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# Stop HATE Speech

"A closed mind, the primacy of emotions over the common sense, building one's own identity through creating the image of an enemy," said Michał Boni, the Minister of Administration and Digitization. His words perfectly describe the reasons and aims of attacking "others". Simultaneously, they give the answer to the question about how to fight the signs of hatred.

## Fighting tools

"Words have great power and they turn into actions. Indifference to hate speech is a social suicide," said Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe. In September 2013, he took part in a two-day conference "Hate speech in a public debate – where does the responsibility lie?" which was organised by the Ministry of Administration and Digitization and the Council of Europe.

According to the Minister Michał Boni, it is essential to create appropriate legal norms to counteract hate speech. However, it is also the matter of social norms and willingness to discuss the problem. One of the major issues talked over during the conference was the definition of hate speech. The more accurate the definition of the phenomenon is, the easier it gets to fight against it. Draft amendments to the law concerning hate speech are being debated in the Polish parliament.

In March 2013, there has been a campaign set up by the Council of Europe entitled "The youth against hate speech on the Internet." Representatives of youth organizations had the largest input in drawing up the campaign. It covers various types of social actions e.g. training courses for young Internet users aiming at presenting how to recognise and counteract the signs of hate speech on the web. Young people act not only within the virtual world. In October 2013, they organised the European Week of Action, which treated about the contribution of politicians, mass media and regular citizens into spreading hate speech but also into eliminating it. The campaign is carried out in all countries of the Council of Europe. Another similar campaign is called R@cism Delete. Within this movement, the Internet users can report instances of hate speech on the web and then, based on such reports, racist websites are deleted.

## Violence comes off walls

In the real public sphere, recently we have witnessed a spontaneous antiracist action. In June 2013, a racist graffiti appeared at the entrance of a Nigerian restaurant and an African shop in Muranów district of Warsaw. In response to this, there was an action called "Let's paint racism over" organized on Facebook and it was supported by over five hundred people. Everything went very quickly – people collected money for painting materials and, on the 19th of June, the walls were repainted. The action is continued under

the slogan "Hejtstop" (eng. Hate-Stop). Everyone, who notices a racist, or other hate-related graffiti, can take a photo of it and then send it to the administrators of the initiative's website, who ask for help in painting such drawings over.

In Cracow and Łódź, among other biggest cities in Poland, abusive graffiti are being eradicated in the frames of the "Repaint Fascism" action. This initiative is not a new one. Since 2000, thanks to Marek Edelman Centre in Łódź, there has been an action called "Colourful Tolerance" carried out. During this action, apart from repainting walls, participants have had a chance to enter some of the city's temples, watch theatre plays and take part in many other interesting activities.

## Let us kick racism out of the stadiums

Recently, the talks about racism most often concern fighting racism in football. Since 1996, the "Never Again" Association (Polish original name – "Nigdy Więcej") has carried out an action called "Let us kick racism out of the stadiums". Its participants are strongly opposed to flags with Nazi symbols, racist songs and fans' slogans as well as acts driven by xenophobia. The reason behind the action is that racism kills sport. The association, together with footballers, coaches, referees, football activists and journalists, promotes a trend for good support. Antiracist posters with the national team, various football clubs and biggest Polish football stars are the effects of this action.

Jacek Purski, a member of the association, explains that the aim of the "Let us kick racism out of the stadiums" action is not to change the views of the greatest radicals and to engage in a dialogue with racists. The action is directed to young people who start to come to watch football matches. Generally, these are regular football fans, who begin to see the problem but they rarely react to it.

Since 2009, the "Never Again" Association has carried out antiracist actions, concerning preparations to Euro 2012, in Poland and Ukraine as well as in Eastern Europe. The association has set up a web of antiracist organizations together with partners in Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. "Racism looks similar in all parts of Europe. However, it appears with different strength. As far as counteracting racism is concerned, the East of Europe comes out poorly in comparison to the West. Poland can be a source of inspiration for the whole



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Eastern Europe, although the cooperation within the country could have been better. Euro 2012 was a breakthrough in this area. But still it is an urgent problem and there is a lot to do," says Purski.

The association organises antiracist football championships for the youth but also league and show games under the slogan of fighting racism and chauvinism. "On 26th October, we organised a football tournament with participation of the representatives of 18 nationalities. In the course of the Week of Antiracist Actions, everyone can organise an action promoting multiculturalism in sport. We heartily encourage you to engage in the creation of events with the participation of national minorities," says Jacek Purski.

## Is the fight with racism successful?

Since 2009, the "Never Again" Association has made a list of attacks driven by prejudice towards national minorities. The so-called "Brownbooks" contain descriptions of this kind of incidents. "People who suffered abuse may find it easier to share their bad experience in such a 'book'. They very often prefer doing it this way rather than reporting to the police. If such an incident is noticed, it is easier to counteract. Thanks to the list, we are able to find the 'inflammation', e.g. stadiums or statements in the media, what helps us to better understand the origins of the problem. What is more, the police or prosecutor's statistics do not reflect the reality," says Purski. For

the time being, the "Brownbooks" cover incidents between 1989 and 2012. Thanks to such a wide scale, we can see that the nature of the incidents has changed through the years – from physical violence to discriminatory publications.

After the summer attacks on foreigners in Białystok, Attorney General Andrzej Seremet said: "The fight against racism has to become a priority for the prosecutors and the police." That is why, in September 2013 there were training courses organised (initially) for a hundred of prosecutors. They are to become specialists in counteracting crimes based on racism and xenophobia. Getting knowledge about racist symbols will be definitely helpful for them. They are supposed to share the knowledge they receive during the training with their other colleagues. They will also closely cooperate with the police.

According to one of the organisers of the "Let us kick racism out of the stadiums" action, the main target of this activities is to draw people's attention to the problem itself. "When we started the action in 1996, nobody would think about racism as a problem on the Polish stadiums. However, within the last couple of years we have created legal instruments that are very helpful in the fight against this phenomenon. Through various educational activities we have shown that football can unite different people and become a very powerful medium of tolerance," concludes Purski. ■

Translation: Marta Dubiel