Addressing hate crime as a regional security threat: an overview of the ODIHR Law Enforcement Officer Programme

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Introduction

What do the numbers 28 and 88 mean? What does Rahowa stand for? Why should the police be vigilant on 20 April? What is Combat 18 and Red Watch? In order for law enforcement officers to identify and record a crime as ‘hate-motivated’, increased knowledge and training is needed in order to read the intelligence, symbols and music of organised hate groups. This has been particularly apparent with the increased sophistication of organised hate groups in their means of communication and their efforts to organise and collaborate internationally in order to facilitate a free flow of hate propaganda and ideology throughout the OSCE region.

Organised hate groups, including neo-Nazis and racist skinheads, are becoming more advanced in the ways they organise and operate. Through the internet, such groups have been able to propagate their ideologies and attract an international network of supporters. The website ns88.org, for example, provides a list of the ‘Top 100 Nationalist Websites’ which includes links to neo-Nazi and racist skinhead groups as well as access to music (including online radio channels), magazines, information about events and online purchase of neo-Nazi clothing, flags, jewellery and other items.

Hate groups are also using the internet as a medium to encourage and incite hate-motivated attacks. For example, the websites Red Watch, with country-specific sites for Poland, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom (UK), post photos and personal information (including addresses, telephone and licence plate numbers) of individuals who are active in anti-racist or anti-fascist activities or members of particular communities (for example, Jewish, Muslim or gay/lesbian) and incite violence against these individuals.2

Hate groups regularly participate in a wide array of international networks and regularly use music as a means to communicate, organise and attract further supporters. For example, Blood and Honour (its initials ‘BH’ are often coded as ‘28’ — ‘B’ being the second letter of the alphabet and ‘H’ the eighth letter) is one of the largest, best organised and most influential ‘white power’

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music groups. The name of the group is taken from the Hitler youth slogan ‘Blut und Ehre’. Initially based in the UK, but now with branches throughout the OSCE region, it publishes magazines, organises concerts, distributes music and has links to neo-Nazi parties throughout Europe. On its website, the Group describes itself as ‘a global confederacy of like-minded freedom fighters – the ’Brotherhood 28’.

Organised hate groups are also using sophisticated symbols and codes to communicate their messages. For example, the number ’18’ in the name of Combat 18, a branch of the organisation ‘Blood and Honour’, is commonly used by neo-Nazi and racist skinhead groups and is derived from the initials of Adolf Hitler. The number 88 stands for HH or ‘Heil Hitler’ and ‘Rahowa’ stands for Racial Holy War. Organised hate groups are also choosing symbolic dates for their organised activities, for example, a quick glance through the event photos on the website of Blood and Honour shows many events linked to April 20th, the birthday of Adolf Hitler.

Unless law enforcement officers are trained to identify symbols, understand the connections between different organised hate groups and monitor the different media utilised by hate groups such as music and the internet, front-line law enforcement officers will fail to see the intelligence behind crimes motivated by hate. Without this deeper level of knowledge and understanding, law enforcement officers will not be able to classify and record racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim or homophobic crimes as such.

The need for an increased law enforcement response to hate crime has been acknowledged by all 56 participating States of the OSCE. Through their adoption of various decisions on tolerance and non-discrimination, OSCE States made specific commitments to establish training programmes for law enforcement officials on the enforcement of legislation relating to hate crimes. OSCE States also recognised the need for informal exchanges among experts in appropriate fora on best practices and experiences in law enforcement pertaining to hate crime.

In order to support participating States in meeting their commitments, in 2004, the ODIHR developed a pilot Law Enforcement Officer Programme on Combating Hate Crime (hereinafter referred to as the LEOP) in order to provide technical support and police-to-police expertise to participating States in their efforts to combat hate-motivated crimes and incidents. From its inception, the LEOP adopted a ‘train-the-trainer’ and ‘police-to-police’ approach, recognizing that professional law enforcement training, developed and provided by certified law enforcement trainers, is an effective way to lead organizational change.

This article provides an overview of the rationale and process for

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4 See: http://www.bloodandhonour.org/e107_v0.7.8_full/news.php

5 PC.DEC/607 and PC.DEC/621