



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
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Statement at the Permanent Council
(Review of Current Issues)

Vienna, 14.06.2001

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to draw your attention to a number of recent developments.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. With great sorrow I learned of the murder of Milan Pantic, a reporter for Vecernje Novosti daily, who was killed in the Central Serbian town Jagodina on Monday. Pantic wrote extensively about crime and corruption. His murder is the first "censorship by killing" in Serbia after the establishment of democratic rule. I hope that the authorities will take all the necessary measures to swiftly investigate this crime and to bring those responsible to justice. I ask the Yugoslav delegate to forward my condolences to the family and friends of the deceased.

In another development, I learned from a statement issued by Veran Matic from ANEM with some concern of the publication in Belgrade of the so-called Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion, a famous anti-Semitic forgery. Also, after an absence of ten years, Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf reappeared on the streets of Belgrade. This is especially worrying in a country whose previous regime had throughout the nineties played a major role in fostering ethnic hatred.

On Turkey. According to a number of NGOs, several amendments to the current law on the Turkish Broadcasting Authority are of concern because they include new restrictive clauses. They provide for additional enforceable penalties as well as for the first time the amendments include control of the Internet. These proposals are not in line with the programme of wide-ranging reforms approved by the Turkish government this March, that, among other things, promised to expand freedom of expression in the country.

Russia. My Office has been actively involved in following the case of Olga Kitova, correspondent for the regional newspaper Belgorodskaya Pravda. After publishing a number of stories on the miscarriage of justice in Belgorod and on some questionable privatisation activities, she has been actively harassed, both physically and mentally, by the local police and prosecutor. On two occasions she was arrested, she suffered breakdowns and just last week left the hospital. She is currently charged under five articles of the Russian criminal code and her lawyers are reviewing the case against her.

My Office has intervened both with the Foreign Ministry and the Office of Sergei Yaztrebzhemsky from the Administration of the Russian President. We have also informed about her case both foreign and local correspondents in Russia which has led to a number of stories in the media. Sweden, currently presiding in the EU, has raised her plight separately with the Russian authorities. We have asked the Romanian Chairmanship to do the same. My Office has contacted Kitova on several occasions and she believed that without this support her situation would have been much graver. I would also like to note with satisfaction the prompt reaction of the Kremlin to this case. Olga Kitova will be facing trial and I do expect it to review objectively all the evidence provided by the prosecutor and to reach a fair decision as is expected from a court of law.