



MARS – MEDIA AGAINST RACISM IN SPORT

Media, Diversity & Racism in Sport

NATIONAL MEDIA ENCOUNTER

Media Cross-Production for Inclusive Coverage

Generation Hate

By Natasha Apostolidou and Adi Halfon (Deutsche Welle)

OUTPUT

25. – 28.01.12

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

CMFE
COMMUNITY MEDIA FORUM EUROPE



MARS - Media Against Racism in Sport

Funded
by the European Union
and the Council of Europe



Implemented
by the Council of Europe

“Eee, ooo, Turks, you will die on Greek soil, eee, ooo, Turks you will die on Greek soil” (APOEL Ultras chant)

APOEL the Greek Cypriot football Club from Nicosia is experiencing this year its biggest success ever in the European Champions League competition. As the club esoteric in European football terms, managed to qualify to the second round it was marked as a Cinderella story.

Nevertheless, this fairytale consists largely of racism, hatred, xenophobia, identity issues and nationalism. APOEL traditionally is linked to the right-winged parties in a conflict struck country where politics mean identity and anything you do determines your identity, including the club you support. In Nicosia, you cannot be neutral, either you like right-wing APOEL or left-wing Omonoia, or you are from the Turkish side.

This extremism creates a gap between generations of fans. On the top of the fans' club building wave just two flags; the blue and yellow of APOEL Nicosia and the Greek flag. The building is separated into two different floors. The extremist young supporters located at the lower floor, and the old supporters and veteran players at the upper floor. Entering the upper floor, we encountered a group of 60 year olds playing cards, backgammon and reading the paper with an Asian looking girl was serving coffee.

“The meaning of life is one – APOEL is the rule of the terror” (APOEL Ultras chant)

“I'm not happy about the fanaticism of the younger generation fans, it is rivalry which is not sportive anymore”, said Klitos Demetriades who supports the team for decades. “The extreme fans are like Nazis, that's the reason why people and families stopped going to the stadium. It's not just sport anymore, it's a mixture of identity and politics”. The difference between the lower and upper floor, and of course the generations, is as Demetriades said “the barbarians, and the almost civilized”.

Demetris Chiotis is a veteran player of APOEL who played during the 50s and 60s. “We have to do something against the youth violence, and I don't think the club can handle it, control must come from the outside. Violence brings violence”, said while playing with his 'mpeglari' – a traditional Greek string with colourful stones used for several purposes, such as breaking up bad habits.

The veterans remembered the days when they would buy their own shoes to play football, when the Cypriot league included Turkish Cypriot and Armenian teams. That was before the war that divided island and communities. Maybe the war they experienced is the reason for their more moderate ideas. Or maybe it is because they lived at a time when the communities were mixed. Whatever the case, both of them told us about their Turkish-Cypriot friends.

“A couple of years ago, APOEL was playing against the Turkish team, Trabzonspor. I took my Turkish-Cypriot friend to the game and arranged VIP seats. I made sure I talked to the other fans about my friend, so that they would not get carried away. However, some fans still chanted about the Turks, calling them dogs. I was so embarrassed”, said Chiotis.

Despite personal friendship, the older fans are still faithful to the old values. "It would be impossible for a Turkish Cypriot to play for APOEL. It is like Glasgow Rangers taking a Catholic player", Demetriades stated. "There was a case of a foreign APOEL player receiving a better offer from a Turkish club. Our response was that it was ok for him to leave, go anywhere except Turkey".

"They call us Hooligans, they call us neo-nazis, they are jealous and copying us, but everybody know that they are scared of us" (APOEL Ultras chant)

Outside the lower floor of the fan club, the graffiti show the perception of the extremists. The area is full of APOEL graffiti, next to slogans such as "In riots we trust", "Fair play no more", "Only APOEL" and the symbol that dominates is the swastika. As soon as we entered the semi-basement converted into an APOEL Ultra's sports bar we encountered a group of mid 20-year old men cautious of us. They insisted that they would speak anonymously and did not allow us to take any pictures, even asked for a press identity.

"We don't have any contact with the gamblers upstairs", stated the leader of the group, who is also involved in the Ultras organization. The leader sat in the middle, was well shaved and dressed in a buttoned shirt in comparison to his unshaved, hoody dressed friends. "We are coming every day to the club after work, even if there is no match, to meet friends and talk." The only case when they don't go is when there is a game, whether at home, or like this year overseas. While the European campaign made them proud, in the local league, APOEL is struggling. "This year we are just in the fourth place. For a club like APOEL this is unacceptable", he said arrogantly.

Around 40 people, all young males occupied the Ultras Club. The atmosphere was very masculine, full with testosterone; we could feel the aggressiveness in the air. "There aren't really any women coming here. Maybe one or two come once a week just to have a coffee. It's not a place for women."

"A good Turk, a good Turk, is only a dead Turk" (APOEL Ultras chant)

"We are true to APOEL, our aim is to promote the ideology of the club, in contradiction to the Club management, who are interested in money. For them the club is just a business." The ideology is, according to him, to promote the message that Cyprus is Greek. "In the match against Porto we wanted to wave a flag which was showing the Cypriot flag inside the Greek flag. The management did not allow us because they would get fined for it." To emphasise his point he talked about another team APOEL played against, Zenit St. Petersburg. "The fans of Zenit burned the 'Turkish Cypriot' flag when they played against us, and their club let them, even if they were fined" he said with envy.

Ethnic pride plays an important role for the Ultras. "The foreign players are just employees. Of course we prefer Greek players but you have to be realistic; without the foreign players we would never have managed to achieve the success we have this year. We wouldn't even win the Cypriot championship."

"You are born a Greek, you can never become one, we will shed your blood, you green rabbit. Can you see them, the leftists, I will sew my clothes from their skin" (APOEL Ultras chant)

But the conflict is not only between the Greek and non-Greek, but also between the Greek-Cypriot fans themselves. It is a question of identity; whether you put your Greek identity first, or your Cypriot one. That leads to the big rivalry with the left Omonoia Nicosia.

"The fans of Omonoia are not Greek, they burn the flag of Greece and they wave Turkish Cypriot flags and they think they are Cypriots", said one of the Ultras. There is a war between the two fan groups, and it doesn't end just with mutual teasing. "If we need to fight we will fight", said another Ultra. "It's only about 100 people from each side that actually fight against each other, but this is expanding", said the leader. "In fact the younger generation is getting more extreme than us. They don't socialize with Omonoia fans, not even in school." The group of men just laughed when we asked how it can stop; nobody believes it will stop.

The upper floor and lower floor have something in common. The old generation says that the 20-year olds are too extreme, and they say that the teenagers are too extreme for them, but nobody knows how to stop this escalation. Maybe they will calm down with the years, or maybe the change will come from a surprising angle. Two of the Ultra admitted their girlfriends are Omonoia fans. "I was young and in love, what could I do?"