



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
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Report to the Permanent Council

23 April 1998

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure today to give you the first progress report on the work of my Office. Consistent with my mandate, I look forward to using the opportunity to meet with you on a quarterly basis as suggested by the Chairman-in-office, Foreign Minister Geremek.

Let me start with some personal and positive observations: After having discussed the situation of freedom of the media and journalism with NGO's which work on a global level, I do find that harassment and imprisonment of journalists as a day-to-day problem is a less common occurrence to the OSCE family than in other regions of the world. I am pleased that the OAS informed me on my recent trip to Washington that it has now established a special rapporteur on freedom of the media. Other positive signals recently came from Croatian acquittance of the former editor-in-chief of "Globus" on charges of criminal defamation. Also I find promising the recent request of Bulgarian President Stoyanov to the legislature to halt criminal prosecution of journalists in the courts. These two incidents demonstrate that OSCE family members come closer, in principle, to sharing the same basic commitments to freedom and democracy.

On the other hand, as a former journalist, I want to ring an alarm bell about a severe problem for which governments may not necessarily be responsible and to which it will not be easy to find an answer: I refer to the murder of a practicing journalist, wherever it occurs, for something he has written. This is the most brutal form of censorship: it is censorship by killing.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I addressed you for the first time in the PC, January 15, I set out our programme until the end of March. Our emphasis at that time was on establishing the Office and making it operational which included recruiting personnel and installing hardware. This objective has been achieved with your cooperation, for which I should like to thank you.

According to my mandate we then gave priority to setting up working relations with OSCE member States, within the OSCE system and with relevant international organizations such as the Council of Europe, with NGO's and with media.

As to OSCE member States, we have started building up contacts with the support of your delegations here by also visiting several capitals. During these visits I have made it a point and I shall continue to do so - of meeting with the "constituencies" quoted in my mandate: firstly with governments, but also with media and journalists, and with NGO'S. To these, I add national parliaments. As a former Chairman of the third Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly I recognize the importance of the fact that a number of countries are in the process of drafting legislation on media laws.

Thus, visits have been paid by my Office since early March - in the following chronological order - to the UK as the EU Presidency, to France, to Albania, to the U.S., to the Russian Federation and to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Let me give you some examples of the kind of work we are already engaged in: In Albania we opened a Seminar on Media, March 13, sponsored by the Albanian Media Institute and

the OSCE Presence in Tirana. April 3, the Office took part in the target oriented meeting concerning Albania organized by the Council of Europe in Strasburg. With the support of the OSCE Mission in Skopje I visited the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia last week. I met with the Prime Minister and other Cabinet members, leaders in the media industry and groups of journalists. I intend to inform the Government of my conclusions and recommendations in the very near future.

One outcome of my talks in Washington and in European capitals was the constant reference to different cultural and historical interpretations of the limits to freedom of the media or the relationship between freedom and responsibility. I received great support when I suggested a Transatlantic discussion on this subject.

Contacts with OSCE member States further included letters which I have addressed to several Foreign Ministries on urgent issues which have been brought to my attention. We have received some replies and anticipate others in the near future. I shall inform the Council about relevant developments in due time.

Let me now briefly mention the setting up of working relations within the OSCE system. In February, the OSCE missions and representations were kindly asked by the Secretary General to include in their reporting, in accordance with their mandates, information about media related issues. In fact, we have been in touch with several missions who were most helpful in providing advice and support for visits.

Furthermore, we established close cooperation with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. We agreed that the ODIHR will continue to work on media issues in the context of its election monitoring activities, while my Office will look into individual cases and into structural issues which limit the activities of a free and independent media.

On March 3, we paid a day's visit to the Council of Europe in Strasburg in order to create working relations at the various levels with this oldest European organization which has great expertise in media issues, especially in the legal and the technical field. We appreciate the readiness of the Council of Europe to provide us with their expertise, as it might be appropriate in our work, and keep us informed about their activities in various countries. This will provide us a means to avoid duplication of effort.

Non governmental organizations active in the field of press freedom have expressed great interest in our Office's work. We are already in contact with more than 30 organizations which will constitute a valuable source of information for our Office. We are planning a meeting May 20, organized by the OSCE Troika, to further develop the relationship of NGO's and our new Office.

The preliminary conclusions I draw from admittedly only three months of work is that there is a broad acceptance of the Office's mandate. It appears to me that the very existence of., this new office has already produced, on the part of some governments, the political awareness of the need to deal cautiously and carefully with the media. The work of our Office needs to be focused on the concepts of cooperation and, when required, of assistance without displaying a kind of missionary spirit, but rather based on a deliberate assessment of how we can improve the media situation in a particular country.

While my Office works on issues which are of concern to all OSCE member States, the very political nature of this office does not favour the long-term listing of activities. We may have to act as an immediate fire-brigade and to be available on short notice.

This is where we are at the present time.

Mr, Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now say a few words about our future activities:

Regarding the OSCE's focus on Central Asia this year, my Office is considering ways and means of approaching issues of free media and freedom of opinion in this OSCE region during in the second half of this year. A joint mission with ODIHR during this autumn is

envisaged. Several Central Asian Delegations here in Vienna have already approached my Office offering information about the media situation in their countries. We have exchanged views with the head of the OSCE Liaison Office in Central Asia and look forward to future collaboration in the interests of this organization.

All States of the former Yugoslavia deserve our special attention. The OSCE mission in Sarajevo is actively involved in programmes to assist the establishment of independent media in that region. I plan a visit to organize a round table later this year with the different agencies already supporting these programmes. As to the envisaged mission of the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, I have transmitted our thoughts on relevant media issues, March 12, to Foreign Minister Geremek.

My Office will also continue to be in close contact with the "Royaumont Process" for Stability and Good Neighbourliness in South Eastern Europe which produced at its recent follow-up meeting in Athens constructive proposals for media action in the region.

Next week I shall visit Belarus on the occasion of the Seminar on "Structures of pluralistic democracies" organized by the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group, April 28-30. This will be also an opportunity to raise a number of issues with official Belarussian personalities, institutions and NGO'S. The delegation of Belarus has offered its support for the visit.

A seminar on media in Zagreb is currently prepared with the OSCE Mission to Croatia for the end of May. We will take into account the recent recommendations of the Council of Europe on the draft laws on radio and television and telecommunications. We would hope that our participation will encourage the Government to move toward meeting its commitments to alleviate some of the problems in the past and promote a more independent media environment.

Upon an official invitation from the Turkish Government, I intend to visit, Turkey, 25 -28 May. This visit will include talks with the Turkish Government in Ankara, with NGO's and media probably in Istanbul.

Short calls during May will take Place in Rome (12-13 May) and in Bratislava (20 May) where I presently intend to give a lecture upon the invitation of a private foundation.

To conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you in this room for your cooperation in this pioneering effort. I or a member of my staff are always available to provide any additional information you might desire.