

**March 28, 1956**

**Budapest Legation Dispatch No. 372, Radio Free  
Europe Hungarian Broadcasts Appraised**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

In Budapest Legation Dispatch No. 372, two Hungarian-speaking officers appraise the content and reception quality of Radio Free Europe (RFE) Hungarian broadcasts. They rate newscasts higher than commentaries and features

**Credits:**

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**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

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PRIORITY

**SECRET**  
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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

COPY NO.            SERIES B

FROM : Amlegation, Budapest, Hungary 372  
DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

March 28, 1956  
DATE

REF : CIA HAS NO OBJECTION TO   
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SUBJECT: RFE Monitoring

This despatch presents: (1) an evaluation of Radio Free Europe programs as to tone, content, and impact, and (2) a record of monitoring between January 26 and March 25. The monitoring log presented at the end of this despatch is divided into two parts and reflects the work of two different monitors, one using a Hungarian Orion and a Dutch Phillips radio and the other a Hallicrafter. All three radios are located in the same building in the Varosliget area of Pest. This report was prepared in response to a request made by RFE for several weeks of intensive monitoring from this post. The request was made informally to Minister Ravndal during his recent visit in Munich.

The one unquestionably great service being performed by RFE is in the field of straight news reporting. Qualitatively these news broadcasts are on a par with those of VOA, and quantitatively, of course, they exceed those of VOA. In any assessment of RFE's role in the total picture of American-sponsored broadcasts in Hungarian, due consideration should be given to the fact that RFE is doing more than its share in sending into Hungary the West's most important propaganda material -- straight news in the Western sense of the word. In addition to broadcasting ten minutes of news every hour, RFE also by its existence alone assures a greater flow of current news into Hungary, since at night when RFE, VOA, and various other West European countries are broadcasting to Hungary, a saturation condition exists and Hungarian jamming equipment is taxed beyond its capacity. In the field of news dissemination, all Western broadcasters to Hungary exist in a state of mutual interdependence. Without RFE broadcasts VOA would probably be compelled to increase its number of transmitting stations or be faced with the certainty of almost total jamming.

In the field of features, commentaries, etc., RFE runs the constant risk of being considered merely as a propaganda mouthpiece that has little relation to diplomacy or to the exigencies of international politics. There is a feeling among some Hungarians

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(especially the more intelligent) that RFE has promised a "pie in the sky" and now there is no one to deliver. In the long run the life expectancy of RFE may depend on its ability to develop a greater sensitivity to the changing international scene. Hungarians in the past have been notoriously bad propagandists. Hungarian propaganda between World Wars I and II, for example, was dominated by a revisionist obsession which was unsubtly displayed for the entire world to see. The RFE Hungarian section has a tendency to show a similar inflexibility and lack of subtlety.

The weakness described above is probably still a source of some present strength. The popularity of RFE among Hungarians is considerable, and this popularity seems to increase as one goes down the educational scale. RFE, very likely much more than VOA, symbolizes to the Hungarian people the active interest of the United States Government in Hungary and Hungarians. The danger is that the symbol is a static one in that RFE still seems to symbolize to Hungarians future Western liberation of their country. RFE in order to survive must face up to the problem of transforming itself into a symbol not of future Western liberation but of Western concern that Hungarians stubbornly wrest concession after concession from their government.

In specific substantive matters, the commentators Ulysses and Notarius seem to enjoy a great deal of popularity. Likewise the program "In the Farmer's Garden" seems to be well received. The music programs, it can be said almost with certainty, are highly popular. Likewise, imitations of such American radio entertainment as Double or Nothing are probably good for audience attraction; perhaps greater care should be taken, however, to keep such programs more on the entertainment than the propaganda level. The lampooning of Hungarian Communist leaders is undoubtedly a good device, but greater care should be taken to keep from going to extremes or of lapsing into banal "cuteness." In all these feature programs, it should be noted, RFE has the knack of "talking the language" of the Hungarian people to a much greater degree than VOA. The overall detail knowledge which RFE frequently shows about happenings in Hungary is undoubtedly (and this means confirmed in discussions with Hungarians) impressive to the Hungarian listener. Since it seems obvious that RFE could not receive such detailed intelligence without the collaboration of Hungarian citizens, it gives Hungarian listeners a sense of pride in their "subversive activities."

Although the feature programs of RFE frequently reveal a considerable background of research and knowledge, the long broadcasting hours of RFE inevitably lead to a large number of fill-in

programs

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programs with little intrinsic or propagandistic value. For this reason, it is suggested that RFE might consider a "Point Four Program of the Air" in the educational field. An article in the February, 1956 issue of Tarsadalmi Szemle (Social Review), entitled "The Situation and Tasks of the Science of Marxist Pedagogy," after admitting shortcomings in Marxist teaching in Hungarian schools, comes to the following conclusions:

"In the light of the November Resolution of the Central Leadership and its resolution to the improvement of educational work, pedagogical research ought to be concentrated on the following topics:

- a) the communist ideological-political education of our youth,
- b) contents and methods of training and educational work,
- c) contents and methods of polytechnical education in our schools,
- d) educational work of the youth organizations carried out at school.

Research work is to be directed as soon as possible toward the communist education of Hungarian youth at large."

It is suggested that RFE might answer this projected Marxist offensive in the educational field by a regular "school of the air" program which would feature lectures on basic American institutions and perhaps even suggest research topics for Hungarian youth to carry on in their public and school libraries. One of the drafters of this despatch had a talk with Mr. Bartok of IBS last autumn about this type of a project in connection with VOA. However, it is the Legation's belief that this type of a program could best be carried out by RFE.

In relation to a program of the type described above, RFE should probably also give serious consideration to the feasibility of producing an English-language teaching program on the order of the type of teaching the BBC has been carrying on so successfully in various European areas for many years. (Incidentally, the BBC English-language teaching program for Hungary was discontinued about five years ago.) That there is a strong desire among Hungarians to learn English is confirmed by every impression of this Legation's officers. This desire is probably all the greater

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because it is suppressed. The Legation feels strongly that an RFE English-language school of the air would enjoy considerable popularity and would unquestionably stir far greater interest than the Russian-language teaching programs sponsored by the Magyar Radio. It should be noted that USIA could supply the necessary teaching materials, thus obviating any need for RFE to undertake a costly and time-consuming preparatory effort. The tone of such a program should be informally academic with no attempt to introduce propaganda-loaded sentences. The amount of information about life beyond the Iron Curtain which would fit easily and naturally into a language-teaching program would constitute its "propaganda payload."

The Legation wishes to draw attention to the fact that by introducing "school of the air" programs into its broadcasts, RFE would take a silent step toward transforming the symbol which it currently constitutes for the Hungarian people.

The following logs show a considerable amount of reception difficulty at least in the Budapest area. In all probability this difficulty is smaller in the provinces. It should also be noted that several local employees who listen to RFE programs in the Legation building have been able to hear mid-morning news broadcasts almost every day on the 16, 19, and 25 meter bands.

**Legend:**

O - Zero  
 P - Poor  
 F - Fair  
 G - Good

**Log of Monitoring Performed on the Hallicrafter**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Hour</u>	<u>Meter</u>	<u>Keys</u>	<u>Reception</u>
Feb 22	1100	41	7165	O
		31	9655	O
		25	11775	O
		25	11885	O
		19	15145	P
		19	15215	O
		16	17725	O
		1630	41	7165
	31		9655	O
	25		11775	O
	25		11885	O

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Date	Hour	Meter	Freqs	Reception
Feb 22	1630	19	15145	O
		19	15215	O
		16	17725	O
Mar 1	1015	41	7165	O
		31	9655	O
		25	11775	O
		25	11885	O
		19	15145	P
		19	15215	O
		16	17725	O
	1030	25	11775	F-P (great deal of fading)
	1130	25	11775	G-O (jammed within a few minutes after tuning in)
Mar 4	1115	41		P
	2300	25	11775	G
Mar 11	1700	41	7165	O
		25	11775	O
		19	15215	O
		16	17725	O
	2300	41	7165	O
	2305	41	7180	O
			5970	G
	2320	31	9695	O
			9750	O
	2325	25	11775	O
2330		5970	F (jammed but audible)	
Mar 13	1905	41	7165	O
		25	11775	O
		19	15215	O
		16	17725	O
		2010	25	11775
Mar 16	0820	41	7165	O
		31	9655	O
		25	11775	O
		19	15145	O
		19	15215	O
		16	17725	O

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<u>Date</u>	<u>Hour</u>	<u>Meter</u>	<u>Keys</u>	<u>Reception</u>
Mar 17	1000	41	7165	0
		31	9655	0
		25	11775	0
		25	11885	0
		19	15145	0
		19	15215	0
		16	17725	0
	1030	41	7165	0
		31	9655	0
		25	11775	0
		25	11885	0
		19	15145	0
			15215	0
		16	17725	0
	1410	31	9655	G-0 (jammed out at 1415 during discussion one-man cult in Hungarian Communist leadership)
1415		41	7165	0
		25	11775	0
		25	11885	0
		19	15145	0
		19	15215	0
		16	17725	0
1630		41	7165	0
		31	9655	0
		25	11775	0
			11885	0
		19	15145	0
		16	17725	G-0 (jammed out at 1703)
1705		41	7165	0
		25	11775	0
		19	15215	0
1715	16	17725	G (came in clear alongside of jamming)	
2000		41	7165	0
		25	11775	G (jammed out at 2007)
2010	19	15215	0	

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<u>Date</u>	<u>Hour</u>	<u>Meter</u>	<u>Keys</u>	<u>Reception</u>
Mar 17	2030	41	7165	O
		25	11775	O
		19	15215	O
		16	17725	O
	2100	41	7165	O
		25	11775	O
		19	15215	O
		16	17725	O
	2215	41	7165	O (jammed at 2245, barely audible thereafter)
	2250	41	7180	O
		31	9750	O
		25	11775	O
2305	41	5970	O	
	41	7165	O	
	41	7180	O	
2305-2320	31	9695	F	
Mar 18	0925	25	11775	F
		19	15215	O
		16	17725	F
		41	7165	O
	1230	41	7165	O
		31	9695	O
		25	11775	O
		25	11885	O
		19	15145	O
		19	15215	O
		16	17725	O
	1305	41	7165	O
31		9695	O (jammed, neighboring Hungarian station broadcasting in Finnish clear)	
25		11775	O	
25		11885	O	
19		15145	O	
19		15215	O	
16		17725	O	
1330		41	7165	O
		31	9695	O
		25	11775	O
	25	11885	O	

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<u>Date</u>	<u>Hour</u>	<u>Mtr</u>	<u>Reception and Comments</u>	
Mar 21	1950	All	O	Jammed.
	2010	All	O	Jammed.
	2210	49	P	(Interference noticeable from Bucharest radio program.)
Mar 24	1940	25	G	Lambasting Rakosi. (Very good, and timely in view of fact that the article in <u>Szabad Nep</u> attacking personal cult appeared in issue of this same day.)
	2300	All	O	Jammed.
Mar 25	2020	19	G	Announcing new youth musical program beginning Easter Sunday. "Double or Nothing." (Use of forints for prizes and comparing these to D-Marks was good.)

It is requested that copies of this despatch be processed for USIA as well as for other interested groups at the Department's discretion.

For the Minister:

N. Spencer Barnes  
 Counselor of Legation

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