

RE-ACTIVE YOUTH I Against Online Hate Speech

RECOGNISING Issues and Opportunities in Combating Online Hate Speech

Greek National Strategy Review of Internet Governance Strategy of Council of Europe

Results of the Coalition Building Session for collective actions

Summary

- 1. The Internet Governance Strategy of the Council of Europe**
- 2. A short overview of the Greek context**
- 3. The methodology**
- 4. Practical review of the Internet Governance Strategy of the CoE**
 - 4.1 Raising awareness**
 - 4.2 Acting on the agents**
 - 4.3 Implementing the law and protecting the victims**
 - 4.4 Some technical solutions**
- 5. Conclusions**



1. The Internet Governance Strategy of the Council of Europe

The Internet is becoming more and more an essential part of our lives. Via the net is possible to meet new people, to communicate with old friends who live far away, to get information from all over the world, to buy items and services as in a real shop. Of course, as real life is, the Internet is not a completely safe place and it is more and more common to incur in unpleasant situations.

Being aware of the central place that the Internet has in nowadays life, the Council of Europe want to give its contribution for making the Internet a better and safer place, where the values that are at the basis of Council of Europe actions are respected and promoted. For achieving so, the Council of Europe promoted an Internet Governance Strategy, which will inform all the activities of the Council of Europe about the Internet from 2012 till 2015.

According to the document the Strategy consists in “over 40 lines of concrete action” which identify “challenges and corresponding responses to enable state and non-state actors together to make the Internet a space which is inclusive and people centred”. More over the Council of Europe states that “the existing framework of international law, including human rights law, is, as a matter of principle, equally applicable on-line as it is off-line”.

Six main priorities are identified by the strategy and for each one several goals are set for “advancing the protection and respect for human rights, the rule of law and democracy on the Internet”.

The participants in the meeting RE-ACTIVE YOUTH I Against Online Hate Speech - RECOGNISING Issues and Opportunities in Combating Online Hate Speech deeply discusses the Strategy and tried to give concrete solutions and proposal in order to implement it mainly in the field of Hate Speech Online.

2. A short overview of the Greek context

Being the meeting focused on Hate Speech Online in Greece, the participants were equipped with information on the issue and of the problems that arise from it. Online Hate Speech is a very new phenomenon worldwide and it is still not very well known in Greece, or at least it is largely underestimated.

One of the main features of the phenomenon of Hate Speech Online in the Greek context is its strong interconnection with Hate Speech activities and expressions offline. That is the reason why in Greece it is almost impossible to separate the two aspects of the problem. Moreover analyzing the issue exclusively from its “online” side would give only a partial and not clear picture of what is the real situation nowadays in Greece.

An example of what explained above is the use that the Neo-fascist and racist party Xrysh Aygh (literally Golden Dawn) make of the Internet. Actions that occur in reality are filmed and posted on the party's website, on YouTube, and other social networks and spread in a viral way all over the cyberspace. This gives big publicity to the party and its member almost without any filter for the final users of the net. A concrete episode of this approach is the video released some months ago, but still very popular on the Internet, that shows Xrysh Aygh members destroying the stands of immigrant workers in the city of Rafina, near Athens, on a summer Friday night.

This introduction is necessary to understand how the participants in the training interpreted the Internet Governance Strategy of the Council of Europe and in order to contextualize the practical review of the strategy the participants in the meeting gave.

3. The methodology

The Internet Governance Strategy of the Council of Europe has been first translated into Greek and then distributed to all the participants in the meeting. It has then been presented by the participants that started a discussion about it already during the presentation. In order to guide the discussion and make it more productive a non-formal education based activities has been implemented.

All the participants were divided in small groups made by 5 or 6 people. The trainer created the small teams in a way that allowed people who had different experiences and from different backgrounds could work together mixing their knowledge and their opinion about the problem. The groups were then assigned an identity which had to lead the discussion about the problem; some groups had to reflect on the problems from the point of view of the agents of Hate Speech Online, while others had to think about the victims of Hate speech Online. This approach allowed a complete 360 degrees overview of the issue, ensuring the presentation of all the perspectives.



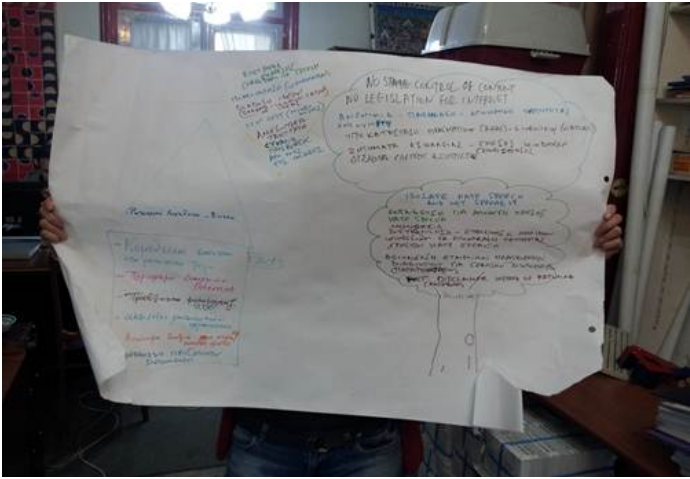
Drawing facts, highlights, problems, and inspirations.



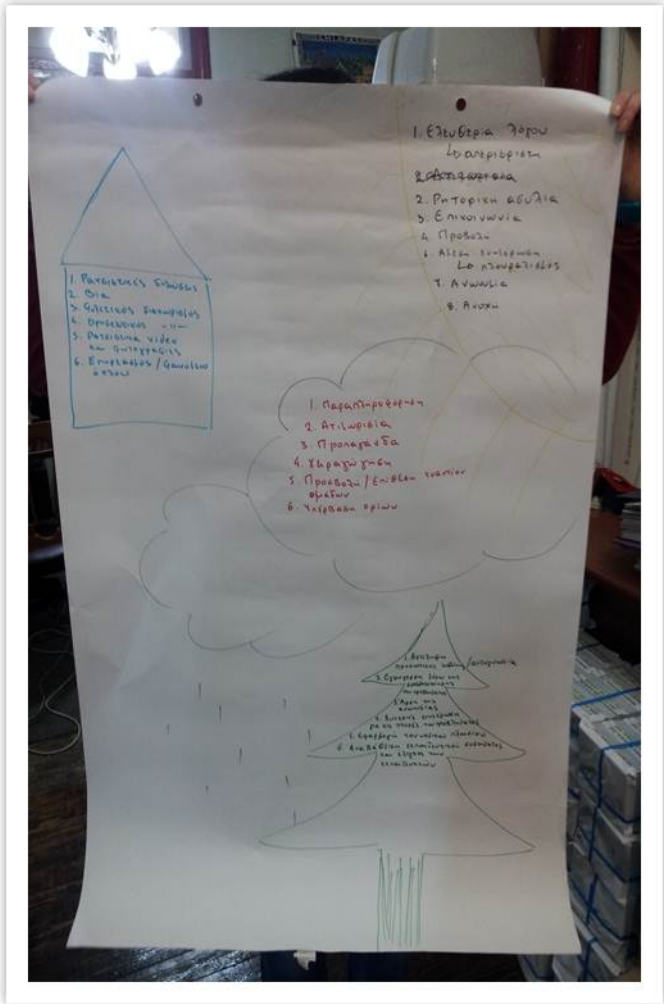
Discussion in a group.

Being the groups divided and assigned an identity, the trainer explained the exercise to be accomplished. Each group had to represent in a big sheet of paper a landscape with a house symbolizing the facts, a sun symbolizing the highlights, a cloud symbolizing the problems, and a tree symbolizing the inspirations and the possible solutions. These symbols gave some space for interpretation. Some participants intended the facts related to the Internet in general, some others thought about the facts of Hate Speech Online, some others focused the facts only from the perspective of the assigned identity. The problems and the highlights as well could be differently interpreted. What is a highlight for an agent in fact it can be a problem for a victim, let's think about the anonymity, for example.

After the groups finished discussing and creating the visual representation of the results, the drawings were presented to the plenary and the debriefing dealt mainly with the inspirations.



One among the drawings.



One among the drawings.

4. Practical review of the Internet Governance Strategy of the CoE

The practical review that came out of the debriefing touched upon many suggestions mainly based on the Greek reality, but that can be applied to the European context as well. A common starting point was that the Internet Governance Strategy of the Council of Europe lacks of concreteness, so the majority of the proposed ideas were based on practice and actual action to be carried on. As some of the ideas were similar, the researcher decided to group the proposals according to the main goal they wanted to pursue.

4.1 Raising awareness

The majority of the “inspirations” were about the need of raising awareness about the topic of Hate Speech Online. This is significant because it visibly shows the lack of information about the issue and the need of having a clearer picture of the problem and its consequences. The participants in the meeting pinpointed many different places and situations where a strong action of raising awareness is requested: in the schools, among parents, among teachers, among the youngsters, with non-formal education.

Another very strong point, really connected with the need of raising awareness, is the necessity of being constantly conscious of the problem of Hate Speech Online in order to recognize episodes of Hate Speech and staying alert.

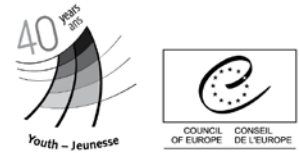
4.2 Acting on the agents

Another very big group of ideas identified the action on the agents of Hate Speech Online as a good solution for the problem. As one of the best and at the same time weakest features of the Internet is the anonymity, the main proposal was to show and make public the identity of those who practice Hate Speech Online. On this subject, the participants noticed that, although very interesting and quite easily technically doable, this proposal is not actually feasible because it involves questions on right of the privacy and data protection.

Another idea was to isolate the agents, meaning to do not share, repost, or “retweet” any sentence, video, or expression of Hate Speech Online.

4.3 Implementing the law and protecting the victims

The third group of ideas is about the victims of Hate Speech Online. The participants pointed out the necessity, also stated by the Council of Europe itself, of implementing the existing laws that can be applied both to “offline” and “online” context. Starting from the implementation of what is actually available; the participants also noticed that a continuous update is necessary in order to follow the very quick improvement and development of the communication technology.



About the victims of Hate Speech Online, it was also highlighted how it is necessary to have networking and free legal protection for them.

4.4 Some technical solutions

The participants also identified some more technical solution for fighting the phenomenon of Hate speech Online, namely the creation of informative links and websites detecting and reporting Hate Speech, and the use of disclaimers.

This last idea is very interesting, even if probably difficult to be actualized. The disclaimer is thought as a stamp, a virtual sticker to be applied by the users when they found an expression of Hate Speech Online. It would allow the other users to immediately recognize and isolate, or react to the Hate Speech. Starting from this idea, the participants decided to write the sentence "This is Hate Speech!" whenever they will encounter Hate Speech while surfing on the Internet.

5. Conclusions

The Coalition Building meeting gave the participants to get acquainted to a problem that is still very new and not well studied or known. Giving the relative lack of knowledge by the participants, the Review of the Internet Governance Strategy of the Council of Europe has been very fruitful because it gave fresh ideas for fighting against the problem of Hate Speech Online.

It is necessary now that all the actors and stakeholders, Council of Europe, European Union, States, NGOs, and single citizens, will work together for developing and implementing new solutions and approaches.