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**OSCE MEETING ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RACIST,
XENOPHOBIC AND ANTI-SEMITIC PROPAGANDA ON THE
INTERNET AND HATE CRIMES**

Paris, 16 and 17 June 2004

**Introduction in Session 4:
Promoting Tolerance on and through the Internet — Best Practices to
Educate Users and Heighten Public Awareness**

**Statement by Mr. Stefan Glaser, Project leader dealing with
right-wing extremism on the Internet, for jugendschutz.net — the Joint Office of the
German Federal States for the Protection of Children and Young People on the Internet**

First of all, I should like, on behalf of my organization, to express my heartfelt gratitude for this invitation. I feel honoured to be able to speak here about the anti-racist educational and media-related project work of *jugendschutz.net*.

Racist information on the Internet is not a temporary phenomenon. All Internet services are used in a targeted manner to spread racist ideas and neo-Nazi propaganda material. In many cases, right-wing extremist website operators are especially geared to young Internet users, knowing that young people increasingly use the Internet for communication and information purposes.

jugendschutz.net was established in 1997 by German ministers for youth affairs as a central office for all federal States to examine material on the Internet relevant to the protection of young people and to press for child protection regulations to be observed. Since its establishment, *jugendschutz.net* has also dealt with right-wing extremist propaganda on the Internet and efforts to combat it. At the present time, this work is being supported by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs within the framework of a nationwide action programme against violence and right-wing extremism.

Our work against racist propaganda and discriminatory material on the Web is carried out on several levels, because in the face of the often fleeting nature of information on the Internet and the dynamics of the Internet and in view of its transnational structure one-dimensional counter strategies are not enough. In the past, the fight against so-called hate speech was primarily waged through criminal prosecution. This strategy functioned well so long as the spread of racist media could be regulated by national laws. However, the dynamics and international nature of the Internet mean that parallel approaches are necessary. It is true that measures for closing down right-wing extremist websites liable to prosecution remain a basic component of our work; it is, however, becoming increasingly important to

simultaneously foster the media competence of Internet users. For a number of years now, *jugendschutz.net* has been offering educational and media-related workshops, where participants are made more aware of the dangers of right-wing extremist propaganda and critical discussions of right-wing extremist material take place.

But why is it important to deal with right-wing extremist material on the Internet in an educational context?

Our experiences have shown that young people who use Internet services for private and school needs can very easily be confronted with right-wing extremist propaganda. However, it is only very rarely that they are equipped to cope with this confrontation.

Teachers have reported that school children carrying out research for projects on the subject of National Socialism with the help of search engines such as Google frequently come across Holocaust denial material on the Web. This is a problem because school children rarely probe in a critical manner the information they obtain from the Internet. Racist arguments, xenophobic slogans or pseudo-scientific theories propounded by revisionists superficially appear plausible and are frequently accepted by school children as serious statements. Under these circumstances, right-wing extremist propaganda can fall on fertile ground.

But right-wing extremist material on the Internet that is not inadmissible and open to attack from the point of view of the law can also be persuasive. Everyday racism feeds existing prejudices. It is “harmless” subliminal racist and anti-Semitic arguments that are accepted without criticism and quoted — and not only by young people.

Right-wing extremists spread their propaganda in a targeted manner on websites and services popular with young people. In the past, *jugendschutz.net* has investigated numerous cases in which neo-Nazis placed slogans in communication portals popular with young people and advertised regionally active right-wing extremist groups.

If one asks young people, one soon learns that many are aware of right-wing extremist websites and especially the music of subculture bands, which is spread primarily via the Internet. Right-wing extremist music provides subconscious access to racist material, also for young people who do not believe in right-wing extremism or are not even right-wing in their thinking.

All this points to a real need for education, something which schools and extra-curricular political education work must take into account. Young people must be induced to take a more critical view of hate propaganda and must be encouraged to stand up for democracy and tolerance. At the same time, teachers must for their part be informed about and made more aware of the dangers of right-wing extremist seduction on the Internet.

But what can education, what can teachers and those providing further education do to counter this?

In the past, *jugendschutz.net* has developed didactic concepts and methods for this subject area and has itself held numerous media-related educational events with various target groups. Our aim was to carefully introduce young people to the idea of using the Internet critically and support them in their development to become competent users of the media.

It is anachronistic to want to teach young people about the dangers of right-wing extremist material on the Internet using the direct classical method of the teacher lecturing the class. Modern teaching methods take into account the expectations and experiences of young people, their competences and interests, and make use of appropriate ways of working. What is important here is to alternate between independent research in the sense of learning through discovery and discussion of the findings within the group. Only when the learner asks his or her own questions, looks for answers independently and then reflects on these critically with others, does the discussion of right-wing extremist slogans become an action-specific process rather than something theoretical.

Whereas these days it is rather difficult to fill young people with enthusiasm for political education, Internet-specific education options enjoy great popularity. In our media-related educational workshops, right-wing extremist websites and the multimedia information contained therein provide a starting point for critical discussions. For example, racist texts, pieces of music, cartoons and animated films along with entries in guest books and forums provide an opportunity for dealing with the content of such sites. Together, the right-wing extremist patterns of thought and lines of argument on which these sites are built are questioned and the use of the Internet as a propaganda platform is analysed.

When discussing the actual content, Internet material is always included which provides authentic information on the subjects of National Socialism and right-wing extremism. Many anti-racist websites are positive examples of how one can courageously take a stand against racism and discrimination. And they provide a wealth of background information — e.g., arguments against those who engage in Holocaust denial — which can be quoted in workshops and later in class.

A last step leads us to workshops at the active level and includes common efforts to try out specific “Network Activities against the Right”. Young people enjoy this and it provides the positive experience of being able to do something to counter propaganda rather than standing powerless before the racists. The talents and creative potential of the learners can be incorporated here. The activities range from writing letters of complaint to providers to posting counter positions in guest books and forums and producing anti-racist banners and websites.

The experiences of our media-related educational project work show that young people can be prompted within the framework of the workshops to take a critical view of racism and are prepared to show civil courage. In the workshops, they have taken an imaginative and genuine position against right-wing extremist propaganda and have stood up for humanity and human rights. In particular, the action-oriented approach, i.e., the general development of specific steps on the Internet, has helped to motivate people.

Holding these workshops always requires a high degree of knowledge as well as didactical and methodical competence on the part of teachers. This points to the need for more further education opportunities to be made available to learners. *jugendschutz.net* is already active in this area and has held numerous seminars and further training exercises over the last few years with teachers, trainee teachers, tutors and also with representatives of the police and the judicial authorities. In addition, we have already produced the second edition of a media education booklet for teachers, which is intended to provide information on the

problem and simultaneously, by providing selected material, reports on various experiences and tried and tested workshop modules, to encourage work with young people on this subject.

Education must face the problems of right-wing extremist propaganda on the Web. For that reason, in summing up, I should like to make the following recommendations:

- The subject should be included in the curricula of university and non-university training and further training of teachers.
- The subject of right-wing extremism on the Internet must become a fixed part of school curricula. The goal must be to make young people more aware of racist propaganda on the Web and help them to evaluate information critically.
- A large variety of media education materials must be developed for schools and out-of-school education, which provide information on the subject and didactic concepts and methods for teaching practice.
- Governments, public institutions and private organizations must set aside financial and human resources to enable media-related educational workshops and anti-racist Web projects to be carried out and to ensure continuous educational work in this area.