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RACISM ON THE RISE IN EUROPE, NEW STUDY SAYS



November 29, 2006 The EUobserver.com reported: "Although there is a lack of objective data on discrimination and racist violence in several EU member states, a new study suggests that racism has increased in Europe, particularly towards the Roma community, Muslims, Jews and immigrants.

According to the 2006 Annual Report by the Vienna-based European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), published on Tuesday (28 November), only two EU countries - the UK and Finland - have a sufficient mechanism in place for collecting data on xenophobia and intolerance-related incidents.

Five countries - Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus and Malta - provided no such information to the centre, which EUMC director Beate Winkler says not only makes it difficult to analyse the trends and compare member states, but also "means ignoring the problem."

"Victims remain invisible, often without support," she said, adding that neglecting this phenomenon also prevents the development of effective policies for tackling the issue.

"Roma are a particular target for racist violence and crime, both at the hands of the general public and public officials. Members of the Jewish community continue to experience anti-Semitic incidents. Rising Islamophobia is an issue of particular concern," noted Anastasia Crickley, chair of the EUMC management board.

"In effect, in spite of some heartening examples of good practice, I stand here today unable to say that there has been a substantial improvement with regard to racism and xenophobia in the EU member states," she added.

Within the countries that have filed data on the issue, eight countries - Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Slovakia and UK - have recorded a rise in racist crimes or violence."..."

HIZBULLAH REARMS WITH LEBANESE COOPERATION

November 29, 2006 The Middle East Newswire reported: "Israel's military has assessed that Hizbullah replenished its weapons arsenal in wake of the war against the Jewish state in August 2006. Officials said Military Intelligence has concluded that Iran and Syria have replaced or enhanced the Hizbullah arsenal in Lebanon. They said that neither the Lebanese Army nor United Nations troops have blocked the flow of weapons from Syria

"Weapons are still flowing to Hizbullah, and the embargo has not been properly implemented," Israeli Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz said on Tuesday. In a briefing to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Halutz said the Lebanese Army has been cooperating with Hizbullah rearmament effort. The general said Lebanese military units have been under orders not to block weapons shipments from Syria."..."

SAUDIS, PAKISTAN LAUNCH EXERCISE

November 29, 2006 The Middle East Newswire reported: "Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have launched a joint military exercise. A statement by the Pakistan military said the two armies began the Sharp Sword-2 exercise on Nov. 27 in Bahawalpur in the eastern Punjab province. The statement said Sharp Sword, the latest in a series of joint maneuvers, would last three weeks.

"Exercise Al Samsaam-2 [Sharp Sword] is a sequel to the series of exercises that are routinely and periodically conducted between the two armed forces," the statement said.

The statement said the Royal Saudi Land Forces contributed a mechanized force as well as aircraft to Sharp Sword. The Saudis were also said to have sent armored units, artillery and anti-aircraft systems for the exercise."..."

SOUTH KOREA TAKES STEPS TO CONTROL AVIAN FLU OUTBREAK

November 27, 2006 The VOA News reported: "South Korea stepped up quarantine measures at an area around a farm in Iksan, about 230 kilometers south of Seoul. Health officials began slaughtering and burying 236,000 birds within a 500-meter radius of the outbreak site.

Investigators confirmed Saturday that the virulent strain of avian flu known as H5N1 was responsible for the sudden deaths of more than 6,000 chickens at the farm just days earlier. A further 6,000 birds were culled immediately.

As the Chief Veterinary Officer at South Korea's Agriculture Ministry, Kim Chang-seob heads up Seoul's efforts to prevent avian flu. He says an area 10 kilometers around the infected farm has been quarantined and strict restrictions imposed on the movement of livestock.

Kim says South Korea is not enacting any new policies to deal with the Iksan infection, since the government is already on very high alert against bird flu during this season. He says health authorities here will focus their efforts on stopping the spread of the infection, and finding any other infections that may have occurred.

This is the first incidence of H5N1 in South Korea since 2003. The World Health Organization says that strain has infected 258 people in 10 countries during the past three years, killing 153 of them. WHO researchers say most, if not all, of the infections were passed from poultry to humans, and usually involved people working in close contact with live birds.

WHO authorities fear the H5N1 strain may mutate into a virus that can be transmitted from human to human.”...”

IRAN THREATENS GCC STATES

November 26, 2006 The Middle East Newslite reported: “For the first time, Iran has threatened to attack Gulf Arab allies of the United States. A unit of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has reported the training of suicide bombers to strike targets in the Gulf Cooperation Council. The IRGC unit said any GCC state that facilitates a U.S. military operation against Iran would be attacked.



"If the bases in these countries are used as a launch pad for the attacking U.S. forces, why should they expect to remain secure while we are not?" Faroz Rajai, commander of the Martyrs Battalions, asked.

Western intelligence sources said the Martyrs Battalions were established in 2002 by the IRGC. The sources said the unit has been drawing recruits from Iran's religious seminaries as well as universities.”...”

'CEASE-FIRE DEAL MUST APPLY IN W. BANK AS WELL'

November 26, 2006 The Jerusalem Post reported: “ Hamas on Sunday dismissed as "unacceptable" Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas's threat to arrest any Palestinian who violates the latest cease-fire with Israel.

Meanwhile, several Palestinian armed groups warned that they would resume their attacks unless Israel also halted its military operations in the West Bank. At least three groups, including Islamic Jihad, have refused to sign on to the cease-fire agreement.

One of them is the Aksa Martyrs Brigades, which said it would not abide by the cease-fire as long as Israel continued to arrest its members in the West Bank. The group, which belongs to Abbas's Fatah party, was responding to the arrest of Mahmoud Kadoura, a top member of the Aksa Martyrs Brigades, in Ramallah.

Abu Obaidah, a spokesman for Hamas's armed wing, Izaddin Kassam, also warned that the cease-fire would collapse unless Israel stopped its military operations in the West Bank immediately.

"The Israeli aggression must stop in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip," he said. "This is a temporary cease-fire and any Israeli assault on our people in the West Bank will be viewed as a violation of the agreement."

Shortly after the cease-fire went into effect at 6 a.m. Sunday, Abbas ordered the deployment of some 13,000 PA policemen in the northern part of the Gaza Strip to stop the firing of rockets at Israel. Abbas also ordered the policemen to arrest anyone who violates the cease-fire.

But sources close to Abbas expressed fear that Hamas would try to torpedo the deployment of the security forces. They also worried that some officers would refuse to carry out Abbas's instructions, either for political reasons or to protest unpaid salaries.”...”

LITVINENKO 'SMUGGLED NUCLEAR MATERIAL'

November 30, 2006 The Independent reported: “Alexander Litvinenko, the poisoned former Russian agent, told the Italian academic he met on the day he fell ill that he had organized the smuggling of nuclear material out of Russia for his security service employers. Mario Scaramella, who flew into London yesterday to be interviewed by Scotland Yard officers investigating Mr Litvinenko's death, said Mr Litvinenko told him about the operation for the FSB security service, the successor to the KGB.

Police said that Mr Scaramella, who met Mr Litvinenko at a sushi bar in London on 1 November to discuss a death threat aimed at both of them, was a potential witness. He was being interviewed at a "secure location" in London but was not in custody.

The Health Protection Agency said that eight people had been referred to a clinic in London for tests for exposure to polonium-210, the radioactive substance that killed Mr Litvinenko. It declined to say whether Mr Scaramella was among them...

In an interview with The Independent shortly after the poisoning became public, Mr Scaramella said that Mr Litvinenko, a friend and professional contact since 2001, told him he had masterminded the smuggling of radioactive material to Zurich in 2000. There have long been concerns that turmoil in Russia and other former Soviet states after the fall of Communism created an international black market in radioactive substances.

The operation would have been one of the last carried out by Mr Litvinenko while still an FSB officer, in a unit tackling organized crime and smuggling.”...”