

Summary

Forgotten Victims: International Conference on the Situation of Victims of Hate Crimes/Hate Violence and Victim Assistance in the Czech Republic

A conference, "Forgotten Victims", focused on the problem of hate crimes and the victims of hate violence, was held on April 22 – 23, 2010. The conference took place in the Goethe Institut, Prague under the auspices of the Czech Prime Minister Jan Fischer and was jointly organized by the Forum 2000 Foundation, the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" (Foundation EVZ), In IUSTITIA o.s. and Kulturbüro Sachsen e.V. Among the participants were experts from Germany, Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland.

A major part of the conference was dedicated to the presentation of the outcomes of the research project "**Hate Crimes – Forgotten Victims**" which was conducted in the Czech Republic by **Kulturbüro Sachsen, In IUSTITIA, Tolerance a občanská společnost** and **Romea**, with the financial assistance of **Foundation EVZ**.

Thursday, April 22

The conference was opened by **Oldřich Černý**, Executive Director of the Forum 2000 Foundation, and the Director of the Goethe Institut **Heinrich Blömeke**. **Ralf Possekel**, Program Director of EVZ, described the activities of German government-supported civil initiatives working with victims of hate violence from marginalized groups.

The first contribution was delivered by **Klára Kalibová** representing the non-governmental organization In IUSTITIA. She presented the main difficulties of their research; the key problem being the absence of a single definition of hate violence or hate crime, which are contextually perceived differently. Ms. Kalibová was inclined to use the term "hate violence" as not every violent act (not just physical, but also verbal and non-verbal aggression) can be considered a crime. Another difficulty is that, contrary to Western Europe or the USA, where research of this complex problem has a long tradition, no research studies had previously been conducted in the Czech Republic.

The research confirmed that the most vulnerable group of hate violence in the Czech Republic is the Roma minority and, even though the evidence was not clear, alternative youth actively involved against extremism and racism. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community has a special position because sexual identity or orientation is not legally recognized within the Czech Criminal Code as a motive for hate violence.

The structure and results of the research study were introduced by **Miroslav Bohdálék** from Kulturbüro Sachsen. He confirmed the lack of professional involvement and data reflecting the problem of hate violence in the Czech Republic. He also supported Ms. Kalibová's assertion that hate violence is in many cases committed by 'ordinary' people rather than extremists.

The former Minister for Human Rights, **Michael Kocáb**, discussed government efforts, strategies and initiatives designed to deal with this problem. Even though he was sceptical on some points, he spoke positively about the rapid reaction of the authorities to the arson attack in Vítkov.

František Vales enriched the debate by providing a legal perspective, speaking about definitions of hate violence and terms such as “group” or “violence” in general. *“Hate violence is violence where the main or only motive is that the victim belongs to a certain group of people.”* Such violence has a two-sided impact: it is an individual attack, but also an attack on the group as a whole. Victims usually regard these attacks as a fact of life, as they are used to them. Such people, already feeling marginalized, are also often frightened by any investigation.

Czech journalist **Petr Uhl** did not agree with the concept of ‘hate violence’. He stated that the majority of hate-motivated attacks are not acts of violence, but verbal attacks. *“Things that are repulsive to me are not necessarily crimes.”* According to him, Czech society is unaware of its own racism and only perceives racism to be acts of extreme violence.

The ensuing discussion raised questions about the perception of hate violence in the USA and its influence on new Czech anti-discrimination law.

The first workshop dealt with police and their investigation of hate crimes and was led by **Stanislav Daniel** (European Roma Rights Centre) and **Zuzana Candigliota** from The League of Human Rights. Both of them focused primarily on the issue of greater integration of Roma people into civic society. Mr. Daniel referred to a personal experience when he was denied entry to a local Slovak disco club because he is Roma and the police did not help at all. *“Are we really surprised that Roma people don’t go to the police to report hate crimes? Speaking from personal experience, I am not at all surprised,”* he said. Ms. Candigliota suggested that it would help to employ Roma in police departments which would instil greater trust in the police.

A number of topics regarding the current situation of the Roma minority and its problematic inclusion in Czech society were mentioned in the second workshop. The well-structured and challenging moderating style of **Jarmila Balážová** opened debate about the crosscutting issues of discrimination, hate violence, xenophobia, racism and extremism towards the Roma. Amongst a number of important issues raised was the segregation of Roma children within the Czech educational system. As **Karel Holomek** said, *“there is a hidden racism behind this separation”*. According to **Lucie Horváthová**, adherence to existing laws and use of the tools already available in our social system is necessary in order to improve the status quo. **Martin Šimáček** added that education and active engagement of young people are also crucial.

Participants in the third workshop spoke generally about the occurrence of hate crimes within the LGBT community in the Czech Republic, Poland and Ukraine as well as the reasons why these crimes are highly underreported to the police. Research has proved that the overwhelming majority of hate crimes (either physical or psychological) are not reported by the victim: they generally fear homophobic reactions from police officers or are afraid of disclosure. *“Society is still homophobic – people can still be fired from their work for being gay,”* commented **Serhiy Ponomaryov** from Ukraine.

There are bad experiences with police interaction with the public on the Queer parades or other occasions in all three countries – they either do not protect the LGBT community from right-wing extremists, or act brutally themselves against the community. **Jan Swierszcz** mentioned a good example of police practice in Liverpool (UK), where officers are trained in hate crime and the police actively seek to project a gay-friendly image.

The fourth workshop was more of an open discussion with the audience on anti-Semitism, with the main focus of the discussion being its definition. **Michal Frankl** began with the difference between anti-Semitism and critiques of Israel using European political cartoons as examples. **Irena Kalhousová** followed with the term "new anti-Semitism", which is often aimed at the existence of a Jewish state. Many young intellectuals are in favour of nations becoming states so long as they are not Jewish. The workshop concluded with a discussion with the audience about the role of the media and whether media attention on anti-Semitism in fact encourages it and what role should NGOs play in this issue.

In the last workshop of the day, **Kati Lang**, **Alexander Verkhovsky** and **Klára Kalibová** compared anti-extremist and hate crime legislation in their respective countries. Germany has a specific legal framework: hate violence is not specifically distinguished, whereas hate speech legislation is very strict. Russia, on the other hand, does have such laws, but their application in practice is disputable. The lack of transparency in state administration is a key issue although, according to Mr. Verkhovsky, the situation in the police force has improved in recent years. Ms. Kalibová also mentioned the fact that hate crime legislation might also contradict civil liberties. The debate concluded that the strength of civil society determined whether or not such laws are required, although it is also questionable whether these have any sense in the era of internet.

Friday, April 23

Friday's programme started with **Dominique John's** presentation illustrating how German organizations which deal with victims of right-wing violence work in general and how the recent shift within political discourse in Germany influences them. He speculated about the future of those organizations, as the new conservative government had also led to a rise in left-wing violence and political support for victims of violence has been put under pressure and uncertainty. Yet Mr. John remains positive: "*We know what we are doing and as we are doing research offering valuable data to academics and media, this is what empowers us*".

The first workshop focused on NGOs monitoring hate crimes. **Stanislav Daniel** and **Agnieszka Mikulska** both emphasized the necessity of monitoring police investigations of these crimes, often the police are unable to determine if a crime was motivated by hate. A question on how to actually determine a hate-motivated crime was also raised. Both panellists agreed that despite the lack of funds, it is essential to share data and research outcomes if their goals are to be achieved.

Victim assistance was discussed at the second workshop of the day. **Irena Biháriová** presented the activities of her NGO, L'udia proti rasizmu, whose work includes organizing humiliating campaigns against neo-Nazis. "*There is a need for media education in Czech schools so that the youth is able to accurately analyse the information coming from the media. We carried out some research with students and discovered that their attitude is rather intolerant,*" warned **Klára Laurenčíková** from the Czech Ministry of Education.

All the participants agreed that the main issue is to heighten the status of the victims of hate crimes. The victims themselves often fear xenophobic reactions if they are not backed up by any NGO or embassy or other institution when trying to get a proper investigation to be conducted. "*Police in general abuse the law quite a lot. If I were a victim I would be afraid of the police as well,*" commented **Marie Manotskova** of the SOVA Centre.

The third workshop's topic was prevention. **Maria Grjasnow** introduced the Network for Democracy and Courage, which organizes seminars at German high schools. Rather than officials, young trained volunteers discuss topics such as prejudice and xenophobia with students. The situation in Romania was the topic of **Monica Vasile**'s presentation; she spoke mainly about the segregation of Roma children in schools. In the further discussion on this issue the participants also explored the role of media and politics.

The last panel discussion of the conference introduced a variety of initiatives to deal with hate violence. Attempts and experiences from both government and non-government sectors were described and issues such as financial support, the role of the media and government involvement were discussed. **Viktória Mlynárčiková** from OSF Slovakia claimed: *"if we want to criticize – we have to be involved,"* calling for active participation of NGOs in the policy making process etc. Broad criticism was raised against the quantity of useless actions and the low number of important ones. Yet, the positive spirit was not forgotten; in the words of **Jan Urban**, changes are taking place in Czech society, and the last 20 years have seen significant progress. But we should not rest and have to carry on, as *"if we will not move, the Nazis will"*; in his words, it is nothing other than a constant *"fight"*.

"If the purpose of this conference was to meet, to better get to know each other, to exchange views and experience and agree on cooperation, then I am convinced that the conference served its purpose," concluded **Oldřich Černý**.