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HELSINKI FOUNDATION for HUMAN RIGHTS**

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Warsaw 2007-07-26

Jarosław Kurski
Deputy Editor-in-Chief of "Gazety Wyborczej"
ul. Czerska 8/10, 00-732 Warsaw

Dear Mr. Deputy Editor-in-Chief,

An article appeared on 24 July 2007 in the daily "Gazeta Wyborcza" about a gang of Roma that recruited Poles to work in Sweden and then forced them to take part in committing crimes. The case was also the topic of the TV magazine "Uwaga", broadcast by the television station TVN. Without undermining in the slightest degree the significance of the problem that was presented in the article and the television program, or the need to inform the public about the existence of such practices, we generally wish to draw attention to the issue of presenting information about the ethnic origin of suspects.

Publication of information about someone's ethnic or national origin is for various reasons a very delicate issue, inter alia because there is usually a stereotype behind a name. Publicly indicating ethnicity can uphold this stereotype, and in the case of particularly negative information it can contribute to the outbreak of a conflict. A car accident occurred in 1991 in Mława. The press informed that the driver responsible for the accident was of Roma origin. When two days later one of the victims of the accident died, and at the same time rumor spread that the perpetrator of the accident is still at large, riots broke out. They lasted five days, many Roma homes were then plundered and devastated and some of the Roma were forced to flee. The events were later called the "Pogrom in Mława".

Of course, there are situations when it is admissible to provide information about ethnic origin or skin color as characteristic features. For example, this is the case when such a feature can help to identify a person who is sought-after, missing, etc. Perhaps the intention of the journalists who decided to include information about the suspects' ethnic origin in their material was to this way warn the gang's potential victims. However, in our opinion, both the mentioned article, as well as the television report, contained a sufficient amount of identifying information (like e.g. the alias of one of the suspects), so that the potential victims, as well as individuals who incurred damages in the past, could identify this criminal group.

We ask both editor's offices, of "Gazeta Wyborcza" and the television station TVN, to carefully make decisions in the future regarding the publication of information regarding the ethnic origin of the people appearing in their articles.

With kind regard,

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Marek Antoni Nowicki
President of the HFHR Board