



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

Statement at the Permanent Council  
(Review of Current Issues)

Vienna, 22 April 1999

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to raise a number of media issues related to the current crisis in Kosovo. Under Paragraph 6 of the mandate, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has a responsibility to monitor compliance with relevant OSCE principles and commitments, including alleged serious instances of intolerance by participating states. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) is suspended from the OSCE, however it is still a signatory to the 1975 Final Helsinki Act. That is why I believe that certain broadcasting practises of Serbian State Television (RTS) are of relevance to this Organisation.

Some of the RTS programmes are regularly re-broadcast in Europe and Northern America. Here is a quote from a Belgrade journalist: "The vocabulary of the media for NATO and the international community (for example, "degenerate criminals") has become the natural way of communication with the rest of the world."

But this does not hold true for all the reports published or broadcast by Serbian journalists. The Independent Media Commission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (IMC) has followed the programmes of the Republika Srpska Television and has observed that since the military conflict started the "style of news presentation has become more professional and credible. Presenters have resumed a normal, detached demeanour." (IMC Assessment of 1 April 1999).

Point two. I want to draw your attention to a development which I find extremely disturbing: the use of terrorist tactics against individuals in order to be able to misuse them for war propaganda purposes in the media. I am disturbed by the use of the RTS in what might in the future be called a media-war-crime: utilising a citizen and one of Kosovo's leading politicians, Ibrahim Rugova, as a media hostage. There are credible reports from foreign correspondent Renate Flottau that Rugova was forced to take part in the so-called Milosevic show broadcast on RTS while his children and his wife were under constant threat from police forces that controlled his house in Pristina. Belgrade denies that. The only way to find out the truth is for Rugova and his family to be allowed to leave the country, and I urge the FRY Government to do so.

Point three. I continue to be concerned for the safety of journalists, both local and foreign, working in FRY. In late March-early April the Belgrade authorities wiped out all independent media - the few ones that continued to operate despite the numerous restrictions of the Serbian Law on Public Information. The leading independent broadcaster B92 was closed down and a radio station under the same name has restarted broadcasting, however with new staff. Slavko Curuvija, a leading independent editor and publisher, was gunned down on 11 April in Belgrade. His wife was assaulted. This is another case of what I refer to as "censorship by killing." The offices of the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) were raided and all employees expelled from the premises.

Numerous foreign correspondents were harassed, detained, expelled, their equipment confiscated. Here are a few examples from April alone: Russian TV correspondent Gleb Ovsyannikov - expelled. German TV journalist Pit Schnitzler - missing after leaving Belgrade en route to Zagreb. Italian reporter Lucia Annunciata - detained, threatened and

questioned by the authorities before being allowed to leave the country. I would like to emphasise that this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Those who are still allowed to work in FRY have to file their reports through the RTS network and are subject to numerous restrictions including their freedom of movement. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Russian NTV network has complained about being subject to military censorship. They are not alone.

The current media situation in FRY is very disturbing - voices of reason have been silenced, the open debate on issues of concern to the country's citizens, which I have been urging for months, never materialised. After a political settlement is finally reached in Kosovo, the international community, and especially the OSCE, will have to look for new approaches in support of democratic media in Serbia.

Viable independent media are paramount to any democratic process and to a civil society that, one hopes, will be established sooner rather than later in Serbia. I believe this will be one of the OSCE's biggest challenges in the near future where all its member-states, especially the new European democracies and the Russian Federation, will play an important role. Today Russia has a free, democratic and lively media scene, something that is totally lacking in Serbia. In this as in other fields OSCE's and especially Russia's contribution could be vast.