



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

-CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY-

22 April 2004

**Statement to the Permanent Council
(Under Current Issues)**

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today I present to you our report on the role of the media in the tragic events that took place in Kosovo in mid-March. At the end of this report, we offer several ideas and recommendations as to how to prevent similar situations in the future by providing conditions for a free, fair and balanced media in Kosovo.

Out of this report I would like to emphasize here the three main problems as I see them: biased reporting, lack of plurality; and the failure of public-service broadcasting. All of them, and especially their combination, contributed to a practical, even if temporary loss of Kosovo's media freedom, and did a great disservice to Kosovo's ethnic peace and democracy.

The essence of our findings is that the most powerful broadcasters provided biased coverage on two counts.

On 16 and 17 March, they portrayed the death of the children as a cruel, criminal, ethnically-motivated killing. But when, in the wake of their own previous reporting, the real inter-ethnic violence occurred, the TV media in particular followed up with justifying, almost supportive coverage.

For several crucial days, the media in Kosovo borrowed some of the characteristics of its own un-free, pre-democratic past, features that I personally know too well: lack not only of objectivity but also of plurality. What we witnessed in Kosovo was not just one-sided, careless and unprofessional journalism in a post-conflict, volatile society, but it was a tragic lack of other balancing voices, at least in the broadcast media.

The last but not the least important disappointment is the failure of the Public Broadcasting System of Kosovo. Its aim - and its only justification - is to meet the need for a firm, reliable infrastructure that provides for objective news; it should be so reliable that it could counterbalance any irrational and irresponsible disinformation. This is why public radio and television in Kosovo (RTK) is supported for by the taxpayers of Kosovo as well as by the taxpayers of the OSCE countries.

And this is why first among our recommendations I would put the strengthening of public radio and television. It should become a bulwark of objectivity, fairness and built-in pluralism. The citizens and donors of Kosovo should get their money's worth.

Equally important is to provide a legal framework for the media.

The third most important proposal is that, at least temporarily, there should be regular checks of programmes of the broadcast media. My office would be willing to select and appoint, with your generous support, a special representative in order to help identify a course of action.

One last note: with me today is the expert who prepared the report, Dardan Gashi, a journalist and the author of two books on the Balkans. He has worked in the region for over ten years as a reporter, as a human rights activist, as well as for three OSCE missions: in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Croatia and in Kosovo. He has also worked for the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia. He is ready to answer your factual questions if you have any.

Thank you.