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STALIN AND PODZEMÍ: PIRATE RADIO STATIONS IN POST-SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA (1989–1991)[1]

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ABSTRACT

The fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 paved the way for a market economy, which, however, did not initially have a clear legislative framework. This is when the first "pirate radio stations" emerged, mostly broadcasting Anglo-American popular music and rock. The early 1990s gave rise to hundreds of such stations. This paper focuses on two renowned Czech pirate radio stations from this period: Stalin and Podzemí ("Underground"). Following an analysis of the literature, periodicals, and eyewitness accounts, the paper describes the circumstances in which these stations emerged and their subsequent existence, while focusing on musical dramaturgy, the public response to illegal broadcasting, and the impact of these stations on legislation.

Keywords: Post-socialism ▪ Czechoslovakia ▪ transformation ▪ Velvet Revolution ▪ 1989 Popular music ▪ media ▪ radio ▪ private radio broadcasting ▪ pirate radio

1. INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 brought about various changes and opened new possibilities for the original European socialist states. The early 1990s was a time of "catching up with the West" and attempting to bring in comprehensive economic reforms. The transition from a centrally controlled economy to a market economy progressed, at least in the first phase of post-socialism, without a sufficient legislative background. While the original laws of the communist era could no longer be enforced in multiple areas, the new legislation was only emerging, and was not yet able to respond flexibly to rapid developments. Private business (of local entrepreneurs as well as international

1 This study is an outcome of research activity supported from the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic within the grant GA ČR P410/20-24091S "Překrásný nový svět: mládež, hudba a třída v českém postsocialismu

corporations) thus enjoyed an uncoordinated flourish, due to which the 1990s in Eastern Europe have been branded "wild" (Tikhomirov, 2020).

As Colin Sparks (2018, p. 146) notes, "The collapse of communism was accompanied by an explosion of information, opinion and entertainment". The media rapidly adapted to the new situation and became one of the first sectors to be privatized. This was especially true of periodicals. The post-socialist countries witnessed a boom in new publications and the de-nationalization of existing periodicals between 1989 and 1992 (Bednařík et al., 2019, pp. 400–408; Coman, 2009; Raycheva, 2009). Electronic media, namely radio and television, faced a much more problematic situation as the frequency spectrum was limited and the legislation for leasing frequencies to private broadcasters was very slow to develop, often taking several years. All this encouraged the rapid arrival of pirate radio (radio stations that operated illegally without the necessary licences or permissions to broadcast on a specified frequency). These largely presented Anglo-American popular music – music that had been heavily regulated under the original media monopolies of the socialist states and in some cases continued to be unavailable in the context of emerging capitalism due to the disproportionate pricing policy of music companies and corporations entering the free market.[2] Given the circumstances, the stations came to serve, in part, as instruments of political activism aimed at the transformation of the legal environment.

This article studies pirate radio in Czechoslovakia immediately after 1989. Our case studies involve the Prague-based Radio Stalin (later Radio Ultra, now Radio 1) and České Budějovice's Radio Podzemí (later Radio Faktor, now Hitrádio Faktor). These stations were chosen because they are practically the only publicly known institutions of their kind, established in the first months after the fall of the communist regime. The article primarily discusses the historical, organizational, legal and technological aspects, but also the often overlooked and, for radio, crucial issue of the musical dramaturgical contexts of both stations. It also considers the wider international context, particularly regarding the analogies and specifics of other (not only) post-socialist states. Other phenomena explored include the broader issues of ethics and freedom of information (in relation to audience and state legislation), which acquired several new connotations in the administrative context of the post-socialist transformation.

The study follows the line of international research into popular music and its personal and institutional vehicles in the key transformative era of early post-socialism in Europe after 1989, which has been expanding in recent years through the work of the authors of the collective monographs *Popular Music in Eastern Europe* (Mazierska, 2016) and *Popular Music in Communist and Post-Communist Europe* (Blüml et al., 2019). By understanding the complex structure of popular music culture in

2 For example, the recordings of Western musicians often sold in Czechoslovakia at higher prices than in neighbouring (and much richer) Germany. The imbalance subsequently prompted the massive spread of illegal copying. See Elavsky (2013).

the region, including all the relevant institutional overlaps (with the media and the music industry), the article builds on the latest interdisciplinary publications such as *Made in Poland*, edited by Patryk Galuszka, a researcher on popular music and media studies (2020). In terms of resources, the article draws on a detailed analysis of contemporary Czechoslovak press articles issued between 1989 and 1992,[3] and on radio broadcast documents (including audio recordings). Another key source are interviews with the eyewitnesses and representatives of the first pirate radio broadcasts in Czechoslovakia, interviewed in most cases by the author in 2020.[4]

2. CZECHOSLOVAK RADIO AND ITS POST-1989 TRANSFORMATION

The production, broadcasting, and distribution of radio content in Czechoslovakia was monopolized, until November 1989, by the state Czechoslovak Radio. This, together with Czechoslovak Television (founded in 1953), was a key medium of the communist regime, run directly by the country's Ministry of Information or Ministry of Culture. Starting in 1964, the tasks of Czechoslovak Radio were defined by law as the promotion of mass political and educational work and the comprehensive awareness of domestic and foreign audiences about developments at home and abroad (Act No. 17/1964 Coll.).

The monopoly of Czechoslovak Radio was, however, never bullet-proof. Residents of border regions were able to tune their receivers (with the CCIR bandplan) to foreign stations. Today, researchers such as Tomek (2014, 2015) focus especially on the political broadcasting of the BBC and Radio Free Europe, which was systematically disrupted by the communist regime. Czechoslovak audiences nevertheless also cherished foreign radio stations presenting the latest Western popular music, which was broadcast by the domestic media only to a very limited extent. The most important radio station of this type, specifically in the fifties and sixties, was Radio Luxembourg. This Luxembourg-based station broadcast a stream of music and influenced several generations of musicians and fans, not only in Czechoslovakia. Its popularity among young people even drove Czechoslovak Radio to produce its own popular music programmes (Štefečková, 2012). Other stations reaching the Czechoslovak air were the Austrian Österreich 3 (Ö3) and the German Bayern 3, public radio stations targeted at young people. In contrast to its attitude to Radio Free Europe or the BBC, the Communist Party did not consider these stations dangerous and did not monitor

3 This includes the specialist media journals *Rozhlas* and *Strategie*, and the dailies *Český deník*, *Jihočeská pravda*, *Lidová demokracie*, *Lidové noviny*, *Práce* and *Studentské listy* and magazines *Mladý svět*, *Melodie* and *Respekt*.

4 Reminiscences about Radio Stalin were sourced from interviews held by Šárka Prágrová with narrators from the station for her bachelor's thesis. Another seven interviews were held, as part of our study, with interviewees affiliated with Radio Podzemí. The interviewees included the station founders (Ladislav Faktor, Bohuslav Čtveráček), DJs (Vladimír Kostínek, Vojtěch Vít, Petr Jungmann), and audience (Jiří Tichý). The aim was to find out as much information as possible about the daily operation of the stations.

them or try to interfere with their signal; people were not prosecuted for listening to them (Štefečková, 2012).

As indicated above, the process of profound structural change in post-socialist European states commenced after 1989. The transition to a market economy often primarily affected the media, turning it into the first major area of private enterprise. The key phase of the transformation of the Czechoslovakian media industry, according to Bednařík et al. (2019, pp. 395–399), kicked off in November 1989 and lasted until February 1994. This is when Nova TV – the first nationwide private television station in Czechoslovakia and also in Central and Eastern Europe – was launched. These years saw the unprecedentedly fast arrival of new media legislation, the transformation of media content and property rights, and the rise of the advertising market. The transition to privatized, profit-driven media was the core of the transformation process (Bednařík et al., 2019, p. 410).

The weeks and months after November 1989 fostered the birth of several new periodicals in Czechoslovakia and across post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe: these were both transformed official titles and originally unofficial samizdat titles (Bednařík et al., 2019, pp. 400–408). The situation was noticeably more complicated in the case of private radio and television, where it was first necessary to establish a basic concept of radio and television broadcasting in a democratic society to replace the then system of state-controlled media. The concept was ultimately modelled on the Western European dual broadcasting system, where public service media (into which the former Czechoslovak state television, radio, and news agency were transformed) coexist with private media and holders of licences to operate radio or television. The category of community radio stations such as the ones in Hungary was not considered, although decision-making took place at a time when the ethos of participatory democracy, presented primarily by Václav Havel, still dominated in Czechoslovakia (Hadjiisky, 2001).

Because of the precipitate developments, the legislative process was marked by anomalies and irregularities from the beginning. A number of foreign stations, especially stations from France, where the private radio market was the most developed in the European context, faced new opportunities in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. The French music station Europe 2, for example, started broadcasting completely outside the legal framework in Czechoslovakia mentioned above. In January 1990 its director Martin Brisac arranged a contract for cooperation with Czechoslovak Radio, which lent the foreign station one of its Prague frequencies (Moravec, 2000, p. 8). The state-controlled radio itself thus took the first steps to demonopolize the industry, which reflects the atmosphere of the first post-revolutionary months. The planned joint venture (a youth station) fell through as a result of subsequent personnel changes in the management of Czechoslovak Radio. Precisely due to the complicated relationship between Europe 2 and Czechoslovak Radio, the private station could not create its own Czech program in the first year of its Prague broadcasting, so it only took over the broadcasting of its parent French station with moderated

inputs and advertisements in French.[5] In cooperation with the Bratislava management of Czechoslovak Radio, CD International began broadcasting at the same time. Paradoxically, even this station did not speak to its listeners in their mother tongue, as it was targeting listeners in neighbouring Austria, where private broadcasting was not allowed until 1995, and its language was therefore German. While the then government criticized such agreements, in its declaration of 14 June 1990 it allowed Radio Free Europe to broadcast on Czechoslovak territory, with the BBC and RFI following a few months later (Moravec, 2000, pp. 8–9).[6]

Czechoslovakia was, nonetheless, officially still not granting licences for private broadcasting in 1990. Those interested could apply to the relevant interdepartmental commission in charge of selecting applicants for the first experimental non-state radio and television broadcasting, which was established on 11 June 1990. The venture proved very popular, as, a mere two months into its existence, the commission was swamped by 49 applications for radio broadcasting permits: fifteen arrived from abroad, and another six from Czech entrepreneurs who planned to cooperate with foreign entities (Řežábek, 1990, p. 1).

Czechoslovakia issued the very first licences on 22 March 1991, one year after Europe 2 had started to broadcast, and authorized only local radio stations[7] within the Prague territory, where the Radiocommunications Administration was able to ensure that the transmitted signal would not interfere with broadcasting from abroad ((r), 1991). The first non-Prague local licences were granted about two months later. As in other Central and Eastern European countries, some of the stakeholders interested in private radio did not wait for a media law and founded their own pirate radio stations. One of the contributing factors was the exemptions given to foreign stations – the initiators of illegal broadcasting were worried that by the time the legislation was completed, the market would have been divided, without any space for new stations (Reilly, 1990).

Only two instances of continuing illegal radio are reported from Czechoslovakia in this period: Radio Stalin, launched on 19 October 1990, and Radio Podzemí, which began to broadcast on 31 December 1990. It is likely that the number of pirate radio stations was higher. This is indicated by the non-specific claims of media historians (Köpplová & Jirák, 2011, p. 278), members of the Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting (the licensing and supervision authority) (Řežábek, 1992) and other sources (Hron, 2019). However, no specific information has been preserved about any other pirate stations broadcasting in the early 1990s. It is therefore possible to

5 Even in this form, 35% of people within range of their transmitters listened to the station (EL, 1991, p.6).

6 The situation was similar in other post-socialist countries: for example, the Bulgarian government began issuing special licences to foreign stations in April 1991; Bulgaria first had Voice of America broadcasts to Europe, and Voice of America was later joined by the French RFI, the BBC World Service, Deutsche Welle, and Radio Free Europe (Sotirov, 1998). The Polish government enabled French FUN and RFI broadcasts a whole year earlier (Sagan, 2014a).

7 The law distinguished between local, regional and national broadcasting. The local radio stations had a 1kW transmitter power and therefore a low signal range.

assume that these were only local short-lived experimental radio stations. Further mentions of pirate radio in the Czech Republic are from the turn of the millennium and later in the 2000s (Super-Radio.cz, 2010).

The following chapters introduce both of the Czechoslovak pirate radio stations mentioned above, and explain their role in the context of contemporary politics, legislation, and popular music trends, with a strong emphasis on rock revival and the circumstantial short-term rise of underground bands.

3. RADIO STALIN (ULTRA)

The first and most famous pirate radio station in Czechoslovakia was the Prague-based Radio Stalin, which broadcast from 19 to 25 October 1990 from a bunker under the former Stalin monument in the centre of Prague.[8] It was established by students of (prevalently) the Faculty of Education of Charles University. Some of them had participated in a humanitarian operation during the bloody uprising in Romania in December 1989, where they had encountered local student radio. This inspired them later to launch their own station. After returning to Czechoslovakia, the students took advantage of the offer by the French station NRJ of free, old, unused and yet still functional radio equipment. The kit consisted of a 50-watt transmitter, a mixer, a microphone, and two gramophones (Prágrová & Štindl, 2017).

The students applied for a radio licence as early as March 1990, later asking the Radiocommunications Administration to identify a vacant transmission frequency which would not interfere with other broadcast or air or fire communications. Before any decision about the licence was made, the team interested in cooperating on the broadcast gradually grew. The initiators rented premises and carried out test broadcasts, without going live, from spring to autumn 1990 to ensure everything was ready for the moment they could broadcast (Prágrová, 2017, p. 34). Copying Europe 2, the students tried to reach an agreement with Czechoslovak Radio, but the latter did not grant the radio any of its frequencies (Prágrová & Hronek, 2016, p. 2).

In the autumn of 1990, an offer came from the Linhart Foundation, the organizer of the Totalitarian Zone Festival held under the former Stalin monument. The festival combined concerts, artistic performances, and theatre, and the foundation wanted to set up a temporary radio station to report on the festival programme (Prágrová, Vintr & Hnyk, 2016, pp. 4–5). The students moved their equipment to the former telephone exchange in the bunker and named their station Radio Stalin after the new venue. The broadcasting team was made up of about thirty young people, some of whom had gained experience with Czechoslovak Radio, particularly Vladimír Vintr, who had worked for the state radio for a year as a technician and was one of the most

8 For the importance of this site, see the study by Hana Pichová (2008). When mentioning Radio Stalin, the author incorrectly states that it broadcast from here before 1989.

prominent DJs of Radio Stalin. The station was run on a voluntary basis, with festival bar drink vouchers being the only perk (Prágrová, 2017, p. 49).

The daytime playlist included alternative music, and at night the station broadcast festival concerts (mostly alternative Czechoslovak bands such as Z kopce, Hudba Praha, E, and Ľahká múza). The DJs reported on the current festival programme, and the radio also had its own jingle, which introduced the station in various languages, including Russian and French.[9] Interviews with music bands and artists who performed at or simply visited the festival also played a significant role in Radio Stalin broadcasts.

Thanks to media attention, word about the new radio station spread quickly even outside the short range of its transmitter, which covered mainly the centre of Prague. Shortly after Radio Stalin began to broadcast, other people interested in private radio from all over the country visited the station, including Ladislav Faktor, who was intent on launching Radio Podzemí (Prágrová & Hronek, 2016, p. 6).

Radio Stalin was on air for about 20 hours a day. When it was not broadcasting a festival concert or interview, its DJs played music. Instead of following a radio format, they played what was available, which was often their amateur-copied and thus not very high quality audio cassettes (Prágrová, Vintr & Hnyk, 2016, p. 11). The very first track Radio Stalin played was *Rocks Off* by The Rolling Stones. The list of Czech music featured underground bands, some of which had, just months earlier, been banned from performing, such as Garage, MCH Band, Psí vojáci, Jasná páka, Plastic People of the Universe, DG 307, folk singers Karel Kryl and Jaroslav Hutka, and new rock bands such as Ecstasy of Saint Theresa, Here, Naked Souls, and Kurtizány z 25. Avenue (Prágrová, 2017, p. 43). Considerable space was also given to foreign music, ranging from industrial metal through electronic music to rock hits of the sixties or seventies, to meet the audience demand (Prágrová & Zima, 2016, p. 13).

Eyewitnesses remember that, despite the several months of test operation, Radio Stalin suffered greatly from technical imperfections due to faulty technology and the inexperience of its operators. Their communication was often marred by speech imperfections and informality. The poor quality is also evidenced in the reminiscence of the founder of the radio, Pavel Hronek, who said: "I ain't gonna lie, the broadcasting was shitty. Nitwits babbling away, music playing, interviews of hammered musicians at 3am" (Prágrová & Hronek, 2016, p. 11). One of the interviewees, however, was President Václav Havel, who attended the event and thus legitimized the station in the public eye.[10]

Although Stalin is generally considered a pirate radio station, it had, according to the media theoretician Václav Moravec (2000, p. 9), a special permit to broadcast at

9 The sound recordings are available at: https://soundcloud.com/jaduportal/poslouch-te-r-dio-stalin-sie-h?in=jaduportal/sets/radiostalin.

10 The recording of this interview is available at: https://soundcloud.com/jaduportal/poslouch-te-r-dio-stalin-sie?in=jaduportal/sets/radiostalin. City officials said in the press that one of the president's advisers even helped install the station's antenna. Radio Stalin refuted this information ((oč), 1990, p. 12).

least from 19 to 22 October 1990 at the festival.[11] After the permit expired, Radio Stalin was visited by officials representing Prague 7, which is where the event had taken place. The officials pronounced the broadcast illegal and demanded it be terminated. The request was accommodated, but the radio resumed broadcasting as early as 24 October (Heidenreichová, 1990). The station kicked off with a statement from which it is clear that, at least from this moment on, it was partially abandoning its original exclusive focus on music in favour of political activism:

> You're listening to an independent radio, you're listening to Radio Stalin. After a short two-day break you can tune in to us at 92.6. We were shut down by the authorities and the threat is still there. We are asking you, our listeners, who enjoy this broadcast, to help us in any way you can. Call us at [...] or call the public media, or your MPs who alone could perhaps help us. From now on, our broadcast is a manifestation against the monopoly of Czechoslovak Radio and the Radiocommunications Administration.[12]

The foretold intervention by the authorities took place very soon: the following morning, the police, in cooperation with the authorities and the Radiocommunications Administration, confiscated Radio Stalin's broadcasting equipment. This was the end of the station. Although the station had broadcast for less than a week and could only be tuned into in part of Prague, it was widely supported by the public, particularly after the police intervention. Its popularity was enhanced by intense media coverage. This trend culminated in a petition in support of independent radio and television, initiated by members of the station, which collected 30,000 signatures within a few weeks, including those of a number of members of Charter 77 and KAN (Club of Committed Non-Party Members), the editorial boards of the magazines *Revolver Revue* and *Respekt*, the dailies *Lidové noviny* and *Studentské listy*, as well as the artists Mikuláš Chadima, Marta Kubišová, Filip Topol, Michal Pavlíček, and Joska Skalník (Reilly, 1990).

The participation of famous people associated with long-term anti-communist resistance provoked a broader discussion – a discussion in which the original understanding that the existence of unofficial organizational structures independent of the establishment was an unquestionable principle or value was confronted with ethical norms and respect for the legislature of the new democratic state. The ambivalent attitude to Radio Stalin was illustrated in, for example, the article "The Case of Radio Stalin" published in the weekly *Rozhlas* in December 1990, in which the author admitted that the station had trespassed, yet tried to justify this by the absence of legislation (Krupička, 1990, p. 48). In addition, the dramatic conditions of emerging

11 Similarly, FM Plus had been allowed to broadcast throughout the celebrations of the anniversary of the liberation of Pilsen by the US Army (Milota, 2007, pp. 8–9).

12 The Radio Stalin broadcast record: https://soundcloud.com/jaduportal/poslouch-te-r-dio-stalin-sie-h?in=jaduportal/sets/radiostalin.

capitalism fostered conspiracy theories: one of them was introduced by a *Mladý svět* journalist, according to whom Radio Stalin was part of a well thought-out plan of the French commercial station NRJ (which had provided Stalin with broadcasting equipment) to enter the Czechoslovak radio market (Vondráček, 1990, p. 19).

The case in a way illustrated the following phase of the Velvet Revolution: it flared up in the November 1989 student demonstrations, only to transition eventually onto a purely institutional and legal level, a level where, for example, decisions about the future of the domestic media were made. A brand new perspective gained attention, too: protection of the Czech radio space against massive private interests coming from the West. After the police intervention, Radio Stalin announced in the media that the confiscation of their transmitter would not stop their efforts to disrupt the monopoly of Czechoslovak Radio. They issued a press release on 28 October, which said:

> We would like to assure our listeners and supporters that we will start broadcasting again as soon as technology allows us, as we cannot condone what is happening: friends of the old order hampering the adoption of new laws on independent radio and television, and the Radiocommunications administration allocating vacant frequencies to western radios in order to maintain its position. We shall therefore continue to broadcast to draw attention to the fact that, once the relevant laws have been adopted, there will no longer be free frequencies for domestic applicants. (Reilly, 1990)

President Václav Havel, criticized for giving an interview to the illegal station, also joined the discussion on Radio Stalin. When asked about it on the regular Czechoslovak Radio programme Hovory v Lánech on 28 October 1990, he answered by pointing to the need for media pluralism:

> It never crossed my mind to ask if the station was legal or illegal, and now I have read in the papers that it is actually illegal as it did not get official approval to broadcast on its frequencies, even though it had applied. I may end up having to go to court as a witness. I think that the micro affair it has caused is good, because it highlights the need for a plurality of those transmitters and the need to look for ways for the government to grant frequencies, if there are any available, to independent stations or private stations, so that the monopoly of our venerable radio is broken, to some extent. (Prágrová, 2017, p. 47)

When the technology was returned to the radio based on a court decision in February 1991, the station immediately started broadcasting on the same frequency under the name Ultra (or "Radio 92.6" at one point). This time the radio based itself in the Bunkr rock club, which had been founded by Richard Němčok. The broadcasting, once again, lacked proper permission. The Radiocommunications Administration

issued a decision for the radio to cease operation the very day the broadcasting was launched (15 February 1990), but after several hours of forced silence the radio resumed broadcasting (*Lidové noviny*, 1991, p. 2). The new station granted space to other parties interested in private radio: licence applicants such as the Prague-based Trans, Independent and Collegium, as well as other radio stations from Brno and Ostrava, carried out test broadcasts from here free of charge (Prágrová & Wienerová, 2017, p. 3).

Ultra only broadcast for a few weeks before the administration finally granted all Prague licences on 22 March, with Ultra gaining one. After winning the licence, the radio began to broadcast under the new name of Radio 1. The station still operates today, now as part of the Media Club network. Radio 1 is one of the few traditional radio stations to have kept to the original concept of primarily non-mainstream alternative music.

4. RADIO PODZEMÍ

The other, less publicized, case of pirate radio in early post-socialist Czechoslovakia was Podzemí. This station broadcast from the cellar of its founder Ladislav Faktor in České Budějovice, a town of 100,000 inhabitants in southern Bohemia. The station was launched on 31 December 1990. Rather than being the primary goal of its initiators, its illegal status was, once again, the result of the dismal legal situation of the time.

Ladislav Faktor, having trained as a solicitor, began his career in the mid-1980s as a freelance musician, composer of film and stage music, and producer (Kleinová, 1991, p. 6). He took part in recordings made in the České Budějovice studio of Czechoslovakia Radio, and built a recording studio in the cellar of his house in Jírovcova Street, where he made records for the České Budějovice band Oceán before November 1989.[13]

In August 1990, together with other jazz and rock musicians from České Budějovice, he requested a licence for "Radio F – Regional Broadcast of Dr. Faktor for České Budějovice" (Řežábek, 1990, p. 1). Other people involved in the project included producer Bohuslav Čtveráček and technician Antonín Couf. Due to delays in licensing and the long-term inaction of the authorities, the team decided to broadcast outside any legal framework (Kleinová, 1991, p. 6). This step was directly inspired by Radio Stalin, in which Ladislav Faktor had also participated, and where he made contacts. These contacts later helped him to find broadcasting technology, which was otherwise hard to obtain in Czechoslovakia at that time (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020).

The pirate radio was based in the cellar recording studio of Ladislav Faktor, whose equipment allowed for elementary broadcasting. In addition to microphones, the

13 The Oceán's YouTube channel features record-making videos which show the premises and equipment of the future Radio Podzemí: https://youtu.be/TUFopuAt34o.

equipment included a basic mixer, a tape recorder, and two turntables from which music was played. The "home-made" transmitter itself was provided by Antonín Couf, a guitarist of the České Budějovice band Boule and a radio communications worker.

The easy-to-remember frequency of 100.0 FM was selected from the relatively free radio spectrum, and on this frequency the new Radio Podzemí (Underground), aptly named given the nature and location of its broadcasting, aired for the first time on New Year's Eve 1990. A journalist of *Jihočeská pravda* commented on the premiere in her article titled Air Under Attack:

> Whisper had me tune in at 100.0 on the afternoon of the thirty-first, and there it was in the CCIR band, RADIO PODZEMÍ! The stale environment of the state-sanctioned radio was at last ruptured also in České Budějovice and the surrounding area by a private pirate radio station, which, housed in a cellar in the city centre, brought a stimulating three hours of mainly current music, delivered with a lively (and humorous) presentation underlined by a constant and truly iconic jingle of RADIO PODZEMÍ. ((akl), 1991a, p. 2)

In addition to the music, the article mentions interviews with musicians and an unnamed MP; the initiators of the broadcast ((akl), 1991a, p. 2) also remained anonymous. As for the MP, it could have been the then minister of finance and main advocate for economic change towards a market economy (later the president), Václav Klaus. The fact that he featured in one of the first broadcasts by the radio is referenced by Faktor himself, who recalls a statement of Klaus, which differed somewhat from the previously quoted subtle call for the support of pluralistic media from Václav Havel: "That ticked me off, Klaus went live and said he did not think radio stations would be the most important thing to create, right at the beginning. I was upset and I still remember his words" (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020).

The New Year's Eve debut of Radio Podzemí did not mean the radio would begin to broadcast regularly. It was not until more than a month later that the station went on air again ((akl), 1991b, p. 1). The first broadcast was primarily demonstrative; the aim was to draw attention to the deficient legislation and to put pressure on the relevant authorities, to provoke discussion.

The broadcasting by the illegal station did not escape the attention of the authorities either: "Sure I was prosecuted by the authorities, [...] twenty radiocommunications guys were there, yelling at me that planes would crash, they made a lot of threats. But our technology was too good for us not to know that it was nonsense" (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020). In the end the threats proved to be vain: the management of Radio Podzemí were never fined, nor was their broadcasting equipment confiscated, unlike what happened to Radio Stalin. According to Faktor, the reason could be the geographical distance from the capital. Local radiocommunications workers were mostly fans of Radio Podzemí, and new

"post-revolutionary" city officials took part in radio interviews (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020).

Radio Podzemí went on air again on Friday 15 February 1991. This time it ran from 6pm to 10pm at the slightly different frequency of 99.7 MHz. The date of the broadcast had been agreed at the founding congress of the Union for Independent Television and Radio Broadcasting. The plan was to broadcast illegally in other parts of the country on this one day, to drive the acceleration of the licensing process forward ((akl), 1991b, p. 1). This is evident from an interview for J*ihočeská pravda*: "We would like to stop our illegal broadcast for now. If things with our licence application don't move forward, you'll be hearing from us again. And this time it won't take a full two months" ((akl), 1991b, p. 1). Podzemí indeed went back on air sooner than that, namely after a week, and retained its weekly periodicity for the following months.

Soon the radio was airing ads made in Faktor's recording studio (Neradová, 1991, p.1). He initially recorded these free of charge for regional entrepreneurs who were friends of his, to convince them that this form of promotion worked. "There was next to zero advertising back then, and entrepreneurs needed to get their products to people, to promote them. And so we shot a set of ads, which were sung by our musician friends and which were pretty funny. Entrepreneurs began to turn up, and once they started making a profit, they started bringing cash. And this set the wheel spinning" (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020).

Musically, Radio Podzemí focused mainly on rock music such as that of Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, and Deep Purple, and the music of the sixties, in particular The Beatles and The Rolling Stones; and yet they also incorporated current hits. "We also played Zappa and special gigs you won't hear on radio anymore, because it was something we liked. And people loved it as well since they hadn't heard it before" (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020). Podzemí also began to put on programmes. In addition to a very popular "songs on request", there was the Something Different show, a 30-minute jazz session prepared by Bohuslav Čtveráček (B. Čtveráček, personal communication, 13 January 2021).

The playlists were selected by the DJs themselves. The first DJs were, almost without exception, experienced south Bohemian disc jockeys, who simply transformed their original club plays into a radio format. They included, for example, Vojtěch Vít, Petr Jungmann, and Vladimír Kostínek, who had started playing in discotheques in the late 1960s (V. Kostínek, personal communication, 17 September 2020). Hiring DJs was advantageous for the station in a number of ways: "The first year guys came over who had heaps of vinyls because they did disco nights and that was the source of music. They were in touch with the audience, with regular folks, they knew how to pick a track that people would love. That's because they did dance gigs every Saturday night and knew what the crowd wanted" (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020). Another advantage of working with disc jockeys was their knowledge of sound technology and their ability to speak into a microphone. Disc

jockeying in Czechoslovakia had been given a standardized instructional and qualification framework in the mid-1970s (Blüml, 2019).

The Podzemí playlists were subject to a single unwritten rule, which was the "ban on the Gotts and Vondráčkovás" – pop stars who had reigned in Czechoslovak popular music for the preceding twenty years (L. Faktor, personal communication, 28 August 2020). The station in general avoided domestic production, namely socialist pop music and other genres. The exception was new wave and rock bands such as Precedens, Pražský výběr, Oceán, and local bands.

The founders of Podzemí did not advertise the station at all, and news about it quickly spread by word of mouth. Although no listening figures are available for this period, naturally, the popularity of the illegal station is illustrated by the fact that, once a telephone line was installed in the studio, the DJs answered eighty calls during a single show (Kleinová, 1991, p. 6). However, the station's signal did not even cover the whole of České Budějovice. The then fifteen-year-old radio fan Jiří Tichý was living in the Máj housing estate, three kilometres from the transmitter, and he says that reception was borderline: "I was living with my parents on the eighth floor of a block of flats. I found a broom and fixed the antennae up above the roof to hear well 'cos the signal was weak in [České Budějovice]. You could tune in only if you were an enthusiast or lived close by. Outside [České Budějovice] or on the edge of the town was just too far for the signal." (J. Tichý, personal communication, 14 January 2021).

The station planned, after being licensed, to change its name to Radio Faktor, as the original name implied illegal activities (Kleinová, 1991, p. 6). Its licence entered into force on Friday 17 May 1991 (kolektiv autorů, 2003, p. 99), and the station began to broadcast under its new name two weeks later ((akl), 1991c, p. 2). The new station took over from the pirate Podzemí its staff, equipment, broadcasting premises, 99.7 frequency, and initially also the weekly mode. A month later, on Monday 1 July, Faktor began broadcasting every weekday from 7am to 7pm, while the weekends were dedicated to technical maintenance ((akl), 1991d, p. 1). Radio Faktor continues to broadcast (as Hitrádio Faktor), nowadays as part of the Radiohouse network. In this respect, it is the longest running private Czech radio station outside Prague.

5. CONCLUSION

As the cases of Stalin and Podzemí illustrate, pirate radio stations were the last resort in Czechoslovakia in 1990 and 1991 for those interested in running a private radio station, as they were not allowed to do so even after several months of trying due to the absence of legislative support. The broadcasts, with their dominant popular music content, were largely demonstrative in nature. The aim was to point out the reluctance of the new legislators to demonopolize radio and television. Similar activities would, under different circumstances, provoke significant legal recourse, but in the transformation period the authorities were extremely liberal. As the authors of *Dějiny českých médií* (History of Czech Media) aptly say: "Developments in the media

industry [after 1989] often raced ahead of the emerging media legislation, outside the existing legal framework, although in a favourable social climate. The epoch was highly tolerant to not entirely legal practices in private media formation, as the process was viewed as part of privatization, of building a system of state-independent media." (Bednařík et al., 2019, p. 400).

The two stations introduced here had slightly different starting points and visions. Radio Stalin was basically a student radio station: its initiators were in their twenties with an interest in alternative art. Radio Podzemí was made up of people who were ten years older and were mostly active musicians or disc jockeys with a vision of radio as a commercial product (remember that the station was already running commercials for local entrepreneurs while it was broadcasting illegally). The output of the two stations had several elements in common: both stations gave a lot of space to alternative, experimental music, but also to political issues. In some respects, the dramaturgy of Stalin and Podzemí followed the "horizon-expanding" function of public radio rather than anticipating the approach of commercial radio stations. A similarly idealistic approach was also a characteristic of the first wave of radio licensees.

In contrast to the importance given to these pirate stations, both had a low real range, as well as a short duration. Radio Stalin broadcast for about a week, mostly as an accompaniment to the festival. Podzemí aired about sixteen times, with a periodicity of one evening a week. It is likely that the pirate broadcasting of many other stations was only one-off and was part of the aforementioned "coercive action" of the licence applicants' organization, the Union for Independent Television and Radio Broadcasting.

The favourable public response, specifically in the case of Radio Stalin, and the fear of more and more similar cases, prompted the Czechoslovak government in the first months of 1991 to allow the (experimental) licensing of private radio, even though the draft Media Act, which would legally define the area and its stakeholders, had not been approved. Interestingly, Vladimír Vintr, one of the founders of Radio Stalin, was a member of the first commission in charge of licensing Prague-based radios (Prágrová, 2017, p. 57). Pirate radio thus achieved its goal in this respect. This is probably why Czechoslovakia did not see such a boom in illegal stations as, for example, occurred in neighbouring Poland, where about a hundred pirate radio stations were set up in larger cities but also in villages (Doliwa, 2019, p. 88; Sagan, 2014b). It is important to add here that Poland had a certain tradition of pirate radio stations even before 1989, when, in addition to several purely illegal stations, there were also many student radio stations that represented the grey zone. So, unlike in Czechoslovakia, there was something to build on (Doliwa, 2019, pp. 85–86).

Speaking of neighbouring countries, it can be said that although the legislative process in Czechoslovakia was much criticized in the press reports of the period for being long, private radio licences began to be granted here earlier than in any other post-socialist country. Poland, for example, did not start licensing private radio

stations until the end of 1993 or the beginning of 1994 (Beliczyński, 2009), and Hungary adopted media legislation abolishing the then moratorium on radio frequency rental as late as 1996 (Gosztonyi, 2010).

Although private radio was considered by its proponents to be a natural part of democratic pluralism and the market economy in Czechoslovakia, the phenomenon had not long been in existence in Western Europe itself by the early 1990s. Private commercial stations, often local only, began to emerge in greater numbers as late as the early 1980s. The Netherlands, for example, welcomed its first private radio and television stations in 1989 (Brants, 2004, p. 146). The first Swedish private commercial radio station was established in 1993 (Hulten, 2004, p. 242). RTL in Luxembourg had a monopoly until 1991 (Hirsch, 2004, p. 142), and the public ORF in Austria until 1995 (Trappel, 2004, p. 7).

Running more on enthusiasm than knowledge or professionalism, the amateur programmes of Stalin and Podzemí, without a clear format, foreshadowed the atmosphere of the following months, when new official stations cropped up across the country whose staff learned how to radio broadcast "on the go". In 1995, there were as many as 87 private radio stations in the Czech Republic (Moravec, 2000, p. 27). The Czech market was too small for so many broadcasters, and so minor radio stations were grouped under several larger networks, which is the model applied even today by the private radio industry in the Czech Republic.

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