



## HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
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# Testimony :: Emma Gray

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Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

"Deterioration of Freedom of Media in OSCE Countries"

Testimony of:

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I am Emma Gray, the Europe program coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists, a New York-based, nonpartisan and nonprofit organization that monitors press freedom conditions around the world. CPJ is the only such organization in the United States with a fulltime, professional staff that documents hundreds of attacks each year on journalists and news organizations, and takes action on their behalf. The attacks verified by CPJ are corroborated by more than one source for accuracy, confirmation that the victims were journalists or news organizations, and verification that intimidation was the probable motive for the attack.

The statistics compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists and recorded in our annual survey, *Attacks on the Press*, make chilling reading. In the course of the past ten years, we have documented a total of 153 journalists killed in the line of duty in OSCE countries. That is just over a third of the total of 458 journalists killed, and is a figure we see reflected again in the latest statistics we have: in 1999 almost a third of the 34 journalists killed died in OSCE countries.

The number of journalists killed is the most dramatic barometer of press freedom. Less headline-grabbing forms of attack which the CPJ records are: legal action, including fines and imprisonment; threats or physical attacks on journalists or news facilities; censorship; and

harassment, which includes denying journalists access to information, denying them visas to travel for their work, or confiscating or damaging their materials. We also document cases of journalists missing, kidnapped, or expelled from a country.

The Europe program at CPJ includes many, but not all, of the OSCE countries (a notable exception is Turkey, which is covered by our Middle East desk). The focus of my work is on the emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, and the republics of the former Soviet Union. As these nations emerge from totalitarianism, and from decades of the state's monopoly control of the media, local journalists face specific problems relating to the transition to market economies, and to private ownership of the media.

I would like to look at four key areas of those regions of Europe and the former Soviet Union which impact on journalists' ability to work. These are: the general economic situation, ownership of the media, the rise of conflict, and government repression.

In the post-Soviet era, many countries have found themselves struggling as they move from state-controlled to market economies. A common trend is the rise of an extremely small, extremely wealthy elite, co-existing with a vast impoverished mass. Such economic circumstances affect journalists in the most fundamental ways. Where can they get paper on which to publish their news? How are bills and office rent and salaries to be paid? Another important feature is organized crime and corruption, which often flourish in conditions of economic turbulence. Journalists who investigate such stories can and are silenced by threats or even murder.

Secondly, the vital issue of ownership. Those who control the media in many post-Soviet countries can wield enormous political and economic power. Many analysts point to the crucial role played by television in the Russian parliamentary and presidential elections of the past decade. The repercussions of media privatization and control are important factors in political life, particularly in countries where democracy is fragile.

Third, the rise of conflict. In many cases the increases in the number of killings and attacks on journalists are attributable to war. The number of OSCE countries continues to grow as member nations spilt into smaller and smaller units, usually as a consequence of armed conflict. Journalists often fall victim in those conflicts; in the early to mid-1990s, our statistics showed dramatic increases in the numbers of journalists killed because of wars in Tajikistan and the Balkans. Last year, all but one of the journalists who were killed in Europe died in conflict situations, in the wars in Chechnya and Yugoslavia. There were also a number of disappearances connected to the conflict in Chechnya, in which Russian and foreign journalists were among those kidnapped for ransom.

Finally, government repression, which of course takes many forms. One of the most virulent examples is Yugoslavia, where government officials have made indirect threats on the lives of some independent journalists. Police harassment and seizure of broadcast equipment are regular occurrences, and over the past three months independent media have been subject to an unprecedented barrage of economic, quasi-legal and administrative sanctions.

Since the adoption of a draconian information law in October 1998, through the end of February this year, the Serb media have been fined 47 times, often in huge sums, totaling 24,424,000 dinars (\$2.1 million). President Slobodan Milosevic is slowly strangling the remaining independent print and broadcast media in Yugoslavia, and the outlook is grim. Independent Serb journalists are frightened, and believe their only hope for survival lies with the West.

In Yugoslavia, as elsewhere in the OSCE region, we see more cases of governments using tax laws, state control of the printing presses, control of newsprint and other bureaucratic techniques to muzzle the media. We are concerned about Russian President Vladimir Putin's record so far on press freedom, and will be watching Russia closely in the months ahead. With the kinds of tactics governments use, it's often harder to prove that what the authorities are doing is retaliating against independent journalism. But with careful research we can make the links, and we have done so in dozens of cases that are documented in our records.

CPJ did see significant improvement in one important press freedom measure this last year. Our book documents 87 journalists' cases who were held in prison at the end of 1999 and that is down from 118 a year earlier. Turkey tied with China as the leading jailers of journalists, with 18 incarcerations each; the number in Turkey was down from 27 the previous year.

Turkish human rights activists caution that the laws under which many journalists have been put in prison remain unchanged. Uzbekistan, another repeat offender, had three journalists in prison last year, and Yugoslavia had one, who was released last month.

CPJ believes that the number of journalists held in prison at the end of 1999 went down because some leaders no longer want to pay the diplomatic and political price of holding their journalists in jail. Local journalists in countries like Kazakhstan tell us their leaders are much more sensitive to their international standing than they might appear. Governments have to weigh their desire to impose a climate of fear on dissenting voices against the negative publicity

of an international outcry which may ensue if they are caught treating journalists badly.

So we do believe that one of the most effective methods of improving the conditions in which journalists work in OSCE countries is to shine a very public light on attacks on the press. Two of the CPJ's Enemies of the Press, a list we compile each year of the 10 worst offenders around the world, came from the OSCE region last year - they are President Milosevic of Yugoslavia, and President Leonid Kuchma of Ukraine. President Kuchma replaced the Belarus leader, Aleksander Lukashenko - not because we believe Lukashenko has improved his record (and arrests of around 500 protestors, including 35 journalists at a peaceful rally in Minsk on March 25 is testimony to his continued iron fist tactics) - but because we wish to draw attention to Ukraine's deteriorating record.

CPJ's efforts to document attacks on journalists in the OSCE region, and our protests to leaders who fail to uphold the standards of press freedom are welcomed by the media in the countries in which we work. On their behalf, we continue to draw attention to their plight.