



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

**Statement by Mr. Freimut Duve at the Bishkek International Conference on  
Enhancing Security and Stability in Central Asia**

13 December 2001

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I regret not being able to be with you in Bishkek today to participate in this International Conference. I especially regret it in light of the importance of the topic I want to highlight today, namely freedom of the media in times of anti-terrorist conflict. I have just spent two days in Almaty at the beginning of this week, debating this particular theme with more than 80 journalists from the Central Asian states, as well as government officials, parliamentarians and NGO representatives.

The main theme that was repeated over and over again during these two days is the critical importance of freedom of the media and the need of free public debate – especially in times as crucial as the ones we are living in today. The criminals behind the 11 September attacks have proved to the world that they are using the most radical form of censorship of words that is possible: not only censoring most reading material, but even reading the Koran selectively according to their own need and interest. To be able to fight this type of activity it would be even more counterproductive to reduce freedom of expression and limit the necessary controversial debates.

The new conflict situation should not be used as a justification and an excuse for repressive steps against opposition media. The Third Central Asian media conference presented us with some troublesome examples of restrictions to independent journalistic media. Many participants were quite alarmed by the speeches of government representatives who made use of the new terror situation to justify government activities. Furthermore, the two earlier media conferences have also proved that many of these tendencies have existed long before 11 September.

The members of the international community must raise their voices to remind all states of the role of the media as society's watchdog on all issues of concern to the public. These central concerns were also expressed in the Almaty Declaration which was adopted by the participants of the media conference two days ago.

The international anti-terror coalition is a pro-freedom coalition at the same time. I would like to quote one of the participants of the Central Asian media conference in Dushanbe that took place more than a year ago: "defence of national security is one of the more significant and often used reasons by government to justify their interference into the work of the media." How true these words sound today. However, I would like to link this quote to another, namely the words of the Bucharest Ministerial Declaration, adopted 4 December, which underlined that the OSCE participating States were "determined to protect our citizens from new challenges to their security while safeguarding the rule of law, individual liberties, and the right to equal justice

under law.” We have all agreed that this should be the guiding light for our work in the future – let us all now do more than our best to make this a reality as well.