

# TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES BETWEEN VIOLENT RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM, TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED CRIME

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**COUNTER  
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# ABOUT THIS STUDY

This study titled “Transnational linkages between violent right-wing extremism, terrorism and organized crime” focuses on the transnational connections and co-operations between violence-oriented right-wing extremist and organized crime actors in seven countries: Austria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Poland, Sweden, and the United States of America. It was commissioned by the German Federal Foreign Office, Division “International Cooperation against Terrorism, Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Corruption,” in 2022.

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**The positions presented in this study only reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily correspond with the positions of the German Federal Foreign Office.**

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## About CEP

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The Counter Extremism Project (CEP) is a nonprofit and non-partisan international policy organization formed to combat the growing threat from extremist ideologies. CEP builds a more moderate and secure society by educating the public, policymakers, the private sector, and civil society actors about the threat of extremism. CEP also formulates programs to sever the financial, recruitment, and material support networks of extremist groups and their leaders. For more information about our activities please visit [counterextremism.com](https://counterextremism.com).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study demonstrates that several violence-oriented right-wing extremist (VRWE) individuals and groups in Europe and the U.S. engage in or maintain ties with organized crime (OC). Many of the identified cases have a transnational dimension, for example, through cross border activities like the acquisition of illegal drugs for distribution or parallel memberships in VRWE and transnational OC groups. Out-law Motorcycle Gangs, VRWE-affiliated football hooligan groups, white supremacist prison gangs and a range of other VRWE individuals and groups are part of such transnational networks which are particularly visible in Austria, Germany, Poland, Sweden and the United States.

The linkages between VRWE and OC are multifaceted and vary in intensity, ranging from mere operational contacts to supply illegal materials to a full-scale transformation of VRWE structures into OC structures that follow an RWE ideology. The most common forms of VRWE-OC linkages are:

- 1) *Supply: OC groups provide illegal drugs and weapons to VRWE groups;*
- 2) *Recruitment: Members are being recruited respectively. Individuals move between OC and VRWE milieus or are members of both;*
- 3) *Support: OC groups and VRWE groups provide security services to each other or granted access to locations for internal and external events; and*
- 4) *Transformation: VRWE groups partially or fully transform into hybrid VRWE-OC organizations.*

VRWE-OC cooperation seems to be driven by the pragmatic principle of “form follows function.” Even ideologically motivated VRWE are flexible with their “values” and cooperate, e.g., with perceived “non-white” OC actors if it serves their “higher” purpose. Not appreciating this sufficiently can lead to incomplete risk assessments.

There are significant differences in the quantity and quality of identified VRWE-OC linkages between the country chapters of this study. This could mean that such cooperations are strongly connected to national strategies, developments and opportunities. It could, however, also mean that the smaller number of VRWE-OC linkages found in some countries is the result of an absence of targeted and sys-

tematic law enforcement investigations into this phenomenon and a lack of official statistical categories that could reveal such connections.

There is a general lack of up-to-date and in-depth analyses of the various financial strategies employed by VRWE groups and individuals in many countries. In general, a “follow the money” approach, which has been successfully deployed against organized crime and in the prevention and fight against Islamist extremism and terrorism, has not been adopted with regard to violent right-wing extremism.

To foster a better understanding of the scope and size of the challenges posed by the linkages between violent right-wing extremism and organized crime, data collection, analysis and sharing practices related to OC activities and strategies by VRWE actors outlined in this study should be improved on the international, European and on national levels. In order to operationally address the phenomenon’s national and transnational dimensions, Joint VRWE-OC Task Forces should be established on the EU level and on the national levels to better enable targeted investigations.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is ideally placed to explore transnational VRWE and OC cooperation, coordinate with (inter)national Joint VRWE-OC Task Forces, and develop recommendations for governments on how to best mitigate the risks.

The financial industry plays a crucial role in combating OC and terrorist financing by identifying and reporting cases of fraud, money laundering, and other suspicious transactions. The existing legal and administrative constraints, however, hinder targeted and systematic law enforcement investigations into VRWE-OC cooperation and disincentivize systematic internal data collection within the financial sector. Therefore, financial sector stakeholders could be engaged systematically by government authorities to identify gaps in current regulations and to develop the necessary regulatory mechanisms that would allow close cooperation with law enforcement investigations targeting VRWE financial networks beyond individual criminal behavior.

# METHODOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

The research and analysis of this study is grounded in desk research and informal interviews with civil society organizations, law enforcement officials and policymakers and builds on previous work of CEP in respect to transnational violence-oriented extreme right-wing actors.<sup>1</sup>

*For the research phase, the working definitions below were applied by the researchers. Each country chapter includes the actual respective definitions and legal frameworks for these terms and categories.*

## **Violence-oriented right-wing extremism (VRWE)**

**Far-right extremism:** Individual or group activities and beliefs that are motivated or justified by narratives of unequal worth of humans based on criteria like “race” or “gender” as well as by narratives of white supremacy. Extremism in particular refers to the goal of overthrowing the existing (liberal democratic) political system.

**Violence-orientation** Any form of support of far-right extremist actors that supports, justifies or calls for violence to achieve far-right extremist objectives, e.g., through propaganda, incitement, finances, logistic or violence itself.

**Terrorism** Targeted threats or attacks for political purposes.

**Organized crime (OC)** Organized crime refers to continuing planned, rational financially motivated criminal acts by groups of individuals. It does *not* include random, unplanned, individual criminal acts.

Relevant financially motivated crimes of particular interest for this study are: money laundering, including through the purchase of real estate purchases through illicit gains; tax evasion; arms dealing; selling of illegal drugs; illegal prostitution; smuggling of contraband; and selling of counterfeit goods.

# INTRODUCTION

Europol's Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) 2021 highlights that "along with terrorism, serious and organised crime continues to constitute the most pressing internal security challenge to the EU."<sup>2</sup> Organized financially motivated crimes were also identified as a financial strategy of some key violence-oriented right-wing extremists (VRWE) in a CEP study on the transnational connectivity of VRWE, which was commissioned by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany in 2020.<sup>3</sup>

To investigate this issue further, the Federal Foreign Office of Germany commissioned this study to explore and analyze activities and strategies of violence-oriented right-wing extremists in Austria, Croatia, Germany, Greece, Poland, Sweden and the United States that are also engaged in financially motivated organized crime (OC), with a focus on transnational linkages.

Existing studies on the extremism/terrorism-crime nexus in recent years have focused on the Islamist extremism and terrorism, while transnational linkages between right-wing extremism/terrorism and organized crime groups remains under-researched.<sup>4</sup> This gap in knowledge can lead to a misunderstanding of the strategies of violence-oriented right-wing extremists as well as of the risks those actors pose to potential victims and society as a whole.

Hence, this study aims at informing policymakers, government agencies, think tanks, civil society organizations and practitioners working on the prevention and countering of violent extremism or terrorism and organized crime with the goal of fostering a better understanding of the linkages between VRWE and OC.

## **How can linkages between violent right-wing extremists (VRWE) and organized crime actors (OC) be assessed?**

The above mentioned Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) states about the links between serious and organized crime and terrorism: "while organised crime seeks profit above all else, terrorists largely pursue political or ideological aims. In the EU, there is little evidence of systematic cooperation between criminals and terrorists. In addition, criminals are thought to be reluctant to cooperate with terrorists because of the attention such cooperation might attract from intelligence and law enforcement services."<sup>5</sup>

A confidential situational analysis regarding connections between the extreme-right scene and biker groups by security and intelligence services in Germany from 2013, reportedly makes a similar assessment by stating that Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs

(OMCGs) were sometimes hesitant to cooperate with (V)RWEs due to the attention they receive from law enforcement, which could negatively affect OMCGs' (illicit) business activities such as dealing with illegal arms and drugs.<sup>6</sup> Also, in some instances, a significant number of non-German members of OMCGs were mentioned as an issue specifically hindering (V)RWE-OMCG cooperation.

At the same time, Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer stated in 2021 that “there is a dangerous mixture of organized crime and right-wing extremism [(in Austria)]. If you think about that just the investigations into drug trafficking led to us being able to take this large number of weapons and explosives out of circulation. They sell and trade drugs and use the proceeds to buy weapons and explosives to destroy and shake up the free basic social order in the long term.”<sup>7</sup>

Also, the German Federal Criminal Police's (BKA) annual situation report for organized crime, includes a subcategory for supposed connections between OC groups and terrorism/politically motivated criminality.<sup>8</sup> Most entries are related to Lebanese, Syrian, Afghan, Russian and Chechen groups and individuals, presumably in relation to Hezbollah, the “Islamic State” and the Taliban. In 2021, the situation report mentioned for the first time a politically motivated extreme-right group, which was active in the “organized distribution of illegal drugs,” presumably referring to the Turonen (see Germany subchapter). The report emphasizes that “it is to be assumed that this was done to finance their politically motivated activities.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Contradicting threat assessments**

How can these – at first glance – contractionary assessments regarding the feasibility and likelihood of VRWE-OC cooperations be explained? In 2021, Katharine Petrich, who researches the crime-terror nexus, highlighted in an article in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies that “monitoring relationships between OC and terrorism is a difficult task given the current organisation of most national anti-crime and counter-terrorism agencies (i.e. generally working independently of one another with limited intelligence sharing and operational collaboration). This bureaucratic reality is unfortunately common throughout most E.U. member-states; greater collaboration has not evolved despite the record of alliances that have been forged between OC and terrorism over the decades.”<sup>10</sup>

This governmental approach of looking at organized crime and violent extremism/terrorism as very different phenomena goes beyond law enforcement and intelligence agencies. It extends to researchers, academics and policymakers, who usually are specialized in one area or the other. Petrich continues: “Traditional security thinking is biased against crime-terror convergence because it emphasizes the difference in motivation between criminal and terrorist groups. Adherents have argued that any such relationships would be transactional and short-lived because criminal groups are interested in remaining out of the public eye, while terrorist groups are explicitly

interested in drawing attention to themselves. However, this perspective misses both the potential benefits of diversified activities of violent nonstate groups, and the idea that groups can pursue a range of goals simultaneously across different levels of the organization.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Incentives for cooperation between VRWE and OC actors**

Incentives for cooperation between VRWE and OC actors are manifold. Several government, media and think tank reports have highlighted such occasional or structural cooperation in the last 25 years. Among the benefits are significant financial gains related to dealing with illicit drugs or illegal weapons, sharing of information and experience on relevant law enforcement strategies, providing security services to each other and learning from respective (illegal) business activities, e.g., for money laundering through real estate purchases, brothels, gyms/fight clubs and restaurants.

Such linkages between VRWE and OC actors are not as risky for the involved groups or individuals as is often assumed. Usually, if an illegal activity is discovered by law enforcement, the investigative focus lies on the specific crime and on the specific individuals who can most likely be convicted. For example, VRWE individuals caught dealing with illegal drugs will most likely be only prosecuted for illegal drug related charges.

Very few cases were found where VRWE groups or networks, in which the accused or charged individuals are active, were (successfully) investigated further, leading to the sentencing of leadership figures.

As far as the supposed hesitation of VRWE to cooperate with “non-whites” is concerned, Austrian VRWE have reportedly worked with the OMCG United Tribunes, which has a particularly high number of members with immigrant backgrounds.

Another argument brought forward against the cooperation of VRWE and OC actors is related to the use and distribution of illegal drugs. There is indeed an anti-drug “straight edge” movement (i.e., no drugs/alcohol/tabaco), in particular within the VRWE combat sports scenes. As shown in different country chapters of this study, however, the use of illegal drugs for the “cause” is nothing new.

In summary, based on the cases of VRWE-OC cooperation identified in this study, it has become clear that the pragmatic principle of “form follows function” applies. Even (supposedly) ideologically motivated individuals or groups will be pragmatic with their “values” if it serves their “higher” purpose. Not appreciating this sufficiently can lead to incomplete risk assessments.

# KEY FINDINGS

This study demonstrates that several VRWE individuals and groups in Europe and the U.S. engage in or maintain ties with organized crime. Many of the identified cases have a transnational dimension, for example, through cross border activities such as the acquisition of illegal drugs for distribution. OMCGs, VRWE-affiliated football hooligan groups, prison gangs and a range of VRWE individuals and groups are part of such transnational networks, which are particularly visible in Austria, Germany, Poland, Sweden and the United States.

## Examples of transnational linkages between VRWE and OC

As demonstrated in the various country chapters of this study, cooperation between VRWE and OMCG actors or VRWEs' involvement in OC have occurred for decades and are manifold. The linkages vary in intensity, ranging from mere operational contacts to supplying illegal materials to a full-scale transformation of VRWE structures into OC structures that follow an RWE ideology.

The most relevant VRWE-OC linkages found also have clear **transnational dimensions**. Forms of cooperation include:

- **Supply:** OC groups have provided illegal drugs and weapons to VRWE groups;
- **Recruitment:** Members are being recruited respectively. Individuals move between OC and VRWE milieus or are members of both;
- **Support:** OC groups and VRWE groups provided security services to each other or have granted access to locations for internal and external events; and
- **Transformation:** VRWE groups partially or fully transform into hybrid VRWE-OC organizations.

The graph shows five select transnational hybrid VRWE-OC groups and lists the illegal activities they are or were reportedly involved in.

There are significant differences in the quantity and quality of identified VRWE-OC linkages between the country chapters of this study. This could mean that such cooperations are strongly connected to national strategies, developments and opportunities. It could, however, also mean that the smaller number of VRWE-OC linkages found in some countries are a result of the absence of targeted and sys-

Examples of  
**Transnational hybrid VRWE-OC Groups**



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tematic law enforcement investigations into this phenomenon and the lack of official statistical categories that could reveal such connections. Hence, a small number of visible cases of VRWE-OC linkages does not necessarily indicate the absence of extensive VRWE-OC cooperation in the context of a particular country.

**Austrian-German-Swiss-Croatian-Western Balkan connections**

Particularly strong transnational connections between VRWE groups that are also active in organized crime are visible in **Germany** and **Austria**. The **Turonen** from the state of Thuringia were and are currently on trial for violent crimes, selling illegal drugs, illegal and forced prostitution as well as money laundering. The prosecution estimates the total earnings of the accused Turonen members to be more than €1.2 million, generated between the fall of 2019 and February 2021. Leading members of the Turonen were active in the Thüringer Heimatschutz and open supporters of the National Socialist Underground (NSU), Germany’s deadliest RWE terrorist organization since 1945. Thuringia’s ministry of the interior assessed that Turonen do not only have networks of contacts within the extreme right-wing scene in Germany but also across the **whole of Europe**.

Members of a VRWE network called **Objekt 21** from Upper **Austria**, which was officially dissolved in 2011, but some members reportedly continue to be active until today, primarily serving as the armed and violent partner of OC groups. Their members were accused of arson, burglary, violence, kidnapping, extortion, robbery,

illegal arms and drugs trafficking, and illegal prostitution. The group's leader, as well as multiple members, have since been convicted of a variety of crimes, including terrorism-related charges and for financially motivated crimes. Affiliated VRWE actors in Austria are strongly connected with the **Balkan region**. Objekt 21 cooperated directly with the German VRWE groups Freies Netz Süd and the Aktionsgruppe Passau. At least one member of the Turonen was also a member of Objekt 21.

The Turonen and Objekt21 have (had) clear connections to **transnational OMCGs** such as the Hells Angels and the Bandidos, who have long been (accused of) being involved in organized crime. For example, a member of the Bandidos Berlin City MC was reportedly supplying the Turonen with illegal drugs, in particular with four kilograms of crystal meth. Another supplier of illegal drugs for the Turonen is reportedly connected to the Armenian mafia. One individual that supported this supplier is a (supposedly former) VRWE and member of Garde 81, the support club of the OMCG Hells Angels Erfurt MC.

The Turonen are also well connected to VRWE actors in **Switzerland**, in particular through the **transnational VRWE Blood and Honour** network. The founders of Objekt 21 are also reportedly affiliated with this network.

The Turonen, Objekt 21 and Blood and Honour structures in Switzerland organized dozens of white supremacy/hate music concerts and festivals (separately and in cooperation) with up to 6,000 participants at some events and with supposedly legal profits ranging between €100,000 and €140,000 for some events. This includes white supremacy/hate music concert in the Kanton of Unterwasser in Switzerland with more than 5,000 participants. The estimated turnover there was between €200,000 and €350,000.

In **Austria**, at least 20 illegal weapons arsenals were discovered in the right-wing extremist scenes between 2019 and 2020. The financing of these illegal weapons and ammunition by VRWE actors in Austria was reportedly generated through proceeds from the trade in illegal drugs. It seems likely that Austrian VRWE actors have connections to VRWE-OC structures in the countries of **former Yugoslavia** and that at least some of the illegal weapons and ammunition seized by Austrian authorities hailed from this region.

Transnationally connected criminal groups from the **Western Balkans** commit violent crimes in **Croatia**, which is situated along an important smuggling route for illicit drugs towards **Western Europe**.

### **Polish-German connections**

In the Polish cities of Białystok and Gdańsk, two VRWE groups were not only sub-contracted by criminal organizations but ultimately took control of the organized crime activities. Starting in 2006 and 2009, they ran the illegal drug distribution,

illegal prostitution, cigarette and alcohol smuggling, human trafficking and racketeering targeting clubs and prostitutes, and were responsible for violent assaults and murders. After a few years, they had transformed into VRWE-OC hybrid organizations. The key **transnational** activities of these **Polish** VRWE-OC groups were primarily focused on the smuggling of illegal drugs.

In Gdańsk, the organization referred to as **Olgierd's group** but which purposely remained nameless to complicate prosecutions, was comprised of the OMCG Bad Company and a legal charity. The leader is a former nazi-skinhead and an active member of the VRWE **transnational** Blood and Honour network. In Białystok, the dominant VRWE-OC group **Patriotyczna Jagiellonia**, known locally as skinheads, also belonged to the **transnational** Blood and Honour network and have openly used the network's brand, logos and badges, including the SS-Totenkopf (skull) symbol and swastikas. Both groups have reportedly invested in real estate and legal businesses. According to media reports, criminal cases against this group were mishandled and only lower ranking members were investigated and prosecuted after 2015.

VRWE individuals and organizations (formerly) affiliated with the Inferno Cottbus 99 VRWE football hooligans network from Brandenburg, **Germany**, are or were reportedly active in organized crime (illegal drugs/illegal prostitution/racketeering/tax evasion). Reports also indicate that they are well connected to VRWE groups in **France, Russia**, and in particular with the football ultras from Beskid Andrychów and Beskid'08 in **Poland**. In recent years, members of Inferno Cottbus 99, which pretended to dissolve in 2017 to hinder investigations and prosecution, joined the VRWE network Kampfgemeinschaft Cottbus (Fighting Association Cottbus). This group serves as a platform for hooligans, MMA-fighters and VRWE businessmen who own private security companies, merchandise stores and restaurants and has reportedly about 115 members. In February 2020, a VRWE MMA fighter of the Kampfgemeinschaft Cottbus was shot dead in public. He was closely affiliated with the OMCG Provocateur MC Eastside, which serves as a supporter club for the Hells Angels MC Cottbus. Kampfgemeinschaft Cottbus was unsuccessfully investigated as a criminal organization by local prosecutors in 2019, but investigations and prosecutions against individual members continue until today.

White supremacy/hate music concerts and festivals in **Poland**, for example in Białystok and Gdańsk, as well as in **Germany**, serve as motivational and strategical meeting hubs for the **transnational VRWE milieu**. At such events, Polish VRWE meet with VRWE-OC individuals and groups such as the above mentioned Turonen, Objekt 21 and affiliated OMCGs.

Club 28 (28 is reference to the letters B and H for Blood and Honour), plays a central role in the organization of white supremacy/hate music concerts in Poland. It operates in the region of Lower Silesia in Poland and serves as a platform for

VRWE from **all over Europe**, including the **United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Hungary**, but also from the **United States, Russia, Ukraine, and Estonia**.

Polish VRWE reportedly have met with German VRWE like Michael Hein from Frankfurt (Oder), Marko Gottschalk from Dortmund and Tommy Frenck from Thuringia, mainly in the context of concerts. Tommy Frenck is a key VRWE figure in Germany. He has co-organized concerts and festivals with the above mentioned German VRWE-OC hybrid group **Turonen**.

## **Key challenges for further identifying VRWE-OC linkages**

The pioneering nature of this study has also exposed key challenges for painting a comprehensive picture of the transnational nexus of violence-oriented right-wing extremism, terrorism and organized crime.

*- Challenge: Lack of a statistical category for the VRWE-OC linkages*

The seven countries at the center of this report currently do not maintain a separate category in their domestic crime statistics which reflects the existing VRWE-OC nexus.<sup>12</sup> If a VRWE individual or group is (accused of) committing financially motivated crimes, such a case will be entered only as a financially motivated crime. Equally, if members of hybrid VRWE-OC groups or for VRWE members of organized crime organizations are (accused of) committing a violent hate crime, then this crime will only be counted in the “politically motivated/hate” crime category and will not be connected to the affiliated OC organization. This lack of aggregated statistical data regarding individuals and groups who are involved in VRWE and OC, results in gaps in the understanding the actual scope and size of the transnational VRWE-OC nexus phenomena. Cases in which such a nexus exist must be compiled based on media reports as well as the professional experience of experts, which necessarily leads to an incomplete picture.

*- Challenge: Police and state prosecutors operate in “silos of focus and responsibility”*

In most of the countries analyzed for this report, police and state prosecutors are structured in specialized departments, which focus either on politically motivated or on financially motivated crimes. This can lead to separated silos of focus and responsibility where highly specialized police officers and prosecutors are mandated to operate only within their area of responsibility. This administrative structure complicates and, in some cases, prevents cooperation concerning extremism/terrorism-financially motivated crime cases. Rather, one of the departments will take over the case, designating this either as extremism related or organized crime related. Accordingly, reports on cases of VRWE-OC cooperation or on hybrid actors

were mostly not a result of targeted investigations by cross-department law enforcement cooperation into such a nexus.

- *Challenge: A focus on single-cases, not on networks*

When investigating politically motivated crimes, law enforcement generally sets a focus on prosecuting the accused individual(s). Affiliations with VRWE or OC organizations of the suspect(s) are of secondary concern, unless they are directly connected to the crime. As a result of such a single-case approach when investigating VRWE related crimes, law enforcement and prosecution may miss the opportunity to identify, expose and combat (transnational) VRWE networks and connections to organized crime organizations.

This study demonstrates that a single-case focused law enforcement approach is the standard across the researched countries when investigating politically motivated individual crimes. Only two countries (Germany and Greece) have actively investigated the VRWE-OC nexus and only one country (Germany) has recently adjusted their strategies towards a stronger network focus, although without addressing VRWE-OC connections specifically.

The larger VRWE groups and networks highlighted in this study, often also operate (supposedly) legal security businesses, restaurants, bars, merchandise stores, or organize hate music concerts or combat sports events. Some of these businesses can generate significant amounts of income with ballpark numbers in hundreds of thousands of euros in turnover. At the same time, it is a declared strategy by some VRWE to buy real estate for investment purposes, which then also serve as “fortresses in enemy territory.”<sup>13</sup> However, these business activities are usually not in the focus of the investigation when a crime is committed by members of such networks. Given the general anti-government and anti-establishment ideology of the members of such networks, an assumption of complete legality of their (supposedly) legal business activities may miss important additional disruption opportunities.

In this context, illegal activities like tax evasion or money laundering should be a major concern for law enforcement and tax authorities. Criminal investigations with an “follow the money” approach by law enforcement or prosecutorial authorities concerning VRWE actors were not found during the research for this study.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

To foster a better understanding of the scope and size of the challenges posed by the linkages between violent right-wing extremism and organized crime, data collection, analysis and information sharing practices related to the OC activities and strategies by VRWE actors outlined in this study should be improved on the international, European and on national levels. For example, analysts in anti-organized crime and counterextremism/terrorism law enforcement agencies could be trained together on how to identify existing linkages between VRWE and OC. Regular information exchange structures and mechanisms could be established.

Improved data collection, analysis and information sharing related to OC activities and strategies by VRWE actors can also be effective mechanisms to anticipate and identify relevant future developments and trends regarding the behavior of different types of VRWE groups and their members. For example, the current Russian war of aggression against Ukraine will likely have consequences regarding the smuggling and availability of arms, ammunition and explosive materials. The return of battle hardened, trained, networked and experienced right-wing extremist foreign fighters from Ukraine to their home countries could lead to increased security challenges in the (trans)national VRWE and OC milieus.<sup>14</sup>

To operationally address the national and transnational linkages, Joint VRWE-OC Task Forces could be established on the EU and national levels to conduct targeted investigations. Such joint task forces should include law enforcement (including the departments for politically and for financially motivated crimes), prosecutors and tax authorities to better enable the identification, investigation and prosecution of VRWE-OC activities and networks (“follow the money” approach). The mandate for such task forces should in particular include prioritized and coordinated company and tax audits for VRWE-related commercial entities as well as in-depth investigation into existing VRWE-OC connections, with a focus on the VRWE key actors in each country (entrepreneurs of extremism). Uncovering undetected illegal activities will also likely lead to increased opportunities for the confiscation of financial assets, for instance, of real estate. For example, to explore and target the interface between illegal and supposedly legal activities and income streams of VRWE and financially motivated criminal actors and networks, lessons learned from the Administrative Approach,<sup>15</sup> a methodology and toolkit developed by the European Union to fight organized crime, could be considered.

The private sector, particularly the financial industry, already plays a crucial role in combating OC and terrorist financing by identifying and reporting cases of fraud, money laundering, and other suspicious transactions. However, as many VRWE

structures are not yet officially classified as terrorism related, legal and regulatory mechanisms that require private sector stakeholders to develop knowledge and tools enabling them to identify the VRWE connection of the relevant criminal activities do not yet exist. Therefore, further awareness raising within the financial industry concerning this issue is necessary. As stakeholders within the financial industry hold relevant data concerning both the ostensibly legal as well as the clearly illegal financial activities of VRWE structures, including when these cooperate with OC structures, enabling these stakeholders to identify patterns of behavior more effectively will likely also result in additional opportunities for law enforcement to disrupt these.

Such awareness raising activities could include the continuation of the special project of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on the financing of ethnically or racially motivated terrorism financing that has already produced important results.<sup>16</sup> Given the long-standing expertise of the organization to develop effective recommendations to hinder the misuse of the financial sector for money laundering and terrorism financing, the FATF is ideally placed to explore transnational VRWE and OC cooperation, coordinate with (inter)national Joint VRWE-OC Task Forces, and develop recommendations for governments on how to best mitigate the risks.

Finally, the existing legal and administrative constraints not only hinder targeted and systematic law enforcement investigations into VRWE-OC cooperation, they also disincentivize systematic internal data collection within the financial sector. Therefore, financial sector stakeholders could be engaged systematically by government authorities to identify gaps in current regulations and to develop the necessary regulatory mechanisms that would allow close cooperation with law enforcement investigations targeting VRWE financial networks beyond individual criminal behavior.

# COUNTRY CHAPTERS

## Main findings of the country chapters

### Austria

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Several cases demonstrate that some violence-oriented right-wing extremists (VRWE) cooperate with organized crime (OC) actors in Austria. The distribution of roles between OC and VRWE cannot be clearly distinguished, as some VRWE were found to act as enforcers for OC, yet in other cases, OC groups provide security services to VRWE. Such cooperation is often facilitated by overlapping memberships between football hooligans, right-wing extremists, martial arts groups and OC outlaw motorcycle gangs. Beyond this cooperation, VRWE also tend to engage in organized crime activities to raise funds. A recent pattern appears to be VRWE engaging in drug trafficking and using the proceeds to procure illegal weapons. Transnational connections and cooperation exist in a number of cases.

### Germany

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A variety of cases of violence-oriented right-wing extremist individuals or groups in Germany involved in financially motivated crimes do exist. These are particularly related to the distribution of illegal drugs, illegal prostitution, bank robberies or money laundering. Some VRWE actors in Germany cooperate with, or are part of, outlaw motorcycle gangs or VRWE affiliated football hooligan groups, which often have transnational connections. A key VRWE group with ties to VRWE actors in Austria and Switzerland morphed into a VRWE-OC hybrid organization and is currently on trial for a series of financially motivated crimes.

### Poland

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Relations between organized crime (OC) and violent right-wing extremists (VRWE) are very close. The most developed links between VRWE and OC milieus are in Gdańsk and Białystok. In these cities VRWE groups seemed to have largely replaced other OC structures and occupy a central position in the local criminal underworld, recruiting their “soldiers” from football hooligans and dealing primarily with prostitution, drug trafficking and extortion. VRWE/OC actors in Gdańsk, are also active in outlaw motorcycle gangs. Transnational connections do exist.

## Sweden

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Sweden can be described as the Nordic hub for extreme right movements in the region. There have been several cases of right-wing extremist individuals being recruited into the outlaw motorcycle milieu. Considering direct relations of criminal co-suspicion (i.e. right wing extremists committing financially motivated crimes) in the period 1995 to 2016, about one third of such links involving violent right-wing extremism occur with other milieus, amongst which the most prevalent are outlaw motorcycle gangs.

## United States of America

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White supremacist prison gangs are engaged in profit-motivated crimes such as illegal drug sales but are criminal enterprises first, ideology plays only a secondary role. Several outlaw motorcycle gangs, which have engaged in drug and arms trafficking, have members that hold extreme right-wing beliefs or are affiliated with violent right-wing organizations.

## Greece

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The primary VRWE actor in Greece was Golden Dawn, which was declared an organized crime group in 2020. Allegations that the group funded itself through mafia-style criminal activities such as money laundering, trafficking, or involvement in protection rings, could not be proven during the trial.

## Croatia

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Research on the possible connection of right-wing extremism with organized crime actors shows that there are individuals who are occasionally mentioned in this context. Also, transnationally connected criminal groups from the West Balkans commit violent crimes in Croatia, mainly murders of Serbian and Montenegrin citizens, members of opponent OC groups from Serbia and Montenegro. These murders are connected to well-known criminal groups, which indicates to a cooperation with OC in the country. The background of these murders is the fight for control over the illegal narcotics trade because Croatia is situated along an extremely important smuggling route for illicit drugs towards Western Europe.

# Austria

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## DEFINITIONS and HISTORY

The legal definitions for crimes related to terrorism and a number of extremism-related crimes, are as follows:

278b StGB (criminal code): A terrorist organization is a long-term association of more than two people which is designed to ensure that one or more members of this organization carry out one or more terrorist offenses (section 278c) or engage in terrorist financing (section 278d).

278c StGB defines terrorist crimes through a list of general crimes such as murder or kidnapping, accompanied with a specific motivation: if the act is likely to cause serious or long-term disruption to public life or serious damage to economic life and is committed with the intention of gravely intimidating the population, public bodies or an international organization to an act, toleration or coerce omissions or gravely upset or attempt to destroy the basic political, constitutional, economic or social structures of any state or international organization. Additional legal provisions related to terrorism are: terrorism financing (since 2018), incitement (since 2013), terrorism training (since 2011).

246 StGB, 247a StGB anti-state organizations (since 2016);

Verbotsgesetz (prohibition law) – Wiederbetätigung (re-activation) in the sense of National Socialism (VerbotsG §§ 3a-3j)

283 StGB Propagation of hate against ethnic and religious groups

278 StGB criminal organization

The definition of right-wing extremism used by the Directorate for State Protection and Intelligence (DSN) (until 2021 named “Office of the Protection of the Constitution and Counter-Terrorism (BVT)”) is as follows:

“...a collective term for political views and efforts - from xenophobic/racist to National Socialist re-activation - which, in the name of the demand for a social order characterized by social inequality, reject the norms and rules of a modern democratic constitutional state and fight it with means or approval or acceptance of violence.”<sup>17</sup>

Violence-oriented right-wing extremism (VRWE) in Austria is a very diverse milieu, ranging from Neo-Nazi organizations, to a certain type of fraternities (“Burschenschaften”), ‘subcultural’ networks, in particular groups linked to the transnational Blood and Honour network, to groups of the so-called New Right, i.e. Identitarians (and follow-up groups such as ‘The Austrians’). The latter have become more prominent in the last years as their propaganda has capitalized on the so-called ‘migration crisis’ and many of their narratives have been taken up in mainstream politics. They also cause headlines because of their extreme propaganda politics and due to their transnational network. A leader of the Identitarians was for instance linked with the Christchurch Shooter who donated a sum of 1500 Euros to him personally.<sup>18</sup> While the group attempts to publicly state their commitment to peaceful means and reject violence, there has been a number of violent incidents by their members and supporters.<sup>19</sup> Recently, a person convicted for preparing a terror plot was found to also have owned merchandise of the Identitarians and their successor groups,<sup>20</sup> and was depicted in the communication of the Ministry of the Interior as member of the Identitarian Movement Austria/DO5 (DO – Die Österreicher Engl. The Austrians)<sup>21</sup>. An appraisal of the recently adapted law on forbidden symbols described the group as having a latent communication strategy that signals a readiness to use violence.<sup>22</sup>

The numbers shown in the annual reports of the Austrian Office of the Protection of the Constitution (BVT, recently restructured into Directorate for State Protection and Intelligence (DSN) don’t indicate a clear trend from 2000 until 2007.<sup>23</sup> However, it is clear that from 2007 onwards the number of *criminal complaints* increased drastically.<sup>24</sup> Following an incident where a member of the Austrian military force was caught wearing a self-made SS uniform but subsequently was allowed to keep his job<sup>25</sup>, the government announced a reform of the Prohibition Act, including expanding the jurisdiction abroad.<sup>26</sup>

In 2015 the DSN assessed that jihadi terrorism was the most severe threat to national security.<sup>27</sup> In 2015, 1,156 acts with a right-wing extremist, xenophobic/racist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic background were recorded, 54,1 percent more than in 2014 (750 acts). The clearance rate for these crimes rose from 59,7 to 65,1 percent in the same period.<sup>28</sup> There were 1,691 reports, most of them (953) under the Prohibition Act. 695 charges were filed under the Criminal Code (including 282 charges of incitement to hatred and 289 of damage to property)<sup>29</sup>. In 2020 there were 1,364 reports (as compared to 1.678 in the previous year) out of which 801 under the Prohibition Act (vs. 1,037 in the previous year).<sup>30</sup> The latest report<sup>31</sup> of the Office of the Protection of the Constitution – newly reformed into the Directorate for State Protection and Intelligence, and covering the year 2021 does not include these criminal statistics anymore, however they have been made available otherwise and they show an increase (see below in the section on statistics). Recent reports also refrain from communicating a ranking of the violent extremist threats.

The connection between VRWE and organized crime has primarily been a characteristic of the subcultural networks of the scene, in particular the Blood and Honour network, the biker and hooligan milieu, but also the Identitarians. The latter group has been generally careful to avoid overt incitement to violence, however individual incidents have been recorded as mentioned above. Furthermore, the most recent intelligence report assesses Identitarian publications as supporting violence in political confrontations<sup>32</sup>.

The most prominent case of VRWE involvement with OC in Austria is the group “Objekt 21”, named after the address of their house being Windern 21 in Upper Austria. Between 2010 and 2013 a number of individuals with ties to the Blood and Honour network rented an old farmhouse in that location. This group committed a number of crimes: “robberies, burglaries, assault, intimidation, extortion, kidnapping, drug and arms trafficking, attacks with incendiary devices and butyric acid in the red-light milieu.”<sup>33</sup> The group was composed of 30 individuals and 200 sympathizers and cooperated with unnamed biker groups in Bavaria, the biker group Hells Angels MC Germany<sup>34</sup>, the “Freie Netz Süd” (FNS) in Bavaria, the Aktionsgruppe Passau<sup>35</sup>, and with Neo-Nazis in Thuringia, the so called “Turonen”.<sup>36</sup> “Objekt 21” was also described as the armed and violent partner of OC groups and networks, mainly responsible for intimidating and attacking the rivals of these criminal networks.<sup>37</sup> Journalists and judicial officials labelled the group’s activities as a conscious effort of establishing a ‘mafia network’.<sup>38</sup>

A further connection between VRWE and OC groups is suggested by personal overlaps in the wider circles of the Identitarians, the OC biker group United Tribuns MC, and the Sportgemeinschaft Noricum (SGN).<sup>39</sup> A report by the Austrian civil society organization OERA highlighted multiple individuals that provided security services at public demonstrations of the Identitarians beginning in 2015, while also being members in SGN and having ties to United Tribuns MC. Noricum and United Tribuns MC are both presumed to have been involved in illegal prostitution, while also offering security services.<sup>40</sup>

## **KEY PLAYERS and LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

Investigations of cases with both politically motivated crimes and financially motivated crimes are mostly carried out by the state criminal police and are usually initiated by investigations into actions of purely OC/criminal nature. That is, investigations of this nature do not usually start with an interest for the right-wing extremist scene. Scenarios that are typical are described in the public version of the annual DSN report from 2021: “In 2020, numerous house searches were carried out on suspicion of crimes under the Prohibition Act. Relevant material with a National Socialist background, electronic devices such as mobile phones, computers and data carriers as well as weapons, ammunition, explosives and war material were

seized on a large scale from the suspects.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, this report does not mention any VRWE organizations or groups by name, except for the Identitarians and “Die Österreicher” (DO5) as right-wing extremist groups, and does not approach the issue of possible VRWE-OC connections at all. The latest report covering 2021 again focuses to a great extent on the Identitarians and on The Austrians, including their capitalizing on the pandemic and the respective demonstrations, also mentions Burschenschaften and continues to not mention information on connections to OC. It merely notes the possible, general trend of recruitment from violent criminal scenes<sup>42</sup>.

There is substantial overlap between the Identitarians and DO5 in terms of content and personnel.<sup>43</sup> In general, the group membership is heterogeneous, but predominantly male. While there were multiple charges brought against the Identitarians and their members, they were acquitted from the charge that they were attempting to establish a criminal association<sup>44</sup> and investigations related to terrorism charges against them were discontinued too in 2018 and 2021.<sup>45</sup> The movement was investigated on the suspicion of terrorism following donations that were received from the Christchurch attacker by the leader of the Identitarians Martin Sellner. Investigations into potential fraud and embezzlement in connection with the donations were also discontinued.<sup>46</sup> However, thirty-two individuals related to the Identitarians on the authorities’ list had been convicted of various offenses, including aggravated assault, rape, extortion, robbery and Nazi reenactment, among others.<sup>47</sup> The group also has ties to the OC biker group United Tribuns through members and supporters that were active in both groups.<sup>48</sup> Some of the Identitarian associations are under investigation for using funds for other purposes than the ones declared in the statutes<sup>49</sup>.

In general, the year 2020 displayed similar tendencies as the years 2015/16, that had heightened activity from the right-wing extremist milieu. In 2020, various milieus within the domestic right-wing extremist landscape (neo-Nazis, skinheads, New Right) came together and participated in various public demonstrations. However, according to the annual DSN report, this suggests only temporary associations and not long-lasting tendencies toward closer cooperation.<sup>50</sup>

Still, in 2020 a significant arsenal of weapons was found in Austria, which were determined to have been compiled for a right-wing militia in Germany. Money from drug trafficking — mainly by the sale of amphetamine, cocaine, marijuana and heroin — was used to procure weapons intended for the establishment of a “right-wing radical militia” in Germany.<sup>51</sup> The main suspect is reported to have organized the arms deals during various phases in which he was released from prison.<sup>52</sup> In general, several such depots have been found in Austria over the last few years – Chancellor Nehammer stated, “that enough weapons had been found to plunge the republic into a severe crisis”.<sup>53</sup>

On the “National Joint Action Day Against Hate Crime” in 2021 the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and Counterterrorism, state offices and also state police directorates and the Cobra task force conducted 15 house searches of 20 people and in five instances, searches were conducted with the consent of the suspect. A total of 20 firearms and numerous other weapons, such as a dagger with SS runes, four samurai swords, five sporting bows, three nunchakus and a butterfly knife as well as electronic data carriers and Nazi devotional objects were confiscated.<sup>54</sup>

Also in 2018/2019, a high-profile case was investigated. This related to a network called the “Staatenbund Österreich” which maintained a structure of individuals and subgroups called “confederates”. Following the investigation of the group’s leading figures, 14 people were put on trial in Graz for treason and the attempted formation of an anti-state association.<sup>55</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, conspiracy theorists in Austria became increasingly prominent and formed alliances with the far-right milieu.<sup>56</sup> In 2021, Chancellor Karl Nehammer referred to the growing threat of “unholy alliances” that were disbanded or strengthened at demonstrations critical of the COVID-19 restrictions. However, the planned storming of the parliament in Vienna, which was part of one of these demonstrations, was prevented by the Austrian security authorities.<sup>57</sup>

The current Minister of the Interior, Gerhard Karner, warned that during such demonstrations, right-wing extremists, hooligans and even individuals that were previously unconnected to the extremist milieu came together and tried to infiltrate demos. Many of the supporters reportedly also sympathized with a coup d’état.<sup>58</sup>

The activities of “Objekt 21” seem to continue in the year 2022, as the former leader of the group was recently accused of *Wiederbetätigung* (*continuing the operations of the banned group*), as well as crimes related to weapons’ legislation. Concretely, the individual was involved in the selling of weapons and NS devotional objects.<sup>59</sup>

Another area in which VRWE and OC intersect is the hooligan scene, such as for example the sports community Noricum, whose members originate from the hooligan scenes of the teams SK Rapid Vienna and FK Austria Vienna. Since 2015, their involvement was regularly observed at Identitarian demonstrations. Some members of Noricum also have tattoos with right-wing extremist symbols.<sup>60</sup> Members of this group are active in martial arts and work as bouncers, both with links to the red-light milieu. They also maintain contacts to biker clubs and debt collectors, among others. The Identitarians were reported to try to specifically recruit people from this scene. Direct connections have been established to the OC bikers club United Tribuns (UT), active in forced prostitution and human trafficking.<sup>61</sup> UT was banned in Germany but a number of chapters also exist in Austria and criminal proceedings were conducted against some of its members on charges of extortion, coercion

and aggravated robbery.<sup>62</sup> A successful police raid found evidence of cocaine and cannabis trade by members of UT in Austria.<sup>63</sup> Multiple members of Noricum also appear to have personal ties to individuals from the Viennese chapter of the Hells Angels.<sup>64</sup>

During the past few years, several cases demonstrated a distinctive pattern. Police operations repeatedly uncovered illegal weapons caches and illegal weapons trade activities by VRWE actors, financed through the trade in illegal drugs by these VRWE actors. Such VRWE activities were geared towards building a right-wing extremist militia in preparation for the so-called Day X.<sup>65</sup> For example, in December 2020 a high number of automatic and semi-automatic weapons as well as explosives and other objects were confiscated as a consequence of a police operation targeting drug-related criminality (in particular with amphetamine, cocaine and marijuana). Concretely, it was reported that: “The proceeds from the drugs were used to buy Uzi, AK47, Skorpion submachine guns and assault rifles and ammunition.” The ultimate purpose was to build a right-wing extremist militia.<sup>66</sup>

Another police operation in November 2021 found another large weapons arsenal of a right-wing extremist couple. This case is connected to a network of right-wing extremists in Germany and Austria. The main suspect was already convicted on counts of *Wiederbetätigung* and was member of the VAPO (Volkstreue Außerparlamentarische Opposition) which had formed around the prominent and well-known Neo-Nazi Gottfried Küssel.

Furthermore, media reports stated that between 2019 and 2020, 20 illegal weapons arsenals were discovered in the right-wing extremist scene in Austria alone.<sup>67</sup> These weapons arsenals included machine guns, submachine guns, sniper rifles, shotguns, handguns, explosives(TNT), ammunitions and Nazi-memorabilia.

Unfortunately, there is no publicly available information concerning the origin of the weapons seized in the various raids. It is also unclear whether the relevant authorities are currently investigating the matter. However, over the years, it has become clear that the Austrian neo-Nazi scene has close contacts with fascist structures of organized crime in the Western Balkans. The contacts are said to go back to the time when Austrian and German neo-Nazis fought alongside fascist Croatian militias as soldiers in the war in Yugoslavia.<sup>68</sup> Huge stockpiles of weapons exist there to this day. Therefore, this is likely one of the sources from which this material is procured by VRWE actors in Austria.

The most violent incidents by VRWE actors yet not necessarily connected to OC in Austria in recent years include:

- 2016-2022:<sup>69</sup> Prominent member of the international right-wing extremist HipHop scene and an administrator of hateful anti-Semitic website both convicted

Philip H. (also known as “Mr.Bond”) made HipHop songs with national-socialist lyrics and distributed these online, that later inspired the German right-wing terrorist Stephan B. for his attack in Halle, as proven by the attacker’s use of a “Mr.Bond” song during his livestreamed attack. The suspect also translated the right-wing extremist manifesto of the Christchurch attacker, and later dedicated a song to him. Philip H. praised online the right-wing extremist murderer of the German politician Walter Lübcke as well. During a house search, authorities found weapons and Nazi memorabilia at the suspect. His brother, Benjamin H. was found to be behind the anti-Semitic website “Judas watch”, known for inciting hate against Jews and creating a public list of ideological “enemies”. Both were convicted in the first instance, but the decisions are not final.

- 2021:<sup>70</sup> Thwarted terror plot of an Identitarian/DO5-member with pipe bombs A 78 years old man was charged and convicted after he disseminated national-socialist sentiments on social media while also cultivating drugs in an indoor space and selling these. During a search at the suspect’s house, authorities found guns, ammunition, war memorabilia, merchandise of the Identitarians and DO5, ingredients and handwritten instructions for the construction of pipe bombs, as well as other means necessary for the preparation of a right-wing terrorist crime.
- In October 2017, Friedrich F. allegedly murdered his two neighbors and injured another person near Graz. F. is currently a fugitive. He was active in the extreme right-wing scene in Styria.<sup>71</sup>
- In May 2016, a 27-year-old in Nenzing, Vorarlberg, apparently randomly shoots two people with a submachine gun at a concert and injures a dozen more. He then killed himself. The perpetrator had close contacts with the neo-Nazi terror group Blood and Honour.<sup>72</sup>
- In March 2009, a neo-Nazi and martial artist beats his victim Albrecht M. to death on Vienna’s Rotenturmstrasse.<sup>73</sup>

The banning of right-wing extremist organizations is a rare occurrence and only the more prominent ones such as the Identitarians are targeted. Once individuals have been convicted to jail sentences of extremist or terrorist offences in Austria, they become subject to continuous surveillance by security authorities in prison. In such cases every contact in and out of prison and also with other inmates is documented by a special branch of the ministry of justice, specialized in terrorism and extremist offences. This part of the ministry of justice was established in 2022 as reaction to the terrorist attack in 2020.<sup>74</sup>

Employees of the military counterintelligence office warned in 2019 of an extreme right-wing terror cell within the Austrian Armed Forces.<sup>75</sup> Investigations into this

began after the Hannibal Network was uncovered in Germany. The Hannibal Network is linked to the far-right association Uniter, which expanded its activities to Austria in 2019.<sup>76</sup>

According to a 2019 investigation report by the authorities, it appears that every fifth person of the Identitarians legally owns a firearm. Ten members of the movement are subject to an ongoing weapons ban. Some are also said to have violated weapons bans.<sup>77</sup>

There is a relatively large degree of exchange between the individual extremist scenes or groups within the overall right-wing extremist milieu and also similarities in terms of content and organization, as can be seen in the examples of the Identitarian Movement and the DO5.<sup>78</sup> Also, through the strategy of certain groups and networks operating under multiple names, the groups try to appear bigger than they actually are.<sup>79</sup>

Also, as can be seen in the most recent public report of the DSN, the COVID-19 crisis has brought long-standing leading cadres of the domestic organized right-wing extremist scene into the limelight and they have been able to use their structures and networks again, in some cases to make appearances at public demonstrations critical of the pandemic-related restrictions.<sup>80</sup>

The intersection between the right-wing extremist scene and organized crime can be seen most clearly in the cases relating to the various weapons caches found in recent years. The investigation of cases at the nexus between OC and VRWE usually takes place at the level of the state criminal police and starts with investigations into OC activities. Drawing on publicly available information, it also appears that specific investigations targeting the VRWE aspects of such cases are scarce. According to Chancellor Nehammer, the network uncovered in 2020 showed connections between the right-wing extremist area and organized crime under the name of “Miliz der Anständigen” (Militia of the decent), albeit recent reports and the charges brought by Austrian prosecutors indicate that it might be less of a well-structured network than initially presumed.<sup>81</sup> The financing for the purchases of these illegal weapons and ammunition by VRWE actors in Austria was provided through proceeds from the trade in illegal drugs. According to Chancellor Nehammer, this type of financing was previously known primarily from the jihadi terrorism scene in the country. The fact that this type of financing is also used for right-wing extremist terror was not really known in Austria before this incident. “This model of terror is obviously also followed by right-wing extremist terror,” said the Chancellor. In general, he said, there was strong connection between the neo-Nazi scene and newer groups such as the “Reichsbürger.”<sup>82</sup>

Therefore, in conclusion, the cases outlined above demonstrate that there is a connection between VRWE actors and OC in Austria. On the one hand, this relates to

the trade in illicit drugs, although it seems that Austrian VRWE actors appear to be directly involved in such activities without acting as a distributor for OC networks. In addition, it seems likely that Austrian VRWE actors have connections to fascist OC structures in former Yugoslavian countries and that these were one of the sources from which the illegal weapons and ammunition seized over the past few years from VRWE actors by Austrian security authorities were provided.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, there appears to be a notable overlap in membership between Noricum and UT as well as MC. The provisions of security services is characteristic to both organizations. In other words, the roles of VRWE and OC actors cannot be clearly distinguished, as multiple individuals are engaged in both circles.<sup>84</sup>

### **Case study**

“Objekt 21” was an Austrian VRWE organization founded by members of the VRWE group Blood and Honour in 2010. It was disbanded by authorities in 2011, yet some parts were secretly active until 2013. Operating in Upper Austria, the group established a cultural association as an official front for their activities, registered under the address of a building that the group bought. “Objekt 21” was known to engage in a variety of activities. Initially these primarily focused on the organization of rock concerts. Based on official estimates by Austrian authorities, the group had approximately 30 members and 200 further individuals that closely supported them. Shortly after the establishment of the group, it forged connections to German OC and VRWE scenes. In particular, they cooperated with biker gangs (Hells Angels Germany)<sup>85</sup>, the “Freie Netz Süd” (FNS) in Bavaria, and the Aktionsgruppe Passau.<sup>86</sup> To fund their activities, “Objekt 21” engaged in arson, burglary, violence, kidnapping, extortion, robbery, illegal arms and drugs trafficking, and was also involved in illegal prostitution.<sup>87</sup> “Objekt 21” primarily served as the armed and violent partner of OC groups and networks, e.g. the members acted as the muscle of these criminal networks to intimidate their rivals.<sup>88</sup> The group’s leader as well as multiple members have since been convicted on a variety of crimes, including both terrorism-related charges and for organized criminality.<sup>89</sup>

### **TRENDS and STATISTICS**

In 2020 the DSN recorded 895 right-wing extremist, xenophobic/racist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic and unspecific criminal offences, as well as 1,364 reports (as compared to 1,678 in the previous year), with 801 (58,7%) being listed under the Prohibition Act (vs. 1,037 in the previous year).<sup>90</sup> It is interesting to note that the 2020 annual DSN report does not contain information about connections between VRWE and OC.

In 2021, a right-wing terrorist attack by a member of the Identitarians/DO5 with

homemade explosives was thwarted in Austria.<sup>91</sup> In that year it was also announced that an annual public report focusing on right-wing extremism would be reintroduced after being suspended in 2002. The report is produced by the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice, together with the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance. However, the publication of the report has been delayed.<sup>92</sup> Although the figures for 2021 were not included in the DSN report, they were published in response to a parliamentary question. Thus, the number of right-wing extremist crimes in 2021 had again risen sharply: 1,053 acts with a relevant background were recorded (previous year 895), 66 acts with a racist background (2020: 104), 52 anti-Semitic acts (2020:36) and nine Islamophobic crimes (2020:16). 102 were unspecific acts but attributable to the right-wing spectrum (2020: 42). The number of persons reported under the Prohibition Act has also risen sharply to 998, compared to 801 in 2020. The Ministry of the Interior sees the main reason for the increased numbers in the fact that the police and the executive authorities take their duties very seriously and therefore more reports are made due to increased deployment. However, experts, journalists and other members of parliament highlight that an increase also occurred in the absolute numbers of members in the right-wing scene in Austria.<sup>93</sup>

Regarding politically motivated crimes, authorities speak about a consolidation of the situation as compared to previous years (latest DSN report 2021 e.g.).<sup>94</sup> The attempted terrorist attack in 2021 (see above) might indicate a potential qualitative change in the nature of the violence and the level of threat posed by right-wing extremism. Based on media information and the RTV dataset,<sup>95</sup> there has been a clear increase in the number of cases involving the confiscation of weapons.

In general, the right-wing extremist scene in Austria in 2020 is also presented as “a potential danger relevant to state protection” according to the annual DSN report.<sup>96</sup> Since 2019, there have been personnel changes. For example, long-standing leading cadres of the domestic scene (e.g. Gottfried Küssel, Martin Sellner) made public appearances again during the pandemic and attracted new followers. The right-wing extremist scene has established and far-reaching contacts in various underground scenes worldwide both on a personal level (marriage of Martin Sellner and Brittany Pettibone) as well as in terms of weapons procurement, in this regard, contacts also exist to organized crime networks (see cases above). The most recent developments in the right-wing extremist field can be seen, among other things, in the field of candidates standing for the 2022 federal presidential election: of the seven candidates, five either came from right-wing political spectrum or wanted to attract voters by using right-wing narratives.<sup>97</sup>

In both its 2020 and 2021 public report, the DSN assesses that supporters of the right-wing extremist scene now appear in part more violence-affine and also more violent, especially at demonstrations related to the COVID-19 restrictions.<sup>98</sup> This resulted in a greater potential for conflict between right-wing and left-wing extremist milieus in Austria. This development was also highlighted in the 2021 DSN report:

“It is evident that violence in the context of right-wing/left-wing extremism is not only directed against the ideological opponent, but can also affect third-party targets (the executive, private individuals, public and private property)”.<sup>99</sup> The latest DSN public report published in 2022 assesses that the tensions between left-wing extremists and members of the DO5 in particular are unlikely to decrease in the near future due to the current economic and social situation in Austria.<sup>100</sup>

### **Legal and illegal FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES and NETWORKS**

The nature of the overlap between right-wing extremism and OC was recently described by Austrian Chancellor Nehammer: “There is a dangerous mixture of organized crime and right-wing extremism here. If you think about that just the investigations into drug trafficking led to us being able to take this large number of weapons and explosives out of circulation. They sell and trade drugs and use the proceeds to buy weapons and explosives to destroy and shake up the free basic social order in the long term.”<sup>101</sup>

Furthermore, Austrian media also reported that VRWE increasingly resort to illegal prostitution to fund weapon purchases.<sup>102</sup>

Neo-Nazis are also increasingly using cryptocurrencies to disguise payment flows. For example, experts believe that amounts in more than 75 different cryptocurrencies flowed as donations to Austrian right-wing extremist Philp H. (Mr. Bond).<sup>103</sup> He has been in prison since 2021 for his anti-Semitic and Nazi-glorifying song lyrics. In 2022, he was sentenced to a ten-year prison term. However, his sentence is not yet finally adjudicated.<sup>104</sup>

Furthermore, the VRWE scene in Austria also continues to fund itself, among other income streams, from the proceeds from concerts, but also the sale of merchandise and by diverting funds meant for legitimate organizational purposes (see the cases of the Identitarian organizations mentioned in the most recent intelligence report above).

### **Transnational CONNECTIONS and ACTIVITIES**

In general, the right-wing extremist scene in Austria is closely connected with other branches, parties and organizations in different countries with the same ideological background. The VRWE and OC scene is especially connected to Germany as described above. In particular, the VRWE group “Objekt 21” had multiple ties to Bavaria and Thuringia, as well as to the global biker group Hells Angels.<sup>105</sup> The relevant actors are strongly networked internationally - including with Balkan region and on a personal level as the example of the marriage between Brittany Pettibone and

Martin Sellner illustrates. The Austrian right-wing extremist milieu also maintains connections to the alt-right movement in the USA.<sup>106</sup>

The Identitarians are generally internationally networked. The movement maintains chapters in Germany, Hungary and France, among other places. The movement has also been associated with the terrorist attack in Christchurch. There are also links of the Identitarians to political parties such as the FPÖ and the German AfD, which in turn also maintain wide political contacts, including with Russia.<sup>107</sup>

### **Governmental and societal RESPONSE**

The Austrian P/CVE strategy and action plans, both in their formulation and their implementation heavily focused on jihadi terrorism and extremism, and less on right-wing extremism. As a consequence, an approach towards countering a potential cooperation between VRWE and OC cooperation structures are not included. In recent years, the Austrian Green party, reiterated repeatedly that it would be necessary to formulate an 'Action Plan Against Right-Wing Extremism' for Austria. However, nothing materialized so far. On the contrary, additional action was taken against Islamist extremisms, in particular with a focus on the topic of terrorism financing. One example is the recent large-scale operation called Ramses/Luxor, carried out in 2020.<sup>108</sup>

In Austria, funding for prevention and research in the field of extremism in general is limited. Official funding for research and monitoring is primarily directed to entities close to or under the control of the government. However, these entities do not focus on right-wing extremism in their work. The Documentation archive of the Austrian resistance is an entity which is state funded. However, its mandate is primarily focused on research concerning the historical National Socialism.<sup>109</sup> Generally, there seems to be a certain sensitivity as far as historical National Socialism is concerned, but less with regard to newer forms of VRWE or legalistic RWE.

The DSN is tasked with observing and initiating investigations into the various extremist and terrorist milieus in Austria. In each federal state of Austria state offices for the protection of the constitution and combatting terrorism (LVTs) as well as state criminal police forces are involved in more operative activities.

The national P/CVE strategy<sup>110</sup> formally mentions a whole of government and whole of society approach, yet generally little has been implemented in this regard. The areas mentioned in the strategy are: security, prisons and resocialization; politics and democratic culture; cooperation and resources; education, labor market and resilience; social responsibility and health; science and research; Internet and media; and gender. The strategy simply refers to extremism as a generic term and does not refer at all to a potential connection to organized crime.

Right-wing extremist organizations are rarely banned in Austria. For example, the website Alpen-Donau.info was banned in 2011<sup>111</sup> and the symbols of the Identitarians and DO5 were banned in 2021.<sup>112</sup> Even if such entities are banned, their members regularly reorganize under a different name. For example, after the banning of the symbols of the Identitarian Movement, new movements appeared, namely The Austrians (Die Österreicher)/DO5 whose symbols were also banned, as well as the Patriots in Movement (Patrioten in Bewegung), among others. In October 2022, a number of symbols were banned by law, the large majority Islamist (7), two left-wing extremist, two local right-wing extremist and two foreign extremist diaspora ones.<sup>113</sup>

Unfortunately, currently, combating and researching VRWE does not seem to be a particularly high political priority in Austria. There is no funding program comparable to the “Demokratie leben!” funding stream in Germany. Individual NGOs and researchers carry out prevention and research activities in this area, but mostly with EU funding, or with national funding for adjacent topics, such as antisemitism. However, even on these issues funding remains limited. A pilot exit program called “Kompass” has been initiated which also includes right-wing extremists and which is currently implemented by the Austrian probation services.<sup>114</sup> Funding for “Kompass” is provided by the Ministry of the Interior. However, so far only a small number of cases have been managed by “Kompass”.

# Croatia

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*Dr. Gordan Akrap, Vedran Matošić*

## **DEFINITIONS and HISTORY**

Article 97 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Croatia<sup>115</sup> defines terrorism as a criminal offense. It contains the definition that all bodies and institutions of the Republic of Croatia are obliged to adhere to. Especially those who have executive powers. Currently, there is no strong political force in Croatian political life that would lead to the creation and operation of such organized groups. There is currently no strong parliamentary party of the radical right in Croatia (such as the AfD in Germany, the National Front in France, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, etc.) The activities of various politicians and activists that hold right-wing extremist views are currently focused in unifying their forces in order to gain further influence in the Croatian political discourse. They primarily operate through right-wing civil society associations and gather around the idea of opposition to modern politics. As a guiding narrative in their statements is the argument that the *Ustaše*, Croatian variant of fascism during WWII, was actually a legitimate aspiration for independence and separation from the former Yugoslavia, and that such a political structure is no longer possible. In addition, they deny any connection with political extremism and try to legitimize themselves as fighters for the “sovereignty of the Croatian nation”. Currently, there are no known cases in Croatia in which right-wing extremists committed a criminal offense to gain financial gain or finance their activities in that manner. There are currently no known cases that point towards an association between VRWE circles and organized criminal groups.

## **KEY PLAYERS and LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

In terms of security, Croatia has been mostly resistant to various forms and influence of right-wing extremism. Proponents of such ideological ideas are usually members of fan groups, some other marginal subcultural groups and “lone actors” radicalized in the virtual world. So far, one of the most egregious examples of extremist violent actions with noticeable social consequences was the attack on the Prime minister office in Markov square, committed in October 2020 by Danijel Bezuk. Bezuk was a seemingly ordinary young man who did not stand out in any way. The investigation later established his activities on the web, which indicate that he became radicalized primarily online. He fired 20 shots from an automatic rifle, seriously wounding a police officer from the security of the government building, ran away and committed suicide a little later in the neighboring district. The

State Attorney's Office and the government characterized this act as terrorism. However, following the attack public debate ensued whether this act should be classified as terrorism or violent right-wing extremism. While there was no conclusive resolution in public concerning the classification, a consensus was reached that it was an individual whose attack was not connected to political parties of the right-wing political spectrum in Croatia<sup>116,117</sup>. In its last statement, the State attorney's office in Zagreb assessed the act as a terrorism.<sup>118</sup>

Another case involved a 17-year-old minor who was arrested during the anti-government protests on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Bottles with flammable liquid, cold weapons, improvised devices with nails however without an explosive charge and a signal rocket were found in his backpack. Police reports published by the media indicated that the young man is a follower of Marko Francišković, a kind of spiritual leader of the radical right in Croatia.<sup>119,120</sup> Francišković leads the Pravednik association, which has about one hundred members. He was in custody on suspicion of inciting terrorism during the anti-covid protest in November 2021 until November 2022.<sup>121</sup>

According to publicly available data,<sup>122</sup> among all radical left and right groups in Croatia, Francišković's is currently the most active and radical. Gordan Šebalj, another representative of the radical right who calls for the violent overthrow of the government, imposed himself as the temporary leader of the group, while Francišković was in custody. Šebalj is the president of the Hrvatski Ratnik<sup>123</sup> Association. In April 2022 he announced the establishment of the National Civil Guard, whose members will undergo military training<sup>124</sup>. However, there is no information that Francišković or Šebalj are connected to the structures of organized crime, or that they perpetrated criminal offenses for the purpose of financing their activities despite the fact that the financing of right-wing extremists and radicals represents an important line of work of the national security system of the Republic of Croatia.

The last case that needs to be mentioned, is from November 2022. At that time an indictment was brought forward against Dražen Koštan<sup>125</sup> due to his planning of the terrorist attacks against several prominent individuals from the political and social life in Croatia, especially those who promoted necessity for vaccination against COVID-19 disease.<sup>126</sup> A "respectable arsenal of weapons" intended for terrorist activities was also found with him. It is important to note that this indictment was brought at a time when Koštan was already in prison on charges of having committed several criminal acts of robbery, which potentially may constitute link to organized crime. By investigating his previous criminal acts, police came into possession of additional information based on which these additional indictments were filed. Koštan is also linked to previously already mentioned Marko Francisković.

Within a separate category of security threats are individual members of (football) fan groups who try to paper over their criminal activities (both nationally and internationally) by their extremely patriotic attitudes. Several examples of such cases will

be outlined below (part 4). However, it is necessary to clarify that these cases are not primarily focused on VRWE but the attempts of criminal groups to use an ideological veneer<sup>127</sup> to distract the attention of government authorities from their criminal activities. In this way, they try (most often unsuccessfully) to hinder operations of the Republic of Croatia geared towards controlling them by steering the debate towards their ideological rather than their criminal activities.

## **TRENDS and STATISTICS**

The relevant Croatian legislative framework includes the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism and nine ordinances on the implementation of that law. Through cooperation with other competent national authorities and international financial-intelligence units, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of Croatia, the Office for the Prevention of Money Laundering, established a strong axis in the fight against the prevention of the use of the financial system for money laundering and/or terrorist financing, as well as other extremist financial activities. The office is composed of the Prevention Department and the Analytics Department. The office analyzes received transactions for the purpose of determining whether a sufficiently based suspicion of money laundering and/or financing of terrorism/violent extremism exist that warrant further investigation or prosecution. Similar to FIUs in other countries, the Office is the intermediary between obligated entities in the financial and non-financial sectors, who report suspicious transactions to the Office, and law enforcement authorities.

So far, there is no publicly available data which would indicate that a key representative of the right-wing extremist and radical scene in the Republic of Croatia was a target of the Office for the Prevention of Money Laundering. When it comes to “lone actors”, self-financing is most likely way of financing activities since their actions do not require significant funds. Experts interviewed for this chapter agree that among all the legal means used by extremists to finance their activities, crowdfunding is the most common, followed by financial operations on various donation platforms that are however quickly canceled if surveillance is suspected. After that, they create new ones with a tendency to network with similar platforms to strengthen their defense against investigators. Cryptocurrency financing should certainly be added to this as one of the key sources of financing. The anonymity of such business guarantees its increasing adoption by extremists, terrorists, and criminals.

In 2017, the Independent Sector for Financial Investigations (in Croatian: SSFI) was established, which operates within the Central Office of the Tax Administration. Previously, various forms of financial fraud were dealt with by the Independent Tax Fraud Detection Sector (TFDS), which was part of the Ministry of Finance. Since its inception, the SSFI has assumed all the responsibilities of TFDS and conducts financial research and analyses, primarily in cases where there is a well-founded

suspicion of organized crime, corrupt criminal acts as well as fraud related to EU subsidized funds. Within SSFI, part of the activities related to the analysis of complex international transactions is organized within a special unit. This is a separate team of officers specialized in analyzing sophisticated, complex international transactions and monitoring the operations of foreign business entities on the territory of the Republic of Croatia. This unit also is responsible for the analysis of potentially illegal outflows of assets of Croatian taxpayers abroad. The work of SSFI is supported by the USA through the special IJET training program.

However, some former high-ranking police officials interviewed for this chapter argue that the fact that the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has opened a representative office in Croatia is a clear indication that the Croatian system, is not effective enough. OLAF has opened representative offices in only a few EU member states in which the effectiveness of the fight against financial malfeasance is deemed unsatisfactory. So far, no connection has been established in the Republic of Croatia between fraud related to EU funds and right-wing extremists and radicals. The diversion of EU funds is primarily a matter of corruption, i.e. abuse of official position.

## **FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES and NETWORKS**

According to the interviews conducted for this chapter among experts within the Croatian law enforcement and intelligence community, the competent Croatian institutions do not have information that indicates a connection of extremist groups and individuals with OC. Similar to other countries, OC groups are primarily focused on creating material gain and social influence and distance themselves from the ideology of extremist groups. In Croatia, no financing of extremists by criminal groups has been recorded.

Two cases are publicly known which, at first glance, may indicate a connection between VRWE and OC. However, a deeper analysis refutes this. At the end of December 2017, at the derby of the Serbian football league in Belgrade, six Croatian citizens were arrested.<sup>128</sup> They played an active role in major riots. Although these individuals are associated with a fan group from Split, investigation into their background demonstrated<sup>129</sup> that they are not member of that fan group (known for their strong pro-Croatian views). They tried to approach it, but were rejected because the fan group also knew about their connections to OC. And in some other cases, the same fan group removed people connected to OC from their club.<sup>130</sup> This fan group, like many others in Croatia, has strong national characteristics. However, there is no information that they were in any way involved in attempts to overthrow of the constitutional order.

In addition, in April 2019, the police arrested the former leader of one of the Zagreb fan groups, who, together with one of the leaders of the Belgrade fan groups, was

arrested for transporting more than 170 kg of marijuana<sup>131</sup>. Under normal circumstances, these two fan groups are opposed to each other, which is why this arrest attracted public attention. Both arrested suspects were previously known to the police for committing illegal and aggressive acts, some of which have characteristics of VRWE.<sup>132</sup> The actions of one of the former leaders of the Zagreb fan group were not part of the activities of that fan group. It was his personal involvement with OC activities.<sup>133,134</sup>

The experts interviewed for this chapter emphasized that individuals and smaller groups of the VRWE milieu in Croatia are networked nationally and transnationally via virtual communities. Through such communities, individuals can be mobilized for activities such as the formation of the “first volunteer battalion” in November 2021.<sup>135,136</sup> There are also gatherings of young right-wingers, such as the gathering “Right-wingers in the pub” or gatherings around music and the Blood and Honor movement<sup>137</sup>. However, currently there seems to be no indication that there are significant VRWE networks in Croatia that unite right-wing extremism milieu and connect it with similar networks abroad. Furthermore, there is also no prominent political party around which citizens with radical right beliefs could gather.

In the public debate in Croatia, the sources of financing of populist parties from left and right political spectrum have been discussed for a long time, in particular given their untransparent financial structures. Among these, the right-wing populist spectrum the political party Domovinski pokret (Homeland movement, founded in 2020). The Homeland Movement was financially connected with the company PPD (First gas Company).<sup>138</sup> There is no information concerning illegal methods used for financial activities of the party nor is there any indication that the party or its members were connected to organized crime. There were however suspicious concerning intensive contacts and relations of the party with Russians. Furthermore, between 2012 and 2016, the leading party in Croatia, Croatian democratic Union (HDZ) pushed towards the right-wing political spectrum and deployed populist and Eurosceptic rhetoric. During that time the party was also financially connected with PPD.

These examples led analysts to the conclusion that there is a well-established pattern of activity: powerful Russian state companies, mainly banks and energy companies, use their foreign offices and partner companies to take over as large a share as possible in key economic sectors.<sup>139</sup> This affords them not only a stronger negotiating position when demanding certain concessions from the national authorities of the countries in which they operate, but also to channel part of their income into financing potential political partners for Russia that can advocate for the Kremlin’s goals. However, it should be noted that the then leadership of both of these Croatian parties never openly propagated for Putin’s regime.

## TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS and ACTIVITIES

As outlined in the previous sections, one particularly important transnational connection of the right-wing milieu in Croatia relates to financial support for key stakeholders of the milieu by Russian entities. Such activities by circles close to the Kremlin clearly aim at weakening liberal democracy and its institutions.

In this context, the publication of 17,000 WikiLeaks documents in 2021 is particularly significant. These documents originally belonged to the Spanish right-wing associations HazteOir and CitizenGO and were published under “The Intolerance Network”. These documents demonstrate lobbying efforts around the world, at a very high level. This extensive network was used to mobilize like-minded people to prevent any progress in promoting LGBTQ rights, secularization, and the fight for reproductive rights.<sup>140</sup> The documents mention Croatia on several occasions. As outlined in the documents these Spanish associations checked the Croatian tax system to ascertain opportunities to finance associations and individuals. The Spanish groups were most interested in supporting the Croatian association “U ime obitelji” (In the name of the Family), which had previously organized two referendums<sup>141</sup>. However, according to the documents, the Spanish journalists that published the documents concluded that CitizenGO had decided that exploiting the Croatian tax system would not be necessary. The contributions of multimillionaires to the coffers of CitizenGO’s coffers had managed to turn this ultra-Catholic platform into an international engine for the promotion of far-right parties and organizations and enabled its rapid expansion and consolidation in around 50 countries. The documents also indicate connections between CitizenGO and Eurosceptic right-wing politicians across Europe such as Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, and Frauke Petry in Germany. However, the daily *Publico* paid special attention to a document in which Ignacio Arsuaga Rato, CEO of CitizenGO, is asking for around 100,000 Euros from the Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev. Malofeyev is the founder of the venture capital fund and investment bank Marshall Capital and the president of Tsargrad, an obscure far-right think tank that maintains contacts with ultra-religious EU lobbies. In 2014, this think tank hired Fox News producer Jack Hanick to found Tsargrad TV, an orthodox fundamentalist channel that glorifies the Russian church and Vladimir Putin, and whose YouTube channel was blocked due to its content. However, as reported by Croatian media outlets, following the publication of the documents on Wikileaks, Arsuaga Rato claimed that his computer had been hacked and referred to violations of Spanish law, arguing that the distribution of documents obtained in such a way is punishable by law in Spain.<sup>142</sup>

Some experts interviewed for this chapter indicated that transnationally connected criminal groups from the West Balkans commit violent crimes in the territory of the Republic of Croatia. This represents a significant security challenge for Croatian and international institutions. Recently, Croatia has been witnessing the particularly

brutal murders of Serbian and Montenegrin citizens in public and populated places. According to the current investigations, these murders are connected to the well-known criminal clans, Škaljarski and Kavački.<sup>143,144</sup> The fact that murders are taking place within Croatia indicates the existence of cooperation with OC in the country. The background of these murders is the fight for control over the illegal narcotics trade. Croatia is situated along an extremely important smuggling route for illicit drugs towards Western Europe. Certainly, the presence of OC generates corruption and economic crime. However, currently, there are no indicators that this money would be used to finance terrorist activities or right-wing extremist groups. Part of the members of the football fan groups have certain connections with these circles, but their influence on the stability of the political scene and national security is negligible<sup>145</sup>.

## **GOVERNMENTAL and SOCIETAL RESPONSE**

Article 97 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Croatia addresses terrorism as a criminal offense. It contains a definition that all bodies and institutions of the Republic of Croatia must adhere to. Articles 98-102 of the same Act defines other activities that are determined to be in the function of terrorism: financing, public incitement, recruitment, travel, association and training of individuals and groups with the intention (whether direct or indirect) of inciting, planning, or committing terrorist acts. The law is in accordance with the EU Directives on the suppression of terrorism. The law does not recognize extremism as a separate legal concept that can be penalized.

However, the National Strategy for the Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism<sup>146</sup> links terrorism and (violent) extremism. This document defines the strategic framework of Croatia in the fight against terrorism and “gives guidelines for upgrading existing and building new mechanisms and measures for the prevention and suppression of terrorism”<sup>147</sup>. Furthermore, the strategy and its mechanisms are based on all relevant national and international documents that deal with the issue of terrorism. The strategy recognizes extremism (Article 10) as one of the main threats to the security and stability of modern societies. It also recognizes the processes of radicalization of individuals and groups, their path to extremism and incitement to the possible commission of terrorist acts. The Strategy emphasizes mandatory participation in international counter-terrorist efforts, as well as the measures to combat terrorism that relate to the fight against radicalism and extremism. The strategy envisages and mandates the strengthening of national capacities to combat these crimes and concrete cooperation at the international level, and all state government authorities and bodies are obliged to comply with it.

Croatia has a good institutional capacity to fight against financial fraud and money laundering through which terrorist and extremist groups are financed. Croatia is

participating in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and within Croatia there is inter-institutional cooperation of all key financial institutions and authorities that monitor financial flows. These have already demonstrated their effectiveness in several cases. In addition, the interlocutors point out that neither society nor the state should underestimate the possibility that in conditions of global crises, the ideas of right-wing extremism and radicalism can become increasingly attractive among the less educated population that exists on the margins of society. Therefore, it is quite possible that such groups also become more closely connected with the carriers of organized crime.

The fact that Croatia is not currently facing these challenges does not mean that they may not potentially develop in the future. The existence of persons spreading populist ideas with which they try to radicalize individuals and groups has been documented in Croatia. Consequently, the risk that right-wing extremist groups and networks emerge that attempt to connect to similar groups abroad exist. In this context, special attention should be paid to Russia's malicious influence operations, which are trying to bring divisions into society and radicalize it in order to undermine the ability of EU member states to exert economic pressure on Russia as a reaction to its aggression against Ukraine.

Therefore, it is necessary to maintain already established channels of official cooperation between bodies and institutions responsible for preventive repressive action against such processes, both at the national and international level. It is necessary to involve the media, the educational system, the academic community, the private sector, civil society organizations and specialized experts so that persons who are found to be prone to activities covered by the term VRWE can be de-radicalized. At the same time, it is necessary to focus on monitoring and preventing the abuse of media freedom for the purpose of spreading violent extremist ideas. Here, the experience of other experts (such as those gathered in the RAN network) should be used. The process should take place on several levels: individuals' prone to radicalism, extremism and even terrorism should be steered away from extremist pathways towards regular political processes that they can use to promote their views. As a second step, structures should be put into place guiding such individuals towards a de-escalation of their attitudes. This should be done in cooperation with experts that specialize in the issues that led these individuals towards radicalization order to achieve this. It is necessary to strengthen the work of institutions that fight against such risks and threats on a preventive and repressive level. These should work in a comprehensive all-of-society framework that includes civil society as well as all relevant government authorities. The capabilities of law enforcement authorities to gather and analyze crime (including serious crime) intelligence should be strengthened and clearly regulated. In this way, law enforcement authorities should become more efficient, judicial processes should progress more efficiently and the resilience of society against extremist ideas should be increased.

VRWE, VLWE and other violent forms of activity represent serious risks that societies and states will increasingly face in view of the constant strengthening disinformation activities and related populist policies. These attempts to undermine societal cohesion by deepening existing societal fissures and creating new ones. The only real response to these threats is a whole-of-society approach both at the national and international level. The exchange of information, experiences and knowledge of different experts is a necessity and should be promoted. No society is immune to malicious influence operations. Even though such serious threats are currently not present in some societies does not mean that they will not affect these societies in the future. The fact that there is information on the existence of a number of risk factors both in Croatia and in countries that border Croatia<sup>148</sup> indicates the necessity of continuing to further develop the existing relevant institutions and the legislative framework. This should consider promising practices deployed by countries affected by these threats, adapted to national needs and in accordance with EU legislation.

# Germany

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*Alexander Ritzmann*

## DEFINITIONS and HISTORY

“Extremism” in Germany is not defined by constitutional or criminal law but is a conceptual tool that German domestic intelligence agencies (Offices for the Protection of the Constitution) have been using since 1974. It describes an assumed or proven “anti-constitutionalism,” meaning any effort opposing the “principles of the free democratic basic order” with the objectives of overthrowing/removing them.<sup>149</sup> Extremism is not illegal in Germany, unless laws are violated. Extremists, however, can be surveilled by domestic intelligence agencies, who have an early-detection function in the German security architecture. Germany’s modern-day interpretation of “right-wing extremism” is based on the denial of universal human rights, which conflicts with the inviolability of human dignity under Section 1 of the German Constitution (“Basic Law”).<sup>150</sup> In 2014, the concept and definition for “violent/violence-readiness,” meaning the “execution or preparation of violent acts” was changed to “violence-oriented,” referring to any kind of support of violence.<sup>151</sup>

The German Criminal Code defines terrorism as the forming of an organization with the objective or directed at “seriously intimidating the population” or “destroying or significantly impairing” an authority or international organization (Section 129a of the German Criminal Code). Germany’s Public Prosecutor General of the Federal Court of Justice (Generalbundesanwaltschaft, GBA) and Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA) refer to terrorism<sup>152</sup> or a terrorist organization in the context of serious seditious acts of violence (Sections 89a, b, c, 91 of the German Criminal Code) “when three or more persons band together, are prepared to commit acts of violence, and start executing these plans.”<sup>153</sup> The domestic intelligence agencies do “not necessarily require there to be a group” but also explicitly focus on so-called “unstructured” (not-affiliated) individuals (e.g. “lone” actors).<sup>154</sup>

The definition of Organized Crime used by German security agencies is “the planned commission – driven by the pursuit of profit or power – of criminal offences which, individually or as a whole, are of considerable importance where more than two persons collaborate, operate on a division of labor basis for a prolonged or indefinite period of time a) by using commercial or business-type structures, b) by using violence or other means of intimidation or c) by exerting influence on politics, the media, the public administration, the judiciary or the business sector.”<sup>155</sup>

German intelligence and security agencies publish annual reports in German and partially in English on extremism and terrorism as well as on organized crime.<sup>156</sup>

Relevant entities covered in this chapter are also motorcycle group/outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs), defined by the BKA as follows: “A motorcycle group is an association of several persons that is characterized by a strict hierarchical structure, close personal relationships among the group members, very limited willingness to co-operate with the police as well as self-made strict rules and regulations. By wearing the same clothes or insignia, the group members demonstrate their shared identity to the outside world. Outlaw motorcycle gang crime includes all offences committed by individual or several members of a motorcycle group that are to be seen – as regards behavioral motivation – in direct connection with the membership of this group and solidarity. Outlaw motorcycle gang crime is defined by the motivation for the offences committed that is directly linked to the motorcycle group.”<sup>157</sup>

Violence-oriented right-wing extremism is multi-faceted in Germany and has a strong transnational dimension. It manifests itself through violence attacks, targeted murders and assassinations, pogrom-like events, riots, “entrepreneurs of extremism,”<sup>158</sup> as well as sometimes being a dominant local subculture.<sup>159</sup>

**In terms of for VRWE actors, four categories can be established:**

1. Groups: The so-called “free scene,” comprising loose and largely unstructured networks of around 5-20 members, often called Kameradschaften (bands of comrades/informal right-wing extremist structures).
2. Parties: In addition to the NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany), there are three newer anti-constitutional micro parties, Der III. Weg, Die Rechte and Partei neue Stärke. All three were Kameradschaften or similar structures before and converted into political parties to shield themselves from government sanctions and bans.
3. Individuals: So-called “lone” actors who are not directly affiliated with existing VRWE groups but feel connected with a broader movement and struggle.
4. Mixed scenes: Cooperations between right-wing extremists, outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs), Reichsbürger/sovereign citizens, preppers, hooligans and so-called Wutbürger (enraged citizens).<sup>160</sup>

All four categories are (or feel) interconnected by right-wing-extremist narratives like the Great Replacement, White Genocide, New (Jewish) World Order or Day X.<sup>161</sup>

The BKA has recorded a total of 109 people killed in right-wing-extremist homicides from 1990 to 2020.<sup>162</sup> Media and civil-society count between 180 and 208 deaths for the same period<sup>163</sup>. This is largely due to the discrepancies in classifying right-wing-extremist views and motives as “accompanying the act” or “triggering” it.

According to the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), there were 33.900 right wing extremists in Germany in 2021, and 13.500 of them are violence-oriented.<sup>164</sup> According to the BKA, which is collecting the data for (pre-trial) crimes in Germany, 20,201 crimes were committed with an RWE motivation in 2021, compared to 22.357 in 2020. Of those, 945 were violent, compared to 1023 cases in 2020.<sup>165</sup>

## **HISTORY AND KEY PLAYERS OF THE VRWE - OC SCENE until 2015**

Germany has a significant number of well documented cases of cooperation between VRWE and OC.

In the late 1990's and early 2000's, cooperation between outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMCGs) and VRWE individuals and groups in Brandenburg, for example, the Bones MC in Lauchhammer, who hosted VRWE hate-music events, and Gremium MC and Hells Angels MC, both in Cottbus and who recruited VRWE Skinheads as members, are well documented.<sup>166</sup>

Members of the VRWE group Werwölfe Wismar (Werewolves Wismar), founded in 2002 in Wismar, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, committed various crimes, amongst them tax evasion, through their merchandise and hate-music Werwolf Shop.<sup>167</sup> In 2008, and after internal disputes which lead to the murder of a group member, the Schwarze Schaar MC (Black Flock) motorcycle club was created as a spin off. The Schwarze Schaar MC had its own support chapter, the Schwarze Jäger (Black Hunters). Schwarze Schaar and their affiliates turned into an OC organization and reportedly more than 160 crimes were committed, amongst them, including the sale of illegal drugs like cocaine. In 2013, and reportedly to avoid a ban order from the government, they founded a Schwarze Schaar Nomads MC chapter in Schwerin. The Schwarze Schaar MC, Schwarze Jäger and Schwarze Schaar Nomads MC were banned in early 2014 and several members were convicted to jail sentences.<sup>168</sup> The remaining members stayed active, displaying close ties with members of a banned Hell Angels MC chapter, for example at a Christmas party in December 2014, when reportedly 140 OMCG members, neo-nazis, (football) hooligans and organized crime affiliated individuals partied together.<sup>169</sup>

In 1999, members of the VRWE „Thüringer Heimatschutz (Thuringia Homeland Protection / THS), were involved in robbing a cash transporter. The stolen money was used to buy a brothel in Rudolstadt, which they operated for several years.<sup>170</sup> At least two of the Nazi-robbers were later involved in smuggling stolen cars from Germany to Lithuania and Russia. Between the year 2000 to 2011 the National Socialist Underground (NSU), an offspring of the THS, committed 11 murders and financed itself largely through 15 bank robberies.

In 2011, 2012 and 2014, a total of six VRWE individuals, some of them active members of the National Democratic Party (NPD), which is the biggest, oldest and still most relevant VRWE organization in Germany, and/or of hate-music bands, were arrested in Saxony with a total of 2,6 kilograms of crystal meth and 14 kilograms cannabis, amongst other illegal drugs. They were sentenced to several years in jail as a result, and some were repeat offenders.

In 2012, several RWE individuals were arrested for the possession and distribution of amphetamine and cannabis, amongst them (former) NPD members, members of a hate music band and OMCG members of the Bandidos MC and Outlaws MC (Spremberg) as well as the Underdog MC in Sachsen-Anhalt and the Stahlpakt MC in Thuringia.<sup>171</sup>

Sascha R., the deputy head of the NPD in Bavaria who was also operating a private security company, is a leading member (secretary) of the Bandidos MC in Regensburg since the early 2000's. He was sentenced in 2017 for his involvement in an attack on a rival OMCG and lost the commercial license that allowed him to operate his security business.<sup>172</sup>

In 2013, a confidential "situational analysis regarding connections between the extreme-right scene and biker groups"<sup>173</sup> by the BfV and the BKA came to the conclusion that there are "selective points of cooperation". According to media reports concerning this confidential analysis, OMCGs rented out their locations or provided security for (V)RWE hate-music concerts and events. Amongst those OMCGs were the MC Gremium in Thuringia and the Rats MC in Hannover, Lower Saxony. There were also frequent visits between (V)RWE and OMCG-linked individuals in Osnabrück and Emden. The closest cooperation took place in Brandenburg, Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Berlin und Saxony. At the time, a total of 552 individuals were reportedly identified in the official document as being involved in those "selective points of cooperation", out of 7300 OMCG members and 18.000 RWE-linked individuals in Germany. 76 individuals were members of OMCGs and (V)RWE groups at the same time.<sup>174</sup>

## **KEY PLAYERS and LEGAL FRAMEWORK since 2015**

As highlighted in the previous subchapter, there were various visible connections and cooperation between (V)RWE and OC actors between the late 1990's and 2015. This phenomenon has since increased and broadened.

In 2016, the ministry of the interior in Thuringia described the cooperation between OMCGs and VRWE as "particularly lucrative related to the production and sales of RWE (hate-) music".<sup>175</sup> OMCGs also continued to regularly provide their clubhouses and bars as meeting venues for VRWE groups. At that time, 18 criminal investigati-

ons and court cases were ongoing against OMCGs like Gremium MC, Bandidos MC and Hells Angels MC, which were related to possession of illegal drugs, the illegal possession of weapons, racketeering and aggregated battery.<sup>176</sup>

In 2019, the same ministry said that hat some OMCG MC chapters have a particularly high number of VRWE-linked members, but that they have no information about a “comprehensive” and “structured” cooperation between RWE and OMCGs. The ministry assumes that such cooperation is rather based on personal relationships and shared financial interests.<sup>177</sup>

The VRWE football ultra/hooligan-group Inferno Cottbus 99 from Cottbus, Brandenburg, is or was reportedly active in organized crime (illegal drugs/illegal prostitution/racketeering/tax evasion) and is said to be well connected to similar groups in France, Poland and Russia.<sup>178</sup> It was unsuccessfully investigated as a “criminal organization” by local prosecutors in 2019, but investigations and prosecutions against individual members continue until today.<sup>179</sup>

In recent years, members of Inferno Cottbus 99, which pretended to dissolve in 2017 to hinder investigations and prosecution, joined the VRWE network Kampfgemeinschaft Cottbus (Fighting Association Cottbus).<sup>180</sup> This group serves as a platform for hooligans, MMA-fighters and VRWE businessmen who own private security companies, merchandise stores and restaurants. According to the State Office for the protection of the Constitution (state domestic intelligence agency, LfV) of the state of Brandenburg, this network has about 115 members.<sup>181</sup> In February 2020, a VRWE MMA fighter of the Kampfgemeinschaft Cottbus was shot dead in public. He was closely affiliated with the OMCG Provocateur MC Eastside, which serves as a supporter club for the Hells Angels MC Cottbus.<sup>182</sup> The two perpetrators, sentenced to at least 15 years in prison, are also part of the Cottbus VRWE-OC milieu.<sup>183</sup> The LfV Brandenburg estimates that the infighting between organized crime actors, in particular OMCGs, and VRWE, might increase.<sup>184</sup>

In February 2021, several individuals were arrested in the state of Brandenburg and 55 kilograms of cannabis, amphetamine and cocaine were confiscated, as well as € 330.000 in cash and a Porsche Panamera. The total value of all confiscated assets was estimated to be € 1.3 million.<sup>185</sup> Amongst the arrested were members of the OMCG Oder City Kurmark, which is affiliated with the Hells Angels MC. According to media reports, they were mostly interested in buying and distributing MDMA tablets with swastikas printed on them.<sup>186</sup>

A chapter of the OMCG Outlaws MC in Bochum, founded in 2021, and accused of being involved in forced prostitution, human trafficking and the distribution of illegal drugs, reportedly included at least two known VRWE members.<sup>187</sup> Their local merchandise products, like t-shirts, feature the national-socialist Reichsadler logo, but without the swastika, which is a banned symbol in Germany.

Several members of the OMCG Hells Angels MC Rostock in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, including their current president, are reportedly VRWE individuals.<sup>188</sup>

In July 2021, the federal government banned the Bandidos MC Federation West Central, including its 38 chapters located mostly in the western/central part of Germany, due to their activities involving violent crimes, possession and sale of illegal weapons and illegal drugs.<sup>189</sup> In January 2022, law enforcement in North Rhine-Westphalia conducted a series of raids targeting locations of the Bandidos Essen East chapter, which continued to operate despite a legal ban. Several kilograms of illegal drugs, € 50.000 in cash, a cannabis plantation, illegal firearms like semiautomatic rifles, and a weapons workshop were found.<sup>190</sup> The Bandidos Essen West support chapter Crew 45 is still active.<sup>191</sup>

The Bandidos Essen East chapter's president, Christian W., is a member of the Steeler Jungs, a VRWE "citizens militia" created in 2017, which pretends to provide security on the streets by taking walks in large groups of 50 to 100 individuals in the city of Essen. Christian W. is also a mixed-martial arts fighter and founder of the Guerreros Fightclub as well as a football hooligan with the Alte Garde (Old Guard) Essen. Several individuals are members of the Steeler Jungs and the Alte Garde at the same time. The Steeler Jungs and Bandidos Essen East have also shared a location which was used to shoot a video for the VRWE/hooligan hate-music band Kategorie C.<sup>192</sup>

Christian W. and his wife own the sportsbar 300, which serves as a meeting point for the Bandidos and the Steeler Jungs, as well as a transportation/moving company where several of his "comrades" (appear to) work. In November 2019, the VRWE figurehead and musician Michael Regener, called Lunikow, gave a concert at Sportsbar 300.<sup>193</sup> He is the former head of the banned criminal organization/band Landser, which was connected to the transnational VRWE Blood and Honour network.<sup>194</sup>

The Steeler Jungs are connected with other VRWE groups like Bruderschaft Deutschland (Brotherhood Germany) or HOGESA - Hooligans gegen Salafisten (Hooligans against Salafists) as well as with the VRWE affiliated hooligan/ultra-groups Northside<sup>195</sup> and 0231 Riot. The latter one, which was officially dissolved in 2017 and had its members join Northside, is reportedly connected to the VRWE actors like Denis Nikitin from White Rex, a transnational VRWE MMA-network, which is currently fighting as volunteer soldiers in Ukraine.<sup>196</sup>

### **VRWE-OC hybrid individuals and groups**

In 2019, three VRWE individuals, aged, 25, 31 and 35, were sentenced to prison for the organized dealing of several kilograms of illegal drugs like amphetamine, cannabis and ecstasy on the darknet from 2015 to 2017. One perpetrator was a

member of the Identitarian movement, the leading drug dealer was a member of Kameradschaft Aachener Land/Syndikat 52 and head of the local chapter of the VRWE micro political party Die Rechte (The Right) in Aachen, as well as a RWE musician and music producer.<sup>197</sup> The overall income from their drug business were estimated by the court to be € 260.000. Since very little money was confiscated and due to the humble lifestyle of the perpetrators, the judge guessed that the illicit gains of their drug business could have been used to support their extremist activities.<sup>198</sup>

Before his sentencing in 2019 and after his release from prison in early 2021, the gang leader used his connection to illegal drug distributors in the Netherlands to provide “product” to one of Germany’s key VRWE transnational groups, the Comrades of Thuringia/Turonen and their support gang Garde 20.<sup>199</sup>

### **Case study**

In an ongoing court case in Erfurt, Thuringia, a number of VRWE individuals, including several members of the Comrades of Thuringia/Turonen and their support gang Garde 20 are accused of having created an organized crime organization which was, amongst other things, selling illegal drugs, had a business of illegal and forced prostitution and operated a professional money laundering scheme, since 2019. Several police raids in February and June 2021, which were planned and executed by the Thuringia state criminal investigation office (LKA) Department 62 for organized crime. 14 arrests were made and a total of 9 kg of crystal meth, 14 kg of cannabis and 200 grams of cocaine was seized, together with around € 200,000 in cash and a number of weapons, like semi-automatic rifles. Assets worth over € 3,3 million were confiscated. In total, 74 individuals are accused of being part of the Turonen network, including non-VRWE individuals like illegal drug suppliers and drug couriers, 30 arrest warrants were issued.<sup>200</sup> The high number of accused individuals is a result of the police getting access to so called Krypto mobile phones and the related servers, which were widely used to coordinate the day-to day business of organized crime groups all over Europe, including the Turonen.<sup>201</sup>

The Turonen have copied the structure of outlaw motorcycles gangs (OMCGs), with privileged full members (9) and prospects (32). In this case Garde 20 is a support structure of individuals who aspire to become full members. Females played a key role in the Turonen network. They managed the brothel or acting as the beneficial owner of the organization’s real estate, but were not allowed as members of the Turonen or Garde 20.

Dirk W., a lawyer who is a former deputy head on the NPD in Hesse and who has the status of honorary member of the Turonen, is being tried for money laundering, drug dealing for commercial purposes and extortion in a total of 70 cases.<sup>202</sup> The money laundering was supposedly done through the acquisition of real estate, using

such real estate as brothels for legal and illegal prostitution, and for operating a real estate management company which was paying salaries to Turonen members and affiliates without them doing any actual work for the company.<sup>203</sup>

The state prosecutors, who are specialized in prosecuting organized crime cases, estimate the total earnings of the accused individuals to be more than € 1,2 million, generated between the fall of 2019, when this activity started, to February 2021, when the first arrests were made.<sup>204</sup>

One of the key defendants in the trial, Lars B. from Gera, Thuringia, who later moved to Berlin. He is a member of the Bandidos Berlin City MC and was reportedly a key supplier of the Turonen with four kilograms of crystal meth and cannabis.<sup>205</sup>

The brothers Martin und Christian U. were arrested two months after the Turonen raids and accused of distributing more than 500 kilograms of illegal drugs. The Turonen were amongst their customers. One of the helpers of the brothers U., Dominik W., is a (former?) VRWE and member of the OMCG Hells Angels Erfurt MC support club Garde 81.<sup>206</sup>

Before the arrests of leading Turonen/Garde20 members in February 2021, there were 32 court cases pending against the members of this group, involving physical assault, sedition, fraud, receiving stolen goods, falsification of documents, trespassing and further crimes.<sup>207</sup>

From 2016 to 2020, the Turonen/Garde 20 had (co-) organized several hate-music concerts and festivals, such as Rock gegen Überfremdung (Rock against foreign infiltration), with up to 6000 participants and with “legal” profits ranging between € 100,000 and 140,000.<sup>208</sup> Three such festivals took place. In 2016, the Turonen were also organizing the Rocktoberfest a hate-music concert in the Kanton of Unterwasser in Switzerland that had more than 5000 participants. The estimated turnover here was between € 200.000 and € 350.000.<sup>209</sup> Leading members of the Turonen were active in the Thüringer Heimatschutz and open supporters of the NSU, Germany's deadliest RWE terrorist organization since 1945 (see previous subchapter).

At the time of writing, the extreme-right wing ideology and actions of the key defendants in the Turonen court case plays no role. The court and the prosecutors are handling this as a “non-political” organized crime trial.

The Aryan Brotherhood Eastside, a VRWE group structured similarly to the Turonen, located in the state of Saxony with reported ties to outlaw motorcycle gangs, could be another relevant VRWE-OC case.<sup>210</sup>

In the state of Brandenburg, seven VRWE organization currently exist that have (partially) copied the structure (division between members and prospects, distinct

rituals and insignia) of outlaw motorcycle gangs, but most do not own any motorcycles or have license to drive them. In an interview in 2016, a representative of the LfV Brandenburg is outlined that these fake OMCG-VRWE groups originally had arrangements with the dominant OMCGs like the Bandidos MC or the Hells Angels MC to keep a low profile and to not interfere with the “businesses” of the established clubs. The (fake) OMCG-VRWE groups then have “emancipated” themselves from those arrangements and are now supposedly active in organized crime circles.<sup>211</sup>

## **TRENDS and STATISTICS**

In general, the investigating police unit, and later on the prosecution, designate (suspected) crimes to be politically, financially or otherwise motivated. Once a crime is categorized as financially motivated, as shown by various cases in the previous subchapters, the ideology of the defendants plays no role in the respective court cases or the related crime statistics. Consequently, the court and the prosecutor treat violence-oriented right-wing extremists as if they were typical organized crime defendants.

This means that the several afore mentioned VRWE-OC related crimes do generally not show up in German crime statistics as VRWE related, which can lead to the impression that no VRWE-OC actors and cooperations exist.

Since 2018, the annual situation report for organized crime, published by the BKA, includes a subcategory for supposed connection between OC-groups and terrorism/politically motivated criminality.<sup>212</sup> Most entries so far are related to Lebanese, Syrian, Afghan, Russian and Chechen groups and individuals, presumably in relation e.g. to Hezbollah, the Islamic State and the Taliban. In 2021 and for the first time, a politically motivated extreme-right group was mentioned, which was active in the organized distribution of illegal drugs, presumably referring to the Turonen (see the previous subchapter). The report emphasizes that “it is to be assumed that this was done to finance their politically motivated activities”.<sup>213</sup>

The BKA’s annual situation reports for organized crime also specifically mentions crime investigations against OMCGs, for example against the Hells Angels MC, Bandidos MC, Surrender MC, Gremium MC and Freeway Riders MC. The number of investigations into this milieu has decreased from 20 in 2017 to seven in 2021. Despite this decrease, which the federal government attributes to effective police work and ban orders for OMCG chapters, the government assesses the potential for criminal activities and related threat level in Germany as continuously high.<sup>214</sup>

## **Legal and illegal FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES and NETWORKS**

As identified in a CEP report from November 2020<sup>215</sup>, (violence-oriented) right-wing extremists apply six strategies for generating income streams. These are: 1) self-financing/donations/cryptocurrencies, 2) concerts and music festivals, 3) merchandise stores/web-shops, 4) combat sports events, 5) real estate and 6) organized crime.

Some of these financial strategies can generate significant amounts of income with ballpark numbers in hundreds of thousands of euros in turnover, be it concerts, festivals or MMA-events or online and physical merchandise stores. At the same time, it is a declared strategy by VRWE to buy real estate for investment purposes, which then also serve as “fortresses in enemy territory”.<sup>216</sup> In this context, illegal activities like tax evasion or money laundering should be a major concern for law enforcement and tax authorities. Criminal investigations with such a focus seem only to happen randomly, if at all. A “follow the money” approach by government authorities when investigating financial activities of key VRWE actors is largely absent in Germany.<sup>217</sup>

In reference to income from organized crime (income stream six above), various cases of cooperation between VRWE and OC actors, some suspected and some based on solid evidence including court rulings, were highlighted in the previous subchapters. In most of these cases, if investigations or prosecutions took place, these either focused solely on the financial motivation, treating the case solely with a focus on OC, or on the politically motivated crime, looking only at the VRWE aspect of the crime.

The key question concerning the purpose for which the related illicit gains were used remains open. Only the BKA in its latest annual situation reports for organized crime in a supposed reference to the Turonen, and the judge in the case against the VRWE drug dealers of the Kameradschaft Aachener Land/Syndikat 52 assessed that the financially motivated crimes were committed to finance politically motivated activities.

Incentives for cooperation between VRWE and OC actors are manifold, involving dealing with illicit drugs or illegal weapons. Such a cooperation is not as risky for the involved parties as is usually assumed. Several government, media and think tank reports have highlighted such cooperations in the last 25 years. Usually, if such an illegal activity is discovered by law enforcement, the investigative focus lies on the few individuals who can most likely be convicted. The larger VRWE networks, which continue to operate (supposedly) legal security businesses, restaurants, merchandise stores or organizes hate-music concerts or mixed-martial arts events, are often not the focus of the investigation by the law enforcement departments that specialize on financially motivated crimes, since this falls outside their mandate and expertise.<sup>218</sup>

## **TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS and ACTIVITIES**

Members of the VRWE-OC hybrid organization Turonen from Thuringia (see case study above) were active in various different neo-Nazi groups, including the former Hausgemeinschaft Jonastal (HGJ) and the group known as Objekt 21 in Austria.<sup>219</sup> Members of Objekt 21 are accused of having served as henchmen for local organized crime gangs, supposedly perpetrating assassinations, bomb plots and arson attacks from 2008 to 2012.<sup>220</sup> Some VRWE individuals were prosecuted in Austria. Reports about investigations into the network behind the Objekt 21 criminal activities and the transnational Austria – Germany connection could not be found.

Members of the Turonen are also known to be connected to the transnational neo-Nazi networks Blood and Honour and Combat 18. The Turonen seem to have particularly strong ties to Blood and Honor in Switzerland.<sup>221</sup> In 2016, they organized a VRWE hate-music concert in Unterwasser, Kanton St. Gallen, with around 5000 participants hailing from all over Europe.<sup>222</sup>

The concerts and festivals which the Turonen (co-)organized included performances by several hate-music bands from various states in Germany. Thuringia's ministry of the interior assessed that Turonen do not only have "networks of contacts within the extreme right-wing scene in Germany but also across the whole of Europe".<sup>223</sup>

The VRWE individuals and organizations (formerly) affiliated with Inferno Cottbus 99 from Cottbus, Brandenburg, are or were reportedly active in organized crime (illegal drugs/illegal prostitution/racketeering/tax evasion) and are said to be well connected to VRWE groups in France, Russia,<sup>224</sup> and in particular with the football ultras from Beskid Andrychów and Beskid'08 in Poland.<sup>225</sup>

Most of the OMCGs mentioned in this report are chapters or support clubs of originally foreign organizations like the Bandidos MC and the Hells Angels MC, which have by design a strong transnational network.

## **Governmental and societal RESPONSE**

In the past 20 years, a number of OMCGs chapters of the Hells Angels MC, Bandidos MC and Gremium MC (local sub-groups) and others have been designated as criminal organizations or banned via the German association law (Vereinsverbot). For example, in July 2021 Germany banned the Bandidos MC Federation West Central in Germany. This was justified in particular with the violent turf wars between the Bandidos and the Hells Angels.<sup>226</sup> Information on how this effected the Bandidos MC operations Germany, including the above-described cooperation with VRWE actors, is not available.

Apart from the in previously confidential situational analysis regarding connections between the extreme-right scene and biker groups<sup>227</sup> by the BfV and the BKA from 2013, no other publicly available official documents by the federal government discussing the VRWE-OC nexus have been found during the research for this chapter. However, this issue was addressed in parliamentary questions in the Bundestag and in various *Länder* (state) legislatures, as well as in different annual public reports of the domestic intelligence agencies<sup>228</sup>.

The “cabinet committee for combating right-wing extremism and racism,” established by the previous federal government in March 2020, highlights the transnational networking of violence-oriented right-wing extremism, and emphasizes the fact that “effective combating and prevention cannot occur solely at a national level.”<sup>229</sup> There is no reference to illegal financial activities or VRWE-OC cooperation.

In March 2022, the German Federal Ministry of the Interior published an “Action Plan against Right-Wing Extremism”<sup>230</sup>, which includes the “Breaking Up (of) Right-Wing Extremist Networks” and the objective to “identify financial activities of right-wing extremist networks and shut them down”, specifically mentioning “concerts, festivals, music products, martial arts events and e-commerce/stores for scene clothing and merchandise”.<sup>231</sup> The new strategy does not mention illegal activities or any reference to organized crime.

In August 2022, the federal government announced the creation of a “Bundesfinanzkriminalamt” (federal financial crimes agency). This new federal authority will combine the investigative capabilities currently located within the federal criminal police (BKA) with the capabilities and capacities of Germany’s Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), which is currently located at the federal customs agency. The German FIU is reportedly overwhelmed with the high number of suspicious transactions reports (STRs) from financial institutions and regulated non-financial entities, flagging potential cases of money laundering, other financial crimes and suspicion of terrorism financing.<sup>232</sup>

In November 2022, the federal government published a new strategy to fight severe and organized crimes.<sup>233</sup> Neither OMCGs nor connections to politically motivated crimes are mentioned in the new strategy.

# Greece

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## DEFINITIONS and HISTORY

In the past two decades, Greece has faced many societal and economic challenges, which led to the rise in crime, particularly property crime, violent crime, including radicalization and extremism. In response to these challenges, the Hellenic State formally defined extremism, radicalization and terrorism, and has created legislation specifying exactly how organized crime and terrorism is to be prosecuted. Further, the Hellenic State has stayed current with international legislation, ratifying a number of codicils into Greek Law.

The terms radicalization, extremism, right wing extremism, violent right extremism are not defined in national legislation, but are commonly identified in administrative practice, and included in a manual published by the Center for Security Studies (KEMEA), which is used by the national counter terrorism agencies. The definitions that are practically used by CT agencies, are listed below. In addition, §30 of law n.4689/2020 integrates definitions pertaining to terrorism, victims of terrorism, in concordance with EUROJUST, however no reference is made to “radicalization” in the text of law .4689/2020.<sup>234</sup>

As far as the definition of radicalization is concerned, when need arises, most Greek agencies will resort to either the academic definition of radicalization, or that used by European Commission. A widely used definition of radicalization introduced by the European Commission defines the phenomenon as “a phased and complex process in which an individual or a group embraces a radical ideology or belief that accepts, uses or condones violence, including acts of terrorism, to reach a specific political or ideological purpose”<sup>235</sup>. In an academic context, Radicalization is defined as i) the social and psychological process of increasing adherence to political or religious extremist ideologies,<sup>236</sup> ii) a process of adoption of extreme religious and political beliefs in order to depose conventional ideologies in the framework of a (perceived by the supporters) “injustice” and alienation from society and the state, iii) a process of change, a political and personal transformation, iv) when connected with terrorism, radicalization is perceived as the preliminary stage that could lead to politically motivated violence.

It is worth noting, however, that as Greece is actively participating in the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RNA) - an initiative is supported by the European Commission - with a number of practitioners coming from Law Enforcement Agencies and other government agencies it is reasonable to expect that they would use the Commission’s definition of radicalization in their communications.

A central concept in the definition of extremism is the identification of an opponent, against whom the extremists are wholly opposed to, and for the destruction of this opponent all actions (including violent ones) taken up by the extremist group are justified.

Right wing extremism in Greece is a nationalistic ideology that regards the national identity as an ultimate value, and is strongly opposed to anything that can be perceived as a threat to that identity<sup>237</sup>. Right wing extremists believe that the Greek nation has remained unaltered since antiquity, and should remain pure, while consequently believing that no foreigner could ever be integrated in the Hellenic Society. Further, they believe that the current democratic system of government is in fact a parliamentary dictatorship, that should be radically modified, as it has led to a decline of their ideal of a national identity.

Violent right-wing extremism are actions taken by right wing extremists that are decisive, premeditated and not spontaneous, and usually carried out by groups<sup>238</sup>.

Organized crime<sup>239</sup> is considered “the organization of persons whose purpose is to carry out criminal activity on a continuous basis, in order to obtain financial benefits and to control national and international situations”. This definition has been legally defined in law N.4619/2019 §187a.

Criminal Organization<sup>240</sup> is defined in Greek legislation as a structured and continuously active group of three or more persons (organization) that seeks to commit more of specific crimes, including forgery, arson, grievous bodily harm, attempted murder and others. In order for a criminal group to be considered as a criminal organization, the following characteristics must be present:

- The team must be structured
- The group must consist of three or more individuals
- The group must have a continuous {criminal} activity
- The group must seek to commit more than one of the prescribed felonies

Terrorism<sup>241</sup> is legally defined as the commission of a felony or any crime of general danger or crime against public order under circumstances or in such a manner or to such an extent as to cause serious danger to the country or to an international organization and with the purpose of seriously intimidating a population or unlawfully coercing a public authority; or international organization to do or refrain from doing any act or to seriously damage or destroy the fundamental constitutional, political or economic structures of a country or an international organization.

Organized crime and terrorism have been defined by national legislation, and since 2014, these definitions have been included in a comprehensive manual issued by KEMEA, which is used across all relevant state agencies, namely the Hellenic Police, Border Patrol, Coast Guard and others.

Right wing extremism was a fringe movement in Greece, until 2012. In the 1996 elections, Golden Dawn received only 0.07% in the national election, and similarly in 2009 the percentage had risen marginally, to 0.29%<sup>242</sup>. However, in May 2012, there was a significant increase to 6.97% in the primary round, and the final round in 6.92%. The same trend continued in the following election year (2015), with Golden Dawn achieving 6.28% in the Primary round of the national elections, and 6.99% in the secondary elections. Finally, in 2019 there was a significant drop, and Golden Dawn dropped to 2.93%.

Golden Dawn was founded as an organization in 1985, and became a political party in 1993. They are considered a far-right neo-fascist and ultranationalist criminal organization.<sup>243</sup> In their ruling, the judges referred to the Golden Dawn as a “a criminal organization masked up as a political party<sup>244</sup>” Their leader, Nikolaos Mihaloliakos actually rejects these characterizations, rather identifying with Greek dictators of the 20th century, such as Ioannis Metaxas and George Papadopoulos.<sup>245</sup> The group was declared a criminal organization and after a 5 year trial that ended in 2020 and is currently on appeal, most of the leaders were pronounced guilty and are currently serving their sentences. Having a political party being declared a “criminal organization” poses unique challenges to the Greek legal order; the Constitution, voted in 1974 when Democracy was re-established after a 7-year long military junta, the Greek constitution makes no reference to the possibility of banning a political party (see article 29)<sup>246</sup>. Although beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that politicians, academics and scholars have suggested as possible solution to this problem the amendment of the current electoral law<sup>247</sup>; according to this suggestion, a party that has been classified as a criminal organization should not have the right to declare candidates for national elections.

Until the national elections of 2012, there was little representation for Radical Right political parties. The economic crisis, starting in 2008, with imposed austerity and a series of bailout agreements between the Greek government and its creditors, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund led to a significant rise in populism<sup>248</sup>, expressed in civil unrests and a shift towards far-right wing extremism, among other political and societal changes that are beyond the scope of this paper. According to Roumanias et al. (2018),<sup>249</sup> during this time, voters fled from established and mainstream political parties that in meltdown, to anti-systemic, fringe parties, therefore deepening the social and political insecurity.

Although far-left extremist and terrorist groups such as November 17<sup>th</sup> (N17) have a long history of financial crimes, right wing extremist groups have few to no charges

brought against them for financial crimes. Specifically, in the prosecuting documents for Golden Dawn, among the 2500 crimes and the 69 individuals, there were only two robbery charges against two individuals.<sup>250</sup>

## **KEY PLAYERS and LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

Since 2015, the financial crisis and the resulting austerity measures created a fertile ground for the rise of right-wing extremism.<sup>251</sup> Their rhetoric against the European measures, globalization and anti-capitalism generated a significant increase in the number of followers, especially with younger audiences.<sup>252</sup> During this time, a variety of groups, both legal and illegal sprouted, with tactics that focused on violence toward human and stationary target. Their primary overall ideology was against immigrants, foreigners, Jews and LGBTQ+ individuals,<sup>253</sup> and their tactics involved mainly violent attacks rather than financial crimes. The dominant VRWE actors in Greece are:

Popular Association - Golden Dawn (Λαϊκός Σύνδεσμος - Χρυσή αυγή). Ellinas<sup>254</sup> (2013) eloquently describes the use of violence by Golden Dawn: "Violence is glorified by the GD. It is not only a means that the GD uses to pursue its ends, but it is an inherent feature of its ideology and main slogans such as "Aima, Timi, Chrysi Avgi" (Blood, Honor, Golden Dawn). Violence is not only deployed as a means of confrontation with perceived enemies, but it also glorified as a symbol of power to attract supporters and voters".<sup>255</sup>

According to reports from various sources<sup>256</sup>, most offices of Golden Dawn across Greece are now closed<sup>257</sup> or defunct and membership appears to have declined dramatically. The party's official newspaper "Golden Dawn" terminated its operations shortly after the court's decision<sup>258</sup> while the party's website and social media accounts have been suspended. Overall, the party seems to have completely shut down.

However, it is worth noting that a branch of the party, the so-called "Youth Front" appears to be still active and currently operates a website called "counter-attack"<sup>259</sup> with explicit references to its connections with the Golden Dawn.

Group E (Ομάδα E-EY)<sup>260</sup> - Group E was a VRWE fringe group in 2015, that had a very strong anti-government/conspiracy rhetoric, conducted two bombings in the Peloponnese area when the five members of the organization were arrested and subsequently convicted on terrorism charges. Their ideology was bizarre, promoting the purity of the Hellenic blood that was corrupted by Byzantines who destroyed ancient Greece. To that purpose, they bombed the statue of the last Byzantine emperor in Mystras, and an ATM. When they were arrested, they carried an arsenal of weapons, that was sufficient to convict them for terrorism.

Other VRWE groups exist on a much smaller scale, in regional levels that act mostly in retaliation to left-wing or anarchist groups. For example, if there is an anti-racism rally organized by a local anarchist group, in retaliation there will be a gathering of a right-wing group. Most often, these groups are organized and led by former Golden Dawn members, or Golden Dawn copy-cats, and their protests very rarely result in arrests.

Combat 18 Hellas – Combat 18 Hellas (also known as “Ανένταχτοι Μαιάνδριοι Εθνικιστές” (Unaffiliated Meandering Nationalists) (AME/C18) was a neo-Nazi VRWE group copy cutting Golden Dawn’s structure, modus operandi and logos, and the UK-born neo-Nazi group Combat 18. Operating mainly in Athens from March 2015 until March 2018 when many of its members were arrested, the group is responsible for many assaults and arsons against far left and minorities.<sup>261</sup>

- Sacred Company 12 (Ιερός Λόχος 12) – This neo-Nazi organization has a branch in Athens, Larissa, Amyntaio and also in Germany, and has approximately 1,000 members, it was founded in 2012 (thus the number 12 in its name). It has taken the lead in violent assaults in Thessaloniki and Katerini in 2019, targeting theatrical performances, the former Thessaloniki Mayor, the Prespes Agreement. The group was also very active in the anti-vaccination rallies.<sup>262</sup>

- ProPatria – It is a hardline Nazi organization with direct links to the Golden Dawn, trying to fill the void of its Assault Battalions, withdrawn due to the GD trial. ProPatria members were among the Nazis who in 2018 they raised the flag of the ‘black sun’ (Schwarze Sonne), one of the darkest symbols of the Nazi period, in OAKA during a Greek National Team football fixture.<sup>263</sup>

Open-source research indicates that there are quite a few Motorcycle Clubs (MC ) in Greece<sup>264</sup> given the popularity of motorcycles in the country. However, there is very little available research or literature that refers to the presence of violent Biker Groups or outlaw motorcycle groups (OMCGs) in Greece. In particular, as far as the notorious Bandidos MC are concerned, no evidence could be found that they are active in Greece as an organized group; although the website that is affiliated with the Bandidos MC – Federation Europe<sup>265</sup> lists two chapters in Greece, one in Athens and one in Thessaloniki. There is no available info about a clubhouse , nor that the Group has ever held in event in Greece. Another open source that lists all active chapter of Bandidos MC around the world<sup>266</sup> makes no reference to Greece.

Interestingly, the German federal government, which banned the Bandidos MC Federation West Central in July 2021, included their chapters in Athens and Thessaloniki in the ban order.<sup>267</sup>

However, a murder of a Greek-Australian businessman that took place in Athens on October 31st, 2018 appears to be indirectly related to the activities of the notorious “Outlaws” motorcycle gang in Canada which is believed to be affiliated with the

Bandidos<sup>268</sup>. In particular, two brothers of Bulgarian origin who have been arrested, charged and ultimately convicted about the murder of the Greek businessman<sup>269</sup> are believed to have links to Australian crime figures living in Canada, according to unconfirmed info published on several media outlets<sup>270 271</sup>.

An interview with a member of another motorcycle club confirmed that even if members of the group live in Greece, they have not been able so far to establish an active chapter or offices, for that matter<sup>272</sup>.

The Hell's Angels, probably the most notorious outlaw motorcycle clubs, appears to be active in Greece since the beginning of the 2000's and in at least two occasions it had been subject of police investigations. On October 12, 2011 an explosion shook a tattoo studio in the high-end Glyfada suburb in Athens. Police sources linked the attack to an internal war between Greek Hell's Angels members<sup>273</sup>. Moreover, in December 2017, a bomb exploded at the clubhouse of the group in the Koropi suburb of Athens, Greece. In the investigation that followed, two members of the group were arrested for illegal gun possession during a house search and, according to the media, police sources linked the attack to a series of illegal activities involving members of the group, including extortion and protection rackets that are active in the Athens metropolitan area<sup>274</sup>.

Last but not least, some small groups - apparently with a friendly aspect to the Hells Angels - exist in Athens (Support 81 Attica), Thessaloniki (Chopper Riders Club), Patra (Support 81 Patra) with an active presence mainly on Facebook. A website<sup>275</sup> is under construction, and is presumed to include content friendly to Hell's Angels.

Connections or cooperations between VRWE individuals or groups and outlaw motorcycle gangs, like in other countries, have not been identified.

Despite the fact that there have been connections established between Golden Dawn and the police, these connections appear to be limited to a few individuals. The prosecuting authorities, following the riots in Athens and other major cities, kept a close watch on all extremist groups, and did not hesitate to take action by either curtailing planned activisms or making arrest. Specifically, Golden Dawn attempted to organize a European Nationalist Camp in 2005, with the participation from German, Italian, Spanish, Romanian and other European far right movements, but the festival was banned by the Greek government.<sup>276</sup>

In Greece, there is a court-proven link between VRWE and organized crime, since the political party Golden Dawn was declared as a criminal group, and their members were tried and convicted for participating in an organized crime group<sup>277</sup>. The groups are organized in a militia-type unit, with a clear hierarchy, and acted out violent acts towards "undesirable" groups. Other, regional groups do not have links with organized crime, and act in retaliation to events, rallies and demonstrations organized by leftist groups.<sup>278</sup>

## Case study

For the purposes of this chapter, Golden Dawn will be selected as a. There is extensive evidence on their modus operandi, their rise and fall, provided not only in scholarly articles, but also in court transcripts.<sup>279</sup> In contrast to the tactics adopted by left-wing extremism in Greece, and perhaps because of that, Golden Dawn members were not charged for financial crimes. Rather, they had a very thorough system of legally financing the organization, by utilizing the funds allocated to the party by the State (all parties represented in the parliament receive funding), reallocating MPs salaries back into the organization, and finally by enforcing a membership fee for all active members. From the court transcripts, the organizational structure of violent attacks towards groups of “undesirables” and individuals deemed as outside threats is explicitly detailed. Following a rigid structure that is similar to the Elite Special Forces of the country, the leader of the organization/political party and the elected MPs, assigned selected individuals as “Nuclei (Πυρήνιάρχεις)” for local party groups<sup>280</sup>. These later evolved into assault battalions, that were equipped and ready under a moment’s notice to carry out violent attacks, including the homicide of a Pakistani worker in 2013, various assaults against student groups and organizations supporting immigrants with the criminal intent to cause intimidation and harm, attempted murders and finally, the murder of musician Pavlos Fyssas, in 2013.<sup>281</sup> This final murder was organized and carried out from the highest ranking members of the organization, and was the cause for the declaration of Golden Dawn as an organized crime groups and the ensuing convictions.

The attitudes and beliefs of the accused MPs and members of Golden Dawn in the trial and later during the appeal process that is currently under way is also noteworthy. Members do not shy away from referring to their ideology, from giving Nazi salutes to family members of murder victims, sparking public outcries.<sup>282</sup> However, the declaration of a political party as a criminal organization and the sentencing of active MPs and members of the European Parliament is considered historic, and the trial itself is frequently described as the largest Nazi trial since Nuremberg.<sup>283</sup>

## TRENDS and STATISTICS

In order to fully comprehend the violence that members of Golden Dawn were capable of, one must look further into the group’s history. Golden Dawn members have proven since the 90s that they were capable of severe assaults and murders, targeting individuals that they deemed “undesirable”, mainly immigrants, and university students and professors that had ties with leftist organizations. The following is a brief selection of criminal assaults and homicides, for which members of the organization were convicted:

- 1999 - 23-year-old Konstantinos Kazakos murdered two immigrants, and cause grievous bodily harm to 7 more, stating that the cause of his crime was the fact

that his victims “were black and Muslims”.<sup>284</sup> He is currently serving two life sentences.

- 2013 – 29-year-old Dionysis Liakopoulos and 27-year-old Christos Stergiopoulos attacked and killed 27-year-old Pakistani Sahzat Lukman. This crime was included in the Golden Dawn trial, and both perpetrators are currently serving life sentences.
- 2013 - 34-year-old musician Pavlos Fyssas is murdered by George Roupakias.<sup>285</sup> This crime was instrumental into declaring the political party as a criminal organization and prosecuting and convicting 15 Golden Dawn members for the crime. In September 2013 Fyssas with a group of friends were watching a football match, and during the course of the game there were heated arguments with another group of people sitting in the same cafe. This second group were members of Golden Dawn, who called for back-up from their local Golden Dawn “nucleus”, who in turn assembled a Battalion Group. The local nucleus then contacted elected MP Ioannis Lagos, who had publicly stated that when he will give the order, “everything that moves, will be slaughtered. More than 30 people followed the call, and assaulted the group in the cafe with knives and bats. It took police 4 minutes to respond, and they found the victim in a pool of blood, stabbed three times in the chest and legs. The victim, Pavlos Fyssas, was able to point to his assailant, before dying. In their investigation the police found telephone conversations and congratulatory text messages from the perpetrator all the way up to the leader of the organization, including elected MP Ioannis Lagos, and leader of the political party Mihalis Mihaloliakos.<sup>286</sup> This chain of messages was sufficient to prove in court the involvement of the political party leadership, to declare Golden Dawn as a criminal organization, and to carry out the sentences for the individuals involved.

The activity of Golden Dawn started in the late 90s, with the organization to carry out the most attacks and criminal actions between 2011-2015, the years when the economic sanctions imposed on Greece were the most severe. Since the murder of Pavlos Fyssas the attacks carried out by members of Golden Dawn slowed down, until 2020 when the political party was declared as a criminal organization. Since the convictions of the party leadership, there has only been one attack in 2021, carried out by minors.

## **Legal and illegal FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES and NETWORKS**

Following the 2012 national election, when 21 MPs from Golden Dawn were elected for the first time since the group’s creation, the party became eligible to receive state funding. In 2013, Golden Dawn was due to receive 873.114,83 € from the State.<sup>287</sup>

According to Greek legislation at the time, political parties that have either elected MPs or have won at least 1,5% of the popular vote in the most recent elections are eligible to receive state funding (subsidy) according to the provisions of the Law 3023/2002.<sup>288</sup>

Part of the 2013 subsidy was suspended after the arrest of the leadership of the group. According to the relevant legislation, in the event of criminal prosecution and the imposition of temporary detention of a party leader or one-fifth of a party's deputies for the offenses of organized crime, etc., state funding and financial support is temporarily suspended.<sup>289</sup>

It remains unclear how the party financed its activities prior to 2012, and very little is known about the sources, if any, used to finance its political activities.

An experienced investigator, member of the elite team of the financial crimes unit of the ministry of finance, speaking on the condition of anonymity, expressed the view that the data collected during preliminary investigations in 2013 regarding the legal expenses claimed by the Golden Dawn accountants showed amounts that could not justify the activities carried out by the organization, including the frequently organized food handouts "for Greek only"<sup>290</sup> that Golden Dawn members used as a tool to win the hearts and minds of the residents in areas with low socio-economic status.

Upon the arrest of the leaderships of the Golden Dawn in 2013, prosecutors and competent authorities launch a detailed investigation aiming at tracking down potential suspicious money transactions in an effort to determine whether the money spent to set up the party in the way it was organized came from illegal activities. In particular, the investigation led by the judicial authorities focused on whether money laundering was committed by the group's members and/or leadership. Allegations and information showing that the groups funded itself through mafia-style criminal activities; in particular, it was claimed<sup>291</sup> that Golden Dawn was involved in protection rings, blackmail, trafficking and off-shore money laundering that secured the group vast amount of money to finance their activities. An important source of income for the group was a rather unusual method: members of the group had created the so-called "raid battalions"<sup>292</sup> against their political opponents, and then they rented out select individuals or entire battalions, to whoever wanted to rent them for a fee, usually night club owners or businesses<sup>293</sup>.

After the trial of the members of the Golden Dawn was concluded in October 2020, despite the fact that nearly all of the defendants received multi-year prison sentences as either leaders or members of an organized criminal group, none of them was found guilty of money laundering.

Last but not least, allegations<sup>294</sup> regarding potential funding of Golden Dawn by far-rights in Russia, Greek and Russian businessmen have surfaced but without any

judicial or criminal implications to this date, and select reports date the funding of Golden Dawn as early as 1996 from the political party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.<sup>295</sup> In 2015, European Parliament Golden Dawn members released statements in support to the Russian war in Crimea<sup>296</sup>

## **Transnational CONNECTIONS and ACTIVITIES**

The crimes that Golden Dawn has committed do not appear to be financially motivated. From the very early years of its creation, key figures of Golden Dawn, among whom Nikos Michaloliakos stands out, appeared keen to establish relations with foreign entities, political parties and other far-right figures. In 1996, at the invitation of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the far-right Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Golden Dawn joined the “Patriotic International” (Patrintern), a coalition of European far-right organizations. In the past, the party maintained contacts with the American National Alliance. More recently, in 2014,<sup>297</sup> Zhirinovskiy expressed his undivided support and solidarity for Golden Dawn and personally for the imprisoned general secretary N. Michaloliakos. In a letter addressed personally to Michaloliakos, he sets as a key priority the tightening of relations between the two parties, LDPR and Golden Dawn, with the ultimate goal of promoting Greek-Russian cooperation.

Golden Dawn maintained ties to the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany, as well as the Italian neo-fascist New Force party. In addition, Golden Dawn maintained relations with the German neo-Nazi organization Freies Netz Süd and its successor Der Dritte Weg.<sup>298</sup>

Although the leadership of Golden Dawn tried to establish relations with other radical right parties across Europe, this effort did not materialize.<sup>299</sup> Furthermore, an attempted approach between the French far-right political party National Party and Golden Dawn did not produce any tangible results.<sup>300</sup> Overall, the network of political entities that affiliated themselves with Golden Dawn was fairly limited and included groups that express far-right/neo-Nazi ideas.

During the 90s, an attempt was made to create a network of fascist parties in Europe. In Greece, Golden Dawn attempted to organize summer festivals to invite far-right parties from across Europe without success. However, Golden Dawn had started to approach neo-Nazis and far-right parties in various regions of Europe.<sup>301</sup> Those bonds had started to strengthen after the election of Golden Dawn MP in 2012. In 2013, Dynamo Kyiv fans would raise banners for the murdered members of Golden Dawn<sup>302</sup> Fundulis and Capelonis, while Ukrainian neo-Nazis would organize a solidarity rally.

However, the ties of Golden Dawn with Ukrainian and Russian neo-Nazis seem to be deeper and long-standing. In 2013, a march was held in the Ukrainian city of

Lviv. Among the crowd stands out a group of people with white hoods, evidence of presence of far-right elements. Two flags stand out; the Greek and the Golden Dawn ones.<sup>303</sup>

Moreover, the Svoboda party, the armed wing of which is the infamous Ukrainian Right Sector, sent representatives to the sister Cypriot party of Golden Dawn, ELAM, which, in fact, dedicated an honorary event to them.<sup>304</sup> This was the period when the extreme right in Ukraine occupied the fourth place in the parliamentary elections. The event was welcomed by Nikos Michaloliakos, leader of the Golden Dawn who emphasized the brotherly relations of the three neo-Nazi parties. However, quite recently the Cypriot far-right party ELAM denounced Golden Dawn and declared that they these two parties are no longer related in any way.<sup>305</sup>

## **Governmental and societal RESPONSE**

In recent years, policy makers and legislators target VRWE by creating a strong legislative foundation to tackle multiple facets of organized crime and terrorist activities. In particular, internet and social media channels that are crucial in the recruitment and spreading of a radicalized group's ideology are identified in legislation, and means to curtail their effect have recently passed into law.<sup>306</sup> In addition, a national counter-terrorism and violent extremism strategy is currently in the drafting process, intending to function as a live strategic and policy document and to efficiently address the phenomena, also in terms of prevention.<sup>307</sup> Further, in 2020 national legislation was passed that addressed support and restitution to the victims of terrorist activities, and finally, in 2018, a law was passed aiming at the prevention and suppression of money laundering and terrorist financing<sup>308</sup>. In Greece, the primary actor presented here, Golden Dawn, received funding through legal means, party memberships, the salaries of MPs and sponsorships. Many researchers view this tactic as a misuse of a democratic party system, that allowed for the financing of a political party that idolized former dictatorial regimes.<sup>309</sup>

In Greece, there is a multi-agency agency called the Hellenic Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) whose mission is combatting money laundering (the legalization of proceeds from criminal activities) and terrorist financing, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction financing, and assisting in the security and sustainability of fiscal and financing stability.<sup>310</sup> This Authority is presided by an acting Public Prosecutor to the Supreme Court. There are three individual units in this agency, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), the Financial Sanctions Unit (FSU), and the Source of Funds Investigation Unit (SFIU). In particular, the 2018 FIU Annual Statement reported that they amount of money they froze for tax evasion was € 181.305.094, for capital market protection € 20.541.961, for criminal organisation €18.026.280, for smuggling € 822.916, for bribery € 53.247, amounting to a total amount of € 227.842.680

frozen. Further, within the Hellenic Police, there is a Financial Crime Unit, which investigates both organized financial crimes, supports the investigations of money laundering.<sup>311</sup>

The 2019 mutual evaluation report of the FATF concerning the anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing measures adopted by Greece marks a significant increase in total requests for investigations, from 254 total requests in 2014, to 2008 in 2018.<sup>312</sup> In addition, the same document reports that financing of domestic terrorism in Greece from illegal activities is typically found in leftist/anarchist extremist groups that use theft or robbery. Further, although financing through the illegal trafficking of migrants is reported, there are no conclusive investigations that led to successful prosecutions of VRWE groups to date.

The prosecution of Golden Dawn, the primary VRWE actor in Greece, and the gradual normalization of the socio-economic environment shifted citizens' involvement back towards more mainstream channels for both formal political parties as well as informal groups. The prosecution of Golden Dawn led to the dissolution of the political party, leaving a void, that other, smaller VRWE groups are struggling to fill, but with very limited success up to this point.<sup>313</sup>

Many civic societies and private citizens in Greece followed closely the 5-year Golden Dawn trial, are currently following the appeal process. The Golden Dawn Watch initiative was launched to monitor the Golden Dawn trial, by the Hellenic Union for Human Rights, the Observatory for Fascist and Racist Speech in the Media operating under the Educational Foundation of ESIEA, the Anti-Fascist Coordination of Athens-Piraeus and the Immigrant Integration Council of the Municipality of Athens. Their dedicated members provided live tweets during the trial, and their website has a complete account of all court documents.<sup>314</sup>

# Poland

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## DEFINITIONS and HISTORY

There are only a few legal provisions that can be applied to the fight against extremism in Poland. In Polish legislation, there are only two definitions which are essential for the fight against extremism and are frequently used by government institutions dealing with this issue: A terrorist offense<sup>315</sup> and an organized group or association to commit a crime.<sup>316</sup> There are no definitions of extremism, right-wing extremism, violent right-wing extremism, or right-wing terrorism codified in Polish legal acts. Consequently, the following articles of the Polish Penal Code are most often used in the context of court trials concerning extremism:

- The crime of extermination (genocide)<sup>317</sup>
- Preparing for and praising the crime of genocide<sup>318</sup>
- Preparing for the crime of extermination<sup>319</sup>
- Public praise or incitement to commit crimes<sup>320</sup>
- Violence and unlawful threats<sup>321</sup>
- Promoting fascism, other totalitarian regimes and hatred<sup>322</sup>
- Insulting a group or person, violating the physical integrity of a person due to belonging to a specific social group<sup>323</sup>.

Laws related to hate speech and crimes related to extremism, such as genocide or its praise or preparation and insulting a social group, are used primarily to prosecute extremists.

The only provision of the Polish Penal Code that relates explicitly to extremism is Article 256, penalizing promoting fascist or other totalitarian regimes and hatred based on national, ethnic, racial, or religious differences.<sup>324</sup> However, according to this article it is only forbidden to promote a system. It is not illegal to promote an ideology, which causes a problem for the prosecutor's office in proving that we are dealing with promoting such a system and not the expression of political thought itself. Furthermore, the third paragraph of Article 256 states that: "the perpetrator of the prohibited act does not commit an offense if he has committed this act as

part of an artistic, educational, collector's, or scientific activity."<sup>325</sup> Using this as a justification is the typical line that defendants take. Furthermore, the work of the police, prosecutor's office, and the Internal Security Agency lacks working definitions of critical terms for the fight against VRWE. Judgments are issued based on very general readings of the provisions contained in the penal code. Issues such as the fascist, communist, or other totalitarian systems are not further legally defined. This forces the prosecution to look for experts in trials or refer to jurisprudence. Consequently each trial, even if it is based on similar evidence, can take a completely different course, as the case law is not binding in Poland when issuing a judgment. Expert opinions presented in the trial serve only as guidelines for the judges.

It is important to understand the context of this approach in Poland. In the Polish political system there are numerous small extremist right-wing organizations, such as: National Rebirth of Poland (NOP),<sup>326</sup> National-Radical Camp (ONR),<sup>327</sup> Independence March Association (SMN),<sup>328</sup> Social Alternative (SA), Third Way (TD), Polish Labour (PP),<sup>329</sup> Nationalist South, Niklot,<sup>330</sup> Zadruga<sup>331</sup> the Polish section of Blood and Honour, as well as groups of radicalized football hooligans (mainly clubs: Jagiellonia Białystok, Lechia Gdańsk, Wisła Kraków, Śląsk Wrocław).

An additional problem of the Polish extremist scene is the lack of any clearly visible dividing line between the extremist right-wing and mainstream right-wing organizations, which allows for practically seamless transition of both people and ideas from extremist circles into more mainstream politics. The far-right media is also in a strong position, ranging from nationalist to neo-fascist media, including several dozen outlets. They produce an ethno-nationalist vision of Poland's internal and foreign policy, attack the LGBT minority, the European Union, Germany, Muslims, and migrants. Radical ethno-nationalist networks are also anti-Semitic and in favor of political violence.

From 2000-2015, the most prominent nationalist demonstration in Europe also developed in Poland – the Independence March event organized by the Independence March Association. In 2018 the March reached its highest attendance to date with 250,000 participants,<sup>332</sup> At the same time, by moving closer to the Law and Justice Party (PIS), its organizers obtained EUR 1.5 million in public subsidies in 2020-2022.<sup>333</sup> As a result, some entities from the list above also received additional support. In Poland, from 2000-2015, the media publicized numerous minor cases of cooperation between VRWE and OC.<sup>334</sup> Such cooperation concerned mainly football hooligans and their participation in criminal groups<sup>335</sup> and acts of violence, both physical and verbal, against footballers<sup>336</sup> or tourists<sup>337</sup> with a skin color other than white. Furthermore, some VRWE groups developed international ties with similar gangs from outside Poland.<sup>338</sup> Bands of hooligans distributed illegal drugs,<sup>339</sup> organized bouncers for clubs, provided security guards to organized crime groups, controlled brothels or were involved racketeering and extortion schemes targeting club owners and prostitutes.<sup>340</sup> VRWE individuals are members of several criminal

groups. They primarily are involved as “foot soldiers” or “muscle men”. This tendency has been visible since the 1990s when members of the skinhead subculture played such roles, often active as stadium hooligans. This was the case in Gdańsk<sup>341</sup>, Warsaw<sup>342</sup>, Białystok<sup>343</sup>, Kraków<sup>344</sup>, and Wrocław<sup>345</sup>.

As time passed and the nazi-skinhead subculture disappeared, some former soldiers rose to prominence and became important gang members, especially when the first generation of mafia leaders after 1989 were either in prison or dead. Currently, the penetration of politically radicalized hooligans into organized crime groups is also visible. They take on similar roles as in the early 1990s - bouncers in clubs, muscle men, etc., except for Gdańsk and Białystok where they took over criminal structures all the way up to the level of bosses. On the other hand, drugs were brought to Poland using the contacts of football hooligans and motorcycle gangs led by VRWE individuals (e.g., from Ajax Amsterdam hooligans to Cracovia Kraków and Wisła Kraków hooligans<sup>346</sup>). VRWE groups also controlled the smuggling of drugs from partners of organized crime groups outside Poland (such as for example in Gdańsk),<sup>347</sup> cigarettes (in Wrocław, Gdańsk, Kraków<sup>348</sup>), and smuggling of undocumented migrants to the EU (by the hooligans Piast Gliwice, Górnik Zabrze, and Ruch Chorzów).<sup>349</sup>

Two significant cases were also widely publicized. These concern gangs controlling the VRWE underground in Białystok<sup>350</sup> and Gdańsk<sup>351</sup>. In these cases VRWE groups were not only subcontracted by criminal organizations but took control of the local criminal world in Białystok and Gdańsk. In both cities, neo-Nazis became the leaders of the criminal groups and their key members. In the case of Gdańsk, this emerged since 2009<sup>352</sup>, and in the case of Białystok - since 2006<sup>353</sup>. In these cities neo-Nazi groups controlled the illegal drug distribution, illegal prostitution, drug, cigarette, and alcohol smuggling, human trafficking, racketeering targeting clubs and prostitutes, and were responsible for violent assaults and murders.<sup>354</sup> Not only did Nazis control the criminal underground in these cities, their members also organized concerts of neo-Nazi bands, created neo-Nazi graffiti,<sup>355</sup> attacked non-white people,<sup>356</sup> members of the LGBT community,<sup>357</sup> anti-fascists<sup>358</sup> and non-radicalized football fans,<sup>359</sup> and attacked and committed arson against places associated with ethnic<sup>360</sup> and religious<sup>361</sup> and sexual minorities.

## **KEY PLAYERS and LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The main VRWE groups in Poland after 2015 are:

- National Guard Association (SSN)<sup>362</sup> National-Radical Camp (ONR)<sup>363</sup> Association for Tradition and Culture Niklot (Niklot)<sup>364</sup> National Rebirth of Poland (NOP)<sup>365</sup> Social Alternative (SA)

- Blood & Honour, Praca Polska (PP)<sup>366</sup> Trzecia Droga (TD), Falanga<sup>367</sup> Nationalist Association Zadruga (Zadruga)<sup>368</sup> Rodacy-Kamraci<sup>369</sup> The main VRWE networks with a flatter hierarchy and less internal structures are:
  - Football hooligans from the „Right-wing Jagiellonia” (Białystok),<sup>370</sup> Wisła Sharks (Krakow),<sup>371</sup> Hooligans of the Free City (Gdańsk)<sup>372</sup> Bad Company motorcycle group (Gdańsk)<sup>373</sup> Duma i Nowoczesność association (Upper Silesia)<sup>374</sup> An informal association of neo-fascists from the south called Poland Nationalist South
  - The neo-fascist magazine “Szturm”<sup>375</sup> and the Stormtrooper movement The neo-fascist portal Autonom.pl and the autonomous nationalist movement that supports the portal<sup>376</sup> The neopagan religious group Rodzima Wiara.<sup>377</sup> The high level of fragmentation and decentralization of these networks, combined with their affinity with violence, facilitates their ties with criminal circles. Many VRWE individuals occupy high-ranking positions in their gangs, including being the leaders of the leading criminal organization in the city. Not only are they overlaps in their membership, VRWE networks and OC groups developed together.

For example, in Gdańsk and Białystok VRWE and OC structures coalesced to such an extent that they have formed a single structure for years (in Białystok since 2006<sup>378</sup>, in Gdańsk since 2009<sup>379</sup>). There is also a clear connection with football hooligans and motorcycle gangs. For example, ex nazi- skinhead and active participant of Blood and Honour network Olgierd L. aka “Olo” is the informal leader of the Bad Company motorcycle gang<sup>380</sup> and a leader of Gdansk’s OC organization. His daughter Bianka L. is one of the leaders of the autonomous nationalist community and the stormtrooper movement in Gdańsk.<sup>381</sup> Other examples are the neo-Nazi VRWE Grzegorz H. aka “Śledziu”. He has five swastikas and Adolf Hitlers’ face are tattooed on his body<sup>382</sup> and declares himself as neo-pagan.<sup>383</sup> Tomasz P.<sup>384</sup> aka “Dragon” and Adam S. aka “Staszyn”, are leaders of the hooligan circles in their cities (respectively Gdańsk and Białystok).

The criminal hooligan group Prawicowa Jagiellonia, controlled by Tomasz P. and Adam S.<sup>385</sup> cooperates with the Białystok neofascist ONR brigade<sup>386</sup> and the National Hajnówka<sup>387</sup> nationalist group. Their leaders are active participants in the Blood & Honour network, use the brands and logos of this network and participate in concerts organized by this network. At the same time, many VRWE groups try to present themselves as “patriots” and, in parallel to criminal activities, establish legal organizations such as the Gryf Północy Foundation<sup>388</sup> and Sergiusz Piasecki Foundation (Gdańsk)<sup>389</sup> and the Dzieci Białegostoku (Białystok).<sup>390</sup> Some ongoing investigations were phased out. Examples are: the case against the Ultras Silesia gang in Wrocław,<sup>391</sup> the case against the Patriotyczna Jagiellonia gang in Białystok,<sup>392</sup> or the case against the NOP party in Warsaw. In practice, if such cases are brought to

court, they are approached as criminal cases, and the political aspects are ignored, or they end up in separate cases concerning mainly ethnic or religious hate crimes.

A good illustration of this tendency in Poland is Białystok. Here a local VRWE gang seized power over local organized crime after defeating their local opponent – a group of apolitical hooligans, the “Praetorians.” During the power struggle the leader of the “Praetorians” was killed,<sup>393</sup> many people were injured.<sup>394</sup> Subsequently, a group called “Patriotyczna Jagiellonia”, known locally as “skinheads”, took power in 2007. This allowed them to recruit new members, push their members in the positions of bouncers in the city’s clubs, control drug distribution, and run extortion and racketeering schemes. The leaders of this group, Tomasz P. aka “Dragon,” Adam S., aka “Staszyn,” Herbert Ż aka “Herbciak,” Krzysztof G., aka “Litwin,” Dominik G. aka “Grucha,” and Artur W. aka “Wiatrak” all are active neo-Nazis.<sup>395</sup> They belong to the Blood & Honor network and openly use the networks brand, logos and badges, including the Totenkopf symbol and swastikas. Concurrently to this power grab of neo-Nazis over the criminal underworld in Białystok, a wave of attacks on non-white persons,<sup>396</sup> anti-fascists,<sup>397</sup> Muslims,<sup>398</sup> and immigrants occurred.<sup>399</sup> This also included arson attacks against the homes of migrants,<sup>400</sup> vandalism against the cultural premises of ethnic<sup>401</sup> and sexual minorities. Anti-Semitic graffiti<sup>402</sup> appeared in Białystok and the surrounding area, and in the stadium of the club. At the group’s clubhouse, Blood and Honor flags were displayed,<sup>403</sup> Neo-Nazi concerts began to be organized in the city.<sup>404</sup> According to media reports, criminal cases against this network were mishandled due to close contacts between police officers, neo-Nazis and prosecutors. As a reaction, a team from outside the region took over the investigation after the direct intervention of the minister of the interior.<sup>405</sup> This resulted in convictions for several leaders for incitement to commit a crime,<sup>406</sup> beating,<sup>407</sup> pimping,<sup>408</sup> and murder.<sup>409</sup>

## TRENDS and STATISTICS

Official data on hate crimes in Poland denotes considerably fewer incidents when compared with local media reports. This is because many crimes are not reported, and acts of violence are not classified as hate crimes by the police. According to official data 826 cases occurred in 2020. Of these, 374 cases were prosecuted and a conviction was obtained in 266 cases.<sup>410</sup> The numbers presented here refer to police investigations initiated for hate crimes. Incidents of hate speech were not taken into account. There were 100 physical attacks, 109 incitements to violence, and 63 punishable threats. Hate crimes were most often experienced by people from Sub-Saharan Africa (43%), followed by Ukrainians (18.5%) and Muslims (8%). For all groups, insults were the most common type of hate incident. 38% of which targeted people from Sub-Saharan Africa, 17% targeted Ukrainians, and 7% Muslims. The most frequent victims of physical aggression were people from Sub-Saharan Africa (17%).<sup>411</sup> At the same time, after the brutal attacks of football hooligans against

the Pride parade in Białystok, in which several hundred attackers participated, only 20 charges were brought forward.<sup>412</sup> This demonstrates the low percentage of cases that go to court in such incidents. In addition, several individuals involved in the VRWE hooligan gang in Białystok were charged with crimes committed for financial reasons<sup>413</sup>. Similar challenges can be observed in other Polish cities, especially those in eastern Poland. In Lublin, a radicalized married couple tried to set off an explosive during the Pride parade.<sup>414</sup> Only due to their ineptitude, no casualties occurred. Pro-Russian nationalists from the groups Falanga and the Camp of Great Poland (OWP) are responsible for several attacks on Ukrainian memorial sites in Poland<sup>415</sup> and at least one terrorist act in Ukraine, where they attacked a Hungarian cultural center in a false flag operation, trying to inflame Ukrainian-Hungarian relations.<sup>416</sup>

However, VRWE associated with the OC were convicted primarily for crimes motivated by financial means and related to the activities of gangs.<sup>417</sup> In Poland, the prosecutor's office, in cooperation with the police and the Internal Security Agency, classifies cases as financially or politically motivated. Although in fact, the first screening is carried out by the police through their investigations and evidence collection. In reality, the underfunding of the police, the lack of appropriate training and awareness, and in extreme cases, the tolerance of police officers towards right wing extremism means that many cases are qualified only as financially motivated crimes without taking their violent extremist context into account.

Media outlets and NGOs dealing with this issue are critical concerning the validity of the official data. They argue that it is very likely skewed due to biases or lack of awareness or training on how to adequately classify the motivation of the (suspected) perpetrator. Large national media such as the daily "Gazeta Wyborcza",<sup>418</sup> weekly magazines "Polityka"<sup>419</sup> or "Przegląd",<sup>420</sup> television stations "TVN"<sup>421</sup> or portals such as Onet<sup>422</sup> or WP<sup>423</sup> have repeatedly indicated that the data on such attacks are underestimated, and that the rates are higher. NGOs, such as the "Never Again" Association,<sup>424</sup> or the Institute of Social Safety<sup>425</sup>, argue similarly. Following the peak in the 1990s and the decline in the zero years of the 20th century, there is an increase in such attacks between 2007 and 2022. Again, a good example is Białystok and the attack on the Pride parade in 2019.

## **Legal and illegal FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES and NETWORKS**

Initially, in the nineties, the contacts between OC and VRWE were strictly business contacts. Aggressive skinheads joined the ranks of criminal groups as rank-and-file members. However, concurrently with the development of sports hooligan groups (infiltrated in large part by activists and supporters of extremist ideologies) and the replacement of the first generation of the Polish mafia by new players after 1989, the growing importance of mixed OC-VRWE groups became more visible. This included the replacement of local mafia structures by VRWE networks

in Gdańsk and Białystok. This new ideological element within the crime groups in Gdańsk and Białystok supported group cohesion, providing additional motivation, beyond financial gain. In addition, infiltration of these criminal groups by undercover officers and finding “repentant” witnesses became significantly more challenging for law enforcement. Other criminal groups realized that this was as an effective and successful defense strategy and began to transform, adding an ideological element. For example, neo-Nazi criminal groups emerged in Wrocław, Częstochowa, Poznań or Kraków. However, according to informants from within these groups, they are much weaker than their counterparts in Gdańsk or Białystok. The groups in Gdańsk or Białystok use the entire set of mechanisms typically of OC: money laundering through the purchase of real estate, tax evasion, selling of illegal drugs, illegal prostitution, smuggling of contraband (drugs, cigarettes), selling of counterfeited goods, and organized theft.<sup>426</sup> Concurrently, there is also a significant increase in hate crimes in the vicinity of Białystok, Gdańsk, and Wrocław. This includes assaults and beatings of non-white people, attacks on institutions related to ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, as well as an increase in the number of concerts by neo-Nazi bands, the number of extreme right-wing demonstrations and neo-Nazi, xenophobic and anti-Semitic graffiti. Especially in these regions, there is an increase in the number of legitimate businesses owned by extremists. These relate primarily to the management of clothing brands and music labels, including the sale of the respective merchandise, the organization of festivals, and concerts, as well as the ownership of tattoo studios and book publishing. For example, Grzegorz H. the neo-Nazi leader of the hooligan group Lechia Gdańsk and a member of the Gdańsk gang led by the neo-Nazi Olgierd L., is the owner of the Gungnir clothing brand referring to Norse mythology and legends about Vikings.

At the same time he is one of the patrons of the neopagan festival of folk / pagan metal in Gdańsk, the Pommerania Festival.<sup>427</sup> Filip F., a supporter of the Silesian branch of Blood and Honor, is also the owner of the neo-Nazi clothing brand Keep it White. Jakub S., aka “Sadek,” is the founder of the radically nationalist organization Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, and the owner of the nationalist clothing company Pro Patriae.<sup>428</sup> Krzysztof K., aka “Kwiatek,” a member of the Blood & Honor network, manages neo-Nazi bands under the Strong Survive Records label in Lublin. According to a well-informed source within the milieu, their music albums are co-financed by the American white nationalist label Resistance Records, which subsequently releases these music albums in the US, including through the US-label SS Records.

Another key member of B&H Wojciech C., aka “Ciepły,” is the owner of the tattoo studio “Valhalla” in the same town. For thirty years, Tadeusz B., from Gdynia, who has been a central player in the revival of the NS music scene in Poland, releases extremist music under the brand “Odłam Skiny.”<sup>429</sup> In Wrocław, Krzysztof W., aka “Raborym,” publishes and sells albums under the brand Lower Silesian Stronghold.<sup>430</sup>

He also plays in the band Dark Fury, which performed at the Asgardrei festival in the Ukraine.<sup>431</sup> Other important labels for extremist music include Olifant Records, Radical Voice, and Eastside Slavonic Identity. The main organizers of neo-Nazi concerts are primarily members of the informal Club 28: Krzysztof S., Piotr G., and Marek B.<sup>432</sup> Bands from the Blood & Honor network also perform at the festivals “Orle Gniazdo” (Silesia and surroundings of Łódź),<sup>433</sup> “Ku Niepodległej” (Warsaw)<sup>434</sup> and “Unity is strength” (Ostróda), all of which are branded as “patriotic” events. They also appear at the folk / pagan metal music festival in Gdańsk - Pomerania Fest.<sup>435</sup> Extremists also own the mixed martial arts (MMA) Fanga club in Warsaw.<sup>436</sup> Their books are published by the following publishing houses: Triglav, Nortom, 3 Dom, Prohibita, and Capital Book.

There is also a dense network of nominally “patriotic” entities, such as the Gryf Północny Foundation or the Dzieci Białegostoku association, which regularly take part in grant competitions organized by local authorities, the Ministry of Culture and Education and serve as a transmission belt for contacts between extremists and right-wing politicians from the mainstream.<sup>437</sup> Extremists recruit new members among the participants of festivals, concerts, and sports events. These environments allow the connection between participants and groups of sports hooligans, including those working for OC. Funds obtained through legal businesses are deployed by extremists to further develop their publishing houses, media outlets and clothing companies, which in turn promote extremist ideology. Therefore, rather than for personal gain, funds from extremist controlled legal businesses are primarily used for the development of the movement, as well as in the further ideological training of young people. They also allow for the organization of events, such as meetings, concerts, festivals and tournaments, which in turn are crucial for the growth of the movement through the recruitment of new and younger members.

It is important to note that the strongest expression of this trend can be observed where the interlinkage between OC and VRWE in Poland is the closest. In these areas, significantly higher amount of funds are available for VRWE activities, since income from illegal criminal activities is generally higher than income from legal businesses run by extremists. For example, the primary concert areas of neo-Nazi music in Poland are the regions of Pomerania (Gdańsk),<sup>438</sup> Podlasie (Białystok, Hajnówka),<sup>439</sup> and Lower Silesia (Wrocław, Dzierżoniów, Bielawa).<sup>440</sup> There the VRWE-connected OC networks are the largest, and criminal groups are heavily infiltrated or even dominated by VRWE.

## Transnational CONNECTIONS and ACTIVITIES

Transnational contacts of Polish VRWE operating in the field of organized crime do not significantly extend beyond the borders of Poland. The key transnational activities of VRWE groups in cooperation with OC are primarily focused on drug smuggling (motorcycle gangs such as Bad Company,<sup>441</sup> Lechia Gdańsk hooligans,<sup>442</sup> and Wisła Kraków hooligans<sup>443</sup>), undocumented migrant smuggling into the EU (Wisła Kraków hooligans,<sup>444</sup> Górnik Zabrze, GKS Katowice, Piast Gliwice<sup>445</sup>), human trafficking (Olgiard L.'s gang)<sup>446</sup> and the organization of neo-Nazi concerts.<sup>447</sup> Also Ultras Beskid Andrychów and Ultras Beskid'08 (u) have connections with the VRWE hooligan/ultra-group "Inferno Cottbus 99"<sup>448</sup> in Brandenburg, Germany. Several members of "Inferno Cottbus 99" are suspected of being involved in organized crime, including dealing with illegal drugs (see Germany country chapter).

As mentioned above, Club 28 plays a central role in the organization of neo-Nazi concerts in Poland. Club 28 operates in the region of Lower Silesia (leaders: Krzysztof S., Piotr G., and Marek B.).<sup>449</sup> In last ten years, Club 28 organized at least a dozen concerts in Poland that served as a meeting platform for neo-Nazis from all over Europe: The British Isles, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Hungary, but also from the United States, Russia, Ukraine, and Estonia.<sup>450</sup> The Polish VRWE actors like Krzysztof S. aka "Słowik", Piotr G. aka "Dziki" and Marek B. have met in the past with the German VRWE actors like Michael Hein from Frankfurt (Oder), Marko Gottschalk from Dortmund and Tommy Frenck from Thuringia, mainly in the context of concerts. Marek B. is also the owner of two brothels in Wrocław.<sup>451</sup> MMA tournaments were also a meeting hub for the transnational VRWE milieu. Here the key connection has been the Finnish MMA fighter Niko Puhakka. He befriended Olgiard L. from Gdansk and Grzegorz H. from Sopot. Puhakka also maintains connections into the Blood and Honour milieu, and plays a key role in connecting OC/VRWE groups with Scandinavian counterparts. In March 2019, he participated in a birthday party of the Bad Company motorcycle club from Gdańsk, whose informal leader is the aforementioned OC boss from Gdansk Olgiard L.<sup>452</sup> The Polish VRWE actors like Krzysztof S. aka "Słowik", Piotr G. aka "Dziki", Grzegorz J. aka "Jastrząb" and Marek B. have met in the past with the Russian VRWE actors like Constantine B. aka "Truvor"<sup>453</sup> and Alexey Mstivoy,<sup>454</sup> and Ukrainian Arseniy Klimachev aka "Bilodub".<sup>455</sup>

The cooperation between these circles takes place during music festivals (e.g., Hot Shower in Milan, Italy, Asgardrei in Kyiv, Ukraine, or Orle Gniazdo, Poland) which they all attend, at rallies of motorcycle groups, through football hooligans in stadiums, at MMA tournaments (including First to Fight in Poland, Tana delle Tigri in Italy, Kampf der Nibelungen in Germany) or during the conference and meetings of the organization (held, among others, in: Warsaw<sup>456</sup>, Kyiv<sup>457</sup>, Riesa<sup>458</sup>).

The most substantial ideological ties link Polish extremists with counterparts in

Italy, Hungary, Ukraine, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, and Serbia. Individual sympathies determine the relationship between Polish football hooligans and those from the Netherlands and Italy and personal relationships with those from Germany. Such contacts are also facilitated by a lack of language barriers, especially when these contacts are maintained through the Polish expatriate communities in the United Kingdom, Norway, Ireland, Germany, Belarus, and Ukraine. Geographic proximity determines contacts with extremists from Germany, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Hungary, Sweden, and Norway. However, no common crime related connection between these contacts and Polish VRWE-linked criminal groups has been observed, only connected with RAC, hate core and NSBN concert organization.

### **Governmental and societal RESPONSE**

In Poland, only two VRWE organizations have been dissolved in the last thirty years - ONR Brzeg<sup>459</sup> and Duma i Nowoczesność.<sup>460</sup> Both were dissolved for administrative and financial reasons, not because of their involvement in acts of violence. All other attempts to dissolve extremist organizations have failed. The dissolution of such organizations, or the creation of an official list of VRWE organizations in Poland encounters many obstacles.<sup>461</sup> Therefore it is unlikely that the dissolution of an organization is going to be a frequently used tool in the future. Poland has no national security strategy explicitly addressing RWE and VRWE groups. The P / CVE anti-terrorist activities are broadly defined by the Terrorism Prevention Center of the Internal Security Agency (Polish counterintelligence), and the ABW Anti-Terrorist Center. Advisory functions are performed by the Interministerial Team for Terrorist Threats, the College for Special Services and the Government Crisis Management Team.

Operational responsibility lies with authorities that have a counter terrorism mandate, such as ABW, the Foreign Intelligence Agency, the police and border service, the Military Counterintelligence Service, the Military Intelligence Service, the Military Police, the State Protection Service, the Government Security Center, the State Guard, the Ministry of National Defense, the General Inspector of Financial Information, the customs and fiscal services, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Public Prosecutor's Office, the National Security Bureau, and local government bodies. However, these are primarily oriented toward threats initiated by third countries or international religious terrorist groups.

Relevant financial issues concerning VRWE activities are examined by the financial supervision authorities and the prosecutor's office with a focus on analyzing whether a criminal offense was committed. RWE and VRWE elements of such cases are normally not included. There are also no specialized government task forces that include tax authorities investigating possible illegal financial activities and networks. Also, police units focusing on politically motivated and financially motivated crimes

do not cooperate on VRWE / OC cases. A notable exception is the case of Białystok in 2007-2015. Therefore, in Poland, policymakers and security agencies are not fully aware and generally not prepared to address the (illegal) financial activities of VRWE actors.

The attention of the secret services is focused primarily on the jihadist terrorist threat, and it was only Russia's invasion of Ukraine that focused more attention on VRWE issues. This is mainly due to the involvement of VRWE on both sides of the conflict. This means that operational activities directed in this context have a history of only one year and internal expertise within investigative authorities has not yet fully developed. Polish counterintelligence, the Internal Security Agency, plays a critical role in this context. It conducts investigations when an operation against a group or individual suspected of criminal activities also involves extremist ideology. A multiagency approach has not developed as a standard operational methodology in Poland to date.

An advantage in Poland is the frequent publication of cases of VRWE and OC cooperation by the media and non-governmental organizations. Media outlets such as *Gazeta Wyborcza*,<sup>462</sup> *Krytyka Polityczna*,<sup>463</sup> *OKO.Press*,<sup>464</sup> *TVN*,<sup>465</sup> and *Polityka*<sup>466</sup> are particularly active in this regard. Non-governmental organizations, such as the Association "Never Again,"<sup>467</sup> and the Center for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behavior<sup>468</sup> conduct constant monitoring of the local press on this issue. The Institute for Social Safety<sup>469</sup> develops strategies for action against extremism and assist officers of various uniformed services in handling matters related to VRWE.

# Sweden

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## DEFINITIONS and HISTORY

There is no legal definition of violent extremism in Sweden. Historically, however, the term 'violent extremism'<sup>470</sup> has been used as a broad concept to describe violent actions motivated by anything from Nazism, fascism and nationalist ideas to radical Islamism or autonomous anarchism and communism.<sup>471</sup> Probably the most common definition of violent extremism in Sweden today refers to acts that support, incite or involve participation in ideologically motivated acts of violence in order to promote a cause.<sup>472</sup> However, the flexibility and porous boundaries of the term have caused people to call into question its usefulness in both scholarly and policy-oriented contexts.<sup>473</sup>

According to the Swedish Security Service (Säkerhetspolisen, Säpo), an extremist milieu refers to individuals, groups and organizations united by a common ideology and regarded as endorsing violence, and based on this advocate, promote, or engage in violence, issue threats, attempt coercion, or engage in other serious criminal activities to achieve changes in the social order; affect decision-making or the exercise of authority, or hinder individuals from exercising their constitutional freedoms and rights. The starting point is then a view of crime as a legitimate and necessary part of the ideological (political or religious) struggle, i.e., that it is inevitable that other people's freedoms and rights are sometimes violated to reach the ultimate goal as defined by the ideology.<sup>474</sup>

Much like violent extremism, the term 'violent extreme right' is ambiguous. There is no clear consensus on its definition or exact boundary. The Swedish Security Service usually uses the terms 'white supremacy' and 'extreme right' as synonyms and defines it as an anti-democratic milieu on the far right of the political spectrum. These are various racial ideological and political groups that have chosen to stand outside of the democratic society and see violence, vandalism, and other crimes as legitimate tools in their struggle.<sup>475</sup>

In the case of organized crime, and since the year 2000, the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime has provided an internationally shared definition of an organized criminal group as "a group of three or more persons existing over a period of time acting in concert with the aim of committing crimes for financial or material benefit." This definition was also adopted in the EU's Council Framework Decision 2008/841/JHA of 24 October 2008. While there is no legal definition of organized crime in Sweden, the Swedish government as well the

Swedish Police and other Swedish law enforcement agencies usually work on the basis of the EU definition of organized crime.

## **HISTORY AND KEY PLAYERS OF THE VRWE - OC SCENE until 2015**

In the Swedish context, domestic national security issues have gained more political importance resulting in an expansion of internal controls and levels of surveillance of all citizens for both criminal and non criminal behaviors.<sup>476</sup> Law and order have become one of the main concerns for Swedish voters due to the surge of gang violence. With the rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS) in 2013, violent extremism, in particular Islamic extremism, became one of the main security issues, resulting in the establishment of a national coordinator at the government offices and a national strategy against violent extremism and a national counter-terrorism strategy.<sup>477</sup>

While the focus on violent extremism has declined and shifted towards organized crime due to the surge of firearm and explosive violence, extremism is still one of the main security challenges in Sweden. As an example, recent threat assessments by the Swedish Security Service point to both violent Islamic extremism and violent right-wing extremism as the main threats for terrorist attacks. According to the National Centre for Terrorist Threat Assessment (NCT),<sup>478</sup> for 2022 the main threats against Sweden come from actors motivated by violent far right or violent Islamic ideologies.<sup>479</sup> Explicitly, Sweden can be described as the Nordic hub for extreme right movements in the region.<sup>480</sup> Several monitoring groups and state actors including the Swedish Security Service have in the past several years identified right-wing terrorism as a growing and deepening threat against Swedish democracy.<sup>481</sup> Further, recent research indicates that Sweden also stands concerning the development of a specific form of violent extremism, that of violent misogyny,<sup>482</sup> which at its core is intricately linked to white supremacist ideology.

## **KEY PLAYERS and LEGAL FRAMEWORK since 2015**

In the period following 2017, organized right-wing extremism in Sweden has been dominated by one group in particular, the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM). During the 2022 elections, the Nordic Resistance Movement campaigned again. However, despite a relatively high level of activity online and offline, with rallies, leafleting, demonstrations and happenings, no seats were won in 2022 either. NRM, which has been losing members since the failed 2018 election campaign and has had difficulties mobilizing activists for demonstrations and so-called street activism, received 847 votes in this year's election, corresponding to 0.01% of the votes.

In the period following 2017, the group has undergone a development of increased levels of activity, street level mobilization and several major efforts in digital activism and election campaigns. The group's attempt to institutionalize and professionalize through electoral politics and a streamlining of the organization was largely unsuccessful. We are now, after electoral defeats, internal conflicts, and splits within NRM, witnessing a stagnation and restructuring of the movement which has become less visible in both the streets and the news.

Historically, we have seen several cases of individuals in right-wing extremism being recruited into the Outlaw Motorcycle milieu,<sup>483</sup> which has set off alarms both within the Swedish Police and the Swedish Security Service. Investigative journalism has provided accounts of police repeatedly finding Hitler portraits, Nazi banners and other forms of propaganda during house searches in the Outlaw Motorcycle milieu.<sup>484</sup> On the topic of this nexus, a senior manager at the Swedish Security Service states that "These groups can pose a threat to representatives of the judiciary and other representatives of society. We have seen many examples of that, both from the right and the motorcycle gangs".<sup>485</sup> There is thus evidence of extensive nexus between violent right-wing extremism and Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs, which indicates that there is still potential for cross-recruiting.

### **Case study**

Among the actors mentioned above, the most vocal and visible RWE group in Sweden in recent years is the neo-Nazi organization, the Nordic Resistance Movement. NRM is also the actor which most clearly provides a case for considering the VRWE-OC nexus in Sweden. Classified by Swedish authorities as violent extremist, NRM openly promotes violence and considers armed revolution as the most direct route to achieving their goals. In the time following the 2015 European border crisis, which marked the beginning of a period of growth for RWE in Sweden, NRM has had a significant impact on the public and the political debate in the country. In some regards, their modus operandi of combining street activism and digital activism has been successful in that they, considering their relatively modest numbers, have managed to punch above their weight in terms of their attention and visibility.

Beyond intimidating minorities and spreading fear in public, NRM members, many of whom are previously convicted felons, have during the most recent cycle of violence, been prosecuted and convicted of incitement to racial hatred, arson, bomb attacks against refugee shelters, the production of illegal arms, illegal possession of arms, preparation for crime, attacks and harassment targeting researchers and journalists, etc.

The Swedish Security Service reports that the organization's main income comes from membership fees, donations, and sales revenue from online retail.<sup>486</sup> In ad-

dition, income has been secured through sales of street weapons and special fundraising campaigns for a number of specific purposes and events (e.g., in support of individuals or a particular activity). All bank accounts linked to the NRM have been closed since 2017. Fundraising has since then partly been done through cash collections, but also through donations in various forms of cryptocurrencies facilitated by a digital wallet for Bitcoin, where new deposits are regularly made. For example, in the period 2018–2020, the equivalent of one million Swedish kronor (SEK) had been deposited in the wallet only to later be withdrawn and transferred to other cryptocurrency wallets or converted into fiat currency. In their mapping of the financial activities and assets of the organization, the Swedish Security Service<sup>487</sup> notes that the criminal activities observed in the RWE movement in recent years has been of such a nature that they do not require large sums of money, i.e., relatively small amounts can have a major impact on the ability of the actors to carry out their planned actions.

Since the failed elections campaign in 2018, the organization has been increasingly incapacitated due to a series of conflicts over leadership and disagreements concerning the internal ideological line. Consequently, they split in 2019 when leading activists formed the splinter group Nordisk Styrka (Nordic Strength).

## **TRENDS and STATISTICS**

Sweden has a relatively strong extreme right movement, fractions of which have an explicitly anti-democratic and violent agenda. In the years following the European border crisis of 2015–2016, during which the country took in more refugees per capita than any other European country, we have seen a new surge in anti-immigration mobilizations and right-wing violence. In fact, in international comparisons of right-wing violence and militancy, Sweden represents an outlier with a markedly stronger and more resilient extreme-right movement, not the least compared to its Nordic neighbors. In recent years, several monitoring groups and state actors, including the Swedish Security Service, have identified right-wing extremism as a growing and deepening threat against Swedish democracy.<sup>488</sup> According to the right-wing terrorism and violence dataset (RTV) about 131 acts of right-wing terrorism and violence were recorded in the period 1990–2021; 17 of these incidents were fatal. Some examples of recent violent acts by right-wing extremists include incitement of racial hatred, arson, bomb attacks against refugee shelters, illegal possession of arms, preparation for crime, attacks and harassment targeting researchers and journalists, and murder.

The VRWE related activities in Sweden are dominated by the Nordic Resistance Movement. Expo<sup>489</sup> has shown that the overall trend for the past years shows an increase of activities, from 1,465 in 2010 to 3,938 in 2018. For this dataset activities are defined as actions by members of the milieu that are open and visible and thus

possible to document and quantify (battle preparation activities, demonstrations, propaganda spread, etc.). This usually relates to ideological activism, as a mechanism for the milieu to influence the public and further their anti-democratic agenda.

The year 2019, however, saw a reduction of 35.6 percent in all activities, for the first time since 2015. This was partially due to a weakening of the Nordic Resistance Movement as a consequence of an internal split. The reduction in activities is not homogeneous across the 290 Swedish municipalities. Despite the general trend, in a few municipalities activities increased. More generally, the VRWE milieu in Sweden is becoming more heterogeneous, with the Nordic Resistance Movement facing competition from smaller groups.<sup>490</sup>

The boundaries between organized and unorganized right-wing extremism are fluid and the two have always existed in some form of symbiosis.<sup>491</sup> In a 2020 report, the Swedish Security Service pointed out that sharp distinctions between the organized and violent factions of right-wing extremism and the broader and more loosely organized part of the milieu is increasingly misleading: “The line between those who advocate, incite and commit ideologically motivated crimes and violence, and those who merely propagate an ideological position is increasingly blurred”.<sup>492</sup> Further, the delineation of what constitutes anti-democratic and violent right-wing extremism messages is virtually impossible when it comes to the digital sphere as actors across the spectrum of what has traditionally been classified as democratic and anti-democratic in Sweden are increasingly intermeshed online.<sup>493</sup>

Further, the Swedish Security Service also states that formal organizations with membership requirements and a focus on street activism have generally become less relevant as a unifying force for the movement. Generally, a shift in activism in Sweden from the streets to the internet has been noted. In the online sphere, unorganized right-wing extremism in Sweden is patchy and leaderless, yet digitally connected by an expanding digital ecosystem of YouTube influencers, publishers and online seminar activities, podcasting, and an extensive network of hyperpartisan alternative media.

### **Legal and illegal financial activities and networks**

One of the most comprehensive and recent accounts of the violent right-wing extremist milieu in contemporary Sweden comes from a compilation of Swedish governmental registers concerning affiliation to organized crime and violent extremism in Sweden, criminal and socioeconomic background, and mental health.<sup>494</sup> According to this register compilation, the violent right-wing extremist milieu in Sweden towards 2017 consisted of 382 individuals with a registered affiliation. Based on other sources, it is reasonable to assume that most of these individuals are affiliated to the Nordic Resistance Movement. The mean age of criminal suspects

within this group is 23 years. Around six percent have been diagnosed with some major mental disorder, like autism or psychosis, and between eight and eleven percent have had documented problems with alcohol or drugs. Almost half the registered suspicions associated with this extremist milieu have to do with violent crime, followed by drug-related crime and theft, both at around 10 percent of the total number of suspicions between 1995 and 2016.<sup>495</sup> Looking at the gender dimension, violent right-wing men constitute 89 percent of the milieu.

In the register compilation described above, it was found that about 78 percent of the individuals in the violent right-wing extremist milieu were reasonably suspected of at least one crime in the period 1995 to 2016, for the period 2011 to 2016 about 60 percent of the milieu fall within this category. Considering direct relations of co-suspicion in the longer time span from 1995 to 2016, it was observed that about one third of the co-suspicion links involving violent right-wing extremism occur with other milieus, amongst which the most prevalent is Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs. The most prevalent crime type, both for crimes within the milieu and between milieus, is violent crime.<sup>496</sup> Regarding the gender dimension, most of the co-suspicions within the violent right-wing extremist milieu take place among violent right-wing men. Women in violent right-wing extremism tend on average to be linked to fewer individuals through co-suspicion compared to men in the same milieu. Women are also less clustered than men in the same milieu, meaning that they are part of triangles of three suspects to a lesser degree than men involved in the extreme right.<sup>497</sup> Considering the criminal activities of the violent right-wing extremist milieu from 1995 to 2016, in the register compilation mentioned above, it has been found that around 6 percent of all crime suspicions involving individuals from this milieu are related to white-collar crime.

There is no generally known pattern as to the financing of activities in the VRWE milieu, as it presumably varies by actor, organization, and financing type. An actor's perceived degree of extremism can also influence the degree to which agencies and companies review his or her transactions. For instance, PayPal and Swish (mobile payment system in Sweden) accounts linked to the Nordic Resistance Movement have recently been shut down. Other organizations, like Alternative for Sweden, have used crowdfunding services to get donations from Swedish sympathizers, as well as supporters from the U.S. and France, to finance their election campaigns for the 2018 parliamentary elections and the 2019 EU elections.<sup>498</sup>

Furthermore, company engagement has been observed in the milieu, with 23 percent of violent right-wing extremists owning at least one registered own company or sitting in the board of a company, out of which a bit more than 3 percent of individuals in the milieu have both a criminal suspicion record and own company or company board affiliation.<sup>499</sup> This share is significantly above the average level of entrepreneurship in the general Swedish population, which was 8.7 % according to the most recent OECD data.<sup>500</sup>

An actor such as the *Nordic Resistance Movement* provides a pertinent case to illustrate the profit-driven activities of VRWE and the legal sources of income that undergird groups and individuals. NRM's financial viability is heavily dependent on membership fees, fundraising and donations, and other income-generating activities such as lectures and the sale of propaganda and various forms of political merchandise. These include, for example, t-shirts, hoodies, mugs, candles, stickers books, etc. sold on the web shop GreenPilled which is run as a sole proprietorship. A further example of online trading linked to individuals within the NRM is the marketing of personal protective equipment and "blinding defence spray". The company behind these sales reported a turnover of just over SEK 800,000, no costs for employee salaries and no fixed assets in its last year of operation (2018-2019). The turnover is thus mainly based on the goods sold and generates a profit for the year of less than SEK 50,000. Online trading is a relatively simple business concept that can be operated with limited resources and knowledge. However, the companies' financial statements suggest that the business does not generate significant profits. Currently, Swedish authorities have not investigated the operations of NRM-linked companies. Consequently, there is no information available on whether these companies have complied with all relevant legal, commercial, insurance or tax obligations during their operations.

In 2018, which was a year of particularly high activity, the group raised SEK 176,908 through 63 fundraising campaigns conducted in 30 different locations across the country. Individual donations ranged from SEK 50 to SEK 9,170. The largest collection was made in Ludvika on May 1, 2018, when SEK 9,170 was collected. NRM's presence at the Politicians' Week in Visby 2018 generated just over SEK 12,000. The places where NRM's official fundraising campaigns were most successful in 2018 were Ludvika, Stockholm, Gothenburg, Visby and Boden. According to the organization's income statement for 2018, NRM has received contributions from anonymous sources with a total value of SEK 30,908. Of these, 25 contributions represented amounts ranging from SEK 228 to 2,275. This disclosure does not include donations received by the organization via cryptocurrencies. As the organization relies heavily on donations from outside actors, the establishment of cryptocurrency accounts became a way to compensate for the problems of fundraising via Swish and bank giro, which require bank accounts. 216 transactions were made in the organization's official Bitcoin (BTC) wallet between January 2018 and March 2020. In total, NRM's fundraising via the Bitcoin account has generated a value equivalent to nearly one million Swedish kronor in this period.

Nordic banks have denied NRM the right to hold bank accounts for its fundraising activities since autumn 2017. Around the same time, PayPal shut down NRM's payment service for both Radio Nordfront and the NRM's online store accounts. NRM circumvented the shutdown of their bank accounts by urging people to shop at the online store of the Finnish branch of NRM and by offering the possibility to donate to the organization through their international bank accounts. In addition, they set

up the donation tool Hatreon - an Alt-Tec alternative to Patreon. The establishment of Hatreon was a reaction the deplatforming of RWE actors by Patreon since 2018.

Another source of income comes from the various membership schemes. There are currently three different types of membership where people can support the party to varying degrees: supporting member, party member, and activist. “Supporting member” is a passive form of membership where the party makes no demands on the member and the member can remain anonymous if so desired. Supporting members thus is akin to sponsorship. In this category, fees range from SEK 500 to SEK 10,000. “Party members” are part of the party’s parliamentary branch and are thus included in the respective local membership group. Applications for party membership are reviewed at the local level by the recruitment officer. The fee for membership is SEK 500 plus a monthly fee which is determined according to whether the member has an income or not. In 2018, NRM reported membership income of SEK 56,500 which may indicate that the party had 113 paying party members in that year. The third form of party membership is “activist”. This requires party membership for at least 6 months. Activists pay a monthly fee which is determined by the individual financial circumstances of the member.<sup>501</sup>

### **Transnational connections and activities**

In the years following 2017, Swedish groups have participated in activities in Germany, Denmark, Poland, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Ukraine, Hungary, Bulgaria, the USA, Finland, Netherlands, the Czech Republic, England, France, Norway, South Africa, and Belarus. In a systematic mapping of the Swedish movements’ international connections and activities conducted by Expo in 2019, a total of 71 recorded activities were documented. Despite increased media attention concerning Swedish connections in the USA and Russia, the activities more often conducted in Europe and exchanges have primarily taken place with actors in Germany, Denmark, and Poland.<sup>502</sup>

In recent years, the neo-Nazi organization Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) has been one of the most internationally oriented actors in Sweden. Beyond its sister chapters in neighboring Scandinavian countries Denmark, Finland and Norway, the organization has primarily had close ties with the German neo-Nazi group Der Dritte Weg (The Third Way), founded in 2013 by former NPD officials and actors from the organization Free Network South, which was proscribed in Bavaria, Germany in 2014. There are only few indications that NRM receives financial support from foreign actors, beyond the foreign donations that may be part of regular fundraising activities. There are reports that the NRM’s close relationship with the Russian imperialist movement has resulted in the Russian organization’s representative, Stanislav Vorobjev, on one occasion handing over a sum of money to the NRM. It is unclear how much was donated, as Vorobjev himself stated that it was only € 150

Euros while the Expo Foundation refers to anonymous sources who stated that the sum was SEK 30,000. However, it cannot be ruled out that donations received by the organization in cryptocurrency may come from foreign sources.<sup>503</sup>

Alongside the NRM, Nordic Youth has been one of the organizations in Sweden that most frequently participates in events abroad, most often in Poland, Estonia and Latvia. These international collaborations were crucial to the development of the organization since its inception in 2010 up until its activities stopped in 2019. In this period, the organization also travelled to Ukraine on several occasions to show solidarity with that country's nationalists.

### **Governmental and societal response**

Violent extremism has motivated a range of measures to strengthen the resilience of society in recent years. The Swedish government has developed strategies against terrorism and violence extremism and the parliament passed new terrorism legislation in 2014, 2015 and 2017.<sup>504</sup> Stronger criminal law tools against organized crime entered into force in 2015 (Prop. 2015/16:113), a new national crime prevention program to strengthen crime prevention was introduced, and a new center against violent extremism was established. In 2015, the Swedish government formulated a new national counter-terrorism strategy based on Sweden's long-term work in this area both nationally and internationally. The aim was to create a clear structure for the work needed to combat terrorist crime, emphasizing the importance of cooperation and follow-up. The strategy was divided into three areas: Prevent, Preempt and Protect. Within the preventive area, measures are intended to counteract radicalization and recruitment to extremist and terrorist groups, and to influence the intent of individuals to commit or support terrorist acts. The preemptive area deals with counteracting and reducing the capabilities and opportunities to commit terrorist attacks. "Protect" deals with creating and maintaining protection for individuals and reducing society's vulnerability to terrorist attacks.<sup>505</sup>

At the central government level, the main structures tasked with CT, P/CVE in relation to RWE in Sweden are the Swedish Security Service, the Police, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service and the Swedish Center for Preventing Violent Extremism (CVE).

The first national plan of action to counter violent extremism in Sweden was adopted by the center-right government, the Reinfeldt Cabinet, in 2011. In the years following several national investigations into how to develop effective means to prevent violent extremism were commissioned. One of the outcomes of the 2013 investigation was the appointment of a National Coordinator (NC) against violent extremism. This body was established in 2014 with the specific task of producing and coordinating strategies within this field and, in addition, initiating the work towards a national strategy for PVE work.<sup>506</sup>

At the national level, in addition to the national coordinator, several other actors have been given special government mandates aimed at P/CVE. These include but are not limited to the Board for State Support to Religious Communities, the University of Gothenburg, the Forum for Living History, the National Board of Institutions, the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Prison Service, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society Affairs, the Swedish Media Council, and the Swedish Defence Research Institute.

Since its founding in 2018, CVE has been tasked with strengthening and developing preventive work against violent extremism, based primarily on crime policy grounds. The primary aim of the center is to prevent ideologically motivated crime and terrorism in Sweden. The center is placed under the auspices of the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), which in turn is an agency under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice mandated to contribute to the development of knowledge within the criminal justice system and the criminal policy area, as well as to promote crime prevention work. Furthermore, the local municipalities, especially those with known extremist challenges, also have extensive prevention work, e.g., through social services and other local stake holders.

So far, no VRWE groups have been banned or proscribed in Sweden. The ban of the neo-Nazi group the Nordic Resistance Movement in neighboring country Finland in 2018 revived the debate on the democratic dilemma of banning political parties and organizations in Sweden. The former government led by the Social Democrats (2018–2022) pushed the line that racist and Nazi organizations can be banned, based on an existing paragraph in the constitution (chapt.16, 7–7 b §§). It states that freedom of association may only be restricted “in the case of associations whose activities are of a military or similar nature or involve persecution of a group of people on the grounds of ethnic origin, color or other similar factor”.<sup>507</sup> Organizations likely to be affected by the proposed legislation include but are not limited to groups like the Nordic Resistance Movement and Nordic Strength. A committee established by Directive 2019:39 to inquire into the possibility of banning racist organizations was set up in 2019 which in 2021 recommended a change in legislation to proscribe organized racism.<sup>508</sup> This was however never put into effect before the change of power after the elections of September 2022. The new government has no plans to pursue this further.

The role of civil society is mainly to act in relation to exit from violent right-wing extremism. In Sweden, the organization that has worked the longest with these questions, and is most known for this type of work, is called Exit Sweden, part of the youth center Fryshuset, a non-governmental organization. Exit Sweden has existed since 1998, focusing on helping individuals to leave the extreme right milieu. Other activities of Exit Sweden also include capacity building in municipalities, schools and non-profit NGOs working with this target group. In 2010, Exit Sweden expanded its work with project Passus, building on previous methods and experiences, to work

with individuals that want to disengage from criminal gangs and networks.<sup>509</sup> They provide personal meetings, a contact person available 24/7, as well as assistance in contacting government agencies. They also cooperate with housing corporations, the police, the social services, and counseling to family and friends of those that want to exit the milieus.<sup>510</sup>

# United States of America

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*Joshua Fisher-Birch*

## Definitions and History

Terrorism is defined by Title 18 of the U.S. Code as illegal actions that imperil life and is intended to “intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping.”<sup>511</sup> International terrorism either occurs outside the territory of the U.S. or involves a connection to a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) as designated by the State Department, whereas domestic terrorism occurs within the U.S. Domestic terrorism in the U.S. does not have associated criminal penalties on the federal level, so other criminal acts are prosecuted, such as murder or weapons charges. The Department of Homeland Security’s definition of terrorism includes threats to “critical infrastructure or key resources.”<sup>512</sup>

The federal government does not have an official definition of extremism.<sup>513</sup> The FBI and DHS define “domestic violent extremists” as individuals within the U.S. who seek to accomplish “ideological goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence.”<sup>514</sup> In 2019, the FBI created new categories for violent domestic extremism, which included three classifications that include violent right-wing movements: “racially motivated violent extremism” or REMVE, “anti-government/anti-authority extremism,” to refer to the sovereign citizens and militia movements, and “abortion extremism.”<sup>515</sup>

Crimes motivated by violent right-wing extremism may be prosecuted as hate crimes if the victim was targeted due to specific identity-based characteristics. Hate speech, political activism, and membership in extremist organizations are activities protected by the U.S. constitution. Law enforcement agencies are tasked with investigating criminal acts, not ideology.<sup>516</sup>

There is no specific statutory definition of organized crime in the U.S.<sup>517</sup> Organized crime as a domestic phenomenon in the U.S. is defined through particular offenses. Several categories of offenses committed by organized criminal entities are tried under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act.<sup>518</sup>

The U.S. has a long history of violent right-wing extremism. The years 2000 to 2015 were marked by the decline of once sizable white supremacist groups such as the National Alliance and Aryan Nations and the rise of the broad alt-right movement.<sup>519</sup> The anti-government militia movement experienced growth in 2008 in reaction to Barack Obama’s presidential victory and the emergence

of decentralized groups.<sup>520</sup> Adherents of the anti-government sovereign citizen movement continued to commit physical and financial crimes, including attacks on law enforcement officers.<sup>521</sup>

The number of right-wing extremist plots and attacks increased substantially by 2015, averaging 8.4 per year between 2001 and 2005, 8 per year between 2006 and 2010, and then rising to an average of 21 per year between 2011 and 2015.<sup>522</sup> Significant attacks included the 2012 murder of six Sikhs and wounding of four others in an attack on a Wisconsin gurdwara by a neo-Nazi skinhead and the 2015 murder of nine African Americans at a church in South Carolina by an avowed racist.<sup>523</sup>

Historically, there is limited evidence suggesting significant cooperation between violent right-wing extremists and organized crime entities in the U.S. Some VRWE groups engaged in profit-generating crime, such as The Order, who committed robberies between 1983 and 1984, including of a bank and armored cars, and the Aryan Republican Army, who robbed 22 banks between 1994 and 1996.<sup>524</sup> Right-wing extremist groups operate legally in the U.S. and likely do not want to participate in illicit enterprises that could lead to criminal charges and added scrutiny.<sup>525</sup> Exceptions include some adherents of the anti-government sovereign citizen movement who have refused to pay taxes and engaged in filing false liens and committed acts of fraud, and individual members of the racist skinhead movement who have committed robberies and at least one counterfeit currency operation in the early 2000s, as well as individual members of the neo-Nazi skinhead Hammerskins group, who have participated in drug sales for personal enrichment.<sup>526</sup>

Some extreme right entities where ideology is secondary operate as criminal enterprises. White supremacist prison gangs (WSPGs) operate in the federal prison system and at least 35 state prison systems.<sup>527</sup> While classified as prison gangs, they often have a sizable presence outside of penitentiaries. They participate in financially motivated crimes, including drug trafficking, burglary, fraud, and protection rackets, and members have also committed hate crimes and have killed law enforcement and corrections officials.<sup>528</sup> White supremacist prison gangs primarily operate as criminal enterprises, with extreme right ideology acting in a secondary capacity and as an organizing principle.<sup>529</sup>

Most violent attacks by right-wing extremists in the U.S. are carried out by self-funded individuals who are not members of established groups.<sup>530</sup>

## **Key Players and Legal Framework after 2015**

In terms of groups or movements that may have connections to criminal enterprises, the violent right-wing extremist scene in the U.S. after 2015 is broadly split into four categories: extreme right-wing groups that prioritize ideology and have

few associations with criminal enterprises, white supremacist prison gangs, white supremacist biker gangs, and sovereign citizens.

There is no available evidence indicating that U.S. right-wing extremist groups that claim their ideology as their primary motivation and seek to change the political system secure funding through financial criminal acts. Right-wing extremist groups, such as Patriot Front and the Proud Boys finance themselves from their own members. The latter has held public crowd-sourcing campaigns.<sup>531</sup> The Atomwaffen Division and its successor National Socialist Order (NSO), have sold books and t-shirts, whereas The Base has self-financed and requested cryptocurrency donations.<sup>532</sup> Individuals affiliated with the Rise Above Movement (RAM) have operated a web store. Individual personalities involved in the alt-right and successive online extreme right have livestreamed on websites where they receive cryptocurrency donations.<sup>533</sup> Overall, these groups do not seem to engage in revenue generating crimes due to potential concerns regarding legal consequences and the ability to fundraise and transfer funds legally.<sup>534</sup> At least one racist skinhead gang has participated in drug trafficking.

WSPGs are revenue-generating criminal enterprises that use white supremacist rhetoric to recruit and maintain discipline. These gangs prioritize money-making schemes within prisons as well as outside, including drug sales and trafficking, fraud, and protection rackets.<sup>535</sup> While many WSPGs heavily use neo-Nazi iconography, the ideology is not always firmly held by all members, especially lower-ranked associates.<sup>536</sup> There is little evidence suggesting membership overlap between WSPGs and more ideologically based VRWE organizations who often view the former as criminal and not ideological organizations.<sup>537</sup> Some members of WSPGs have reportedly attended events with ideological groups however there is no evidence of cooperation.<sup>538</sup>

Some outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) may either subscribe to extreme right-wing views or might have members who belong to VRWE groups.<sup>539</sup> OMGs have historically had connections to the white supremacist movement in the US.<sup>540</sup> In addition to violent crime, OMGs participate in drug and arms trafficking.<sup>541</sup> In 2011, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) noted that OMGs had connections with VRWE groups, including neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, WSPGs, and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).<sup>542</sup> The same report also noted the presence of ideological overlaps between OMGs and ideological white supremacist groups, as well as the existence of at least 13 specific white supremacist biker gangs operating in at least 15 states.<sup>543</sup> OMGs such as the Gypsy Jokers in the Pacific Northwest have worked with WSPGs to traffic firearms and illegal drugs, and have employed WSPG members after their release.<sup>544</sup> Members of the Nazi Low Riders WSPG are suspected of working with motorcycle gangs to manufacture and sell methamphetamine.<sup>545</sup> Some biker groups may also engage in limited ideological activity, such as one group that distributed white supremacist flyers in Florida, and in one instance members of the Warlocks OMG appeared with former Proud Boys member Jason Kessler, one of the main organizers of the August 2017 Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.<sup>546</sup>

Adherents of the sovereign citizen movement believe that the modern U.S. government, and its laws, are illegitimate. Sovereign citizens might engage in activities such as making their own license plates and identification cards, as well as acts of violence against law enforcement officers and others.<sup>547</sup> Followers of sovereign citizen ideology have also committed tax-related crimes and fraud.

Some WSPGs have developed connections with individuals outside of the broader VRWE scene to further their drug sales and trafficking operations.<sup>548</sup> Several powerful WSPGs, including the Aryan Brotherhood and the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas (unrelated), have maintained limited business relationships with members of Mexican cartels for drug trafficking.<sup>549</sup> In 2015, Texas authorities arrested 52 members of several WSPGs, the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas, the Aryan Circle, the White Knights, and the Peckerwoods, as well as their co-conspirators in Mexican drug cartels and gangs in a methamphetamine trafficking operation.<sup>550</sup> Similarly, members of the Aryan Brotherhood and the Georgia based WSPG Ghost Faced Gangsters were sentenced along with individuals outside of the VRWE scene in 2021 in a methamphetamine trafficking operation.<sup>551</sup> In 2021, members of three WSPGs allegedly purchased drugs from members of the Sinaloa Cartel in Arizona and then resold them in New Mexico.<sup>552</sup> The same WSPG gangs are also accused of selling firearms to cartel members who then smuggled the weapons across the border into Mexico.<sup>553</sup> In these cases, non-VRWE individuals have assisted WSPGs by trafficking drugs or acting as a channel for the distribution of drugs.

There is no evidence that non-VRWE individuals or entities involved in drug trafficking have any ties to VRWE not involved with for-profit motivated crimes. Drug cartels, for instance, are frequently framed as the opponents of primarily ideological VRWE groups.

Criminal cases tied to organized crime, drug trafficking, etc., are outside the purview of counter-terrorism investigations and are handled on the federal level by agencies and taskforces that investigate those specific crimes. Cases involving white supremacist groups and organized crime are investigated through Violent Crimes Task Forces, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF).<sup>554</sup>

There is potential cross-recruitment and overlap between VRWE and criminal elements in the OMG subculture. Many OMGs use white supremacist symbols and imagery, are primarily composed of white men, and have racist members.<sup>555</sup> The FBI's 2015 National Gang Report stated that OMGs have relationships with white supremacist groups and that some OMG members might subscribe to sovereign citizen ideology.<sup>556</sup> In 2005, individuals in at least two states shared membership with the KKK and the Ghost Riders OMG.<sup>557</sup> In 2011 the ADL noted that several members of biker gangs had overlapping membership with racist skinhead gangs, WSPGs, the KKK, and adherents of the Christian Identity religious movement.<sup>558</sup>

## Case Study

One of the few examples of an ideological VRWE group participating in repeated financially motivated crimes is the case of the New Jersey-based neo-Nazi skinhead gang Aryan Strikeforce (ASF). The skinhead group, which formed in 2013, claimed links to the violent neo-Nazi group Combat 18 and sought to recruit via the internet.<sup>559</sup> The gang promoted the use of violence. Their leader, Joshua Steever, attacked a group of African Americans at a Pennsylvania bar in 2016.<sup>560</sup> Steever had previously been kicked out of the U.S. chapter of the international skinhead group Blood and Honour for infighting.<sup>561</sup> The FBI infiltrated ASF in late 2016, eventually arresting Steever and four other men in 2017 for conspiracy to sell “methamphetamine, firearms, and machinegun parts to fund the organization’s activities,” specifically, financing the purchase of firearms.<sup>562</sup> The traffickers ASF thought they were working for were, in fact, undercover FBI employees. Steever was sentenced to 20 years in prison, and other members of the group were sentenced to prison terms of between 30 months and 14 years.<sup>563</sup>

## Trends and Statistics

Data regarding profit motivated-crime committed by members of VRWE groups or VRWE individuals are limited. Data only includes federal charges and does not include state-level charges. Some entries do not contain values for the charging, indictment, or arrest dates, so exact information by year is difficult to determine regarding trends.

Between January 2015 and August 2020, at least 329 VRWE individuals were either charged or indicted at the federal level for committing profit-motivated criminal acts.<sup>564</sup> 268 crimes (81%) were related to the sale, trafficking, or manufacture of drugs. 32 (10%) were related to racketeering. 17 (5%) included charges for the sale, trafficking, or manufacture of drugs and racketeering. 3 (1%) were for fraud. One case (.3%) was for robbery or burglary, 1 (.3%) was for arms sales or trafficking, 1 (.3%) was for “other” (in this case offering murder for hire), and 6 cases (2%) involved the sale, trafficking, or manufacture of drugs and arms sales or trafficking. The actual number of crimes is higher, individuals might not have been coded as being members of white supremacist groups, or they were tried in state courts.

304 cases (92%) involved WSPGs. 83% of those were related to the sale, trafficking, or manufacture of drugs, 11% for racketeering, and 6% for both drugs or racketeering. 3 (1%) of total cases involved non-white supremacist prison gangs. 2 cases (.6%) involved OMGs, 6 cases (2%) involved members of two extreme-right gangs, five members of Aryan Strikeforce were sentenced for illegal possession and transfer of firearms and conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. One member of the Proud Boys was sentenced to 30 years in prison for selling firearms and conspiracy

to sell cocaine.<sup>565</sup> It should be noted that there is no evidence that the Proud Boy member acted for any purpose other than personal financial enrichment.

The database lists additional non-financial crimes by WSPG members: two convictions for murder and conspiracy to commit murder, one conviction for assault with a deadly weapon, two individuals were charged with transporting undocumented immigrants (non-trafficking), 25 instances of possession of a firearm by a felon or otherwise illegal possession of weapons, and one charge of possession of a pipe bomb.<sup>566</sup> The database does not include individuals charged at the state level.

Members of the Proud Boys have either been charged or convicted of multiple crimes after August 2020, including threatening a former prosecutor, assault, unlawful use of a weapon, illegal firearms possession, and property crimes.<sup>567</sup> In October 2022, a member of the Proud Boys pleaded guilty to seditious conspiracy for trying to prevent the transfer of presidential power on January 6, 2021.<sup>568</sup> Five other members of the Proud Boys have been indicted for seditious conspiracy and other crimes related to their alleged actions to prevent the transfer of power on January 6.<sup>569</sup>

### **Legal and Illegal Financial Activities and Networks**

Extreme right groups and gangs that prioritize ideology have few observable links with organized crime entities. OMGs, which engage in profit-driven crimes and may engage in limited ideological activity or include members of VRWE groups, are one exception. WSPGs, which are profit-making criminal enterprises, have few links to primarily ideological groups. In many cases, profit-motivated crime enriches the perpetrator, and not a group or movement.<sup>570</sup>

Groups that focus on ideology and typically create propaganda and organize events attempt to meet their financial needs through legal means.<sup>571</sup> Even after groups have been de-platformed from mainstream online payment processors and fundraising tools, alternatives exist, including alternative crowdfunding sites and cryptocurrency.<sup>572</sup> Most VRWE groups do not have significant financial assets.<sup>573</sup> Furthermore, WSPGs often have a negative connotation within the broader extreme right due to the former's criminal activities which are viewed as dishonorable for participation in the drug trade and sole focus on making money.<sup>574</sup>

In some cases, members of extreme-right gangs might have individual connections to members of WSPGs, such as Rise Above Movement (RAM) co-founder Rob Rundo's social interactions with members of the Aryan Brotherhood.<sup>575</sup> There may be other individual links, especially between members of racist skinhead gangs and similar VRWE groups, WSPGs, and biker gangs.

Sovereign citizens commit tax fraud, prey on others through debt relief scams, and in some cases, occupy homes under fraudulent pretenses, among other crimes. While groups exist, the movement is disorganized as a whole. No evidence indicates that profit-generating crimes by individuals are used beyond personal enrichment. Fraud committed by groups within the movement is used for business and personal enrichment.<sup>576</sup>

U.S. VRWE individuals and groups raise funds through several legal means. Because right-wing extremist groups operate legally, individuals can donate money through crowdfunding campaigns and purchasing goods from affiliated online shops.

Individual racist skinheads, as well as those tied to groups such as the Blood and Honour network, operate record labels and sell associated merchandise such as t-shirts.<sup>577</sup> Racist skinheads also hold in-person white power music shows, including the annual Hammerfest event organized by the Hammerskins.<sup>578</sup> The size of the racist skinhead scene in the U.S. has declined over time, very likely impacted associated businesses.<sup>579</sup>

The Atomwaffen Division, the NSO, and their ideological website have sold books and t-shirts. The Base has requested cryptocurrency donations, but members have provided their own funding.<sup>580</sup> The co-founder of RAM operates an online clothing store that carries designs relevant to the white supremacist active club movement.

Proud Boys' leader Enrique Tarrio operated an online store that sold merchandise promoting the group and their politics.<sup>581</sup> The group also relies on crowdfunding and membership dues.<sup>582</sup> Crowdfunding on a website notorious for allowing extreme right fundraisers has allowed group members to travel to demonstrations and purchase equipment.<sup>583</sup> Two fundraisers allegedly for travel and the purchase of communications and protective gear for protests in Washington, D.C. on January 6, 2021 netted \$5,500 and almost \$19,000, respectively.<sup>584</sup>

VRWE groups were early adopters of cryptocurrency and have continued to request it for donations and payments.<sup>585</sup> Privacy-focused crypto coins, such as Monero, have become increasingly popular to conceal transactions and the identity of the payer. One knowledge gap related to the extreme right may be cryptocurrency transactions which could have allowed individuals to participate in tax evasion.<sup>586</sup>

## **Transnational Connections and Activities**

VRWE actors that engage in profit-motivated crimes act locally or regionally. Many WSPGs originated in a specific state or regional federal prison system, however, some have expanded to other states due to the transfer of prisoners.<sup>587</sup> Additionally, active WSPG members have moved to other parts of the country upon their release

from incarceration.<sup>588</sup> OMGs are generally located in areas where their members live and work and encompass additional claimed territory. Some OMGs with white supremacist members, such as the Gypsy Jokers, have global membership, stretching to Canada and Europe. There is no indication that specifically racist biker groups have a transnational presence.

Some members of WSPGs with broad reach outside of prisons have cultivated business relationships with members of Mexican drug cartels.<sup>589</sup> These links are based on the supply and sale of illegal drugs, especially the smuggling of methamphetamine.<sup>590</sup>

There are adherents of conspiracy ideologies similar to the sovereign citizen movement outside of the U.S., however the U.S. movement is solely focused on conspiracy theories related to their own government.

## **Governmental and Societal Response**

The 2021 National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism (NSCDT) includes suggested proposed action for improving investigations of domestic terrorist financing.<sup>591</sup> The document stated that the Bank Secrecy Act, which includes anti-money laundering and anti-terrorism provisions, would be used to investigate and prevent domestic extremist financing activities. Following the 2021 NSCDT, the Treasury Department included domestic violent extremists for the first time in the National Terrorist Financing Risk Assessment, noting the use of person-to-person payments, cash transfers, and cryptocurrency by the extreme right.<sup>592</sup>

The RICO statute allows prosecutors to charge leaders and criminal associates of organized crime entities, which is important for investigations into multilayered organizations, including gangs that sell drugs, or traffic firearms. RICO includes 35 different crimes as part of a racketeering operation, including trafficking or selling illegal drugs, fraud, money laundering, and murder.<sup>593</sup> Multiple investigations of WSPGs have led to charges under the statute.<sup>594</sup>

Profit-motivated crimes and the groups responsible for them are investigated by several different agencies at the federal, state, and local levels. This often includes 160 multi-agency Violent Crimes Task Forces and Violent Gang Task Forces, which include federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.<sup>595</sup> Regional Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces investigate and prosecute organized crime entities engaged in drug trafficking and connected crimes such as money laundering and racketeering.<sup>596</sup> The FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Forces are involved in investigations that have an explicit terrorism component. Local law enforcement agencies, state-level investigative agencies, the Bureau of Prisons, and Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigations also play roles in investigating profit-mo-

tivated crimes within their respective jurisdictions and in partnership with other law enforcement agencies.

The IRS's number of enforcement personnel decreased by 31 percent from 2010 to 2021, following a significant reduction in funding for both enforcement and operations support.<sup>597</sup> Investigating tax fraud among VRWE groups is potentially politically contentious in the U.S. and might be interpreted as politically targeting ideological groups.<sup>598</sup> The IRS has a history of investigating the right-wing tax protest movement due to their flagrant violation of tax laws.<sup>599</sup>

Domestic VRWE groups and VRWE profit-generating criminal enterprises are investigated differently from FTOs due to constitutional speech protections. Membership in or financing of FTOs is always illegal under U.S. law. The Treasury Department investigates the financing of FTOs and associated networks.<sup>600</sup>

Domestic VRWE groups are not banned or designated in the U.S. Individual members of certain groups have been charged under anti-gang statutes following their arrest for other specific crimes, such as conspiracy to commit murder.<sup>601</sup>

Civil society groups play an essential role in monitoring VRWE groups, maintaining statistical databases, and producing research later used to inform the government and the public. In September 2022, DHS awarded \$20 million in 43 grants to dozens of organizations, including community-based groups and academic institutions, working on issues related to countering domestic violent extremism and targeted violence through the Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant Program. Groups working in the P/CVE VRWE space mainly focus on extreme right wing ideological, rather than criminal groups. Extreme right profit motivated criminal groups, such as WSPGs, are frequently not included in the broader media and public discussions regarding VRWE attacks because their violence often takes place in the criminal sphere, and does not include acts of terrorism.<sup>602</sup>

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