



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
The Representative on Freedom of the Media
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Statement to the Permanent Council
Review of current issues

Vienna, 11 February 1999

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to draw your attention to a number of issues concerning freedom of the media in Croatia. At the meeting the OSCE Heads of Institutions had on 9 February with the Croatian Government led by Prime Minister Zlatko Matesa, I once again stressed the need for the authorities to re-consider the Law on Croatian Radio and Television (HRT). This Law as amended last year did not take into consideration some of the suggestions made by the Council of Europe and the OSCE Mission. The recommendations made by the international community should be taken on board by the government.

I am also concerned with the re-broadcasting of HRT into Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are two aspects to this problem: political and commercial. HRT through its broadcasts that one can hardly describe as unbiased is trying to influence the political landscape of a neighbouring sovereign state - a situation unheard of in international relations. In Bosnia and Herzegovina HRT favours one specific political party putting at a disadvantage all the other political players.

On the commercial side, HRT is re-broadcasting three channels in Bosnia and Herzegovina this way monopolising three frequencies and using transmission sites that do not belong to it. The re-broadcasting is done by a front company, Erotel, that is controlled by the Croatian authorities. As a result, television programmes and movies purchased for broadcasting in Croatia are also being shown in a neighbouring state.

In December 1998, the Independent Media Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina ruled that HRT's activities must be put on a proper legal footing. Until that is done re-broadcasting in Bosnia and Herzegovina must cease. In my view the best way to 'enfranchise' the Croat people in Bosnia and Herzegovina is through the establishment of Federation TV and this is being hindered by the existence of an illegal HRT network in the country.

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Two more issues concern me: the current number of defamation suits against journalists in Croatia is higher than in many other OSCE member-states and I made this point at the meeting with the Croatian Prime Minister. Many of the defamation suits are filed by government and ruling party officials. This puts the independent media into a very difficult situation. For example, a reporter writing about alleged war crimes committed in Croatia during the war runs the risk of being fined under the current laws while the person or persons he is writing about walk free with no investigations initiated into their wartime activities.

I have also noted my concern at the surveillance of journalists, recently acknowledged by the Minister of Interior. This is a problem in many other countries and I was pleased to hear that the Prime Minister does not condone this practice.

I have spoken on a number of occasions regarding the Croatian newspaper distribution network and its unwillingness for months to pay the newspapers their money. Exploitation

of the virtual monopoly enjoyed in the market by one company, TISAK, has placed tremendous pressures on independent publishers. I hope that this crisis will be overcome soon.

In our meeting with the Croatian Government, Prime Minister Matesa appealed to my office to help his country in developing freedom of the media and has stressed that his government is willing to fully co-operate with my Office. This is a positive sign. I hope that together we will be able to address effectively the issues that I have raised here today.