



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
Freimut Duve

Statement at the Permanent Council
(Review of Current Issues)

Vienna, 12 May 1999

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the first week of May I visited the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia where I met with editors, journalists, writers and other representatives of the cultural elite from both the Macedonian and Albanian community as well as journalists and writers from Kosovo. I also travelled to Tetovo where I visited the offices of Koha Ditore, a leading Kosovo Albanian daily newspaper, that recently restarted publication and is being distributed among the refugees from Kosovo. Those journalists who were able to flee Kosovo informed me about the destruction of their offices in Pristina. I have asked them to provide additional information on this matter to my Office.

The issue I focused on during my trip was how can the OSCE as an organisation and its member-states support the independent media professionals who fled Kosovo and also how we can support the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. One thing that is absolutely clear: most of our interlocutors put it this way: "If you want to help the Albanian deportees you have to help Macedonia."

Relief agencies are extremely busy setting up camps for refugees, providing the basic necessities, bringing in food, water, other supplies. But people need more. When the first issue of Koha Ditore was distributed in the refugee camps there were small riots - everybody tried to get a copy. There is a definite hunger for intellectual food among the refugees and we should try to address this issue.

I believe there are four ways this can be done by utilising relatively small financial grants from OSCE member-states and NGOs:

- By publishing books on the Macedonian market, including children's books, for further free distribution in the refugee camps. This will provide additional financial support to the local publishers, and their situation is dire, and much needed reading material for a restless population.

- By extending the free distribution of newspapers to the refugees. Koha Ditore brings 10,000 copies to the camps. This is not enough. More copies should be printed by independent newspapers, and for that they need additional funding. Other publications should also be encouraged to distribute among the refugees. However, they will also need funding.

- By publishing texts now written by deportees, including fiction and poetry, in the local Macedonian media through international financial support.

- By buying advertising space in local Macedonian newspapers that can be used for discussions among the intellectuals from the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo.

These are all small things that could make a huge difference not only among the refugees but also among the Macedonians who are somewhat frustrated with, what they refer to, as a lack of substantial support for their country.

I urge the OSCE member-states to consider these proposals.