



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

23 May 2002

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentleman,

Today my Office presents its sixth country report, this one on the media situation in Turkmenistan. My Office has previously published reports on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Georgia. All were written by outside experts.

Turkmenistan, as far as I can see, is the only member of the OSCE where currently media freedom, in the basic understanding of the wording of my mandate, is non-existent. To quote from the report itself: "Turkmenistan is a country where the notion of freedom of the media has not undergone any real changes since the days of the Soviet regime. Furthermore, in the course of the entire decade since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Turkmen government has carried out a deliberate policy of subjecting all of the nation's media to the interests of building their totalitarian state."

It is ominous that for the first time since I took up the position of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, I am not at liberty, and I would like to stress—for security reasons—to provide to the public the names of the experts that helped prepare this report. These are the conditions that journalists, who tried or are still trying to make a difference, have to work under. For an organisation that claims to be a family of democracies such a situation can only be described as completely unacceptable.

I would also like to point out that the Government of Turkmenistan is the only one among the Central Asian states that has basically ignored the Central Asian Media Conferences that we have held in the region for the past three years. The Government has never given my Office an explanation on this matter.

The report clearly states that any recommendations to the government of Turkmenistan regarding changes in the media field may only be made within the larger context of a global and fundamental change in the state's attitude towards freedom of speech, in the context of adhering to the entire spectrum of international human rights.

As you know, my Office is currently in the process of developing several media projects in some Central Asian states, however, I do not see any possibility to get involved in similar work in Turkmenistan before there is a substantial change in the attitude of the leadership of Turkmenistan to freedom of expression.

To continue on Central Asia: I would like to stress that with great interest I learned of the decision by the Government of Uzbekistan to close down the official censor's office, especially in light of the statement that President Islam Karimov made recently admitting that the reality in his country where all media were heavily state-controlled left a lot to be

desired. I will continue monitoring developments in this OSCE participating State and hope that the latest change will influence the state of the media in Uzbekistan for the better.

Overall, I plan to pay more attention to media freedom in the Central Asian countries. In addition to Turkmenistan, this year my Office will issue reports on the media in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. All five reports will be published for public distribution as I have done with several previous ones. Just to underline the seriousness of the media situation in some of these countries: Yesterday, in just one day, in Kazakhstan two media outlets were objects of violence. The office of an independent newspaper Respublika Delovoye Obozreniye was burned down. The offices of the SolDat newspaper in Almaty were raided by unknown assailants with two journalists being badly beaten and equipment stolen. I have already intervened on previous cases of harassment of both newspapers and I do expect the authorities in Kazakhstan to thoroughly investigate these incidents and to ensure a safe environment for the media.

I would also like to use this opportunity to thank the Bosnian authorities to finally agreeing to my proposal of exactly two years ago to re-name a street in Sarajevo after Kurt Schork, an American journalist who worked throughout the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and was killed in 2000 in Sierra Leone.

Two more items I would like to raise with you. First the good news, which many of you will appreciate: I do not plan to end my term in Office until 31 December 2003. Now the bad news for some: I do not plan to end my term in Office until 31 December 2003.

Thank you.