



**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, 18 May 2000

Madame Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yesterday morning the Serbian authorities took over control of the Belgrade TV station Studio B accusing it of calling for "the violent overthrow of the legitimate authorities." In an official statement broadcast on Studio B the regime said: "The Serb government had decided to take over all the assets of Studio B." The statement was signed by Serbian vice-premiers Vojislav Seselj from the Radicals and by Milovan Bojic from the United Left. Most of you are well aware of the reputation of Seselj - a notorious paramilitary commander during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina and an outspoken enemy of free media in Serbia.

The authorities also discontinued the programmes of Radio B2-92 carried on Studio B's third channel. Journalists from Blic, a leading Belgrade daily, were not able to enter their offices yesterday. Their reporters called my Office to inform us that the newspaper was basically closed down without any official explanation and that the staff planned to publish a special edition at a different location.

Through the enormous efforts of its staff, Radio B2-92 was able to re-start broadcasting via satellite. Blic also published yesterday a special edition thanks to the solidarity of journalists from Danas and my Office was informed this morning that the editors of Blic will try to put out a regular edition today. Yesterday evening, thousands of people gathered in Belgrade to support the independent media.

This new and unprecedented attack on freedom of expression in Serbia follows a long campaign against independent journalists that gained new momentum this year with many reporters being arrested, harassed, their equipment and materials and even passports confiscated.

For example, Miroslav Filipovic, a correspondent for Danas and AFP and a contributing editor with IWPR in London, is "still enjoying the hospitality" of the police after being arrested at his home in Kraljevo on 8 May. His passport, address book, texts and the hard disc of his computer were confiscated. There are reports that he may be charged with espionage - a ludicrous assertion that was often used by the Soviet Union to stamp out dissent.

I can spend here hours giving you detailed information on all the cases of media harassment recorded by my Office this year. Dozens and dozens of cases reported every, I would like to underline, every day. Nothing like this, reminiscent of the worst days of totalitarianism, has been seen in Europe for years.

The Director of Studio B, Dragan Kojadinovic, described the closure of his station as an act that showed that "the government is practically introducing a state of emergency in the country." A country ruined by a family that misuses state functions to stop all protests against Bambiland, its citizens plunged into darkness by leaders that are indicted for crimes against humanity by an international tribunal. A new crime was committed yesterday against the people by Milosevic's group that believes that they are the only ones who can uphold the truth.

Serbia now is on the path that many countries with authoritarian leaders have experienced in the XX century. UN Balkans envoy Carl Bildt described the country as a "system in serious decay, which, day by day, shows increasing signs of severe instability and lawlessness."

What can all of us do to stop the decay and help the people of Serbia? The limits of my mandate are very clear - I have intervened with Belgrade on several occasions but to no avail. However, among us are participating States that can exercise substantial influence on the actions of this government.

I understand from media reports that over the past ten days both the Defence and the Foreign Ministers of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia visited Moscow for talks with senior Russian officials.

Defence Minister Dragoljub Ojdanic, indicted for war crimes by the Tribunal in The Hague and for some reason not arrested by Russian police on his arrival to Moscow, met with Russian defence officials. Foreign Minister Zivadin Jovanovic, banned from entering most European countries, spoke in Moscow with Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov.

Russia fully supported the establishment of my Office and throughout the last two years supported my everyday work. That is why I ask the Russian government to use its influence on Belgrade and particularly on many Cabinet members in order to rectify the situation and to stop attacks on freedom of expression in Serbia.

I believe that if Russia makes this plea many ears in Belgrade will be listening very carefully.