

**SOVA Center intervention for the session “Special Challenges posed by Violent Hate Groups”**

**Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Hate Crimes –  
Effective Implementation of Legislation  
4 - 5 May 2009, Hofburg, Vienna**

Session 3: Special Challenges posed by Violent Hate Groups

Honored Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen!

In my presentation, I would like to focus on two problems with the law enforcement response to hate crimes, which we have observed from the Russian experience.

Firstly, law enforcement agencies are often guided by the fact that most hate offences (in the post-Soviet space) are committed by neo-Nazi skinheads (i.e. members of a certain subculture), so the police "preventively" stop and arrest people based on their appearance. We find it absolutely ineffective. Moreover, this arbitrary practice does not only discredit law enforcement authorities, but also creates a romantic aura around those arrested as "victims of the authorities."

And secondly, since the existence of hate crime was denied for many years, members of violent racist groups now feel a kind of impunity and permissiveness. Failure to suppress violent hate groups in Russia allowed isolated racist gangs in big cities to form an organized network of small groups, able to coordinate demonstrative actions. It became possible to talk about this with certainty from the end of 2007 - beginning of 2008, when Moscow was swamped by a whole series of murders and assaults, crimes which – as a rule – happened precisely in those regions where neonazis had been arrested very recently. Now it is not enough to deal with individual offences which may be investigated by applying the skills and techniques available to criminal police. Rather, we need to design new methods of law enforcement capable of destroying the infrastructure of this racist underground, as well as bringing the individual culprits to justice.

In light of this, we recommend that:

**OSCE:**

Summarize and disseminate best practices of comprehensive response to violent racist groups, from investigation of individual crimes to detection and destruction of their network infrastructure (identify funding sources, organizers and coordinators of violent attacks, etc.)

**Member states of the OSCE:**

1. Respond to data provided by NGOs engaged in monitoring racist groups' activity.
2. Abandon the practice of "hate crime prevention" through arbitrary arrests based on visual profiling and assumed membership in a certain subculture.
3. Form special-purpose police units.
4. Where such police units already exist, train them involving domestic and international, government and NGO-based experts.