

## LOSING THE WAR OF IDEAS IN EASTERN EUROPE

The U.S. is in danger of losing the war of ideas in Eastern Europe. Unless Congress can appropriate \$22 million in emergency operating funds by July 4, Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL)--two of the Free World's most important weapons in the war of ideas--may stop broadcasting. The loss of these two stations would remove an important barrier to Soviet efforts to extinguish the flame of liberty behind the Iron Curtain.

Over 50 million people in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union listen to Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty every week. The stations function not as propaganda organs for the U.S. but as alternative sources of information for people who would otherwise have almost no source of news but the censored, state-controlled broadcasts of Moscow and its satellites. Inhabitants of Soviet bloc nations listen to RFE and RL because they know these stations broadcast the truth--a precious commodity in totalitarian lands.

During the news blackout imposed by Soviet authorities in the days following the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, for example, RFE and RL provided the people of Eastern Europe with their primary source of information about the incident. The stations' rapid dissemination of knowledge about Chernobyl caused people to demand information from local authorities, forcing the Soviets to go public with news of the incident. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty are at peak levels of popularity, while the credibility of the communist government media has suffered drastically. RFE and RL won a significant victory for the West in the war of ideas.

These priceless symbols of freedom are now threatened--not by incessant Soviet attempts to jam the broadcasts but by the declining value of the U.S. dollar coinciding with the budget-cutting atmosphere in Washington. Located in Munich, RFE and RL must pay nearly two-thirds of their operating costs in West German marks. When Congress appropriated funds for the stations' fiscal year (FY) 1986 operations, the exchange rate was 3.08 marks to the dollar; today, the dollar is only worth about 2.17 marks. The dollar's fall means that

RFE and RL face a shortfall of some \$22 million in their \$100 million operating budget. Already hit with a reduction in operating funds mandated by the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings bill, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty will run out of money by the beginning of July.

Congress is now considering an emergency supplemental appropriation that would keep RFE and RL on the air through the rest of FY 1986. The problem is that the measure is part of a bill that is generally opposed by the Reagan Administration. If the White House vetoes the bill, the stations will be forced to cut back programming dramatically or cease broadcasting altogether until funds are appropriated, which could be as late as the beginning of FY 1987, or October 1, 1986.

Even if they survive until that point, the existence of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty still will be threatened. To comply with the budgetary restraints imposed by Gramm-Rudman-Hollings, the Senate Budget Committee has proposed further cuts in the RFE and RL operating budgets and has also scaled back plans to rehabilitate and upgrade the stations' transmitting facilities.

The U.S. must not allow budget-cutting efforts to destroy one of its most cost-effective weapons in the war of ideas. The information heard over RFE, RL, and the Voice of America is so threatening to totalitarianism that the Soviet Union spends between \$750 million and \$1.2 billion per year to jam foreign language broadcasts. Such efforts offer proof of the power of such programs to influence the people living behind the Iron Curtain. Soviet technological advances eventually will allow successful jamming of the radio signals coming from the outmoded equipment in Munich. For what, to Washington, is a negligible cost, RFE and RL can be given state-of-the-art technology that will allow them to overcome Soviet jamming far into the future.

Ideas are as important as actual weapons to the West's defenses. U.S. strategic interests are served by the broadcasts of RFE and RL because they provide support for millions of men and women, such as the members of Solidarity, who yearn to cast off the shackles of communist oppression. Silencing the voice of freedom in Eastern Europe would cost the West far more than the dollars saved.

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For further information:

Malcolm S. Forbes, Jr., "A Threat to Both U.S. Radios in Europe," The New York Times, May 19, 1986, p. A21.