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Research Report

Project title:

## The Means of Political Propaganda and the End of the Cold War in Yugoslavia in the International Perspective: Reshaping of Totalitarianism from the Global to Local

My research at the Open Society Archives (OSA), conducted in March and April 2020, derives from my larger ongoing research project on the media representations and interpretations of the late socialism in Yugoslavia. The main thematic framework and research platform for my project includes exploring various cultural materials overlooked by the mainstream political analysts and historians, and, by doing so, identifying new prospective paths for conceptualizing studies of late socialism in Yugoslavia. On a larger scale, I am interested in the complexities of the final stage of the Cold War era, and the controversies of historical events, movements and social transformations that marked the crossovers into post-communist political and economic circumstances in Central and Eastern Europe. My access to the OSA collections, supported by the Visegrad Scholarship grant, has informed my research by new angles of looking into social, economic and political imbalances of the time, revealing new research directions and points of reference. Since my main research focus were the indicators of particular official propaganda patterns in Yugoslav mainstream cultural and media life, with regard to the global political changes in the 1980s, the OSA research provided me with advanced understanding of the predominant discourses in Yugoslavia at the time and a new draft for the expansion of my research methods, as well as upgrading my main conceptual tools and most relevant research questions.

My main research interest addresses the various faces of propaganda related to the political and social changes in the countries of East Block in the late 1980s, detectable and identifiable in Yugoslav cultural and public life at the time. The research background takes into account the ideological, political and other structural co-relations between the general social narratives of the late socialism, and the various aspects of post-communist transitions in post-Yugoslav region. The development of post-Yugoslav social and political conflicts in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall was also interrelated with the revolutionary shifts in the political systems of the other former communist countries in Europe, which echoed in various implicit, unevenly distributed media

comments, observations and statements in Yugoslav printed media and other representatives of cultural and political life. Therefore, I have been interested in exploring the ways in which Yugoslav society experienced, implied and reflected the phenomenon of the end of the Cold War and state socialism throughout its media and cultural representations, since they conceived many conceptual and ideological directions that came into full realization in the early periods of post-socialist transition in Yugoslav region.

The fact that former Yugoslavia was a case of communist country structurally and ideologically somewhat different from the countries of the Warsaw Pact, posed a particular challenge to my research, which I successfully reassessed thanks to my work with OSA collections. My insights in RFE/RL (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) sources, particularly those ones holding Yugoslav printed media and Background Reports on Yugoslav themes, helped me identify and unpack some specific modes of representation of political changes in a given context, which reflected on local institutions, various social groups and individuals in Yugoslavia. Since Yugoslav state authorities kept certain political and diplomatic distance from the official politics of the so-called East Block, the mainstream media sphere in Yugoslavia mostly followed the realities of political changes in Central and East Europe in the late 1980s with reservations, considering these political changes as a subtext of foreign politics rather than major political foreign affairs. This situation required an inventive and thorough approach to the reading of documents, reprints of media sources and other types of written resources. The thematically sorted sources in the RFE/RL collections brought me to a number of relevant findings that indicated the directions for the further stages of my research project design.

I was honored to be offered the two-month research grant at the OSA in Budapest as a fellow of Visegrad Scholarship at the Open Society Archives, and the opportunity to explore the RFE/RL archival collections. As a widely acclaimed institution, the OSA represents an important source of documented evidences of historical developments in the former countries of state socialism in the Cold War era, including Yugoslavia. During my research stay at OSA, I looked into the newspapers, academic and other professional journals articles, transcripts of speeches, various written reports and analyses of political, cultural and other social events, and other forms of written sources relevant for the understanding of Yugoslav public narratives and interpretations of political changes in Eastern Europe and the worldwide. What I found was the collection of various articles and written materials following heated debates, polemics, and numerous controversies and antagonisms among the structures of socialist Yugoslav society, as well as detailed Background Reports by RFE/RL analysts, which depicted and analyzed the interactions between Yugoslav and foreign diplomats, and other social, political and cultural events, developments, and conflicts in the 1980s. I considered the overall predominant political, cultural and social discourses and practices of the Yugoslav political life in the 1980s, and the ways in which the general understanding of political changes in Eastern Europe was contextualized within main media narratives in leading Yugoslav printed media at the time. Many of the sources I have researched are nowadays hard to obtain from regular holdings of the academic and cultural institutions in the region of former Yugoslavia, which means that RFE/RL Research Institute holds a rare detailed collection of materials that reflect social and cultural issues, movements and whereabouts of Yugoslav public and political life in the second half of the twentieth century.

Theoretical and methodological foundation of my research has been informed by my scholarly background in cultural studies of political and social shifts from Yugoslav to post-Yugoslav era in the region. Since the completion of my doctoral dissertation (earned from the Central European University in 2010), in which I explored the relationship between gender, popular culture production and the nation-state formation in post-Yugoslav period in Serbia, my research interests have been focused on the late phase of socialist period in Yugoslavia. In particular, I have been looking into cultural and media practices that created public opinions in Yugoslavia in the 1980s, triggered and initiated by global developments, but shaped locally. My aim was to identify discursive strategies of social and political elites' opinion making in various parts of Yugoslavia in the final years of the 1980s, and to explore to which extent these strategies interacted with the general Yugoslav society's perception of the collapse of state-socialism, end of the Cold War narratives and introduction of post-socialist era. I have been mainly interested in the dominant Yugoslav narratives on the upcoming political shifts in the relationships between the East and West Block during the 1980s, and the public narratives on the role of Yugoslavia with regard to international politics at the time.

In terms of methodology, I have focused predominantly on close reading and analysis of the written sources, such as newspapers and cultural, professional and academic journals in Yugoslavia and abroad, as well as other relevant documents, published and/or written in Yugoslav languages, English and German. In practice, the majority of my research material consisted of the media articles dealing with various relevant social, cultural and political events in Yugoslavia, RFE/RL Background Reports on the various Yugoslav media contents, broadcast practices of the state television and radio stations, political protests, activities of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and its republics, as well as other separate written sources of cultural or political relevance. I classified the research data I explored at the OSA into 4 groups: 1) articles from prominent Yugoslav newspapers and magazines, such as: *Borba*, *Vjesnik*, *Politika*, *Jutarnji list*, *Večernji list*, *Mladina*, *Večernje novosti*, *Danas*, *Delo*, *Dnevnik*, *Nova Revija*, and the others; 2) selected interviews and public speeches of prominent intellectuals and politicians, saved either in the forms of published articles or in the form of scripts; 3) detailed RFE/RL Background Reports on political and cultural events in Yugoslavia, in English and German; 4) Yugoslav affairs related articles from the foreign press: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *The Guardian*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Die Presse*, *Le Monde*, *Europäische Rundschau*, *Der Spiegel*, *The Independent*, *Financial Times*, and the others (some of the forementioned foreign press articles were incorporated in the Background Reports). In order to obtain the material relevant for my research, I used the data stored in four major sections:

- Yugoslav Subject Files I (HU OSA 300-10-2)
- Yugoslav Subject Files II (HU OSA 300-10-3)
- Yugoslav Biographical Files I (HU OSA 300-10-4)
- Digital Repository: RFE/RL Background Reports (HU OSA 300-8-3) and RFE/RL Situation Reports (HU OSA 300-8-47)

Relying on these sources drew my attention to a number of political and cultural affairs of Yugoslav society in the 1980s, as well as overall social and political standpoints of its official politics. I obtained data on the media coverage of a number of Yugoslav debates, movements and crises, as well as the perception of international movements, debates and institutions, which were created in Yugoslav public. The themes covered in the media varied from regular state agreements and economic collaboration with „western countries“ such as the Federal Republic of Germany and USA to Yugoslav views at international crises, political controversies and new political and cultural concepts of the Cold War such as the emergences of „perestroika“ and „glasnost“. I also looked into the foreign media articles in English and German on Yugoslav affairs, and, subsequently, the way foreign political narratives were interpreted by the media discourses in Yugoslavia.

Having assessed the RFE/RL resources from the OSA collections, I rethought and updated some of my initial research conceptual standpoints, which enabled me to formulate more informative research time framework and terminology. I have expanded my research plan so that it includes the written sources from the 1980-1989 period (and not only between 1987-1989 as it was initially planned), since I encountered a number of articles and other sources containing data relevant for my research, published in the early 1980s. In addition, I have come to the conclusion that, in Yugoslav case, the conceptual term “propaganda” should be understood as a complex set of political tools and practices with ambivalent and somewhat disparate implications rather than a system of strictly planned strategic practices designated by a clearly defined univocal ideological standpoint.

My research of the OSA collections informed my work in the field of cultural and social life in the period of late socialism by valuable new insights in still insufficiently explored social, cultural and ideological tensions in Yugoslavia in the 1980s. The technical aspects of my work faced a number of challenges due to the difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic situation that emerged soon after the beginning of my research work at the OSA. However, thanks to the very responsive, professional and responsible advising and assistance that I received from the Open Society Archives academic and administrative staff, I was able to explore written sources and collect digital copies of the relevant material. Based on my work at the OSA, I have improved my knowledge about the extent to which leading Yugoslav media and official political discourses engaged with the crucial international events of the demise of the Cold War. My findings indicated that the way Yugoslav media and cultural agents dealt with the international political narratives of the 1980s was influenced by the official attitudes of Yugoslav state authorities towards the political dispositions of the East Block politics. The particularities of the political orientation of Yugoslavia as a non-aligned socialist country, burdened with its own economic and political challenges, produced an ambivalent and reserved media coverage of the demise of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. My analysis of the research data has pointed out that Yugoslav social elites and the media were more preoccupied by the rising ethnic tensions and economic crisis within Yugoslavia than by the Cold War ending on a global scale. The research at the Open Society Archives helped me find an adequate way of approaching and exploring the complexity of implied social concerns and anxieties produced in Yugoslav public life, in relation to the overall global political changes in the 1980s. This newly acquired knowledge has made an impact on my current

approach to the understanding of the final years of socialist political system in Yugoslavia and cultural representations that constructed dominant narratives at the time. In sum, my research work at the OSA has improved my knowledge of the key political, cultural and economic platforms, tensions, and contradictions of the Yugoslav state in the 1980s, the years that preceded the crucial social and political shift in recent European history. On that note, I would like to express my deep gratitude to all colleagues and members of the Open Society Archives staff for their tremendous help, guidance and support during my research stay in Budapest.