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'Racism needs to be rooted out'
University professor hits out against what he believes is society's
unwillingness to tackle or even recognise racial abuse in Cyprus
By John Leonidou (The Cyprus Weekly)

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Cyprus Community Media Centre
Ledra Palace Buffer Zone - Nicosia 1703
PO Box 24359 - Cyprus
+357 226 608 38
info@cypruscommunitymedia.org
www.cypruscommunitymedia.org

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MARS - Media Against Racism in Sport

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'Racism needs to be rooted out'

SUBHEADING – University professor hits out against what he believes is society's unwillingness to tackle or even recognise racial abuse in Cyprus

Not enough is being done to tackle racism in Cyprus and actions need to be taken now before things get worse, warned a University of Nicosia professor.

Speaking at a seminar in Nicosia as part of a joint EU-European Commission project to promote MARS (Media Against Racism in Sport), Assistant Professor of Law and Sociology Nicos Trimikliniotis - who has done extensive research on the problem of racism and discrimination on the island - said things have gotten worse and that the problem will spiral out of control if action is not taken.

"Since 2009, we have seen the problems of racism and discrimination in society get much worse", he commented. "This is due to several factors such as the rise in unemployment and the global economic crisis. I focused my research on sports, and more specifically in the areas of football, basketball and volleyball where the games are professional, because in this area we see big social gatherings."

Some of the other speakers to address the problems of racism and discrimination within sport in Cyprus was Coskun Ulusoy – a Turkish Cypriot footballer who is just part of handful of athletes to have plied his trade for clubs on both sides of the divide. Ulusoy had stated that racism aimed at athletes was mainly being done to "discredit" and "harass" them simply as a means of trying to put them off their performance on the pitch or on the court. But Trimikliniotis argued that the problem runs deeper than that.

Trimikliniotis hinged his argument on the fact that the root of the problem was within society itself claiming that most people were either playing down the seriousness of racism or simply burying their heads in the sand.

As part of his research, he even visited football club officials as well as high-ranking figures within the Cyprus Football Association (CFA) and was surprised to see the attitudes of many people.

"They played down the problems saying things like 'things are not so bad' or 'we have more serious things to worry about'. The same club officials say it is a low-level problem and a problem associated with anti-social behaviour. They also blame the police saying it is within their jurisdiction to eradicate this problem if there is one."

Another reason why there is a lack of willingness to deal with the problem, explained Trimikliniotis, is because some people are will not stand up to racist groups in fear of reprisals against them and their families. Other clubs are also worried that rooting out some of their fans may see a downturn in tickets.

"This is absolutely wrong!", he hit out. "Racism and discrimination is not just an anti-social problem. It is a huge stigma of society and a criminal offence. People in Cyprus need to begin to understand this. The picture here is dire. Due to our failure to deal with

the problem, the situation has gotten worse and we have seen the problem shift away from sport. More and more younger people are now turning to racist behaviour.” Like many other footballing nations, Cyprus is not immune to the problem of footballers being targeted by racist abuse.

Footballers to have been targeted in the past in Cyprus include Senegalese forward Seyni N'Diaye and Zimbabwe’s Musa Mguni while the abuse was all too much to take for one Gambian player.

“I remember the case of Mustapha Kamal who broke down in tears after a game and wanted to leave Cyprus for good”, said Trimikliniotis.

Speaking about some of the measures that could be deployed to tackle this issue, he suggested, “One way to battle this problem is to target the clubs whose fans show racist behaviour. The fines currently being imposed teams for their fans showing racist behaviour or displaying racist slogans is simply insufficient. Even the CFA play down the problems of racism in sport. There is no desire to take action even from the ruling body.”

Commenting on the problem of racism out of the sports arena, Trimikliniotis also spoke of how a gang recently attacked students during the university elections and walked away with the voting ballot. “This was because one of the candidates was a Turkish-Cypriot”, he claimed. Another example, he told reporters, involved an attack on a 14-year-old Cypriot girl of African descent. She was attacked by girls from a neighbouring school who reportedly shouted “Blacks out of Cyprus!”.

“All the school could say was that this was not racism but a problem of anti-social behaviour!”, commented Trimikliniotis. “If that isn’t racist behaviour, then I don’t know what is?”.

He also said that the more needs to be done to address the problem within the justice system saying that even some judges turn a blind eye to cases involving racist attacks or behaviour.