

Ethnic Intolerance in the Lithuanian Press

SUMMARY

Introduction

Although many forms of ethnic and racial intolerance and xenophobia exist, the verbal expression of ethnic intolerance—manifestations of ethnic intolerance and xenophobia in public discourse (particularly in the press)—became especially important after Lithuania's accession to the European Union. Two major factors influenced the importance of verbal expression of ethnic intolerance: first, as migration flows increased after the opening of the borders, the media started addressing issues of migrant groups (Chechen, Muslim, etc.) more often; and second, after the accession of Lithuania into the European Union, common EU principles of equality and non-discrimination were to be implemented, including policies on the media, which is an important contributor to public attitudes toward ethnic, religious, racial, etc. groups. In accordance with EU directives and recommendations, manifestations of ethnic intolerance and ethnic hatred started being monitored in Lithuania (also in the Lithuanian press). The importance of the verbal form of ethnic intolerance is manifested in contemporary Lithuanian society. For instance, the development of information portals in the Internet and freedom to anonymously comment on press articles has led to a significant increase in exceptionally intolerant and hostile comments, often inciting to others to commit acts of violence against certain ethnic, racial, or religious groups or even murder members of those groups. These comments are often acknowledged as an indicator of ethnic intolerance in Lithuanian society, not only by social scientists analyzing this phenomenon, but also by mainstream society and politicians, who often attempt to deny the existence of ethnic intolerance toward some ethnic groups (especially Roma and Jews).

The significance of ethnic intolerance in the press is also supported by an annually increasing number of registered crimes defined in Article 170 of the *Lithuanian Criminal Code* (Incitement against Any National, Racial, Ethnic, Religious or Other Group of Persons). According to data collected by the Centre of Ethnic Studies of Institute for Social Research, 79 hate crime offences were registered in 2008, whereas only 32 were registered in 2007 and 11 in 2006 (for comparison, two hate crime offences were registered in 2005

and five in 2004) (*National Data Collection Report 2006 Lithuania*: 44; *National Data Collection Report 2007 Lithuania*: 89). Two major factors behind the increased numbers of registered hate crimes could be the significant increase in daily Internet use and the ratification of *the Additional Protocol to the Convention on cybercrime, concerning the criminalization of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems*; this is the only legal document preventing ethnic and racial intolerance in virtual space.

It is important to understand the role of the media in spreading ethnic intolerance. The importance of the press in this process can be demonstrated by comparing the number of articles published about certain ethnic groups and the data received from surveys of public attitudes toward the same ethnic groups. It can be observed that as the number of articles and news messages about ethnic groups increased in the printed media in Lithuania (513 articles in 2004, 647 in 2005, 931 in 2006, and 1280 in 2007), negative attitudes towards certain ethnic groups also increased (according to the data of the European Values Survey [1990 and 1999] and of surveys of the attitudes of Lithuanian residents conducted by the Centre of Ethnic Studies of the Institute for Social Research in 2005–2008).

Therefore, the issue of defining verbal attacks against any national, racial, ethnic, religious, etc. groups of persons is becoming more and more problematic, especially because the forms of expression of ethnic intolerance are changing over time and are becoming less open and clearly recognizable, hence less easily measurable using empirical methods. Practical application of theory is also problematic because it is difficult to draw a clear line between racist expressions and freedom of speech. Hence, the main problem in this study is the assessment of the concept of ethnic intolerance and measurement of ethnic intolerance in media discourse.

The objective of the research is to examine in what forms and how ethnic intolerance is constructed in the press through presentation of topics, problems, named causers of the problems, and their causality (i.e. by introducing/presenting explanations of causes of the problems).

The main body of empirical data was collected during qualitative research of printed and Internet dailies, which consisted of two parts: (1) press content analysis and (2) structured interviews with experts (politicians, officials, representatives of ethnic minorities, and journalists). A total of 21 interviews were conducted in January and February of 2008 in Kaunas and Vilnius. The texts for the press content analysis were collected from the three main Lithuanian dailies—*Respublika*, *Lietuvos rytas*, and *Lietuvos žinios*—as well as the Internet dailies *Delfi*, *Omni (Balsas)* and *Bernardinai*, covering the period of January 2005–June 2007. The texts from printed and Internet dailies were collected by using a few keywords: ethnonyms (the names of the main ethnic groups—

Roma/Gypsies¹²², Russians, Jews, Polish, Chechen, etc.), labels of various immigrant groups (refugees, immigrants, etc.), and names of religious groups (Muslims, Jews, Orthodox, etc.). A total of 455 texts (of printed and Internet dailies) were collected for the media content analysis. In order to analyze the contents of ethnic intolerance in the Lithuanian press, the research was carried out in several stages. For the research, the qualitative method of content analysis was used. In the first and second stages of the research, the main topics of articles concerning ethnic, religious and immigrant groups were discerned and the visibility of these groups in certain topics was analyzed. In the third and fourth stages, the topics of problematic interethnic relations and their causality, as well as manifestations of ethnic intolerance, were analyzed according to the operationalization scheme created.

Data from some surveys on attitudes toward ethnic groups in Lithuania was also used in this study.

This work presents a novel approach to the phenomenon of ethnic intolerance and its research in printed and Internet dailies. It presents a method of discerning the premises of ethnic intolerance by analyzing the presentation of interethnic relations in public discourse (printed and Internet dailies) and defines possible forms and verbal manifestations of ethnic intolerance. Verbal manifestations of ethnic intolerance are defined using empirical studies that present the scale of manifestations of ethnic intolerance in public discourse. Building upon four theoretical perspectives (economic, psychological, cultural, and political) analyzing the causality of ethnic intolerance in interethnic relations, the premises of ethnic intolerance in the Lithuanian press are discerned.

After analyzing previous research of ethnic and racial intolerance and their methodology, it has been decided not to analyze quantifiable ethnic intolerance in separate texts, but to study the context of press content, in which interethnic relations are presented.

The aim of this research is to analyze ethnic intolerance in the press using analytical tools. Normative evaluation of ethnic intolerance and its prevention is not presented.

This research is based on several premises that are examined and grounded in the study. First, the topics of interethnic relations in Lithuanian press are related to economic arguments explaining the causality of describing problems. Second, each ethnic/religious group—Roma, Jews, Polish, Russians, Muslims and immigrants (which involves different ethnic/religious groups)—is linked to different topics in that Lithuanian press. Third, the main agents in the formation of public opinion about ethnic groups and interethnic relations are

¹²² In this study, the names *Roma* and *Gypsies* are used as synonyms for the same ethnic group.

the representatives of the ethnic majority, not of ethnic minorities. Finally, aggressive forms of ethnic intolerance—incitement to discriminate, be hostile, or engage in violence—are not used in press discourse.

The study consists of an introduction, three main parts, and conclusions. The first part is theoretical; it analyzes the definition of ethnic intolerance in media discourse. In the second part, the concepts of ethnic/racial intolerance and xenophobia used in European Union law and the main principles of common policies in the field of racial intolerance and xenophobia are analyzed. The transposition of EU law to national law in Lithuania is examined. The third part presents the data and analysis of the empirical research of the Lithuanian press. In addition to conclusions, policy recommendations for prevention of ethnic intolerance and xenophobia in the Lithuanian press are presented.

Theoretical framework of the research

The research model was created by combining the study of the theoretical insights of different authors, grouped into theoretical perspectives—economic, psychological, cultural and political—that analyze the causality of ethnic intolerance in interethnic relations (tensions, negative attitudes, incongruity of interests, and confrontation) and the given potential verbal forms of ethnic intolerance (“the discourse of silence”, subtle (hidden) prejudice and stereotypes, harassment (verbal abuse, threats, and disdain, hate speech, and incitement in the media to discriminate, be hostile, and engage in violence).

The economic theoretical perspective is based on the theories of the *split labour market* and *middleman minorities*, cultural theories of *labour market segmentation*, and the *dynamics of ethnic competition and conflict* (Bonacich, Horowitz, Hechter, Olzak). The psychological perspective is based on the cognitive and scapegoat theories (Allport). The cultural perspective is based on ideas of cultural determinism and ethnocentrism (Connor, Smith, van Dijk, Fredrickson, Balibar, Hall, etc.), and the political perspective is based on concepts of the *racial state* (Omni, Winant, Goldberg) and on the ideas of Bourdieu and Murray.

In the context of this research, ethnic intolerance in the press is perceived as symbolic violence directed against ethnic, racial, religious and migrant groups. Based on the French theorist Bourdieu's statements regarding language as a symbolic expression of power. He has declared that verbal communication (language skills and use) does not only entail the assumptions for social integration and the ability to participate in a public space and to use the media, but may also be the manifestation of the position occupied in the social hier-