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## REPATRIATION OR REDEFECTION? COLD WAR REFUGEES AS CONTESTED ASSETS, 1955–1956

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### ABSTRACT

**Repatriation or Redefection? Cold War Refugees as Contested Assets, 1955–1956**  
The article examines the response of a united representation of Cold War era exiles (Assembly of Captive European Nations, ACEN) to the Moscow-inspired repatriation campaign of 1955. The article's focus rests on the US-sponsored exile political activities carried under the aegis of the Free Europe Committee. The year 1955 serves as a particularly interesting moment when both key adversaries in the Cold War were engaged in programs using migration as a tool to advance their political goals. The issue of political exiles' agency is signaled based on the Polish case in the context of American redefection programs and Washington's response to the Soviet Bloc campaign to demoralize anti-communist escapees and *induce* their return.

**KEYWORDS:** repatriation campaign, Cold War, political exile, Assembly of Captive European Nations

### IZVLEČEK

**Repatriacija ali vrnitev prebežnikov? Tekmovanje za begunce hladne vojne, 1955–1956**  
Članek predstavlja odziv skupnega zastopništva izgnancev hladne vojne (znanega pod imenom Assembly of Captive European Nations, ACEN – Skupščina evropskih narodov v ujetništvu) na kampanjo repatriacije, ki jo je Moskva izvedla leta 1955. V središče pozornosti postavlja politične dejavnosti izgnancev, ki so jih podpirale ZDA pod okriljem Odbora svobodne Evrope (angl. Free Europe Committee). Leto 1955 je zanimivo obdobje, ko sta glavna nasprotnika hladne vojne uporabljala migracije kot orodje za uresničevanje svojih političnih ciljev. Članek na poljskem primeru obravnava dejavnosti političnih izgnancev v kontekstu ameriških programov za pridobitev prebežnikov iz sovjetskega bloka in odgovora Washingtona na sovjetsko kampanjo demoralizacije ubežnikov.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** kampanja repatriacije, hladna vojna, politični izgnanci, Skupščina evropskih narodov v ujetništvu

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## INTRODUCTION

One way to study the Cold War is to look at the competition for the “hearts and minds” on both sides of the Cold War divide. Works related to psychological warfare and propaganda struggles offer multiple areas of focus, one of which is examining the fate of the migrants (Mazurkiewicz, 2019b: 41–58). In the bipolar world, each adversary argued the superiority of its socio-economic regime. People who crossed the Cold War divide were living testimonies to such claims, and as such, exploitable propaganda assets. In 1955, two propaganda systems collided over the issue of the Soviet repatriation campaign, swiftly branded redefection by the opposing side. While there are studies within national historiographies on how individual countries in the region organized repatriation campaigns under Moscow’s direction (Mazurkiewicz, 2019a) and on émigré responses to calls for return, this text looks at the problem from a slightly different angle. Focusing the attention on the agency of political exiles places them within a larger context of US psychological warfare. Looking from the vantage point of a transnational organization working in symbiosis with the US government, the main research question relates to the impact the repatriation/redefection campaign had on the role that both sides assigned to Cold War refugees.

In this text, I chose to examine the repatriation campaign through the perspective of the Assembly of Captive European Nations (ACEN), an organization of political exiles from nine East-Central European countries which were seized by the Soviet Union after World War II. ACEN was established in 1954 based on national councils and committees in exile. These political organizations, created after the mid-1940s, consisted of the democratic (non-communist, non-fascist) exiles from East-Central Europe who resided in the West. The New York-based Free Europe Committee (FEC), an organization underwritten by the US government and prominent private US citizens, financially and politically supported the ACEN (Mazurkiewicz, 2021: 22–50). Through this symbiosis, the exiles from nine East-Central European states who gathered under the ACEN umbrella strived to confront the Soviet repatriation campaign. The ACEN perspective is particularly interesting since the assembly was the voice of people who, had it not been for the forcible imposition of the Communist rule across the region, would have likely played prominent roles in the political and socio-cultural lives of their homelands. Thus, ACEN offers a unique view on their consideration for the possibilities and circumstances regarding returning home. One must remember that the sole concept of returning home seems to be the single most definite feature distinguishing the political exiles from the Cold War refugees (from displaced persons to escapees and defectors) (Mazurkiewicz, 2015: 159–171).

This text begins with a brief survey of the US and Soviet programs that exploited the Cold War refugees as psychological warfare assets in the early 1950s. Against this background, I describe the ACEN response, which consists of three elements representative of their political operations in general (Mazurkiewicz, 2021). The first

area of intervention was the international relations forum. The second area was rallying support for their organizational activities in the United States. The third, divided here into two separate fields, was to orchestrate coordinated exile action to effectuate real change behind the Iron Curtain. The first task was to halt Soviet efforts to rally returns. The second was to seek the return of the wartime refugees held against their will within the USSR. Poles were the largest group among these. Due to the coerced migrations (deportations, population transfers, forced labor and military service, imprisonment, exile, and expulsions, etc.) perpetrated by both the Nazis and Soviets during and after the war, and also a result of the significant shift of the country's borders to the West (based on decisions made at Yalta and Potsdam in 1945), millions of people in the Polish lands were forced to move in 1939–1948 (Stola, 2010: 10, 24).

While the 1955 Soviet repatriation campaign targeted the entire region, an investigation of the Polish case serves the readers to address the question of exile agency—between Moscow and Washington. The issue of repatriation was especially pertinent for the Polish members of the ACEN since, among the nine united delegations, Poland's post-World War II diaspora was also particularly numerous. A significant amount of research already exists related to the story of the Polish Section of Radio Free Europe's (RFE) activities for the release of pre-war Polish citizens stranded in the USSR (Machcewicz, 1999; Stanek, 2009). However, no mention thus far has been made on the political exiles gathered under ACEN's umbrella—an obvious target of the Soviet campaign. What was their response to repatriation? Were they considered an asset for the Americans, and if so, in which forums? Did they advance any original agenda that would deliver a concrete outcome? Since the issue of the exiles' political agency seems to stand out as the least addressed in research, the final question should be: were the political exiles in the non-Communist world mere objects of the Soviet repatriation campaign?

## **FROM REPATRIATION TO REDEFECTION: REFUGEES AS A COLD WAR ASSET**

The end of World War II in Europe marked the beginning of a major repatriation campaign. Former prisoners of war (POWs), forced laborers, people displaced by the military conflict, hunger, or border changes that followed the defeat of Nazi Germany in Europe were on the move (Shephard, 2012: 62–119). These return migrations were instinctive, individually organized, and facilitated by states based on international agreements or resulting from forcible population transfers. The largest scale of repatriation was based on the provisions of both Yalta and Potsdam agreements with the assistance of the liberation armies and international organizations such as the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA, established in

November 1943), International Refugee Organization (IRO, December 1946), (Judt, 2006: 23–40). However, not all returns were voluntary (H. Res. 137, 1955).<sup>1</sup>

With the post-war border changes, intertwined with the imposition of Communist rule across the region of East-Central Europe, came the unwillingness of many refugees to return home. Refugee camps across Western Europe became sites of dramatic actions protesting return. Within a year after the war's end, many displaced persons (those with a home to return to) became refugees awaiting resettlement in displaced person (DP) camps. Many refugees experienced discrimination because of their health, age, or lack of skills. Thus, their resettlement in the West was hindered for many years after the war. Moreover, by 1948, a new phenomenon became evident: spectacular yet often tragic escapes across the descending Iron Curtain (Carruthers, 2009: 4–5; Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 416–418, 435–459). Consequently, by the early 1950s, thousands of people across Western Europe still refused to return to the countries of their origin for fear of Communist persecution.

Mindful of the militarization of the borders dividing Europe and the fact that legal departure from Communist-dominated countries had become almost impossible, the United States decided to exploit the vulnerability of the Soviet Union and the countries it controlled in East-Central Europe. Thus, it focused on inducing further defections. The United States did not expect a mass influx of new refugees. Still, dangerous and dramatic escapes across the Iron Curtain served as evidence to the Western public of the unbearable living conditions under Communism. Based on the policy proposal regarding Soviet and Satellite Defectors spelled out in the NSC 86/1 and approved by President Truman in April 1951, the US government decided to weaken the Soviet party and military apparatus by inducing defections (Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 78). In spring 1952, a special operation called the US Escapee Program (USEP) was inaugurated to assist those fleeing to the West. Notably, it expanded the program's scope to include refugees already needing resettling. The program grew significantly when President Eisenhower assumed office in 1953. While planning for the fiscal year 1954, Harold E. Stassen, the director of the Foreign Operations Administration (formerly the Mutual Security Agency), said the Escapee Program was particularly important in "re-building hope among the victims of oppression by offering them an opportunity to become self-respecting and productive members of a democratic society" (Bureau of Public Affairs, 1953). Among the many agencies receiving assistance from USEP, there were also ethnic organizations such as the American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees, the American Polish War Relief, and the United Lithuanian Relief Fund of America, etc.

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1 Repatriation carried a negative connotation due to the forced repatriation program carried out by US military and civilian authorities in Germany in 1945–1947. It was proposed as a subject of investigation by a House of Representatives Committee in February 1955. Of course, this could hardly be considered a coincidence. A copy of a proposed resolution was forwarded to the ACEN Office by American journalist Julius Epstein.

The program was not just about refugee maintenance and resettlement. The US psychological warfare planning included inducing defections, especially from within the Communist military and high-ranking party members. The most spectacular success of this policy followed the defection of Józef Światło, the high-ranking official responsible for internal security within the ranks of the Polish Communist Party. He defected in Berlin in December 1953. In making the information public, he sent shock waves across People's Poland and prompted personal changes in the country's regime (Machcewicz, 2007: 94–95; Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 452–457). Communist defectors became a new, powerful asset in the hands of US propaganda. However, their usefulness for psychological warfare was only temporary, and most of the defectors were promptly rejected by both ethnic and émigré communities in the free world.

Another measure developed by the US government in cooperation with its public partners (representing business, media, prominent politicians, and former diplomats) became a long-term and efficient weapon in confronting the Soviets. In 1949, state-private cooperation resulted in the establishment of the National Committee for a Free Europe (renamed Free Europe Committee, FEC in 1954). This publicly operating organization assisted the work of the democratic exiles from East-Central Europe. The committee engaged in "political warfare" in which exiled leaders played an important role (Kádár Lynn, 2013: 7–69). Most of the exiled political leaders who received assistance from FEC left their homelands in 1944–1947. Headquartered in New York, FEC sought to facilitate exile organizational structures and programming to help maintain these leaders' potential while abroad (temporarily, it seemed at the time). At the same time, FEC was using their knowledge, skills, contacts, and willingness to cooperate with the West to weaken Soviet claims of representative governments established under Moscow's aegis in East-Central Europe. By the early 1950s, the Cold War political exiles active in the West were, in fact, a surrogate opposition in place of crushed domestic anti-Communist and democratic forces across East-Central Europe (Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 473).

The FEC ran numerous programs: from supporting political committees and councils intended to coordinate exile political activities, radio broadcasts, and publications to break the Communist-imposed censorship in the countries behind the Iron Curtain, regional study centers for the advantage of the Western policy-making to citizen services which aimed at assisting refugees stuck in the DP camps with the help of respective political, social, and cultural émigré organizations (Mazurkiewicz, 2021: 51–85). The most impactful of all these programs was Radio Free Europe (RFE), which broadcast news and cultural content to five countries of the region: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania (Johnson, 2010: 39–78). This elaborate structure was, of course, a result of the new doctrine of containment announced in 1947, which sought not just to prevent further Soviet expansion. The US policy aimed to weaken the Soviet Union by ensuring that the people of the countries the Communists seized control over would not be dominated in their spirits. The

struggle “for hearts and minds” was part of a much greater effort of economic, diplomatic, and other forms of pressure on the USSR. Obviously, at stake was a global confrontation in which Moscow and Washington wished to present themselves as guarantors of peace, stability, and cooperation, hence the propagandistic clashes in which Cold War refugees played a visible role.

By 1955, the Soviet Union was well aware of the elaborate US-made support system established to assist members of political, cultural, and intellectual elites who did not return home after World War II or fled their homelands when the Communists took over. As mentioned above, the refugee became an asset in the Cold War competition for hearts and minds. Communists quickly realized that the same was even more true in the case of re-defectors, the disillusioned political exiles in the West who decided to return home. In the Moscow-led propagandistic machine, these returnees were ultimate proof of the West’s inability to deliver on its promises of support in the areas ranging from political engagement on behalf of the captives to issues such as resettlement and standard of living.

In 1953, the Soviet Union announced the first amnesties, foretelling more advanced steps to induce returns via the Moscow-coordinated effort. The release of some gulag prisoners between March 1953 and May 1956 was followed by the Soviet Amnesty Decree of September 17, 1955. On top of releasing Soviet citizens who were sentenced for collaboration with the Nazis during the war, it also included a provision for the Soviet citizens abroad who had participated in anti-Soviet organizations after the war and were ready to publicly repent this fact (Zalkalns, 2014: 78–80). Soviet-controlled regimes in East-Central Europe replicated Moscow’s operation, intended to lure back émigrés, by issuing amnesty decrees inducing returns (Cenkiewicz, 2008: 37–38; Ruchniewicz, 2000: 275–285; Wierzbiański, 1955).<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in 1953, the issue of defection, escape, and the return gained special momentum in the Cold War psychological confrontation between the United States and USSR. Following Stalin’s death in 1953, the fighting in the Korean War ended in a stalemate. At this point, the POWs’ return once again became a focus of the world’s attention, with twenty-two thousand prisoners held by South Korea choosing to settle in Taiwan rather than returning to North Korea or China. At the same time, a small but exploitable group of twenty-three American soldiers who refused to return home became the spotlight of the Communist propaganda. What was intended as a US-directed spectacle demonstrating the unwillingness to return to the Communist-dominated homelands turned out to be a potential propagandistic setback for the West (Carruthers, 2009: 174; Mazurkiewicz, 2021: 212–214).

By the mid-1950s, the situation in Europe was also dynamic. In early 1954, Bohumil Lausman—former Czech socialist minister of industry, émigré politician

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2 Romania: August 1, 1954, and January 25, 1955; Czechoslovakia: May 9, 1955, Hungary: April 3, 1955, and January 22, 1956, Bulgaria: October 27, 1953, and April 7, 1956, Albania: January 5, 1956. In Poland, an early announcement was made on August 17, 1955, by Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz. The amnesty was announced on April 27, 1956.



active in Austria, suddenly appeared in Prague (Friszke, 1999: 233). In September 1955, the prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile (in London), Hugon Hanke, returned to Warsaw. We now know that he had worked for Communist intelligence since 1952 (Cenckiewicz, 2005: 271–273; Tarka, 2001: 19–33). But in 1955, his return marked the peak of the Soviet repatriation campaign and became a potent symbol of its success. Stanisław “Cat” Mackiewicz, also a former prime minister of the government-in-exile (1954–1955), while inspired by the intelligence, was prompted to return in June 1956 being disillusioned in the émigré work, Western policy, loneliness, and the incapability of life in exile (Cenckiewicz, 2005: 268–271, 274; Machcewicz, 1999: 30; Friszke, 1999: 239–240). These were significant blows to the morale and cohesion of the Polish political activities in the West. However, the result of the Soviet repatriation campaign was meager, given the scale of exile. Bolesław Wierzbiański, who prepared ACEN’s policy paper related to the redefection campaign, estimated two million refugees, displaced persons, escapees, and defectors in the West (Wierzbiański, 1955). In the Polish case, about seven thousand people returned from non-Communist countries (Cenckiewicz, 2005: 276–280; Stola, 2010: 83–84, 478). Among them, about one hundred people were Poles who played prominent roles in the country’s political and cultural life in the past. Thus, their names were recognizable by the general public. Some willingly cooperated with Communist propaganda, condemned by their former colleagues in exile upon their return. Others, having returned mostly for personal reasons, eventually assisted in developing domestic opposition (Nowak-Jeziorański, 2005: 182–183).

Based on the evidence from the archives of the Polish state security, one is left with little doubt regarding the real nature of the repatriation campaign. Bringing home anti-Communist activists (politicians, intellectuals, other social leaders) *en masse* was not in the best interest of Warsaw’s regime since it could have fueled the re-emergence of domestic opposition. The campaign’s ultimate aim is best illustrated by the Decree of November 10, 1955. It proposed the use of an agent and operational projects aimed at weakening and paralyzing the “reactionary activities of emigration centers”; deepening the contradictions within the exile milieu, unmasking and discrediting the leaders, and pulling away from the émigré masses from them; supporting activists and groups who wanted to change their attitude toward the homeland and to go back or establish positive cooperation with the country (Decree of November 10, 1955 (Warsaw) cited in Cenckiewicz, 2004: xxxviii–xxxix). In short, the aim of the campaign was simply to destroy political emigration centers, to turn the exiles into economic migrants, connect them to the network of diplomatic missions, and eliminate their potential as a weapon used for psychological and political activities by Western powers (Cenckiewicz, 2005: 252).

## THE ACEN'S RESPONSE

When the ACEN was established, both the US Escapee Program and the Soviet repatriation campaign were in place. However, in 1955, the Communist repatriation campaign became a full-fledged, regionally coordinated project that reached exiles in Western Europe and America. The exiles from nine countries dominated by the Communist regimes gathered in the ACEN were swift in preparing their response to the widespread inductions of émigré returns. The political exiles in the West were not naïve and immediately recognized that the campaign orchestrated across the region had one common political aim: to weaken, divide, and eventually destroy the anti-communist opposition that gained strength in the West. Hence, in their minds, “repatriation” became “redefection” (Memorandum, 1955).

From their perspective, the campaign's focus was much greater than a mere struggle for the refugee's decision to stay abroad or return home. Following the Geneva Conference of July 1955—the first meeting of wartime Allies since the Potsdam Conference—the exiles recognized that Moscow believed the world had entered a long period of peaceful co-existence. According to ACEN, the Soviet goal became securing recognition of the West that the Communist regimes in East-Central Europe were permanent. The ACEN assessed the Soviet intention to convince the West that:

these regimes have undergone serious changes in the post-Stalin era, that the excesses of the first years have been suppressed and that a harmonious “modus vivendi” between the demands of Communism and the human aspiration for freedom, as well as between Soviet Russia's ambition to leadership and the patriotic feelings in the captive peoples, are in the process of being found (ACEN News, 1955a).

As a regional representation in exile, the ACEN's mission was to respond in a regional mode displaying the real origin of the campaign and explaining its larger goals. Since Moscow was using strictly national channels to contact the various émigré milieus (to conceal the Soviet-dictated regional pattern), it became the ACEN's mission to expose and warn against the Communist methods of reaching the exiles. The formerly prominent politicians from East-Central Europe were also trying to explain to their American partners that the Soviet Union was taking advantage of the “Geneva spirit” to get rid of political exile as part of a much larger goal which was to “liquidate the policy of liberation,” to secure their grip on region only to move on with “the overall strategic plan of the Kremlin against the Western democracies” (ACEN News, 1955a).

The synchronized repatriation campaign waged by the puppet governments aims at discouraging the captive nations in their hope for liberation. It tries to make them believe that even the exiles have lost hope and faith, thanks to the so-called “spirit

of Geneva” and that Western Powers have allegedly renounced their policy of liberation ... as for the exiles, they will not be duped by this propaganda and will not give up their struggle. Although their dearest wish is to return to their countries, they will not go back in order to become accomplices of their people’s masters. They will return only when independence has been restored to the captive nations and when the political freedom of their peoples can be insured under conditions permitting free and unfettered elections (ACEN, 1955).

In the resolution adopted by the assembly, the exiles reiterated conditions essential for their return home. They shall go back once all traces of Soviet occupation disappear (armed forces, special services, and all personnel), political police, Communist apparatus be disbanded, political rights and democratic freedoms restored, free and unfettered elections were held (ACEN doc. 57).

There are three key areas in which the ACEN responded to the Communist redefection campaign: offering assistance and preparing information campaign directed to the refugees (Refugee Know Your Rights campaign), calling for increased Western support for the exiles (Marshall Plan for the exiles), and by re-directing the attention of the “free world” to the fate of the East Central Europeans stranded within the Soviet Union (imprisoned, displaced, resettled, etc.). In all of the above, the ACEN was not working in a vacuum. It was coordinating its activities with the Free Europe Committee and diasporic organizations.

## ACEN REACHES OUT TO THE UNITED NATIONS

The exile assembly sought contacts and ways to influence the United Nations (UN) from its inception. *The New York Times* even referred to it as a “Little U. N. O” (Mazurkiewicz, 2018: 227–245). The UN was one of the important forums for Cold War propaganda activities. Within the repatriation/redefection campaign, the focus of the big powers’ attention was the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Issues) of the Tenth UN General Assembly. Using this forum, the Soviet Union asked for UN support for its plans for the repatriation of refugees. On September 23, 1955, ACEN issued an appeal widely distributed among the non-Communist UN members exposing the real agenda behind the Soviet initiative (Coste, 1955). The assembly also prepared an information package entitled: “Refugee Know Your Rights.” It cited the rights listed in the Geneva convention 1951 relating to the status of the Refugees, coming into force only in 1955 (ACEN News, 1956: 25–26). Two

elements were the focus of this paper: the right of a refugee to claim no expulsion or forced return and no penalty for illegal entry (UNHCR, 1951, 1967).<sup>3</sup>

In the UN forum, the Soviets presented a draft resolution aimed at instructing the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to assist in the early return of refugees to Soviet-dominated countries and prohibiting propaganda hostile to their countries of origin. In October 1955, ACEN unanimously adopted a resolution by which it acclaimed the UN decision (29 against, 14 in favor) to reject the Soviet proposal. Instead, the UN urged “free world’s” protection and material and spiritual well-being of refugees (ACEN doc. 58). In the document, two other items that ACEN demanded draw our attention. One was the emphasis on “giving wider scope to the activities of political exiles from captive European countries and recognizing them as the genuine spokesman of the subjugated nations.” This statement was, of course, a reference to the ACEN’s own goals and aims. The second was the appeal to the non-Communist governments in the UN to induce the USSR and its puppet allies in Central and Eastern Europe to “release from forced labor camps, prisons and other places of confinement the hundreds of thousands of citizens of subjugated countries of Central and Eastern Europe whether in their homeland or deported to Soviet territories” (ACEN doc. 57). Both items require further elaboration.

## ACEN CALLS FOR A NEW MARSHALL PLAN FOR THE ÉMIGRÉS

The first of the areas mentioned above consists of two overlapping themes: the exiles as surrogate opposition from abroad who became the target of Soviet repatriation campaign and the unfortunate fate of displaced persons and Cold War émigrés in need of assistance in the West. The ACEN addressed both. The exiled leaders believed they were effectively influencing public opinion in the West as stern critics of life behind the Iron Curtain (ACEN News, 1955b: 9–11). As they had become the target of the Soviet repatriation/redefection campaign, they requested additional support. Stefan Korboński, leader of the Polish delegation to the ACEN, proposed the New Marshall Plan for the émigrés. He described the Soviet repatriation campaign as having two targets: the captive people behind the Iron Curtain and the people in the “free world.” Korboński wrote that Moscow sought “complete disintegration of the strongest anti-Communist exile center which, with the support of the respective American ethnic groups, serve as a constant reminder of the existence of Soviet occupation in the captive nations.” His plan proposed to counteract the Communist propaganda by giving more attention and recognition to the voices

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3 The ACEN periodical says that twenty-six countries signed it, among them the United States. Yet, we know that while there were representatives of twenty-six countries, two were observers. The United States became a signatory only to the 1967 Protocol. Thus, on July 25, 1951, twenty-four countries voted to adopt it. The United States signed the protocol on November 1, 1968.

of political exiles in the West and by taking concrete measures to alleviate conditions in the camps (immigration legislation, assistance with employment, social security, veteran care, scholarships for the youth, etc.) (Korboński, 1956; Machcewicz, 1999: 130; Nowak-Jeziorański, 2005: 181).

Evidently, FEC was already doing much along the lines Korboński had in mind. Since 1953 the FEC has coordinated a special program called Free Europe Citizens Service. It aimed to provide assistance and maintain morale among the refugees in Europe (Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 464–465). Since these communities were not just subject to inducement to return but also recruitment attempts by the Communist intelligence, the FEC developed another program named: SHORTSTOP. The annual report by the president of FEC indicates that this operation was inaugurated already in February 1955, so before the Communist bloc campaign was publicly announced and took on a forceful character (Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 469–450).

Moreover, upon suggestions coming from the director of the Polish Desk at RFE, Jan Nowak, Radio Free Europe initiated operation “gauntlet” with the intent to protect the émigrés (in particular, the vulnerable intellectuals) from the Communist lure (Machcewicz, 1999: 131–132). Money was one way to support the émigrés by underwriting the operating cost of their political organizations, publications, scientific institutes, libraries, cultural centers, writers’ stipends, etc. The increased appreciation of exiles’ role in countering the Soviet redefection campaign increased support for the exile activities within the FEC budgetary allocations (Mazurkiewicz, 2021: 63–64).

The repatriation/redefection campaign was also of concern to the US government, not just to exiles or state-private organizations like the FEC. Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), an advisory body created by Eisenhower’s administration in place of the Psychological Strategy Board, held lengthy discussions of possible ways to counter the Soviet campaign to eliminate and demoralize political émigrés. On April 13, 1955, the OCB initiated a program that called for increased material assistance to escapees, propaganda counter-offensive, and protection and security of the émigrés (OCB, 1956). By October 1955, the OCB recommended that the US address the UN on behalf of the refugees’ right for protection, including protection from the aggressive inducements to return. The activities on the exiles were in synergy with those of the US psychological warfare planning. Based on NSC 86/1 (US Policy on Soviet and Satellite Defectors), the US government combined a variety of tools at its disposal, notably and upon OCB’s urging, combining the potential of USEP, with Radio Free Europe, ACEN, FECS as well as Voice of America which regularly broadcast dramatic stories of new escapes from the Communist-dominated countries to the West (Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 468–470). The voices of the exiles added legitimacy and credibility to this effort.

## EXILE EFFORT TO COUNTER REDEFECTION: THE POLISH CASE

While it is not possible within the scope of a single article to address the diversity of approaches toward repatriation/redefection campaign across the entire region, a closer look at the Polish case allows presenting the development of the Soviet plan for repatriation. For Poland, the plan was initiated in March 1955 when the Polish delegates of the Committee for Public Security received instructions regarding the new course of policy to be applied toward the Polish diaspora during their visit to Moscow (Cenckiewicz, 2005: 253; Friszke, 1999: 233). On July 26, 1955, a public appeal by prominent Polish intellectuals and cultural leaders was announced by Warsaw openly calling for the return of émigrés whose potential was supposedly needed by their homeland and whose service to the Western countries was called a disservice to Poland (Friszke, 1999: 234). Other tools used for the sake of inducing returns included press and publications distributed to the Polish communities in the West, special radio station “Homeland” [Kraj] broadcasting to the West (established in July 1955), Association for Contacts with Diaspora “Polonia” (established in October 1955)—which sponsored cultural and social activities in the West (Lencznarowicz, 1996: 43–60), appeals citing poor living conditions, meager career opportunities awaiting exiles in the West were contrasted with the possibilities (and status) awaiting those who decided to return (Friszke, 1999: 236; Machcewicz, 1999: 128–129; Nowak-Jeziorański, 2005: 175–180).

There were also more subtle ways directly addressing the nostalgic longing for home, such as trips to Poland or individualized letters from Poland sent to exiles signed by family members, friends, or random people. Wierzbiański amended the list of means of luring the exiles to return by adding to the arsenal: visits by regime agents to the refugee camps in Germany, Austria, and migrant settlements in England and France regime-sponsored newspapers appealing for return exploiting refugee nostalgia and sense of patriotism. Using transnational exile networks, Wierzbiański was able to cite many examples comparing Communist propaganda content from Czechoslovakia, Estonia, and Poland, explaining how journals across the region conveyed a similar message, sometimes even under the same titles; how Communist diplomatic posts in the West were using similar tactics of entertaining exiles, how new social and cultural organizations were sprouting in exile centers like London and Paris, children and youth were encouraged to visit homelands via summer camps, etc. (Wierzbiański, 1955).

Reporting from Vienna, the American press correspondent noted that the “refugee population was bombarded for months with special leaflets and periodicals in Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, and Polish languages, dispatched anonymously through Austrian post offices” (Brook, 1955). He also mentioned diplomats and agents approaching the communities, radio broadcasts (Poland and Hungary), special committees, information bureaus to stimulate returns. Reports on the Hungarian repatriation campaign, consequently called redefection by the exiles, were also

prepared by individual ACEN members. For example, Tibor Eckhardt submitted a report of his visit to Austria (Eckhardt, 1955), followed by a memorandum, which he called “very confidential” based on his conversations with Hungarian refugees (Memorandum, 1955). Wierzbiański indicated the weak points upon which the Communists sought to capitalize. The feelings of frustration resulting from the inability of exiled intellectuals—writers, journalists, artists, professors—to find occupations adequate to their skills, paired with the hopeless position of refugees stuck in DP camps, played the most prominent role (Wierzbiański, 1955). Because of the ACEN’s symbiotic relationship with the FEC, these files were also available to the American psychological warfare planners.

Beyond the efforts of the FEC and the publicity it garnered, there was also a public effort to explain to the American public how the Communists were targeting the anti-Communist exiles and present the outcomes of the repatriation/redefection campaign. The International Rescue Committee established a special Emergency Commission led by General William J. Donovan (former head of the Office of Strategic Services – OSS, the US wartime intelligence agency) to investigate the campaign. It established that, in a little over a year, 1,158 people were repatriated from the United States (not just Poles). Allegedly, in New York alone, agents representing the Communist bloc held about 60 meetings with diaspora (Cenckiewicz, 2005: 278).<sup>4</sup> The findings of the Commission were discussed in the US Senate, and parts of it were published in the Congressional Record (Wiley, 1956). The report contained five recommendations: to arouse the “free world” to the real danger posed by this campaign and the need for counteraction; to stimulate US cooperation with other nations to “equalize the burdens of refugee care”; to shorten refugees and strengthen their morale, as well as extend special care to the old and incapacitated, including admitting some of them to the United States (Memorandum, 1956).

Despite all of these efforts, the fate of the Cold War refugees in Europe lingered on for many years. ACEN report of October 1958 listed the following numbers (citing UNHCR): 178,000 refugees in Europe still in need of resettlement, including still 58,000 in the camps. Since the inauguration of the USEP, 300,000 received assistance, 90,000 resettled (ACEN doc. 58). When the Communist repatriation campaign subsided, some people still needed urgent resettlement assistance. Their fate was secondary to the mighty powers’ global competition. In the context of the repatriation/redefection campaign, the refugees were a contested asset in the propaganda struggle. As such, their fate was subjected to different policy considerations.

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4 It was based on a visit by IRC commission members to France, Austria, Switzerland, and Germany in February and March 1956, including information from Belgium, Sweden, Italy, Greece, Turkey, South America, and the United States.



## EXILE CALL FOR REPATRIATION: THE POLISH CASE CONTINUED

The Polish case is a great example of how cooperation with the political exiles led to turning tables in the story of inducing returns. March 1955 marked the tenth anniversary of the Soviet imprisonment of sixteen leaders of the Polish underground who decided to go to a meeting with the Russians to discuss the post-war government for Poland. The US government welcomed the opportunity presented by the anniversary and supported the Polish exiles' demand to release all Poles remaining in Soviet prisons. While none of the original sixteen leaders was present in the USSR by 1955 (some died in prison, some were returned to Poland only to be imprisoned there, some were released in the 1940s), the information on their fate was not available at the time (Machcewicz, 1999: 136–137). However, the call for allowing the Poles to return home focused on an estimated more than half-million pre-war Polish citizens awaiting repatriation—prisoners, forced laborers, citizens of pre-war Poland who wished to leave the USSR (Nowak-Jeziorański, 2005: 183). Since the end of the post-World War II repatriation (1948), the fate of the remaining people was cloaked with silence in Warsaw. In 1955, the Soviet-controlled regime in Poland was forced to break the silence as the Polish Desk of RFE began broadcasting names, and precise locations of people held prisoners.

The RFE had information about Poles in the USSR gathered from the soldiers serving under General Władysław Anders (Polish Armed Forces in the West formed during the war from Polish citizens in Soviet camps and prisons). New evidence surfaced in the aftermath of Konrad Adenauer's visit to the USSR in September 1955. Based on the bilateral agreement signed after the meeting, the Soviets released some thirty thousand German as well as some Austrian and Italian POWs. These former prisoners served as sources of information collected by the RFE staff about the remaining Poles (and other nationals) still in the Soviet camps (Nowak-Jeziorański, 2005: 188–189). Consequently, the RFE was answering the Communist repatriation campaign with the repeated calls for releasing the Polish citizens from the USSR, supporting their plea with names of the people and their locations across the Soviet Union (Friszke, 1999: 237–238; Nowak-Jeziorański, 2005: 184–189; Ruchniewicz, 2000: 354–370).

The Communist regime in Warsaw also pleaded with Moscow to release Poles remaining in the USSR already in May 1955. Some 6,000 former prisoners and forced laborers returned by the winter of that year. However, the Polish Communists officially admitted that the repatriation from the Soviet Union was indeed underway only in early October 1955. In fact, it was not until Władysław Gomułka was in power that an official agreement was signed with Soviet authorities providing for the repatriation of pre-war Polish citizens from the USSR. Between 1955 and 1959, over a



quarter million Poles returned to Poland from the USSR (Machcewicz, 2007: 115; Stanek, 2009).<sup>5</sup>

In June 1956, the ACEN Political Committee listed soldiers and citizens from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, POWs from Romania, Hungary, and post-war deportees as people who should be repatriated. The exile assembly, speaking on behalf of the “silenced peoples” of the captive nations, appealed to the UN to put the subject of repatriation of foreign nationals from the USSR on its agenda and to demand immediate repatriation of soldiers, officers, and civilian deportees who still held in the USSR in violation of the provisions of International Law, and contrary to the generally recognized humanitarian principles:

although the authorities in Soviet-subjugated countries are conducting a wide campaign aimed at the return of political émigrés, a stubborn silence prevails on the part of those authorities in regard to the repatriation to their homelands of the masses of soldiers and civilians forcibly deported to the Soviet Union, as it has been reported by numerous witnesses of various nationalities recently released from Soviet prison and concentration camps, retained there under abominable conditions (ACEN doc. 72).

By the end of 1956, 16,000 people “returned” to Poland from the USSR, followed by 94,000 the following year. Quotation marks are necessary as many of the people the Soviets forcibly transferred came from the territories taken over by the USSR. Some people seeking “repatriation” never left their homes but were made Soviet citizens by the changing borders following the wartime agreements at Yalta and Potsdam. While not available to everyone held against their will, some 224,000 citizens of pre-war Poland were released from the USSR (Machcewicz, 2007: 115). In this regard, the repatriation campaign from the East was of truly impressive scale compared to few thousand who returned home from the West—the original target group of the Soviet campaign.

## CONCLUSION

The emergence of a new arena for East-West confrontation placing the refugee (escapee, defector, exile) in the center of attention constitutes an interesting field for further exploration. This text is not intended to ascribe a particularly decisive role of the political exiles united in the ACEN in weakening the Soviet repatriation/ redefection campaign. Rather, it seeks to underscore the exiles’ agency within the

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5 The agreement between Poland and USSR was not prolonged and thus RFE continued its campaign for the release of Poles from the USSR in the following decades. RFE audio recordings related to the topic: Wolna Europa o repatriacji Polaków z ZSRR: <https://www.polskieradio.pl/68/2057/Artykul/590843,Wolna-Europa-o-repatriacji-Polakow-z-ZSRR>.

US-coordinated psychological warfare organization. While the migration policies of both Washington and Moscow should be contextualized within the general Cold War discourse, the role and agency of the migrants themselves, and the political exiles, in particular, pose a series of new research questions, some of which were addressed here. The FEC system created in symbiosis with exile political organizations provided the members of ACEN with an opportunity to present their views in a broad international forum. It facilitated their access to international organizations and gave them the means to implement their political programs in cooperation with FECS and RFE. We now know that the exiles correctly grasped the real aims of the repatriation campaign, branding its redefection as evidenced by secret security archival documentation now available to researchers. In cooperation with their American partners, the East-Central European exiles gathered and shared information which proved to be instrumental in flipping the Soviet call for a return to rallying for the release of people from the Soviet Union. As indicated by the ACEN, the real aims of the Soviet re-defection campaign were not achieved. Instead of liquidating political emigration as in the “free world,” the political exiles became stronger. They gathered sympathy for the cause of facilitating assistance to Cold War refugees, secured increased funding, and attracted more attention to their political actions. As a contested asset in the Cold War, they emerged as subjects and not objects of the campaign.

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## POVZETEK

### REPATRIACIJA ALI VRNITEV PREBEŽNIKOV? TEKMOVANJE ZA BEGUNCE HLADNE VOJNE, 1955–1956

Anna MAZURKIEWICZ

Leta 1955 so režimi v vzhodni in srednji Evropi, ki jih je nadzirala Sovjetska zveza, pod vodstvom Moskve začeli s tako imenovano kampanjo repatriacije. Ta je vključevala propagando po radiu in v tisku, spodbude za vračanje, kot so bile amnestije, pa tudi izsiljevanje in prisilo. Glede na to, da bi lahko vrnitev političnih izgnancev potencialno spodbudila ponoven vzpon domače opozicije v državah srednje in vzhodne Evrope (ki je bila v času stalinizma zatrta), je treba poiskati dejanske razloge za motivacijo vzhodnega bloka. Kot so to pravilno ugotavljali izgnanci v 1950. letih in kot to potrjuje tudi komunistična arhivska dokumentacija, ki je na voljo od poznih 1990. let, je bil cilj sovjetske kampanje repatriacije uničiti politična in kulturna središča izgnancev na Zahodu ter oslabiti odločenost Zahoda, da ponovno vzpostavi svobodo in demokracijo v vzhodni in srednji Evropi. Kot taka je kampanja povečala interes za dejavnosti skupnosti izgnancev v »svobodnem svetu«, zaradi česar sta se povečali prepoznavnost in naklonjenost tako pospešitvi procesa ponovne naselitve beguncev kot tudi podpiranju političnih in kulturnih programov na Zahodu.

Na podlagi te kratke analize kampanje repatriacije oz. vrnitve prebežnikov je mogoče jasno argumentirati tezo, da so bile migracijske politike eno od področij hladnovojnega spopada, pri katerem so imeli politični izgnanci ključno vlogo. Moskva je razumela, da so izgnanci sovražniki, in je želela s kampanjo repatriacije ovirati njihove dejavnosti. Washington, ki je za njih konec 1940. let že poskrbel, je ponovno pokazal interes za njihovo potencialno vlogo v psihološki vojni in je okreplil podporo njihovim dejavnostim. Politični izgnanci so dokazali svojo koristno vlogo kot zastopniki protikomunističnih teženj beguncev v mednarodni sferi in kot posredniki za pomoč beguncem v zahodni Evropi. Poleg tega je mogoče iz primera Poljske sklepati, da je bila mobilizacija izgnanstva z namenom onemogočenja sovjetskega načrta repatriacije za izpustitev predvojnih državljanov Poljske iz ZSSR uspešna. To dokazuje, da so imeli z učinkovitim sodelovanjem s svojimi zahodnimi (predvsem FEC) ter z emigrantskimi in etničnimi partnerji v ZDA in zahodni Evropi tudi precejšen vpliv na politike komunističnih režimov. Ta vpliv izgnanstva je postal oprijemljiv, ko so slednji prisilili Varšavo ne samo k priznanju, da potekajo vračanja iz Sovjetske zveze, temveč tudi k pospešitvi teh prizadevanj. Tako je treba kampanjo za repatriacijo oziroma vrnitev prebežnikov preučevati ob upoštevanju protikomunističnih izgnancev kot akterjev v hladnovojnem spopadu za naklonjenost.