

Introductory Remarks

Looking back at the year of 1997, the human rights situation over the world is all but encouraging. Death penalty, torture, persecutions, oppression of minority groups, extra-judicial executions, censorship and prohibition of demonstrations are just some of the violations of human rights, which are still taking place in all regions of the world. The situation is especially worrying in conflict and post-conflict areas, such as the countries of the former Yugoslavia, where the Swedish Helsinki Committee, SHC has intensified its activities. Improvements have taken place in some parts of the region, such as parts of Republika Srpska in Bosnia-Herzegovina, whereas the situation has worsened in other parts, such as Kosovo - with tragic consequences for the people.

In order to fight violations of human rights the Swedish Helsinki Committee has co-operated with people working to improve the human rights situation in their countries, through project support. The SHC has focused on democracy building projects, including human rights organisations, independent media and some cultural institutions. Thanks to this project support, SHC has become an important factor in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The funds for this support have been provided by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency, Sida.

During 1997 the Swedish Helsinki Committee has also been involved in training programs in democratic practice, building of civil society and human rights. A seminar for young political leaders from Bosnia-Herzegovina has been organised within the framework of the Democratic Leadership Programme of the Council of Europe. At another seminar, young journalists from the countries of the former Yugoslavia were invited to Stockholm for a training course. Together with other Swedish NGOs the SHC has initiated and supported a course on human rights and democracy for Bosnian refugees in Sweden. Visits for various intellectuals from different countries have been organised for meetings and information exchange with relevant Swedish experts and institutions.

The co-operation with other Swedish and international NGOs and IGOs has been extended and intensified during the year. Being part of the International Helsinki Federation, IHF, with its 34 national committees, implies a strong impact on the international scene, towards organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, OSCE and the Council of Europe.

We are grateful to all of you who have contributed to the work of the Committee and we would like to take the opportunity to thank our funders, members, board and staff. We feel that the activities of the Swedish Helsinki Committee have been important and we hope that our work has led to some improvements in the field of human rights. With stronger capacity and resources, it is our intention to intensify our work for human rights, civil society and democracy in 1998.

Projects

Since 1994 the Swedish Helsinki Committee, SHC, has worked with democracy- and human rights projects in the region of the former Yugoslavia. The funds for this support derive from Swedish development aid to this region, which is administered by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency, Sida. Since 1995, the SHC has also co-operated with a human rights institute in Latvia, in the Baltic region, through funds provided by the Swedish Foreign Ministry.

The project support of the Swedish Helsinki Committee is directed to three types of organisations; human rights-, media- and cultural organisations:

- On the basis of its mandate SHC closely co-operates with several human rights organisations in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. In spite of hard working-conditions, these organisations have succeeded to produce reports and information bulletins on human rights issues in their respective country.
- Freedom of speech is a fundamental part of a democratic society and is especially important in the region of former Yugoslavia where the main media, electronic as well as printed, are completely in the hands of the respective governments. Therefore, SHC considers it to be of utmost importance to support and co-operate with independent media organisations.

- New ideas, attitudes and feelings are many times promoted and channelled through cultural activities. SHC considers it important to co-operate with, and support, cultural organisations working against xenophobia, racism and ethnic cleansing.

The projects, which SHC have co-operated with during 1997, are shortly presented below.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

A human rights organisation within the family of Helsinki Committees. Lead by Sonja Biserko, the Serbian Helsinki Committee makes a tremendous job. The main fields of activity are: legal-aid to individuals, especially refugees, media analysis, seminars/ dialogues and publishing of human rights reports.

Radio B 92 and the radio network ANEM, Belgrade, Serbia

B92 is a professional and independent media group with various activities. Radio B92 is a very popular station broadcasting in the Belgrade area, mainly for young people. It also supplies the broader public with accurate news and information. Radio B 92 has great impact on the democratisation process, which was evident during the demonstrations in Belgrade during the winter 1996-1997, and also in the struggle against the regime in its efforts to curtail the free media through legislation and close down of TV/ radio stations. During 1997 B 92 established an independent network for radio stations, ANEM, in order to strengthen local radio stations in a legal, moral and qualitative way. SHC also co-operates with the ANEM network.

BETA, Belgrade, Serbia

A very well known and respected, independent news agency with correspondents all over former Yugoslavia as well as internationally. Along with an extensive news service in Serbocroat, BETA also has a special economic news service and a news service in English. BETA is the only media, which regularly covers the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.

Nasa Borba, Belgrade, Serbia

Nasa Borba is one of the few independent daily newspapers in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It is a high-quality paper, which has gained a strong reputation both nationally and internationally. However, financial problems during 1997, makes the future of the paper uncertain.

Newspaper Danas, Belgrade, Serbia

Danas is a new daily in Belgrade, which started in the summer of 1997. The journalists behind the paper are among the best and most professional journalists in the country. In spite of various problems, the paper has increased its circulation during the first half year of its existence and the paper is now being distributed in many parts of the country.

AIM (Alternative Information Network), Belgrade, Serbia AIM is an independent news agency working in the whole of former Yugoslavia. The journalists prepare analytical, so-called background texts, which are spread by electronic means through the headquarters in Paris and finally published for free in other media within former Yugoslavia and internationally. During 1997 the Belgrade office has started an electronic training program for young journalists. The SHC has also co-operated with the AIM office in Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Belgrade Circle, Belgrade, Serbia

Within the Belgrade Circle books and magazines are published on issues such as international law, sociology and philosophy. The Belgrade Circle is also a meeting place for independent intellectuals, which has become attractive to young academics and students.

Centre for Cultural Decontamination, Belgrade, Serbia

This cultural centre, lead by Mrs Borka Pavicevic, has produced art exhibitions as well as dance performances and theatre plays. Additionally, the Centre has functioned as a national and international meeting place for various NGOs, thus becoming a centre for persons and organisations fighting for a civic society. The ensemble is preparing for a performance in Stockholm in June 1998, in connection with the project Stockholm – Cultural Capital City 1998.

Cinema Rex, Belgrade, Serbia

This project is a forum for alternative ideas of young people, which is located in an old cinema in Belgrade. Within the building alternative exhibitions are set up, video films which are not accepted by the state TV are

shown, among others. During 1997 SHC has worked with Cinema Rex in the creation of a so called media laboratory, which will provide young people with access to internet, computers with lay-out programs and the possibility to create artistic media projects. Cinema Rex is part of the media group B 92 (see above).

Newspaper Nezavisna Svetlost, Kragujevac, Serbia

A local newspaper in the city of Kragujevac. Nezavisna Svetlost produces articles of high quality and has a circulation of around 6000 copies. The paper also works as a co-ordinator of an Independent Association for Local Press.

Magazine Monitor, Podgorica, Montenegro

One of the few independent magazines in Montenegro, which focus on political issues. The policy is to advocate ideas for, and debate on, an open society with multicultural, multiethnic and multireligious coexistence in Montenegro and in the Balkans. The magazine gained strong reputation during the war and is still respected for its high quality.

Radio Antena M, Podgorica, Montenegro This independent radio-station in Montenegro belongs to the same media group as Monitor. The station is broadcasting a mixture of news, information and music and is acknowledged for being professional and well informed. It covers the area of Podgorica and is trying to expand its broadcasting to other areas.

Magazine Graffiti, Podgorica, Montenegro

A monthly, professional magazine directed to young people. The paper is run by a group of young journalists who have been educated at the Magazine Monitor and Radio Antena M. Magazine Graffiti contains critical and sometimes satirical articles on different social topics and has become very popular among young people.

Paper Onogost Standard, Niksic, Montenegro

Once a month this local newspaper is being published in the city of Niksic in Montenegro. The paper has a circulation of around 6000 copies and there are plans to turn into a biweekly in 1998. This is, however, depending very much on the financial situation of the paper and the country as a whole.

HAS, Novi Pazar, Sandzak The bi-weekly bulletin HAS is the first independent forum for politics and culture in the Muslim region Sandzak in Serbia and Montenegro. The media climate in Sandzak is repressive and the redaction of HAS is working under tough conditions.

Magazine MM Review, Pristina, Kosovo

MM Review, which is published in Pristina, is a magazine with the aim to create an open debate on topics such as literature, philosophy and social issues. It is the only magazine of its kind in the entire Albanian speaking sphere.

KOHA, Pristina, Kosovo The media group KOHA has several activities. A new daily newspaper was established in 1997 with the name KOHA Ditore. The paper has become a success with a circulation as high as 30.000 copies. The Magazine KOHA, which was produced by the KOHA group, has ceased to be published during 1997.

Correspondents Club, Pristina, Kosovo

The club consists of independent journalists working for foreign media on a freelance basis. The network is now well established with a reputation of being an important and reliable source of information. Under the auspices of the Correspondents Club, many young journalists have been given the opportunity to develop their professionalism.

Postpessimism, Pristina, Kosovo

Postpessimism is a network of youth organisations in several countries. The Kosovo Postpessimists produce a monthly paper called Postpessimism, which is distributed in Kosovo and in Macedonia. The paper has now reached a considerable circulation and the redaction is functioning as a training centre for young journalists.

Health Magazine Shendeti, Pristina, Kosovo

A group of doctors at the hospital in Pristina is producing the Shendeti magazine, which is distributed to families all around Kosovo. The magazine contains information on health- and family issues, which among others provide possibilities for people to solve some health problems of their own.

Montenegrin Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Budva

Based in Budva in the South of Montenegro this Helsinki Committee is the only organisation in Montenegro dealing with human rights monitoring. The committee is very active, following the human rights situation and the development of democracy in the region.

Macedonia

Newspaper Dnevnik, Skopje

The paper was started in March 1996 in Skopje and is the only professional alternative to the state controlled media. The year of 1997 has been very successful for Dnevnik. The circulation, which was 7-8000 copies at the end of 1996, has during 1997 increased to 50- 60.000 copies per issue.

Radio VAT, Skopje

The radio station Radio Vat is one of few radio stations broadcasting in the Albanian language. The transmissions reach into Kosovo, which is important considering the harsh situation of media in Kosovo. The station has developed well, but future development is strongly dependent of the implementation of a new Macedonian law on electronic media.

Helsinki Committee of Macedonia, Skopje

Since 1994 the Helsinki Committee of Macedonia has monitored the human rights situation in the country. The committee has an office in Skopje to which 18 local observers are associated. The main focus of the committee is monitoring of minority rights, police behaviour and trials.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Magazine Dani, Sarajevo

An independent monthly magazine produced in Sarajevo. The staff is young, consisting of people with different nationalities. The magazine is highly esteemed for having high quality with accurate information. During 1997 the circulation has increased significantly.

Newsagency ONASA, Sarajevo

ONASA is the main independent news agency in Bosnia-Herzegovina. When ONASA started its activities in 1994 the agency was part of the media company Oslobođenje, but during 1997 the agency became totally independent. Apart from its regular news summaries, ONASA has produced specialised news services during 1997.

Media Management Training, Sarajevo

This project, undertaken in co-operation with the Open Society Foundation in Sarajevo, aims at providing management skills for leaders within media organisations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. During one year a group of leaders has been given training at weekend courses in Sarajevo.

Magazine Reporter, Banja Luka

This biweekly magazine was established in May 1997, with the help of SHC and the Open Society Foundation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Reporter immediately gained recognition for its professionalism. Considering the hard media climate, which is prevailing in Republika Srpska, the redaction of Reporter has managed well.

Student Magazine BUM, Banja Luka

This paper is produced by one of the Student Associations at the University of Banja Luka. The policy of the paper is to cover issues relevant to students and student life. The conditions for students in Republika Srpska are bad and not much has been improved since 1995.

Helsinki Committee in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo

Monitoring of human rights and information/ education on human rights are the main activities of the Helsinki Committee in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was established in 1995. The Committee regularly distributes a bulletin on the human rights situation in Bosnia and special effort is dedicated to monitoring of the situation for refugees and displaced persons.

Helsinki Committee in Republika Srpska, Bijeljina

The committee is located in Bijeljina in Republika Srpska, where the human rights situation is serious. The staff/ members are doing a tremendous job, working under very tough conditions. The work of the committee, which is focused on legal-aid and monitoring of human rights in Republika Srpska, is among others highly esteemed by international actors.

Croatia

Newspaper Novi List, Rijeka

An independent daily newspaper based in Istria, which is to 95% owned by the journalists and other employees at the paper. The paper is successful and is considered as one of the most recognised dailies in Croatia.

Paper Bumerang, Osijek

This first and only independent magazine in Eastern Slavonia was unfortunately forced to close down in early 1998. The financial situation was critical and the situation for the employees was severe due to constant physical threats, which all together diminished the possibilities to find competent and independent journalists.

Radio 101, Zagreb

A so-called independent radio station in Zagreb, which was temporarily supported by the SHC in 1997. The co-operation took place at a time when the authorities threatened to withdraw the broadcasting permit of Radio 101, in connection with the demonstrations held in Zagreb at the end of 1996.

Radio LAE, Labin

This radio station is located in Labin in Croatia. Unfortunately, the Croatian authorities withdraw the broadcasting permit of this independent radio station in 1997. The organisation behind the station has tried to create a network of independent radio stations in order to strengthen the role of such stations. However, of various reasons, it has been difficult to make a radio network working.

Magazine Erasmus Guild, Zagreb

Erasmus Guild is a politically independent "think tank" or platform for intellectuals regardless of nationality and the organisation has a wide international reputation. The SHC has mainly co-operated with Erasmus Guild in relation to the publishing of the magazine "Erasmus", focusing on different political topics.

The Publishing House Durieux, Zagreb

In Croatia, SHC has enabled the publishing house Durieux to produce books in the series "Ex Ponto". These books have been written by Bosnian authors in exile who otherwise would not have been able to be published. The books have been spread all through former Yugoslavia as well as through libraries in Sweden.

Magazine Arkzin, Zagreb

A political and cultural magazine produced by the organisation Arkzin. The magazine, which is directed to young readers, is produced on a monthly basis. The articles in Arkzin cover a broad range of political and cultural issues and attention is given to human rights issues, especially minority rights.

Croatian Helsinki Committee, Zagreb

The Helsinki Committee in Croatia is very active in monitoring the human rights situation in Croatia. The head office of the committee is located in Zagreb, from which several local monitoring stations have been established in different parts of Croatia.

Latvia

Latvian Human Rights Institute, Riga

Since 1995 the SHC has co-operated with the Latvian Human Rights Institute in Riga (associated with the University of Latvia). The co-operation has been related to the publication "Latvian Human Rights Quarterly". A board member of the SHC is a member of the Advisory Board of the institute.

Monitoring of Human Rights

Kosovo

The Swedish Section of the International Commission of Jurists, in co-operation with the SHC, has sent Swedish lawyers to Kosovo in Serbia in order to observe trials in the region. Hopefully international presence can help to decrease the number of show trials.

Alarmed by the increasing tension in Kosovo, four Swedish NGOs (including SHC) decided to increase their presence in the region. A project has been developed in which each organisation will follow the human rights situation in Kosovo for one month each during the first half of 1998. A joint report will be produced after the four missions have been undertaken.

Macedonia

In September, a fact-finding mission to Skopje, Macedonia was organised. The mission consisting of SHC staff and Lawyer Karin Åhman, University of Uppsala investigated the problematic issue of property rights for former Greek citizens, now living in Macedonia. A number of individual cases were documented, in which property rights were claimed by former Greek citizens. The SHC is investigating the possibilities to bring a few of the cases to the European Court of Human Rights.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

A joint fact-finding mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina was undertaken by the Bosnian-, French- and Swedish Helsinki Committee in May. The purpose of the mission was to monitor the human rights situation in the city of Bugojno and to present a report to the press and international organisations.

Sweden

A brief report on the situation in Sweden regarding the Human Rights, the Rule of Law and the Functioning of Democratic Institutions, has been prepared by the Human Rights Group of the SHC Board. This report will partly be included in the Annual Report of the International Helsinki Federation, IHF 1998.

Seminars

Seminar for Journalists

In co-operation with the Swedish Branch of Reporters sans Frontieres, the SHC organised a seminar for young journalists from the countries of former Yugoslavia. The seminar was held in Stockholm, April 8-20, and contained one theoretical part and one practical part. Visits to the Parliament, the Swedish Journalist Association, Swedish politicians and leading newspapers, were arranged during the theoretical part, along with lectures by different experts. The practical part consisted of a two-day individual practice at local media in different parts of Sweden.

University in Exile

This seminar was a four-weeks course on democracy and human rights for Bosnian refugees living in Sweden. "University in Exile" was organised by Demokratiakademin (the Academy of Democracy) in co-operation with Caritas, the Swedish Red Cross and the Swedish Helsinki Committee, financed by the Swedish Ministry of Interior.

Seminar for Young Political Leaders from Bosnia-Herzegovina

Within the framework of the Democratic Leadership Programme of the Council of Europe, the SHC together with Article 19 in London organised two seminars for young politicians from Bosnia-Herzegovina, in November 1997. The aim of the Democratic Leadership Programme is to strengthen the skills of young political leaders in order to enhance democratic security, in particular in those societies where extremism represents a serious threat to nascent democracy. The one-week seminars, organised for 28 participants, aimed at providing useful skills for democratic political work. The overall impression was that the seminars were very fruitful. Above all, the participants were happy to meet people from other entities and exchange experiences. The seminars were sponsored by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the Council of Europe.

Visits

During the year the Swedish Helsinki Committee has organised several visits for persons active with human rights/ democracy projects in their countries. The visits have enabled these persons to meet and exchange information and experiences with people and institutions in Sweden, active in the same field. The following persons were invited in 1997:

- Sonja Biserko, Serbian Helsinki Committee, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Srdjan Dizdarevic, Bosnian Helsinki Committee, Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- Borka Pavicevic, Centre for Cultural Decontamination, Belgrade, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
- Senad Pecanin, Magazine Dani, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina

- Veran Matic, Radio B 92, Belgrade, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
- Vesna Nikolic, Journalist, Kragujevac, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
- Boris Altschuler and Tatjana Douginova, Moscow Research Center for Human Rights, Russia

Other Activities

International Co-operation

The SHC closely co-operates with other national Helsinki Committees and with the International Helsinki Federation, IHF, based in Vienna. The Chairman of the SHC, Gerald Nagler, is a member of the Executive Committee of the International Helsinki Federation.

Co-operation with the Media Development Loan Fund, a Soros institution in Prague, was established during 1997 and will be further developed in 1998. The aim of this co-operation is to support media organisations in the region of the former Yugoslavia, through loans on favourable terms.

During 1997 we have also established a closer the countries of the former Yugoslavia is planned for 1998. Most of the projects supported in 1997 have proven to be trustworthy projects and some have even been very successful. SHC will continue to co-operate with many of these projects, but we will also start co-operation with new projects.

Another form of project co-operation will be undertaken in co-operation with the Media Development Loan Fund in Prague. This support will consist of favourable loans to media organisations in the region of the former Yugoslavia. The Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency, Sida will finance the loans on a 50-50 basis with Soros funds.

Apart from the project support SHC has plans for new seminars for young political leaders (within the framework of the Democratic Leadership Programme of the Council of Europe), as well as a follow-up to the seminar for journalists held in April 1997.

Monitoring activities will continue and if possible also be intensified. Aware of the human rights violations in Sweden, such as racism, xenophobia and racially motivated crimes, the SHC has the intention to monitor and report on the situation in Sweden. The monitoring project in Kosovo, described above, will continue and some fact-finding missions will be undertaken. Additionally, visits for people involved in human rights/ democracy projects will be organised during the year.

Acknowledgement

The Swedish Helsinki Committee would like to express our gratitude to the organisations sponsoring the activities of the Committee. Especially, we would like to thank the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida), the Swedish Institute, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Bonnier Group, the Council of Europe, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia-Herzegovina. For their engagement and trust, the Swedish Helsinki Committee would also like to thank the Board and the Members of the Committee.

Gerald Nagler
Chairman

Marie Månson
Head of Secretariat