



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)

4 June 1998

Speaking points on recent developments in the Slovak Republic

- Express concerns on recent developments in the Slovak Republic 4 months prior to Parliamentary Elections

- Firstly, concern about the general atmosphere of media freedom in Slovak Republic. Critical and open debate based inter alia on free media and freedom of expression are essential to all modern societies. Journalists must be free to express their views without fear and with confidence that their role is appreciated for its contribution to a strong and democratic nation.

- Secondly, concern about electoral law which passed second and third reading in Parliament on May 20. Contains provision which excludes electronic private and local media from election campaign. Thus election campaigning exclusively reserved to public TV and radio.

A joint recommendation on this provision made by the Director of ODIHR and FoM, May 8, has according to our information so far not been taken into account by the competent bodies.

Specific reservations in this respect:

In substance, it would appear that the provision infringes upon the rights of all media to publish information about the election of members of Parliament and upon the rights of Slovak citizens to receive information on political issues and participate fully in the electoral process. However, full and fair participation in the electoral process, including the right to receive information on candidates, is vital to the achievement of a democratic society.

Also concern that the blanket prohibition on any reporting on political issues could be interpreted as a form of censorship, although the Slovak constitution unambiguously declares that censorship is banned.

Further concern at the magnitude of the penalties that could be imposed upon struggling Slovak media outlets. Fines for violating the election law, as adopted now, have been considerably increased. Broadcasters and print publishers would be very likely to refrain from reporting any political matters just to be absolutely certain that they do not run afoul of the law.

- Hope that these considerations might still be taken into account and acted upon, even at this late date.

- From a broader perspective, we look forward to a fruitful collaboration between the Government of the Slovak Republic and ODIHR during the forthcoming election period.