

Broadcasting a Nuclear Accident: Chernobyl on the Hungarian Radio

Dalma Boldog

 0000-0002-0282-4818

BUDAPEST BUSINESS UNIVERSITY, BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Abstract: On April 26, 1986 a major nuclear accident occurred in the Soviet Union: Reactor No. 4 of the Vladimir Ilyich Lenin Nuclear Power Plant exploded and harmful radioactive fall-out effused. The disaster threatened most of the population of Europe who, however, could not access timely and appropriate information about the health risks, as most of the media outlets were under close authoritarian political control in throughout the countries of the Eastern Bloc. Based on an analysis of archival radio news and of political communiques, this paper describes how the Hungarian party leadership managed the communication of this crisis domestically and discusses what information, and when, was aired on Hungarian Radio (HR). Using mixed research methods, the paper reveals the impacts of loosening political control over a Soviet-type media system in the last decade of the 20th century. The paper also provides an insight into daily practices of political and editorial decision making in a communist regime in times of crisis, which is a currently understudied research field.

Keywords: Chernobyl nuclear disaster, crisis, Hungarian Radio, information policy, Soviet communist media system

INTRODUCTION: COMMUNICATE A DISASTER

At 01:23 a.m. (Eastern European Time) on 26 April 1986, two explosions shook the Soviet Nuclear Power Plant near the Ukrainian city of Chernobyl, damaging Reactor No. 4 and causing a 750 meters high fire that kept burning for the next ten days (Aszódi, 2006). Owing to the nuclear disaster, harmful radioactive fall-out effused and polluted an area of over 30,000 square kilometers. The accident had been caused by contributory negligence (INSAG-7, 1992, pp. 51–89).

Crises must be communicated in a timely and accurate manner, or else misinformation spreads, trust decreases, and social anxiety rises. Issues of reputation management must also be addressed (Heath & O’Hair, 2009, p. 6). Rapid,

organized, and conscious communication is essential. By contrast, delayed and misleading communication may damage the reputation, and in some cases even the legitimacy, of the communicator. Such communication is carried out *after* the negative effects have already emerged, many of which are often unforeseeable.

The media coverage of the Chernobyl disaster was a complex case with various outcomes. It led to a major continental European healthcare threat, awareness of the technological failure of the Soviet Union, and had unforeseeable political consequences such as the declining legitimacy of the communist regime. The communist propaganda narrative during the Cold War had claimed that only the Soviet Union (USSR) could win the political and technological competition with the West, but also that every mistake would weaken the nation's position.

The prevailing winds over northern Ukraine on the night of the 25/26th April 1986 were from the south and east¹, which pushed the nuclear cloud created by the accident into Belarus within 24 hours, and the Baltics and Scandinavia within 48 hours. Treated initially as a local crisis by the Soviet authorities, it acquired an international dimension once Swedish scientists at Forsmark in central Sweden (1000 km from the accident site) analysed the source of the sudden increase in radiation levels and asked the Soviet authorities if there had been an accident at a nuclear power plant in Russia. Despite repeated inquiries by Scandinavian authorities (Plokhy, 2018, pp. 1-3), the Soviet authorities initially denied having any information about a nuclear accident ("To the Hungarian Services" Folder 3) and confirmed the crisis officially only *hours later*. More specifically, they did not use the term *crisis*; it was the Soviet Official News Agency (TASS) that issued a brief statement acknowledging that an "accident" had happened at a North-Ukrainian power plant, and a party committee was to be founded to manage the situation ("To the Hungarian Services" Folder 4). By then, the nuclear explosion threatened thousands of lives in Europe. As a result of the tardiness of the Soviet announcement, affected populations did not receive timely and adequate information about the health threat.

This paper explores how the crisis was communicated in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, and how the Soviet communist media system functioned in the region in this tense situation, while a pan-European crisis was unfolding? This paper offers a case study of Hungary, a rhetorically loyal, but maverick partner country of the Soviet Union. The paper discusses how the Chernobyl disaster was reported on Hungarian Radio. Radio coverage was particularly important, as this was the news media that operated with the shortest news cycle in 1986, while under close political supervision. This paper also attempts to answer the question of whether accuracy or partisanship was more important when it came to making decisions about the media coverage of the nuclear accident

¹ See <https://www.livescience.com/planet-earth/nuclear-energy/chernobyl-the-worlds-worst-nuclear-disaster>

for the Hungarian public in the last decade of a Soviet-type media system. It also provides an insight into daily practices of political and editorial decision making in a communist regime in times of crisis, a currently understudied research field.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

THE HUNGARIAN MEDIA SYSTEM: A VERSION OF THE SOVIET COMMUNIST MEDIA SYSTEM

Authoritarian theory of the press considers media as the transmission belt of the party-state, and the means of mass communication are useful as propaganda instruments (Siebert et al., 1956/1984, pp. 105–146). The Soviet media system, a special version of the authoritarian media system, was established throughout the Eastern Bloc although there was a great deal of variation across the region in terms of actual practices (Bajomi-Lázár et al., 2019). The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) not only controlled the media system via direct political guidelines, but all communicational channels, media institutions as well as their essential infrastructure were owned by the organs of the party-state (Siebert et al., 1956/1984, pp. 27–28).

The Soviet information policy remained largely unchanged during the nearly seventy years of existence of the Soviet Union and was based on four main components: *partiinnost* (communist partisanship); *glasnost* (transparency); *obyektivnost* (communist objectivism); and *massovost* or *narodnost* (linkage between the media and the people) (McNair, 1991, pp. 15–24). Just which of these principles was emphasized varied over time, depending on the party leadership, the ruling political concept of the day, and the actual Cold War discourse. After the demise of Stalinist despotism, mass media gained some political independence and offered a s more varied content than in the Khrushchev Era (1953–64). The neo-Stalinist personality cult of Brezhnev (1964–82), however, eliminated the little autonomy that the media had (Brooks, 2000, p. xiv; Hopkins, 1965, p. 531; McNair, 1991, pp. 33–35; Sakwa, 1993/2008, pp. 9–10). *Glasnost* (transparency) and *Perestroika* (restructuring), introduced by Gorbachev in 1986, were aimed at relaxing political pressures on the media and at opening some space for constructive debates in the public sphere (Gibbs, 1999, pp. 86–89).

The Hungarian media system during János Kádár's leadership (1956–1988) was less strict than under Soviet rule, albeit with significant variations over time. On the one hand, the media system was rhetorically committed to the state-socialist ideology and its structure—including its infrastructural and institutional background, hierarchical organization, content and expected political role—which reflected the Soviet scheme. On the other, the supervision and control

mechanisms of the media were more permissive than elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe (Lánczi & O’Neil, 1996, p. 82). The level of direct political control of the media gradually decreased over the years and gave way to indirect intervention methods such as a state monopoly over intelligence, the paper industry, the publishing houses, and the infrastructure of the media, as well as the encouragement of self-censorship by a differentiated information policy. From the mid-1960s onwards, the relative flexibility of the political system was reflected in a different interpretation of the role of journalists compared to previous years: in addition to acting as propagandists, they were also expected to play a collaborative and truth-seeking role (Sipos, 2010, pp. 75–77). The communication of the Chernobyl disaster, as this paper attempts to show, was a case in point.

János Kádár had a permissive outlook in several fields, such as his remarkable de-Stalinization attitude (Földes, 2012, pp. 200–214; Takács, 2013, pp. 84–90). Kádár also announced a slow democratization and cultural opening process to the West in the late 1960s in trying to revive the Hungarian economy (Romsics, 1999, pp. 450–456; Valuch, 2005, pp. 67–68).

Media control mechanisms changed further in the late 1970s when Hungary encountered financial difficulties amidst a recession: the country had to reconsider its foreign policy and opened up its economy to capitalism as it needed international (mainly Western) financial support to manage its economic hardships. Owing to this opening process, media policy was faced with some “unwelcome” outcomes—as the policy makers put it in official documents—as cultural-ideological imports increasingly crossed the Iron Curtain (Kékesdi-Boldog, 2022, p. 185). In 1979, the leaders of the Party officially acknowledged that the policy of delivering only good news via the media was no longer sustainable, as this type of information did not meet the population’s information needs. Indeed, by overemphasizing the good and deliberately hiding the bad news, media were unable to inform the public about the status of the economy. For this reason, the Party leadership decided to differentiate between the information and propaganda functions of the various media outlets. Radio, the medium of the shortest news cycle, became the primary medium, while television was expected to engage in popular genres and to broadcast entertainment, educational and cultural programs. Television was also expected to broadcast reports and interviews that echoed and reinforced the information first aired on radio. The function of the long news cycle dailies was to orient people, to help them understand the political and economic news by delivering longer, “theoretical, summarizing articles” and “explanatory material” (Az MSZMP Központi Bizottsága Politikai Bizottságának határozata...1979. III. 27.).

At the 12th Congress of the Hungarian Worker’s Party in 1980, a new media regulation concept was presented, declaring the need for reliable and timely reporting. Dialogue with the public also became an important element of media

policy (Berényi, 1980, p. 46). However, these concepts were not translated into actual practice, and the media continued to be politically instrumentalized until the very last years of the regime.

Despite the strong political, economic, and military dependence of Hungary upon the Soviet Union, media could not always act as a means of agitation and propaganda (cf. Bajomi-Lázár, 2005, p. 24), as outlets had to reflect on everyday events and specific issues, too – such as the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. At the time of the catastrophe, *glasnost*, the Soviet policy of transparency initiated by Mihail Gorbachev, had been in effect for about a month. Changes in the Hungarian media occurred in the same year, contributing to a gradual opening of the public sphere in the late 1980s (Bajomi-Lázár, 2005; Sipos, 2010). The first Hungarian press law, passed in 1986, was a real breakthrough, and declared the idea of accuracy instead of partisanship.² In the same year, a major taboo—the whereabouts of the remains of the martyrs of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, buried in unmarked graves for decades—was first broken in the official public sphere in the late-night show “*Bagoly*” (“Night Owl”) by journalist Miklós Györffy and without consultation with the Party officials of Hungarian Radio (Györffy, 2007, p. 129). The first Hungarian music radio channel *Radio Danubius* was also established in 1986, which was the first time that a media outlet served purely entertainment goals, not propaganda (Bajomi-Lázár, 2005, p. 29). *Radio Danubius* was meant to air programs for a specific audience of East German tourists spending the summer at Lake Balaton. These changes slowly expanded the borders of the public sphere, the limits of speech, and encouraged journalists to do their job more professionally. As the following sections will reveal, the redrawing of these borders was also manifest in the radio coverage of the Chernobyl disaster.

HUNGARIAN RADIO

Radio was one of the most popular outlets for decades, reaching thousands of people, and hence the communist leadership paid special attention to it. Institutionally, *Hungarian Radio* was separated from *Hungarian Television* in 1974 by a Declaration of the Council of Ministers (1047/1974. IX. 18). This statement specified that there were three main tasks for the broadcast media in Hungary. The first was to participate in the propaganda activities of the Party, the second was “modern and fast broadcasting,” and the third was to orient and to educate people via high quality programs in an effort to “help them build socialism” (Declaration of the Council of Ministers, 1047/1974. IX. 18).

² It stated that “[t]he job of the press is to provide authentic, precise and up-to-date information” (1986. évi II. törvény a sajtóról 2§ (1) [Press law 1986/II 2§ (1)]).

Political supervision affected the radio's newsroom, too, but *Hungarian Radio* gradually became a special medium during the last decades of the Kádár era. There were more live broadcasts from the 1970s onwards, indicating that political concerns had declined (Tertinszky, 1998). Some consider *Hungarian Radio* an island where the imaginary borders were gradually expanded (Agárdi, 2004). According to the journalists of the broadcaster, Director-General István Hárs was a odd person: one the one hand, he was a faithful communist and a member of the Central Committee, on the other, he was an open-minded leader who tried to ban fewer but tolerate more topics on the air (Bolgár, 2014). He slowly transformed a “propaganda radio into an informative radio” (Farkas, 2014, p. 30). Cultural mediation was very important for him, therefore he ran a reliable news service and aired high quality programs with authentic, trustworthy editors, journalists, and anchors (Agárdi, 2004). Hárs allowed for a range of viewpoints to be presented on the air, as a result of which the radio broadcast multicolored programming (Bolgár, 2009).

Radio in general was an important news source during the Chernobyl crisis: most people (59 per cent) first heard about the Chernobyl disaster via the airwaves (HU OSA-420-2-2:1 A8203). This is also including *Radio Free Europe*, *Voice of America* and the *BBC*, openly available for the Hungarian at that time. People occasionally used information from these sources to confirm or to complete the news issued by the official news agencies of the Soviet Bloc as, according to the party directive, news from other state-socialist countries could only be derived from the “official” Soviet communiques (I. Bedő, personal communication, December 4, 2018).

Radio Free Europe (RFE) was founded and financed by American individuals and its establishment was catalyzed by the Cold War information competition. According to its own definition, *RFE*'s task was to provide reliable and free information to the public of the Eastern Bloc (Cummings, 2009: 10–11). The importance of *RFE* lay in broadcasting radio programs in their native languages – including Hungarian – to the populations of the countries beyond the Iron Curtain. As a “soft power” or “peaceful propaganda tool,” *RFE*'s purpose was to counter the state-socialist governments' political influence – mainly Soviet propaganda – in the Eastern Bloc (Holt 1999: 12, Puddington 2000: 5–6, Johnson 2010: 37).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this research project was to disclose when the Hungarian officials informed the public about the crisis and how the disaster was communicated in Hungary. To illustrate the specific characteristics of the Hungarian version of this Soviet-type media system, it focused on three main research questions (RQ):

- RQ1: When was the very first piece of news about the accident broadcast in Hungary? RQ2: What kind of information was shared about the level of nuclear radiation over Hungary with the public in the studied period?
- RQ3: What health protection recommendations were issued in Hungary?

These were the topics that affected the daily life of the people the most (HU OSA-420-2-2:1 A8203). Awareness that the nuclear cloud had reached Hungary's airspace triggered daily questions concerning decision-making situations, such as: "should children be allowed to play outside or not," "should tap water be drunk or not," "should one take iodine pills or not," and "should one eat fresh vegetables or not." These dilemmas permanently reminded people of the danger (Harper, 2001).

DATA-COLLECTION AND LIMITATIONS

To answer these three research questions, a descriptive analysis was conducted of the sources found in the Archives of *Hungarian Radio*, the National Archives of Hungary, and the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security, and coupled with personal interviews made in 2018 with the former chief editor of *Hungarian Radio*, Iván Bedő. In line with Sipos's argument (2007), the interviews were not used to "reveal the truth," but to interpret and to frame the findings. The information provided by the interviewee was seen as a construction of the past from the perspective of the present.

The collected data included 238 scripts of radio news and covered the period between 28 April and 19 May 1986. This interval was chosen because the first Chernobyl-related news item in Hungary was aired on April 28, and May 19 was the first day when no daily radiation measurement data were issued by the Hungarian National Civil Defense (MNL OL-XIX-A-2-af-00147-II-szn/1986."147/a). Only the texts relating to Hungary were included in the sample. Consequently, the sample did not involve official Soviet reports, accounts on the radiation levels in the other Eastern Bloc countries, nor other news, reports and interviews about the accident. Because of the uniform information monopoly of the Party, the three official Hungarian radio channels, controlled by the same person, were not treated separately.

The broadcasts of *Radio Free Europe* have been preserved and stored at the Hoover Institution in Stanford but access to them is limited. Hence only two of the daily boxes of the written material were analyzed (sound recordings being unavailable). When comparing the contents of *Hungarian Radio* and of *RFE*, two broadcasts and the Hungarian Daily Broadcast Analysis of 28 and 29 April from this database have been selected.

The sources in the Archives of *Hungarian Radio* were lacking and difficult to analyze because the scripts were neither properly catalogued nor numbered. They were only categorized according to the day of the broadcasting, and the copies of the newsreaders and those of the news editors were not sorted. This was an important limitation because the texts may have been changed just before the newsreader received them to read on air. Further, the first audio records of the Chernobyl accident were deleted for reasons unknown, and the original scripts of the news bulletins were rerecorded in 1993.

Because of the missing and mixed archival fonds, a special coding system was set up to label the sources. References are hereafter made based on the first letter of the radio channel (K for *Kossuth Radio*, P for *Petofi Radio* or URH for *Hungarian Radio*), followed by the time and date of broadcasting by Central European Time, and the last items being the signatures of the news editor and of the typist. The signatures are important because of the news editing practice of *Hungarian Radio*: the editor was on duty from afternoon to morning, and it was a common method for them to write the news in advance the previous evening. Whenever something important happened during the night, the prewritten news item was updated (I. Bedő, personal communication, December 4, 2018). The titles of the news items are also included in the code.

Almost 40 years after the Chernobyl accident, it was difficult to define which source was prewritten and which was updated in the process. Further, because of the missing catalogue and sound record, it was impossible to determine which news items were actually broadcast.

DATA ANALYSIS

To answer RQ1, it was necessary to reconstruct the timing of the information released, a chronological order of the radio news was set up before a content analysis could be conducted with a focus on the key information said or repeated in order. The steps of the Hungarian crisis team, including the very first information broadcast on the Hungarian airspace, are displayed on a timeline (see Figure 1). RQ2 relates to the content of the news and hence focused on the wording of the scripts. In search of an answer, all the words used to express explicitly or implicitly changes in nuclear radiation level have been listed, and then the scripts were categorized into three clusters regarding whether they suggested that the level of radiation was about to increase, to decrease or to fluctuate. RQ3

examined the health protection recommendations. Here descriptive content analysis was conducted in order to reveal the repeated topics and the frequency of these occurrences compared to the entire sample was counted.

FINDINGS

Regarding RQ1, Hungarian officials first issued official information about the disaster on the night of April 28 (MNL OL XIX-A-83-a-863. jkv.-6.np./1986. 12/b.). But on April 25, the day before the accident, the Soviets had requested a reduction in Hungarian electricity imports, referring to the malfunctioning of a Soviet power plant (MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-Ma-00147-VII-szn/1986. (IpM M-2523)). At that time, the Hungarian crisis team was still unaware of the accident. They were informed, unofficially, a day later, on April 26, by Swedish, Finnish, and Polish sources (MNL OL M-KS-288. f. 5. cs. 968. ő.e.-1986. 4/b.). The Scandinavian specialists reported that they had identified special chemical substances indicating a zonal damage in a nuclear power plant. According to unofficial Polish sources, the amount of the radioactive iodine-131 isotope in the Masurian Lake District had greatly increased (MNL OL XIX-B-1-ai-1-a-579/1). On April 28, the Civil Defense issued an order for increased readiness in Hungary. On the afternoon of April 29, the Hungarian Consul General in Kyiv provided information to the Hungarian leadership in encrypted telegrams marked “urgent” and indicating that a serious power plant disaster had happened, and many people had been injured (MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1986-SZU-145-532-002679/1986.), the roof of the power plant had collapsed, and the level of local nuclear radiation was very high (MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1986-SZU-145-532-002679/1/1986). A Hungarian expert committee headed by Mihály Berki, the National Tribal Commander of Civil Defense, was convened on the afternoon of April 29 to investigate what had happened in Chernobyl. A crisis management team was set up and assigned local tasks. As Mihály Berki put it, “we have no reliable information. The Soviet comrades do not provide us with information” (MNL OL XIX-B-1-ai-1-a-579/1986.). From April 30 onwards, news release about the disaster was managed directly by the Hungarian Information Office and was supervised by the Hungarian crisis management team (MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-Ma-00147-VI).

The first relevant news item was aired on *Hungarian Radio* two days after the disaster, on 28 April at 9 p.m. It was short and comprised general statements such as “the injured people were given medical attention” and “a special government committee was established” (P 28/4/1986 9:00 PM, LL/Kné). This short news item was uninformative about the real situation because healthcare and political activities are general actions in time of crisis, in other words, it did not warn the public about the real threat. But the end of the report included

a remarkable piece of information as it said that nuclear radiation was also measured in Scandinavia. The first half of the news relied on information issued by the Soviet News Agency (TASS) and the second half was taken from the listen-to service of *Hungarian Radio* (Germuska, 2010, p. 196). At the top of the programme's paper was a handwritten "L", meaning either or both listened-to and the *BBC London*. According to the political instructions in effect during the entire Kádár era, only official Soviet news sources could be cited, but news editor Iván Bedő, head of the newsroom in charge of the news about the accident, broke this rule that night. As he observed later, it was undoubtedly an extraordinary case which he tried to confirm by using listened-to Western broadcast information with Hungarian reporters in Moscow before airing it (I. Bedő, personal communication, December 4, 2018). Even though he had no more information than that provided by the BBC, Bedő decided to let the news be aired.

Radio Free Europe broadcast the first news item about the accident on the very same day (the time of broadcasting is not known, but presumably it was before the Hungarian news item was aired). However, in contrast with the Hungarian news item, it was longer, more detailed, and also mentioned the time-delaying and information-withholding behavior of the Soviet officials ("To the Hungarian Services" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcast records, Box 3157, Folder 3).

An hour later in Hungary, Bedő received the official communiqué of the *Hungarian News Agency* marked "just for the information of the editors." This meant that the news editors could read the news, but could not publicly reveal any information (Bánáti, 2014). Despite the prohibition, Bedő let the new information be aired at 10 p.m. (K 28/4/1986 10:00 PM KM/HAR), repeated at 11 p.m. (P 28/4/1986 11:00 PM KM/HAR), and repeated yet again an hour later (K 28/4/1986 24:00 KM/HAR). The first news bulletin was completed with more details taken from this announcement and included information about the location of the power plant: "next to the Rivers Uzh and Pripyat, and near the Kiev aquifer." It added that a nuclear cloud was going through Scandinavia's airspace and a rise in radiation levels had been measured there. The following sentences were removed from the script of the news: "It was assumed that the nuclear cloud did not come from Scandinavian nuclear plants" and "there was no information about the actual danger, victims or casualties." It was also mentioned that, according to the Soviet Cabinet, "official measures were taken" and "the injured were given medical attention" (K 28/4/1986 10:00 PM KM/HAR).

At 3:00 a.m. the next day, the original news was reworded, now stressing that a "serious accident" had happened. It was also added that the nuclear cloud had quickly moved thousands of kilometers and nuclear contamination was detected from Denmark to Finland (P 29/4/1986 3:00 a.m. LL/Kné). Ninety minutes later, the news only said that a nuclear reactor had been damaged and an official committee established (K 29/4/1986 4:30 AM KM/HAR). Thirty minutes later,

the second news was repeated (K 29/4/1986 5:00 AM KM/HAR). The last news bulletin was broadcast at 8 a.m. with the content of the 5 a.m. news repeated (K 29/4/1986 8:00 AM KM/Gné).

One hour later, a new chief editor took over and new kinds of news stories were broadcast. At 9 a.m., it was only said that a nuclear reactor had been damaged in Chernobyl and a Soviet committee had been established, and it was stressed that “there is no power plant in Hungary similar to the one damaged” (P 29/4/1986 9:00 AM Zp/Kné). This was the last news bulletin about the accident until that afternoon. The consequences of the accident for Hungary were first mentioned that night (P 29/4/1986 7:00 PM NGY/vm).

In contrast to this, *Radio Free Europe* continued to share information on April 29 with a long report, during which the station noted that high level radiation was measured in Scandinavia on April 27. The *RFE* also added that although Sweden had sent diplomatic requests to the Soviets for information, the Soviets did not respond in time and had tried to hide the facts (“To the Hungarian Services” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcast records, Box 3157, Folder 4). According to the Hungarian Daily Broadcast Analysis of April 29, the *RFE* did a Western press review and concluded that there was no reliable information about the disaster and that experts were only trying to reconstruct what had happened (Hungarian Daily Broadcast Analysis for Tuesday, 29 April 1986). All the daily news summaries stated that the Soviet deputy minister – in response to Western reports – denied having any major losses; according to his claim, the number of the injured was under one hundred. The report also noted that the Soviets were criticized for failing to inform the neighboring countries after the reactor accident (Hungarian Daily Broadcast Analysis for Tuesday, 29 April 1986).

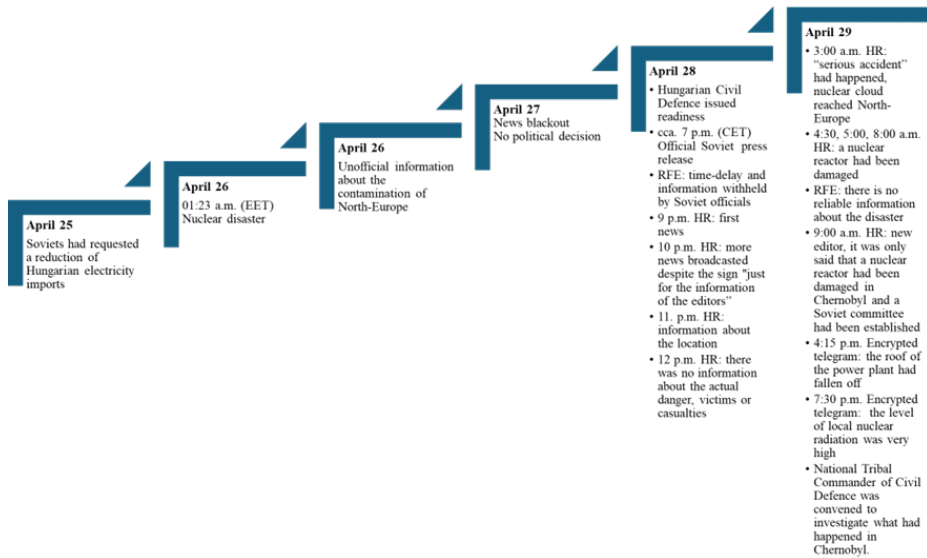
Regarding RQ2, since May 1, the Nuclear Power Plant Accident Response Committee had been convened on a daily basis at the National Civil Defense Headquarters. On May 2, a press conference was held and information was provided on the launch and operation of a Hungarian radiation measurement system (MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-00147-VII-szn-tájhiv/1986.).

The available radio scripts make it clear that several terms were used to refer to nuclear radiation. The following phrases (translated from Hungarian by B. D.) were found: “(air/radioactive) contamination,” “(natural) background radiation,” “air mass contaminated by radioactive substances,” “level of the nuclear radiation,” “level of radiation,” “level of the radioactive exposure,” “nuclear contamination,” “radiation level,” “radioactive substances,” “radioactivity,” and “the radioactive content of the air.” The official radio news did not use consequent measurement units, nor were exact data of the nuclear radiation level communicated.

Most of the radio news dealt with the “reduction” (34,87 per cent) and the “fluctuation” (17,65 per cent) of nuclear radiation. The rise in contamination (8,82 per cent) was often mentioned, either along with a conditional wording,

or complemented with the phrase “not significant.” Of the analyzed news items, 7,56 per cent said that there was no change in radiation levels. The news that radiation was near the normal, i.e., the pre-accident, level, that the actual radiation was not significant, or that it was far from the dangerous level, accounted for 26,89 per cent of the total sample. Other news items (4,2 per cent) discussed the following topics: “no more contamination comes,” “vegetables may be contaminated,” and “the radiation will not rise again.”

Figure 1. Timeline of the information and the news coverage of the disaster in CET time zone



HR: Hungarian Radio, RFE: Radio Free Europe

Regarding RQ3, the most salient agendas of the National Civil Defense included nuclear radiation measurement and the precautionary actions recommended for the protection of the Hungarian population (MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-00147-VII-szn-tájhiv/1986.).

Of the 238 news bulletins, 95 radio scripts discussed some health protection recommendations in the studied period, which means that almost 40 per cent of the radio news gave preventive practical advice. The first piece of information—aired at midnight on April 29—specified that a Hungarian expert group had been established to assess the consequences of the accident (URH 29/4/1986 11:30 PM KL/Gné). From May 1 afternoon to May 2 forenoon, it was repeatedly noted that, considering the actual “natural background radiation,” it was not necessary to launch any countermeasures in Hungary (P 1/5/1986 5 PM KM/Gné; K 2/5/1986 10:00 AM KM/Gné). The first official health protection recommendations were issued on the afternoon of May 2 when it was noted that the

level of radiation had risen for the first time (K 2/5/1986 2:00 PM KM/Gné). This radio news included two elements: lettuce should be thoroughly washed because of surface pollution and people should buy inspected packed milk. The same recommendations were repeated in almost every news bulletin (94,28 per cent of the Hungarian-related news about the accident) until May 10. The washing of lettuce was mentioned again—for a total of five times—between May 13 and 14 when the news also said that a pasturage ban had been imposed (P 13/5/1986 9:00 PM ZP/KZS). That “taking medicine or iodine pills was unnecessary” was highlighted six times (6,31 per cent). That “there was no limitation to drink water” was mentioned two times (2,1 per cent), and that “all foods were safe and edible” was mentioned once (1,05 per cent).

The two main recommendations—to wash the vegetables and to drink only inspected milk—were still in effect “as a precaution” (P 13/5/1986 9:00 PM ZP/KZS). After that, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that there was no surplus radiation in Europe, and it was not necessary to take any further precautionary measures (MNL OL-XIX-A-2-af-00147-VI-szn/1986).

The analysis of the radio coverage of the Chernobyl disaster was completed by examination of a weekly political radio magazine called *168 Hours*. This was aired every Saturday afternoon, a highly popular time slot for radio listening, and had a huge audience. Two weeks after the accident, on May 10, *168 Hours* dedicated more than 40 minutes of the 90-minute show to discussing what had happened in Chernobyl. A Hungarian news correspondent from Moscow gave a detailed summary of the incident, noting that “the true significance of what had happened could not be assessed immediately, and therefore incorrect information could reach Moscow.” There was an interview with a radiation biologist who provided detailed radiation measurement data and talked about the possible consequences of the increase in radiation levels. Then a genetics expert provided information about the taking of iodine tablets and, finally, the show discussed the restrictions on food export (550026 *168 hours* 1986. V. 10. Kossuth Rádió 16:00–17:30).

One week later, on May 17, the Moscow news correspondent gave more detailed, and more accurate, information about the accident. Quoting the Hamburg daily *Der Spiegel*, he said that according to the president of the Soviet news agency the party leadership had received information about the accident on April 26, “but at that time the technical staff of the reactor did not yet know that a serious accident had happened. They thought they could handle the situation themselves.” He added that the operators had “made their first decisions randomly, which was not efficient. Some measures have made the situation worse.” The president of the news agency admitted that an official government announcement should have been issued a day earlier. The next topic discussed was the restriction on food export and the contamination of vegetables. There was also an interview aired

with the manager of the tourism association who talked about the negative impact of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster upon domestic tourism (550342 168 Óra 1986. V. 17).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper explored the communication of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Hungary. Based on an analysis of primary sources issued by the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, and aired on *Hungarian Radio*, it offered an insight into the mechanisms of a relatively flexible information management in a time of crisis.

Official documents show that the work of the Hungarian crisis management team was hampered by several circumstances. The Chernobyl accident was unprecedented, which explains why there was no crisis management practice or preventive experience available. Furthermore, there was not even a uniform, international, example to follow for the units of radiation level measurement. The Party documents indicated that the information officially communicated by the Soviets arrived late and provided too few clues about the nature and magnitude of the accident. It is also clear that the Hungarian party leadership was not always given an adequate quantity and quality of information and hence did not initially know how to have the accident reported.

The communication of the catastrophe was a mirror of some of the characteristics of the Hungarian mutation of the authoritarian media system in the last decade of the regime. Radio news on the issue—just like the official Soviet statement—was two days late. Considering the official archival sources, there is a suggestion that the delay in Hungary was not caused by the domestic media withholding information, but by the lack of information brought about by the delay of the Soviet officials as well as their efforts to conceal the details of the accident. *Hungarian Radio* reported on the disaster immediately after it had officially been admitted by the Soviets. In the first hours, political interests were replaced by professional considerations, and radio listeners received news from several sources, including top secret and Western ones.

Even though the communication of the crisis was under strict and permanent state control, from April 30 onwards (MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-00147-VII-szn-tájhiv/1986; MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-Ma-00147-VI), the wording of the news of *Hungarian Radio*, at that time the only official radio station in the country, was not regulated at all. The visible aspect is that the news scripts were shortened and reworded many times by the news editor to fit the actual airtime available. The interview with the chief editor of *Hungarian Radio* highlighted one more aspect about the domestic communication of the accident: the human factor: news bulletins were repeatedly changed in line with the intentions of the journalist

who was in shift at the time. Most notably, Iván Bedő, having assessed the situation on the night of April 28, broke the rules of official information policy and let confidential, Western, information be aired.

Compared to the Hungarian press, where information was strictly controlled by the Party and no reference was made to Western news sources at all (Kékesdi-Boldog, 2019b), radio news bulletins informed the public about the accident from a differing perspective. Until the morning of April 29, there was a short (self-)censorship-free period when radio listeners were given information from both official Soviet and Western sources. As a result, the public not only heard about the damage done to Reactor no. 4, but also about the rise in radioactivity levels, detected thousands of kilometers away. This piece of information may have helped the audiences understand how serious the accident in Chernobyl had been.

This decision of the chief editor did not cause any political outrage. He was not sacked, nor was he publicly shamed, and he could carry on his work a few days later. Bedő, however, received a disciplinary punishment and a three-month premium deduction (Germuska, 2010, p. 197). Yet, as he said, this penalty was not a serious sanction; all it meant was that he could not get any extra jobs for the ensuing three months (I. Bedő, personal communication, December 4, 2018). In other words, *Hungarian Radio* was a sufficiently permissive platform to inform the audiences about the disaster at this time.

The quantity of news bulletins was relatively high in the studied period. Overall, 238 news bulletins, i.e., more than ten per day, discussed the level of nuclear radiation in Hungary during the 22 day period studied. Based on the content analysis of the news, it is safe to conclude that the official state-socialist propaganda was not disrupted by the nuclear disaster. In the age of a bipolar world system, Soviet fair-weather relationships could not be damaged by the reporting of the real medical, environmental, and economic consequences of the disaster, which aspects were not even mentioned at first.

It is important to note that there was not any news blackout in the Hungarian media. A crisis management team was set up early and presumably, to avoid panic among the audiences, it chose a communication strategy that was highly concise in terms of the content of the announcements and formal in terms of their style.

In terms of the wording of *Hungarian Radio's* news, equivocation was frequent. Even though the nuclear cloud had undoubtedly reached Hungary, the radio news did not clearly mention the rise in radiation levels. Either the phrases about the rise were formulated in the conditional tense, or they were followed by some calming statement such as “not significantly” or “far from the harmful level,” or the news did not use the term “rise” at all but mentioned a radiation level in fluctuation. When the news told listeners about the contamination, no exact measurement data of nuclear radiation were provided. The inconsistency of the

terms of measurement could be confusing, and it did not help ordinary people to understand the degree of the threat. Uncertainty was also manifest when listening to the health protection recommendations issued by the Hungarian authorities, as these continued to be in effect after the WHO reported that they were no longer necessary. The news about the unchanged levels of radiation in Hungary was on air as long as the Hungarian expert committee was uncertain about the details: only from May 1 onwards, i.e., after the Ministry of Agriculture and Food had ordered a pasturage ban in several counties, did announcements in the Hungarian media indirectly acknowledge the presence of harmful substances.

The analysis of Hungarian Radio's news broadcasts is informative about the following dynamics in the domestic communication strategy:

The news editor and the journalists of the radio reacted professionally to the situation as they tried to quickly obtain information about what had happened and confirmed the news by referring to several sources, to the extent possible, in the first 24 hours. As a result, all the information available was made public immediately after the Soviet statement.

Then, however, the Hungarian Party leadership—in part owing to the lack of information—switched to 'manual control' and defined the media's agenda and frames, while *Hungarian Radio* no longer had the chance to deviate from it. In these days of geopolitical vulnerability, political interests and the prevention of panic were more important than the dissemination of adequate information.

This changed only two weeks later when the news editors and journalists of the radio could produce content about topics beyond the official agenda, which resulted in more details about the disaster and its consequences for Hungary being revealed, and even the responsible behavior of the nuclear engineers and of the Soviet officials was seriously questioned. This may have reduced the uncertainty and fear that arose in society after the accident and its domestic communication.

The radio coverage of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster highlights two further features of the Hungarian public sphere. First, the various role interpretations of the journalists. There were 1) propagandists such as the chief editor on April 29 who, in an effort to avoid conflict, deleted both the Western and the classified pieces of information from the news, 2) collaborative media professionals who tried to balance between diverging interests, and 3) truth-seeking journalists who played a decisive part in the dissemination of information and later in its interpretation. Secondly, the studied news coverage demonstrates that loosening political control over *Hungarian Radio* gave radio journalists more leeway. The editors of *Hungarian Radio* publicized classified information in a less controlled evening time slot. As a result, radio provided detailed and accurate information for a few hours. This kind of journalistic courage that prioritized

accuracy instead of partisanship, appeared again two weeks after the accident in the weekly political radio magazine. By mentioning that the authorities did not initially assess the significance of what happened in a proper manner, and several wrong decisions were made, the authority and integrity of the Soviet Union were seriously questioned.

REFERENCES

- Agárdi, P. (2004). A Magyar Rádió utolsó 15 éve [The last 15 years of the Hungarian Radio]. *Médiakutató*, 5(3), 93-110.
- Aszódi, A. (2006). Csernobil 20 éve [20 years of Chernobyl]. *Fizikai Szemle*, 4, Retrieved from <http://fizikaiszemle.hu/archivum/fsz0604/aszodi0604.html>
- Bajomi-Lázár, P. (2005). Médiapolitika [Media Policy]. In P. Bajomi-Lázár (Ed.). (2005). *Magyar médiatörténet a késő Kádár-kortól az ezredfordulóig* [Hungarian Media History from the Late Kádár era until the Millennium] (pp. 19–51) Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó
- Bajomi-Lázár, P., Balcytiene, A., Dobрева, A., & Klimkiewicz, B. (2019). History of the Media in Central and Eastern Europe. In K. Arnold, P. Preston, & S. Kinnebrock (Eds.), *The Handbook of European Communication History* (pp. 277–298). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119161783.ch15>
- Bánáti, B. (2014). Csernobil-az elhallgatott információ [Chernobyl the untold information] KMA-MTVA, [video] YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piR2tEuM88k&t=435s>
- Bolgár, Gy. (2009). Hárselvtárs trükkje [The trick of Comrade Hárs]. *Népszava*, 219, 7. <https://doi.org/10.15290/bth.2009.07.19>
- Bolgár, Gy. (2014). A Magyar Rádió elnöke [The director of the Hungarian Radio]. *168 Óra*, 26(50), 38–39.
- Brooks, J. (2000). *Thank you, Comrade Stalin! Soviet public culture from revolution to Cold War*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400843923>
- Cummings, R. H. (2009). *Cold War Radio: The Dangerous History of American Broadcasting in Europe, 1950-1989*. North Carolina: McFarland.
- Farkas, Z. (2014). Az elnök és kora [The director and his era] *168 Óra*, 26(37), 30–31.
- Földes, Gy. (2012). Kádár János és a magyar desztalinizáció [János Kádár and the Hungarian De-Stalinisation]. *Múltunk*, 57(2), 192–214.
- Germuska, P. (2010). Zápor, zivatar, jégeső [Showers, thunderstorms, hail], In Gy. Kozák (Ed.). *Kádárizmus átereszek évkönyv XVIII*. [Kadarism almanac No. XVIII] (pp. 185–220), Budapest: 1956-os Intézet.
- Gibbs, J. (1999). *Gorbachev's Glasnost. The Soviet Media in the First Phase of Perestroika*. Texas: College Station, Texas A&M University Press.
- Györfy, M. (2007). Ez egy nagy összjáték volt. [It was a huge collaboration] In P. Bajomi-Lázár & Á. Monori (Eds.), *Rendszerváltás és az újságírók. [Regime Change and Journalists]* (pp. 126–136). Budapest: Antenna Könyvek.
- Harper, K. (2001). Chernobyl Stories and Anthropological Shock in Hungary. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 74, 114–123. <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2001.0028>

- Heath, R. L., & O'Hair, H. D. (2009). The Significance of Crisis and Risk Communication. In R. L. Heath & D. O'Hair (Eds.), *Handbook of Risk and Crisis Communication* (pp. 5-30). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070726-2>
- Holt, R. T. (1999). *Radio Free Europe*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press.
- Hopkins, Mark W. (1965). Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev: Three Concepts of the Press. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 42(4), 523–531. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769906504200401>
- HU OSA-420-2-2:1 A8203 Közvéleménykutatás a csernobili szerencsétlenség után [Opinion poll after the Chernobyl accident]
- HU OSA-420-2-2:1 A8204 Újabb közvéleménykutatás a csernobili szerencsétlenség után [Another opinion poll after the Chernobyl accident]
- INSAG-7 (1992). *The Chernobyl Accident: Updating Of INSAG-1, A report by the International Nuclear Safety Advisory Group*. pp. 51–89. Safety Series No. 75, Vienna: International Atomic Energy Agency.
- Johnson, A. R. (2010). *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. The CIA Years and Beyond*. Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
- Kékesdi-Boldog, D. (2019b). The Chernobyl Disaster: A Case Study on the Information Policy of the Kádár Regime. *Central European Journal Of Communication*, 12(1), 78–91. [https://doi.org/10.19195/1899-5101.12.1\(22\).5](https://doi.org/10.19195/1899-5101.12.1(22).5)
- Kékesdi-Boldog D. (2022). Nyitás és médiapolitika a Kádár-korszakban [Opening and Media Policy During the Kádár era]. In R. Takács (Ed.). *A nyitott zárt ország: Kulturális és tudományos érintkezések az 1970-es és 1980-as években Magyarország és a Nyugat között*. [The open closed country: Cultural and scientific contacts between Hungary and the West in the 1970s and 1980s] (pp. 175–206) Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó.
- Lánczi, A., & H. O'Neil, P. (1996). Pluralization and the politics of media change in Hungary. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 12(4), 82-101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523279608415324>
- McNair, B. (1991). *Glasnost, Perestroika and the Soviet Media*. London: Routledge.
- Plokhy, S. (2018). *Chernobyl: History of a Tragedy*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Puddington, A. (2000). *Broadcasting Freedom*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Romsics, I. (2010): *Magyarország története a XX. században [The history of Hungary in the XX. century]*. Budapest: Osiris.
- Sakwa, R. (1993/2008). *Russian Politics and Society*. London and New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203931257>
- Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956/1984). *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should be and do*. Chicago University Press.
- Sipos, B. (2007). Médiatörténet és az elbeszélte történelem [Media history and narrated history]. In P. Bajomi-Lázár & Á. Monori (Eds.), *A rendszerváltás és az újságírók [Regime change and journalists]* (353–376.). PrintX-Budavár.
- Sipos, B. (2010). *Média és demokrácia Magyarországon. A politikai média jelenkortörténete*. [Media and Democracy in Hungary. The Contemporary History of Political Media] Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó.
- Takács, R. (2013). Desztalinizáció Közép- és Kelet-Európában [De-Stalinization in Central and Eastern Europe]. *Múltunk*, 3, 68–103.

- Tertinszky, E. (1998). A Magyar Rádió 1956-tól [Hungarian Radio from 1956] In: I. Kollega Tarsoly (Ed.). Magyarország a XX. században [Hungary in the XX. century] III. kötet Retrieved from <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02185/html/504.html>
- Valuch, T. (2005). A „gulyáskommunizmus [Goulash Communism]. In I., Romsics (Ed.) *Mítoszok, legendák, tévhitek a 20. századi magyar történelemről* [Myths, legends, misbeliefs about 20th century Hungarian history] (pp. 361–390.). Budapest: Osiris Kiadó.
- Party Communiques
- Az MSZMP Központi Bizottsága Politikai Bizottságának határozata az agitációs munka helyzetéről, időszzerű feladatairól (1979. március 27.) [Decision of the Political Committee of the Central Committee on the timely tasks of the agitation work]. In H., Vass (Ed.) *Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1975–1980* [Decisions and documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party 1975–1980] (pp. 939–947.). Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó.
- 1047/1974. (IX. 18.) MT határozat az Állami Rádió és Televízió Bizottságról, valamint a Magyar Rádióról és a Magyar Televízióról [Declaration of the Council of Ministers about the National Radio and Television Committee and about the Hungarian Radio and the Hungarian Television] In V. Paál (Ed.), *A magyarországi médiaháború története. Média és politika 1989–2010* [The history of the Hungarian media war. Media and policy 1989–2010] (p. 699.) Budapest: Complex Kiadó
1986. évi II. törvény a sajtóról 2§ (1) [Press law 1986/II 2§ (1)] Retrieved from <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=98600002.TV&txpreferer=A1000185.TV>
- MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-00147-VII-szn-tájhiv/1986 “A Minisztertanács Tájékoztatási Hivatalának értékelése a csernobili reaktor-balesettel kapcsolatos hazai tömegtájékoztatási munkáról” [An evaluation of the Hungarian information work about the Chernobyl accident by the Council of Ministers] (1986. VI. 16.)
- MNL OL-XIX-A-2-af-00147-II-szn/1986. “147/a. Emlékeztető a csernobili atomerőműben történt balesetből adódó feladatok megbeszéléséről (1986. május 16.)” [Reminder of the discussion on the tasks arising from the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant 16 May 1986]
- MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-00147-VI-szn/1986. (WHO 1986. 05. 06.) “Az ENSZ Egészségügyi Világszervezetének ajánlása” [Recommendation of the UN’s World Health Organization] (1986. V. 6.)
- MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-Ma-00147-VI-Hazai tájékoztatás- egyéb tájékoztatási munka- Feljegyzés – 1986.05.05. “A Minisztertanács Tájékoztatási Hivatalának feljegyzése Marjai József miniszterelnök-helyettes részére a közvélemény csernobili atomerőműbalesettel kapcsolatos tájékoztatásáról” [A note of the Council of Ministers to Deputy Prime Minister József Marjai about the public information of the Chernobyl accident]
- MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-Ma-00147-VII-szn/1986. (IpM M-2523). Kapolyi László ipari miniszternek a csernobili atomerőmű balesetéről szóló első tájékoztatása Marjai József miniszterelnök-helyettes részére (1986. április 29.). [Industry Minister László Kapolyi’s first information about the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident to Deputy Prime Minister József Marjai (April 29, 1986).]
- MNL OL M-KS-288. f. 5. cs. 968. ő.e.-1986. 4/b. Tájékoztató a Politikai Bizottság 1986. május 6-án megtartott ülésének 10. napirendi pontjához (1986. május 6.). [Information sheet for agenda item 10 of the meeting of the Political Committee held on May 6, 1986 (May 6, 1986).]

- MNL OL XIX-B-1-ai-1-a-579/1986. MNL OL XIX-B-1-ai-1-a-579/1986 Berki Mihálynak, a Polgári Védelem Országos Törzsparancsnokának jelentése Kárpáti Ferenc honvédelmi miniszter részére az atomerőműben történt balesetről (1986. április 30.). [Report of Mihály Berki, National Chief of Civil Defence, to Minister of National Defense Ferenc Kárpáti on the accident at the nuclear power plant (April 30, 1986).]
- MNL OL XIX-A-83-a-863. jkv.-6.np./1986. 12/b. A minisztertanács ülésének napirendjén szereplő jelentés a csernobili atomerőművi baleset hazai következményeiről, a szerzett tapasztalatokról és következtetésekről (1986. november 27.). [The report on the domestic consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident, the experiences gained and conclusions included in the agenda of the meeting of the Council of Ministers (November 27, 1986).]
- MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1986-SZU-145-532-002679/1986 Monori István kijevi főkonzul rejtjeltávirata a lakosság evakuálására vonatkozó szovjet intézkedésekről (1986. április 29.). [Encrypted telegram of István Monori, Consul General in Kyiv, about Soviet measures for the evacuation of the population (April 29, 1986).]
- MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1986-SZU-145-532-002679/1/1986 Rejtjeltávirat a szovjet atomerőmű meghibásodásáról (1986. április 29.) [MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-1986-SZU-145-532-002679/1/1986 Code telegram about the failure of the Soviet nuclear power plant (April 29, 1986)]
- MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-Ma-00147-VI-Hazai tájékoztatás-egyéb tájékoztatási munka-Feljegyzés – 1986.05.05. [MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-Ma-00147-VI-Domestic information-other information work-Note – 05.05.1986]
- MNL OL XIX-A-2-af-00147-VII-szn-tájhiv/1986. A Minisztertanács Tájékoztatási Hivatalának értékelése a csernobili reaktor-balesettel kapcsolatos hazai tömegtájékoztatási munkáról (1986. június 16.). [Evaluation of the Information Office of the Council of Ministers on the domestic mass media work related to the Chernobyl reactor accident (June 16, 1986).]
- HU OSA-420-2-1:31 8192 Bolgár György: A csernobili szerencsétlenség a Magyar Rádióban [György Bolgár: The Chernobyl disaster on Hungarian Radio]
- Radio News
- 550026 168 hours 1986. V. 10. Kossuth Rádió 16:00–17:30, editor: Ákos Mester.
- 550342 168 hours 1986. V. 17. Kossuth Rádió 16:00–17:30 editor: Ákos Mester.
- K 2/5/1986 10:00 AM KM/Gné “Magyar jelentés a sugárzásról” [Hungarian report about the radiation]
- K 2/5/1986 2:00 PM KM/Gné “Magyar sugárszint mérések” [Hungarian radiation-measurements]
- K 28/4/1986 10:00 PM KM/HAR Szerencsétlenség szovjet atomerőműben [Disaster in a Soviet power plant]
- K 28/4/1986 24:00 KM/HAR “Szovjet atombaleset” [Soviet nuclear accident]
- K 29/4/1986 4:30 AM KM/HAR “Szovjet atombaleset” [Soviet nuclear accident]
- K 29/4/1986 5:00 AM KM/HAR “Szovjet atombaleset” [Soviet nuclear accident]
- K 29/4/1986 8:00 AM KM/Gné “Szovjet atomerőmű baleset” [Soviet power plant accident]
- P 1/5/1986 5 PM KM/Gné Szovjet kormányközlemény [Statement of the Soviet Government]
- P 13/5/1986 9:00 PM ZP/KZS Radioaktivitási szint Magyarországon [The level of the radioactivity in Hungary]

- P 28/4/1986 9:00 PM, LL/Kné „Robbanás egy szovjet nukleáris erőműben” [Explosion at a Soviet nuclear power plant]
- P 28/4/1986 11:00 PM KM/HAR “Szerencsétlenség szovjet atomerőműben” [Disaster in a Soviet power plant]
- P 29/4/1986 3:00 AM LL/Kné “Szovjet nukleáris baleset” [Soviet nuclear accident]
- P 29/4/1986 7:00 PM NGY/vm “Légszennyezés” [Air pollution]
- P 29/4/1986 9:00 AM Zp/Kné “Paksi erőmű helyzete” [Situation of the Power Plant of Paks]
- P 7/5/1986 7:00 PM KM/ré “Mérések Magyarországon + sugárhelyzet és következményei” [Measurements in Hungary + radiation and its aftermath]
- Hungarian Daily Broadcast Analysis for Monday, 28 April 1986
- Hungarian Daily Broadcast Analysis for Tuesday, 29 April 1986
- Lovas, István: “To the Hungarian Services”, 1989. IV. 28. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcast records [in Hungarian], Box 3157, Folder 3, Hoover Institution Archives
- Szigriszt, László: “To the Hungarian Services”, 1989. IV. 29. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcast records [in Hungarian], Box 3157, Folder 3, Hoover Institution Archives
- URH 29/4/1986 11:30 PM KL/Gné “Magyar közlemény az atombalesetről” [Hungarian report about the nuclear accident]