



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

ENGLISH only

Speaking Notes for the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
Vienna, 19/20 February 2004

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today I am speaking to you on behalf of an Office that has been without a Representative on Freedom of the Media for almost two months. This Office continues to function in a low-key manner: we monitor, we identify cases of non-compliance with participating States' commitments to freedom of expression and freedom of the media, but we cannot enter into a public debate as we are advised that this would be in the way of finding a consensus on a new Representative. I therefore turn to you, the legislators, to help the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media to return to the full implementation of its mandate, and appeal to you to urge your governments to come to a solution.

This institution is a unique one, unprecedented in the history of international organisations. The idea of a watchdog established by those who are being watched came out of this Parliamentary Assembly. Now it is in danger of being keyed down by a bureaucratic process. My colleagues and I urge you to support the continuation of this Office and the election of a new Representative.

I will now give you a short overview of our long-term projects that we will work on in 2004:

Media in Multi-lingual Societies

This pilot-project in 2002/2003 pointed out the constructive role media could and should play in combating discrimination, promoting tolerance and building a stable peace in multi-lingual societies. The project showed how the media can help overcome prejudices and intolerance against citizens as members of minorities. It focused on the media in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Luxembourg, Moldova, Serbia and Montenegro and Switzerland. Country reports were presented at a concluding conference in Switzerland in March 2003. A publication was issued later in the year in several languages: English, Albanian, Hungarian, Romani and Serbian. We will continue to develop the project this year.

Freedom of the Media and the Internet

The project "Freedom of the Media and the Internet" included a workshop in Vienna in November 2002 and the booklet *From Quill to Cursor* with working papers from this meeting, as well as a two-day conference in Amsterdam in June 2003. The Representative issued the "Amsterdam Recommendations on Freedom of the Media and the Internet" at the conference. Contributions from participants were combined in the book *Spreading the Word on the Internet. 16 Answers to 4 Questions* that was presented by the Representative to the Permanent Council on 23 October 2003.

The Office intends to continue this project with a round table for OSCE delegations in Vienna and a follow-up Strategy Conference with experts in Amsterdam, both in the first half of 2004. The strategies and solutions will be published in a fact sheet, pointing out best practices and provided to all participating States.

Libel Legislation in OSCE Participating States

Another key area we focused on in 2003 was criminal libel legislation and so-called insult laws in the OSCE region. To discuss what steps can be taken to try to deal with this problem, a meeting on 24-25 November 2003 in Paris issued recommendations. The Office will continue following this matter in 2004 and plans to solicit funds to develop a matrix on libel in the OSCE participating States. A publication on this subject is also being prepared.

Freedom of the Media and National Security: What Comes First?

The purpose of this project is to analyze how the war on terror in the aftermath of 11 September has influenced media coverage of national security matters. We will focus on cases in the US and Western Europe as well as in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. How should a modern democracy balance the right to freedom of expression with certain legitimate national security concerns? We plan to discuss this at a meeting with journalists, editors and media experts from OSCE participating States.

Legal Reviews

The Office has been working closely with several OSCE field presences on reviewing existing as well as draft legislation related to media. Specific projects have been undertaken together with the OSCE missions in Croatia, Armenia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Moldova. We will continue providing legal reviews in 2004.

Central Asia

Five Central Asian Media Conferences have been held in the region. Last year we met in Bishkek. In 2004 we plan to hold our annual conference in Tajikistan. The theme for this conference is being discussed and input from delegations is, of course, very much welcome.

We are also distributing to you a list of recent cases of harassment of media in the OSCE region. This is by far not an exhaustive list, and it shows all of us that media continue to face different forms of harassment from both governments and big business in the OSCE region.

Thank you.