

## **U.S. Information Agency Programs to Poland 1953-1999: A Study in American Public Diplomacy**

The Cold War, defined by nuclear weapons, was fought between the Soviet Union and the US on many levels; political, diplomatic, economic as well as military (regional, substitute conflicts using conventional weapons by parties supported by the feuding powers), but also cultural and informational. During that time, thoughts and beliefs were of great importance. As part of many of the tools used to fight, Americans were engaged in winning the minds and hearts of people living in the shadow of Communism. By providing hope for the liberation of those oppressed, the US government sought to build alliances with the citizens of communist-dominated countries, break censorship and strengthen pro-American sentiments.

One of the tools of the American government in public diplomacy was the United States Information Agency (USIA). The agency promoted the American image on a global scale through radio broadcasts, publications, films, visits of American leaders and artists in other countries, cultural and scientific exchanges, etc. The American government used USIA to, as the agency's motto said: "Tell the America's Story to the World."

Poland was one of the countries the USIA created programs for. The agency managed to send messages through the Iron Curtain – primarily via radio (Voice of America, VOA) - which enabled Poles to see the positive sides of the American way of life. American public diplomacy towards Poland during the Cold War, attempts to establish relations with Poles, were based on historical sentiments, on the heritage of historical ties between the two nations. The sense of American exceptionalism, being a country of great power and freedom, and a belief in America's ability to free the oppressed, seemed to dominate Polish public opinion for all these years.

The fact that the US government created a chain of communication with the Polish society is widely known; however, there is not much detailed information about what messages were sent, via what means, how they related to which events, and to achieve what goals. We do not know how the American political narrative towards Poland has evolved, how the means have changed, and how the State Department's policy guidelines have adapted overtime.

Considering the USIA a mediator for American soft power, a tool for discrete propaganda and a way foreign government can influence the public opinion of another country, I would like to answer the following questions: What messages were sent to Poland and how? What was the American government's approach to Poland and how did it change? What political messages were conveyed through art and culture? What were the State Department's political guidelines for Poland in 1953–1999? Assuming that the majority of Poles in communist-dominated Poland looked favorably on the United States during the Cold War, what role, according to the American government, would Poles play during this period? How significant were the Polish citizens in the American agenda of opposing Communism and the USSR?

Through an in-depth analysis of USIA's foreign operations in Poland, directed by the State Department, this research will expand our current knowledge of the American-Polish relations (1953-1999). The project will provide information on how American political narratives evolved, what was conveyed, how and in response to which events in this difficult period in Polish history, especially - during the transition from totalitarianism to democracy (1989-1999). An analysis of the agency's documentation from this period will show how political narrative processes have evolved over almost 50 years. In addition to the Polish case, the USIA's actions towards Poland can serve as a case study of how to create public diplomacy. In this context, methods of transmitting political content to recipients behind the Iron Curtain – deprived of free access to information – will be of particular interest.

To sum up, I am convinced that the proposed project will improve our understanding of American public diplomacy – ways of its development and expansion (contribution to the field of American studies), and also deepen our understanding of American-Polish relations, including the place or role Poland plays in American thinking about the region of Central and Eastern Europe. As such, the project can become an important contribution to both the study of the Cold War in Poland and contemporary discussions on bilateral relations, as well as to theories of political communication.