

Prevention and responses to hate crimes in Eastern Europe

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In recent years, the situation with hate crimes in Eastern Europe has worsened. For example, if we consider the case of Ukraine, we will see that hate crimes are regularly committed in this country, but the Ukrainian authorities do not react sufficiently to this problem.

Hate crimes are dangerous for any society, because in this case the attacker expresses his intolerance not only to a specific victim, but to the whole group of people sharing one or several characteristics.

In Ukraine, these crimes are committed mainly by right-wing radical groups based on racial or religious intolerance, on grounds of sexual orientation, etc. The victims of these crimes are foreigners, representatives of national, religious and sexual minorities.

One of the key problems is the fact that in Ukraine there is no clear law description and, hence, no punishment for crimes that have been committed on the basis of hate and intolerance. Those who commit hate crimes in Ukraine usually do not hide the grounds for their crimes or the fact that they have prepared and carried out these crimes. Nevertheless, it is often difficult to prove that the crime was committed precisely because of hate and intolerance; therefore such cases of violence are usually qualified as mere “hooliganism”. Many victims do not believe that the investigation could be carried out objectively and that the perpetrators would be punished, therefore they do not appeal to law enforcement bodies.

In addition, non-violent hate crimes are usually not recorded by Ukrainian law enforcement agencies at all.

The article on criminal liability for discrimination based on race, color, political and other convictions, gender, disability, etc. has recently been removed from the Criminal Code of Ukraine. This happened on February 17, 2016, bill number 3501. Instead of criminal liability, only administrative responsibility is now provided.

Surprisingly as it was, these changes were presented as part of a program to harmonize Ukrainian legislation in the field of preventing and combating discrimination with the law of the European Union. However, the actual result has been the practical impossibility of bringing perpetrators to account for discrimination.