

A stylized map of Central Europe composed of a grid of grey dots. Several dots are highlighted in red, indicating specific geographical locations. The map is centered behind the title text.

Right-wing Extremism in Central Europe

An Overview

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December 2011

- In the newly emerging democracies of Central Europe, such as Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, new political entities have formed, including a number of right-wing, nationalist and extremist entities.
- Right-wing extremist organisations in the Czech Republic and Slovakia are often registered as civic associations or political parties. In Poland, the radical right has no legal basis, operating only on a semiformal platform.
- These organisations pose a threat to the new emerging democracies in Central Europe and thus coherent policies are needed to combat them.

Introduction (Merin Abbass)

In the 20 years since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the Western media has often reported on the successful transition of the new EU member states to a free market economy, as well as on elections and emerging political parties.

However, there have been fewer reports about the other, darker side of Central Europe, with the existence of right-wing extremists, racists and agitators against Roma, homosexuals, Jews and other ethnic minorities. These are obtaining more and more power in the emerging democracies. The particular dimensions of danger of course differ from one country to another. The Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia have therefore confronted these challenges differently.

In recent years, right-wing extremism has emerged in Europe. Right-wing extremists are trying to establish themselves in society and politics and are deploying a range of strategies and structures to that end. Especially in hard times of financial and economic crisis, right-wing extremists seek to benefit from people's insecurity and fear and to exploit them for their own political aims. Right-wing extremism pose a threat to democracy therefore more attention should be paid to developing anti-extremist policies.

The present paper provides an introduction to the current situation with regard to right-wing extremism in Central Europe and outlines the historical background and actors and their position within the political system and society. It also presents some future scenarios of the development of right-wing extremism in Central Europe.

Right-wing Extremism in Central Europe (Kateřina Tvrdá)

In Central Europe the communist system, which remained in place for almost 40 years, was characterised by strictly limited political competition and the restriction of fundamental rights and civic freedoms. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of communism in 1989, however, new democracies emerged and started to consolidate in Central Europe. The basic features of

democracy are plurality, consisting of free competition between political parties and members of society, equality and freedom. In the newly emerging democracies of Central Europe, such as Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, new political entities were formed in accordance with this, including a number of right-wing, nationalist and extremist entities. These right-wing extremist political movements take various forms such as informal youth subcultures, media, interest groups and formal political parties.¹ They have clear ideological attitudes that contradict constitutional and democratic principles.² They are a threat for the new emerging democracies in Central Europe so that coherent policies to combat it are needed.

Czech Republic (Václav Walach)

In the Czech Republic, right-wing extremism³ has been developing since 1989. Since the very beginning, there have been two main strands of the far right social movement, neo-Nazi and nationalist, although in the 1990s, their exponents were both to be found in the Coalition for the Republic/Republican Party of Czechoslovakia, the most successful political party in the Chamber of Deputies from 1992 to 1998. Subsequently, however, relations between them became fairly complicated, ranging from collaboration to outright hostility. The Czech far right seems on the decline at the moment. Nevertheless, in some respects it still requires attention.

The Worker's Party for Social Justice (DSSS) is the most important political party within the far right spectrum, obtaining 1.14 per cent of the votes in the parliamentary elections in 2010. As a successor of the Worker's Party that was outlawed by the Supreme Administrative Court in 2010 because of its antidemocratic aims, xenophobic, racist, and chauvinist programme, and involvement with the violent actions of banned neo-Nazi groups, it focuses on a variety of issues: a Europe of white nations, the prosperity of the Czech nation, the interests of the work-

1. Bastl, Martin, Mareš, Miroslav, Smolík, Josef, Vejvodová, Petra. 2011. *Krajní pravice a krajní levice v R.* Praha: Grada Publishing, pp. 139–143.

2. Backes, Uwe. 2007. *Meaning and Forms of Political Extremism*, *Central European Political Science Review*, Vol. IX, No. 4, pp. 242–262.

3. Since it has little analytical significance, the author of this paper leaves the concept of political extremism to one side, preferring to use the term »far right«.

ing class in particular and criticism of the liberal capitalist regime and its political elites, immigrants, ethnic minorities, including Jews and minorities with regard to sexual orientation. Interestingly, they are at least partly willing to satisfy the territorial and state demands of German neo-Nazis.

Two phases of the DSSS can be distinguished. Until 2007, the party mainly dealt with the defence of workers' interests. Since then, however, it has concentrated on ethnic minorities and crime: for example, Roma and sometimes Vietnamese people are portrayed as criminals or socially maladaptive. One frequently deployed strategy is to march through localities inhabited by Roma.

There are several informal organisations in the country that are clearly influenced by developments in Germany. National Resistance, Free Resistance and Autonomous Nationalists are the most significant. At the moment, the importance of particular groups is obscure. However, informally organised groups continue to function as important the segments of far right, which is evident mostly at public demonstrations. Besides acts of violence, they propagandise National Socialist ideas and try to mobilise new adherents. They have abandoned the discredited »skinhead« image and have opened up the movement to some extent to a wider range of people, insisting only on adherence to National Socialist beliefs. They are also trying to speak directly to youngsters by holding concerts, organising environmental activities, distributing leaflets and so on.

Last but not least, there is a substantial nationalist movement (associated with right-wing populism). The National Party – the most important, but nevertheless politically marginal party, obtaining only 0.17 per cent of the vote in the 2006 parliamentary elections – ceased to exist in 2009, but representatives carry on its work. The foremost organisation is Action D.O.S.T. (whose name stands for Confidence, Objectivity, Freedom, Tradition). This campaign seeks to promote traditional family values and private property, and rejects antidiscrimination policies, a multicultural society or Europeanisation. Some members are employed in various offices and have direct support from the government.

The government is dealing with far right organisations in a variety of ways. Neo-Nazis are subject to surveillance

by the police and intelligence services. They are prosecuted and imprisoned. Nationalists are tolerated and sometimes even defended by members of the government, if the latter's connections to neo-Nazi or anti-Semitic organisations are discovered: Ladislav Bátor is the best example. The far right – especially neo-Nazis – may be declining, but nationalists are gaining ground among mainstream political parties.

Poland (Bartosz Rydliński)

Right-wing extremism has a very long tradition in Polish history. Right-wing language and discourse can be found not only in the Second Polish Republic (1918–1939), but also in the People's Republic of Poland (1944–1989). During the communist period, the Party⁴ used anti-Semitic language in expressions of official policy in 1968. It was a time of campaigns against the intelligentsia and the students' movement, which were demanding reforms and liberalisation of the Party. After 1980 even some members of the main opposition force, *Solidarność*, used »exclusionary« language, based on the view that only »true« Poles, with a right-wing orientation and a strong Catholic background, could be policymakers in the new, free Poland.

After the political transition that commenced in 1989, the Third Polish Republic witnessed further right-wing extremism in public life. New political organisations such as ZChN (Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe), LPR (Liga Polskich Rodzin) and PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) have at times used right-wing extremist arguments based on anti-Semitism, nationalism and homophobia. In today's parliament, only PiS uses similar political language, but its right-wing extremism is progressively diminishing. Right-wing extremism in Poland is based on small quasi-political organisations (for more details, see below).

Important background in any presentation of right-wing extremism in Poland is provided by Article 13 of the Constitution, which sets out clearly what kinds of organisation are forbidden: »Political parties and other organisations whose programmes are based on totalitarian methods and the modes of activity of Nazism, fascism

4. Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza).

and communism, as well as those whose programmes or activities sanction racial or national hatred, the application of violence for the purpose of obtaining power or to influence state policy, or provide for the secrecy of their own structure or membership, shall be prohibited.»⁵

ONR (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny)⁶ is an organisation with a long nationalist tradition. Its main platform is the establishment of a Great Poland (Wielka Polska) and it regards itself as a union standing for the Polish nation, state and language. ONR is radically against democracy, which it considers the enemy of European civilisation. Its main values are, professedly, justice, morality, conscience and honour, based on Christianity. ONR rejects human or civil rights that conflict with the European heritage. Equality is also regarded as subordinate to a harmonious and hierarchical nation. Only heterosexual families have a right to raise children and families must be a national priority. Foreign policy should be strictly based on Polish interests. ONR is against the European Union and its multicultural profile is perceived as an enormous danger.

Falanga⁷ envisions a great, civilised Nation. The state should be strong and not democratic. Only in this way will a Great Poland become a reality. The basis of Polish identity, in Falanga's view, is the Catholic faith and the Polish–Catholic triangle of God, Honour and Fatherland. Freedom is primarily a matter of freedom of choice in the labour market: Falanga's motto here is »Not Ireland, not Chicago – job for Poles in Poland«. It supports private property, but also the nationalisation of strategic industries for the benefit of the Polish nation. It also favours universal national service: only in that way will future generations will be able to understand their obligations to the nation, according to Falanga.

These organisations are partial to strongly nationalistic rhetoric. They also favour the use of force, order and hierarchy. The project of a »Great Poland« is exclusionary: only »true« Poles without any other roots can be part of this total and nationalistic vision.

Right-wing extremist organisations do not have political representation in the current Polish Parliament. They do

not take part in elections as political organisations. Sometimes, individual PiS MPs support right-wing extremist initiatives (such as seminars, marches or demonstrations). The principal aim of right-wing extremist organisations is to present their ideas in public. They entice young, nationalistic people with strong conservative and religious backgrounds. The Polish government does not consider these organisations a danger and tends to justify their existence on the basis of human and civil rights, such as freedom of opinion, speech and political expression.

Any possible future success on the part of right-wing extremism in Poland would arise from the social repercussions of the global financial and economic crisis. The core of right-wing extremist views that are of sociological interest comprises unrest concerning the current economic situation in Poland, poverty, low wages and pension cuts. The prominence of right-wing extremism in Poland is likely to increase, albeit gradually.

Slovakia (Tomáš Nociar)

Right-wing extremism has been present in Slovakia since the demise of the communist regime in 1989. Originally, when it came to public awareness in the early 1990s, it took the form of a violent neo-Nazi skinhead subculture. A number of different forms and political efforts (described below) have emerged in due course.

Right-wing extremism (as well as the far right) in Slovakia can be classified into two groups:

- (i) those with a fixed organisational structure, officially registered and of direct foreign inspiration;
- (ii) those without a fixed organisational structure, unregistered and without direct foreign inspiration.

Both these groups include people who incline towards either nationalism or neo-Nazism or a mixture of both. The most significant foreign inspiration comes indirectly from Germany, through the Czech Republic (for example, informal groups such as National Resistance and Autonomous Nationalists). The domestic inspiration comes mainly from the era of the fascist Slovak state (1939–1945).

The most significant manifestation of right-wing extremism in Slovakia is Slovak Togetherness (Slovenská

5. Constitution of the Republic of Poland, <http://www.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/konst/angielski/kon1.htm>.

6. Official website of ONR: <http://www.onr.h2.pl/>

7. Official website of Falanga: <http://www.falanga.boo.pl/>

pospolitost' – SP) and its current and former offshoots. In this regard, SP plays the role of parent organisation.

In terms of the political spectrum, the organisations around SP operate on the border between constitutional conformity and right-wing extremism. While they endeavour to operate legally in order to develop their current marginal support into broader support, their ideology is based on nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, neo-Fascism and also neo-Nazism.

SP operates as a civil association with national scope. It has been registered at the Ministry of Interior since 1995. SP considers itself the strongest nationalist organisation, synonymous with Slovak nationalism today and demanding »real change« and »national revolution«. SP's organisational structure is based on the leadership principle, which they consider the only way of achieving their objectives. The organisation cooperates with various far-right groups (both formal and informal) within Slovakia and also internationally. However, there are tensions between SP and the Slovak National Party, the strongest far-right political party in the country.⁸

Up until 2003 SP's activities were limited. It made no effort to impinge on the general consciousness. From 2003, however, the members of SP started to appear in public in uniform. This reminded many of the fascist era of the Slovak state and SP became known as a paramilitary vigilante organisation.⁹ The push to increase public visibility was probably aimed at establishing the organisation as a political entity, which took place at the turn of 2004/2005, resulting in the organisation Slovak Togetherness – National Party (Slovenská pospolitost' – Národná strana – SP-NS). In 2005, the state took action against these political efforts, leading to a series of clashes between the police and members of SP. Finally, this culminated in a ban being imposed on SP-NS in March 2006 because of its antidemocratic character. The period starting in March 2006 and ending at the close of 2008 was a low point in the fortunes of the SP. This ended with an unsuccessful attempt to wind up the SP by the Ministry of Interior, which served only to mobilise its members and sympathisers.

Probably the greatest success in the SP's history occurred during the summer of 2009 when it participated in a series of marches against so-called »gypsy crime«. It led to more clashes between SP sympathisers and the police, but more importantly to a boost in its media profile as its popularity grew. The best known figure of Slovak extremism (a former head of the SP and the SP-NS) and one of the main protagonists of these demonstrations is Marián Kotleba, who took advantage of the situation and decided to run for president of one of the eight self-governing regions in Slovakia in the municipal elections. The election result (10.03 per cent or 13,629 votes, giving Kotleba fourth place)¹⁰ can be considered the biggest electoral success of the non-parliamentary far right in Slovakia to date.

In autumn 2009 Kotleba began preparations to found a new political party, which was finally formed by infiltrating the existing Party of Wine Lovers and was renamed the People's Party – Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko – ĽSNS). The party ran in the parliamentary elections in 2010 and obtained 1.33 per cent of the votes (33,724).¹¹

The party's programme was presented in 2005 and consisted of a number of basic theses generally hostile to parliamentary democracy, liberalism, pluralism and the free market, and favouring a paternalistic economic approach, as well as nationalism, xenophobia, authoritarianism, conspiracy theories and unrealistic nationalist demands, particularly – but not only – in foreign policy. Since the ban was imposed on the SP-NS some of the demands have become more moderate: most notably, ĽSNS declares that it is pro-democratic in contrast to the SP-NS, which took an antidemocratic stance.¹²

The SP continues to represent the most important branch of right-wing extremism in the country, while ĽSNS, as its political representative, takes a more moderate stance, at least according to its programme. Future development will depend on both internal (whether it chooses to present itself as moderate or more extreme, and whether it will be able to unite different far-right

8. Website of Slovak Togetherness <http://www.pospolitost.org/SP/onas.html>

9. Paramilitary vigilantism involves violence by non-state organisations.

10. Number and share of valid votes cast for candidates for the presidencies of self-governing regions, 2009: <http://app.statistics.sk/vuc2009/sr/tab5.jsp?lang=en>

11. Parliamentary election results of 2010: http://app.statistics.sk/nrsr_2010/sr/tab3.jsp?lang=en

12. The statute of Slovak Togetherness: <http://www.lsns.sk/stanovy.pdf>

positions) and external (the government's counter-extremism policy, the activities of NGOs, the success or failure of SNS and public trust in mainstream political parties and elites) factors.

Conclusion (Kateřina Tvrďá)

As we can see from the contributions presented here, right-wing extremism threatens not only society but also political culture in the Czech Republic, Poland and the Slovak Republic. Increasing right-wing extremism in the 1990s was associated mainly with the consolidation of democratic regimes in these states. However, in the late 1990s, extreme right-wing political parties became marginal. Right-wing extremism in these countries exhibits a number of differences in terms of actors, issues, strategies, roots and political involvement.

The situations in the Czech Republic and Slovakia are fairly similar. We can differentiate between formal and informal adherence to right-wing extremism. The Czech and Slovak far right take their inspiration from historical totalitarian regimes, such as the Nazis in Germany. The various expressions of right-wing extremism are similar in the countries dealt with here, including symbolic violence, public demonstrations and propaganda. However, in Slovakia right-wing extremism has achieved the greatest degree of organisation and political engagement, in contrast to Poland and the Czech Republic. The main issues of the Czech and Slovak far right are related to racism and hatred. Polish right-wing extremists also profess Christian values and nationalist ideas.

Right-wing extremist organisations in the Czech Republic and Slovakia are often registered as civic associations or political parties. They participate in public life, including elections. In Poland, the radical right has no legal basis,

operating only on a semiformal platform. Importantly, the Czech Republic and Slovakia also prohibit right-wing extremist political parties or civic associations, as does Poland, but Czech and Slovak organisations do not officially present themselves as right-wing extremists. The question here is whether it is preferable to allow the extreme right to operate within the political and legal systems or not. If far right actors are integrated, the state thereby provides them the opportunity to influence public opinion and to have access to political processes (as long as right-wing extremists do not go too far). On the other hand, if the state denies right-wing extremists the opportunity to become legal, it also denies itself the possibility of influencing them in a positive way. This may even contribute to the further radicalisation of right-wing extremism. So the question still remains whether we should exclude right-wing extremists from political life or integrate them in it. However, in the future we can expect a continued decline of extreme right-wing entities, for two main reasons – national anti-extremist policy and an ideological shift by extreme right-wing organisations from extreme anti-system ideas to radical conformist ideas. The development of right-wing extremism will also depend on the socio-economic situation and the demands of the voters, which can change.

Compared to other European states, right-wing extremism has not achieved much political success in the countries under discussion. Also, in electoral terms, far right organisations are still on the margins of public life. Nevertheless, it is necessary to prevent and combat all forms of racism and xenophobia by all means and at all levels to protect fundamental rights and liberties and democratic values. New European Union states, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, could play a special role in promoting the peaceful development of societies. They can be living examples of states not marred by right-wing extremist crimes and symbolic violence in the public sphere.



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Imprint

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This publication is printed on paper from sustainable forestry.



ISBN 978-3-86498-026-8