



Geneva Centre for the
**Democratic Control of
Armed Forces (DCAF)**
CH 1211 Geneva
Tel. +41/22/741 77 00
info@dcaf.ch
www.dcaf.ch



medienhilfe

PO Box, CH 8031 Zürich
Tel: +41/(0)1/272 46 37
Fax: +41/(0)1/272 46 82
info@medienhilfe.ch
www.medienhilfe.ch



Centre for Civil-Military Relations

Centre for **Civil-Military
Relations CCMR**
www.ccmr-bg.org
office@ccmr-bg.org
tel/fax: +381-11-435 428



Media Center Belgrade
www.mediacenter.org.yu
mc.mail@mediacenter.org.yu
tel:+381-11-3343 225
fax:+381-11-3343 420

Address by the Ambassador of Switzerland, Mr. Gaudenz Ruf

Security Sector Reform and the Media

Regional Conference on defence and the freedom of information

Organized by

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Serbia & Montenegro, November 14/15, 2003

Mr Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honoured to address you on behalf of the Swiss authorities at the opening of this regional conference which has been coorganized by two Swiss organizations, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armend Forces and Medienhilfe in Zürich. I would like to thank the authorities of S-M for their interest and the Centre for Civil-Military Relations and the Media Center, Belgrade for their partnership, support and hospitality.

This "Conference on defence and the freedom of information" will deal with one of the basic problems of the democratic society, which can be described as the difficult relations between the rulers and the ruled, i.e. the governments and the citizens.

In a democracy, governments are elected by the people, or indirectly by parliament. They are supposed to act within a legal framework defining their tasks, goals, structures, competencies and - last but not least - the budget. There have to be controlling mechanisms as well that make sure that governments do act within the law, that their activity is useful and to the benefit of the community and that the money is spent correctly. To this end, there is a need of transparency. The administration should be "open" so that the citizens will understand it and are able to identify themselves with it and not perceive it as a closed and hostile caste.

The first and foremost controlling instance is, no doubt, the parliament. Also NGO may play an essential role. However, the wider public should be involved, too, but most of the citizens first need information and explanations- and here is where the media have their crucial importance.

These democratic rules and control mechanisms apply to all activities of the state, from infrastructure to social insurance, from economy to culture. Obviously, things become more complicated in the sphere of security and law and order, in the so-called power ministries of defence and police. Here the state is not only the giving part, but it might take something from the citizens, impose duties and restrict their freedom. The authorities will have to use various means to enforce the law. Moreover, full transparency might be contrary to the efficiency and even the finality of the state's activity. Not everybody is supposed to know all details of a defence strategy, of the armament, of police dispositions and criminal investigations. This would be only too convenient for potential enemies, mafia groups and criminals. So, secrecy cannot be fully excluded and there must be limits to the principle of the "open" administration.

It is extremely difficult to find the correct balance in every sector and situation. In the past years and decades, my country, Switzerland, has experienced several scandals where either the government was accused of withholding important information, unnecessary secretmongering and violations of the private sphere of the citizens - or the media of divulging state secrets and

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thus harming the nation. To develop a reasonable *modus vivendi* might be even more difficult for a country such as Serbia and Montenegro after a decade of undemocratic rule and wars and with a difficult heritage that has not yet been completely overcome.

The participants in this conference will debate the thorny question how "open" the security sector can be and where the line will have to be drawn. I do not think a solution can be found once and forever. But it will be possible to develop criteria and even more important understanding for each others positions and needs.

I wish you best success.

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