



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
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Statement at the Permanent Council
(Review of Current Issues)

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Madame Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking you for the broad support of my work in last week's Council meeting. I greatly appreciate the statements of the Chairmanship and of the majority of the delegations present here regarding Belgrade's verbal attack against my Office.

Today, I would like to present to the OSCE Permanent Council a report on International Assistance to Media in Southeastern Europe. The report was commissioned by my Office and financed by a grant from the European Commission. It deals with international involvement in post conflict media development in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia (FYROM) and Kosovo. Mark Thompson who is one of the leading experts on media issues in the region wrote it.

After visiting all the former Yugoslav republics in 1998-99, I felt that there was a need for a study that would look at the post-Yugoslav media, how after becoming independent, for example, Slovenian TV developed as compared to Macedonian TV. However, for reasons beyond my control, it was difficult to find funding for such a large and comprehensive study. With Mark Thompson we therefore discussed another approach - to look at the region from the perspective of international assistance to media. As a result we are presenting this report today.

The report is a unique study that analyses a new trend in post conflict development known, for a lack of a better name, as media development (as you know, this was successfully done in my own country in 1945 and in Cambodia in the early 90s). OSCE is the main international organisation involved in this matter. OSCE media development offices are operational in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. OSCE Missions in Croatia and FYROM also deal with support and assistance to independent media.

Mark Thompson looks at the many obstacles faced by the local media and the governments in establishing free journalistic media in the region. Where can the international community help either through international governmental or through non-governmental organisations? Where is there a need for relevant legislation to be introduced by the international community? These and other questions are answered in the report.

In my view, the report is important as a lessons-learned study that should be used by the OSCE as a training manual when it tasks its missions with media development. It should also be part of the OSCE induction course for new mission members who will deal with these issues. One thing is clear - international players in the future should be better prepared to assist the public of the country concerned.

Here are some of the author's conclusions and recommendations:

On Slovenia - According to the author, Slovenia's progress in democratising the media shows that events in other former Yugoslav republics were not a legacy of the socialist system, but were the outcome of deliberate policies.

On Croatia - the author believes that international organisations tended to neglect journalists in order to devote time to politicians, arguing the need for media reform. In hindsight, they should have tried harder to educate the journalists, who, like the politicians, had little or no experience of life in a liberal democracy. It is important to underline the constructive work that the OSCE played in keeping media reform issues as a priority even during discouraging times.

On Bosnia and Herzegovina - The struggle for a democratic public media has not been won yet. We are still in the middle of that struggle. With enough international will, a democratic broadcast network for the whole country can be developed. Without strong determination, this will not happen.

On FYROM - Restructuring the state media should be a high priority, within the framework of the European Union's regional approach and the 1995 commitments to the Council of Europe. More should and can be done to help and encourage the liberalisation of the state broadcast network.

On Kosovo - UNMIK's overriding obligation is to ensure that the public obtains accurate and impartial information from Kosovar media. This will become even more important as elections approach. The media must reflect the genuine concerns and priorities of people from Kosovo. This will not be possible in an atmosphere of intimidation and lawlessness, such as currently prevails. The author also believes that donors should know more about media that they support. If the problem of donor-supported media pursuing undemocratic and illiberal objectives is to be eliminated, donors will need to keep themselves better informed about the content purveyed by their beneficiaries.

This is only a small fraction of the issues Mark Thompson raises. These are his conclusions based on extensive research and many interviews. Not every international intervention into media is positively assessed by the author. Mistakes were made - unavoidable since international organisations have almost no experience in this field. The report helps us look back and learn from both our successes and from our mistakes.

I hope that this report will be useful to all the delegations and not only to those that represent Southeastern Europe. Many of the problems discussed in the report are generic and the author's views should be of interest to most newly emerging democracies.

Madame Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me for a minute use the opportunity to remind us of the death of two journalists from two of our participating States: last week Reuters correspondent Kurt Schork, a 53-year-old U.S. citizen, and Associated Press cameraman-producer Miguel Gil Moreno, 32, of Barcelona, Spain, were killed in an ambush in Sierra Leone. Both had worked in Bosnia.

Let me quote Martin Bell, BBC veteran reporter and currently member of the British Parliament, on Kurt Schork: "...He did more than file dispatches, which he did faster and better than anyone. He helped the helpless, rescued the wounded, and became the conscience-in-residence of the Sarajevo press corps...For Kurt the Bosnian war was and still is an epic struggle between good and evil."

Paying tribute today to the memory of Kurt Schork and Miguel Gil Moreno, we should also look at what we can do more to protect journalists in areas of conflict. Schork and Moreno were seasoned war correspondents, they knew the risks and how to minimise them. This knowledge did not save their lives. There are others, mostly free-lancers, who go into battle with no protection, no insurance and very little if any experience.

Last year, after the death of three journalists in Kosovo, I once again raised the issue of protection of journalists. My Office will continue the discussion on protection of journalists with media and military experts from OSCE member states this year. Look at options that are available to governments to try to help minimise the risks for war correspondents. Look at such issues as training, insurance, protection gear. We owe it to the memory of Kurt Schork and Miguel Gil Moreno and many others who have died trying to provide us with accurate and timely reports on a subject the OSCE since its birth in 1975 had been committed to stop before it ever starts: war.

Alexander Ivanko, one of my advisers who knew Kurt Schork, is trying to get a street in Sarajevo named after him. He is in touch with some Bosnian officials, however, I would like to ask the Bosnian delegation to support this initiative.