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Racist Violence Recording Network: Justice to uphold the Rule of Law in Greece

The Racist Violence Recording Network is following with great interest the Golden Dawn trial, to which it has been summoned to testify on behalf of the legal team of the “Egyptian fishermen case” - one of 154 incidents that the Network recorded in 2012.

Since its establishment in 2011, the Racist Violence Recording Network has repeatedly sounded the alarm over the dramatic increase in the number of racist attacks and how they were carried out. According to the victims' testimonies, the most common practice, especially between 2009 and 2013, was for "patrolling" of organized black-clad pedestrians or motorcyclists as self-appointed hit squads attacking refugees and migrants on the streets, squares, or at public transport stops. In several cases of particularly brutal attacks, the victims identified among the perpetrators, people associated with Golden Dawn, who were bearing its distinctive insignia. Only a few of these incidents were officially reported to the police. The victims testified to the inability or reluctance of the prosecuting authorities to conduct adequate investigations and arrests, while most of the victims who did not have legal documents, did not report to the authorities for fear of arrest and deportation.

Being a credible and consistent interlocutor of the State for recording and addressing racist crime, the Racist Violence Recording Network recalls the main finding made also during the criminal proceedings: **not all recorded racist violence is related to Golden Dawn, but the activities of the hit squads during the critical period of 2009-2013 presented common characteristics, confirmed also in court rulings - indiscriminate racist violence, perpetrators outnumbering the victims, spread of organized violence and fear amongst the public and domination of such groups in the neighbourhoods. In the international literature, these characteristics are linked to the activities of neo-Nazi and extremist groups, in which the Golden Dawn “claimed” a prominent position.**

In the last quarter of 2013, following the arrest of the Golden Dawn leaders and high-ranking members, the Network saw a drop in the recordings of organized violence incidents. The significant reduction in the incidents of organized racist attacks compared to the past, apart from its positive aspect, comes in support of the Network's evidence about the existence of hit squads with specific practices, against which, unfortunately, the Greek State was slow to take measures.

It is also recalled that the ruling in the *Sakir v. Greece* case affirmed retrospectively and conclusively the specific *modus operandi* and the lack of institutional action, already recorded by the Network during the period in question: the European Court of Human Rights had ruled against Greece, confirming a clear increase in racist violence incidents in the centre of Athens since 2009, a pattern of attacks on foreigners by extremist groups, often linked to the Golden Dawn, and ultimately a failure by the prosecuting authorities to fulfil their positive investigative obligations.

We recall that the Racist Violence Recording Network was established at the initiative of the National Commission for Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Greece, in the absence of a formal and effective system for recording racist violence, which had been on the rise since 2009.

These incidents are recorded by member organizations of the Network, following the victims' in person testimony and with a very specific and rigorous methodology. Reports by European and international organizations as well as the adoption of some of the Network's key recommendations by the State, demonstrate the credibility of its recordings and findings.

The Network emphasizes that the well-established lack of legal protection and adequate access to justice for victims in the period in question renders an even greater need for the Rule of Law to be upheld by all competent authorities.