

# **The Ford Foundation's East European Fellowship Program, ca. 1950-1970**

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## Abstract

From the mid-1950s onwards, the Ford Foundation (FF) awarded research fellowships to hundreds of social scientists, humanities scholars and artists from Communist-ruled East European countries, which was probably the earliest and largest effort to establish academic exchange across the Iron Curtain in the social and human sciences. The program was driven by the idea that allowing extended research stays for East European intellectuals in the West would reduce their isolation and increase their anti-Soviet and anti-Communist tendencies that were observed in the course of the crises in Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and elsewhere in the bloc in the 1950s. In 1968, the program was merged with similar programs into a new organization called the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). The documents at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) contain rich materials on the Ford Foundation's own views of the program, on its network of academics that helped to run it and on the conduct of the program including travel notes, etc. It proved very difficult, however, to find detailed information on the individual fellows and their doings during their research stays in Western countries. More research will be necessary to assess the impact of the program.

## Introduction

From the mid-1950s onwards, the Ford Foundation awarded research fellowships to hundreds of social scientists, humanities scholars and artists from Communist-ruled East European countries, which was probably the earliest and largest effort to establish academic exchange across the Iron Curtain in the social and human sciences (SHS). This report summarizes some general insights from my research at RAC in October and November 2016 on the Ford Foundation's East European Fellowship (EEF) Program.

Since this program has, to my knowledge, not received detailed coverage in the literature, my initial research questions were defined broadly, covering three dimensions.

1 Background: How did the program come about? What were its institutional predecessors? Who were the main actors and networks of alliances?

2 Conduct: How was the program administered? Which individuals outside the Foundation were involved? What kind of problems appeared? Etc.

3 Who were the fellows? Is it possible to draw a collective portrait of them based on basic variables such as age, gender, nationality, discipline, research field, seniority, host institution, topic of research, etc. over time and to get a good impression of research activities?

In summary, the first dimension (background) could be clarified to a satisfying degree in particular concerning the American perspectives. Several hints can be found on the perspective of the East European regimes and academics, though more research in these countries will be necessary to deepen the understanding of their views. Likewise, excessive documentation exists about the conduct of the program (second dimension), including travel notes from Ford Foundation officials and associated people as well as internal reports about the daily workings of the program and assessments of its strengths and weaknesses. The results concerning a portrait of the recipients of Ford Foundation fellowships from Eastern Europe (third dimension) are less satisfying than hoped. Individual applications and reports are currently not being made available for researchers, neither are centralized registers of fellows' names and projects. The documents do contain statistical summaries produced by foundation officers on different occasions and some personal information about the fellows can be found at different places. To compile the scattered pieces of information to a broader picture is, however, very laborious and the completeness of the resulting lists is hard to ascertain.

## **From the East European Fund to the new East European Program**

The Ford Foundation's earliest program directed at the Communist bloc was its 1948 'Free Russia Fund', later renamed 'East European Fund', led by George F. Kennan, starting in 1950. Its main goal was to provide assistance to Russian émigré intellectuals after they had fled Europe in the course of the Second World War. The second major activity of the EEF was running a Russian-language literary publishing company.

A good impression of Kennan's views on the East European Fund can be gained from the interview transcript produced in the course of the Ford Foundation's Oral History Project. Kennan thought of the program as important and successful, but it was turned down in 1953 by the Foundation. The core rationale, however – providing assistance to émigré intellectuals from the Eastern bloc in order to strengthen strategic sites of anti-Communist thinking – remained a guiding principle of the FF's East European activities. Refugee help continued during the Hungarian crisis in autumn 1956 and in Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1968, when the Foundation provided quick assistance to students and intellectuals who had fled the countries.

After 1956, the Ford Foundation developed a new and more ambitious East European Program characterized by two changes in strategy: a shift from émigrés to scholars and intellectuals who lived and worked *inside* Communist countries; and a shift from the Soviet Union to the East European 'satellite states'. The various crises in East Germany, Poland, Hungary in the 1950s and even earlier in Yugoslavia made the Foundation aware of internal splits within the bloc that they thought they should fuel further. The Foundation thus distinguished between the 'major communist powers' (Soviet Union, China), and the "secondary communist countries" (East Europe, Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba) and designed policies accordingly. The latter, "[varied] importantly in the extent of their commitment to communism and also in their degree of independence of Russian or Chinese control."<sup>1</sup>

## Poland

The first country where the new program has been implemented was Poland. After Władysław Gomułka had become Poland's new leader in 1956, Ford Foundation officers, particularly the head of the International Affairs office, Shepard Stone, sensed a chance to provide Polish intellectuals contacts to the West that so many of them sought after by sending professors, books, periodicals and other materials. The strategic importance of Poland lay in the strong anti-Soviet (and also anti-Communist) sentiment in the Polish population and among its intellectuals in particular. There was a sense that such a program held a risk of Soviet intervention, but Stone and others thought the opportunity had to be taken.<sup>2</sup>

With the ‘Gomułka thaw’ lasting for several years longer, the program was successfully implemented. The Ford Foundation achieved an agreement that left the selection of candidates in their hands, built solely on intellectual grounds.

Out of more than 300 applications in the first round of fellowships, 64 candidates were selected by the Ford Foundation through interviews in Poland. The selection committee consisted of area experts such as Robert Byrnes, science administrators such as the president of the American Council of Learned Societies, Frederick Burckhardt, and the president of the Social Science Research Council, Pendleton Herring, as well as some disciplinary specialists in fields of interest. Many candidates for the selection committee were either born in East European countries or had extended research or working experience in the area.<sup>3</sup> Among the network of scholars Stone and others consulted for the East European program were Columbia sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld who undertook several trips to Poland and other countries for the Foundation, Harvard political scientist and later National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzeziński, and Henry Kissinger, at that time also a political scientist at Harvard.

After several years of exchange that were considered very successful in the Ford Foundation, the program ran into problems in the years 1960/61. A conflict emerged over the selection procedure that the Polish government tried to get more control over, leading to an almost-termination of the program in 1962. Only later, during a second phase of negotiations with other East European countries, was the Polish program resumed. In the two phases between 1957-62 and 1967-69, 368 Polish scholars and experts received Ford Foundation fellowships.<sup>4</sup> Slightly more than half of them chose to spend their fellowships in the USA, the rest in West European countries, mostly UK, France, and West Germany. Increasingly, candidates from the natural sciences took part in the program after the initial emphasis was squarely on the social and human sciences.

## Yugoslavia

Yugoslav officials inquired about a Yugoslav program of the Ford Foundation as early as in 1953<sup>5</sup>, three years before the Polish program got on its way. Nevertheless, only after the Polish program had been realized, an analogous program agreement was signed in 1958. The first Yugoslav scholars arrived in the

USA in the academic year in 1959/60, in their case exclusively from the social sciences, humanities, and arts. A special grant had been awarded after the devastating earthquake in Skopje in 1963 to send American specialists in urban planning and architecture to Yugoslavia. By 1969, 188 Yugoslav scholars had received Ford fellowships. The program did not include fellowships to West European countries, as the Polish program did.

The Yugoslav law prescribed that candidates be screened by a government commission. Thus, different from the Polish program in the early years, the Ford Foundation did not possess full control over the selection of candidates, but agreed on a compromise. A special Yugoslav commission preselected a short list from which the Ford Foundation then did the final selection. Though not a fully satisfactory procedure for the Foundation the results proved its workability. Obviously in response to its limited agency in the selection process, the Foundation ordered the Institute of International Education in New York, which was responsible for administrating the exchanges, to produce monthly reports on each Yugoslav fellow.<sup>6</sup>

Due to Yugoslavia's liberal travel policies, Ford's Yugoslav program competed with a number of academic exchange programs with France, West Germany, Italy, the UK and other countries. A Ford evaluation from 1968, however, pointed out that the Ford program remained the most prestigious because it offered more flexibility with regard to the number of institutions to visit, better preparation for each individual visit and a unique focus on the social sciences, humanities and arts. Among the Fulbright fellows, for example, only a fraction was from the social and human sciences and the arts.<sup>7</sup>

## Other countries

A Hungarian program was initiated in 1963 with 145 fellows until 1969, roughly half of them from the physical sciences and half from the social sciences and arts. In Czechoslovakia a rapid expansion of the social sciences occurred in the mid-1960s upon which scholars and authorities turned to the Ford Foundation around 1965-66 with the wish to establish an exchange program. Although Ford advisors thought high of the intellectual achievements of Czechoslovak scholars, they had fears about the stability of the political situation. In the end no program agreement

comparable to that of Poland or Yugoslavia was signed.<sup>8</sup> Negotiations with Bulgaria and Romania also commenced in the mid-1960s. A few fellowships were awarded in the late 1960s, but their number remained far below the Polish and Yugoslav programs. No contacts were established with Albania and East Germany. Exchanges with the USSR were not considered part of this program that targeted the "secondary Communist countries" only. The Foundation did, however, contribute to another academic exchange program between the USA and the Soviet Union that had been set up in 1958 under the name Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants (IUCTG). The IUCTG also had smaller exchange programs with Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria.<sup>9</sup> First based at Columbia University in New York, the IUCTG moved to Indiana University, Bloomington, in 1960, where it was chaired by former CIA consultant for the Soviet Union and East Europe and professor of history Robert Byrnes. In 1968, the IUCTG was merged into a new organization called the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) where all academic exchanges with Communist countries, including the Ford Foundation's activities, were now handled under one roof. In addition, the American Council of Learned Societies has maintained an exchange program with the Soviet Academy of Science since 1961.

## **The Bundy era: new East European program: focused, cooperative, institution building**

Under its new president, McGeorge Bundy (1966-79), the Ford Foundation undertook a significant policy change concerning its East Europe academic relations program. Bundy abandoned the idea of "broad-spectrum academic exchanges" and favored thematically focused programs, stronger reciprocity between East and West, and institution building inside the Communist countries. Three strategic research fields were chosen: management training, linguistics, and urban planning.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most remarkable result of this new mode of thematically focused collaborative East-West research was the establishment of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) in 1972 in Laxenburg near Vienna, where hundreds of scientists from 12 (soon: 15) countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain did cooperative research on pressing global problems within one institute.

## **The impact of the East European fellowship program in Eastern Europe**

Within the Foundation there was consensus that the program had a strong effect on the academic and political relations between the USA and Eastern Europe. The fact that FF's East European program was the earliest of its kind and succeeded in bringing several hundreds of East Europeans to Western countries has been acknowledged in the Foundation and beyond.<sup>11</sup>

There was, however, some ambiguity as to what effect the program was supposed to have exactly. Beyond establishing contacts that had not existed before, there has been the explicit vision to instigate political change in Eastern Europe in the direction of liberalization and democratization.<sup>12</sup> Within the Ford Foundation, this question has also been answered positively by most of the involved persons, although it remained stated in rather general terms and it was acknowledged that there is hardly any way to determine its actual value.<sup>13</sup>

## **Summary and future research**

Though represented here only in the roughest sketch, the documents in the Rockefeller Archive Center allow a good understanding of the political rationales behind the Ford Foundation's East European Fellowship Program that can be substantiated with quotes and references. An important question remains regarding the exact intentions on the side of the East European governments. In the Polish case, it appears from the Ford documents that the intellectuals themselves shared the wish to establish close contacts with the Western world that was, at least in part, also carried by a non-outspoken anti-Communist sentiment. It is much less clear what the Polish government had in mind but it should not be ruled out that even they silently shared much of the same rationale. Comparing the Yugoslav and the Hungarian cases with that of Poland (including their internal views of the Communist parties) is likely to produce interesting insights. The other East European countries differ from these three in that they never achieved the necessary degree of West-orientation before the Ford Foundation changed its strategy in the late 1960s.

The second extension is research into the fellows themselves. Efforts to make fellowship files (applications, reports, etc.) available would be, in my view, very desirable. The records of the East European Fund have, as I learned, been processed subsequent to my research visit and contain useful information to explore both the administration of the program and for the fellows.

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<sup>1</sup> “Discussion Paper: International Politics and the Foundation's International Programs” Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Division, Office Files, F.X.Sutton, Box 70, Folder 8, p.1

<sup>2</sup> “Polish Program, December 1957”, Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation records, International Affairs, Series V: Exchanges, Box 7, Folder “East European Program – finances & appropriations”, p.4

<sup>3</sup> “American Scholars Participants on Ford Foundation Selection Missions to East European Countries”, Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Affairs, Series V: Exchanges, Box 7, Folder “Eastern Europe – Selection Team candidates”, p.1

<sup>4</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Division, Office of Vice President F.X.Sutton, Series II Program files, Box 20, Folder 6

<sup>5</sup> “The Yugoslav Exchange Program of the Ford Foundation: Background for Selection Team, Jan. - Feb. 1963”, Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Affairs, Series V: Exchanges, Box 7, Folder “East European Program – Stats, general info, press release”, p.1

<sup>6</sup> “The Yugoslav Exchange Program of the Ford Foundation: Background for Selection Team, Jan. - Feb. 1963”, Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Affairs, Series V: Exchanges, Box 7, Folder “East European Program – Stats, general info, press release”, p.4-5

<sup>7</sup> “Ford fellowship program in Yugoslavia, C.E.Black, 20 Feb 1968”, Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Affairs, Series V: Exchanges, Box 7, Folder “Eastern European Programs – Trips to East Europe”, p.2

<sup>8</sup> “Letter Robert Byrnes to Joseph Slater, October 25, 1967”, Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Division, Office of Vice President F.X.Sutton, Series II Program files, Box 20, Folder 7, p.3-4

<sup>9</sup> “Report by David Bell to McGeorge Bundy (draft), 7/22/68”, Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Affairs, Series V: Exchanges, Box 7, Folder “Eastern European Programs – Trips to East Europe”, p.2

<sup>10</sup> “Foundation programs vis-à-vis East Europe and the USSR”, Ford Foundation Records, Catalogued reports, Rp 6262-9286, FA 739C, Box 377, Folder 9036, p.5

<sup>11</sup> “Robert Byrnes – Policy Paper for discussion on November 6<sup>th</sup>”, Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Division, Office of Vice President F.X.Sutton, Series II Program files, Box 20, Folder 7, p.3-4

<sup>12</sup> “Robert Byrnes – Policy Paper for discussion on November 6<sup>th</sup>”, Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Division, Office of Vice President F.X.Sutton, Series II Program files, Box 20, Folder 7, p.3

<sup>13</sup> “Exchange and scientific activity with Eastern Europe including the U.S.S.R.”, Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation Records, International Affairs, Series V: Exchanges, Box 7, Folder “East European Program – finances & appropriations”, p.4