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Marcin Kornak (1968-2014) – the founder and leader of the “NEVER AGAIN” Association

Aleksander Kwasniewski, the former president of Poland wrote in his letter of condolence, addressed to the representatives of the “NEVER AGAIN” Association: *“Marcin Kornak was a brave man with a big heart, who devoted many years of his life, to building a world free of discrimination. He launched many beautiful initiatives, spreading tolerance and promoting multiculturalism, which has enriched our society. We had the pleasure to experience the effects of his laudable actions as well as observe and admire his determination and constant optimism. His merits will stay with us forever. We received the news of his passing with a great deal of pain and regret. It’s a huge loss to both “NEVER AGAIN” – who has lost its founder – as well as for the whole country, which, thanks to his tireless efforts has become a more tolerant and open minded place”.*



Marcin Kornak, founder and head of the “NEVER AGAIN” Association and editor-in-chief of “NEVER AGAIN” magazine, passed away suddenly on March 20, 2014. He was a social activist, public life commentator as well as a poet and songwriter who collaborated with independent rock bands. From the age of fifteen, due to an accident, Kornak lived with a physical disability.

In 1994, Marcin Kornak established the magazine “NEVER AGAIN”, which became the most important anti-racist journal in Central and Eastern Europe. The magazine promoted the idea of diversity and the cultural heritage of national and ethnic minorities. The magazine hosted amongst others, Marek Edelman, Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, Jerzy Kluger, as well as Aleksander Kwasniewski and Jerzy Owskiak. What’s more, the publication featured the famous writer and journalist Stieg Larsson. In subsequent issues, the magazine was supported by Henryk Grynberg, Agnieszka Holland, Norman Davies, Anne Applebaum, Michal Glowinski, Jan Tomasz Gross, Miriam Akavia, Adam Michnik, and many other prominent authors. “NEVER AGAIN” has been also supported by the renowned visual artist Wilhelm Sasnal.

In 1996, Marcin Kornak became the head of the “NEVER AGAIN” Association, initiating a great number of social campaigns, and motivating thousands of people to participate throughout the years. His undertakings have been supported not only by Poles but also by many others across Eastern and Western Europe. Thanks to his enthusiasm and passion, Marcin expanded and coordinated a network of volunteers. His erudite knowledge attracted individuals and minority organisations to join and cooperate with “NEVER AGAIN”. In 1996, “NEVER AGAIN”

launched a successful campaign which advocated the ban on fascist and racist organisations, which was subsequently included in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Article 13).

Thanks to the professional cooperation and great friendship between Marcin Kornak and Rafal Pankowski (a sociologist and political scientist who co-founded the Association, Pankowski currently teaches at Collegium Civitas in Warsaw, and also continues to conduct broad research on the far right in Poland and Europe), the “NEVER AGAIN” Association began collaborating with international organisations, including the Council of Europe, United Nations and The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. “NEVER AGAIN” is also an active participant in various, international anti-racist networks such as: UNITED for Intercultural Action, Football against Racism in Europe (FARE), Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly (HCA), International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH) and Anti-fascist Network for Research and Education (Antifanet). In cooperation with these organisations, “NEVER AGAIN” has organised numerous international conferences and workshops in Poland and abroad.



Thanks to its consistent and effective work against racism and xenophobia, the “NEVER AGAIN” Association is becoming prominent both in Poland and abroad – specialising in monitoring crimes committed by neo-fascists and the far right. In 1996, Marcin Kornak initiated the “Brown Book” – a record of racist and xenophobic incidents and various other acts of discrimination – which he continued for the next eighteen years. The “Brown Book” is recognised as the most comprehensive independent compilation of its kind throughout Poland, and the information it provides is used by the media, international organisations and various scientific centres. By working together, representatives of the “NEVER AGAIN” Association are able to reach out to the public, promoting openness and respect for others, while at the same time condemning the passive acceptance of xenophobic prejudice and aggression that has been growing in Poland for years. The “Brown Book” monitoring system is therefore used for educational purposes, as a form of intervention in specific cases as well as a tool for raising public awareness.



Marcin Kornak was a passionate sports fan. He loved to cheer on athletes who were competing in all sorts of disciplines. In 1996, he launched a social campaign called “Let’s Kick Racism out of the Stadiums” which was mainly aimed at football fans as well as players, coaches, active club members and journalists working within that sport. Just like its Western counterparts, the Association promotes anti-racist attitudes amongst supporters, and seeks to eliminate the fascist symbols, which have remained present inside Polish stadiums.

“NEVER AGAIN” cooperates with UEFA and various sport clubs. Furthermore, the Association conducted educational activities during the 2006 World Cup and 2008 European

Championships. A year later, in 2009, “NEVER AGAIN” became an official partner of UEFA and started to coordinate the UEFA EURO 2012 Social Responsibility Programme “RESPECT Diversity”. This was a unique educational anti-racist programme, organised in Poland, Ukraine and the entire Eastern European region in preparation for Euro 2012.

It is worth recalling the (still relevant!) words of Marcin Kornak, who just before the tournament, wrote in the introduction to the special issue of “NEVER AGAIN” that *“The beauty of football inspires both artistic and poetic creative processes. Its universal language creates bridges of understanding between cultures. It offers a chance for social emancipation, a way out of the most difficult oppressions of life as well as the destruction of nationalistic and racist prejudices. Only few other things, apart from playing ball or cheering for the same team, can effectively bring strangers, often hostile people, together. Nevertheless, football is also a platform for abuse. Sometimes, the popularity of football and its fans can become easy prey for chauvinists and racists, false political prophets and shady businessmen. (Recently the football stadiums have become recruitment grounds for their potential followers/victims)”*.

Marcin Kornak loved music. It was rare for him to be unable to recognise a song. He knew the roots of each genre, the cultural traditions from which a given type of music came from. In the 1990s, he initiated the campaign “Music Against Racism” which attracted performers of various musical genres, to spread a positive message to hundreds of thousands of listeners. At that time, Marcin encouraged artists to join the movement against racist violence with the following words: *“We count on an effective reaction from the circle of people connected to music, who multiple times in history, have proven their social sensitivity. There is only one race - the human race!”* Until this day, concerts and festivals are held under the slogan of that campaign. Furthermore, musicians proudly place the logo of the campaign on their records. With the participation of many well-known artists from Poland and abroad, “NEVER AGAIN” has released seven compilation albums under the motto “Music Against Racism”. This initiative was considered by the music press to be one of the most important events of 1997, and remains popular in the music community to this day. In 2017, to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the most popular compilation (which began the entire social campaign), “Music Against Racism” CD was published in its entirety on YouTube.

In 2019, on the fifth anniversary of Marcin Kornak’s passing, “NEVER AGAIN” released a special vinyl record in his memory. That was the best way his friends could pay tribute to his work. The record entitled *“I Know My Path is Right”* includes tracks by two Polish rock bands closely associated with “NEVER AGAIN”: Qulturka and Skowyt. Their songs commemorate Marcin and address the issues of bigotry and violence.

Since the beginning of its existence, “NEVER AGAIN” has taken on the mission of promoting diversity and the respect for being different. Thanks to the commitment of Marcin Kornak and his team – the Association has been breaking the silence about the problem of racism and xenophobia in the country. Its work has contributed to the ever-increasing social movement against discrimination in different areas of social life. The ethical attitude of Marcin can be well described by recalling one of his media statements, which could even be considered a motto that guides the entire





Association: *“The most important thing is to react. Not to accept the aggression and the persecution of others. It won’t be solved on its own. The guards won’t come and won’t put out the fire. What is happening around concerns only us. We are jointly responsible for it. Let’s not complain how bad it is, but let’s do something to change it. No more fascism, racism, discrimination, harassment! Don’t ever pass by feeling uninterested”*. Thanks to the cooperation between the Association and the media, thousands of articles, TV programs, radio broadcasts, documentaries and academic works have been produced, which discuss the phenomena of racism and neo-fascism. What’s more, the association runs a website and has a multilingual profile on Facebook and Twitter.

The path that Marcin took in life, can be illustrated by the great deal of awards given to him in recent years. In 2011, Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski awarded Marcin Kornak the Officer’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta – one of the highest honours in Poland. Marcin also received the Man Without Barriers Award - given to an outstanding disabled person who breaks down barriers and stereotypes and who is a positive role model in various walks of life. In addition to this, in 2012, Marcin Kornak was awarded the title of “Social Activist of the Year 2011” by the Polish edition of “Newsweek” weekly.

A unique issue of “NEVER AGAIN” magazine published in 2016, commemorated Marcin Kornak’s legacy. In over 200 pages of text, eminent humanists and social activists stressed Marcin’s great contribution to building a modern, open and tolerant society. The issue featured personal anecdotes shared by people who had the pleasure to meet Marcin. The issue also contained articles on xenophobia and populism, which have both intensified in the face of a humanitarian crisis which has seen large numbers of refugees fleeing North Africa and the Middle East. The authors paid a lot of attention to the manipulative language of public media, which is encouraging xenophobic societal attitudes.

“For many years, the «NEVER AGAIN» Association has been warning people about the rise of neo-fascism. Unfortunately, the same authorities who applauded our actions, have at the same time, ignored them. The long lasting passivity of the state and the juridical system has given space to the extreme right, including, amongst others, racist football hooligans. Fortunately, the often bloody results of this, are now being tracked and recorded in the «Brown Book»” – wrote Marcin Kornak in his last “NEVER AGAIN” issue from 2014. No one will replace Marcin, but the “NEVER AGAIN” Association continues its work, because it has to.

