



European Union / United Nations Alliance of Civilizations symposium

#SpreadNoHate: Hate Speech Against Migrants and Refugees in the Media

Brussels, 26 January 2017

@UNAOC @eu_eas #SpreadNoHate

CONCEPT NOTE

(draft 15 December 2016)

Within the framework of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations' (UNAOC) #SpreadNoHate initiative, UNAOC and the European Union (EU) will co-organise a one-day symposium in Brussels on 26 January 2017.

Hate speech and incitement to hatred against migrants and refugees are on the rise across Europe. In a growing number of countries, anger and polarisation characterise domestic politics, and harsh measures targeting migrant and refugee communities are put forward. This is partly due to misconceptions and prejudice in a context where communities are confronted with challenges related to the arrival of refugees and migrants with diverse backgrounds, cultures and religions.

Acts of intimidation and violence have spiked, and hate speech against migrants and refugees – and all those who are perceived as "foreigners" on the grounds of their national or ethnic origin, or of their religion and belief –, inaccurate reporting, false "data" and xenophobic slogans are intensifying. Increasingly, migrants and refugees are seen as an economic drain and a strain on public benefits. They are perceived as unable to adapt to customs and life in receiving societies, and they are associated with fears of terrorist attacks. Their positive contribution to our societies is not explained and therefore rarely absorbed.

In this context, the media is a major player. Every minute of the day people are exposed to television, radio, newspapers and social media. Every day, information from the media is influencing their thoughts, perceptions and opinions. The media is well placed to inform, communicate and connect citizens across the globe. Instead, in many cases, it acts as a powerful platform for discrimination, exclusion and the incitement to hatred and violence.

The media coverage of migration to Europe has in many cases exacerbated anti-migrant sentiment through biased, aggressive reporting. Journalists often fail to tell the full story or offer the correct context when it comes to migration issues and routinely fall into populist traps laid by politicians. Moreover, although positive narratives about migrants and refugees sometimes come up in the media, they rarely have as massive a public reach as more controversial stories.

The EU/UNAOC symposium draws on the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants of 19 September 2016 and its commitment to counter hate crimes, hate speech and racial violence. The symposium also dovetails with the launch of the United Nations TOGETHER INITIATIVE to changing negative perceptions and attitudes towards refugees. UNAOC is one of the working groups contributing to this campaign.

The aim of the European #SpreadNoHate symposium is to foster inclusive, open and diverse societies. Against this background, it is important to step up efforts to prevent hate speech in the media. We must acknowledge, support and amplify the work of media operators who provide accurate and objective coverage of migration issues and build balanced narratives on migrants and refugees, thereby contributing to preventing racism and xenophobia and to promote inclusion. The media's potential to help prevent and moderate tensions needs to be examined, evaluated and, where appropriate, encouraged.

Objective of the symposium

The objective of the EU/UNAOC symposium is to provide a platform for discussion and operational conclusions on:

- Exploring how migrant voices and experiences are framed in the migration debate against the backdrop of a complex relationship between the media, politics and public opinion;
- Better understanding the triggers and mechanisms of hate speech against migrants and refugees;
- Fostering dissemination and replication of successful initiatives that have been taken to prevent negative narratives against migrants and refugees in the media;
- Exploring additional ways and means to improve the quality of media coverage about migrants and refugees, notably by promoting ethical journalism; building partnerships between media and civil society; and preventing hate speech on the Internet.

Participation in the symposium

The European #SpreadNoHate symposium will gather eighty select participants from the media and civil society, as well as governments and international organisations in Europe and its neighbourhood. Particular emphasis will be placed on engaging the global media space and journalists. Other speakers and participants will include representatives of Internet intermediaries and tech companies, non-governmental organisations, migrants and refugees' organisations, community representatives, national human rights institutions, as well as representatives of think tanks, the private sector and academia.

UNAOC will take advantage of the momentum of its on-going social media campaign, with the hashtag #SpreadNoHate, which has successfully reached millions of people online globally. The EU/UNAOC Symposium will be covered live on social media, to share key messages in real time and to engage the global community on several social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, LinkedIn, and Snapchat. Through this effort, the debate will gain global visibility, and it will reach and engage a maximum number of people, in particular among the youth.

Report of the symposium

Through the various presentations, active discussions and debates of symposium participants, as well as through the general public's participation on social media, a complete policy report will be issued. The report will include a clear set of recommendations for preventing negative narratives against migrants and refugees and mitigating the impact of hate speech, as well as a concrete proposal on the setting up of an online platform. The policy report will be posted on UNAOC's and the EU's websites and widely shared with media organisations, journalists, government officials, higher education institutions and civil society organisations.

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