



Bohemian National Hall
321 E 73rd Street
New York
NY 10021



The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

March 24, 2025

Dear Mr. Secretary,

The Vaclav Havel Center views the decision of the U.S. administration to stop funding Radio Free Europe with great concern. Its role in spreading information to countries where freedom of speech and democracy do not function is crucial and irreplaceable. Limiting its operation fundamentally threatens the path to freedom in countries with totalitarian governments.

Almost 75 years ago, on July 4, 1950, 'Radio Free Europe' broadcast its first program into then communist-Czechoslovakia from neighboring West Germany. For the next 40 years it, and its sister station Radio Liberty, provided a lifeline of information, support, and hope through trusted and reliable news and reporting for all freedom-loving and aspiring people trapped in the Eastern European countries behind the 'Iron Curtain' and in the Soviet Union.

After the fall of communism in 1989 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) continued to operate and established local bureaus throughout its coverage area to support the newly independent states as they grappled with the challenges of building new democracies. RFE/RL journalists helped train a whole new generation of local journalists by modelling journalistic ethics of fairness and factual accuracy.

Vaclav Havel was linked to and supported RFE/RL heart and soul. In 1993 Havel, who appreciated the role of RFE/RL (as well as the ironies of history), invited RFE/RL to relocate from Munich to Prague. In 1995 they moved and with further irony broadcast from the building of the former communist parliament at a rent of one crown per annum. [RFE/RL has since moved to a state-of-the-art, more secure, less central location in Prague's 10th district of Hagibor.]

RFE/RL's mission, like that of the Vaclav Havel Center, is to promote democratic values. It does this by providing accurate, uncensored news and open debate in countries where a free press is threatened, and disinformation is pervasive. It reports the facts, undaunted by pressure.

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info@havelcenter.org | +1 973 810 6144 | www.havelcenter.org



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While historically known for radio broadcasting behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War, today's RFE/RL reports in 27 languages to 23 countries reaching more than 47 million people every week in countries including Russia, Iran and Afghanistan. With over 1,700 staff and more than 20 bureaus, RFE/RL is one of the most comprehensive news operations in the world, reporting on and into countries where a free press is banned by the government or not yet fully established.

Sadly, however, the U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) put forward a proposal for RFE/RL as a government-owned media agency funded by the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), to be considered for closure as a cost saving measure for the U.S. federal government.

On March 14, President Trump signed an Executive Order continuing the reduction of the federal bureaucracy and subsequently ordered the withdrawal of funding of USAGM to the extent allowed by law.

On the same day, DOGE imposed a 30-day total freeze on funding to RFE/RL and other USAGM outlets, with the intention of making that permanent.

Reporters and other employees at RFE/RL, received an email that same weekend (March 15–16) stating that they would no longer be allowed access to their offices and would have to surrender press credentials, work phones, and other equipment.

The Vaclav Havel Center decries this decision of the current U.S. Administration and fully endorses the statement by the President of the RFE/RL Steve Capus, who stated:

“The cancellation of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s grant agreement would be a massive gift to America’s enemies.

The Iranian Ayatollahs, Chinese communist leaders, and autocrats in Moscow and Minsk would celebrate the demise of RFE/RL after 75 years.

Handing our adversaries a win would make them stronger and America weaker.

We’ve benefitted from strong bipartisan support throughout RFE/RL’s storied history.

Without us, the nearly 50 million people in closed societies who depend on us for accurate news and information each week won’t have access to the truth about America and the world.”

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Vaclav Havel knew that a free press allowed people to make informed choices about their future. By contributing to media freedom in autocratic societies and emerging democracies, RFE/RL supports long-term development and stability in the region it covers. RFE/RL's budget is spent fostering an open media climate as a core democratic value. This is vital to the national security and foreign policy objectives of all democracies who wish to preserve liberty and advance universal human rights. We call on Republican and Democratic members of Congress and Senators to actively work to restore the funding.

Andrew H. Schapiro, Amb. (Ret.)
(Ambassador to CR, 2014-2017), Chair

Lise Stone, Vice Chair

Elliot S. Berke

John Shattuck, Amb. (Ret.)
(Ambassador to CR, 1998-2000)

Jack Stack

Katya Heller

cc: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
Members of the U.S. Senate

Martin Palous, Amb. (Ret.)
(Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the U.S., 2001-2005),
President

Joseph Balaz, Treasurer

The Hon. Wendy W. Luers (Presidential Appointee)

Bill Shipsey

Petr Simunek

Jana Krupkova, Executive Director