

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

(By Julie Kostroj)

Although, according to the United States Constitution, everyone in America has the right of free speech, I believe that in some ways the press abuses its right to free speech. The writers of the Constitution intended everyone to have a right to voice their opinions without being prosecuted by the law. Today, however, the press does more than just profess their views. Publicists often tell lies and proclaim them as facts. As a strong influence in the lives of every American, the media can easily sway public sentiment and ruin the reputation of celebrities.

The media has a right to report facts. It is also acceptable to broadcast opinions as long as it is made clear that what is printed or said is one's own views and not a proven fact. The press has the right to address social grievances, but publicists must be informed on the issues. It would cause much confusion in the public if a distinction was not made between truths and personal views. The population would never know what to believe, and there would be chaos. The media has crossed the line when it uses misleading propaganda or defames a celebrity. In one's own home, around close family and friends, it is acceptable to state whatever one wants. However, there is a difference between sharing your views with a group of friends and printing your opinions in a newspaper or broadcasting them on national television. Publicists should use prudence and common sense when determining what is acceptable to be read or hear by millions. The media often does not realize its great power and the trust that Americans have in the media. It is detrimental to use this power without discretion. Celebrities especially can have an injured reputation and be discriminated against by something the media declared about them.

It is very difficult for the government to prevent abuses by the press without violating a constitutional right. The government has passed laws outlawing libel, but libel is very hard to prove in court. The press can find a loophole in just about everything that they print. The First Amendment basically gives the media the right to say anything and assemble whenever it wants.

The press morally has an obligation to print the truth, but the media more often than not cares more about sales than ethics. As long as the American population continues to read these stories in the newspaper or listen to them on the news, the problem will not stop. The general public has the liberty to buy what it wants. People should not purchase newspapers and magazines in which there are articles in poor taste. The media tailors to the public. The population should not be controlled by the media. The people of this nation have a right to call for higher standards of workmanship.

Individuals have a right to privacy that the media should not invade. According to the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, every citizen has the "right to life, liberty, and property." People's individual rights are often violated by the media. Journalists are many times guilty of harassment. They cannot take "no" for an answer. Some of the most tenacious journalists will go to great lengths to get a story. Reporters will trespass on private property and harass people until they get what they want.

I do not believe that celebrities are less entitled to privacy than the general public. Every American is equal in the eyes of the law. Celebrities do not have any less rights than the common resident. However, celebrities do usually tolerate the media better than the commoner because celebrities have an image to worry about. Celebrities know

that if they are rude to the press, the media could easily destroy them.

Although the press is given freedom of speech in the Constitution, I believe that the rights of the individual precede the rights of the press. When personal rights are being violated by the media, then the government has to intervene. The American population should demand that more laws be passed to protect them from the injustices of the media. The press can be regulated by the government without violating a Constitutional right. Just as written in the Second Amendment to the Constitution, every individual has a right to bear arms. However, for the protection of the majority of people, the government has limited the kinds of arms that civilians can own, and it is illegal to carry a concealed weapon. With limits, United States citizens are still allowed to bear arms. There is no reason why the government cannot regulate the freedom of speech of the press without taking their Constitutional liberties away.

CRISIS IN KOSOVO (ITEM NO. 4)
REMARKS BY TONY ELGINDY DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH & TRADING, PACIFIC EQUITY INVESTIGATIONS

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 18, 1999

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, on April 29, 1999, I joined with Representative CYNTHIA A. MCKINNEY and Representative MICHAEL E. CAPUANO to host the second in a series of Congressional Teach-In sessions on the Crisis in Kosovo. If a peaceful resolution to this conflict is to be found in the coming weeks, it is essential that we cultivate a consciousness of peace and actively search for creative solutions. We must construct a foundation for peace through negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy.

Part of the dynamic of peace is a willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue, to listen to one another openly and to share our views in a constructive manner. I hope that these Teach-In sessions will contribute to this process by providing a forum for Members of Congress and the public to explore alternatives to the bombing and options for a peaceful resolution. We will hear from a variety of speakers on different sides of the Kosovo situation. I will be introducing into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD transcripts of their remarks and essays that shed light on the many dimensions of the crisis.

This presentation is by Tony Elgindy, Director of Research & Trading for Pacific Equity Investigations. Mr. Elgindy is not a professional aid worker. He is a dedicated and committed individual who has adopted a personal role in helping his fellow human beings who have been brutalized by this ongoing tragedy. Mr. Elgindy shares his observations and experiences with us, speaking in graphic and moving detail. He was instrumental in bringing 30 refugees out of the Kosovo area to the United States, the first group of refugees to arrive in our country. Among these displaced families were Skefkije Ferataj and her 2 year old daughter, Besarta. Both of them appeared at this second Congressional Teach-In. Following his presentation in a May 1, 1999, article from

the Chicago Tribune that describes what the Ferataj family encountered when they reached Chicago. These documents give a very real, human face to the Crisis in Kosovo.

PRESENTATION BY TONY ELGINDY TO CONGRESSIONAL TEACH-IN ON KOSOVO

I'd like to first apologize, having just gotten here in the States from Macedonia. I don't have prior prepared remarks. I would like to thank everyone for having this opportunity to share what I've seen, and to assist me in trying to define some sort of forward momentum here.

Upon my arrival in Skopje, Macedonia which is approximately 23 km. south of the border, I saw my first camps. We went to the border, saw Serb activity on the border, and talked to refugees.

It's difficult to know from my standpoint exactly where to start. I don't know if it's with the random torture, the beatings, the sadistic mutilation of women, their unsafe enslavement, the taking of eyes of women and children, the cutting off of ears, the burning alive of males, castration of young boys. I just don't know where to start. What's happening in Kosovo is a tragedy beyond anything you could ever watch on TV. There is no way for any of us to sit here today and understand what they are feeling, what they are seeing, or what they've endured. You cannot smell it here, you cannot hear it here. The Serbs are systematically burning evidence, destroying all traces of the atrocities, pulverizing ashes. There were flashes in the sky at night when we were trying to sleep from the NATO bombing. All of the relief workers that I met would be there during the day and leave there in the evening, leaving the camps to the Macedonian police. The crying and the grief intensified at night. And I don't know how anyone could tolerate it.

This is a Holocaust, undoubtedly. Holocaust Number Two. I'm not a politician; I'm a trader. I work on Wall Street, been doing it for 11 years. I deal with numbers. I've been fortunate enough to be able to help various relief organizations in the United States with money donations, connections, support, one of which is the Mother Teresa Foundation in Skopje. So I can't sit here and tell you what the results will be and what it will be like if we didn't bomb, or we stopped military action or we sent in ground troops or we never sent in ground troops. All I can testify is what I saw in my two weeks at the border of Kosovo.

Right now in America our markets are at an all-time high. We are swimming in money. The Internet, Dow Jones, and NASDAQ markets capture our focus, our imagination. And—I say this without trying to offend anyone—our greed has blinded us to what's happening elsewhere. And it became apparent to me that somewhere down the line their lives don't meet our standards for valuable commodities to protect. We are remote control-happy. We click through our channels one after another, and we all say yes, that's terrible and we go on to the next channel and we find a sitcom that we can sit down and watch for the rest of the evening. These people don't have that luxury. They cannot turn it off. They cannot switch channels.

Of the 30 refugees [he is helping to evacuate to the U.S.], six of them are family members—two close family members and four distant family members—of another U.S. citizen who accompanied me on the trip to find her family. The other 24 have no connections here in the U.S. It's a very difficult ordeal to obtain their visas, since the U.S. Embassy when we arrived wasn't allowing any refugees to come. And I used whatever

resources I had in the financial markets to contact the people—whatever little bit of influence I had—to have them appeal to the Embassy. Well, we ended up using up all the fax paper and jammed the phone lines and we prevailed in getting the very first 30 refugees' visas approved. And a few of them are with us today.

I don't know if America could have learned anything in Bosnia why it wasn't applied here. We knew what the man was capable of doing; we knew how brutal he was; we didn't take into account the retribution he would show the people of Kosovo. I don't know if we should have evacuated the country or been better prepared before we took aggressive steps.

For us to allow him to stay in power, for us to idly sit by and let him continue, is also another matter for debate up here on Capitol Hill, which is something that I have little control over. However, I don't know that we can idly sit by and let a madman run around doing the things that I saw. Out of the 24 refugees that will be coming to the States in the next several days, there are 20 children who are all children of three brothers. These three brothers are all gone, and presumed either dead or missing in Kosovo. All three mothers are missing and presumed dead in Kosovo. The adults accompanying the children are the sister of the brothers who is in her late 60s, and the grandmother who was born in 1908, who is currently sleeping on a wooden pallet in the camps. So, for her to have lived through World War I and World War II, Vietnam, Korea, and to be now facing the final years in a camp, are beyond anything I've ever seen or expected to encounter.

While we were there we did meet up with several refugees—medical students, doctors, lawyers. It's interesting when you meet a lawyer who talks about his practice and he's wearing a suit and tie and he lives in a tent and he's in bare feet. He's walking around in the mud without shoes because the Serb police took his shoes. These people, aside from living in denial and shock, need help ever so desperately.

If everyone is captured today by the top story, which is the Columbine High School tragedy, imagine that happening five times a day, every day, for five years. That's what's happening in Kosovo. It's that multiplied 10,000 times. And for some reason we as Americans have placed a value on an American life higher than that of any other. It could be because Americans are more photogenic, better groomed, live in nicer homes. Whatever it is, it's not right. These people are as valuable as we are. And to discount them, or to shrug them off—as I read in the Wall Street Journal yesterday, that markets are up and doing well and apparently have shrugged off the Kosovo crisis—enrages me.

While we were there I met a medical student, a female, 23 years old, who was in the camp right next door to another camp. She knew where her family was: in the other camp. Yet she was forced to stay in that camp for 16 days. I gave her my video camera, my jacket, my backpack, and we smuggled her out of the camp. All we did was drive a few short miles to the next camp to reunite her with her family which she hadn't seen in over two months. But she'd been in this camp for 16 days after finding out where her family was. The Macedonian police are in my opinion not helping the situation. They are pro-Serb for the most part. And the U.S. needs to take as big a role in the humanitarian side of things as they have in the military.

[From the Chicago Tribune, May 1, 1999]

TWO WHO FLED KOSOVO LAND IN CHICAGO

(By Julie Dearthoff)

She is only 2 years old, but Kosovo's Besarta Ferataj has already seen more suffering than most will experience in a lifetime. She has watched death and dismemberment. She has been hungry and has gone without sleep. And she automatically says "bomb" when she hears the word NATO or a loud noise.

But Bersarta could be considered one of the lucky ones from Kosovo. On Friday, she and her mother, Shefkije, quietly arrived at Chicago's Midway Airport, two of the first refugees allowed into the United States from the Balkans.

Stepping off an AirTran flight from Washington, D.C., in her new Teletubby shoes, Besarta hugged a stuffed koala and stared at the foreign surroundings. Shefkije, wiping tears of joy and disbelief from her eyes, hugged family and friends and held her daughter tightly. In Shefkije's purse were precious six-month visas allowing them into the U.S., marked No. 1 and No. 2.

Their arrival came before next week's expected wave of about 20,000 refugees sponsored by relief organizations, and is due almost entirely to the fierce, relentless drive of Chicago beauty salon owner Ana Ferataj Mehmetaj, Shefkije's older sister.

Mehmetaj left for the Balkans on her own two weeks ago, in a desperate search for her three sisters. Her childhood home in Istog had already been burned to the ground. She had no idea how to find all of them, let alone transport them back. But she planned to stay until she did.

"From the first day on, I knew I had to do something for my family because I know what Slobodan Milosevic is capable of," said Mehmetaj, who came to the U.S. alone more than 25 years ago, when she was just 17. "When I was watching everything on television, I felt if I didn't do something for my family I would never forgive myself. Now I feel worse. I saw kids without eyes. I saw people taking clothes off the dead and covering children. I say . . . I saw things you should never see. I couldn't sleep at night, couldn't eat. I felt so guilty. It's so different from watching a war in the living room."

Remarkably, she found Shefkije and Besarta at a friend's home in Macedonia. Days earlier, the two had been plucked out of Radusha, a refugee camp, thanks to money Mehmetaj supplied to pay off the guards.

Their journey to the camp had been an ordeal in itself. They traveled at night to avoid Serbian patrols. Eventually, they made it to Macedonia. "Every time I talked to her on the phone I thought it was the last," Mehmetaj said. "As soon as I arrived, we just hugged and both started crying. She knew she was safe."

Initially, Mehmetaj said, the U.S. Embassy in Macedonia would not issue visas for the two because the official refugee program was not yet in place. But a friend, California commodities trader Tony Elgindy, worked the Internet—contacting friends and politicians, including Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-Mich.), asking for help. About a week later, Mehmetaj received a call from the U.S. Embassy. She said Pat Walsh, the head of consular services at the embassy, told her she could take her sister and her niece back to the U.S. immediately, and several other Kosovar Albanians at a later date.

Mehmetaj is also sponsoring a family of four, paying for their transportation to the U.S., their housing and food.

"It's still a dream," said Shefkije. "I feel happy, but I also feel so bad when I think of my people in Kosovo. They need clothes;

they need help. I am OK. But my people are not."

During the grueling, emotional two-week journey, Mehmetaj managed to locate a second sister, Sofije, who had trudged through mountains, eaten snow and was living with her family in an abandoned cigarette factory in Skorg, Albania. The factory was crammed with refugees, and Sofije was located by a friend who spent hours roaming through the nine stories of the building, calling out her name.

"I was so frightened for the first time in my life," said Mehmetaj, who made the dangerous eight-hour trip to Albania alone and in the dead of night, against the wishes of her husband. "When I found Sofije, I tried to separate her family and take them away, but there were only about 30 people left (alive) from her village and they didn't want to be apart. So I promised to help them too."

Though she was unable to bring Sofije, her husband and their five children back to the United States this time, Mehmetaj rented two apartments for the family and other Kosovars from the village of Skorg. She also bought them food and clothing.

A third sister and her family are still missing. But Ferataj said the minute she finds out where they are, she will be on the next plane to Greece.

"We were all scared for her safety—it was highly risky, but she has her own mind, thank God," said Alenna Hiles, one of Mehmetaj's closest friends who greeted her at Midway Airport. "It's a miracle she made this happen. She not only found them but got them back here before the refugee program was in place."

Most of the Kosovar refugees will begin arriving in Chicago, Detroit, Boston and New York—cities selected because they have substantial Albanian populations—as early as Wednesday, according to a State Department spokesman. The State Department has encouraged people with relatives to assist in refugee resettlement.

The second oldest of nine siblings, Mehmetaj owns the European Touch salon and day spa in Dearborn Station, her seventh salon, and drives a car with the license plate "KOSOV A M." Friends and family describe her as tough and fearless.

Most of her family has left Istog, the town where they were raised. Six months before the war, Mehmetaj convinced her mother, Gjyle, to leave Kosovo and move in with a brother in Switzerland. When Istog fell to the Yugoslav army, more than 15,000 refugees fled to Rozaje, Montenegro.

"(My mother) is very determined to get what she wants," said Mehmetaj's 20-year-old daughter, Linda. "Either way she was going to do it, whether the United States was going to allow it or not."

Mehmetaj, Shefkije and Besarta arrived in New York on Wednesday and spent Thursday in Washington, D.C., meeting with several senators and briefing politicians about the situation in Kosovo. Friday, they were weary but overjoyed to be together.

After stopping at the salon to see family members, they all returned to Mehmetaj's South Loop condominium. There, Shefkije gazed at the stunning view of Chicago from the 25th floor. Both mother and child looked curiously at all the things in Mehmetaj's apartment.

"We're so happy for them to be here. They'll have everything they need from all of us," said brother Rich Ferataj, 37, who also owns a salon and lives in Oak Lawn. "I think for now we'll just try to laugh and talk about old times."