

Introduction in Session 2: The nature and extent of the relationship between Racist, Xenophobic and Anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes

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Ladies and gentlemen, as I was getting ready to travel to this conference, I received the latest issue of the British anti-fascist journal *Searchlight*. The editorial of this issue was almost like an opening statement for this conference.

Racist violence follows racist agitation, as sure as night follows day. Where the British National Party is active, we can be sure that people will be harassed, beaten and even murdered.

BEFORE I GO FURTHER into this area I would like to make a small point. It seem to be a foregone conclusion that violence follows hate propaganda.

We have seen this all through recorded history.

When a nation or a clan or a para-military outfit or whatever is about to go and do something fundamentally evil to other people, there will be a period of slander, innuendo or rumor mongering that is meant to legitimize the actions that will follow. The most well known case in world history of hate propaganda leading to violence is perhaps *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler, who outlined the core of his political philosophy – that Jews were the ultimate evil and had to be purged. We all know the result of this.

However, when researching this topic in preparation for this seminar I noticed that although a great number of websites internationally deal with the subject of Hate Propaganda, there is precious little actual scientific research in the subject. I couldn't find a single scientific paper mapping out the relationship between agitation and action.

At the same time it would perhaps seem superfluous to point out that propaganda is the tool of any lobby group or political group from right to left, from good to evil. I rather doubt that any group would spend time, effort and money on propaganda if it didn't have a proven effect.

Most of the propaganda we meet in everyday life is legal and reasonably benevolent. Some of the propaganda is not.

IN THE DECADES following the end of the Second World War, race biology and obvious anti-Semitic sentiments didn't make much impact on everyday life among the Europeans.

Although there were an abundance of groups producing Hate propaganda, a Nazi magazine or a leaflet was actually very hard to come by, by the average public. You really had to make an effort to be able to read any of the rather tatty mimeographed editions making rounds in the political sub-vegetation.

The arrival of Internet has changed all that. And, to tell the truth, we have been slow to catch on.

For the racist group cyber space is a dream. It is no accident that today the first item on the agenda for any racist or ultra-nationalist group is the creation of a home page. Nazis were among the first to realize the potential of Internet. This is clearly worded in their own internal strategies.

- Internet, compared with the production of books or paper magazines, is cheap and easy to maintain.
- An internet homepage of the smallest racist group of three or four people has the same circulation and availability as Der Spiegel or CNN. It is in everybody's computer at the distance of a click of a mouse.
- And perhaps most importantly – it offers a brand new way of organizing, merchandising, fundraising and communication.

WITHOUT GOING INTO statistical detail I would like to say a few words about what does the propaganda consist of. At Expo Foundation and Sweden and among similar groups in other countries we have monitored organized racism on the Internet for a number of years. Our conclusion is that on the Internet you can find absolutely anything that you are looking for.

Hate propaganda on the Internet can be divided into a number of diversified messages.

On one end of the spectrum you can find 'soft racism' – moderate innuendo voicing concern for for instance culture if immigration goes on. I am not a racist, but...

On the other end of the spectrum you will find the most vulgar conspiracy theories claiming that Jews – or most recently Muslims – are planning to annihilate the Western world.

You will find Nazi sites advocating terrorism, publishing bomb manuals and glorifying an armed struggle against the democratic society.

Believe me – there is no propaganda that is so sick and demented that it will not get a groups of followers, and of course, if you again and again press home the message that other people are sub-human and argue the need for militant action – eventually some activist will go out and do something.

Experts in terrorism will tell you that every group that has ever taken violent action has done so following a period – sometimes years – of active propaganda.

In many ways this stage is the process of dehumanizing the target of your propaganda. There are web pages carrying the crudest jokes about Jews or Muslims. First you joke about the

Holocaust. Then you claim it is a forgery – it never happened. And finally, so what if it did happen – Jews after all may have deserved it. Or so, the argument goes.

HOWEVER, IT IS equally important to realize that while immigrants, or Jews or Muslims etc may be the immediate target of the propaganda, an underlying theme is fostering suspicion against democratic society, democratic politicians and democracy itself.

My personal opinion – and some of my partners and associates will agree while others will disagree – is that legislation alone cannot solve the challenge of Internet Hate propaganda. Indeed, I would even argue caution against relying to much on legislation.

Please don't misunderstand me. We have laws separating right from wrong according to our social standards. If we have a law against incitement of racial hatred, then let us by all means use it as a tool to prosecute offenders.

But the reality of the problem is that we are now facing thousands and thousands of racist pages all over the world. The reality of the situation is that we haven't even got enough police officers to investigate, and not enough prosecutors to take action. For that reason, the judicial process in any country will only skim the surface and make examples of a few worst offenders, while letting most of the offensive material slide.

The radical right are a political movement. Thirty years ago it was made up of a small fringe netting at best a handful of votes in elections. Today the same groups have moved out of the basement hideouts they populated in the 1960s and 1970s. In some countries they are polling ten-fifteen percent of the vote.

In other words we have a shift of political winds in which sentiments which were almost taboo 30 years ago, are again becoming a real political option.

Internet has become one of the most important tools in the revival of the race hate politics. This is the challenge offered to democracy by racism.

We cannot wish that they will go away. We cannot legislate the problem away. We can only defeat them in a process where democratic society will rise to this challenge.

And to do that we need more research, more knowledge, more funding, more democratic groups responding.