

## FES against right-wing extremism

### Is Europe on the “right path”? Right-wing extremism in Europe\*

#### Introduction

Right-wing extremism is not just a national phenomenon. Xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism are present in many countries, and the extreme right is increasingly building international networks. Prejudice towards sections of society based on inequality, discriminatory actions and structures or even open hatred and violence reveal a disturbing level of hostility against specific groups in many parts of Europe and the world. In many places, right-wing extremists are employing a wide variety of strategies and structures in the attempt to exploit this hostility and gain a foothold in politics and society. They hold rallies and organise commemorations that rewrite history, they gather in informal groups or set up political parties, and in some cases they win parliamentary mandates. In the latest elections for the European Parliament the extreme right won 39 seats, scoring once again in the international arena with propaganda about scapegoats and exclusion.

What danger does the extreme right actually pose? How do they project their image and organise themselves in Europe and its regions? What far right forms and strategies can we identify and how can we combat them effectively? Is Europe on the “right” path?

Speaking at the beginning of the international conference in November 2009, Nora Langenbacher, head of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung’s project, “Combating right-wing



#### Speakers:

- **Welcome:** *Nora Langenbacher*  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Forum Berlin
- **Opening address:** *Martin Schulz, MEP*  
President of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament
- **Keynote Speech:** *Prof. Michael Minkenberg, Ph.D.*  
Max Weber Chair for German and European Studies,  
New York University

\* Summary of a conference held in Berlin on 30 November 2009

extremism”, emphasised that it was important to look beyond one’s own national backyard, both when analysing the problem and developing counter-strategies. Right-wing extremism is an international problem that demands an international response. So far, the debate in Germany about right-wing extremism and how to combat it has generally lacked an international perspective. With this conference and increasing focus on the international dimension of right-wing extremism, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung aims to broaden the debate on this problem and how to counter it by including European perspectives.

This booklet provides a summary of the conference presentations and discussions.



Opening address: Martin Schulz, MEP

### **Combating right-wing extremism as a task for European policy making**

In his introductory speech, Martin Schulz, MEP, president of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, outlined the development of right-wing extremism in Europe and specifically of the extreme right in the European Parliament. He commented regretfully that in this context Europe is “moving more towards the right than the left”. Clear signs of this shift, he said, included the increase in votes for xenophobic and extreme right-wing parties in the European elections in June 2009. As an MEP, he observed that xenophobic and anti-Semitic statements in European politics have increased to such an extent that they no longer incur official reprimand at the European level, and particularly in the European Parliament. Nowadays there are no sanctions of the type imposed on Austria when the right-wing FPÖ party entered the government. There are no calls for sanctions even when Poland’s culture minister incites homophobia or the Lega Nord in Italy threatens to sink refugee boats.

### **Right-wing extremism – A phenomenon across Europe**

Martin Schulz referred to the problem that the EU initially classified right-wing populism as an Eastern European phenomenon to be tolerated during the transformation process in those societies. In his opinion, however, it is a phenomenon right across Europe that is reflected in the parliaments of both Eastern and Western Europe. The French Front National (FN) and the Belgian-Flemish Vlaams Blok are more influential and stable than any comparable Eastern European party. Schulz said that this was why the problem needed to be tackled at an all-European level as well. In fact, the strongest right-wing impact comes from the west, from Le Pen, the FN chairman, who was even awarded the title of most senior member of the European Parliament.

Schulz emphasised that not only “hard core” right-wing extremism should be monitored. The shift of right-wing populism into moderate civil societies should not be underestimated either. In his view, the Swiss referendum on banning the building of minarets was a case in point. The referendum, held in November 2009, shortly before the FES conference took place, showed how Switzerland’s moderate middle classes could be incited against a minority by the right-wing populist SVP party. Its leader, Christoph Blocher, inflamed the debate with remarks like, “We once had the Turks at the gates of Vienna, we don’t need that again”. Martin Schulz noted that there is no clear-cut line between hardcore right-wing extremists and xenophobic EU sceptics. It is particularly serious that right-wing extremist and right-wing populist players, while being Euro-sceptics on the European level, seek to erode European democracy from within. Fortunately, however, the mutual hostility fostered by Europe’s extreme right-wing groups obstructs their own Europeanization and ability to build parliamentary groupings – as exemplified by the collapse of the EP parliamentary group, Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty (ITS).

### **The need for a European alliance**

Schulz saw the failure of ITS as offering an opportunity to develop a European alliance against right-wing extremism. This applied not just in the political arena, he said. It was also important to consider the individual and collective values that should define our democratic societies. A public debate on moral courage in Germany, along with other European societies, would be a step in the right direction.

Schulz referred to his experience as mayor in a municipality in North Rhine Westphalia when collective action by a considerable number of players prevented the rise of Die Republikaner, a far right party. He added that Europe must show clearly that it will act to protect human rights and take a stand against racists.



Keynote Speech by Prof. Michael Minkenberg, Ph.D.

### **The radical right in a united Europe – trends and patterns in East and West**

Professor Michael Minkenberg, University of New York, classified the radical right in Europe from a scientific perspective and discussed its current significance. In his view, right-wing radicalism in Europe today is growing and multiplying. He suggested a new definition of the radical right using modernisation theory: The radical right is based on ultra-nationalistic ideology (of homogeneity) and tends to be opposed to liberal democracy and its fundamental values. To understand this multi-faceted phenomenon, Minkenberg finds it helpful to categorise the players according to their organisations on the one hand and their ideology on the other. In organisational terms, distinctions should be made between “political parties”, “movements with organisational forms” and the “subcultural scene”. In terms of their ideology, distinctions should be made between the “extreme right”, the “xenophobic and ethno-centric right”, the “populist right” and the “religious-fundamental” right.

### **The changing radical right**

Prof. Minkenberg criticised the use of the common term “right-wing extremism” as used in Germany according to the formal legal definition of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. He saw a problem in the simplification implied by the term. According to Prof. Minkenberg, the phenomenon has actually changed in the process of development: before the 1960s the radical right was characterised by its fascist and authoritarian features, but after 1968 the radical right experienced a renewal. In its ideology, the radical right turned away from classical racism towards xenophobia based on cultural arguments. A current buzzword, “ethnopluralism”, derives from these modified methods of agitation, which continue to advocate the segregation of allegedly non-compatible groups of people. Minkenberg explained that the radical right sees recent developments as a “culture war” – to use a term from Gramsci – from the right. The formula of the “Third Way” is also a common term among the radical right as an alternative to “vodka-Coke imperialism” (of the USSR and the USA). As Minkenberg said, a hostile attitude towards the USSR and communism has obviously lost its relevance nowadays. More recent developments among the radical right are their demands in the area of social protectionism, and a xenophobic populism that no longer appears to be openly anti-democratic. A typical feature of this new development is that not only established political parties have changed, but that new radical right-wing organisations are increasingly being established. Some players, such as the French Front National, have managed to develop their own profile by distinguishing themselves from other political parties. According to Professor Minkenberg, the political party sector of the radical right is particularly pronounced in religiously homogenous, especially Catholic societies. Islam has become a major topic in precisely these societies. Conversely, the radical right party spectrum is weaker in societies more accustomed to multiculturalism. Professor Minkenberg voiced concern that the majority society is not making enough effort to draw clear boundaries. This is shown, for instance, in the formation of coalitions with the radical right.





### Comparing Eastern and Western Europe:

Professor Minkenbergh argued for more research, especially in Eastern Europe. He pointed out that little research had been done on the radical right there, and there was also a lack of scholarly information on its relationship to the authoritarianism of the past and its importance within the transformation process to a young democracy. A glance at the election results in Eastern Europe clearly shows less consistency than in Western Europe. An important difference to Western Europe is that the religious fundamentalist right is stronger in Central and Eastern Europe, and the role of national minorities is a prominent issue. Immigration, however, which is a major topic in Western Europe, hardly plays a role in Eastern Europe as migration is practically non-existent there. Lack of reliable data for Eastern Europe makes it difficult to estimate the radical right's propensity to violence. Russia, in particular, shows signs of a widespread radical right with violent tendencies. Generally speaking, Professor Minkenbergh thought that the radical right in Eastern Europe was more likely to be oriented to fascist and other authoritarian models dating from the Second World War or the pre-war era, whereas the radical right in the West was more interested in issues of immigration, with border disputes losing significance for them. Minkenbergh affirmed that the radical right is "ready for Europe", and therefore poses a political threat, but he foresaw only limited success in the near future for a European Radical Right. Firstly, he said, the familiar fascist ideas of Europe are clearly influenced by hierarchical formations incapable of achieving consensus. Secondly, close alliances between certain countries (such as Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary) are hardly conceivable because of issues such as ongoing border disputes and debates on minorities. However, Minkenbergh discerned trends towards a (new) Europeanisation of the radical right, for example in the music scene. He added that hostile images of Islam and anti-Semitism helped to bolster transnational links within the far right.

### Timely counter-strategies

Prof. Minkenbergh highlighted the importance of conducting a differentiated analysis before devising counter-strategies. The current radical right have the major advantage of being able to adapt their strategies successfully, for example by claiming to be the defenders of the welfare state. They embark on a losing track, however, if they associate themselves with Nazi ideology. Wherever opponents of the radical right manage to link radical right players to Nazism, the radical right loses acceptance.

### Focusing on Europe's regions: Analysis and discussion

In three subsequent specialist forums, the conference focused on right-wing extremism in Western, Central and Eastern Europe, and Southern Europe. At each forum three invited experts initiated the discussion by presenting an outline of the current forms and strategies of the extreme right in their respective countries. This was followed by regional discussion and analysis of possible similarities and/or differences between these countries, and of the need for political action.

### WESTERN EUROPE

#### Experts:

- **France:** *Prof. Jean-Yves Camus, Ph.D.*  
Institute for International and Strategic Relations (IRIS), Paris
- **UK:** *Prof. Christopher Husbands, Ph.D.*  
London School of Economics
- **The Netherlands:** *Suzette Bronkhorst*  
Secretary-General of the International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH), Amsterdam

#### Moderation: *Mike Whine*

Government and International Affairs Director,  
Community Security Trust, London

## Analysis by country – The Netherlands: Wilders' disastrous impact on political culture

**Suzette Bronkhorst** explained that in the Netherlands racism was shunned after the Second World War and anti-racism became the norm. Right-wing extremism only emerged in the late 1980s, but has been steadily on the rise ever since. She reported that initially there were various small right-wing extremist groupings, of which only the Centrum party and its successors (CD, CP) were interested in contesting elections. At that point, Bronkhorst said, the extreme right was merely a “small incestuous group with about 500 hardcore followers”.

**New phase – radicalisation and Islamophobia:** Meanwhile, the neo-Nazi scene, involving mainly young people, has seen dramatic growth. Currently it comprises a relatively small grouping – compared to the overall population of The Netherlands – of around 1,000 supporters and 10,000 sympathisers. Right-wing populism however, has a more widespread influence. Islamophobia has increased in the Netherlands since 2001. The right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn put anti-immigration and anti-Muslim issues at the centre of his political agenda. Suzette Bronkhorst remarked that he represented a new type of right-wing populism that attracted considerable positive response in the Netherlands. Following his assassination by an animal rights activist, his party gained 26 seats in the Dutch parliament, but internal conflicts caused it to collapse shortly afterwards. Pim Fortuyn's political agenda, however, had an enduring impact on Dutch society, a society that was once proud of its cosmopolitan and anti-discriminatory outlook. Racism and xenophobia were no longer taboos there. And discriminatory speech scarcely evoked public outrage any more.

**Wilders, a “success story”:** At the time of the conference there were no right-wing populist delegates in the parliament of the Netherlands, but Suzette Bronkhorst thought it likely that Geert Wilders and his Party for Freedom would enter parliament soon with considerable public support. She described Wilders as the new face of right-wing populism in the Netherlands. He is strongly opposed to Muslims and immigration. Muslims are the main targets of his aggressive statements. He has called the Qur'an a fascist book that should be banned. He has demanded a headscarf tax and called for Muslims “to clean the streets with their toothbrushes”. His hate speeches against Muslims led to legal charges of inciting hatred and discrimination. The trial was held in January

2010. Recent surveys suggested that Wilders' Party for Freedom could win 28–30 parliamentary seats and become the biggest group in the Parliament of the Netherlands. Bronkhorst reported that Wilders' popularity was growing by the day, and said the right-wing populist politician used a cunning strategy in organising his party. It has neither members nor a party structure. His reputed support for Israel means skinheads are kept well out of the way. Wilders' party resembles a foundation, and he appointed nine members of parliament and runs the administration himself. He does not allow any external criticism and no media representative has ever been allowed to attend a party convention. Bronkhorst implied, however, that it was the media in particular that was helping the spread of right-wing populism.

**The responsibility of the media:** Geert Wilders is in the media spotlight, Suzette Bronkhorst said, but at the same time he tries to avoid it – in order to appear more interesting. For example, he arrived at Heathrow Airport with a large entourage of journalists, although he knew for certain he would be barred from entry to the UK. Bronkhorst described how difficult it is to deal with Wilders strategically, because he labels everybody who wishes to debate with him or criticise him either as mentally ill or a member of the “leftist Church”. His devices include accusing others of violating his right to free speech – which in turn silences “potential” critics. Bronkhorst believes that Wilders, with his propaganda against Muslims and against anti-discrimination rights, had contributed significantly to the increasingly hostile social and political climate in the Netherlands. His populist influence and his assumptions – such as his claim that the Netherlands was being “Islamised” – cannot be justified rationally, but many people respond emotionally. In Bronkhorst's opinion, there is an acute risk that the political parties in the Netherlands will follow the Danish example and adapt their immigration policies in response to Wilders' political initiatives or even try and outflank him from the “right”. She added that political parties did not know how to deal with Wilders and were uncertain as to whether it was better to ignore him or engage in talks with him, whether to form blocs of his opponents or completely isolate him. Bronkhorst argued that Geert Wilders should be given responsibility and brought into the government, because he could not do more harm than he was currently causing in opposition. She was convinced that the population would become disenchanted with him and his party once they were in power.

## Analysis by country – France: “A weak front regaining strength”

**Professor Jean-Yves Camus** began his presentation by pointing out that the Front National (FN) had its heyday in 2002. In the first round of the presidential election, Le Pen came second (after Chirac) with 16.86% of the votes. In 2007, the FN won 10.44% of the votes in the general election, which meant a dramatic loss. Currently, the party would only notch up 8–9% of the vote. Even in periods when the FN was stronger, it never managed to break out of its political isolation. Between 1983 and 2009, more than 80% of the population consistently expressed doubt that the FN could be trusted or should be in the government.

**Decline of the Front National (FN):** Prof. Camus saw a link between the decline of the FN and the populist campaigns of Nicolas Sarkozy. He thought that Sarkozy took over topics such as immigration, scepticism about multicultural society and law and order from Jean-Marie Le Pen, who was aging and losing his charisma. Around 70% of all those who voted for Le Pen in the first round of the 2002 presidential election voted for Sarkozy in the second round of the 2007 election. Most voters who changed their minds were from middle-class backgrounds. The FN retained its support in the working class and among the unemployed, particularly in the areas hit by the industrial crisis (northern and eastern France). Professor Camus estimated that the FN could cross the 10% threshold in the forthcoming elections, but he did not think they would regain their previous peak share of the vote. Loss of votes could also be traced back to cuts in public party funding. The FN was obliged to sell its headquarters and dismiss part of its staff because of financial constraints. Another factor in its decline was the perennial issue of Le Pen's successor. Professor Camus thought it valid to ask whether the party would survive Le Pen's retirement. He said many new organisations were trying to carve out a new position between the ultra-conservatives and the far right, hoping to win over FN hardliners. Others believe there will be a third way after Le Pen, integrating anti-establishment, racist, anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation attitudes (e.g. *Terre et Peuple*). In Camus' view, the poor showing in opinion polls and Le Pen's retirement will certainly change the far right in France. Some observers fear that splits or continuing decline of the FN may give rise to violent extreme right-wing groups on the pattern of the autonomous nationalists.

**Extreme right-wing subculture and violence:** According to Prof. Camus, one of the characteristics of right-wing extremism in France is the lack of a strong skinhead and neo-Nazi movement (aside from a growing movement in northern France). Autonomous nationalists are rare, but monarchists and fundamentalist Catholics exert some intellectual influence. The New Right (Alain de Benoist) does not support the FN and is not a significant player. Unlike trade unions and associations, however, the extreme right has little influence on social movements. Yet extremist publications are widely available at newsagents. Prof. Camus described the extreme right as a kind of counter-society with its own codes and traditions – but FN voters hardly have real access to that world. The number of racially motivated and anti-Semitic attacks fell in France in 2006, but rose again in 2008/9. According to Camus, French society cannot be said to have become less tolerant. In fact, he said, the opposite was true. Muslims and Jews were among the groups most vulnerable to hostile attacks. Camus also noted an increase in attacks on Jews committed by migrants of North African origin. There was a correlation between prejudices against minorities and votes for extreme right-wing parties. Prof. Camus described the typical FN voter as male and working class, with a low level of education and income. Most Le Pen voters are non-observant Catholics, with some Protestants in Alsace.

**International networks:** The FN was the driving force behind the development of similar parties in Western Europe, and became the spearhead of the extreme right in Europe. Le Pen tried to establish a transnational network several times, both inside the European Parliament and beyond. His most recent attempt was the European parliamentary group, Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty (ITS), which lasted less than a year. However, unlike the Italian MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano) which had the leading role prior to FN, the latter's ambitions did not include setting up a transnational network on an ideological basis. Rather, it envisaged the network as Le Pen's desperate, narcissistic attempt to gain respectability at home (for example, by meeting with politicians from parties in the government coalitions in Austria or Romania). On the other hand, working in the European Parliament benefited the party by giving it access to money and other resources.



### Analysis by country – UK: “No exception (any longer)”

**Christopher Husbands** started his presentation by highlighting the fact that the situation of the extreme right in the UK used to be analysed as “British exceptionalism”. Compared with other European countries, the UK was regarded as less susceptible to the politics of the far right, and it was considered unlikely that right-wing extremism would ever gain sustained support or become established in British society. Husbands confirmed that the British situation was indeed different to that in France or Belgium. However, the success of the British National Party (BNP) (in some regions) since 2000/01 meant that the premise of British exceptionalism should perhaps be abandoned or revised.

**Rise of the British National Party (BNP):** The BNP was founded in 1982, but the party began gaining political credibility and support only after Nick Griffin was elected party chairman in 1999. According to Husbands, BNP voters are disproportionately male, mostly white working class or lower middle class and are concentrated in specific regions (e.g., Lancashire, Yorkshire, Birmingham, outer East London). At the end of 2009 there were 57 BNP local councillors (all of them in England), an achievement no other far right party has ever attained. But given the total of 22,000 council seats in the whole country, this is a tiny proportion. The BNP has an additional 3 seats at county level. Until 2008 the party performed well only in local elections, but in May 2008 it won 9.8% of the votes, winning a seat in the London Assembly for the first time. In June 2009 the BNP entered the European Parliament with two MEPs (who won 8% and 9.8% of the vote in their respective constituencies). Analysis of the election results showed that the BNP also received votes from

regions outside their strongholds. Nationwide support for the party amounted to 6%. The current spread of the BNP shows that the party has overcome its social and geographic particularism. Husbands pointed out that the election results should also be considered in the context of the Labour Party’s decline in popularity and the electorate’s disenchantment with the major parties. Without such favourable factors, BNP supporters would only account for 4% of the total vote, according to Husbands. He said the particular risk for democratic politics is that a segment of the electorate sees support for the far right as an ordinary, if unconventional, demonstration of their rejection of the political system per se. The European Parliament, too, had followed that trend and accepted BNP views, or at least ceased to object to them. Husbands expressed his astonishment at the European Parliament’s decision to include BNP leader Nick Griffin in the EP delegation to the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference.

**BNP and the media:** The BNP’s recent success disrupted the media’s customary strategy of isolating the party. The BBC, for example, invited BNP chairman Nick Griffin to participate in an important talk show in which he had to answer some difficult questions from other panellists. During the debate on the BBC’s decision to invite him, the BBC was criticised for bolstering the BNP’s support with this invitation; however, the fact that the programme was not immediately featured on the BNP’s website suggested that the BNP leadership regarded it as less than favourable to the party’s image.

**Counter-strategies:** Christopher Husbands said it was important to distinguish between various categories of support in dealing with right-wing extremism. He mentioned differences between activists, passive supporters, and sympathisers. Currently, countermeasures usually

target the far right core group and are hardly addressed to the much larger number of passive supporters and sympathisers. State involvement is limited mainly to legislation on relevant crimes. There are, for example, legal provisions against incitement to racial hatred, but there are very few convictions for this offence. Husbands noted that there were hardly any procedural methods for monitoring far right groupings, and no proactive activity – in contrast to cases of (potential) Islamists. Membership in right-wing extremist organisations, including the BNP, is prohibited for specific professional groups, including police and law enforcement officers. Trade unions have also been successful on occasion in keeping BNP activists out of their ranks – by making it clear that their views contradict trade union goals and policies. It is difficult to prove that activities of anti-fascist and anti-racist campaigns have either helped or damaged the BNP, but Husbands suggested that these types of activities might have contributed to limiting the party's influence. He added that an approach seeking to marginalise the BNP was no longer effective if BNP councillors were members of local authorities, because the rules of democracy allowed them access to the usual facilities for elected officials in order to fulfil their functions in local or city councils.

## SOUTHERN EUROPE

Experts:

- **Italy:** Prof. Roberto Chiarini, Ph.D.  
University of Milan
  - **Switzerland:** Prof. Damir Skenderovic, Ph.D.  
University of Fribourg
  - **Spain:** Frauke Büttner  
Mobile Counselling against Right-wing  
Extremism, Berlin
- Moderation:** Brigitte Brück, Ph.D.  
Director of "Arbeit und Leben e.V.", Bremen

### Analysis by country – Italy: "Not just a problem in the North"

In his report on Italy, Professor Roberto Chiarini explained that after the Second World War the political right picked up directly from fascism, and only distanced itself from this ideology in the 1990s. Today's parties in Italy would hardly describe themselves as "right wing" in this sense any more. The introduction of majority voting shattered the bipolarity of the party spectrum after 1993 and the ideological gulf between all the existing parties is narrowing.

Italy's far right is modernising itself on the model of Le Pen's party in France. This "new right" is developing a new agenda: instead of pursuing conventional right-wing topics and protesting against immigration, or criticising the regime, they support constitutional reform together with the left. They even back the idea of offering immigrants Italian citizenship after five years' residence in the country.

**Lega Nord:** Prof. Chiarini outlined the specific features of the Lega Nord within the European far right. The goals of the party that fought for Padanian independence have changed since it was founded. Italy's oldest active party, it initially campaigned against Rome's monopoly position. Only later did the party start to differentiate itself radically from southern Italy. According to Chiarini, the party fabricated the history of Padania and its population in the North of Italy. At present the party protests against immigration and is openly xenophobic. The Lega Nord also focuses heavily on issues of domestic security. It is a territorial party which feeds off Catholic subculture and was an important stabilising factor for the Berlusconi government between 2001 and 2006. From 2008 it was the third-largest party in Italy (with about 8% of the vote) and was part of the governing coalition under Berlusconi. Lega Nord gained 10.2% of the vote in the elections to the European Parliament in June 2009. It has had close links to Le Pen since the 1980s. Chiarini pointed out that the party does not have close links to German and Austrian Neo-Nazis and that individual contacts are unstable.

**The politics of the "non-political":** Chiarini described Berlusconi's new party, Popolo della Libertà, founded in 2009, as an "innovative" development in Italy. It brought together several right-wing conservative and radical parties, including Azione Sociale, headed by Mussolini's loyal granddaughter, Alessandra Mussolini.

### Analysis by country – Switzerland: "Precursor of right-wing populism in Europe"

Professor Damir Skenderovic distinguished between two phases of right-wing radicalism in post-war Switzerland. Right-wing populist parties already existed in the first phase, from the 1960s to the '80s, although they were weak in terms of structure and electoral base. They exerted some influence by mobilising specifically for referendum campaigns. The second phase opened at the beginning of the '90s, and right-wing populism gained



significance. The far right consolidated their organisational structures following a rise in extreme right-wing violence from the late '80s.

**The SVP's "winning formula":** The Swiss People's Party (Schweizerische Volkspartei, SVP) existed since the 1910s as a right-wing conservative party, but in 1991/1992 it changed its structure and programme and assumed the features of a right-wing populist party. Christoph Blocher, Chairman of the SVP in the canton of Zurich from 1977 to 2003 and member of the Swiss Federal Council from 2003 to 2007, shaped the SVP into a highly successful political force. Initially the electoral success of the "new" SVP was confined to the German part of Switzerland, but the party also became increasingly popular in French-speaking Switzerland as well. At the federal level, it is the party with the strongest base and the largest parliamentary group in the Federal Assembly. In common with other right-wing populist parties, the SVP's winning formula lies in combining nationalist and identity-based agendas in migration and European politics with neo-liberal positions in economic and fiscal policy. In Professor Skenderovic's opinion, this is why it attracts votes from both the under-privileged and wealthier sectors. The following factors have contributed significantly to the SVP's success:

- The SVP has managed to project itself as a nationally organised party and to "nationalise" political discussions in Switzerland by means of nationwide campaigns.
- The SVP can present itself as a party in opposition without losing its status as a governing party as a result of Switzerland's concordance democracy, which aims at consensus and involves various players in the decision-making process.

- It was successful in absorbing the voters and even some of the leaders of the traditional radical splinter parties, and establishing widespread unity on the right edge of the political party spectrum.

According to Prof. Skenderovic, another reason for the success of xenophobic campaigns is that the political parties have barely discussed Switzerland's development into a society of migration although work-related migration has been promoted and considered desirable ever since the 1950s. Neither trade unions nor the left addressed these issues because they "were afraid of the masses". Skenderovic noted that ultimately Swiss politics did not defend the multicultural society that evolved in Switzerland, as in other European countries, after the Second World War.

**The ban on minarets:** Prof. Skenderovic highlighted the significance for Europe of the Swiss referendum held at the end of November 2009, which voted against the construction of minarets. Right-wing populists elsewhere quickly followed suit with similar demands in their own countries. A public initiative largely rejected by the other Swiss parties had finally caught on, due partly to active support from major SVP groups. It is likely that the right-wing populists will utilise this situation to further politicise Switzerland in line with their ideology and to increase the pressure on centre-right parties in relation to migration policy.

As well as public appearances and acts of violence that manifest right-wing extremism, far right attitudes are widespread among young people. Recent studies show that one in ten teenagers aged 16–20 sympathises with right-wing extremists, and one in ten teenagers has al-

ready fallen victim to far right violence. Prof. Skenderovic added that statistics for right-wing extremism in Switzerland are insufficient because right-wing extremism is not seen as a long-term problem and is only intermittently discussed publicly. He emphasised that empirical data and comprehensive studies and analyses of the phenomenon are indispensable prerequisites for forward-looking strategies. Skenderovic called for increased commitment by politicians, but above all by groups within civil society.

### Analysis by country – Spain: “Parties irrelevant, but sorry champion in extremist attitudes”

**Frauke Büttner** underscored the violent dimension of right-wing extremism in Spain by starting her presentation with a description of hate crimes committed in the country. NGOs registered 80 deaths from right-wing violence since 1991, with around 4,000 attacks annually. Right-wing extremism is also widespread on the Internet (over 200 websites), as is far right music (over 60 bands). In Spain there are about 70 extremist groupings, including 20 political parties with an estimated membership ranging from 10,000-15,000. Extreme right-wing parties do not have any parliamentary significance, according to Frauke Büttner; they have never had success in national or European elections. However, at the local elections in May 2007 they won around 50 seats in local councils across Spain.

**Players:** Büttner spoke of a rough distinction between the “old” and the “new” across the extreme right-wing spectrum, although the “new” right should not be confused with the intellectual “New Right” movement. The old right, which comprises several very small parties, is primarily nostalgic. Among them, only Fuerza Nueva had some success in 1979 after Franco’s death. Three years later, however, the party lost most of its votes to the conservative Partido Popular (PP), which still attracts extreme right-wing votes. The new right emerged in the mid-’90s and its programmes mostly draw on aggressive incitement against immigrants. Ultra-right parties like MSR or Frente Nacional integrated some of the most radical neo-Nazi and “independent” forces such as Combat España. Büttner said that the spectrum of “independent” movements offered a wide variety of youth culture events such as concerts and demonstrations. Conversely, the old right upholds traditional values such as the family, linking this

with campaigns against abortion and homosexuality. Büttner added that the defence of Christianity often plays a key role in the Franquist and religious conservative spectrum. The glorification of the Franco regime in these circles is illustrated by celebrations and commemorative services on the anniversaries of the deaths of the dictator Franco and of Primo de Rivera, the founder of the Falange. Ever since the “law on historical remembrance” came into force at the beginning of 2008, the display of fascist symbols is prohibited inside the Basilica and on its grounds.

**“Champions” in terms of attitudes:** Frauke Büttner explained that Spain’s extreme right-wing groupings mainly target the conservative middle class, former Franco supporters and the working class. The new right tries to reach out to young people in particular. Büttner was struck by the fact that organisations of the new right frequently plan their demonstrations in working-class districts with a large migrant population. While they aim to recruit new members in these districts, at the same time they want to intimidate migrants living there. Büttner believes that the global economic crisis is being instrumentalised by these groups, who propagate “solutions” for it by marginalising immigrants, mainly from countries outside Europe. Meanwhile they call for preferential treatment of Spanish citizens in the labour and housing markets as well as social services and health care. The results of attitude surveys are alarming. They show an increasing rejection of migrants and related issues such as the construction of mosques. A recent survey among school children showed particularly worrying results: two thirds of all the pupils interviewed had refused to work with Moroccans and Roma, while 50% of them did not want to sit next to a Jewish person on a school bench. This makes Spain a sorry “champion” in an international comparison of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic attitudes.

Summing up, Frauke Büttner emphasised the existing threats in Spain: The new right could develop a dangerous dynamic, particularly on the streets. Additionally, xenophobic, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic attitudes are widespread and could lead to rising tensions and conflicts among different social groups. Büttner called on the Spanish state and civil society to improve preventive measures and develop activities to combat the far right in Spain.

## CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

### Experts:

- **Bulgaria:** *Kristian Vigenin, MEP*  
Member of the European Parliament
  - **Poland:** *Rafal Pankowski, Ph.D.*  
Never Again Association, Warsaw
  - **Hungary:** *Prof. Pal Tamas, Ph.D.*  
Director of the Research Institute for Sociology, Academy of Sciences, Budapest
- Moderation:** *Prof. Nikolai Genov, Ph.D.*  
Free University of Berlin

### Analysis by country – Bulgaria: “Democratic politics should stand up against Ataka”

**MEP Kristian Vigenin** emphasised that the rise of the right-wing radical party Ataka had surprised many people in Bulgaria. He said the party's political agenda was marked by a mixture of ultra-nationalist attitudes with a social dimension. Its success was surprising because it seemed to establish itself ad hoc and unrestrainedly attacked minorities and political opponents. This is a new element, as ethnic Turks and Bulgarians had previously coexisted without any tensions and there had been no political movements fuelled by hatred towards any specific ethnic minority.

**Increasing aggression:** Vigenin reported that Ataka had pioneered an aggressive kind of speech, especially in relation to Roma, homosexuals and politicians, which still seemed shocking in its brutality. He cited some examples of Ataka slogans: “Roma are all criminals”, “Homosexu-

als are sick”, “Politicians grunt like pigs”. Meanwhile, he said, the Bulgarian population has become accustomed to this type of language. The radical right's main targets of hostility are Roma, ethnic Turks, and homosexuals. Referring to the labelling of Roma as criminals, Vigenin mentioned that members of the Roma population are indeed guilty of certain crimes. Roma often committed petty crimes in rural areas, which fuelled hostility against them. Unlike major crimes (such as corruption), petty crimes are easily visible locally. Vigenin emphasised, however, that they reflect the dire social situation of this group, and noted the need for a political response to change this. Ataka currently has two of the 17 MEP seats for Bulgaria in the European Parliament. The party plays an important role in the national parliament. While not part of the government, it fully supports it. The party can therefore exert some influence in current government affairs, but it can also act visibly and assertively in public. Only the Social Democratic Party sees a problem in the establishment of radical right-wing parties in Bulgaria and cooperation with them. The Socialist Group in the European Parliament recently discussed the question of how to treat these parties: isolation, confrontation, forming coalitions with them, or toleration?

**The importance of the media:** Kristian Vigenin stressed that the media, especially TV, played a considerable part in creating Ataka's attractiveness and success. Cable TV, in particular, gives Ataka extensive coverage. Without this, the party's aggressive, hostile speech and ideas could not have spread in the first place. Regional studies have confirmed this: in a village which received all the cable broadcasts, Ataka won 15-30% of the votes, whilst in a comparable locality without access to these broadcasts it received only one or two votes.



Vigenin pointed out the need for adequate counter-strategies to take account of regional differences and country-specific situations. The rise of the radical right in Bulgaria is related to individual disenchantment following the political changes, which left many Bulgarians with frustrated hopes. Yet social and economic developments in Bulgaria have also helped the rise of Ataka. The popularity of its chairman is another contributing factor. Vigenin said that the traditional parties have few concepts for dealing with Ataka. He saw this as a crucial problem in combating the radical right in Bulgaria.

### Analysis by country – Poland: “Some relief, but still on alert”

At the beginning of his analysis, **Rafał Pankowski** pointed out that the history books treat Poland as a victim of fascism. The historical image of being a victim is deeply entrenched – and rightly so. However, he added, Poland also had its homegrown political traditions that resembled fascism, notably the fiercely radical nationalist movement of the 1920s and '30s. This survived even through the communist era, although only on a very small scale.

**Construction of a cultural space:** In the 1990s, Pankowski explained, the far right established a “cultural space” essentially targeted at two main groups:

1. Racist youth culture (such as skinhead subcultures), present in the music scene, for example, but also in soccer and on the Internet.
2. The older generation influenced by the radio station Radio Maria, which is simultaneously a media empire and a social movement. It transmits fundamentalist Catholic, nationalistic, anti-Semitic and homophobic attitudes.

**The establishment of these cultural spaces** did not immediately translate into electoral success. It was not until 2001 that a separate group or movement was established. Two political parties in Poland were able to develop an agenda to link up with these Polish groups. Firstly, the League of Polish Families, which follows the traditions of the 1930s, and secondly Samoobrona (“Self-defence”), a movement of farmers and the rural population. Their ideologies are vague, but encompass populism, pronounced nationalism, and tendencies to violence.

**Rise and fall of the radical right:** Rafał Pankowski explained that not only the rise of right-wing radical parties in Poland was interesting, but also their rapid decline. Previously, the parties described above were not taken

seriously, but in 2005 President Kaczynski accepted them as partners in the government. This phase in government, also known as the “coalition with extremists”, harboured some disturbing signals: civil liberties and the independence of the media were heavily attacked. On Pankowski's analysis, this phase of extremist participation in the government ended for two reasons: firstly, because of inefficient politicians, but secondly, due to the rise of Donald Tusk's conservative party Civic Platform and its success in attracting the support particularly of young people. A new government emerged from early elections held in 2007 with a voter turnout of 53% – an unprecedented figure for the period since 1989. The criticism of Poland's political course came from within – unlike in the case of Austria and Haider, other countries showed no kind of solidarity or interest in getting the Kaczynski government voted out. The League of Polish Families subsequently shrank to around 1%. In Pankowski's view, radical right-wing parties are politically irrelevant in today's Poland. In their heyday, all these parties together represented about 40% of the vote. This implies that the problem has not disappeared entirely. Players of the radical right are still active and some of their followers have joined the right-wing conservative Law and Justice Party. Acts of violence are another persistent problem in Poland. The level of violence has not decreased since the 1990s. The main victims of this violence are ethnic minorities, homosexuals and human rights activists.

**Counter-strategies:** Pankowski said that active commitment in civil society and cooperation with the media are important for counter-strategies. The media could learn from competent researchers and NGOs about how to deal with the radical right and how to be better equipped to join the discussion about them. Reaching out to the public and providing information on attacks by radical right-wing groups could be useful for developing counter-strategies. Acts of violence by radical right-wingers are documented in a regularly updated list, the “Brown Book”, published by the association “Never Again”. Pankowski reported that the media had responded well to the consistent publicity about attacks, and it has helped to raise public awareness.

### Analysis by country – Hungary: “The problem is deep-rooted and widespread”

**Prof. Pal Tamas** argued that the success of the far right in Hungary derives from the fact that their opinions are by no means a problem of ghettoisation, but part of the mainstream. He noted that there was no difference between right-wing conservatives and the radical right



wing in Hungary. The conservative right seems to be the training ground for the radical right, he said.

**Past and future: The “Trianon syndrome”:** Prof. Tamas blamed the “Trianon syndrome” for this state of affairs. (The Treaty of Trianon determined the division of the Kingdom of Hungary in 1920.) In fact, Tamas said, most Hungarians have a sense of victimisation. Those affected by the Trianon syndrome have maintained the German concept of a culture nation and feel attracted by the notion of ethnic community. This harks back to the historical worldview that was continuously developed by the Hungarian middle class from the 1920s onwards. In the public debate, right-wing extremists make this self-perception the central issue. In Tamas’ view this self-image is deeply rooted in the public at large, making it difficult to develop counter-strategies to combat present-day right-wing extremism. Looking at the region as a whole, Tamas distinguished between two different groups of countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The first group are countries with a nationalist ultra-right tradition and (semi-)fascist roots and connections, such as Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Ukraine and Slovakia. The second group are countries without (semi-)fascist traditions such as the Czech Republic and Poland.

**The ‘Roma issue’:** The most explosive issue in Hungary at present is the Roma issue. Prof. Tamas compared the hostile image of the Roma in Hungary with the hostile image of Islam in Western Europe. The Roma population has developed differently in the various countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In the Czech Republic, for example, the Roma have a strong sense of group identity and attach importance to maintaining their traditions, whereas studies have revealed that Hungarian Roma seem to wish to assimilate. The Hungarian population as a whole, however, is uncertain about how to deal with

the Roma. They rank low on the social ladder – without opportunities for upward mobility. Unlike Jews, who have international organisations and awareness to help counter anti-Semitism, the Roma are exposed to aggression and acts of violence without any protection. Opinion polls show that Roma have a particularly bad reputation among the Hungarian population. 70% of all Hungarians interviewed responded negatively when asked whether they could imagine having a member of the Roma as their neighbour – the same percentage as responded negatively when asked about living next to a neo-Nazi. In contrast, only 10% of the respondents rejected the idea of a Jewish neighbour.

**Jobbik:** Prof. Tamas explained that this radical right-wing party derived its attractiveness from skilfully making the link to issues of identity. Jobbik’s personnel are highly educated and some of them were products of leftist political socialisation. Kristina Morvai, the party’s leading candidate for the elections to the European Parliament, used to be active in the leftist scene. The president of Jobbik, Gábor Vona, is a young historian and one of the main representatives of the Hungarian students’ movement. Tamas acknowledged that while Germany’s brightest students generally belonged to the political left, Hungary’s best students were part of the radical right. Right-wing radicalism in Hungary is atypical in the sense that women are over-represented among its voters and are also among its most prominent figures. Jobbik was able to gather 14.8% of the votes in the most recent European elections, giving it representation in the European Parliament for the first time with three seats. Prof. Tamas estimated that the party would gain from 5–10% in the next national elections. He predicted that Jobbik would lose votes compared to the European elections because the conservatives would try to steal votes away from it.

## “Combating right-wing extremism – Perspectives for European counter-strategies”

Experts in panel discussion:

- *Suzette Bronkhorst*  
Secretary-General of the International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH), Amsterdam
- *Martin Dulig*, member of Saxony State Assembly  
Leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in the Federal State of Saxony
- *Floriane Hohenberg*  
Director of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Program at the OSCE-Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Warsaw
- *Kristian Vigenin*, MEP  
Member of the European Parliament
- *Mike Whine*  
Government and International Affairs Director, Community Security Trust, London

**Moderation:** *Thomas Grumke, Ph.D.*  
Office for the Protection of the Constitution of the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia

In Michael Whine’s contribution to the panel discussion, he argued that the **starting point for strategies against right-wing extremism** should be ideas about how to change the world so that people will take an active stand against racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic attacks and attitudes. He said it was necessary to have a differentiated analysis of the causes of right-wing extremism, and to examine approaches on a number of levels in order to develop counter-strategies for combating it. Among the causes are fears arising from social changes – along with the way individuals react to the challenges of change. Martin Dulig emphasised that it was essential to empower people to become self-confident, self-critical individuals. He added that a culture of acknowledging difference and allowing contradiction is needed to fight right-wing extremism. In Kristian Vigenin’s view of the basic principles of counter-strategies, it is important to get to the heart of the genuine problems that right-wing extremists tap into, and which help them to electoral success. This entails taking the individual’s lack of prospects seriously and promoting social inclusion. Suzette Bronkhorst pointed out that it is not the far right which has changed, but society’s response to it. She emphasised that it was important not to get accustomed to right-wing tendencies, adding, “We have to open up to a constantly changing

world in which we have to live together whether we want to or not.”

### Problems and strategy levers

**Protection against discrimination:** Floriane Hohenberg called for the **protection of (potential) victims** to be incorporated as a core element in strategies against right-wing extremism. Continuous monitoring of hate crime is indispensable for understanding the problem and raising awareness among politicians as well as the general public. In previous discussions at international level on hate violence and extremism, governments have shown a strong commitment to prevent and respond to this phenomenon, but implementation remains inconsistent. The role of civil society is crucial in challenging governments to take constructive action. Although hate-motivated violence is condemned on all sides and governments agree on solutions (such as adequate legislation and its effective implementation, or education to counter stereotypes and prejudices), there is no consensus on how to deal with hate speech on an international level. Different countries use different methods to find a balance between their duty to protect and foster freedom of expression and their duty to protect citizens from discrimination. Michael Whine noted that one important function of civil organisations must be to support governments in monitoring and evaluating data on hate crimes. He pointed out, however, that working at national and local level is obviously easier than multi-lateral efforts. In the UK, the three major parties could be persuaded to agree not to use racist arguments in their election campaigns. Whine described the work of the anti-racist organisation Searchlight and its “Hope not Hate” campaign, which has been successful in fighting discrimination in local communities.

**Education** at school and in the family is decisive for helping to defend Europe against right-wing extremism. Kristian Vigenin highlighted the importance of showing that foreigners or members of minorities are not to blame for problems. In addition to factual knowledge it is also important to convey experiences of diversity so that people can look beyond their own experience and be able to adjust to a heterogeneous society. Martin Dulig advocated concrete experience of democracy as an important starting point for strategies against right-wing extremism. He argued that democracy should not be reduced to parliamentarianism, but required grassroots participation instead. This is why there must be scope for increased activity in schools and communities. A case in



point is the project “Showing Courage for Democracy” (original title: Für Demokratie Courage zeigen). Initially based in Saxony, this has spread successfully in Germany and France as the “Network for Democracy and Courage”.

### The radical right at political level:

#### “No go for cooperation with right-wing extremists”

Legal sanctions against extreme right-wing parties – such as restricted zones, bans on the use of assembly halls or prohibiting demonstrations – are important tools in combating the far right. They need to be employed effectively and adjusted regularly to prevent damage to rights that are indispensable in a democracy. Martin Dulig argued that a strategy that curtailed his own rights just because neo-Nazis were using those rights was mistaken. In his view this would reduce democracy and undermine our own capacities. Instead of accepting curtailment of democratic rights, it is necessary to confront right-wing extremists confidently, but not to accept their involvement in policy-making. Consequently, Martin Dulig and Kristian Vigenin called for a “no go” approach to cooperating with extreme right-wing parties. In the regional parliament in Saxony in eastern Germany, the parties agreed on principle to reject all NPD (German National Party) motions. Vigenin mentioned the example of the Extreme Right Watch Working Group of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament. This working group analyses the extent to which radical right-wing parties influence the decision-making process in the EU. Conferences and meetings of this group have already been held in Leipzig, the UK, and Hungary as well as in Brussels. The parliamentary groups of the European Parliament reached agreement on non-cooperation with the ITS (which collapsed within a year). The group’s political isolation led to people keeping their distance from it, and to mounting internal tensions. Suzette Bronkhorst, however, did not agree with the calls for isolation, but advocated giving

right-wing populists political responsibility in the Netherlands. She argued that the only way to get rid of Geert Wilders was to let him get into power. She predicted he would only last about six months.

### Players in the fight against right-wing extremism

**State and civil society:** Martin Dulig affirmed that the state needs to maintain its monopoly on the use of force and punish acts of violence and infringements of human rights. However, he added that state institutions also need to open up towards civil society and engage in a joint battle against right-wing extremism. In this context the financial resources of NGOs are always a controversial topic. Michael Whine described the successful work of the Community Security Trust in the UK. The trust has set up and trained a security force for the protection of the Jewish community and offers training for other denominational communities, all with the active backing of the police and government. It acts as consultant to the government on legislation and policy on hate crime issues.

**Schools and youth work:** Programmes and training in schools such as anti-racism coaching or Holocaust education are already underway in some countries, for example, the UK. Some programmes include school trips to Auschwitz and discussions on the “Holocaust in Srebrenica and Rwanda”. Michael Whine explained that the main emphasis of the school programmes was not right-wing extremism or combating racism, but promoting equality. They become sustainable by being integrated into the national curriculum.

**Kristian Vigenin** argued that political parties should address topical social issues and economic problems and find constructive answers, aiming particularly to promote social inclusion. Martin Dulig called on the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) to offer more appealing, up-to-



date forms of political participation. A participant from the audience pointed out that extreme right-wing parties sometimes offered more attractive public events than the other parties (musical concerts, discussion groups, politicians going to discothèques, etc.).

**The EU** has demonstrated active commitment by adopting the Anti-Discrimination Directives and some recommendations for dealing with racism and xenophobia. The directives and recommendations have been integrated into the legislation of the member states, with necessary modifications for national law which brought them to the attention of the general public. Suzette Bronkhorst demanded, however, that EU officials be delegated to monitor implementation of these laws. She said the EU is not particularly decisive in dealing with these topics. There are no committees or watchdog offices to monitor implementation of the directives – or recommendations about xenophobia and racism – and to issue reprimands if necessary.

**Publicity/Media:** Several speakers, including Floriane Hohenberg, stressed that public debate on human rights and attacks on members of certain groups (especially Roma, Jews, Muslims, and homosexuals) is essential for fighting right-wing extremism in the long term.

**Current developments:** Some players from the radical right in Europe are attempting to set up a transnational network. The Alliance of European National Movements intends to play a role in the European Parliament, but also beyond the EP. So far, the French FN, the British BNP, Hungary's Jobbik, the Swedish Democrats, the Front National Belge, the Ukrainian Svoboda Party and the Italian MS-Fiamma Tricolore have joined this radical right alliance.

*About the author:*

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The **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung** assigns key importance to activities against right-wing extremism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobic and racist ideologies, and for the promotion of democracy.

**"Combating right-wing extremism"** is a project of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Forum Berlin. It includes organisation of regular events, publications and seminars on current forms of right-wing extremism and effective counter-strategies. The project also focuses on the European dimension of right-wing extremism.

For more information on the activities of the FES for democracy and against right-wing extremism, please visit our website at [www.fes-gegen-rechtsextremismus.de](http://www.fes-gegen-rechtsextremismus.de) or contact project director Nora Langenbacher (Nora.Langenbacher@fes.de).

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