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NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
Member of the Fundamental Rights Platform (FRP) of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
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Language(s): ENGLISH ONLY

Session III: Challenging intolerant discourse

Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship Civil Society Preparatory Meeting ahead of the High level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination 28 June 2010 Astana, Kazakhstan

Dear President,
Distinguished Representatives
Esteemed Experts
And NGO Representatives,

Safe use of the Internet remains an important problem in the information society which plays a crucial role in promoting in enhancing citizens' ability to participate fully in democratic processes. However, safe use of the Internet needs combating the use of the Internet for incitement to racial hatred or racial discrimination, because the widespread circulation of material motivated by racism, xenophobia, anti-Muslim propaganda on the Internet is worrying in today's information society.

Aware that freedom of opinion and expression is an essential right in democracies, the circulation of hate material on the Internet still remains a serious concern and needs to be balanced. Therefore, the OSCE and its Participating States should provide adequate legal responses to the hatred propaganda, and they should combat all forms of discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. However, national legislation in most of the OSCE Participating States does not apply to racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim offences committed via the Internet and it does not prosecute those responsible for this kind of offences.

Internet related hate crimes can be caused by a number of different factors but the most dominant one is the political climate which a region faces and the way this climate is portrayed to the public by the media sources. The media has a large role to play for such crimes as people often get offended by what they read or see on the media which, results in actions being taken with anger and hatred. There is no doubt that people should freely be able to express their political views but this should not result in insults regarding an individual's ethnicity or their

beliefs. We are able to see many examples of media coverage's which provoked hate crimes on the internet, it has to be remembered that people are able to express their opinions more freely on the internet than the real life, as they do not need to reveal their personal information. Individuals are aware that these crimes are more likely to be overseeing on the internet community, so they do not hesitate to take such actions; where as in the real community which they live in these sorts of antisocial behaviour will be addressed to with serious consequences. Therefore such systems needs to be adapted to the information community to address this issue, if the problem is to be solved same strict procedures needs to be put in place to monitor and control the internet community.

ABTTF would like to analyze the situation in Greece, where there is an estimated population of 150.000 Turkish Minority lives in the northern region, Western Thrace. In Greece, Law 927/1979 on punishing acts or activities aiming at racial discrimination with regard to the incitement to hatred and dissemination of racist ideas penalizes "to willfully and publicly, either orally or by the press or by written texts or through pictures or any other means, incite to acts or activities which may result in discrimination, hatred or violence against individuals or groups of individuals on the sole grounds of the latter's racial or national origin(or by virtue of article 24 of Law 1419/1984) religion, and, "to express publicly, either orally or by the press or by written texts or through pictures or any other means offensive ideas against any individual or group of individuals on the grounds of the latter's racial or national origin or religion". Besides, Law 3719/2008 entered into force in November 2008 stipulates that a crime committed on the basis of national, racial or religious hatred, or hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation constitutes an aggravating circumstance for sentencing. Nevertheless, on 12th September 2009 Georgios Karatzaferis, President of the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS), announced his candidacy for the province of Rhodope at a press conference during a visit to the city of Tripoli in Peloponnese, and he stated that "Thus it will not seem like only the Turkish consulate is serving in this area". After Karatzaferis' speech, a placard on which "Remove the Consulate General of the Republic of Turkey" is written has been placed in the city center of Komotini. And, a sign petition for the removal of the Turkish Consulate in Western Thrace has been started via the website named www.proxencio-stop.gr, which is established by the group that placed the placard over the bridge around the city center in Komotini. And the group and the website is supported by a local newspaper, Antifonitist¹, which is an indication that the propaganda on the Internet and the hate speech fuelled by racism and discrimination based on the ethnic origin of the Minority in Western Thrace has been intertwined. The sign petition and the campaign about the removal of the Turkish Consulate in Komotini have had an adverse effect on the Turkish Minority living in the region, and it raised the tension between the minority and the majority which in turn destroys the unity in diversity in the region.

Another major issue with regard to internet blogs and forums, there are many examples of such websites which contain very disturbing phrases of hatred attacks. Such websites and its administrators post up subjects which provokes individuals to insult ones beliefs or ethnic origins, examples of such websites can be seeing in Greece which continually target Western Thrace Turkish minority. It is very clear that there are strong bonds and cooperation between the websites, similar topic is posted on a number of forums, meaning that a wider profile of individuals can gain access to such blogs. Forums of that kind can also be found regarding Turkish- Greek relations, most posts are in English and often turns into "heated arguments" as it is described, which is a polite term used for the insults which is contained within the forums(<http://www.greekalert.com/>). Since such websites appeal to large number of people, they may easily provoke feelings of hatred.

The challenge in combating incitement to hatred on the Internet is to find a proper balance between freedom of expression and an effective fight against acts of racist and xenophobic nature. Although national legislation prohibits any acts or activities aiming at racial discrimination

with regard to the incitement to hatred and dissemination of racist ideas through any means, it has a limited application in practice in Greece, like most of the OSCE Participating States. And, it should be noted here that Greece has signed but not ratified yet the Additional Protocol to the Convention on cybercrime, concerning the criminalization of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems.

In addressing the phenomenon in the OSCE Participating States, raising awareness of hate on the Internet must be at the root of any coherent strategy to combat hate crimes which are based on racist, xenophobic and anti-Muslim propaganda on the Internet. This should be a part of action plan which sets out a coherent framework for combating hate crimes in all OSCE Participating States. Emphasis should be placed on the need to develop new models and multiply their use across the OSCE region, and to promote the value of diversity and pluralism. In particular, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) should consider paying more attention to hate crimes on the Internet in the annual OSCE hate crime reports in which it should stress the importance of promoting tolerance, mutual respect, dialogue and understanding, including through the Media and the Internet within strategies based on a variety of measures.

Reaffirming the importance to collect and maintain reliable information and statistics about hate crimes motivated by racism and related discrimination and intolerance to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Participating States should take investigate and full prosecute any act and/or threat of violence motivated by hate on the Internet, while ensuring that the Internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of opinion and expression for all individuals and groups, including minority and/or youth organizations.

In this combat against hate on the Internet, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media should be granted a more active role in promoting both freedom of opinion and expression on the Internet and monitoring the national legislation in the Participating States. The Representative should go further in observing relevant developments in all the Participating States, including early warning when laws or other measures prohibiting speech or crime motivated by hate are enforced in a discriminatory or selective manner for political purposes which can lead to impeding the expression of alternative opinions and views. The Representative should also be in close cooperation with NGOs in monitoring the Internet for hate crimes motivated by racism, xenophobia and anti-Muslim content.

In light of the above information, ABTTF calls the OSCE participating States to:

- Ensure that relevant national legislation applies also to racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim offences committed via the Internet and prosecute those responsible for this kind of offences;
- Set up of a national consultation body which acts as a permanent monitoring centre and increase public awareness of the problem of the dissemination of incitement to hatred via the Internet.

With regard to the fight against the intolerant discourse, we recommend that,

- The OSCE participating States should counter prejudices and misrepresentation in general society, and their efforts should in particular be targeted at the younger generation in order to build up their understanding of the need for tolerance and the importance of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.
- The participating States should promote educational and awareness-raising programmes for combating intolerant discourse, and they should encourage the promotion of

tolerance, dialogue, respect and mutual understanding through the Media, including the Internet.

- The participating States should welcome and encourage continued and increased efforts by NGOs to monitor and their efforts to fight against intolerant discourse among societies they live in.