



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

23 October 2003

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement under Current Issues

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to raise three issues today.

First of all, my condolences go to the family and friends of Alexei Sidorov, a Russian editor fatally stabbed by two men who ambushed him in the car park of his apartment building in Toliatti, Samara Region. His predecessor Valery Ivanov, who also edited the local weekly *Toliatinskoie Obosrenie*, was murdered on 29 April 2002. His case I raised in this forum in my regular report on 20 June 2002.

I have issued a press statement on this matter voicing my indignation at another case of “censorship by killing” and urging the Russian authorities to swiftly investigate this murder. What concerns me is the chilling effect such attacks against press freedom have on rank-and-file reporters who for survival's sake end up opting for self-censorship and passing on the opportunity to investigate, for example, corruption or the abuse of the environment by big business. Being a journalist in some regions of the Russian Federation is a hazardous profession. Unless more is done to ensure safe and secure conditions for all reporters, notwithstanding the political affiliations of their publications, investigative reporting might just die out together with the watchdog function of a free media.

My second point concerns Ireland and the ongoing discussion in this OSCE participating State regarding press freedom. I specifically refer to the proposal to establish a statutory Press Council appointed entirely by the Government to impose a Government-initiated Code of Conduct on journalists and newspapers. This proposal was made by a Legal Advisory Group set up by the Government.

The Irish Times, for example, in a recent editorial wrote that it “strongly believes that statutory press regulation of the kind proposed is not in the public interest as it would significantly interfere with editorial independence, freedom of expression and the role of the press in a democracy.” I fully agree with this view. In a letter I wrote last week to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, I stressed, among other things, that some of the statements made by officials during this public debate put into question certain fundamental beliefs on how a free media operates in a democratic society.

I would like to repeat once again: we live in a global village. Anything that happens in one OSCE member-state might be closely followed and even replicated in another. That is why there is no need to set an example that is questionable to say the least.

My third point concerns the extreme violence directed toward journalists during the post-election protests in Baku, Azerbaijan, and the reports of journalists throughout the country being prevented from covering the elections, as well as being subject to beatings and insult as they tried to report from the polling stations. For a while, one journalist was missing and a major independent daily was closed down. “*Yeni Musavat*” continues to have problems with access to its office and with distribution. I call for a full investigation of these incidents, prosecution of those responsible for excessive use of force and for clear measures by the government of Azerbaijan to ensure the safety of journalists in the future.

One last point: I would like to mention the latest publication of my Office that we have distributed to you today. It is called *Spreading the Word on the Internet* and contains contributions from participants of the conference on Freedom of the Media and the Internet that was held in June 2003 in Amsterdam. The Amsterdam Recommendations on Freedom of the Media and the Internet that were issued at it can also be found in this publication.

Thank you.