

“MASS MEDIA IN CENTRAL ASIA: PRESENT AND FUTURE”

On 14-15 November 2000 more than 90 journalists from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, along with OSCE media officers and media specialists, met in Dushanbe, Tajikistan for an international conference organized under the auspices of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, **Freimut Duve**. The list of participants included the Chairman of the National Association of Independent Mass Media in Tajikistan, Mr. **Nuriddin Karshyboev**, the Head of the Department of Mass Media in the Presidential Cabinet, Mr. **Abdulrajab Abdumanonov**, representatives of non-governmental media organizations, as well as experts and foreign guests. The Conference, opened by Mr. Duve, provided a unique opportunity for interaction and exchange of views among the representatives of the mass media of the Central Asian countries on the basic problems and potential for regional cooperation. The Head of the OSCE Mission to Tajikistan, Ambassador **Marc Gilbert**, invited the participants to observe a minute of silence in memory of **Maksudjon Huseinov**, a Tajik journalist who died in the days preceding the conference;

The conference focused on libel legislation, media law, new technologies and the role of the media in the development of civil society. The quality of the presentations showed deep understanding of the issues as well as the professional commitment of the participants;

The lively discussion of the issues led to the conclusion that efforts should be re-doubled to continue searching for ways for Central Asian journalists to share information and experience on a regular basis.

Dushanbe Declaration on Freedom of the Media

The debates during the Conference in Dushanbe on Media stressed these conclusions:

1. All transition processes during the 20th century show that there is no real chance for democracy and the independent rule of law without free and professional media. As participating States of the OSCE, the Central Asian States have committed themselves to upholding freedom of the media;

2. The tragic human, cultural, economic and ecological errors of the totalitarian period prove: Free journalistic media are needed to play their critical role in the major political and economic decision making processes. The ecological problems in many of the regions (e.g. Lake Aral and Lake Sarez) might have been avoided if a public debate would have had a chance;

3. Conditions should be created, where those who want should be offered the capacity to learn the rules and tradition of independent journalism;

4. *Censorship* and the terrible *censorship by killing critical journalists* must have no chance in Central Asia. Recognizing the difficult and often dangerous working environment under which most Central Asian journalists work, the conference concluded that more must be done to guarantee supportive measures to ensure their security.

5. Libel laws should not be misused to stop journalistic criticism of decisions at all levels of power.

Dushanbe , 15th November 2000