



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

Report to the Permanent Council

Vienna, 20 January 2000

Madame Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today I would like again to focus on south-east Europe. First of all, I would like to introduce this book *In Defence of the Future* that I edited together with Nenad Popovic, a prominent Zagreb intellectual. In a way it is the first product of the idea of a Stability Pact. The book is published in Croatian, German and English. It can therefore be read in all the post-Yugoslav regions. It includes essays by leading journalists and authors from Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade, Pristina and Ljubljana. Some of the contributors are members of Group 99, a circle of writers from south-east Europe who united as a result of a proposal I made at the Leipzig Book-fair last year.

The idea behind this book is to try to avoid referring to the past, to avoid mutual accusations, to avoid the old game of name-calling, as is very common in this region. The idea is to look to the future, to discuss and debate ways that can help the region prosper.

The leitmotif of *In Defence of the Future* is summed up by Zagreb writer Miljenko Jergovic, who writes in his essay that "life without neighbourliness and without an ethnic mix is not possible in the Balkans. The cultures of the peoples of the area were created in a constant dialogue with others and in being mixed with others." I hope this book will contribute to reconciliation in south-east Europe. Croatia has already voted for a new generation, for breaking with its nationalist past. Now it is time for the others, especially Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, to choose Europe and not the tribalism of the previous years.

Here I would like again to draw your attention to the continued media repression in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, specifically in Serbia. On 21 October 1998, in line with my early warning function, I stressed publicly that the adoption on 20 October of the Serbian Law on Public Information basically institutionalised a state of war against independent media. On 23 October, I raised this Law with the Yugoslav Foreign Minister Zivadin Jovanovic, and four days later I met with journalists from Serbia to hear their views.

Since then I have been regularly appealing to the Belgrade regime to repeal this Law. On 25 June 1999, I wrote to all OSCE Foreign Ministers asking them to use their influence to bring about a repeal of the Law. In 1999, as predicted, we saw our worst fears materialise in Serbia. The Law has been used on numerous occasions to silence independent media, to prosecute those who have tried to inform the public on the state of affairs in their country.

Here are some recent facts: in the first year since the Law's adoption, 30 media outlets were sentenced to pay fines totalling 18 million dinars. Only last month, Danas, Blic and Studio B were fined a total of 970,000 dinars for carrying a statement by the opposition party SPO. According to the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia, of its 1,100 registered members, 70 percent lost their jobs since the adoption of the Law. I can spend here hours going case after case, after case.

But not only this Law is being used to harass media. Outright intimidation and sabotage are also common. A few days ago, unknown perpetrators damaged the Studio B transmitter on

Mt. Kosmaj. As a result, the audience of this leading opposition television station was halved. According to Studio B management it will take some time to fix this problem. I assume that the Belgrade authorities, if they were not involved in this act of sabotage, as is being implied by the independent media, will take action and bring the perpetrators to justice.

I would also like to mention Milosevic's interview to Politika given this New Year's eve. Milosevic believed that the Serbian Law on Public Information had not been used "sufficiently enough." Milosevic told Politika that there was complete freedom of the media in Serbia while in Western countries the media was controlled by the state. It seems that Milosevic is living in his own world, a world that has very little to do with reality. However, his interview will once again have a chilling effect on media in Serbia, and not only on those who consider themselves in opposition to the current regime, but also on the media that tries to be apolitical.

Media and universities are the last bastions of free expression in Serbia. They are now being strangled. We have an obligation to do something about it. I urge your countries to unite in the struggle for civility in Serbia. Without a democratic Serbia one can not guarantee stability in south-east Europe. The challenges in this region will dominate the work of the OSCE in the year 2000.