

**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
COMBATING RACISM, INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION IN
SOCIETY THROUGH SPORT
19-20 April 2012**

Muslim community in Bulgaria remains concerned by acts of violence and other form of hatred against Muslims, to which respective authorities have often been slow to respond. In recent years, bias-motivated violence against Muslims has acquired the form of personal assaults in the streets and attacks in places of worship and manifestations during and after football matches.

Racism and intolerance in sport, particularly in football has different expressions. More visible are the incidents of racist, anti-Semitic or Islamophobic chants or abuse against a certain player, team or ordinary citizens of Muslim or different background, display of fascist, racist or neo-Nazi flags, symbols and propaganda by some of the fans. But it is not just the fans who offend, sometimes football personalities or even coaches do the same.

Many times we have witnessed anti-Muslim incidents and intolerance and discrimination against the minorities in Bulgaria committed by football fans, below is given one of them:

On 23rd of September 2011 a criminal incident provoked thousands of people to come out for a protest in all major cities in the country. In many cities different groups of football team supporters took part in the protests. The protest quickly turned into a show of racist, xenophobic and anti-Muslim manifestation. The most frequently uttered slogans with racist outbursts, instigated by extreme politicians were "Freedom or Death", "Lets turn Gypsies into soap", "Turks should be slaughtered". Demonstrators, most of them football fans, attacked the "Dzhuma Mosque" in Plovdiv.

Similarly they were also indented to assault the "Banyabashi Mosque" in Sofia, fortunately they were restrained by the police. Thus, peaceful protests which started against a criminal case were exploited to provoke ethnic hatred.

It's well known that some extremist and ultra nationalistic formations use football fan clubs and supporters to express their far-right or Neonazi views and achieve their political goals.

It gives the impression that the prototype of such speech is provided by far-nationalistic political parties that are the main distributor of anti-Islamic models of thinking. One of the direct results from such speech is the enhancement of stronger attitudes in society against Muslims, Islamic symbols as mosque, performing religious rituals, speaking Turkish which is associated with Islam and Muslims.

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**MUSLIM DENOMINATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
(HEAD OFFICE OF MUFTI)**

These incidents threaten the mutual understanding between religious and ethnic groups in the country, disturb the normal functioning of the democratic rules and observation of European values.

We believe that sport must be used as a means for promoting social cohesion, mutual understanding and tolerance, both within and across national borders. Sporting events can serve as a mechanism to build confidence and mutual understanding and promote tolerance and respect between different communities.

This month praiseworthy efforts have been made by football fans of CSKA-Sofia to prevent and combat racism and intolerance. Recently, on the occasion of racist expressions of a member of Bulgarian Football Union, the fans publicly proclaimed that they were against all forms of racism and discrimination in football. This is a model of good conduct. An example to be imitated. Head Office of Mufti acclaims this initiative.

Recommendations:

With regard to this topic we encourage Bulgarian authorities:

- To implement the mechanisms to combat hate crimes, including those targeting Muslims;
- To enact laws that expressly addresses racism and intolerance through and in sports;
- To work on how sporting events can serve as a mechanism to build up confidence and mutual understanding and promote tolerance and respect between different communities;
- To emphasize the important role of sport in promoting equality and tolerance in society. In order to fully develop and further expand on the potential of sport to serve as a vehicle and play a potential role to combat racism, intolerance and discrimination, it is also necessary to examine and address the existence of these phenomena within sport itself.

And we encourage OSCE

- To suggest specific measures of surmounting racism, intolerance and discrimination in sports, including bias motivated incidents committed by fans at the places for sport and out of these places;
- To observe closely the process of combating racism, intolerance and discrimination in sports;

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