



# Mapping Right-Wing Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe

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This report is the final product of the project “**Mapping of Violent Right-Wing Extremist Groups in Central and Eastern Europe**” supported by the Counter Extremism Project.

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November 2023



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# Addressing Right-wing Extremism in Central Europe

Central Europe represents a fertile ground for extreme right-wing ideologies (XRW), some of which are openly preaching intolerance and even violence. Similar to the western part of Europe, Central Europe has been affected by global dynamics related to the expansion of populism and XRW to a considerable extent. There are, however, also some specific conditions in the formerly communist Central Europe that are setting the region aside from other parts of Europe. These conditions are historical, economic, and ethnic in nature.

With most of the region subjected to foreign communist domination during the second half of the 20th century, nationalism, sometimes in extreme forms, remains a strong under-current within the nations of Central Europe. With interwar Czechoslovakia (1918-1938) being historical exception, Central Europe had practically no tradition of democracy prior to 1989. Also, whilst most of Western Europe went through the period of cultural changes in the 1960s, the Communist states of Central Europe were stuck on the wrong side of the iron curtain and isolated until 1989. Finally, although Central European nations are often historically heterogeneous, there is little experience of recent migrations into the region, especially from the outside of Europe.

Whilst democratic transitions in the formerly communist Central Europe were achieved relatively smoothly, these processes were considerably helped by the international context and the conditionality of NATO and EU enlargements. For much of the current post-Cold War history Central Europeans were guided through the process of post-communist transitions by externally imposed criteria and requirements. The process was entirely voluntary as Central Europeans were keen to join the EU and NATO, hence, ready to meet the conditions set out by these institutions. Most importantly, this conditionality was also supporting stability and predictability of the domestic transitions in Central European states. However, this inevitably led to some shallowness of the process with the candidate states

hurriedly setting up institutions and mechanisms that would satisfy NATO and EU. Today, with these countries being members of the EU and NATO, the stabilizing role that the conditions during the accession processes played is no longer available while democratic norms and institutions remain very fragile.

The combination of all these factors means that XRW ideologies have found sizable constituencies in Central Europe. The salience of the phenomenon is compounded by the relative inexperience and sometimes the lack of legal instruments to address this issue in the states of Central Europe. In this report we chose to focus on four middle and smaller size Central European nations: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. Three of the four were formerly parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire whilst Bulgaria spent half of the previous millennium under Ottoman domination. All the four were members of the Soviet block until 1989 (Czech Republic and Slovakia as a one state) and today all are members of the EU and NATO. Although XRW movements remain outside mainstream politics in all four countries, all have powerful populist movements which tend to operate in symbiosis with the respective XRW movements.



# The Radical Right in Bulgaria

by *Spasimir Domaradzki*

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Bulgaria's Far Right consists of a range of groups expressing radical ideas that reject most or all the constitutive elements of the current political order. The wide spectrum of political organizations can be divided along several axes and cannot be analysed outside the existing political context. The dividing line stands between groups actively involved in opposition mainstream politics and those associated with the political model of state capture enacted by the various governments of prime minister Boyko Borisov since 2008. Some political parties that are part of these milieus have been present in the Bulgarian parliament in different constellations and generally have played an active role in Bulgarian politics. There are also smaller groupings involving more extreme platforms and activities. These groups, however, operate on the political margins of Bulgarian society. This fringe takes a critical stance even towards those Far Right parties that partake in the political system and rather consider them to be traitors to the nationalist cause. Some of these extra-parliamentary networks question the existing political system altogether. Finally, the milieu also includes paramilitary associations despite an explicit ban on such groups according to Bulgarian law. Ideologically, the milieu is divided by their attitudes towards Russia. The majority combine nationalist narratives with communist nostalgia and openly promote Russian interests. A small but vocal minority, however, are critical towards any international dependencies including ties to Russia. Despite their ideological differences, Far Right groups frequently reformulate and reinvent themselves through new political projects.

## Interwar period

In order to fully understand the current status of the Far Right milieu in the country, a short historical perspective is necessary. Far right militarized groups operated in Bulgaria until the end of the Second World War. During the interwar period, for instance, several fascist organizations appeared in the 1920s. The Union of Fascist Bulgarians (Съюз на българите фашисти) disbanded in 1932 while the Native Defense (Родна защита) remained active until 1936, when it was banned. Many of the former members of the latter established or joined other Far Right organizations such as the Union of Fighters for the Advancement of Bulgarianness (Ратничество за напредък на Българщината), the Union of Bulgarian National Legions (Съюз на Българските Национални легиони) of General Hristo Lukov and/or the Brannik organization.

The National-Socialist Bulgarian Workers Party (Националсоциалистическата Българска Работническа Партия, NSBRP) was established in May 1932, replicating the German Nazi ideology and political platform. Headed by Hristo Kunchev, NSBRP relied on a classical leadership style and espoused its own party militia. The NSBRP openly agitated against liberalism, democracy, masonry and Marxism. The NSBRP promoted the dissolution of the party system with a strong antisemitic and anti-capitalist agenda. Despite the establishment of the party across several Bulgarian cities, it was not able to attract wider public support and was eventually banned along with all other political parties following the coup in Bulgaria in May 1934.

## The Far Right in Bulgaria after 1945

Radical right-wing groups and networks were virtually non-existent during the communist period in Bulgaria. By the end of the 1980s, however, radical right ideas reemerged in Bulgaria due to several factors. This reemergence took place amid, firstly, an expanded relationship with the West and, secondly, following the emerging political pluralism that followed 1989. The reestablishment of old radical right parties, in that context, became enticing for some Bulgarians. At the same time, there was an opening to replace the Bulgarian Communist Party ideology with another impressionable political narrative. This final factor was apparent not only by the fact that some leaders (like Krasimir Karakachanov) belonged to the communist security apparatus (State Security) but also attempts by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (the former communists) to exploit the nationalist narrative.

The Far Right milieu in Bulgaria can structurally be divided into political parties that actively take part in the political system and are represented in parliament and groups and networks outside the formal political structure that are nevertheless able to regularly attract public attention.

The Far Right in Bulgaria is closely related to the political transformation process following the collapse of communism in the early 1990s. The discrediting of communism as an ideology and political system created ideological vacuum that was filled by a plethora of political ideologies within the new multiparty political system. The Bulgarian Communist Party (Българска комунистическа партия, BCP) itself split into several factions, with some of these embracing the nationalist agenda. This was not only a quest for a new political and ideological identity but also a response to the political priorities that defined the final days of the communist regime.

BCP was seeking a new source of political appeal and ways to secure a legacy for its period of single party rule to the best extent possible.

Another important factor shaping the emergence of nationalist narratives in Bulgaria pertained to the policy of forceful name change of the Bulgarian Turks in the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> The shift towards a multiparty political system and the establishment of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) served as a further catalyst for political opposition from nationalist circles within the Bulgarian Communist Party which resisted the termination of the assimilation policy. The rebranded Bulgarian Socialist Party opposed the registration and the existence of MRF, even going as far as filing a case against it in the Constitutional Court. A nationalist-socialist bond, consequently, was established with nationalist leaning socialist politicians playing important role in Bulgarian politics, such as the latter president Georgi Parvanov.<sup>2</sup>

A second ideological stream of the Far Right milieu in the country, defined by Anthony Todorov as nationalist-conservative, emerged as a consequence of the establishment of the multi-party-political system. Some of the pre-communist area political parties were reactivated (such as the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – IMRO), although they remained at the margins of political life.<sup>3</sup> The opening of Bulgarian society to the West swiftly increased socio-economic diversity and the emergence of subcultures, including Far Right skinheads. These emerging Far Right subcultures concentrated their antagonism against minority groups such as the Roma and Turkish communities as well as foreigners of different ethnic backgrounds - and more recently sexual minorities.

While the left nationalists were involved in the political process in the 1990s, the newly emerging Far Right has constituted itself as a more fringe

1 The forceful name change was a policy conducted by the Bulgarian Communist Party under the direct order of the communist leader Todor Zhivkov in the period 1984-1985. Over a million citizens were forced to change their names from Turkish-Arab to Bulgarian. The policy resulted in internal tensions and international isolation until the end of the communist regime in Bulgaria in November 1989. The attempts to reverse the consequences of the forceful name change led to the establishment of the Public Committee for the Protection of National Interests.

2 See, ANTONIY TODOROV | THE EXTREME RIGHT WING IN BULGARIA, January 2013, International Policy Analysis, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, p.3 <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09660.pdf>

3 Радикализация в България, заплахи и тенденции, Център за изследване на демокрацията, P.62 [https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user\\_upload/publications\\_library/files/22898.pdf](https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/22898.pdf)

phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> The 2001 emergence of the National Movement Simeon II (NMSII), which terminated the communist/anti-communist dichotomy in Bulgarian politics, proved to be a critical turning point. Grounded in populism and delivering a new pro-Western perspective, this movement sheltered post-communists, agents of former secret services and anti-communists alike. Antony Todorov emphasizes that *“the fading of the opposition between communists and democrats created a fertile breeding ground for the boom in extreme right-wing formations.”*<sup>5</sup> This process was also steered by the completion of the privatization process in Bulgaria and the articulation of the economic fault lines between winners and losers of this process.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the predominance of a vehemently pro-western and liberal narrative that went unopposed and growing social and economic schism contributed to the emergence of alternative political views contesting the prevailing order. The growing gap between the affluent and poor particularly provoked some to pursue a sense of justice and solidarity that the new political regime was not able to effectively manage. The Far Right individuals, groups and networks began to reject the liberal democratic order altogether, labelling it as harmful and premised on imported products that were to destroy Bulgarian society.

## Overview of Far Right formations in Bulgarian politics

Far-right representation in parliament

### **Attack | Last elections: 2022** **% of the vote: 0.30 | Votes: 7593**

Since Bulgaria’s 2005 elections, the Far Right has consistently maintained a presence in the Bulgarian parliament. Until 2017, the Far Right was represented by Volen Siderov’s party Attack (Атака) – the party placed fourth in the 2005, 2009 and

2013 elections. Siderov’s most significant political success peaked during the 2006 presidential elections, with a second-place finish at 24.1% of the vote in the second round.<sup>7</sup> Attack is a political party organized around a charismatic leader relying on nationalist and populist slogans. Siderov’s position was strengthened by his TV channel “Alfa” where he regularly comments on political, economic and social issues. He ultimately united the most significant nationalist blocs by deploying aggressive anti-Roma and anti-Turkish rhetoric, patriotic slogans, and “us” and “them” populist ploys.<sup>8</sup> However, Siderov’s political instincts, nevertheless, saw frequent scandals and internal disagreements within his party. Consequently, many of the more recently established Far Right parties were created by defectors from Attack, such as Valery Simeonov’s National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (Национален фронт за спасение на България, NFSB), Slavi Binev’s short-lived Civic Union for Real Democracy (Гражданското обединение за реална демокрация), and the National-Democratic Party (Национал-демократична партия).

Formally in opposition, Siderov’s party has served as a silent proxy for Boyko Borisov’s governments, particularly since 2013. In 2017, Siderov joined the pre-election Alliance “United Patriots” together with the NFSB and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (Вътрешна Македонска Революционна Организация). After the elections, the two latter parties joined the government coalition, whereas Siderov remained again in a formal opposition role. Attack’s active presence in politics came to a close in 2021, however, after Bulgaria was torn apart by public protests against Borisov’s government. As the junior coalition partner, the nationalist political parties were scapegoated and marginalized over the next two years.

4 Радикализация в България, заплахи и тенденции, Център за изследване на демокрацията, Р.61 [https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user\\_upload/publications\\_library/files/22898.pdf](https://csd.bg/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/22898.pdf)

5 Antony Todorov, The Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, International Policy Analysis, January 2013, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09660.pdf> p.1

6 Antony Todorov, The Extreme Right Wing in Bulgaria, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, International Policy Analysis, January 2013, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09660.pdf> p.2

7 [https://pvr2006.cik.bg/results\\_2/](https://pvr2006.cik.bg/results_2/)

8 Радикализация в България, заплахи и тенденции, Център за изследване на демокрацията, Р.63 [https://wp.flgr.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Радикализация\\_в\\_България\\_заплахи\\_и\\_тенденции.pdf](https://wp.flgr.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Радикализация_в_България_заплахи_и_тенденции.pdf)

### **IMRO-BND | Last elections: 2022 % of the vote: 0.81 | Votes: 20177**

The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Bulgarian National Movement (Вътрешна Македонска Революционна Организация – Българско Национално Движение, IMRO-BND or IMRO) claims to rely on the legacy of the former militarized organization with the same name that was active in the late 19th century - it fought for the liberation of Macedonia and Aegean Thrace.<sup>9</sup> In its current form, the organization was established in 1990 as a part of the wider right-wing anti-communist camp. The organization evolved into a political party with nationalist ideology and can be qualified as a pro-EU and populist formation. The party belongs to the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament and currently has two members, Angel Dzhabazki and Andrey Slabakov.<sup>10</sup> IMRO's political ideology is grounded in "traditional national values, spiritual unification of all Bulgarian communities, the protection of national interests, democracy and civil society, Europe of nations, free market economy and private property" values<sup>11</sup> and aims for the political and spiritual unification of Bulgarians throughout the world and the establishment of a strong and prosperous country. IMRO's political platform proposes a mixture of opportunist and anti-systemic ideas. On the one hand, the party is critical towards the existing political system in Bulgaria and proposes constitutional changes. It emphasizes the "demographic crisis", a basic right-wing theme, and is against Turkish membership in the EU. The party further defends the rights of Bulgarians in North Macedonia and promotes the introduction of Orthodox Christianity as the official religion in Bulgaria. On the other hand, IMRO espouses a rather liberal economic philosophy, encouraging both foreign investments and European funds as well as innovation and support for national entrepreneurs. IMRO claims that Bulgaria must become an energy hub in South-Eastern Europe. The party also concentrates on the problems concerning interethnic relations

with the Roma and Turkish communities and resists Turkish interference in Bulgarian politics. IMRO finally supports the establishment of a Bulgarian club<sup>12</sup> in North Macedonia and persistently seeks to create provocations against any efforts for bilateral reconciliation. Whereas IMRO, as well as NFSB discussed below, represent rather strongly conservative views more than a nationalist orientation and accept the existing political order; they often participate in formal or informal alliances with radical right parties, serving the role of providers of access to mainstream Bulgarian politics.

### **NFSB | Last elections: 2022 % of the vote: 0.14 | Votes: 3520**

The National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (Национален фронт за спасение на България – НФСБ) is a splinter movement from the Attack party established in 2011. The party's political aims include the protection of the territorial integrity of Bulgaria and the establishment of an indivisible, independent and strong state. The party pursues its goals through active participation in national, European and local elections. Akin to Attack, NFSB relies on the television channel SKAT based in Burgas. The channel, notably, broadcasts talk shows on history and politics in Bulgaria. The movement is generally open to coalitions with other nationalist organizations. However, in 2014 it refused to unite with Nikolay Barekov's populist party "Bulgaria Without Censorship".<sup>13</sup> Several months later NFSB invited IMRO to establish the "Patriotic Front" coalition with other nationalist organizations. The coalition collapsed in 2017 but was swiftly replaced by a new one called "United Patriots", consisting of NFSB, IMRO and Ataka (until July 2019). IMRO left "United Patriots" prior to the April 2021 parliamentary elections. The political agenda of the NFSB is primarily focused on the question of North Macedonia.

<sup>9</sup> <https://vmro.bg/кои-сме-ние/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://ecrgroup.eu/ecr>

<sup>11</sup> Art.5 of the IMRO statute, <https://vmro.bg/устав/>

<sup>12</sup> The establishment of the Bulgarian Clubs in North Macedonia has become another source of tense bilateral relations, as the clubs were named after "provocative" historical personalities from Macedonian point of view, as the former Bulgarian king Tzar Boris III or the leader of IMTO Vanche Mihajlov.

<sup>13</sup> ВМРО реши да напусне Бареков заради съюз с НФСБ, Mediapool, 24.7.2014, <https://www.mediapool.bg/vmro-reshi-da-napusne-barekov-zaradi-sayuz-s-nfsb-news223012.html>



## The nationalists in power (2017-2021)

While part of the third Borisov government (2017-2021), the NFSB leader Valeri Simeonov became the face of political attacks against the gambling tycoon Vasil Bozhkov. Under the guise of restoring state control, Simeonov led efforts to assume control over Bozhkov's gambling and lottery business.<sup>14</sup>

Within Borisov's government, IMRO controlled the Executive Agency for Bulgarians Abroad (Изпълнителна агенция за българите в чужбина). This government agency is responsible for the granting of Bulgarian citizenship. IMRO shifted the agency's priorities and focused on making it a profitable business.<sup>15</sup> The case against the former head of the agency and his aids for corruption and membership in an organized crime group are currently at the trial stage.

In 2019, the governing coalition in Bulgaria drafted and adopted a framework position on North Macedonia and Albania and passed the Bulgarian parliament's declaration on EU enlargement and the Stabilization and Association Process of the Republic of North Macedonia and Albania. This parliamentary declaration set out conditions for Bulgarian support for the accession of North Macedonia and Albania to the EU. A period of heated bilateral relations with Skopje ensued which remains in place today. While a matter of secondary importance in Bulgarian politics, the question of North Macedonia still serves its role as a catalyst for the political mobilization of supporters. It is not by chance that the North Macedonia question has reappeared in every election campaign over the last two years as Bulgaria has worked through multiple political crises and five parliamentary elections.

Although a junior partner in the government coalition, the "United Patriots" paid a high political price for their actions. The three parties have not only failed to pass the 4% threshold in the four elections held since 2021 but the nationalist vote shifted in-

stead towards the more radical and openly pro-Russian "Revival" party.

While the different discussed aspects may not represent a blatant example of the power of radical right activism, these cases reveal the complex nature of Bulgarian politics. Parties that claim to profess a more moderate political agenda provide access to radical politicians. On the other hand, the mere presence of these parties in the government pressured them to soften their rhetoric. IMRO's membership in the ECR group plays a similar role.

### **"Revival" | Elections: 2022 % of the vote: 10.18% | Votes: 254952**

Since the beginning of the protracted political crisis in 2020, the nationalist vote has been represented in the Bulgarian parliament by Kostadin Kostadinov's "Revival" party (Възраждане). The party leader was formerly a member of IMRO<sup>16</sup> but in 2012 defected and established Revival. Apart from nationalist slogans, the party's rhetoric is staunchly pro-Russian and openly anti-European and anti-NATO. Its economic program, meanwhile, calls for a mixture of state interventionism, cuts to state expenditures, the prioritization of small and medium enterprises and the development of state assets. The revival of the Bulgarian army is also central to the party's priorities. It proposes that a complex reorganization and modernisation of the Bulgarian army be carried out to this end. The "Revival" party further advocates for the "genuine" independence of Bulgarian foreign policy to be guided solely by the country's economic and political interests. In Kostadinov's view, North Macedonia should be recognized as a second Bulgarian state and the goal should be its complete unification with Bulgaria. The party rejects a western-centric worldview and promotes the restoration of close relations with Russia, the Arab world and the Far East (Asia). The "Revival" party also acknowledges the need for meticulous amendments to the constitution but argues that these changes should only take place after a thorough discussion and consensus. The party programme, simultaneously, identifies the

14 Валери Симеонов твърди, че Божков се е опитвал да го разубеди да внесе поправките в Закона за хазарта, Banker.bg, 1.6.2020 <https://banker.bg/2020/06/01/valeri-simeonov-tvurdi-che-bojkov-se-e-opitval-da-go-razubedi-da-vnese-popravkite-v-zakona-za-hazarta/>

15 Да си купиш българско гражданство, Deutsche Welle, 22.01.2019, <https://www.dw.com/bg/да-си-купиш-българско-гражданство/a-47184812>

16 <https://vmro.bg/kandidatt-za-kmet-ot-vmro-kostadin-kostadinov-az-1>

need for more extensive societal awareness about constitutional provisions and the extension of the right to raise questions at the Constitutional Court. Despite its Far Right nationalistic program, “Revival” aims to achieve these goals within the democratic political process. The party’s share in the last parliament was 10.18%, benefitting from the weak results of other opposition parties and absorbing the vote share from the sinking Bulgarian Socialist Party. Voters disappointed with the malfunctioning system of parliamentary democracy in the country that has seen parties unable to reach an agreement on the establishment of a coalition government especially cast their ballots for Kostadinov’s party. For Revival’s voters, the anti-EU, anti-NATO and pro-Russian stance and nationalist narrative of the platform presents an alternative to the pro-EU and NATO parties backed by what they perceive to be corrupt political elites. Kostadinov’s solution is not simply a change of elites but more fundamentally a change in Bulgaria’s political orientation.

## Non-parliamentary parties

Apart from the nationalist parties that have gained representation in the Bulgarian parliament, a plethora of less visible and, at times, provocative nationalist political parties and associations are active in the country. Some of them have consciously sought to distance themselves from the nationalist parties that have served in parliament, deeming them to be too soft or traitors to nationalist ideals.<sup>17</sup> An annual event, Lukov March, gathers members of various radical right parties every February.<sup>18</sup>

## Bulgarian National Union

The Bulgarian National Union (Български Национален Съюз, BNU) is a nationalist organization that ideologically positions itself “closest to the pre-second world war fascist Union of the Bulgarian

National Legions”. The BNU rejects “the radicalism of liberal capitalism and all derivatives of Marxism”.<sup>19</sup> The organization stands for a “third way” based on a nationally powerful and socially just order.<sup>20</sup> The leader of the BNU is Zvezdomir Andronov.

The BNU organizes the annual Lukov March in Bulgaria, the most important Far Right public event in the country. The march commemorates the general of the Bulgarian army and a minister of war (1935-1938), Hristo Lukov, who was killed by communists on February 13, 1943. Lukov headed the fascist Union of Bulgarian National Legions and is considered to have been one of the strongest supporters of close relations with the German Third Reich. Although local authorities have repeatedly banned the organization of the event, Bulgarian courts have adopted an ambiguous approach towards the March. In 2021 the “Sofia city court refused to delegatize the BNU “Edelweis”<sup>21</sup> and in 2022 the Appellate court confirmed this judgment.<sup>22</sup>

The BNU is a non-transparent organization with little public information about its structure and membership. The organization has distanced itself from its past or current members that are investigated by law enforcement. The BNU continuously operates on the border between open and clandestine activity. On the one hand, it exploits the human rights protections of Bulgarian law to secure its right to exist but on the other, it refuses to participate in elections labelling them as a “mockery”.<sup>23</sup> The organization vigorously protects its image as a truly nationalist non-governmental organization and openly seeks out conflict with right-wing politicians and organizations that allegedly betray nationalist ideals.

The organization, nonetheless, tends to promptly distance itself from members interrogated or under the oversight of Bulgarian authorities. That said, members of BNU regularly obstruct meetings aimed

17 [http://www.rassate.bg/blog/id\\_6194/](http://www.rassate.bg/blog/id_6194/)

18 <https://www.lukovmarsh.info/>

19 <https://bgns.net/кои-сме-ние/>

20 <https://bgns.net/кои-сме-ние/>

21 Съдът отхвърли иска на прокуратурата за забрана на организаторите на Луков марш (допълнена), Dnevnik.bg 18.02.2021, [https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2021/02/18/4176427\\_sudut\\_othvurli\\_iska\\_na\\_prokuraturata\\_za\\_zabrana\\_na/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2021/02/18/4176427_sudut_othvurli_iska_na_prokuraturata_za_zabrana_na/)

22 И Апелативният съд отказа да забрани организаторите на Луков марш, Dnevnik.bg 13.04.2022 [https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2022/04/13/4335923\\_i\\_apelativniat\\_sud\\_otkaza\\_da\\_zabrani\\_organizatorite/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2022/04/13/4335923_i_apelativniat_sud_otkaza_da_zabrani_organizatorite/)

23 <https://bgns.net/настоящето-състояние-на-българия/>

at discussing questions related to the Far Right in Bulgaria. And BNU seldom enters into cooperation with politically active right-wing organizations like IMRO.

The organization's political credo is premised on an idea of Bulgarian nationalism defined in rather ambiguous terms. The dividing line in Bulgarian society, according to BNU, lies between Bulgarians on one side and Roma, Jews, Turks and Armenians as guests on the other. Unlike Revival or the Attack party, BNU formally rejects any alignment with the United States or the Russian Federation, labeled as "liberal capitalism and all derivatives of Marxism"<sup>24</sup>. It portrays them both as the face of the contemporary political world order, dominated by left-wing forces. In 2019 the organization hosted a meeting of Far Right organizations in Sofia. Together with other radical right groups from Germany, Poland, Czechia, Hungary and France the "Fortress Europe" umbrella organization was established.<sup>25</sup>

## BNU-ND

Another organization that has formally declared its national socialist ideology is the Bulgarian National Union–New Democracy (BNU-ND). Established in 1990, it is one of the oldest nationalist organizations in the country. Its current leader Bojan Stankov-Rasate openly denounces most of the politically active nationalist organizations in Bulgaria as pro-Russian and controlled by foreign powers.<sup>26</sup> Stankov-Rasate's ambition is to create a multi-faceted network of national socialist proxy organizations (Bulgarian Women's Union, Kubrat Youth), think-tanks and a publishing houses and to build up his own network concentrating on youth education and mobilization networks such as the Kubrat Youth. The field organization of the BNU-ND consists of local "sheafs". The party's symbolism draws on Nazi symbols in terms of style and content. The BNU-ND rejects parliamentary democracy and blames liberalism for

the current situation in Bulgaria. Instead, it promotes what it calls the values of friendship, discipline and the cult of a strong leader.<sup>27</sup>

Bojan Stankov-Rasate is among the most consistent and determined social nationalists. He has been involved in the Far Right movement since the early 1990s and served as a member and leader of numerous organizations. While collaborating with Volen Siderov in the establishment of the Attack party, he later distanced himself from Siderov and established National Movement "Gvardia" (Гвардия), which was dissolved in 2010.<sup>28</sup> Stankov-Rasate often gets into feuds with other nationalist leaders. Whenever he perceives that his voice is ignored within a group, he is quick to resign from the organization and establish a new one. After several Bulgarian – Roma conflicts in 2007, Stankov-Rasate established the Civic Patrols to provide security, simultaneously mocking the inability of the Bulgarian state to guarantee citizens' safety.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, Stankov-Rasate's national socialist position is also pitted against Russia. He established connections with Ukrainian nationalists and supports the Ukrainian war against Russia.<sup>30</sup> While emphasizing his relations with Azov, Stankov-Rasate advocates for the Bulgarian minority within the Ukrainian state. Stankov-Rasate also claims to be a member of European Action and says he serves as the Bulgarian representative in the organization.<sup>31</sup>

## New Power

In 2009, the former aide of Volen Siderov and vice-president of the Attack Party Anton Sirakov established a new political party called New Power "Нова Сила". The party achieved meager results in the 2014 parliamentary elections, gaining just 0.17% of the vote (5553 votes). During the most recent presidential elections, the party backed Nikolay Malinov, representing the party Rusophils for the Re-

24 <https://bgns.net/кои-сме-ние/>

25 <https://bgns.net/нашите-нации-нашата-европа-съюз-кре/>

26 Расате - кривото огледало на българската десница, Duma, 13.03.2023, <https://duma.bg/rasate-krivoto-ogledalo-na-balgarskata-desnitsa-n271716>

27 <https://kubrat.idem.bg/кои-сме-ние.html>

28 Георги Папакочев, "Национална"? "Гвардия"?, Deutsche Welle, 28.07.2007, <https://www.dw.com/bg/национална-гвардия/a-2746234>

29 Роми поемат патрули с "Егида", Медиароол, 21.08.2007 <https://www.mediapool.bg/romi-poemat-patruli-s-egida-news131355.html>

30 Слава Україні! Героям слава! Да живее България и всички националисти <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfMaMeeZ8-4>

31 <http://www.rassate.bg/bio/>

vival of the Fatherland (Русофили за възраждане на отечеството).

Rusophils for the Revival of the Fatherland is a political party established in 2020. It also experienced weak results in October 2022, garnering only 0.26% of the vote (6533 votes). The party leader Nikolay Malinov was subsequently sanctioned in February 2023 under the Magnitsky Act for his active participation in corruption schemes in Bulgaria.<sup>32</sup> Malinov has not hidden his close relations with Kremlin and was awarded a medal by Vladimir Putin.<sup>33</sup> A long-time member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, Malinov defected in 2015 arguably over disagreements about party positions. His party is considered to be left nationalist.

## Nation

Another former member of the Attack party, Kiril Gumnerov, established the Nation (Нация) party in 2021. The party promotes strong control over NGOs in Bulgaria, economic protectionism, an exit from the EU and the introduction of a neutrality policy in international relations.<sup>34</sup> The party scored a mere 0.03% (897 votes) in the April 2021 parliamentary elections. The nationalist landscape in Bulgaria also hosts extreme right organizations that failed to register as political parties.<sup>35</sup>

There is little information available on the ideology, structure and organization of extreme right communities in Bulgaria which are often associated with organized football hooliganism. In 2016, a report on the radicalization in Bulgaria underlines that 90% of their members share right-wing ideals.<sup>36</sup> Whereas most members seem to have a rather shallow

understanding of these ideological concepts, they generally embrace the notion that Bulgaria deserves an elevated position in the international arena, consider Roma guilty for Bulgaria's grievances and espouse protectionist, anti-globalist and anti-communist ideas. Importantly, this symbiosis between political radicalism and support for the respective football club is not obvious and often politically active extremists abandon hooligan communities.<sup>37</sup>

These hermetically closed communities avoid publicity. In particular, over the last 20 years these organizations have often morphed into organized crime structures. In the Bulgarian context, many of the football clubs are utilized as convenient mechanisms for money-laundering by "businessmen" with criminal records.<sup>38</sup> In these cases, it is unclear the extent to which Far Right extremism is a genuine source of ideological motivation and to what extent it is an alibi for lawbreaking activities and criminal behavior.

## National Movement "Khan Kubrat"

Registered in 2017, the National Movement "Khan Kubrat" defines itself as a non-governmental patriotic organization. Its leader, Veselin Kostov, is a member of the Bulgarian branch of the Putin backed Russian bikers club "Night Wolves".<sup>39</sup> In the current elections, the movement together with other nationalist groups like Great Bulgaria and Orthodox Dawn supported the Revival party.<sup>40</sup> Apart from its disdain for liberal economic policies, the organization has focused its ire on what it perceives as a flawed parliamentary political system. It glori-

32 Treasury Sanctions Corrupt Elites Across Bulgarian Political Spectrum, U.S. Department of the Treasury, 10.02.2023, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1264>

33 Санкционираният по "Магнитски" Николай Малинов пред БНТ: Горд съм, че съм включен в списъка, това е оценка за работата ми, BNT, 10.02.2023, <https://bntnews.bg/news/sankcioniraniyat-po-magnitski-nikolai-malinov-pred-bnt-gord-sam-che-sam-vklyuchen-v-spisaka-tova-e-ocenka-za-rabotata-mi-1223169news.html>

34 <https://нация.бг/%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b3%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%bc%d0%b0/>

35 See chapter on the effectiveness of the legal and institutional framework below

36 Радиализация в България, заплахи и тенденции, Център за изследване на демокрацията, P120-121 [https://wp.flgr.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Радиализация\\_в\\_България\\_заплахи\\_и\\_тенденции.pdf](https://wp.flgr.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Радиализация_в_България_заплахи_и_тенденции.pdf)

37 Ibidem.

38 Among the more famous businessmen owning football clubs were Georgi Iliev, Alexander Tasev or Nikolay Popov. All of them were killed. Vasil Bozhkov, now a fugitive in the United Arab Emirates owned CSKA Sofia and later, its main competitor Levski Sofia. However, other football clubs are not immune. See, Разстреляните президенти на „Локомотив“-Пловдив, Nbox, 13.08.2015 <https://nbox.bg/redaktora/item/5228-razstrelyanite-prezidenti-na-lokomotiv-plovdiv.html>; Официално: Васил Божков поема управлението в Левски, BNT, 13.02.2019 <https://bntnews.bg/news/oficialno-vasil-bozhkov-poeма-upravlenieto-v-levski-1107078news.html>

39 Спас Спасов, "Хан Кубрат" - татуировки, потури и гайди с подкрепата на "Джи Пи груп", Dnevnik, 13.11.2022, [https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2022/11/13/4367380\\_han\\_kubrat\\_-\\_tatuировки\\_poturi\\_i\\_gaidi\\_s\\_podkreпата\\_na/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2022/11/13/4367380_han_kubrat_-_tatuировки_poturi_i_gaidi_s_podkreпата_na/)

40 Ibidem

fies physical power and wants Bulgaria to seek out relative distance from all great powers.<sup>41</sup> However, in terms of practical actions, the movement has adopted the nationalist playbook on North Macedonia and stresses the Bulgarian origin story of the Cyrillic alphabet. It has also organized protests opposing Halloween celebrations and various progressive gender viewpoints.<sup>42</sup>

Beyond its nationalist rhetoric, the organization serves as a tool for wreaking political havoc. At times it supported Ivan Geshev, the former controversial prosecutor general dismissed by the judiciary in June 2023.<sup>43</sup> The movement, together with the biker club Great Bulgaria, was also instrumental in supporting the visit of the “Night Wolves” to Bulgaria in 2019.<sup>44</sup> And the movement criticizes military support for Ukraine in its war against Russia. The movement is linked to the controversial JP group, one of the Bulgarian construction companies.<sup>45</sup> The JP group is associated with the former deputy director of the Lukoil Executive Board, Valentin Zlatev, who denies such connections. The company was investigated for the misuse of EU funds and is also associated with former prime minister Boyko Borisov.<sup>46</sup>

“Khan Kubrat” is also among the organizers of the “conservative-patriotic movement” (Консервативно-патриотично движение), which gathered media publishers with close ties to Borisov. This includes Nedyalko Nedyalkov and Yulii Moskov, the president of the Bulgarian and Balkan MMA Federation Stanislav Nedkov – Styki, and former communist member of secret services Boyan Chukov who is known for his nationalist, anti-west-

ern and pro-Russian views. The movement was instrumental in exerting pressure for the return of paper ballots during the April 2023 elections.<sup>47</sup>

The so-called migrant crisis in 2015 and the inability of the Bulgarian authorities to prevent illegal border crossings encouraged radical right activists and groups to organize so-called “civil patrols” on the Bulgarian-Turkish border. In 2016, Petar Nizamov conducted a “citizen’s arrest” of illegal migrants.<sup>48</sup> Nizamov established several such groups, the “Bulgarian Judiciary Committee”, the “Civil Units for the Protection of Women and Faith”, and more recently the association “Free Europe”. He further stands behind the Rodina party (Motherland).<sup>49</sup> While Nizamov had ambitions to revive “Fortress Europe”, these aims failed to garner traction internationally.

In 2020, Simeon Kostadinov, an organizer and active participant at the Lukov March events, established the CHEST Party (Чиста, Единна и Суверенна, Татковина, ЧЕСТ) with six fellow activists.<sup>50</sup> The party is campaigning for the reformulation of social relations, emphasizing what it calls mutual understanding, support and cooperation. The party is led by a collective body instead of an individual leader. All told, CHEST is national-patriotic, conservative and social constellation harbouring openly anti-liberal views, emphasizing social justice and radical statism.<sup>51</sup> Members of the party presidium include Ivan Spiridonov, Preslav Kulekov, Ivan Ganovski, Spas Genchin, the Orthodox priest Silvester Yanakiev and Vladimir Pavlov.<sup>52</sup> Although the party put forward an ambitious goal to become a significant political player in the country, there is little information about its subsequent activities.

41 Веселин Костов, лидер на национално движение Хан Кубрат: Който не празнува този празник, няма място в България, Trud, 3.03.2022, <https://trud.bg/веселин-костов-лидер-на-национално-движение-хан-кубрат-който-не-празнува-този-празник-няма>

42 Спас Спасов, “Хан Кубрат” - татуировки, потури и гайди с подкрепата на “Джи Пи груп”, Dnevnik, 13.11.2022, [https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2022/11/13/4367380\\_han\\_kubrat\\_-\\_tatuировки\\_poturi\\_i\\_gaidi\\_s\\_podkreпата\\_na/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2022/11/13/4367380_han_kubrat_-_tatuировки_poturi_i_gaidi_s_podkreпата_na/)

43 <https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-prosecutor-geshev-fired-analysis-judicial-independence/32466120.html>

44 “Български нощен вълк” води контрапротеста на ПИК в подкрепа на Гешев, Bivol, 12.09.2019, <https://bivol.bg/veselin-kostov-support-geshev.html>

45 Спас Спасов, “Хан Кубрат” - татуировки, потури и гайди с подкрепата на “Джи Пи груп”, Dnevnik, 13.11.2022, [https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2022/11/13/4367380\\_han\\_kubrat\\_-\\_tatuировки\\_poturi\\_i\\_gaidi\\_s\\_podkreпата\\_na/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2022/11/13/4367380_han_kubrat_-_tatuировки_poturi_i_gaidi_s_podkreпата_na/)

46 Ibidem.

47 Ibidem.

48 Задържаха Петър Низамов за т. нар. “граждански арести” на мигранти, BNR, 12.04.2016, <https://bnr.bg/music/post/100680248/zadarjaha-petar-nizamov-za>

49 <https://petarnizamov.com/низамов/бюк-български-юридически-комитет-соц/>

50 Новата партия ЧЕСТ се обяви за антилиберална, иска връщане към корените, Trud, 23.01.2021 <https://trud.bg/новата-партия-чест-се-обяви-за-антилиберална-иска-връщане-към-корените/>

51 <https://fakti.bg/bulgaria/503001-uchrediha-partia-chest>

52 Новата партия ЧЕСТ се обяви за антилиберална, иска връщане към корените, Trud, 23.01.2021 <https://trud.bg/новата-партия-чест-се-обяви-за-антилиберална-иска-връщане-към-корените/>

Interestingly, Simeon Kostadinov, who is apparently close to Revival's leader Kostadin Kostadinov,<sup>53</sup> was employed by the National Customs Agency in a senior position that involved performing enforcement functions related to excise duties.<sup>54</sup> This resulted in a range of media reports warning that his unit in the Customs Agency was responsible for the import of oil within the Bulgarian exemption from the EU sanctions.<sup>55</sup>

The Bulgarian spectrum of nationalist organizations also includes biker groups like "Great Bulgaria" and the national forum "Unification" (Обединение). The leader of this latter group, Marin Marinov, is a former employee of the communist era Ministry of Internal Affairs, a bodyguard of the 1990s gangster Ivo Karamanski, and a former private detective.<sup>56</sup> A supposed "patriot", Marinov holds strong anti-Roma views and is an organizer of street patrols and a member of the board of the "Great Bulgaria" biker club.<sup>57</sup>

## Paramilitary organizations

Despite a constitutional ban on the existence of paramilitary organizations in Bulgaria, such formations as the Committee for National Salvation "Vasil Levski" (Комитет за Национално Спасение "Васил Левски"), Bulgarian National Volunteer Corps "Shipka" (Българско Национално Опълчение „Шипка“) and Military Alliance (Воински съюз) uploaded online content revealing not only the existence of the organization but also that it conducted military exercises in the Bulgarian mountains.<sup>58</sup> The

face of these organizations is Doncho Rusev (a.k.a. Vladimir Rusev). Their internet content, meanwhile, contains a mixture of radical narratives about masonry, the alleged dysfunctional state, conspiracy theories and nationalist appeals. Such formations have existed at least since 2016. Rusev's recent posts on Facebook touts the Russian propaganda narrative that this is a "Bandera-fascist regime" in Ukraine. Allegedly, in some of the military training exercises of this paramilitary group, a member of Russia's GRU was present.<sup>59</sup> In late 2022, the State Agency for National Security initiated an investigation accusing the groups of committing "crimes against the republic".<sup>60</sup>

Another paramilitary organization called "Orthodox Dawn" was established by Pavel Chernev, the former aide of Volen Siderov and his one-time vice-president. Since the death of Chernev in 2016, the organization has fallen under the leadership of the mixed marital arts (MMA) fighter Zhivko Ivanov. "Orthodox Dawn" organizes military training camps with instructors from OMON and Specnaz.<sup>61</sup> Allegedly, the organization sent a volunteer unit to support the Russian aggression in Ukraine.<sup>62</sup> Orthodox Dawn also supported a Serbian paramilitary organization in Kosovo, known as "Chetnichki pokret" of Bratislav Zhivkovic.<sup>63</sup> Ivanov was accused of and investigated for drug trafficking in Spain.<sup>64</sup> Currently, Bulgarian courts are considering an Italian request for the extradition of Ivanov concerning a crime he is accused of having committed in 2003.<sup>65</sup> Ivanov presently owns a sports club and supports the "Revival" party.<sup>66</sup>

53 Нацист дефилира в руската подлога „Възраждане“ (СНИМКИ), 5.06.2022, <https://promiana.eu/nacist-defilira-v-ruskata-podloga-vazrazhdane-snimki/>

54 <https://euractiv.bg/section/разследвания/news/луковмарш-не-пречи-на-кадровия-подбор/>

55 <https://bairak.bg/2023/01/29/вербовчик-на-главорезите-от-вагнер/>

56 Охранител на Иво Карамански заведе дело срещу Асен Генов, <http://www.budnaera.com/201603f/1603000067.html>

57 Детектив Марин Маринов, Братята Роми да си налягат парцалите! Интервю <http://skandalno.net/detektiv-marin-marinov-bratyata-romi-d-150994/>

58 <https://www.bnoshipka.org/>

59 Руски лагер за неонацисти, Под Лупа, <https://www.burgas-podlupa.com/руски-лагер-за-неонацисти>

60 ДАНС проверява БНО "Шипка", 28 000 души в паравоенни организации? Dnes.bg, 19.12.2022

<https://www.dnes.bg/obshtestvo/2022/12/19/dans-proveriava-bno-shipka-28-000-dushi-v-paravoenni-organizacii.554352;>

Проруска паравоенна организация е разследвана в България, Euractiv Bulgaria, 16.12.2022

<https://euractiv.bg/section/правосъдие-и-вътрешен-ред/news/проруска-паравоенна-организация-е-ра/>

61 Сигнал до пик: Наркобаронът Хорхе Мазния бил ортак с паравоенните на Живко Иванов от „Православна Зора“, Piko.bg, 7.03.2019, <https://piko.bg/сигнал-до-пик-наркобаронът-хорхе-мазния-бил-ортак-с-паравоенните-на-живко-иванов-от-правос-824683.html>

62 Бойци и националисти заминават за Украйна под знамената на "Православна зора", bTV, 4.03.2014, <https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/na-raba-na-voina.html#>

63 Гангстери от Враца в международна престъпна мрежа, Bivol, 17.04.2018, <https://bivol.bg/opg-vratza-milko-2.html>

64 Скандал! Съден за наркотрафик в Испания и ортак на сръбски четници стана партньор на Възраждане, narod.bg, 18.06.2021, <https://narod.bg/2021/06/18/скандал-съден-за-наркотрафик-в-испани/>

65 Националистът Живко Иванов заплашен от екстрадиция в Италия заради сводничество, Trafficnews.bg, 21.02.2023, <https://trafficnews.bg/krimi/natsionalistat-zhivko-ivanov-zaplashen-ekstradi-tsiia-270979/>

66 Ibidem

## Response to radicalism

### Legal framework

Bulgaria's constitution provides a framework that regulates matters concerning acceptable social norms and demarcates certain limits. Among the relevant basic constitutional provisions concerns the basic tenet of equality before the law for all citizens and a general ban on discrimination (Art. 6). Whereas political pluralism is defined in Art. 11, no political party or ideology shall be proclaimed or affirmed as a party or ideology of the State (Art. 11.2). Along with a general ban on political parties established along ethnic, racial or religious grounds, the constitution forbids the establishment of political parties seeking the violent seizure of state power (Art. 11.4).

Chapter 2 of the Bulgarian constitution, outlining human rights and duties contains numerous relevant limitations. Notably, *"No one shall be persecuted or restricted in their rights because of their views"* (Art. 38), freedom of expression *"shall not be used to the detriment of the rights and reputation of others, or for the incitement of a forcible change of the constitutionally established order, the perpetration of a crime, or the incitement of enmity or violence against anyone"* (Art. 39.2). Freedom of the press can be limited among *"others in case of incitement of a forcible change of the constitutionally established order, the perpetration of a crime, or the incitement of violence against anyone"* (Art. 40). The freedom of association also *"shall not be contrary to the country's sovereignty and national integrity, or the unity of the nation, nor shall it incite racial, national, ethnic or religious enmity or an encroachment on the rights and freedoms of citizens; no organization shall establish clandestine or paramilitary structures or shall seek to attain its aims through violence"* (Art. 44.2).

The law on political parties (Закон за политическите партии)<sup>67</sup> further contains regulations against the misuse of national symbols

by political parties. According to Art. 5, political parties are not allowed to use the coat of arms in their symbols or the national flag (as well as those of other countries). Religious symbols or effigies are also prohibited (Art. 5.1). *"The symbols cannot infringe upon the values of humanity or contradict mores"* (Art. 5.2). The law also explicitly forbids the establishment of political parties involving children or youth (children under the age of 18) as well as those involving religious and militarized entities in this context (Art. 20.4). A political party can be banned, among others, following a judgement of the Constitutional Court, by which the party is declared unconstitutional (Art. 38.4). A party can also be dissolved by the Sofia City Court, *inter alia*, if it repeatedly violates the provisions of the law on political parties or its activities contradict constitutional provisions. In the event of repeated violations, the motion needs to be filed by a prosecutor (Art. 40.(1) 1, 2 and (2)).

Far-right groups may also register as non-profit organizations. However, the law on non-profit legal entities (Закон за юридическите лица с нестопанска цел) also contains provisions on the termination of such entities if their activities contradict the constitution and/or other legislation (Art. 13.6) or support terrorist activity (Art. 13.в).<sup>68</sup>

The Law on Radio and Television (Закон за радиото и телевизията)<sup>69</sup> also contains provisions obliging media providers to follow, among other provisions, the principle that they should not broadcast programs inciting hatred among citizens or contradicting social mores (such as pornography or praising or justifying cruelty or violence based on racial, sexual, religious or national grounds) (Art. 10.5 and 6).

Bulgaria's Criminal Code also contains provisions addressing hate crimes, including murder (Art. 116,1(11)), serious bodily harm (Art. 131, 1(12)), the dissemination of hate speech including via the media, discrimination-based violence (including organizations and the leader of groups committing discrimination-based violence) (Art. 162 and 163), crimes

67 <https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135501352>

68 <https://justice.government.bg/home/normdoc/2134942720>

69 <https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2134447616>

against religions (Art. 162-166) and hooliganism (Art. 325).

The counterterrorist law<sup>70</sup> adopted in 2016 additionally addresses problems of radicalization and terrorism. However, the law concentrates on the problem of terrorism. The challenge of radicalization is treated only as a supplementary issue.

It is important to note that, similar to legislation in other countries, the relevant Bulgarian legislation does not recognize the extreme Far Right as a specific threat and therefore government and judiciary authorities are managing this challenge using the general provisions that the constitution and the relevant legislation provide.

## Strategy for countering radicalization and terrorism

Currently, Bulgaria operates on an outdated national strategy for countering radicalization and terrorism. The last strategy, which was adopted for the 2015-2020 period, defines radicalization as the resolute readiness to impose one's own views and principles on society through the rejection of the constitutional principles of democracy and rejection of human rights.<sup>71</sup> The document aims include prevention, countermeasures, effective prosecution, the minimalization of risks and the fostering of public confidence. The strategy identifies the external and internal security environment and policies of prevention and countermeasures against radicalization and terrorism.

The language of the strategy is very general; although the document provides clear definitions, the content blurs the line between radicalization and terrorism, leaving the impression that the most prevalent threats emanate from radical Islam rather than homegrown radicalization. The Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) confirms this and highlights that *“the Far Right has received less attention*

*from institutions despite civil society being very vocal about this more established threat”*.<sup>72</sup> In addition, right-wing extremist groups and networks in Bulgaria systematically stigmatize minority groups such as Muslims and Roma.

One action point within the strategy is the creation of implementation plan. The government of Bulgaria published these implementation plan annually until 2019<sup>73</sup> but not since. The initial implementation plan of the strategy focused on the creation of effective legal framework, establishment of a monitoring and coordination system, improvement of the organization and activity of relevant law enforcement structures and an extension of the administrative capacity of public employees dealing with these issues. The plan also contained extensive lists of activities, deadlines and responsible institutions. The subsequent annual reports, however, contained no information concerning the status of the targets and how much of these were fully or partially implemented or achieved.

## Institutional framework

The Security Council at the Council of Ministers is responsible for strategic decision-making related to radicalism and terrorist threats. The Council provides a general assessment of security threats, proposes measures and coordinates and guides the work of Bulgarian security agencies.

Bulgaria's main institutions dealing with radicalization include the State Agency of National Security (SANS) and the relevant units of the Ministry of Interior (MoI). SANS monitors radicalisation and extremist networks using overt and covert means (use of agents and informants, surveillance, etc.) and on the basis of information received from foreign intelligence services. SANS also monitors the activities of high-risk extremist groups and organizations operating in the country. Law enforcement bodies such as the Border Police and the Director-

70 [https://www.mvr.bg/docs/librariesprovider20/закони/закон-за-противодействие-на-тероризма.pdf?sfvrsn=bd39120e\\_2](https://www.mvr.bg/docs/librariesprovider20/закони/закон-за-противодействие-на-тероризма.pdf?sfvrsn=bd39120e_2)

71 [https://www.mvr.bg/docs/default-source/strategicheskidokumenti/стратегия-за-противодействие-на-радикализацията-и-тероризма-\(2015-2020-г-\).pdf?sfvrsn=66f863d4\\_2](https://www.mvr.bg/docs/default-source/strategicheskidokumenti/стратегия-за-противодействие-на-радикализацията-и-тероризма-(2015-2020-г-).pdf?sfvrsn=66f863d4_2)

72 Rositsa Dzhekova, Stefan Ralchev, Nadya Stoynova, Drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism in the light of state dynamics in MENA and the Balkans. BULGARIA, Connekt, Country-Paper on Macro Level Drivers, p.3 [https://h2020connekt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Bulgaria\\_CONNEKT\\_Macro\\_Drivers.pdf](https://h2020connekt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Bulgaria_CONNEKT_Macro_Drivers.pdf)

73 П Л А Н за изпълнение на Стратегията за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма (2015–2020 г), РЕПУБЛИКА БЪЛГАРИЯ, МИНИСТЕРСКИ СЪВЕТ



ate General for Combating Organised Crime at the MoI are responsible for monitoring and countering risks related to violent extremism and terrorism. The lack of cooperation and exchange of information between SANS and the MoI is considered one of the key challenges that should be improved.<sup>74</sup>

## NGOs

Civil society organizations are well established in Bulgaria and play a crucial role in countering radical and extremist narratives. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Shalom organization, Open Society Foundation, Amnesty International and think-tanks like the Center for Research on Democracy monitor respond to and report on radicalization and extremism in the country. For example, civil society was pivotal to preventing the registration of the Nationalist Party by organizing public protests against it.

The National Strategy also takes into consideration the need for active and close cooperation with NGOs in the implementation of deradicalization programmes and the strengthening of confidence among citizens and society. However, there is little indication that these elements of the strategy have been implemented successfully on a broader scale.

## The effectiveness of the legal and institutional framework

In 2013, the Nationalist Party of Bulgaria (националистическа партия на България), a coalition of various right-wing extremist groups, the Blood and Honor national sections, the National Resistance, the Bulgarian national-radical party and the “Offensive” Association of football ultras, as well as members of the “Liberty” party and the

BNU, attempted to register itself formally.<sup>75</sup> The announcement of the party’s establishment was made by Simeon Kostadinov. The initiative failed following ardent NGO criticism and appeals to the court responsible for potentially registering the party to provide a negative legal opinion concerning this registration.<sup>76</sup> In 2018, another party, “Independence” (Независимост), was established. Blagovest Asenov and Todor Totev jointly led the party and Nikolay Ilovev served as vice-chairman. All three were previous members of National Resistance.<sup>77</sup> In 2012, Ilovev, together with Alexander Angov, Stoian Stavrev and Vasil Georgiev, were arrested following a bomb explosion in front of the Euroroma club in Sandansky, where one person was killed. IMRO responded by initiating a campaign to collect money for them, adding them in its candidates lists and lobbying for their release.<sup>78</sup>

While the existing legal framework was sufficient to prevent the registration of the Nationalist Party as an official political party in 2013, the same was not the case seven years later.<sup>79</sup> Despite a motion from the prosecutor in court and clear arguments against the organizers of the Lukov March, the Bulgarian National Union – Edelvais Party (BNU-Edelvais), the court denied an attempt to ban the party. In 2020, the prosecutor general, Ivan Geshev, referred the case to the Sofia City Court, arguing for a ban on BNU-Edelvais, claiming that its activities constituted a violation of the Bulgarian constitution and that the group incites hatred and was involved in organizing paramilitary formations.<sup>80</sup> But in February 2021, the city court rejected the motion and the Supreme Court did the same in April 2022, concluding that the wearing of uniforms is not in itself a crime and that the arguments about the spread of national hatred are not proven. The courts ignored the fact that

74 Радикализация в България, заплахи и тенденции, Център за изследване на демокрацията, Р.84-85 [https://wp.flgr.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Радикализация\\_в\\_България\\_заплахи\\_и\\_тенденции.pdf](https://wp.flgr.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Радикализация_в_България_заплахи_и_тенденции.pdf)

75 „Националистическа партия на България“ бе учредена в София, 9.11.2013 <https://dnes.dir.bg/politika/natzionalisticheska-partia-bulgaria-15472007>

76 Радикализация в България, заплахи и тенденции, Център за изследване на демокрацията, Р.66 [https://wp.flgr.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Радикализация\\_в\\_България\\_заплахи\\_и\\_тенденции.pdf](https://wp.flgr.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Радикализация_в_България_заплахи_и_тенденции.pdf)

77 Появи се нова националистическа партия, щели да спасяват България, news.bg, 23.04.2018 <https://news.bg/politics/poyavi-se-nova-natzionalisticheska-partiya-shteli-da-spasyavat-balgariya.html>

78 Соня Колчакова, ВМРО събира пари за гаранцията на двамата от Сандански, <https://news.bg/crime/vmro-sabira-pari-za-garantsiyata-na-dvamata-ot-sandanski.html> 23.4.2013

79 Радикализация в България, заплахи и тенденции, Център за изследване на демокрацията, Р.84-85 [https://wp.flgr.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Радикализация\\_в\\_България\\_заплахи\\_и\\_тенденции.pdf](https://wp.flgr.bg/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Радикализация_в_България_заплахи_и_тенденции.pdf)

80 [https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2022/04/13/4335923\\_i\\_apelativniat\\_sud\\_otkaza\\_da\\_zabrani\\_organizatorite/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2022/04/13/4335923_i_apelativniat_sud_otkaza_da_zabrani_organizatorite/)

many weapons had been discovered by the police in the home of one of the BNS-Edelvais members.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time, extremist groups and entities could have legally joined any already existing political entity to evade the law, as was the case with Pavel Chernev and the registration of the “Liberty” party (Свобода).<sup>82</sup> Due to this legal loophole, in recent years, extremist right-wing groups have always featured in elections in Bulgaria. This is despite the fact that the participants in right wing events are confident that they are subject to strict surveillance and monitored by the Ministry of Interior.<sup>83</sup>

The extensive legal anti-discriminatory and anti-extremist provisions in Bulgaria, nonetheless, still contain further loopholes. There is a need for the introduction of more explicit sanctions for hate crimes and more awareness raising efforts among law enforcement bodies to clearly distinguish between ordinary crimes and hate crimes and handle hate crimes with greater urgency.

## Financing

The funding of right-wing extremist groups in Bulgaria is linked to their involvement in party politics. Those groups that are active participants in political life, like “Revival”, IMRO, NFSB, and others, are able to obtain party subsidies and therefore receive financing from the state budget. To qualify for a party subsidy, political parties need to get at least 1% of the vote in the prior elections (or 4% if they participated as a part of a coalition).<sup>84</sup>

The officially registered political parties also can draw on their own sources of funds including private donations, income from renting out premises that they own, membership fees, proceeds from publishing fees, bank loans, etc. Given several recent scandals concerning nationalist politicians in power, it is reasonable to assume that while in

power most also take advantage of their position for personal enrichment as well as to channel funds to their political party. Apart from the IMRO scandal with the Executive Agency for Bulgarians Abroad mentioned earlier, the case of Kostadin Kostadinov’s declaratory rejection of public subsidies after his party obtained more than 1% of the vote in the 2017 elections is also exemplary. In the meantime, however, Kostadinov purchased a new house and car and questionably used this subsidy in the period between 2017 and 2020.<sup>85</sup>

According to the law, it is forbidden for political parties to obtain anonymous donations, financing from religious communities and funds from abroad, as well as public financial resources apart from official party subsidies.<sup>86</sup> Although it seems that right-wing extremist parties are not adhering to these limitations, to date there were no investigations of the financial resources of radical right organizations in Bulgaria even if there are cases of concern like Volen Siderov’s exclusive stay in Paris. Siderov claimed that he has wealthy friends who are ready to cover his costs and acknowledged that he never declared such situations, despite the legal obligation to do so in his annual declaration of income.<sup>87</sup>

Right-wing extremist formations that are registered as political parties can also finance their activities via membership fees. However, some of these organizations are financially supported by companies connected with politicians, as in the case of “Khan Kubrat” described earlier.

Another source of financing is linked with various sports activities. Sports clubs, particularly the popular MMA clubs linked to right-wing extremist networks, often offer paid courses. The MMA scene in Bulgaria has to a certain extent become an umbrella network for the training and organization of violence in politics in Bulgaria. Bulgarian hooligan organizations own gyms and sports facilities.<sup>88</sup>

81 <https://trud.bg/съдът-отказа-да-заличи-бнс-еделвайс/>

82 <https://nationalistbg.com/readarticle.php?id=950>

83 Радикализация в България, заплахи и тенденции, Център за изследване на демокрацията, P.87

84 Art.25 Law on political parties. <https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135501352>

85 Спас Спасов, Прокуратурата проверява лидера на партия “Възраждане” за присвояване на партийната субсидия (видео), Dnevnik, 13.05.2020, [https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2020/05/13/4066200\\_prokuraturata\\_proveriava\\_lidera\\_na\\_partiia\\_vuzrajdane/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2020/05/13/4066200_prokuraturata_proveriava_lidera_na_partiia_vuzrajdane/)

86 Art. 24 Law on political parties. <https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135501352>

87 Volen Siderov не е декларирал парите от богатите си приятели, Bivol, 29.12.2013, <https://bivol.bg/siderov-paris-deklaracia.html>

88 Национална Съпротива България, 9.08.2018 <https://bg-nacionalisti.org/BNF/index.php?topic=246.0>

Right-wing extremist organizations and networks also often provide a convenient tool for money laundering and drug or migrant trafficking, as in the case of Zhivko Ivanov. Leaders of these organizations further manage their own businesses, such as the fashion line “Robobran”, as they seek to shape the Far Right subculture in Bulgaria through groups like Paganblut, Aryan Art or Nation’s Defence. A diverse range of so called “patriotic” merchandise and fashion are easily accessible online. While radical websites espouse global conspiracy theories, they often also advertise the use of cryptocurrencies, arguing that using this new technology enhances people’s independence from formal economic and financial structures.<sup>89</sup>

## Radical right’s role in Bulgaria’s political life

Efforts to analyze the Far Right of the political spectrum in Bulgaria require certain terminological clarity. While radicalism may include nationalism and the rejection of equal rights, democratic rules and human dignity, it stands somewhere between democracy and extremism and still falls under the constitutional system.<sup>90</sup> Radical parties criticise democratic rules and may demand extensive changes while still accepting the state’s monopoly on political violence. Hence, Bulgaria’s radical right can be organized along the following axis: their level of radicalization and the East-West orientation.

The first axis positions each party between the radical and more extreme ends. From that perspective, the main Far Right political groupings over the past two decades were rather closer to the radical than extreme end of the spectrum. IMRO and NFSB, namely, participated in Borisov’s third government and exerted a significant impact on Bulgaria’s domestic and foreign policy at that time. IMRO is also a member of the European Conservatives and Reformers group in the European Parliament and

actively exploits this platform for its own political purposes.

And for a decade, Siderov’s Attack party not only served as the main party providing parliamentary representation to Bulgarian nationalists but it also turned into a silent, yet reliable, partner for Borisov’s governments. Attack embraced many Russian symbols and propaganda rhetoric but advocated a softer version of Euroscepticism.<sup>91</sup> Over the past several years and in the context of Bulgaria’s prolonged internal political crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, “Revival” has emerged as a new force for nationalist representation. The “Revival” party has benefited from the loss of political credibility of IMRO, NFSB and Attack by the end of the last Borisov government in 2021. Today, “Revival’s” agenda has shifted closer to the extreme as it consistently parrots Russian propaganda. Recognizing the poor political results of the earlier nationalist parties represented in the parliament, the leader of “Revival” has sought to expand his agenda by enriching his key ideological themes with anti-Euro, anti-EU and anti-NATO rhetoric.<sup>92</sup> Kostadinov attempts to use the growing split between Russia and the West to stoke deep internal divisions within Bulgarian society. For this, he relies on popular dissatisfaction with the political, economic and social situation in Bulgaria over the past 30 years. Betting on the disillusionment with the European Union within parts of Bulgarian society and communist nostalgia, his goals are the strategic departure of Bulgaria from the West and significant changes in the internal political system.

Among those groups and networks that are not represented in the Bulgarian parliament or among political parties in Bulgaria, only a handful are genuinely extreme and have openly declared their willingness to challenge the existing political order. The extreme faction includes Boyan Stankov-Rasate’s BNU-ND. But other parties consist of marginal and often short-term political projects that

89 <https://webcafe.bg/analiz/kriptovaluti-i-nft-novite-nachini-za-finansirane-na-terorizam.html>

90 Smrčková, M. (2009), Comparison of Radical Right-Wing Parties in Bulgaria and Romania: The National Movement of Ataka and the Great Romania Party. In: Central European Political Studies Review, 1/XI/winter 2009. In her text she follows Mareš, M. (2003): Pravicový extremismus a radikalismus v ČR, Brno, Barrister & Principal. p.34

91 Вълната на евроскептицизма, Портал Култура, 19.05.2014, <https://kultura.bg/web/вълната-на-евроскептицизма/>

92 Spasimir Domaradzki, Bulgaria: rząd rotacyjny Denkow-Gabriel, Komentarze IEŚ, 865 (113/2023) <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/bulgaria-rzad-rotacyjny-denkow-gabriel/>

are often linked to private political and business interests and frequently used as political proxies for Borisov's GERB party. Despite their radical rhetoric, they seldom conduct any significant actions. Their role rather is to serve as a violence provider when counter-protests or provocations are deemed to be necessary by power brokers, such as during the protests in support of the prosecutor general Ivan Geshev or the raid on the Ministry of Sports led by Stanislav Nedkov-Styki in June 2021.

<sup>93</sup>The second axis sees the positioning of these groups on the East-West divide determining the political priorities that these parties pursue. Despite the nationalist rhetoric of the different groups, only Boyan Stankov-Rasate has explicitly equally distanced himself from both Moscow and Washington.<sup>94</sup> Previously, the Attack Party (and recently "Revival") promoted Russian interests and amplified Moscow and Bulgarian communist propaganda. They, in fact, never miss an occasion to underline the orthodox and cultural proximity between the two countries nor waive Russian flags at rallies. The coalition partners of "Revival" in the forthcoming April elections are Rusophils for the Revival of the Fatherland, No to EU and NATO, and the Bulgarian Communist Party – these groups all back Russia. The paramilitary organizations also draw on Russian support. The Bulgarian National Volunteer Corps "Shipka" even uses former communist nomenclature on its uniforms. The networks of football hooligans and neo-Nazis have adopted xenophobic attitudes and drawn symbolic inspiration from these ideologies.

The fact that Bulgaria has been in a state of a permanent political crisis since 2020 has not helped matters. The anti-Borisov revolution of 2020 resulted in political deadlock, with Bulgarian society divided almost evenly between reformist parties (Democratic Bulgaria, We Continue Change) and status quo parties (GERB, DPS, BSP). A significant shift in this process has been the demise of the "old" nationalist coalition partners of Borisov, mainly IMRO, NFSB, and the Attack party. They were

replaced by Kostadin Kostadinov's "Revival", which espouses an even more extreme attitude towards the West.

The current political debate in Bulgaria is concentrated on the problems of the post-pandemic transition and the consequences of the war in Ukraine. Though the issue of migration constantly highlights the inability of the state to manage its borders, it has not provided any new reasons for additional radical mobilization. A new source of concern, however, concerns growing nationalist narratives that portray all other Bulgarian politicians as traitors and lackeys that merely follow the instructions of foreign embassies and serve as vehicles for foreign interests. This narrative has the potential to encourage political violence against non-nationalist politicians.

The LGBTQ+ community, Roma community and Turkish minority remain targets of radical nationalists. For example, the Sofia Pride parade has regularly faced counter-marches and increased threats of physical attacks though no attacks or violations were reported in 2022. Attacks on offices of minorities, religious spaces and attacks on migrants and representatives of people from different ethnic origins take place on an irregular basis but constitute a permanent element of the Bulgarian political landscape.

### The OSCE hate crimes data on Bulgaria<sup>95</sup>

Year	Hate crimes recorded by police	Prosecuted	Sentenced
2021	18	384	303
2020	727	353	289
2019	22	432	155
2018	46	6	158
2017	22	9	9
2016	28	299	71
2015	704	752	135
2014	617	750	117
2013	651	300	239

<sup>93</sup> Стъпки повежда протеста в защита на Борисов, Zashoto, 4.05.2021, <https://zashoto.com/2021/05/04/staki-povezhda-protesta-v-zashita-na-borisov/>

<sup>94</sup> Украинските националисти не са платени терористи, 11.03.2022 [http://www.rassate.bg/blog/id\\_6232/](http://www.rassate.bg/blog/id_6232/)

<sup>95</sup> The data, methodology and disclaimers are available at: <https://hatecrime.osce.org/bulgaria>

One of the more recent violent attacks that has taken place occurred during the 2021 presidential elections. Boyan Stankov-Rasate campaigned as a presidential candidate in this election. During his campaign, he organized a raid on an LGBTQ+ community office or the “Rainbow hub”. Stankov-Rasate was detained and subsequently sentenced for hooliganism, but the court acquitted him on the charges of physical abuse and insolence.<sup>96</sup> Following this case, the Prosecutor’s Office submitted recommendations for changes to the penal code. Among other measures, the Prosecutor’s office recommended reforms to provisions concerning hate crimes and human trafficking.<sup>97</sup>

One of the particularly concerning problems in Bulgaria pertains to a lack of clear legal provisions defining hate crimes. The National Statistics also does not contain a separate data category for such crimes.<sup>98</sup> Experts have raised this problem for years already.<sup>99</sup> Given this unclear legal situation, law enforcement action does not seem to be very effective and often such crimes are disregarded altogether. The case of Mihail Stoianov is a good illustration in this regard. He was murdered in the main park of Sofia by nationalists who wanted to “purge” the park during a demonstration.<sup>100</sup> During the ensuing trial, Mikhail Ekimdzhev, a lawyer, stressed that the lack of specific legal sanctions for hate crimes had become a paradox. Namely, a crime can be committed based on hatred, but since there is no explicit category for “hate crimes” in the Bulgarian penal code, it is possible that such crimes can escape appropriate punishment if they do not fall under other crime categories defined in the Bulgarian Penal Code.<sup>101</sup> In the judgment of the case *Stoyanova vs Bulgaria*, the European Court of Human Rights called on Bulgaria to introduce hate crimes as aggravating circumstances.<sup>102</sup>

## Main topics among Bulgarian nationalists

Against the present backdrop, the issue of North Macedonia has united all nationalist formations in Bulgaria. The goal of unification is explicitly declared by “Revival”, which sees Macedonia as a second Bulgarian state.<sup>103</sup> While in power, IMRO and NFSB were instrumental in the fuelling of negative relations between North Macedonia and Bulgaria and continue to stoke emotions for political purposes.

The substantial Roma and Turkish minorities in Bulgaria also remain primary sources of nationalist flame-fanning. During the last 15 years, radical right organizations have organized “civic patrols” targeting the Roma and Turkish community, regularly organized violent attacks against the Roma minority, attacked mosques and incited conflict between representatives of the Roma community and the wider Bulgarian society.

Zvezdomir Andronov provided an exclusivist definition of Bulgarianness that excludes Roma, Turks, Jews or Armenians, defining them as “guests”.<sup>104</sup> Nationalists espouse xenophobic sentiments against the Roma and Turkish communities, seeing them as an internal threat to Bulgaria and blaming them for Bulgaria’s problems.

Another central ideological theme of the nationalist scene in Bulgaria is the so-called migration crisis. Early on in 2015, volunteer groups were created by Bulgarian nationalist groups and networks ostensibly to protect the border. These volunteer groups also included members of other European Far Right and right-wing extremists.<sup>105</sup>

96 Боян Расате е осъден и на втора инстанция за нападението срещу “Рейнбоу Хъб”, Mediapool, 11.07.2023, <https://www.mediapool.bg/boyan-rasate-e-osaden-i-na-vtora-instantsiya-za-napadenieto-sreshthu-reinbou-hab-news349431.html>

97 <https://news.bg/crime/prokuraturata-predlozhi-na-parlamenta-izmeneniya-na-nk-kasaeshti-prestapleniyata-ot-omraza.html>

98 [https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/query.jsf?x\\_2=1877](https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/query.jsf?x_2=1877)

99 See for example the Amnesty International report from 2015, ПРОПУСКАЙКИ СЪЩЕСТВЕНОТО ЛИПСА НА АДЕКВАТНО РАЗСЛЕДВАНЕ НА ПРЕСТЪПЛЕНИЯ ОТ ОМРАЗА В БЪЛГАРИЯ p.17

100 Мария Кадийска, 14 г. след трагедията в Борисовата градина: Свобода за убийците на студента, 30.09.2022, <https://telegraph.bg/krimi/novini/14-g.-sled-tragediata-v-borisovata-gradina-svoboda-za-ubijcite-na-studenta.-mihail-stoianov-mozheshe-da-stane-blestiasht-lekar-353804>

101 Български Желски Комитет, Малцинствата в България, Лесни за омраза, 2019, p.124

102 *Stoyanova v. Bulgaria* - 56070/18, Judgment 14.6.2022, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%7B%22itemid%22%3A%22002-13685%22%7D>

103 <https://vazrazhdane.bg/македония/>

104 <https://vazrazhdane.bg/македония/>

105 Националист заяви: Циганите, арменците, турците, евреите са гости в България, pik.bg, 22.04.2019, <https://pik.bg/националист-заяви-циганите-арменците-турците-евреите-са-гости-в-българия-news836119.html>

The LGBTQ+ community is another group that has come under persistent attacks from Far Right and right-wing extremist forces in Bulgaria. This is particularly visible during the annual Sofia Pride parade, which various nationalist groups are always obstructing. Emulating the activities of the European Conservatives and Reformists in other EU countries, an inaugural annual march for the family was organized in 2022 by the national civil initiative called “citizens for the protection of the family and the child”. This social initiative was backed by IM-RO.<sup>106</sup> The event is also associated with the movement’s opposition to the Istanbul convention,<sup>107</sup> which was also backed by the pro-Russian and formally leftist Bulgarian Socialist Party (Българска Социалистическа Партия, БСП).<sup>108</sup>

## Presence of radical right and extreme ideas in the public media

Several cable TV channels like Alfa, SKAT and Eurokom, as well as YouTube channels and other platforms serve as transmission tolls for radical right propaganda. Under the guise of political pluralism, other programmes also offer airtime to representatives of Far Right parties in their programmes. The Bulgarian Council for Electronic Media (CEM) has not issued a single admonishment or reprimand for programs in Bulgaria where radical views have been spread. Though CEM withdrew the license of TV DEN for hate speech in 2003,<sup>109</sup> since then no such steps have been taken towards the Attack Party’s TV Alfa despite the fact that a request for the revocation of the licence was submitted by the Protest Network 2014 on account of the fact that TV Alfa espoused extremist views.<sup>110</sup> CEM has

been mocked by Attack leader Volen Siderov who ignored fines imposed by CEM.<sup>111</sup> CEM has frequently sanctioned various media providers for unethical behaviour but radical and extremist statements rarely, if at all, are considered a reason for punitive action by CEM.

Far-right opinions can be easily found on the internet. The social media applications provide propaganda platforms, and the websites of Far Right and right-wing extremist parties in Bulgaria are generally rich with propaganda and ideological narratives. One particular aspect of the situation in Bulgaria is the promotion of radical right and left symbols in souvenir shops, where swastikas and images of Hitler or other Nazi dignitaries can be purchased together with those of Stalin and Putin.

## Trends

**A closer look at the voting trends among radical right-wing supporters reveals frequent shifts of voter support among nationalist parties. Prior to the war in Ukraine, nationalist parties like Ataka, IMRO and NFSB were narrowly focused on the defence of national interests. This resulted in a rather low level of political support of the parties. Today, however, the new face of Bulgaria’s nationalist political scene, “Revival” and its leader Kostadin Kostadinov, aims to formulate a wider and more coherent political vision that undermines the pillars of Bulgaria’s international institutional setting.**

**Russia’s aggression in Ukraine has engendered a serious impact on the Bulgarian economy and society and has furthered growing political divisions that have surfaced since the end of the last Borisov government in April 2021. The deepening di-**

106 Aleksandrina Ginkova, Balkan Insight, Да патрулираш безнаказано в Източна Европа, 25.01.2017, <https://balkaninsight.com/bg/2017/01/25/da-patruhiras-beznakazano-v-iztocna-evropa-01-24-2017/>; Още националисти от Холандия ще посетят границата ни до месец, bTV, 7.07.2016, <https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/regionalni-novini/oshte-nacionalisti-ot-holandija-shte-posetjat-granicata-ni-do-mesec.html>; „Гражданските патрули” по границата – какви са те, bTV, 26.10.2016, <https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/grazhdanskite-patruili-po-granicata-kakvi-sa-te.html> <https://dariknews.bg/regioni/sofiia/grazhdani-se-vkliuchihva-v-dve-sybitiia-v-zashtita-na-tradicionnoto-bylgarsko-semejstvo-snimki-2314606>

107 The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, passed in 2011. This convention focuses on preventing violence against women and domestic violence.

108 Александър Марков, БСП остава твърдо против ратификацията на Истанбулската конвенция, BNT, 19.07.2018, <https://bntnews.bg/bg/a/bsp-ostava-tvrdo-protiv-ratifikatsiyata-na-istanbulskata-konventsia>; Нинова за Истанбулската конвенция: Искаме децата ни да са момче или момиче, а не нещо трето, Българска Социалистическа Партия, 27.01.2023, [https://bsp.bg/news/view/23794-ninova\\_za\\_istanbulskata\\_konventsia\\_iskame\\_detsata\\_ni\\_da\\_sa\\_momche\\_ili\\_momiche\\_a\\_ne\\_neshto\\_treto.html](https://bsp.bg/news/view/23794-ninova_za_istanbulskata_konventsia_iskame_detsata_ni_da_sa_momche_ili_momiche_a_ne_neshto_treto.html)

109 Юниън телевизън / Телевизия Ден (1995-2004 г.), <http://www.predavatel.com/bg/istoriya/tv-den>

110 [https://m.offnews.bg/news/Medii\\_73/Protestna-mrezha-poiska-SEM-da-spre-televiziia-Alfa\\_329567.html](https://m.offnews.bg/news/Medii_73/Protestna-mrezha-poiska-SEM-da-spre-televiziia-Alfa_329567.html)

111 <https://www.mediapool.bg/sem-ne-mozhe-da-vrachi-aktove-za-narusheniya-na-televiziya-alfa-news215412.html>

visions around core political and economic issues provide fertile ground for nationalist narratives to gain traction. The growing image of the EU as a silent supporter of “stabilitocracy” and, therefore, corruption and state capture, associated with Borisov’s regime, has compelled voters to search for alternative solutions. The nationalist agenda offers an easy and at the same time safe alternative for those disillusioned with the political experiences of the past thirty years. The radical right explanatory narrative builds upon the images of victimhood, foreign meddling and a sense of tribal unity.

The “Revival” party has made significant efforts to further its position during the post-Borisov era election marathon over the last two years and now plays the role of representing the nationalist cause and serves as a center of gravity for openly pro-Russian and anti-EU and anti-NATO political projects. It benefits from the political stalemate between the “reformist” and status quo parties by offering alternative promises beyond the current political system and geopolitical orientation of Bulgaria.

Radical parties that are not represented in the Bulgarian parliament and extreme groups remain marginal in Bulgaria. They are instrumentalized by power brokers, including stakeholders in the status quo parties to further short-term political goals.

The existence of paramilitary units, finally, is a matter of serious concern. Their existence presents a clear threat and will require resolute action by Bulgarian authorities, especially since their existence is a clear violation of the provisions of the constitution. However, so far, the relevant law enforcement agencies have not prioritized this matter.



# Mapping Violent Right-Wing Extremist Groups – Who’s Who in the Czech Republic

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Keywords: violent extremism; terrorism; paramilitarism; hate crimes Czech Republic; transnational militancy

The violent extremist scene in the Czech Republic has been dominated by an unorganized and disparate mix of groups in recent years. The permanent threat of individual radicalisation, that said, remains a significant security policy challenge.

## Introduction

Violent right-wing extremism continues to pose a serious threat to the security of the Czech Republic even though the severity of this threat has moderated compared to prior decades. The Czech Republic has not experienced the same types of mass terrorist attacks that several other European countries have seen in recent years.

The various dimensions of this threat will be discussed in this paper which proceeds as follows. The paper first turns to introducing a conceptual framework to make sense of the varied forms of contemporary right-wing extremism operating in the country. It also underscores the specific ideological developments on the Czech extremist scene, including the fuzzy boundaries between right-wing extremism and left-wing extremism in some cases. The historical legacy of right-wing extremist violence in the Czech Republic is subsequently briefly described. This legacy indeed sometimes surfaces in the politics of the contemporary right-

wing extremist scene. The essential manifestations and entities of violent right-wing extremism in the contemporary Czech Republic is next explored in the central part of the paper. Specific attention is paid to the financing of these activities. The outline of counter-extremist activities follows that, and the primary trends are finally summarized and forecasted in the conclusion.

The analysis is based on the author’s extensive research of the extremist scene in the Czech Republic, including observation of extremist events. It is critical to mention that several cases described in the paper have not yet been decided upon by courts and therefore the assessment of these cases could change in the future.

## Conceptualisation of violent right-wing extremism

Right-wing extremism can be defined as a specific form of extremism based on the rejection of the value of human equality and instead the institutionalization of inequality.<sup>1</sup> Various ideological streams and activities, consequently, fall under this definition. In Europe, these recently include intolerant authoritarian conservatism, neo-Fascism and neo-Nazism. A segment of the “New Right” is also associated with the main ideological variants of right-wing extremism. Numerous regional and national subvariants, moreover, are also present as part of the movement.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bötticher, Astrid – Mareš, Miroslav (2012): *Extremismus. Theorien – Konzepte – Formen*. München: Oldenbourg Verlag, pp. 296-297.

<sup>2</sup> Mareš, Miroslav (2022): *Die extreme Rechte in Europa: Strukturen, Ideologien, Strategien*. In Decker, Frank Henningsen - Bernd Marcel; Philipp - Lewandowsky Adorf (ed.): *Aufstand der Außenseiter : Die Herausforderung der europäischen Politik durch den neuen Populismus*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, pp. 57-70.



The Czech Republic uses an official definition of extremism that is included in the Ministry of Interior's annual reports on the topic. The definition consists of three components: (1) a description of extremist goals, (2) incorporation of various constitutional values under threat by extremists and (3) a description of the impact of extremist activities (such as the establishment of a non-democratic regime). The definition specifies that extremism refers to "distinct ideological positions that deviate from constitutional and legal norms, are characterized by elements of intolerance, and attack the basic democratic constitutional principles as defined in the Czech constitutional order".<sup>3</sup> And it notes that right-wing extremists are "inspired by and using primarily national, racial, and ethnic resentment, sympathizing with historical fascism or Nazism".<sup>4</sup>

That said, not all forms of extremism, including right-wing extremism, necessarily involve the use of violence within democratic regimes. Movements espousing this ideology sometimes seek to obtain power using non-violent means but may turn to deploying excessive violence after they seize power. These distinctions mean that right-wing extremist scenes (similar to other forms of extremism) can be divided into violent and non-violent categories. For example, militant rhetoric, which can include direct violent threats, may or may not be accompanied by real acts of violence. Threats of violence can be more or less specific. For example, they can be targeted at the "establishment" generally or against individual politicians or people affiliated with specific groups including national minorities. Violence can be further be directed at property (including acts of sabotage) or against human beings. Physical attacks against people can be characterized by different intensities and targets. In this paper, the category of violent right-wing extremism is defined relatively broadly; it encompasses violence ranging

from assaults against property to terrorist attacks and plots including the manifestation of violence in vigilante and paramilitary groups.

## Historical legacies of right-wing extremism violence on Czech territory

Contemporary violent right-wing extremists have only, in part, been inspired by extremist groups from the past. Even so, understanding the contemporary movement requires some knowledge about prominent historical examples of right-wing extremist violence carried out on Czech territory.

In the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938), notably, Czech fascist paramilitary units and gangs were both active. Members of the National Fascist Community (NOF), for example, organized a (failed) coup d'état in Brno in 1933. On the other hand, the Nazi Sudeten German uprising, led by paramilitary units backed by Nazi Germany, opened the door to irredentism<sup>5</sup>.

During the second Czechoslovak Republic (1938-1939), Nazi German and Czech fascist paramilitary activity continued on the rest of Czech territory<sup>6</sup>. In the meantime, the right-wing organization, National Social Camp – Flag (ČNTS-Vlajka), attacked and bombed several Jewish facilities<sup>7</sup>. Repressive measures against the Jewish and Roma communities were also introduced during this era.

The occupation of Czech lands by the Nazis (1939-1945) was characterized by brutal terror and garnered support from various administrators in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and numerous Czech collaborators. Czech Jews and Roma individuals were exterminated during the war.<sup>8</sup> Only a few Czech units fought alongside Nazi German troops during World War II against Allied forces.<sup>9</sup>

3 Ministry of Interior of the CR (2022): Report on Extremism and Prejudicial Hatred in the Czech Republic in 2021. Prague: Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, p. 5

4 Ministry of Interior of the CR (2022): Report on Extremism and Prejudicial Hatred in the Czech Republic in 2021. Prague: Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, p. 5

5 Mareš, Miroslav (2012): *Paramilitarismus v České republice*. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, pp. 76-78.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

7 Mareš, Miroslav (2014): Leadership and Right-Wing Extremist Violence: Case Studies from the Czech Territory. In Milošević, Marko Rekawek. Kacper (eds.): *Perseverance of Terrorism: Focus on Leaders*. Amsterdam: IOS Press, pp. 103-110.

8 Schuster, Michal – Beck, Aletta (2020): *The Persecution of Roma and Sinti in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia*.

9 Pejčoch, Ivo (2009): *Armády českých politiků. České polovojeenské jednotky 1918-1945*. Cheb: Svět křidel, pp. 152-161.

Sudeten Germans were recruited to the Wehrmacht and to SS units.

After the Second World War, meanwhile, the third Czechoslovak Republic (1945-1948), which featured limited democracy, was established. Nazi-German terrorist and guerrilla Werewolf units conducted activities typical of Czech borderlands at the time.<sup>10</sup> Small anti-government threats and plots were orchestrated by the Czech fascist milieu. In this era, certain interpretations of Czech nationalism prompted several massacres of Sudeten Germans (mainly during the so-called “wild transfer”<sup>11</sup>. However, these atrocities are usually not associated with Czech right-wing extremism.

As far as the communist regime is concerned, violent incidents were largely confined to fringe gangs of youth that assaulted the Roma community and foreign students. The actual scope of the activities of the Werewolf gang from Northern Bohemia in the late 1980s remains unclear. In the mid-1980s<sup>12</sup>, right-wing extremism as an identifiable subculture infiltrated the country from across the “iron curtain,” in the form of racist skinheads and Nazi-punks. After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, moreover, there was a noticeable expansion of the skinhead subculture with right-wing extremist threads. The 1990s and 2000s were characterized by a startling number of hate crimes committed by racist skinheads and later also by so-called autonomous nationalists. Victims of these crimes primarily included people from the Roma community, foreigners, people from the LGBTI+ community and leftist activists. Around 30 people, mostly Roma, were murdered during these brutal attacks<sup>13</sup>. One such case involved an arson attack against a Roma in Vítkov in 2009 (80% of the body of a two-year-old Roma girl was burned though she survived)<sup>14</sup>. But

the courts, nevertheless, declined to deem them as terrorist acts.

Various violent demonstrations were organized in the 2000s and in the first half of 2010s mainly by the neo-Nazi group National Resistance (NO). Anti-Roma violent demonstrations and riots associated with vigilante patrols were especially typical of the 2008-2013 period. The right-wing extremist Workers’ Party (DS) was subsequently banned due to its involvement in these activities<sup>15</sup>. Its successor organization, the Workers’ Party of Social Justice, launched several provocations (such as in Duchcov in 2013).<sup>16</sup>

In the mid-2010s, a mass right-wing extremist mobilization against migrants and Muslims arose in the Czech Republic against the backdrop of the so-called migration crisis. This period was characterized by demonstrations, vigilante groups (including border patrols) and various (primarily small-scale) attacks against supporters of migration and Muslim facilities. In 2017, right-wing extremist pensioner Jaromír Balda committed two false flag attacks. He felled trees with the intent to derail trains and he also disseminated leaflets lobbying quasi-Islamist threats. Though the harm was mostly limited to material damages and light injuries, he was sentenced as a terrorist.<sup>17</sup>

## Right-wing extremist ideological spectrum in the Czech Republic

The crime committed by Balda signalled a broader shift in the ideological background of individuals committing right-wing extremist crimes in the Czech Republic. While most attacks in the 1990s and 2010s were committed by members of various

10 Horčica, Ludvík (2003): *Ve znamení dvojitého V*. Brno: Šimon Ryšavý.

11 This refers to the transfer, mostly by force or threats, of Czech citizens of German origin, the Sudeten Germans, from the territory of Czechoslovakia, to the territory of what later became the Federal Republic of Germany. Staněk, Tomáš (I): *omáš. Poválečné „excesy“ v českých zemích v roce 1945 a jejich vyšetřování*. Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2005

12 Mareš, Miroslav (2005): *Terorismus v ČR*. Brno: Centrum strategických studií, pp. 172-174.

13 Mareš, Miroslav (2010): *Gewalt und Ideologie. Rechtsextremismus in Tschechien*. Osteuropa. Vol. 60, No. 10, pp. 33-50

14 Ibid.

15 Mareš, Miroslav (2012): *Czech Militant Democracy in Action : Dissolution of the Workers' Party and the Wider Context of This Act*. East European Politics and Societies. Vol. 26, No 1, pp. 33-55.

16 Fujdiak, Ina – Mareš, Miroslav (2022): *Transnational violence and the German connection : National resistance and autonomous nationalists in the Czech Republic*. In Dafinger Johannes - Florin. Moritz (eds): *A Transnational History of Right-wing Terrorism : Political Violence and the Far Right in Eastern and Western Europe Since 1900*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 197-214

17 Vegrichtová, Barbora (2019): *Hrozba radikalizace. Terorismus, varovné signály a ochrana společnosti*. Praha: Grada, p. 20.

subcultures (connected to neo-Nazi, neo-Fascist, or specific nationalist backgrounds), since the mid-2010s, a decline of blatant neo-Nazism and neo-Fascism is apparent.<sup>18</sup>

The rise of militant groups and individuals with fewer deep ideological roots appears to be a new trend though. This new milieu combines nostalgia for the communist regime with hate directed against Western progressivism, the EU and NATO and Muslim migrants. The actors involved typically espouse favourable views of Putin's Russia supporting its imperial ambitions and celebrating the legacies of the Soviet Union and its various levels of influence on the Czech Republic.<sup>19</sup> Some of these individuals also invoke the tradition of the Hussite movement from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> In this paper, the term "pro-Kremlin forces" is used to classify these various submilieus. Not all, however, are strongly affiliated with Russia. For some, their extremist backgrounds are rather premised on their non-tolerance and rejection of government authority (as demonstrated by their militant opposition to government measures during the COVID-19 pandemic) on the one hand and demands for discrimination and the targeting of specific enemies (liberals, leftists, "Soros" supporters, Muslim, migrants, etc...) on the other hand. They are called "sovereignists" in this paper. The various "anti-opinions" include many variants though and finding a common nominator to label them all is a complicated task.

The "traditional" right-wing violent extremist scene, however, remains active in the Czech Republic. The modern forms of global neo-Nazism that appear to be accelerating are especially impacting young Czechs (see below). In the older ex-skinhead generation, meanwhile, the WWII Czech collaboration and the Sudeten-German Nazi traditions are still practiced. There is a tendency to resort to the primitive use of neo-Nazi symbolism among some hooligan gangs linked to football and ice-hockey

spectators.<sup>21</sup> Foreign right-wing extremists in Czechia further share ideological links with right-wing extremist ideologies from their home countries and/or with respect to global trends.

It is notable that national socialists with a non-extremist character are also active in the Czech Republic. This fact is connected to the specific development of Czech and Czechoslovak politics in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Czechoslovak National Socialist Party was one of the pillars of the Czechoslovak interwar democracy and fought against the Nazi occupation and later against communist rule. Recently, the ideology of Czech national socialism has been widespread across a large part of the democratic political spectrum and been organized within official party structures. Czech neo-Nazis indeed sometimes attempt to conceal their more extremist convictions behind this democratic national socialist banner.<sup>22</sup>

## Contemporary development trends in right-wing extremist violence

Contemporary right-wing extremist violence is not strictly linked to organized structures. However, various entities have fomented a radicalisation milieu for individuals and small groups. The mass demonstrations with anti-government goals (de facto pro-Kremlin) are accompanied by militant rhetoric and support in the so-called disinformation pro-Kremlin and sovereignist disinformation online social networks. Calls for the "defenestration" of the government<sup>23</sup> or other victims are typical due to Czech traditions concerning this specific form of anti-government violence from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. These calls, however, have not translated into any serious coup attempts in the contemporary era.

18 Security Information Service (2022): Annual Report 2021, Prague: BiS, p. 20. Available at: <https://www.bis.cz/public/site/bis.cz/content/vyrocní-zpravy/en/ar2021en.pdf>

19 Mareš, Miroslav – Holzer, Jan – Šmíd, Tomáš (2020): The Hybrid Campaign Concept and Contemporary Czech-Russian Relations. In Holzer, Jan – Mareš, Miroslav (eds.): Czech Security Dilemma. Russia as a Friend or Enemy? Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 15-53.

20 Mareš, Miroslav (2021): Hussitism and Illiberal Politics in the Czech Republic : A Historical Religious Legacy in Dispute. In Hennig Anja - Weiberg-Salzmann, Mirjam (eds.): Illiberal Politics and Religion in Europe and Beyond : Concepts, Actors, and Identity Narratives. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, pp. 271-289.

21 Mareš, Miroslav (2013): Extremismus v České republice. In Gabaň, Peter - Gabaňová Dana – Zahradníková, Marie (eds.): Demokracie versus extremismus. Výchova k aktivnímu občanství. Teoretická část. Praha: Asi-Milovaní, 2013, pp. 43-65.

22 Vejvodová, Petra (2014): Transnational Forms of Contemporary Neo-Nazi Activity in Europe from the Perspective of Czech Neo-Nazis. Brno: MUNI Press.

23 Tran, Viet (2022): Vláda se nám fehtá, přijde defenestrace? Ostrá slova protestujících na Václaváku. CNN Prima News, available at: <https://cnn.iprima.cz/vlada-se-nam-rechta-prijde-defenestrace-zpovedi-demonstrujících-z-vaclavskeho-namesti-189713>

### The most frequent forms of contemporary right-wing extremist violence are:

- Planned lone-wolf/small cells attacks/plots with a terrorist character;
- Perpetration of hate crimes that are not systematically planned;
- Violent demonstrations and attacks at demonstrations of political opponents;
- Paramilitarism and vigilantism (mostly manifestation of violence readiness; however, sometimes they commit planned acts of violence);
- Foreign fighters (they commit violent acts abroad and sometimes threaten the use of violence in the Czech Republic).

In the following part of the paper, these forms of violence will be discussed within the context of the main ideological scenes of right-wing extremism in the Czech Republic.

## “Sovereignism and Pro-Kremlin” right-wing extremist scene

The contemporary sovereignist and pro-Kremlin militant spectrum has its roots in protests against migration and Muslims beginning in 2015 and the protests against lockdowns and anti-vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This scene, nevertheless, was also involved in pro-Kremlin paramilitary activities after the start of the Crimea and Donbas crisis in 2014. After the Russian re-invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, mass political mobilization of pro-Kremlin forces began across social networks and through so-called disinformation media.<sup>24</sup>

Some of the participants in these demonstrations have turned to violent rhetoric. At the end of a demonstration in Prague on March 11th, 2023, several individuals, for example, even attacked police officers who were protecting the building of the National Museum in Prague as the crowd struggled to tear down the Ukrainian flag from the building. It is notable, however, that the organizers of the main demonstration renounced this violence and the entire violent escalation that occurred after the official end of the rally.<sup>25</sup>

Militant and hateful rhetoric has also been used across social networks; however, its translation into offline violence is relatively limited. Individual hate crimes, nonetheless, have been committed against Ukrainians including assaults against Ukrainian refugees in Karlovy Vary and Louny in 2022, fortunately without injuries.<sup>26</sup> Recent violence of the pro-Kremlin and sovereignist forces has been focused primarily on inflicting property damage and it has been carried out by isolated individuals. Targets, in several cases, included cars with Ukrainian license plates such as attacks in Pilsen (three arson attacks in March 2023) and in Prague (tire damages in early 2023).<sup>27</sup>

All these attacks were – as is known so far – not organized. One case of a possibly organized violent plot has been under investigation since 2021 though. But the courts have yet to release their verdict in the case, which is apparently linked to the pro-Kremlin paramilitary spectrum. The Ministry of Interior, commenting on the case, noted that *“A significant event in 2021 associated with the domestic militia was undoubtedly the indictment of five individuals from the group Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserve for Peace (Českoslovenští vojáci v záloze za mír, z.s.) for several terrorist offenses in connection with the conflict in eastern Ukraine. This case, led by detectives from the National Centre against Organised Crime, initially sparked outraged*

24 Mareš, Miroslav (2022): Anti-Impf-Bewegung und Verschwörungsnarrative in der Tschechischen Republik. *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, Vol. 19, No. 2. pp. 237-342.

25 Vaničková, Kateřina (2023): Rajchlovci se distancovali od tažení na muzeum a proruských symbolů. *Idnes*, Available at: [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/demonstrace-narodni-muzeum-pro-vaclavske-namesti-vlada-rajchl-rakusan.A230315\\_121240\\_domaci\\_remy](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/demonstrace-narodni-muzeum-pro-vaclavske-namesti-vlada-rajchl-rakusan.A230315_121240_domaci_remy)

26 Blažek, Vojtěch (2023): Soudy řekly, jaké nadávky Rusům i Ukrajincům jsou už trestné. *Seznam Zprávy*. Available at: <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-kauzu-rozsudky-za-nenavist-zdechly-rus-byl-za-podminku-borec-putin-za-pokutu-230380>

27 Rogner, Šimon (2023): Policie navrhla obžalovat muže, který provrtával pneumatiky aut s ukrajinskými značkami. *Česká televize ČT24*. Available at <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/3588051-police-navrhla-obzalovat-muze-ktery-provrtaval-pneumatiky-aut-s-ukrajinskymi>

*condemnations from some right-wing extremists or disinformation producers*”<sup>28</sup>

Czech foreign fighters also previously fought in Donbas on the separatist side and threatened enemies in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, for example, in a telephone call to journalist Tomáš Forró in February 2022.<sup>29</sup>

## Czech Neo-Nazi and Neo-Fascist violent scene

As mentioned above, the contemporary neo-Nazi scene is weaker than that from one or two decades ago. However, legacies of neo-Nazi violence are still very sensitive, as the early release of two arsonists in 2023 from the Vítkov case of 2009 (see above) underscores. Roma organizations protested vehemently against this early release.<sup>30</sup> The previously strong national and regional structures of the neo-Nazi movement have, nevertheless, been disrupted in recent years despite the remnants of some former violent organisations still on the internet in the form of webpages and profiles on social networks that are often no longer updated.

The most substantial former neo-Nazi group – the National Resistance – was disbanded recently though some former members sometimes hold meetings in pubs and other social establishments. The “last” surviving registered organisation from the “golden era” of the Czech neo-Nazism, meanwhile, is the association Workers Youth (DM) which was founded as the youth organization of the banned Workers’ Party (DS) and later affiliated with its successor Workers’ Party of Social Justice (DSSS). The DM organized vigilante patrols in 2019 in Prague with the group Independent Nationalists (NN). During this activity, members of the patrol committed violent attacks against alleged drug

dealers. In June 2021, members of the DM held a counter-protest against a rally organized by Roma activists and anti-Fascists to commemorate a Roma man who was killed during a police operation. The presence of the DM sparked a short clash (initiated mostly by Roma and anti-Fascist participants) that was quickly ended by the police.<sup>31</sup> In 2022, the DM propagated a “partisan fight” according to the model of the Nazi underground Werewolf organization<sup>32</sup> but these declared goals were not translated into reality. The DM also regularly deploys antisemitic propaganda. Membership is confined to several dozen people.

Excessive violent acts are also occasionally connected to the hooligan scene. Parts of gangs affiliated with several football and hockey clubs have come under the influence of neo-Nazi or neo-Fascist ideas (such as the Johnny Kentus Gang in Brno, a section of fans of Slavia and Sparta Prague, etc.). The chair of Prague Pride described assaults involving Nazi-hooligans against the marches of the LGBTQ+ community in August 2019: *“A pair of scoundrels set fire to the rainbow flag hanging from the Legions Bridge and subsequently shot Roman candle fireworks into the crowd of visitors at the evening Pride Village. Rainbow flags were torn down from lamp posts in the streets, and our e-shop came under attack, too. On Saturday morning, someone poured 50 litres of oil onto the steps leading to Letná Plain, along which a rainbow parade was due to pass in a few hours. A group of extremists then attempted to break into the parade crowd, but they were stopped by the police. Some of these incidents really put our lives and health at risk.”*<sup>33</sup>

The last significant use of political violence committed by various members of the gangs – for this event “united” - occurred in Prague after the

28 Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic (2022): Report on Extremism and Prejudicial Hatred in the Czech Republic in 2021. Prague: Ministry of Interior, p. 11.

29 Gruntová, Kateřina (2022): Opuští Lysyčansk tři dny předtím, než ho uchvátí Rusové. Město upadlo do středověku, říká Forró. Irozhlas. Available at [https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-svet/valka-na-ukrajine-novinar-lysyčansk-donbas\\_2208050645\\_gut](https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-svet/valka-na-ukrajine-novinar-lysyčansk-donbas_2208050645_gut)

30 Ryšavý, Zdeněk – Albert, Gwendolyn (2023): Roma react to early release of two of the Vítkov arsonists by a Czech court: Shock, injustice, this is contempt for Romani suffering. Romea. Available at: <https://romea.cz/en/czech-republic/roma-react-to-early-release-of-two-of-the-vitkov-arsonists-by-a-czech-court-shock-injustice-this-is-contempt-for-romani-suffering>

31 Novinky, Jap (2021): Demonstrace za zemřelého Roma. Přišla i Dělnická mládež a strhla se potyčka. Novinky, available at:

<https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/krimi-v-praze-se-sesli-demonstranti-za-zemreleho-roma-prisla-i-delnicka-mladez-a-strhla-se-potycka-40365012>

32 Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky (2022): Projevy extremismu a předsudečné nenávisli. Souhrnná situační zpráva. 1. pololetí roku 2022. Praha: Ministerstvo vnitra, p. 4.

33 Walek, Czeslaw (2019)? Foreword. In Prague Pride – Annual Report 2019. Prague: Prague Pride, p. 5. Available at: <https://www.praguepride.cz/en/aboutus/media-downloads/annual-reports/77-prague-pride-annual-report-2019/file>

anti-lockdown rally on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The Ministry of Interior described this event as such: *“The main event associated with the neo-Nazi and hooligan scene was the October riot on Prague’s Old Town Square. Thanks to the preparedness of the police, the militants’ expectations of repeating the several-hour-long clashes with the law enforcement forces from the end of the first decade of this century did not come true. Some 500 hooligans and neo-Nazi activists gathered at the rally site. 130 people were arrested for misdemeanours and 14 people were detained for criminal activity. The riots were subsequently exploited by various disinformation media.”*<sup>34</sup>

The most recent serious latent threat linked to the “new neo-Nazism” scene concerns the participation of several individuals (usually teenagers) in the global “Siege” movement including the accelerationist and Terrorgram structures. These groups propagate terrorist attacks abroad but have not committed any attacks themselves.<sup>35</sup> In 2022, a young perpetrator from the Vyškovsko region (a legal minor at the time of the crime) was sentenced for preparing a terrorist attack. He planned to put bombs in front of the US and Israeli embassies and had already conducted one test with a homemade bomb in the forest. Police discovered him before he was able to carry out the planned terrorist attack.<sup>36</sup>

Various ad hoc crimes associated with people with neo-Nazi backgrounds are also occasionally committed in the Czech Republic, mainly against Roma people, the LGBTQ+ community and migrants. A typical case from August 2021 was summed up as follows: *“The man stood in front of a group of 5 people who appeared to him to be of Romani ethnicity, He shouted at least three times to this group: ‘Gypsies to the gas!’. He then raised his right hand*

*upright - the Nazi salute, while exclaiming: ‘Sieg Heil!’. A little later, he borrowed his friend’s gas gun, which he loaded by drawing it, and then pointed it twice quickly at the group walking in the same direction. As a result, the members of the group got scared and hid behind parked motor vehicles.”*<sup>37</sup>

## Foreign violent right-wing extremists on Czech territory

Foreign violent right-wing extremists are active on Czech territory in various forms. Apart from short-term visits, their long-term stays pose a security threat to the Czech Republic and their own countries (as well as other foreign countries). Slovak right-wing extremists have traditionally maintained close ties to the Czech Republic, particularly the Moravian region. Over the past decade, the Moravian Conscripts, a regional branch of Slovak Conscripts (mainly consisting of Slovak students in Brno), organised paramilitary training.<sup>38</sup> More dangerous activities, meanwhile, were connected to a Slovak student in Brno, Pavol Benadič (known as Slovakbro), who was detained and later sentenced in 2022 due to his terrorist propaganda. Slovakbro’s violent propaganda also inspired Juraj Krajčík who killed two people in an LGBTQI+ establishment in Bratislava in the same year.<sup>39</sup>

The Czech Republic has also been infiltrated by Russian neo-Nazi activists<sup>40</sup> and Ukrainian right-wing extremists; but there is no evidence at this time that any of these individuals have committed acts of violence on Czech territory. The symbols of Serbian right-wing irredentist extremism could signal, at least temporarily, the presence of these extremists in the Czech Republic, too, again without real known militant activities up to now.<sup>41</sup> Some of the Russians who are living in the Czech Republic

34 Ministry of Interior (2021): Report on Extremism and Prejudicial Hatred in the Territory of the Czech Republic in 2020. Prague: MVČR, p. 9.

35 Národní centrála proti organizovanému zločinu (2022): Výroční zpráva NCOZ 2021. Praha: NCOZ SKPV, pp. 53-54. Available at <https://www.policie.cz/clanek/vyrocní-zprava-ncoz-2021.aspx>

36 Česká tisková kancelář (2022): Mladík připravoval bombové útoky u ambasad v Praze, dostal podmínku. České noviny. Available at: <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/2284356>

37 In Iustitia (2023): Material on hate crimes for the author (Author’s Archive).

38 Mareš, Miroslav – Milo, Daniel (2019): Vigilantism against migrants and minorities in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic. In Bjørge Tore – Mareš, Miroslav (eds.): Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities. London: Routledge, pp. 129-150.

39 Sólmos, Karin Kováry (2022): Za čo odsúdili pravicového extrémistu Slovakbro na 6 rokov väzenia? Investigatívne centrum Jana Kuciaka. Available at: <https://www.icjk.sk/203/Za-co-odsudili-pravicoveho-extremistu-Slovakbro-na-rokov-vazenia>

40 Holzer, Jan - Laryš, Martin – Mareš, Miroslav (2019): Militant Right-Wing Extremism in Putin’s Russia : Legacies, Forms and Threats. London: Routledge, p. 230-231

41 Observation by the author in Brno, 22 May 2023 (documentation in author’s archive).

are also nationalist supporters of Putin's regime. This includes the controversial Motorcycle Club Night Wolves (it also has a Czech branch). Their rides throughout the Czech Republic have stoked tensions between opponents and supporters. However, the police have been able to avoid an escalation of violence.<sup>42</sup>

## Financing right-wing extremism on Czech territory

Financing right-wing extremism in the Czech Republic remains one of the most under-researched issues in this field. In this paper, this author can formulate several basic ideas about this topic though based, however, only on general knowledge about the subject matter and, more or less, unconfirmed speculation. For this reason, it is impossible to refer to standard academic sources.

### The primary financial resources of right-wing extremist scenes in the Czech Republic likely are:

- Direct fundraising among a broader spectrum of supporters. This support is typically extended to activists under investigation or imprisoned (presented by the milieu as “prisoners of war”) or for demonstrations and campaigns;
- Own legal or quasi-legal business of the right-wing extremist scene (legal concerts, shops with scene wear including military wear and sportswear, merchandise, music, publishing houses, boxing and MMA-commercial activities, security training, the commercial security sector including bouncers, watchers, and perhaps military companies);
- Own illegal business or even organized crime (prohibited propaganda materials, weapons, illegal steroids and drugs; these activities are linked to the MMA RWE scene and may involve racketeering in some cases) or the hiring of violent right-wing extremists by criminal groups

and the financing of the right-wing extremist scene from such money;

- Concealed financial support from legal sources, political parties and other publicly active entities (e.g., the use of violent right-wing extremists for secret strategic purposes such as threatening political opponents) including secret support from sympathizers among entrepreneurs with political goals and interests;
- Concealed support from global extremist networks (specifically in the neo-Nazi spectrum);
- Concealed support from foreign government actors including secret services/special agencies (of course various speculation links these activities mostly to Russian secret agencies).

## Countering violent right-wing extremism in the Czech Republic

Countering violent right-wing extremism is a matter of maintaining a relatively well-working system of public institutions that cooperate with non-government and academic spheres. The primary responsibility for this task falls on the Ministry of Interior whose security policy department prepares reports and strategies on extremism issues. The Ministry of Interior further cooperates mainly with the intelligence services, the police, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defence, the Prosecutor General's Office, and the General Inspectorate of the Security Forces<sup>43</sup>. As evidence of government interest in combatting extremism, the new National Counter Terrorism, Extremism and Cybercrime Centre of the Criminal Investigation and Police Service was established on January 1st, 2023<sup>44</sup>.

Efforts to comprehensively counter radicalisation and violent extremism are still needed including educational activities in interconnected fields, especially media literacy.<sup>45</sup> Non-governmental institu-

42 Rovinalti, Luca (2018): Night Wolves biker group arrives in Prague. Euronews. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2018/05/07/night-wolves-biker-group-arrives-in-prague>

43 Ministry of the Interior (2023): Report on Extremism and Prejudicial Hatred in the Czech Republic in 2022. Prague: MVČR, p. 4.

44 Ibid.

45 Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky (2021): Zpráva platformy CZ RAN o činnosti v oblasti radikalizace v České republice. Praha: MVČR, pp. 31-32.

tions and civil society organisations are also active across specific branches of counter-extremist policy such as the In-Iustitia organization which helps victims of hate crimes. Minority advocacy groups that are typically targets of right-wing extremist violence (Roma, Jewish, LGBTQ+, migrant organizations) are also involved in various activities against right wing extremism.<sup>46</sup>

## Risk assessment and perspectives of violent right-wing extremism in the Czech Republic

Violent right-wing extremism in the contemporary Czech Republic poses no threat to the democratic status of the country itself. However, these activities could contribute to undermining the democratic order and societal cohesion in the Czech Republic and worsening the safety and security situation in the country. The rise of violent right-wing extremist activities can be expected in the event of an intensification of hybrid war against the Czech Republic or even a real war on Central European territory. In recent eras, the entities most threatened by the actions of right-wing extremists include the Roma community, people from migrant backgrounds (Ukrainians, Muslims, and people of colour), the LGBTQI+ community and their supporters, new leftist and liberal activists, and certain government officials and politicians and their supporters (including journalists). Police officers are also often targets of various assaults during violent demonstrations.

## Conclusion

The violent right-wing extremist scene is active in the Czech Republic. However, the disparate groups remain largely unorganized. The movement can be perhaps best characterized as a loose network of small cells, freelancers and gangs that conduct online campaigns to mobilize individual or mass violent actions. Given this heterogenous network and the lack of formal organizational structures, it is not possible to put together a meaningful list or catalog of right-wing extremist violent organizations (in contrast to the 1990s and 2000s). However, the permanent activity of populist radical anti-Western forces supported by the so-called disinformation scene and foreign hybrid interference create a milieu for individual and group radicalization towards violent right-wing extremism. This situation requires fostering adequate resilience and countering violent extremism.

<sup>46</sup> Mareš, Miroslav (2010): Politics against right-wing extremism in the Czech Republic. Budapest: Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Available at: <http://www.fesbp.hu/common/pdf/Mares20101119.pdf>



# Extreme Right-wing, paramilitary organizations in Hungary: Live and Let Live

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## Introduction

Tectonic shifts have prevailed across the Hungarian extreme right scene over the past 13 years. Since Fidesz- Magyar Polgári Szövetség<sup>1</sup> came to power in Hungary in 2010, extreme right (paramilitary) movements have experienced an existential crisis. These organizations have been challenged by an ever-increasingly dominant Fidesz that has accommodated some of their extreme right agenda, particularly following the so-called migration crisis in 2015. Some organizations have ceased to exist altogether while new ones have formed and their patterns of collaboration have changed over time.

Jobbik<sup>2</sup> dominated the extreme right party in Hungary until 2017 by pursuing a twofold message. Firstly, the party exploited a wave of anti-establishment sentiment and entered national politics during the political crisis of 2006, calling for radical protests against “corrupt” post-communist leaders.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, the party successfully connected the topics of the Roma community to public safety, particularly in rural areas. Ahead of the elections in 2018, however, two contradictory trends prevailed. While Fidesz increasingly occupied the space of extreme right narratives and implemented them into legislative acts, Jobbik strategically sought to pivot to the centre in a bid to become a centrist “people’s party.” Although Jobbik gained more than 20%

of the vote in 2018, its party leader, Gábor Vona, stepped down which resulted in the end of Jobbik in its original form.

## Party politics of the extreme right-wing in Hungary

The party subsequently split into two flanks: the less extreme members remained in Jobbik while the more extreme members followed László Toroczkai to form a new party called Mi Hazánk Mozgalom.<sup>4</sup> This latter party is mainly centred around ex-Jobbik members who were disappointed with the new path of the party and “want to go back to its radical roots” and adopt racist, anti-Semitic, anti-EU, anti-NATO and openly pro-Russian stances.<sup>5</sup> During the 2022 general elections, Jobbik showcased its more moderate reformulation but suffered a significant loss in seats, dropping from 26 in 2018 to just nine mandates in 2022. At the same time, Mi Hazánk as the newcomer gained six seats in parliament. Apart from propagating blatant irredentism and xenophobia, the party successfully channelled public consternation over COVID-19 restrictions and anti-vaccine sentiment.<sup>6</sup>

While Mi Hazánk sought to unify fringe right-wing paramilitary organizations under its tent and loosely coordinate the activities of extreme right movements, the most radical representatives of the para-

1 Fidesz- Hungarian Civic Alliance, henceforth Fidesz

2 Movement for a better Hungary, henceforth Jobbik.

3 Róna, 2016 [http://real.mtak.hu/37892/2/rona\\_kotet.pdf](http://real.mtak.hu/37892/2/rona_kotet.pdf)

4 Our Homeland Movement, henceforth Mi Hazánk.

5 <https://hungarytoday.hu/brand-new-Far-Right-party-emerges-from-the-ashes-of-jobbik/>

6 <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/04/22/hungarys-orban-eyes-opportunity-risk-in-rising-Far-Right-party/>

military scene decided to leave the various satellite organizations established around the party.

The Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom (HVIM),<sup>7</sup> the Betyársereg,<sup>8</sup> the Légio Hungária, the Magyar Önvédelmi Mozgalom,<sup>9</sup> the Nemzeti Front and the Farkasok<sup>10</sup> are closely linked to the extreme right party scene in terms of activities, structure and membership. While these actors are far from homogeneous, they can be best characterized by their commonly held ideological narratives: ethnocentrism, white supremacism, antisemitism, anti-Western and Eurosceptic stances.

Since the third constitutional majority of the Orbán government in the national elections in April 2018, Fidesz, for its part, has been actively involved in shaping the extreme right to reconstruct the so-called “Central field of power.”<sup>11</sup> Though Jobbik has regularly been attacked for its extremism despite it recently repositioning itself as a centre-right party, Fidesz appears unperturbed about the outright extremism of Mi Hazánk. Even more extreme fringe organizations centred around Laszlo Toroczkai, the leader of Mi Hazánk, such as HVIM, are not countered by Fidesz stakeholders. Fidesz and HVIM, moreover, often cooperate together at the local level: for many years, HVIM’s vice president, Kónyi-Kiss Botond, has been one of the organizers and participants of events in Székesfehérvár about the Treaty of Trianon,<sup>12</sup> the Secler Independence Day<sup>13</sup> and national flag inauguration at which high representatives of the local government (e.g. the mayor) regularly participate.<sup>14</sup>

## The power of the “glorious, historical past”

Since the democratic transition in 1989, the extreme Far Right has attracted around 10-15% of voters in the country. The Hungarian Party of Justice and Life (MIEP) was a contemporary nationalist movement that started in 1993. It supported the idea of a “Greater Hungary,” including reclaiming territories inhabited by Hungarians in Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, Serbia and Croatia. These grievances date back to the 1920 Treaty of Trianon which reduced Hungarian land by two-thirds leaving a quarter of the Hungarian population outside of the country’s borders. Extreme right groups, therefore, fostered openly revisionist narratives and vocally supported Hungarian minorities in other countries. The historical past, to this end, is always a reference point in terms of organizational meetings, commemorations and political speeches by the broader movement. The past and the future is indeed constantly idealized to get past an imperfect present. The extreme right boasts its own identity based on an idea of the nation’s shared identity stemming from historical events, symbols and historical personalities.

One of the most prominent historical periods emphasised by these ideological narratives concerns the Horthy-era and the “Greater Hungary” period overall symbolizing an era that saw the greatest expanse of territory controlled by Hungary (under the then Crown of Saint István). Admiral Miklós Horthy never accepted the outcome of the Treaty of Trianon, which “shredded” Greater Hungary by depriving it of two-thirds of its territory and giving birth to a nation via the diaspora. The key aspects of this era that are translated into ideological narratives by Hungary’s Far Right, therefore, include nationalist elements based on revisionism. They incorporate strongly anti-liberal, anti-leftist and antisemitic narratives. The representatives of the extreme right

7 Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement, henceforth HVIM

8 Army of Outlaw, henceforth Betyársereg.

9 Hungarian Self-Defence Movement, henceforth MÖM

10 Wolves, henceforth Farkasok

11 The concept of the Central field of power was originally defined by Viktor Orbán in 2009 as a departure from a competitive democratic model to a monopolistic party system to put an end to the dualistic party elite which defined the Hungarian political landscape after 1989. As a result, in Viktor Orbán’s view, Hungarian politics can be characterized by one dominant governing party “capable of articulating a national agenda” with a fragmented opposition that is not able to challenge the ruling party.

12 The treaty of Trianon, signed in 1920, formally ended the conflict of the Kingdom of Hungary with most Allies of World War I. Among others, its provisions limited the size of the Hungary military and required the country to make significant territorial concessions to several of its neighbours. The Treaty remains a sensitive subject in Hungarian political life. See for example: <https://www.politico.eu/article/trianon-treaty-anniversary-hungary-viktor-orban/>

13 The Secler Independence Day was first celebrated in 2012. It is celebrated by the Secler minority in Hungary commemorating the execution of Secler revolutionaries Mihály Gálffy, Károly Horváth and János Török by the Austrian empire in 1854. See for example: <https://historia.ro/>

14 <https://pcblog.atlatszo.hu/2019/06/12/a-magyar-kormany-a-hvim-altal-szervezett-felvideki-magyar-sziget-egyik-fo-tamogatoja/>

scene, consequently, often join marches to commemorate the election of Horthy as a governor. Under the leadership of Mi Hazánk, HVIM and the Betyársereg, radical organizations actively work towards restructuring the country's collective memory by condemning the communist past while reviving and recreating nationalist traditions.

Hungarian revolutions against imperial occupations like in 1848 against Austria and the 1956 uprising against the Soviet Union serve as other reference points. In the interpretation of the Hungarian extreme right, “the freedom fight of 1848 is a never-ending struggle” and “being a Hungarian means fighting for freedom on a daily basis.”<sup>15</sup> This sovereigntist approach, however, almost never turned into opposition against Russia despite its invasion of Ukraine. It rather is generally directed against the West, the EU, the NATO and the United States.

Arguably, the biggest and most important yearly gathering of the Hungarian extreme right is the so-called “Day of Honor” to commemorate the purported breakout of German and Hungarian soldiers during the siege of Budapest on February 8, 1945.<sup>16</sup> Together with a number of European extreme-right and neo-Nazi groups, the entire Hungarian right-wing extremist scene gathers every year to march and participate in memorial tours of the breakout in the countryside as well. The commemoration serves a twofold role to strengthen the network of the extreme right both domestically and internationally. Firstly, the “Breakout Tour” has been mainstreamed and popularized over time, with citizens who are not part of the extreme right and presumably even unaware about the original purpose of the event joining in. Secondly, the commemoration provides an opportunity to Far Right groups, including Mi Hazánk Movement, HVIM, the Betyársereg and Légio Hungária, to further extend their international connections.

Before Fidesz came to power in 2010, radical figureheads like György Budaházy and László Toroczkai campaigned on an extremely anti-systemic platform: they established, for example, the Hunnia Movement and a terrorist organization called Magyarok Nyilai Nemzeti Felszabadító Szervezet (National Liberation Movement of the Arrows of Hungarians). The organization coordinated attacks with Molotov cocktails against properties that belonged to members of the Hungarian parliament in 2008. Though Budaházy was sentenced to prison in 2022,<sup>17</sup> Toroczkai was not implicated in this case. Budaházy was considered the first convicted Hungarian terrorist who organized violent attacks with petrol bombs against the socialist-liberal Gyurcsány-government between 2007-2009 and hate crimes against LGBTQI+ people. He also participated in the attack on the Public TV headquarters in 2006. Yet, he was pardoned by President Katalin Novák in 2023 during the visit of Pope Francis in Budapest. It strongly indicates that the government aims to lure these nationalist-radical voters to Fidesz, to prove that the governing party shares a certain affinity with them.<sup>18</sup>

## Anti-gypsy rhetoric, xenophobia and antisemitism

The dominant strategy of extreme right-wing actors traditionally has involved mobilization against minority groups including the Roma community, the Jewish community, and other national or ethnic minorities. László Toroczkai's outburst in 2012, during a HVIM meeting in Devecser, where he stated that Hungarians should either “kick [the Roma population] them out of the country” or follow the Arab example where “they usually end up in pits or on the gallows”<sup>19</sup> is indicative of the approach of the Far Right towards the Roma community. Drawing on the Great Replacement Theory, the extreme right in Hungary claims that societies are facing a twofold threat: an external threat posed by Muslim immi-

15 [http://www.multunk.hu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/szelea\\_14\\_2.pdf](http://www.multunk.hu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/szelea_14_2.pdf)

16 On the night of February 8, 1945, thousands of Hungarian and German soldiers attempted to get through the blockade of the Soviet forces, which eventually resulted in the death of most German and Hungarian forces. According to Krisztián Ungváry, a historian expert of the era, the outbreakers were not defending Europe, but rather victims who prolonged the agony of Nazi Germany. See more here: <https://en.kitoresnapja.hu/mitosz-es-valosag>

17 <https://hu.euronews.com/2022/03/16/17-eves-letoltendo-bortonre-iteltek-budahazy-gyorgyot-terrorcselekmények-elkovetése-miatt>

18 <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/05/09/pardoned-Far-Right-extremist-rides-to-freedom-in-hungary/>

19 Róna, 2016. [http://real.mtak.hu/37892/2/rona\\_kotet.pdf](http://real.mtak.hu/37892/2/rona_kotet.pdf)

grants allegedly challenging the ethical and cultural basis of Christian civilization. And internally, it is the decadent leftist-liberal forces that are pursuing feminist and gay rights. To this end, “Gender” serves a symbolic glue<sup>20</sup> that holds the extreme right-wing scene together to fight the “onslaught of modernity” both domestically and internationally. They perceive it as epitomizing the collapse of the fundamental God-assigned difference that makes society function properly: that between men and women. The long list of components of “gender” include the issue of divorce, same sex marriage, social acceptance of promiscuity, abortion and the demise of the traditional family in which the primary role of women is ostensibly to bear children. They claim to defend common sense against “the suicidal manias of the EU.” The messages are all embedded within a staunchly pessimistic and consistently anti-modernist narrative about the West’s intellectual, cultural and social history. In the narratives of the extreme right-wing scene in Hungary, the West has degenerated under the influence of Marx, Engels, Freud, the Frankfurt School, feminism and postmodernism.

## Legal Situation

As far as law enforcement and investigative bodies are concerned, there seems to be no particular emphasis on the threat posed by neo-Nazi or white supremacist organizations in Hungary. The Counter-Terrorism Center (TEK) and the Hungarian civilian Intelligence Agency primarily focuses on the prevention of organized crime and international terrorism.<sup>21</sup> Following the so-called migration crisis in 2015, the Hungarian parliament amended the country’s fundamental laws concerning the response to terrorist threats. The Counter-terrorism Intelligence and Criminal Analysis Centre (TIBEK) was also established to collect and analyse data on public security threats. Although the scientific journal of TEK<sup>22</sup> discussed the security threat posed

by domestic extremist organizations before 2010, it has not been published since 2018.<sup>23</sup>

Law enforcement bodies have responded to the actions of extreme right-wing platforms differently over the past decade. In February 2017, during a march in Budapest, radical organizations like HVIM and the Betyársereg displayed Illegal Nazi symbols (flags and SS banners). These actions received no response from law enforcement authorities. As of October 2018, the amended law on the freedom of assembly makes it possible for the police to prohibit the gatherings even solely based on suspicion that participants will publicly deny Nazi or communist crimes or publicly deny the crimes of genocide or crimes against humanity committed by the Nazi and communist regimes. Although the police have banned such gatherings several times, these actions have been annulled by court decisions ruling that the bans were not soundly based.<sup>24</sup> Due to the broadly defined freedom of speech, these so-called “preventive bans” have not proven to be sufficient to undercut the activities of neo-Nazi gatherings in Hungary. In 2023, the Day of Honor was banned once more, but hundreds, possibly thousands, of demonstrators showed up at Budapest’s Vienna Gate and marched without a permit.<sup>25</sup> Despite the fact that the National Police Commissioner has developed a hate-crime protocol specifying how Hungarian police officers are expected to intervene against hate crimes, human rights organizations claim that the law enforcement authorities are not taking these cases seriously.<sup>26</sup>

In other cases, the Constitutional Court has ruled against extremist organizations that sought to interfere with various other demonstrations. For example, the court dismissed the complaints of two extreme right-wing representatives who claimed that they had the right to join a demonstration for the rights of African Americans in Budapest. In June 2020, HVIM and Légión Hungária joined this demonstration despite the police ban, with their participa-

20 Kováts and Póim 2015; Grzebalska, Kováts and Pető 2017.

21 <https://ih.gov.hu/egybes-feladatokról-reszletesen.html>

22 [http://tek.gov.hu/tt\\_pdf/2.%20%C3%A9vfolyam%201.%20sz%C3%A1m.pdf](http://tek.gov.hu/tt_pdf/2.%20%C3%A9vfolyam%201.%20sz%C3%A1m.pdf)

23 <http://tek.gov.hu/tt.html>

24 <https://tasz.hu/cikkek/az-elozetes-tiltas-tobb-problemat-vet-fel-mint-amennyit-megold>

25 [https://www.bnaibrith.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/AnnualMarchesGlorifyingNazism\\_Z105c.pdf](https://www.bnaibrith.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/AnnualMarchesGlorifyingNazism_Z105c.pdf)

26 <https://merce.hu/2019/12/19/a-magyar-rendorseg-garazdasagkent-kezeli-azt-ami-valojaban-gyulolet-buncselekmeny/>

tion resulting in physical violence. In a similar case in 2020, extremists wanted to enter a "roundtable discussion on rainbow families in Hungary" event organized partly by Budapest Pride. Both cases saw financial penalties of 80 000 HUF (around 210 EUR) imposed on the radical organizations.<sup>27</sup>

According to the Hungarian Criminal Code, anyone who incites hatred against the Hungarian nation, any national, ethnic, racial, or religious group or social groups on the basis of disability, gender identity or sexual orientation commits the crime of inciting violence against the community. The sentence of imprisonment for committing such a crime shall not exceed three years. Hungarian law also allows for the prosecution of persons who publicly deny Nazi or communist crimes or publicly deny the crime of genocide or crimes against humanity committed by the Nazi and communist regimes. Alongside many other facts, authorities should consider the prejudicial reason as a qualifying or aggravating circumstance.<sup>28</sup>

## Key Players

### Mi Hazánk

The Mi Hazánk party was established primarily by former members of Jobbik, like Torockai and Dóra Dúró, who have espoused stridently anti-Roma, anti-Semitic and homophobic type of narratives embedded into a deeply anti-EU and openly pro-Russian conspiratorial posture. The largest paramilitary organizations (HVIM and Betyarsereg), which have maintained a close personal relationship with the party leader, have quickly lined up behind the party. Though Mi Hazánk received less than 3.3% during the European Parliamentary election in 2019, the party was able to cross the domestic parliamentary threshold with 6.45% of the vote (good for six seats) in the country's 2022 parliamentary elections. In 2019, Torockai also established the National Legion for "defense education, preserving military

traditions and helping to save lives and assets in case of a natural disaster." He argued that "the factors that led to the establishment of the Hungarian Guard have not been eliminated but have multiplied." Mi Hazánk insisted that the new organization was not a legal successor to the banned Hungarian Guard but shared its ideology.<sup>29</sup>

The party openly advocates for territorial revisionism. In January 2020, Mi Hazánk announced a seven-point action plan on the occasion of the centenary of the Treaty of Trianon; the party wants the United Nations to pay reparations for Hungary's post-World War I losses and it aims to achieve a revision of Hungary's national borders "when the international situation changes". It has also vehemently espoused an anti-European stance and advocated for a national referendum about Hungary's membership in the EU. The party argues that the EU is exploiting Hungary while undermining national sovereignty. The party would prefer, consequently, bilateral economic cooperation and the strengthening of coordination within the Visegrad Group<sup>30</sup> seeing a "life outside the Union."<sup>31</sup>

### Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom (HVIM)

There are two major Far Right organisations in Hungary with close ties to the members of former Jobbik/Mi Hazánk. One of them is HVIM which was founded in 2001 by László Torockai, former mayor of the village of Ásotthalom in South Hungary and a current leader of Mi Hazánk. The current leaders of HVIM include György Gyula Zagyva, a former Jobbik MP, and Gábor Barcsa-Turner. The movement depicts itself as an "ultraright-ultraconservative" platform premised on a traditionalist worldview and a rejection of modernity. HVIM is mostly active at the local level, namely not only in Hungary but also in various parts of Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine with a significant number of ethnic Hungarians. The heroization of the glorious past is prom-

27 <https://444.hu/2021/11/25/az-alkotmanybirosag-szerint-nem-alaptorveny-ellenes-hogy-megbirsagoltak-ket-radkialis-jobboldali-csoport-mert-meg-akartak-zavarni-egy-antirasszista-es-egy-lmbtq-rendezvenyt>

28 Criminal Code, 2018.

29 <https://dailynewshungary.com/radical-nationalists-set-up-paramilitary-arm-in-hungary/>

30 The Visegrad Group is an alliance of four Central European countries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

31 <https://hirklikk.hu/kozelet/a-mi-hazank-a-huxit-azeuropai-uniobol-valo-kilepes-mellett-kampanyol/402309/>

inent in their worldview. The group's name (Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom, Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement) also refers to idealized historical periods; it stems from the administrative design of Hungary before the Treaty of Trianon which constituted of 64 counties. As a testament to its beliefs, the movement foregrounds an outline of the territory of historical Hungary.

HVIM's primary activities are centred around advocating for stricter measures at the local level against those who "do not obey the rules." With these terms, extremist groups usually refer to Roma by focusing on Roma perpetrators and "Gypsy crime" only. Moreover the group organises demonstrations and other activities (e.g., petition campaign) to spread anti-Roma, anti-Semitic and nationalist messages including via marches commemorating "heroic acts" of German and Hungarian soldiers during WWII. The group also organizes summer camps, sports activities and paramilitary training for the youth.<sup>32</sup>

While HVIM claims that it "tolerates other races," it rejects multiculturalism by propagating an ardent white supremacist narrative and placing significant emphasis on the importance of physical activities, a militant culture and traditional family roles. The organization also mobilizes its base through its anti-abortion agenda. Transnationally, HVIM coordinates with the Italian Militia Christi and the Movimento Nazionale movement among others by holding local demonstrations simultaneously in Budapest and Rome.<sup>33</sup>

## Farkasok

Farkasok (Wolves) is a paramilitary organization affiliated with HVIM that is focused specifically on (para)military activities by teaching (semi)military and martial arts skills to its male and female members with the help of veteran soldiers. It is led by HVIM co-chair Gábor Barcsa-Turner who also leads martial arts training sessions. During such sessions,

participants can take part in airsoft games, and Farkasok members provides unarmed weapons to participants<sup>34</sup>. The group provides basic military training to its members who, among other equipment, make use of airsoft replicas of weapons. One of their unofficial trainers, Zsolt Dér, was a veteran of the Balkan wars and is in direct contact with separatists fighting in Eastern Ukraine. He has acknowledged having been approached by pro-Russian forces to join them in Ukraine.<sup>35</sup> Dér said he ultimately refused to do so because he was employed by the deputy speaker of Parliament and member of Jobbik, Tamás Schneider. The group's motto, "Ancient content, new form," points to the acquisition of, in part, skills of modern warfare. The organization chose "wolf" as a name because of its role in German mythology and as one of the most frequently used totem animals of extremism and militarism.<sup>36</sup>

## Betyársereg

Betyársereg (Outlaw Army), founded by Toroczka in 2008, has become the largest and most violent Far Right group in Hungary. The anti-systemic organization was spurred as a response to brutal police action following a political crisis that erupted in 2006. The group has engaged in a long history of violence against the Roma minority and marked itself as "helping" with problems with "gypsies," which primarily means that the group engages in the intimidation of the Roma community. The organization, consequently, has prioritized physical strength and coordinated training "on the basis of self-defense". Its current leader, Zsolt Tyirityán, previously served a prison sentence for a vicious attack on a Roma citizen.<sup>37</sup> Tyirityán was also a member of Pax Hungarica Movement (abolished in 2017) that evolved from the Hungarian Blood and Honor organization. The organization is mostly active in Horthy-commemoration, national holiday events (October 23, March 15). It also regularly seeks to engage in intimidation tactics at LGBTQI+ parades

32 [https://civic-nation.org/hungary/society/radical\\_right-wing\\_political\\_parties\\_and\\_groups/](https://civic-nation.org/hungary/society/radical_right-wing_political_parties_and_groups/)

33 <https://www.hvim.hu/post/europanak-meg-sosem-volt-akkora-szuksege-rank-mint-most-hvim-movimento-nazionale-interju>

34 <http://faktor.hu/faktor-milyen-kapcsolatban-van-a-jobbikkal-a-felkatonai-szervezeta-farkasok-vezetoje>.

35 [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC\\_NED\\_country\\_study\\_HU\\_20170428.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_HU_20170428.pdf)

36 [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC\\_NED\\_country\\_study\\_HU\\_20170428.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_HU_20170428.pdf)

37 [https://index.hu/belfold/2015/06/15/naci\\_vagyok\\_vallalom\\_vona\\_meg\\_a\\_baratom/](https://index.hu/belfold/2015/06/15/naci_vagyok_vallalom_vona_meg_a_baratom/)

and demonstrate its force at motorcycle tours, joint training sessions, and strength and sports competitions. Betyársereg is considered a rather self-involved organization that aims to reach out to only the core membership of the platform.

## Légio Hungária

One of the newest organizations of the extreme right scene was founded in 2018 by Béla Incze and Tamas Liptak, former members of HVIM. They left HVIM to establish Legio Hungaria with the aim of bringing back “national radicalism” to the street as a manifestation of “radical resilience.” Formally, Legió Hungária keeps a distance from Mi Hazánk by claiming that it does not want to serve the interest of any political parties. Their basic assumption is that it makes no sense to participate in the formalized political structures since they are structured in such way that change is not possible within the existing system. Légio Hungária is a strictly militant, homophobic, and law and order-centred organization that is striving to get back to its neo-Nazi roots in a disciplined paramilitary fashion. The three main pillars of their worldview encompass tradition, self-awareness and community - Legio aims to present itself in an activist style. Members wear black uniforms and often seek to intimidate members of Pride Parades, (among others). Their overarching aim stands to create an appealing platform for young people that follow the extreme right scene in Hungary. Nevertheless, the organization does not consider itself as a catch-all platform but rather focuses on its own base instead.

Legio Hungaria has gained visibility on various occasions in the recent past. The group is the main organizer of the Day of Honor commemorations and tours centred around it, among others. Their purpose is to strengthen their internal cohesion, recruit members and display strength within the Far Right movement by attracting attention and scan-

dalizing these moments. In contrast to the rest of the extreme right scene, Legio does not advocate for territorial revisions and even cooperates with the Ukrainian Far Right organization called Karpathian Sic.<sup>38</sup> The organization also gained visibility by burning an LGBTQ+ flag in Budapest<sup>39</sup> and through the destruction of a sculpture that represented solidarity towards the Black Live Matters movement in America.<sup>40</sup> It also attacked pedestrians in the capital on the “Day of Honor” in 2023.<sup>41</sup>

## MÖM and Identitás Generáció

Two other extremist organizations need to be mentioned. The Magyar Nemzeti Önvédelmi Mozgalom (MÖM)<sup>42</sup> was established in 2014 to pursue a chauvinist, racist revisionist ideology. It advocates for territorial revisionism regarding territories it perceives as wrongly lost following the First World War. Apart from irredentism, the organization employs strongly anti-Roma and anti-immigration narratives aimed at creating a “living space” for ethnic Hungarians. MÖM mostly concentrates on educating young people for national self-awareness. They are further primarily active in smaller settlements in south-eastern and eastern Hungary.

The Identitás Generáció (IG)<sup>43</sup> was founded in 2014 and is an “eccentric” outlier on the radical right-wing scene. It deliberately differentiates itself from the rest of the extreme right and neo-Nazi actors both in terms of ideology and communication style. The group generally refrains from cooperating with other Far Right groups. Although its leader, Ábel Bódi,<sup>44</sup> has also “visited” extreme organizations like the Hungarian-oriented Pax Hungarica, the ideology of the IG is significantly different from the Far Right organizations and rather based on the French New Right idea. While it is rooted in the French-originated and now pan-European Identitarian Movement, their modus operandi also differentiates the movement from the rest of the extreme

38 <https://karpathir.com/2019/10/31/budapest-utcain-vonult-a-karpathiszka-szics/>

39 <https://444.hu/2019/10/23/a-nagykoruton-skandalva-vonultak-a-szelsojobbhosok>

40 <https://444.hu/2021/04/02/neonacik-tortek-ossze-a-ferencvarosi-black-lives-matter-szobrot>

41 <https://444.hu/2023/02/12/jarokeloket-tamadtak-meg-a-szell-kalman-teren-a-becsulet-napjan-a-rendorseg-garazdasag-es-sulyos-testi-sertes-gyanujamiatt-nyomoz>

42 [https://magyaronvedelem.hu/?page\\_id=29](https://magyaronvedelem.hu/?page_id=29)

43 <https://www.generacio.eu/>

44 Political Capital, 2020.

right-wing groups and networks in Hungary. IG prioritizes provocative street actions to undermine the leftist-liberal establishment and reclaim the space of the extreme right in public places.

## Trends

The extreme right-wing scene, all told, currently functions as an arbitrary security force whose services can be purchased online upon local request in any settlement if residents are concerned about public safety. Most of these organizations aim to re-establish public security through demonstrative marches directed at intimidating the local Roma community rather than the actual use of force. They formally consider the use of violence to be acceptable only for self-defence - interpreted broadly due to the artificial magnification of the perceived threat.

Although the level of physical violence committed by the extreme right has remained relatively low, the potential for escalation remains high.<sup>45</sup> Immigration and anti-LGBTQ rhetoric remain the most frequent topics and consequently the potential for violence is also the largest in these cases. Recent physical violence has been linked to foreign representatives of the Antifa Movement who attacked a man in Gazdagrét and others in the centre of the capital.<sup>46</sup> In response to that, representatives of the Betyársereg, who were supposedly planning to attack Antifa groups in Budapest, assaulted pedestrians who were not affiliated to any political organizations.<sup>47</sup>

In 2019, Legio Hungaria flexed its muscle for the first time by organizing a mob attack on an NGO community centre called Auróra in Budapest where LGBTQ, Roma, Jewish, homeless, transparency, education and environmental NGOs reside. Although the neo-Nazi group committed a hate crime in broad daylight, there was no police present and the Hungarian government has refrained from

commenting on the case. This act of intimidation included tearing down and burning of a rainbow flag before covering the building with neo-fascist slogans. This took place on a national holiday commemorating Hungarian national heroes who died on October 31 in 1956. The community centre was closed when it was targeted by members of the ultranationalist Legio Hungaria group, and that decision helped prevent injuries. Auróra is the only place in Budapest displaying the rainbow flag year-round. Budapest Pride resides in the building and holds tens of events there annually. This attack was the second consecutive targeting – a group of extremists had previously attempted to terrorize visitors at Auróra.<sup>48</sup>

## The extreme right movement in the past

The Roma community, religious minorities (Jews), sexual and gender minorities (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people) and migrants have been most frequently the targets and victims of hate crimes.<sup>49</sup> In the past two decades, the perpetration of hate crimes has varied over space and time. As for the Jewish community, Béla Incze, then vice-president of the HVIM movement, forwarded comments from Ferenc Szálasi<sup>50</sup> to the preparatory Commission working on the new Constitution calling for an attack on "the Zionists" in 2012. Incze was also suspected of damaging Jewish monuments in Budapest.<sup>51</sup>

The most violent forms of hate-crimes occurred in 2008 and 2009; with the arguably most extreme attack happening on November 3, 2008, in the village of Nagycséc in north-eastern Hungary. In that incident, Neo-Nazi terrorists firebombed Tibor Nagy's house and took aim at the family as they fled. Tibor was left injured and his wife, Éva, and his brother, Jozsef, both lost their lives. This double murder case was the first in a series of deadly

45 Minel jobbra, minnel jobban - PC 2020

46 [https://hvg.hu/itthon/20230211\\_Simaszkos\\_banda\\_tamadt\\_egy\\_ferfira\\_Gazdagreten](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20230211_Simaszkos_banda_tamadt_egy_ferfira_Gazdagreten)

47 [https://hvg.hu/itthon/20230212\\_Budan\\_harom\\_embert\\_verték\\_meg\\_szelsosegesek\\_szombaton\\_minden\\_ok\\_nelkul](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20230212_Budan_harom_embert_verték_meg_szelsosegesek_szombaton_minden_ok_nelkul)

48 <https://444.hu/2019/10/25/kik-azok-a-fekete-ruhas-fajvedok-akik-megtamadtak-az-aurorat>

49 <https://gyuloletellen.hu/mi-gyulolet-buncselekmény>

50 The leader of the nazi Hungarian Arrow Cross Party

51 <https://hang.hu/belfold/megis-megtartottak-az-idei-kitores-emlekturat-hitler-szalonnat-is-osztottak-a-resztvevoknek-123157>



racist attacks between 2008 and 2009 that all told claimed the lives of six Roma, including five-year-old Robika Csorba.<sup>52</sup> No similar acts, however, have occurred over the past few years targeted against the Hungarian Roma community. Since those prior atrocious crimes, the police have invested some additional effort towards effectively investigating hate crimes. A police hate crime hotline, notably, was established in 2012 and an indicator list developed by civil society organisations has been used since 2016 to assist in the investigations of prejudice-motivated crimes.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, in 2018, law enforcement also created an investigation protocol to respond to hate crimes. And yet the main problem continues to be that law enforcement bodies either respond too slowly or remain too passive. Several homophobic actions in recent years have seen the police respond insufficiently<sup>54</sup>. And even when there are strong indications of violence against a member of the community, the police often launch investigations regarding vandalism or other minor crimes instead of focusing on the ideological background of these crimes.

## Finances

The financial background of Hungarian extreme right wing organizations can be described as fairly untransparent. The scene is ostensibly underpinned by a complex financial model that involves large-scale events, such as the Day of Honor/The Outbreak tour, that must be financed partly by foreign-based groups attending the gatherings in Hungary. The extreme right scene also strengthened its agency and income by organizing cultural/music festivals that have attracted a larger audience over time. One of the most notorious examples concerns HVIM's Hungarian Island. Though the event attracted only a few hundred people in its early years, it grew into one of the largest annual events on the

extreme radical scene by 2010.<sup>55</sup> Buoyed by the success of this domestic event, HVIM began organizing a so-called Upper Hungarian Island in Slovakia attended by a significant number of people from the Hungarian minority in the country. It has not only been financially supported by the most popular Far Right fashion firm, the Fighter (Harcos),<sup>56</sup> but also by the Hungarian government.<sup>57</sup>

The so-called National Children Camp and various nature tours are additional community building events that may also serve as a source of financial income. According to investigative journalists, HVIM is partly financed through a number of non-governmental organizations operating with public funds. These groups, however, regularly fail to publish their financial reports, despite a legal obligation to do so. The local municipality of Asotthalom (where Toroczka was mayor from 15 December 2013 – 27 April 2022), furthermore, has also appeared to have a role in the non-transparent business network of HVIM.<sup>58</sup>

While there are no prominent financial linkages between the Hungarian extreme right and the Kremlin, a former representative of Jobbik received direct fundings from Russia. Béla Kovács, a former Member of the European Parliament, was sentenced to prison after accusations of espionage. He had previously appeared as an "independent" election observer in Crimea.<sup>59</sup> His conduct suggests that there may have been direct financial links between the Kremlin and Jobbik before. He is currently living in Russia and teaching at a local University.<sup>60</sup>

Meanwhile, the most extreme group of the Hungarian extreme right-wing milieu, the Hungarian National Front, has been proven to have connections with Russian military intelligence. Officers from the Russian military intelligence service, the GRU (Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye), have been in

52 <http://www.errc.org/news/ten-years-after-the-roma-killings-in-hungary-theres-nothing-so-called-about-antigypsyism>

53 [https://tasz.hu/files/tasz/imce/tasz-gybc-s-allaspon-t-final\\_.pdf](https://tasz.hu/files/tasz/imce/tasz-gybc-s-allaspon-t-final_.pdf)

54 [https://hvg.hu/itthon/20210718\\_lmbtg\\_gyuloletbuncselekmeny](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20210718_lmbtg_gyuloletbuncselekmeny)

55 <https://atlatzso.hu/2014/07/07/az-orszaggyules-es-akozmedia-iskiveszi-a-reszet-a-hatvanegy-varmegye-ifjusagi-mozgalom-finanszirozasa-bol/>

56 <https://pcblog.atlatzso.hu/2019/06/12/a-magyar-kormany-a-hvim-altal-szervezett-felvideki-magyar-sziget-egyik-fo-tamogatoja/>

57 <http://fmsz.info/tamogatok/>

58 <https://atlatzso.hu/kozpenz/2014/07/07/az-orszaggyules-es-a-kozmedia-is-kiveszi-a-reszet-a-hatvanegy-varmegye-ifjusagi-mozgalom-finanszirozasa-bol/>

59 [https://hvg.hu/itthon/20181112\\_Keletukrajnai\\_szakadar\\_valasztason\\_volt\\_megfigyelo\\_egy\\_jobbikos\\_politikus](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20181112_Keletukrajnai_szakadar_valasztason_volt_megfigyelo_egy_jobbikos_politikus)

60 [https://hvg.hu/360/20220927\\_Dezso\\_Andras\\_Az\\_orsz\\_kem\\_akit\\_majdnem\\_elfogtak](https://hvg.hu/360/20220927_Dezso_Andras_Az_orsz_kem_akit_majdnem_elfogtak)

contact with the organization, and Russian “diplomats” have participated in airsoft exercises via the platform.<sup>61</sup> The organization was led by István Györkös, one of the most well-known members of the Hungarian neo-Nazi scene, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for murdering a Hungarian policeman in 2016.<sup>62</sup> As a Far Right figure who established a well-connected network following the democratic transition, he also spearheaded the Day of Honor in 1997 and founded a violent neo-Nazi organization. His group, the Hungarian National Front, was loosely affiliated with Jobbik and was banned in late 2016.<sup>63</sup> To date, no other organisation has been confirmed to be this directly linked to and influenced by the Kremlin in Hungary. The fact that Hungarian intelligence services, including military counter-intelligence, were aware of these common exercises between members of the group and Russian officials indicated the efficiency of the Kremlin in influencing paramilitary and extremist organisations operating in Hungary.<sup>64</sup>

## Online activities

The main communication tools of the extreme right-wing and neo-Nazi scene are a closed network of media platforms (websites and social media platforms), fashion brands and festivals. It goes beyond ideology and manifests as a “fashion phenomenon” with the overarching goal aimed at attracting young people to the cause. Different factors of radical subculture, like the fashion brand or the Magyar Sziget as a cultural platform, serve an important role in identity-creation by giving a sense of belonging to its members. The extreme right has also used online and social media as effective mobilizing tools, in particular Facebook, to announce the details of their most important events. Online media platforms like Kurucinfo, Barikád, Alfahír, Hunhír and Szent Ko-

rona Radio<sup>65</sup> are among the most popular websites to disseminate their narratives.<sup>66</sup> While HVIM and Légió Hungária are banned from Facebook, some others like MÖM are still available on the social media platform.

Although most extreme paramilitary organizations were sceptical about the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic and put an emphasis on overdone reactions and mass panic, they generally called for compliance with the lockdown and social distancing regulations. The most prominent propaganda themes of the Betyársereg were centred around their volunteering activities, including how the organization helped various smaller municipalities by providing sanitizers.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, Political Capital research has illustrated that these organizations are more likely to adhere to conspiracy theories and narratives and remain sceptical about the virus, considering the public health related restrictions as an oppression of individual freedom.<sup>68</sup>

HVIM, the Betyársereg and Farkasok mostly present their pro-Russian narratives through their websites or via interviews they occasionally give to the mainstream media. The most active fringe platforms seeking to normalise pro-Russian narratives are Hídő (Bridgehead), social media (Számok<sup>69</sup>) and pro-Kremlin sites (Orosz Hírek,<sup>70</sup> Newsfront,<sup>71</sup> and Balrad) among others<sup>72</sup>. Legio Hungaria also amplifies its messaging through its podcast called the NZona. Mi Hazánk, moreover, was deemed to be a satellite organization of Fidesz even before it received six mandates in the Hungarian parliament. Torockai’s extreme right party, for example, has been promoted by a website called Promenade which was centred around the governing party in 2018. The leaflet published on the website provided

61 [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC\\_NED\\_country\\_study\\_HU\\_20170428.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_HU_20170428.pdf)

62 <https://infostart.hu/bunugyek/2019/12/11/jogerosen-eletfogytiglant-kapott-a-bonyi-rendorgyilkos>

63 [https://index.hu/belfold/2016/12/08/felszamoltak\\_a\\_magyar\\_nemzeti\\_arcvonalat/](https://index.hu/belfold/2016/12/08/felszamoltak_a_magyar_nemzeti_arcvonalat/)

64 [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC\\_NED\\_country\\_study\\_HU\\_20170428.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_HU_20170428.pdf)

65 <https://szentkoronaradio.com/>

66 Róna, 2016.

67 <https://betyarsereg.hu/2020/04/>

68 Political Capital, 2016

69 <https://www.facebook.com/szamokadatok/>

70 <https://oroszhirek.hu/>

71 <https://hu.news-front.info/>

72 [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/Zinc\\_XFR%20Disinfo\\_Report\\_Final%20report\\_221010.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/Zinc_XFR%20Disinfo_Report_Final%20report_221010.pdf)

an opportunity for the president to explain the identity of Mi Hazánk, depicting it as an “unorthodox, truth-seeking and potent political force.”<sup>73</sup>

Since 2022, this privileged relationship has been reinforced by the support of pro-governmental local and national media outlets. It is indicative that while opposition politicians have lacked access to the government linked media outlets, Toroczkai could appear both in local television channels and public TV on a number of occasions. Furthermore, government-linked media outlets seem to employ a double standard towards Jobbik and Mi Hazánk, heavily criticising Jobbik for being an extremist organization while remaining silent about the openly hate-mongering, white supremacist leaders of Mi Hazánk. The latter ran on a strongly anti-COVID regulations stance that they used to gain visibility both in the mainstream media and on social media.<sup>74</sup> Since no other party has touched upon this issue, it significantly helped Mi Hazánk to reach the parliamentary threshold in 2022. Toroczkai's radical party held a demonstration against the epidemiological rules and restrictions and demanded vaccination not be made compulsory. The party also protested against the vaccination of children.<sup>75</sup>

## Governmental responses- Fidesz is taking the wind out of the extreme right's sails

As Fidesz has become Europe's most successful populist party, it has continued to take the wind out of the Hungarian Far Right's sails. It not only co-opted some of their rhetoric, in particular, on issues of migration and sexual minorities but has also formally implemented some of these ideas through legislation. Fidesz was originally established merely as an anti-communist party, it has radically changed since its foundation in 1988. Notably, it was once a rather liberal pro-Western party following the regime change of 1989 before it moved to the right in the mid-1990s.<sup>76</sup> Today, Fidesz identifies itself as a right-wing conservative party that strongly opposes

the liberal agenda of personal freedoms, in particular, same-sex marriage, access to abortion, euthanasia or multiculturalism, with anti-gender mobilization another important pillar of its platform. It mirrors a collective fear of the loss of national identity and the excessive influence of the West along with its cultural hegemony. The party has further combined nationalist and ultraconservative ideas in a catch-all style, instrumentalizing migration and minority rights. In riding the wave of “anti-others,” it has been closely linked with the escalation of culture wars and the renewal of social conservatism.

Fidesz deliberately exploits Far Right parties as an instrument to reach its political goals to remodel the political system in Hungary. Both Jobbik and Mi Hazánk - but also foreign Far Right actors - have at different times helped Fidesz to be a “pioneer” in marking out new pathways ideologically and politically. The exclusionary populist impact is traceable in the political discourse, constitutional and institutional reforms, and policy measures initiated by different Fidesz governments. The constitutional majority of Fidesz in parliament enabled it to enact a wide range of political and legal measures (billboard campaigns, national consultations, legal challenges, etc...) that bolstered its narrative. The Fidesz government has ultimately changed the constitution 12 times to restrict immigration, civil society, and sexual minorities and to equate homosexuality with paedophilia. Some of the most prominent topics marking the convergence between the Far Right and radical populist right in Hungary are outlined below.

## Refugee crisis / Great replacement theory

Differentiating between ethnic Hungarians and “others” has been central to Fidesz's rhetoric since 2010. However, the refugee crisis was a turning point. From 2015 onwards, Fidesz was leading the charge in terms of a nativist, nationalist and anti-other approach. This cocktail found fertile soil in

73 <https://merce.hu/2018/07/10/fidesz-kozeli-uj-sag-szorolapja-nepszerusiti-toroczkai-ek-mozgalmat/>

74 <https://hungarytoday.hu/Far-Right-mi-hazank-party-holds-demonstration-against-hungarys-covid-dictatorship/>

75 <https://telex.hu/koronavirus/2022/01/16/mi-hazank-tuntetes-koronavirus-jarvany-szabalyok-korlatozasok-covid-diktatura>

76 Bozóki, 2008.

a region where lack of trust in democratic institutions is palpable and where social capital stood low since even before the Eurozone crisis (let alone the refugee crisis). The media capture by Fidesz in a top-down centralized fashion has, importantly, played a central role in helping the party effectively pursue its narratives. Whereas interest in political extremism was high even before 2010,<sup>77</sup> prejudices, welfare chauvinism and xenophobia have all significantly increased since Fidesz adopted a fiercely anti-refugee stance in 2015.<sup>78</sup>

Fidesz has particularly centred its views around the concept of an ethnically and culturally homogeneous nation to unify the conservative base of the party.<sup>79</sup> Given that Hungary is a rather homogeneous country,<sup>80</sup> the government was able to build momentum on the so-called migration crisis in 2015 by capitalizing on existing prejudices. Amid the peak of the crisis in late 2015, the government shut down the country's largest open-door refugee reception centre in Debrecen, constructed a fence on the country's southern border and introduced Europe's strictest migration policy. In February 2015, Jobbik initiated a referendum regarding four issues, including restrictions on immigration. After the government held an invalid referendum against migration in 2016, the prime minister's rhetoric shifted. In 2017, Orbán said that "Hungary's ethnic homogeneity must be preserved."<sup>81</sup>

The political exploitation of societal fears and insecurities seems to have substantially contributed to Fidesz's electoral successes in 2018.<sup>82</sup> Hungary's stance on migration including particularly the border fence idea, which had originated from Far

Right actors such as Toroczkai, became a reference point and rallying cry for both the European and the American Far Right.<sup>83</sup> Orbán seems to have been inspired by these external actors too; he namely "borrowed" the "great replacement" theory from the Hungarian and French identitarianism movement and also reused a controversial billboard of Britain's Far Right UK Independence Party to underpin its own anti-immigration campaign.<sup>84</sup>

## LGBTQI+/gender

In the name of "protecting traditional family values and children," the government engaged in a harsh anti-LGBTQI+ campaign in 2020. It amended the constitution claiming that "Family ties shall be based on marriage and the relationship between parents and children. The mother shall be a woman, the father shall be a man."<sup>85</sup> The amendments also state that sex is assigned at birth and is given and unchangeable: one is either born a man or a woman. In the same manner, the Fidesz government also banned singles from adopting children with an omnibus bill. The new law only allows for adoption by married couples. These actions parallel prior legislation that ended the legal recognition of transgender people in Hungary replacing the term "gender" in the civil registry with "sex at birth."<sup>86</sup>

The Hungarian Parliament, furthermore, adopted and acted "to take strict action against paedophile offenders and to amend certain child protection laws" in June 2021.<sup>87</sup> The law bans gay people from being featuring in school educational materials or on television shows targeted to minors. Arguing there was a need to protect children from alleged

77 Political Capital, DEREK Index (2017)

78 E. Sík (2017), "Rekordot Döntött Az Idegenellenesség Magyarországon", <http://nepszava.hu/cikk/1119911-rekordot-dontott-az-idegenellenesseg-magyarorszagon>.

79 A. Bozóki and E. Simon (2019), *Two Faces of Hungary: From Democratization to Democratic Backsliding*, in: S. P. Ramet, C. M. Hassenstab (eds), *Central and Southeast European Politics since 1989*, pp. 221–248. New York: Cambridge University Press.

80 Up until 1920, Hungary has been a multi-ethnic state where Hungarians made up 50 percent of the population. Then the Treaty of Trianon transformed the country into a rather homogeneous state where Hungarians comprised 90 percent of all citizens. Similarly, Polish has been a multinational and multi-ethnic country for centuries. But by the end of the second World War, Poland also became an ethnic monolith, with over 95 percent of its population consisting of Polish Catholics.

81 The "ethnic homogeneity" section was later omitted from the transcript of Orbán's speech. Zoltán Kovács, the international spokesperson of the government explained it as a coincidence, that the prime minister was actually talking about preserving 'cultural homogeneity'.

82 A. Kende and P. Krekó (2020), "Xenophobia, Prejudice, and Right-Wing Populism in East-Central Europe." *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 34 (August): 29–33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2019.11.011>.

83 <https://www.vox.com/2020/5/21/21256324/viktor-Orban-hungary-american-conservatives>

84 <https://www.euronews.com/2018/03/28/hungary-government-s-new-anti-immigration-ad-copies-ukip-s-controversial-anti-migrant-post>

85 [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/mother-woman-father-man-constitutional-amendment-passes/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/mother-woman-father-man-constitutional-amendment-passes/)

86 [https://index.hu/english/2020/05/19/hungary\\_legal\\_recognition\\_gender\\_change\\_sex\\_at\\_birth/](https://index.hu/english/2020/05/19/hungary_legal_recognition_gender_change_sex_at_birth/)

87 <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/10/02/democracy-digest-states-of-emergency/>

liberal sexual education, the government introduced a restrictive law, directly connecting sexual minorities to paedophilia. Fidesz began making this link after an MP of Mi Hazánk shred a children's storybook<sup>88</sup> for promoting acceptance towards LGBTQ minorities. While the legislation was most likely inspired by a Russian law designated to purportedly protect children, the Hungarian bill went further as it directly links homosexuality to paedophilia, which is more restrictive than the Russian law.<sup>89</sup> The European Commission launched an infringement procedure against Hungary by claiming that this act is incompatible with European law.<sup>90</sup> The government also held a referendum in 2022 that included loaded questions such as "Do you support the propagation of gender reassignment treatments to underage children?" After Amnesty International in Hungary, together with other NGOs, successfully encouraged voters to cast invalid ballots, the referendum was found to be invalid and failed.<sup>91</sup>

## Restricting abortion

Although Fidesz did not at first touch upon the issue of abortion,<sup>92</sup> the party did enshrine its support for protecting "foetal life that begins with conception" in the new constitution in 2012.<sup>93</sup> Following Mi Hazánk demands to restrict abortion that have persisted for years, the government passed a new decree in 2022 to promote conservative social values. Pregnant women seeking abortions in Hungary will now be required to listen to the foetal heartbeat before going ahead with an abortion. Doctors must also issue a report that records that the pregnant woman was presented "with the factor indicating the functioning of foetal vital functions in a clearly identifiable manner." Dóra Dúró<sup>94</sup> has celebrated it

as a "chance for life."<sup>95</sup> On behalf of Mi Hazánk, she had for years advocated for the introduction of the foetal heartbeat listening bill.

## Ethnic and national minorities

While Hungarian history has had no shortages of "us versus them" battles, public discourses have increasingly focused on what it means to be a true Hungarian (*igaz(i) magyar*)<sup>96</sup> National belonging now indicates not only knowing who "we" are but also recognising who the "others" are. Consequently, national identity makes sense only through the contrast with external groups. Although the government does not explicitly target national minorities, its populism developed a certain exclusionary anti-Roma component. It includes segregated housing and education within a broader strategy "to steer popular sentiments of dispossession and disenfranchisement against internal and external 'enemies'."<sup>97</sup> In 2019, the government launched a public campaign against the Roma community by rejecting a court decision on compensating Roma students whose education suffered due to racial segregation. By claiming that the Roma receives a "significant sum without having to work for it in any way."<sup>98</sup>

Contrary to its harsh anti-refugee policy, the Orbán government promised to help Ukrainians crossing the Hungarian borders. But the "demolished" asylum system made it harder for Ukrainians to integrate. Furthermore, the Hungarian Prime Minister avoided naming Vladimir Putin as being responsible for the war and confronted the Ukrainian government instead.<sup>99</sup> Amid the war, the ruling elite successfully deepened this "us' vs. them" divisions

88 <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/10/02/democracy-digest-states-of-emergency/>

89 Pintér, L. (2021) Pázmány docense: A melegellenessé eltérített pedofilellenes törvény sokkal szigorúbb az orosz mintánál, Telex. Available at: <https://telex.hu/belfold/2021/06/16/racz-andras-egyetemi-docens-velemeny-magyar-torveny-orosz-minta-osszehasonlitás>

90 [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_2689](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_2689)

91 <https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20220404/ervenytelen-lett-a-nepszavazas-537317>

92 Women in Hungary were allowed to access an abortion up until 12 weeks of pregnancy, sometimes later if there are severe health complications at play. They were also required to complete a counseling session first.

93 [https://hvg.hu/itthon/20120119\\_alkotmany\\_abortusz](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20120119_alkotmany_abortusz)

94 She is a former member of Jobbik, currently a member of Mi Hazánk in the Hungarian National Assembly. Restricting abortion, including a preliminary hearing of the fetal heartbeat has been on her political agenda for years.

95 <https://24.hu/belfold/2022/09/13/duro-dora-abortusz-szivhang-kormany/>

96 E., M. Goździak and P. Marton (1994), Where the wild things were. *Electronics Education*, 1994(3), 7–7. <https://doi.org/10.1049/ee.1994.0068>

97 Samu, S. D., Bóna. (2020, January 15), Orbán: Compensating Romas for school segregation is "unjust" for the rest of the community. Index.hu. [https://index.hu/english/2020/01/15/gyongyospata\\_roma\\_school\\_segregation\\_hungary\\_viktor\\_orbán/](https://index.hu/english/2020/01/15/gyongyospata_roma_school_segregation_hungary_viktor_orbán/)

98 Ibid.

99 France24 (2022, May 20), Hungary's neutral war stance puts off Ukraine refugees. France 24.

within society, claiming that the opposition would "get Hungarians killed in Ukraine."<sup>100</sup>

## Politics of historical memory

As for symbolic politicking, the government addressed historical grievances at many levels. Firstly, the government reconstructed the pre-1944 appearance of Kossuth Square in front of parliament and inaugurated a Turul bird statue that is one of the most important symbols of the Hungarian extreme scene.<sup>101</sup> Secondly, it has placed considerable emphasis on the Treaty of Trianon<sup>102</sup> which still evokes strong sentiments in Hungarian society and represents a traditional focal point on the Far Right. Fidesz also started commemorating the Treaty of Trianon at the state level and the government had designated June 4<sup>th</sup> a Day of National Togetherness. The government also erected a monument in front of the parliament building in Budapest – the first such memorial to be funded by the government since World War II. The new Fundamental Law emphasised the unity of the Hungarian people across state borders and the government has eased easier procedures for obtaining Hungarian citizenship and accessing voting rights for Hungarians living in neighbouring countries.<sup>103</sup>

One of the main differences between Fidesz and more extremist actors concerns their approach towards territorial revisionism; while the Far Right openly advocates for it, the government has not done so. However, the Hungarian Prime Minister provoked international criticism after he posted a video of himself at a football match wearing a scarf featuring a map of Greater Hungary in 2022. The scarf included territories that are today part of Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia that were perceived as blatant nationalism and irredentism.<sup>104</sup>

## Football hooligans, linked to Fidesz

Anti-Semitic, anti-Roma and homophobic ideology has also filtered itself into radical elements of the football club Ferencvaros, where Far Right sentiment proliferated over time. The Far Right ideology is shared by an overwhelming majority of football fan bases in Hungary. The government's position, in fact, aligns closely with football fans for the first time since pre-WWII.<sup>105</sup> Such rhetoric used by Hungarian government figures is now used interchangeably by those of the "Fradi" clubs, with informal links established between Hungary's main ultra (ultrák) groups and some of the government stakeholders. For example, the director of the Football club, Gábor Kubatov, is also the director of the Fidesz party. On 23 February 2016, socialist MP István Nyakó, was prevented by "bald strongmen" centred around Kubatov from submitting his referendum proposal. These individuals, instead, allowed Lászlóné Erdösi Lászlóné, (the wife of a former Fidesz deputy mayor) to submit her proposal first.<sup>106</sup>

## Societal responses - the "demand side"

Extensive empirical and theoretical research<sup>107</sup> has explained the social preconditions for the extreme right-wing milieu to gain political support in Hungary. The movement, namely, has benefitted from an increasing right-wing value orientation that is underpinned by numerous factors. The combined effect of strong prejudice and welfare chauvinism has been a prevailing trend since the fall of communism in Hungary. According to the Political Capitalás DEREK index,<sup>108</sup> Hungarian society is characterized by a high degree of intolerance against racial and sexual minorities. These attitudes are linked to a broad feeling of social threat, as "we are generally

100 <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/20220223-marki-zay-peter-haboruba-kuldene-a-magyar-katonakat-video.html>

101 Bozóki, 2016.

102 Hungary lost about two-thirds of its territory after the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, a loss that is still considered a national tragedy by many parts of the population. See more here: <https://kafkadesk.org/2019/06/04/the-trianon-treaty-and-hungarys-identity-crisis/>

103 Sadecki, (2020), [https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/PV\\_EN\\_Trianon.pdf](https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/PV_EN_Trianon.pdf)

104 <https://kafkadesk.org/2022/11/24/Orbans-greater-hungary-scarf-prompts-anger-and-sarcasm-among-neighbours/>

105 <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/12/08/hungarys-football-ultras-Far-Right-not-for-fidesz/>

106 <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/12/08/hungarys-football-ultras-Far-Right-not-for-fidesz/>

107 [https://socio.hu/uploads/files/2014\\_4/3juhasz\\_kreko\\_molnar.pdf](https://socio.hu/uploads/files/2014_4/3juhasz_kreko_molnar.pdf)

108 <http://derexindex.eu/>

intolerant of groups that we see as threatening.”<sup>109</sup> This is further intertwined with a low level of social capital and declining trust towards democratic institutions – this climate has provided a conducive background for an authoritarian turn and extremist narratives.<sup>110</sup> After the Fidesz government deliberately exploited these identity-based anxieties, xenophobia and prejudices have further intensified against minorities.<sup>111</sup>

The ideological roots of Mi Hazánk are similar to that of Jobbik, a former Far Right party that moved to the centre-right in an effort to broaden its base. Its electorate lives in smaller towns and comprises primarily young people, men and those with low levels of educational attainment. A majority are supportive of the illiberal direction Hungary has taken but are frustrated with corruption and the way the government handled the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>112</sup>

In March 2023, one poll revealed that Mi Hazánk had become the most popular opposition party among the younger electorate (those below 30 years old), receiving 20 percent support compared to 14 percent for Fidesz among this group.<sup>113</sup> While experts claim that the margin is wide and the gap between the two could eventually shrink, it is relevant that an extreme right party is able to gain such popularity among youth voters. The reasoning is that this electorate is deeply disappointed in mainstream parties, including leftist parties, hence they are seeking solutions among the anti-establishment parties.

Russian propaganda and disinformation efforts seem to be particularly effective in Hungary and are able to shape public opinion to a certain extent. According to an Ipsos poll, Hungarians hold markedly different opinions than the rest of Europe about the

war in Ukraine; two-thirds of respondents in the survey claimed that it is the problem of Ukraine alone and Hungary should not be involved in the conflict at all. And only three percent of Hungarians agreed with sending weapons to Kyiv.<sup>114</sup>

## Transnational connectivity /COVID-19/ War in Ukraine

In addition to the above-mentioned Day of Honor, which serves as one of the key networking hubs of the regional extreme right-wing organizations in Budapest, and various festivals, right-wing extremist actors have been coordinating at various levels. Before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Legio Hungaria had been building formalized cooperation with the regional neo-Nazi networks in an apparent attempt to strengthen cooperation between the extreme right-wing in CEE. In 2019, Legio was invited by the Ukrainian Karpatska Sic<sup>115</sup> to participate in a strategic conference in Ungvar to coordinate regional activities and ideological underpinnings with Ukrainian, Russian, Serbian, Polish and Czech neo-Nazi organizations. Legio Hungaria also gathered in Bulgaria to extend the scope of cross-regional cooperation with Western delegations with the participation of the Bulgarian National Union,<sup>116</sup> the German Die Rechte,<sup>117</sup> the French Les Nationalistes,<sup>118</sup> the Polish Szturm,<sup>119</sup> and the Czech Národní a Sociální Fronta.<sup>120</sup> Under the name of “The Alliance for the Fortress of Europe,” their overarching goal is to set aside chauvinism and join forces in order to protect Europe from the onslaught of multiculturalism, immigration, gender and LGBTQI+ rights, among others.<sup>121</sup> Légio Hungária also invited the Ukrainian and Czech organizations

109 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352154619301299>

110 <https://www.refworld.org/docid/473aff0ac.html>

111 [https://hvg.hu/itthon/20160331\\_Tarki\\_2016\\_rekord\\_idegenggyulolet](https://hvg.hu/itthon/20160331_Tarki_2016_rekord_idegenggyulolet)

112 <https://24.hu/belfold/2023/03/22/mi-hazank-szavazok-idea-intezet-felmeres/>

113 <https://telex.hu/belfold/2023/03/03/mi-hazank-legnepszerubb-part-a-fiatalok-kozott-median>

114 <https://www.szabadeuropa.hu/a/kozvelemeny-haboru-ipsos/31816053.html>

115 <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-carpathian-sich-battalion-russia-invasion/31960108.html>

116 <https://bgns.net/>

117 <https://die-rechte.net/>

118 <https://www.facebook.com/nationalistesfr/>

119 <http://www.szturm.com.pl/>

120 <http://www.nsfontra.cz/>

121 <https://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/nemzetkozive-lesz-126797>

to commemorate the 1956 revolution in Budapest, along with the Russian Center.<sup>122</sup>

This cooperation has been partially interrupted since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The war has divided the German extreme right-wing extremist scene, among others.<sup>123</sup> While Legio Hungaria has not communicated extensively about Russia's war in Ukraine, it has strived to maintain a good relationship with the Ukrainian Karpatska Sic whom they consider to be an anti-chauvinist organization.<sup>124</sup> This was not always the case: as Political Capital's previous analysis pointed out,<sup>125</sup> part of a broader effort by the Kremlin after 2014 was to undermine the region's stability in general and bilateral links with Ukraine in particular by supporting the real "troublemakers" throughout the region: secessionist, revisionist and ultranationalist organizations. Deploying secret service and hybrid warfare tools, Russia sought to fuel disputes between these countries and their extremist organizations. In 2015, the extreme right Ukrainian paramilitary organization Karpatska Sich threatened to annihilate Jobbik and HVIM activists for undermining the Ukrainian state and destabilising the region along ethnic fault lines in Western Ukraine and Subcarpathia. The reasoning behind this approach was that the more historic debates about the borders are resurrected and the more fear and distrust can be stirred up in the region, the better it is for the Kremlin.<sup>126</sup>

The Hungarian extreme right-wing milieu contextualizes the current war in accordance with its antisemitic, anti-Western and pro-Russian approach. The movement has generally leaned towards condemning President Zelenskiy, the US and NATO for provoking the war which they see as an opportunity structure to reclaim Transcarpathian territories from Ukraine. Mi Hazánk and its satellite organizations (Betyársereg, HVIM) are the most vocal on this matter. The Vice President of the National Assembly and deputy chair of Mi Hazánk party, Dóra Dúró, recently regurgitated Kremlin's

propaganda and conspiracy theories about Ukraine on state-owned Russia. Now she argues that "Ukraine's accession to NATO poses a huge national security risk" and that the Hungarian government will only approve it "if Putin did." The party claims that "Ukraine hides in the shadow to the US and the West," "cannot be seen as independent" and that it is led by a leader who is "anti-peace and anti-democracy." According to Dúró, Ukraine should "hand over all its occupied territories because it is the only way to achieve peace."<sup>127</sup>

#### **According to Political Capital,<sup>128</sup> Hungarian extremist organizations are propagating the following narratives:**

- Ukraine deserved the attack from Russia.
- Russia acted legitimately in response to a threat.
- The war serves the interest of the USA which is mostly responsible for the war.
- Russian troops are trying to behave humanely/ Ukrainians are also committing war crimes.
- The West employs a double standard when condemning Russia.
- Hungary should stay out of the war/should not be concerned about the territorial integrity of Ukraine.
- In contrast to so-called migration crisis in 2015, Hungary should help the "real refugees" coming from Ukraine who are primarily Hungarian minorities from Transcarpathia.<sup>129</sup>

Another recurring argument purports that Ukraine does not deserve Western support because of its mistreatment of minorities. Those within the Hungarian extreme right-wing extremist milieu advocate that all support to Ukraine should be suspended until the situation of the Hungarian minority inside the country improves.<sup>130</sup>

122 <https://karpathir.com/2019/10/31/budapest-utcain-vonult-a-karpatszka-szics/>

123 <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-Far-Right-split-by-russia-ukraine-war/a-61283065>

124 <https://soundcloud.com/user-119537511/a-h-bor-r-l-s-a-sz-ljobbos-vet?in=user-119537511/sets/nacionalista-zona#t=0:12>

125 [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC\\_NED\\_summary\\_analysis\\_EN\\_20170428.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_summary_analysis_EN_20170428.pdf)

126 [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC\\_NED\\_summary\\_analysis\\_EN\\_20170428.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_summary_analysis_EN_20170428.pdf)

127 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBUFCH4bMUI>

128 [https://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=2979](https://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=2979)

129 [https://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article\\_read=1&article\\_id=2979](https://politicalcapital.hu/hireink.php?article_read=1&article_id=2979)

130 **Mi Hazánk: Ne fizessünk Ukrajnának!** | Mandiner RTL.hu – Oroszország mellé állt a Mi Hazánk, amely szerintük emberséges az ukránokkal



## European Patriots Unite (EPU)

Some organizations were created specifically to build international cooperation. Standing for “national Christian values” and fighting for the protection of identity, national language and culture, the European Patriots Unite (EPU) was established in June 2020 in Budapest as an international platform. According to their founding act, the organization is constituted of civilians aimed at connecting patriots of Europe into a network” to “raise their voice” and to help them become more effective in their own country.<sup>131</sup> The platform has been most vocal about “mass migration” against which they organized demonstrations in Brussels in 2017 and in 2019.<sup>132</sup>

Tamás Gaudi-Nagy, who is a Far Right activist, has taken a seat in the management of the organization and serves as its legal representative. Between 2010 and 2014, he was a member of the Hungarian parliament for Jobbik. The leadership of the group also includes Péter Pál Walter, the former chief national organizer of Mi Hazánk Ifjain, who was replaced because of a photo with an arm wave and then returned as president of the organization.<sup>133</sup>

The ultimate goal for many of these extreme right groups is to form a pro-Russian geopolitical platform, opposed to the European Union and NATO. They agree with Vladimir Putin's characterisation of the “nihilistic” and “decadent” West contrasted with Christian-conservative Russia. Hungarian extreme-right wing groups supported the Russian annexation of Crimea and the invasion of eastern Ukraine, allying with pro-Russian separatists allegedly to protect the Hungarian minority in Ukraine and in return receive support for their fight against Western liberal values. The Russian connections of extreme-right wing movements and their dedication to the Putinist ideology threaten the stability of Hungary and the entire region, which the Hungarian government should take seriously.<sup>134</sup>

## Forecast

The Far Right and right-wing extremist scene in Hungary represents both an opportunity and a threat to the government. The weak but visible Far Right movement is supposed to demonstrate to the West that the current government is the only guarantee to keep the extremists out of power. Fidesz is, however, continuing to follow a strategy according to which only one party is needed to mobilise potential right-wing voters. As for the extreme right wing scene: despite the fact that some of these elements are being challenged by Fidesz co-opting some of their core ideological beliefs,<sup>135</sup> they mostly see it as an opportunity. As Political Capital research has noted, these platforms define themselves as a “thrust” to push the government - “the more to the right, the better.” They see their role as a guarantee to make sure that the government “enforces justice” and “does the right thing” at the end of the day.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, the future interplay between the extreme right scene and the ruling radical right can best be characterized as mutually reinforcing in the spirit of “live and let live.” While Fidesz's policy is likely continuing to capitalize on accommodating the extreme right wing agenda, the extremist fringe organizations will also keep benefiting from a government structure apparently not willing to significantly disrupt their operations.

131 [https://gaudinagytamás.hu/european\\_patriots\\_unite\\_-\\_eur%C3%B3pa\\_patri%C3%B3t%C3%A1i\\_egyese%C3%ADts%C3%A9tek\\_er%C5%91iteket\\_-\\_be-mutatkoz%C3%B3\\_film\\_%C3%A9s\\_sajt%C3%B3t%C3%A1j%C3%A9koz](https://gaudinagytamás.hu/european_patriots_unite_-_eur%C3%B3pa_patri%C3%B3t%C3%A1i_egyese%C3%ADts%C3%A9tek_er%C5%91iteket_-_be-mutatkoz%C3%B3_film_%C3%A9s_sajt%C3%B3t%C3%A1j%C3%A9koz)

132 <https://harcunk.info/index.php/esemenyek/2691-a-toemeges-migracio-ellen-tuentettek-a-magyar-radikalisok-es-mas-nacionalistak-bruesszelben>

133 [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_Patriots\\_Unite](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Patriots_Unite)

134 <https://euobserver.com/opinion/136354>

135 Political Capital, 2020.

136 Political Capital (2022): Minnel jobbra, minel jobban. A magyar (szélső)jobboldal 100 évvel Trianon után. [https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/pc\\_boll\\_minel\\_jobbra\\_minel\\_jobban\\_2020.pdf](https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/pc_boll_minel_jobbra_minel_jobban_2020.pdf)



# Addressing Right-wing Extremism in Slovakia

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Though the Slovak Republic lacks a specific legal definition of right-wing extremism (XRW), the Slovak Penal Code criminalizes acts of extremism, including hate crimes, the promotion of extremist ideologies and right-wing extremism. Therefore, the government and law enforcement officials may use these laws to investigate and prosecute right-wing extremist activity.<sup>1</sup>

The Slovak government has indeed developed national strategies to address extremism (including right-wing extremism). Most recently, the Slovak Ministry of Interior adopted the Conceptual Framework for countering radicalization and extremism by 2024.<sup>2</sup> This conceptual apparatus identifies extremism as a term that describes actions and ideologies that conflict with the democratic rule of law and which seek to limit or thwart certain groups of people from exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. It may include attempts to suppress or inhibit the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms based on a person's race, nationality, ethnic group, religious beliefs or other characteristics.

Accordingly, right-wing extremism or the extreme right is considered a specific type of extremism that is characterized by ultranationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-democratic or anti-systemic attitudes, and a rejection of egalitarian principles. Right-wing extremism is particularly premised on a distinction between "us" and "them" as it pertains to inequality, with immigrants and ethnic or religious minorities

often victims of discrimination. Right-wing extremists also seek to build cultural unity within a nation, while rejecting political plurality. They further propagate verbal or even physical violence to deny or diminish the universal rights and freedoms of others.

The Slovak government has additionally established the Committee for the Prevention and Elimination of Racism, Xenophobia and Antisemitism (VRAX)<sup>3</sup> under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior, specifically the Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality, which is responsible for coordinating and implementing measures to combat extremism.

The Committee is to serve as a platform for coordinating activities, defining priorities and devising public policy aimed at preventing and eliminating racism, xenophobia and extremism. At the same time, this committee is a suitable tool for exchanging information between representatives of public administration, local government and civil society – this coordination will facilitate resolution to issues within the committee's jurisdiction. In addition to this function, the committee, or its working groups, can also initiate certain measures and activities in the form of preparing analyses, studies and relevant materials for initiatives.

1 Crimes of extremism are the criminal offenses of supporting and promoting groups that aim to suppress basic rights and freedoms according to § 421 and 422, production of extremist materials according to § 422a, dissemination of extremist materials according to § 422b, possession of extremist materials according to § 422c, denial and approval of the Holocaust and political regime crimes according to § 422d, defamation of nation, race and conviction according to § 423, incitement to national, racial and ethnic hatred according to § 424, incitement, defamation and threats to persons for their belonging to a certain race, nation, nationality, skin colour, ethnic group or origin according to § 424a and a criminal offense committed for a special motive according to § 140 letters d) and f).- Slovak penal code Law 300/2005 available at <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2005/300/20220717>

2 Available at <https://www.minv.sk/?zakladne-dokumenty-3&subor=404334>

3 VRAX - <https://www.minv.sk/?VRAX>

## Historical context

The historical context of the Slovak extreme right-wing (XRW) can be traced back to the period of Slovak independence during World War II, when the country was led by a pro-Nazi regime under the leadership of Jozef Tiso. That government, which collaborated with Nazi Germany, was responsible for the deportation of tens of thousands of Slovak Jews to concentration camps.

After World War II, Slovakia became a part of communist Czechoslovakia, where political dissent was repressed and the promulgation of nationalist ideas (of various manifestations) was strictly regulated. The fall of communism in 1989 and the subsequent establishment of the independent Slovak Republic in 1993 saw nationalist and Far Right movements begin to surface.

The Slovak National Party (SNS), which gained parliamentary representation in the late 1990s and early 2000s, has constituted one of the most Far Right groups in the country. The SNS, however, has been largely marginalized following a series of corruption scandals and internal disputes.<sup>4</sup>

In recent years, the Slovak XRW scene has been marked by the rise of a new generation of Far Right activists who are often associated with the street movement "Kotleba - People's Party Our Slovakia" (K-LSNS). That political party was led by Marian Kotleba until he was banned by the Slovak Supreme Court in 2021 for promoting extremism and violating the country's constitution. K-LSNS and its members have been involved in numerous controversial activities, including protests against refugees and the Roma communities and commemorations of Slovak Nazi collaborators. The Slovak XRW scene has also been linked to multiple violent incidents, including attacks on the Roma communities and left-wing activists.<sup>5</sup>

The popularity of XRW groups and movements over the past 20 years in Slovakia can be attributed to a complex and multifaceted combination of economic, political and social factors. The social and economic transition that followed the fall of communism in 1989, in particular, contributed to high unemployment rates, poverty and social inequality. This created fertile ground for extremist ideologies to thrive, with many Slovaks feeling marginalized and disenfranchised with the political establishment.

The rise of populist and nationalist rhetoric in mainstream politics has, moreover, fuelled anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiment, providing a platform for XRW groups to promote their extremist ideologies and recruit new members.

Against this backdrop, the increased accessibility of the internet and social media, finally, has enabled XRW groups to spread their propaganda and recruit supporters more effectively.<sup>6</sup> The lack of effective legal countermeasures from relevant officials and law enforcement agencies, meanwhile, has permitted these groups and movements to expand in Slovakia.

## Slovak XRW narratives

The XRW scene in Slovakia is constantly evolving and encompasses groups that vary in both their beliefs and tactics. There are, furthermore, distinct aspects to the national narratives deployed by XRW groups in Slovakia compared to those in neighbouring Central European countries.

Slovakia's large Hungarian minority, for example, is often targeted by nationalist rhetoric and propaganda from XRW groups. These extremists have also been known to exploit historical events, such as the Nazi puppet state in Slovakia during World War II and the post-World War II expulsion of ethnic Germans from Slovakia, to promote their ideology.<sup>7</sup>

4 Andel o kríze SNS: Slotá a Malíková verejne prepierali špinavé prádlo <https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/sns-andel-danko-slota-malikova/96967-clanok.html?mostViewedArticlesInSectionTab=0>

5 Súčasný pravicový extrémizmus a ultranacionalizmus na Slovensku: Stav, trendy a podpora, available at <https://www.ivo.sk/8003/sk/publikacie/sucasny-pravicovy-extremizmus-a-ultranacionalizmus-na-slovensku>

6 Monitorovacia správa o stave extrémizmu v SR za obdobie rokov 2020 a 2021, available at <https://www.minv.sk/?zakladne-dokumenty-3>

7 Hlásime sa k Tisovi. Náš čas ešte príde, hovorí líder Slovenského hnutia obrody <https://www.parlamentnelisty.sk/arena/137524/hlasime-sa-k-tisovi-nas-cas-este-pride-hovori-lider-slovenskeho-hnutia-obrody/>

There have been, additionally, instances where the XRW in Slovakia have used religious themes and symbols, particularly those associated with the Catholic Church, to support their agenda.<sup>8</sup> This contrasts with other Central European countries where the XRW may be more secular or focused on ethnic or nationalist narratives.

**Specific narratives based on the historical and political context of Slovakia articulated over the past 15 years include the following:**

1. **The Roma community:** Roma individuals have been regularly subjected to racially motivated attacks, discrimination, and hate speech by XRW groups. The extremist groups have especially sought to exploit the long-standing history of tension and conflict between the Roma and non-Roma communities in Slovakia and the failure of the government to adequately address the issues faced by the Roma population.<sup>9</sup>
2. **Migration and Islamophobia:** While the number of refugees and migrants in Slovakia has been low compared to other European countries, the issue of migration and Islamophobia has been heavily exploited by the Slovak XRW scene in recent years. These ploys have been fuelled by the rise of Far Right political parties and politicians who have used anti-migrant and anti-Islam rhetoric to gain political support.<sup>10</sup>
3. **Historical revisionism:** The Slovak XRW scene has also been characterized by a revisionist approach to Slovak history, particularly with regards to the country's role in World War II. Some XRW groups have sought to glorify the wartime Slovak State, a Nazi puppet regime which collaborated in the deportation of Slovak Jews to concentration camps. This has led to

tensions with Jewish and other minority groups in Slovakia.<sup>11</sup>

4. **Anti-establishment sentiment:** The Slovak XRW scene has further been marked by strong anti-establishment sentiment, exacerbated by perceptions of corruption and a lack of accountability among the political elite. This has led some XRW groups to position themselves as a viable alternative to mainstream political parties, particularly among disillusioned young people. These anti-establishment aspects were, furthermore, strengthened by the anti-COVID/anti – vaccination stance that the Far Right groups staked out. Bratislava's staunch support for Ukraine following Russia's aggression, finally, has seen extremist groups respond with pro-Russian narratives.<sup>12</sup>

Overall, these unique aspects of the Slovak XRW scene reflect the specific historical and political context in which it has emerged, shaped by tensions between different ethnic and social groups, the rise of populist and Far Right political movements and a general sense of disillusionment with the political establishment.

## COVID 19

Like other countries in Europe the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on mass gatherings also limited the ability of XRW groups to organise events and raise funds. The restrictions ultimately pushed XRW groups to seek new methods of financing or to rely more on other existing sources. This included the organisation of larger online campaigns aimed at selling XRW merchandise and products, attempts to anonymize donors to secure additional funding and further engagement with organized crime.<sup>13</sup>

8 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Slovakia <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/slovakia/>

9 For more on Roma in Slovakia see for example <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/roma-survey-findings>  
For more on XRW attacks on Roma see also <http://www.errc.org/what-we-do?country=188&code=slovakia#country-results>

10 See for example Report on Islamophobia in Slovakia available at <https://www.islamonline.sk/islamophobia-in-slovakia/>

11 See for example available at Holocaust denial in criminal law Legal frameworks in selected EU Member States [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698043/EPRS\\_BRI%282021%29698043\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/698043/EPRS_BRI%282021%29698043_EN.pdf)  
Anti-Semitism in Slovakia after the Velvet Revolution of 1989 Available at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol40/iss4/3>

12 See also SIS Správa o činnosti za rok 2021, 2.1.5 Extremistické aktivity a prejavy radikalizácie <https://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti.html#extremizmus>

13 Ethnically or Racially Motivated Terrorism Financing <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/Methodsand Trends/Ethnically-racially-motivated-terrorism-financing.html>

However, the economic and social impact of COVID-19 also provided a recruiting opportunity for XRW groups. As marginalized and lower-income individuals faced economic hardship, they looked to blame their misfortune on ethnic and/or racial minority groups. Business closures and lockdowns mandated by governments, additionally, elevated the use of social media for personal communication and news consumption. XRW groups used this shift to contact and "groom" more disillusioned and isolated individuals.<sup>14</sup>

The Slovak Intelligence Service (SIS) reported a significant increase in extremist activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021.<sup>15</sup> XRW groups focused their efforts on lambasting pandemic measures implemented by state institutions, questioning the severity of the disease and denying the existence of the virus outright. These groups also disseminated various conspiracy theories and disinformation narratives, drawing on other popular conspiracy theories, and contributed to the polarisation of society.<sup>16</sup>

The pandemic also saw new groups crop up that rejected pandemic measures. These initiatives, active on social media, have been able to attract a large number of supporters and influence public behaviour by peddling information in the virtual space.<sup>17</sup> They have sought to attract attention by organising various forms of pressure campaigns and, in some cases, violent activities, against representatives of professional and civil society groups (e.g., protests that blocked traffic or public/violent threats directed at epidemiologists and hygienists, violent attacks against healthcare professionals providing vaccinations and maskless protests in retail chains).<sup>18</sup> Members and sympathisers of XRW groups supported several of these activities, using them to gain political capital from growing public dissatisfaction.

Tensions in Slovak society related to the COVID-19 pandemic have translated into the escalation of verbal aggression in everyday life and hateful rhetoric in the online space. SIS has reported cases<sup>19</sup> of physical violence and death threats directed at Slovak government officials, state and public administration authorities and members of the police forces. Individuals from XRW groups have been directly involved in these threats in some cases.

In the context of the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, SIS has identified a new trend in the foreign XRW scene related to the increasing interest of young people in XRW ideology. However, this has not occurred through personal involvement in traditional XRW groups, but via new "online XRW movements" that promote the violent enforcement of XRW ideology (known as "accelerationism"). These movements use widely available communication platforms, including those used for distance learning, to spread their ideology and hate. It is apparent that social isolation during the pandemic and a significant increase in youth time spent in the virtual space have contributed to these trends.<sup>20</sup>

## Pro-Russian stance

Slovakia has been vulnerable to Kremlin propaganda and information operations for many years, with 78% of Slovaks considering Russia to be their traditional Slavic brother nation as of 2020. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has contributed to a significant decrease in positive perceptions of Vladimir Putin among Slovaks, with his public approval dropping from 55% to 28% in March 2022. Moreover, 65% of respondents say that Putin's desire to restore the Russian Empire makes him a threat to other countries, not only Ukraine.<sup>21</sup> The invasion may have also triggered memories of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact countries among older generations. A total of

14 SIS Správa o činnosti za rok 2021, 2.1.5 Extremistické aktivity a prejavy radikalizácie <https://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti.html#extremizmus>

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 SIS Správa o činnosti za rok 2021, 2.1.5 Extremistické aktivity a prejavy radikalizácie <https://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti.html#extremizmus>

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 War in Ukraine: A wake-up call for Slovaks <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/war-ukraine-wake-call-slovaks>

66% of Slovaks consider the war in Ukraine to be an unprovoked and unjustifiable instance of Russian military aggression.<sup>22</sup>

President Putin's image and public approval had been increasing in Slovakia before the invasion - he was seen as a "pillar of stability" and protector of ordinary people and traditional values. The invasion of Ukraine, however, has sparked a public attitude shift among Slovaks. The growing list of war crimes committed by the Russian military has dented Russia's image in the country, shifting it from being perceived as a "Slavic brother" to an aggressor. Slovakia's vulnerability to Kremlin propaganda, in part, dates back to 19th century events - 20th century political movements have now sought to position the country as a "bridge" between East and West. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea, an increasing number of domestic actors have further promoted Kremlin propaganda in Slovakia.<sup>23</sup>

The effects of persistent Kremlin propaganda are likely to endure for the foreseeable future, especially considering that numerous actors<sup>24</sup> have participated in spreading these messages including domestic politicians and over 1,600 Facebook pages and groups.<sup>25</sup> A considerable number of Slovaks, 37%, still believe Kremlin propaganda advocating for military action to disarm Ukraine and eliminate Nazis. Additionally, 45% believe that NATO, led by the United States, is responsible for the conflict in Ukraine. However, 51% disagree with this claim.<sup>26</sup>

## SLOVAK XRW - key players

In the 1990s several groups with XRW ideologies, such as the skinhead movement, Klan Slovenských Rytierov (the Slovak Knight Klan group that takes inspiration from the American Ku-Klux-Klan), Slovenský Národný Front (Slovak national front) and Slovenský úsvit (Slovak Dawn) largely disappeared

from the scene but, nonetheless, have served as precursors to contemporary groups.

## Slovenska Ľudová Strana (SĽS)

The Slovak People's Party (SĽS) was the first political project of the XRW movements that went beyond the anti-Hungarian emphasis of the Slovak National Party. The SĽS attempted to foster closer cooperation with other groups, both mainstream nationalist and ultra-nationalist and Far Right groups. In 2002, its representatives ran in parliamentary elections on the list of the Slovak National Party (SNS), led by Anna Malíková (Belousovová). In 2004, SĽS joined the Confederation of National Forces of Slovakia (KNSS), alongside other smaller nationalist parties and groups. Though the coalition supported Ivan Gašparovič in the presidential election, SĽS left KNSS before the elections and ultimately supported his opponent, Vladimír Mečiar instead. In the parliamentary elections of 2006, SĽS provided seats on its list to members of the Far Right Slovenská Pospolitosť – (Slovak Community, SP). And in 2008, SĽS revised its statutes, with some of the amendments reflecting the further radicalization of the party following its close cooperation with the SP. In September 2009, the attorney general requested the Supreme Court to dissolve SĽS for promoting a programme that violated the democratic principle of equal citizenship. The party was accused of supporting a fascist political ideology and its platform and activities as violating the constitution and laws. The request, nevertheless, was withdrawn in May 2011.<sup>27</sup>

## Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko (ĽSNS)<sup>28</sup>

22 GLOBSEC Vulnerability Index 2021 [https://www.vulnerabilityindex.org/src/files/Globsec\\_VulnerabilityIndex\\_online.pdf](https://www.vulnerabilityindex.org/src/files/Globsec_VulnerabilityIndex_online.pdf)

23 War in Ukraine: A wake-up call for Slovaks <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/war-ukraine-wake-call-slovaks>

24 Exposing Russian propaganda network in Slovakia <https://blog.gerulata.com/russian-propaganda-network-in-slovakia/>

25 War in Ukraine: A wake-up call for Slovaks <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/publications/war-ukraine-wake-call-slovaks>

26 Ibid.

27 Súčasný pravicový extrémizmus a ultranacionalizmus na Slovensku: Stav, trendy a podpora,

<https://www.ivo.sk/8003/sk/publikacie/sucasny-pravicovy-extremizmus-a-ultranacionalizmus-na-slovensku>

28 The various iterations of the name of the party are: October 2000 – May 2009: Party of the Friends of Wine (Strana priateľov vína, SPV, established as recessionary association and hijacked) May 2009 – February 2010: People's Party of Social Solidarity (Ľudová strana sociálnej solidarity, ĽSSS) February 2010 – November 2015: People's Party Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, ĽSNS) November 2015 – November 2019: Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia (Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, KĽSNS) from November 2019: Kotlebists – People's Party Our Slovakia (Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana naše Slovensko, KĽSNS)

The People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS) is a political party representing the ambitions of Slovak right-wing extremism. The party embodies the ideas and messages of a generation of Slovak fascist right-wing extremists who, due to various circumstances, began grouping around the Slovak Solidarity association headed by Marian Kotleba at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> The founders of this "new" fascist party were concerned that the Ministry of the Interior would reject their registration, steering them instead to conduct a pre-arranged "friendly takeover" of an existing registered party, the Wine Friends Party. The party changed its name twice and eventually became the People's Party Our Slovakia, with Marian Kotleba as its chairman. Though the party has existed since 2010, its first electoral success came in 2016 when it achieved 8% at the polls - or two hundred thousand votes and enough for 14 seats in the Slovak parliament. In the 2020 elections, the party bested those results with 229,000 votes, amounting to 17 parliamentary seats. Two of its parliamentary members, however, have lost their mandates during their term due to crimes they committed. Those crimes included the use of derogatory terms against Roma in Slovakia by Milan Mazurek in a discussion on a radio programme in 2018<sup>30</sup> and party leader Marian Kotleba's deliberate attempts to display sympathies towards movements aimed at maligning human rights and fundamental freedoms (according to a 20 court decision).<sup>31</sup> The crimes were committed when Kotleba served as the regional governor of the Banská Bystrica region and gave away checks to three poor families at a charity event in the amount of 1,488 Euro (1,488 is a commonly used XRW numeric symbol).<sup>32</sup> The Supreme Court determined Kotle-

ba to be guilty and sentenced him to a six-month conditional penalty and a year and a half probation. The court's decision, more significantly, also led to the loss of his parliamentary mandate. Due to internal political splits among parliamentary members who ran on the ĽSNS ticket in the 2020 elections, the parliamentary club ceased to exist.<sup>33</sup> This entails that although there are still 8 MPs representing the party, they have been forced to surrender some of the privileges enjoyed by political parties that hold parliamentary club status. While the ĽSNS parliamentary members have not directly committed acts of violence during their work duties, their parliamentary activities and party platform have fostered an environment that has normalized extreme right-wing narratives. The party, for example, has hijacked the agenda of reproductive rights and provided space to anti-immigration, anti-Muslim, pro-Russian and anti-vaxx ideologies.<sup>34</sup>

Prior to entering the parliament in 2016, members of the party participated in and organised several public demonstrations and provocations. Milan Mazurek verbally attacked a Muslim family visiting Bratislava while a group of people accompanying him threw stones at the family. He was also investigated for Facebook posts expressing admiration for Adolf Hitler.<sup>35</sup> Another member of the party, Medvecký, attacked a man from the Dominican Republic in 2014. Medvecký ultimately was forced to pay a 10 thousand Euro fine.<sup>36</sup> Another well-known example is a march in Krásna Hôrka, a municipality in southeast Slovakia. Directed against the Roma community in the aftermath of an inadvertent fire caused by local Roma community members, the rally resembled similar marches of the Jobbik movement in neighbouring Hungary.<sup>37</sup> The party

29 Súčasný pravicový extrémizmus a ultranacionalizmus na Slovensku: Stav, trendy a podpora,

<https://www.ivo.sk/8003/sk/publikacie/sucasny-pravicovy-extremizmus-a-ultranacionalizmus-na-slovensku>

30 Súdia Kotlebovho poslanca Mazureka pre rasistické reči, demonštrovať zaňho prišli stovky ľudí

<https://dennikn.sk/1041138/sudia-kotlebovho-poslanca-mazureka-pre-rasisticke-rci-protestovat-zanho-prisli-stovky-ludi/>

31 Kotleba prišiel o mandát poslanca, tým zaniká aj poslanecký klub ĽSNS <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/2815052/>

32 1488 is a commonly used XRW numeric symbol. 14 stands for the sentence, "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children" and 88 stands for the 8th letter of the alphabet „H“ and refers to „Heil Hitler“, see for example: Anti Defamation League (ADL), Hate Symbol 1488,

<https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/1488>

33 Kotleba prišiel o mandát poslanca, klub ĽSNS tak v parlamente zanikol <https://sita.sk/kotleba-prisiel-o-mandat-poslanca-klub-lsns-tak-v-parlamente-zanikol/>

34 Súčasný pravicový extrémizmus a ultranacionalizmus na Slovensku: Stav, trendy a podpora,

<https://www.ivo.sk/8003/sk/publikacie/sucasny-pravicovy-extremizmus-a-ultranacionalizmus-na-slovensku>

35 Kotlebov poslanec pred súdom: Svedkovia hovoria o bitke a kopancoch

<https://domov.sme.sk/c/20114295/kotlebov-poslanec-andrej-medvecky-a-jeho-brat-celia-obzalobe.html>

36 Obžalovaného poslanca ĽSNS Medveckého nahradí obdivovateľ Hitlera

<https://domov.sme.sk/c/20115004/obzalovany-medvecky-od-kotlebu-ako-poslanec-nenastupi.html>

37 Kotlebovci pod Krásnou Hôrkou: Cestu do osady im skrížili ťažkoodenci! Available at:

<https://nove.topky.sk/cl/10/1303816/Kotlebovci-pod-Krasnou-Horkou-Cestu-do-osady-im-skrizili-tazkoodenci->

also organised so called “train patrols” on Slovak trains in 2016, claiming an absence of law and order on national trains because of ‘Roma criminality’. The social media posts about these patrols garnered thousands of views and shares.<sup>38</sup> The most notable aspect about these endeavours concerned the slow and generally ineffective reaction of officials to prosecute these actions.

## REPUBLIKA (Republic)

The newly established political party (founded in 2021) REPUBLIKA is facing criticism and scepticism from the public, media and politicians for its allegedly ideological connections to the Far Right and neo-Nazi party ĽSNS. There is indeed a noticeable continuity in the personnel of the two parties.<sup>39</sup> Despite Milan Mazurek's apology for his vulgar remarks towards a Muslim family during an anti-immigrant protest in 2015, he and other party members such as Miroslav Suja and Ondrej Ďurica, who have ties to the neo-Nazi scene, have not distanced themselves from their pasts.<sup>40</sup> REPUBLIKA promotes Eurosceptic and pro-Russian views, calling for Slovakia's withdrawal from NATO and opposing military aid to Ukraine while questioning mainstream media coverage of the conflict. The party currently boasts representation in both the European parliament and the parliament of the Slovak Republic<sup>41</sup>.

## Noční vlci (Night Wolves)

The Night Wolves are a Russian motorcycle gang that maintains close ties to Russian government officials who have regularly funded the group since 2011. Gang members have actively participated in fighting in Ukraine on the side of pro-Russian

separatists in eastern Ukraine and some have even been awarded for their activities in this regard.<sup>42</sup>

The US government has sanctioned the Night Wolves<sup>43</sup> and pointed to their purported close ties to the Russian special services and their efforts to recruit separatist fighters in Donetsk and Luhansk. The group's annual “rides” have been used to promote Russian propaganda and spread pro-Russian and pan-Slavic ideas. In 2017, the organization received a subsidy directly from the Russian presidential fund dedicated for these activities.<sup>44</sup> The European branch of the Night Wolves, meanwhile, is based in Dolná Krupá (Slovakia) in a former agricultural building that has been painted with a military camouflage pattern and surrounded by a concrete wall topped with barbed wire. The site contains decommissioned military equipment and appears to host a training area for heavy military vehicles.<sup>45</sup> The Slovak government, for its part, has faced criticism for allowing the Night Wolves to establish their European headquarters in the country.<sup>46</sup> Slovakian disinformation websites have downplayed the significance of the Night Wolves' presence in Slovakia and even defended their actions, claiming that the group's Slovak leader, Jozef Hambálek, intended to create a museum of military technology on the site. In July 2022, Hambálek was added to the EU's sanctions list, with his assets frozen including the training grounds in Dolná Krupá.<sup>47</sup>

## Slovenskí Branci (Slovak enlisted men/Slovak recruits)

Slovenskí Branci (SB) was a paramilitary group that operated between 2012 and 2022 and a borderline and controversial organization. Although it never openly professed sympathies towards Nazi

38 Naozaj hliadky ĽSNS vo vlakoch znížili kriminalitu? Available at: <https://www.mladiprotifasizmu.sk/naozaj-hliadky-lsns-vo-vlakoch-znizili-kriminalitu/>

39 Odídenci od Kotlebu prevzali Marčekovu stranu Available at: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/580601-odidenci-od-kotlebu-prevzali-marcekovu-stranu/>

40 Prezliekanie Republiky pokračuje, tvrdia, že sú protifašistickí bojovníci Available at: <https://dennikn.sk/3445082/prezliekanie-republiky-pokracuje-tvrdia-ze-su-protifasisticki-bojovnici/?ref=list>

41 Ibid,

42 Noční vlci: Nielsen motorkáři, ale aj Putinovi žoldníci <https://svet.sme.sk/c/20875127/nocni-vlci-nielen-motorkari-ale-aj-putinovi-zoldnieri.html#ixzz5N0vGquK5>

43 Night Wolves <https://www.opensanctions.org/entities/NK-DiYN7keGKRrGcs3eCN3qyT/>

44 'Nočný vlk' Hambálek na sankčnom zozname EÚ: Podanie ruky s Putinom neznamená podporu vojny Available at:

<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/635081-nocny-vlk-hambalek-na-sankcnom-zozname-eu-podanie-ruky-s-putinom-neznamena-podporu-vojny/>

45 Noční vlci: Nielsen motorkáři, ale aj Putinovi žoldníci <https://svet.sme.sk/c/20875127/nocni-vlci-nielen-motorkari-ale-aj-putinovi-zoldnieri.html#ixzz5N0vGquK5>

46 Slovakia alarmed by pro-Putin Night Wolves bikers' base, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45019133>

47 Bez varovania a šance niečo vysvetliť. EÚ zmrazila majetok podnikateľa Hambálka, ktorý pomáhal Putinovým vlkom <https://dennikn.sk/2965429/bez-varovania-a-sance-nieco-vysvetlit-eu-zmrazila-majetok-podnikatela-hambalka-ktory-pomahal-putinovym-vlkom/>



or fascist ideologies, the founder and leader of the organisation allegedly had ties to Russia – this included participation in training exercises in Russia together with three other members of the organisation.<sup>48</sup> He also claimed in one interview that agents of the Russian intelligence services were attempting to take over the organisation.<sup>49</sup> It was also reported that the SB participated in training exercises at the Night Wolves training camp in Dolná Krupá. The group was linked to notable figures from the disinformation scene such as Tibor Rostas and the former presidential candidate Štefan Harabin.<sup>50</sup> Slovenskí Branci is a very controversial organisation.<sup>51</sup> Although SB does not hold particularly ideologically vehement or defined views and the group takes pains to describe itself as non-political, it poses a potential threat to the national security of Slovakia by actively training paramilitary units in the country. The group, additionally, did not make secret the fact that part of the training was aimed at preparing its members and trainees for service in the regular Slovak Army and therefore infiltrating the military with around 200 official members.<sup>52</sup> The SB, nevertheless, inexplicably announced its disbanding in October 2022.<sup>53</sup>

## Akčná Skupina Vzдор Kysuce (Action Group Resistance Kysuce)

According to their own website, the goal of the group is ‘to raise a new generation, an unspoilt generation’. Vzдор is an organisation centred around convicted extremist Marian Magát who

was sentenced to three years’ probation for illegal armament. He was also charged with 36 counts of extremism including because of the publication of his book *Židokracia* (Jewcracy) and active presence on social media promoting its content.<sup>54</sup>

## FINANCES

The results of the parliamentary elections of 2016 and 2020 mean that ĽSNS will receive substantial campaign funding from the state budget. ĽSNS continues to benefit from legislation stipulating that parties that reach a 3% threshold in national elections are eligible for state support based on the level of their vote share. And despite attempts by the prosecutor general, the party has not yet been banned. In 2021, for example, ĽSNS received 1.18 million Euro<sup>55</sup> and in the prior term (2016–2020) 4.22 million Euro.<sup>56</sup> For the 2020 to 2024 election cycle, the figure will amount to 7.2 million Euro.<sup>57</sup> This status, therefore, provides completely legitimate financing for the party and individuals involved with it. While the basic premise of the law is that the state contribution can be used for political party activities and cannot be donated otherwise, journalists have recently shed some light on ĽSNS’s problematic use of this money. The party, for instance, gave 454,000 Euros to two non-governmental organisations (People’s Youth – Ľudová Mládež and Kotelobovci pomáhajú a rozvíjajú – Kotlebists are involved in supporting both of these groups). A recent government audit further revealed that the resources have been used to cover membership fees, side stepping the law on donating state contributions to other individuals

48 Hybridné hrozby na Slovensku, Polovojenské a extrémistické skupiny, available at <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/Hybridne-hrozby-na-Slovensku-Polovojenske-a-extremisticke-skupiny.pdf>

49 Šéf Slovenských Brancov: Už nepredstavujeme bezpečnostné riziko, available at <https://blog.sme.sk/branik/spolocnost/sef-slovenskych-brancov-uz-nepredstavujeme-bezpecnostne-riziko>

50 Ako militantní mladíci prerástli štátu cez hlavu, available at <https://dennikn.sk/1188126/obec-robila-sportovu-akciu-radsej-so-slovenskymi-brancami-nez-s-vojakmi-militantni-mladici-prerastli-statu-cez-hlavu/>

51 Peter Švrček, veliteľ Slovenských brancov available at <https://dennikn.sk/blog/1379854/peter-svrcek-velitel-slovenskych-brancov/>

52 Ako militantní mladíci prerástli štátu cez hlavu, available at <https://dennikn.sk/1188126/obec-robila-sportovu-akciu-radsej-so-slovenskymi-brancami-nez-s-vojakmi-militantni-mladici-prerastli-statu-cez-hlavu/>

53 Slovenskí Branci končia, available at <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/WtKW6Yk/slovenski-branci-koncia/>

54 Marián Magát – obdivovateľ Adolfa Hitlera, rasista, antisemita a popierač holokaustu, available at <https://dennikn.sk/blog/2645197/marian-magat-obdivovatel-adolfa-hitlera-rasista-antisemita-a-popierac-holokaustu/>

Zakladateľa skupiny Vzдор Kysuce zadržali pre obvinenia z extrémizmu available at <https://mykysuce.sme.sk/c/22827177/zakladatela-skupiny-vzdor-kysuce-zadrzali-pre-obvinenia-z-extremizmu.html>

55 Politické strany dostanú v tomto roku za výsledky minuloročných parlamentných volieb príspevok 11,7 milióna eur <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/2477183/>

56 Volby 2020: Kotleba aj Matovič dajú mikrostranám len drobné. Musia pri tom obísť zákon available at: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/763143/volby-2020-kotleba-aj-matovic-daju-mikrostranam-len-drobne-musia-pri-tom-obist-zakon/>

57 Kotlebovci si robia z príspevku za voľby charitu, tvrdí audítorka. Štát to nezaujíma available at <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22944666/marian-kotleba-lsns-volby-prispevky.html>

or organisations.<sup>58</sup> The audit, however, found no general wrongdoing. This finding, in fact, is more a commentary on the deficiencies in the law on financing of political parties in Slovakia. The size of the cash allotments enables individuals that share personal links and business ties to easily avoid detection by presenting payments as legitimate business transactions. There is no need, to this end, for parties to engage in clandestine fundraising or resort to outright criminal activities.

While groups like the Night Wolves have been allegedly supported directly by the Russian Federation, those ties have not been formally investigated. The Slovenskí Branci further benefitted from direct government support from Matica Slovenská (Slovak cultural organization).<sup>59</sup>

## ONLINE Activities

According to the “Online Extremism in Slovakia” study conducted by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, the most common narrative in online communities between January and August 2021 concerned nationalist ideas (present in 49% of posts). Other prevalent themes included anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment at 16% and antisemitism at 15%. The report also highlighted the prevalence of anti-media and anti-democracy messages at 11% and 10%, respectively. The study found that there was a clear overlap between different narratives, especially between antisemitic and anti-media discourses and conspiracy theories.<sup>60</sup> Telegram has particularly emerged as a significant platform for extremist content, possibly due to its lax community guidelines. The Far Right in Slovakia employs extensive networks of pages and groups to disseminate content and increase their reach. There is evidence that extremist groups are also utilizing coded language to refer to marginalized communities, rather than explicit slurs, to evade moderation.<sup>61</sup> Private extremist groups on Facebook are further attempting to

recruit new members from public Facebook groups by sharing URLs from closed groups in public nationalist or radical right groups. The non-governmental organization digiQ10 processed the results of the 6th monitoring exercise within the Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online for Slovakia. According to their 2021 report, the largest share of hate speech in the Slovak language on social media was directed at migrants and refugees (50%) followed by antisemitic speech (32%), speech and comments targeting the Roma community (14%) and speech relating to sexual orientation (3%). The pandemic has led to a significant global decline in the identification and removal of hate speech from social media, with the rate dropping in Slovakia from 94% to 47% due to the enormous rise in conspiracy theories and hoaxes related to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>62</sup>

There are two notable incidents that took place in the digital space. One involves the case of Danny Kollar (whose actual name is Daniel Bombic) who became infamous during the COVID-19 pandemic for ‘doxing’ and publicizing personal details and addresses of public health officials and medical personnel. These individuals were then targeted by his followers online and in person. Kollar resides in the United Kingdom and is currently on the Slovak Police wanted list. His main channel on Telegram allegedly has 50,000 followers.<sup>63</sup>

A far more tragic example of online self-radicalization is the case of a terrorist attack on Zámocká Street in February 2023 at an LGBTQI+ establishment. The perpetrator was a 19-year-old man and son of a onetime political candidate for the unsuccessful radical right wing political party of Štefan Harabin. He communicated and self-radicalized on the 4-chan website and also published a manifesto blaming Jews and LGBTQI+ on Twitter. The manifesto peddled the same ideological grounding as that from the 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue attacks

58 Ibid

59 Matica reaguje na tvrdenie Dostála: Spolupráca so Slovenskými brancami je lžou a urážkou, Available at:

<https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/1717833/Matica-reaguje-na-tvrdenie-Dostala--Spolupraca-so-Slovenskymi-brancami-je-lzou-a-urazkou>

60 Online Extremism in Slovakia <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Online-Extremism-in-Slovakia-Actors-Topics-Platforms-Strategies.pdf>

61 SIS Správa o činnosti za rok 2021, 2.1.5 Extremistické aktivity a prejavy radikalizácie <https://www.sis.gov.sk/pre-vas/sprava-o-cinnosti.html#extremizmus>

62 Monitorovacia správa o stave extrémizmu v SR za obdobie rokov 2020 a 2021, available at <https://www.minv.sk/?zakladne-dokumenty-3>

63 Meet Slovakia's most popular Telegrammer,

<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2022/08/19/meet-slovakias-most-popular-telegrammer-a-Far-Right-conspiracist-now-wanted-by-law-enforcement/>

and is steeped in the great replacement conspiracy theory<sup>64</sup> and antisemitic tropes.<sup>65</sup>

## Government responses

The implementation of extensive amendments to the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, which came into force in January 2017, has led to extremist offenses falling under the jurisdiction of Specialized Criminal Court, the Office of the Special Prosecutor, the National Criminal Agency and the National Anti-Terrorist Unit. Compared to the prior period, the number of recorded extremist cases has increased, thereby reducing the latency rate of this type of criminal activity. At the same time, all legal options for their prosecution are now used more actively and decisively.<sup>66</sup>

The Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic has primary responsibility for registering civil associations, thereby acting as a registration authority for several types of non-governmental non-profit organizations, such as civil associations, foundations and charitable organizations.<sup>67</sup> In cases where there is suspicion of a connection to extremist entities or individuals, the Ministry of the Interior prioritizes cooperation between state authorities when deciding on the registration of entities. However, due to the lack of a central database for extremist groups and individuals, this process is not systematic and some provisions in the statutes of some civil society associations may be controversial. Therefore, it would be appropriate to establish the verification of information about registrars and their possible connections to extremist or paramilitary entities in an internal legal act that would more precisely regulate cooperation during registration by relevant components of the Slovak Republic's security forces, mainly the National Criminal Agency and the Slovak Intelligence Services. Some progress has already been achieved. Following the elections of 2020 and in response to the rise of disinformation

online and as well as the war in Ukraine, the Slovak government approved an amendment to the Slovak cyber security law giving National Security Authority the right to block designated disinformation websites for a period of time.<sup>68</sup>

## Forecast

Far-right movements in Slovakia now are in the process of transformation and generational change. While Kotleba is still the leader of the most well-known political party of the Far Right, the party is not polling well at the moment and is likely not on course to get into the parliament in this year's elections. The party has instead been supplanted by the REPUBLIKA party following an internal split. The popularity of paramilitary organisations is also declining following the disbanding of Slovenskí Branci. However, the most recent terrorist attack on the Tepláreň club on Zámocká Street has spotlighted the power of online self-radicalisation and the polarised atmosphere of Slovakia. The ability of extremists to peddle narratives in the national parliament over the last two cycles means that they are becoming more mainstreamed in the public discourse. A very recent investigation into a cold case from 2005 that was never solved indicates that a student, Daniel Tupý, was murdered by right wing extremists, demonstrating a noticeable violent undercurrent in the XRW milieu. Finally, the training activities of extremist paramilitary organisations such as Slovenskí Branci means that there is a sizable group of trained extremists that may have entered the armed forces or the national police forces, an issue that requires urgent attention.

*The report has been edited prior to the parliamentary elections in Slovakia*

64 For replacement theory see also <https://www.britannica.com/topic/replacement-theory>

65 Shooter at Bratislava LGBTQ bar called in manifesto for murder of all Jews <https://www.jta.org/2022/10/14/global/shooter-at-bratislava-lgbtq-bar-called-in-manifesto-for-murder-of-all-jews>

66 See also <https://www.justice.gov.sk/sudy-a-rozhodnutia/sudy/aktuality/?eid=2163>

67 Na Slovensku podľa ministerstva vnútra neregistrujú extrémistické náboženské skupiny <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/571500-na-slovensku-neregistruju-extremisticke-nabozenke-skupiny/>

68 Fleeing Ukrainians to get temporary protection; the state will fight disinformation <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22849620/fleeing-ukrainians-will-be-able-to-get-temporary-protection-the-state-will-fight-disinformation.html>



# Conclusion

Despite their historical and geopolitical similarities, each of the four case studies in this report is quite distinct and will require tailored-made and specific approach to address XRW movements. Below we are outlining some of the key findings of from each of the case studies.

## Slovakia

The rise of XRW groups in Slovakia can be attributed to a mix of economic, political, and social factors, including high unemployment, poverty, and social inequality following the fall of communism. Populist and nationalist rhetoric in mainstream politics has fueled anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiment, offering a platform for XRW recruitment. The accessibility of the internet and social media has allowed XRW groups to propagate their propaganda and expand. The lack of effective legal countermeasures has also contributed to their growth.

Unique aspects of the Slovak XRW scene include targeting the Hungarian minority, exploiting historical events like World War II, and using religious themes and symbols. Specific XRW narratives focus on the Roma community, migration and Islamophobia, historical revisionism, and anti-establishment sentiment.

Slovakia's vulnerability to Russian propaganda, mis- and disinformation has persisted for years, with a significant portion of the population viewing Russia as a traditional Slavic brother nation. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and war crimes committed by the Russian military have shifted public opinion in Slovakia. Still, domestic actors have promoted Kremlin propaganda, and a significant number of Slovaks believe in certain aspects of it, indicating a continued need to address this influence.

### **Three Main Conclusions:**

*Legal Framework and Government Commitment:* Slovakia lacks a specific legal definition of XRW, but its penal code provides a foundation for addressing extremism and hate crimes. The government's

adoption of the Conceptual Framework for countering radicalization and extremism by 2024 demonstrates a commitment to combating extremism, including XRW, through a well-defined framework.

*Historical Context and Social Factors:* Understanding the historical context of XRW in Slovakia, including its roots in World War II and the post-communist period, is crucial for addressing this issue. Economic challenges, populist rhetoric, and social inequalities have contributed to the rise of extremist ideologies, making it necessary to address these underlying factors.

*COVID-19 and Russian Influence:* The COVID-19 pandemic has had a multifaceted impact on XRW in Slovakia. While limiting the ability of extremist groups to organize physical events, it also led to increased online recruitment and the spread of extremist ideologies. Furthermore, Slovakia's vulnerability to Russian propaganda, although somewhat diminished, remains a concern, necessitating continued efforts to counter such influences.

## Czech Republic

The chapter titled "Mapping Violent Right-Wing Extremist Groups – Who's Who in the Czech Republic" provides a comprehensive analysis of the landscape of violent XRW in the Czech Republic. The chapter examines various dimensions of this threat, from its historical legacy to contemporary developments and ideological trends. It also explores the financing of XRW activities and the efforts to counter this threat.

### **Three Main Conclusions**

*Shift in XRW Ideology:* A notable shift in the ideology of XRW in the Czech Republic has emerged. While neo-Nazism and neo-Fascism were prevalent in the past, in recent years a decline in these overtly extremist ideologies occurred. Instead, a new trend has emerged, characterized by a blend of nostalgia for the communist regime, anti-Western sentiment, and opposition to liberal values, along

with a fondness for Putin's Russia and disdain for government authority. This evolving extremist landscape, encompassing various sub-milieus, presents a complex challenge for authorities.

*Diverse Manifestations of Violence:* Violent XRW in the Czech Republic takes various forms, ranging from planned lone-wolf or small cell attacks and hate crimes to violent demonstrations and paramilitarism. The lack of strict organizational structures within the extremist network makes it difficult to pinpoint specific groups or organizations. The threat also extends to foreign fighters, particularly those who have engaged in violent acts abroad and may threaten violence in the Czech Republic. However, despite the militant rhetoric and mobilization, serious coup attempts have not materialized in the contemporary era.

*Resilience and Countering Extremism:* Given the current challenges it will be crucial to maintain a well-functioning system of public institutions and cooperation between governmental and non-governmental sectors to counter the rise of XRW. Education, particularly media literacy, is a key tool to counter radicalization. Efforts are made to assist victims of hate crimes, and minority advocacy groups actively participate in various activities against XRW. Although violent XRW does not pose a direct threat to the democratic status of the Czech Republic, it has the potential to undermine societal cohesion and worsen the security situation, especially if external factors, such as hybrid warfare, intensify.

## Hungary

Over the past 13 years, Hungary has witnessed significant transformations within its XRW and paramilitary landscape. The rise of Fidesz from 2010 onwards marked a turning point for these organizations, leading to existential crises and shifts in their dynamics.

The chapter also touches on issues like anti-gypsy rhetoric, xenophobia, antisemitism, and the evolving narratives of the XRW scene in Hungary, with a focus on the refugee crisis and the "Great Replacement Theory." It highlights the financial mechanisms supporting these groups, which often involve

foreign-based groups attending events in Hungary, and the potential influence of foreign actors, such as Russia, on Hungarian Far Right elements.

Hungary's XRW and paramilitary landscape remains a complex and evolving entity. The chapter suggests a "live and let live" dynamic, where Fidesz accommodates some XRW views for electoral purposes, while fringe organizations continue to influence and challenge government policies. This situation highlights the need for continued scrutiny and awareness of the Far Right in Hungary, especially as it remains an integral part of the country's political and social fabric.

### Three Main Conclusions

*Evolution of Political Parties:* Jobbik, the dominant extreme right-wing party in Hungary until 2017, leveraged anti-establishment sentiment and concerns about the Roma community's impact on public safety in rural areas. However, the party faced a dilemma in the run-up to the 2018 elections, as the governing Fidesz started incorporating XRW narratives into legislative acts. Jobbik attempted to pivot towards the political center, leading to internal divisions and the formation of a new party, Mi Hazánk Mozgalom, which openly espoused racist, anti-Semitic, anti-EU, anti-NATO, and pro-Russian views. Jobbik's electoral influence waned, while Mi Hazánk gained seats by capitalizing on public disapproval of COVID-19 restrictions and anti-vaccine sentiment.

*Paramilitary Organizations and Radicalization:* The XRW paramilitary landscape in Hungary includes groups like Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom (HVIM), Betyársereg, Légio Hungária, Magyar Önvédelmi Mozgalom, Nemzeti Front, and Farkasok. These organizations share common ideologies of ethnocentrism, white supremacy, antisemitism, anti-Westernism, and Euroscepticism. While some of them loosely coordinated their activities with Mi Hazánk, the most radical factions broke away from satellite organizations associated with the party.

*Government Response and Law Enforcement:* Despite the radicalization of some XRW elements,

Hungary's law enforcement agencies have not prioritized combating neo-Nazi or white supremacist groups. The Counter-Terrorism Center (TEK) primarily focuses on organized crime and international terrorism, while amendments to fundamental laws have primarily targeted responses to terrorist threats post-2015. Law enforcement responses to XRW activities have been inconsistent, with bans on gatherings based on Nazi or communist denial often being annulled due to the broadly defined freedom of speech. Furthermore, the legal system has imposed minimal financial penalties on extremist organizations, failing to deter their actions.

## Bulgaria

The XRW milieu in Bulgaria is a diverse and multifaceted phenomenon encompassing various groups with radical ideologies that challenge the existing political order. This milieu can be divided into those involved in mainstream politics and those associated with state capture. While some XRW parties have been part of the Bulgarian parliament, others operate on the margins of society, critical of their mainstream counterparts. Paramilitary associations also exist, despite legal prohibitions.

One of the key ideological divides within the XRW milieu in Bulgaria is their attitudes toward Russia, with the majority embracing nationalist narratives infused with communist nostalgia and promoting Russian interests, while a vocal minority opposes international dependencies, including ties to Russia.

### **Three Main Conclusions:**

*Diverse XRW Landscape:* Bulgaria's XRW milieu is diverse, with a spectrum of political groups ranging from those actively participating in mainstream politics to more extreme, marginal organizations. This diversity is driven by varying attitudes towards Russia and the existing political system.

*Legal Framework Challenges:* While Bulgaria has legal provisions to counteract radicalization and extremism, challenges remain in enforcement, particularly related to hate crimes. The lack of specific legal definitions for hate crimes results in ineffective law enforcement and oversight.

*Shifting Political Landscape:* The political landscape in Bulgaria is evolving, with a shift away from traditional nationalist parties to more extreme alternatives that are pro-Russian and anti-EU and anti-NATO. The deepening divisions within the country's politics provide fertile ground for nationalist narratives to gain traction and present alternative solutions to disillusioned voters.





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