



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Kosovo Media, Current Issues

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 6, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We would like to take this opportunity to return to an issue raised at the last meeting of this august body. I am referring, of course, to the issue of the role of the media in Kosovo during the disturbances in March. Now that the Temporary Media Commissioner has issued a report, we think it is both timely and appropriate to reflect on this issue.

To begin, let us recall that, in the OSCE, "media development" is a responsibility we place in the hands of our field missions. We have not so far equipped the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media to do this kind of work. His small staff lacks the resources to render assistance in the practical matters such as developing a media law, creating a proper and appropriate regulatory framework, and running training programs -- that our field missions face. His report is itself an example of his Office's shortcomings in this regard, for it required the hiring of an outside consultant to prepare it.

Let us recall as well that in the year 2000, in order to respond to just the kind of media problems we saw in March, the Special Representative of the Secretary General issued a regulation establishing the Temporary Media Commissioner in Kosovo under the auspices of OMIK. This regulation granted the TMC the power to censure, fine, and even close media outlets in cases where the media had acted irresponsibly, including attempts to incite ethnically-based violence. It thus gave the TMC the legal authority to deal with criminally irresponsible media behavior in that province.

Similarly, although OMIK no longer has a separate Department of Media Affairs, which is what we presume Mr. Haraszti's report was referring to when it called for the re-establishment of a "Media Development Section," there nevertheless remain a number of mission members engaged in supporting the independent media.

The Temporary Media Commissioner's report on the role of the media in Kosovo quite properly focuses on Kosovo's main broadcast media. They were, after all, the prime culprits. The Temporary Media Commissioner's report also makes specific recommendations for each of those broadcasters, which should be considered in the future.

Quite properly, too, Mr. Gillette directs most of his recommendations at the public broadcaster, RTK, in whose founding OMIK was instrumental. The United States believes this part of his

report is particularly useful and valuable in helping solidify a balanced environment for both public and private media outlets in Kosovo.

Mr. Chairman, on the same day that Mr. Haraszti released his report, the International Crisis Group also released a report. Titled "Collapse in Kosovo," it made a single, sensible recommendation on the media, that was directed at "Kosovo Albanian institutions..." that recommendation said this: "Accept that media coverage of the violence was indefensibly one-sided and inflammatory, and cooperate with the Temporary Media Commissioner and the OSCE in finding a way forward, including by reforming the management and board of the public broadcaster, RTK, and by seeking sustained technical assistance from experienced European broadcast professionals."

Mr. Chairman, the United States supports OMIK's efforts to improve media standards in Kosovo, including the TMC's use of appropriate sanctions and penalties to respond to the behavior of the broadcast media during the March violence. We will continue to work with our partners and with interested parties to improve Kosovo's broadcast media.

Thank you.