

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

WORDS ARE STONES
HATE SPEECH ANALYSIS
IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE
IN SIX EUROPEAN
COUNTRIES

AUSTRIA, CYPRUS, FRANCE, GREECE, ITALY AND SPAIN

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CONCLUSION



This report proposes an independent analysis of the evolution of the discriminatory, racist and xenophobic political discourse that characterized the public debate in 2018 in Austria, Cyprus, France, Greece, in Italy and Spain. The report summarizes the contents of the six national reports prepared within the project **“Words are stones”** by six civil society organizations: Adice (FR), Antigone (GR), KISA (CY), Grenzenlos (AT), Lunaria (IT) and SOS Racisme (ES).

The report consists in six chapters.



THE FIRST CHAPTER offers a recognition of the **definitions of “hate speech” highlighting** the difficulties that derive from the lack of a shared definition both internationally and in the individual countries. **The focus is the racist hate speech of political nature** identified with public and disparaging concepts expressed by people in power (politicians, public servants, religious leaders, media professionals) meant to provoke a negative reaction against a specific individual or social group. These individuals and groups are identified incite discrimination, hostility or violence against a specific individual or social group, identified on the basis of negative stereotypes and prejudices used as tools of inferiorization and denigration; hate speech violates some fundamental human rights: the right of equality, human dignity, freedom, participation in political and social life.

THE SECOND CHAPTER illustrates the critical issues related to the lack of an official and standardized system of data collection at international and national level, a direct consequence of the absence of a shared regulatory definition. An overview of the official data available in the six examined countries highlights the difference in the detection methods. This makes a quantitative comparison between the data available in the individual countries impossible.

Each country adopts different methodologies for collecting data on hate crimes, but no country, among those considered, has an official data collection system dedicated to hate speech. At the present, none of the six countries collects and/or publishes all the necessary information to document hate speech in a systemic way recording cases





by typology of the act, of the target, of the bias motivation, of the offenders, of the law references. Only some countries publish data on prosecutions of hate speech cases.

In Austria official data are available broken down on the basis of the reference standards that are applicable to hate speech, but the typology of the discriminatory motive is not detectable. For Italy, different data sets are available on the reporting/charges of discrimination and discriminatory crimes, but they are not coordinated with each other and not all offer a breakdown based on the discriminatory motive or based on the type of crime. Moreover, recent official statistics on the investigations initiated and the verdicts pronounced are not available.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

analyzes the target groups, the most recurrent topics and the most aggressive public actors of hate political speech on the basis of a qualitative analysis of some exemplary cases collected and analyzed in the individual national reports, highlighting a sort of **internationalization** of the wickedness, hatred and discriminatory, xenophobic and racist violence.

Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, Muslims and Roma are the **target groups** most affected by discriminatory and violent political rhetoric. Hostility against black people is particularly evident in Italy and Spain, with messages and speeches that come to evoke biological racism. The anti-Semitic discourses go through the public debate in Italy, Austria, France and Spain. In the last country, however, Muslim men are the group most affected by violent public rhetoric. In Greece, the hostility expressed towards migrants, asylum seekers and refugees goes hand in hand with the one that affects Albanian communities that have long been resident in the country. In Cyprus the anti-Muslim rhetoric overlaps with the revolt against the new arrivals of migrants from third countries and the unresolved conflict between the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey. In Italy and in Spain attempts are also made to criminalize

Portrait of a Refugee.

Photo by babasteve

NGOs that work with migrants and minorities.

The thematic spheres around which the hostile public rhetoric of discriminatory, xenophobic and racist matrix tend to concentrate are six:

- security/insecurity/illegality;
- invasion (referring to migrants);
- cultural/religious incompatibility;
- economic and social costs of migration;
- competition for welfare services and jobs between nationals and non-nationals/minorities;
- danger of spreading Islamist terrorism.

These arguments are used to represent migrants and minorities as a **threat** to the social, cultural and economic stability of European society.

While the targets and issues on which hate speech in the six examined countries tend to converge, there are more differences when it comes to **the main political protagonists of the offensive and violent rhetoric**. This is also due to the total absence of data on “haters”. However, we can certainly point out the central role played in the propagation of hate speech by parties and movements belonging to the far right history and political culture and impregnated with nationalism and populist impulses. The reports highlight how these forces have been essential in the construction of a cultural and political hegemony in the current historical phase in the public debate concerning migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and minorities. This hegemony has the effect of also orienting the political communication of other parties towards forms of stigmatization and towards arguments that, even when they do not take on the explicit characteristics of hate speech, can contribute to nourish public feelings of hostility towards these groups.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

offers a reasoned overview of the main areas of **intervention in which the commitment of civil society** in the fight against hate speech has been concentrated so far. Reporting and legal assistance activities; monitoring, mapping and analysis of hate speech; human rights education in schools and media literacy; promotion of correct information; campaigns

and online awareness-raising activities and the development of initiatives and spaces for intercultural dialogue offline are the main areas of intervention tested to date.

The overall picture shows an active and experienced civil society. The main limitations of this rich and varied anti-racist mosaic is its **fragmentation** and the consequent difficulty in promoting information, awareness and advocacy initiatives capable of having a significant impact on public opinion and on the political sphere.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

is devoted to the possible strategies to be put in place to promote a fight against the most effective, strategic and wide-ranging hate speech.

First of all, there is the need for a specific, transversal, coordinated and multidimensional commitment capable of involving all the relevant actors in a common goal: migrants, minorities and their representative organizations, anti-racist organizations, media, national and local institutions, law enforcement and the judiciary, police and security forces, education, culture, research, entertainment, cinema and sport. The **transversality** and **coordination** of law enforcement strategies against racist discourses are in fact indispensable conditions for guaranteeing their effectiveness and impact, as well as the leading role of migrants, refugees, Roma and religious minorities in their definition and implementation.

Specific attention is devoted to the promotion of a more **correct information, awareness campaigns and educational moments in schools**. The need to change and reorient the agenda of the public debate is emphasized, favoring the production of **alternative narratives** with respect to **counter-narratives**. Where the latter aim to deconstruct the dominant existing discourse risking to reinforce its core vision, alternative narratives, are proactive and seek to construct a different point of view. Alternative narratives should take into account the main themes that are at the centre of violent political rhetoric without remaining subordinate to the narration of this proposal, **especially regarding the causes of the persistent economic and social inequalities** that characterize European societies and the political and institutional responses that could be fielded. Indeed, the over-representation in

negative terms of the issue of migration in the political agenda of many European countries indicates a deficit of convincing alternative political proposals on structural economic and social policies, which should instead return to the centre of the public and political debate. Crucial to this end seems **the relaunch of a public debate to discuss and advance alternative ideas on some key themes and concepts**: identity, culture, citizenship, community, equality, human rights, security, perception, wellbeing. A new debate on these issues would in fact significantly weaken all the pillars that sustain the new forms of xenophobia, nationalism and populism, revealing their demagogic, instrumental, undemocratic, polarizing and therefore divisive character.

A specific reflection should also be carried out on the very **definition of “hate speech”**, whereas on the one hand, it seems insufficient to focus only on contrasting explicitly offensive rhetoric as formally defined by international and national legislation. The analysis of laws defining and addressing hate speech should be deepened in order to offer a more effective legal, social and psychological support to the groups hit by hate speech and its consequences.

This would also be useful in order to better qualify the activities of media education and awareness of human rights and against the different forms of racism aimed at young people and to create new opportunities and new spaces for discussion and intercultural dialogue.

In summary, this report neither offers nor could offer a resolute recipe that would allow the river of communication and violent political propaganda against migrants and cross-border Europe to stop. What we do is documenting how the target groups, the topics used and the political culture of its protagonist present **common characteristics** in all the countries examined. Faced with what **we might call the internationalization of malice, hatred and discriminatory, xenophobic and racist violence, civil society and democratic political forces are called to respond with proactive, autonomous and independent narratives, but above all with social practices and convincing proposals on structural, economic and social policies**.