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Ισότητα, Στήριξη, Αντιρατσισμός
Equality, Support, Antiracism



Hate speech in the public discourse and the media in Cyprus

The Cypriot national meeting organized by KISA on May 31st and June 1st, had the objective to discuss, in a participatory way, about the phenomenon of hate speech and to share the conclusions of the national Report written within the Words are stones project.

During the first day of meeting, KISA, start introducing the topic that and presents some of the initiatives on hate speech carried out by some Cypriot associations. With regard to Cyprus, KISA points out that despite the Cypriot Constitution prohibits any discrimination on the grounds of, among others, nationality and religion, statements of a discriminatory and racist nature are increasingly present in public discourses, especially against migrants, refugees, LGBTQI+ community and even non-Greek Cypriots. These attitudes are deeply legitimized by persons fulfilling public positions: politicians, teachers, religious authorities, etc., who do not miss any opportunity to badly express towards migrants and minority groups members. Another important issue deals with media and journalists, that very often produce intolerant contents.



The initial speech is held by Aristos Tsiartas, lawyer and head of the anti-discrimination body, at the office of the Cypriot Ombudsman for Human Rights. The lawyer introduces the legislative framework, pointing out

that in Cyprus, like in other countries, there is not any direct reference to hate speech in both criminal and civil legislation. The only legislation aimed at punishing hate crimes is that derived from European law and then integrated into national legislation in view of Cyprus accession to the European Union in May 2004, and all the subsequent provisions transposed by European legislation as converged in the national criminal legislation. These provisions give a central role to police authorities.

The second speech is held by Aristotelis Constantinides, professor of international law and human rights at the University of Cyprus, who analyses the limits placed by international and European laws to human rights (with particular regard to freedom of expression). The European Court of Human Rights, he says, has defined, in its case-law, the necessary elements that allow a State to put some limitations to these rights: national security, defence of the established order, interference "provided for by law" and "necessary in a democratic society". It is the Convention itself which provides an adjustment of protection under Article 10, through Article 17 concerning the abuse of right. With regard to hate speech, the Court has tried to define the differences between hostile expressions and hate speech, highlighting the need to take into account not only the content of these speeches but also the context in which they are expressed. More generally, a case-by-case analysis should be provided.



The next intervention is held by a member of the police, on behalf of the Chief of Police of Cyprus, who describes the tasks entrusted to the police, including the implementation of racism cases recording, since 2005. The same intervention highlights the pressures and limitations encountered by police dealing with hate crimes and racist crimes, and the important role played by NGOs in reporting them.

The last speech is conducted by Sevgül Uludağ, Turkish-Cypriot journalist and investigative reporter, nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her work on Cypriot missing persons during the Greek-Turkish clashes of the 60s/'70s. Starting from her personal experiences, the journalist tells about her will to continue with the project of reunite the two Cypriot population, overcoming the victim-chief logic that has always characterized the conflict.

The second day of meetings opens with a reconstruction of what was discussed the previous day by some of the KISA team.

The first panel is composed of Nicoletta Charalambidou, a human rights lawyer and member of KISA, Michalis Theodorou, a journalist who highlighted the use of aggressive and ethnocentric expression in media, and Mike Hajimichael, professor at the University of Nicosia, who presents the results of a study conducted among and with the contribution of his students on how some visual expressions (meme, retouched photos, cartoons and other images), as widespread on the major social platforms, can help to manipulate ideas and perceptions of people, especially among the youngest generations.

The second panel is composed of representatives from KISA's partner organizations, within the WAS project, who present the results of their national analyses on hate speech and discuss with the public about best practices and about strategies that should be put into practice.

The last panel is composed of Constantia Lilly, member of the anti-discrimination unit of the Cypriot police, Christos Christofides, member of the Union of Journalists, Stavri Kalopsidiotou, member of the AKEL (Progressive Workers' Party of Cyprus) and Doros Polykarpou of KISA that discuss counter-narrative strategies, good practices already implemented and strategies to be adopted to combat hate speech. Among the issues of particular interest emerged: the responsibility of journalists, required to comply with the Journalist Code of Conduct (no longer sufficient to disseminate accurate information) and, regarding the police authorities, the limits found in the wide discretion given to the Attorney General to prosecute abusers.