

A stylized map of Slovakia composed of a grid of grey dots, with several dots highlighted in red to indicate specific locations or regions.

Right-Wing Extremism in Slovakia

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- Right-wing extremism in Slovakia can be distinguished in two kinds of entities: on the one hand groups of skinheads and leaderless »resistance groups« operating unofficially, independent of political parties without a steady organizational structure and those civic organizations and political parties that try to establish permanent structures of institutionalized right-wing extremism. The best known and most successful of them are Slovak Togetherness (SP) and People's Party Our Slovakia (LSNS).
- The central issue in their agenda and main mobilisation tool of the extremist parties is their strong anti-Roma rhetoric. Therefore they try to organize rallies and support local protest in places of difficult coexistence of the Roma minority with the majority population.
- Although right-wing extremism does not pose an essential threat for the Slovakian democratic society nowadays, it seems difficult to inculcate anti-extremist values in the public. It can in turn be observed that mainstream political parties begin to take over a part of the far right rhetoric in a moderate form.



Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Right-Wing Extremist Actors	1
2.1 Unofficial Entities	1
2.2 Official Entities	4
3. The Social Base of Sympathisers of Right-Wing Extremism	7
4. Counter-Strategies in the Fight Against Right-Wing Extremism	7
References	9

1. Introduction

In Slovakia right-wing extremism emerged¹ directly after the demise of the communist regime in 1989. While in the 1990s members of the skinhead subculture were the most typical holders of right-wing extremist ideas, since 2003, a crucial change in representation has occurred, and right-wing extremism in Slovakia has become more organised and has developed political aspirations. This is one of the reasons for the organisational diversity of right-wing extremist groups, which operate as:

- *political parties;*
- *civic associations;*
- *unofficial groups*
(subcultures or leaderless resistance groups).

In terms of ideology, right-wing extremist groups in Slovakia have two main profiles:

- *the ultranationalist stream* – who espouse nationalism, anti-Semitism and anti-Hungarian chauvinism and are apologists for the wartime Slovak state and draw on its legacy;
- *the Neo-Nazi stream* – who are typically racist, anti-Semitic and apologists for the Third Reich and maintain contacts with contemporary transnational neo-Nazi organisations (Danilov, Nociar, 2012).

In terms of typology, the following right-wing extremist entities can be distinguished in Slovakia:

- *registered entities with a stable organisational structure, without any direct foreign inspiration;*
- *non-registered entities without a stable organisational structure but with direct foreign inspiration.*

These are, however, only rough classifications since several entities display overlapping features.

1. In this paper, right-wing extremism is interpreted as a primarily ideological concept that in connection with the theory of extremism combines some far-right aspects (nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and an emphasis on a strong state) with an anti-democratic stance representing the extremist aspect (Mudde, 1996). *Slovenská národná strana* (SNS, Slovak National Party) is therefore not included in the study since its ideology, political agenda and presentation are not in conflict with the democratic system. In this respect, it would be more accurate to label the SNS as a populist far-right party.

2. Right-Wing Extremist Actors

2.1 Unofficial Entities

Unregistered groups engaging in informal activities constitute the most direct and the most open form of right-wing extremism in Slovakia. They do not strive for power or engage in serious politics and their unofficial status makes them difficult to sanction as entities. These groups usually lack a coherent, sophisticated ideology and channels for presenting themselves, which makes them difficult to analyse.

Subcultures – Far Right Skinheads and Hooligans²

The beginnings of right-wing extremism in Slovakia are associated with the skinhead subculture. Until 1989, when Slovakia was still part of Czechoslovakia, the skinhead scene was relatively weak in numbers. It was only after 1989 that it significantly proliferated and peaked in the 1990s, when it experienced two boom periods. The biggest boom occurred in the period from 1990 to 1992. This was followed by a period of moderate decline. From 1997 onwards, a new boom period began (Vitko, 1998), lasting until 2000, when a new decline set in which is continuing today.

Skinhead subculture tends to make its presence felt in public mainly through rowdyism and street violence. At the same time, its violent nature is also its most dangerous aspect, as it has no real political influence worth mentioning. The Roma population in Slovakia as well as foreigners and/or alternative youth movements have been the main victims of skinhead street attacks. These violent activities peaked in the second half of the 1990s when brutality increased and resulted in the first racially motivated murders committed by far-right skinheads (Draxler et al., 2009).

Efforts to bring together the skinhead subculture in an organisational framework began back in the early 1990s and included organisations like *Národno-socialistické hnutie Európy* (National Socialist Movement of Europe),

2. Including skinheads and hooligans among right-wing extremists is, indeed, questionable as these scenes are not a priori right-wing extremist in nature. However, since in Slovakia the right-wing extremist component largely prevailed in these groups, the skinheads and hooligans examined in this section are understood to mean their ultra right-wing stream.

Klan Slovenských rytierov (Clan of Slovak Knights), *Slovenský národný front* (Slovak National Front), *Slovenský úsvit* (Slovak Dawn), *Slovenská národná liga* (Slovak National League) and *Slovenská vlastenecká organizácia – Garda* (Slovak Patriotic Organisation – the Guard). However, these attempts were usually short-lived and all ended in failure (Milo, 2002). Starting in 1995, branches of transnational neo-Nazi organizations such as the *Slovakia Hammerskins* and *Blood & Honour Division Slovakia* began to dominate the Slovak extremist scene. In terms of political inclinations skinheads tended to support official nationalist entities such as *Slovenská ľudová strana* (Slovak People's Party), *Slovenská národná jednota* (Slovak National Unity) or the then parliamentary party *Slovenská národná strana* (SNS, Slovak National Party), although the skinhead movement generally had major reservations about the SNS in the 1990s. Since 2003, and especially since 2005, when public awareness of *Slovenská pospolitosť* (Slovak Togetherness) and its later political offshoots increased, a continuing growth in political support for these organisations has been observed. Political positions espoused by far-right skinheads included racism, anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial, historical revisionism, hostility towards various minorities, an uncritical view of the wartime Slovak state and its protagonists, and various other attitudes typical of right-wing extremism.

After 2000, the position of skinheads in the right-wing extremist scene gradually weakened. One reason for this was a change in the approach of the law enforcement authorities. Another reason, which has become particularly apparent since 2005, is that the right-wing extremist scene has attempted to divest itself of its skinhead image and lifestyle in a bid to win more public acceptance. This has led to the emergence of new trends in this environment.

Like the skinheads, the hooligan scene had started to become established even before 1989. At that time, it consisted mainly of crowd violence and vandalism by fans of the football teams Slovan Bratislava and Spartak Trnava. However, organised hooligan groups were still emerging in larger cities such as Bratislava, Trnava, Košice, Nitra and Žilina as late as the mid-1990s (Mareš Smolík, Suchánek, 2004). It can be noted that at that time the skinhead and hooligan scenes were closely intertwined and some of the hard-core fans of individual clubs were skinheads who often appeared only during

football matches. However, unlike the skinhead subculture, hooliganism has not weakened, and hooligans continue not only to engage in violence but also to espouse nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism and other manifestations of intolerance (Ľudia proti rasizmu, 2010). One of the most ostentatious expressions of Slovak hooligans' extremist attitudes was the displaying of a banner with the German words »*Alles Gute Adi!*« along with a picture of Adolf Hitler on the occasion of the anniversary of his birthday in 2007. This choreography included the hooligans' chanting the slogan »*racist, fascist, hooligans*« (Pavlik, 2007). Traditionally, the most active groups are the ultras of Slovan Bratislava and Spartak Trnava. The ultras of DAC Dunajská Streda representing the Hungarian minority are a special case, since some of them support Hungarian far-right organisations such as *Jobbik* and the 64 Counties Movement.³

Leaderless Resistance Groups⁴ – *Národný Odpor* (National Resistance, NO) and *Autonómni Nacionalisti* (Autonomous Nationalists, AN)

The negative public image of skinheads has contributed to the emergence of a new kind of leaderless resistance group. These groups became active in response to the dissolution of *Slovenská pospolitosť – Národná strana* (Slovak Togetherness – National Party) and the associated decline of official groups at the extreme right end of the political spectrum between 2006 and 2008.

Národný odpor Slovensko (National Resistance Slovakia, NO) was established in 2005 inspired by the German and Czech right-wing extremist environment and emulated its concept of national resistance. In terms of ideology, the NO's declarations and manifestos cast it in

3. The matches between DAC Dunajská Streda and other Slovak clubs are quite often the scene of ethnic tensions. The most famous case of this was a conflict during the DAC versus Slovan Bratislava match at Dunajská Streda in November 2008 when hooligans rampaged. Tension between the hooligan fans of Slovan Bratislava and the ethnic Hungarian supporters of Dunajská Streda did not stop at trading insults but escalated into violence. The Slovak police intervened only against the Hungarian hooligans, which triggered tension between the two countries at the international level.

4. The American neo-Nazi Louis Beam made the tactic of leaderless resistance in the right-wing extremist environment popular in his essay of the same name published for the first time in 1982. He called it a »*non-organization*« and »*nothing less than a fundamental departure in theories of organization*«. According to his ideas these tactics functioned in practice thus: »*all individuals and groups operate independently of each other, and never report to a central headquarters or single leader for direction or instruction, as would those who belong to a typical pyramid organization*« (Beam, 1992).

the role of a revolutionary movement fighting against the democratic system. In one of its statements, the NO declared itself a nationalist organisation fighting very different phenomena such as communism, »magyarization« (i. e. domination of Slovakia by the Hungarian minority), pseudo-humanism, drug abuse and so on. The form of action chosen was leaderless resistance, which was supposed to take the form of individual cells based on mutual trust among their members. The NO announced its abandonment of any attempt to engage in public political activity, but at the same time declared its willingness to cooperate with and support political entities claiming allegiance to the ideas of National Socialism. Until 2007, the only NO cell operating was the one in Nitra, which became the most active cell within the Slovak NO. The activists of NO Nitra are suspected of responsibility for the highly publicised assault on the ethnic Hungarian student Hedviga Malinová in August 2006. Their demonstrations against drugs and homosexuality also received broad media coverage. Less active cells in cities such as Bratislava, Trnava, Čadca, Prievidza and Senica followed the NO Nitra later.

Autonómni nacionalisti (Autonomous Nationalists, AN) is the latest stream to appear on the right-wing extremist scene in Slovakia. Its views and its methods of recruiting sympathisers are rather like those of the (radical) left. Slovak neo-Nazis started to espouse AN ideas in Slovakia in early 2008 inspired, like the NO, by the right-wing extremist scene in Germany and the Czech Republic. The first AN group was established as a result of cooperation with the Czech AN, and efforts were made to unite smaller diversified groups on this basis in the Považie region. Later, similar AN groups also emerged in other regions of Slovakia, in particular *AN Juhozápad* (Southwest) and *AN Stred – stredné Slovensko* (Centre – Central Slovakia), *AN Severovýchod* (Northeast), *AN Gemer*, *AN Cassovia*, and *AN Zemplín*. The individual cells bring together activists from various towns in the region to form *AN Slovakia*.

The manifesto detailing the name, objectives and origin of the Slovak AN states that this form of association has been chosen because it believes that organisations with a more centralised structure are less able to defend themselves. It thus de facto confirms that a hierarchy – or a leadership-based model of organisation – is not alien to them but that they currently favour the leaderless model. One of the unifying features of these groups is their sym-

bols, which consist of two overlapping flags, one black, symbolising resistance to the establishment, and the other red, symbolising revolutionary ideas. For tactical reasons, they strictly avoid using Nazi and fascist insignia.

In terms of ideology, *AN Slovensko* holds the usual views of the far right, but is more on the left when it comes to economic issues. This ideological stream within right-wing extremism is referred to by some political scientists as a new form or revival of »Strasserism«⁵, which means combining various aspects of the radical autonomist left, initially mainly manifested in the anti-globalisation movement, with a far-right stance. In this context, this includes a critical attitude to globalisation and capitalism as well as presenting and organising the AN from the grassroots. It considers the concept of the nation, understood to mean a group of racially related people connected by a blood bond, one of its most essential values. According to this idea, Europe should be made up of strong nation-states. Multiculturalism is criticised and religion is considered a divisive factor. The wartime Slovak state and its protagonists are openly defended.

Surprisingly, the AN tends to manifest itself in the promotion of subcultural trends such as graffiti and hip-hop, which were rejected within the right-wing extremist scene in the past, as a way of appealing to youth. At the same time, however, the AN takes a negative attitude to the skinhead movement and football hooliganism. It also rejects adherence to specific musical styles, arguing that the style of music is irrelevant and that it is the agitation texts that matter.

In terms of cooperation, *AN Slovakia* has participated in some joint activities with *Slovenská pospolitost'* and also supported the formation of the *Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko* (ĽSNS, People's Party Our Slovakia). Its activities abroad include participation in meetings and demonstrations organised by the Czech *Dělnická strana* (Workers' Party) as well as in various activities organised by right-wing extremists in neighbouring countries. However, since the foundation of the ĽSNS the activities of the NO and AN have slackened as some major activists from these groups have become active in the ĽSNS and even ran for election under its auspices in the 2010 parliamentary elections.

5. The name is derived from a German Nazi party (NSDAP) faction led by the brothers Otto and Gregor Strasser which tried to integrate socialist elements in the NSDAP discourse and policies.

2.2 Official Entities

Discussing right-wing extremist registered political parties and civic associations is made more difficult by the fact that these groups tend to disguise and deny their extremist nature both in order to avoid legal sanctions and to boost their popular appeal. Nevertheless, it is possible to find indications of their right-wing extremist inclinations and profile.

Slovenská Pospolitosť (Slovak Togetherness, SP)

Slovenská pospolitost' (SP), which calls itself a Slovak nationalist organisation committed to real change), is the most significant civic association associated with right-wing extremism in Slovakia. In terms of organisational structure, the SP is based on the leadership principle, which it considers the only one suitable for achieving its goals. The SP consists of local organisations with their own leadership headed by the elders. The association is active in several regions of Slovakia. Its current leader, elected by the SP assembly, is Jakub Škrabák.

The SP has been active since 1995, but did not really penetrate public awareness until 2003. The nationalist *Slovenská národná strana's* (Slovak National Party, SNS) failure to get into parliament at that time provided an arena for other far-right organisations to present themselves, which the SP exploited. The public at large became aware of the SP members after they began to appear in public in uniforms resembling those of World War II Slovak paramilitary organisations, which sparked a polemic. The actions in which they engaged in 2003 and 2004 were performed in this spirit and eventually culminated in the establishment of their own political party which aimed to run in the next parliamentary elections. *Slovenská pospolitost' – Národná strana* (SP-NS) (Slovak Togetherness – National Party) was founded at the turn of 2004/2005 as a result of cooperation between *Slovenská pospolitost'* and the *Nové slobodné Slovensko* (New Free Slovakia) far-right civic association. The government responded by curbing the party's activity and it was subsequently dissolved on account of its openly anti-democratic programme. However, the leading figures of the dissolved SP-NS were eventually able to run in the 2006 parliamentary elections after the far-right *Slovenská ľudová strana* (Slovak People's Party) enabled them to be listed with a programme almost identical to

the one the SP-NS introduced in 2005 in leading positions on its own ticket. In the end, these elections resulted in failure for the SP, which managed to poll only 3,815 or 0.16 percent of the vote. The government's attempts to clamp down on the party together with its electoral failure resulted in a subsequent decline, manifest in a drop in the membership from some 200 to half of that. It also ceased wearing uniforms and elected a new leader.

The SP again attracted attention at the end of 2008 when the Ministry of the Interior failed in its attempt to dissolve the civic association as well. Repeated media coverage led to a mobilisation of sympathisers. SP leaders, encouraged by this failed attempt to dissolve the association, formally declared their rejection of the dissolution of the SP-NS and tried to revive political activity in the run-up to the municipal and parliamentary elections. The modification of its strategy, whereby the SP shifted its main focus from nostalgia for the fascist regime to a stronger anti-Roma stance, brought an increase in popularity. This can be linked with the series of actions against »Gypsy crime« which they co-organised in the summer of 2009. Popular support encouraged the SP to organise further mobilisation actions, mostly with an anti-Roma theme, and it has continued to organise such campaigns to this day. Encouraged by popular support, Marian Kotleba, the former leader of the SP-NS became one of the leading figures in these demonstrations. In line with the declared aim of the »renewed« SP-NS to run for election again, he decided to run for president in the Banská Bystrica self-governing region. Heavy anti-Roma rhetoric together with broad media coverage of these actions brought Marian Kotleba almost 14,000 votes as an independent candidate. With 10.03 percent of the votes this meant he was the fourth-strongest candidate. This can be considered the best electoral result of the extra-parliamentary far right in Slovak history.

In terms of ideology SP combines the traditional themes of extreme nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, neo-fascism and in some aspects even neo-Nazism. The SP and SP-NS's political programme is outlined in three joint documents. The first one, *Ľudový program Slovenskej pospolitosti – Národnej strany* (People's Programme of Slovak Togetherness – National Party) introduced in spring 2005, consists of several theses essentially attacking parliamentary democracy, liberalism, pluralism and liberal economics. It favours economic paternalism as well as espousing nationalism, xenophobia, authoritari-

anism and conspiracy theories and voicing national-populist demands. These theses included a call to change the form of political organisation from a parliamentary democracy to an estates system.⁶ With respect to ethnic minorities, they suggest applying the principle of reciprocity, so that the political representation of a specific national minority would reflect the representation of the Slovak minority in that minority's country of origin. Such an arrangement would mean de facto inequality in the weight of votes. They also professed three principles: the first was the national one interpreted as a substitute for the civic principle and giving pride of place to the Slovak nation understood in exclusively ethnic terms. The second one was the Christian principle, which seeks to permit only the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches and ban all others. This principle runs counter to religious tolerance and freedom of religion. The third principle is the social one and calls for considerable regulation of economic life, employment and private property in favour of ethnic members of the nation. In this program the SP also proposes that Slovakia withdraw from international structures such as the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the UN and NATO, declare military neutrality and introduce a visa requirement for nationals of African and Asian countries as well as Israel, the United States and Hungary. The programme declares Hungary as enemy number one for Slovak statehood and also portrays communists, liberals, Zionists and freemasons as declared enemies of the Slovak nation. It emphasises the need to rehabilitate Jozef Tiso, president of the wartime Slovak state (*Slovenská pospolitost' – Národná strana*, 2005).

The drafters of the SP-NS 2009 programme objectives, which later became the programme objectives of the envisaged political entity, also drew on the *Ludový program* (People's Programme). In addition to a number of points identical with those included in the above-mentioned People's Programme of the SP-NS, there was only one more substantial change: namely a call to replace representative democracy with direct democracy and to introduce an imperative mandate for MPs. Before the last parliamentary elections in 2012, the SP further de-

6. The estates system presented in the party program was a clear reference to the estates system of the wartime Slovak state. SP-NS proposed to divide the society into 10 estates (or classes), 9 of them based on professions and the tenth reserved for ethnic minorities. Only registered citizens would be able to vote and stand as candidates within their own estates and only the estates would be represented in the parliament and local municipalities.

veloped this idea in the so-called *Modranský manifest* (*Modra Manifesto*), which introduced the concept of estate democracy. This was portrayed as a form of direct democracy that would weaken the scope of action of directly elected political parties and instead give power to the representatives of the individual estates. In addition, this document criticised capitalism, communism, Zionism and chauvinism. The idea of nation is placed at the forefront of its rhetoric and it advocates cooperation among sovereign states, in particular the Slavic ones, which are referred to as related to Slovakia by blood (*Slovenská pospolitost'*, 2011).

With respect to links abroad, the SP says that it has cooperated with the German far-right NPD, the neo-fascist representative of the Romanian new right, *Noua Dreapta*, and the Czech far right *Dělnická strana* in the past. *Dělnická strana*, currently banned in the Czech Republic, and its successor party *Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti* are the most significant source of inspiration for the rhetoric and activities of the SP and *Ludová strana Naše Slovensko* (LSNS). Also of interest are the SP's contacts with some Hungarian neo-Nazi organisations, mainly *Magyar Nemzeti Arcvona*, which demonstrates why the SP may have abandoned its originally strong anti-Hungarian positions. On the domestic scene, the SP currently cooperates most closely with the LSNS, which it supports and for which its representatives ran in the last two parliamentary elections.

Ludová Strana Naše Slovensko
(People's Party Our Slovakia, LSNS)

The LSNS was established in the wake of the aforementioned efforts of the SP-NS to revive their activities. Another impetus was provided by the extensive media coverage and popular support for its anti-Roma campaigns of summer 2009. At the end of that summer, the intention was announced both to establish a new political entity called *Naše Slovensko* (Our Slovakia) and to participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The above-mentioned Marián Kotleba was on its preparatory committee. Its programmatic objectives were nearly identical to those approved by the assembly of the »renewed« SP-NS in January 2009. A petition aimed at collecting the number of signatures required for the registration of this political party was launched. After the media reported that a party called *Naše Slovensko* al-

ready existed and that therefore the new party could not be registered on the basis of the petition, the leadership opted for another alternative. They decided instead to enter the political arena through an already existing marginal political party. The registered *Strana priateľov vína* (Party of Friends of Wine) first changed its name to the *Ludová strana sociálnej solidarity* (People's Party of Social Solidarity) and, in early 2010, finally to *Ludová strana Naše Slovensko* (People's Party Our Slovakia, ĽSNS) under which it still operates. The party is active in all regions of Slovakia and Marián Kotleba is its central figure.

The ĽSNS identifies itself as a political party based on national and Christian values that advocates the introduction of the principles of direct democracy and absolute freedom of opinion. The party's statutes officially commit it to the rule of law and social justice and to an economy based on private ownership as well as to democracy, Christianity and the rejection of violence (*Ludová strana Naše Slovensko*, 2010b). It is understandable that after the dissolution of the »neighbouring« SP-NS this party has chosen to define itself in more moderate terms in its official documents. In its rhetoric, the ĽSNS therefore describes the current situation in the Slovak Republic as a loss of national identity and as a situation of lawlessness and social injustice. On its web site, for example, it uses the slogan »With Courage against the System«. The central issue on its agenda and at the same time the most successful mobilisation tool is strong anti-Roma rhetoric. The party calls the Roma »asocial parasites« who abuse the welfare system and are the source of a high crime rate. This party has also called for the introduction of a eugenics programme (Mišún, 2012). For these reasons, the party is often referred to as extremist in the media. Leaders of the ĽSNS, however, reject such attributes and attempt to relativise the term extremism by introducing terms like »Gypsy extremism« into the extreme right discourse. Their notion of the LGBT movement as »sexual extremists« can be understood in a similar manner. The second most distinctive theme in the rhetoric of the ĽSNS is its criticism of and attempts to discredit established political parties and elites, against which the party seeks to take a sharp stance, portraying them as corrupt and distant from and indifferent to the problems of ordinary citizens. Building on its activist style, the party presents efforts to »take matters into its own hands« and refers to its members as guardians of »decent people«. In that spirit it has organised protests and rallies in places where coexistence between the Roma minority and the

majority population is difficult. This can be described as their main area of contact with the population. Anti-Hungarian rhetoric, on the other hand, another traditional issue of the Slovak far right, scarcely figures on the ĽSNS agenda. Anti-Semitism is likewise not accorded the same degree of attention as it is by the SP, for example.

The ĽSNS participated in the last two parliamentary elections of 2010 and 2012, but failed to win any seats. In 2010, the party polled 1.33 percent of the vote and in 2012, 1.58 percent. However, a slight increase in electoral support can be observed among the population. At the municipal level, where the party is currently more likely to succeed, it experienced a significant setback in the 2010 municipal elections when it managed to get only one mandate in the whole of Slovakia, which is less than what several less active and more marginal political entities achieved. This indicates that the party has not yet developed stable local structures.

As for the party programme, the ĽSNS presented manifestos for both the 2010 and the 2012 parliamentary elections, but in neither case did these constitute a sophisticated political programme or agenda. Rather they were a hotch-potch of populist slogans in the spirit of anti-Roma rhetoric, social chauvinism, paternalism, an emphasis on law and order, and criticism of the country's political leaders and the direction of its foreign policy. In 2010, the ĽSNS programme also included, in addition to the anti-Roma agenda, proposals to cut the number of MPs from 150 to 100, to implement unrestricted freedom of speech, to establish a home guard and to withdraw missions from abroad (ĽSNS, 2010a).⁷ In 2012, it added other requirements to these proposals such as leaving the European Monetary Union and NATO, tightening immigration policy and the rejection of registered homosexual partnerships (ĽSNS, 2012). Although the ĽSNS has so far failed to achieve a significant election result, its current strategy of reaching out to supporters by using an anti-Roma agenda appears to be successful and effective and has resulted in an increase in popularity and media coverage. Having its agenda introduced into the public discourse allows this currently marginal party to participate in public debate and hence gain in relevance.

7. In 2010, the ĽSNS called its electoral programme »14 Steps for the Future of Slovakia and our Children«. The choice of name indicates a certain inclination towards and sympathy for neo-Nazism. The primary reason, however, may well be that the party ran as number 14, a reference to the well-known neo-Nazi slogan consisting of 14 words (»We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White Children«).

3. The Social Base of Sympathisers of Right-Wing Extremism

In general, right-wing extremist actors try to target not only youth but also frustrated voters who may cast their ballots for extremists as a form of protest against the incumbent political parties. The literature often refers to this group as the losers of the transformation process and it presents their low level of education and low income as factors conducive to their supporting the extreme right. No elaborate studies have been done, however, on the social composition of sympathisers or of the right-wing extremist electorate in Slovakia. Therefore assessment of the social base, if indeed there is one, must necessarily be rather tentative.


Media coverage of rallies of right-wing extremists and their supporters suggests that their sympathisers are mainly young men. But as right-wing extremists start to win over public opinion, we need to know more than this. For instance, the research report studying public opinion on right-wing extremism states that more (though not significantly more) men than women, more people with a low level of education and manual workers, and more people with exclusively Slovak nationality tend to lean towards right-wing extremism. A stronger inclination in this direction has also been observed among older voters for *SMER – Sociálna demokracia* (SMER – Social Democracy), *Slovenská národná strana* (Slovak National Party) and *Ludová strana – Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko* (People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia) (Gallová Kriglerová, Kadlečíková, 2012). By contrast, a survey of voters' behaviour in Slovakia in 2010 shows that it is mainly young first-time voters who increasingly cast their votes in favour of the *ĽSNS* (Gyárfášová, Krivý, Bútorová, 2010). In terms of geography, it can be concluded that the *ĽSNS* enjoys increased support especially in areas close to Roma settlements where coexistence between the majority and the socially excluded Roma communities is difficult and the party is able to exploit this (Klunkavská, 2012).

4. Counter-Strategies in the Fight Against Right-Wing Extremism

Right-wing extremism becomes threatening if it attempts to dispose of the democratic regime. Currently, there is no real danger of this happening in Slovakia, since the government has put a series of effective le-

gal counter-measures in place designed to prevent it. For instance, the Slovak electoral system prescribes a 5 percent threshold for parties to be eligible for parliament. One of the functions of this quorum is to make the acquisition of parliamentary mandates more difficult for extremist parties, which are usually marginal parties. Another instrument to protect the democratic system is the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, which guarantees fundamental human and political rights and allows them to be restricted only under certain circumstances if democracy is threatened. Similarly, the laws on political parties and associations regulate when political parties and civic associations may be refused approval and/or dissolved. To be effective, these measures must also be successfully implemented. The motion by the Prosecutor General concerning the abolition of the SP-NS and the subsequent ruling of the Supreme Court of March 2006, which dissolved the party, serves as an example. The Supreme Court justified its ruling by citing the SP's stated interest in replacing the current system of representative democracy with a system built on estates. The consequence of this step was a decline in the extra-parliamentary far right. Nevertheless, when the Ministry of the Interior attempted to abolish the SP altogether, the Supreme Court rejected its application on the grounds that the abolition procedure had failed to respect statutory deadlines. This gave a fresh impetus to right-wing extremists and resulted in their resuming political activity.

Criminalisation of extremists is another option for countering right-wing violence. In 2009, an amendment to the Penal Code defining extremism, extremist groups and extremist material as criminal was adopted. This legislative initiative, however, met with a mixed reaction in the expert community, which criticised the wording of the amendment as ineffective. The *2011–2014 Policy for Combating Extremism* suggests that introducing the concept of hate crime into the Penal Code might be a more effective measure. Police action, which in many cases has used force against extremists, is linked with the criminalisation of extremists. One of the more successful interventions was the police raid of a neo-Nazi concert at Papradno in 2001, which resulted in significant restrictions being imposed on the organisation of similar events on the territory of Slovakia in the future. Similarly, the police activities of the autumn of 2005, when the sympathizers of the SP and the SP-NS clashed on the eve of SP-NS dissolution, or the breaking up of



the racist *Hnutie Kreativita* (Creativity Movement) are among the success stories. However, repressive actions become a problem once right-wing extremist groups succeed in winning over part of the public, which is the case now.

The final strategy area for action against right-wing extremism is education, where the government, the non-governmental sector and political parties should respond to extremist agenda and rhetoric. *Ludia proti rasizmu* (People against Racism), which seeks to respond to racist views in society, is the most well-known NGO in this sphere. In general, political parties have two possible avenues of response to extremist activity. Distancing themselves from extremist rhetoric or criticising it and

convincing the public of the need for affirmative action programmes in relation to Roma communities may seem to be the more difficult option. On the other hand, the simpler option – namely, to present extremist rhetoric in a moderate form and thus take the wind out of extremists' sails is more dangerous because it may produce a radicalisation of the extreme right rhetoric as well as a spill-over of some of its ideas into the political mainstream, which may result in more acceptance of extremist ideas in society. Political parties in Slovakia tend to go for the latter option. The current situation, in which the LSNS is boosting its profile, bringing its agenda into public discourse and forcing established political parties to respond to these issues, suggests that both strategies are currently failing in Slovakia.



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