



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

Report to the Permanent Council

15 January 1998

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to be invited today by the Chairman-in-Office to take the floor in the Permanent Council and to give you some first ideas and information on this new field in which we will work together after my appointment in Copenhagen..

Since the office of the OSCE Media Representative is at this moment still in statu nascendi, let me now first outline the basic principles of our future work and then give an overview of the very practical steps within the next three months.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When, at the end of last year, the OSCE Member States adopted by consensus the mandate of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, it was an important step towards the implementation of the basic elements of our common values and democratic convictions.

We are the first international organization that has decided to have a new political institution to help to bring to reality what our basic documents say in writing: to guarantee the freedom of the media. A similar and very successful step had been taken with the appointment of the High Commissioner on National Minorities who works on the difficult task of reducing conflicts which may arise from minority and ethnic problems. Now the OSCE member states have appointed an ombudsperson who has the task - which will not be an easy one either - of looking into the difference that might occur between our written convictions on freedom of the media and the day-to-day reality.

The Copenhagen decision of the December 19, 1997 strengthened our main common conviction: yes, the OSCE members are and will remain a family of democracies.

Any democratic society requires the respect of free, independent and pluralistic media. The OSCE members have reaffirmed this time and again, and they have consequently established the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media. This Office shall serve as an instrument to enhance the effectiveness of relevant OSCE action and to assist Participating States in implementing OSCE commitments.

Any democracy needs freedom of expression for two reasons: the first is the great tradition of the struggle for human rights in which we all believe. The second reason is: we all have experienced what happens to societies and economies that do not allow for the necessary corrective function of public criticism.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I have already pointed out in Copenhagen, freedom and responsibility of the individual and of the media belong together as core elements of the mandate. When we take a closer look at the mandate, we become aware of its complexity. The mandate lists a number of tasks such as the observation of the situation of the media with regard to worrying developments, rapid response to serious non-compliance with OSCE commitments, broad

contacts with Participating States and interested parties. Apart from that, the mandate does not exclude the possibility of dealing with individual cases in a non-judicial way.

The early warning function which the OSCE Representative will assume according to the mandate deserves special attention, as the Chairman in Office pointed out.

My Office may be approached for action by Participating States or by interested parties including NGOs. It may also take initiatives in co-ordination with the Chairman-in-Office and with other OSCE institutions.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me reflect at this stage on the OSCE working conditions and working methods which will also apply to the Office of the Media Representative.

On the one hand, commitments in the field of the human dimension of the OSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all member states and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the state concerned. This is common ground since the Helsinki Summit 1992 that allows for OSCE action in the comprehensive concept of security.

On the other hand, OSCE action is submitted to the overall principle of co-operation and consensus. Therefore, the OSCE will only be as efficient, as the member states want the Organization to be.

My Office will privilege the idea of assistance in the promotion of OSCE commitments. It should be as transparent as possible for all member states.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Acting in the aforementioned sense, requires broad information from various sources. I am convinced that the media themselves as well as relevant NGOs will not hesitate to provide the Office with information. But I would also like to encourage the member states to provide the Office with information about the media situation in their countries.

It goes without saying that we will establish close working relations with OSCE institutions, with the ODIHR, the High Commissioner for National Minorities and the OSCE missions in order to exchange information on relevant matters and to coordinate our work.

The Office will also be in regular contact with other international organizations, such as the U.N. and the Council of Europe, in order to draw upon their already existing expertise in the field of freedom of expression and free media. We shall try to avoid duplication of work. I therefore hope that my office can also serve as a "clearing body" for the work which is done on media matters within the OSCE family.

I shall attend the tripartite meeting of the OSCE, the U.N., and the Council of Europe which will be held in Geneva on January 23.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am now getting into the Office's programme until the end of March.

A first and basic practical priority for us is to become operational by the beginning of February. In this respect, I should like to express my thanks to the Government of Austria, our host country, who once again was most generous in making already available a beautiful, but provisional office space on the top floor of the Krtnering. The OSCE secretariat has already given kind support for the necessary practical and administrative arrangements. The office needs to be equipped with furniture, computers etc.

As to the staff, I should like to inform you that two advisors will be seconded before long by Germany and by the United States of America, to take the two P5 positions foreseen in the budget. My German advisor will be Dr. Beate Maeder-Metcalf and my US-American advisor Stanley Schragar.

The budget further provides for a secretary and a P4 officer who both can be employed as of the beginning of April. The respective vacancy notes will be issued shortly.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

During this starting phase of the office, it is also my intention to contact your delegations in Vienna. I am convinced that advantage should be taken of the Office's location here in Vienna for good co-operation with all delegations. Please do not hesitate either to raise issues with the Office during the starting phase.

Out of Vienna and after my visit to the Chairman-in -Office in Warsaw yesterday, I am planning visits, until the end of March, to the United Kingdom as the EU Presidency, to the U.S., to Russia, to Canada, to Italy and to Portugal and to the Council of Europe.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me say at this stage a word on my personal commitments, especially those towards Parliament of which I have been a member since 1980. I shall for the time being remain a member of the Bundestag . However, following my appointment as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in December, I have resigned from all direct political functions in Parliament. This means that my main place of work will be my office in Vienna.