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What is This?

#### Voice of America's political propaganda for Austria (1945–1950)

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#### Introduction

Political propaganda has been described by a number of similar terms including: psychological warfare, political warfare, foreign information, mass communication, and public diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> It can best be described as the "communication of facts (or non-facts) and opinions in an effort to influence" opinions, emotions, attitudes and behavior of enemy, neutral and friendly foreign groups in order to generate support for foreign policy goals.

Traditionally the United States has taken a negative view of propaganda activities, considering them to be justifiable only in the face of external threats such as fascism and postwar Communist expansionism. Nevertheless propaganda has become a permanent instrument of foreign policy. Oftentimes underestimated it has sometimes been called the "fourth arm of statecraft". This article will concentrate on important aspects of Voice of America (VOA)'s political programs for Austria — especially those concerning the shaping of Austrian public opinion and the promotion of specific political ends in the Cold War. Therefore propaganda should not be dealt with as an isolated means of imposing U.S. policies on Austrian society, but in the overall framework of interdependent relationship between foreign public opinion and foreign policy.

The fundamental issue is, how, and to what degree, the Voice could inform and influence Austrian policymakers, domestic interest groups, and the population in general to support U.S. postwar policies in Central and Western Europe.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, the Voice of America as integral element of the U.S. information and propaganda machine (the "Office of War Information (OWI)",<sup>5</sup> its various successors, and finally the "United States Information Service (USIS)")<sup>6</sup> was not in a position to

define geopolitical policy goals, but rather attempted to "explain and defend government policies to foreign audiences". Within the given highest long-range framework, however, radio officers could to some extent varify the arguments, intensity and methods of propaganda.

Furthermore one might be interested as to why Austria – due to her strategic situation – was not used as a permanent 'Propaganda Island' in the 'Red Sea' with regard to Eastern European broadcasts of VOA, "Radio Free Europe" and "Radio Liberty", even though Western Austria and parts of Vienna were occupied by U.S. Forces throughout the period 1945–1955.8

#### VOA's Austrian desk – Wartime history and administration

In order to analyse the role of U.S. radio propaganda in the Cold War, one should always keep in mind that the "experience of war had sensitized American leaders to the possibilities of future external threats" – on both high and secondary policy levels. The change in policy perspective – from isolationism to a geopolitical balance of a two-superpowers-system – effected VOA too. The basis of the massive propaganda apparatus of the fifties and sixties was created in the early forties to counteract Nazi propaganda.

It was not until June of 1942, 6 months after the U.S. had declared war on the axis, that an overall government organization was established: "The Office of War Information" and that finally in November of that year government and private international broadcasting stations were centralized.<sup>10</sup>

The first Austrian wartime show started on April 25, 1942, 3 months after the first VOA program went on air. It was produced under the auspices of the Foreign Information Service.<sup>11</sup> Most of the Voice's programs were news, the rest made up of a daily feature for Austrian workers, which was transformed into a feature aimed at all listeners in March 1943.

This situation changed when the Moscow Declaration on Austria was published (November 1, 1943). In the declaration signed by the Allies the 'Anschluss' was declared null and void. Austria was to be liberated and re-established as an independent state. Immediately thereafter OWI established two daily Austrian shortwave shows in order to carry out the declaration's propaganda warfare purpose.<sup>12</sup>

The newly established American Broadcasting Station in Europe (ABSIE) also adapted its program to particular audience groups:

broadcasts were made twice a week to Austrian soldiers in the 'Wehrmacht', once a week to Austrian workers comprised of commentaries and 'neutral' thoughts. In addition to these strategic broadcasts, BBC carried features on American foreign policy, news, and humerous talk by two Viennese for the general public. Radio Algiers relayed a VOA show produced especially for Austrian patriots to encourage resistance movements.<sup>13</sup>

The German language programs were done by emigres from Austria - some of them with experience gained in the operation of a radio station in France after the German occupation of Austria in 1938.<sup>14</sup> Both Martin Fuchs, 15 chief of the Austrian desk in 1945, and his deputy Robert Bauer<sup>16</sup> were already professionals when they joined the OWI in 1942. The Austrian staff consisted of conservatives, Christian democrats and Social democrats, but they did not (or were prohibited to) continue their old party struggles which had led to civil war in Austria in 1934.17 The influence of aliens in VOA was restricted to the mere operational level and guidances on high policy level questions were regularly furnished by OWI and the Department of State. In contrast to the problem-fraught atmosphere of VOA's German desk, the Austrian desk functioned more smoothy<sup>18</sup> possibly due to the common legal background of its most important editors and speakers including, in addition to Fuchs and Bauer, the junior members: Walter Roberts (Rothenberg), 19 Konrad Maril, 20 and Ernest G. Land (Landau).<sup>21</sup> They had no serious problems in interpreting the general directives issued in terms of the particular target group.

#### From anti-nazi broadcasts to anti-communist 'War of Words'

At the end of 1945 the impact of American broadcasts on Austrian listeners was a minor one in comparison with the corresponding BBC programs or the Swiss radio station Radio Beromünster. The U.S. newcomer to the field of international propaganda did, however reach Austrian listeners — even in the concentration camps, where Gustav A. Canaval (later a leading publisher in Salzburg) heard his friend Fuchs, under the pseudonym Martin Richter, on a self-built radio set. Listening to foreign radio stations was strictly forbidden in Germany and punished severely. 23

As stated above, the main purpose of the news programs, commentaries and features was to stirr up Austrian resistance against the Nazis by showing how hopeless the military situation was. There is no clear

evidence that this propaganda theme did indeed succeed or motivate concrete actions. It, however, certainly helped to initiate and strengthen 'inner resistence'.<sup>24</sup>

No detailed information on the political future and situation of Austria in geopolitical terms went on air, with the exception of general references to the Moscow Declaration regarding Austria's planned liberation (including the 'Taking into account' of Austrian liberation efforts).<sup>25</sup> The last commentaries by Martin Fuchs before the liberation of Vienna in April 1945 dealt with the liberation of Paris and the battle around Vienna.<sup>26</sup> No concrete postwar aims were furnished.

Soon after the end of World War II Voice of America programs seemed to loose both their importance and influence on Austrian listeners. The main reason of this 'political cut back' was that the U.S. occupation army had established, in accordance with its original reeducation aims, an U.S. controlled and managed 'German' radio station "Red-White-Red" in Salzburg, Linz, and later in 1945 in Vienna.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to the wartime information monopoly enjoyed by VOA, created by the rigorous censorship imposed by the Nazis on local radio stations, it now had to compete with other stations for listeners. In addition to "Red-White-Red", there was the government (partially Soviet)-controlled "RAVAG" (Radio-Verkehr-Aktiengesellschaft) in Eastern Austria. Both the French and British forces also had their own Austrian radio stations.<sup>28</sup> During the early occupation years VOA's Austrian desk officers had troubles in obtaining up-to-date facts on internal affairs. Consequently Hans Cohrssen, chief of Red-White-Red, tried to cut down VOA relays from New York.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile cultural programs, as means of positive propaganda, were increased to propagate the United States. They ranged from music shows to "America in books", and other aspects of American life. 30 This positive and oftentimes naive portrayal of American society 'in toto' was very unsuccessful in that being old-fashioned Europeans the Austrians were absolutely convinced that the United States did not have any culture to export. Anti-American cultural sentiments and prejudices going back to clichés from the 19th century were emphasized by the National Socialists and still exist today.31 The most popular programs throughout 1945 were the "Prisoner of War programs" which consisted simply of interviews and names of Austrian POWs in the United States.

One special type of broadcast relayed by the local U.S. radio stations in Salzburg, Linz and Vienna, however, was still widely heard throughout Austria: the commentary. In the first postwar phase these commentaries, mostly edited and spoken by Fuchs or Bauer, covered

post-Nazi matters and problems such as "Are Austrians Germans?" and tried to implement reeducation goals.<sup>32</sup>

The authorized comment on and interpretation of global news, as opposed to local developments, was concentrated upon especially in regard to the San Francisco Conference and the United Nations. Differences between the Allies, including the sensitive American-Soviet relationship, were played down and unity was stressed. All rumours of a common struggle of Nazis and Americans against the 'Reds' were to be countered.<sup>33</sup> This 'artificial' demonstration of Allied unity — despite various interest disputes — continued throughout 1945.

In compliance with official policy most of the first VOA-interview with the then U.S. High Commissioner in Austria, General Mark W. Clark, were devoted to the treatment of former Nazis.<sup>34</sup>

It was not until May 12, 1946 that the first commentary openly criticizing the Soviet Union for its occupation policies in Iran was broadcasted.<sup>35</sup> The U.S. High Command in Austria, however, channeled and controlled both the contents and the intensity of this political propaganda thereby censoring the guidance imposed by the Department of State. After a broadcast based upon a New York Times article on the Soviet misuse of their veto power in the Allied Council made in early 1946, military orders required relays from America to be carefully checked.<sup>36</sup>

VOA's political programs were to be radically modified and integrated into the overall pattern of Cold Warfare.

The severe cut backs of funds for official overseas information programs did effect the Voice as such, but not its Austrian outlet. Austria had been classified as "critical" area of U.S. foreign policy, implying national security interests,<sup>37</sup> and the daily 15-minute relays, the New York shortwave broadcasts, and the nine weekly transmissions of 15-minute transcribed shows, all prepared by VOA, continued.

## Political impact on the Austrian audience

In February 1945 OWI began to develop techniques for the measurement of the effectiveness of VOA propaganda by using listener panels composed of Germans (including Austrians) in Bern (Switzerland), Stockholm (Sweden) and New York.<sup>38</sup> The special broadcasts to Austria received enthusiastic praise — especially due to concrete instructions on how the listeners could speed up the liberation of their home country.

Nevertheless VOA programs lagged behind the BBC broadcasts and the news programs of the Swiss station Radio Beromünster — both in quantity and quality.<sup>39</sup>

As early as 1946 the local U.S. radio station prepared a major public opinion survey in the U.S. zones (Salzburg, Upper Austria and parts of Vienna) by sending out 200.000 questionnaires. Of the 20.855 returned for evaluation only 50% referred to the "Broadcasts from America". Two third of the answers indicated the quality of the VOA program to be very good or good, whereas 30,4% disliked these broadcasts.<sup>40</sup>

At the end of 1946 23% of the Viennese radio listeners heard VOA. Of these listeners 60% agreed with the political programs. Only 6% expressed discontent. With the intensification of the Cold War the total number of permanent listeners increased up to 19,7% in Vienna, 50,6% in Linz (Upper Austria) and 39,1% in Salzburg – a fact which was mainly due to the improvement in the scheduling of the programs (especially at  $17^{45}$  and to a lesser extent at  $22^{30}$ ).

As a very interesting matter of fact the Austrian public was much more aware of the political conflict between East and West than both the "elite" and the "mass" opinion in the United States where the Cold War did not reach its peak in 1946, but rather sometime after the Berlin crisis of 1948.<sup>43</sup> This "war of ideas was being waged with particular forocity in Austria, easternmost part of the Western salient in Europe", according to an American information officer in Vienna (July 1947).<sup>44</sup>

In the field of foreign radio propaganda, the U.S. regarded the 'battle for hearts and minds' in Austria as more vital to its security interests than did the U.S.S.R., which started the relays of the Moscow-produced radio programs for Austria in the first half of 1947. The argument that American broadcasts were conceived of as a countermeasure against the Soviet propaganda machine holds little validity for Austria, for in no period of the occupation did either the "RAVAG" or the Radio Moscow rebroadcasts to Austria (the Soviet equivalent of VOA) match the influence of the U.S.-controlled "Rot-Weiss-Rot" and of the VOA.<sup>45</sup>

In Austria psychological warfare certainly started as early as 1946 and not in late 1949, when the psychological component of the Cold War became central to American attempts to defeat or to contain Communist influence in the world.<sup>46</sup>

A very complicated but important question remains to be answered: How far could VOA programs influence Austrian public and elite opinion? It is certainly true that the Voice was just one element among the various instruments in the total anticommunist effort which ranged from newspapers and newsagencies to cultural affairs. The Voice, however, became the link between the policy level in the United States which concerned the U.S. foreign policy efforts directed towards Austria and the various operational activities of the Information Services Branch (ISB) in Austria.

This editorial dependence on the Voice was best reified in the regular reprints of higher policy level commentairies on Austrian matters in U.S. newspapers for the Austrians, in the "Wiener Kurier", beginning at the end of 1946.<sup>47</sup> These editorials, which continued throughout the phase of occupation, were widely read; according to a public opinion poll from March 1948, 40,5% of the "Wiener Kurier" readers paid attention to that column.<sup>48</sup> The U.S. paper was the largest selling German-language daily in Central Europe during 1946 and 1947 and continued to be one of the leading newspapers in Austria.<sup>49</sup>

The leading commentator was still Robert Bauer — as at 1947 also head of the Austrian desk. His "excellent personal approach" to the 1945 listenership, when he had spoken as "Rudolph", continued during the Cold War. <sup>51</sup> His first visit to Austria in 1948 received prominent coverage in the media and included receptions by the Federal Chancellor Leopold Figl and other Ministers. <sup>52</sup> Having seen evidence of his influence on the policy-making elite, Bauer also discussed a need for hard-hitting commentaries.

The other political commentator Walter Roberts also became well-known, although his approach was a much more rational one — sometimes lacking the emotional engagement of Bauer. Other speakers such as Konrad Maril and Walter Engel (a well-known actor, director and producer of political "Kabarett" in Germany and Austria before the Nazi regime) covered various aspects of American political, social and cultural life.

When the total American psychological warfare began in earnest in 1949, the commentaries on internal Austrian questions had been favorably improved. In order to bridge the information gap in day to day affairs ISB had introduced a two-way exchange between Austria and the United States.<sup>53</sup> This exchange of facts and feedback broadened the range of propaganda themes, thereby targeting the Soviets and the Austrian Communists. The local information officers, however, carefully watched the propaganda battle and tried to stop to much personal mudslinging in favor of a more factual anti-Communist approach.<sup>54</sup>

This cordial cooperation was not without conflicts, as the Voice wanted to get the best listener time for its relays. The American radio officers in Austria staunchly opposed these efforts and continued to build up the 'Austrian Image' of their radio station. Despite various interventions from Washington, D.C., ISB finally succeeded, and thereby prevented a further expansion of VOA programs.<sup>55</sup>

The effectiveness of U.S. radio propaganda was reached sometime between 1949 and 1950. Especially in 1949 when the VOA had to cope with a particularly difficult situation in which United States diplomats delayed a possible conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty which would have freed Austria from quadripartite occupation. Because of the carefully-cultivated confidence built up by VOA the U.S. policies withstood the test with great success. The pro-western Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Karl Gruber admittedly criticized the American strategy of trying to delay a quick solution in internal talks, but Austrian general public opinion continued to back the United States until the Soviets reversed their tactics towards stalemate at the end of 1949. 57

Although in 1950 the influence of VOA programs began to decline slowly, their listenership was increased through cooperation between the British radio station in Austria "Alpenland" (beaming into Carinthia, Styria, and Vienna) and "Red-White-Red". According to an exchange of radio time agreement, VOA could relay its most important programs on the British radio. 58

In 1950 VOA beamed 45 minutes per day to Vienna, consisting of 10% news, 85% analysis and features. and only 5% music.<sup>59</sup> At the end of that year the total radio time, however, was cut down to 30 minutes, but the Austrian VOA audience mail continued at an extremely high rate, showing high listener response to all VOA programs.<sup>60</sup>

Within the general U.S. radio propaganda scheme, the Voice became more and more a symbol of "Americanization", i.e. too much a governmental instrument and was therefore pushed into the background. New political programs were introduced by the U.S. radio in Austria including political commentaries produced by Austrians. Interestingly these Austrian programs represented the general U.S. position but the listeners did not sense the American control — which still existed: "Red-White-Red" had become in effect an Austrian radio station. Increased VOA transmissions would only have hindered the successful process of 'Austrification'. After the conclusion of the Austrian State Treaty the U.S. did not retain control of "Rot-Weiss-Rot" (as they did with RIAS in Berlin) but the radio stations were turned over to the

Austrian government and finally dissolved and partly absorbed by RAVAG.

#### Cold war in Central Europe on the air

During the first months of 1946, soon after the beginning of the Cold War in Austria, the U.S. Legation in Vienna proposed "to assure for the United States both broadcasting rights and facilities sufficiently powerful to cover the entire Balkan and Danube area" which would remain in effect as long as necessary.

This strategic argument, however, was not taken up by the Voice in their anti-Communist propaganda campaign, and in the commencement of radio braodcasts behind the "Iron Curtain". Austria, it seems, did not belong totally to the developing western alliance — may be because of the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe and the security risks it implied. Only vague plans concerning initiation of Russian language information programs which aimed at Soviet troops in Austria were drafted.<sup>62</sup>

The American run Red-White-Red displayed its own initiative in starting a Hungarian news program in November 1946. The reason given was to fill up the program schedule, thereby counteracting a Soviet request for program time concerning Displaced Persons (DPs) programs.<sup>63</sup> This original DP-program was later on primarily aimed at Hungary. In early 1947 reaction to the news broadcasts was favorable, thereby constituting a valuable addition to the U.S. originated programs, which were often jammed or faintly received ("Red-White-Red" was much nearer to the target). The news was edited by Hungarian emigres and primarily based upon U.S. newsagency sources. Later on similar programs in Serbo-Croatian and Czech language went on air.<sup>64</sup>

"Rot-Weiss-Rot"'s new concept of 'Austrianization' was counterproductive to these foreign language broadcasts, which were of great value in the accomplishment of the official anti-Communist propaganda aims. Several offers to the Voice of America to take over these programs, which seemed to be better produced than the broadcasts from the International Broadcasting Division, were well-received in principle but no formal arrangement could be worked out during 1948 and 1949. This offer was immediately cancelled after announcement of the new medium wave program from Munich (Germany), due to political disadvantages in having "Red-White-Red" involved.<sup>65</sup>

This high policy decision of the United States Allied Commission in

Austria (USACA) effected not only relays of VOA originated programs penetrating the "Iron Curtain", but also to transmissions from the newly established "Radio Free Europe" (RFE) in Munich.

On a reconnaissance trip to Vienna a member of the staff of "Radio Free Europe" made field strength measurements for possible relay of RFE programs. The ISB operations officer, Douglas C. Fox, explained "Red-White-Red"'s decision not to continue broadcasting to the East. A plan to erect a 100kw transmitter in the U.S. zone near Linz for relays of "Radio Free Europe" was never carried out.<sup>66</sup>

Austria had become an early center of East-West radio propaganda, and her "undernourished" capital Vienna received an overdose of radio programs from five nations (the four Allies and the Austrian government operating their own radio stations).<sup>67</sup> Within the overall propaganda aims, however, the Austrian audience was the primary target — as of 1949 the only target. The success of U.S. propaganda aims in Austria required a renounciation of the propaganda effort into Eastern Europe — despite Austria's strategic position in the middle of Central Europe.

#### Conclusion

When analysing VOA propaganda warfare in Austria, one can certainly not add any facts or opinions on the question of who began the Cold War. U.S. propagandists certainly had not overreacted and thereby started the political conflict between East and West.

With regard to the Austrian case study, VOA political programs in particular were strictly subordinated to both mid-level and high policy aims of the local occupation administration, and to the head-quarters in the United States. The Voice could not, and did not, initiate anti-Communist or anti-Soviet propaganda campaigns of its own. Certainly Austria belonged to those European countries in which the United States forced an ideological and political integration from the outset and carefully watched, and acted on, the propaganda scene.

VOA has been one important element within the overall campaign of Austria's ideological integration into the Western alliance which was very successful in the political field. Various public opinion polls show that in the majority Austrians always stood on the American side and distrusted the Soviet Union.<sup>68</sup>

Even after the end of the allied occupation in 1955, Austrians tended to favor the U.S. position<sup>69</sup> – oftentimes regardless of the actual

background of events. Although U.S. geopolitical national security interests after 1945 and Austrian "neutrality" did not always coincide, the U.S. had won an immense lead over the Soviet Union in political influence, especially concerning the various themes of occupation policies ranging from the State Treaty to the political aspects of the so called "Marshall-Plan" (European Recovery Program).

#### Notes

The author wishes to thank Mr. Bryan van Sweringen for his valuable assistance in 'Americanizing' this article and his editorial improvements.

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- 9. Gaddis, Post-Revisionist Phase, p. 4. More details in: Witnesses to the Origins of the Cold War, ed. by Thomas T. Hammond, Seattle 1982.
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- 11. Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (Vienna, Austria), No. 6756/29: Development of the Austrian Desk, Jan. 26, 1945. Browne, Voice, p. 50, note 15.

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- 13. Dokumentationsarchiv No. 6756/29: Development of the Austrian Desk, Jan. 26, 1945, p. 2.
- 14. Oliver Rathkolb, Politische Propaganda der amerikanischen Besetzungsmacht in Österreich 1945 bis 1950. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Kalten Krieges in der Presse-, Kultur- und Rundfunkpolitik (unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Vienna, Austria, 1981), pp. 476-478.
- 15. Fuchs held a LL.D. from the University of Vienna and worked in Paris as a foreign correspondent since 1926. In 1937 he became Chief, Press-, Information- and Cultural Services, Austrian Legation in Paris. After the occupation of Austria by Nazi troops in March 1938 he resigned and organized and directed Free Austrian radio programs in Paris and Fécamp in addition to his activities in legitimistic émigré circles around Otto of Habsburg. He published a book based on background material from the Legation on the "Anschluss" (Un pacte Avec Hitler, Paris 1938). In September 1940 Fuchs came to the United States and joined the OWI in 1942 (Dokumentationsarchiv No. 6756/29: Statement of Activities and Experiences).
- 16. Bauer holds a degree of doctor of laws of the University of Vienna and a degree from the college for world trade and economic sciences in Vienna. He started his career as a lawyer and a counselor for the Austrian Chamber of Commerce. He was very active in the propaganda department of the governing Christian Socialist Party under Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg. In 1938 Bauer fled to Prag (Czechoslovakia) and then to France, where he worked with Fuchs for the Austrian Freedom Station in Normandy. Upon arrival in the United States in 1940 he went on a lecture tour and was engaged by the Crosley Corp. in Cincinnati, Ohio to organize their German language shortwave to Europe. In February 1942 he joined the Voice since then working as editor, writer and commentator (U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Overseas Information, pp. 1217-1218).
- 17. More details on the domestic political situation between 1918 and 1938 in: Charles A. Gulick, Austria from Habsburg to Hitler, 2 Vols., Berkeley 1948.
- 18. Browne, Voice, p. 7.
- 19. Roberts, who was forced to leave Austria in 1938 shortly before the final examination in his law studies, holds a LL.B. He came to the United States over Great Britain in 1939 and worked as research assistant to Professor Hans Kelsen, Harvard Law School (1940-1942). In 1942 he joined the Voice (Who's Who in America, 1978-1979, Vol. 2, Chicago 1978, p. 2735).
- 20. Maril held a LL.D. from the University of Vienna and a B.A. He worked as lawyer, editor, music critic and correspondent in Vienna. In 1920 he went to Berlin to become managing director of a publishing house. After Hitler had come to power he left Germany and stayed in Austria till 1938. In 1938 he came to the United States and kept on writing on a free lance basis. In 1942 he was engaged by OWI as translator, editor and writer (Register of the Department of State April 1, 1950, Washington, D.C. 1950, p. 324).
- 21. Land joined the Austrian Government as legal assistent in 1935 after his graduation (LL.D.), He left Austria and since 1942 after a job as correspon-

- dent for exporters he stayed with VOA. His main responsibilities referred to review and to control the various manuscripts (Register of the Department of State, p. 292).
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- 35. Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Collection Martin F. Fuchs, Box 10, Folder: Martin Richter.
- Private Collection Hans R.L. Cohrssen, Frankfurt/Main, Cohrssen Towards a Policy in Austria, July 6, 1946, p. 5.
- 37. Barbara Mettler, Demokratisierung und Kalter Krieg. Zur amerikanischen Informations- und Rundfunkpolitik in West-Deutschland 1945-1948 (= Rundfunkforschung 2), Berlin 1975, p. 43.
- 38. Dokumentationsarchiv, No. 6756/29: Reactions to O.W.I. German Broadcasts by Listener Panels in England, Sweden, Switzerland and New York VIII.

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- 40. Berichte und Informationen, Nov. 8, 1946, p. 15.
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