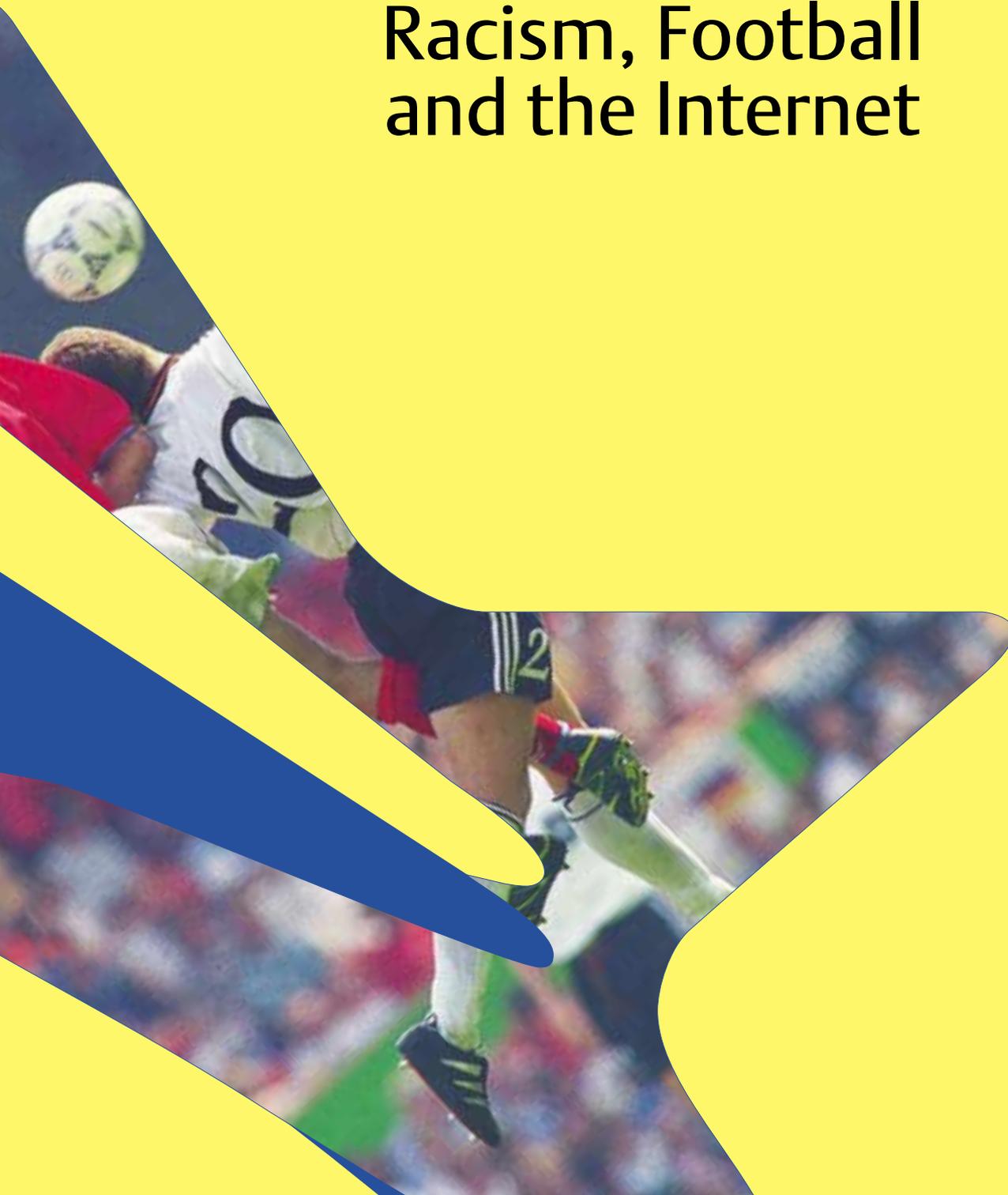


# Racism, Football and the Internet



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# Racism, Football and the Internet

on behalf of the

**EUMC**

European Monitoring Centre  
on Racism and Xenophobia

by

**U.I.S.P**

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## Introduction

The Internet has today become a forum for over 300 million potential users around the world. Racist, violent and extremist organizations and groupings have been quick learnt to seize upon this new medium and take advantage of it's benefits through systematic and rational use. In this way the Internet has proved to be an effective and impunitive medium for disseminating racist, anti Semitic, xenophobic and hate-filled ideas to a wider audience, and with a great degree of impunity.

Furthermore, the internet is proving to be a practical tool for racist organisations, groupings and individuals of presenting themselves to new audiences, recruiting activists and emerging from a relatively clandestine existence. This successful dissemination comes on the one hand from the growing success of this modern means of communication, especially among young people and, on the other hand, from the freedom of expression on which it is founded

According to the researchers of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, in 1995 there was just one site inciting racial hatred. By November 1997, the Centre had already logged 600 sites, and today this figure has risen to more than 2500 sites. Given the exponential development of the Internet the researchers consider these statistics to be a considerable underestimate of the actual figures.

The world of sports is under pressure from organisations and groups, which, through racism, xenophobia and the use of violence, seek to destroy the joy, enthusiasm and unity surrounding sport. In Europe we have already seen the way that various groups with links to neo-nazis and right-wing extremists, have used the Internet to spread their racist attitudes inside and outside football stadium.

With these developments in mind the European Monitoring Centre (EUMC) decided in 2000 to commission research, using the expertise of international experts, to examine both the scope and the content of home pages which call for the use of football as a platform for racist and violent activities. This is the first time that research has been undertaken in this specific area. The results from this research are being reported back through this paper in a way that we hope make for informative reading for anyone with an interest in the areas of race, football and the Internet. We hope the recommendations outlined in conclusion of the report can act as a spur for action in the areas covered by the study.

## Methodology

This research study on Racism, Football and the Internet analysed football supporter sites, especially those of supporter groups most often seen as the most active, demonstrative, and, occasionally, violent and racist. This does not mean that racism and xenopho-

bia in football are limited to these groups only: they are also perpetrated by supporters not part of these formal fan groups, players, managers and significant clubs. It is far easier to look for racist messages in fans sites because they are less visible than more institutional sites such as team sites or those endorsed by players, which have a higher public profile.

In order to analyse the full complexity of the situation and classify the sites examined, we used the technique of "content analysis". This instrument of examination allowed us to read the sites under examination following recurrent key words and symbols, structure and architecture of the documents. Practically, each site has been analysed in depth with the aim of inserting it into one of the categories identified at the outset.

The use of this tool of analysis presumes a close knowledge of the referring context, of the dominant culture (including supporters' habits, languages and behaviours), of the fan groups internal dynamics. This approach pushed us to use three supporters/researcher (one from Italy and two from Germany), who could relate the area of research to their wider knowledge of fan culture and the Internet. All had taken part in other scientific research studies.

Using experienced supporters proved to be an advantage: as they started their activity, the researchers already knew the names and characteristics of many supporter groups and had clear ideas of the racist inclinations of some groups in their own countries and in other European stadiums. In short, they knew exactly what and where to look for.

All three researchers have social scholars background and so the research wasn't invalidated by non-objective "value judgement" (M. Weber), because of the strict use of a rigorous tool, such as the content analysis is. We can still add that their experiences of "participant observer" help them in order to chose the best way searching and reading the site.

The three researchers agreed on what geographic areas each one of them would investigate. The Italian researcher focused her attention on the Mediterranean area (Italy, Spain and France), the other two about Central and Northern Europe (the United Kingdom, Austria and Germany). This internal subdivision is not one made casually, but has a precise scientific base: in these two regions football supporters express themselves in rather different

ways, thus requiring two different approaches and socio-anthropological knowledge.

With a certain degree of simplification, one may say that the Mediterranean area is strongly influenced by the Italian fans model. This model is characterised by a limited number of groups (sometimes just one) accounting for a large number of members, able to influence and control many young people in their terrace. These groups tend to be hegemonic in their stadium sectors and to organise themselves with megaphones, drums and sometimes with very complex choreographic works.

In Central and Northern Europe football supporters use what might be called a 'choral' method of support; it is more spontaneous and less well organised. In these stadiums, terraces are full of both small groups of hooligans (elite supporters with a clear tendency to violence) and many small or medium size supporter groups who operate in complete mutual autonomy, though they may belong to the same Clubs Association.

Starting from these differences, determined by a social history, which has strongly influenced the way of grouping people we saw the necessity to adopt strategies tailored to specific needs. For instance, monitoring a Mediterranean site like the Irriducibili Lazio one (that is the hegemony group) proved very important in order to understand the opinions shared and very widespread in the Lazio supporters terrace; on the other hand, monitoring other sites by Lazio supporters (not so many, we must admit) was not as much interesting because they are less visited and less representative. Focussing on the few main groups, as far as these countries are concerned, mirrored the real situation more faithfully.

In Central and Northern Europe, on the other hand, monitoring the site of a single group, however well-known, may give us a clear idea of that group's policy, but not of the common opinions of that stadium, where dozens other groups can be found. In these countries it was necessary to examine a greater number of sites.

### **Classification**

Besides the essential data necessary to identify a site (site name, group name, provider name, country, town, team and division), a four-level classification table was devised in order to clearly spot the degree

of intensity of the racist material present in the site. These four levels are been set down in an imaginary continuum and are as follows:

- a. Absent.** These sites have no racist allusions or messages, neither in the structures (in the pages written and managed directly by the groups) or in the open spaces (forum and guestbook)
- b. Latent.** These sites focus on football don't have clear racist or discriminatory allusions in the structure, but they conceal in the forum or in the guestbook racist insults, offences and some allusions to the extreme right are evident.
- c. Recurrent.** These sites contain, in the structure of the site, racist allusions or reference to the extreme right ideology. In the forum or in the guestbook racist or xenophobic messages can be seen.
- d. Strong and well-structured.** These sites are explicitly racist and xenophobic, discrimination is clearly encouraged in the same structure of the site and in the open spaces. Here football fandom is often a secondary concern to the propagation of the policies of the extreme right.

## Data and Analysis

Because of the relatively limited time at our disposal, it was not possible to examine all the supporter sites present in Europe, nor could the situations be thoroughly studied in any single country.

In fact, in order to be able to perform such an analysis it would be necessary to base it on a content analysis of the web sites, with a socio-anthropological and historical research for each country. The best indicators for a good survey could be: process of civilisation and sportivisation (N. Elias), old a new tendencies in the youth aggregation (music, sport, art, literature) and social history.

We identified some countries which are considered to play major roles in football supporting because of their well-established traditions. These are the countries the study focussed on. The most carefully monitored countries were Austria, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. Outside the EU also the situation in Switzerland was integrated as a part of the German

speaking area and analysed because of the strong supporter traditions. Undoubtedly we examined all the most important groups sites in these countries and, approximately, we covered one fifth of all the football sites (a little less in the UK). As far as Portugal, France and Spain are concerned, the last by far more active than the previous two in this field, fewer sites were examined, but the choice was an informed one which picked up the most famous and representative groups (for example the Ultras Sur of Real Madrid).

On the whole, the research study has examined, though not in a homogeneous way, 455 sites of 8 European countries, as reported in the following table.

At a first glance, the table shows remarkable differences in the number of sites examined in the main countries inspected. Countries like the United Kingdom and Germany (or also Austria and

### Sites by country

Country	Sites examined	Absent racism	Latent racism	Recurrent racism	Strong racism
Germany	146	131	10	4	1
United Kingdom	101	97	4	-	-
Italy	53	36	11	2	4
Austria	80	75	3	1	1
Switzerland	48	45	1	-	2
Spain	12	7	2	2	1
France	8	8	-	-	-
Portugal	7	6	1	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>

*Total number of sites found as far as racist content is concerned : 50*

Switzerland, with reference to their smaller surface) account for a larger number of sites (in absolute terms or proportionally to their geographical extension) compared to other countries like Italy. This should not be interpreted as a lack of balance, it is a mere consequence of the smaller number of relevant supporter sites in Italy and in countries where the dominant model is the "ultra" one, compared to Central and Northern Europe.

Due to the presence of sites with a racist content the problem can surely not be underestimated: in fact the table shows that 50 sites out of the 455 analysed were found positive as far as racist content is concerned

which is 10,9% of the total, and concretely means that each 10 sites managed by the fan groups in Europe there will be one that explicitly contains racist, anti-Semitic or xenophobic messages.

Among all the countries examined, the one with the lowest incidence rate is the United Kingdom, with 4%; the figure for Austria and Switzerland is 6.25%, in Germany it is 10.4%, whereas Italy, with 32% (about 1/3 of the analysed sites) of positive sites, is by far the country with the highest rate.

Some countries in the list, regardless of the restricted number of sites visited, can provide some interesting data. It is interesting to notice that all the eight sites monitored in France (including the Paris Saint Germain, a group with potentially racist members) are negative; in Portugal, just one of the seven sites taken into consideration contained some racist material. On the other hand Spain, with 5 positive sites out of 12, surely shows that there is some ground for racist concern. If the data collected is representative of general tendencies, it should be agreed that the countries most seriously affected through the internet Italy and Spain. These findings are particularly interesting because they matches the geographic areas where racism is most widespread in the stadiums.

These developments are also in evidence at a social level, where we can observe an increase of violent episodes, an increase in racial harassment, racist culture and a "social alarm" of the migration phenomenon as dangerous for social security.

The reasons for such a widespread presence of racism in the stadiums of these countries could probably be explained by referring to their recent history in immigration..

However, an attempt at offering some suggestions as to the reasons why Italian and Spanish stadiums are more vulnerable to racism than those in other European countries should be undertaken.

In Italy, as well as in Spain, immigration is a relatively recent phenomenon, starting in the late eighties. Measures taken to curtail racist intolerance and to make local populations aware of the necessity to embrace new-comers have often been late, improvised and devoid of a far-reaching strategy.

Additionally, only in very recent times has the fight against racism acquired an importance in terms of

public policy. Some recent legislative changes have been implemented, thus acknowledging, though with inappropriate delay, the importance of social intervention in this sector. Other developments have also begun to develop, with some supporter groups organising anti-racist initiatives.

Under such circumstances racism in stadiums, places where, by definition, hidden and latent feelings express themselves freely, is the tip of the iceberg.

The high number of racist sites in the present study also seems to indicate that in Italy, as well as in Spain, there is a lack of clear rules and efficient control preventing the spread of racism in Internet.

Immigration in other European countries is a much older phenomenon, therefore integration methods and measures to face the problems caused by racism and xenophobia have been in existence longer. Portugal, France and the United Kingdom, for instance, experienced a major migratory flux from their former colonies throughout the last century. France, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Germany and the Vienna district in Austria have been facing a large immigration from the 60s on, especially because of a lack of labour in their industries.

Some of these countries, especially the United Kingdom and Germany, have thus had a chance to develop efficient countermeasures to contrast racism and discrimination, both at an institutional level and in large sectors of their societies. This did not result in the eradication of racism, which is still present in the above countries, but rather in its exclusion from all public activities, thus forcing it to remain latent.

This is proved by the fact that in the United Kingdom laws punish every form of racism, even in the Internet, very strictly and the public opinion itself is very careful about this issue. As far as football is concerned, starting from the late eighties, because of a growth in racist abuse addressing black players, supporters, especially those belonging to the Football Supporter Association, have been reacting and organising a great number of anti-racist events. A very successful anti-racist campaign was launched many years ago; it denounces racist abuses and promotes a culture based on tolerance in the stadiums. This campaign, called "Kick it Out", is promoted by institutions, both political and sport ones, and by the supporters themselves.

Even in Germany, where racism and neo-Nazism are much more alarming than in the United Kingdom, strategies and measures to contrast them were also devised. Besides passing specific laws, Germany has carried out a number of social intervention projects in order to spread the values of law and tolerance among extreme right-wing militants. Inside the stadiums, through the activity of supporter associations like BAFF (Association of active German supporters) and the various Fanprojekte (structure for social intervention dealing with supporters), sustained by the institutions, long and successful anti-racist campaigns have been launched. As a result, racist abuse of black players are extremely uncommon in Germany, with the exception of a few stadiums.

Germany has also paid particular attention to racism and neo-Nazism present in the Internet. In 1997, when the number of extreme right-wing sites was on the rise, Germany passed a law which made providers liable for the content of their sites. From that moment on, German commercial providers have been shutting off the Home Pages with extreme right-wing political views; many neo-Nazi groups, in order to keep on spreading their ideas, were forced to resort to foreign providers in America, South Africa, etc.

In the summer of 2000, as a result of some serious racist event, Germany started a major anti-racist campaign which has also looked at activities on the Internet. The Federal Office for the Defence of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz) has even started an international online petition for the removal of racist and neo-Nazi pages present in the American provider geocities.yahoo.com. This campaign has also ventilated the hypothesis of some sort of punishment to the providers who offer their services to people who spread Nazi and racist ideas.

This constant attention paid to the Internet has certainly contributed to reducing or eliminating the racist or neo-Nazi content of some football supporter sites. As a result, 10 of the 15 positive sites found in Germany had a low degree of racist content.

## **Analysis of the sites**

### **Latent**

32 of the 50 sites classified (latent, recurrent or strong and well-structured) have a low degree of racist content. It means that in those sites racist comments and statements were occasionally, not fre-

quently, found, sometimes in a description of a game, but mostly in the forum and in the guestbook, areas which are open to everyone. Some of the sites belonging to this first category of latent sites are either groups which declare their right-wing political view by choosing names like Fronte, Irriducibili and Camerati (such names clearly refer to a Nazi or fascist past) or groups well-known because of their political tendencies and racist ideologies (Curva Nord Milano, Ultras Verona, Ultras Trieste, Real Madrid Ultras sur, Salzburg ultras, Chelsea Headhunters and Dortmund Rabauken). It is reasonable to believe that most such groups, since they are aware of their reputation as racists and extremists, are afraid of having their activities curtailed. As a result, they have probably made a decision not to express their views in a clear way in their sites.

### **Recurrent**

The second category of sites with recurrent racist content, accounts for 9 sites. These sites not only contain, in their forums and guestbooks, racist messages referring to Roma (in Austria), Turks (called "Kanaken" in Germany), blacks or Jews (Italy and Spain), but also some racist or extreme references in the very site structure. For example, in the home page of the German site called "Commando Ultras Leoben" one can read: "We define ourselves as patriots, and we would like to tell all those who protest against our slogans addressing foreigners and black players that such slogans are nowadays heard in all football stadiums". These sites frequently use nationalistic colours (black or the colours of the national flag), runic or gothic fonts.

### **Strong and well-structured**

Finally, 9 sites have a strong and well-structured racist content. The site structure is interspersed with extreme right-wing and racist content. We can undoubtedly say that such sites also use football and the Internet to spread their racist ideas. Two such sites in Switzerland, Koma Kolonne 88 and Commando Ultras 88 Lugano, use the number 88 not as a reference to the year in which the group was founded (quite unlikely), but because this is a code for the Nazi greeting Heil Hitler, "8" being a symbol of "H", eighth letter of the alphabet and first letter of both "Heil" and "Hitler". The Austrian site called Rapid Club Wels shows ironic comic strips with racist and xenophobic content and constantly insults the Africans.

The site of Mods e Skinheads Real Madrid has a strong political content illustrated by an abundance of Celtic crosses and Fascist symbols.

However, the top of this particular classification is reached by two Italian groups supporting fourth division teams. In the site of the Padova group called "Juventude Crociata" football takes second place to politics. Most pages in the site are used to disseminate racist and xenophobic kind of propaganda. Group members declare themselves to be followers of an extreme right-wing political party called Forza Nuova, whose site is among the group links.

The Pro Patria supporter group site shows more interest for football, but Fascist symbols and racist references are still abundant. What seems to be really alarming in this site is the area containing songs



Source: Internet

and chants (presented in a downloadable format). This section contains stadium chants as well as other slogans like "there are no Italian niggers" and the monkey imitation racist supporters make when a black player touches the ball.

A different analysis is necessary for the site of Lazio "Irriducibili", the main supporter group of the Lazio team. This site, technically excellent, has been added to the most racist ones not only and just because it contains a large number of racist messages in the guestbook, fascist symbols, racist and anti-Semitic statements in other pages, but because we consider it to be especially dangerous. This group is well-known world-wide because of its racist expressions and many other smaller groups often tend to imitate it. It is no coincidence that almost all the Italian and Spanish sites with racist content contain a link to this

site; it is also hardly a coincidence that in many foreign guestbooks (e.g. Chelsea and Paris Saint Germain) individual supporters referred to Lazio supporters' fascism and racism.

We compared the links present in the racist supporter sites and found that their mutual acknowledgements is a typically Italian and Spanish habit, which is absent in other countries. In these two countries almost all sites include links to other extreme right-wing groups, even if they are considered enemies or rivals. One of the sites most frequently mentioned is Lazio Irriducibili, sometimes also present in Spanish sites.

In Central and Northern Europe an almost total lack of links to other supporter groups was noticed. The only link present often is the one to the team official site. Enquired led us to discover that, in Germany at least, links to other supporter groups are no longer used because law holds the webmaster liable even for the content of the sites present in the link section.

It should not escape one's attention that two Italian sites are the only ones with a direct link to Forza Nuova, a political party which is quite popular inside stadiums and among skinheads.

Among the 50 sites, as many as 18 have bought a domain of their own, whereas all the others have resorted to various commercial providers. The most frequently used provider is geocities.yahoo.com (7 occurrences), followed by Italian tefonet, specialised in football supporting (5 occurrences).

A final observation is inspired by a reading of all data as a whole. It is reasonable to believe that racism is more freely expressed in the Internet where it is more freely expressed in stadiums. In other words, racism in the Internet mirrors racist activities inside stadiums.

If we compare the situation in Germany, and the situation in Italy, the comparison seems to endorse our hypothesis above.

The data gathered show that 10.4% of German sites are racist, a figure noticeably lower than the Italian percentage (32%); in addition, just one site in Germany is strongly racist, whereas in Italy there are four such sites.

## Suggestions and Proposals

The results of this study seem to indicate that there exist different approaches to the monitoring and control of racism in the Internet, there exist different form of attentions, approaches, provisions and controlling.

In countries like Italy and Spain, where we have highlighted a number of racist sites, the attention and publicity of expressions of racism is still focused in stadiums and has not been identified as existing within new technologies, the current norms of identification and monitoring appear to be inefficient.

In order to tackle this phenomenon work needs to follow two paths: the legislative one (with a emphasis on clamping down) and the social one (with a goal of trying to achieve prevention).

### Legal initiatives

From a legislative point of view there is the necessity to adopt at a European level a resolution joined by all the countries about the recognition of the crime of spreading racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic through internet. The resolution must give also indications about how to struggle against this phenomenon. The European Commission should urge that these indications are changed into law in each single country. Furthermore, taking in account that internet is an international instrument by definition, this provisions adopted should be only the first step for the creation of a world-wide statement.

The proposed law should also have provisions to oblige webmasters to instantly filter and shut off messages with racist content. This should not only happen when the site is a commercial one and a contract exists in which the people liable can easily be identified, but also when the site is freely granted by a local or national provider. In this case there should be provisions holding the commercial provider based in another country (this happens quite frequently), the provisions should include the obligation on the part of the national sites which act for the foreign sites to shut them off as soon as the presence of racist content is ascertained.

These kind of indications must not have only a repressive and punishing element, but they have to guarantee the freedom of expression and the free circulation of ideas. In fact, it must take in account that the internet is an instrument able to go throughout the borders,

which allows the communication among all the citizens of the world and it is considered an important instrument to build up a less nationalistic and more international identity.

It is our view that if we only give consideration to legal and restrictive measures we risk interfering with the basic principles of the internet and restricting the tenets of freedom of expression that should be guaranteed to each citizen.

### Social and educational actions

The dilemmas of law which guarantees the dignity of each human being, but that at the same time don't forbid the freedom of expression, is a crucial point in the history for every legislator. For this reason we believe that each law with the goal to punish criminal behaviour against the community must be accompanied by social actions designed to change the culture, the mentality and the behaviour of the people. In the specific case, projecting activities, actions and methodology of intervention which work directly with and for the supporter groups is one of the way to challenge racist slogan in the internet.

In this way the change of the model of behaviour is provoked not only by the fear of the punishment, but by the learning of a code of respect toward the other and the appreciation of diversity.

According to this we make the following proposal for social and educational interventions which follow two different fields of actions: the first one more specifically is about the phenomenon of racism in the internet, and the second one is about the general problem of discrimination inside the football world.

### Addressing racism on the internet:

- o Taking the conclusions of this study which clearly points to the existence of racism on the internet we believe there is a necessity to create an international group of experts, with the duty of analysing the situation further, and monitoring and evaluating the phenomenon of racism on the internet. This activity would have as its goal to draw on positive actions and interventions against this new phenomenon
- o according to the statement of ECRI (recommendation n° 6 - 15th December 2000) it is necessary to support the self-regulatory measures taken by the internet industry to combat racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism on the net (antiracist hotlines, codes of conduct and filtering software)

- o it is necessary to research at an Institutional level methods for supporting who is still active with antiracist fan website, and to support the development of new supporter site with antiracist and anti-discriminatory content
- o to give consideration to action against providers who host racist sites (like geocities and tifonet) in order to make them understand that the presence of sites with discriminatory content is an affront to human dignity and also for the positive image of their own company, and suggest to them the possibility of giving antiracist ads for free
- o to liaise with all the football club in order to push them to inserted in their own home page antiracist statement by the players or supporters

However, since the most effective way to combat racism and intolerance is to act in the places where people actually gather, it was thought appropriate to illustrate some preventive methods, some suggestions for institutions as to how to practically to take measures to decrease racism and discriminatory attitudes linked to football. These observations, principally directed to political institutions, are the result of the ideas that have arisen from this research and of the long experience of the "Football Against Racism in Europe" network. It is also informed by the resolution on racism passed by FIFA, the world governing body, on 7th July 2001 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

To take forward the struggle against racism and related forms of discrimination inside the football world local, national and European institutions should:

- o put pressure on the all realities of the football world at each level and in all the countries, to establish a common action to exchange information and experiences useful in the struggle against racist manifestation
- o organise and promote common projects to combat racism involving all the appropriate parties (including football teams, police forces, supporter groups, organisations studying football supporters, mass media and local institutions), in order to achieve integration between supporter groups and communities of immigrants
- o to promote educational programme with the aim of educate all people of each age and social class (but especially children and young people) about the damage racism causes our societies and the positive benefits of racial harmony and unity
- o promote the development of intervention projects which aim to limit intolerant, violent and racist

- actions by football supporters
- o support the co-operation among Projects for fans at a national, European and world level, with the goal of identifying and promoting best practice in the field of social interventions to limit the intolerant behaviours of fans
- o favour bottom-up, self-established anti-racist initiatives by supporter groups or organisations
- o promote the active participation, not just symbolic declarations, on the part of the various football clubs. In particular, football clubs should be encouraged to use their own players as symbols in anti-racist campaigns, because they represent a model to follow for many young people. For example, the clubs can organize periodical meetings with supporter groups about racism and violence involving their players, the same players could do anti-racist announcements in the stadium or in their official instrument of information. Also effective could be also the use of the players to broadcast messages in the stadium, as the Paris Saint Germain clubs did in 1998, after that some fans made racist insults to black players of the other teams
- o encourage the mass media to give proper resonance to anti-racist events, and to better inform about racism, without being over-emotional and without implying that supporters are all racists
- o promote the continuous training of policemen working within the framework of security in stadiums, as far as racist and xenophobic groups and political parties are concerned
- o make sure that in all football institutions and clubs understand and promote equal opportunities in regard to employment and provision of services. All clubs should support the goal of social inclusion, and to treat everyone with respect, irrespective of their status as comrades, enemies, public, fans.

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