



## HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

# Testimony :: Statement of Hon. Steny H. Hoyer

Ranking Member - Helsinki Commission

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

"The Deteriorating Freedom of Media and Speech in OSCE Countries"

Statement of Rep. Steny H. Hoyer

April 4, 2000

The international Press Institute reports that 87 journalists or media workers were killed or murdered in 1999 and violations were committed against the media in 165 countries.

The largest number of journalists and media workers were killed in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, where 25 journalists and media workers were killed. 16 of these media workers were killed in the NATO bombing of the Radio Television Serbia building in Belgrade in April.

The situation has deteriorated to the point that last Fall Santiago Canon, OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, Abid Hussain, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, and Freimut Duve, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media whom we shall hear in a few moments, felt compelled to jointly call for specialized international mechanisms which promote free expression to be further strengthened, underlining the central role freedom of expression has in democratic development, noting that the free flow of information and ideas faces new and old threats from both public and private actors. They also called for the elimination of all criminal defamation laws, often a hangover from the Soviet Era in the OSCE.

And the abuse of charges brought against journalists in some post-communist countries under laws that prohibit the release of "state secrets"--but what constitutes a "state secret" seems to be a rather elastic concept--must be brought to an end.

The OSCE must step up and face this situation. We must use the tools at our disposal to join Mr. Duve in trying to protect and even advance the Freedom of Media, of Speech--what we

Americans tend to take for granted as the First Amendment.

As Vice President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I intend to work vigorously to remind our fellow Parliamentarians of the importance of this matter.

And to look for ways to improve the ability of the Representative on Freedom of the Media to do his or her work.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses.