POSITIVE MESSENGERS

Report

Mapping Out the National Context of Online Hate Speech

in Czech Republic

Compiled under the Coalition of Positive Messengers to Counter Online Hate Speech project
Project reference number: JUST/2015/PRAC/AG/BEST/8931

Prague, 2017

Methodology

Based on analyses, studies, and statistics, we attempted to map OHS within the Czech context. We used the findings of state and non-governmental organisations, various movements, and minor initiatives. Chapters 4.1 and 4.2 map specific initiatives that provide examples of good practice; they were prepared by Mgr. Jaroslav Valůch, a Czech expert on online hate speech and extremism. Chapter 3.3. deals with the legislative and regulatory framework for OHS; it was prepared by the employees of the In-Iustitia legal organisation, who have the best grasp of this topic in the Czech Republic. One World in Schools also addresses OHS, and its employees are well-versed in this topic.

Main findings:

- Czechs are not dogmatically hateful towards migrants; they only need an understandable and un-exacerbated discussion.
- During the "migration crisis" of 2015, hatred against other minorities (mainly Roma, but also the Vietnamese and LGBT communities) was overshadowed by the focus on Muslims and refugees; however, even it was more negative than before.
- An increase in hatred towards one minority typically fuels a growth in hatred towards other minorities.
- The media, politicians, and Islamophobic groups were responsible for the escalated atmosphere during the "migration crisis".
- Islamophobic narratives are subsequently legitimised, penetrate the public debate and the mass media, and consequently even high politics, leading to their widespread dissemination.

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1. Project background

The project is implemented by a consortium of 8 organizations from 7 countries: Sofia Development Association (Bulgaria) – lead partner, Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione IULM - IUL (Italy), the Languages Company (United Kingdom), Center for Peace (Croatia), People in Need (Czech Republic), Asociația Divers (Romania), Associazione FORMA.Azione (Italy), and Municipality of Agii Anargiri-Kamatero (Greece).

This project tackles the issue of hate speech - online hate speech in particular, targeted against migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the 7 EU countries. It addresses the need for more

effective civil society response to online hate speech through sharing and disseminating best practices. The main project objective is to strengthen the response of civil society at the national and EU level to online hate speech through active engagement of local communities in creating and sharing powerful counter-narratives against xenophobic discourse. The project focuses on 1) building multi-stakeholder coalitions for developing counter-narratives to denounce hate speech and negative representations of migrants and refugees, and 2) disseminating the positive messages through media literacy and a public awareness campaign.

The project also aims:

- to compile and share best practices for countering the spread of online hate speech against migrants, refugees and minorities through awareness-raising campaigns;
- to provide new data on the nature, scope and impact of online hate speech targeting migrants and refugees, in order to aid national and EU authorities to develop more effective integration and anti-discrimination policies;
- to foster shared understanding and communication between the communities most vulnerable to hate speech and mainstream society in Europe;
- to educate and train the target groups about hate speech, media literacy, creation and dissemination of web content.

1.2. Objectives

The first part of the research focuses on the national normative frameworks developed to identify, limit and counter hate speech online, the mechanisms for monitoring and reporting hate speech instances, and legal and non-legal measures to counter hate speech.

Specific research objectives:

- To provide up-to-date picture of the national context as well as comparative assessments on countering hate speech
- To identify key stakeholders, supporters, multipliers, to be involved in subsequent project activities
- To assess key civil society initiatives for countering hate speech and other forms of discrimination
- To identify best strategies for civic actors to counter hate-based violence on the Internet
- To develop methodological and technical tools for media content analysis on hate speech

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research problem and aim of the research

The research problem is defined by the main project objectives, namely, to strengthen the civil society response against the spread of online hate speech against migrants and refugees. Accordingly, the research has two main aims: 1) to describe and assess the effectiveness of the existing regulations against online hate speech in each partner country, and 2) to assess the societal responses against hate speech in each partner country in order to develop more effective strategies for civic actors to counter online hate speech against migrants and refugees.

2.2. Justification of the research

While a number of studies on the regulatory framework on hate speech have been done in individual countries and across the EU, not enough has been done to establish the effectiveness of these regulations (or the need for new ones) in the case of online hate speech against migrants and refugees. The increasing migration flows to Europe in the past two years, coupled with the rising negative attitude to migrants and refugees create a new sense of urgency to look deeper into the issue and to generate the changes needed. In this regard, the research will provide the basis for developing powerful counter-narratives against xenophobia in an environment where migrants and refugees are becoming increasingly vulnerable not only to verbal assault but to physical violence as well. In addition, the study will allow for a critical assessment of social media's role in creating and spreading discriminative and xenophobic attitudes, and for a critical assessment of the most recent regulatory changes and cooperation agreements between national and EU public authorities and Internet intermediaries – organizations that mediate online communication such as Google, Facebook, to curb the spread and incidence of hate speech on the internet. Research findings will be followed with recommendations in the country reports and the integrated comparative report targeted at the relevant stakeholders.

In defining the scope of the research, the project team members have considered previous studies on hate speech done at national and EU level, as well as publications on discrimination, xenophobia, and racism. Given the tensions between hate speech and freedom of expression, as well as its intersection in issues of human rights, equality and dignity, and laws governing the media, the research will focus on various pieces of legislation that might be applicable to hate speech and online hate speech in particular.

2.3. Definitions used

The research does not aim to engage in theoretical debates on the definition of the term "hate speech" or debates on the tension between freedom of expression and hate speech. For the purposes of this study, and given the lack of a common international definition of hate speech, the project partners have agreed to use the definition proposed by the Council of Europe: „The term, hate speech' shall be understood as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin."[1] The research will also take into account article 2.1 of the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime[2], which states that "racist and xenophobic material" means any written material, any image or any other representation of ideas or theories, which advocates, promotes or incites hatred, discrimination or violence, against any individual or group of individuals, based on race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin, as well as religion if used as a pretext for any of these factors. Partners will also use as guidelines the definition of cyberhate and the forms and mechanisms used by those who spread or promote hate online proposed by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) "ADL defines Cyber hate as any use of electronic communications technology to spread anti-Semitic, racist, bigoted, extremist or terrorist messages or information. These electronic communications technologies include the Internet (i.e., Web-sites, social networking sites, "Web 2.0" user-generated content, dating sites, blogs, on-line games, instant messages, and E-mail) as well as other computer- and cell phone-based information technologies (such as text messages and mobile phones)."[3]

2.4. Research methods

Given the main goal of the research, that is, mapping the national context (regulatory framework and societal responses to online hate speech), the methods selected for data gathering and analysis are qualitative. The qualitative focus of the research is justified in light of its primary aim, namely to get a deeper understanding and to support assessment of the social and non-regulatory mechanisms that can help to counter the production, dissemination and impact of hateful messages online. The methods to be employed for the research include literature review (including review of legal literature, academic and non-academic articles), and secondary data review (for example, content produced by NGOs, relevant public bodies, scholars, representative surveys, legal databases, national statistics reports).

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[1] Appendix to RECOMMENDATION No. R (97) 20 of the Committee of Ministers on "Hate Speech." Adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 30 October 1997 at the 607th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies
[2] Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems (Strasbourg, 28.I.2003).
[3] From Responding to Cyberhate, Toolkit for Action (ADL), http://www.adl.org/internet/Binder_final.pdf

Various radical groups and initiatives were found to have played a key role in the dissemination of hate speech on Czech Facebook. Leading the list is the extremist movement **We Don't Want Islam in the Czech Republic** (IVČRN), which, together with its many regional mutations and associated projects, actively spread various forms of hate speech against Islam and Muslims (and consequently also against migrants from Muslim countries). The main influence of the IVČRN initiative lies primarily in the focused development of Islamophobic discourse and creating hate speech narratives that are subsequently legitimised, penetrate the public debate, the mass media, and ultimately high politics. The further dissemination of hate-filled content then progresses independently, with the direct involvement of the initiative, where the Islamophobic discourse is further elaborated by individual users and the formerly entirely marginal topic of Islam as a threat starts to significantly build the debate regarding migration and refugees.

NARRATIVE

According to various analyses,[17] Czech anti-Islamic statements on Facebook and other online commentaries were very often intertwined with attacks on migrants or refugees as such. There was no differentiation between the **concept of migrant as compared to refugee** and both terms were mostly associated with people from the countries of the Near East and Africa. Hate speech against specifically defined migrants from other countries, such as Vietnam or the post-Soviet republics, was found to hardly exist. Islamic and migrant themes appeared as **security threats** in the analysed hate speech. There were considerable concerns about *the abuse of social systems, labour market distortion, threats to the existing values of "our" culture, "our" rights, and threats to the safety of "our" women and children*. The dichotomy of "us" (as something positive) versus "them" (as the bearers of negative values) was very common in the discourses.

Anti-Islamic myths and hoaxes appeared in the posted contributions. The most widespread was that refugees (Muslims) rape women and murder each other.

There was an obvious concern that refugees are "***criminals***" or "***terrorists***". Islam is referred to as a "***criminal ideology***" and compared with Nazism. Statements about ***false refugees***, i.e. people only pretending to be refugees, were frequent.

Conspiracy theories, mainly about the "*spread of Islam being driven from above*", and that "*'we' will soon have fewer rights than 'Muslims'*" have also emerged.

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[17] Analysis performed by People in Need: HRDINA M., DAŇKOVÁ H., KOPECKÁ L., *Projevy nenávisti v online prostoru a na sociálních sítích [Hate Speech in the Online Environment and on Social Networks]*, 2015.
Analysis performed by Glopolis: FRANTOVÁ V., LEGEČKA M. PROKOP D., *Proč uprchlíci jitří naše emoce, Narativy související s migrací a uprchlictvím v české společnosti a nahlédnutí za ně [Why Do Refugees Stir Up Our Emotions? Migration Narratives in Czech Society and a Glance Beyond Them]*, 2016.
Analysis performed by the Multicultural Centre Prague*: Nenávistné projevy v online prostředí internetové diskuze v Česku [Hate Speech in the Online Environment of Internet Discussions in the Czech Republic]*, 2015.

A significant proportion of the hate speech consisted of **socio-economic narratives**: refugees abuse the social system or, conversely, steal jobs. It is worth noting how the current situation and other hate speech are also applied to **politicians, the European Union,** and **the non-profit sector**, and they are accused of having enabled the current refugee situation. It is clear that many other, long-standing, frustrations and social conflicts are being added to the escalated debate.

An important role in this is played by the social networks that can quickly disseminate any hate speech, amplify its impact, and allow it to gain considerable publicity for otherwise minor organisations and individuals. This potential is also being used by established organisations, political parties and their leaders.

REGULATING ONLINE HATE SPEECH

The regulation of the discussions was monitored by the BRICkS project (Bricks-project.eu),[18] which led interviews with media representatives from the following news sources: Aktuálně.cz, iDnes.cz, Novinky.cz, A2larm, Czech Radio, the daily *Referendum*, and the weekly *Respekt*. These particular media were selected based on their willingness to participate in the research.

The question of cultivating discussions in below-the line comments and on the social networks is, to varying degrees, dealt with by most Internet journalistic periodicals in the Czech Republic. Some media hire **employees** who do nothing but **moderate posted contributions**, particularly when they receive a large volume (2,000-7,000 posts a day). In other cases, authors of articles, editors and other editorial staff are also involved in the moderation activities.

Because of the negative commentaries and hate speech, primarily against Roma, later also against the conflict in Ukraine, and, since 2015, the so-called refugee crisis, a large proportion of the Czech media decided to **radically limit discussion**. They chose various alternatives to achieve this purpose:

Blesk.cz offered its readers the ability to send their comment directly to the editorial desk and permits anonymous contributions only to discussions about non-controversial subjects or via a Facebook profile.

Following the example of some foreign media, Respekt.cz only accepts below-the-line comments in advance, from which it publishes just the most interesting – a process that is not very common in the Czech Republic, as few Czech media go through reading or editing a post before publishing it.

Other media have decided not to open any discussions on controversial topics (Aktuálně.cz and Novinky.cz). Although the iDnes.cz server always opens a discussion, it sometimes closes it if it develops unfavourably. Another solution sometimes used by iDnes.cz is that it places a time limit on discussions and allows them only for a short time. Czech Radio has its own unique approach,

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[18] Analysis performed by the Multicultural Centre Prague*: Nenávistné projevy v online prostředí internetové diskuze v Česku [Hate Speech in the Online Environment of Internet Discussions in the Czech Republic], 2015.*

which, following the example of the BBC, allows discussions only rarely and just on selected topics. Blesk.cz proceeds similarly in some cases.

In the Czech Republic, the **Disqus** system is most often used to facilitate the work of the moderator. This system is an automated spam filter. The individual editors decide which words they want to capture in the below-the-line comments. A contributor who finds himself on the so-called blacklist may, for example, end up with a blocked account. Some media (such as Novinky.cz and iDnes.cz) use their own independent system that works on a similar principle.

Within the framework for cultivating discussion, the rules for contributors to discussions have also been tightened. Increasingly, readers must register under their own (real) name or with their Facebook account. The one alternative that the Czech Internet media have not yet chosen to apply is a fee-based system where contributors pay for the opportunity to participate in a discussion.

Facebook

Discussions on Facebook are different from below-the-line comments on new portals because only the contributors to these discussions are able to regulate and manage their own profiles. As a result, editors most often hide inappropriate posts; however, the post is only hidden on the editor's page, and it remains visible to the reader's friends. It is only exceptionally that Czech editors post comments in relation to individual responses. According to most of the survey respondents, it appears that editors also intervene in those cases when the hate speech is turned directly against them or against the editorial desk. A certain form of regulation may also be seen in the positive rating given to interesting and factual posts through the use of the "*like*" feature.

A large role may also be played by the use of the "*long tail*"[19]model, i.e. a large number of pages with a small number of fans who share hate speech content, but the aggregate impact of which may be quite high. It is necessary to address Internet service providers and request a higher level of responsibility for moderating content on Internet pages, and increasing awareness of the hate speech phenomenon amongst Internet users. The attention of these providers may be drawn to the issue of hate speech not only by organisations, but also by individuals, including politicians.

INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED IN PUNISHING ONLINE HATE SPEECH

In the Czech Republic, the monitoring of hate speech and its criminal prosecution is within the competence of the **Information Crime Department of the Police Presidium** and the **Organised Crime Unit**. A special **Internet Hotline** has been established to handle reports about the illegal and inappropriate use of the Internet. The police verify the contents of the received reports as well as searching for problematic online posts.

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[19] Analysis performed by People in Need: HRDINA M., DAŇKOVÁ H., KOPECKÁ L., *Projevy nenávisti v online prostoru a na sociálních sítích [Hate Speech in the Online Environment and on Social Networks]*, 2015*.*

The **Ministry of the Interior** is the main resort addressing hate crime and it publishes its ***Report on Extremism*** (mapping manifestations of extremism in the Czech Republic) and ***Concept for Combating Extremism*** on an annual basis. Both documents also address the issue of online hate speech, unfortunately, only in a marginal manner at this time.

The **Security Centre of the Jewish Community in Prague** also addresses the issue of hate speech, specifically through monitoring incidents of anti-Semitism and publishing an annual report.

The **Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention** is responsible for checking the spread of online extremism amongst young people.

The non-governmental legal organisation **In Iustitia** (www.in-ius.cz) plays a very important role in the Czech Republic. It addresses the issue of hate crimes along its entire length and breadth. Its activities include providing social and legal assistance to hate crime victims.

4. SOCIETAL RESPONSES

4.1 Specific initiatives

MONITORING

   Antifa – an anarchistic, anti-system movement that has been monitoring neo-Nazis and neo-Nazi activities over the long term. It has long effectively been uncovering links that exist even beyond the movement in the direction of mainstream political parties[20] and Russian pro-Kremlin initiatives.[21]

   Romea – a non-governmental organisation that addresses cases of hate crimes not only against the Roma minority, acts as a media watchdog, and monitors the situation systematically and over the long-term.

   In Iustitia – a non-governmental organisation providing legal support to hate crime victims, it has been monitoring and collecting data about attacks over the long-term, including online verbal attacks, and publishes regular quarterly reports.

   Ministry of the Interior – systematically monitors the ultra-right extremist scene and provides information about the collected information through quarterly and annual reports.

   HateFree Culture – a project of the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic that, amongst other things, performs buzz monitoring of hatred and hate speech in the online environment.

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[20] In Czech only: http://antifa.cz/content/jkg-2017-brnenska-ods-si-podava-ruku-s-neonacisty-fotbalovymi-chuligany ["Johny Kentus Gang 2017: Brno ODS Members Shake Hands with Neo-Nazis and Football Hooligans "].
[21] In Czech only: http://antifa.cz/content/blbej-nebo-navedenej-foldyna-s-putinem-v-sedle ["Foolish or Manipulated? Jaroslav Foldyna in the Saddle with Putin"].

GOVERNMENTAL AND POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

"Campaign Against Racism and Hate Crime" Project

Agency for Social Inclusion, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, a part of the "Campaign Against Racism and Hate Crime" project.

Summary:
1. **Media campaign**
   Building a community through social networks (mainly Facebook and Twitter), comics published on a regular basis, promotional items (banners, badges, flyers, posters, postcards, printed artworks, and others), research, translation and preparation of blog contributions (articles, interviews, and commentaries), artistic production, production of television and other spots and news reports, website, broadcasting of radio and television spots, public events

2. **Project activities for students and teachers**
   Conferences for pedagogical employees, methodological handbook entitled "Mediation in Schools", online media workshops, training for school and peer mediators, website, other workshops

3. **Expanding good practice in socially excluded locations**
   Interventions by those carrying out good practices, communication strategies and public relations, conferences, media training in a television studio, handbooks of good practices, social integration courses for local stakeholders, experiential education courses for the professional public and other local stakeholders

4. **Migration research** in socially excluded locations, research about new forms of **usury** (including recommended measures for the relevant stakeholders)

5. **Educational activities for the police**
   Instructional videos for the police, conferences regarding the course and results of educational activities for the police, manual for good media communications, manual for the municipal police departments, presentational events and educational seminars for representative of the institutions providing training to the Police of the Czech Republic, the Criminal Police and Investigation Unit, and the Riot Police, promotional spot on the topic of helping victims of hate crimes for the Police of the Czech Republic

HateFree Culture
Agency for Social Inclusion, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, a part of the "Campaign Against Racism and Hate Crime" project.
Online community – 56,000 Facebook fans
Organises public events and artistic performances
Refutes hate hoaxes

CIVIL CALLS FOR ACTION AND INITIATIVES

Scientists Against Fear and Indifference
This initiative, comprising members of the scientific, academic, and research fields as well as students from scientific fields, turned to the government with a call to mitigate hate and fear in society, primarily in relation to the so-called migration crisis in 2015.
http://www.vyzvavedcu.cz/

Advent Appeal
This appeal is a response to the events surrounding the so-called migration crisis in autumn 2015. It warns against abusing concerns about the crisis and against the division of our society. The first signatories were Czechoslovak World War II veterans, Resistance fighters, Holocaust survivors, and former political prisoners and dissidents from the time of totalitarian Communism.
http://www.adventnivyzva.cz/

Czech Scouting: We Stand By Scouting Principles – Leadership's Declaration Regarding the Current Situation in Society
In response to growing concerns about hate speech in relation to the so-called migration crisis the Czech Scouting Organisation published a declaration in which they clarified their position regarding the situation.
https://krizovatka.skaut.cz/zpravodajstvi/2233-trvame-na-skautskych-principech?autologin=1

Student Solidarity Movement
This initiative was started by students from the Charles University in Prague in response to the social situation in relation to the so-called migration crisis. The movement produces educational materials for dissemination on the Czech Internet, organises public events, and created the Encyclopaedia of Migration as a source of information that where important and verified facts about migration are compiled (http://encyklopedie.org/).
http://studentizasolidaritu.ff.cuni.cz/

Helping People on the Run
This organisation was originally started as a spontaneous Facebook initiative; subsequently, hundreds and later thousands of individuals set out as volunteers to help along the migration path, particularly in Hungary and Serbia, then also in Macedonia and Greece. The initiative also continued to respond to hate speech on the Czech Internet, provided true stories – for instance on the www.videlijsme.cz website, organised public lectures, and gradually transformed into an official organisation under the name of Helping People on the Run.
www.plnu.cz

Sharing a Common Meal

This initiative was organised by the Muslim community in Prague. More than 300 people participated, including opponents of Islam who, however, also joined in and tasted the meal.[22]

Praying Together

This is another initiative of Prague's Muslim Community. Several dozens of people participated in the event. The objective was to jointly condemn the terrorist attacks that are committed in the name of Islam.[23]

ORGANISED CAMPAIGNS

HateFree Culture
See the information provided above.

NoHate.cz
This is the Czech branch of the Council of Europe's No Hate Speech Movement.
www.nohate.cz

Hej-ty.cz
This campaign is organised by the non-governmental Nesehnutí Independent Social Ecological Movement, and it is a part of the project "Farewell Hate, Farewell Prejudice", which is focused on multicultural education in schools. The main aim of the campaign is to capture the attention of youth with regard to the issue of hate speech, particularly on the Internet.
www.hej-ty.cz

Jsme to my / It is Us
The "Jsme to my / It is Us" platform was created under the patronage of the OSF Prague Foundation at the instigation of non-profit organisations and experts on migrant affairs. The aim is to create a space – online and offline – where it will be possible to discuss not only migration but also other topics in a reasonable and civilised manner. It will focus on supporting several specific areas that work with the public and perform awareness-raising activities for the topics of migration, refugees, and an open society. It works in cooperation with many other organisations, individuals, and companies.
www.jsmetomy.cz

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

A Social Experiment – I'm a Muslim, Will You Hug Me?

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[22] In Czech only: http://www.blesk.cz/clanek/zpravy-udalosti/384557/prazsti-muslimove-pohostili-v-mesite-stovky-lidi-posmakli-si-i-islamofobove.html ["Prague's Muslims Host Hundreds in Mosque. Even Islamophobes Enjoyed a Taste"].
[23] In Czech only: http://zpravy.idnes.cz/muslimove-proti-terorismu-demonstrace-fc4-/domaci.aspx?c=A160810_100043_domaci_zt ["Muslims in Prague Demonstrate Against Terror. They Participated in a Catholic Mass"].

desk has become an important source of information for voters (based on the mapping accessible at lidovky.cz/bubliny).

Difficulties encountered/ lessons learned:

"Interviews with Haters" lies on the very sensitive edge of whether it is right to provide space to those who promote racist and xenophobic opinions. This approach is unsuitable primarily in the media, as it would legitimise the spread of hate. However, in the case of this campaign, which is focused on this topic, the issue may be seen as saying that, until we understand why people hate, it will be impossible to find an effective solution.

Potential for transfer:

Polarisation is one of the most frequently discussed topics associated with the growing popularity of social networks. Racism and hate speech are more of a symptom of something deeper, of frustration, mistrust, and fear. These people often feel that no one is listening to them, that their opinions are ridiculed even censored. Traditional reactions, such as the reporting of posts and banning, may even enforce these feelings. Communications with individuals naturally reflect this. Various initiatives encounter hate everywhere on their networks, and thus this practice may be transferred to anywhere where social networks provide space for spreading hate and polarisation.

Further information:

Links in Czech:

http://www.hatefree.cz/blo/rozhovory/1993-vaclav-masat

http://www.hatefree.cz/blo/rozhovory/1660-elka-christianova

http://www.hatefree.cz/blo/rozhovory/1653-petr-chaloupek

https://nazory.aktualne.cz/komentare/kampan-hatefree-nemohla-nic-moc-zmenit-dokud-se-spolecnost-n/r~3efe7686f36711e6984a002590604f2e/?redirected=1497513414

Contact details:
Name: Lukáš Houdek
Organisation: HateFree Culture
Email: lukas@hatefree.cz

4.2.2. Good practice 2

BarCamp Against Hate

Specific objective:

To face hate speech and threats from a neo-Nazi initiative with humour, creativity, and cooperation

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Main organization involved:

Cooperative effort of multiple stakeholders – influencers, the HateFree campaign, and the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art

Location:

Prague, Czech Republic

Detailed information:

The neo-Nazi website White-Media.info has been spreading neo-Nazi propaganda for several years. So far, the Czech police have not been able to discover who the website operator is or how to make the website inaccessible as it is located on servers in the USA. One section of this website is entitled "Anti-Multicultural Watch", which presents an updated list of enemies of the white race. Here, the neo-Nazis place the personal profiles of individuals (at this time, several hundred), their photos, addresses, and other contact information. The aim of this activity is to evoke fear, thus demotivating these people in their activities (for the most part, the list includes the staff of non-governmental organisations, anti-fascists, journalists, experts, etc.). The basic logic is that no one wants to be on this list. One of the people who has managed to get on the list and who is a fairly well-known influencer wrote in one of his Facebook posts that it is actually a list of very interesting people he would like to meet personally. This gave birth to the idea to organise an event at which these people could meet each other, learn about what they do, allowing them to establish new partnerships and initiate new projects. It was decided to hold the event as a BarCamp, which was organised by the HateFree Culture initiative and the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, acting in conjunction with several well-known personalities. On the day of the event, there were a number of presentations and workshops where the individuals from the list introduced themselves and the work that they do. Also important was the networking section. Many people participated in the event and it was very well-received.

Additionally, a new Facebook group was established and given the name "We Love White Media"; since that time people who are on the list celebrate the fact that White Media exists, request to be added to the list, and the original idea that it should spread fear has effectively been dissolved.

Resources needed:

No special financial resources are required; however, a suitable venue to hold the event must be found.

Timescale (start/end date):

March 2016

Evidence of success:

The idea of using one of the most severe forms of hate speech (one that directly calls for the liquidation of certain individuals) and transforming it into something humorous and creative is actually an effective form of what could be called trolling. Now, the more that the White-Media.info website expands its list of enemies of the white race, the more praise and positive reactions it will receive. It thus has the exact opposite effect of what was originally intended. Another important aspect is that it transfers the initiative from online space to offline, where it is possible to build stronger ties.

No official evaluation of the event was performed. The measure of success may be seen in the event itself, as it generated interest and 150 people participated in it.

Difficulties encountered/ lessons learned:

In the case of these events it is important to ensure the involvement of influencers (people who have significant outreach on the social networks) in the organisation of the event. This helps to brand the event as something "cool" and as a good event in which to participate.

It is also necessary to consider security risks, for instance, to notify the police that certain individuals and groups may arrive and try to interfere with the event.

Another important aspect is the informal nature of the event; it should not be a traditional conference and the BarCamp format is very appropriate.

Potential for transfer:

Lists of enemies of the white race and other comparable lists may not be a reality in some countries. However, it does not necessarily have to be this type of specific list that acts as a trigger for organising an event like this. Just about everywhere you will find people who are not afraid to actively stand up (even in public) and speak out to defend human rights and the basic principles of humanism against mocking, ostracism, and even hatred. In this day and age of social networks, they may be connected through these "weak ties", but this cannot fully replace personal interaction through an event that makes it possible to learn what others are doing and subsequently informally establish a partnership or friendship. In this way hatred may become the stimulus that connects those who often may not even agree on other points, but, thanks to this type of event, they establish cooperation that leads to new ideas and projects.

Further information:

Links in Czech:

http://kulturnistudia.cz/hate-free-v-doxu/

refugees. However, the discussion on the topic must lead to specific measures, and they must take place in direct, understandable language.

The media should step away from a marketing strategy that tries to increase readership as much as possible within the shortest time and should instead focus on changes of a qualitative nature – building a community of loyal and respectful readers. Any discourse concerning minorities should not be tainted, negativistic, and artificially escalated with the aim of increasing readership.

Just as important is an appeal to politicians to not use tense and escalated topics in order to gain political points; instead, they should strive to explain and calm down the situation, and carefully consider the issues prior to addressing the general public, as it has come to light that the way politicians express themselves regarding these types of topics has great potential to affect situations and may retrospectively influence many people.

An important and valuable role in combating negative discourse is played by both publicly known figures as well as unknown individuals who respond to negativism, even at the price of losing their fans, followers, customers, friends, and supporters… Their voice may have a great impact on things.

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