

## **Against the Ruling Political Power**

### Clandestine Activities and Pirates in Europe from 1933 to the Present

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**Abstract** The paper analyzes the unlicensed radios, how they were formed and what the motivation for their formation was. The ideology of pirates is connected with the idea of free broadcasting and liberalism, and it contributed to a widening of the social discourse. Unlicensed radios have several times promoted social change and wrung the required laws from authorities. Pirates or clandestine radios have played an important part in international political propagandizing. In Hungary, pirates have played a significant role in changing the social structure as well as in changing the hegemony of program providers. Pirates have contributed to structural changes in local publicity. Since these radios have started, Hungarian society has begun to accept the minority: independent thinkers and minority groups such as homosexuals more easily. Radio Sirius seemed to be piratical in the eyes of authorities, but it was the local government's partner at the same time.

**Keywords** clandestine activities, pirate radios, history of radio broadcasting

#### **Introduction**

The basic rules of local broadcasting were created by Radio *Zöm* in Hungary. This radio provided a large dose of local news and popular music programs, while the state run radios transmitted less pop music, alternative music, local news, and local speeches than the audience expected. In Hungary, pirates have played a significant role in social structure changes as well as in the upsetting of program provider's rule. I define "pirate radio" as unlicensed radio transmissions. We can safely assert that the motives behind starting unlicensed radio stations vary from country to country; but there seem to be common factors as well:

- desire to provide a microphone to the civil community
- lack of adequate funding to operate licensed radio

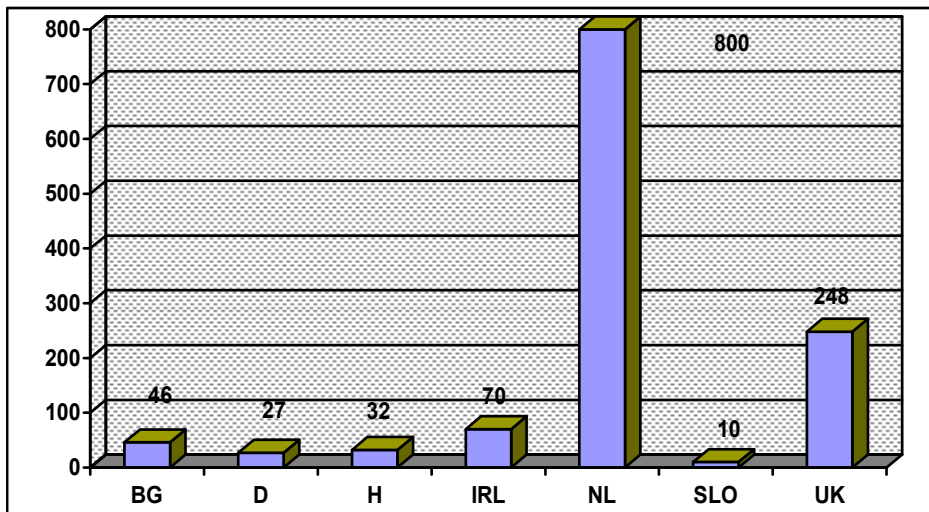
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- overly complicated licensing and operating laws
- desire to make money by radio advertising
- spirit of adventure
- desire to provide an alternative account of events/phenomena
- a feeling that one's musical taste is not represented in normal radio broadcasts
- a desire to rebel against authority

Categories of pirate radio include: commercial, political (clandestine), alternative-communal, and local public.

Many unlicensed radio stations broadcast in Europe nowadays. In Scandinavia unlicensed broadcasting is virtually unknown, while the Netherlands hosts more than 800 unlicensed broadcasting stations.<sup>1</sup> Pirates are part of everyday media and mass communication in a lot of countries in Europe.



**Chart 1. Number of clandestine activities in Europe, 2006; source: CEPT**

In the following parts of my paper, I would like to analyse the social effect of European pirates through the lens of Radio *Zöm*'s history, its social surroundings in Hungary, and the reactions of the ruling party. Unfortunately, there is not much analytical literature available on the subject. For this reason, I will use contemporary articles published by papers and other periodical journalism. I will also use my own radio reports, interviews that are available on the state run radio. I held deep interviews with colleagues at Radio *Zöm* and the Hungarian authorities.

<sup>1</sup> Unlicensed Radio Broadcasting, CEPT, 2004.

### Unlicensed transmitting in Europe

They are called “pirates” or “unlicensed radios.” In times of crisis, clandestine radios have had great effects on society. They broadcast political propaganda abroad for alien powers. The pirate radios in Hungary are called “*tilos rádió*,” meaning, “forbidden radio,” after the name of the second oldest pirate radio. The sixties saw a mushrooming number of unlicensed radio stations running from ships or other locations offshore. In France such stations have been named “guerilla radio” since the time of the Paris student rebellion in 1968. Ten years ago I found in a Hungarian weekly paper the most interesting denomination of an unlicensed radio, “air-brigand.”

The characteristic feature of pirates is that they have no license for operation, that is to say, they are against the supreme political power ruling in the area of the transmission. Pirates operate in direct violation of the the law, and they can expect quite a hefty fine for transmitting. However, unlicensed radio satisfies a lot of social, business, and political demands among its audience.

Unlicensed broadcasting has always rejected the state-run radio’s sample in Europe. Despite the fact that the old fashioned radios are maintained by license fees and are sponsored by the authorities, pirates still turn up from time to time.

We must make it absolutely clear that pirates have contributed considerably to the establishment of pluralism among European radios. Considering that the first rule of European dual-pole transmitting became law after 1976 (after the decision of Constitution Court of Italy), the final codifying was in Bulgaria in 1998. After thirty years that the first was signed.

### Luxemburg and Caroline

During the sixties, European pirate programs were similar to American commercial radios in their dynamism and freshness. The stations had always transmitted popular music, easy speeches, and hit lists or so called “charts,” and lot of advertising. That was the authentic answer to the demand of the British teenager, who would have heard more popular and light programs on the radio. Soon afterwards (1967) the BBC was obliged to start the BBC One program in response to the challenges of ship radios.<sup>2</sup>

I have to mention that lots of listeners in the early seventies were enticed back by British state run radio's new programs.

“It is clear that the BBC didn’t cater to the young audience. If the state run radio had been up to listeners expectations, the pirates would never have come on the scene,” said Mr. Hugh Jenkins, Member of Parliament, in the sixties.

I think that the fist European advertising-pirate broadcasting in English from France aimed at the UK market was the Radio Paris. (It is important that British state run radio has never transmitted advertising.)

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<sup>2</sup> Bajomi-Lázár, 2004a.



The ancestor of all European English commercial radio programs is Radio Luxemburg, a continental station that reached the UK. The programs of RL consisted of popular music for teenagers, quizzes, and cabaret. In 1938 the “Luxi” made the first request-by-telephone program in the history of European broadcasting.

Continental radio satisfied the musical demands of Brits and gave space for advertising to British companies that wanted to sell to teenagers on the British markets. By 1938 Radio Luxembourg had 45 percent of the Sunday listening audience against the BBC's 35 percent. Advertisers spent 1.7 million pounds sterling per year. “Radio Luxembourg’s program is scandalous and it is piratical,” said one of the Member of British Parliament. Thereafter “pirate” became a regular term for illegal radio. I would like to cite the Member of Hungarian Parliament Mr. Torgyán: “with pirate we couldn’t go to Europe”, but it was in 1993.

### **Take the radio station shipboard**

Against the monopolist radio laws of European broadcasting, lots of unlicensed radios were set up shipboard, and transmitted from international waters. One of the most successful marine stations was Radio Caroline (RC), which started broadcasting on Easter Sunday 1964. It was broadcast from a ship.



Ronan O’Rahilly was the owner and boss of RC. At a party, a girl told to Ronan about the station Voice of America, which was operating at sea. The radio station was named after John F. Kennedy’s daughter. Ronan had good rock and roll credentials; the young rich Irishman had bought the first set of stage equipment for the Rolling Stones and briefly managed them at the outset of their career. He also managed other singers. But the record companies did not receive the new station with open arms. In 1964 RC broke the monopoly of BBC. In the words of one speaker: “This is Radio Caroline on 199, your all day music station.” By the autumn of 1964, Caroline had more listeners than the three BBC networks combined. However, the primary aim of RC was to give airtime to artists sponsored by O’Rahilly, and, of course, to advertisers.

The Marine Broadcasting Offences Act became law in 1967. It forbade the transmitting of pirate programs and advertising. RC survived, though it moved to a new base in Holland. At midnight, an estimated twenty million people listened to the station. The radio determined to continue working until the legislation recognized its legality.

The ruling party was against commercial/clandestine radio programs. The government forgot to consider that the age group Radio Caroline’s listeners, 18-21 years of age, would be voting in the next election. The teenagers and RC helped to break the Labour Party’s power in 1968. The first British Act of commercial broadcasting became law in 1973.



As shown in the two examples above, early pirates worked to satisfy teenagers’ desire for European and American popular music. Advertising was connected with the radio programs. The pirates took over the dynamism and freshness of American commercial stations. The unlicensed radios declared the idea of free broadcasting, against the will of governments, and they fought the laws of European dual-pole transmitting. The programs of pirates consisted of a lot of popular music and call-in programs that used dynamic hit charts.

### **Limited Hungarian air**

In 1991, a year after the regime change in Hungary, the first pirate radio station appeared in Hungary.

Let us give the motives for its appearance:

- no free radio frequencies were available in Hungary
- the frequencies moratorium was in force
- the legislation for plural-broadcasting took too much time
- the youth and civil society wanted a microphone to express their opinions
- the state run radio couldn't satisfy the populace's desire for popular music

It is typical that in 1989 thirty two televisions and twenty nine radio stations wanted to be registered in Hungary but the laws of legislation were too convoluted. The political-social environment was fraught. Distrust of the government and economic desperation were everywhere. Exasperated citizens wanted to know: why are there so few free frequencies in Hungary?

According to the dictates of Moscow, the Central European “socialist block” had to use the OIRT frequency band from 1960 to 1989. Hungary didn't demand frequencies in the 100 MHz frequencies band, in 1974, from Geneva Frequencies Conference. The Hungarian Broadcasting Act became law in 1996; it specified only two national commercial radio frequencies.

### **Radio Zöm (“Bulk”) Kaposvár, Hungary**

The first Hungarian pirate began to speak on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1991 on a 87, 654 MHz frequency broadcasting from Kaposvár and operated by an eighteen-year-old student. Did you catch that?--that is an easily-remembered frequency: 8, 7, 6, 5, 4. Surprisingly, the existence of the radio was unknown to the authorities until an article appeared in the paper.



The purpose of Radio Zöm was to allow young people to communicate with one another. Soon, they were able to send messages to their schoolfellows at college. And, what is more, they could broadcast more popular music in better quality than the state run radio in the region of Kaposvár.

The music editors could catch the attention of the great majority of young men and women with rock music. A survey made at the end of nineties pointed out that about 21 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 19 belonged to the rock group-culture. The radio programs consisted of edited music, quizzes, telephone request programs, and bedtime stories. But the most important programs were local news programs, weather reports, and live sports broadcasts.

The youngsters redefined the structure of local broadcasting. At the time of Hungary's media-war, they embodied the idea of free broadcasting. However, they realized that unlicensed radio could not work without sponsorship by opposition party or companies.

Radio *Zöm* did not get political support, but they got financial sponsorship. This gives Radio *Zöm* a good claim to be considered as the basis of local commercial radio.

The ruling power did not listen to any provincial radio, but turned on Radio *Tilos* most frequently since it was working in Budapest, the capital. Radio *Tilos* ("forbidden") played cat and mouse play with the authorities from the end of 1991, transmitting from moving cars. It gave a lesson to the authorities about democratic broadcasting and the populace's mentality.



The aim of Radio *Tilos* was to broadcast non-commercial, non-political programs. They would have liked to give a microphone to the minority. In the modernizing Hungarian societies there haven't been given enough communication fields for the alternative associations on the state run radio. As far as I know, against the West democracy alternative associations have wide-spread system of institutions. In Hungary the minority associations had worked in bad communication possibilities, isolated and had formed into despite of society. The Radio *Tilos* could be considered as a basis of alternative communal broadcasting. The alternative radio obtained from the authority that it gives temporary licensees for transmitting from 1993. After all in Hungary the act of plural-pole radio became law in 1996.

### **Clandestine transmitters supporting propaganda or political movements**

There are no long-standing clandestine radios in Hungary nowadays. However, large numbers of clandestine transmitters exist, advocating civil war or revolution; these desire to keep their identity unknown. There are three categories of radio propaganda stations, according to Sterling:<sup>3</sup> "Dark,' 'clandestine,' and 'white' are categories used by U.S. intelligence agencies." So called "white" radio stations are loyal representatives of their country. Examples include Radio Free Europe and broadcasts by the Foreign Service or armed forces. Dark stations may be either gray or black. Gray

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<sup>3</sup> Sterling, 2004



clandestine radios may be operated by local dissident groups, but are often sponsored by foreign governments. Black radio stations are operated by anti-government guerilla groups, and they keep their location and operation secret.



During the Cold War, the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Moscow could be heard. But the first European clandestine broadcast was *Radio España Independiente*, so-called “*La Piraneica*,” and “*La Voz de la Verdad*” (“The voice of the truth”).<sup>4</sup> The longest-running clandestine station in history started in 1941 and closed in 1977. After Franco’s victory in the Spanish Civil War, the Spanish Communist Party set up a station called *Radio España Independiente*.<sup>5</sup>

In my opinion, the BBC Hungarian Service could be considered a clandestine radio during the Cold War. Charles de Gaulle spoke to all the French from BBC London in 1940: “Continue the war against the occupying German!” It was a message from a clandestine radio from France’s point-of-view. The Iraqi Troops had clandestine radios that worked extremely efficiently during the war to transmit propaganda programs for the American Army. After this I would like to mention the aims of clandestine radios: political propaganda, trouble-making, and changing the political regime for a long period.

### **Pirates nowadays**

Since radio broadcasting acts have been validated in the majority of European countries, we would think that the pirates should begin to disappear. The *Conférence Européenne des Administrations des Postes et des Télécommunications*, CEPT, produced a report one year ago that shows some interesting contrasts: in Scandinavia unlicensed broadcasting is virtually unknown, yet there are up to 800 unlicensed

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dxing.com/clandest.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Plans, 2011



broadcasting stations in the Netherlands. The large number of pirates in the Netherlands can be attributed to the advertisement business. From among the 20 member-countries of the CEPT, only 10 administrations reported any unlicensed activity. In Hungary 4-8 unlicensed radios, mostly operated by young students, are caught by the authorities each year. The Head of Radio Authority in Hungary, Peter Tomka, has said that the Hungarian pirates do not want to appear on the media market. They use the airwaves to demonstrate their own gadgets for each other. It is in the air they took a common stand in the allocation of quotas of the free illegal frequency bands. The pirates can expect hefty fines if they are caught, but unlicensed radios continue to pop up. Legal penalties vary from country to country: British pirates have to pay about 750 Euros, five times as much as the license fee. Hungarian unlicensed radios are obliged to pay 100-300 Euros in Hungary. Though it may not seem like much, this is actually a relatively hefty penalty, since most Hungarian pirate stations are run by students.

### **Public interest Sirius**

Among Hungarian pirates, Radio Sirius was on air the longest: from 1998 to 2005. The radio was run by a pensioner, 72 in a little town near the capital. The aged man's aim was the reparation of public education and culture. The old speaker had no choice but to set up an unlicensed radio, because he lacked adequate income or funding to license a legal station. The mechanic set up the radio for himself and kept in close touch with the local government. The mayor trusted him and he trusted the village. He recorded and broadcast meetings of local government. *Radio Sirius is public interest local radio*. It was sealed up five times, but it was consistently rebuilt and nowadays has a legal license. 18 local public radios are working in Hungary, while 14 other are applying for a license. The pirate Radio Sirius is a good example of public local broadcasting, and it has contributed to the awareness that the competition for the free frequencies needs to be announced by the Hungarian Radio Authority. The range of public local radios is usually no more than two or three kilometers in Hungary.

### **Summary**

I have analyzed the unlicensed radios, how they were formed and what the motivation for their formation was. The ideology of pirates is connected with the idea of free broadcasting and liberalism, and it contributed to a widening of the social discourse. Unlicensed radios have several times promoted social change and wrung the required laws from authorities. Pirates or clandestine radios have played an important part in international political propagandizing. In Hungary, pirates have played a significant role in changing the social structure as well as in changing the hegemony of program providers. Pirates have contributed to structural changes in local publicity. Since these radios have started, Hungarian society has begun to accept the minority: independent thinkers and minority groups such as homosexuals more easily. Radio Sirius seemed to be piratical in the eyes of authorities, but it was the local government's partner at the same time.

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