

VÁCLAV HAVEL

Prague, August 2010

Dear Mr Gedmin,

Permit me to look back briefly over the 60 years that have elapsed since the founding of Radio Free Europe and the beginning of its broadcasts to Czechoslovakia and other countries of the Soviet bloc.

I vividly recall the enormous influence which RFE/RL broadcasts exercised at a time of omnipresent Communist propaganda, as well as the outstanding personalities who worked on the Czechoslovak desk. The opposition in this country co-operated closely with the Munich centre and they frequently addressed their fellow citizens via broadcasts from abroad. The world has changed significantly, however, over the past sixty years, a period which has seen the Cold War, the promising 1960s, the post-68 disillusionment and the peaceful democratic changes in central and eastern Europe. Whereas the citizens of many former dictatorship now enjoy democracy and all civic freedoms, and whereas our countries are part of the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance, elsewhere the civic opposition is engaged in an unequal struggle over the future character of the state, while we have seen a flare-up of intolerance, nationalism and religious fundamentalism, and even international terrorism. As if natural disasters were not enough for humankind.

I have an advantage over present-day listeners in that I recall not only the first broadcasts but also the key moments of history that I was fated to be present at and participate in. That was one of the reasons why, years ago, I came up with the idea of shifting the headquarters of Radio Free Europe from Munich to Prague. I considered it to be a way of repaying our debt to the Free World, as well as of demonstrating that the central European countries were now anchored for good among the traditional European democracies..

Dear Mr Gedmin,

I would like to congratulate you on the anniversary of the important international institution that you lead and to thank Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty as a whole for disseminating the message of freedom to a world that is no safer than it was sixty years ago. The danger looming over it it has simply assumed a different form and – even more disturbingly perhaps – it has been globalised. That is why the globalisation of broadcasting is as important as it was when it was “merely” a question of a free Europe.

Yours sincerely,

Václav Havel



Jeffrey Gedmin