

Address given by Freimut Duve (Copenhagen, 18 December 1997)

Caption: On 18 December 1997, Freimut Duve delivers an address to the Ministerial Council of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) before taking up the post of OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on 1 January 1998.

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Address given by Freimut Duve, Representative on Freedom of the Media, delivered in Copenhagen on 18 December 1997

[Opening salutation]

Freedom and responsibility - these are for me the two guiding concepts underlying this new office. Responsibility and freedom have always been the twin pillars of the Helsinki process, without which the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain might still be in existence.

I thank you all for entrusting me with this mandate.

This is a mandate borne by all the participating States of the OSCE. Here we have a reaffirmation of the fact that the OSCE regards itself as a family of democracies that, today more than ever, nearly a decade after the end of communism, takes seriously the commitment to democracy inherent in the Helsinki process.

For me personally this is an emotional moment. And I cannot help but remember some of the distinguished persons whom I have had the honour to know personally:

Willy Brandt and his partners in the East and West, without whose Ostpolitik the CSCE process would not have come about;

Mario Soares, the first President of the Portuguese democracy after years spent in exile;

Vaclav Havel, the first President of the Czech Republic after years of imprisonment.

I learned a great deal from the last two of these men - Mario Soares and Vaclav Havel - and as a producer of books I published their writings on freedom in Germany at a time when Soares was still in exile and Havel still behind bars.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the help of all of you I should like, in a small way, to contribute to ensuring that whoever today or at any time in the future wishes to assume responsibility for liberal democracy in his country will be able to commit to writing and publish his thoughts in his own land, and that no one will be forced into exile or into prison for so doing.

I should also like to thank High Commissioner Max van der Stoep. His successful work has set an example for me.

To the outgoing Chairman, Danish Foreign Minister Niels Helveg Petersen, I wish to express my deep gratitude for the enormous work that he and his colleagues, in close co-operation with the Vienna OSCE Missions, have carried out for the establishment of this office. All of these persons deserve not only my thanks but those of the many political commentators and journalists who are working for the cause of freedom of speech.

Finally I should like to thank Foreign Minister Kinkel and his staff, who have toiled with such devotion and commitment for the establishment of this office.

I look forward with confidence to good co-operation with the new Chairman-in-Office, my friend of many years, Bronislaw Geremek, as well as with Ambassador Stoudmann in Warsaw, the Secretariat in Vienna, and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, which with the assumption of my office I am leaving as a member but with which as Media Representative I shall be working closely. The Bureau of the Assembly has always paid particular attention to the importance of the human dimension. In this connection, I am certain that the OSCE Prize for Journalism and Democracy will become increasingly important in the future.

This is not only an assignment to promote co-operation but, at the same time, an assignment to develop an awareness of the long and painful history of freedom of speech in all our States.

The fact that the OSCE numbers Canada and the United States among its most committed members is a historical stroke of luck for this Organization, for without the splendid traditions of freedom represented by these two great American nations the situation in Europe would look quite different as this century draws to a close.

In my own country, Germany, this century has seen free speech radically suppressed by two dictatorships. Your willingness today, two years before the end of this century, to entrust a German with this office fills me with profound gratitude and modest pride.