



# A Frontline of Espionage

Studies on Hungarian Cold War  
Intelligence in Austria

Edited by Magdolna Baráth and Dieter Bacher

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## A Frontline of Espionage



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# Introduction

In October 2017, the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security in Budapest, Hungary and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War in Graz, Austria signed a cooperation agreement on the realization of joint research projects at the Embassy of Hungary in Vienna. Among the proposed topics, particular attention was devoted to uncovering the Austrian activities of the Hungarian state security bodies and publishing the results of this research. Within and beyond the framework of this project, at the beginning of October 2018, the two institutes organized a joint conference in Budapest, the presentations of which have been edited and annotated for publication in the present volume.

Following World War II, Austria became important to the Hungarian state security bodies controlled by communist leadership for several reasons. On the one hand, Austria became a place of refuge for the Hungarian armed forces, which had fought alongside Nazi Germany to the very end and were ultimately forced to retreat, as well as part of the Hungarian political and military elite, and several leaders and members of the far-right Arrow Cross Party. As early as 1945, the Hungarian political police and the recently established military counterintelligence service were charged with the task of observing the activities of these groups (with the support of the Soviet occupying forces stationed in Austria), despite the fact that several measures had been taken to restore order in Hungarian-Austrian relations. During the preparation phase of the communist takeover, the Hungarian authorities took increasingly severe measures against the Hungarian emigration and in order to observe the Western intelligence services operating in Austria. Not even the closing of the state border and the establishment of the “Iron Curtain” could curtail this process, as Hungarian state security managed to establish an intelligence and counterespionage residency operating under the guise of the Hungarian foreign representation in Vienna.

The activities of Hungarian state security were fueled by the fact that Austria was the only state among Hungary’s neighbors that did not fall under the complete and direct influence of the Soviet Union: in the eyes of those growing



dissatisfied with the communist system, Austria became the main route of escape, a gateway to the West, while to the Western secret services, it became the primary channel of infiltration into Hungary. Hungarian intelligence was not the only secret service that considered Austria an important “intelligence hub” for the upcoming Cold War, after all – the British security service (MI5) and Vitaly Nikolsky of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Soviet Union (GRU) also saw Austria as the “place to be” in the upcoming years, though the country and its administration were only secondary targets.

It would appear that the intelligence agencies of the Western occupying forces were also aware of the importance of Austria. For example, in April 1954, the 430th Detachment of the U.S. Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) in Upper Austria filed a 180-page report on the Austrian activities of the Czechoslovak intelligence service and on other Eastern European services as a whole. Concerning the Hungarian service, the CIC concluded that “until 1948 and even as late as early 1949, the Soviet, Polish, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and even the Romanian intelligence services were quite active in Austria, being concerned mostly with their own nationals residing there, secondly with Western intelligence, and thirdly with Western military forces.”

The above statement by the CIC would make an excellent “brief overview” of the present volume, as it succinctly captures the Austrian activities of Hungarian intelligence not only in the immediate post-war years, but also for the entire period of the “Cold War.” However, it is also important to study the activities of Hungarian intelligence in conjunction with other secret services from the later “Warsaw Pact” countries, as the U.S. and British services suspected these secret services to be acting under Soviet control: according to them, in the plans of the Soviet Union, the Hungarian and Czechoslovak services were the ones mainly responsible for the Austrian line.

Today it might seem self-evident, but we must not ignore the fact that the Eastern European secret services, including Hungarian intelligence, always pursued their own “national” interests, sometimes to the great displeasure of the Soviet partner; in other words, the general interest of the Hungarian service in Austria cannot be explained exclusively by the decisions of Soviet leadership. As a neighboring country, Hungary wanted to be well-informed about the general situation in Austria and certain factors in particular, such as the Hungarian emigration in Vienna or the situation on the common border, which later became part of the “Iron Curtain.”

The perspective of any one intelligence service is of course interesting in its own right, but cannot be understood properly without also examining the perspectives of other services involved, which first and foremost requires access to the relevant archival sources. When it comes to early Cold War Austria, the general situation is rather good, as the archives responsible for the documents of the former communist secret services can provide access to the majority of the material, and many of the files of U.S. and British intelligence until the mid-1950s are also available. However, there is a considerable shortage of sources when it comes to French and Austrian intelligence and state security, or Soviet foreign intelligence, just to mention the “most obstructive” ones.

The CIC report quoted above proves that studying Austria as an “intelligence hub” in the early Cold War could offer an interesting perspective on this period in East and Central Europe. However, research on this topic is still scarce, which means that intelligence in and about Austria largely remains a “blind spot” in contemporary history and Cold War studies. In many respects, the first steps have yet to be taken; therefore, the present volume is intended to be a “first step” which, on the one hand, offers examples of what is already known about the activities of Hungarian intelligence in Austria, and on the other, it shows the potential for further research.

The research potential of the present topic can only be fully explored when such research is carried out in international cooperation, as a single institution or archive often does not have the capacity and/or the “knowledge” required (language skills or access to sources). In this regard, cooperation agreements like the one made between the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War in Graz and the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security in Budapest can provide the platform necessary to counter such shortcomings. Therefore, this volume shall be published in Hungarian as well as in English to make the first insights of our joint project accessible to the broader international community.

In light of the above, we are very happy to present this volume, which contains studies by authors from both Hungary and abroad. Their studies are based on newly uncovered primary sources found in Hungarian, Austrian, and other foreign archives, and examine the establishment, network of connections, and international embeddedness of Hungarian intelligence and counterespionage between 1945 and 1989. These studies range from comprehensive overviews to more specific case studies, which together paint a cohesive picture of the most significant events of the historical periods covered in this volume.

The contributions of the present volume focus on many different aspects of the activities of Hungarian intelligence in Austria, which shows how diverse this research field really is; for this reason, we have divided these studies into three major categories. The first major category centers on the structural and organizational issues of the secret services and their agent networks, as this forms the basis of all further research, and relevant sources are usually available in abundance.

The second major category pertains to certain intelligence operations and their goals, which is yet another crucial starting point for all further in-depth studies focusing on certain theaters of operations. These studies give insight into the planning, preparation, and implementation of intelligence practices and also enable us to draw general conclusions on intelligence strategies.

The third and last major category attempts to reconstruct the structures and activities of certain bodies of intelligence. During the early phase of the Cold War, “human intelligence” (HUMINT) or information collected by agents was one of the most important sources of information, and the present volume contains a variety of contributions on this operative method.

The studies of the present volume also show how the consolidation of the Hungarian communist system went hand in hand with expanding the activities of the state security bodies abroad; in the case of Austria, this process began in the early 1950s, and continued following the signing of the Austrian State Treaty that granted the country sovereignty and independence. At the time, Austria was not yet a prioritized target in the eyes of Hungarian intelligence, though there were attempts, if largely unsuccessful, to use Austria as a base of intelligence operations against West Germany, and temporarily against Yugoslavia. Although undermining the activities of Hungarian refugees and the resistance of the Hungarian emigration remained a priority to the very end, following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Hungarian intelligence focused on infiltrating Austrian ministries, party headquarters, and international organizations in Vienna to perform political, military, and economic intelligence. However, uncovering this particular process remains the task of future research within the framework of this joint research project.

We hope that the present volume will be the first of many steps to shed light on this “missing dimension” of contemporary European history, and we want to wish all our readers an interesting and also (to a certain degree) “revealing” reading experience.

*Magdolna Baráth – Dieter Bacher*

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# Abstracts

**BARBARA STELZL-MARX**

**In the Arms of the Western Intelligence Agencies:  
Death Sentences Issued by the Soviet Military Courts against  
Hungarian Citizens in Austria between 1950 and 1953**

With the liberation and occupation of Austria in 1945, the Soviet Union exported its judicial policies to the Eastern part of the country for some ten years. The Soviet military tribunals prosecuted those persons for crimes that were allegedly directed against the Soviet Union and which, from Moscow's perspective, could therefore only be punished by their own courts. In the context of the Cold War, above all "anti-Soviet espionage" became the most important crime. The Soviet judicial system made no distinction between domestic and foreign citizens. Military Tribunal of Army Unit No. 28990 in Baden from 1950 until the time immediately after Stalin's death in March 1953, sentenced to death 100 persons, who were executed in Moscow. Most of them were citizens of Austria, but among them there were 12 Hungarians, some Germans, "displaced persons" and also the members of the Red Army.

The study shed light on the circumstances of the arrest and sentence of 12 Hungarian citizens, shot in Moscow, who had their fate, because they were in connection with Western Intelligence services.

**DIETER BACHER**

**Refugees as Informants: Project "WRINGER"  
and Hungarian Refugees in Austria**

The intelligence services operating in Austria after World War II were confronted with approximately 1,650,000 displaced persons, refugees, and exiled persons living in the occupied territories; however, certain services such as the British Joint Intelligence Bureau (JIB) saw this situation less as a threat and more as an opportunity, because they assumed that information about the Soviet Union and its satellite states could be obtained relatively easily from refugees and displaced persons who had emigrated to Austria from Eastern Europe. The result of these considerations was Project

“WRINGER,” which was supposed to provide a wide range of detailed information that could then be compiled into a comprehensive picture of the Soviet Bloc. In the continuously escalating Cold War, this became a high priority not only to the British intelligence community, but for other Western intelligence services as well.

In order to obtain information on the states of the Soviet Bloc, the British Field Security (FS) in Austria conducted tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of interviews with displaced persons, refugees, and exiled persons from Eastern Europe, and forwarded the resulting reports to the JIB. This study aims to provide an overview of the previously known activities of this project in Austria and the methodology of the surveys, and examines a few selected survey reports of Hungarian displaced persons and refugees.

THOMAS WEGENER FRIIS– ADI FRIMARK  
**The Least Likely of Enemies: Hungarian Intelligence  
 in Denmark during the Cold War**

Hungarian intelligence in Denmark and in Scandinavia is largely a non-existing subject, both to the Danish intelligence community during the Cold War and to historians in the last 30 years. From Copenhagen to Budapest it was simple so far, it was hard to imagine that Hungarian intelligence services would have any interest in the small NATO-state in the North. However, they did. Hungarian archival documents keen interests to military questions, making it feasible that Hungarian military intelligence was doing “intelligence by proxy” for the GRU. Whereas the military attachés of the Soviet Union attracted attention from Danish counterintelligence, only few resources were ever spent on Hungary which reduced the risks to an absolute minimum. No Hungarian diplomats were ever expelled from Denmark, nor was anybody tried for espionage in favor of Hungarian People’s Republic. Uncovered sources show that also Danish security authorities and Danish politics were targets for Hungarian espionage. In the late 1980’s every second Hungarian diplomat was thought to be an intelligence officer. A classical aim for the Eastern European Security and Intelligence apparatus were the emigres or diaspora groups in the West. During the Cold War, the emigrants was in the eye of both Hungarian and Danish services. To the Danes, the new citizen posed a security/integration dilemma. Furthermore, the political refugees challenged the host states ability to protect everybody on its’ territory. During the Cold War, this basic principle of sovereign states was put to its test.

**MAGDOLNA BARÁTH – LAJOS GECSÉNYI**  
**Hungarian Intelligence in Austria 1945–1956**

During the radical political transformation in Hungary after World War II, the watching of the activity of the former military and political elite's withdrawal with the German army towards West in the last months of the war, had great significance.

For the sake of it the agents of the newly created counterintelligence and intelligence organs (Military Political Department) – parallel with the increasing communist take-over attempts – became more and more active on the territory of the occupied Austria – with the efficient support of the Soviet state security bodies.

In 1948/1949 within the political police (State Security Authority) was created a new department dealing with political intelligence abroad. The first base of the new Hungarian state security intelligence service was established in Vienna embassy by recruiting András Kovács embassy secretary. His activities laid the foundation for establishing an intelligence residency under the guise of diplomatic service at the Hungarian embassy in Vienna in November 1950. In the next years the number of the staff gradually was on the increase and soon the most responsible positions at the embassy were filled by the employees of the Intelligence. They were supported by employees of the embassy and trade representation, working as secret collaborators of the intelligence. Since, considering that the main criteria was the political reliability, their activities were limited by their lack of foreign language skills and the lack of general cultural education.

Their main task invariably was the watching of the Hungarian emigration and undermining their organizations, but getting informations about the Austrian governmental organs and economic life also became more important. In October 1956, during the Hungarian revolution the intelligence officers temporarily left the embassy. After returning they continued their activities under new circumstances, fulfilling new tasks.

**ÁGNES JOBST**

**Using Austria as a “hub”**

**Performing Reconnaissance on the Hungarian Section  
of the NATO Training Center in Oberammergau**

From the early stages of the Cold War to the 1960s, Austria (and its capital, Vienna) was a “spring board” for the intelligence services of the Central and Eastern European socialist countries. The satellite states of the Soviet Bloc used Austria as a base for

their intelligence operations, where organizational support came from the residencies established in the Austrian capital of Vienna. It is no coincidence that in the fall of 1950, Hungarian intelligence also established its military and state security residencies in Vienna. In February 1961, news from the Czechoslovak partner bodies alerted Hungarian counterintelligence to the U.S. intelligence school and its Hungarian section in the Federal Republic of Germany. In this study, I shall discuss the role of the Hungarian residency in Vienna in the execution of intelligence operations by examining their reconnaissance activities targeting the NATO training center in Oberammergau, Bavaria

ÉVA SZ. KOVÁCS

“With Love, Your Friend, Lehel”

Hungarian Planted Agents in Austria, 1945–1965

After World War II the Hungarian state security turned to Austria with a special interest because it was the only country in which relation the Hungarian state security organs had general and special, external and internal counter-intelligence tasks.

Austria became a country beyond the Iron Curtain after the Austrian State Treaty, therefore all those general operative tasks, which should be executed against a country outside the socialist camp, were expected to be done also in connection with it. It means that agents had to be enlisted, an intelligence base had to be maintained, which should be controlled. This gave also an external counter-intelligence task for the Hungarian political police.

Primarily, there were geo-political reasons behind the special state security tasks in the Austrian relation, because Austria was the only neighbouring country of Hungary, which did not belong to the socialist camp. It also meant that this was the only escape route towards the West. As a consequence, the Hungarian state security services had a couple of special tasks, too: the special defence of the western frontier and its surveillance; the control of the population living in the frontier region; the prevention of border transgression; the arrest of the transgressors; the prevention of smuggling goods and humans; a special state security defence of certain industrial objects, or railways in the frontier region; disturbing western radio channels, etc.

At the same time, Austria was kept under observation because it accepted Hungarian emigrants into its refugee camps and finally because Austria was considered as “the penetrating channel of imperialism” to the socialist world. Therefore it also belonged to the special tasks of the Hungarian state security services to observe those Austrian and other western citizens (diplomats, businessmen, churchmen, tourists, etc.) living in Hungary, who kept contact with Hungarian

citizens. The author presents the priorities of the Hungarian intelligence through a couple of case studies of Hungarian informants settled in Austria.

**ILDIKÓ CSERÉNYI-ZSITNYÁNYI – NÓRA SZEKÉR**  
**Two Agent Stories from the Occupation Zones of Austria**

The essay analyses the event that led to the case of the Hungarian Brotherhood Community. Charges included the organization of a conspiracy spearheaded with the objective of overthrowing the newly established Hungarian Republic. The charges brought were entirely politically motivated: Hungarian state security essentially fabricated a conspiracy that involved the Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party and its leading politicians as the masterminds. In this manner, communist leadership managed to compromise and weaken the strongest non-communist political power to such an extent that the Smallholders could no longer interfere with the Hungarian Communist Party's rise to power. The politically motivated charges and compromising "evidence" presented was based on two tangentially connected intelligence cases that took place in the occupation zones of Austria; therefore, the aim of the present study is to examine the background of these two cases. A detailed analysis of the events reveals, on the one hand, that the case was built on a series of organized provocations by Hungarian state security; on the other hand, it also reveals that the targets of the provocation had indeed created a network whose members might not have meant to organize a conspiracy, but did cooperate with one another in ways that made the communist party feel threatened by their activities.

**MÁRIA PALASIK**  
**The Mysterious Disappearance of a Hungarian Intelligence  
 Officer, Vienna, May 1953**

On May 22, 1953, at 8.00 pm, the Intelligence Division of the State Security Authority in Hungary (*Államvédelmi Hatóság*, ÁVH, the Hungarian political police) received the following encrypted telegram from the Hungarian political representation in Vienna: "This morning at 11.00 am, Captain Czirok entered the press club, and left it five minutes later. As per discussion, he should have returned to the embassy by 1.00 pm, but as of 7.00 pm, he still has not returned." A few hours later, another telegram arrived, according to which "as of 10.00 pm, Captain Czirok has not reported back." The unexpected disappearance of State Security Captain András Czirok caused much anxiety at both the Hungarian embassy in Vienna and at the political police in

Budapest, as the victim worked for the Intelligence Division of the ÁVH as deputy head of the department in charge of Western European intelligence. This anxiety was also justified because Czirok, who was sent to Vienna for an operative mission on May 20, 1953, had never been to the West, and had only begun to learn the German language. At first, his colleagues at the intelligence residency of the embassy supposed Czirok had got lost in the city, but after 3.00 pm, they began to worry that he might have suffered an accident. Finally, at 8.00 pm, they decided to notify the Intelligence Division of the ÁVH to request further instructions.

To this day, we still do not know what happened to András Czirok; the possibility of abduction did occur to his colleagues, but while the ensuing investigation could not disprove the idea, Hungarian state security organs preferred to think of Czirok's disappearance as a case of defection. His superiors thought that whether Czirok had been abducted or had defected on his own volition, the results are the same. He likely provided information to the Western intelligence services and thus betrayed his country. Therefore he should be considered and treated as a traitor.

From available documentation, we were able to reconstruct the antecedents and circumstances of András Czirok's disappearance, its impact on Hungarian state security organizations, and the ways in which the state security bodies proceeded to handle the case for decades after the fact; we even traced the career trajectory of the victim, but to this day we still do not know what had happened to Czirok after 11.00 pm on May 22, 1953. Through research, we have eliminated certain possibilities, but in order to proceed in the case, we would need access to the relevant documents of the Western secret services.

KRISZTINA SLACHTA

**Tourism as Espionage – Espionage as Tourism?  
A “Travel Company” Agent in Vienna**

Simultaneously with the reprisals following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the attention of Hungarian state security turned towards Hungarian emigrants and performing reconnaissance on the “hostile activities” of Hungarians in the West, with limited success. The Western Hungarian emigration remained in the cross hairs of intelligence and counterespionage until the political system change in 1989, and they continued to register more and more “groups and persons engaging in hostile diversion against the Hungarian People’s Republic,” such as Germans who had been expelled from Hungary, Western business people, and scholars interested in the region, all of whom were suspected of espionage. In this regard, the circle of persons deemed dangerous by Hungarian state security and how this circle changed over

time shows the way in which the image of the “enemy” continued to transform and develop as Hungarian state security tried to map the imagined or real enemies of the communist regime.

Following the 1955 signing of the Austrian State Treaty, Austria became a sovereign state independent of the Western and Eastern “Blocs” of the Cold War; consequently, several international organizations chose Vienna as their base in Europe. These new institutions attracted a multitude of diplomats into the Austrian capital, which also became a prominent center of international intelligence. In this manner, Vienna became a “spring-board” towards capital cities further to the West, not only for Hungarian intelligence, but other communist secret services as well, the Hungarian intelligence residency operated within the Hungarian embassy. As early as the summer of 1956, Hungarian state security had entertained the idea of exploiting the opportunities inherent in the Vienna office of the Tourism, Procurement, Travel, and Transport Company (*Idegenforgalmi, Beszerzési, Utaztatási és Szervezési Vállalat*, IBUSZ), which first required the appointment of a director suitable from a state security perspective.

With a monopoly on Hungarian tourism, IBUSZ was in a key position not only in terms of controlling foreigners entering the country, but also Hungarian tourists going abroad. IBUSZ played an important role in controlling “legal channels of infiltration,” as its tour guides and the employees of the Western agencies “naturally” aided the activities of Hungarian state security. It is especially interesting to examine archival documentation on the activities of the employees of the IBUSZ offices in Vienna and Frankfurt, the latter of which was opened in 1968 as the first West German representation of the company. These documents not only describe the day-to-day organization of tourism, the process of transporting foreigners into Hungary, the administrative process of issuing visas, and the administration of official currency exchanges, but also illuminate the relationship between the employees of these offices and their connection to the officers of the local Hungarian intelligence residencies.

SZILVIA KÖBEL

**An Espionage Case at the End of the Eighties in Hungary  
in the Context of Crimes against the “Established Order”**

The study focuses on a Hungarian espionage case at the end of the 1980s in the general context of contemporary criminal law and the ways in which it categorized crimes against the state, with concrete cases of illegal border-crossing used as examples. I consider this subject important for several reasons: on the one hand,



and most importantly, the case I shall examine here is tied to Austria inasmuch as the espionage case involved, among other places, the refugee camp in Traiskirchen; on the other hand, in the second half of the 1980s, crimes against the state, broadly defined as crimes “against the established order” were less severely criminalized than before, but if the charge was espionage, the accused still received exceptionally severe sentences. In fact, espionage was treated as a severe crime to the very end of the regime, and even after the political system change, Act XI of 1992 on the nullification of convictions for certain crimes against the state and public order committed between 1963 and 1989 did not extend to cases of espionage.

IMRE TÓTH

**From Winter to Spring: Global Thawing and Local Climate Changes  
at the Foot of the “Iron Curtain,” 1948–1989**

The border between Austria and Hungary was gradually reinforced, and in 1948, a decision was made to hermetically and “completely” seal the Western (and Southern) border section. With the laying of a minefield in 1949 and the erection of barbed wire fences in 1950, the border had become a physical barrier between the two countries. From 1950, personal contact and tourism between the populations had become almost completely impossible. The signing of the Austrian State Treaty in May 1955 caused significant changes in many areas of Austrian-Hungarian relations, including state security concerns and border-crossing attempts. With the withdrawal of the Red Army from the former Soviet Occupation Zone, the border zone encompassing Burgenland and Western Hungary had become the Western border of the Warsaw Pact countries, which meant new tasks and dislocation for the Hungarian border guard and armed forces, and a huge amount of work for the state security bodies. In May 1956, the Hungarian government made a decision to clear the minefields along the physical barrier, but as early as the start of 1956, preparations for the removal of the barrier had begun on one section of the Austrian-Hungarian border. In the wake of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the physical barrier on the Austrian-Hungarian border was reestablished, and while communist leadership explained this measure as a means of protecting Hungary from Western threats, the real reason behind it was to stop the wave of political refugees from leaving Hungary. After 1956, the Austrian-Hungarian border section was shut down, but there were signs of opening up from 1961 onwards. Hungarian state security was starving for information on the mysterious subject of Austrian political and economic life, the external relations of the country, as well as the situation and activities of the circles of the Hungarian emigration. By the end of the 1960s, the minefields along the Austrian-Hungarian

border were cleared, and a more humane electric signaling system was installed on the Hungarian side of the border, and in 1968, the border zone was opened up. At the end of the 1970s, bilateral Austrian-Hungarian relations continued to expand: there were plans of opening new border-crossing points, modernizing existing structures, and abolishing visa requirements. It is interesting to note that East German state security was beginning to have serious doubts about an Austrian-Hungarian tourism and visa agreement: we have found an influx of state security documents, according to which East Berlin seriously considered limiting traffic between East Germany and Hungary in order to close the window to the West and keep their own citizens within. After six months, the Hungarian authorities conducted an assessment of the agreement and shared their experiences with their East German counterparts, and the latter probably got goosebumps when they learned that citizens from socialist countries were often more troublesome than anyone from Austria.

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