



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

Statement at the OSCE/ODIHR
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting,
Warsaw, 16-18 October 2000

Today, at the opening of this major meeting, I would like to provide you just with a brief overview of our activities over the past year. You can find a detailed report on all our activities, including country by country interventions, in our 1999/2000 annual yearbook *Freedom and Responsibility*.

My Office has continued to monitor the media situation in the OSCE participating States and intervened whenever necessary to protect media from government harassment. One thing is clear: in several countries journalistic media freedom today is under more pressure than it was when I took this job.

Before I brief you on the media situation in some of the countries my Office has been active in, I would also like to draw your attention to a number of structural problems we have identified: censorship by killing; structural censorship; the role of the media when democracies go to war; industrial cross-ownership of media; post-conflict societies: defending the future; dealing with "hate speech". I have spoken on several occasions on censorship by killing and structural censorship – the two new phenomena in the emerging democracies, both used to silence critics in the media - either through murder or through a more sophisticated system of economic pressure. The end result, however, is the same: the public is kept unaware of certain events that, instead of generating an open debate, are swept under the carpet. We can talk about these issues in more detail at tomorrow's session.

My Office has continued to focus extensively on media developments in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. As I have said on many occasions, the 1998 Serbian Law on Public Information has been used throughout the past two years to harass independent media, fine it and even take over control. Millions of dinars had been paid in fines often bringing different media outlets to the verge of bankruptcy. On several occasions I intervened with Belgrade voicing my concerns regarding the situation of the media. In the end, I received a threatening letter from Ivan Markovic, Belgrade's Minister of Telecommunications, who, among other things, accused me of being a "German agent".

During the recent election campaign, my Office published a daily bulletin *Serbia: Journalism and Elections*. We collected from open sources and from journalists in Belgrade information on harassment of media and opposition supporters in Serbia as well as on the campaign against the opposition initiated in state-controlled media. That is why I was especially heartened to learn that in early October hundreds of employees of state-controlled media have gone on strike protesting the Government's refusal to recognize the results of the elections and the state media's lack of objectivity in covering the post-electoral crisis.

My Office has also been actively involved in Russia. Throughout this year we have raised on several occasions the case of Andrei Babitsky, *Radio Liberty* correspondent in Chechnya. I will not go into the details of the case. I have asked the Russian Government to drop all charges against Mr. Babitsky; however, this has not been done. On 2 October, Mr. Babitsky went on trial in Makhachkala accused of using falsified documents. He was found guilty and fined, but was cleared under current amnesty laws. Mr. Babitsky has said he will appeal the verdict.

I have also debated with the Russian authorities and at the OSCE Permanent Council about the recent developments in Russia. I have certain concerns that I would like to share with you. On a positive note, the Kursk tragedy showed that freedom of expression has taken root in Russia. The tragic events of August generated a public debate on the way the Government handled the crisis as well as on the role of the media in reporting disastrous events. However, not everybody was happy with the spirit of combative reporting seen in the Russian media.

On several occasions President Putin has stressed his devotion to freedom of expression. He has also raised the issue of the need for economic independence of the media. I share these concerns of President Putin and urge his Government to continue adhering to the commitments it signed up to as an OSCE participating State.

We continue to focus on Ukraine. An ongoing concern is the misuse of libel legislation by officials that sometimes lead to non-government media going bankrupt. My Office conducted a round table on this matter last December. We have made specific recommendations on the implementation of OSCE and European standards. The Government of Ukraine has expressed its readiness to implement these recommendations. They are in line with my mandate which stresses the need to assist participating States on media matters.

This September my Office was informed of the disappearance of a prominent Ukrainian journalist, Georgiy Gongadze, editor of the online magazine *Ukrainska Pravda*, who went missing in Kiev on 16 September 2000. Prior to his disappearance, Mr. Gongadze had published an open letter to the prosecutor on the Internet complaining about certain forms of harassment against him. I have also raised this case with the authorities.

Throughout the past year I have continued focusing on developments in Belarus, the Central Asian States, Turkey, Azerbaijan. Whenever I am informed of cases of pressure on media professionals I try to immediately intervene with the Government concerned. Furthermore, in Central Asia my Office, in co-operation with the Government of Tajikistan, will host this November in Dushanbe a regional conference for journalists from the Central Asian States. This is the second such conference, the first one was held last year in Bishkek.

I would like to draw your attention to some of the projects my Office has been involved in over the past year and to some of our plans for the future. Last year, through financial aid from private donors, my Office, together with the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, organized the publication of children's books in Albanian for the schools and libraries in Kosovo. This spring almost 100,000 books were distributed throughout the province and are bringing smiles to the faces of children many of whom have lost everything, including their favourite books, during last year's refugee crisis.

One of the projects I developed deals with post-conflict societies and defending the future. Last year I organized the publication of a book titled *In Defence of the Future: Searching in the Minefield*. This book includes twelve texts by authors from South-Eastern Europe who examine the recent history of the area in regard to its consequences for the future. Now a collection of writers from the various nations of the Caucasus are contributing to a book, again under the title of *In Defence of the Future*. I expect to present this publication later this year at the OSCE Ministerial Council and in the region. This book is edited by Heidi Tagliavini, the CIO's Personal Representative for the Caucasus, and by myself and brings together over twenty writers from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and from the northern Caucasus Republics in the Russian Federation.

Currently my Office is also organizing a round table on media and corruption. I plan to invite journalists from the newly emerging democracies to discuss how they are dealing with corruption in their countries and what dangers they face investigating these stories. Among those planning to attend are reporters from South-Eastern Europe and Russia. The round table will take place later this year in Prague.

This is just a short description of some of our activities. I will discuss our other concerns in more detail at the session dedicated specifically to freedom of the media.