

Actink

presents

LISTEN

a film by —

— DIANA IVANOVA

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The Unknown Story
of *Radio Free Europe*.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

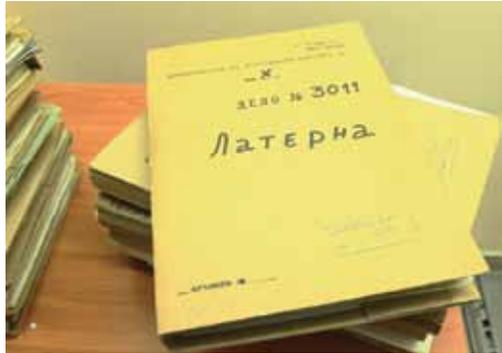
Where is the truth when everything is propaganda?

Listen gives unexpected answers to the old, but always pressing, question.

The film tells the forgotten story of one of the most dangerous enemies of communist Bulgaria – the US funded *Radio Free Europe*.

Why was *Radio Free Europe* so dangerous and why did it become a legend for several generations?

Listen presents different stories – personal recollections of RFE journalists and listeners, Bulgarian State Security Operatives, their Agents and US Security Directors. The film also features, for the first time, official Bulgarian and US propaganda footage as well as Bulgarian State Security internal archives. The result is a new and unexpected picture of a volatile Bulgaria before the fall of Communism in 1989.



LONG SYNOPSIS

Black screen. The voice of a man calling the radio. Crackling noise. The man is saying that after this interview he will probably be tortured. “Do you hear me?”
“Yes, I hear you” replies the journalist.

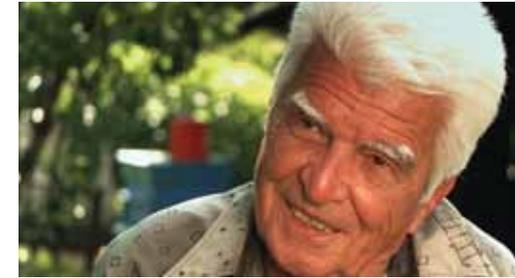
That’s how *Listen* begins – from 1989 and the nervous interview with a displaced Bulgarian Muslim, going back to the founding of the Radio, by the USA in Munich in 1951, through the eyes of one of their first employed journalists still living today – Luben Mutafov. Taking us through the memories of a woman from Rousse, for whom the Radio was the most important thing in her teenage years, visiting other facts and stories, and finally returning to 1989.

In this miscellany of facts, emotions and stories one recurring factor appears – the Secret Services. Why did the USA cover for so long the fact that the Radio was funded by the CIA? One of the RFE security directors – Richard Cummings – reveals his opinion. And what was the attitude of the Bulgarian Secret Service to the Radio?

Two former employees of the Bulgarian State Security (DS) – Atanas Kremenliev and Boncho Assenov – talk for the first time about the various operations against the Radio. What was the truth about Vladimir Kostov, an officer who left the DS and his country to become one of the most popular RFE journalists?

Listen gives the viewer an opportunity to hear and see a lot of subjective truths, archive footage that was locked away, or unexplored until now, from the Bulgarian National Television and State Security files, and forgotten radio interviews.

The result? A new and unknown Bulgaria before the fall of communism that is revealed for the first time.



DIANA IVANOVA
biography

Diana Ivanova is a Bulgarian writer, documentary filmmaker and cultural manager, working in the field of post-communist trauma and the personal experiences and traces left after big political events.

She received a European Award for Journalism in 2005 by Austrian Press Agency in Vienna for her writing on post-communist Europe *Hello Melancholy*.

Currently she researches the film archive of the Bulgarian State Security from communist time.

Scriptwriter and idea developer of two awarded documentaries:
Father (2012, 16', animation documentary, director: Ivan Bogdanov, Compote Collective, Bulgaria/Croatia/Germany, www.father-film.com)

How was the idea for this film born?

The idea came to me when it became clear that a colleague of mine from *Radio Free Europe* had been a DS (State Security) agent. I started to seriously consider my own biography. Until then I didn't think the DS and I had anything in common. The DS seemed a distant mountain that didn't overshadow my life in any way. With the case of my colleague however, a question became apparent: When one of the best journalists turns out to be a former DS agent, what does that mean for the people who have worked with him, including me?

The Town of 'Badante Women' (2009, 72', feature length documentary, director: Stefan Komandarev, ARGO Film)

Director of several short documentaries:
My Street Cuba – 28', 2010
Between Havana and Sofia 16', 2010, prod. Actink
The Abandoned Northwest – 22', 2012, featured on the Bulgarian National Television.

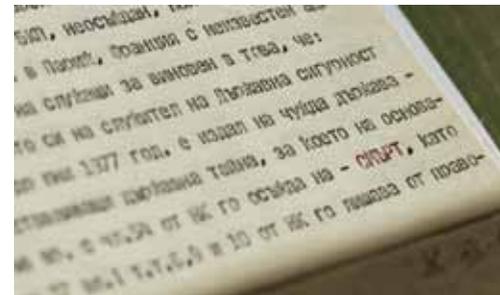
Listen is her first feature documentary.

So I started reading, at the Commission for the Disclosing of State Security Files, the *Radio Free Europe* dossier. I read randomly and chaotically in 2008—2009. As yet I didn't know what I was looking for. Then, amongst the pile of files, I was deeply moved by the story of a former colleague. The DS sent his father to recruit him, and bring him back to Bulgaria. That didn't happen but, since I know this person, I could imagine the huge pressure he felt. Him against the system... against his own father. That is how I decided I wanted to make a film about these impossible worlds, and how the Radio had become a haven for such invisible conflicts. During my work on the film it turned out that there was no way I could tell this story in a documentary, so the idea was transformed.

Why do you stop your story in 1989?

My remaining desire was for the viewer to experience for themselves this world of invisible propaganda which we had perceived in a certain way, but to which there was also a second and third layer. For everyone to ask themselves: What am I doing as a person when surrounded with so many invisible untruths. This question is even more valid today. The challenge was to convey this through the film media – through archive footage, through the juxtaposition of different perceptions, so that the viewer could sense what it was like to be in such a situation. That was the film's challenge, and that was also my limitation – to tell the story only about the things for which there were enough archives and conflicting viewpoints.

This decision was born, at about the midway point of my work on the film, due mainly to the archives I found and to what I was trying to say. But there's another reason also – 1989 marks the end of an era. The radio jamming stopped, going abroad became possible, the world itself changed – although Radio Free Europe continued to exist until 2004 with a really strong effect, especially in the 90's. 1989 was the year of a series of tragic events in Bulgaria, and helps us to see today, from a distance, how traumatic, or inadvertently traumatic, for most of us, our transition period had begun. What we can do today is *Listen*. To listen and to be heard – I think that for each of us these words mark a level in our human development. *Radio Free Europe* in 1989 leaves a lesson in empathy. There is something very comforting in it for our wounded souls. Despite the truths or untruths that surround us no one can take away this capability of ours which depends only on us. The interviews of Roumyana Uzunova from 1989 cannot leave anyone indifferent. With her calm voice, not asking lots of questions, just listening and saying: "I'm listening, go ahead." They strike this chord of empathy everyone carries within. These testimonies of Roumyana and the other journalists from *Radio Free Europe* remain among the best examples of world journalism from the 20th century. That's why I finish my story with them.



**DIANA IVANOVA****Author and Director**

I would define *Listen* as a passionate and sincere film. I couldn't have done it if I hadn't met so many priceless people whilst shooting and hadn't been able to accept two pieces of advice. Firstly, that a desire to show the historical truth isn't a good enough cinematic reason to make a film and secondly, the most important thing in making a film is to preserve your passion for it right until the end.

**SVETLA NEYKOVA****Director of Photography and Editor**

Working on the film *Listen* gave me the opportunity to interact with people I would never have otherwise met. To get to know more life stories, people's ups and downs, their ideals and values, is important to me as a person who strives for an understanding that all of us are part of the whole organism of the Universe.

**PETAR DUNDAKOV****Composer**

Working on the musical score for *Listen* was inspiring because it gave me the chance to participate in a 'happening now' debate about the period before our transition to democracy. I was excited, not just as a film composer but also as an individual who has memories of that time, meeting pieces of that life for which we now wearily use the clichés 'Eastern bloc', 'Iron Curtain' and 'Cold War'.

**IVAN ANDREEV****Location Sound Engineer**

The filming of *Listen* gave me a real pleasure – wonderful team, conversations, trips... The people we filmed provoked my curiosity to learn as much as I can about this period in our history when I was only a child. I think the emotion of the characters will make a lot of people think about our past and our future.

**ALEXANDER SIMEONOV****Postproduction Sound**

When I'm working on a film I am one of its first viewers. I have a special interest for documentaries and, when it reconstructs events that directly affected my life, the excitement is really huge. *Listen* gives me the chance to reconsider a historical period that still echoes these days, and won't fade away any time soon.

**ALBENA KOVACHEVA****Producer**

The theme turned out to be not just huge but rather 'heated' even today. The filming process was long and with lots of twists. We ended up with an enormous amount of material from which a truthful and synthesized film story had to be extracted. I'm happy that, in the end, *Listen* turned out to be what you see now and I'm grateful to all who, with their participation, contributed towards it.

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LISTEN

documentary, 76 min, HD, stereo sound

with the participation of

LIDIA STEFANOVA | VANYA ZHEKOVA | NERI TERZIEVA | RICHARD H. CUMMINGS | ATANAS KREMENLIEV | VLADIMIR KOSTOV | LUBEN MUTAFOFF | BONCHO ASSENOV | ZHELYU ZHELEV |

writer and director DIANA IVANOVA | director of photography SVETLA NEYKOVA | original music PETAR DUNDAKOV | editor SVETLA NEYKOVA | sound IVAN ANDREEV | postproduction sound ALEXANDER SIMEONOV | line producer YULIA DOBREVA | assistant director MAYA ZAHARIEVA | coordinator KRASIMIRA GEORGIEVA | graphic design & animation ROSITSKA RALEVA, IVAN BOGDANOV | colour grading TODOR TODOROV | producer ALBENA KOVATCHEVA

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