

Tense Christmas in Kosovo

AP Photo/Visar Kryeziu



Ambassador William Walker, Head of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission, observes Serb military positions near Podujevo, 30 km north of Priština, on Christmas Day.

The holiday season was marked by several serious incidents in Kosovo. Members of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) reported a number of violent clashes; the worst came on Christmas Eve.

The situation was relatively calm during the first two weeks of December. On 11 December the KVM carried out its first weapons verification inspection on the barracks of the Yugoslav Army's (VJ) 549 Motorized Brigade in Prizren. The inspection team then inspected a company position near Dobruste, approximately five kilometres from the border with Albania.

On 14 December the VJ informed the KVM of an incident on the border with Albania (near Malji Pastrik mountain west of Prizren) and requested that verifiers visit the scene. OSCE verifiers found 31 dead Kosovars (all except one wearing uniforms) and nine prisoners. The KVM also observed a quantity of abandoned equipment, including small arms and rocket launchers. On the same evening, six Serbs were killed when masked gunmen opened fire in a bar in Peć.

On 15 December the out-going Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek, issued a statement in which he strongly con-

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demned the killings. He said that the violence occurred "at a critical juncture in the efforts of the international community to relax tensions and support the peace process" and warned that "continued violence could reverse the progress made over the past couple of months towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict." He also said that "while the OSCE remains steadfast in its commitment to carry out its mandate, it can not do it alone. The Federal Yugoslav authorities and the people of Kosovo must commit themselves to negotiations, and not resort to further violence. Fighting will not lead to peace and prosperity, but to a future of instability."

However, further violence erupted only a few days later. On 19 December the VJ began a "military exercise" in the Podujevo region, in the area of the main road from Belgrade to Priština. Heavy fighting took place on 24 December as Serb police (MUP) and VJ forces assaulted Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) positions. The Head of the KVM, Ambassador William Walker, and Mission members spent Christmas trying to defuse the stand-off in the Podujevo region. While KVM teams patrolled the region, Ambassador Walker went to the scene of the violence and talked with representatives of the VJ, MUP and KLA in order to defuse tensions. He succeeded in negotiating withdrawal conditions and re-establishing the cease-fire. However, the situation at the end of the month remained tense.

This latest violence demonstrates the fragility of the cease-fire and, by extension, the importance of the OSCE's presence. It also highlights the volatile environment in which the KVM is operating and the potential danger this presents to the unarmed verifiers. On 27 December Mr. Geremek issued a statement in which he said that the "spiral of violence puts in danger the perspective of a peaceful solution to the conflict in Kosovo" and that "if the bloodshed and violence escalate, the OSCE would have to reconsider the forms of its activities in Kosovo in the context of a broader involvement of the international community in the search for a peaceful solution to this conflict."

NATO has deployed an extraction force in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Secure communications links have been established between KVM headquarters and the Kosovo Verification Coordination Centre in Skopje.

The OSCE is working closely with the international community, particularly in the area of humanitarian assistance. Ambassador Walker met with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Dr. Sadako Ogata, when she visited Kosovo on 21 and 22 December. The plight of internally displaced persons remains a matter of concern. The Mission is co-operating with a number of inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations in order to deal with inadequate nutrition, medical care, clothing, heating, sanitation facilities and shelter. The KVM is also taking a lead role in co-ordinating mine information.

Incidents of kidnapping and abduction continue to create tension and division in Kosovo. Family re-unification and the search for missing persons are emotive topics with both Serbs and Albanians. In December, a number of demonstrations outside Mission headquarters were held by people (mostly by Serb civilians) concerned about missing family members. A Human Rights Outreach Office has been opened within walking distance of Mission headquarters to record and follow-up on testimonies and depositions regarding human rights violations and disappearances.

Another element of the OSCE's human dimension work in Kosovo is elections. An expert from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights carried out a fact-finding mission to Kosovo between 3 and 16 December to assess the current intentions of the different parties involved in the Kosovo conflict regarding the conduct of a census and/or the registration of Kosovo electors in connection with the elections expected to take place in Kosovo during 1999.

Negotiations led by US envoy Christopher Hill and supported by the EU representative Wolfgang Petritsch are continuing on a political solution to the Kosovo issue. The OSCE is supporting this process and the KVM is following developments closely.

In December, the KVM's regional centres in Prizren and Mitrovica became fully operational and some co-ordination centres were opened. All five regional centres will be established by the end of January. KVM absorption of the Kosovo Diplomatic Observation Mission (KDOM) is virtually complete. The infrastructure (telecommunications, vehicles, accommodation, staffing) necessary for bringing the mission up to full strength is being put in place. By the end of December there were 1125 KVM staff (including local staff) in the field.

Facing page: "Peace is my Future", a poster prepared by the OSCE to be displayed throughout Kosovo.



«Paqja është
ardhmëria ime»

«Мир је моја
будућност»

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NEWSLETTER

Oslo Ministerial Council Stresses “Solidarity and Partnership”

OSCE Foreign Ministers met in Oslo on 2 and 3 December to review the role and activities of the OSCE, and especially the Organization’s contribution to meeting current risks and challenges to security.

The crisis in Kosovo was a central topic of discussion. The Ministers issued a statement which urged all parties involved to stop the violence and resolve their differences by peaceful means. The authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Serbian authorities and all Kosovo Albanians were urged to co-operate in the search for a political settlement, “so that substantial political dialogue could start as soon as possible.” They stated that “the international community is willing to help. But only the parties can overcome their differences. The sooner they do so, the sooner the reconstruction and development of Kosovo can make headway.” All parties to the conflict were urged “to respect the cease-fire, to comply fully with relevant Security Council Resolutions, and to co-operate closely with the KVM so that it can carry out its duties unimpeded throughout Kosovo.”

A number of other decisions were taken, including a Ministerial Declaration. Although, in the words of the out-going Chairman-in-Office, Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek, the documents did not contain “breakthroughs or sensational elements” they took stock of the current situation and set tasks for the future.

One of the recurring themes of the Ministerial Council meeting was “solidarity and partnership”. In the Ministerial Declaration, participating States under-

lined that “respect for OSCE principles and implementation of OSCE commitments remain fundamental to security.” It was noted that “primary responsibility for achieving these goals lies with individual States, but much depends upon solidarity in the OSCE and a genuine partnership based on sovereign equality.”

Participating States declared that a spirit of solidarity and partnership “extends not only to the partnership between States, but to co-operation among the different organizations and institutions to which those States belong.” Developments on the ground and the drafting of a Document-Charter on European Security (particularly its Platform on Co-operative Security) are strengthening this network of co-operation. The in-coming Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Knut Vollebæk of Norway, stressed that providing leadership in work on the Document-Charter and developing and maintaining ties with international, regional and non-governmental organizations will be priorities for the Norwegian Chairmanship.

In Oslo, the work on the Document-Charter was reviewed and a decision taken on “The Way Ahead”. The aim is to complete the work on the Document-Charter in 1999. It was noted that “in this pragmatic, flexible and non-hierarchical co-operation the OSCE should continue to develop its own operational activities in areas in which it has proved its strength.”

Examples of the OSCE’s successes cited at Oslo include supervision of the general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, police monitoring in the Danubian region of Croatia, the growing

involvement of the OSCE in Central Asia, democratization and human rights projects in the Caucasus, and arms control in south-east Europe.

In addition to outlining areas where the OSCE has “proved its strength”, the Ministerial Declaration and decisions reviewed issues which need further attention.

On Georgia, the Ministers took a decision in which they stressed that the OSCE “should intensify its efforts in the conflict resolution process as well as in monitoring the situation in the sphere of building democratic institutions” in that country. While progress was acknowledged in the process of finding a peaceful settlement to the conflict in the Tskinali Region/South Ossetia, Georgia, concern was expressed about the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia. Support for the Geneva peace process was declared, as was the OSCE’s readiness to participate in the implementation of a final and comprehensive settlement. Assistance to a joint local administration in the Gali District was cited as a possible way of contributing to a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the region. The OSCE Chairman-in-Office was asked to explore with the United Nations Secretary-General the usefulness of establishing of an OSCE office in the Gali District.

The Ministers noted that negotiations concerning the status of the Trans-Dniestrian region of Moldova had “languished” and called for reinvigorating these negotiations through the facilitation efforts of the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the Russian and Ukrainian mediators. Several proposals were made



with regard to a political settlement of the question of the status of Trans-Dniestria and to military issues. Concern was expressed about the lack of progress in respect of the withdrawal of Russian troops currently stationed in Moldova. It was suggested that consideration be given to a potential role for the OSCE Mission in ensuring transparency regarding the Russian troop withdrawal process.

The Chairman-in-Office, having received a report of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Conference on their efforts to help resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, urged the parties to the conflict to resume negotiations in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group and called on the Co-Chairs to continue their efforts to facilitate negotiations and search for a solution.

The in-coming Chairman-in-Office, Mr. Vollebæk, stressed that with regard to the conflicts in Georgia, Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh the Norwegian

Chairmanship is “committed to doing everything we can in the search for mutually acceptable political solutions.” He said that “given the necessary political will and courage, 1999 could be the year when the so-called ‘frozen’ conflicts begin to thaw.”

In working towards this end, Norway will be assisted by Poland and Austria, the latter joining the Troika after the Ministerial Council decided that Austria will exercise the function of the OSCE chairmanship in the year 2000.

Istanbul will host the next OSCE Summit which will take place on 18 and 19 November 1999. This decision, subject to a silence procedure, became official on 22 December.

A number of operational issues relating to the strengthening of the OSCE’s activities were considered. Decisions were taken on the further operational strengthening of the OSCE and on enhancing the OSCE’s capabilities re-

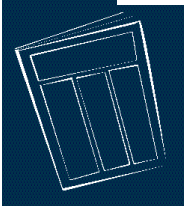
garding Roma and Sinti issues. The Ministerial Council accepted with gratitude the commitment of the Netherlands to continue providing the High Commissioner on National Minorities with premises in The Hague, initially covering the period up to and including the year 2004.

Jordan was welcomed as a new Mediterranean Partner for Co-operation. The Mediterranean Partners were encouraged to continue contributing to OSCE activities including through sending visitors to OSCE

missions and guest observers to OSCE election monitoring operations. The support of the Partners for Co-operation, Japan and the Republic of Korea, was welcomed and Japan was thanked for its generous financial contributions in support of OSCE activities.

Although the Oslo Ministerial Council meeting did not mark the formal end of Poland’s Chairmanship, it gave the outgoing Chairman-in-Office a final opportunity to address all participating States and pass the torch to his Norwegian successor. In his address at the meeting, Mr. Geremek warned colleagues not to become complacent and said that the OSCE should “keep track of changing realities” and “respond quickly and adequately to relevant developments.” Looking back on a busy year, he cautioned that the new Chairman-in-Office “will be faced by neither smaller nor easier tasks.” He said that “we pin much hope on the Norwegian Chairmanship” and wished them “every success for our common good”.

PRESS PROFILE



Die Presse, Vienna, 4.12.

(on the Oslo Ministerial Council Meeting)

No agreement was reached in Oslo on readmitting Yugoslavia, which was suspended from the OSCE in 1992. Moscow sees the participation of Belgrade as essential for a solution in Kosovo, and Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov consequently demanded the reintegration of Yugoslavia into the OSCE “with full rights”. At present this is impossible – not only because of scepticism about whether the Milošević regime is prepared to fulfil the OSCE’s human rights criteria, but also because of the country’s status. The other successor States refuse to acknowledge Belgrade as the sole legal successor to the former Yugoslavia, so that there cannot be any readmission of “Yugoslavia” – only of the new federal republic consisting of Serbia and Montenegro.

Frankfurter Allgemeine, 5.12.

(on the Oslo Ministerial Council Meeting)

There was a palpable fear in Oslo that the expectations of the organization, which have been rising continuously in recent years, could be dashed by the realities in Kosovo, resulting in a dangerous belly-landing for all 2,000 OSCE verifiers – and this exactly at a time when the OSCE could finally play the role which, in the eyes of many members, it should play, namely “a key role in the family of European institutions” as the out-going Chairman-in-Office, Polish Foreign Minister Geremek put it. What some OSCE States wish to see is the OSCE acting as a peacekeeping organi-

zation “in parallel with” the United Nations - nothing less. The tenuousness of the air in which such pretensions are being uttered has been demonstrated not only by the practical problems confronting the OSCE in Kosovo; the credibility of the organization is being put to the test also by disagreements over the so-called “European Security Charter” – a magic wand expected to bring order into the security policy “confusion” reigning throughout the region between Vancouver and Vladivostok and to finally heal the still open wounds of the Cold War between East and West. Moreover, the OSCE’s involvement in Kosovo is revealing the fact that not even with regard to the principles of the organization is there clarity and unity.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1.12.

(on Geremek’s trip to the Caucasus)

Is the OSCE glass now, after the Geremek trip, half empty or half full? Nobody was expecting a speedy resolution to any of the numerous conflicts in the Caucasian region. Were the release of political prisoners in Georgia – which took place mainly because of the imminent admission of Georgia to the Council of Europe – and the exchange of a few prisoners of war – facilitated by the ICRC – more than gestures made for the benefit of the international community in response to the gentle pressure being applied by the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Union? OSCE Chairman-in-Office Geremek had asked representatives of the Council of Europe and the EU to be part of his delegation in order to demonstrate the firm common resolve of the three. At least in countries of the former Soviet Union, the OSCE is acting in accordance with the saying that “steady drops wear away the stone.”

BRIEF

The OSCE’s budget for 1999 was approved on 17 December. The budget, excluding the budget of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission is ATS 1,434,423,618 (or approximately USD 121.5 million). The budget for the KVM will be adopted before 31 January 1999. As of 1 January 1999, the EURO will be used as the OSCE’s book-keeping currency. The OSCE’s budget for 1999 amounts to approximately 104 million EURO.

On 17 December the Permanent Council decided on a supplementary extension of the mandate of the **OSCE Mission to Ukraine** until 30 April 1999. As part of the decision, it was agreed that before the expiry of the mandate “the Council will take a decision on how best to advance continued co-operation between Ukraine and the OSCE institutions, including the establishment, at that time, of new forms of co-operation in Ukraine, instead of the OSCE Mission.”

Copies of the Secretary General’s **Annual Report 1998 on OSCE Activities** are now available.



News from the Field

The OSCE currently has Missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Kosovo (FRY), Latvia, Skopje (FYROM), Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine as well as an Assistance Group to Chechnya, a Presence in Albania and an Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus. The following are highlights from the work of some of the field operations during the past month.

Student Hunger Strike Ends in Albania

The OSCE Presence in Albania was instrumental in ending a hunger strike by students which started on 10 December. A breakthrough came on 21 December with a surprise meeting between Prime Minister Pandeli Majko and leader of the Democratic Party, Sali Berisha. The meeting produced agreement on how to end the students' strike, on how to proceed investigating the murder of Azem Hajdari and on the need for a unified Albanian position regarding the Kosovo conflict. It was the first meeting between the leaders of the two main political parties since March 1997.

The Presence is still monitoring the border with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; several incidents were reported in December. It is also still monitoring the refugee situation which is described as "stable".

Seminars in Belarus

On 10 and 11 December, the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group (AMG) in Belarus held a seminar on "Human Rights and Police Work" at the Police Academy of the Ministry of the Interior, in Minsk. Experts from Sweden and Hungary discussed with teachers of the Police Academy and high-ranking police officers topics like the maintenance of order during mass demonstrations and the use of force when making arrests.

From 10 to 17 December the AMG organized three separate workshops for domestic election observers, from both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Experts from Lithuania, Ukraine, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the ODIHR took part. Voluntary financial contributions came from Switzerland and the United States of America.

In another development, the AMG has upgraded its ombudsman function and is now handling five or six cases a day.

Developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The conclusions drawn by the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) meeting in Madrid, on 14 and 15 December, emphasized the importance of the OSCE's continued supervision of elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In particular, the PIC has assigned to the OSCE to take the lead role in conducting the public information campaign relative to the Permanent Election Law.

At the same time, the Elections Department of the Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina is working to turn over greater responsibility for the conduct of these elections to state institutions. Two key initiatives have already been undertaken to begin this program of "nationalizing" the election process. First, a national expert has been recruited to serve as the Associate Director General of Elections.

Second, the Elections Department sponsored the 1st Conference of Local Election Officials held in Teslic from 14 to 18 December with the participation of over 250 election officials representing 142 municipalities. A six month municipal training project has also been initiated. The project, launched during a meeting from 12 to 14 December in Sarajevo, is designed to pair best-practice municipal management of budgetary and material resources with consensus building and community building which fosters "good governance" in Bosnian municipalities.

In December, the Mission hosted an Inter-Entity Journalist Conference to promote cross-entity co-operation and dialogue between journalists from all areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Also in December, the Head of Mission and the Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office for Articles II and IV hosted a workshop on military/strategic study research in Sarajevo – an event seen as the beginning of the development of centers of military/strategic research at universities around Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Activities in Central Asia

In December, the Head of the Central Asia Liaison Office (CALO), Ambassador Gancho Gantchev, visited a number of towns across Uzbekistan in order to establish contacts with local authori-

ties and local NGO representatives and to exchange views about the political, economic and human rights situation at the regional level. The upcoming elections, inter-ethnic relations and religious issues were also discussed.

On 4 December, a seminar was held by the CALO in Tashkent to train election observers. The CALO continues to assist the ODIHR and NGOs with a number of human dimension projects.

On 14 to 16 December the new Head of the OSCE Centre in Almaty, Ambassador Ulrich Schoning, paid an introductory visit to Kazakhstan.

News from the Assistance Group to Chechnya

On 8 December, the remains of four persons were found on Chechen territory close to the Ingush border. On 9 December the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geresmek issued a statement in which he strongly condemned the brutal killings of three nationals of the United Kingdom and one of New Zealand kidnapped in Chechnya. He called on the relevant authorities “to make every effort to bring to justice the perpetrators of this abhorrent crime.” He conveyed the sincere condolences and expressions of the deepest sorrow to the families of the victims and to the Governments of the United Kingdom and New Zealand. He also urged the relevant authorities to intensify their efforts to free without delay all remaining hostages and to ensure their safe return to their respective countries.

The Assistance Group (AG) to Chechnya is continuing with its active humanitarian efforts. This work is of particular importance as the AG is the only inter-

national organization operating in Chechnya. In December it started the distribution of 410 metric tons of flour amongst 10,000 beneficiaries. The flour, purchased locally, is being distributed with the help of the Chechen Red Cross and the Chechen Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers. The seven-month programme is designed to help the most vulnerable in Chechen society.

The AG has also been involved in a number of other humanitarian projects: it has started a pilot-project together with SIDA and a Chechen NGO for the psycho-medical rehabilitation of 200 children and adolescents suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome; it is helping an orphanage and the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers in developing income generation projects to make them financially self-sufficient; the water and heating supply of a boarding school have been restored thanks to the AG; and the Medical College of Grozny will soon be able to provide its 1,600 students with warm classrooms and other study facilities as a result of OSCE assistance.

The AG is also active in the cultural sphere: the National Dance Ensemble, “Vainakh,” will soon be able to rehearse their programmes in a theatre partly renovated by the AG and the Football Association of Chechnya has received assistance from the AG that will eventually trickle down to several thousand children.

Police Monitoring in the Danube Region of Croatia

In mid-December the OSCE Mission to Croatia’s Police Monitoring Group in the Danube Region prepared an overall evaluation of the situation in the region after two months of monitoring activity.

It concluded that the uniformed police were generally performing their duties to a satisfactory standard when responding to incidents, but that follow-up in the case of ethnically related incidents was not always satisfactory. It also noted shortcomings in the judiciary’s follow-up to police investigations.

The Police Monitoring Group – one of the components of the Mission’s Co-ordination Centre in Vukovar – consists of 120 international police monitors (16 national police contingents from OSCE participating States) and 87 local field assistants.

The Group maintains a presence in ten of twelve local police stations in the Danube Region. At the ten stations the Station Commanders meet daily with their local police counterparts, and report to senior staff. In addition, a police monitor and field assistant are co-located with the local police duty officer on a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week basis in order to monitor all local police activities. The monitors accompany police on patrols on a random basis and respond to incidents, forwarding reports on the incidents which they monitor. Twice a week members of the Group participate in a radio interview programme during which the public are encouraged to report all incidents to the police and to utilize all Croatian Government agencies.

In other news from Croatia, the “First Conference on Development and Reconstruction of Croatia” was held on 4 and 5 December with participants from 47 countries and 27 organizations. The Conference focused on economic development and reconstruction, reform of the social sector, refugee return and mine clearance.

OSCE Follows Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia

The OSCE Mission to Georgia continues to closely follow the situation in the Gali district of Georgia. A member of the Mission participated in the sixth session of the Co-ordinating Council which took place on 17 and 18 December. These meetings, designed to facilitate dialogue between the parties, are usually held alternatively in Tbilisi and Sukhumi. Because of the recent deterioration of relations, the meeting was held in Geneva.

Following the visit of the Chairman-in-Office to Georgia in November and in light of recommendations made at the Oslo Ministerial Council meeting, the OSCE is considering the establishment of an office in the Gali district. The Head of Mission has stressed that the opening of this office is contingent on an understanding being reached with the United Nations (which, through the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia and a Human Rights Office in Sukhumi, is active in Abkhazia) and adequate security guarantees being given for OSCE personnel.

Update from Tajikistan

On 9 December, the OSCE Mission to Tajikistan and UNMOT jointly organized a ceremony marking the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The ceremony was attended by high government officials, and by representatives of professional organizations and NGOs.

The Mission is closely following the security situation in Tajikistan and the implementation of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord.

REPORT from the High Commissioner on National Minorities

The Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) is located at Prinsessegracht 22, NL-2514 AP The Hague, The Netherlands, tel.: (+31-70) 312 55 00, fax: (+31-70) 363 59 10, e-mail: cscehcnm@euronet.nl

Croatia

On 1 and 2 December the High Commissioner sent his Legal Adviser and Deputy Legal Adviser to Zagreb in order to review, together with the OSCE Mission to Croatia, the overall situation of minorities in Croatia. The High Commissioner is working closely with the OSCE Mission reviewing certain legislation and policy issues. This is with a view to encouraging the Government of Croatia on legislative and policy reform necessary to bring Croatian practice into conformity with its international obligations and commitments and, more generally, to contribute to the overall democratization process with full respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Estonia

On 8 December the High Commissioner issued a statement in which he warmly welcomed the adoption by the Estonian Parliament of the amendments to the Citizenship Law regarding the children of stateless parents. He said that the adopted text was broadly in conformity with his recommendations, taking into account the statement made by Foreign Minister Malk during the parliamentary debate to the effect that the mere opportunity to apply for the citizenship of some other states does not make an individual who is legally residing in Estonia and factually without citizenship the citizen of some other state. The High Commissioner noted that the new law would help to reduce the number of stateless persons in Estonia and would help to stimulate the process of integration.

Slovakia

From 13 to 16 December the High Commissioner visited Slovakia – his first visit since the parliamentary elections in September. He met with Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda and also had meetings with some members of the new cabinet including Deputy PM and Minister for National Minorities, Pál Csáky, Deputy PM Fogas, Minister of Culture Milan Kňažko, and Minister of Education Milan Ftáčnik. In the Parliament the High Commissioner met with Deputy Speaker Pavel Husovský, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs Peter Weiss, and the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and Minorities, László Nagy.

Discussions in these meetings focused on future cooperation between the High

Commissioner and the Slovak authorities, and specifically on issues connected with draft Minority Language legislation and amendments to the State Language Law. It was agreed that further expert consultations would be held soon on these matters. The High Commissioner also launched an initiative for a seminar on the Oslo and Hague Recommendations to be organized in Slovakia in 1999.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

On 16 to 18 December the High Commissioner paid a visit to former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The visit followed his statement of 6 November 1998

in which he formulated a number of recommendations on various inter-ethnic issues in the country, with a special emphasis on Albanian language higher education. The purpose of the visit was to become acquainted with the policy aims of the new Macedonian Government, particularly in the sphere of inter-ethnic relations.

During his visit the High Commissioner was received by President of the Republic Kiro Gligorov. In addition, he had talks with Prime Minister Ljubco Georgievski, Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksandar Dimitrov, and Speaker of the Parliament Savo Klimovski and met with the leaders of the main political parties: Branko Crvenkovski and Blagoj

Handziski of SDSM, Arben Xhaferi of DPA, and Abdurahman Aliti and Ismet Ramadani of PDP.

The High Commissioner discussed with his interlocutors possible ways of implementing his recommendations. He pointed out that compromise solutions to particular inter-ethnic problems would significantly contribute to the strengthening of the country's stability. Representatives of the Macedonian authorities and of the different political parties showed their understanding for the need to solve inter-ethnic issues and said they were ready for further cooperation with the High Commissioner in this area.

REPORT of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

The Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media is located at Kärtner Ring 5-7, A-1010 Vienna, Austria, tel.: (+43-1) 512 21 45-0, fax: (+43-1) 512 21 45-9, e-mail: pm-fom@osce.org

Duve at the OSCE 7th Ministerial Council Meeting

Freimut Duve, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, attended the seventh meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council held on 2 and 3 December in Oslo, where he met with a number of foreign ministers.

In talks with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk, Mr. Duve suggested that the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media can work closely with the Ukrainian Government in the future, especially on reforming the current practice of demanding exorbitantly high compensation in libel cases brought against newspapers.

The Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan Mr. Tokaev briefed Mr. Duve about a new media law which was being prepared in Kazakhstan. He said that the new law would be much more liberal than the present one, adopted in 1991. He suggested that the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Kazakhstan authorities could work together on improving the legal framework in the area of the media.

During a meeting with Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer of Germany, which has the Presidency of the European Union (EU) during the first half of 1999, Mr. Duve said that the EU member States' common policy regarding human rights and freedom of the media had significantly facilitated his work during his

first year as OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

During the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting, Mr. Duve held a press conference where he once again drew the attention of the public to the dire situation regarding freedom of the media in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). He stressed that the attitude of the Belgrade authorities towards media was offensive to the OSCE, an organization which the FRY Government has strived to re-join as a full member. He underlined that open public debate, a basic essential for a democratic society, was impossible without freedom of the media. This was especially imperative in the case of the Kosovo conflict. One can hardly envisage a peaceful solution

to this conflict without an open and pluralistic debate, noted Duve.

Conference on Media for a Democratic Europe held in Belgrade

On 4 and 5 December, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media visited Belgrade where he took part in a Conference on Media for a Democratic Europe organized by the Association of Independent Electronic Media (ANEM) and sponsored by the Council of Europe. Speaking at the Conference, he restated his recommendations on how freedom of the media should be encouraged in the FRY and stressed the need to ensure unimpeded access to conflict areas for all journalists, foreign and local. One of the proposals to which he drew particular attention was for the establishment of an independent newspaper distribution network in FRY.

Concern for Freedom of Expression in Ukraine

On 16 December, in a letter to Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk, Mr.

Duve expressed concern about the annulment of the registration of the opposition newspaper Polityka. He underlined the obligation of all OSCE member States to promote conditions for free, independent and pluralistic media. He stressed that he had certain concerns regarding the Ukrainian Government's commitment towards freedom of expression.

Censorship by Killing

On 23 December, the OSCE Representative issued a statement where he pointed out that in 1998 fifty journalists were killed around the world, according to the International Press Institute/ International Federation of Journalists (IPI/ IFJ). Nine of those journalists had lived in countries that were members of the OSCE and one person lived and worked in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a suspended member of the OSCE.

Among them were Afrim Maliqi, a reporter for the Kosovo newspaper *Bujki*, killed in an ambush on 2 December in Priština; Larissa Yudina, a Russian reporter working for an opposition news-

paper in the autonomous republic of Kalmykia, found dead in a pond on 11 June; Meirkhaim Gavriellov, a respected journalist and editor in Tajikistan, beaten and strangled at his home on 8 June. Seven more reporters were killed in Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Canada.

Mr. Duve stressed that all these individuals who lost their lives defending one of the most basic human rights, freedom of expression, had been investigating corruption, criticising extremists, and covering war stories – doing what journalists do all over the world. They suffered the ultimate act of censorship – censorship by killing.

Mr. Duve joined the IPI/ IFJ in demanding from those governments whose citizens have lost their lives defending freedom, that more must be done to protect journalists. He said that censorship by killing has no place in any society.

UPDATE from the ODIHR

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Memoranda of Understanding with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) were signed between the OSCE and the Governments of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan on 2 December, on the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Oslo. The MOUs were signed by Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokaev for Kazakhstan, Foreign Minister Muradbek Imanaliev for Kyrgyzstan, and the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Polish Foreign Minister Bronisław Gerek. The agreements include a number of projects to be organized by the ODIHR in the two countries during 1999. These include projects to assist both countries to bring their electoral systems into line with international standards and make legislative reforms, as well as projects to encourage the development of civil society and provide training for local workshops on 'women in politics'. In Kyrgyzstan, projects are

also planned to provide assistance to the Commission on Human Rights, to provide election assistance focusing on training domestic election observers, and to facilitate the registration of permanent residents in the country. In Kazakhstan projects are planned to provide voter education through the electronic media, and assistance to establish an Ombudsman's office. A full ODIHR action plan for 1999 will be posted on the ODIHR website in January.



Kazakhstan

In early December the ODIHR established an assessment mission in Kazakhstan to assess and report on the 10 January Presidential Election. The mission, which includes 15 experts, is based in Almaty and headed by Ms. Judy Thompson (Canada).

In press releases dated 3 and 15 December, the ODIHR expressed concerns and serious doubts that the principles for democratic elections would be met by 10 January. Of particular concern is the refusal to register two candidates because of minor administrative convictions, raising serious doubts whether a fairly contested election is possible. Other concerns included the unequal access of parties to the media, and reports of intimidation of voters to force their support for the incumbent President.

The ODIHR stated that Kazakhstan, which had so far been one of the leaders in democratic reforms in Central Asia, could severely damage its reputation as a country committed to democratisation and ought to postpone the election to allow for adequate preparations to ensure a democratic election. The ODIHR was not prepared to launch a full election observation mission in the country, but instead established the more limited Assessment Mission headed by Ms. Thompson.

The ODIHR consulted closely with representatives of the Government of Kazakhstan to ensure that they are aware of its concerns. The Assessment Mission continues to enjoy good cooperation with the authorities in the fulfilment of its monitoring duties.

Kosovo

An ODIHR representative visited Kosovo from 9 to 16 December to help with the development of a human rights structure for the KVM, and in particular to help



Signing of MOUs with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

design and put into place the organizational and substantive basis for human rights verification.

The ODIHR was involved in the formulation of induction and continuation training in human rights issues, in close co-operation with the KVM and United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR). The induction training for all KVM staff includes four hours of intensive human rights training, in keeping with the OSCE concept of the human dimension as a central element of security. The ODIHR has proposed plans for continuation training to include one-day training modules focused on specific topics of practical concern, such as fact-finding, monitoring and international human rights standards. Such training would be conducted in co-operation with other international organizations and institutions, such as the UNHCHR, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, International Committee for the Red Cross and the Council of Europe.

The ODIHR has also begun work with the KVM on preparations for eventual elections in Kosovo. An ODIHR elections adviser began preliminary work on the creation of a credible voters' register, which will be essential to the holding of elections. Two ODIHR experts have been attached to the KVM to assist with elections and other human rights issues.

Technical Assistance

Civic/voter registry in Albania

An ODIHR election adviser visited Tirana and Vlora, Albania, from 14 to 21 December to assess the progress of the ODIHR voter/civic registration project. The ODIHR is producing a new civic/voter register in six pilot locations

and, although the project has encountered delays, the computers and database should be ready for hand over to the Albanian authorities in Spring 1999. A presentation about the project was also made at a meeting on 18 and 19 December on the Albanian population census, to be funded in part by the European Commission.

The ODIHR representative attended a round-table meeting organized by the Albanian Ministry of Local Government, to assess the referendum on the Constitution which took place on 22 November. The meeting, which was also attended by representatives of the OSCE Presence in Albania and other international and Albanian organizations involved with the referendum, highlighted the main areas in which the election process should be improved in the future. The ODIHR's final report on a number of recommendations for the Albanian authorities will be available in January 1999.

Roundtables on Draft Ombudsman Law for Albania

As a follow-up to work with the Albanian Ministry of Legislative Reform on the Law on the Ombudsman/People's Advocate earlier this year, the ODIHR and OSCE Presence in Albania organized two roundtables on the draft law during December. The project is funded by a voluntary contribution from the Government of Switzerland and was organized in conjunction with the Albanian Ministry for Legislative Reform.

At the first meeting, for Members of Parliament, it was recommended that several provisions of the law be redrafted and the revised law submitted to Parliament in due course. At the second meeting, attended by representatives of

numerous NGOs, interest was expressed in close co-operation with the people's advocate, once s/he is elected. The international community signalled its willingness to fully support the new institution.

Civil Society Assistance Programme in Kyrgyzstan

On 3 December the fifth in a series of NGO-Government consultations took place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The topic was "Women in Kyrgyzstan on the eve of the 21st Century", and the meeting was organized jointly by the OSCE/ODIHR, UNDP and the Presidential Administration of Kyrgyzstan. Representatives of more than 20 NGOs attended the meeting, together with representatives of the Presidential Administration, the Constitutional Court, Parliament, and a number of international organizations and embassies. Three working groups were set up during the meeting to discuss the political, legal and economic rights of women. The participants concluded that the Government and NGOs of Kyrgyzstan should actively work together in pursuing international best practices, and should seek to organize preparatory meetings before the New York Conference on gender issues in 2000.

Roma and Sinti

The ODIHR will be appointing a new Adviser on Roma and Sinti, pursuant to a decision taken by the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting on 3 December 1998 which decided to enhance the OSCE's capabilities regarding Roma and Sinti issues by strengthening the existing ODIHR Contact Point. Priorities will be co-operating and enhancing interaction with all parties involved in Roma and Sinti issues, in particular the Council of Europe, OSCE participating States, NGOs and other international

institutions. The aim is to develop synergies and common approaches designed to facilitate full integration of Roma and Sinti communities into the societies they live in, while preserving their identity.

Other priorities will be the development of a programme of seminars and workshops on Roma and Sinti issues, as well as the collection and dissemination of information on legislative and other measures relating to the situation of Roma and Sinti.

New ODIHR Website

The ODIHR is proud to announce the launch of its new Website:

<http://www.osce.odihhr.org>

and would like to thank the OSCE Prague Office for all its hard work and assistance.



Publications in 1998

ODIHR semi-annual reports were published in June and December 1998, giving a detailed account of the projects and other activities of the ODIHR. Both reports are available in Russian and in English and are also accessible on the ODIHR Website.

The following reports were also published for the 1998 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting:

- Ombudsman and Human Rights Protection Institutions in OSCE Participating States;
- Freedom of Movement: a) The Issue of Internal Registration (Propiska) and b) The CIS Migration Conference;
- Women and Democratization;
- Public Policies Concerning Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Region;
- Freedom of Association: The Question of NGO Registration;
- Combating Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment: the Role of the OSCE;
- Restrictions on Political Parties in the Election Process.

A former ODIHR Rule of Law Adviser, Frederick Quinn, gives a personal account of his OSCE experiences during the period 1993-95 in the newly democratic OSCE States, in his book *Democracy at Dawn: Notes from Poland and Points East*, Texas A&M University, 1998.

REPORT from the Parliamentary Assembly

The Secretariat of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is located at Rådhusstræde 1, DK-1455 Copenhagen K, Denmark, tel.: (+45-33) 32 94 00, fax: (+45-33) 32 55 05, e-mail: oscepa@centrum.dk

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly holds Bureau Meeting

On 1 December, the Bureau of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly – composed of the Assembly's President, the Vice-Presidents, the Treasurer and the President Emeritus – held a meeting in Oslo. At that meeting, chaired by OSCE President, Ms. Helle Degn, MP, of Denmark, the members of the Bureau reviewed the activities of the Assembly, including seminars, conferences and election monitoring missions, and discussed the theme of the upcoming Eighth Annual Session which is to be held in St.Petersburg from 6 to 10 July 1999. The Bureau also heard an assessment of OSCE activities in 1998 by Ambassador Jerzy Nowak, representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Polish Foreign Minister Mr. Bronislaw Geremek. Ambassador Kim Traavik, representative of Norwegian Foreign Minister Mr. Knut Vollebæk, gave a report on the priorities of the upcoming Norwegian Chairmanship.

Assembly Participates in OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting

On 2 and 3 December, Ms. Helle Degn, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, represented the PA at the Eighth Ministerial Council Meeting of the OSCE in Oslo. She delivered a speech on behalf of the Assembly during the first plenary session and held meetings with numerous officials. In her presentation, she spoke about the importance of trans-Atlantic cooperation, principally through summits of the "triple



OSCE PA President Ms. Helle Degn addresses the OSCE Ministerial Council.

crown" (OSCE, NATO, EU), in establishing democracy, market economy and unchallenged security within the OSCE area.

Ms. Degn also addressed the issue of decision-making. She urged reforms in the OSCE decision-making process, promoting the adoption of the "approximate consensus", a formula where the adoption of decisions would be subject to their acceptance by ninety per cent of both membership and financial contributions. Since its 1994 Annual Session in Vienna, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has repeatedly called for a change in the unanimous consensus requirement and has advocated "approximate consensus" – or at least a wider use of the "consensus less two" – for decisions related to budget or personnel.

President Degn also reiterated the Parliamentary Assembly's willingness to play its part as and when it will be possible to hold free and fair elections in Kosovo. Until that time, the OSCE PA is ready to send to Kosovo short term "Democracy Teams" of parliamentarians to undertake assignments from the Head of the OSCE mission. Finally, President Degn drew attention to the gender issue inside the OSCE and asked the Ministers gathered in Oslo to reflect and take action on the various recommendations, including those made at a meeting of women parliamentarians during the OSCE PA 1997 Copenhagen Annual Session, which called upon the OSCE to ensure full participation of women in the activities of the organization.

Several delegates welcomed the statement of Ms. Degn, including British Minister of State Mr. Tony Lloyd who saluted the work of the Parliamentary Assembly saying "They keep the Organization on its toes and they are invaluable in keeping the Organization in the public eye."

President Degn to Visit OSCE Field Offices

The first months of 1999 will be dominated by a series of extensive visits of President Degn to ten countries where she will observe in the field the core areas of the work of OSCE Missions. From 11 to 13 January 1999 Ms. Degn will pay a three-day visit to the Republic of Croatia. Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan

– is on the program from 12 to 20 February after which she will travel to Moldova and Ukraine from 22 to 25 February. From 30 May to 4 June President Degn will observe the work of the OSCE Missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Preparations for Eighth Annual Session in St. Petersburg

From 7 to 13 December 1998, Deputy Secretary General Vitaly Evseyev of the

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and General Services Officer Kurt Andersen of the Assembly's International Secretariat travelled to St. Petersburg. They examined the facilities at the historical Tavrishesky Palace, the venue of the Eighth Annual Session of the OSCE PA that will be held from 6 to 10 July 1999. Work is also being done on the agenda of the Session, which will include a meeting of the Assembly's Standing Committee, a series of meetings of the PA's three General Committees, a meeting of Women Parliamentarians and the

presentation of the 1999 OSCE Prize for Journalism and Democracy. The delegates will also have the opportunity to address questions to the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Mr. Knut Vollebæk.



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