



Report

on the Activities of the Open Society Archives
1995–2000

Budapest
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Executive Summary

The core of the Open Society Archives (“OSA”) holdings is formed by the historical file collection of the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Research Institute. As discussed below in greater detail, these holdings have been supplemented with other records to achieve OSA’s mission of obtaining, preserving, and making available research resources for the study of communism and the Cold War and for the study of twentieth and twenty first century issues of human rights, as well as providing information, records, and archival services to all parts of the Soros foundations network, including the Central European University (“CEU”), in which OSA is housed.

Today OSA holds 3,341 linear meters of textual records, and maintains its own library and a constantly growing audiovisual collection. Most of these holdings are fully accessible on the OSA website. OSA moved to its present site in the buildings of the Central European University complex in 1997. Here the holdings are stored in a three level underground storage area, are made available in a well equipped research room, and form the materials for exhibitions in OSA’s own exhibition hall, Galeria Centralis.

In the five years of its existence OSA Reference Services (which went on-line in 1999) have served roughly 250 new researchers per year; produced and shipped 100 000 copies of archival materials; and made about 17,500 archival units available to researchers. OSA has also developed a grant system, initiated a number of academic programs, conferences and workshops, and has staged about 25 exhibitions as part of its archival work. It has also considerably improved the standard of its technological functioning and resources. Today all of the workplaces in the offices and the processing area are equipped with desktop computers and use an integrated mailing and workflow system. OSA’s audio and video recordings are made with state-of-the-art equipment.

Part of OSA’s mission is to function as the information gateway linking East and West in the archival field. In this capacity it has carried out joint projects with many institutions and organizations (for example, *The National Security Archive*, Washington; *Citizens’ Watch* and *The Archival Training Center* in St. Petersburg; *The Institute for the History of the 1956 Revolution*, Hungary; the *Institute of Contemporary History* in Prague; and the *International Committee for the Computerization of Comintern Archives* (“INCOMKA”), with which OSA holds the status of Associate Institution). It has played an important role in a number of international programs and has helped the war torn Balkan countries to restore their archival holdings and to form modern archival policies.

OSA sees its future development marked out along these lines and hopes both to further improve in its capacity as the archives and research center of communism/cold war and documents of human rights and to become a major factor in formulating information policies in countries of the region.

I Introduction

The aim of this present report is to give an overview of the activities of the Open Society Archives since it was established in 1995, with the aim of maintaining, preserving and processing the former archives of RFE/RL Research Institute for the next 50 years and making it available to researchers.

OSA's achievement of its present status as one of the region's foremost scholarly institutions with a huge and technologically sophisticated archive of world importance has taken it a long way from the modest conditions in which it began. During the five years of its existence it has become a significant global repository of documents relating to the cold war, communism, and human rights issues and the records of the Soros foundations network. It has initiated a number of projects in line with its mission to help the archives in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and established a network of connections with many different professional and civil organizations all over the world. Its growing reputation is well reflected in the ever-increasing number of visitors, researchers and cooperative relationships world wide.

II Institutional History

Negotiations about setting up an archives facility to preserve and process the records of RFE/RL and acquire research resources for the new Central European University (CEU) started in 1994. Under the custody agreement made between the Open Society Institute ("OSI"), OSA and Open Media Research Institute in Prague ("OMRI"), the first shipment of materials arrived in Budapest in the spring of 1995. In May 1995 Istvan Rev, from CEU's History Department, was elected as Academic Director, and in August 1995 Trudy Huskamp Peterson, former Acting Archivist of the United States, joined OSA as its first Executive Director. OSA's official opening ceremony was held on 15th March 1996 and in the spring of 1997 it moved to its present location. The four-party Foundation Agreement between RFE/RL, OSI, OSA, and OMRI was signed on November 20th, 1996. From the very beginning OSA has worked under the umbrella of CEU with the exception of the period from the end of 1995 to March 15th 1998 during which it was housed administratively at OSI-Budapest.

III History of the Building

When the shipment to Budapest of OSA's main holdings, the RFE/RL archives, began in spring 1995 their destination was a completely unfurnished building, formerly the Iron Worker's Union, on the edge of downtown Pest. There they were received by OSA's first small team: a historian, a technician and a secretary. Within two months more than 2,500 linear meters of RFE/RL materials had arrived in Budapest and these were soon supplemented with the records of other organizations, such as the International Human Rights Law Institute in Chicago and the London-based periodical Index on Censorship. It quickly became apparent that the storage and management facilities OSA had at its disposal at that time would not be suitable for the long-term task of properly managing and making available to researchers the growing OSA collection. Plans were thus drawn up for the construction of OSA's present and permanent site in Oktober 6 utca, part of the downtown Central European University complex. The archives moved to their new location in spring 1997. This site contains a vast and technologically sophisticated three-level underground storage area. Materials from the archives are made available in OSA's modern open-access research room, conveniently situated next to the CEU library and equipped with audio-visual viewing stations, computer terminals, microfilm/microfiche readers, printers, and storage cabinets. In accordance with its commitment to provide open and equal access to its holdings, OSA regularly organizes public historical exhibitions and presents them in its own exhibition space, the Galeria Centralis in Nador utca, which was opened in October 1997.

IV Equipment and Technical Resources

OSA strives to maintain and enhance its high level of service as an archives and research centre by utilizing the most up-to-date equipment and technology. OSA's three-level storage area, for example, is humidity and temperature-controlled, with an electronic alarm system including smoke detectors and video cameras and equipped with the best modern compact shelving system and other storage technology imported from the British firm Britannia Storage Systems in a 929.91 m² storage area with a total storage capacity of 5000 linear meters. These holdings are processed in accordance with the most up-to-date archival description standard, ISAD(G).

OSA maintains two specially designed elevators to help transportation of materials within its building: one inside the three-floor storage, and one between the OSA offices and the storage area.

The OSA research room is equipped with two audiovisual viewing stations, computer terminals, microfilm-microfiche readers, and printers (including a microfilm printer

that prints films directly onto plain paper). In the processing area there is a special microfilm scanner as well as a standard high quality scanner connected to a computer with programs installed for manipulating and printing digitized pictures, color and black and white alike. Three copying machines, including two heavy-duty copiers and one for digital equipment, are used to serve inside demands and the needs of on-site readers as well as those of the off-site visitors.

The OSA audiovisual laboratory is responsible for the care and preservation of electronic archival materials. For this purpose, OSA has purchased the Archival Preservation System (APS). The APS is a sophisticated specialty software application designed to handle tasks such as the regular inspection of the physical condition of tapes and disks, the recopying program for records 8–10 years old, and the management and tracking of information about the physical characteristics of the records as copied. The APS system is used by only a few prestigious archival institutions, such as the US National Archives, but OSA is the first institution within Hungary to implement this technology. OSA is well equipped for normal audio recording, playback, and copying on audio cassettes and on open reel tapes with all standard speed. For professional studio quality recording and playback, DAT MK II equipment is used. OSA's video lab can record, playback, and copy (8 tapes at a time) on VHS and SVHS systems; it can also record, playback, and edit in U-matic video systems, including the old SECAM standard; and in Beta SP system. Using a video and sound mixer the technician can produce blue box effects and superimposed subtitling, as well as video material ready for broadcasting with editing, subtitling, dubbing for Beta SP, U-matic, VHS, or SVHS systems. From analog or digital video material, photos can be printed and shorter digital video material can be edited. Using a Digital Time Base Corrector, the quality of SECAM, NTSC, or PAL system video recordings can be enhanced and the material checked with a vectorscope.

In order to make professional live video recordings, a Panasonic 3CCD digital camera with professional stereo microphones and the necessary studio accessories is used.

Today all of the workplaces in the offices and processing area are equipped with PCs, using an integrated mailing and workflow system (GroupWise 5.5) connected to the Novell network system of the CEU. Two servers, 40 PCs with heavy duty printers, and the necessary terminal equipment – including a digital video card and a CD writing device – are in use. Each PC has basic Windows software and MS Office applications, Netscape Communicator, and other specialised applications.

Apart from the special APS software, OSA uses a software package specifically designed for archival databases as well as Oracle, Adobe, Front Page, and other application programs.

The computerized security system contains personalized chipcards and controlled electronic locks at each main office door.

OSA also has its own manufacturing department, which makes storage and shipping containers for archive materials.

V Employees

As OSA's responsibilities have grown considerably, so has its original team of three employees. To date, the number of staff has settled at 31 employees of many nationalities: Hungarian, Polish, Slovakian, Canadian, Rumanian, Russian, Belorussian, American, Croatian, Yugoslav, and Bulgarian. These 31 staff members, led by CEU History Professor István Rév, are involved in organizing and preparing public and academic programs, in maintaining archival programs and in general administration.

The work of the staff at OSA is distributed as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| 1) Public and academic programs | 7 staff |
| 2) Archival programs | 20 staff |
| 3) General administration | 4 staff |

VI The Holdings

The OSA holdings comprise three main topical areas: *Communism and Cold War*, *Human Rights*, and *documents of the Soros foundation network*.

1 Communism and Cold War

The core of the textual collection is formed by the *Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute*. These 2,600 linear meters of archival materials have been processed in accordance with the most up-to-date archival description standard, ISAD(G), are fully accessible, and their catalogue is available on the OSA website. OSA is planning to publish a separate Guide about them. The most recent addition to these materials are the 18 file cabinets from OMRI, Prague (which ceased operation in 1997), which contain Ukrainian, Belorussian, and Russian materials delivered to OSA in May 2000.

During the five years of its existence OSA has received donations from outstanding public figures and important international institutions and collected materials to enrich its holdings from all over the world. The most important accessions are the samizdat publications of *Gabor Demszky*, current mayor of Budapest, together with a collection of equipment used in samizdat production; the personal papers of *Bela Kiraly*, Colonel general (four star), Professor Emeritus of History and former MP; and the personal papers of *Andras Hegedus*, Prime Minister of Hungary between 1954 and 1956.

2 Human Rights

OSA's human rights holdings are comprised of documents from three main sources. The *International Human Rights Law Institute* donated 15 linear meters of textual materials, 252 videotapes, 23 audiotapes, and 68 books and journals covering important aspects of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia. The records of *Index on Censorship* contain background materials for the London-based journal (including the coverage of the Salman Rushdie affair). These are constantly supplemented from Vienna by the records of the *International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF)*. OSA is the official archives of these organizations and some of the national Helsinki Committees.

In line with its initiative, proposed in January 1999, to establish an international repository for documents related to war crimes and human rights violations, OSA has continued to focus on materials relating to human rights and human rights violations, thus establishing a unique collection in this area. One significant step towards this goal is the acquisition of paper-based and audio-visual materials from the US organization *Physicians for Human Rights* documenting the exhumation of mass graves in Serbia.

3 Soros Foundations Network

OSA also holds archival documents of the Soros foundations network, the core of which are the second depository of the *Chicago Law Program* archives – documents relevant to the study of comparative constitutional law – which were donated to OSA in 1999. Other important materials include the CEU records and those of *William Newton-Smith*, Chair of the CEU Executive Committee, and the *Belarussian Soros Foundation* documentation that was shipped to Budapest following the closure of the BSF.

4 Audio-visual Collection

OSA has a relatively small but rapidly growing audio-visual collection put together with the goal of building a research center – a non-circulating video library of propaganda films, historical films, and feature films produced after the Second World War in Central and Eastern Europe.

Central to the audio-visual collection are the Black Box oral history interviews relating to the activities of RFE/RL. These were later enriched by a collection of videotapes from the *International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia*, 2,500 hours of recordings of Soviet and Russian television news in the holdings of RFE/RL Research Institute, videotapes from many other projects OSA has so far run (among others the 2450 hours of the Balkan monitoring project), and the Hungarian film-maker Peter Forgacs's 469-title collection of twentieth century home movies – a unique record of domestic and everyday life.

5 OSA Library

The OSA Library holds the RFE/RL and OMRI periodical collection, which amounts to about 6,000 serial titles, while the book collection is kept by the Central European University Library. Based on an agreement with the CEU Library, OSA systematically buys newly published literature on the Cold War and history of communism, thus continuously enhancing and updating the former RFE/RL library.

Special library collections include RFE's and RL's own publications as well as regional and samizdat periodicals on microfilm and microfiche (approximately 53,000 items). OSA collects publications about the history of RFE/RL, the history of broadcasting, and professional literature for archivists. The OSA website includes catalogues for periodicals and special book collections.

VII Reference Services

Due to the diversity of its holdings, OSA is a multifaceted institution: It is an archive, an exhibition organizer, a research institution, and a library. It is the complexity of the Archives' role and holdings – and the diversity of its users – that makes the reference services' task of bringing records to the public likewise complex.

As an open-access facility, virtually anyone may apply to use the Archives and its associated non-circulating library. Reference services are provided both on-site at the

OSA Research Room, and off-site through the internet, and by telephone, fax, e-mail and regular mail.

Put in figures, OSA registers on average roughly 250 new researchers every year, making approximately 1,100 visits to OSA's Research Room annually. Additionally, OSA has a rapidly growing number of "virtual" researchers whose off-site inquiries are soon to reach half of the Archives' total reference output. Each year this output amounts to approximately 20,000 copies produced and shipped and some 3,500 archival units made available to researchers.

VIII Grants

OSA offers a variety of grants to encourage outstanding and innovative research. Applications are accepted from all over the world (notably, from the countries of the former Soviet Union, Central and Eastern Europe, as well as North America). Since 1996 – when the OSA Research Grant Program was established – 72 grants have been awarded on a competitive basis to support scholars who wish to pursue research using the OSA holdings. The grant provides travel to and from Budapest, a modest stipend, and accommodation in Budapest for a maximum period of two months. Two researchers awarded grants by the OSA have been awarded prizes for books written using OSA resources. Paul Josephson was awarded the Marshall Shulman Book Prize for his study *New Atlantis Revisited – Akademgoodok: the Siberian City of Science* (Princeton University Press), and Padraic Kenny was awarded the AAASS/Orbis Polish Book Prize for his work *Rebuilding Poland – Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Cornell University Press).

There are other grants available to outstanding scholars and artists to carry out projects related to the Archive's programs and exhibitions in the *Galeria Centralis*.

IX Public Programs

1 Exhibitions

OSA believes that the exhibitions are inherently a part of its archival work. The historical exhibitions aim to bring the recent past as close as possible to those to whom it belongs – to the people of the region. It is OSA's hope that the *Galeria Centralis* exhibitions can provide an opportunity for and contribute to the process of collective historical recognition and reconstruction that is so vital for the region.

Since the first exhibition in March 1996, a comparative exhibition of samizdat publications from all over the region, OSA has staged about six exhibitions each year.

Recent highlights from this series of exhibitions include *Freeze Frames of Communism, Gulag, The Commissar Vanishes – Falsified Photographs of the Stalin Era*, an exhibition of original and retouched Soviet photographs; *Ten Years After* presented a view of a decade of change in East-Central Europe as seen through the eyes of 27 photographers from 15 different countries; *Vietnám and Vietnam* presented a photo collection contrasting representations of the war in the western press and the socialist press, and *The Siege of Budapest* (more than 10 000 visitors in six weeks of opening).

Often these events are not simply exhibitions, but are quite complex programs. For example, the 20th century historical exhibitions have doubled as venues for secondary school history classes with the students being given a guided tour of the exhibits. Film festivals are occasionally linked to the exhibitions, or related documentaries are shown either in CEU or in the nearby *Cirko Gejzir* cinema. Other exhibition-related events have included a National high school competition on the occasion of the *Non Conformist Soviet Art* (a comprehensive overview of former Soviet underground art) and *Freeze Frames* (a multimedia exhibition exploring the now half-forgotten medium of slidefilm ("diafilm")) exhibitions. At the end of their run in the *Galeria Centralis* most exhibitions continue life as virtual exhibitions on the OSA website.

2 Academic programs

In May 1995, the academic programs of OSA were launched with a standing seminar of six lectures called *Construction of Memory Under Historical Contingency* organized in cooperation with Collegium Budapest (Institute for Advanced Studies). In the following years OSA has taken an active part in organizing and hosting international conferences closely related to its profile and holdings, the last one scheduled in September 2000.

3 Summer University

The Archives' CEU Summer University (SUN) courses and its public lecture series serve as a bridge between archival professionals of the East and West. OSA regularly invites prominent international archivists and historians from the fields of archival management and contemporary history to give public lectures in Budapest, usually at CEU. The SUN courses are designed both for junior faculty and for researchers involved in teaching and for professionals such as archivists, librarians, environmental experts and computer experts. These courses offer full funding for students from Central and Eastern Europe, the countries of the former Soviet Union and Mongolia.

4 Open House

OSA has a four year tradition – starting at OSA's initial location at February 1997 – of organizing open house events for archival professionals from the region with the aim of putting forward new and interesting topics in the archival and management sciences.

X Website

The OSA web site functions as an information gateway linking East and West in the archival field. There are many different sections to the website, making available a variety of information. For example many of the exhibitions organised for the Galeria Centralis are transferred to the gallery section of the website.

The OSA website also hosts the Archival Bridge's Regional Archival Information Center (see the Cooperation section below for more details of the Archival Bridge). The main project being undertaken at the moment is the development of a meta-informational database of regional archives – a description of the archival landscape in the region. This includes descriptions of and links to the most important institutions and also a growing database of archival laws and regulations from each country of the region. The focus of this project is on archives and institutions relevant to OSA's main area of specialization: communism, the cold war and human rights.

XI Cooperation

Much of OSA's cooperative activity is organized under the "Archival Bridge" umbrella. This organization is the successor to both the Regional Archival Support Project (RASP) and the Regional Archival Cooperation Project ("YEAST"). The Archival Bridge is intended to provide an information bridge between East and West; to help researchers from outside the Central and Eastern European region find archival sources in countries of the region, to help archivists establish professional contacts in OSA's main areas of activity, and to provide professional information for archivists in the former communist countries and from the rest of the world.

One of the main cooperative projects that OSA is currently engaged in is the electronic cataloguing of the Russian Film and Photo Archive in Krasnogorsk – the largest of its kind in Russia. OSA is financing this project with a grant of, \$120,000 and is seeking further opportunities to cooperate on similar projects with other archives.

One of OSA's important current projects is the International Recovering Identity Program, which was established by a number of international organizations to ensure that wherever possible such destruction of identity would be reversible. To this end OSA has developed, working from and based on existing international documents, a draft set of *Principles and Recommendations* for the use of DNA in establishing such blood relationships.

The latest project of this kind is the help OSA has rendered to the archives in Kosova by donating computers, archival boxes, and giving expert advice in the field of archival policy making.

OSA believes that through the various forms of cooperation summarized above it can actively contribute to the development of archival and information legislation in the countries of the region, as well as to the formulation of information policies based on democratic principles.

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