



MARS – MEDIA AGAINST RACISM IN SPORT

Media, Diversity & Racism in Sport

NATIONAL MEDIA ENCOUNTER

Media Cross-Production for Inclusive Coverage

**Racist language is a common approach in Bulgaria's media landscape:
Surprisingly in Cyprus the racism in sports is almost unknown**
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MARS - Media Against Racism in Sport

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Twenty-two years after the fall of the Communism European Bulgaria is still suffering from some social "diseases" of the modern world. Most foreigners characterize it as a peaceful place where local people are tolerant and friendly to the foreigners. But is it right in the territory of sports - an area that seems to be little examined by sociologists and journalists in Bulgaria?

For the racism in sports in Bulgaria most local journalists prefer not to write or speak about it, but that does not mean that this social phenomenon doesn't exist. Is it racist Bulgarian society today, taking from a sports angle?

As a journalist, writing for years on issues of expression of diversity and non-discrimination, the answer is ambiguous. Most Bulgarians have always been suspicious of almost anything different, different in origin, color of skin and religious understanding. Sports as one of the biggest areas of social inclusion and understanding has always been one of the border fields, where the Bulgarian tolerance was placed on trial. To expose and write against the racism in sport is the most important tasks of the Bulgarian media. In the field of media coverage of racism in sport Bulgarian journalists have much to learn from European best practices.

Here is a concrete indicative example from a week ago which supports my thesis. A few days ago the biggest Bulgarian sports newspaper "7 Days Sport" published on its front page a huge title "New in CSKA: Italian, Swede and two Darkies."

This startling headline in a newspaper didn't make any impression to any other Bulgarian media and journalists, but was noticed by the Ombudsman of R of Bulgaria Konstantin Penchev, who said that he would bring the case to the prosecutor's office. On the next day the editor-in-chief of sports newspaper "7 Days Sport" Julius Moskov said he did not see anything racist in the title of his newspaper, which explained the purchase of CSKA two players, who are called "Darkies".

The next day, the human rights NGO Bulgarian Helsinki Committee issued a statement that defines the title of the front page of the newspaper for "absurd and racist."

The headline "New in CSKA: Italian, Swede and two Darkies" generate huge debates on the social networks. The media boss Mr. Moskov added: "I see nothing racist in this title." "Darkies" is an inappropriate word, because it is a street slang, but it is not offensive. I must say: I am sorry that I have distressed a lot of people with this headline on our front page." "I didn't like to distress the public, but really there is nothing racial. It's quite accidentally".

Using abusive, racist or discriminatory expressions and titles is not a new practice in the "7 Days Sport" daily newspaper and regular "Darkies" and "Negros" is used for black football players or athletes, playing in Bulgaria. However to the moment similar titles and definitions was published on inside pages of newspapers. In the particular paper's article with racist title the footballers are the player from Mali Abduluahid Sissoko and Steve Leo Belek from Cameroon.

Although a Commission operates against discrimination in Bulgaria so far no one from media was punished for racist language used for classical cases of discrimination, not only in sports, but also in society as a whole. The fines are symbolic, from 100 Euros to

1,000 Euros. I could even say that discrimination is part of the manner of living of some media, especially the sports media.

The most unacceptable is that the general public in the country does not take a special impression and don't take into account whether or not is speaking against discrimination in the Bulgarian media. But there are also good practices as well, accurate models for journalism as a whole on issues of diversity and non-discrimination newspaper is "now". This is a small newspaper that strictly adhered to a policy against discrimination and protection of diversity. Even journalists from this paper are fined by the Editor-in-chief for discriminatory language, if they committed it in their articles.

In Bulgaria there is 6 Faculties of Journalism at university level but only in one is taught Journalistic ethics and Journalistic deontology. Young journalists often have to learn on the move of the main principles and rules of diversity and non-discrimination and the most even approach.

Often the public is better prepared themselves for this topic from the media and here the racism in the sports has remained as a legacy of hidden discrimination in the society, which, however, thanks to the third sector and the implementation of best practices has been changed.

Slightly different is the media experience of speaking against discrimination and racism in sports on this small Mediterranean island. Racism in sports is not only about colour, language or religion. Even though these are the differences that are targeted by racism but is not only limited to them. Especially in Cyprus, in both part of the island, racism is mixed with political affiliations. Turkish Cypriots living in Northern part and Greek Cypriots living in Southern part, fought against each other in the bloody conflict and due to this difficult past, the both communities remained distant from each other for many years and resentment towards the other became a common theme in Cyprus.

The history that was taught to children at schools was and is still fueling the hatred at a young age, it teaches them to hate each other. So if we want to stop racism in sports, we have to teach children the good things, not the war and bad experiences. For example, the biggest TV station which I am working for, officially forbids the words "negro" or similar racist and abusive words in sports commentating. Instead of those words we are now using "players foreign". So after we stopped using these racist words, the other TV channels also followed and began to use a similar definitions such as "players foreign" as well.

After the check points opened in Cyprus 9 years ago, some Turkish Cypriot sportsmen have gone to southern side and they started to play football, athletics and some other sport activities. When I talked to these athletes as a journalist they said that the club manager or the other managers weren't acting racist against the Turkish Cypriot players.

However they reported that there were occasions that the supporters were using racist terms against them. Nowadays, some of the Turkish Cypriot sports federations are trying to be members of international sports federations, but the Greek Cypriot institutions and federations are trying to prevent this from happening.

In addition to this, the Turkish Cypriot federations who are trying to be members of the international sports community are facing challenges as the Greek Cypriot community is putting pressure on the international community to remove Turkish Cypriot federations from such organisations. So, these are the other aspects of state discrimination. Undoubtedly, all these actions are politically driven. So I hope the Cyprus question is going to be solved and such state discrimination will not be here anymore.

In the meantime though, until the solution is reached, there are precautions to be taken by the federations in order to battle with racism in sports. For example the criteria that defines what racism is can be extended and the penalties given for such actions in sport can be increased. Another way can be rewarding the best sportsmanship, that is to say the football clubs that are outspoken against racism can be rewarded and this may be a good encouragement and motivation for the others to follow, so racism should be minimized.