

NEWS



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Bulletin of the International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR) – Association of Antifascists

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No. 50

Special edition

December 2018

Anti-racism in Poland - Current Challenges

The “NEVER AGAIN” Association was established in 1996 by Marcin Kornak. Since that time it has been educating the society, as well as actively fighting against right-wing extremism, xenophobia, racism and violence. A very important part of our mission is the “Brown Book” - a periodical in which one can find the effects of monitoring xenophobic incidents.

Nowadays in Poland we are observing similar processes and diagnosing problems similar to those in other countries, like e.g. USA, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy or France. This includes the rise of far-right political parties and organizations that use xenophobia, racial prejudice and economic frustration to appeal to voters and supporters. The situation worsened in as of mid- 2015. It was the time of immigration crisis in Europe, but – different to what happened in many other countries – here in Poland the problem was mainly theoretical, since Poland was never an important destination to which the refugees would travel, and a common Polish citizen probably never met a true refugee. This allowed right-wing politicians to create an image of a dangerous, violent immigrant who is not running away from a war in his country but comes here to destroy our society and use the money from social assistance. This clearly false image came to be deeply rooted in the minds of many Polish citizens. It will also be a fuel for the politics of hatred, allowing organizations and parties previously unknown or marginal to become serious political players or even make their way into the Parliament.



What happens frequently is violence – either verbal and/or physical or both – towards people who are considered “different” - judging by skin color, language they speak or the way they dress. In the “Brown Book” we record such incidents and simultaneously observe that the number of such events is growing. A very important cause is the passivity of authorities which allows the attackers to feel free. Also in media we observe radical politicians discussing the situation in Poland. Words that some time ago would be spoken only quietly and in private now make their way to the bigger audience. It is a big challenge to educate society, show that violence and hate speech is not to be tolerated. This requires a responsible approach by the journalists and also rapid reactions when the said hate speech is heard.

A quick glimpse at the incidents noted in “Brown Book” can help us understand, what is really happening and what we can do to stop the growth of hate-related events. In the edition covering years 2009-2010 we can find about 30 mentions about devastating memorial places – mostly Jewish cemeteries, but also ones of Russian soldiers. In the years 2011-2012 – over 20 mentions. Only in 2018 the media informed about many devastations of Soviet military cemeteries, during which many tombstones were destroyed – e.g. 57 in Milejczyce in eastern Poland and 20 in the city of Gdansk. In the case of Jewish cemeteries the attackers usually destroy the tombstones and paint anti-Semitic signs and writings. Also, synagogues are frequently defaced with swastikas and other anti-Semitic symbols. Most of the perpetrators remain unknown.

A very loud happening, covered also in foreign media, is the “March of Independence” in Warsaw, which takes place every year on November 11. It has little to do with commemorating the Polish fight for independence of our country, instead it is a time for radicals to show up and present their views to the public. We can see different banners with slogans about “white Europe”, attacking Muslims and refugees, clearly anti-Semitic, homophobic and xenophobic. This happens every year, and despite that a large group of conservative journalists and important political figures try to defend the march as patriotic, calling what is seen: “marginal incidents and provocations”. Anti-immigrant marches also take place in other cities of Poland, on different dates. What connects them is that they are all defended as patriotic and harmless, despite the rising violence towards people considered to be “outsiders”.

To sum up – the situation in Poland resembles the way in which politics go in many countries. The growing importance of extreme right-wing political parties is alarming and calls for our reaction which must come in many ways – from reacting to every violent incident, to educating society and raising awareness about such universal values as tolerance, peace and the now maybe forgotten truth that we are all equal and everyone has the right to feel safe and remain unharmed.

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