The Many Faces of the Far Right in the Post-Communist Space

A Comparative Study of Far-Right Movements and Identity in the Region

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SÖDERTÖRN UNIVERSITY
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Preface

Liberal Democracy and Its Alternatives

The Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES), founded in 2005 at Södertörn University, Stockholm, promotes and develops research and doctoral studies focusing on the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe. CBEES organizes conferences, workshops, public lectures and advanced seminars, and hosts postdocs, guest researchers, and PhD students. CBEES also publishes *Baltic Worlds*, a quarterly scholarly journal which, like this report, and CBEES itself is funded by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (*Östersjöstiftelsen*).

The *CBEES State of the Region Report* is an annual publication, reporting and reflecting on social and political developments in the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe, each year taking a new and topical perspective. The first report, covering events in 2020, focused mainly on constructions or reconstructions of national historical memory in the region and the instrumentalization of the past. This year, the aim of the report is to present an overview of elements of far-right national identity and populist politics in the recent upsurge of authoritarianism, Euroscepticism and illiberalism in the Baltic Sea Region and Central and Eastern Europe.

Contrary to hopes and actual progress in the early 2000s, what we have seen in Central and Eastern Europe since the EU expansions in 2004 and 2007 indicate that the state of democracy in the region is far from assured. Some scholars have pointed to the communist legacy in order to explain the resilience of non-liberal orientations among citizens in the region; while others have identified performance-related explanations (like corruption) for the emergence of low trust societies, where far right and populist parties may thrive. In order to understand the challenges that lie ahead, we need a better understanding of how far right ideas and attitudes in Central and Eastern Europe come to be manifested. That is the point of the 2021 report.

Ninna Mörner has edited the report, alongside CBEES-associated researchers Mark Bassin, Joakim Ekman, Tora Lane, and Per Anders Rudling. We hope that the report will stimulate informed academic debate as well as public discussion on the state of affairs in the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe. ●

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> **"** What we have seen in Central and Eastern Europe since the EU expansions in 2004 and 2007 indicate that the state of democracy in the region is far from assured.

Introduction

Far-Right Politics and National Identity in Central and Eastern Europe

by **Joakim Ekman** and **Tora Lane**

Twenty-seven years ago here in Central Europe, we believed that Europe was our future; today we feel that we are the future of Europe.

Viktor Orbán[1]

Contemporary political analyses of Central and Eastern Europe typically paint a gloomy picture of the region. In stark contrast to similar analyses in the 1990s, which tended to be about democratization, liberalization and Europeanisation, recent years' observers have rather emphasized nationalism, xenophobia, and illiberalism. Following the 2004 and 2007 Eastern enlargements of the European Union – sometimes described as a "return to Europe" – we have witnessed signs of democratic backsliding, Euroscepticism, the rise of radical right populism, and a general authoritarian backlash throughout the post-communist region. This includes a backlash against what one might label European values in a post-communist setting, i.e. the manifold instances of populist attacks on or challenges not only to Euro-

pean integration but also to what the European Union claims to represent: tolerance, liberal democracy, gender equality, respect for human rights and the protection of minority rights.[2]

The recurring crises in the region have further added to the notion of a new East/West divide in Europe: the 2008–2010 financial crisis, the Crimea crisis from 2014 and onwards, the 2015 refugee crises, and the more recent Brexit and Covid-19 crises. The mere titles of some of the more prominent analyses of contemporary politics in Europe and the world reveal the academic (and pessimistic) *Zeitgeist* of our time: *How Democracies Die*, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*, and *The Light That Failed: Why the West is Losing the Fight for Democracy*.[3]

The *CBEES State of the Region Report* is an annual publication, reporting and reflecting on social and political developments in the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe, each year taking a new and topical

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perspective. The report is written by researchers and area specialists, from within as well as outside of Södertörn University. The overall purpose of this initiative is to offer a publication that will be of interest to fellow researchers, policy makers, stakeholders, and the general public. The first report, covering events in 2020, focused mainly on constructions or reconstructions of national historical memory in the region and the instrumentalization of the past.

This year, the aim of the *CBEES State of the Region Report* is to present an overview of elements of far-right national identity politics in the recent upsurge of authoritarianism, Euroscepticism, and illiberalism in several countries of the Baltic Sea Region and Central and Eastern Europe. The labels used to characterize such regimes are many and debatable – including illiberal democracies, semi-democracies, hybrid regimes, electoral authoritarian regimes or competitive authoritarian regimes.[4] What the countries they describe seem to have in common is a general turn away from the pro-European liberalism that set the tune for more or less the entire political agenda after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, towards a more isolationist or protectionist – not to say xenophobic – nationalism.

Nationalism is, in itself, not considered to be a threat to democracy. In the field of democratization studies, it is part of the received wisdom that nationalism (or national unity) has historically been a prerequisite for democracy. Only when people in a given territory can agree upon who the people are (the *demos*), democracy is possible, as argued by Dankwart Rustow in the early 1970s.[5] Later generations of researchers have confirmed the need for a supportive political community in stable democracies.[6] Moreover, nationalism has played an important historical role in the region, as a motivation for the opposition in the struggle against the Communist regimes, from the dissident movements in the 1960s and 1970s, through the protests in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the outset of the Crimea crises in 2014, Anne Applebaum argued that nationalism could work as such a positive force for the people in Ukraine.[7]

Still, we know from the catastrophic lessons of history that nationalism, as a political ideology, has close ties to authoritarianism, xenophobia, and fascism. And

> **99** Nationalism is generally perceived by the electorate in different countries as the (preferred) opposite to Europeanization.

today, nationalism in Eastern Europe that was to serve "the return to Europe" no longer plays into the hands of pro-European liberalism, as argued by Ivan Krastev. Rather, nationalism is generally perceived by the electorate in different countries as the (preferred) opposite to Europeanization and submission to Brussels.[8] What is more, nationalist authoritarian movements pose open threats to democratic values. But the turn away from Europe today only reminds us that the sovereignty regained by the nation states of Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism was related to supranational unions, such as the EU.

The most often cited examples of a nationalist or illiberal turn in the region refer to Putin in Russia, Órban in Hungary and the Law and Justice party (PiS) in Poland, but the same tendencies are detectable in several other countries in the region, as this report demonstrates. In fact, in a majority of the countries in the region, authoritarian right and far-right movements or elements have become increasingly influential in politics and society in recent years. The explanations for such authoritarian tendencies differ, and how we are to understand this phenomenon in relation to traditional parliamentary party politics remains an open question. Some have argued that the rise of illiberalism (i.e. the electoral success of right-wing populist parties) is related to unfulfilled and perhaps unrealistic expectations of the transformation era, after which many voters felt that the idea of "catching up with the West" never materialized.[9] At the same, other observers have pointed out that disillusionment with liberal democracy is not exclusively confined to post-communist countries, and that the recent electoral success of radical right-wing parties can be found all over Europe.[10] Important as the notion of Eastern European disillusionment seem to be for the emergence of popular support for right-wing parties, it is clearly not the full story.

Backlash symptoms may be found all over Europe, and beyond. In the well-functioning democracies in Northern Europe, radical right parties have had unprecedented electoral success in recent elections. The anti-immigration Sweden Democrats entered parliament in 2010, and despite having its roots in neo-Nazism and promoting outright opposition to multiculturalism, the party has remained a significant actor in Swedish politics.

In the 2018 general election, they won some 18% of the vote. In a similar fashion, in Finland, the far-right Finns Party proved that both opposition to immigration and the rejection of climate change policies appealed to many voters in the 2019 elections. In Denmark, the Danish People's Party has a history of successful cooperation with the government parties on most issues, in return for acceptance of their anti-immigration political stance.

In Western Europe, we have seen parties of similar kinds for a number of years in e.g. the Netherlands (Party for Freedom), Belgium (Vlaams Belang), France (National Front, more recently National Rally), Italy (the League) and Austria (the Freedom Party). These parties seem to have been able to capitalize on the 2015 refugee crisis in particular. The Brexit Party in the UK is part of the same family of parties. In Germany, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) entered parliament in 2017, with almost 13% of the vote. The party is typically described as basing its agenda on anti-immigration (especially hostility towards Muslims) but also on "resistance" to the (West) German establishment, and appeal in particular to voters in the former GDR parts of Germany. At the same time, as demonstrated by Weissenkircher's contribution in this report, Germany's far right is currently much more multifaceted, involving political parties, social movements (like PEGIDA) and think-tanks. Moreover, opposition to the liberal establishment is not just about "East" versus "West"; rather, the far right uses multiple identities in order to mobilize locally, regionally and even on the supra-national level.

Far right parties have thus become significant political players throughout Western Europe; but common wisdom is that similar parties are stronger in post-communist Europe.

In Central Europe, Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Órban stand out as something of a role model for other extreme right politicians in the EU, and with his party FIDEZ (and government coalition partner Christian Democratic People's Party) he has used its two-thirds majority in the parliament to make constitutional changes, virtually getting rid of checks and balances, turning Hungary into what Órban himself labels an "illiberal state". The aim has been to take full control over all state institutions, and after that, to make conditions increasingly difficult for critical journalists, NGOs, oppositions groups and – as highlighted in Andrea Pető's contribution in this report – universities. The

> **" The assault on academic freedom also includes attacks on individual researchers.**

assault on academic freedom also includes attacks on individual researchers. In his contribution on Ukrainian nationalists, Rudling points to the same practice.

In 2019–2020, the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) returned to power in Poland, with almost 44% of the vote. Voters, especially in the rural parts of the country, have been attracted to the party's emphasis on Catholic values, social welfare, and Polish nationalism (see also Michlic's contribution). In both Hungary and Poland, democratic freedoms have been steadily declining over the past decade. In the yearly rankings provided by *Nations in Transit* (NiT), a report by Freedom House focusing on democracy in Eastern Europe, Hungary recently dropped out of the group of "democracies" altogether, to become a "hybrid regime". Poland is still labelled a "semi-consolidated democracy" in NiT, but the democracy ratings have been in decline over the past few years. The government has advocated distinctly discriminatory treatment of LGBT+ people and introduced controversial changes in the abortion law. Also, press freedom has been under attack in recent years.

The chapters included in this report demonstrate the *diversity* of the post-communist regimes. In some countries, an extreme nationalistic agenda is not promoted by populist or radical right-wing parties, but rather, by the political incumbents themselves, like in Tajikistan (see the contribution by Lemon and Antonov). In Belarus, the discussion about identity formation among far-right movements relates to competing narratives of World War II (see Kotljarchuk's contribution); and in Russia, Shenfield provides an informed discussion about various forms of Russian nationalism.

The contributions in this report also demonstrate the need to take context-specific factors seriously. In some countries, you have a situation where one single party stands out as the main right-wing party, like in Slovakia, where the People's Party Our Slovakia (L'SNS) represents the key radical right actor (see the contribution by Paulovicová), or in the Czech Republic, where the SPD (Freedom and Direct Democracy Party) presently fills the same function (see the contribution by Kazharki). In Estonia, the far right and anti-immigrant Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) entered parliament in 2015, and has since consolidated its position as the main anti-immigration (and

anti-liberal) party in the country. In other countries, the situation is very different, for example in Serbia or Croatia, where several radical right-wing parties exist at the same time (see the contributions by Pavlović and Todosijević, and Petsinis, respectively). In Catholic-dominated Lithuania, there are also a number of right-wing actors promoting family values, as part of a nationalistic agenda (see the contribution by Ulinskaitė and Garškaitė), whereas in Orthodox Romania, the far-right is mainly a phenomenon on the political fringe, as demonstrated in Gherghina's contribution.

What all these illiberal or right-wing parties have in common is an aggressive approach to politics, rather than a specific common agenda. In the research literature, the far right in Europe is typically depicted as a diverse phenomenon, being at the same time anti-establishment, anti-EU, anti-Muslim, anti-multiculturalism, and anti-globalization. While all of these voices arguably advocate intolerant views of some variety, they differ in terms of targeted "others". Some are outright neo-fascist, focusing almost exclusively on immigration or ethnic minorities, while other support e.g. LGBT rights, as a way of pointing out Muslims as the true enemies of freedom.[11] Many promote what they claim to be traditional European values, while at the same time being critical of the European Union. Some of the actors highlighted in this report constitute a direct threat to democracy, like the radical right-wingers in Ukraine (see the contribution by Likhachev).

There are some common traits, however: all of the parties commonly understood as radical right-wing parties typically claim to represent ordinary people, in stark contrast to the corrupt elites. The political establishment is considered to be dishonest and self-interested. There is a common notion of the need to protect the silent majority from the perils of globalization and non-Western immigration. After the refugee crisis in 2015, the latter has gained importance. To liberal politicians, this remains a serious challenge. Being unable to totally dismiss the right-wing populists as illegitimate, liberal politicians have to varying degrees failed to stop the far right agendas from making an impact on the public debates. While this need not necessarily mean the death of liberal democracy, it nevertheless entails political polarization

> **"** What all these illiberal or right-wing parties have in common is an aggressive approach to politics.

and the rejection of consensual politics and as such, a distinct threat to societal integration and European cooperation.[12] On top of this comes the shrinking influence of the EU, not least after Brexit. EU tutelage worked in Central and Eastern Europe until membership was achieved, it would seem; and once an EU member, countries could relax about further reforms and observance of democratic or "European values".[13]

Given the general development towards popular support for the far right documented in this report, one may ask if post-communist voters after having "returned to Europe" more recently have turned away from "Europe"? But that is obviously not the case. Public support for the EU remains widespread. A more appropriate question would be if post-communist voters accept the notion of an *alternative vision* of Europe?

In his contribution on the far right in Hungary, Balogh draws attention to the meaning of Europe in the right-wing discourse. It is certainly not about the EU; rather it has to do with a self-image as a Christian bulwark. Hungary (and Europe) need to be protected from Muslim migrants or asylum seekers, and FIDEZ is there to do the job. Likewise, in his contribution, Bassin demonstrates that illiberal or far-right politicians like Viktor Órban and Jarosław Kaczyński (leader of PiS in Poland) are not out to dismantle or secede from the EU; rather, what they want is to remodel the union, making it into a populist version of itself. After Brexit, a window of opportunity has opened. In the right-wing European populist discourse, such a cultural "counter-revolution" is possible. Thus, as Bassin argues, there are no simple lines to be drawn between the nation states and Europe in today's far right milieu. The far right may be EU-sceptic, but it is not anti-European. Several nationalist parties are in fact pan-European, and ready to form alliances on the supra-national level (see for example Weissenkircher's contribution in this report). Bassin underlines the significance of ideas of European identity contingent to national projects of identity within the far right, with an emphasis on, among other things, traditional Christian values.

The kind of illiberal politics promoted by Órban and Kaczyński are thus not primarily about fighting multiculturalism or Brussels; rather, it is nothing less than

dealing with a perceived civilizational threat to European Christianity. As suggested by Krastev and Holmes,[14] this entails a cynical twist on "returning to Europe". Three decades after the fall of communism, returning to Europe doesn't mean the East catching up with the West; it is rather about the Western liberals that – supposedly – need to return to Europe. That is, to the *real* Europe. In the words of Órban: "Twenty-seven years ago here in Central Europe, we believed that Europe was our future; today we feel that we are the future of Europe."

As evidenced by the political contestation of Europe, far-right populists have become increasingly preoccupied with identitarian issues, relating to both national and European identity. The coalition of far-right parties in the European Parliament has assumed the name *Identity and Democracy*. The interest in identity seems to have been appropriated from leftwing political movements. Identity politics may be tentatively understood as a political approach wherein people of a particular ethnicity, gender, or social class (or some other basis of identification) develop political agendas based on such identities (cf. the contributions on Serbia, by Pavlović and Todosijević in this report). In the far-right take on identity politics, the "other" that needs recognition and protection are those silently opposing the hegemonic or dominant norms in society: The common people, those who feel alienated from Western liberalism, which defines European values and Brussels-style tolerance.

> " Far-right populists have become increasingly preoccupied with identitarian issues, relating to both national and European identity.

Not only does identity politics seem to fit well into the projects of national identity formation in post-communist Europe; it also serves to underpin the ideological quest for hegemony over the political field that the French chief far-right ideologue Alain de Benoist saw as the task of the New Right think tank *La Nouvelle Droite*. According to de Benoist, a crucial strategy for the new right was to challenge the political distinction between the left and the right. And indistinction seems to work well in the hands of contemporary right-wing movements. Another appropriation from leftwing politics has to do with social welfare. Both Putin and the Polish PiS party have derived a lot of their popularity from promises of increased welfare for all. But how then do these very different political projects and ideas work together,

if they do at all? As mentioned, it is very difficult to name the political tendencies that we are attempting to define here using any single label (such as authoritarianism, illiberalism, populism, or nationalism). The question can also be raised as to whether there is any coherent ideological program at all in the new right movements of today, or whether it is just an amalgam of indistinct nationalist strategies. (In the present report, in his essay on the far right's online engagement with national identity issues, Zavatti addresses the question about ideological consistency.)

What are we then to make of this situation? How close are we to the *Twilight of Democracy* as Applebaum termed this historical moment, opening up the possibility of the end of liberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe? How can we understand this development in the dynamics of the region in itself, and in relation to global political tendencies? Back in 2007, in a special edition of *Journal of Democracy* on the democratic backsliding of Central and Eastern Europe, Ivan Krastev noted bluntly: "The liberal era that began in Central Europe in 1989 has come to an end. Populism and illiberalism are tearing the region apart".[15] Contrary to hopes and actual progress in the early 2000s, what we have seen in many places in Central and Eastern Europe since the EU expansions in 2004 and 2007 indicates that the health of democracy in the region is far from assured.[16] Some scholars have pointed to the communist legacy in order to explain the resilience of non-liberal orientations among citizens in the region; others have identified performance-related explanations (like corruption) for the emergence of low trust societies, where and far right populist parties may thrive.[17] In order to understand the challenges that lie ahead, we need a better understanding of how far right ideas and attitudes in Central and Eastern Europe come to be manifested. That is the point of the present report. ●

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Essay

"Real Europe" Civilizationism and the Far Right in Eastern Europe

by **Mark Bassin**

From its origins in the interwar period, the European far right has been powerfully attracted by a "Europeanist" or pan-Europeanist vision of supra-national, continent-wide solidarity and unity.[1] Despite this interest in pan-Europeanism, however, there has never been anything resembling a consensus as to what, or indeed where Europe as such is supposed to be. Very much to the contrary, Europe has been conceived by the far right in a wide variety of different forms – as a geopolitical Grossraum, a cultural-historical civilization, or an identitarian "bio-culture" and ethno-race – and its geographical boundaries have been described in a correspondingly diverse array of spatial projections. And not only did the European imaginary evolve through changing historical periods, but there was a multiplicity of far-right Europes at any given time. In the present day, there are at least three separate civilizationist discourses on the far right: one focused on Western Europe, one on Eastern Europe, and one for Russia. While they share significant commonalities, especially the first two, the three are essentially different and incompatible. Indeed, in a pioneering study of far right civilizationism in Europe,

Rogers Brubaker not only confirms these differences but concludes that the East European variant does not represent a genuine example of civilizationism at all.[2]

The perennial appeal of pan-Europeanism exposes a wrinkle in our understanding of the European far right that has never been satisfactorily investigated. It is commonly assumed that far right ideology most fundamentally speaks to and reflects nationalist sentiments – that nationalism, as one expert has succinctly put it, "is the master concept of the radical right."[3] But if this is true, then what are we to make of the supra-nationalist Europeanism just noted? The full scope of the problem comes into sharper focus if we examine the writings of neo-fascist Europeanists of the Cold War, ideologues such as Francis Parkey Yockey, Julius Evola or Jean Thiriart. Not only were they not "nationalist" in a standard sense, they were militantly anti-nationalist, trenchantly opposed to the continued existence of national communities and nation-states, which they argued should all be subsumed into a single greater-European political formation. Yockey memorably declared in 1949 that "The

nations are dead, for Europe is born." while Thiriart 1981 insisted that "the stupid and dangerous theory of nationalities ... should give way to the principle of supranationalism (*supranationalité*).[4]

This national-continental juxtaposition is still a part of the civilizationist Europeanism of the far right today, but now it takes on a new and more complicated twist. Rather than treating the juxtaposition as sort of zero-sum choice between two incommensurable and mutually exclusive alternatives, as did Yockey or Thiriart, today the supranational impulse cohabits peacefully with the traditional nationalist prioritization of the nation as a unique social community and political entity. This cohabitation, moreover, does not depend on the two somehow being kept separated in discrete affectional boxes in order to reduce the obvious ideological tension between them. To the contrary, they are actively conflated and combined, and this combination generates a synergy that is constructive and positive. The present essay will explore the dynamics of this novel juxtaposition and synergy in the example of civilizationist discourse in Eastern Europe – what I will refer to as "Real Europe civilizationism" (REC).

> " What is distinctive in the contemporary discourse of REC is the very specific way it projects the two Europes as geographical entities.

Real Europe and Its Others

Civilizationism in Eastern Europe frames itself in terms of a well-established trope of the "two Europes" – one of them liberal, secular and progressive, the other traditionalist, pious and conservative.[5] Liberal Europe is embodied in the political institutions, structures and dogmas of the EU. This Europe is seen as modernist and progressive, believes in the existence of universal values and norms, and pursues an interventionist agenda aimed at reshaping all Europeans in the image of what is disparagingly referred to as "homo Brusellicus."[6] This agenda, REC claims, puts Europe's most valuable social institutions and political traditions under threat. The ethno-cultural integrity of European nations is being diluted by EU-mandated multi-culturalism, traditional gender and family roles are undermined by gay rights and same-sex marriage, and the political sovereignty of nation-states is threatened by the determination of Liberal Europe to enforce its hegemony across the entire continent. The ultimate goal is nothing less than the creation of a faceless and homogenized superstate, as free as possible from national differences.[7]

The other Europe, by contrast, is the "Real" Europe, and represents the mirror opposite. It is a spiritualized community of values, a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* that draws its inspiration from what it claims to be Europe's genuine political, moral, and cultural traditions. This vision rests on three basic pillars: family, nation-state and Christianity.[8] *Family* stands for traditional domestic hierarchies and received sexual identities and roles; *nation-state* signals the prioritization of the nation as an essentialized ethno-cultural community that has an inviolable right to political sovereignty and to defend its national interests; while *Christianity* provides a civilizational identity that unifies all of Europe's diverse peoples and serves to distinguish them from all other faith-based civilizations.

REC defines itself in terms of a mortal struggle with two hostile "Others," one internal and one external. Internally, the struggle is against the hegemonic pretences of Liberal Europe just noted, in order to resist its attempts to create a hyper-federalized geopolitical Frankenstein that is "godless, freethinking, and gender-bending."[9] Externally, REC is mobilized by a sense of mortal threat it faces from non-European migrants and asylum seekers, in particular those originating from Islamic countries. These apprehensions were fundamentally exacerbated by the immigration crisis of 2015, which served to sharpen perceptions of an active assault by immigrant populations that threatened to overrun Europe both demographically as well as culturally.[10] Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary and one of the leading proponents of REC, declared in that year that "Europe is under invasion," and he warned perilously of "an unprecedented challenge which could crush and bury under itself the form of existence we have known up to now."[11] Immigrants bring with them administrative and demographic burdens, but it is above all what are described as the civilizational values of Islam – extremism, terrorism, misogyny, and sharia law – that are perceived as alien to a Europe "rooted in Christianity", threatening its culture and heritage.[12]

There is nothing entirely new about these twin spectres of liberalism and immigration, which have been

Map over the member countries in the Visegrád group.

tory, for while it is self-evidently European, it is at the same time emphatically non-Western.[17]

Locating Real Europe

So where, exactly, is Real Europe? The answer is not entirely straightforward, complicated by the alternative valorizations of the toponymics in question. On the one hand, the logic of the east-west contrast suggests that Real Europe is the "East European" counterpart to the Western Europe just described. The designation "Eastern Europe," however, is fraught with historical associations of backwardness, provincialism, and oppression that date back centuries but remain fresh from the experience of Soviet domination. Thus, rather than "Eastern Europe", the Real Europe in question is associated with the "Mittleeuropa" or "Central Europe" toponym, which has a more distin-

standard concerns for the identitarian radical right in Europe since the latter decades of the 20th century.[13] What is distinctive in the contemporary discourse of REC is the very speci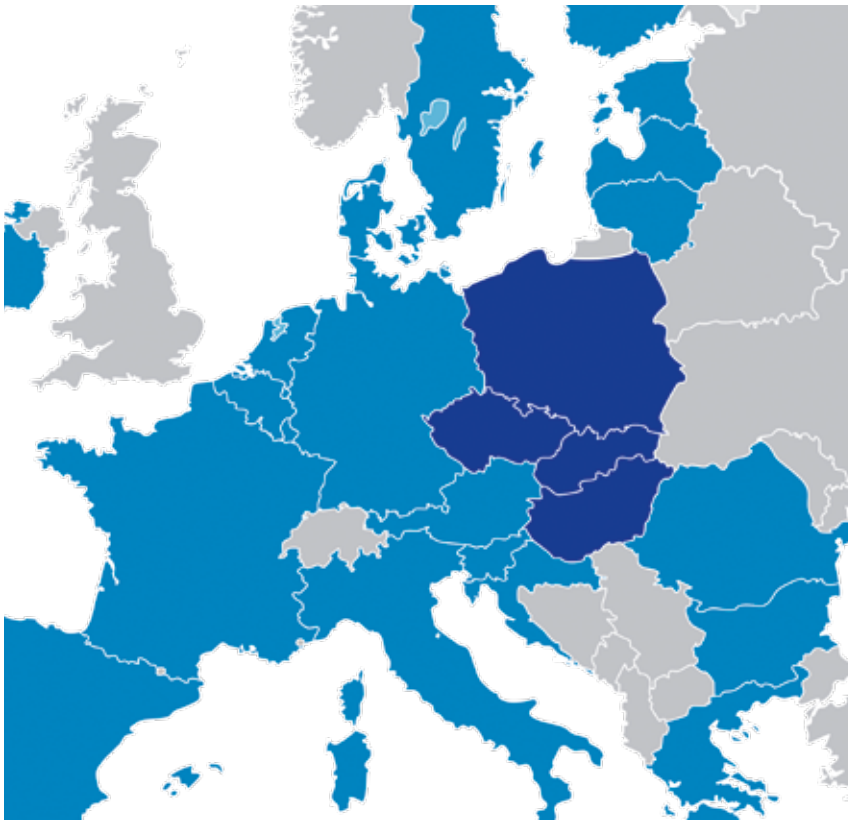fic way it projects the two Europes as geographical entities, framing them within a familiar model of a Europe split geographically between its western and eastern parts that goes back centuries. While one of the goals of the extension of EU membership to former Soviet block countries in 2004 was precisely to overcome and eliminate this cleavage, the discourse of Real-Europe brings it back to life in a reburnished form, and maps out the two alternative Europes within its spatial parameters.[14] Liberal Europe is identified geographically with Western Europe, liberal secularism is "Western secularism" that a "Western oligarchy" based in Brussels seeks to impose universally, and even its Eurocentrism is really "West-centrism".[15] By a subtle extension, this liberal Western Europe can then be conflated with "the West" more generally, providing a direct connection back to the original Spenglerian prognostication about how the "West" – identified in REC today as Western Europe – is in decline, "committing suicide," and "dying".[16] Needless to say, REC removes itself from this downward trajec-

guished resonance and – after the hiatus of Europe's Cold War bifurcation – has come back into circulation, often rendered in English as "East Central Europe."[18] The focus here are the four countries – Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic – that joined together in the early 1990s to form the Visegrád Group for the purpose of promoting their common interests. Since the mid-2010s, all of these four nations have developed powerful conservative and radical-conservative movements that have reinvigorated an intraregional "normative consensus" based on notions of Europeanness that "diverge from those espoused in Western Europe."[19] The populist far-right governments of Poland and Hungary are the principal drivers of this movement – the PiS politician Adam Andruszkiewicz declared in 2018 that "It is Poland and Hungary that are becoming Real Europe"[20] – but it is the greater regional solidarity of the Visegrád four that gives rise to what has been referred variously to as a revived – and conservative – "Central European Zeitgeist"[21] or, as Brussels might see it, a kind of "Central European awkward squad."[22] The discourse of REC, by and large, is generated within this group.

The geographical association of liberal European

values with the countries of Western Europe is a significant embellishment of the hostile juxtaposition to Real Europe, insofar as the image of a menacing Other is more effective and compelling when it is materialized and projected on the map as a distinct geographical entity. And despite the taunts about the neo-Spenglerian decline that Western Europe is supposed to be undergoing, the latter is still seen to retain a vigor and hegemonic intent that pose a clear and present danger to the integrity of Real Europe to the east. The West-European powers that control the EU are accused of having sought to impose "foreign rule," indeed even "Western colonialism" on its new member states in the east from the very moment of their accession, and this policy continues unabated. Such attempts to construct a "European empire" on the backs of the eastern countries are manifested today in the universal imposition by Brussels of liberal principles of multi-culturalism and gender fluidity, principles that as we have seen violate Real Europe's indigenous value system.[23] And while it is appreciated that Western Europe faces its own same existential challenge from immigration and "Islamism," one of the primary sources of the immigration problem – the 2015 EU-wide quotas for accepting refugees – is seen as a Western policy engineered in Brussels for the express purpose of weakening Real Europe in the east.

Insofar as the principal overland entry points for migrants and refugees seeking entry into Europe run along the EU's south-eastern borders, Real Europe finds itself on the unstable and dangerous frontline of this incursion.[24] This positioning brings with it a special danger, of course, but at the same time it provides a vital positive element of Real Europe imaginary, namely its self-assigned identity as the bearer of a mission or European salvation. Indeed, an awareness of this role is a driving impetus of Real Europe's ethos. The savior/salvation tropes that animate and inspire REC are entangled in an ideological matrix of considerable complexity, the nuances of which are vital for the purposes of this essay. Specifically, they serve to reveal the peculiar conflation of national and supra-national narratives in this particular Europeanist vision and exemplify how the traditional

> " The West-European powers that command the EU are accused of having sought to impose 'foreign rule,' indeed even 'Western colonialism' on its new member states.

disjunction between these different identity levels is transformed into a harmonious correspondence that fosters a constructive synergy.

A Christian Rampart

The conflation of narratives can be seen in regard to the identities at the center of the discourse. Who are the agents of salvation, or "saviors," and who is the target to be saved? It is out of these questions that the full complexity of REC emerges, for both of these identities are bifurcated between the national and the supranational. On the one hand, it is Real Europe as a collective entity, based on the political geography of the Visegrád group that is seen to provide the critical leadership that can lead the continent as a whole back to the spirit of a genuinely European civilization. From this perspective, the Cold War legacy ceases to be a stigma and serves instead as a positive precedent, for the collective cultural and spiritual resistance to Soviet totalitarianism offered by the countries in question is taken as evidence of their moral righteousness and fortitude. Such virtuous qualities were never matched by the nations of the West, and the implication is that they can be re-mobilized for the purposes of leading the struggle against Europe's enemies in the present day.[25] The establishment of regional cooperation schemes, among them the organization of a intra-regional Visegrád police unit dedicated to the collective management of immigration and border controls, reflects among other things a sense of regional responsibility for the greater European good.[26]

Much more resonant, however, is the notion of an individual nation as an exemplar that can help restore the genuine moral and civilizational parameters for Europe as a whole. This narrative conflates the symbology of the "nation as saviour" with that of the "nation as martyr," and is the more powerful for its familiarity, having long formed a part of the respective national mythologies of the countries in the region. It takes different forms, the most dominant being the image of the nation as an "Antemurale Christianitatis," a "Christian rampart" or "bulwark" that stands as guardian of the true faith at the front lines of battle, charged with the holy mission

of defending the whole of European civilization against incursions of the infidel assailants.[27] In Hungary, this national mythology has long provided a potent valorization of the country's difficult historical experience. In the 19th century, the ancient legacy of struggle against Tatar and Ottoman invasions was a central theme in the construction of national identity narratives. With the embellishment of the 20th century experience of resistance to Bolshevism and "Asiatic" communism, this cultural memory is effectively re-mobilized by far right civilizationist discourses of the present day.[28] A rather different "nation as holy savior" trope is the notion of Poland as the "Chrystus Narodów", the "Christ of Nations," whose political dismemberment through partition from the late 18th century is represented as a holy national sacrifice that puts Poland in a position to lead the redemption of Christian civilization across Europe.[29] The resonances across the centuries that are associated with this role are immediate and powerful.

The same national-supranational dualism regarding the identity of the savior also characterizes the target of salvation.[30] On the one hand, REC discourse operates on the level of national identity and identifies a particular national group as its primary concern. This national group is projected as a unique and sacred entity, a chosen people occupying a homeland made sacrosanct by God himself. In this connection, Christianity and Christian values, which as we have seen are an essential marker of European civilization in toto, are here nationalized as "national Christianity" or a "Christian-national vision" and are promoted as exclusively national qualities.[31] Christianity acts as "an ethno-nationalistic surrogate religion" that projects the respective nation as a chosen people, a sacred entity inhabiting a correspondingly sacred space.[32] In Hungary, Orbán identifies the national character of Christian culture as "the unifying force of the nation," something that provides "the inner essence and meaning of the state" and has a vital role "in preserving nationhood." The national-supranational ambivalence of this position is clear in his assertion that Hungary is European not because it is a geographical part of Europe but "because we are Christians"[33] Correspondingly, nationalist discourses of the populist leadership in Poland emphasize the centrality of the Christian faith as a feature of the country's unique historical path and its self-understanding as a sovereign nation.[34] The subject to be saved from all of today's threats – to Christian belief, to traditional social roles, or to the integrity of essential-

ized nationhood – is by implication the mythologized Christian nation itself.

But at the same time, REC is manifestly about the salvation of Europe as a whole, a point emphasized by the frequent references of the Polish and Hungarian governments to "saving Europe" from itself.[35] One of the more demonstrative undertakings in this regard was the decision of the Hungarian government in 2015 to defend Europe against the immigrant threat by erecting a border "wall" or barrier fence along country's southern border in 2015. This was a potent contemporary re-enactment of the ancient mission to protect Europe against invaders from the east that are civilizationally and culturally alien – and was necessary in the present day in order, as Orbán put it, "to preserve Europe's Christian values."[36] While the internal threats to European civilization cannot be repulsed in a similar fashion by a physical barrier, the discourse around REC finds other ways to preserve its identity as a defensive bastion. Krzysztof Szczerski, Chief of Staff to the Polish president Andrzej Duda and a key policy architect for the PiS party, expressed a general sentiment of his political cohort in his anticipation that that expatriate Poles living across the EU could have the effect of re-evangelising Europe and bringing it back to Christianity.[37] In 2017 the head of the party Lech Kaczyńnski described a Pole as "someone who points the way for today's sick Europe toward recovery, the way toward fundamental values…[and] true liberty, the way toward victory and strengthening of our civilization based on Christianity."[38]

As it is deployed in contemporary civilizationist discourse about Real Europe, therefore, the ramparts trope operates in a highly complex variety of ways. Its proponents on the far right present themselves "as working … to defend *their national 'peoples'* from a series of bad [European] elites and 'dangerous [immigrant] Others' threatening them at national level," while at the same time "doing so to defend *a European 'people'* from [the very same] elites and 'dangerous others' at the continental level."[39]

Sleeping with the Enemy

Why is it that far-right populist leaders promote a discourse in which the appeal to traditional nationalist attachments is complicated by setting it alongside a structurally similar appeal for allegiance to a supranational entity? While there are certainly various factors at play, I would suggest that one of the more salient relates

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Identitarians in Scotland in 2019. Brexit became a litmus test for the solidarity between the far-right parties across Europe.

to the particular constellation of political attachments and sentiments that are embraced by electorates and leaders alike in the region in the present day. Despite the perennial and undeniably strong appeal of nationalism and the sovereigntist defence of the nation-state, it is nonetheless a fact that many of the structures and operations of the EU remain extremely popular in the region. The electorate, it turns out, highly appreciates the privileges and freedoms – to say nothing of the funding – that membership provides.

An indicative case in point is the guarantee of free movement within the Schengen scheme. This arrangement enjoys such wide-spread support that its defence was used prominently to justify the erection of a fence along Hungary's southern border. Along with his call to block the in-flow of migrants in order to save Christianity, Orbán also emphasized the more practical intention to "save Schengen" and preserve "free movement inside the European Union." Leaders of other East European countries echoed the point. [40] Polling consistently shows popular support for EU membership in Eastern Europe to be among the highest in the Union, with approval levels measured in late 2019 at 84% for Poland, 70% for Slovakia, and 67% for Hungary.[41] Given this particular constellation of political sentiment, Kazharski's conclusion that the political leaders in Eastern Europe – despite their principled denunciations of a Godless and gender-bending oligarchy in Brussels – still "remain locked into European supranationalism" as a "precondi-

tion of their political survival" seems entirely logical.[42]

But it is not only the electorate in Eastern Europe that today discovers its inner appreciation for the EU. As the political parties of the far right have become increasingly popular and influential domestically, their position within the European Parliament has been correspondingly enhanced – much augmented by the increasing sophistication of their trans-national connections and cooperation.[43] And as they become more powerful in the parliamentary framework of European political organization, the latter becomes more useful for them, to the extent that the political elites – rather like their voters – increasingly recognize their own stake in being a part of it.

The great litmus test came in 2016, with the UK referendum on EU membership. In this exercise, the far-right parties in Eastern Europe might have been expected to demonstrate their solidarity with the cultural nationalism and nation-state sovereignism of their sister parties in Britain: UKIP and the BNP. In the event, however, they opted instead for EU solidarity, and indeed did so in emphatic terms. "Brexit is obviously a very bad event," judged Jarosław Kaczyński, and he assured his compatriots that whatever the outcome of the poll in the UK, "Poland's place is in the EU." For its part, the Hungarian government went so far as to publish a page-long advertisement in the conservative London newspaper *The Daily Mail* urging the Brits to vote remain, and offered what it apparently imagined to be a reassuring message that "Hungary is proud to stand with you as member of the European Union."[44] Since the catharsis of the Brexit victory, the far right parties have taken care to tighten up their terminology in order to distance themselves from it, rebranding their own "Euroscepticism" as "EuroRealism" and explicitly disavowing the secessionist "Eurorejectism" opted for by the British electorate.[45] The Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki subsequently described the EU in strikingly generous terms as "a great success," and both Hungary and Poland have given their support to precisely those EU-wide policies – notably the creation of a European Army – that had galvanized such widespread opposition to Europe in the UK.[46]

Conclusion

The civilizationist narrative of a Real Europe in Eastern Europe can be seen at least in part as an ideological response to the various countervailing tendencies and pressures identified in this essay. Effectively, it reflects the intricate dialectic between rejection and appropriation of the European project, a dynamic that has been in gestation really since the accession of the Visegrád countries in mid-2004 and comes now to fruition in the ideological form of REC. The point is not to reject, dismantle, or secede from the EU but rather to redesign it from the bottom up, remodel its basic principles and restructure key aspects of its operations. All of this is to be accomplished from within the EU itself, by genuine Europeans committed to the principle of European unity.[47] Here, for both Orbán and Kaczyński, are real fruits of Brexit. They are neither the actual destruction of the EU nor the enhanced legitimation of popular opposition to membership in it, but rather precisely the opposite: the creation of "a fantastic opportunity" and "historical cultural moment" for them to embark on a "cultural counter-revolution". The goal is to overhaul both the EU's underlying philosophy as well as its modus operandi, in the spirit of the same illiberalism that inspires their domestic political programs.[48] Their own particular projection of REC described in this essay is thus an attempt to incorporate and combine the disparate impulses that drive the political world in which they operate, in which the clear support for nation-state-based identities and interests sits awkwardly alongside a similarly clear commitment to a supranational formation, legitimated and indeed consecrated in the form of a traditionalist and values-based civilization. ●

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Essay

Far Right's Engagement with National Identity Issues in Online Spaces

by **Francesco Zavatti**

This essay investigates the far right's engagement with national identity issues in online spaces in Baltic and East European countries. Focusing on recent years, it offers an interpretation of how far-right entities (groups, parties, movements, but also individuals) leave traces on online space. It proposes that national identity issues constitute a prominent feature of their politics as evidenced by these traces.

Far-right entities may look very different from each other because of their organizational complexity and ideological heterogeneity[1] and because they remain so blurred with regards to several well-established political issues.[2]

As Nigel Copsey claims, for strategic reasons, the far right keeps an open mind towards norms of multi-ethnic and liberal-democratic societies, but it maintains its ideological core. This core, according to Roger Griffin, consists of an ultra-nationalist political alternative that aims at a palingenetic national rebirth to be achieved through a revolution.[3] In the post-war era, the far right developed a strategy of de-territorializing its message, making it meta-political and therefore adaptable across changing societies and cultures, and by investing heavily in historical revisionism.[4] Since the Cold War decades up to the present day, instances of the far right proliferated exponentially in myriads of groupuscules, parties, and movements, diversifying their offer from backward-looking and extremist philosophies to more reassuring pleas for democracy, security and individual freedom.[5]

This heterogeneity shows that the far right can implement constant permutations of its political and cultural offer in very short times. Consequently, identifying it resembles shooting at a moving target with clouded vision, as posited by Michael Minkenberg with reference to the radical right in Central and Eastern Europe.[6] Nevertheless, far-right entities of the region continue to share characteristics: they are similarly anti-democratic, anti-liberal, racist and revisionist.[7] The permutations of the far right should not surprise anyone. The actions of far-right entities are purposeful, rational, and organized. Their public discourses and worldviews are a matter of political opportunities: at the right time, these entities exploit certain specific material or symbolic resources to gain tactical advantages. They mainly play on identity

frames and oppositional frames (the opposition between "us" and "them"), which then leads to create polarization among groups with such different values.[8]

Ultimately, the various issues that the far right touch upon in their public outreach are attempts to reconnect exclusionary values with mainstream discourses, in order to attract new supporters. Proper programs and clear-cut ideological pinpoints may not be constantly spelled out in each speech or action; but new discursive opportunities are constantly exploited to present the same core values to a broader audience, in a much more sophisticated, nuanced, and acceptable fashion.[9]

The Internet transforms the nature of the far right under various aspects.[10] It gives it the opportunity to be more incisive in the radicalization of individuals,[11] while extending and establishing their networks into online social movements, reaching a broader and more differentiated audience, also across borders,[12] and to censorship.[13] In relation to identity issues, the Internet makes the play with identity and oppositional frames easier – and much more evident. Mainly, the Internet has simplified, consolidated, and empowered offline established strategies of playing with identity and oppositional frames. As recently noted by Andreas Önnerfors, the Internet simplifies the far-right's work of creating a dualistic political cosmology between Apocalypse and Redemption, which consists in separating "the people" ("us"), presented as good, from an evil "them".[14] For example, the Internet has offered a powerful loudspeaker to the French identiarian movement. Generation Identity (GI) succeeded in mobilizing also in the Baltic and East European countries, where GI chapters have been established. Its rhetoric plays both on identity frames and oppositional ones: it explicitly opposes globalization, immigration, Islamism, the European Union, the Euro, and the political and cultural left, which are accused of destroying national tradition, culture, and identity. These identity frames are only vaguely defined, and only in relation to oppositional frames. This vagueness is an important element, since it permits to adapt these frames in other national contexts.[15] This is why online plays with national identities are a serious matter at a European and at a global level.

The next sections are aimed at illustrating how the Internet helps various far-right actors, at different stages of mobilization and radicalization, and with materials of the past and of the present, to play with identity and oppositional frames related to national identity.

"Far-right group Generation Identity have been banned from Facebook across Europe", news publishing on June 21, 2018 by *Inews*.

Digital Memory Wars in East European Online Spaces

Due to the historical proximity to violence and the rapid, radical social and political changes in Eastern and Central European societies,[16] the far right has an easy game in shaping nationalist versions of the various national identities, since the identity turmoil generated by the demise of communism. A great deal of this game is played on materials of the past in terms of memory work. By presenting the nation as a martyr of "Judeo-Bolshevik" violence in the interwar era and of communism after the Second World War, the far right proposes to whitewash national responsibilities for the atrocities committed by fascist movements and Nazi-allied regimes.[17] This "double-genocide theory" directly touches upon matters of national identity by the way of memory work and it offers the possibility to establish country-specific revisionisms and negationisms.[18] The use of digital memory[19] in the memory wars of the East European far right is still largely unexplored, in reference to the double-genocide theory. Yet the social networks had a tremendous impact on

memory work. Online spaces present a hybrid between public and private that conforms well with the notion of memory. Being non-confrontational spaces, they permit the mediation and immediate mediatization of fragmented and discontinuous interpretations of history.[20] These characteristics contribute to shaping memory as fluid, de-territorialized, diffused, immediate but at the same time highly revocable.[21] For these properties, online spaces can generate hostility and conflicts between individuals over various competing memories, in web wars which are fought by presenting black-and-white versions of national history in a mix of verbal aggressions and scattered information.[22] Consequently, the online spaces become battlefields of digital conflicts. For example, the Russian and Ukrainian Wikipedia pages of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the Holodomor, the Russian Liberation Army, and the October Revolution have been the theatre of several edit wars between supporters of the opposing nationalisms.[23]

Victimizing the own nation and presenting its enemies as responsible is also a consolidated technique. In the former Yugoslav area, each far right entity depicts its own national group as "new Jews" and the former enemies of the 1990s war as "fascists" and "Nazis".[24] Ad hoc Facebook pages serve the purpose of exacerbating national resentment and ethnic hatred – in former Yugoslavia, pages in Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian showcase, with images and texts, the sufferings of each national community as victims of the coexisting ethnicities.[25]

> " Neighboring countries are of course the perfect target for fueling ethnic hatred online.

The far right's instrumental use of history, combined with the mediatic power of the Internet, simplify the demonization of national minorities: in Bulgaria, the far-right party Ataka has filled its websites with historical documents portraying a nationalist version of an idealized past in which the Turks were the enemies and, therefore, there were no Bulgarian Turks. That past is contraposed to present-day Europe, which is presented as an Islamized continent, and to present-day Bulgaria, which is presented as subjugated by the Bulgarian Turks.[26] Neighboring countries are of course the perfect target for fueling ethnic hatred online. For example, far-right actors like the Polish Konfederacja use the social networks to fuel ethnic hatred against Ukraine over the Volhynia massacre during WWII.[27]

At a regional level, the identity of the post-communist East European states is often strongly opposed to Russia, as instanced also in the reference to memory and history.[28] However, in the 2010s, several West and East European far-right parties and movements expressed admiration for Vladimir Putin's autocratic regime, which in many cases established a strong relationship with them.[29] For example, in the information war set up since the occupation of Ukraine in 2014, Russia entitled Konfederacja with wide media visibility.[30] From Russia's perspective, the European far-right actors are but one of the many assets of the resentment politics inaugurated by Vladimir Putin, who has capitalized consensus from the identity crisis of post-Soviet times through a unique blend of domestic repression of individual freedom and international hybrid war and information warfare. For Putin's "project Mayhem,"[31] the Internet is pivotal for shaping identities in the right direction, also using materials of the past; and, therefore, the regime's crackdown on the Internet is specular to that on Russian civil society.[32]

In the digital media ecology, the resources of memory-making are fluid, accessible and diffused.[33] At the same time, they are also very quickly revocable, since memory circulates in a state of continuous present.[34] In this peculiar ecology, far-right actors have easy game in mainstreaming historical narratives which create an endangered "us" and an evil "them": Russia has accused Ukraine of genocide; Ukraine has responded by presenting the Holodomor as the Ukrainian Holocaust.[35] Image substitute and visual fake history on the social networks weaponize misinformation and disinformation, as seen by the hashtag #holodomor, which reconnected anti-Jewish and anti-Russian meanings to the narratives on the 1932–33 famine.[36] In the conflict between Russian and Ukrainian nationalists, the identity of Crimea as either "Russian" or "Ukrainian" was constructed with the use of digital maps, which reinforced each narrative, and demotivational images aimed at discrediting the other's narrative.[37]

Undeniably, online spaces offer opportunities to hijack inter-ethnic conflicts not only to organized entities, but also to individuals, as exemplified by George Simion, who back in 2019 streamed live on Facebook from the Romanian-Hungarian WWI military cemetery

The Romanian far-right politician George Simion. He streamed live on Facebook from the Romanian-Hungarian WWI military cemetery of Valea Uzului in Transylvania, 2019.
PHOTO: WIKIWAND

of Valea Uzului in Transylvania. Romanian far-right parties, groups, and religious extremists engaged in a physical altercation with the Hungarians present at the cemetery.[38] Simion's skills in staging national victimhood online shows that the Internet is a powerful resource for far-right actors in search of legitimation.

Online Radicalization

The atomized nature of the far-right in a myriad of groupuscules makes their discourses less guided by determined movements' leaders and more by content which is already present in the public digital space. As Joe Mulhall puts it, the social networks and peer-to-peer technologies offer new opportunities to far-right activists. From behind pc-keyboards, anonymous individuals emanate content referable to a plurality of actors and ideologies.[39] In the Baltic and East European area, two recent cases of online extremism have shown that even young users may generate offline far-right terrorism: the cases of Feuerkrieg Division, whose leader was a 13 year-old Estonian, and of Moonkrieg Division, run by a 16 year-old Swede. Via Telegram channels, both terrorist organizations succeeded in recruiting members from Croatia, Lithuania, and other East European countries.[40] According to Pam Nilan, digital media favor the gamification of hate, providing teenagers with a sense of belonging and agency.[41] Even though those lone wolves may not necessarily collaborate directly with bigger groups and organizations, they still contribute to carrying extremist messages further in a less formalized, postorganizational fashion. The Internet settings favor the transnationalization of issues such as anti-immigrant stances and nativist

> 99 The East European far-right groups' online presence, especially on social networks, surpasses that of the Western groups in intensity.

interpretations of the economy,[42] which are still identity and oppositional frames.

Thanks to the self-organized nature of digital online content,[43] different websites favor gradual levels of radicalization in the users.[44] For example, the YouTube software, by suggesting similar channels to the ones followed by the users, involuntarily creates a "radicalization pipeline", moving users towards more extreme content, video after video.[45] That content and the comments added by the users add constructively to discourses which are later accommodated into the oppositional frames of other online actors, as seen with the massive online anti-immigration mobilization during the refugee crisis of 2015, once Generation Identity launched the hashtag #defendeurope, which turned viral across the major social networks.[46]

The East European far-right groups' online presence, especially on social networks, surpasses that of the Western groups in intensity, especially for recruitment and communication.[47] One of the consequences of this trend was the electoral success of Simion's Alliance for the Union of Romanians in December 2020. The success of AUR has shown the power of social networks of reconnecting a composite identity discourse together with violent oppositional frames, carried out by video-political performances streamed on Facebook and Telegram by the aforementioned Simion, in a one-man-show which started under different slogans and campaigns in 2018 and which profited by notable returns from diaspora voters.[48] Similar online one-man-shows are also common and successful in the Baltic space, as recently shown by Rasmus Paludan's party New Right (Denmark), which succeeded in passing the electoral threshold by streaming defamatory speeches and anti-Islamic performances.[49]

Mainstreaming the Far Right

According to Lenka Bustikova, one of the specificities of the East European space is the coexistence of the radical right beside radicalized mainstream parties.[50] Since the 2010s, the Internet has shown its potential for providing support to the mainstream parties' attempts to feed on the content of the far right. These mainstream actors deploy far-right content by the dynamic use of the Internet

Online communication had pivotal relevance in building the "Soros Plot", in which George Soros functions as the core of the oppositional frame. Here the web site of the Hungarian government.

and of more traditional media, in well-designed strategies of political communication. In Hungary, Viktor Orban started to take over the national media in the mid-2010s. At the same time, the number of independent news websites diminished, and several new government-financed ones appeared.[51] Online communication had pivotal relevance in building the "Soros Plot", in which George Soros functions as the core of the oppositional frame. In 2017, Maria Schmidt, professor of history and director of the Budapest's House of Terror, wrote a long, ill-informed, and conspirationist post on the government-sponsored blog Látószög (Viewing Angle). The post accused George Soros of being the puppeteer of several world crises. Even before it was published, state television endorsed the views contained in the blog post.[52] In Hungary, the "Soros Plot" helped Fidesz to steal part of the electorate from the far-right party Jobbik, fueling antisemitism while claiming to oppose it.[53] This plot constructs Soros as a Jew. It associates the Jewish identity with power, wealth, and leftist and liberal ideas and policies. Being fundamentally antisemitic, it is an oppositional frame adaptable to any context at a global level. What originated as an infamous, minutely planned, *ad hominem* electoral campaign with antisemitic tones has become "a globalized, freely available, and adaptable open-source weapon" for right-wing entities.[54] Such conspiracy plots have helped the mainstream parties to cannibalize the far right, but they turned out to be less controllable than anticipated. For example, in Slovakia, Robert Fico took tough stances against immigration, but he succeeded only in normalizing the anti-NATO and anti-EU oppositional frames of the far-right People's Party-Our Slovakia.[55]

These attempts to steal consolidated far-right politics of hate and emotions have succeeded, in some cases, in radicalizing the mainstream parties, while in others they have instilled a sort of political correctness in the far-right parties and movements which aim to expand the range of their voters. For example, the People's Party-Our Slovakia has attempted to clean up its image from the openly fascist and antisemitic rhetoric of the previous decade. However, the Slovakian virtual communities to whom it belongs are part of a segmented galaxy of extreme right websites which support neo-fascism, neo-Nazism and anti-establishment, ethno-nationalist and anti-EU stances.[56] While presenting to the mainstream audience a socially acceptable political instance aimed at reconstructing the national identity in a nationalist narrative,[57] these groups show the unfiltered nature of the far right in the unregulated online environment. In those settings, networking and recruitment are more explicit in tone and ideological content,[58] as also made visible by the explicitly racist online frequentation of some members of the populist radical right parties Conservative People's Party of Estonia[59] and Sweden's Democrats.[60]

Social media have started to take action against these dangerous online presences by targeting the most extreme instances. In 2019, Facebook and Twitter banned the Azov regiment pages, which succeeded in recruiting online at a global level.[61] Despite moving to alternative social networks such as VK[62] and more recently Parler, which represents a safe haven for preserving the far right discourse, the far-right organized entities are conscious that these offer only minor chances of engendering mass mobilization, since they are not mainstream at a European level. For the far right, the importance of mainstream virtual spaces for doubling the discursive opportunities from political correctness to various degrees of extremism becomes evident when looking at the Czech far right's battle against the social networks firms' right to ban content from their platforms.[63]

Conspiracy Theories

While the past is a highly usable weapon in the East European spaces' (online and offline) political struggles, recent global issues are also relevant, and not exclusively for radicalizing mainstream parties. As Mark Fielitz and Holger Marcks state, far-right actors both disseminate fears and use elements of social networks that may catalyze those fears.[64] The far right, beside dividing the past into identity and oppositional frames, weaponiz-

es websites, blogs, social networks and peer-to-peer technologies for presenting mainstream issues through ideological lenses, between identity core values and rejected ones. In this strategy, conspiracy theories serve as oppositional frames. The conspiracy theories permeating the European space present the core of the national and religious identities of Europe and its countries as in danger.[65] Plots in which evil, secret, and unstoppable forces aim at destroying the nation and Christianity are narrative resources that the far right has used regularly throughout its history, as the interwar and wartime propaganda of the European fascist movements against the "Jewish-Bolshevik threat" testifies. As recently pointed out by Roger Griffin, the far right offers something to hate to "individuals experiencing an impoverished or disintegrating reality principle and real or imaginary existential threats".[66] By doing so, the far-right narratives provide them a sense of empowerment, agency, rebirth, and transcendence which favor the individuals' radicalization and mobilization.

> 99 The step from metaphor to promoted hetero-normativity as politics was relatively short.

This is why the circulation of bizarre plots in the digital realm, where these circulate and reproduce easily and quickly, is so dangerous.

Like the "Soros Plot", which was crafted with Orban's Hungary as client but which was later weaponized by other far right actors globally, several other conspiracy theories are presently circulating in the online spaces, crafted locally and readapted on occasion by other actors. In 2019–2020, the conspiracy theory according to whom the 5G communication technology would be an instrument of the "Illuminati" for controlling mankind has been virally disseminated on a global scale and, in the East European region, it found activists who wrote numerous Facebook posts in Romanian, German, Polish, Czech, Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, Slovenian or translated others published in English, Italian, Spanish, and French.[67] East European actors both drew and contributed to such global trends, by translating and reposting relevant content; for example the Moldovan Orthodox Church and the Romanian Academy fell for the 5G oppositional frame and supported the theory on their websites.[68] In Poland, from the web-pages of the anti-Ukrainian and antisemitic portal *Wprawo*, the former Catholic priest and far-right activist Jacek Międlar presented Covid-19 as part of a plan to depopulate the planet ideated by

those who believe in "LGBT, cultural Marxism, [...] pop culture junk or trash from Hollywood".[69] In Slovenia, the far right has linked the 2020 lockdown against Covid-19 with the theory of the "great replacement", according to which NGOs and leftist parties would substitute white people with immigrants.[70] The Slovakian far-right has operated mainly via Facebook for advocating against the use of facemasks, attempting to capitalize on conspiracy theories at the expense of globally-accepted epidemiological best practices, with the result of causing the second Covid-19 wave in the country.[71]

The identity and oppositional frames sketched by these conspiracy theories are not necessarily accepted as a whole by the online audiences of far-right ideas. The audiences pick and choose from repertoires of nostalgic nationalism[72] or by constructing their identity in opposition to various "villains" identified by conspiracy theories which resemble the plot of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*[73] or which are specific to certain national contexts and historical moments.[74] These global conspiracy theories provide new trajectories of radicalization, which contribute to normalizing the oppositional frameworks promoted by the far right, making them more appetible for national audiences. For example, in Hungary, almost half of the population is convinced by the state media that the EU elites favor immigration in order to weaken Europe.[75] In Poland, where far-right groups have professionalized since the 2000s,[76] there is a widespread belief that the online-based conspiracy theories of QAnon, according to which the US, media, and Hollywood elites constitute a global network of pedophiles and Satanists, are true; Q-groups are present also in several European countries, with the risk of growth and radicalization.[77]

From "Gender Ideology" to the Defense of the "Traditional Family"

The previous sections have presented a series of processes by which the far right have attempted to mainstream identity and oppositional frames online, with examples taken from the Baltic and East European countries. Those processes aim at finding scapegoats against whom hate is directed, and at establishing the far right as savior of an imagined nation made of positive values.

In lieu of a conclusion, this section will show that the

far right's play with identity and the transnationalization of hate favored by the Internet have already caused visible offline consequences, namely the practice of exclusionary values against specific groups. To date, the far-right play with identities has succeeded, in the region under consideration, in establishing "LGBT-free zones" in several voivodeships and communes of Poland.

The process of stigmatization and exclusion of LGBT from the public space has a long history rooted in the global far-right attempts to establish a clean, public presentable identity frame and to de-humanize its adversaries in injurious and hateful oppositional frames. In the East European space, gender and sexuality are skillfully weaponized by nationalist politicians. In the region, the discourse has its origin in the clash between the openings of the post-communist times and the rise of an ethnic-nationalist conception of national identity, which favored stability, cohesion and familiar norms in order to maximize predictability in uncertain times.[78] The East European far right started to present LGBT as "the secret weapon of the West" for weakening national identity.[79]

The oppositional frame against LGBT has evolved into a more encompassing discourse against what is called "gender ideology" and the establishing of an identity frame related to the "traditional family". This ideology is presented as a theory that goes against the understanding of sex as a biological category. Targeting the widespread anxieties about homosexuality and gender roles, this frame aims at attacking whoever struggles for gender equality, with politicians, feminist intellectuals, and LGBT activists as main targets. This discourse constitutes a unifying ground for religious, nationalist, and conservative actors, who use it as a shared framework.[80] These actors compare "gender ideology" to Nazism and communism. Basically, they pretend that progressive ideas are crafted by crazy humanists in service of obscure, malevolent elites. According to Ruth Wodak, the far right uses gender politics for advocating for a patriarchal social order under the leadership of white males. These latter are presented as losers of a globalized modernity which would have women and Muslim immigrants as winners.[81]

For the Baltic and East European far right, presenting the nation metaphorically as a family on the brink of disaster served traditionally in order to promote its leader as a savior, either in the shape of a strict father or of a youthful challenger.[82] The step from metaphor to promoted heteronormativity as politics was relatively short. The Internet has provided a megaphone to the far

right's homophobe oppositional frames for a long time. For example, in Ukraine, Svoboda and Right Sector have made wide use of the Internet to present "homosexuality and gender ideology" as a "pervert ideology" forcefully imposed by the European Union.[83] Such views are also shared by nationalists in Czechia, Hungary, Russia, and former Yugoslav-countries.[84] These oppositional frames target LGBT specifically but also include immigrants, Muslims, Jews, and leftist and feminist movements, parties, and intellectuals among the ranks of the "enemies".

The homophobe oppositional frame has favored the creation of a transnational coalition based on an identity frame, that of the "traditional family". Several right-wing parties and state rulers in the mid-2010s provided support to the World Congress of Families (WCF), a US-based organization aimed at fostering homophobia and transphobia under the guise of protecting the "traditional family". Thanks to its linkages to various churches (the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches of Russia and some of the East European countries' Orthodox churches), to semi-authoritarian regimes and illiberal democracies (Putin's Russia, but also the ruling Law and Order party in Poland and Fidesz in Hungary), and to several European right-wing politicians, the presence of WCF in the East European space has grown steadily in the last five years. The massive presence of several far-right actors in each national online space (linguistically speaking) has guaranteed the mainstreaming of homophobe intolerance. Beside the English-language *Citizens Go* petitions website, which is financed by Russian and European institutional and private actors, several right-wing-run "coalitions for the family" exist throughout Europe; they are, invariably, set up by far-right organizations.[85]

Although far-right attempts to forbid civil unions throughout the region have partially failed (like the referendum held in Romania in 2018), homophobia became normalized and very soon LGBT events started to be boycotted and banned locally.[86] In Russia, an "anti-gay propaganda" law exists since 2013; in Hungary, an anti-LGBT law was passed in 2021. Key instrument of the spreading of this oppositional frame was the Internet, which favored the mobilization of anonymous individuals in a counterculture made of, according to Agnieska Graaf, "sharing the same videos on social media, signing the same online petitions, and 'liking' coverage of similar protests in various countries: against gay marriage, against abortion rights, against 'gender ideology,' against 'political correctness'."[87]

Essay

The most enduring offline consequences of these exclusionary and hateful identity politics are presently visible in Poland, with the near-total ban on abortion enforced since 2021 and the establishing of "LGBT-free zones". Particularly, in reference to the case of the "LGBT-free zones", the Internet shows its potential for local mobilization: the ultra-conservative Catholic organization Ordo Iuris, that is the main promoter of "LGBT-free zones", has uploaded on its website a "Charter" with a declaration of principle ready to be subscribed by the Polish local and regional authorities who wished to "strengthen [...] the family as a basic social community, and [to] ensur[e] its protection against influences of the ideologies that undermine its autonomy and identity."[88] The ideological proclamation, provided with a fillable form, was available on the Internet. It required only few steps to pass from radicalization to mobilization. At present, about one third of Poland's municipalities and voivodships have endorsed the "Charter" and enforced "LGBT-free zones".[89] Beside the national abortion ban, these zones are the most visible sign so far of the success of far-right oppositional and identity frames in the Baltic and East European area, and the clearest explanation of where the national identities promoted by the far right wish to lead Europe. ●

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Essay

The Illiberal Polypore State and Its Science Policy

by **Andrea Pető**

Tucker Carlson, the face of the pro-Trump US media, visited Hungary for a considerable fee as he charges USD 70 000 for one public appearance.[1] Even he, a very experienced US media personality, confessed about this overseas summer trip that "This is by far the weirdest thing I've ever done". Among the "weird things" were several trips in a Hungarian state military helicopter and while his interview with Viktor Orbán was fully available on *Fox News*, the Prime Minister's Office omitted two sections of the transcript from the written version prepared for journalists.[2] How they imagined that they can trick journalists in the era of internet access is unclear, but it is clear that the two omissions, later retweeted after the *New York Times* journalist's Twitter post, speaks volumes about the new far right and its modus operandi. In the first omitted quote, Carlson complained that Xi Jinping, who according to him is notorious as he had many of his political opponents killed, is not called a totalitarian gangster as Orbán is by President Biden. The other omitted quote was when Orbán in his response questioned whether Joe Biden, who does not speak Hungarian, can possibly know anything about Hungary. There is nothing

new in the certain media outlets omitting or changing content to suit their own temporary interests. What is new is that it illustrates precisely this total disregard for values but a strong will to power. How to explain this assemblage of values and communication tactics? In order to respond to this, I analyze a rarely analyzed field of illiberal politics, namely science policy, in order to present a new theoretical framework which can be applied to other policy fields.

Case study.
The Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC)

The institution which invited Carlson was the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC), founded in 1996 in Budapest by András Tombor, one of the FIDESZ (Alliance of Young Democrats) oligarchs, during the left-liberal government. As a founding member of FIDESZ, Tombor was deeply disappointed by his party's 1994 electoral loss to the former communist party, MSZP; therefore, he decided to use the wealth he had accumulated during the first FIDESZ government to prepare for the next election. His idea was to copy the very successful educational system of colleges of advanced studies. These

Werner Patzelt was hired by Mathias Corvinus Collegium, after a controversy with his faculty in Dresden.   PHOTO: MCC.HU

small tertiary institutions were set up in the 1930s by founders of Hungarian sociography and writers who exposed the misery of the Hungarian peasantry, creating institutionalized channels to social mobility for a select talented few. These institutions received government support in the late 1930s, when social differences were increasingly addressed by the far right.[3] The colleges at first bore their founder's name, but after 1945 Győrffy Colleges were renamed People's Colleges and continued to train a new elite according to the ethos of the new leftist culture of egalitarian knowledge production. This latter aim necessarily conflicted with the country's Stalinization and was banned in 1949. It was no accident that the revival of these colleges was only possible because of funding and political support from Júlia Rajk, the widow of the first victim of the show trials in Hungary in 1956.[4] During the Kádár regime these colleges were affiliated with different universities to train future elites from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The founders of FIDESZ, who had also come from the provinces to study law at ELTE (Eötvös Loránd University) in Budapest, were trained in the Specialized College named after István Bibó (1911–1979), a legendary legal scholar and minister during the 1956 revolution. During the Kádár regime, the Specialized College offered affordable accommodation, meals, a generous stipend, and extra tuition. Tombor invested in this educational enterprise, having learned from his own experience that the institutional systems of a previous political order often serve as cradles of a new political system training a new elite. His investment was well spent, as in 1999, during the first

FIDESZ administration (1998–2002), the government donated the lavish former headquarters of the Workers' Militia (*munkásőrség*), founded in 1956, to MCC in the Buda Hills. Since that moment, MCC has received millions in donations from various foreign donors, including the German Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.[5]

Today, none of the 16 young or at most middle-aged all-male faculty listed on MCC's flashy webpage has produced any considerable academic publication or earned distinction, or even reached an h-index higher than 1.[6] This list of faculty, with its very low level of academic authorization, is even more peculiar than the situation during Communism, when teaching in these colleges of advanced studies was an honor and only the crème de la crème were invited to teach there. Now, as part of the internationalization of this institution, MCC not only invited Carlson but also has hired former Technical University Dresden faculty Werner Patzelt, who lost his position because of his close connection to PEGIDA.[7] After 1989 and the neoliberalization and impoverishment of the state educational system, this system of specialized colleges was considered a haven for intellectual work.[8] The colleges had little chance of attracting lavish financing, but they radiated intellectual excellence and elitism, which for a while counterbalanced material poverty with prestige and academic authority. However, by 2020 MCC was receiving exactly as much state financial support as the whole of Hungarian higher education and with an endowment rivaling that of the University of Oxford.[9] The MCC is just one example of the institutions that make up today's Hungarian illiberal scientific landscape, which at first glance look like scholarly institutions but in fact do not operate as such. MCC started as a small, elite educational institution and was transformed into the flagship of illiberal science policy. Using MCC as an example, this article aims to unpack why and how illiberal governments are setting up these institutions, and what constitutes their novel relationship to science.

Previous Explanations. The Emergence of Illiberal States

In the past decade, political scientists, sociologists, and economists have mapped and analyzed the emergence of illiberal states, focusing especially on how illiberal states managed to curtail media freedoms, normalize corruption, eliminate free markets and competition, replace personnel in the legal system, and rewrite constitutions and electoral laws.[10] But even though policymakers were

warned as early as 2016 that "the legal protection of the right to academic freedom in Europe appears to be in a state of 'ill health',"[11] little attention has been paid to science policy in illiberal states. The lack of attention is partly due to specificities of science policy elaborated below.

First, as science policy is a national competency, the analytical frameworks are connected to the national frame. The national framing of research very often prevents researchers who track and analyze transnational policy transfer from controlling the humanities/social sciences in Brazil, Russia, Greece, Turkey, Slovenia, France, Hungary, Romania, and Serbia.[12] Therefore human rights watchdog organizations like Freedom House monitor developments and publish reports relating to academic freedom, defined as freedom for teaching and research, autonomy, shared governance, and employment protection.[13] Missing from this list is academic authorization, which in fact is a constitutive element of academic freedom. These three present fields of academic freedom are difficult to measure and sometimes overlap with other issues. Thus, science policy does not rank high among the preferred topics handled by various human rights watchdog organizations, and violations of human rights in fields like the media or the economy are more likely to be featured prominently than very complicated cases that look individual but produce results that actually show how institutions work.

Second, science policy is also international. Internationalization of higher education is usually portrayed as a positive development and a necessary teleological process. When joined to neoliberal marketization, however, internationalization allows illiberal regimes to extend their influence and transfer their practices to liberal democracies.[14]

Science and academic research are very similar to Covid, in the sense that it is a transnational activity. No matter that one keeps the national environment controlled, if not the spread from the outside is controlled as there are several interactions. The basis of science is trust in standards: if a result is flawed then it might take millions of research money to correct that mistake. A

> **The MCC is just one example of the institutions that make up today's Hungarian illiberal scientific landscape, which at first glance look like scholarly institutions but in fact do not operate as such.**

recent article uncovered that the plagiarized works by Elena Ceausescu (the wife to Nicolae Ceausescu) is still quoted as the research were not done by the person who was listed as the author.[15] What happens in Hungarian academy also concern Europe and the world. Different European countries are hosting and sending Hungarian researchers and students in different frameworks: Erasmus, CEEPUS, and Hungary also sends researchers and students to abroad. The knowledge they are bringing in cannot be trusted as the quality control is nonfunctional. The fraud system infects the higher education system of other countries as they are unprepared for this type of fraud as the results cannot be trusted. That will cause millions of euros in the higher education and research.

Science policy has been discussed as a site where different illiberal polices are manifest, but not as a separate field.[16] The rapid spread of illiberal science policies, such as closing accredited study programs and research institutions, privatizing higher education, appointing university leaders based on their loyalty to the government, ignoring quality assurance, etc. demands not only reaction but also critical analysis.

In this article I claim that science policy, as a national competency with an international character, is especially suited to spearhead illiberalization efforts because it offers something no other policy field can offer: academic authorization. Via academic authorization, science policy secures the legitimacy of all other illiberal states' activities. Illiberal politicians and oligarchs like Tombor recognized the importance of educational institutions as sites of knowledge production and transfer, training of loyal supporters, academic authorization, and dissemination of ideas abroad. Illiberal spin doctors have similarly acknowledged that the academic authority granted by these organizations is necessary not only to legitimize their ideological agenda, but more importantly, to secure employment for loyal supporters who will train further loyal supporters, who will then take over existing educational and research institutions. In their communications, evidence-based policymaking has been the basis of governance. Illiberal politics also refer to surveys and research conducted by experts, with the difference that

CEU, Central European University, is now seated in Vienna. Here the port to CEU in Budapest, before the move (2008).
PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

the surveys do not meet academic standards and boast neither authorization from academic institutions nor measurable scientific achievements.[17]

This process of illiberal takeover of (neo)liberal academia is portrayed as an ideological struggle between ideological opponents. A similar example though vice versa is what happened to East Germany's ideologically driven communist academia when it was taken over by (neo)liberal West German academics. To reach their planned hegemonic position, illiberal Hungarian actors applied several strategies that differed from those used during West German academia's takeover of East German academia after 1989. Back then in united Germany, "integration through cooperation" was the process applied in a paradigm change in which the social definition of academic credentials was a consideration.[18] Hungary's illiberal transformation started as early as 2011 and supposedly served to enhance efficiency when the Higher Education Act gave the minister in charge of higher education the right to appoint university rectors. The chancellor system implemented in 2015 relies on chancellors appointed by the Prime Minister who are responsible for administration, finance, and management. The rectors are responsible for academic issues. It also created new, five-members executive boards that may veto most substantial financial and administrative decisions at universities.[19]

Very recently, four disturbing and interrelated events took place in Hungary. First, the Hungarian state nationalized and centralized the research institutes of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) following the Russian model of institutional reform. The leadership of HAS had 54 minutes to review the proposal.[20] Second, it forced the Central European University into political exile from one European Union country to another.[21] Third, the Hungarian government proposed a decree that deleted an accredited, well-performing two-year MA program in gender studies with consistently high enrollment and excellent placement records from the accredited study list.[22] Fourth, the largest universities and all their assets have been transferred to private foundations. Not only have they lost their autonomy, but appointments in these intuitions no longer follow the previous procedure regulated by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. Now that the universities have transformed their institutional structure, everything depends on the rector, who is deployed by the government and appointed to different academic positions. Previous academic credentials are not needed or valued and have even raised suspicions of disloyalty. However, given recent acts in Hungary and elsewhere – like closing the Institute of Philosophy in Belgrade and the European University in St. Petersburg, or appointing Erdogan's friend as president of Bogazici University – analysis of science policy in the illiberal states is imperative.[23]

Previous Analytical Frames. The Science Policy of Illiberal Regimes

As I argue in this article, there are several misleading approaches to understanding these fundamentally new developments in the science policy of illiberal regimes.

The first approach considers the science policy of illiberal states as a mere temporary institutional backlash,

The Budapest seat of HAS (Hungarian Academy of Science) on the bank of Danube.
PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

easily reverted by good policies and institution build-ing.[24] This argument is based on belief that returning to a business-as-usual situation is possible. I will argue that the institutional transformation is so profound that a simple reversion to the "good old times" is impossible. The recent privatization in Hungary requires a two-thirds majority of MPs' votes, a requirement which can only be changed by laws, so the divided opposition is unlikely to get electoral support any time soon. More importantly, there are no "good old times" of science policy to return to because the neoliberalization of the academic landscape has already fundamentally changed scientific knowledge production and communication. Over-bureaucratized neoliberal universities and their impact factor-driven, conveyor belt-style mass teaching is suitable for many things, but they are no longer able to produce responsible, critical thinkers.[25] I will argue later that this problematic development is ruthlessly exploited by illiberal forces that are hacking the quality assurance system on the one hand while delegitimizing the quality assurance system itself by labeling it an ideo-logical institution aiming to import foreign influence to oppress "real patriots" on the other.

The second explanatory frame simply resorts to historical analogies of Nazi Germany and the So-viet Union, along with the warmed-over authoritarian paradigm for explaining illiberal science policy.[26] This approach centers mainly on the relationship between the state and the researchers, which allegedly explains the impact of the state's punitive measures regarding self-censorship and the conformity of researchers, as well as state's deleterious impact on the quality of scientific work. The gravity of such punitive measures var-ies from Turkey to Hungary. Scholars are being jailed in Turkey, but nobody has even been fired yet in Hungary. Lessons learned from these examples discourage any form of organized resistance. As a political consequence, the explanatory framework based on historical analogy creates in the individual a feeling of hopelessness against an overpow-ering state that is meanwhile shifting responsibility for resistance onto individuals. Another danger arises from the use of the argument of historical path dependency and location of illiberal policies in the "East" alone, thus Orientalizing the countries of the East as the only prob-lematic countries and denying that this is a global phe-nomenon. The phenomenon as such is appropriating and hijacking academic authority in nearly every country but given the variance among countries, the hijacking itself also differs, depending on what strategy the state actors apply. In Russia, the whole academic system has been taken over, from recruitment of academics to censorship of educational content to personal processes of awarding degrees.[27]

The third unsatisfying explanatory framework advo-cates for scientific objectivity and places science out-side the realm of politics. This approach relies on the individual morality of scientists – who according to this framework work in ivory towers – and regards illiberal science policies as ordinary arrangements that will pass eventually. Such was the attitude toward colleges of ad-vanced studies as privileged spaces of intellectual work. The false assumption that "real" science is objective and has its own rules outside everyday political struggles originates from the positivism of the 19th-century hope of drawing a line between the good "real" science and the bad "troll" science.[28] This approach positions "real" science outside of market forces and thereby paved the way to the illiberal takeover, which ruthlessly applied the concept of "situated knowledges"[29] wherein "science is a contestable text and a power field" by

which to discredit previous institutions and results of knowledge production.

The three assumptions discussed so far are based on the false premise that illiberal states have *not* implemented a science policy distinct from that of the mainstream or previous authoritarian regimes. The problem with these approaches is that they cannot explain the long-term impact that science policy has had on academic authority: if the state supports the "troll science" with taxpayers' money and all its quality assurance institutions are based on institutions and systems of academic authority, "troll science" becomes "real science."

I argue that another explanatory framework – the illiberal polypore state – is needed to recognize the global danger illiberal states pose to science via changes in academic authorization processes. Illiberal polypore science policy[30] is hard to recognize as something new because it is hard to differentiate illiberal actors' vocabulary from that of neoliberal science policy. In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, other European countries hoped to resolve the structural crisis by applying increasingly absurd solutions to Hungary's so-called unorthodox policies. This shows how dangerously quickly national cases can set examples for other countries. Science institutions and actors are globally connected, so transfers between them happen quicker than before. Measures introduced by illiberal states, such as the imposition of direct control over universities' finances, deletion of previously accredited study programs, or invention of new disciplines were first tested in Hungarian laboratories and now are in use in other countries.[31]

A New Analytical Framework: Polypore Science

George Mosse, in his oft-quoted *Masses and Man*, described fascism as an "amoeba-like absorption of ideas from the mainstream of popular thought and culture, countered by the urge towards activism and taming," along with a ruthless dismantling of the liberal parliamentary order.[32] Here he was referring to the inadequate political response to radicalization of the mainstream in interwar Europe. For the past decade, political sci-

entists have at great length discussed terminology that helps us understand recent developments in countries as different as Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Brazil, the US, and Turkey: mafia state, hybrid state, autocratic legalism, constitutional authoritarianism, etc.[33] Like Weronika Grzebalska, we call these states *illiberal polypore states,* based on their common modus operandi.[34] The polypore is a parasitic pore fungus that lives on wood and produces nothing but more polypores. Unlike political scientists who admire the effectiveness of these states,[35] we argue that polypore states do not have original ideas; rather, they take the ideas of others and use them for their own purpose: self-maintenance. Past authoritarian regimes took over existing scientific institutions and transformed them into explicitly ideological institutions such as research institutes of Communist Party history or race hygiene. By contrast, polypore institutions mask themselves as "real" institutions, i.e. as "one of them."

> " Not since 1945 have scientists in European academic culture been threatened, e.g. listed as enemies of the nation on the front pages of newspapers or physically attacked at an academic conference.

Scrutiny of the political framework of the illiberal polypore state helps boost our understanding of how awareness of threats can alter university education and scientific work. Hungary's FIDESZ-KDNP (Christian Democratic Party) government has recently established a novel state form; i.e. a new quality of governance that is dangerous because it attempts to dismantle the notion that research and education are public goods and human rights. The institutional system should mitigate this illiberal threat by protecting educators and researchers who are exercising their human rights to do science while creating public goods.

I argue against perceiving illiberalism as a revival of authoritarianism and in favor of seeing it as a new form of governance founded on and instrumentalizing previous democratic concepts and institutions – one that can be better understood by going beyond routine comparative analyses of political systems along the East-West divide to instead trace gradual sociopolitical developments in these countries and position them in the context of broader global processes. Post-communist democracies have their own sociohistorical legacies, and the fact that illiberal tendencies extend throughout Europe suggests that they should rather be viewed as local symptoms of

structural failures of the European (neo)liberal democratic project.

In terms of its *modus operandi*, an illiberal regime can best be understood as a polypore state: a parasitic organism that feeds on its host's vital resources while also contributing to its decay, producing only a fully dependent state structure in return. On the one hand, illiberal "polyporism" involves exploitation and appropriation of various aspects of the European liberal democratic project, e.g. institutions, procedures, concepts, and funding opportunities. On the other hand, polyporism involves the illiberal regime's divestiture of resources from those it regards as beneficiaries of the "corrupt liberal post-communist system" – i.e. the already existing human rights and civil society sector – in order to transfer those resources to its own base, securing and enlarging it. Moreover, unlike Mosse's amoeba, which has an existence and economy of its own, the polypore usually attacks already damaged trees; hence, illiberal forces typically rise to power in the context of weak state institutions, weak and divided progressive parties and a failing liberal democratic project. In the case of science policy, an already weakened and underfunded higher education and research infrastructure is easy prey for illiberal forces. The polypore state incorporates far-right extremism to legitimize and maintain the very existence of the polypore, whose only source of livelihood is the life energy and ideas that stem from the tree under attack. Therefore, it is in the polypore's vital interest to keep the tree alive by using its resources and structures – institutions of academic authorization among them. These institutions see keeping the tree alive as an entry ticket to EU funding. This EU funding does not come from traditional research funding schemes like the ERC (European Research Council), where Hungarian researchers are not competitive, but rather from other funds like the Structural Fund. In the case of science policy, the illiberal polypore institution uses vocabulary appropriated from neoliberal science policy up to a certain and controlled limit to describe its endeavors, thereby legitimizing its own existence while using the available resources to develop its own clientele and network.

The above-mentioned article by Grzebalska and Pető defines three functional characteristics of the polypore state: the establishment of parallel institutions, familism, and a security discourse, all of them gendered. The illiberal FIDESZ government regularly presents policy-related questions as security questions. According to its rhetoric, a vigilant government will defeat the threats posed by the EU, the UN, migrants, gender studies professionals, George Soros, etc. The security discourse also affects narratives concerning science policies. It has become routine to call enemies "enemies of the nation" and to personally intimidate scientists who disagree with government policies.[36] In its public discourse, the state securitizes all possible aspects of life and policy areas, e.g. portraying gender studies and critical intellectuals as threats.[37]

Members of the scientific professions were totally unprepared for the vicious personal attacks that have become the new normal in illiberal states. Not since 1945 have scientists in European academic culture been threatened, e.g. listed as enemies of the nation on the front pages of newspapers or physically attacked at an academic conference. No longer is this the case, it seems. Scientists nowadays have found themselves subject to physical, psychological, and financial attacks.[38] Government-sponsored newspapers habitually publish lists naming academics as enemies of the nation. Scholars have been singled out for "public targeted harassment" that the police refuse to investigate.[39] This creates a dangerous climate, not just because it is in harmony with the functioning of the polypore state but also because it diverts attention and energy from really important matters and delegitimizes academic actors.

A second functional characteristic is the ideology of *familism*, "a complex term which refers to a special *social condition* (or set of social conditions) and also to a particular *ideology* (though not of course in a strictly political sense).[40] State policies support only men from selected, mostly middle-class families – not women, which also means that state policies consciously ignore the value of gender equality. This disregard presents serious consequences for science policies as far as women's participation is concerned. Anti–gender studies movements and hate speech have appeared, aiming to challenge the political and scientific legitimacy of gender equality and science. It is no surprise that the newly privatized Hungarian higher education was declared "gender ideology-free".[41]

The third functional characteristic, and the one most relevant to academic knowledge production, is the founding and funding of new research and teaching institutions bearing the same profile as the already existing ones, as seen in the introductory case of the MCC. This direct intervention is creating a new phenomenon: polypore science.

Essay

The difficulty lies in understanding the rise of illiberal science policy in Hungary, as it is a twofold case study in both polypore government control/state capture, and neoliberal marketization of higher education. In the European context, the main actors used to be state-financed actors. Now, however, the neoliberalization of academia has opened scientific knowledge production up to corporations, which are interested solely in their own profit,[42] as is also true of illiberal actors. This combination of state capture and profit-making for the few also makes for a unique, deeply influential situation with long-lasting consequences for the creation, protection, and transfer of academic authority.

Conclusions

Following the developments in Hungary and elsewhere, the take-over of science in illiberal states happened without considerable resistance except the mass demonstration supporting CEU in Hungary with 80 000 participants.[43] At the moment, "educated acquiescence" offers more benefits than resistance does.[44] There is the question of the existence – or rather, non-existence – of the institutional mechanisms that help mostly young and middle-aged academics who refuse to collaborate and instead resist the existential pressure of impoverishment and lack of research and travel grants. The institutional system for helping scholars at political risk is based on a model developed during the Second World War. It relies on the assumption that the period of exile from academia will only last a few years and that scholars will then return to their countries to continue their work. This will not be the case with polypore academia because of the fundamental transformation of institutional and evaluation systems. This lost generation of scholars – or, as they have been called since the Open Society Institute and Central European University left Hungary, the "left-behind academics" – will not produce books or journal articles. In the long run they cannot get access to resources because the polypore state swallows them all. If they emigrate, their access to academic jobs in the notoriously difficult academic job market will apply only in exceptional circumstances. Therefore, the crucial question is what the representatives of polypore institutions will meet with: appeasement in the European context once they bring lavish financial state support into the proposed cooperation, or rejection and despair. If the latter is the case, then the polypore will quite possibly infect other institutions with its Machiavellian approach to values and morals sooner rather than later. That is

why mapping the modus operandi (parallel institutions, familism, and securitization) of science policy in illiberal states is helpful: it explains why and how these institutions mask political authority as academic authority. The process leaves no space for independence and free thinking, even though at first sight the academic institutions and authorization system look like those in any other country. But once the essence and content of academic research are removed, these institutions present the onlooker with only hollow copies of academic institutions – like those shown in the case of the MCC, which operates under academic authorization that is neither academic nor authorization. This is an important lesson for higher educational institutions in Europe and it is not a surprise that Carlson called his visit to Hungary his "weirdest experience". ●

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The Far-Right Ukrainian Diaspora's Policing of History

by **Per Anders Rudling**

Recent years have seen an increase in the instrumental use of history. In several societies in the region historians working on topics involving the far right, political violence, and collaboration in the Holocaust face increasing political pressure from state and non-governmental actors. To some extent this is linked to the deteriorating security situation in the Baltic Sea region following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent fundamental challenge to the security order established through the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 on the inviolability of borders.

This trend is most evident in the region's non-democracies. The situation is most acute in Belarus, where the authorities have cracked down upon all forms of dissent following the falsified 2020 elections and where several prominent historians and publishers have been detained and abused by the authorities. At the time of writing, human rights group *Viasna* lists 882 political prisoners in Belarus.[1] In the Russian Federation today there are 420 documented political prisoners, and repressions against critical scholars is increasing.[2] In December 2021, the human rights organization *Memorial* was banned as a "foreign agent."[3] Democracy is, however, in retreat also in other states in the region. According to the interdisciplinary research project Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) at the University of Gothenburg, Poland has

seen the most rapid decline in the Liberal Democracy Index globally, between 2010 and 2020.[4]

A recent illustration of this problem concerns litigation against historians Jan Grabowski and Barbara Engelking for statements made in the context of their research,[5] initiated by government-funded NGOs such as The Institute to Combat Anti-Polonism Verba Vitatis and Redoubt of Defense of the Good Name of the Polish Nation, the missions of which include reporting journalists thought to have "slandered the good name of the nation," to the authorities.[6] In regard to academic freedom, Poland has the third lowest score in the EU, ahead only of Hungary and Bulgaria.

Academic freedom in Ukraine is considerably lower still.[7] In 2015, inquiry into local perpetration in the Holocaust was further complicated by the criminalization of "disrespect" for a whole set of Ukrainian far-right groups and individuals with a legacy of ethnic cleansing and collaboration with Nazi Germany.[8] The Ukrainian memory law 2538-1 is not limited to policing the discourse in Ukraine, but explicitly designated to apply worldwide, "to citizens of all states and stateless people."[9] At the bottom of these recurrent conflicts lies the absence of an *Aufarbeitung* of the history of Ukrainian nationalism. In particular, the role of the dominant Ukrainian far-right group, the Bandera wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and its armed branch, the Ukrainian

Insurgent Army, in political violence aimed against Jews and Poles remains the rawest of nerves.[10] In Ukraine, books on sensitive historical topics, including by people as far afield as Swedish journalist Anders Rydell (b. 1982) and British historian Anthony Beevor (b. 1946), have been banned, under the pretext that they do not present Ukrainian nationalists in accordance with legislated history.[11] This phenomenon has increasingly worried the scholarly community, and resulted in open letters of concern from academics around the world.[12] Moreover, the *Geschichtspolitik* pursued under Yushchenko and Poroshenko, with the rehabilitation of far-right groups involved in substantial anti-Jewish and anti-Polish violence, has also marred Ukraine's relations with its neighbors. In response to the rehabilitation of the OUN(b) and UPA, Poland in 2016 recognized the massacres of the Polish minority in Volhynia in 1943 as an act of genocide and declared the OUN(b)-affiliated director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory *persona non grata* in Poland.[13]

> " The Ukrainian memory law 2538-1 is not limited to policing the discourse in Ukraine, but explicitly designated to apply worldwide.

Long-Distance Nationalist Far Right

There is an emerging literature on the instrumentalization of the past in several post-socialist states.[14] The role of radical long-distance nationalist groups in the field of identity politics has, to date, received considerably less attention from the scholarly community.[15] This essay is a case study of one such group, the Toronto-based League of Ukrainian Canadians (LUC), and its attempts at policing Ukrainian "national memory" beyond the borders of Ukraine. This article seeks to answer a set of research questions: How does the authoritarian, hard right core of the Ukrainian long-distance nationalist community go about policing "national memory"? This inquiry into Ukrainian long-distance nationalist memory culture aims at illuminating phenomena applicable beyond the field of Ukrainian studies – and Canada.

The OUN

In order to understand the context of these controversies, some background is needed.

The clandestine, conspiratorial and strictly hierarchial Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists has its roots in interwar Poland. The principles of the explicitly totali-

tarian political group were formulated as the *Ten Commandments of the Ukrainian Nationalists* by Stepan Lenkavs'kyi (1904–1977) in 1929. The so-called "decalogue" has to be learned by heart by its members and contains commandments such as: "Treat the enemies of Your Nation with hate and perfidy," "Do not hesitate to commit the greatest crime, if the good of the Cause demands it."[16]

After the war, OUN militants found themselves as stateless Displaced Persons (DPs) in the US and British zones of occupied Germany. According to OUN(b) ideology, military violence was regarded a means in the Darwinist struggle of nations, and they placed their hope for a return in a World War III between the West and the USSR.[17] In the British Zone the UNRRA team regarded the OUN fractions in the DP camps as dangerous, sounding the alarm that the Banderite youth league SUM (Ukrainian Youth Association, Ukr: Spil'ka ukrains'koi molodi) was "endeavoring to create a small army on its own after the style of the Hitler Youth." SUM cadres in the DP camps took part in military exercises, including target shooting with small arms and hoarding hand grenades, firearms, and ammunition.[18] In the US occupation zone of Germany, more than a hundred Ukrainian political opponents were killed by the SB (Ukr: *Sluzhba Bezpeky*), the security service of the OUN(b).[19]

Ideologically, the OUN(b) represented a highly radical current form of Ukrainian nationalism. In his book *Muscovite Poison*, the "spiritual father" of Ukrainian ultranationalism, Dmytro Dontsov (1883–1973) made a passionate call for the total destruction of Muscovite evil and all traitors in the West: "Ukraine and the whole Western world can challenge those Muscovite schemes only after uprooting the influence of Muscovite ideological poison and its propagators from their own ranks, from within the social organism of the West."[20] Dontsov called for emotionality, fanaticism, amorality, demanding heroism and rejuvenation of the Ukrainian fighting spirit while rejecting as "castrates" believers in the ideals of the enlightenment.[21]

Canada became a prime destination for Ukrainian post-war émigrés. Centered in the Toronto area, the OUN(b) pursued an utterly militant political line. That organization was a prominent, indeed dominant ele-

ment among the strongly nationalist post-war wave of Ukrainian immigrants from the formerly Polish eastern borderlands.[22] Geographer and activist Lubomyr Luciuk (b. 1953), raised himself in the OUN(b) tradition, notes that "the refugees, particularly its military nationalistic pitch, reflect an ideology which had been further cultivated within the DP camps and subsequently exported as part of the cultural baggage the refugees brought with them to Canada."[23]

December 15, 1948 saw the first issue of the Canadian Banderites' paper *Homin Ukrainy*, which Luciuk characterizes as "an unflagging advocate of revolutionary nationalist principles."[24] On May 1, 1949, the League for the Liberation of Ukraine, (Ukr: *Liha vyzvalennia Ukrainy*, LVU, colloquially *League*, or *Liha*), since 1993 the League of Ukrainian Canadians (Ukr: *Liga ukrains'kykh kanadiitsiv*) was founded "by participants of the liberation struggle, who, [...] understanding the needs for its continuation on the native lands and in Canada by all possible means, united in emigration for the purpose to continue and widen the struggle for a Ukrainian State. From day one, LUK was at the vanguard of the so-called Second Front of struggle organized by the Ukrainian community in Canada".[25] The LVU joined two international umbrella organizations, the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN) and the World Anti-Communist League.[26]

> **"** Canada became a prime destination for Ukrainian post-war émigrés.

During its first decade in Canada, many of the OUN(b)'s policies were conducted in isolation from Canadian society, but also from Ukrainian groups of immigrants from previous waves. While the pre-WW II immigrants had assimilated into the Canadian mainstream, the political immigrants proudly refused. So great was the gap in political culture between the nationalist militants and the Canadian mainstream that they regarded it as futile to try to persuade the larger society, even previous waves of Ukrainian immigrants to Canada, about their militant cause:

> **There was no need, or time, they argued, to try to educate Ukrainian Canadians about the contemporary Ukrainian national liberation movement. For advocates of this viewpoint, it was more important that the League support the creation of 'military cadres' to draw in the younger people of the DP immigration to prepare them for a return on short notice to the homeland. There they would participate in the war of liberation which many League leaders felt was imminent.[27]**

The Vanguard

For the far right, operating in an open, democratic, and pluralistic society such as Cold War Canada was quite different from its activities in authoritarian inter-war Europe. The revolutionary nationalists' Leninist mode of organization is reflected in LUC's slogan: *V Avangardi Ukrains'koi Spravy* – [In the Vanguard of the Ukrainian Issue][28] From the late 1950s onwards, the OUN(b) sought to take over community organizations, presenting itself as speaking for "the community," even "Ukrainians."[29] Its fronts practice entryism, seeking to take control over, and speak in the name of, larger organizations, a practice otherwise primarily associated with the Trotskyite far left. While Ukrainian Canadians of previous waves of immigration were troubled by the OUN(b)'s "conspiratorial" methods and wanted them to adopt "Canadian" and "democratic" characteristics, Luciuk argues "It may appear naïve in hindsight [...] to have asked recently resettled DPs to give up their behavior."[30]

In Canada there were clashes, "fitful incidents of open warfare between the pro-Soviets and nationalists within the Ukrainian community in Canada" taking place across the country: in Winnipeg, Sudbury, Kingston, Vancouver, and Timmins. The violence peaked on October 8, 1950, with the bombing of the Ukrainian Labor Temple in Toronto.[31]

From 1949 the US government distanced itself from the OUN(b), opposing letting its top leaders entering the US and Canada, instructing its broadcasters, such as Radio Liberty and Voice of America, to ignore the militants.[32] Instead, the CIA supported a small revisionist splinter group of the OUN under Mykola Lebed (1909–1998).[33] Canadian authorities expressed concerns about Yaroslav Stets'ko (1912–1986), the leader of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN) – a multi-nationalist OUN(b) front organization bringing together East European authoritarian nationalists – and from 1968 until his death the OUN(b) itself. The Canadians were troubled by him "preaching the inevitablity" of war with the USSR and his calls for its dissolution into a galaxy of successor states.[34] Instead, the OUN(b) cultivated close

Hon. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, keynote speaker at ABN and CNW Jubilee in U.S. Congress and Hon. Yaroslav Stetsko.

To the Honorable Yaroslav Stetsko with Best wishes Gry Bush

The Reagan administration had contacts with far-right anti-communist exile groups, such as the ABN (Figure 1) In 1983, Reagan and Bush received Mr. and Mrs. Stets'ko in the White House. (Figure 2).

relations with Franco's Spain and Chang Kai-shek's Taiwan through the ABN, which it had established in 1946.[35]

> **Without dogmatic faith in our truth, as an absolute truth, we will not be victorious, Stets'ko thundered:**
>
> **In the face of the horrific, satanic assault forces of the enemy with thermo-nuclear weapons, the people, in particular the youth, knows how to behave only with faith in our Kyiv as the center of noble ideas, in St. Sophia, in our heroic and undefeated people, with a flaming hatred of Russia as the incarnation of evil.**[36]

In 1968, the IV Congress of the OUN(b) adopted the slogan "Kyiv against Moscow!"[37] To this day, the militants perceive the world in terms of a Manichean struggle between good and evil, literally a struggle against Satan.[38]

In the post-war boom years, many Ukrainians entered the growing Canadian suburban middle class. Historian Orest Subtelnyi argued that "Because many Ukrainians profited from Toronto's remarkable economic upsurge, its Ukrainian community became known as not only one of the largest, but also the most active and wealthiest in North America. Indeed, by the 1980s, it laid claim to being the informal capital of the Ukrainian diaspora."[39]

Around this time, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the end of détente and the election of Reagan, human rights discourse was replaced with *Realpolitik* as the new administration reaffirmed US alliances with authoritarian anti-communists across the "third world." Reagan's ambassador to the UN, Jeanne Kirkpatrick (1926–2006), argued that a distinction needed to be made between "totalitarian regimes," by which she meant communist regimes, which she regarded as unreformable – and "authoritarian governments," which, she reasoned, had a potential to develop into democracies. This view, that authoritarian states were preferable to totalitarian ones, and that the US ought to therefore support friendly authoritarian regimes, became known as the "Kirkpatrick Doctrine."[40] Subsequently, the Reagan administration opened up for friendlier relations to authoritarian regimes in places like Haiti, South Korea and Argentina,[41] but also resumed contacts with far-right anti-communist exile groups such as the ABN, shunned by US administrations since the early 1950s (Figure 1). In 1983, Reagan and Bush received Mr. and Mrs. Stets'ko in the White House (Figure 2).[42]

Repatriation of the Far Right to Ukraine

The USSR did not collapse as a result of a militant multi-nationalist uprising, as envisioned by Stets'ko. The command economy was not sufficiently competitive; the political system turned out to be impossible

to reform and collapsed under its own weight.[43]

In 1993 the OUN(b) legalized itself in Ukraine, establishing the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (KUN) under the leadership of Yaroslav Stets'ko's widow Slava Stets'ko (1920–2003), who had succeeded her husband as head of the ABN in 1986 and the OUN(b) in 1991.

A 2010 OUN(b) publication characterize the group as a "global clandestine structure," an organization operating through façade structures.[44] It remains authoritarian and conspiratorial, and avoids and suspect public debate. In Ukraine, the role of KUN has been has been limited, though Stets'ko's widow served as *Alterspräsidentin* of the *Verkhovna Rada*, and her secretary Roman Zvarych (b. 1953) served briefly as Minister of Defense. Serhii Kvit (b. 1965), a veteran of the KUN and other far right groups, advanced to become rector of the Kyiv Mohyla Academy (2007–2014) and minister of education (2016–2019).[45]

Largely out of touch with the realities of life in post-Soviet Ukraine, the aging émigré OUN(b) came to play a rather marginal role in Ukrainian electoral politics. On the whole, direct far-right influence on Ukrainian politics has been modest.[46] The far right has been considerably more successful in terms of shaping and managing public memory and education. Under presidents Yushchenko and Poroshenko, the cult of the OUN(b) and UPA became state policy, and activists affiliated with its front organizations came to exercise significant influence on the shaping of historical memory in Ukraine.

Open Wounds

The OUN's role in the anti-Jewish pogroms of 1941 and the ethnic cleansing of the Polish minority in Volhynia and East Galicia in 1943–44 remain open wounds, which in the absence of *Aufarbeitung* have not been able to heal. On the contrary, the undigested past has been a rallying point around which the nationalist hard core of the diaspora has mobilized. The establishment of the Office of Special Investigations (OSI) of the US Justice Department in 1979 and a string of denaturalization and deportation cases against alleged war criminals – one of the most spectacular being that of death camp guard John Demjanjuk (1920–2012) – triggered strong emotions in the Ukrainian community.[47] In Canada, community passions were mobilized connection with the establishment of the Deschênes Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals in 1985–1986, set up to investigate claims that Canada had become a haven for war criminals.[48]

Figure 3. In 2009, the 100th anniversary of Bandera's birth (1909–1959) was celebrated in Ukraine with a stamp collection.

President Viktor Yushchenko's rehabilitation and glorification in the 2000s of UPA commander Roman Shukhevych (1907–1950) and OUN leaders Stepan Bandera (1909–1959), and Yaroslav Stetsko (1912–1986) mobilized long-distance nationalist passions.[49] (See Figure 3.)

Multicultural Funding

A pioneer of normative multiculturalism, in 2021 Canada celebrated the semi-centennial of multiculturalism.[50] Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (b. 1971) argued that the policy, introduced by his father half a century earlier, "continues to give vitality to Canadian society, reflect its multicultural reality, and inspire people and countries around the world."[51] The Canadian multiculturalist movement was initiated by Ukrainian nationalists, by far the most active group in the pursuit of multiculturalism.[52] The Ukrainian lobby in Canada remains one of the most powerful in that country. It is organized as an umbrella organization, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, UCC, established in 1940. The LUC has been a member of the UCC since 1959.[53] In the past two decades, OUN(b) front organizations have asserted themselves as an increasingly dominant force within the UCC – through which it has direct channels to the top leadership of all major Canadian political parties.[54] Since its introduction in 1971, Canadian normative multiculturalism has been a boon to the LUC and other OUN(b) front organizations, which have obtained substantial funding from the Canadian government. Multicultural funding co-financed,

among other things, construction of the Roman Shuk-hevych Youth Unity Complex in Edmonton. The funding is ongoing.[55] The Government of Canada currently funds 19 UCC programs, amounting to CAD 1,082,500.83.[56]

Managing Memory

The collapse of the Soviet Union deprived the émi-gré hard right of much of its raison d'être. In 1993 the League for the Liberation of Ukraine was renamed the League of Ukrainian Canadians.[57] After Ukraine obtained independence in 1991, many of the LUC's activities have been in the field of "historical memory." According to its website, "Today the League of Ukrainian Canadians has transformed into a powerful instrument for preserving the historical memory and support of Ukraine under the conditions of a renewed liberation struggle, when Ukraine is again facing challenges."[58] As an organiza-tion, it is mainly backward-looking, representing a "frozen immigrant culture" and preoccupied with "na-tional honor" and "dignity," struc-tured around a rather one-dimen-sional narrative of history in which Ukrainians figure mainly as victims and heroes.

Canada has undergone dramatic demographic changes during the fifty years since the introduction of official, normative multiculturalism. The Ukrainian community has seen a dramatic loss of members at the same time as the Ukrainian community has lost its numerical position as a percentage of the Canadian population. While con-stituting the fifth largest ethnic group in Canada after World War II, Ukrainians now lag far behind immigrant communities from South and East Asia.[59] Attempts by the LUC and SUM to prevent cultural assimilation of the second and third generations have only been modestly successful. Today, the Nationalist hard core in Canada consists disproportionately of members of the post-war émigré generation who arrived in Canada as children. The vast majority of the post-war migrants are dead. The group is aging and greying, its membership declining, and its difficulties recruiting new cadres evident.[60]

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress is fond of claim-ing to speak on behalf of 1.4 million Canadians of Ukrainian descent. The real numbers are much smaller. Surveys indicate some 200,000 members of the UCC um-brella structure, of which church groups comprise by far

the largest parts: 160,000 members of the Greek Catholic Church and 50,000 of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. SUM has about 1,500 members, the nationalist scouting organization Plast 1,400. The League of Ukrainian Cana-dians and the OUN(m) Ukrainian National Federation barely reach 1,000 members each.[61]

"Distorting public opinion by means of shrill, hysterical propaganda"

The LUCs relation to history is conflicted. On the one hand, it is intensely committed to how the past is being presented. On the other hand, it has an aversion towards academic methods and intellectual pluralism. Historian Ivan Lysiak Rudnyts'kyi (1919–1984) wrote in 1974 that the OUN(b) "still remains a totalitarian group today. The examples of this are many: the strivings for mo-nopolizing control over all Ukrainian societal-political life; organic incapacity for honest cooperation with other groups on an equal footing; the infiltration of non-political communal and cultural organization and their subordination under the orders of party *polituks*, its mafiosi-conspir-atorial *modus vivandi* in regards to its own community members, an extreme obscurantism, hatred of independent artistic creation, systematic suppression of free thought, criticism and discussion, distorting public opinion by means of shouting it down with shrill, hys-terical propaganda."[62]

> The LUC's narrative has been ineffective out-side the Ukrainian dia-spora echo chamber.

The founding director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and multicultural activist Manoly Lupul (1927–2019) noted, laconically: "As for the Bander-ites, conventional wisdom had it that they would rather destroy than live with whatever they could not control."[63]

Literary scholar Myroslav Shkandrij (b. 1950) recalled how his father referred to the Banderites as *primityvy*, primitives: "They were ordinary folk, but they were tough, hard-headed, with 'a warrior mentality.' "[64] A sim-ilar characterization is found in the internal assessments by the CIA, which similarly referred to "primitive ban-dera [sic] publications."[65]

Toronto-based political scientist Taras Kuzio (b. 1958), himself "acculturated in a Banderite diasporan environ-ment" and raised in the OUN(b) youth league SUM,[66] explains the OUN(b)'s adversarial position towards ac-ademic research by a fear of losing control: the OUN(b),

Essay

Figure 4. On the website of *Homin Ukrainy* current Minister of finance Chrystia Freeland poses with OUN(b) activists Oleh Romanyschyn, Yury Shymko and Orest Steciw, endorsing the LUC publication *Holodomor: the Ukrainian Genocide 1932–33.*

Kuzio argues, "always had [...] the most members, the most resources in terms of finances. They've always been extremely antagonistic towards becoming involved in the academic world, probably because they don't trust those academics, they think that they can't control them, can't control the output that they produce."[67]

The irreconcilable aims of seeking to control historical research while rejecting academic freedom of inquiry has faced the LUC with a dilemma. The LUC's narrative has been ineffective outside the Ukrainian diaspora echo chamber. Since 1973 it operates the Ukrainica Research Institute, "a charitable non-profit organization dedicated to education and research, providing information on issues affecting the dynamics of the Ukrainian Canadian community within the framework of multiculturalism."[68] Its activism has been reactive rather than proactive; protesting, picketing, organizing "task forces," applying political, financial, and legal pressure on scholars pursuing a critical line of inquiry.

Its name notwithstanding, Ukrainica Research Institute's contributions to scholarly research have been very modest.[69] It does not adhere to academic rigor and research methods. Its activities cannot be regarded as dispassionate inquiry but fall within what historian Klas-Göran Karlsson (b. 1955) refers to as ideological use of history.[70] More successful in the arena of politics, Ukrainica is well-connected to the Canadian political elite, listing MPs Borys Wrzesnewskyj (b. 1960) and James Bezan (b. 1965) as well as veteran senator Raynell Andreychuk as patrons.[71]

The UCC and the LUC enjoy a close relation with the current Liberal government, as they did with the Harper government before that. Current Minister of finance Chrystia Freeland (b. 1968) refers to Paul Grod, the OUN(b)-affiliated UCC President as a "friend."[72] On the website of *Homin Ukrainy* Freeland poses with sen-

ior OUN(b) activists Oleh Romanyschyn (b. 1941), Yury Shymko (b. 1940) and Orest Steciw (b. 1947), endorsing the LUC publication *Holodomor: the Ukrainian Genocide 1932–33*[73] (Figure 4).

The UCC has maintained a close relationship with all three major Canadian parties; Tories, Liberals, and the leftist New Democratic Party.[74]

Memory Culture in the Émigré Ukrainian Authoritarian Right

The memory culture of the Ukrainian hard right in Canada rests on two pillars. One is the cult of the leaders of the OUN and UPA. From the mid-1980s a sacralized narration of the 1932–33 famine in the Ukrainian SSR, presented as genocide of the Ukrainian nation, has constituted the other. In the mid-1980s, the diaspora introduced the neologism "Holodomor" to refer to ethnic Ukrainians who perished in the famine.[75] The significant number of non-Ukrainian famine victims from the Volga region, the Kazakh ASSR, Northern Caucasus and West Siberia are generally not included as victims of "Holodomor," explicitly ethnicized as "the genocide of the Ukrainian people."[76] The choice of this term and the inflation of the victim tally in excess of six million is hardly coincidental. The UCC and the LUC prefer still higher numbers: Steciw and Romanyshyn's count is 10 million dead Ukrainians in the Ukrainian SSR alone – an inflation of the actual numbers by 250–400%.[77] Manipulating the numbers is not just an innocent activity but, as historian Timothy Snyder (b. 1969) has aptly noted: "By repeating exaggerated numbers, Europeans release into their culture millions of ghosts of people who never existed. Unfortunately, such specters have power. What begins as competitive martyrology can end with martyrological imperialism [...] When history is removed, numbers go upward and memory goes inward, to all of our peril."[78]

The narrative of the OUN-UPA and the famine has been sacralized through the use of symbols, rituals, and sanctioned by clergy.[79] Historian Yuliya Yurchuk (b. 1981) shows how "sites of memory" can be based on amnesia rather than recollection,[80] noting how "the fashion of commemoration creates [an] atmosphere where one is invited to take part in rituals that presuppose unanimous support and exclude questioning or debating."[81] Historical events cease to be treated as such, instead they are presented in a mythologized way to form the basis of social cohesion, what Mikhail Bakhtin

(1895–1975) referred to as monologization of language.[82] Canadian normative multiculturalism has affirmed the LUC and UCC's memory culture through direct funding and political endorsement by Canadian government institutions. The narrative of the famine as *Holodomor* and genocide has been officially endorsed by the Canadian parliament. Justin Trudeau endorses the claim that the famine constituted "a genocide against the Ukrainian people."[83] His predecessor Stephen Harper is on record affirming the LUC's claims of over ten million Ukrainian genocide victims.[84] A gulf has been widening between scholars and memory activists; the latter have prioritized political venues of influence, taking their agendas directly to legislators, policy makers and university administrators – rather than supporting dispassionate inquiry.

Genocide in a Box: 10,000,000

One of Ucrainca's more high-profile projects is "Exhibit in a Box" *Holodomor: Genocide by Famine. 10,000,000 Ukraine, 1932–1933*, a portable exhibit produced by Orest Steciw and Oleg Romanyshyn.[85] The project aims to affirm the 10 million figure[86] through the construction of 1,000 Holodomor memorials.[87]

A prioritized area for Ucrainica's activities includes the ideological training of the youth, disseminating its narrative of the past through OUN(b)-affiliated schools. Oksana Sokolyk, who succeeded Romanyshyn as editor of *Homin Ukrainy* in 2018, is also director of the Yurii Lypa heritage school.[88] Originally set up in Toronto in 1956 to train SUM cadres, it operates today from the same address as the LUC headquarters.[89] Sokolyk explains that prioritized activities include "celebration of [...] the soldiers of UPA and members of OUN, who, at the price of their own lives and health, achieved an Independent Ukraine.[...] we attend actions of mourning in memory of the victims of the *Holodomors* in Ukraine."[90] The activities are ritualistically structured around a calendar commemorating Ukrainian heroic exploits and genocidal victimization at the hands of its neighbors. Key words are truth, honor, defense, and armor. "The purpose of the school is to raise Ukrainian patriots, conscious of their origins and mission. Our graduates are Canadian citizens, armed with knowledge of Ukraine, who are spreading the truth about Ukraine and its history, defend the good name of

> " There have been recurrent confrontations with scholars whose research findings diverge from the nationalist narrative.

Ukraine and Ukrainians in the world and who will be useful for the Ukrainian community in Canada."[91]

Targeting Historians

As the OUN(b)'s version of Ukrainian history is at odds with the historical record on a number of issues, there have been recurrent confrontations with scholars whose research findings diverge from the nationalist narrative. The objects of the ire have varied, though the form and content of the campaigns have remained rather consistent. Space restraints allows but a cursory overview. In 1980 Paul Robert Magocsi (b. 1945) was appointed Chair of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Toronto. Magocsi is not opposed to Ukrainian nationalism. The community's concern was rather that he identified as a Rusyn, a regional identity which, variously, has been referred to as a Ukrainian sub-group or a separate ethnicity.[92] Borys Wrzesnewskyj (b. 1960) – a wealthy businessman and future Liberal MP for the heavily Ukrainian Etobicoke Center – "had led the Ukrainian Students club at the University of Toronto in 1980 and had therefore been in the forefront of opposition to Magocsi's appointment."[93] Having failed to prevent preventing Magocsi's appointment Wrzesnewskyj "never talked to Magocsi again ever since then."[94] For almost three decades, Magocsi was ostracized by the Ukrainian community, which leveled serious allegations at the historian; in September 1992 John Fizer (1925–2007), president of the American Association of Ukrainian Studies wrote the president of Magocsi's university, explaining the historian's "activity to destabilize the Ukrainian ethnic community" by him being an agent of the former Czechoslovak state security police, calling upon his employer to "look into this case and make your findings public."[95]

In April 1993 letter to the Vice-President of Magocsi's university, Wasyl Veryha (1922–2008), general secretary of the World Congress of Free Ukrainians and a prominent veteran of the Waffen-SS Galizien veterans' association, accused Magocsi of becoming a "source of disunity among the Ukrainians, instead of teaching the history of Ukraine."[96] Veryha demanded that the historian's "research should not run contrary to Ukrainian interests," and that "Magocsi should not use his position

as Chair for the purpose of putting into practice the political axiom 'divide at impera.'" Veryha warned the vice-chancellor that "Professor Magocsi's dubious and harmful political activity created a very negative opinion among the Ukrainian Canadian community and not only for him as a scholar, but also for the University of Toronto, something I am certain the University administration will not be pleased to hear."[97]

In 2009 political scientist Taras Kuzio broke the ice by bringing Wrzesnewskyj and Magocsi together. Kuzio writes that "the Ukrainian community, including radical nationalists, was beginning to seek allies against two threats that had appeared independently but around the same time. The first came from Western historians such as Per Anders Rudling and John Paul Himka who began to write revisionist studies of Ukrainian nationalism in the 1930s and during World War II [...]The second threat came from the election of Viktor Yanukovych in Ukraine whose Minister of Education, Dmytro Tabachnyk, returned to Soviet-era denunciations of Ukrainian nationalism in the past as 'fascists' and used the same contemptuous label of 'fascists' for the contemporary opposition. One of the most surprising new alliances that emerged from these threats was that of Magocsi and Oleh Romanyshyn, the editor of the Ukrainian-Canadian Organization of Ukrainian Nationalist (OUN) newspaper *Homin Ukrainy*."[98]

> 99 The rehabilitation triggered a polarized debate about the OUN(b)'s anti-Jewish pogroms in 1941.

The détente appears further facilitated by Viktor Yushchenko's posthumous designation of OUN(b) leader Stepan Bandera (1909–1959) as a Hero of Ukraine, in the final days of his presidency. The debate soon spilled over to Canada as the UCC, led by the OUN(b)-affiliated Paul Grod, demanded recognition of OUN(b) and UPA veterans in Canada as well. The rehabilitation triggered a polarized debate about the OUN(b)'s anti-Jewish pogroms in 1941.[99] John-Paul Himka (b. 1949), perhaps the most prominent scholar of Ukrainian nationalist violence, voiced objections to the UCC's demands, citing the organizations' involvement in anti-Jewish violence.[100] The community mobilized to uphold the orthodox nationalist narrative, denying Ukrainian involvement and responsibility. Zenon Kohut (b. 1944), the then director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, CIUS, at the University of Alberta, denied that the OUN(b) was a fascist organization and that it was involved in the 1941 pogroms, as "all responsibility lies with the German authorities." Himka not only expressed an alternative interpretation in a matter of historical controversy; he challenged a cornerstone of the political and social culture of his community. To the diaspora stalwarts, challenging the cult of Bandera was nothing short of heresy. Himka became an object of ostracization and intense scorn. The University of Alberta history professor was denounced as a "notorious Soviet apologist" and "a Ukraine detractor."[101] In early 2010, Paul Grod set up a "UCC Task Force" with the aim of "Developing Community Strategy regarding Recent Attacks on Ukraine's Liberation Movement," and to "put pressure on North American academic institutions which are funded by community money."[102] Soon the University of Alberta started receiving letters from the community, threatening to withhold funding if research into sensitive historical topics continued. Pro-nationalist donors used their considerable financial leverage to force Himka to steer his research away from the taboo topics: "I do not know if the UCC acted on the suggestions formulated during the teleconferences and I cannot ascribe all pressure on academic institutions to the UCC. I do not know if the UCC had anything to do with the letter of the Petro Jacyk Educational Foundation to the dean of the Faculty of Arts where I teach. I never saw the letter, only my dean's reply to it. The Jacyk Foundation, which has been a multimillion-dollar donor to CIUS [...] was expressing its displeasure with my debate with the CIUS director, Zenon Kohut."[103] The pressures appear to have had some effect: "An associate dean called and asked me to 'keep the temperature down,'" Himka recalls.[104]

The shrillest calls came from the OUN(b) fronts. The leader of the Edmonton LUC denounced what he called a "cabal of pseudo-historians, of which Himka is a ringleader."[105] From Kyiv, Serhiy Kvit, rector of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, sounded alarm about a supposed "Ukrainophobic academic international" which, he cautioned, "adopts Soviet anti-Ukrainian myths to the language of contemporary western science," and which had "formed around the American-Canadian researcher John-Paul Himka." According to Kvit, these Ukrainophobes sought "to manipulate collective opinion by various means by

Figure 5. In response to the defacing of the Oakville, Ontario monument to the 14th Waffen-SS Division Galizien the LUC and SUM launched a campaign to defend the legacy of the Waffen-SS Galizien, known under euphemism as the first Ukrainian Division of the Ukrainian National Army, denouncing negative media attention as a result of Russian propaganda, claiming the veterans had fought "for a free Ukraine."
PHOTO: UKRAINIAN YOUTH ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (CYM), FACEBOOK

equating the national liberation movement with fascism and denying the Holodomor."[106]

A similar fury faced Berlin-based historian Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe (b. 1979), the author of the first scholarly biography of Bandera, when he was invited by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung to speak on the topic of his research in Kyiv in 2012. Following threats, the scheduled lectures were cancelled; the one lecture that could be held took place under significant security measures at the German embassy in Kyiv, with torchlight-carrying protesters from VO Svoboda chanting slogans outside, denouncing the historian as "Goebbels' lying great-grandson." *Homin Ukrainy* was quick to join in, describing Polish-born Rossoliński-Liebe as "the emissary of the 'Fourth Reich' in Ukraine," sounding alarm about a "Merkel-Putin pact,"[107] ominously warning that "Ukrainians are beginning to approach the limit of their tolerance."[108]

In 2015, the turn had come to Himka's colleague David Marples (b. 1952). The British-born Marples, Distinguished University Professor at the University of Alberta, had expressed concerns about the passing of law 2538-1 which criminalized "disrespect" for "Ukrainian national liberation movement in the XX century."[109] The reaction from the community was shrill; Marples was denounced as a "Kremlin agent."[110] The passions

culminated in 2017 when his university nominated him as director of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, CIUS, at the University of Alberta, which at the time was struggling financially and had merged with the Faculty of Arts. In his recent memoirs, Marples recalled how "adopt[ing] positions not in line with the prevailing narratives in the diaspora [...] was tantamount to an offence."[111] Marples notes, "The reality was that they no longer liked what I was writing, based on my research findings. There were no other factors involved. And because my works seemed in their view to undermine their preconceived and long-held notions about their historical past, then they became unacceptable, even chided as Kremlin propaganda, or pro-Russian."[112]

According to Marples, "the social media campaign reached new heights. [...] I began to realize how Magocsi must have felt in 1980 or John-Paul Himka for the previous ten years. I learned also that the threats to withdraw public endowments had some impact on the Dean, as did a meeting with Frank Sysyn [the head of CIUS Toronto Office and the CIUS de-facto director, PAR] (b. 1946) and one with a major donor to CIUS."[113] Marples decided against taking the job.

The diaspora's highly successful campaigns to have the Canadian political elites affirm its historical memory have not settled the matters of historical controversy. In

Figure 6. Mrs. Slava Stets'ko at the banquet with Mrs. and Mr. Orest Steciw, and conference coordinators Ms. Lesia Shymko and Ms. Larysa Figol. (1986).

PHOTO: ABN CORRESPONDENCE

Figure 7. Orest Steciw and Stephen Harper, Toronto, March 2, 2020.

PHOTO: HOMIN UKRAINY – UKRAINIAN ECHO, FACEBOOK

2018 the Russian embassy in Ottawa successfully exploited the partially taxpayer-funded Canadian far right monuments in order to embarrass the Trudeau government. All of a sudden, the curious monuments to Waffen-SS veterans and ultranationalist ethnic cleansers started to generate discussions in Canadian society at large, dovetailing on the intense discussion about confederate memorials in the United States.[114] Not unlike similar actions in the US and Western Europe, radicals took to vandalism (see Figure 5).[115] The monument to the veterans of the 14th Waffen-SS Division Galizien in Oakville, Ontario was vandalized in 2020.[116] The Edmonton Shukhevych memorial was defaced twice. In 2019 and again in 2021 someone sprayed "NAZI SCUM," and "ACTUAL NAZI" on the monument to the UPA commander, who served in German uniform in 1939–1943.[117] The government of Canada labelled the defacing of the memorial a hate crime and provided the Roman Shukhevych Youth Unity Complex an additional CAD 35,765.32 in funding, to pay "for the installation of a closed circuit television system and intrusion system components"[118] in order "to increase community safety by providing funding for enhancement of security infrastructure to a community with a demonstrated history of being victimized by hate-motivated crime."[119]

> From the organizations' vantage point, the memory of the heroes, and the patriots themselves, are victims of a Russian covert action campaign of hybrid warfare.

Policing the Past, Protecting Memory

Apparently alarmed by the unwanted attention the multicultural OUN, UPA, and Waffen-SS Galizien mon-

uments attracted from Canadian mainstream media, the LUC launched yet another campaign to "protect" its "memory" on December 12, 2020, and announced a mobilization against "lies and disinformation." From the organizations' vantage point, the memory of the heroes – and the patriots themselves – are victims of a Russian covert action campaign of hybrid warfare:

> **Russia, either in its Soviet incarnation or now under Putin's rule, has spared no effort to defame the Ukrainian nation and its global diaspora, including the Ukrainian Canadian community [...].To dismiss these attacks and not respond would be a prudent course, so as not to draw further attention to them. By responding, it also could be constructed as giving credence to the accusations. However, to allow lies and disinformation repeated ad nauseam to go unanswered, especially by a campaign of Russian hybrid information warfare, can create a veneer of credibility that can be taken at face value by unaware Canadians, and that has even led to acts of violence against monuments and memorials.[120]**

Lamenting "the lack of objectivity, truth and reality in the Humanities," the LUC launched a new campaign, "Project FACTS" claiming to offer an unambiguous "truth:"[121]

Unfortunately for the historical FACTS and TRUTH, the disinformation campaign and outright lies targeting Ukraine's national aspirations launched by Stalin's Russia linger to this very day in the world information space, mainly because of the subversive efforts of Putin's Russia and its fellow travelers in the West. To set the record straight is the purpose of our 'Project FACTS' – BASED ON FACTS![122]

Ukrainian Echo, Homin Ukrainy's English language version, issued a "manual" with instructions on how to counter what it described as "disinformation" of the "Ukrainian Liberation Movement."[123] In the form of briefing points, *Homin Ukrainy* claimed to offer its readers "researched material made available to swiftly counter cases of defamation and calumny against Ukraine and Ukrainians."[124] To the LUC, this was a simple matter of truth versus lies.

"Malign Activities" in Lund

Four days after reposting their "Statement on defaming Ukraine" the LUC launched another leg of its campaign. This went beyond arming its community with *facts* and *truth*. Its aim was to uncover, de-platform, and censor an individual historian. That historian happens to be the author of this study, who since 2020 is leading a research project on long-distance nationalism at Lund University, funded by the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation. The LUC approached Vice-chancellor Torbjörn von Schantz of Lund University, the Head of the Department of History Henrik Rosengren, and the Swedish Embassy in Ottawa. The letters from National Executive of the League of Ukrainian Canadians sought to bring to the vice chancellor's attention a number of serious incidents they claimed emanating from the premises of Lund University. The letters (see Figure 8) were sent out by Orest Steciw[125] former president of the Canadian branch of the ABN, former National President of the LUC, currently President of the Ukrainica Research Institute.[126] The LUC's concerns were not limited to academic disagreements about matters of historical controversy: the organization alleged illicit acts, including defamation, disinformation, and hybrid warfare in the service of an adversarial foreign power.
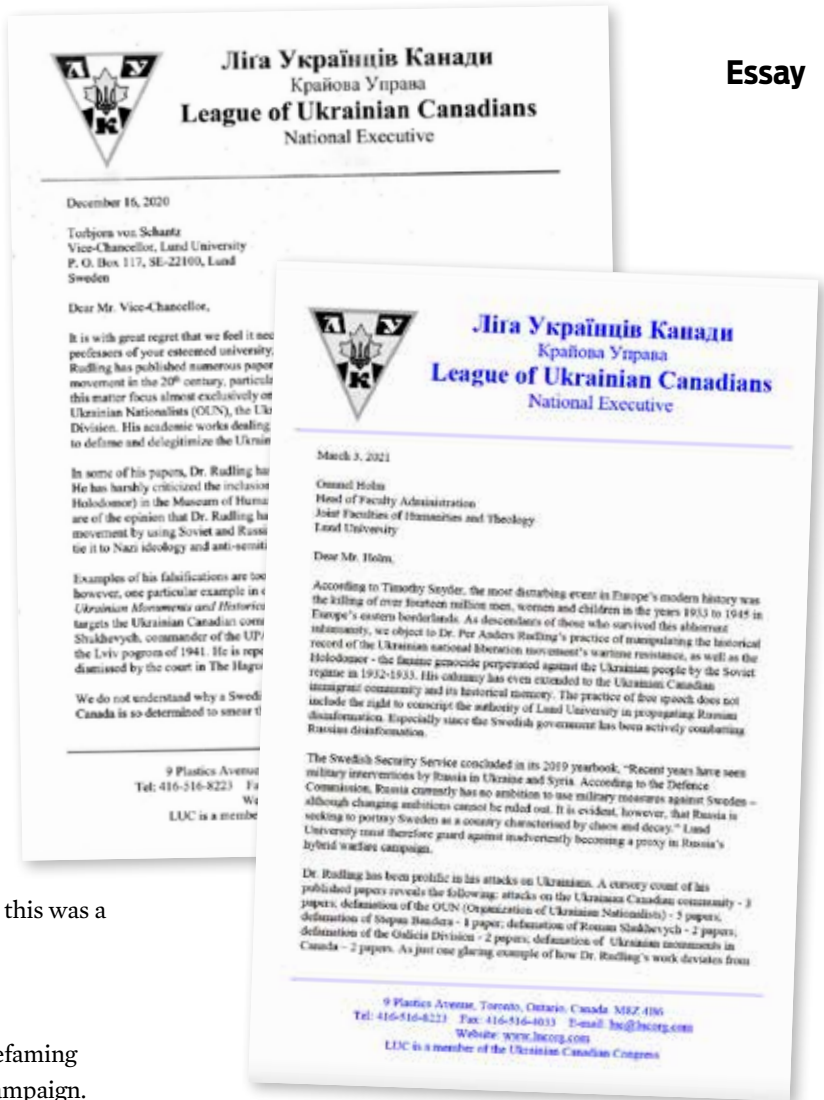
Figure 8. Letters by Orest Steciw and Ihor Mykhaylets of the League of Ukrainian Canadians to the administration of Lund University.

The signatories of the letter, Steciw and LUC President Borys Mykhaylets, explained that it was "with deep regret" they approached vice chancellor von Schantz to inform him that "one of the professors at your esteemed university" is linked to "malign activities" of "extreme leftist activists and journalists," and that the historian's research threatened to "incite hatred and, possible violence towards our community," since "[h]is academic works dealing with Ukrainian issues have always been intended to defame and delegitimize the Ukrainian national liberation movement."[127] Comporting themselves as victims of malignant activities, the League of Ukrainian Canadians felt compelled to ask the vice-chancellor:

> **Is Dr. Rudling aware that his concerted attacks on our community can lead to criminal activity and even violence? Is this the kind of reputation**

Figure 9. Bertil Häggman and Slava Stets'ko at the ABN Canada Campaign Freedom Conference 1986, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. "Mr. Bertil Häggman receiving the ABN Silver Medal of Distinction from ABN President, Mrs. Slava Stets'ko at the conference banquet." PHOTO: ABN CORRESPONDENCE, 1986, 21

When subsequent vice-chancellors were approached in 2020 and 2021, Lund University reiterated to Steciw that neither Swedish law nor the charter of Lund University had changed since 2012. Apparently dissatisfied with the response, Mykhaylets and Steciw approached the university again on March 3, 2021:

> **As descendants of those who survived the abhorrent inhumanity, we object to Dr. Per Anders Rudling's practice of manipulating the historical record of the Ukrainian national liberation movement's wartime resistance [...] His calumny has even extended to the Ukrainian immigrant community and its historical memory. The practice of free speech does not include the right to conscript the authority of Lund University in propagating Russian disinformation. Especially since the Swedish government has been actively combatting Russian disinformation [...] Manipulation of the historical record [...] serves to embolden the Kremlin's hybrid warfare campaign against the West, and in particular against emerging European democracies such as Ukraine. We have confidence that you will take appropriate action to preserve the trust and authority of your institution.**[131]

> **you desire for your university? [...] We are very concerned that Dr. Rudling's malign activities may continue to incite hatred towards our community. Dear Mr. Vice-Chancellor, we welcome the opportunity to engage you and your university in a sincere dialogue to address our concerns.**[128]

The was not the first time the Toronto Banderites had approached Lund University regarding Rudling's research. The LUC had already approached von Schantz' predecessor Per Eriksson in 2012 about their concern about what they described as "hate speech" emanating from the historian.[129] In response, Lund University informed the LUC that:

> **Any employee of the University has the right to state his or her views and to direct whatever questions he or she likes to any person or organization. Neither the Vice-Chancellor nor the Dean has any responsibility in the matter. If the actions of the employee would seem to go against the law of a country, an interested party might demand to have the case tested in court. It is, however, still not the responsibility of the University.**[130]

Lund University could but repeat again that "Researchers can freely publish their results, and academic institutions do not have the right to dictate how they conduct their research or what results they are able to publish. Colleagues can challenge the results presenting their own research validating their resource and their analyses in the accepted academic tradition."[132]

Evidently discontent with the university's response, Steciw's response then became more animated:

> **When you state that researchers can freely publish their results, and academic institutions do not have the right to dictate how they conduct their research, or what results they are able to publish, does this include defaming Ukraine and Ukrainians? Hiding behind 'freedom of speech' in order to defame others is not exactly academic research!**[133]

> ❝ Recent years have seen renewed efforts to police memory and limit the range of permissible interpretations of matters of historical controversy.

After the University having again clarified their position to the LUC, it was approached two weeks later, this time by an associate of Steciw's, the former head of the Swedish branch of the ABN, Bertil Häggman (b. 1940) (See Figure 9).[134] Häggman described Rudling's scholarship as "disinformation" and the historian as a "Holodomor denier and tarnisher of leading Ukrainian freedom fighters in violation of the Ukrainian law 2538-1 which came into force in 2015."[135] This veteran of the ABN – an organization explicitly sheltered from "disrespect" by 2538-1 – informed Lund university that he was working on an essay, titled "Is a Swedish Academic Violating Ukrainian Law?"[136] If Swedish law would not enable stifling critical inquiry into the legacy of wartime Ukrainian Nationalism, Häggman seemed to suggest, Ukrainian law could offer an alternative path.

Project FACTS also targeted other scholars as agents of the Kremlin. Even before John-Paul Himka's 2021 book *Ukrainian Nationalists and the Holocaust* saw the day of light, tax-payer funded *Homin Ukrainy* denounced Himka as "odious," suggesting the professor emeritus was being paid by the Kremlin: "And here, already at an advanced age, that odious historian decides to publish a book, from which the Kremlin will be jumping for joy [...] Bonus retirement benefits?"[137]

Promotors of the Ukrainian Nationalist heritage often invoke concepts such as honor, pride, and allege "national dignity" being "offended."[138] Paul Grod, chairman of the Ukrainian World Congress – and a senior SUMite – regularly calls upon SUM members to fulfill their oath and "be prepared to defend the honor of Ukraine."[139] The militants mean this quite literally. The latest campaign is but one of many, but nevertheless gives an idea of the methods they employ to police "memory" – and not only in Ukraine.[140]

Recent years have seen renewed efforts to police memory and limit the range of permissible interpretations of matters of historical controversy. These are not only internal provisions, a concern for Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian scholars, but a trend that has emboldened action against scholars also in countries with more firmly established traditions of academic freedom.

Working in states with more firmly ensconced democratic institutions and an absence of memory laws does not exempt scholars writing on sensitive topics from pressure.[141] The Ukrainian law 2538-1, with its extensive list of political groups, "disrespect" of which is explicitly banned, is far-reaching; the OUN(b) and ABN are but

two of the 71 groups listed.[142] The Polish memory law refers to "the Polish national community" – i.e. a category wider than the Polish state or citizenry.

Bertil Häggman's question to the administration of the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology at Lund University, "Is a Swedish academic violating law 2538-1?" suggests an ambition to apply the 2015 law. That ambition is not unreasonable. The law is vaguely written and the scope of transgressions that could be regarded as subjected to it immense. The law explicitly outlaws "disrespect" of the OUN and the ABN.

The combination of misrepresenting a scholar's research ("Holodomor denier," "disinformation," "hate speech") to his employer while accusing him of slander and defamation is not something new or novel. Regretfully, this is a reality that generations of scholars in this field of inquiry have had to relate to – and cope with.

The Canadian multicultural praxis of using tax revenues to underwrite the memory production of ethnonationalist groups could, arguably, fall within the boundaries of the positive freedoms of a liberal democratic society. For a liberal democracy, it is essential to allow for multiple, alternative interpretations of matters of historical controversy. By contrast, public funds disseminated to radical groups seeking to restrict inquiry of which they disapprove seem to run contrary to that aim. Canada has resisted history laws of the kind we have seen in several European countries.[143] Its parliament and several provincial legislatures have, however, endorsed the *Holodomor* discourse and its head of government disseminated the diaspora's inflated ten million victims claim. The issue of multicultural funds channeled to authoritarian groups censoring certain inquiries and individual scholars has received little scholarly attention. The semicentennial of normative Canadian multiculturalism should invite reflection upon its application and consequences. ●

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73 The Ukrainian Genocide 1932–33' Presented to Members of Canadian Parliament," *Homin Ukrainy*, July 9, 2015, http://www.homin.ca/news.php/news/15446/group/23 (Accessed November 30, 2021)

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125   Figure 5: *ABN Correspondence*, vol. 38, no. 1 (January-February 1987): 39. https://diasporiana.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/books/14112/file.pdf#page=1 (Accessed December 6, 2021); Figure 6: *Homin Ukrainy – Ukrainian Echo*, *Facebook* update, March 3, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/ukrainianecho/photos/a.2790929687689714/2790951237687559 (Accessed December 7, 2021).

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127   Borys Mykhaylets, President, and Orest Steciw, Executive Director, League of Ukrainian Canadians, To Vice-Chancellor Torbjörn von Schantz, December 16, 2020.

128   Mykhaylets and Steciw to von Schantz, December 16, 2020.

129   Orest Steciw President, League of Ukrainian Canadians to Vice Chancellor Per Eriksson, 5 October 2012, Dnr. HT 2012/468, 2012-10-09.

130   Gunnel Holm, Head of Faculty Administration, Faculty of Humanities and Theology, Lund University, to Orest Steciw, League of Ukrainian Canadians, October 9, 2012, and (again) March 4, 2021.

131   "[L]etter from LUC to Lund University re: Dr. Rudling," Borys Mykhaylets, President and Orest Steciw, Executive Director, League

of Ukrainian Canadians, to Gunnel Holm, Head of Faculty Administration, Joint Faculties of Humanities of Theology, Lund University, March 3, 2021, Head of Department of History Henrik Rosengren and Cecilia Bergsten and the Swedish Embassy in Ottawa.

132   Holm to Steciw, March 4, 2021.

133   Steciw to Holm, March 4, 2021.

134   *ABN Correspondence*, vol. 38, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1987), 21. https://diasporiana.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/books/14112/file.pdf#page=1

135   Bertil Häggman to Kanslichef Gunnel Holm, Kansli HT, Lunds universitet, March 14, 2021. Häggman develops these claims further in his publicistic works, alleging that "various left leaning online publications have invited an assistant history professor, Per Arne[sic!] Rudling, at Lund University, to spread disinformation on the Ukrainian Resistance Army (UPA) and Ukrainian resistance leaders during World War 2." Bertil Häggman, *Support in Scandinavia for the subjugated nations of the Soviet empire 1943 to 1991*, vol. 2 (n.p.: Rectio Förlag, 2020) e-publication, no page number. https://delivery-33.elib.se/LibraryReader/read/2bbf13c1-1699-4e39-bdf2-e6e0e50d7b44/1110292/en/#/locations/1468 (Accessed April 15, 2021)

136   "Rudling's disinformation has prompted leading Ukrainians within and outside Ukraine to react. I find it difficult to understand how a university with such a good reputation as Lund can support research and publishing which is similar to previous Soviet and East German disinformation and now Russian disinformation." Häggman to Holm, March 14, 2021.

137   Oleksandr Kovalenko, "Istoryk Dzhon Pol Khimka svoeiu knyhoiu pro holokost pidihrae rosiis'kii propahandi," *Homin Ukrainy*, July 20, 2021, 13.

138   Taras Hunchak, *Moi spohady – stezhky zhyttia* (Kyiv: Dnypro, 2005), 72.

139   "Pavlo Hrod, Holova SKU – Banket z nahody 95 rokiv SUM: Etobiko, Kanada," SUM Calgary, February 24, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTKu7jzQwnw (Accessed January 7, 2022); "SKU pryvitav Spilku Ukrains'koi Molodi z 75-littiam," *Homin Ukrainy*, May 4, 2021, http://www.homin.ca/news.php/news/23638/group/19 (Accessed May 14, 2021)

140   A similar formulation would be included in the Polish "Holocaust law" of January 2018. As Jan Grabowski noted in regard to the lawsuit against him and Engelking, "the inclusion of terms such as the 'right to national identity' and the 'right to national dignity,' which the lawsuit wanted to be recognized at par with personal goods, such as the right to one's honor and reputation.... is ... an attempt to allow any member of the 'Polish national community' to initiate legal action whenever any other Pole has been – as could be argued – slandered." Grabowski, "The Polish Holocaust Law," 23.

141   Academic Freedom Index compiled by the University of Nuremberg gives Canada, along with the Nordic countries, top scores in academic freedom. Anisha Maulida, "World Science Day for Peace and Development: Challenge to Academic Freedom," V-Dem: Varieties of Democracy, November 10, 2021, https://www.v-dem.net/en/news/world-science-day-peace-and-development-challenge-academic-freedom/

142   Shukhevych et al., "Proekt Zakonu." Curiously, the law does not stipulate a punishment though its tandem law, 2558 of the "decommunization package" punishes Soviet propaganda by five to ten years in prison.

143   In October 2021 the Swedish government indicated an interest in moving in that direction, announced its intention to criminalize the denial of the Holocaust, "and some other crimes." "Kriminalisering av förnekande av Förintelsen och av vissa andra brott," Dir. 2021:87, *Regeringskansliet*, October 21, 2021, (Accessed November 30, 2021).

The Counter-Narrative of WWII and the Far Right-Identity

by **Andrej Kotljarchuk**

Today, many of the historical narratives upon which Europe has built its post-war identity are under attack. Far-right revisionists are using alternative perspectives to advance alternative values. The aim of this article is to map out identity formation in far-right movements in today's Belarus with the focus on their work with the memory of World War II. The process of identity formation in Belarusian far-right movements is discussed here in terms of discursive tropes of the counter-narrative of World War II. The author analyzes how memory work has changed depending on the political and cultural context in Belarus after 1991. The paper shows that the relationship of the Belarusian far right to historical narratives of World War II is a cornerstone of their collective memory and identity. The article examines the strategies used by the Belarusian far right to gain influence within the population in the context of oppositional protests and the military conflict in Ukraine. A special focus is on the specifics of the digital memory work.

Introduction

The official Belarusian World War II pantheon (known in Belarus mainly as the Great Patriotic War) includes only those who fought the Nazis. This reflects the Soviet past and Lukashenka's close ties (much resented by pro-West nationalists) with Russia. They celebrate the Soviet partisans and the Red Army which fought against the Nazis.[1] At the same time, both the Polish anti-Nazi resistance in Western Belarus (prior to 1939 belonging to interwar Poland) and Jewish partisan resistance are suppressed in the official narrative of World War II.[2] Most Belarusians who collaborated militarily with the Nazis were forced into exile after 1945. But they created a counter-narrative of World War II and kept it alive in American, British, German Canadian, and Australian exiles.[3] The fall of the

> Most Belarusians who collaborated militarily with the Nazis were forced into exile after 1945.

61

Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

Belarusian veteran memorial in South River, New Jersey, erected in 1974. Description (both in Belarusian and English): "Glory to Those who fought for Freedom and Independence of Byelo-russia".
PHOTO: VITAL ZAJKA

Soviet Union gave them a new audience. In the early 1990s the veterans of pro-Nazi military formations were widely celebrated in Belarus. The veteran diaspora provides these heroes and martyrs, the fighters against Communism for the country's freedom and independence. It is also credited with preserving "true" pro-Western values and the Belarusian language and culture during the long-term exile. In the 1990s a counter-narrative of World War II created by the veterans in the West was successfully deployed and then developed by their younger sympathizers in Belarus.[4]

Theoretical Frameworks and Aims of the Study

One group of Eastern European diasporas that has been especially successful in passing on its symbolic capital during the Cold War is that of the Belarusian pro-Nazi military veterans. This is due, not least, to the Cold War that was

a favorable setting for an active promotion of their myths in the West. It was also due to the concentration of Belarusian pro-Nazi military veterans in the US, the UK, and Western Germany – principal NATO countries. The veterans established professional relations with intelligence services, army and veteran associations of these countries. They also founded legitimate veteran associations and journals and have written memoirs that kept the cult of pro-Nazi soldiers alive. Their narratives, symbols, and ideologies began to be adopted by far-right sympathizers in Belarus after the Cold War. Georges Neumeyer and Laure Mink argue that the symbolic past is as important as the future, not only for central governments but also for different political organizations and associations, which are increasingly forced into "memory games" in Eastern Europe.[5] Ruth Wodak, Austrian linguist and Professor in Discourse Studies and Rudolf de Cillia, Professor of

Applied Linguistics at the University of Vienna., draw attention to how historical narratives vary in different public spheres; each has its own audience, genre rules, and rhetoric. The method developed by Wodak and Cillia in tracing major discursive tropes of counter-narrative (creation of the myths, half-truths and significant silences) is used in this study.[6]

In many European countries today, ultranationalist movements spread veterans' messages in media and politics. In the Baltic states and Ukraine, the "double genocide theory" was developed, which compares Nazi atrocities with Stalinist crimes against humanity. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Ukrainian scholars and politicians began debating the Holodomor-as-genocide (Soviet state-run mass famine in the early 1930s) alongside the Holocaust and the Nazi crimes against the Slavic population. The "re-discovery" of the Soviet mass famine has played a crucial role in the contemporary political identity of Ukrainians. In 2006, the Rada recognized the Holodomor as a genocide of Soviet regime against the Ukrainian people. According to the law, public denial of the Holodomor is considered illegal, but the punishment for such actions is not specified.[7] At the same time, in 2021 the Russian Duma and President Vladimir Putin prohibited by law the comparing of the actions of Stalin's Soviet Union and the Nazi Germany during World War II.

One the one hand, the official narrative of World War II in Belarus is similar to the one in Russia. On the other hand, today, the counter-narratives of pro-Nazi veterans who fought against the Soviet Union and the Stalinism have gained a new audience, due to the ongoing political crisis and new digital technologies. The oppositional parts of Belarusian society that are currently suffering from massive political repression are looking for a new non-Soviet gallery of national heroes and martyrs.[8]

One of the aims of this article is to shed light on the efforts of the Belarusian far right regarding the memory of World War II that left an enduring legacy. The research questions are: How has the collaborator's symbolic capital, which was memorialized, codified, and ritualized during the Cold War, been re-imported to Belarus after 1991? How have the narratives created by Waffen-SS veterans in the West been modified by their sympathizers in Belarus? How does the counter-narrative of World War II shape the identity of the Belarusian far right?

Manuel Castells has described how the "networked" society of the Internet allows even small, under-resourced networks a good deal of visibility.[9] What role do digital technologies play for the memory work of the Belarusian far right? How has the counter-narrative of World War II been fitted into the ongoing political context? What supra-national narratives of World War II were developed and how do they affect issues of Belarusian far-right identity? How do the military conflict in Ukrainian Donbas and the mass protests in 2020 in Belarus affect the memory work and identity issues of the far right?

Historical Background

Like other European countries occupied by the Nazi Germany, Belarus has a dark history of the military collaboration with Nazi Germany, via the auxiliary police, the SIPO/SD and the Waffen-SS. In the early days of the occupation the Nazis were initially reluctant to arm the Belarusians, sending many collaborationist police and military battalions from neighboring Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine to Belarus. In March-June 1944, however, the SS recruited a large Belarusian Home Defense Force (BKA, or *Weißruthenische Heimwehr*), to be used against partisans and civilians who supported the Soviet resistance.[10] When the Red Army retook Minsk on July 3, 1944, the BKA forces were moved to East Prussia and recreated as a Waffen-SS Siegling brigade, used to fight partisans in France. Another military formation was the *Weißruthenische Schutzmannschafts Bataillon der SD 13* (aka Btl.13 Sipo.u.SD). This strong unit with about 1,000 soldiers led by SS-Untersturmführer Kurt Junker, and formed in 1943, was heavily involved in the Holocaust in Belarus.[11] After the liberation of the republic, the battalion was moved to Poland where it

> **"** After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Ukrainian scholars and politicians began debating the Holodomor-as-genocide.

Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

> **The veterans turned to the past and began to develop a counter-narrative of World War II.**

took part in the suppression of the Warsaw uprising, and then to the Reich.[12] In late 1944, the Siegling brigade was transformed into the 30th Waffen-SS division (first formation) and send into combat on the Western front. Due to its low combat capacity and the desertion of many soldiers, this division was dissolved.[13] However, in January 1945, in a typical last ditch move to encourage allies to keep up the fight against Soviet Union, Himmler allowed the formation of a new, this time national Belarusian Waffen-SS division (*30. Waffen-Grenadierdivision der SS weißruthenische nr. 1.*) The division, led by SS-Obersturmbannführer Hans Siegling, was formed under the auspices of the Belarusian Central Rada (BCR) – a pro-Nazi administration in German exile. The division did not participate in combat and was surrounded by the US army in April 1945.[14] Finally, a special unit, *Luftlandebataillon Dallwitz*, was formed by the Abwehr from Belarusians in 1944. Based in Eastern Prussia, this battalion sent its agents behind the front. By then, however, the war was lost; and the bulk of veterans from different pro-Nazi Belarusian military formations (about 10,000 individuals) were forced into exile. Most of them achieved displaced person status in the West (often giving new names and fake biographical notes about their activity during the war). Some of them were recruited after the war by the CIA.[15]

Initially, the Committee of Byelorussian War Veterans functioned as an umbrella organization for all veterans from Belarus in the West. However, the Belarusian diaspora soon split politically between two "governments" in exile: the BNR (Belarusian Democratic Republic) and the BCR (Belarusian Central Council). Both the BNR and the BCR included mainly former political and military collaborators with Nazi Germany. The division affected the veteran movement. "General" Frantisek Kushal (aka Francis Kuschel), the former Nazi-police lieutenant-colonel and the commander of the BKA, was the leader of the veteran association under the BNR. "General" Dzmitry Kasmovich (aka Dmitry Kosmowicz), the former Nazi officer and police chief in Minsk and Smolensk, and

officer of Dallwitz battalion, was head of the veteran association under the BCR.[16]

The end of the "hot stage" of the Cold War buried veterans' plans for a military revenge. The CIA Belarusian project AEPRIMER for training of special agents sent to the USSR was terminated in 1959. The veterans turned to the past and began to develop a counter-narrative of World War II, adroitly excluding pro-Nazi sentiment, recruitment to the SS and SD, participation in war crimes (including the Holocaust and the genocide of Roma), and an embarrassing, German-led battle against the Allied troops. The German SS and SD formations acquired new national-flavored names in the veteran press; for example, the 30th Waffen-SS division became "the Belarusian Sturm Division", the 13th SD battalion was renamed "the Belarusian Special Battalion" and the 68th auxiliary police battalion in Navahrudak led by Barys Rahula (aka Boris Ragula) became the national unit called "the Belarusian Squadron".[17] To conceal the affiliation to the SS and SD was the deliberate choice of the leaders of the movement.[18] The aim was to avoid the association of the veterans with the Holocaust and other war crimes and to build the myth of the creation of a national army under the Nazis, with the primary aim of defending Belarus. In fact, recent research shows massive participation of, for example, the 13th Battalion in the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities.[19] The soldiers of the 30th Waffen-SS division (first formation) participated in bloody anti-partisan actions in France.[20] Soldiers of the division killed 40 civilians in Étobon near Belfort, on September 27, 1944, in retaliation for the villagers' support of French partisans. Paradoxically, the soldiers who fought against Allied troops in 1944 became the citizens of these countries after 1945. Only few Belarusian veterans, primarily those who served during the Nazi occupation of Belarus (prior to summer 1944), were suspected by Western justice of war crimes and even fewer were convicted.[21] About twenty former soldiers of the 13th SD battalion were sentenced by Soviet (1962 and 1987) and Polish (1957) courts to prison or the death penalty for crimes against humanity.[22]

Banner presented by Belarusian Youth Front at the 2014 oppositional demonstration in Minsk. The banner includes a portrait of Mikhal Vitushka surrounded by images of Ukrainian ultranationalist leaders Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych with the slogan "The heroes never die".
PHOTO: RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY

In 1962 the opus magnum *Змагарныя дарогі* [Combat Roads] by Kastus Akula (previously Alexander Kachan) was published in Canada, edited by Frantisek Kushal.[23] This volume illustrates the major discursive tropes of the Belarusian counter-narrative of World War II: silence about the Holocaust and other atrocities, and the image of the BKA as a national army that fought against Bolshevism for the freedom of Belarus and all Europe. The veterans actively promoted this counter-narrative in Belarusian-language periodicals and memoirs, detailing heroic battles in which patriots, warriors and martyrs valiantly fought for an independent Belarus against Communism. In 1974 the World Congress of Belarusian veterans was held in Manchester. The veterans decided to start a new magazine, *Зважай* [Attention], and discussed the creation of military archives as well as the publication of memoirs.[24] Cold War policies favored their memory work. At that time, the veteran associations were courted by main-stream conservative political parties, the US and British Army and their veteran associations as well as the international Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations. Meanwhile, Belarusians at home were, like all Soviet citizens, taught to venerate only Red Army soldiers, native partisans, and underground fighters. Collaborators and the Holocaust were, with a few exceptions, forgotten. As Per Anders Rudling points out,

World War II became a foundation for the creation of a modern Belarusian identity. In fact, no historical event has had a greater influence on today's Belarus.[25] The Soviet narrative of the Great Patriotic War remains a key factor in Lukashenka's historical politics – albeit with a different slant.[26]

To Pass the Torch. The Fall of the Soviet Union and a New Window of Opportunity

In late 1980s, Belarusian veteran organizations in the West were in deep crisis. The 1986 meeting of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavik symbolized the end of the Cold War. The legal authorities in the US and the UK started investigations against influential members of Belarusian veteran organizations, suspecting them of crimes linked to the Holocaust.[27] The rapid fall of the Soviet Union gave the veterans new opportunities and a new audience. In 1991, the political monopoly of the communist party was replaced in Belarus by an unstable democracy. The exiled veterans soon began to visit independent Belarus and found political and cultural sympathizers there. They set up Chernobyl aid committees and met their brothers-in-arms who had survived the Gulag. In 1993 Joseph Sazyc, head of the BNR government in exile and former Waffen-SS officer, visited Minsk. He met the head of state,

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Left: Belarusian military collaborator with the Nazis on the cover of Belarusian-language German police journal *Беларус на Варце*, [Belarusian on Guard], no. 1, 1943. From the author's private collection.

Right: The cover of magazine *Барацьба* [Fight] – organ of the Belarusian Liberation Front with the slogan "Belarus über alles" on the sword. From the author's private collection.

the social-democratic politician Stanislau Shushkevich, took part in the official assembly devoted to the celebration of independence and gave many interviews to state-run television and press. Kastus Akula, the editor-in-chief of *Зважай*, also visited Belarus. His memoirs were reprinted in Belarus and shortlisted as one of the best historical books. He moved the printing of *Зважай* to Minsk. In Belarus, Akula presented himself as a former veteran of the BKA and the British Army, an anti-Communist and great Belarusian patriot. He concealed the fact that in Canada, he was considered to be a veteran of the Western Guard and the Nationalist Party of Canada – two extreme right-wing populist organizations.[28].

As a result of intensive contacts, a large corpus of veteran literature was reprinted and widely distributed in Belarus. Belarusian media and academia celebrated the BKA as a first true national army. After the years of strong Russification in Belarus, the veterans who spoke their native language looked like great patriots who had maintained the Belarusian culture in exile. Their SS past was suppressed. They were described as iconic Belarusians who preserved na-

tive culture and represented true, i.e. pro-Western, national anti-Communist identity. Mikhas Bieliamuk (aka Michael Bielemuk), a US citizen and former officer of the police battalion in Bialystok, acted in the 1990s as a great sponsor of Belarusian Orthodox Church. Educated at the Department of History at Ohio State University, he founded the popular historical journal *Полацак* [Polatsk] in Belarus and became Doctor Honorius Causa of the National Academy of Sciences. His memoir, which glorified the war activity of Bialystok Belarusian police battalion, was printed in Vilnius and distributed in Belarus under the remarkable tittle *You cannot change your destiny*.[29]

Aliaksandr Lukashenka became president of Belarus in 1994 in the result of the first democratic elections in the country. In 1995 and 1996 he won two referendums that dramatically increased his power and allowed him to rule the country for the next 25 years. Unlike many neighboring countries, the Lukashenka regime politically marginalizes such ethnic referents of nation such as native language and national history, basing its nation building on the idealized

past of Soviet unity.[30] The regime sponsors only a WWII narrative of a nation united against fascists – Soviet-style, that is, albeit shorn of pro-Communist facets. According to Vitali Silitski, exploiting the mythology of World War II certainly has a practical political significance for Lukashenka. This gives Lukashenka a special position as the last defender in Europe against Fascism (the official term of Nazism in Belarus).[31] This narrative is enshrined in many new memorials and holidays.[32] Belarus under Lukashenka underwent a dynamic process of the memorialization of the sites of the Holocaust and the Nazi genocide of Roma. However, until 2020 the military collaboration of many Belarusians with the Nazis was suppressed, since the official narrative of World War II is based on the Soviet-rooted narrative of the glorious struggle of the *entire* Belarusian nation against Nazi Germany.[33]

The contemporary history of the far-right movement in Belarus is under-studied.[34] The exact number of far-right activists is unknown since none of the organizations were recognized by the state. All calculations are tentative; however, the number of skinheads in Minsk alone is estimated (2004) at about 300 supporters.[35] The first far-right organizations were established in Belarus in the mid-1990s. Among them were the paramilitary organizations *Белы Легіён* [White Legion] and *Край* [Land], the cultural Kryuskaja Draugija Druvingau and Gega-Ruch, as well as sport- and skinhead-oriented *Белая Воля* [White Will-power] and Support88. Their memory work focused on the counter-narrative of World War II representing "true" heroes through the journals and newspapers. In 2004 a new journal of military history magazine *Беларускі Рэзыстанс* [Belarusian Resistance] edited by Siarhej Iorsh was established in Minsk. Pretending to be an academic publication, this periodical popularized the narratives of diaspora and developed the myth of massive anti-Soviet national military resistance after 1945, coordinated by the BNR and BCR governments in exile. Siarhej Iorsh was also editor-in-chief of the newspaper of non-Soviet military veterans *Голас*

Камбатанта [Voice of Combatant] as well as pocket calendar series.[36] The myth on post-war anti-Soviet military resistance, created by the magazine Belarusian Resistance, was adopted by the ultra-nationalistic newspaper *Голас Краю* [Voice of Land].[37]

In 2008, the KGB arrested the leaders of the White Legion for attempting to blow up the Victory Monument in Minsk – the principal memorial of the Great Patriotic War in the country. The criminal prosecution was terminated; however, it led to the destruction of this organization. One of the last famous public actions of the Belarusian far right was in 2010 when during the football match between Dynamo Minsk and Vitebsk, the fans unfurled a banner at the stadium with a portrait of Rudolf Hess and the slogan "For us, your life is an iconic example of loyalty".[38] The fan-club of Dynamo Minsk is famous in Belarus for its far-right connection. By 2016 the KGB had destroyed practically all far-right organizations in Belarus, which were never recognized legally by the state. The leaders of the movement were sent to prison or had to leave the country or went underground. All periodicals that popularized the counter-narrative of World War II were dissolved. Since then, the revisionist narrative has been driven underground. The situation became even worse for far-right sympathizers when in 2020 the state introduced criminal prosecution for the rehabilitation and glorification of Nazism and collaboration with the Nazis.[39]

The Digital Era as a New Window of Opportunity

The destruction of far-right organizations included, inter alia, the inability to continue physical activity on streets. However, this challenge was soon solved. In recent years, the Internet has come to every Belarusian household. This created a new window of opportunity for far-right activists both in exile and underground. Manuel Castells has described how the networked society of the Internet allows even small, under-resourced networks a good deal of visibility. Castells' vision of a "space of flows" – the hubs in which networks crisscross – is

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> Using social networks and digital platforms, the activists popularize an alternative gallery of national heroes and martyrs.

useful in studying the counter-memory work on both revisionist narratives and practices, providing the storylines, heroes and rituals that can be deployed in a wide national context. Using social networks and digital platforms, the activists popularize an alternative gallery of national heroes and martyrs. They also redefine suspected Nazi war criminals as martyrs for the fatherland and victims of Stalinist terror. Today, digital work is the only possibility for the Belarusian far right to mobilize their movement and to recruit new members. The collaborationist history is widely propagated via social networks, on YouTube films, and in small private forums and groups associations, all outside the KGB's control. The activists also participate in various international digital forums. How have the new forms of memory work and ongoing political crisis reshaped the identity of Belarusian far-right?

An Alternative Gallery of National Heroes and Martyrs

On February 16, 2018 (a few days before the BKA Memorial Day), Bulbash United, one of the largest alcoholic beverage companies in Belarus, posted an article on its official homepage on Facebook. The text included a portrait of General Kushal in front of the map of Belarus. The photo was accompanied by a text glorifying his life, which contained the following words: "Throughout his life, he strove to create a powerful national army as the main guarantee of the independence of Belarus. Today we remember the name of Frantisek Kushal. He is a well-known political figure, the founder of the BKA, a publicist and author of memoirs […] He went through two wars and remained a man of worth."[40] The publication caused a storm of positive and negative comments and was widely disseminated via digital forums. Only after the reaction of Russian mass media did the article disappear from Bulbash United's homepage. The Kushal case is an example of how the counter-narrative of World War II became popular outside far-right groups. His memoirs under the remarkable title *Attempts to organize a Belarusian army during the German occupation of Belarus* were printed in Belarus in the 1990s and became well-known.[41] The memoirs,

which are considered by many Belarusian and Western historians as a reliable source;[42] are in fact a very well-constructed counter-narrative of World War II based on falsifications, silence and half-truths. Upon arriving in the US, Mr. Kushal was recruited as a special agent by the CIA (under the cryptonym CAMBISTA-10) and as an FBI informant.[43] This position gave him a great deal of security. The CIA knew about the Nazi past but he was still known in the US as "two-star general Francis Kuschel".[44] In fact, Kushal ended the war as a Nazi police lieutenant-colonel and the freshly-achieved rank of general. He started his military service in 1915 as a professional officer of the Russian Imperial Army, then took an active part in the creation of Belarusian military forces in 1918–1920. During 1921–1939 he was a captain in the Polish army. Captured by the Red Army in 1939, he survived the Katyn massacre due to being recruited by the NKVD as an informant.[45] During his life in exile, the Soviet authorities accused Kushal of war crimes as the man "who directed the execution of 40,000 Jews".[46] As the chief inspector of auxiliary police and head of the police school in Minsk he did not participate directly in the atrocities. His contribution to the Nazi extermination war was the training of the collaborationist officer corps, which was involved in crimes against humanity. The 13th SD battalion was Kushal's personal project. Despite his memoirs, he never led the 30th Waffen-SS division and it was not he who "saved" this division via US captivity. The archival records tell us a classic story of a temporizer who changed service and cap insignia many times and survived under any regime. Kushal died in 1968, celebrated by Belarusian and Ukrainian diasporas in the US as a great commander of the 50,000 men strong National Army.[47] In fact, the short-lived BKA was an auxiliary police formation under the SS with about 28,000 policemen. Kushal acted as a staff coordinator of this formation, since every BKA unit was under the command of the local German police-chief. The myth of Kushal as a founder of the national army was successfully reimported to Belarus and used by far-right activists as a confirmation of the correctness of their narrative of World War II.

A special place in the counter-narrative of World War II today is occupied by moon-beams, who were dropped by parachute onto Belarusian territory by Nazi Germany, and after the war by Western intelligence services, and who died in combat against the Soviet secret police or were sentenced to death. Their cult, which is central for far-right sympathizers, is promoted today via a range of digital platforms and social networks. Two people play a key role in this myth. One was Janka Filistovich, a student of history at Sorbonne University in Paris, who was recruited as a CIA agent within the project AEPRIMER and dropped in 1951 onto Belarusian territory as a representative of the BNR government in exile with the task of leading anti-Soviet resistance. After a year in the forest, Filistovich was captured by Soviet secret police with a small group of followers and sentenced to death. The romantic image of Filistovich as a fighter against Communism and a victim of Stalinist terror, who sacrificed his life for Belarus, is undermined by his wartime biography.[48] According to archival records, he was a solider in the 13th SD battalion, the unit which was involved in Holocaust crimes. In August 1943, the battalion command encouraged him to take leave. Historian Oleg Litskevich found out that the time of his vacation coincides with the final liquidation of the ghetto in Hlybokae, in which Filistovich's company took part.[49]

Mikhail Vitushka is another popular figure for far-right and conservative circles of Belarusian youth. The myth of General Vitushka was created by the veterans in exile and reimported to Belarus after 1991. According to this myth, Vitushka led the anti-Soviet partisan army consisting of 45,000 combatants in 1944–1959,[50] and died peacefully in 2006 in Germany. For young Belarusian admirers, he is a kind of equivalent to Roman Shukhevych, the military leader of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). In fact, Vitushka was neither a military leader of the insurgent army, nor a general. He ended the war as a major in Nazi service. After the liberation of Belarus in 1944 he was dropped onto the territory of the republic as part of Nazi efforts to create an anti-Soviet partisan movement in Be-

The first issue of *Зважай* [Attention] – magazine published in 1974–1998 by Liaison Committee of Byelorussian War Veterans and edited by Kastus Akula. Fragment about the first world congress of Belarusian veterans in Manchester in 1974. Belarusian internet-library Kamunikat.

larus. However, in 1945 a small group of agents led by Vitushka was surrounded by the Soviet MGB near Vilnius, and he was killed.[51] His personal file is available at the Lithuanian Special Archives and has been well-researched.[52] Like Shukhevych, due to his high position within the Nazi police he was certainly involved in the war crimes.[53] In 1941–1943 he occupied a number of key positions within the auxiliary police, being a deputy head of the district police in four regions of Belarus and Russia: Minsk, Bryansk, Smolensk and Mahileu. However, his adepts ignored the facts and suppressed the details of his service prior to 1944. In 2014, the conservative right-wing organization *Malady Front* (Young Front) took part in an opposition demonstration in Minsk with a banner showing a portrait of

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Banner of Belarusian detachment *Пагоня* [Chase] within the Ukrainian Azov Battalion. Ukraine. 2015.
PHOTO: RADIO FREE EUROPE/ RADIO LIBERTY

Vitushka surrounded by the portraits of Ukrainian ultranationalist leaders Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych and the slogan: "Heroes never die". The banner provoked a strong reaction from Alexander Surikov, Russia's Ambassador in Belarus. The Young Front replied to Surikov that only Belarusian nation may decide who their heroes were and whose portraits should be on the banners. Andrus Tsianiuta, the deputy head of the Young Front explained for media why they placed these figures with slogan "Heroes do not die": "We participate in the demonstration in order to show our support to Ukraine, therefore we placed Belarusian and Ukrainian heroes together. Belarusian heroes Bulak-Balakhovich, Mikhail Vitushka and Vincent Hadleuski appeared together with Ukrainian heroes Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevich. By this we wanted to show that Belarusian and Ukrainian peoples have been very close in past, and our national movements have been developed in similar way". The heroes on the Young Front banner are important for the history of Belarus and Ukraine, but they are not recognized today by the official authorities (in Belarus)".[54] Paradoxically, like in Ukraine, many collaborators and ethnic cleansers who fought for Hitler and were also involved in mass-violence actions against major Slavic population recognised today by many people as "martyrs for the fatherland".

The official gallery of heroes and martyrs of World War II is losing its legitimacy for the anti-Lukashenka democratic opposition, due to their popularity in the official historical narrative. The ongoing political crisis helps the far-right to promote the cult of anti-Soviet and pro-Nazi heroes, which has reached broad segments of society.[55] This myth also shapes their own identity as the only true successors of heroic pro-European martyrs for the fatherland. At the same time, after the brutal suppression of the peaceful protests in August 2020 and the subsequent political reaction, the anti-Lukashenka democratic opposition today is in search of heroes from the past who fought against dictators.

The 2020 Protests, the Belarusian Far Right and the Donbas Connection

The anti-globalist, anti-EU and anti-liberal rhetoric of Lukashenka gives him a great support within the European far-right movement. For example, a delegation of the British and Italian far right, led by Nick Griffin and Roberto Fiore, visited Minsk in 2016 and had a meeting with ideologists close to the presidential administration.[56] The popularity of Lukashenka within the international far right have led to a split within the Belarusian far right. Some intellectuals have changed sides and became pro-Lukashenka propagandists.

One of them is Aliaksei Dzermant, a sociologist from the National Academy of Belarus and the founder of *Kryuskaja Draugija Druvingau*. This organization identifies itself as a part of the extreme right-wing network, *Allgermanische Heidnische Front*. Dzermant was also a founder of Gega Ruch, the organization presented as the successor of the Belarusian National-Socialist Party (founded in Poland in 1933) and its leaders Fabian Akinczyc and Uladzislau Kazlouski, who led the anti-Semitic propaganda apparatus in Minsk during the Nazi occupation. Another pro-Lukashenka ideologist is Aliaksandr Shpakouski, a political scientist and former member of *Правы Альянс* [Right Alliance]. The change of side by some influential far-right intellectuals was not supported en masse by ordinary members since it was considered to damage their identity and threaten major historical narratives. Today, Dzermant is the main advocate of Eurasianism in Belarus.

The role of the far right in the 2020 protests against the unfair elections is unknown. Unlike the Maidan revolution in Kyiv, the symbols of the far-right movement were not visible during the street protests in Minsk. However, Roman Pratasevich, a journalist and key newsmaker of the mass protests, previously served as the propagandist in the Azov Battalion, which has been described by researchers as a far-right militia with connections to neo-Nazism.[57] Pratasevich was arrested in May 2021 by the KGB after his flight was forced to land in Minsk. Another far-right activist, Vital Shyshou, who was found dead in Kyiv in 2020, led the organization Belarusian House in Ukraine. Since 2014, about one hundred far-right activists from Belarus went to Ukraine to participate in the military conflict in Donbas. Many of them joined Azov and Pravy Sector units.[58] In Ukraine, the Belarusian military volunteers created two associations: Atrad Pahonia and Tactical Group Belarus. They developed and reshaped the existing counter-narrative that has been crystallized into its internal and external forms. The external counter-narrative is based on the myth of BKA and the martyrs of post-war anti-Soviet Belarusian resistance.

The anti-Polish discourse, which was natural for post-war veterans, is suppressed, since Poland is described as a country on the "right side" in the struggle against the communism and liberalism. Another reason for this was the strong anti-Polish rhetoric in Lukashenka's politics of memory. The silence has also been applied to prominent Belarusian veterans in the West who fought against the Nazis in the Anders Army.[59] Like SS-veterans in the Cold War West, Belarusian far-right activists use the narratives of World War II in order to claim special status as exclusive true patriots. The war in Ukraine is presented as a war for Belarus too. The supra-national perspective is also important. The military conflict in Donbas is described as the war against the non-European "Eastern Empire". The volunteers claim that they fight for all of Europe, defending a pan-national future confirmed by NATO and the fall of the Berlin wall, and saving Western civilization from Russia.[60]

The internal historical narrative of Belarusian military volunteers in Donbas is based on neo-Nazi values. The SS-runes and insignia of the 30th Waffen-SS division are on helmets of many volunteers.[61] In 2016, police in the Vitebsk region arrested Stanislau Hancharou, one of the Belarusian volunteers in Ukraine, a soldier of the Azov Battalion. He was known in Donbas under his nickname Terror-Machine. The media published photos of his body covered by tattoos presenting an illustrated history of Waffen-SS and Nazi atrocities. The symbols of the 30th Waffen-SS division and Sonderkommando Dirlewanger are adjacent to the image of SS soldiers, as well as a panorama of a death camp with a guard in front shooting a prisoner in the head. Terror-Machine had a personal page in the social network Vkontakte, in which he promoted the ideas of neo-Nazism and White Power.[62]

In many countries, far-right extremists are openly proud of their countries' contingents in the Waffen-SS and neo-Nazi ideology.[63] Today's Belarus is an exception. Very few far-right activists (e.g. Dzmitry Rubasheuski, a Belarusian volunteer in the Pravy Sector Bat-

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The popularity of Lukashenka within the international far right have led to a split within the Belarusian far right.

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> **The romantic image of pro-Nazi veterans became more and more popular in Belarus.**

talion) admit openly the commitment to ideas of National Socialism.[64] Instead, they prefer to speak in public about "controlled democracy" and present themselves as "moderate right" and "non-extremists".[65] In my opinion, the reasons for such careful political statements are the introduction of anti-Nazi legislation in Belarus and the threat of political repression.[66]

Conclusion

The pro-Nazi military veterans in the West have been very successful in passing on their symbolic capital to the contemporary Belarusian far right. Their networks benefit today from free digital networks and media, using what Manual Castells terms "transnational discursive public spaces" to gain visibility despite their small size and limited resources.[67] They successfully developed counter-narratives of World War II and adapted them to the ongoing political situation. They succeeded in winning the public legacy and building social capital, through the construction of a glorious past for the fighters for the fatherland.

This also shaped their own identity that could be defined in terms of "new right" as a historical and cultural one. They realized the need of pro-European segments of society for a new gallery of anti-Soviet heroes and martyrs. The Ukrainian conflict in Donbas and the ongoing political crisis in Belarus gave them a new audience, but also reformed their identity which is based today on the connection between past and present. According to the constructed narrative, their predecessors had fought solely to save the Belarusian people from communism and Russian supremacy, as they do today. The pan-European perspective gains them support within the pro-EU circles of the society, which are against union with Russia. This also shapes the identity of the far right as members of a strong historical pan-European far-right project, just like in times of the supra-national Waffen-SS and the Nazi New Europe project.

The clear political distinction between the vision of the past among the democratic opposition and Lukashenka's regime helps the far-right activists to strengthen their social capital and secure their future political legitimacy. This contradiction increased after the 2020 protests when the government started a massive propaganda campaign in which the peaceful democratic protesters were presented as the heirs of the military collaborators with the Nazis.[68] However, despite their lack of resources, the far-right activists have an effective counter-weapon, the Internet, through which they attack the official narratives and distribute their own version of the past. Despite the existence of critical international and national academic research on Belarusian military collaboration with the Nazis, the romantic image of pro-Nazi veterans became more and more popular in Belarus. The revisionist history presented by the Belarusian far right is selective, manipulative, and toxic for the message they spread. The Holocaust and other Nazi crimes are not mentioned. Unfortunately, the work of professional historians has its limits; very few historians have published popular texts, and even fewer use the Internet to popularize the results of academic research. At the same time, far-right activists are very successful in their use of digital space in order to promote the counter-narratives of World War II in a fairly simple form. The narrative of a "glorious past" has a very practical meaning for the extreme right: It shapes their identity and legitimizes their movement within Belarusian civil society. We can conclude that the counter-narrative of World War II is ready for a post-Lukashenka Belarus. ●

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15   Alexander Mark, *Nazi Collaborators, American Intelligence, and the Cold War: The Case of the Byelorussian Central Council* (MA thesis. University of Vermont, 2015); Anton Rudak, "Беларусы на службе ЦРУ: беларуская інфармацыя ў рассакрэчаных дакументах амерыканскай разведкі" [Belarusians in the CIA: Belarus in Declassified US Intelligence Documents], Nasha Niva, February 4, 2017.

16   For his memoirs see: Dzmitry Kasmovich, *За вольнаю і суверэнаю Беларусь* [For a Free and Sovereign Belarus] (Vilnius: Gudas, 2006). For the apologetic biography: Siarhej Iorsh, *Генэрал вызвольнага фронту* [General of the Liberation Front] (Менск: Голас Краю, 2002).

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25   Per Anders Rudling, "Lukashenka and the 'Red-Browns': National ideology, Commemoration of the Past, and Political Belonging", *Forum für Osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 15 (2010): 95–125.

26   Kotljarchuk, 2013.

27   Among them were Sergis Hutyrczyk, the head of Belarusian veteran associations in the US (under the BNR) and former officer of the 13th SD battalion and a guard at the Koldyczewo Nazi concentration camp, and Szymon Serafinowicz, the activist of Belarusian veteran association in the UK (under the BCR) and former chief of the auxiliary police in Mir. See: U.S. v. HUTYRCZYK. Civ. A. No. 90-3184.1992, https://www.leagle.com/decision/19921804803fsupp100111700 (retrieved 10 November 2021); "Sergis Hutyrczyk, 68; Named as Nazi Guard", *The New York Times*, February 6, 1993; Ros Wynne-Jones "Refugee, 85, sent for Britain's first war crimes trial", *Independent*, April 16, 1996.

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68 Kotljarchuk 2020.

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Turning to the Right. The Right-Wing Faction and Hot Button Issues

by **Vassilis Petsinis**

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the far-right political spectrum in Croatia. The timeframe concentrates on the engagement of far-right political actors between 2015 and 2021 with references to earlier periods when deemed necessary. First, this report summarizes the hot-button issues in Croatia's identity politics with a stress on interethnic relations, gender-related themes, and the migration crisis. Then, it covers the oldest political parties among the Croatian far right (the Croatian Party of Rights/HSP; the Croatian Pure Party of Rights/HČSP; and the Autochthonous Croatian Party of Rights/A-HSP): their history and origins, programmatic standpoints, and patterns of political engagement. Of particular importance is to clarify why and how the ruling centre-right, conservative Croatian Democratic Union/HDZ has succeeded in attracting the bulk of nationalist and socially conservative voters under its wings, thanks to a "right-wing faction" operating within the party. Lastly, attention is paid to the recently formed (national conservative) Homeland Movement/DP and its prospects of antagonizing both the far-right spectrum and the "right-wing faction" of HDZ.[1]

This report relies on a qualitative study and a content analysis.[2] The primary material consists of official documents such as programmes and manifestos, electoral platforms, and statements and declarations, issued by the parties under study. Selected interviews and quotations of leading members of these parties, monitored in the Croatian and international press or other informative outlets (electronic and printed), expert reports, and surveys both public and independent, have been of complementary importance. This report also includes data from a set of research (expert and elite) interviews, conducted between autumn 2018 and spring 2019 in Croatia within the frame of the Horizon 2020 MERW-BKBS-749400 individual research project.[3]

Hot-Button Issues
The spectrum of interethnic relations

The *Law on the Use of the Languages and the Alphabets of National Minorities* (2000) guarantees that minority languages and their scripts are to be equal with the Croatian language before the law (Article 1). It endorses their public use in those municipalities and localities where ethnic minorities make up a local percentage of 30%, in the areas of local administration, public information, signposting and naming of geographic locations (Articles 4, 5, 8, 10, 13 and 18). The *Constitutional Law on the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities*/CLRNM (2002) additionally safeguards and establishes these rights (Articles 7 and 11). Especially in

"Thousands of Croatian Far-Right Support-ers March in Zagreb", *voanews.com*, Zagreb, Croatia, March 24, 2018.

the ethnically diverse north-western region of Istria, the Serb Cyrillic script is publicly used in institutions of collective importance for the ethnic Serb minority (e.g. the Serb national minority council building and the Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries in the town of Pula) without disruptions.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that the implementation of the constitutional and legal clauses on minority rights has been without shortcomings throughout the country. Especially in the municipality of Vukovar and other parts of Slavonia where the ethnic Serb population meets the 30% threshold prescribed by law, the public use of the Serb Cyrillic script has not been implemented. In the case of Vukovar, the elevation of this eastern Slavonian town as a primary symbol in the *Domovinski Rat* [Homeland War] of August-November 1991 against the Yugoslav People's Army/JNA has been of crucial significance.[4] Consequently, the period between 2013 and 2016 witnessed a series of mass protests against the public use of Serb Cyrillic script in Vukovar.[5]

Gender-related themes

One landmark event that occurred shortly after Croatia joined the EU was the ban on same-sex marriage in the Constitutional referendum that was held on December 1, 2013.[6] Two-thirds of those who voted granted their assent to the proposal that: "the Constitution should be amended to define marriage as the union between a man and a woman". The petition for a referendum was initiated by grass-roots groupings with an affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church and spearheaded by the NGO *U ime obitelji* [In the Name of Family].[7]

To comprehend more adequately the wider implications of opposition to LGBTQI rights in Croatia, one needs to take into consideration the pact between Croatia's Catholic clergy and the political establishment; as also stipulated in the Vatican Contract.[8] As part of this semi-formal arrangement, the governing HDZ granted its assent to the constitutional referendum on the same-sex marriage ban and still condones the Church's opposition to sexual education.[9]

The migration crisis

Since 2019 and up to date, sporadic incidents of maltreatment of refugees and other migrants have been reported in Croatia, especially along the Croatian-Bosnian border.[10] Nevertheless, by contrast to Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán and/ or former Slovak PM Robert Fico, Croatian PM Andrej Plenković of HDZ (and, previously, PM Zoran Milanović of the Social Democrat Party/SDP) refrained from resorting to cultural

> One needs to take into consideration the pact between Croatia's Catholic clergy and the political establishment.

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NGO In the Name of the Family on the referendum of same-sex marriage.
PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

argumentation against the accommodation of refugees and other migrants on Croatian soil. Instead, between 2015 and 2017, attention was paid to the limited infrastructural capacities.[11]

In addition, expert reports by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles/ECRE for Croatia assessed that the conditions at the Croatian accommodation centres for refugees were satisfactory overall.[12] The same reports also observed that the bulk of migrants tended to see Croatia as a "transit country".[13] This is a catalyst that considerably mitigated any prospects of public or political discontent.

The Croatian Far Right: Main Actors
The Croatian Party of Rights/HSP

HSP was officially established on February 25, 1990, by Dobrosav Paraga and Ante Paradžik. The party founders envisaged the party as a continuation of the homonymous political organization which operated in Austria-Hungary during the late 19th century. Between 1991 and 1993, HSP dispatched its paramilitary unit (Croatian Defence Forces/HOS) to the battle zones of Slavonia and Herzegovina. The party leadership pledges commitment to the legacies of Ante Starčević, leader of the 19th century Croatian Party of Rights and one of the founding fathers of modern Croatian nationalism.

However, the party has been repeatedly accused of trying to rehabilitate Mile Budak and other chief ideologists of the Fascist Ustaše [Insurgents] movement which was active during the interwar era and the Second World War.[14] In its fundamental principles, HSP opposes "the concession of any rights that

would grant other ethnic groups state-building capacities inside the territory of the Croatian state".[15] Elsewhere in the same document, the party declares that it is "pro-life", pledges to "free the educational system from any ideological and political influences", and stresses that it will "facilitate the inclusion of Croatian traditional values into everyday life".[16]

Between 2013 and 2016, HSP participated actively in the protests against the public use of the Serb Cyrillic script in Vukovar. In another declaration, issued in 2018, the party castigated "all those political forces who obstructed, prevented, and/or falsified the investigation process for the war crimes committed (by the JNA and Serb paramilitary/auxiliary forces) during the Homeland War".[17] The mobilization of nationalist grass-roots groupings and Catholic Church NGOs, during the Constitutional referendum on same-sex marriage (2013), provided HSP with one more opportunity for active political engagement. Smaller public gatherings were organized by the party, amid the outbreak of the migration crisis, between 2015 and 2018. Although the bulk of refugees and other migrants were merely transiting through Croatia, this did not hinder the party leadership from dubbing the migrant waves collectively as "potential rapists".[18] HSP is currently not represented in the national parliament (Sabor). However, the party controls the town halls of Popovača (Sisak-Moslavina constituency)[19] and Gospić (Lika-Senj constituency). The local mayor in Gospić is the current party chair, Karlo Starčević.[20]

The Croatian Pure Party of Rights/HČSP

In a similar vein as HSP, HČSP (founded on December 12, 1992) claims continuity from the original Croatian Pure Party of Rights which was set up in 1895.[21] Just like the HSP, the party leadership also pledges commitment to the legacies of Ante Starčević and has equally been accused of historical revisionism and attempts to rehabilitate the *Ustaše* movement and the Fascist Independent Croatian State/NDH which was established during the Second World War.[22] In its extensive programme,

HČSP pledges to defend the national sovereignty and prosperity of Croatia; safeguard the values of family, homeland, and Christianity; nationalize banks; combat corruption; protect the dignity of the Homeland War and its legacies; "de-Communize" Croatia via the practice of lustration; renegotiate Croatia's membership of the EU; grant material and political support to the ethnic Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina; cooperate with the Croatian diaspora abroad; and revise state legislation on minority rights.[23]

HČSP has actively participated in all demonstrations and other events against the public use of the Serb Cyrillic script in Vukovar, the recognition of same-sex marriages, and the accommodation of refugees and other migrants on Croatian soil. Nevertheless, this party is even weaker than HSP, without a single deputy at the *Sabor* or any municipality under its control.

The Autochthonous Croatian Party of Rights/A-HSP

A-HSP was founded in 2005 and it is the smallest among all three parties of the extremist right in Croatia. The party opposes Croatia's membership of the EU and NATO, advocates for the establishment of a "Greater Croatia' (comprising the regions of western Herzegovina, Boka Kotorska in Montenegro, and Srem in Serbia), and has often been accused of instigating hatred against the ethnic Serb community.[24] A-HSP does not disguise its historical revisionism and overtly sports the "*Za Dom Spremni*!' [Ready for the Homeland!] slogan of the *Ustaše* in its official website.[25] In all of this, the main ideological difference between A-HSP and the other two parties consists in the greater stress placed by this party on the alleged "cultural exceptionalism and uniqueness of the Croatian nation and civilization" in relation to the Slavic, Germanic, and Latin realms of cultural influence. Overall, the forces of the Croatian extreme right have been largely operating as extra-parliamentary agents with a feeble electoral appeal and a low mobilizing potential. Therefore, they have not succeeded in capitalizing on public grievances over the management of interethnic relations, gender-related themes, and/or the migration crisis.

Non-partisan actors

In addition to these three parties, the Croatian far right also comprises non-partisan actors such as the YouTuber Veljko Bojanić, who has often been accused of propagating hate speech against ethnic minorities and migrants, and nationalist websites such as "narod.hr". Furthermore, the investigated period between 2017 and 2018 witnessed an increase in anti-refugee hate messages on YouTube and the Croatian web sphere as a whole.[26]

The "Right-Wing Faction" of HDZ and Its Functions

The period since 2000 witnessed the process of '*de-Tuđmanizacija*[27] inside the party structures of HDZ. Nevertheless, the era of Tomislav Karamarko's tenure as the chair of HDZ (2012–2016) saw an intra-party project towards the "selective re-appropriation' of elements from Franjo Tuđman's legacy as the founding statesman of the Croatian independent republic.[28] This process gradually facilitated the consolidation of what is known as the "right-wing faction" inside the HDZ's party structures. This is an intra-party segment characterized by more nationalistic and socially conservative outlooks on policymaking areas such as minority issues; LGBTQI rights, abortion, and other gender-related themes; relations between clergy and state; the management of the migration crisis; and the implementation of stricter "law and order" agendas – coupled with the occasional communication of soft Eurosceptic standpoints.

Throughout 2013 and 2016, the "right-wing faction" of HDZ also mobilized amid the demonstrations against the public use of the Serb Cyrillic script in Vukovar. This mobilization involved the coordination among local party affiliates (e.g. the mayor of Vukovar, Ivan Penava, when he still was an affiliate of HDZ) and extra-parliamentary actors such as the Croatian War Veterans Association/UHRV.[29] On the macropolitical level, throughout 2018, HDZ's "right-wing faction"and grass-roots grouping *Narod odlučuje* [The People Decide] campaigned for a referendum (eventually rejected)

> HSP participated actively in the protests against the public use of the Serb Cyrillic script in Vukovar.

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> Since 2017–2018, the party's 'right-wing faction' has shifted its focus towards certain guidelines of the Istanbul Convention.

in order to amend the Constitution (article 72) and reduce the number of ethnic Serb minority representatives at the Sabor from three to one.[30] This endeavour ran parallel to allegations over historical revisionism about *Ustaše* and the Second World War among certain members of HDZ's "right-wing faction"– the European Parliament MP and former HDZ-member, Ruža Tomašić, in particular.[31]

Since 2017–2018, the party's "right-wing faction" has shifted its focus towards certain guidelines of the Istanbul Convention (2017) (e.g. civic partnership for same-sex couples) and mobilized its target-groups across the country in cooperation with Catholic Church groupings.[32] Furthermore, HDZ's "right-wing faction" opposes any proposals for the liberalization of the legislation on abortion and has been endeavouring to internationalize their campaign through the systematization of links to conservative think-tanks based abroad (mainly in Poland).[33]

Since autumn 2015, HDZ has been questioning the long-term viability of EU quotas for refugees. Empirical surveys have found out that the majority of the party's affiliates hold that immigration policy must remain under the authority of sovereign states (the highest percentage among Croatia's largest parties).[34] Nevertheless, unlike the Polish and/or Hungarian precedents, no segment within HDZ, up to date, appears to see much scope in the 'weaponization' of the party's scepticism over EU refugee quotas. Therefore, it is mainly HSP, HČSP, A-HSP, and smaller grass-roots groupings that have been predominantly active in mobilization campaigns over the migration crisis. The operation of the "right-wing faction" within HDZ has considerably enhanced the ability of the party to attract votes from the more socially conservative layers, especially in specific parts of Croatia (Dalmatia and Slavonia).[35] In addition to this, it has drastically contributed to the marginalization of the more extremist right-wing forces along the party spectrum.

Ambitious Contenders from the Right: The Homeland Movement/DP

The Homeland Movement was officially established on February 29, 2020 by former singer and TV-host Miroslav Škoro. Having built a stronghold in the war-ravaged territories of Slavonia (namely, Virovitičko-podravska county and Osječko-baranjska county)[36], Škoro and his DP have set as top priorities the: (a) safeguarding of national and Christian values; (b) stricter control of immigration and tougher "law and order" measures; (c) revision of certain clauses in the legislation on minority rights, especially as far as the representation of the ethnic Serb community is concerned. In the parliamentary elections of July 5, 2020, DP garnered 10.89% of the vote, appointed 16 deputies to the *Sabor* (out of 151 seats), and occupied the third spot after HDZ and SDP.

The party benefited from the relative weakening of HDZ's "right-wing faction" on the municipal and local levels. This was particularly the case with the departure of Vukovar mayor Ivan Penava from HDZ (May 2020) and his subsequent decision to join forces with Škoro.[37] The state of disarray further along the far-right angle of the political spectrum (e.g. the feebleness and electoral insignificance of HSP, HČSP, and A-HSP, as well as the Bloc for Croatia and the Croatian Conservative Party) additionally enhanced DP's chances of consolidating themselves as the most potent force to the right of HDZ.

Soft Eurosceptic sentiment interweaves with the management of interethnic relations in the party's discontent over the pressures from the Venice Commission (Council of Europe) and the EU on Croatia (between 2000 and 2002) for the adoption of the "fixed" quotas arrangement towards the representation of ethnic minorities in the *Sabor*.[38] DP holds that with the exceptions of Croatia, Slovenia, and Hungary, "this model is mostly applied outside of Europe (e.g. Armenia, China, Cyprus, Iran and India) […] Western democracies no longer implement this model".[39] In addition, the party leadership contends that "this arrangement has

Belarus

Croatia

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mostly enabled certain individuals and groups to serve their private interests".[40] Therefore, DP calls for the abolition of this model.[41]

In regard to gender-related issues, DP pledges to "respect and safeguard traditional family values"[42] whereas the full party manifesto defines "marriage as the union between a man and a woman, as stipulated by the Constitution [...] this guideline must be respected by the Croatian institutions".[43] In addition, DP firmly objects to the adoption of children by same-sex couples. [44] Conforming to the trend established by HDZ, the party does not show great interest in 'weaponizing' the policymaking area of immigration but still holds that "the management of the latest migration crisis, as well as the protection of borders and citizens from potential threats, must be assigned primarily to the authorities of sovereign states within the EU".[45]

The DP leadership epitomize their soft Eurosceptic stance by underlining that it subscribes to a European Union as "a confederal union of sovereign states and not as a supranational federal state with the prospect of becoming unitary".[46] Along the same lines, DP prescribes that Croatia must develop closer relations with the "Visegrad Four" because of "the shared historical experiences, as well as the similar positions and outlooks on the European and global developments" with this group of countries.[47] The participation of an invigorated DP to the right of HDZ poses a crucial challenge to the alleged endeavour by HDZ-chairman and Croatian PM Andrej Plenković to shift the official party-narrative more firmly towards the centre. This, in turn, is likely to readjust, to varying degrees, the intra-party equilibrium between the more liberal and the more conservative factions of HDZ – especially with respect to policymaking areas such as minority rights, migration issues, gender-related themes, and the semi-formal partnership between the Catholic Church and the state. Lastly, this is a development which further marginalizes the "traditional" forces of the Croatian far right.

Final Remarks

The oldest and more extremist parties of the Croatian far right (HSP, HČSP, and A-HSP) appear to be in a state of disarray with a feeble electoral appeal and a low mobilizing potential. Of particular significance towards this development has been the efficient engagement of the "right-wing faction" within the ruling HDZ among the more nationalistic and socially conservative segments of the electorate. Since the parliamentary elections of July 5, 2020, the national conservative Homeland Movement emerged as a formidable contender to the right of HDZ with the potential of additionally side-lining the more extremist right-wing parties.[48] ●

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2   See M. Schreier, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*, (London: SAGE, 2012); and M. Hermann, "Content Analysis", in *Qualitative Methods in International Relations,* (edited by A. Klotz and D. Prakash), (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 151–167.

3   MSCA-IF, project title: "Patterns and management of ethnic relations in the Western Balkans and the Baltic States", duration: 2017–2019. See https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/749400 Accessed June 19, 2021.

4   It should be noted that the designation *Domovinski Rat* refers to the entirety of military operations conducted throughout the territory of the contemporary Croatian republic between 1991 and 1995.

5   http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/vukovar-bilingualism-introduce-faces-violent-resistance Accessed June 19, 2021.

6   https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25172778 Accessed June 19, 2021.

7   See A. Petričušič, *Religio-politics through Law: Use of Legal Norms and Institutions by the Croatian Conservative Social Movement*, MA thesis, (Budapest: Central European University, 2015); D. Čepo, "Breeding Ground for Croatia's Conservative Social Movements" in *The Democratic Potential of Emerging Social Movements in Southeastern Europe,* (edited by I. Mujanović), (Sarajevo: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017), 17–22.

8   See V. Petsinis, "Converging or Diverging Patterns of Euroscepticism among Political Parties in Croatia and Serbia", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2020): 145–146. Available at https://www.total-croatia-news.com/politics/31604-vatican-praises-its-contracts-with-croatia. Accessed June 19, 2021.

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12   European Council on Refugees and Exiles, ECRE. (2017). *Country Report: Croatia* (2017 update), 83–85.

13   Ibid., 33, 41, 55. It should be kept in mind that no recent field research was conducted by ECRE, or any other agencies, in Croatia since the Covid-19 crisis broke out in spring 2020.

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15   Basic Principles of HSP. Available at https://hsp.hr/temeljna-nacela-hsp/ Accessed June 20, 2021.

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17   https://hsp.hr/ii-vukovarska-deklaracija-hsp-a-2018/ Accessed June 19, 2021.

18   Interview with a senior analyst at the 'GONG' NGO, Zagreb (November 13, 2018).

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39   Ibid.

40   Ibid., 31.

41   Ibid., 32.

42   DP. (2020a). *Parlamentarni Izbori 2020: Zašto Što Svoje Volim*, Zagreb: Domovinski Pokret, 2.

43   DP, 2020b, 20.

44   Ibid.

45   DP, 2020b, 29.

46   DP, 2020a, 3.

47   DP, 2020b, 30.

48   It should be added that, on May 30, 2021, the candidate of the green/leftist Možemo ('We Can!') coalition, Tomislav Tomaševič, won a landslide victory over Miroslav Škoro in the second round of the mayoral elections for Zagreb. Tomaševič won 199,630 votes (67.3%) whereas Škoro garnered 106,300 votes (32.7%).

Czech Republic

Identity Politics of the Far Right in the Czech Republic. Freedom and Direct Democracy

by **Aliaksei Kazharski**

This article analyzes the identity politics of the Czech far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy party (SPD). It demonstrates that, in addition to the traditional enemy images that the far right uses as negative *others* to articulate its vision of the national identity, the discursive strategies of SPD include a strong *populist* element. The latter consists in radical frontier-drawing and juxtaposition of the "authentic" people and the treacherous elites, domestic and international, who have been wronging the Czech nation. At the same time, SPD's identity politics also has to operate in a specific environment, defined by Czech cultural and political traditions, and grasping that broader context is also important for understanding the Czech far right and its approach to identity.

In comparison to the Visegrád Four and the broader East-Central European region, the Czech Republic has differed from its neighbors in several key ways. On the one hand, it has

traditionally exhibited a strong tradition of Euroscepticism that distinguished it from the more Euro-optimist Poland or Slovakia, not to speak of the Baltic states. Yet, it has lacked a messianic nationalism of the Hungarian and Polish type, which tends to strengthen authoritarian or "illiberal" tendencies. Furthermore, as far as democratic backsliding in the region is concerned, Czech political institutions and political culture have been seen as quite robust by regional standards. Additionally, from the beginning of the Czech post-Communist transition and all the way up to the 2021 national elections, there was a Communist party faction present in the Czech parliament. In terms of attracting marginalized/impoverished/anti-liberal/anti-Western voters, the far right thus also had to compete with the "far left."

In principle, there have been several political parties and movements that could qualify as "far right" in the post-Communist Czech

> **The Czech Republic has differed from its neighbors in several key ways.**

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Germany

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Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

Tomio Okamura speaking during the anti-immigrant protest at Wenceslas Square, Prague, Czech Republic.
PHOTO: AKTRON / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Republic. One of the more notable ones was the Worker's Party [Delnická strana – DS], which existed between 2002 and 2010, when it was dissolved by the Supreme Administrative Court on the grounds of being a threat to democracy. Neither DS nor its successor party ever demonstrated any impressive electoral performance. Jana Bobošikova's Free Bloc [Volný Blok] is another case of a far-right political project that failed to gain traction with voters (1.33% and 0 mandates in the 2021 national election).

By far the most successful far-right "start-up" has been Freedom and Direct Democracy [Svoboda a přímá demokracie-SPD], founded in 2015 by Radim Fiala and Tomio Okamura, a Czech-Japanese entrepreneur. SPD won 10.64% of the votes and twenty-two mandates in the 2017 election to the Chamber of Deputies (lower chamber of the bicameral Czech parliament). In the next cycle (2021 election) SPD performed somewhat worse with 9.5%, losing two of their mandates, but remained a force to be reckoned with in Czech politics.

Political scientists and commentators have identified Tomio Okamura's party as "right-wing," "far right,"[1] "populist"[2] or "far right populist."[3] The exact definition of all these terms may, of course, be contested and, presumably, should also always be contextualized. However, it can be safely argued that, in Czech politics, SPD occupies the political niche which attracts the typical far-right voter, given that the openly neo-fascist political parties are marginalized or outlawed. Many of the political tropes that the SPD draws on clearly overlap with the discursive strategies of multiple other far-right parties engaging in identity politics across Europe.

The so-called divisive "cultural" (for lack of a better term) issues and the "culture wars" they trigger obviously play a pivotal role in the identity politics of the far right. SPD is certainly no exception here. Yet reducing the analysis to the ideological cleavages that develop along the conventional right/left or traditionalist/progressivist divide would be

an oversimplification. Arguably, to grasp their identity building strategies in their entirety, one needs to analyze their *populist* dimension.

Political scientists have developed an understanding of populism as an ideologically unspecified political *style*, which can be discovered across the political spectrum (for a discussion see Kazharski and Makarychev 2020).[4] At the same time, certain shared "morphological" traits could be clearly identified, such as postulating the cleavage between the "ordinary people" and the "elites," disregard for institutionalized politics and a preference for "raw majoritarianism, and an overall confrontational and uncompromising attitude".[5] Earlier conceptual work by theorists like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe explains populism as a strategy of drawing "antagonistic frontiers" and establishing a dichotomy of "camps" radically opposed to each other.[6] When it comes to the far right in Central and Eastern Europe, these frontiers can be drawn between the "good" people, or the primordially understood "nation," and a broad array of internal and external enemies, which can range from members of the Roma community to transnational companies and oligarchs (see for example Kazharski's study of the Slovak far right).[7]

These conceptual points are essential for grasping the identitarian strategies of the far right. Any identity building, in principle, hinges on production of difference via *othering*.[8] However, political scientists have observed that the new wave of the so-called "ethnopopulism" has introduced a much wider scope of *others*, at least in comparison to the more conventional European nationalisms that have traditionally worked through othering the neighboring nations (see Vachudova's work[9] and also Brubaker's earlier take on the new "civilizationism").[10]

Against the background of these discussions, the case of Tomio Okamura's SPD can be read as an attempt to construct a vision of Czech identity which relies heavily but not exclusively on "cultural" issues, but also taps into the populist strategies of postulating other radical antagonisms. Consequently, the national community is defined through an array of *otherings*, with only some of them pertaining to the so-called "culture wars," i.e., divisive issues of race, ethnicity, religion, or gender.

The party defines itself through what one may call populist exceptionalism, e.g., as "a patriotic movement" and "the only party in parliament that promotes" systemic change. The "only party" is a construct that tends to be used repeatedly in party documents. Populist exceptionalism is a discursive strategy which makes a claim of representing the nation as a whole rather than its particular part, understood as a stratum or an interest group. In principle, it is typical for political campaigns to put forth *hegemonic* articulations (i.e., political bids to represent the *multitude* of societal actors and interests). However, in populist discourse such as that of SPD this tendency is visibly exaggerated to the point of drawing a radical frontier between the populist and the "citizens", on the one hand, and the rest of the political establishment defined as the "usurper elites" (*samozvané elity*), on the other.[11]

This populist exceptionalism is combined with a discourse of danger and the imperative of "protecting your nation, protecting your state" and "not trading the Czech flag for any other" as the SPD official anthem calls on its voters.[12] The enemies against whom the nation needs to be protected are predictably numerous. SPD was formed in 2015, almost simultaneously with the start of the European migration crisis, and has since then systematically capitalized on the anti-migration sentiments, which can run strong in the Czech and other Central European societies. This could feel somewhat ironic, considering the fact that the party leader Okamura is himself a product of international migration, having been born to a Czech mother and half-Japanese half-Korean father. However anti-migration discourses in Central and Eastern Europe tend to be notably selective in their securitization of foreigners, mostly focusing on people of Middle Eastern/Muslim background, while ignoring the migrants who come from the same region.[13]

SPD is no exception here. There is no apparent desire to capitalize on possible sentiments against Slovaks or Ukrainians who arrive in the

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Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

> The party admonished that the national education system should raise citizens in the spirit of 'patriotism and traditional family values'.

Czech Republic in large numbers, but there is a staunch anti-Islam position. Thus, Islam and migration, which is imposed through the "EU diktat," (i.e. the controversial system of refugee redistribution quotas) are often presented together in SPD campaigns.

In 2020, the Czech police launched a criminal investigation for hate speech against the SPD MP Karla Maříková following her social Darwinist comments about migrants. Maříková wrote on her Facebook page: "It is forbidden to bring non-autochthonous, invasive species of animals and plants to the EU. Muslim migrants are also non-autochthonous, and as with other invasive species, this means that they will spread in an unpredicted manner and will gradually displace the autochthonous European population. This is why they should be banned from entering the EU."[14] However, in the end, the Chamber of Deputies voted down the police request to lift Karla Maříková's parliamentary immunity.

As compared to the anti-migration/anti-multiculturalism rhetoric, SPD has been somewhat more moderate in capitalizing on the other traditional theme of the far right, namely gender and sexual identity. Arguably, this has to do with voter preferences and the political environment the party operates in. Whilst anti-migration/anti-Islam sentiments can run strong in the Czech society, it is traditionally more tolerant when it comes to LGBT issues, in particular when compared to some of the other CEE countries. For instance, a 2018 Pew Study showed that only 12% in the Czech Republic would be prepared to welcome a Muslim in their family, as compared to 33% and 47% in Poland and Slovakia, respectively. On the other hand, only 18% of the Czech young adults opposed same-sex marriage (with 50% and 42% for Poland and Slovakia).[15] The far right thus adapts its rhetoric to the more secularized Czech society, not securitizing the LGBT directly but, nevertheless, clearly speaking in favor of a "traditional family." For example, in a 2021 interview to the Czech Radio, dedicated to the issue of legalizing same-sex marriage, Okamura said "he had

nothing against gays" but argued that his party still supported the understanding of a family as a union between a man and a woman.[16] SPD's 2021 election program also contained a demand to introduce this definition in the Czech constitution.

When it comes to "culture war" issues there is also a clear attempt to exploit the broader influence of progressivist ideology on the Czech society. Thus, in the section on education, science, and research in the 2021 program, the party admonished that the national education system should raise citizens in the spirit of "patriotism and traditional family values" and rejected "genderism and Neo-Marxism" and the "false ideology of equality." The party newspaper *Na Vlastní Oči* [In My Own Eyes] occasionally uses the term "gender fascist,"[17] presumably in a sarcastic manner. SPD discourse targets "gender political NGOs" and wants the education system to be freed from "the influence of non-governmental organizations with a political program, engaged in a biased ideologization of the study programs."[18] Elsewhere, the same demands are made with respect to public funding for NGOs involved in what they call promoting of gender ideology.

This anti-NGOism draws a frontier between the nation and independent and pluralist civil society, which the far right routinely accuses of being in cahoots with various foreign actors, e.g. George Soros, Brussels, or the more vaguely defined "global elites." This rhetoric is akin to the discourses on civil society that can be found in Hungary (Orbánism), in countries with authoritarian regimes like Belarus, or in similar far-right rhetoric in democratic countries. The far right that operates in democratic systems, like SPD in the Czech Republic, tends to sow distrust not only in civil society but in the existing political system as such, including its electoral, judiciary and media pillars.

Thus, it is not uncommon for SPD to lash out at the media for their alleged unfairness and biased coverage, which stems from their "corrupt"[19] nature and from having abandoned their service to the nation in favor of "ideological propaganda that serves the interests of the

Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

Czech Special disci-
plinary force during
Queer Parade 2008 in
Brno, Czech Republic.
PHOTO: MARTIN STRACHOŇ /
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

EU elites".[20] Official party documents claim that the main public broadcasters, Czech Television and Czech Radio, have long failed to exercise their function as public media. In 2021, party leader Tomio Okamura received a court order to apologize to the Institute of Independent Journalism for calling its news and investigative journalism website *HlídacíPes.org* "a media cesspit," "connected to George Soros' money" and "set to corrupt traditional values."[21]

This anti-media attitude naturally begs for a comparison with the populist experience in other countries, in particular, the United States and Trumpism with its complaints about "fake news." The parallels do not end here. Even prior to becoming SPD leader Okamura professed a political style which involved questioning the legitimacy of the existing political system. Thus, he tried to run for president in 2012 but was rejected by the Ministry of the Interior and the Supreme Administrative Court due to invalid signatures. Okamura then filed a criminal complaint and accused the presidential election

of being rigged in order to exclude "undesirable" candidates. He also claimed that "mafia godfathers were paying the media to be biased in favor of some of the candidates.[22] In 2021, following the serious illness of president Miloš Zeman, who had had a long-time problem with alcohol, the Czech Senate discussed his removal from office. The SPD leader accused the upper chamber of parliament of organizing a "state coup." [23]

All these can be seen as elements of a political style which is highly reminiscent of Trumpism, and which consists in operating within a democratic system but constantly pointing out its allegedly "rigged" and unfair nature. The populist style of the far right thus works to sow distrust in institutionalized politics and its procedures, and appeals to the "raw" politics beyond institutions, the "authentic" voice of the "people" as opposed to the doings of the political "elites." This is where the mantra of "direct democracy," enshrined in SPD's name,

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> The party commits itself to voting for a Czexit and renegotiating a new format of relations with Europe.

plays a key role. Questioning the democratic nature of the existing system, the party puts forth demands for a "democracy without adjectives" (*demokracie bez přívlastků*) but ends up adding an adjective of its own ("direct"). It has systematically insisted on using the referendum as instrument of "direct democracy," including Brexit-style plebiscites on Czech membership of the EU *and* NATO.[24] SPD campaign leaders have also spoken in favor of radically reforming the Czech political system and cutting down on the existing parliamentary institutions by abolishing the Senate (the upper chamber) because it is "unnecessary" and reducing the number of MPs to just 81 (from the current 200 in the Chamber of Deputies).[25] *A propos*, according to Czech political scientists, the bicameral parliament is one of those features of the institutional setup of Czech politics, which "disadvantages extremist parties" and provides a safeguard against sliding into a hybrid regime after the Hungarian fashion.[26]

Thus, in SPD discourse populist exceptionalism and drawing of frontiers are combined with "culture war" issues to put forth a vision of a national community as endangered, victimized, and in need of protection. The party frames itself as the champion of the "underdog" Czech people that has been cheated and marginalized by the elites, both domestic and global. Among other things, this also becomes evident in the way the party exploited the Covid-19 agenda. Tomio Okamura can perhaps be identified as a *soft Covid-19 skeptic*. Without denying the existence of the virus *per se*, he systematically tried to downplay its gravity. The party discourse exhibits emotional cliches such as "pandemic tyranny" (referring to the restrictions) or "Covid hysteria."[27] SPD also campaigns against *mandatory vaccination* (presumably, a preventive move since, as of 2021, no one had seriously discussed making Covid-19 vaccines mandatory) and against what it calls "segregation" or "discrimination" of the non-vaccinated.[28][29] This use of strong emotional language and controversial analogies fits into the broader discursive strategy of (self)victimization and underdog championing, and portraying the

Czech nation as a victim of a corrupt domestic political system and international pressure.

In terms of foreign policy and international relations, SPD articulates a strongly sovereigntist, anti-globalist, and nationalist vision of the Czech identity, to which the EU and "Brussels" with its "diktat" serve as a key negative other. The 2021 SPD program calls for a new plebiscite law, which would allow Czech citizens to vote on membership of the EU and NATO. The party commits itself to voting for a Czexit and renegotiating a new format of relations with Europe, as "cooperation between free, sovereign countries" based on the four freedoms (free movement of citizens, goods, capital, and services). Needless to say, it also opposes the introduction of the euro and calls for a separate referendum on the issue.[30]

It can be safely argued SPD does not take the Czech identity out of the European context, but like some of other members of the Identity and Democracy grouping in the European Parliament to which it belongs, calls for a *very different Europe*. In this vision, which, in Central Europe, is most actively advanced by Viktor Orbán, Europe has done away with supranationalism, the deepening of European integration, social progressivism, multiculturalism and the development on European soil of cultures that do not belong to the European "*civilizational area*" (*civilizační okruh*).

As seen against this background, many of these ideas are not necessarily endemic to SPD discourse. Given the long tradition of Czech Euroskepticism, they can be found, in their more moderate form, among Czech conservatives and Klausites (i.e., followers of the neoliberal Eurosceptic president Václav Klaus, who had confessed, at some point, that he voted against EU membership in the 2003 plebiscite).[31] However, the proposed referendum on NATO membership would be taking that line too far and breaking with the Atlanticism of the Czech (and other East-Central European) Eurosceptic conservatives.

There are other sporadic indications of a more general anti-Westernism, such as the call for an "international investigation of

all war crimes, including Turkish and American ones."[32] In 2020 SPD welcomed Jaroslav Foldyna as a member. Previously an MP for the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), which he left for SPD, Foldyna had become famous for his association with the Night Wolves, the controversial motorcycle club closely linked to Vladimir Putin's regime, as well as for his strong criticism of the Czech approach to the Kosovo problem and the Turkish and American policies in the Middle East.[33]

SPD leader Tomio Okamura has also displayed a notably lenient stance on Moscow. In April 2021, the Vrbětice scandal broke out as the Czech secret services claimed that Russian agents were involved in the 2014 ammunition depots explosion. Apart from the Communist Party, SPD were the only faction in the Czech Parliament who refused to place trust in this statement and to condemn Russia for sabotage (or "state terrorism").[34] In a subsequent interview, Okamura explained that he did not believe there was sufficient evidence. Although, as he claimed, he had no sympathies for Russia, he did not want the Czech Republic to be dragged into and to suffer from great power rivalry and he wanted to avoid a "confrontational" approach.[35] Notably, this suddenly careful approach to Russia stands in stark contrast with the SPD's attitude towards the EU, which is, indeed, typically confrontational and uncompromising.

From Okamura's explanations, it could also be deduced that he saw international politics as a cynical, realist game where the US was pitted not only against Russia but also against the EU. This brand of *realpolitik* is quite typical for the far right and it is usually tied to the image of a nation that can only rely on itself in this dangerous and treacherous world. SPD has indeed repeatedly called for a sovereigntist approach to foreign policy, which would be "independent" and "driven by the interests of the Czech Republic and its citizens and not by the interests of the EU or transnational corporations." It also spoke in favor of economic nationalism, pointing out the necessity to strengthen the country's food self-sufficiency and to protect the domestic producers from unfair competition, which the EU promotes.

In sum, SPD displays many typical features of the far right that can be found across the European continent, sometimes modified by the Czech cultural and political context. Its approach to defining identities is also an inherently populist one as it engages in frontier drawing. Thus, it juxtaposes the "people" not only to the traditional Others of the far right (among which Muslim migrants occupy a central role) but also to the domestic political system, which is said to be corrupted by the "elites", as well as to the present European order, with the EU/Brussels playing the role of the main negative Other. ●

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Germany

The Importance of Being Eastern German. The Multiple Heartlands of Germany's Far Right

by **Manès Weisskircher**

Since the 1990s, eastern Germany, the former territory of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), has been the stronghold of Germany's far right.[1] The self-proclaimed *Mosaikrechte* [Mosaic Right] in this region consists of a great variety of more or less relevant far-right players, including political parties, social movement organizations, and think tanks. More than thirty years after "reunification", their political activism strongly focuses on opposition to Muslim immigration and recently, the politics of the Covid-19 pandemic. These players also vocally reject Germany's *Energiewende* (energy transition) and liberal gender policies. Many of these perceived grievances are portrayed as not homegrown, i.e. not rooted in the political preferences of a majority of eastern Germans.

Instead, "left-green" hegemony is frequently depicted as mostly a western German political project.

The east-west divide has shaped contemporary German public debate – successful mobilization by far-right parties or movements has regularly appalled western German public observers. It has also highlighted ongoing and long neglected societal problems in the east, such as higher unemployment rates, population decline due to emigration to the west, and widespread dissatisfaction with the functioning of real-existing democracy – related to the heritage of the GDR, neoliberal transition policies in the 1990s, and welfare state retrenchment in the 2000s.[2] The far right's popularity among significant shares of the population in the region is

> **"** A majority (!) of eastern Germans perceive themselves as 'second-class citizens'.

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Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes, PEGI-DA [Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident] demonstrate in Dresden January 25, 2015, yelling "Wir sind das Volk!" ["We are the people"].
PHOTO: KALISPERA DELL/ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

also related to a more widespread perception of a lack of recognition in broader German society: A majority (!) of eastern Germans perceive themselves as "second-class citizens".[3]

The complex background of the significant east-west divide within Germany suggests that it is particularly interesting to look at the identities of key far-right actors in the east. In an influential study, Paul Taggart has strongly emphasized the importance of the "heartland", stressing how references to ethnically and culturally homogenous collectives, which supposedly throve in an idealized past but now struggle, hold powerful significance for "populist" mobilization.[4] The concept of a heartland does not necessarily only refer to the nation (state). The term *Heimat*, one of these German words resisting precise translation into the English language, may refer to a great variety of spaces and places.

Analyzing the identity of the key far-right players in the *neue Bundesländer* (new federal states), this article makes two contributions. First, it assesses the relevance of a specific eastern German identity. Indeed, far-right players frequently evoke eastern Germany as community with a unique past and present. Importantly, for them, such associations are clearly connected to specific themes, which go

beyond socioeconomic differences between the west and the east. Far-right players portray eastern Germans as distinctly prone to protesting and "resisting", alluding to the memory of the "peaceful revolution" of 1989 at the end of the GDR. Drawing an analogy to the present, they portray the Federal Republic's political system, the national government and decisions made over the course of the "refugee crisis" or the Covid-19 pandemic as illegitimate – with explicit comparison to the dictatorship of the GDR. Therefore, the dominant function of far-right interpretations of a distinct eastern German identity is not the exclusion of immigrants, but the delegitimization of Germany's political elite and the institutions of real-existing democracy.[5]

Second, the article qualifies the relevance of an eastern German identity for far-right mobilization. For example, references to an eastern German identity do not go along with calls for devolution or autonomy. In this respect, despite their strong regional identities, far-right players in eastern Germany cannot be described as regionalist political actors such as, previously, *Lega Nord* [Northern League] in Italy. Moreover, they link to multiple heartlands, emphasizing the importance of many interconnected identities. These include not only an all-German identity, but also other regional identities,

such as strong attachments to the community of the regional state – especially in Saxony, which is frequently regarded as a textbook case of "resistant" eastern German identity. Importantly, but more ambivalently, far-right players in eastern Germany also positively identify with "Europe," – first and foremost as an assembly of a diversity of national communities – even when strongly opposing the European Union. The importance of many heartlands and their meanings reflects a broader contemporary shift in European far-right politics: *Heimat* is not a unidimensional concept – an understanding of far-right players as merely "nationalists" misses the importance of subnational[6] and European[7] identites for the far right.

The article refers to important primary source evidence from three key cases of contemporary far-right politics in eastern Germany – *Alternative für Deutschland,* AfD [Alternative for Germany], *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes,* PEGIDA [Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident], and the *Institut für Staatspolitik,* IfS [Institute for State Politics]. Clearly, the electorally most relevant one is the AfD, established in 2013. Initially founded by neoliberal critics of the Eurozone,[8] the AfD slowly but steadily developed, at least ideologically, into a rather typical example[9] of a western European "populist radical right party"[10]. Importantly, in eastern Germany, the AfD has been more or less twice as strong in elections than in the west, with support of over 20% in some states.[11] By now, the AfD has almost completely overshadowed far-right parties that previously enjoyed electoral success in parts of the east, for example the National Democratic Party of Germany (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, NPD).[12] Going beyond party politics, PEGIDA is the most important contemporary far-right protest group in Germany. In the winter of 2014/2015, well ahead of the "refugee crisis" peaking in autumn 2015, PEGIDA managed to attract about 20,000 followers at several protests in Dresden, Saxony.[13] While massively declining in numbers and failing to diffuse beyond Dresden, by the end of 2021

it has mobilized for over seven years. The IfS is a "think-tank" founded in 2000 (based since 2003 in Schnellroda, Saxony-Anhalt) that publishes offline and online, organizes seminars, and has an associated publishing house.[14] Beyond these groups, there are many other fringe parties, social movement groups and other type of actors, mainly with local strength in certain districts or towns such as *Freie Sachsen* [Free Saxons] or *Zukunft Heimat* [Future *Heimat*].

The Importance of Being Eastern German

Among the broader eastern German population, most self-identify as eastern Germans.[15] Importantly, though, in the early 1990s, a majority primarily identified just as Germans – an eastern German self-perception only became dominant over time, after "the experience of symbolic devaluation as eastern Germans and the exclusion from the normality paradigm of a German identity, which is often equated with western German experiences".[16] A majority of eastern Germans, way beyond the AfD vote share, agree that eastern Germans are "second-class citizens", disadvantaged in comparison to western Germans.[17]

It is no surprise then that "AfD was able to successfully present itself as the more 'authentic' and new populist representative for protest voters" in eastern Germany, superseding *Die Linke* [The Left Party], i.e. the party that succeeded the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* [SED, Socialist Unity Party of Germany].[18] Most prominently, in the regional elections of 2019, which were held in the eastern states of Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia, AfD campaigned with the slogan "*Wende 2.0*". *Wende* is the German word for "turn", referring to the "peaceful revolution" of 1989 and the process of the GDR's integration into the Federal Republic. AfD slogans included "The east rises up", "Accomplish the *Wende*" and "*Wir sind das Volk*" ["We are the people"], the chant of the 1989 protests. Linking an eastern German identity to the memory of 1989 is typical for far-right actors in the region.

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mportantly, these references do not only remind their supporters of the mere potential of protest against political elites. Instead, far-right actors use this memory to portray themselves as "resistance movement" against an "illegitimate" political system, or at least "illegitimate" current government. A three-page comic strip posted by AfD Thuringia co-leader Björn Höcke on his Facebook account titled "Time for the *Wende* 2.0" literally illustrates the main messages.[19] The comic strip shows a man and a woman, arguably members of the "people", having a conversation next to Höcke about the current state of politics: "My son lost his job. The trade union made a stink because he votes AfD" – "That's not why we went on the streets in '89, so it's like in the GDR all over again". Later, Höcke says "It's frightening how *gleichgeschaltet* [!] politics, media, culture and even the churches now seem. A real establishment across all party lines".[20] In the end, all agree to the best solution for the problem: voting for AfD.

At a party conference in 2018, a speech by Alexander Gauland, Saxon-born AfD co-founder and then co-chairman of the party and co-leader of its parliamentary group, draws a similar analogy, delegitimizing the Federal Republic even more explicitly:

> **[...] I currently feel reminded of the last few months in the GDR time and again. In no way do I want to play down the SED dictatorship. But comparisons are simply suggesting themselves and comparing does not mean equating. Again, a country is degenerating because its leadership stubbornly follows a destructive ideology. As in the past, the regime consists of a small group of party functionaries, a kind of Politburo, and again a broad societal alliance of block party functionaries, journalists, TV moderators, church officials, artists, teachers, professors, cabaret artists and other activists stands behind the state leadership and fights the opposition. Then as now, dear friends, insubordinate citizens**

> **take to the streets to claim their rights. Again, these civil rights activists are being persecuted by thugs, defamed by the media, and denounced at their workplaces. [...] The only opposition party, AfD, is the current New Forum, so to say. Then as now, everyone who speaks out against the policy of the regime is a fascist, racist, man of the past [...]. The anger with which the Juste Milieu reigns against the resistance is also reminiscent of 1989. Dear friends, Swiss newspapers are the new Western TV.[21]**

Other far-right players highlight similar features of what they construct as eastern German identity. PEGIDA offers the following self-description on the 28th anniversary of the "fall" of the Berlin wall on November 9th, 2017, portraying themselves as opposition against a GDR-like system:

> **A people won the peaceful and non-violent revolution and forced a regime to its knees. A people fought for freedom and peace – and they won! The following 25 years were marked by rethinking, relearning, rebuilding, and the idea of achieving pan-German unity. In 2014, a resistance movement grew again in the east – in Dresden – which for three years now has been critical of the government and Islam, standing against a government that, as in the deepest GDR times, permanently decides against the majority of the people. The "Merkel" regime has adopted the socialist structures from back then: the people have to function, obedience is desired, also in the voting booth. [...] PEGIDA is leading the way in these times and now it looks that, like 28 years ago, a regime will be brought to its knees for the second time within a generation. We are the people![22]**

The IfS constructs a similar discourse, at times even more bluntly. A guest author, Roland

Woldag, writes the following for the IfS's main publication, the journal *Sezession*:

> **Germany is still deeply divided. In the east, that breed of people dominates that defends the freedom they won 25 years ago and is willing to organize the fight against the alliance of SED leftists and left-wing western extremists and to take it to the streets with AfD and PEGIDA. No system is sacrosanct for eastern Germans if they realize that it is directed against them. The eastern German experience has also correctly identified this block party state as an enemy. In the west, the majority does not even consider that an externally controlled, criminal party camarilla could consciously work against the vital interests of the German people.[23]**

For the political actors referred to above, "the socialist past [is activated] as a negative nostalgia to frame a far-right opposition to 'today's system'".[24] Importantly, research indicates that recalling an "inspirational past" through (negative) nostalgia is an effective communication strategy.[25]

Multiple Heartlands – From the Local to the European Level

Crucially, though, far-right actors in eastern Germany do not explicitly mobilize for devolution or more autonomy (or even independence) for the region. Despite their strong evocation of an eastern German identity, they cannot be described as regionalist political players such as Lega Nord used to be until the 2010s. Moreover, far-right actors in Germany's east also should not be misunderstood as exclusively emphasizing an eastern German identity. In the context of the federal election of 2021, references to such an identity featured much less prominently in the AfD's campaign, which, across Germany, used the main slogan of "Germany. But normal". For PEGIDA, the first of its ten "Dresden theses" already emphasizes German

Alternative Für Deutschland, *AfD*, election poster for the 2021 federal election.
PHOTO: TAIBHSEOIR/ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

identity: "The protection and preservation of our German identity must be a duty of those in government!".[26] Apart from their title, none of PEGIDA's theses explicitly refers to anything eastern German – immigration and law and order are not the only, but the key themes of the document. Likewise, one of the earliest "studies" published by the IfS was titled "national identity", understood in an explicitly essentialist way, and called for its ongoing relevance in Germany.[27] Importantly, then, the

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prominent role of an eastern German identity does not necessarily prevent an embracement of a national identity: Instead, from the perspective of far-right actors, eastern Germany is Germany's "heartland" where developments portrayed as negative, in particular immigration and "left-green" hegemony, have not taken hold yet.

However, and often neglected in the study of Germany's far right, other regional identities, apart from an eastern German one, also matter. In the federal country, large shares of the population in both the west and the east feel attached to a region. Interestingly, even though the *Länder* of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia were only (re-)established as political and administrative entities in 1990, after the end of the GDR, feelings of regional identity in eastern Germany are slightly stronger than in western Germany.[28] Moreover, only in eastern Germany is a stronger individual regional identity linked to stronger rejection of foreigners.[29]

During the campaigns of 2019 it was especially in Saxony where the AfD emphasized a regional identity. The poster "Courage for Saxony" included an image of a famous monument of Augustus the Strong, former Elector of Saxony, in Dresden. Again, far-right actors link a Saxonian identity to the themes of "resistance" and delegitimization, with Saxony understood as prime example of a broader eastern German identity. In the Gauland speech quoted above, he referred to Saxony as "again the heart of the resistance"[30] in contemporary Germany. The IfS journal *Sezession* published its very own issue focusing on Saxony as a far-right stronghold. Once again, Saxony is understood as textbook case of an eastern German identity:

> **Saxony is first and foremost an eastern German phenomenon: the difference between east and west is greater than that between Saxony and its eastern German neighbors that share the same destiny "*Schicksalsgenossen*" [...] The most resistant today are presumably**

> **those socialized in the GDR, but with a typical Saxon essence.[31]**

Beyond Saxony, other examples of regional identity within eastern Germany are also linked to a broader German identity, such as in the case of AfD Brandenburg, which frames this region as heartland of Prussia [!] and therefore Germany as a whole, linked not only to specific values, but also to national identity:

> **Beyond the borders of the German cultural space, Brandenburg-Prussia is known for a number of secondary virtues such as modesty, discipline, progressiveness, punctuality and thrift. Character traits that those who direct the fortunes of our Heimat sadly lack. Politics in the state of Brandenburg must return to these virtues that once led to the blossoming of our entire body politic. Today our Prussian virtues are still admired and often carried over to the whole of Germany. They are an important part of our national identity.[32]**

Local identities are relevant too, for example in the political conflict over global warming measures. The AfD strongly opposes the politics of the *Energiewende*, which aims for a transformation from fossil fuels to renewables. In this context, one of the bones of contention is the expansion of wind turbines, especially visible in rural areas. There, the AfD campaigns against their construction, referring to the beauty of landscapes and the need to, for example, protect local forest such as the *Pfälzer Wald* or *Thüringer Wald* as important elements of the local environment and feelings of *Heimat*.[33]

At the same time, contemporary far-right players strongly identify with Europe. They can be conceptualized as "pro-European nativists,"[34] cherishing both the diversity of nation states and Europe as civilization, while portraying Muslim immigration as threat.

The prominent role of an eastern German identity does not necessarily prevent an embracement of a national identity

Their "visions of Europe"[35] imagine a "fortress of Europe" and a "Europe of the fatherlands", rejecting the contemporary model of European integration. Most visibly, PEGIDA's name itself emphasizes that "Patriotic Europeans" march on the streets of Dresden, portraying "Islamization" as the main threat to Europe. In their political discourse, PEGIDA often positively links to Europe, but usually while highlighting the importance of the nation state, in calls such as "PEGIDA continues to fight against the Islamization of Germany and Europe and clearly stands for a Europe of fatherlands, because only that is diversity and cultural enrichment"[36] or "Thousands of patriots from all over Europe gathered to demonstrate for their country, for their national values and for a better future"[37].

AfD Saxony, however, explicitly denies the possibility of a common European identity in its manifesto for the regional elections of 2019 (confidently labelled "government program"). It speaks of an "an artificial European identity that does not and cannot exist" in contrast to "a naturally grown *Heimat* that is shaped by a secure Saxon and German identity"[38]. The latter is underlined by a recent, narrow, internal decision by the AfD, which decided to support *Dexit*, i.e. Germany's exit from the EU, in the 2021 federal electoral campaign. However, in my own interviews[39] with AfD politicians, several of those based in eastern Germany, positively identify as European, even when supporting Dexit – even though the relevance and meaning of such an identity differs among them.

Interestingly, in another article in the IfS's *Sezession*, Maximilian Krah, an AfD MEP, connects regional identities in eastern Germany with attitudes towards the national state and Europe. Crucially, this quote again indicates how different identities linked to specific spaces or places not only coexist, but strongly relate to each other:

> **Eastern Germany in general and Saxony in particular are shaped differently. Geographically, Prague is certainly closer than Paris, and culturally too:**

already because of the shared experience of communist repression. [...] The *neue Bundesländer* are still shaped by national thinking. For them, the EU is a necessary instrument to face global challenges and to achieve necessary coordination with neighboring countries. It is not an emotional project, let alone a substitute nation. And therefore, curiously enough, the thinking in the *neue Bundesländer* is much more European than that in the old ones. Because in France, Spain, and Italy, too, one is European because one is French, Spanish, Italian. Even more so in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. Pitting the identification with Europe against national identity, understanding it as contrast, not a complement, is something purely western German. And it is something that harms Europe as much as Germany.[39]

While for Krah, an eastern German identity is important, it is by no means the only important one, less specific than a Saxon one, and it matters because it shapes broader understandings of the nation and even of Europe.

Conclusion

This article has shown that far-right players in eastern Germany use regional identity for political mobilization, mainly to delegitimize governing political actors and institutions. Therefore, the main function of promoting an eastern German identity is not necessarily the exclusion of immigrants, but a delegitimization of the political system, equating it with the non-democratic GDR. However, eastern Germany's far-right does not only revolve around an eastern German identity: Many other heartlands matter to them, from the local to the European level. Beyond questions of *Heimat*, other dimensions of identity matter to far-right actors, unrelated to space and place. For example, many AfD figures, especially below the national leadership, cherish their strong internal democracy.[41]

For political opponents, research has indicat-

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ed the limits of a variety of approaches to curb the strength of key far-right players. Even if one regards the far right mainly as a challenge in party competition[42] or as a consequence of a lack of public policy output,[43] one already encounters numerous problems. Tackling deeply embedded identities might even be more of a challenge. For Germany's left, the question to what extent an inclusionary, pro-democratic identity can also be space- or place-bound has remained an unresolved, and controversial, debate. ●

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Spatial Identity Politics and the Right in Hungary

by **Péter Balogh**

Given that Hungary has now been ruled by a rightist government with a two-thirds majority for eleven and a half years, questions of identity politics and the political right are highly relevant. Additionally, in relation to its geographical size and economic weight, the country has received considerable international attention over the recent decade. This is also because Hungarian policies are not taking place in isolation; instead, like many other movements the political right too is increasingly networked globally. To take a recent example, August this year saw a week-long visit to Hungary by Tucker Carlson, *Fox News*'s political commentator whose show is regularly followed by millions of Americans. As numerous media outlets (e.g. *BBC, The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*) reported, while broadcasting from Budapest Carlson praised the country and its prime minister, Viktor Orbán, for rejecting asylum seekers on its border, and ridiculed the idea that the latter was authoritarian.

"Trump Congratulates PM Orbán after Tucker Show", in *Hungary Today* September 1, 2021.

The Question of Labeling the Right

The above brings up the somewhat difficult question on how exactly to label the incumbent Hungarian government. It goes without saying that – similarly to most rightist parties in the world – Hungary's Fidesz and Christian Democratic People's Party (which form the government coalition) would never refer to themselves as far-right. Representatives of the opposition parties do apply that label on the government occasionally, but perhaps not systematically. Unsurprisingly, the labels used by political commentators tend to reflect the standpoint from which they write. More interestingly, different labels appear in academic publications as well, as will be shown. To some extent, this also reflects shifts within the Hungarian right.

Up until a decade ago, few would have labeled Fidesz far-right. Its shift in the late 1990s from a liberal profile to national conservatism is well known. This placed the party right of center, in distinction to the unquestionably far-right Hungarian Justice and Life Party, which however lost significance in the 2000s and was formally dissolved this year. Instead, the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) was the country's main far-right party between the mid-2000s and the mid-2010s. What happened in the early 2010s was that Fidesz selectively took over some of Jobbik's ideas, thus incorporating lower middle-class rural voters and giving up on some of its urban middle-class electorate. In parallel to a stronger nationalist

September 21, 2015. Viktor Orbán addressing the National Assembly in Budapest on dealing with mass migration. The Assembly decided with a 2/3 majority vote to empower the Hungarian Defense Forces to assist the police at the borders of Hungary.

PHOTO: ELEKES ANDOR/ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

rhetoric, this included for instance an embracement of neo-Turanism which until then was largely associated with Jobbik. That ideology, with all its anti-establishment and anti-Western elements, fits well with the increasingly anti-Brussels rhetoric and policies of Fidesz.[1] The government and its voters apparently do not see or mind any contradictions in blending neo-pagan Turanist ideas with their more pronounced Christian-national conservatism.

Fidesz and especially its leaders have labeled their own ideology in various ways over the past decade. In the early 2010s, they would refer to some of their own policies as unorthodox. The prime minister's (in)famous 2014 speech on building an illiberal state has received global attention and criticism, so much so that 3–4 years ago the new keyword became Christian democracy. However, several Christian Democrats, especially in Germany, have distanced themselves from the Hungarian right's understanding of this, and Fidesz's exit from the European People's Party earlier this year is well-known. More stable has been the national-conservative (self-)label.

Various designations have seen light in (and sometimes within the same) scholarly works, too. Orbán's above-mentioned speech makes it unsurprising that references to illiberalism

appear in a number of analyses.[2] The term populism has been associated with Hungary for a longer time but is enduring.[3] It can appear in different varieties, ranging from populist democracy to radical-right populism.[4] But modern writings on authoritarian attitudes also slightly predate the long reign of the current government, although such approaches have certainly become more present.[5] In general, the label far-right was typically attached to Jobbik up until the mid-2010s, but has more recently also come to be linked with the incumbent government.[6]

Regarding Jobbik, the party has turned less radical in the last 6–7 years[7] and has aligned itself this year with the anti-government coalition dominated by left-of-center and centrist political forces. Hungary does have a new ultra-national opposition party since 2018 (Our Homeland Movement) which can be characterized as far-right beyond any dispute, but it "only" has two seats out of 199 in the National Assembly. The more interesting question therefore is how the two-thirds majority government has been shaping identity politics. Unlike many other papers, though, this contribution focuses on how such politics have been linked to various spatial categories.

Spatial Identity Politics

The three words in the title of this section appear together in this form relatively rarely, but

> Up until a decade ago, few would have labeled Fidesz far-right.

Orbán in Kyrgyzstan, 2018, on a high-level meeting with representatives from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan.

PHOTO: MINISZTERELNOK.HU

The Hungarian Government and the Question of East and West

Over the past decade, leading figures of the Hungarian government have vehemently engaged in civilizationist discourses and spatial identity politics. This was triggered partly by the economic crisis around 2009 which hit the country particularly hard, and partly by growing political tensions between Hungary and the EU due to contested steps taken by the national government.

In the early 2010s, a discourse was launched that "we will not be a colony", targeting both the EU and (mostly western) multinational corporations. However, a decade later Hungary relies on foreign capital and in many ways on the EU just as much as it did then. State debt remains on a similar level as a decade ago, even if the high share of foreign debt has decreased. Based on data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, FDI's share remains almost two thirds of the national GDP, around three fourths of which stem from other EU countries. Similarly, three fourths of Hungary's foreign trade is with other EU members. In addition, the country has received EU structural funds annually, equaling about five per cent of its national GDP (which also happens to equal its annual growth). Although the amount of trade and investments with non-EU countries has grown somewhat lately, this also applies to that with other EU countries, meaning that the overall proportions have changed little. Hungary continues to depend on the EU and its members in a multitude of ways. Nevertheless, the claim that "we will not be a colony" was also mentioned in Orbán's very recent speech upon his reelection as head of Fidesz.

As a strategy to diversify the country's trade partners, the Opening to the East program was launched eleven years ago, and has remained one of the key priorities of Hungarian foreign policy. As András Rácz reported in a *Válasz Online* article on August 11, 2019, the aim was that one third of Hungarian exports should head eastward, which has not been achieved since only about a fifth go outside the EU. Instead, the Opening to the East has come to be associated with large-scale Russian and

the connection between space, identity and/or ideology[8] have of course already been studied by scholars of critical geopolitics, for instance. A key lesson from that body of literature is that geographical labels are never neutral but are always linked in one way or another with various ideas and intentions.[9] Like many concepts, geographical designations can also be treated as empty signifiers which can be filled with different content and meaning for various purposes. It is the intentions and effects of such meaning-making, then, that is of primary interest.

While identity politics has a large literature in itself, a common feature is a critique that such politics tend to essentialize various ideas associated with any given (social) group.[10] Imbuing various spaces with identity politics can be at least as contested in the sense that residents of the affected territory may or may not identify with such politics, but will be impacted by them, nevertheless. To a certain extent, members of a spatially bound community cannot retreat as easily as those of social groups who no longer feel represented by actors who (allegedly) speak on their behalf. Spatial identity politics can also be particularly divisive in societies that tend to be less consensual and where competing imaginations are deployed. In Hungary, much of the opposition has embraced more mainstream understandings of Europe in recent years, whereas the government has leant on a dual narrative of idealizing the East and an alternative vision of the West.

Chinese investments which lack both transparency and completion, with their feasibility remaining doubtful. Although it makes sense for any country to diversify its trade and investment partners, the above-discussed strategy has more underpinned a political message – namely that Hungary has a role to play not just within the EU. Since 2018, the country also has an observer status in the Turkic Council. Most recently, Orbán has initiated a summit of that council and the Visegrád Group, to be held in Budapest next year.

There is a certain segment among the Hungarian population to which the premodern nation's eastern roots are meaningful and worth cherishing. That segment has been embraced by the government over the past decade, partly as a strategy to win over Jobbik voters and partly as it suits the Opening to the East program discussed above. The largest popular manifestation of this is the annual/biannual Kurultáj festival, a three-day megaevent on the Great Hungarian Plain, attended each time by around 200,000 visitors from Hungary and other countries and nations imagined to belong to the large Turanian family. Beyond being devoted to the nomad culture of ancient Hungarian and Turkic tribes, several rightist politicians (including the prime minister) also appear at the event, which has been supported since 2012 with a growing amount of public money. The ideology behind it is Turanism, which at various times in Hungary's modern history has been embraced as an alternative to the nation's much more deeply rooted western identity.[11]

The Revival of Central Europe as a Christian Bulwark

Based on Eurobarometer and other surveys, the Hungarian population has stably remained among those most positively inclined toward their country's EU membership (around 70%). The Hungarian government is obviously aware of this but has nevertheless – or because of this – launched several anti-Brussels campaigns over the past decade. But what exactly Europe should stand for is a divisive issue among Hungarians, though less for their government. Especially since the refugee crisis of 2015, the

new-old self-image of Hungary as a Christian bulwark – a protector of western Christian civilization – has been propagated, with some specific political and societal consequences.[12] Yet rather than achieving greater cohesion, such policies and ideas have become more divisive in Hungary, Europe and beyond.

As Mark Bassin points out in his contribution to this volume, "the image of a menacing Other is more effective and compelling when it is materialized and projected on the map as a distinct geographical entity."[13] For the Hungarian government, that geographical entity has increasingly become a reimagined and redefined Central Europe. True, Central Europe (Közép-Európa) has in Hungary been associated with at least two competing narratives. What unites them is an understanding of the notion as a channel of protest against large powers; in the 1980s especially against the Soviet Union. What divides them is whether they see the region as part of the West, or at least of Mitteleuropa as defined in Germany and Austria. In the last two decades of the 20th century, some (dissident) Hungarian authors embraced a definition of Central Europe that was not that dissimilar to Mitteleuropa.[14] However, more numerous have been the works that see the region as a sui generis entity and identity space.[15] These are implicitly closer to the concept of Zwischeneuropa (Köztes-Európa), an interwar term for the countries between Germany and the USSR.

Viktor Orbán, who was also prime minister around the millennium, at that time already emphasized the need for Central European countries to hold together even in a future EU. But following the eastern enlargement, discourses on Central Europe waned. For about half a decade, Hungary including much of its political elite was happy to have "returned" to Europe. That consensus began to shake with the 2009 economic crisis but was exacerbated by the 2015 refugee crisis which partly revived the East–West divide within the EU. Above all, it was the Hungarian government that diverged from the Western European mainstream. Its leaders have redefined Central Europe's mission in Europe as "to save the latter from

> The ideology behind it is Turanism, which at various times in Hungary's modern history has been embraced.

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itself", as the prime minister then repeatedly claimed.

The policies and ideas associated with this redefined Central Europe were recently analyzed elsewhere.[16] In Hungary at least, that geographical label has, in the last few years, primarily been associated with the Visegrád Group: however, Central Europe is also widely used because it is a more malleable term which can occasionally include some neighbors of Hungary that happen to share interests in any given policy field.[17]

But the core of this reimagined Central Europe, the Visegrád Four, also has its diverging interests internally. Its members have quite different approaches toward Russia, with Poland and Hungary being the two most diverging cases. This is particularly noteworthy as it is exactly the governments of these two that have revived and redefined Visegrád. For years, Eurozone member Slovakia and Czechia have been expressing a limited interest in Orbán's and Kaczyński's self-proclaimed cultural "counter-revolution" and a desire to be closer to core Europe. Relatedly, Fidesz does not always find its allies in Central Europe but elsewhere – including the West (such as in Italy, France or the US). Although Hungarian–Slovak relations have considerably improved over the past decade, tensions due to some of Hungary's engagements in southern Slovakia (which hosts a large ethnic Hungarian group) still flare up occasionally. This fall, the Hungarian government had planned to buy farmland in southern Slovakia but withdrew following criticism by that country's representatives, as for instance Euractiv reported in an article on October 13. In their turn, Polish–Czech relations seriously deteriorated this year due to conflicts over a coal mine at Turów located right at the border. Moreover, when it comes to taking decisions in Brussels, Visegrád states have not necessarily tended to vote along the same lines over the last years. Finally, the national economies of the region have now also been competing for decades for more or less similar types of external investments.

All this points to the difficulty of demarcating (geo)political alliances on adjacent territories

as well as of defining spatial identity regions. True, it makes sense for neighboring countries to cooperate on a number of issues, or even to lobby together in international fora. For instance, Visegrád states cooperated a few years ago when their authorities revealed that some multinationals were distributing lower-quality consumer products in the EU's eastern markets, or when Austria wanted to pay lower social benefits to East Central European workers and their family members. But in which situations and fields alliance-building actually takes place tends to be defined by the agenda of the day and specific issues, rather than by fixed notions of regions filled with homogenous ideological content.

Conclusions

Rightist parties are strong in Hungary and this article has presented a wide range of approaches applied to them, some of which include the label far-right while others do not. More crucial is the question of what such parties have intended to do and what they have (or have not) achieved. This contribution focused on the sorts of spatial identity politics engaged in by the main rightist forces in Hungary. It has shown that such politics have been a key priority on their agendas over the past decade, with mixed outcomes.

While since the 2008–2009 financial crisis many countries in the West and elsewhere have been keen on expanding their relations with Asia, in Hungary this has also been underpinned by ideologies of to some extent also belonging to the East and a distancing from the West. What concrete gains this has yielded for the country remains doubtful so far. Further, ideas of an eastern affinity to some degree fit ill with Hungary's more established western identity, especially at a time when the country's self-image as a Christian bulwark is also heavily emphasized. Nevertheless, what unites both spatial identity narratives is a denunciation of more mainstream ideas of Europe. The Hungarian right has found some allies for that in Central Europe, which it has imagined as a (geo)political alliance to redefine not just the

region but the whole of Europe. However, it is also encountering a number of sceptics in Central Europe and is thus trying to build ties to like-minded actors outside the region, also in the West. Orbán's most recent idea of bringing together the Visegrád Four and the Turkic Council may be an attempt to counterbalance Western Europe and other powers, but such an alliance can of course not be based on a self-image as a Christian bulwark. All this points to the difficulty of delimiting ideologically and politically cohesive identity regions. ●

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In the Name of the Family

By **Jogilė Ulinskaitė** and **Rosita Garškaitė**

n 2000, Dainius Liškevičius, a contemporary Lithuanian artist, created a video performance *Blot/Restart*, where he covers his face and hands with chocolate and then wipes them with the Lithuanian national flag. The provocative performance was intended to reflect on patriotism, identity, national symbols and to foretell a future for Lithuania in which citizenship will be based on civic rather than ethnic identity. The performance went unnoticed outside artistic circles until June 2021, when a pre-trial investigation for defacing state symbols was opened (closed due to the statute of limitations) after the organizers of the Great March in Defense of the Family (*Didysis šeimos gynimo maršas*) made an official complaint. A month earlier, this march took the form of a large-scale rally-protest in Vilnius under the slogan: "A strong family – a strong country!" The organizers insisted that "Now it is not only a question of the families' future but also of the future and survival of the Lithuanian state. Only together will we defend what we hold dear! [...] The family, consisting of mother, father and children, must and will be protected!"

The event attracted about 7,000–10,000 people, a remarkably high number in a society characterized by low levels of political trust, civic engagement, and political participation.[1]

A lthough the recent event in Lithuania may seem to be an exception, anti-establishment activism focusing on the defense of Lithuanian identity, which is seen as being at stake, started to emerge as early as 2008 with the yearly nationalist marches on Lithuanian Independence Day. Subsequently, a citizen-initiated mandatory referendum was organized on amendments to the Constitution to restrict the sale of agricultural land to foreigners and make it easier for Lithuanian citizens to initiate a referendum. The organizers of the referendum claimed to defend traditional Lithuanian values – the family, the nation, the state – and they illustrated their aims with anti-modernist imagery. Although the referendum failed in June 2014 due to low voter turnout, in 2016, the Lithuanian Union of Peasants and Greens won the Seimas elections by attracting precisely the people and organizations that had participated in the referendum initiative. Thus, the issues related to defense of national identity that take on a more pronounced form in today's political initiatives were originally articulated in earlier protest activities.

Vilnius May 15, 2015: the "Great Family Defense March" and actions against it.

PHOTO: BALTIC NEWS

In this analysis, we seek to map out the recent discourse on Lithuanian identity among Lithuanian far-right political actors. We acknowledge the heterogeneity of the far-right actors who mobilize online and offline, inside and outside the electoral arena, using conventional and unconventional action.[2] In the selection process, we followed the emerging scholarly consensus to analyze those collective actors that act in line with procedural rules of democracy and can be located at the far-right edge of the left-right ideological scale. Populism, nativism, and radicalism are considered the essential characteristics of far-right parties. They understand a nation as a homogeneous unit that must be protected from outsiders or dangerous invaders,[3] such as immigrants. For them, the essential feature of democracy is the majority principle,[4] and a strong or even authoritarian-leaning government is preferred to protect the homeland/us.[5] Moreover, the political elite is perceived as corrupted, working against the will of the people, and promoting the EU agenda.[6]

We focus on three political parties, namely *Nacionalinis susivienijimas* [The National Alliance], *Tautos ir teisingumo sąjunga* [Union

for Nation and Justice, former Centre Party – Nationalists], and *Kartų solidarumo sąjunga – Santalka Lietuvai* [Union of Intergenerational Solidarity – Cohesion for Lithuania] that took part in the last parliamentary elections in 2020. None of them managed to get enough votes to enter parliament (electoral threshold – 5%). We also analyze the discourse of the organizers of the Great March in Defense of the Family, who have established a legal entity called *Lietuvos šeimų sąjūdis* [The Lithuanian Families Movement] and organized a few more demonstrations with a lower number of participants after the biggest one in May 2021. Currently it has the lion's share of media attention and followers on social media among the far-right actors. The data we analyzed consists of electoral manifestos as well as communication on official Facebook pages or official websites.

Existential Threat as the Emotional Core of Identity Narrative

We begin our analysis by reviewing one of the primary elements of identity construction in the discourse of Lithuanian far-right politicians, namely the existential crisis. The picture of an imminent and overwhelming crisis is a starting point for politicians in constructing

The family, consisting of mother, father and children, must and will be protected!

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an emotionally charged narrative about who is responsible for the crisis and what should be done to manage it. Elevating a failure to a level of crisis is a well-known strategy of populist leaders. They discursively connect separate political failings into a single framework, giving it a dimension of temporality.[7] Such a crisis is overwhelming, sometimes metaphysical, i.e., enacted by someone evil or an "amoral superman".[8]

A critical element of this identity-building strategy is to exaggerate the threat and describe it in abstract terms, for example, using the vocabulary of what they call ideologies: globalism, genderism, and multiculturalism. Far-right actors are expected to oppose policies that promote LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality.[9] Thus, the gender-neutral civil partnership bill is called genderism or gender propaganda aimed at destroying traditional values and families. The bill and the Istanbul Convention were on the parliament's agenda last year as there is no legal recognition of same-sex relationships in Lithuania, and the Istanbul Convention, although signed, is not yet ratified. The first was voted down, and the second was not even debated by parliamentarians and postponed due to fierce discussions in media. Far-right actors being vocal against both issues capitalized on public discontent and stimulated it even more.

God says to Noah in the book of Genesis: "Breed, multiply and fill the earth." Petras Gražulis, one of the leaders of *Tautos ir teisingumo sąjunga*, quotes this biblical line on Facebook to vindicate the moral claims about LGBTQ+ activism being against God's natural order and, consequently, contrary to human nature. Others also invoke religious tropes to prove that "genderism" is foreign to long-lived traditions, natural values, and Christian morality. Meanwhile, the nation, the family and traditional Christian values are equated with natural objects that should be protected, similarly to the surrounding natural environment, mainly forests, needing defense and protection.

The more concrete shape of the crisis can be called "demographic panic".[10] Far-right politicians connect the above-mentioned issues,

> **The gender-neutral civil partnership bill is called genderism or gender propaganda aimed at destroying traditional values and families.**

that they call ideologies, to massive, supposedly conscious, and well-managed actions aiming at denationalization and state decline. The narrative is that high emigration from the country and, at the same time, planned and well-organized future immigration will fundamentally change the social structure of the country. It is claimed that this will be the end of Lithuanian identity, traditional Christian values, and the traditional family. Demographic panic is reinforced by claims of socio-economic inequality, poverty, and oligarchic or neoliberal governance. Left-leaning positions on the economy are a distinctive feature of the far-right in the CEE region.[11]

According to far-right actors, Lithuania's current situation is like being between Scylla and Charybdis. Both immigrants and "genderists" (or "LGBT'ists") are threatening the nation's existence; that is why there is a need to defend traditional families in the form of marriage between a man and a woman. In this fight, the Catholic Church is seen as an ally not only because of its teaching about family but also due to its respected role in society. Even though the importance of Catholicism in the everyday lives of Lithuanian citizens is shrinking, it still maintains some societal and political influence. What Grzymała-Busse[12] wrote about Poland is true about Lithuania – the Catholic Church has a moral authority that comes from a fusion of national and religious identity due to the important historical role that the Church played in the resistance of Lithuanians to tsarist and later to communist rule and in nation state building.[13] While the far-right counts on the Catholic Church to take on the role of the nation's protector as in Soviet times, they endorse the priests and bishops who participate in their protests or support them publicly. They even compete for the attention of such clergy members because there are few of them. Criticism for the local Catholic Church or the Vatican is rare but exists. It comes mainly from the *Nacionalinis susivienijimas*, which consistently monitors Pope Francis, criticizes him for being too liberal, and attacks his pro-immigration stance and mixed messages on LGBTQ+ issues.

Far-right politicians portray the current situation of the country as being on the brink of extinction, giving it a dimension of temporality and immediacy – something must be done now. The crisis is vague, and its perception is always up to the spectator (in this case, far-right politicians), meaning there are no clear criteria to determine if and when the crisis is over. When the crisis is amplified by a "sense of impending doom",[14] ordinary people are powerless, conventional means are inadequate, and all means are justified to bring about a rupture.[15]

EU as a Vaguely Articulated Enemy and Other Adversaries

On August 10, 2021, when an angry crowd gathered outside the parliament to protest restrictions for non-vaccinated citizens, MPs in a plenary chamber received from them funeral wrath with a card saying "Opportunity choice passed away. Nation is in grief" (a reference to Covid-19 immunity certificate which in Lithuania is called "opportunity passport"). Naturally, the pandemic has given the far-right a new political opportunity for attacking political adversaries. Like some European counterparts, such as Germany's AfD or Slovakia's Ľ'SNS, Lithuanian far-right actors criticized "anti-democratic" and "anti-constitutional" government policies hampering civil liberties. As noted by Wondreys and Mudde, although the idea of restrictions fits well with authoritarian tendencies of the far-right, those in opposition (or in the case of Lithuania – non-parliamentary opposition) accused the political elite of abusing their power.[16]

Beyond pandemic policies, far-right actors in Lithuania never let slip an opportunity to speak out against Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT (Lithuanian National Radio and Television). The mainstream media overall is made a scapegoat responsible for citizens' disappointment with their country, their increasingly liberal attitudes, silencing of "other" voices and destruction of traditional-family-Christian-national values. But LRT is the worst of all "systemic" and "one-sided" media because it is supposed to "represent and defend the interests of the Nation" but instead it serves the political elite which in turn dance to the tune of "global powers." The following quote from the online communication of *Tautos ir teisingumo sąjunga* illustrates well the prevalent strategy to target elites as serving the mighty of the world instead of their own citizens:

"Lithuania is not a place where globalist ideas are being created, thus here we have people who execute and mimic the globalist agenda." In addition, most of the texts by *Tautos ir teisingumo sąjunga* engage in defending the majority of the people from the "liberal" elite who are "implementing the dictatorship of minorities."

All the electoral manifestos analyzed acknowledge that NATO and EU membership is a necessary security guarantee for Lithuania because of the concerns posed by Russia. There has not been any overt opposition in online communication either. Caiani investigated online and offline mobilization of radical right-wing actors in Central and Eastern Europe between 2008 and 2016 and concluded that despite discursive opportunities for mobilization on European issues due to Europe's economic crisis, there was no direct mobilization against the EU.[17] Down and Han also demonstrated the substantial variation of far-right parties' antipathy and the extent to which they emphasize the EU issue.[18] It is impossible for them to win votes by contesting the EU when neither public opinion nor mainstream political parties are polarized on this issue. Since 1991, Lithuanians have been among the most supportive of EU membership,[19] and to this day, according to Eurobarometer surveys, the European project does not lack legitimacy. Even the 2008 financial crisis did not undermine the confidence of Lithuanians in the EU.[20] Therefore, it is no surprise that there has not been a Eurosceptic party in the Parliament of Lithuania up to now.

However, this does not mean that Euroscepticism is absent from the discourse. Instead, it shows that politicians face more challenges when explaining their anti-EU stance to Lithuania's very pro-European society. Euroscep-

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Images of traditional family. Produced in the context of Lietuvos Šeimų Sąjūdis.

PHOTO: SEIMUSAJUDIS.LT

ticism usually is presented as a natural feature of far-right ideology,[21] but instead of direct opposition, it can be characterized as ambivalent. Marta Lorimer's analysis of the far-right in France and Italy showed that Euroscepticism functions together with support for some aspects of the EU and Europe as civilization.[22] Andrew Glencross makes the same argument in the analysis of the Brexit supporters' catchphrase "Love Europe, hate the EU," illustrating how the cleavage between institutional and cultural understandings of Europe emerges.[23] Equivalence between Europe and the EU is contested.

Even if the EU is rarely blamed directly, we can infer that the alleged threatening ideologies are associated with the respect for human rights, minorities and diversity originating from the EU. Migration and "genderism" are perceived as efforts to change "the demographic face" of EU countries because of meddling in political issues related to family, which should be regulated according to "national traditions, customs and constitution" (*Lietuvos šeimų sąjūdis*) and the EU's promotion of migration is

compared to the former USSR. As the *Nacionalinis susivienijimas* formulates it:

"Therefore, the citizens of the countries of our region that lived through the nightmare of the communist experiment of the last century recognize more quickly [...] the EU's perpetuation of the criminal communist ideology at the highest political level, and the efforts to impose this ideology on all the EU's countries and peoples under the guise of equality of rights for the members of the LGBTQ+ community."

"Globalism," "new Marxism," and "neo-communism" are constantly mentioned to equate the EU and the former occupying power. Meanwhile, the blame is attributed to the "Euro-bureaucrats," "global EU elite" or "EU powers." The ambiguity lies between opposing what the EU institutions are supposedly doing and not opposing the EU per se.

The European project is currently also depicted as being in crisis because of too much centralization ("political and cultural edicts" from Brussels) damaging the nations and countries. *Tautos ir teisingumo sąjunga* and *Nacionalinis susivienijimas* both argue that intensive EU integration and federalization itself poses

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a threat to the survival of the EU. Europe is therefore divided into two parts – the Western one without identity (for some far-right actors, the West is even in moral decline) and the Central-Eastern one trying to save its national identity (particularly Hungary and Poland). A Europe of homelands and strong sovereign states is favored, while attempts to integrate member states more deeply are rejected.

A nativist identity does not restrict international cooperation with other like-minded international partners. The familiar notions of European identity against the EU enable, among other things, a transnational collaboration of far-right parties. A good example is a declaration about the future of Europe signed by sixteen European radical right parties in the summer of 2021,[24] which the *Lietuvos šeimų sąjūdis* celebrated because "a proposed path leads to a true Europe of free nations". In addition, political figures like Katalina Novak (Fidesz) and Stefan Korte (AfD) gave speeches in the movement's latest protest, while all the politicians analyzed highlighted Viktor Orban's behavior and decisions as an example to be followed.

Finally, participation in international organizations such as the EU to protect international security and national interests is promoted. For example, *Nacionalinis susivienijimas* expressed support for Poland, Romania, and Hungary in opposing the European Parliament resolution on LGBTQ+ rights in the EU.

What Needs Protection?
A trinomial combination between the nation, the family and traditional values

What is the most important thing to protect? What part of what are seen as the elements representing the Lithuanian identity is going to disappear? Three elements – the nation, the family and traditional Christian values – constantly appear in the parties' discourse. As the *Tautos ir teisingumo sąjunga* frame it, "A nation is a family of families. A nation can survive without its state, but if the family is destroyed, the nation will not exist." Therefore, political objectives such as returning sovereign rights to the people

underlines that "we" are the majority and gives a moral dimension to the ongoing struggle.

For all the far-right actors analyzed, the nation's protection and ethnic Lithuanian identity are critical priorities. *Kartų solidarumo sąjunga – Santalka Lietuvai* and *Tautos ir teisingumo sąjunga* call the Lithuanian language the foundation of Lithuanian identity and the world's wealth. In a sense, far-right politicians anthropomorphize the nation when describing it as losing its dignity, being undermined, and ultimately dying as a human being. As Lithuania was not affected by the previous migrant crisis of 2015–2016, far-right politicians, similarly to other Central and Eastern European countries, have focused on socially conservative ideas and used rhetoric targeting sexual minorities and local ethnic groups.[25] However, since the summer of 2021, more than 4,000 migrants from the Middle East and Africa have crossed the Lithuanian-Belarusian border, triggering a migration crisis in the region. Recent events reinforced the position of politicians that immigration will threaten Lithuanian identity. The discourse of the crisis also takes on a racist tone, as seen in the quotes: "Hannibal and the barbarians are no longer at the gates – they have crossed the borders;" "It will not be Lithuanian choirs singing here, but drums – the tam-tams of Africa and Asia" (Arvydas Juozaitis, former leader of *Kartų solidarumo sąjunga – Santalka Lietuvai*). The argument is strengthened by adding a civilizational aspect, arguing that the clash of civilizations will change the demography of Lithuania. Strengthening Baltic identity and closer cooperation with Latvia is suggested instead.

Values, in general, even though they may appear to be quite different (national, family or traditional-Christian), are the essence of protecting from a significant and inevitable crisis. Values are seldom explicitly articulated, but they point to something deeply personal, close to the core of personal identity, and frame the purpose of political engagement in moral terms. "If God does not help us, nobody will help us. For us, the common people, the structures of power are invincible" – with such a line around five thousand people gathered in

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Ukraine

The colors of the flag are strong national symbols expressing patriotism.

PHOTO: SEIMUSAJUDIS.LT

> **Far-right actors in Lithuania, where 74% of the population officially identify with the Roman Catholic Church, are not afraid of mixing religion and politic.**

the latest protest of the *Lietuvos šeimų sąjūdis* on September 10 and invited all present to pray the rosary together. Far-right actors in Lithuania, where 74% of the population officially identify with the Roman Catholic Church, are not afraid of mixing religion and politics. In general, references to Christianity in the far-right discourse in Western and Central and Eastern Europe are pervasive.[26]

Lithuanian far-right actors use religion discursively in several ways. Sometimes it is employed for negative labelling of the out-group, as Rassemblement National, Lega, or Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs do in France, Italy, and Austria. "Christian civilization" or "Western culture formed by Christianity" or "Christian politics" are "empty signifiers" in Laclauian terms – elusive phrases without substantial content used to demarcate the in-group (who defend it) and the out-group (who destroy it) and to shape antagonism between them. For example, the "Land of Mary" is contrasted to the "Land of EU regulations." Very often Christianity is invoked as a marker of national identity like in Poland[27] or Hungary.[28] But the most salient trope in the discourse is "Christian

values" that go hand in hand with "traditional (family)" or "natural (family)." References to Christianity express a backlash against the concept of gender and sexual diversity or – to put it in other words – as a counter-revolution to the Inglehartian type silent revolution of post-materialist values.[29] Although Christian values are a somewhat vague concept, they are primarily used to oppose the LGBTQ+ position.

It is interesting to note that the legality of abortion was not contested in the political discourse analyzed although it is usually considered as a part of the conservative family attitudes package embraced by the radical right-wing.[30] Using the voting tool "Mano Balsas," where politicians and political parties were asked whether they agree that "women should have the right to decide freely about abortion," we found divided positions. While the *Nacionalinis susivienijimas* has a solid opposing stance, and Naglis Puteikis, one of the leaders of *Tautos ir teisingumo sąjunga*, has a rather negative stance, *Kartų solidarumo sąjunga – Santalka Lietuvai*, on the other hand, is more likely to support women's choice. On the one hand, last year far-right actors had many issues to capitalize on, from Covid

restrictions to the Istanbul Convention. On the other – Lithuanian society tends to justify abortion, according to European Values Study (EVS) data.[31]

Abstract moral values are made more tangible through the reference to the family. The family in far-right discourse seems to be a particular group that functions as a frame through which the nation and people are perceived.[32] It is presented as a component of society; therefore, the interests of the families are common for all. The frame chosen strategically reflects the attitudes of society very well. Family is the most crucial dimension of Lithuanian people's lives, more important than professional development, friendship, religion, or politics.[33] It is hardly surprising that far-right actors invoke family values that have strong potential for mobilization for engagement and emotional identification with the cause.

Finally, as in Poland and Hungary, far-right actors in Lithuania challenge the success of the post-communist transformation as an additional part of the cultural counter-revolution.[34] That implies questioning the country's direction for the last 30 years and invoking the image and emotional upheaval of the Reform Movement of Lithuania (*Sąjūdis*). All the organizations analyzed proposed returning to the *Sajūdis*' values, uniting as previously during the movement, and even organizing the movement in small local organizational groups as the *Sajūdis* did before the fall of the USSR. This reference serves several purposes: it implies mass mobilization in the face of an existential threat, suggests a positive mobilization goal, stimulates emotions of pride and hope,[35] and stresses once again that an unprecedented crisis calls for exceptional measures. The winners of this strategy so far are *Lietuvos šeimų sąjūdis* which identifies with *Sąjūdis* even by name and organized their biggest march in the same place where three decades ago the Singing Revolution took place. Even other far-right leaders endorsed *Lietuvos šeimų sąjūdis* as being a "true *Sąjūdis*," expressing a voice of the Lithuanian people, and participated in its big rally. However, a few months later the feeling of unity disappeared and even the organizers of the marches divided. Currently the far-right is competing for many things, including contacts with their counterparts in other EU countries.

While Lithuania has witnessed mass emigration and negative natural population growth since the 1990s, conditions are right for the unarticulated feeling of the small nation melting away, described by Ivan Krastev as "existential melancholy". To take advantage of the feeling, far-right actors elevate it to the heights of "demographic panic." The core element of the Lithuanian far-right is a demographic imagination which undergirds hostility to LGBTQ+ and migrants because they all are perceived as contributing to further demographic decline. Far-right politicians in Lithuania are proposing supposedly simple solutions to the imminent overarching crisis. In this case, the only hope offered to the disillusioned is to return to the golden age of the *Sąjūdis*, make a rupture, and start rebuilding the state again. The pledge to belong once again to a national movement remains the only way to mobilize support for far-right politicians who barely get votes in elections in a country that strongly favors EU integration. ●

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Poland

"We are the Creators of Our History. Poland is Ours"

by **Joanna Beata Michlic**

O n the November 11, 2021, in the western Polish town Kalisz, numbering 100,000 inhabitants, hundreds of radical ethno-nationalists participated in a march through the center of town to the City Hall. The march resembled a disciplined theatrical performance decorated with lit torches, Polish flags, and radical right-wing symbols. Loud somber military music accompanied it throughout. Some of its participants wore military uniforms and others historical costumes of Polish knights from different eras. During the march, the organizers chanted a variety of both emotionally charged and violent slogans inciting ethnic hatred against Jews and hatred against LGBT community, such as "Death to the Jews", "LGBT, pederasts and Zionists are the enemies of Poland".[1] They also chanted a phrase underscoring their sense of national identity and the national destiny of the Polish state: "We are the creators of our history. Po-

land is ours". At the culmination of the march in front of City Hall, the organizers burned a copy of the Kalisz Statute, the charter of rights granted in 1264 to the Jews of *Wielkopolska* [Great Poland] by Boleslav the Pious, that became the chief document determining the legal and social status of the Polish Jewish community during the premodern period till the partition of Poland in the late 18th century.

During the burning of the charter, the participants shouted repeatedly: "*To nie Polin, tu jest Polska*", [Here is not Polin, here is Poland!], Polin being the old, premodern Hebrew name for the Polish state. One of the striking features of this march was the atmosphere of comradeship and discipline among its participants. Another main feature was the visible participation of representatives of youth and traditional Polish families, both men and women with young children walking along or being carried on their parents' shoulders, as well as of ordinary middle aged and older men and women. The

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March of Nationalists In Wroclaw. November 11, 2021, on the occasion of the 103ʳᵈ anniversary of Poland regaining independence. In Wroclaw, national groups organized a march.
PHOTO: ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

latter is one of the most troublesome aspects of the march because it indicates an appeal of far-right ideology and agenda among ordinary people – a rather new social phenomenon, unthinkable in the 1990s and the early 2000s. It also clearly demonstrates that at present, some regular ordinary members of society are not ashamed or embarrassed to be associated with the far right.

What are the social and cultural factors behind the appeal of the radical right among young people, young families with children and more mature members of society? What agendas and strategies does the radical right employ to build and strengthen its popularity among ordinary people? What are the everyday social and cultural activities of the radical right that enable it to build local and regional support among ordinary members of Polish society? And to what extent? Can we talk about specific manifestations of the far right in a form of "everyday and family-based ethno-nationalism"? There are the pivotal questions that need to be investigated about the radical right not only in Poland and other parts of post-communist Europe, but also in Western Europe, since these developments manifest themselves in different parts of the region.[2]

Radical Right Parties and Organizations in the 1990s and 2000s

A wide range of right-wing nationalist and right-wing radical organizations and parties emerged on the Polish political scene in the 1990s in the aftermath of the post-communist transformation. Though they varied their respective positions on democracy and authoritarianism, the vision of European integration and the role of Catholicism in their ideological agenda, from the start they all stressed the priority of Polish national interests and Polish sovereignty and were opposed to pan-European organizations. Separate radical right-wing groups that had emerged in the 1990s were neo-fascist and neo-Nazi networks.[3]

Most of the right-wing radical parties and organizations of the 1990s took the names of historical prewar ethno-nationalist movements and parties such as the Nationalist Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe, SN), All-Poland-Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska, MW), National Revival of Poland (*Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski*, NOP) or National Party (*Szczerbiec*). They did so to emphasize their connections with the ideological traditions of the interwar period, including the ethos, the agenda, and the same catalogue of national enemies, especially the Jews and communists, frequently fused to-

gether in the anti-Semitic myth of Judeo-communism.[4] Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, radical right-wing parties, organizations and networks were politically and socially marginal. They were characterized by fluidity of ideological agendas, were prone to splits and to changing names and their local leaders. However, they did not vanish from the public life, but gradually established their social bases and networks on local, regional, national, and international levels. Thanks to focusing on new internet and social media communications, they have reached out to wider circles of young people.

The League of Polish Families party, (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR), formed in 2001 by Roman Giertych, was the only right-wing ethno-nationalistic party that enjoyed significant political success in the 2000s. LPR consisted of a broad range of smaller right-wing nationalistic organizations and political parties and enjoyed the support of Father Tadeusz Rydzyk of the *Radio Maryja*, a chief representative of the so-called Closed Church in Poland with strong roots in prewar Polish Catholicism fused with ethno-nationalism and anti-Semitism.[5] In the parliamentary election of 2001, the LPR obtained 7.9% of the votes and in 2005 8% of the votes, but in 2007 the Party failed to reach the 5% threshold to secure representation in parliament. During its short-lived spectacular political success, LPR's agenda was not only ethno-nationalist, Polonocentric and clerical, but also adopted an anti-EU position.[6] Between 2001 and 2006, LPR developed a connection to the All-Polish Youth (MW) that ended in 2006.[7] MW, founded in 1989 as a nationalist youth organization, has been known from its inception for its radicalism in the form of anti-Semitism, anti-abortion, anti-feminist, anti-LGBT rights, and anti-EU stance. In the early 2000s, MW was also connected to some illegal neo-Nazi skinhead groups. However, despite attempts to disband MW in 2006 for its radicalism and links to illegal groups, the MW has thrived and has forged new close links to another radical nationalist party, National Movement (*Ruch Narodowy*, RN) established in 2012 by Robert

Winnicki. The latter has secured international connections to radical right-wing organizations in both Eastern and Western Europe, such as the Hungarian *Jobbik* party and the Italian *New Force*. Two years after its establishment on June 13, 2014, RN staged the first anti-Roma demonstration in the country in Andrychów, a southern town numbering 20,000 inhabitants, calling for the one hundred-strong Roma minority to be expelled from the town. The RN anti-Roma demonstration transformed the Nazi anti-Jewish slogan "Jews out" into "*Cyganie raus*" ["Roma out"]. Prior to the anti-Roma rally during which the tiny Roma population was terrorized, local football fans from Beskid Andrychów club, closely linked to RN, created an anti-Roma Facebook page "liked" by more than 14,000 individuals. In the anti-Roma agenda, Winnicki followed the anti-Roma strategies used by the Jobbik party against the Roma minority in Hungary.[8]

More recently, RN has also developed ties to the Confederation Liberty and Independence (*Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość*, known as *Konfederacja*), a radical right-wing political organization that was first founded in 2018 as a political coalition.[9] In 2019, Confederation, as a political party, proclaimed in its vision for a future Poland, "Polish ethnocracy".[10] In the latest parliamentary election on October 13, 2019, Confederation won 6.81% votes. From its inception, Confederation has positioned itself as a chief rival of Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) on the radical right. For that reason, Confederations's politicians such as Krzysztof Bosak, Stanisław Michałkiewicz and Janusz Korwin-Mikke have accused the current PiS government and Andrzej Duda, president of Poland, of representing "Jewish and not Polish interests", "for giving in to the Jews" and for being responsible for "building Judeo-Polonia run by Jews and for the Jews" in the state.[11] Similar strategies of dismissing political opponents on accounts of them "being Jews" were used by radical ethno-nationalist groups and individuals against Marshall Józef Piłsudski in the post-independence period 1918-1935, and also against

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the center-right *Sanacja* government after the death of Piłsudski in 1935.[12] During the outbreak of the global Covid pandemic between 2020 and 2021, *Confederation* was also engaged in staging street demonstrations in which strong anti-vaccination sentiments were regularly expressed. On online networks, Confederation's advocates and sympathizers typically blame the Jews for allegedly creating and spreading the Covid pandemic.[13] In its propaganda, *Confederation* employs various conspiracy theories and preys on people's social and economic fears. At the same time, it portrays itself as a respectable and "caring" political party, protecting the interests of Polish families and Polish youth, and reaching out to ordinary members of society through local clubs, sports activities and holiday camps for children and young people.

The Right-Wing Radical Parties in the Era of PiS's Government

How has the extreme right-wing become a part of the mainstream political, social, and cultural life in contemporary Poland? This has been brought about by the victory of the conservative, centre-right Law and Justice Party (PiS) in both presidential and parliamentary elections of 2015. Similar shifts to the right in mainstream politics have occurred in other post-communist countries in Eastern Europe such as Hungary, as well as beyond the region. Like the FIDESZ party in Hungary in 2010, the PiS government openly proclaimed in 2015 a cultural counter-revolution that aims at the permanent marginalization of liberal democratic elites, its civil society, and its pluralistic, liberal democratic values. To successfully accomplish the cultural counter-revolution, the PiS government has been engaged in the "zero sum war" on civil society and its institutions on the one hand, and on the other, in the systematic building of a parallel "counter national pantheon of national heroes", a parallel "counter community of political and cultural elites including academia" and a parallel "counter civil society". PiS's cultural counterrevolution is directed at reshaping all forms of public life including the mass media, the judiciary, and educational systems.[14]

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In radical far-right discourse, Jews are also accused of being one of the causes behind current troubling global events.

One of the key unprecedented dangers of the PiS's ongoing cultural counterrevolution is a gradual merger with the vision and political agenda of extreme radical right-wing ethno-nationalist parties and organizations with the prewar xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and racist heritage. In the post-communist era with new social, cultural, and political challenges, the far right have been engaged in creating and fighting new enemies such as LGBT communities, feminism and gender studies, Muslim refugees, and the EU.

But these "new enemies" are often linked to the core traditional enemy of exclusivist ethno-nationalistic Poland, the Jew, who is viewed as responsible for the emergence of these "new enemies," as the following title of a 2019 book, written by Katarzyna Treter-Sierpińska, illustrates: Żydzi, gender, multikulti, czyli oszustwo i szajba [Jews, Gender, Multiculturalism, Meaning Deceit and Madness].[15]

F ifteen-year-old Jakub Baryla instantly became a social media sensation and a "hero" of radical Catholic, ethno-nationalistic circles for his action of attempting to stop an LGBT Pride March in Płock on August 12, 2019, with a cross and a rosary. In an interview on August 13, 2019, accessible on YouTube, Baryła accused "left-wing parties and Jews of spreading the LGBT ideology." He also "accused the Jews of wanting to make Polin out of Poland, of wanting to rob Poland, and of brainwashing children in Polish schools, so children would not be able to think for themselves."[16] Baryła also blamed socialists, including one of the founding fathers of modern Poland, Marshal Pilsudski, "for the murder of hundreds of thousands of Poles." One might consider his YouTube interview as an oddity, not worth paying attention to, if not for the fact that 48,802 thousand people viewed it over a short period of time. The news about this young man even reached international social media in the US. Some conservative right-wing Catholic Americans who read the news left comments on the online forums in which they also saw him as a hero fighting the "Judeo-globalist homosexual menace".[17] This is an illustration of how in the global internet-driven world,

Poznań 2015. March of members of the contemporary National Radical Camp on the occasion of the 81st anniversary of ONR. A *falanga* is visible on the banners.
PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

symbols, and values of a specific radical far right in one national context travel geographically and receive support in a different radical far-right national context.

In radical far-right discourse, Jews are also accused of being one of the causes behind current troubling global events such as Europe's crisis of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. For example, in November 2015 in Wrocław, during an anti-refugee demonstration organized by the ONR (National Radical Camp), Piotr Rybak burned an effigy of an orthodox Jew – a scene that became infamous and was condemned in Western media.[18] However, for committing this act of inciting to ethnic and racial hatred, Rybak had received a sentence of only 3 months imprisonment, instead of the original sentence of 10 months in prison. An Appeals Court approved the lenient sentence and ordered the Wrocław court to reconsider Rybak's request to serve the penalty under the house arrest. On January 27, 2019, during the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Rybak and 45 other radical right-wing activists gathered in front of the former Auschwitz death camp in Oświęcim, shouting "Time to fight Jewry and free Poland from Jews." "We are the true owners of this state."[19] He was not imprisoned for organizing and speaking at the demonstration.

But, today, we cannot simply consider Rybak as an isolated case of an individual, holding and expressing radical anti-Jewish convic-

tions, who could be ignored as belonging to the fringes of society. In the post-truth and internet-driven reality that we live by, individuals such as Rybak or the former catholic priest, Jacek Międlar, a chief editor of the radical ethno-nationalistic and anti-Semitic website: *wprawo.pl*, have been given a voice via social media that allow them to disseminate hate speech, in a powerful manner, to wider circles of Poles, young and old, in Poland and abroad.[20] The activities of Rybak and others alike show that in the anti-liberal and authoritarian climate, the language of anti-Semitism, xenophobia and racism can be disseminated without fear of legal repercussions or moral condemnation by society.

What is evident about the political scene in today's Poland is that the far right seems to share both its prewar and post-communist spectrum of "enemies of Poland and its people" with the centre-right conservative PiS government, especially with the more radical groups within PiS.[21]

In the case of PiS's Poland (and also in Fidesz's Hungary) the platforms adopted by the official governments, especially in the areas of national symbols, discourses and values, do not vary significantly from the platforms of far-right political parties. For example, since the beginning of the current European refugee crisis, in 2014-2015, the leader of PiS party Jarosław Kaczyński has been depicting Poland

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The 77th Warsaw uprising Anniversary on August 1, 2021, including waving the sign of the Fighting Poland, popularly known as the Anchor.
PHOTO: ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

as the bulwark of Christianity,[22] as a country that would rescue the real Christian Europe from the wide- spread decadence of Western Europe filled with liberal and multicultural practices and values. Kaczyński's position does not differ much from the position of far-right activists who portray themselves as "faithful believers and defenders of the true white Christian Europe that is being threatened by the EU, Muslim refugees, and gender agendas".[23]

Even before PiS came to power in 2015, it had already widely opposed sexual education, gender studies, the LGBT community's rights to same-sex marriage and women's rights to abortion. The PiS opposition against the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and same-sex marriage evolved into a "morality war" over family values in 2013. Similarly, far right activists see gender rights as a

"new communism"[24] that needs to be destroyed and insist on defending traditional (heterosexual) families.

In the post-2015 Poland, the PiS government emboldened and legitimized radical right-wing parties and organizations. One of the first and most conspicuous illustrations of empowering the far-right by the PiS government was the disbandment, on April 27, 2016, of the governmental advisory and coordinating Council to Oppose Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related to them, Intolerance, (*Rada ds. Przeciwdziałania Dyskryminacji Rasowej, Ksenofobii i związanej z nimi Nietolerancji*) that was established in 2013. The PiS government evaluated the mission of the Council as "useless" despite of being strongly criticized for its action by human rights NGOs, opposition parties, left-wing organizations and Dr Adam Bognar, the Ombudsman at that time.[25] A couple of months later in the same year, the PiS government put an end to important regular instructions of

the police about racism, xenophobia and hate-crimes. Extreme far right and fascists symbols inciting to hate crimes such as the *falanga*, in a shape of a gripping hand with a sword – a traditional emblem of the pre-1939 ONR party, were removed from the formal police training. The formal police training about racism, xenophobia and hate crimes was introduced in 2006 and approximately 86,000 policemen participated in that training up to the end of 2015.[26] By abolishing the Council to Oppose Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related to them, Intolerance and removing instruction about xenophobic, racist and hate-speech motives of such crimes from the police's training, PiS gave a green light to the far-right to conduct, without punishment, verbal and physical hate crimes against members of various minorities, including Roma, Jews, the LGBT community, and foreigners, especially with darker skin, on the streets of Polish cities and towns. The number of xenophobic, racist and hate crimes instantly increased from several per month to several per week.[27] In addition, racially motivated online hate speech and harassment have been flourishing on different far-right platforms.

The far right has also been empowered in the sphere of influencing mainstream national culture. The current Ministry of Culture and National Heritage supports far right radical groups by offering them various grants for the development of their exclusivist mono-religious and monocultural vision of the national past and national future, tainted by racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. For example, thanks to the grant awarded in 2020 by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the newly established Digital Library of National Thought (*Cyfrowa Biblioteka Myśli Narodowej*), "a self-proclaimed organization of young people who want to serve their homeland", launched a new, free of charge, online library of pre-1939 works by various authors including many publications by Roman Dmowski - the founding father of Polish modern ethnic collective nationalism and the core pre-1939 ethno-nationalist party and movement, the National Dem-

ocrats, known as *Endecja*. This online library does not provide any critical commentaries on its content.[28]

Radical right-wing leaders, advocates and sympathizers are not only supported by the current Polish state authorities, but in fact have been appointed to important official public roles representing the Polish state and shaping its policies and practices. For example, Adam Andruszkiewicz, a former leader of the extreme All-Polish Youth and a former member of the nationalist faction of the parliamentary club Kukiz'15, was appointed deputy Minister of Digitalization in 2018.[29]

This, in fact, means an opening of a Pandora's box of far-right radicalization with violent and militant undercurrents that could not be easily contained by the state and that would inevitably have a significant influence on the present and future conditions of both the Polish state and society. This could also signify the onset of what Anna Applebaum succinctly calls the twilight of liberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.[30]

There are number of multifactored reasons responsible for the current right-wing radicalization of politics and culture in Poland and other parts of post-communist Eastern Europe and beyond. Increasing social and economic insecurities and fears of globalization, climate change and covid pandemic, fears about the waves of migrant refugees from Africa and the Middle East, and the outburst of radical Islamist terrorist attacks in Western Europe, are among the general political, social, and cultural conditions that have led to the emergence and legitimization of the far right in the mainstream political culture in different part of Eastern and Western Europe and beyond. The historical legacies of the totalitarian communist regimes (1939-1941 and 1945-1989) and a weak pre-1939 liberal democratic heritage, are also seen among the factors behind the rise of the far right in the mainstream politics and culture in the region.[31] But of course, historical legacies rooted in a particular national past are also one of the triggers behind the current rise of the far right in Western European countries

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> **The far right also perceives itself in general as 'being the carriers of the historical and social truths'.**

such as Austria, Italy, France, and the Netherlands.[32]

In the current global post-truth era, what is striking about the far right in Poland and in other post-communist countries is its consistent insistence on defending first and foremost "national symbols and values", defending the "true Europe and true European values understood as conservative and Christian" and defending "traditional (understood as heterosexual) families". The far right also perceives itself in general as "being the carriers of the historical and social truths" and "fighting for the truth" and against alleged misinformation produced by liberal elites.[33] Activists and sympathizers of radical right-wing parties and organizations are regularly involved in historical commemorative events, ceremonial marches with torches and national flags, and debates in mass and social media. They are also engaged in the production of books, pamphlets, popular songs, and a variety of artifacts and everyday items. The latter, including T-shirts and other items of streetwear for the entire family, as well as toys, books, and puzzles for children, with allegedly "patriotic" symbols, are easily accessible in online shops such as the Polish "Red is Bad".[34] Some young people, both women and men, display their ideological affiliation with the far-right in the form of bodily tattoos of right-wing and historical symbols, including the symbol of the Fighting Poland of the Warsaw Uprising of August 1, 1944. The latter has been appropriated by the radical right in the post-2010s era.

The Radical Right and the Appropriation of the History of National Past

Throughout the first decade of the third millennium in post-communist Poland, a "hunger" for national twentieth century history, suppressed under communism, has been organically growing among different sections of Polish society, including members of football clubs and their fans. Ordinary Poles of different generations began to play the role of "spontaneous historical memory agents" by active participation in the popular annual singing of patriotic songs dedicated to the commemoration of the

Warsaw Uprising of August 1, 1944, and to Poland's regaining independence on November 11, 1918. Singing old patriotic songs together, and participating in the popular reconstructions of historical events, are good illustrations of not only bottom-up growing interest in the national past, but also of a strong emotional attachment to that past within Polish society. Not surprisingly, during the same decade, polls conducted by the well-known statistical institute Pentor in 2005 and 2009 respectively, indicated that Polish society was still not yet ready to accept the model of critical history that challenges soothing national memories.[35]

By the end of the first decade of the third millennium, the social "hunger" for an "affirmative soothing national past" has been partially hijacked by extreme radical ethno-nationalist and home-grown fascist organizations such as Polish National Community (*Polska Wspolnóta Narodowa*), National Revival of Poland (*Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski, NOP*), All-Polish Youth (MW) and its co-founded National Movement (*RN*), and National Radical Camp (*ONR*). During the period between 2009–2012, with the increasing fragmentation and radicalization of public discourse and the decrease in power of liberal democracy, those groups began to be visible in national commemorative events on the streets and in the social media, promoting new "national heroes" such as the extremist anticommunist National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne, NSZ*) active during the Second World War, and its direct military and ideological successor between 1945–1950 – the anticommunist underground military camp whose members became known as the "cursed soldiers". From the beginning, the memorialization of NSZ as a "chief collective hero" has been a clear indication of the fundamental aim of the radical ethno-nationalist historical counter-revolution: to make an extreme version of the national past a central part of the mainstream memory of the national past.[36] The "cursed soldiers" were discovered in the 1990s by a milieu of Warsaw-based memory activities chaired by a radical right-wing journalist Leszek Żebrowski and linked to a new

Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

Polish President Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria were killed in the plane crash in Smoleńsk on April 10, 2010.   PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

social memory agent, the association of the Republican League (*Liga Republikańska*) and the right-wing NGO, We Remember.[37] The 2000s saw the emergence of serious scholarly works dedicated to the anticommunist underground and their partisans by first class professional historians such as Rafał Wnuk.[38] Wnuk's and other critical history works about the activities of the anticommunist military units in early post-war Poland reveal the complexities of their history, including the key dark aspects – large scale theft, murders of Catholic Poles and ethnic cleansing, resulting in murder, of Polish Jews, Lemkos and Belarussians by certain units and military commanders.[39] However, at the same time, the legend of the "cursed soldiers" as the forgotten "national heroes" without any blemishes on their past increased as a result of the writings of right-wing historians and memory activists. Ironically, their idea that the "cursed soldiers" deserve to be institutionally commemorated as the victims of the communist regime was accepted by the majority of political elites, including the post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy*

Demokratycznej, SLD) in the Polish parliament on February 3, 2010, and led to the establishment, in 2011, of an official National Day of Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers on March 1.[40] The deep political crisis in the country in the aftermath of the plane crash in Smoleńsk on April 10, 2010 that resulted in the death of 95 representatives of Polish political and cultural elite, including Polish President Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria, no doubt played a pivotal role in the finalization of the official recognition of the cursed soldiers. It was President Lech Kaczyński's successor, Bronisław Komorowski of Civic Platform, who signed the law making the National Day of Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers an official "sacred day" in the Polish national calendar that Poles would live by.[41]

Hence in late 2015, it seems that the "cursed soldiers" and its direct predecessor, the NSZ, including the military unit of Holy Cross Mountains Brigade (*Brygada Świętokrzyska*) that openly collaborated with Nazi Germany, began to play the same, parallel role in the national pantheon as the Home Army, the chief mainstream "collective national hero of WWII". This is another unprecedented act revealing the internal shift to the radical right on the part of the PiS government and the state institutions. Good illustrations of current attempts at radical reshaping of the national pantheon are the wide range of annual national and local commemorative events of the "cursed soldiers" that, for example, lasted not one day, but two months between late February and early April 2017,[42] the erection of 600 monuments, memorial sites, and plaques related to the "cursed soldiers" across the country, and annual educational activities about "cursed soldiers" for youth in the country and abroad.[43] Perhaps the most disturbing symbolic example of this process was the laying a wreath on the tomb of soldiers of *Brygada Świętokrzyska* on February 17, 2018 by prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki during his official visit to Munich in Germany.[44] Not only does this development indicate a radicalization of the current PiS's historical policy, but, in fact, demonstrates the ongoing merg-

> The legend of the 'cursed soldiers' as the forgotten 'national heroes' without any blemishes on their past increased.

er of that historical policy with the extreme ethno-nationalistic vision of the national past, advocated by political parties and movements in contemporary Poland that have clear domestic fascist, xenophobic and racist roots in the pre-1939 period. This situation constitutes another unprecedented, dangerous development not only for public discourse about national past, but also for the state and civil society in Poland. In comparison to interwar Poland in 1918-1939, in which the post-1930s right wing conservative *Sanacja* government attempted, not always successfully, to contain the radical fascists groups in order to prevent violence on the streets, the post-2015 PiS government encourages radical organizations to be an integral part of the mainstream commemorative "sacred events" in "the national calendar". In the early 2010s, these organizations had already been empowered by receiving a platform in the major annual national celebrations of Poland's Day of Independence on November 11 to celebrate the reinstatement of sovereignty after the end of World War I in 1918,[45] and in conducting their own commemorations of the Warsaw Uprising of August 1, 1944. The participation of families with young children in both the annual radical right-wing demonstrations of November 11, 1918, and of August 1, 1944, in which the use of vulgar, militant language and hate speech against political, social, and cultural opponents is common, is another troubling feature of the radicalization of Polish society. It indicates the dissemination and internalization of radical far-right historical discourses, values, and symbols among ordinary members of society. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to research the current levels of internalization of far-right national symbols, values, and discourses among ordinary members of Polish society, especially young people.

There is no doubt that the presence of radical right-wing symbols, values and discourses in mainstream political, social, and cultural life can lead to a deep misinformation in both formal and informal education at all levels, and general confusion on both cognitive and moral levels. Under the conditions of illib-

eralism, ethno-nationalism, continuous culture wars and alternative knowledge, the far right seems to become a permanent fixture in the mainstream politics and society. By presenting itself as a respectable political actor "caring for the most sacred national values and symbols and traditional families", it skillfully reaches out to ordinary members of society and thus gains its followers among young people, families with young children and older people. This, perhaps, might be the most dangerous manifestation of the refashioned far right today, leading to the fusion of militant and violent radicalism with "everyday, family-based" ethno-nationalism. ●

Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

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Still on the Fringes? Far-Right Parties and Identity in Romania

By **Sergiu Gherghina**

Far-right movements and parties have a peculiar trajectory in the Romanian political arena. In the first decade after the regime change in 1989, several far-right political parties gained parliamentary seats on a regular basis. The country was among the first in Eastern Europe to elect far-right representatives to Parliament. Out of a total of seven parliamentary parties and alliances in the 1992 national legislative elections, two were of the far right.[1] The rise of the far right reached its peak in the 2000 parliamentary elections when the Greater Romania Party (PRM) came second, with roughly one-fifth of the valid votes. The 2008 legislative elections marked the fall of the far-right parties, which failed to gain parliamentary representation at national level in three consecutive elections until 2020. The traditional parties either disappeared – for example, the Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR) merged in 2006 with the Conservative Party and lost its political identity – or lost their electoral appeal as was the case with the PRM.[2] Although

new far-right parties and movements emerged, competed in elections, formed coalitions, their appeal remained minimal. Political actors such as the New Generation Party (PNG),[3] the United Romania Party (PRU) or the New Right Party (PND) made unsuccessful attempts to gain electoral support.[4]

In 2020, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) made a breakthrough and gained parliamentary representation with a heavily nationalist discourse emphasizing family, tradition, and religion. Its anti-vaccination rhetoric gained momentum during the Covid-19 pandemic and its popularity rose on a continuous trajectory. The party gained slightly more than 9% in the 2020 legislative elections and one year later its electoral support reached 17% in national polls.[5] The ups and downs in their popularity raise several question marks about the identity and ideological consistency of far-right political parties and movements in Romania.

This article analyzes the extent to which far-

right parties engage with identity issues on different levels and how these have an impact on their political agendas. In doing so, it discusses the extent to which these identities tie into the political legacy of communism and post-communism, covering the ways in which these parties shape ideas and expressions of nationalism in Romania. Finally, the text discusses the existence of a turn within the far right in contemporary Romania compared to the previous three decades of post-communism. The analysis covers several parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties in the last five years. In addition to those mentioned above, it will also refer to the Romanian Nationhood Party (PNR), which signed a protocol with AUR to have their candidates elected on the latter's list in the 2020 legislative elections.

Nationalism Rooted in History and Myths

Nationalism has played a key role in Romanian politics for roughly one century. Nationalist

rhetoric was a defining feature in the interwar period, cultivated by political parties such as the National-Christian Defense League, the Legion of Archangel Michael, the National Agrarian Party, and the National Christian Party.[6] Nationalism was also a key feature during the communist regime.[7] These are the two main sources for the current themes of contemporary nationalist rhetoric among far-right in Romania. Taking the first case, two political parties formed in the 1920s were characterized by a strongly nationalist and anti-Semitic discourse. One of these was the National-Christian Defense League (LANC), which later merged with the National Agrarian Party to form the National Christian Party. The party enjoyed limited electoral support and gained between 8 and 11 seats (out of 387) between 1926 and 1933 in the National Assembly. The second party was the Legion of Archangel Michael, formed in 1927 by Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu. The party was later complemented by a paramilitary wing (Iron

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Guard) and changed its name in the 1930s into Everything for the Country to reflect better its nationalist ideology. This was complemented by anti-Semitic, anti-democratic and anti-capitalist rhetoric, and a strong Orthodox Christian mysticism. AUR borrowed several ideas from the Legion: its political program includes references to the elitism or classical fascism promoted by the interwar party.[8] The religious identity promoted by contemporary far-right parties in Romania – to be discussed in the following section – was shaped by this approach.

The xenophobic messages against the Jews in the interwar period find correspondence in the current messages directed mainly against the Hungarian ethnic minority but also against foreign interference. For example, PND calls for a ban on the political parties representing ethnic Hungarians and, on all parties, claiming territorial autonomy on ethnic grounds.[9] For roughly two decades, PRM made repeated attacks against the ethnic Hungarians and promoted anti-Semitism in its manifestos and in the speeches of its long-time leader Vadim Tudor.[10] The party lost its notoriety more than one decade ago and the death of its leader kept it on the fringes of the political arena. The current PRM political program says nothing about ethnic minorities.[11] AUR speaks about xenophobia and ethnic segregation oriented against Romanians who live in counties with a majority Hungarian population.[12] In 2018, PRU condemned a statement issue by several parties representing the Hungarian minority in Romania as irredentism.[13] The statement refers to several forms of autonomy and has no legal character.

Romanian communists gradually distanced themselves from the Soviet Union and instead developed their own interpretation of the Romanian nation-state from its early history until the present. The dominant themes were the nation's ancestry, continuity, independence, and unity.[14] These were accompanied by profiles of strong rulers from the country's past who were able make all these happen, who opposed fierce enemies, and kept the nation's integrity. This alternative/distorted version of history was used to link communist leaders to brave rulers from the past with emphasis on their virtues. The use of nationalism in the post-communist period continues this approach, applying the communist reinterpretation of history. Political parties across the political spectrum make an appeal to the nation's unity and national identity to mobilize the electorate. For example, the Social Democratic Party (PSD), successor to the Romanian Communist Party,[15] won all but one of the popular votes in national legislative elections organized after the regime change. The party uses nationalist rhetoric in many of its election manifestos and its leaders made extensive use of it in public speeches. As a supplementary proof, several people from the PSD's elite including one of its recent leaders, Liviu Dragnea, left in September 2021 to form a new party with a nationalist ideology called Alliance for the Fatherland.

Far-right parties in Romania use nationalism as a solution to contemporary problems and developments. They reproduce the same references to the historical past and greatness of the nation as crafted by communists and used broadly by many other political actors. For example, the PRM leader Vadim Tudor campaigned for the presidency in 2000 with the slogan "Down with the Mafia! Rise up Romania!" as a tool to tackle the corruption problems. The PRU, which emerged in 2015, has as its party logo the face of Vlad the Impaler, a cruel ruler from the 15th century who is the basis for Dracula's fictional story, portrayed in history as a justice-maker and rule enforcer. References to him were made – especially by Vadim Tudor in the 1990s and 2000s – to address the rule-of-law problems in the country.

The continuity of nationalist themes addressed by the far right also applies to the territorial integrity of state borders, national pride, and the broad idea of "Fatherland". To begin with state borders, the Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR) and the PRM were the far-right parties advocating in the 1990s for unification between the Republic of Moldova and Romania. The name PRM is a direct reference to this unification: the Greater Romania that

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Far-right parties in Romania combine nationalist discourse with two types of identity that are prominent on their political agenda: religious and social.

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existed between 1918 and 1940 included a large part of the current territory of the Republic of Moldova. The name PRU (United Romania) also makes a direct reference to this unification. AUR and PND explicitly list unification as a priority of their programs. In 2021, AUR competed in the national legislative elections in the Republic of Moldova with a program advocating unification with Romania. Its very poor electoral result – slightly more than 7,000 votes, which is less than 0.5% of those cast on Election Day – indicates limited support for this idea. PNR supports an indirect unification of the two countries through the gradual integration of the Republic of Moldova in the EU and NATO.

In the 1990s, PRM and UNPR extensively used the slogan "We do not sell our country" to oppose privatization and foreign investment in the country.[16] Their central point was that the country can survive through its own resources and hard-working people. Three decades later the same ideas are reflected in the political programs and electoral manifestos of other far-right parties. For example, AUR brings up these elements in the context of high levels of migration. According to statistics, Romania is the country with one of the largest shares of migrating population in the world.[17] The Fatherland is one of the four pillars on which the party builds its agenda, alongside family, faith, and freedom.[18] The party explicitly states that their ideas are the same as 500 and 100 years ago and rely on territorial and national unity. The same ideas are picked up by the PND that emphasizes the country's sovereignty, independence, and dignity.[19] AUR argues that migration can be temporary, and it is crucial for Romanians to return and preserve the national identity. This party claims that Romanians cannot be "strangers in their own country", which is also the slogan used by PND to recruit new members. The official website of the party has on the homepage the question "Do you feel a stranger in your country?" followed by a suggestive answer: "Then come and join the PND". In its program, PND uses literally the same words as PUNR and PRM in

the 1990s: the country must not be sold to foreigners; internal consumption needs must be addressed by what is produced in the country.

Religious and Social Identities

Far-right parties in Romania combine nationalist discourse with two types of identity that are prominent on their political agenda: religious and social. These accompany a more general critical discourse towards the political and economic elite, existing problems such as corruption, high prices or the negative consequences of the pandemic, and the inefficiency of state institutions in addressing problems.

Religious identity has been approached by many other political actors over time. For example, in the final TV debate of the 1996 presidential elections, the candidate of the democratic camp used references to religion to distinguish himself from the incumbent president who belonged to the successor party of the communists (PSD, which was labeled differently at the time). Almost 20 years later, in the campaign for the 2014 presidential elections, the PSD candidate attacked the candidate of the Liberal Party on grounds of ethnicity and religion. The latter was German and Protestant as opposed to Romanian and Orthodox. In general, many election manifestos include paragraphs on religion or religious institutions. These references to religion among political parties and candidates – including the mainstream ones – are not surprising given that in terms of religiosity the country has consistently ranked highest among European countries over the last two decades.[20] The use of religion or religious-based values in party rhetoric was considered to mobilize the electorate.

Far-right parties use religion in two specific ways: religious nationalism and fundamentalism. Religious nationalism was used extensively in the 1990s and 2000s by representatives of the far-right such as PRM or PNG-CD. For example, the PRM party leader, Vadim Tudor, made Biblical references and referred to nationalist mythology in his speeches to attack the political opponents and to create a feeling of drama about the situation in the country. The PNG-CD's main goal was the Christian

> **Far-right parties in Romania use nationalism as a solution to contemporary problems and developments.**

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The president of PNG-CD, George Becali, his mother, and the deputy Vlad Hogea (vice-president of the party) at the relics of St. Pious Parascheva (Iasi, October 14, 2006).
PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

> **Becali drew parallels between himself as a former shepherd and the notion of shepherd associated with Jesus.**

rebirth of the country; they often referred to orthodoxy as the way to regain national values. George Becali, the party leader after 2004, used many references to saints and martyrs from the Bible when explaining his attitudes and actions. The party headquarters was furnished with statues and paintings depicting biblical scenes such as St. George slaying the dragon. Becali drew parallels between himself as a former shepherd and the notion of shepherd associated with Jesus.[21] AUR makes references to divinity in public speeches and its electoral manifesto has a section called "Together in the name of God". The party claims that it makes politics "with faith in God and out of devotion for predecessors".[22] PND associates the Romanian Orthodox Church with the nation and speaks about the importance of stopping secularism and Christianophobia throughout the country.

Religious fundamentalism is mainly reflected in the promotion of religious values and the rejection of homosexuality. The latter applies especially to same-sex families that were on the political agenda of many East European countries in the last decade.[23] Although AUR does not make direct references to the Romanian Orthodox Church, its explicit claims

about faith and God indicate a close connection with the Church. According to several media reports, priests actively campaigned for AUR. The promotion of the traditional family brought AUR even closer to the Church. The same applies to PND, which existed at the time of the 2018 referendum for the traditional family in Romania, strongly supported by the Orthodox Church.[24] PND makes references to the Church in its program (see above). PNR also makes direct references to the Church and asks for its institutional involvement in civic education, the protection of religious identity and the active promotion of national identity.[25] The failure of the 2018 referendum prompted the Church to look for new allies that could shape the political agenda according to religious values. There are some resemblances between AUR and the Legion in terms of their relationship with the Church; these lie in the appeal that both had to some members of the clergy and the promotion of religious values.[26]

The social identity cultivated by the far-right in Romania overlaps with the nationalism described in the previous section. In essence, social identity is based on individuals' self-perception regarding their membership

in social groups.[27] Far-right parties around the world build a nationalist social identity, calling for the defense of "our people" against "the enemy", which can be any individual belonging to other groups. This is how speeches against immigration or against ethnic minorities residing on the territory of the country lead to feelings of xenophobia. In Romania, anti-immigration rhetoric is limited because it is a sending rather than a receiving country. Since many voters have one emigrant in their families, an anti-immigrant approach would have limited chances of success. However, the strategy of "othering" targets ethnic Hungarians who are mainly attacked due to their claims for territorial or language autonomy in the counties where they form the majority population. In its xenophobic discourse, PND brings in a historical dimension when calling for the "cancellation of the illegal return of possessions to Hungarian aristocracy and their successors in Transylvania".[28] Transylvania is a historical region of Romania where many Hungarians lived over centuries. At the end of WWII, many Hungarian aristocrats' assets were confiscated by the communists. These assets were returned in the post-communist period, an action the PND calls illegal although the return took place for all property owners, not only for aristocratic Hungarian families.

The far right also cultivates an anti-elitist social identity. All the parties covered in this article strongly criticize the establishment and the politicians of mainstream parties. They emphasize the dichotomy between the people and the elites, which is common for populists, to reflect the negative features among politicians. This strategy appeals to some segments of society that faced large challenges during transition and after. Moreover, the failure of politicians to secure economic stability, to prevent social unrest or to ensure political cooperation fueled this approach. The Covid-19 pandemic brought more opportunities to enlarge the gap between the people and the political elites after March 2020. AUR organized street protests against government measures and restrictions. Although the number of partici-

pants was quite limited, the party continued its rhetoric of resistance in Parliament.

Conclusions

Far-right parties remain fringe in Romanian politics and society. In the last two decades, two such parties had parliamentary representation of which one failed to gain any seats since 2008. Although in contemporary times there is a handful of parties with such an ideology, they are extra-parliamentary and have limited support in the electorate. There is little turn within the far right in Romania since the themes used by these parties are rooted in the interwar and communist periods. The ideas are reproduced and (sometimes) slightly adapted to the current realities rather than generating new concepts. The nationalist discourse after 2020 is a continuation of what was on display in the last century. Similar messages are repeated by different political actors across different decades during post-Communism.

The preferred identity issues remain in the realm of religion and the social spectrum, with a significant overlap between these and nationalism. The far-right shape ideas and expressions of nationalism in Romania with references to the past. In that sense, their political agendas are stable and tied into the legacy of previous decades. However, this rarely allows these parties to address current challenges or to look into the future. A partial exception to this rule is AUR that mobilized the electorate with appeals rooted in contemporary problems. Such an approach can attract protest voters but will hardly create long-term loyal voters based on ideological grounds.

The rejection of liberalism is one important reason why such parties are not considered as potential government partners, even when they join the legislature. For example, in one year after the 2020 legislative elections the composition of the government changed three times and all the parliamentary parties except for AUR had several months in office. The denunciation of mainstream ideas in the country can bring popularity to far-right parties. Nevertheless, this is counterbalanced by traditional

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ties with an Orthodox Church that faces increased criticism for its corrupt practices, and by the absence of new identity issues that could increase their popular appeal. ●

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The Politics of Russian National Identity

by **Stephen D. Shenfield**

The purpose of this contribution is to investigate the various kinds of Russian national identity and their impact on contemporary Russian nationalist politics. I start by examining the basic division between Russian ethnic and state nationalism, first as reflected in language and then in historical perspective. This leads me to the question of whether the current Russian Federation is likely to evolve into a "normal" European nation-state. Next, I generate a richer typology of Russian nationalism today by focusing on identification with different periods of Russian history and also with different geographical orientations. Finally, I discuss what changes have occurred in Russian nationalism in connection with the Ukrainian crisis that broke out in 2014.

Ethnic and State Nationalism in Russia

The main division within Russian nationalism is that between ethnic nationalism and state nationalism.[1] The two types of Russian nationalism are not mutually exclusive. Ethnic nationalists value the state, while many though not all state nationalists value the ethnic nation or *ethnos*. For ethnic nationalists, however, the state exists to serve the *ethnos*, while for state nationalists the state itself is the supreme value. For ethno-nationalist theorists, the most influential of whom is Lev Gumilyov, history is above all the history of the rise and fall of ethnic communities. In theories of state nationalism, such as the Eurasianist geopolitics of Alexander Dugin and Alexander Panarin, states are the central historical actors.[2]

Ethnic and state nationalism tend to merge when the state territory and the area of settlement of the ethnic group associated with the state coincide, at least approximately, as they ideally do in the modern nation-state. Ernest Gellner and his school define nationalism as a movement that aims to bring about this situation. Nationalism in this narrow sense exists in Russia too, but I use the word more broadly to signify any doctrine that gives overriding priority to the interests of the state and/or ethno-nation.

Words

The division between ethnic and state nationalism is revealed in the key words through which Russian national identity is expressed.

English has only two words for this purpose: *Russia* for the country, *Russian* – as a noun – for a member of the nation, and also as an adjective referring either to the country or to the nation.

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> **All three Soviet constitutions, adopted in 1924, 1936, and 1977, described the state as federal and multiethnic.**

The closest Russian equivalents to these words are *Rus'* and *russkii*.

Russkii, like *Russian*, can be either a noun or an adjective. In either case it refers to the nation as an ethno-cultural (as distinct from civic) entity.

The *Rus'* were a clan of Norse origin who formed a state known as Kievan Rus (879—1240 CE). Today's Russian Federation, Belarus, and Ukraine all lay claim to the legacy of Kievan Rus. Russian ethno-nationalists occasionally use *Rus'* as a literary device to create an image of a primordial and ethnically homogeneous Russia.

Unlike English, however, Russian has a second set of words for Russia and Russian that emphasize the multiethnic character of the state: *Rossiya* for the country, *rossiyanin* for a citizen of Russia, and *rossiiskii* as the corresponding adjective.[3]

The difference between *russkii* and *rossiyanin/rossiiskii* is sometimes exaggerated. Only marginal groups of Russian ethno-nationalists assign a racial meaning to *russkii*. What it means to be a Russian is usually specified in terms of language, culture, and loyalty to the Russian state. While descent may nonetheless play some role in Russian identity, it is not a decisive one. Many Russian nationalists would agree with the definition given in the program of The Other Russia, a political party founded by the late writer and National Bolshevik Eduard Limonov:

> **Who is a Russian is determined neither by blood nor by religious confession. A Russian is someone who regards Russian language, culture, and history as his own and who has spilled and is prepared to spill his own and others' blood for the sake of Russia and for no other homeland.**[4]

During both the tsarist and the Soviet period many members of ethnic minorities underwent some degree of *russification*. Russification proceeds by stages. Some people of non-Russian descent, such as the Chuvash, now speak only

Russian but retain a separate group identity. Others no longer feel a strong connection with the ethnic community of their forebears. It is common to refer to such people not only as *rossiyane* but also as *russkie*. Thus, *rossiiskiye armyane* are Armenian citizens of the Russian Federation, while *russkiye armyane* are Russian-speaking people who know that they are of Armenian descent but no longer have a strong sense of belonging to an Armenian ethnic community.

Finally, I note the traditional broad conception of the Russian ethno-nation as a union of Great Russians (Russians in the narrow sense), White Russians (Belarusians), and Little Russians (Ukrainians). This conception, which reduces Belarusian and Ukrainian identities to regional variations of Russian identity – like Siberian identity, for instance – invalidates the current self-identification of Belarusians and (especially) Ukrainians as non-Russian. Nevertheless, this archaic conception has persisted among Russian nationalists. For instance, the "national democrat" oppositionist Alexei Navalny has said that "Russians and Ukrainians are the same people."[5]

Ethnic and State Nationalism in Historical Perspective
Tsarist Russia

Tension between ethnic and state nationalism arose as Muscovy expanded to encompass a multiethnic population. The starting point of this process was the conquest of the Kazan Khanate by Ivan IV (the Terrible) in 1552.[6] Foreign elites who accepted Muscovite expansion were incorporated into the Russian elite. Thus in 1574 the Kasim Khan Simeon was proclaimed Grand Duke of Moscow. When the Kingdom of Georgia was annexed in 1801, Tsar Paul I recognized a hundred Georgian princes as princes of the Russian Empire.[7] West Europeans with valuable skills were also encouraged to settle in Russia, again starting with Ivan IV but especially under Peter and Catherine. In the 18th and 19th centuries many high governmental and military posts were filled by Russified members of the German Baltic nobility. The Slavophile Yuri Samarin (1819–76) expressed widespread popular

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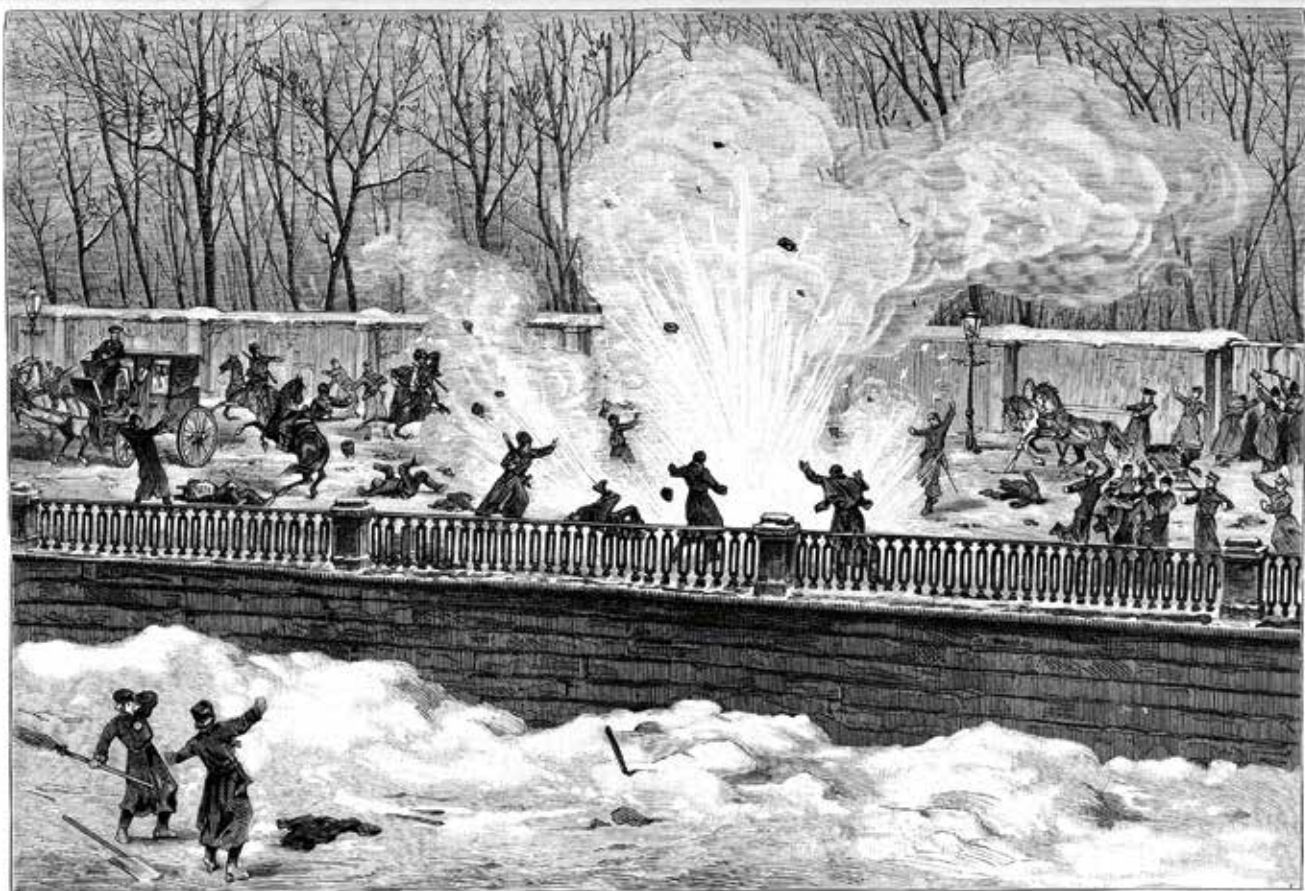
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The assassination of
Alexander II of Russia,
March 1, 1881.

feeling when he denounced this practice in an outburst that earned him a term of imprisonment.

Ivan and his immediate successors attempted forcible Russification of their non-Russian subjects, entailing not only imposition of the Russian language but also conversion to Orthodox Christianity. Thus, before Khan Simeon could be inducted into the Muscovite nobility he had to be baptized. In the second half of the 18th century Catherine prohibited Orthodox proselytism in predominantly Moslem parts of the empire and declared adherence to all confessions consistent with loyalty to the Crown.[8] Given the close association between religious affiliation and ethnic identity, Catherine's multi-confessional model may be regarded as a precursor of later (Soviet and post-Soviet) multiethnic forms of Russian imperial or state nationalism.

After the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 there was a reversion to a policy of forcible Russification.

The Soviet Union

The Bolsheviks believed in the objective existence of "nationalities" – i.e., ethnic groups. All three Soviet constitutions, adopted in 1924, 1936, and 1977, described the state as federal and multiethnic. The 1936 and 1977 constitutions declared that citizens have equal rights irrespective of ethnic affiliation and made "advocacy of ethnic exclusivity, hatred, or contempt" a punishable offense (Article 123 of the 1936 Constitution, Article 36 of the 1977 Constitution). The ethno-pluralist character of the state was embodied in an ethno-federal structure that assigned "homelands" to many of its ethnic groups.

In the first few years after the revolution, in an effort to compensate for the injustices of the tsarist past, state policy often favored previously persecuted ethnic groups over ethnic

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> **The Cossack revivalists and the racialist Russian National Unity – won a substantial presence in certain regions.**

Russians. In land disputes between Cossacks and "mountain peoples" of the Caucasus, for example, the state took the side of the latter. Ethnic Russian nationalism was associated with the Whites and harshly suppressed as "Great Russian chauvinism". In what one writer has dubbed "the affirmative action empire" there were indeed advantages in *not* being Russian.[9]

Under Stalin this orientation was reversed. Many prominent non-Russian Bolsheviks were purged as "bourgeois nationalists." During the Soviet-German war concessions were made to ethnic Russian nationalism – notably, the Russian Orthodox Church was revived. Several ethnic minorities judged disloyal were deported to Kazakhstan and Central Asia under horrific conditions, with only about half surviving.[10] Conversely, Russians came to be regarded as the ethnic group most loyal to the regime. In a famous toast that Stalin proposed at a Kremlin reception in May 1945, he called the Russians "the most outstanding of all the peoples forming the Soviet Union" and the state's "leading force," praising them for remaining loyal in the first year or two of the war despite the desperate situation and the government's errors.[11] Stalin's last years were those of the campaign against "rootless cosmopolitanism," targeting Soviet Jews – a striking contrast to Lenin's condemnation of anti-Semitism.

Khrushchev presided over a partial restoration of "Leninist norms." Stalin's deportations were condemned, and deportees allowed to return to their homelands. In this respect as in others, however, de-Stalinization was incomplete. Russification continued.[12] In 1971 it was announced that ethnic groups in the USSR were gradually merging to form a single "Soviet people" – a doctrine hard to interpret otherwise than as implying Russification. There also emerged under Brezhnev a "Russian Party" inside officialdom.[13]

Nevertheless, the ethno-federal structure remained in place throughout the Soviet period. As Dmitry Gorenburg points out, assimilationist policies were accompanied by action to maintain and even strengthen the ethnic institutions established in the 1920s.[14] One result was a bi-furcation of top officials into an overwhelmingly ethnic Russian power elite at the center and regional elites drawn mainly from titular ethnic groups in the non-Russian union republics and in some of the "autonomous" territories within Russia itself (the RSFSR).

The post-Soviet transition

Gorbachev's liberalization unleashed both Russian and non-Russian nationalist movements, which together with other destabilizing developments led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Most of the post-Soviet successor states – all of those that were recognized by the international community – were formed on the basis of the union republics, although there also emerged several *de facto* (unrecognized) states at lower levels of the Soviet federal structure. The four states at the core of the former Soviet Union – Russia (the Russian Federation), Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan – ensured that the transition would be initially peaceful in their region (except for parts of the Northern Caucasus) by officially acknowledging their multiethnic character.

The Russian Federation

Thus, the constitution adopted by Russia in 1993 opens with the phrase: "We, the multiethnic people of the Russian Federation." Like the preceding Soviet constitutions, it prohibits ethnic and racial discrimination (Article 19/2) and the propaganda of ethnic and racial hatred and superiority (Article 29/2). It also defines the federal structure of the state, demarcating areas of federal, province/republic, and joint jurisdiction.

In fact, the relations that developed under President Boris Yeltsin between Moscow and various ethnic republics – above all, Tatarstan – were confederal rather than federal in nature, based on negotiated bilateral treaties. Specialists in Russian Studies seriously considered the possibility that the Russian Federation would meet the same fate as the USSR.[15] This trend was reversed after 2000 by President Vladimir Putin, who repudiated the bilateral treaties, abolished popular election of provincial gov-

ernors, and took other measures to strengthen the "power vertical." However, a campaign to eliminate ten ethnic republics and autonomous districts by amalgamation with neighboring "Russian" provinces provoked so much local unrest that it was abandoned in midcourse. Only six autonomous districts were eliminated; all the ethnic republics survived.[16] The ethno-federal structure as a whole is still intact. Its abolition is a key goal of Russian state nationalists like Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia, although the implications of this goal for his expansionist foreign policy are unclear.

In the 1990s Russian nationalism was more characteristic of the "national-patriotic" opposition than of the Yeltsin regime. Some nationalist movements – notably, the Cossack revivalists and the racialist Russian National Unity – won a substantial presence in certain regions.[17]

Putin has tried to coopt nationalist feeling, with a degree of success sufficient to split Russian nationalists into pro- and anti-Putin camps. In response to violent clashes between ethnic Russians and migrants from the Caucasus in Kondopoga (Karelia) in August 2006 and then in Moscow in December 2010, Putin clamped down on ethno-nationalist organizations – for example, banning the popular Movement Against Illegal Immigration in April 2011 – but simultaneously pushed through concessions to Russian ethnic nationalism in official language. Ethnic Russians were assigned a special cementing role: Putin redefined Russia as "a multiethnic civilization held together by an ethnic-Russian cultural core." Finally, in 2020 the constitution was amended to refer to ethnic Russians as "the state-forming nationality."

A Russian Nation-State in the Making?

It might seem that separation from other former Union Republics, especially in the Baltic, the Southern Caucasus, and Central Asia, will finally enable Russia, in the form of the post-Soviet Russian Federation, to constitute itself as a "normal" European nation-state. After all, ethnic Russians now constitute about 80% of the country's population, as compared with just over 50% at the end of the Soviet era. Undoubtedly, many ethnic Russians would like such "normalization" to occur. In reality, however, it remains infeasible.

First of all, as the partial failure of the amalgamation campaign showed, the ethnic minorities are by no means a negligible political factor. Many are concentrated in strategically important regions of the Northern Caucasus and Middle Volga. The ethnic minorities are, though to very different degrees, integrated into Russian society. Members of ethnic minorities are prominent in all spheres of life – in government (minister of defense Army General Sergei Shoigu is Tuvan; deputy prime minister Marat Khusnullin and housing minister Irek Faizullin are Tatars), in business (10 of the top 20 businesspeople on Forbes' 2021 list of Russia's billionaires are not ethnic Russians, starting at no. 4 with Vagit Alekperov, Azerbaijani chairman of Lukoil, Russia's main oil company), in sports (Yelena Isinbayeva, world champion pole vaulter, is Tabasaran), and in science, medicine, and the arts (many members of the Russian Academy of Sciences are Armenians, Jews, Tatars, and so on). The interests and concerns of ethnic minorities cannot therefore be ignored or overridden without jeopardizing social stability.

Second, the proportion of the total population constituted by non-Russians is unlikely to decline significantly and may well increase. Four main factors have to be taken into account, of which two point in one direction and two in the other:

1) the gradual Russification of members of ethnic minorities living dispersed among ethnic Russians, and also of some very small ethnic groups;
2) the "return" to the Russian Federation of ethnic Russians from other post-Soviet states, especially in response to upheavals in those states (e.g., refugees fleeing the fighting in eastern Ukraine);
3) the differential between the relatively high birth rates of most ethnic minorities and the low birth rate of ethnic Russians (1.58 births per woman – well below the replacement level of 2.1);

> **National identity is usually tied to a specific historical narrative of the origin and evolution of the nation.**

4) the settlement of migrant workers and their families from Central Asia and the Caucasus in areas previously populated mostly by ethnic Russians.[18]

The last of these factors has the greatest political salience. Migration of workers to Russia from Central Asia and the Caucasus dates back to the late Soviet period, but it used to be temporary and seasonal in nature. Men went north to earn money and brought it back home. In recent years, however, migrants have been bringing their families to settle permanently and establish Moslem communities in Russia, even in Siberia and the Russian Far East.

The authorities have accepted this development, granting permission to build mosques despite local protests. A visa regime has been introduced to regulate migration from Central Asia, but it is very unlikely that migration will be halted altogether. From the perspective of state nationalists, the new immigrants are a means (albeit not an ideal means) of overcoming labor shortages and mitigating the demographic crisis – Russia's population, currently 146 million, is projected to fall to 139 million in 2040, 133 million in 2060, and 127 million in 2080. For Russian ethnic nationalists, by contrast, such a "solution" is nothing short of a disaster – worse than the problem it is meant to solve. It is no coincidence that the most successful organization created by Russian ethnic nationalists is the Movement Against Illegal Immigration. Navalny too has exploited anti-immigrant feelings for political advantage: one "humorous" video of his likens migrants to large cockroaches and recommends the use of guns to extirpate them.

Thus, demographic and economic considerations as well as the legacy of Soviet ethno-federalism militate against the formation of an ethnically homogeneous Russian nation-state. Any serious attempt to "normalize" Russia in this manner would set off a massive upheaval.

Historical Identification

So far we have considered the basic distinction between ethnic and state forms of Russian nationalism. There are, of course, other important distinctions to be made. National identity is usually tied to a specific historical narrative of the origin and evolution of the nation. One way to generate a richer typology of nationalisms is therefore to focus on historical identification, as reflected in attitudes toward different periods of national history.[19]

Historical identification is exceptionally difficult for Russians because the history of their nation is marked by sharp breaks that separate successive Russian states – Kievan Rus, Muscovy, the tsarist empire, the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet Russian Federation. The 20th century alone encompasses two such breaks.

Of the various periods of Russian history, two stand out in Russian historical memory as both longer and closer to the present than others – the tsarist empire and the Soviet Union. This generates four logical variants of historical identification: identification with tsarist Russia, with the Soviet Union, with both tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, and with neither tsarist Russia nor the Soviet Union. Let us examine these in turn.

Identification with tsarist Russia

Monarchist organizations that identify wholly with tsarist Russia do exist in today's Russia. One example is the Russian Imperial Movement, based in St. Petersburg and led by Stanislav Vorobyov. Its paramilitary auxiliary, the Russian Imperial Legion, has been active in the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

Nevertheless, this variant occupies a rather marginal position in Russian politics. Besides the practical difficulties involved in finding and installing a legitimate heir of the Romanovs, the idea itself must appear contrived and unreal to most Russians, for no one alive today has personal memories of the tsarist era.

Identification with the Soviet Union

Those who continue to identify with the Soviet Union are much more numerous, especially but not only among older and middle-aged Russians who remember life in the late Soviet era. Restoration of the Soviet Union in one form

The double-headed eagle of the National Bolshevik Party by Dugin, 2015. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

or another figures in the programs of many organizations.

Identification with the Soviet Union as a securely multiethnic state is also very common among non-Russians who feel threatened by the rise of Russian ethnic nationalism.[20] However, the features of the Soviet legacy that appeal to ethnic minorities are precisely those features which most Russian nationalists reject. Leninism was not originally a nationalist doctrine in any sense. And yet many Russian nationalists do strongly identify with the Soviet era. They reconcile their nationalism with their Soviet identification by focusing less on Lenin than on Stalin, whom they view as a Russian nationalist like themselves.

One specific group of "Soviet" nationalists call themselves National Bolsheviks (natsboly for short) – a reference to the doctrine of National Bolshevism, which arose in Germany in the early 1920s. Some Western scholars attach the label of National Bolshevism to Stalin's amalgam of Leninism and Russian great-power nationalism.[21] However, it is important to distinguish between Stalinism (in its classical and revived forms) and the Russian National Bolshevism inspired by its interwar German analog.

Identification with both tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union

This variant seems contradictory. Were the tsarists and the Bolsheviks not bitter enemies? And yet it is the most influential of the four variants. In particular, it is the variant favored by the Putin regime, which considers the Russian Feder-

ation a successor state both to the Soviet Union and to tsarist Russia and combines the symbols of the two states (though without much of the content). Dual tsarist-Soviet identification is also characteristic of the ideology imposed on the Communist Party of the Russian Federation by Gennady Zyuganov.

True, "creative" reinterpretation of the historical record is required. Thus, the animosity between Reds and Whites is softened by presenting the Civil War as a tragic misunderstanding between sincere patriots. And construction of the amalgam is facilitated by selecting the most compatible elements from the two periods. Within the Soviet component the emphasis is again more on Stalin than on Lenin and above all on the Great Patriotic War, while salient elements drawn from the tsarist era are allegiance to Russian Orthodox Christianity and the special role and mystique of the Cossacks.

A specific subtype of dual identification is that of the movement known as Eurasianism.[22] Eurasianist identification is exceptionally expansive in character, for Eurasianists identify not only with *both* tsarist Russia *and* the Soviet Union but also with other states that at various times have controlled large sections of the North Eurasian landmass – states abhorred by all other Russian nationalists as enemies of Russia. These include the Judaic Khazar Khaganate (7th–10th centuries CE), the Mongol Empire (13th–14th centuries), and the Kazan Khanate (15th–16th centuries).

Identification with neither tsarist Russia nor the Soviet Union

This variant covers a variety of historical identifications that have in common only a refusal to identify with either the tsarist or the Soviet era.

First, there are groups of ethnic nationalists who reject Christianity as a foreign Jewish religion and identify with the Slavic tribes of the pre-Rus era and their "pagan" beliefs. However, Christianity is deeply rooted in Russia and the appeal of this form of identification is correspondingly limited. Russians may take an interest in the gods of the ancient Slavs, but few really believe in them. Religion has been

Russian poster from 1921 – "Donbass is the heart of Russia".

a source of internal conflict in many ethnic-nationalist organizations, such as Russian National Unity and its offshoots; the Christians usually win out.

Second, there are people who search Russian history for democratic alternatives to the authoritarian legacies of tsarism and Bolshevism. One alternative is found in the relatively democratic merchant republics of the 12th-century city states of Novgorod and Pskov and their resistance to Muscovite autocracy.[23] This identification is likely to inspire a regionalist rather than a nationalist outlook.

Other alternatives hark back to the democratic and libertarian aspirations of the four-year period from the fall of tsarism in February 1917 to the consolidation of the Bolshevik regime in the spring of 1921. Based merely on aspirations and not on lasting achievements, these alternatives rest on the weak foundation of counterfactual histories. For instance, on what might have happened had the Constituent Assembly not been dispersed in January 1918? Or had the Kronstadt rebels in March 1921 managed to trigger a wider uprising that led to the collapse of Bolshevik rule?

Finally, there are people in Russia who are able to identify with nothing in the history of their own country and therefore have to rely on foreign models such as the "normal" European nation-state. These people are unlikely to qualify as Russian nationalists even in the broadest sense.

Geographical Identification

Russia's relationship with Europe has been a central concern of Russian philosophy since its emergence in the early 19th century. Is Russia part of Europe or does it constitute a distinct civilization of its own? This remains a matter of contention among Russian nationalists today. For Eurasianists, for example, Russia is a "continent" located between Europe and Asia but separate from both.

Nevertheless, an identification with Europe remains common even among Russian nationalists. However, two caveats are in order.

First, identification with Europe must not be equated with identification with "the West," understood to include the United States. European identification is quite compatible with anti-Americanism (as it is in France, say); identification with "the West" as a whole is rare in today's Russia.

Second, there is no necessary association between a European identification and political liberalism. Those Russian nationalists who do identify with Europe, both inside and outside the official structures of the Putin regime, identify with what Marlène Laruelle calls "illiberal Europe" – that is, with the conservative reaction against liberalism, multiculturalism, and "political correctness" that is widely observable in Western and Central as well as Eastern Europe and already prevails in such countries as Hungary and Poland.[24]

Russian Nationalism and the Ukrainian Crisis

What changes have occurred in Russian nationalism as a result of the Ukrainian crisis that began in 2014?

The tone of nationalist rhetoric has certainly become sharper. Some disturbing new expressions have appeared in official discourse. For instance, in an address to parliament on March 18, 2014, Putin called opponents of the annexation of Crimea "national-traitors" (*national-predateli*).[25] What makes this new coinage particularly disturbing is that it appears to be a calque on the German *Nationalverräter* – a term used by Hitler. Would it not suffice to have called the wretched fellows simply "traitors"?

Another linguistic change associated with the Ukrainian crisis is the revival of the term *Novorossiya* [New Russia]. Originally the name given in 1764 to a new province of tsarist Russia formed in what are now the steppes of southern Ukraine, the word disappeared from common usage after the fall of tsarism but has now been reintroduced. It refers primarily to the areas of eastern Ukraine under the control

Orthographic projection of Greater Russia /Eurasia and near abroad

Dark redwood and maroon: the Soviet Union in 1945 (Maroon for Soviet territories never part of the Russian Empire: Tuva bordering Mongolia, Konigsberg region turned Kaliningrad enclave, and Zakarpattia, Lviv, Stanislav, and Ternopil regions in west Ukraine)

Cornell red: additional territory from the Russian Empire (Finland and Congress Poland)

Red: maximum extent of the Soviet near abroad, in 1955 (Warsaw Pact, Mongolia, and North Korea)

Imperial red: maximum extent of the Russian Empire's sphere of influence after the sale of Alaska, in 1867

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

of secessionist regimes (the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic) but it could potentially imply a Russian claim to the whole of southern Ukraine.

Has a shift occurred in the balance between ethnic and state nationalism in official discourse? Opinions differ. In a collection of papers published in 2016,[26] Pål Kolstø (University of Oslo) argued that Russian nationalism was undergoing a process of "ethnification," but other contributors, such as Emil Pain (head of the Center for Ethno-Political and Regional Studies in Moscow) and Marlène Laruelle (George Washington University), saw no sign of any such process. There is some evidence that there was an initial shift in favor of ethnic nationalism, but that influential state nationalists – in particular, Academician Valery Tishkov (director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences) – intervened to restore the *status quo ante*. Helge Blakkisrud (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs) suggests on the basis of linguistic evidence that the ethnic aspect of national identity has not been highlighted at the expense of

the civic aspect. Rather, the boundary between the two has been blurred by avoiding the terms *rossiyanin/rossiiskii* (resorting where necessary to *grazhdan Rossii*, i.e., citizen of Russia) while imputing a civic sense to *russkii*.

However, that may be, Putin's assertive policy in Crimea and Ukraine appeals to ethnic and state nationalists in equal measure. State nationalists can derive satisfaction from the return to Russia of Sevastopol – naval base and "City of Russian Glory"[27] – and from Russia's enhanced strategic position in the Black Sea. Ethnic nationalists can be glad that Russia has intervened to protect Russian and Russian-speaking "compatriots" in Ukraine against persecution. All Russian nationalists can rejoice in the fact that at last Russia has stood up for itself and broken free of the unjust constraints of a western-dominated interstate system. And the fighting in eastern Ukraine gives the young men among them the chance to volunteer for what they expect to be an exhilarating adventure. ●

Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

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1   Some use the term "imperial nationalism" but I avoid it, partly in order to avoid difficult questions like "what is an empire?" and "was the Soviet Union an empire?" "State nationalism" also corresponds more closely to the Russian words *derzhavnost'* and *gosudarstvennichestvo*.

2   For a stimulating survey of theoreticians of Russian nationalism, see: Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields*. (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

3   Academician Valery Tishkov has proposed that English follow the Russian model by adopting alternative words for Russia and Russian in the civic sense: *Rossia* and *Rossian*. A few English-speaking scholars have supported this proposal, but the new usage remains rare.

4   https://drugoros.ru/partiia/programma, point 12.

5   *The Moscow Times*, October 16, 2014.

6   This is the view taken by the author of one of the few histories of tsarist Russia that give due emphasis to its multiethnic character: Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-ethnic History*. (Routledge, 2014).

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9   Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union*, 1923—1939. (Cornell University Press, 2017).

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17 For a detailed analysis of Russian nationalism in the 1990s, see: Stephen D. Shenfield, *Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001.

18 Migration from the Northern Caucasus is internal to the Russian Federation and does not change ethnic proportions for the country as a whole. Insofar as Russians do not view the Northern Caucasus as "really" part of Russia, however, migration from this region is not perceived as internal. For data on migration, see https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/russia-migration-system-soviet-roots.

19 For an earlier attempt at such a typology, see Stephen D. Shenfield, "Post-Soviet Russia in Search of Identity," 5–16 In Blum, op. cit..

20 See: Mikhail A. Alexseev, "Backing the USSR 2.0" in Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, eds. *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–15*. (Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

21 David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity*, 1931–1956. (Harvard University Press, 2002).

22 The best available analysis of Eurasianism is: Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*. Translated by Mischa Gabowitsch. (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

23 See, e.g.: https://russia-direct.org/opinion/democratic-russia-we-lost

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Serbia

The Core Idea is "Our Own People First"

by **Zoran Pavlović** and **Bojan Todosijević**

dentity politics has long been in the focus of scholarly research.[1] Fukuyama,[2] for instance, argues that the politics of today is more defined by questions of identity than by economic and ideological concerns. Aimed at explaining the political activities rooted in injustice and marginalization and reclaiming greater political freedoms for the "oppressed", the concept of identity politics has been used in theoretical analysis of a variety of political upheavals, from women's and civil rights movements to separatist and populist movements.

In general terms, it is based on the idea that some social groups are oppressed and their members more vulnerable to, for instance, cultural imperialism, marginalization, and even violence.[3] Members of such groups feel deprived and believe that their identities, in whatever terms, are not receiving adequate recognition.[4] As such, identity becomes utilized as a "tool to frame political claims, promote political ideologies, or stimulate and orient social and political action, usually in a larger context of inequality or injustice and with the aim of asserting group distinctiveness and belonging and gaining power and recognition".[5] In a way, identity becomes the expression of underlying social cleavage – a fracture between groups that differ in "objective" positions within society, developing a distinct and distinctive set of culture and values orientations, and a common "disadvantaged" identity. Such divisions often have a substantial potential political payoff and can forcefully motivate political action.

Although in essence related to the lived experiences of *minority* groups (for example, those fighting racial discrimination), which has traditionally been a leftist issue, identity politics has increasingly, especially in the context of the European politics, been used

> In a way, identity becomes the expression of underlying social cleavage.

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Figure 1: Closeness to other Europeans by party identification
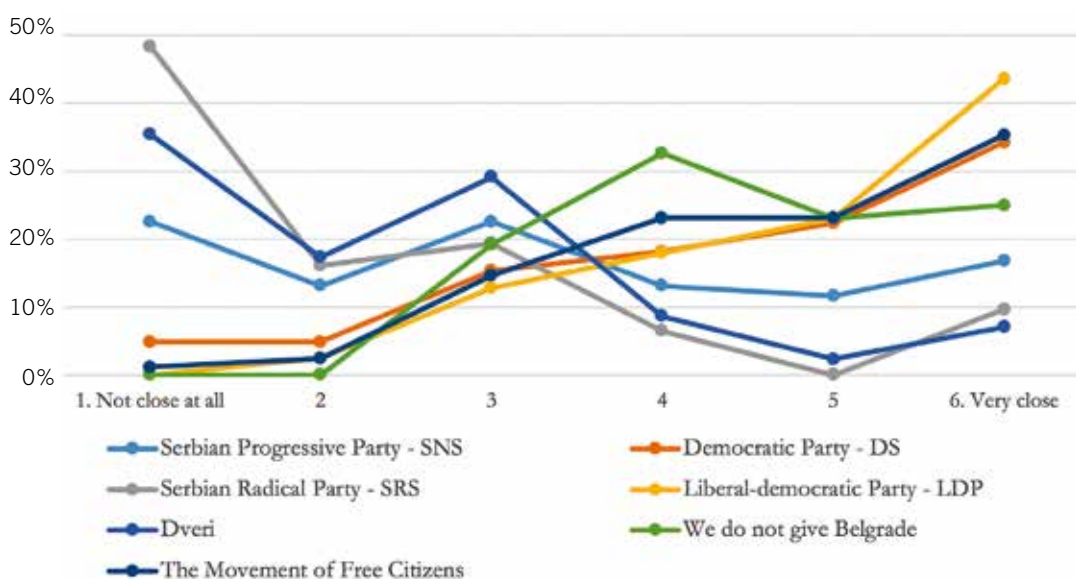
Source: JMS 2018 online survey (N=611)

around the idea that the silent majority needs to be protected from globalization and immigration.[6] Thus, identity politics has been embraced by right-leaning movements and parties. In a sense, the right has redefined its core mission as the patriotic protection of traditional national identity, which is often explicitly related to race, ethnicity, or religion.[7] As a sort of "reactionary tribalism",[8] in the mission of the reproduction of the "white nation" as part of the endangered "Western civilization",[9] the core idea of (far) right politics has become: "Our own people first".[10] These specific grievances narratives and consequent hostility oriented against ethnic minorities have been extensively utilized in the East European context as well, both during and before the ongoing authoritarian-populist wave and recent immigration/refugee crisis.

There is a variety of theoretical reasons why narratives that focus on ethnic identities should be more voiced by those on the right. The main features of conservative/rightist ideology with its emphasis on hierarchy, status quo, and security,[11] the importance of nationalist sentiments and opposition to ideas, individuals and groups that disrupt social order and the traditional way of life, can easily be conceptu-

alized as the need to protect the *ingroup* from an *outgroup* threat, irrespective of minority/majority status or in a society (e.g., a minority can present a *symbolic*, rather than "real" threat). These issues are especially relevant in the context of relatively recent dramatic political and social history (including ethnic-based conflicts), such as those in Eastern Europe since the 1990s, or ongoing global social turmoil (economic & immigration crisis, pandemics, etc.). In particular, numerous empirical studies from Serbia showed that supporters of parties on the right are more prone to nationalistic, authoritarian, and traditionalistic values and attitudes.[12] This would additionally stress the relevance of the ethnic-national discourse as a way of political mobilization, which can be more utilized by those on the right side of the political spectrum.

Finally, identification with the national and supranational (i.e., European) community significantly varies between the supporters of political parties in Serbia. As shown in Figure 1, supporters of the main rightist political parties in Serbia, SRS, Dveri, and SNS,[13] feel less close to other Europeans in comparison to the supporters of the more liberal political parties (e.g., Democratic Party, DS, Liberal-democratic

Figure 2: Emotional attachment to Serbia by party identification

Legend:
- Serbian Progressive Party - SNS
- Serbian Radical Party - SRS
- Dveri
- The Movement of Free Citizens
- Democratic Party - DS
- Liberal-democratic Party - LDP
- We do not give Belgrade
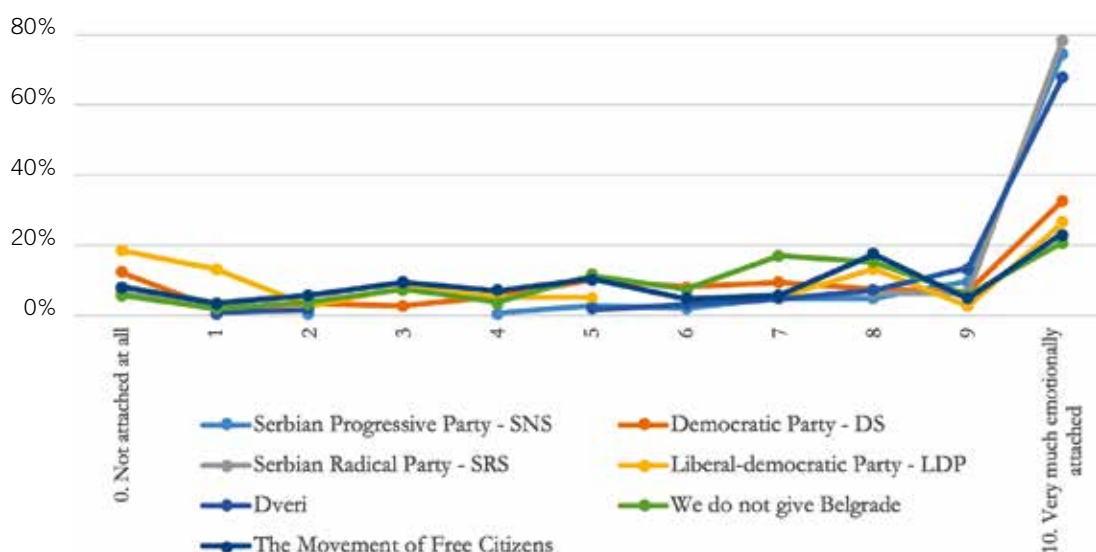
Source: JMS 2018 online survey (N=623)

Party, LDP). The majority of those who support parties on the right are on the "negative" pole of the six-point closeness scale, while only a tiny fraction of supporters of other political parties stated that they do *not* feel close to Europe (see Figure 1).

Similarly, the attachment to Serbia is significantly more pronounced among supporters of the rightist parties than among those who support other political options (see Figure 2). For example, on an eleven-point national attachment item (0. not at all / 10. very much), approximately three-quarters of SNS and SRS supporters placed themselves on the positive end of the scale, stating that they fell *very much* emotionally attached to Serbia; the same goes for, say, "only" a third of (liberal and somewhat leftist) DS supporters. All this suggests that national identification, as a facet of identity politics, is polarized and politicized in Serbia. Clearly, national identification is more intense among supporters of the rightist parties.

The aim of this article is to analyze the main elements of the ethnic identity politics narratives in official documents of relevant rightist political parties and movements in Serbia. We proceed as follows: We first give a short description of the political actors included, their ideologies and political relevance (i.e., the rationale for their inclusion in analysis). The results of the analysis of their manifestoes are then presented and discussed. We conclude with some final remarks.

Rightist Movements and Parties in Serbia

This analysis is focused on (far) right movements and political parties that are currently active in political life in Serbia or, at least, have some political ambitions.[14] Below is given a short description of these:

- **Serbian Radical Party (SRS).** The SRS was founded in 1991, challenging the ruling former communists from an extreme nationalist position. However, during most of the 1990s, the SRS supported the ruling Socialist Party of Serbia's (SPS) regime and had strong popular support until 2000, when they suffered a major defeat. The SRS is positioned on the far-right on the political spectrum and often labelled as nationalist, xenophobic, anti-Western, traditionalist, and Russophile.[15]
- **Serbian Progressive Party (SNS)**. The

> Supporters of parties on the right are more prone to nationalistic, authoritarian, and traditionalistic values and attitudes.

> **SNS's policies implemented since in power reveal clear neo-liberal, that is right-wing, economic leanings.**

SNS was founded in 2008 as a splinter party from the above-mentioned extreme nationalist SRS. It retained the conservative outlook while expressing lip service to pro-European and neoliberal policies. In 2012 SNS came into power and has won every national-level election since then. Its leader, Aleksandar Vučić, is currently the President of the Republic of Serbia, while SNS has an absolute majority in the current Government and Parliament. SNS has been described as a catch-all, populist and nationalist political party and is actively balancing between "East" and "West".

- **Serbian Right (SD)**. Serbian Right is a minor ultranationalist and far-right political party in Serbia, founded in 2018 and led by Miša Vacić, mostly known for his anti-LGBT and xenophobic rhetoric.
- **Oathkeepers**. This is a minor far-right ultranationalist political party founded in 2012 that actively opposes EU and NATO and advocates pro-Russian politics. They participated in the parliamentary elections in 2020 but did not enter Parliament.
- The **Serbian Movement "Dveri"**. Dveri is a right-wing, conservative political party. It was formed in 1999 as a Christian right-wing youth organization promoting nationalism, Orthodox Christianity, and family values. In 2010 they became a full-scale political party, participating in general elections from 2012 onwards (they managed to enter the Parliament only once, in 2016, as part of a pre-election coalition with some other parties).
- **National Network**. This is a minor right-wing political movement founded in 2015 by a former prominent figure of the above-mentioned Dveri political party, Vladan Glišić, currently a member of the Serbian Parliament. Although they participated in the national elections in 2016, the National Network is a relatively inactive actor in Serbian politics, visible in public only through the activities of its leader.
- **I live for Serbia**. A far-right political movement founded and led by Jovana Stojković, a psychiatrist who recently has become well-

known for her anti-vaccination rhetoric and activities. She is a former member of the Dveri political party.
- **Movement for the Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia (POKS).** This is a right-wing, monarchist, and conservative political party in Serbia, founded in 2017 after a split within the larger Serbian Renewal Movement political party. They participated in parliamentary elections in 2020, obtaining 2.67% of the valid vote, but did not enter parliament.

SNS is the dominant political party in today's Serbia, and its inclusion in the present analysis may seem controversial. The party is clearly on the right-wing side of the cultural aspect of the left-right dimension. SNS's policies implemented since in power reveal clear neo-liberal, that is right-wing, economic leanings. However, this is not much reflected in the SNS materials that were analyzed. The still-official party program was formulated back in 2011 before they won the major elections in 2012 and came to power. This document is, in some respects, the textbook of populism – full of blaming the then-ruling parties for all problems, presenting them as a corrupt, alienated group acting against the common people. There are very few references to identity politics.[16] Hence, some of the overall conclusions of this article do not fully apply to SNS if we focus exclusively on the party program. However, the party's exclusive conception of national identity is clearly visible in their daily policies.[17]

Ethnic Identity Politics in Rightist Movements' and Parties' Platforms

As stated above, the analysis included the most important political movements and parties that represent the right wing of the ideological spectrum in current Serbian politics (see Table 1). Their main agendas are analyzed by way of combined narrative and thematic analysis, performed through several stages: familiarization with the text, systematically categorizing the data by generating codes and developing themes.[18] We treated the manifestos and party programs as a sort of ideology narrative which,

Table 1: **Movements and parties included, document types, and source**

Party (Serbian name; acronym)	Document type	Manifesto date	Source:
Serbian Radical Party (Srpska radikalna stranka; SRS)	Party manifesto	2019	www.srpskaradikalnastranka.org.rs/program.html
Serbian Right (Srpska desnica; SD)	Party manifesto	2018	www.srpskadesnica.rs/cir/program-stranke/
Oathkeepers (Zavetnici)	Party manifesto	2021*	www.zavetnici.rs/program-stranke/
National network (Narodna mreža)	Party manifesto	2015	www.narodnamreza.com/sr/manifest.html
Srpski pokret "Dveri" (Serbian Movement "Dveri")	Party manifesto	2021*	dveri.rs/zasto-dveri/program/
I live for Serbia (Živim za Srbiju)	Party manifesto	2018	zivimzasrbiju.com/program-pokreta/
Movement for the Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia (Pokret obnove kraljevine Srbije, POKS)	Party manifesto	2018	poks.rs/dokumenti/program-statut-i-pravilnici/
Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska napredna stranka, SNS)	Party manifesto	2011	www.sns.org.rs/sites/default/files/bela-knjiga.pdf

* html/site version; Date refers to the date when the document was accessed.

like any other narrative, has specific content, structure and function.[19] The main aim of such an analysis was the identification of the main elements related to the expression of national identity and communication of it in their manifestos. What constitutes "us"? Who are "we" and "they"? Are the criteria of "we-ness" ethnic? What aspects of it are 'endangered' by "them"? What can "we" do about it, and what policy implications arise? Can some underlying functions of such rhetoric be identified? These are some of the main research questions that guided the manifesto analysis.

Starting from the general, primarily socio-psychological, theorizing on social identity,[20] we expected that the "us" versus "them" distinction would be easily identified, mainly, but not necessarily, in ethnic terms. Ethnic ingroup and outgroup membership would be salient and underlying motivational processes that stress the (symbolic) threat that "they" pose strongly voiced. Various policy stances as a reaction to threat and ways of responding to it would be proposed in order to overcome the threat and maintain the positive (ethnic) group identity. As such, it would serve a different function like re-establishing group dominance,

system justification, or supporter mobilization. This is the well-described and evidenced dynamics of political conservatism in general terms[21] and a reasonable starting position in analyzing the patterns of rightist groups' political communication. But what constitutes "we" and "they", what is perceived as threatened, and which policy should be introduced to answer it are empirically unanswered questions which our study tries to address (see Table 1).

Serbia represents a context where identity politics is particularly likely to be framed in national/ethnic terms, given the violent collapse of the former Yugoslavia. Specifically, Serbia supported the continuation of Yugoslavia, among other reasons, because this polity would keep all Serbs within a single country. However, this proved an impossible goal, and the country collapsed so that large Serbian minorities remained in some of the seceding countries (mainly Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina). Since Serbia/Serbs emerged as the main losers of the 1990s wars, it is not surprising that ethnicity and nationalism have remained salient political issues. Yet, during the last decade, nationalism has been quite attenu-

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Slovakia

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Ukraine

> **Yet, during the last decade, nationalism has been quite attenuated in the rhetoric of the main parties.**

ated in the rhetoric of the main parties, even the right-wing ones. Not entirely, of course. In the case of the ruling SNS, for instance, the nationalist discourse mostly comes from the second echelon of their political figures.

Table 2 summarizes the core themes that emerged in the manifestoes in regard to the main elements of identity narratives. The first column denotes the issue of who the main narrative actors are (the WE), groups of people that are communicated to or on whose behalf the party speaks, whose interests and image they protect. The second column lists various "entities" (not necessarily members of groups with clear-cut boundaries) that are targeted as those who pose a threat to the ingroup in the broadest sense of the term (THEY). What is perceived as 'endangered' is given in the third column; these features include not just familiar elements of ingroup identities and symbolic markers of group membership, but, so to speak, anything that is perceived as "threatened" (WHAT) and is related to "us" or perceived as "ours". The final column summarizes the policies that are formulated as a reaction to the perceived ingroup/outgroup dynamics, as a response to the question of how 'we' should deal with it (HOW). The following example illustrates the analytical strategies:

> **The current cultural politics in Serbia destroys the Serbian national identity [WHAT] and any cultural uniqueness [WHAT]. Serbia [WE] is under fierce attack of global colonialism groups [THEY], who promote violence and primitivism [...] The most important cultural institutions [WHAT] of Serbia, such as the Serbian Academy of Science and Art, National Museum, Serbian literary association, are being destroyed and marginalized by the plan [...] We advocate the protection of Serbian cultural heritage [HOW] and new cultural politics [HOW].**

We aimed to identify the full range of "themes" in regard to these narrative elements. Under

each domain, we differentiated facets of content that are conceptually distinct (have a different meaning), relatively general (integrate various specific instances), extensive (cover all empirically identified instantiations), and exclusive (do not overlap). We did not seek to identify *all* policy positions that have been advocated in a specific manifesto, but only those that, in line with the above example, could have been unequivocally treated as motivated by or as a reaction to a perceived ingroup threat.

If we turn to Table 2 entries, it is clear at first glance that "we" are mostly the members of the *ethnic majority* in Serbia, in its various linguistic elaborations (e.g., "We have the best interests and sovereignty of the Serbian people at heart"; "The Serbs have always been at the Balkan crossroads"; "The Serbian nation is in crisis"). But the ingroup often comprises those upholding traditional values or a positive and unquestionable attachment to the nation as well (e.g., "We are not just another patriotic organization [...]"; "Emphasizing traditions and being a true patriot is the constructive and valid attitude towards one's own nation").

With this in mind, one would expect that "they" (labeled as those who pose a threat to the ingroup) should be defined as members of a different *ethnic* group. Yet that is, in fact, quite rare. Apart from the Albanians, "they" denotes quite heterogeneous non-ethnic groups:
- *international organizations and associations* that can be:
  - *political* (European Union, e.g., "The collapse of the Republic of Serbia is being carried out through the current process of implementing the legal system reforms ordered by the EU")
  - *economic* (International Monetary Fund, e.g., "The domestic economy should not be based on the dictates of the IMF and the World Bank")
  - *military* (NATO, e.g., "NATO attacked our country in 1999 [...] and supported the formation of the illegal Kosovo state")
- generic *foreign* (factors/states/capital, e.g., "Serbia is currently under literal occupation by foreign structures")

Table 2: The main elements of identity politics narratives in right-wing political movements and party manifestos in Serbia (alphabetically ordered)

Who are "WE"?	Who / What are "THEY"?	WHAT is ours that is "endangered" by them?	HOW to deal with is (core policy issues)?
Ethnic ingroup Citizens of Serbia Good people of Serbia Serbia Serbian nation The people The Serbs The Slovenians **Shared values** Patriots Traditionalists	**Ethnic outgroups ("enemies")** Albanians **Foreign (neoliberal) actors** Banks Brussels Capitalists International economic institutions (MF, WB) EU Foreign "factors" Foreign capital Power centers Foreign countries Global colonialism Globalization NATO The Globalists USA Washington "West" **Foreign (neo/liberal) values** Consumerism European values Hedonism Individualism **Domestic "enemies"** Corrupted elites Internal traitors Leftists Communists "Extremists" Feminists Liberals Neoliberals Regime Ruling parties Auto-chauvinists Separatists **Other** "They"	**Facets of ethnic identity** Collective being Collective consciousness Collective identity Collective memory Cyrillic alphabet Diaspora National identity Serbian "spirit" Our people Our biology Serbian soul Serbian language **Facets of nation-state** Economy Environment Freedom Kosovo and Metohija Land Legal system National / cultural institutions National state Serbia Serbian banks Territory **Culture, morality & religion** Cultural heritage Cultural uniqueness Family Family values Orthodox spirituality Orthodoxy Patriarchal society Social cohesion The church Traditional society Unity	**International relations** Sovereigntist agenda State independence Economic protectionism EU scepticism Eurasian orientation Non-cooperation with Western countries Pro-Russian policy Pro-military **Culture, morality & religion** Anti-immigration Anti-LGBT Anti-NGO Censorship Cultural assimilation Pro-family policies Pro-natality Protecting culture Protecting traditional values Patriotic education Unity **Political system** Centralization Return to monarchy **Economic system** Economic patriotism

Note: Entries illustrate the full varieties of elements identified under each narrative domain; individual manifestos contain one or more of the listed entries under each domain, but none include all of the above.

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Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

- *individual countries* that are often seen negatively by the Serbian right-leaning public (the USA, e.g. "[...] the USA and the majority of the EU countries made an illegal attack on our country, despite UN regulations") or its metonymical denotation (Washington)
- large *cultural units* ('West', e.g., "For ages, the Serbs have been perceived by the West as "little Russians" on the Balkans")
- *internal 'traitors'*, as well as ruling political elite (e.g. "[...] the governing structures justified every concession toward the foreign demands that they made at the expense of the Serbian people"; "This method is being used by domestic traitors as a way of the dissolution of Serbia")
- those that represent *ideologies* that are the antithesis to rightist beliefs and values (communism, individualism, feminism, neoliberalism, "European" values, e.g., "Feminism is an especially dangerous phenomenon [...] it destroys the very fabric of society – the family"; "European values are anti-civilization values which would lead Serbia into the dark ages of the new barbarism"; "All leftist theories and liberalism lead to the loss of national identity").

Perhaps the broadest common denominator to the listed entities that represent a threat to "us" is that they represent liberal and, to some extent, leftist (although also economic neoliberal) ideology and discourse. This ideology is then identified with its source, which is "Western", "foreign", and so on.

"They" threaten different aspects of ingroup identity, variously labeled as a collective being, identity or consciousness, Serbian soul or spirit (e.g., "Current cultural politics decomposes Serbia national identity"; "[...] this is the issue of Serbian national identity and the archetypically coded soul of the Serbian people"; "[...] the crisis of the collective identity and value emptiness of our collective being"), as well as symbolic markers of ethnic memberships – cultural heritage, uniqueness, national identity, the Serbian language, Cyrillic alphabet, and Orthodox spirituality (e.g., "The protection of the national culture and identity, Orthodox religion, the Serbian language, and the Cyrillic alphabet"; "We should work on protecting our own traditions and cultural heritage"; "[...] we should secure and maintain symbols and institutions that protect our very identity – a father figure, mother, family, army, work, authority principle [...]").

Yet what needs protection is not just the matter of identity and symbolic issues, but different aspects of the nation-state (e.g., economy, territory, e.g., "For more than 20 years we have been watching the dissolution of the Serbian territory [...]"; "[...] foreign economic monopoly is favored over inadequate incentives for the domestic economy [...]") and fabric of society (e.g., family values, patriarchal society, social cohesion, collective memory, e.g., "We oppose anything that endangers family values"; "[...] to protect various elements of tradition and organic patriarchal society"; "[...] we think that those ideological, political and theoretical matrices that are in contrast to social cohesion are the most dangerous").

(See Table 2.)

The policy stances that are formulated as a response to outgroup threat are as pervasive. They cover the typical facets of rightist political ideology such as the re-establishing or maintaining *group domination and hierarchies* (e.g. anti-LGBT and anti-immigration, assimilation policies, e.g. "We will forbid the promotion of homosexuality to under-aged persons and fight anti-family ideologies"; "We will limit the passing of immigrants through Serbia"), emphasizing *traditional morality* (pro-family and natality agenda, censorship, patriotic education, e.g. "The strong family is necessary for the survival of Serbia"; "We will cancel or additionally tax reality shows"; "We will promote education in those areas that are important for [...] the development of the patriotic consciousness"), *security* (pro-military policies, obligatory military service, e.g. "We advocate the return of obligatory military service for all healthy men"; "The long and honorable history of the Serbian army demands and obliges the state of Serbia to provide all the conditions for a strong and efficient army, always ready to defend of the

Figure 3: **Pro-Russian versus pro-"West": self-positioning by party identification**

- Serbian Progressive Party - SNS
- Democratic Party - DS
- Serbian Radical Party - SRS
- Liberal-democratic Party - LDP
- Dveri
- We do not give Belgrade
- The Movement of Free Citizens
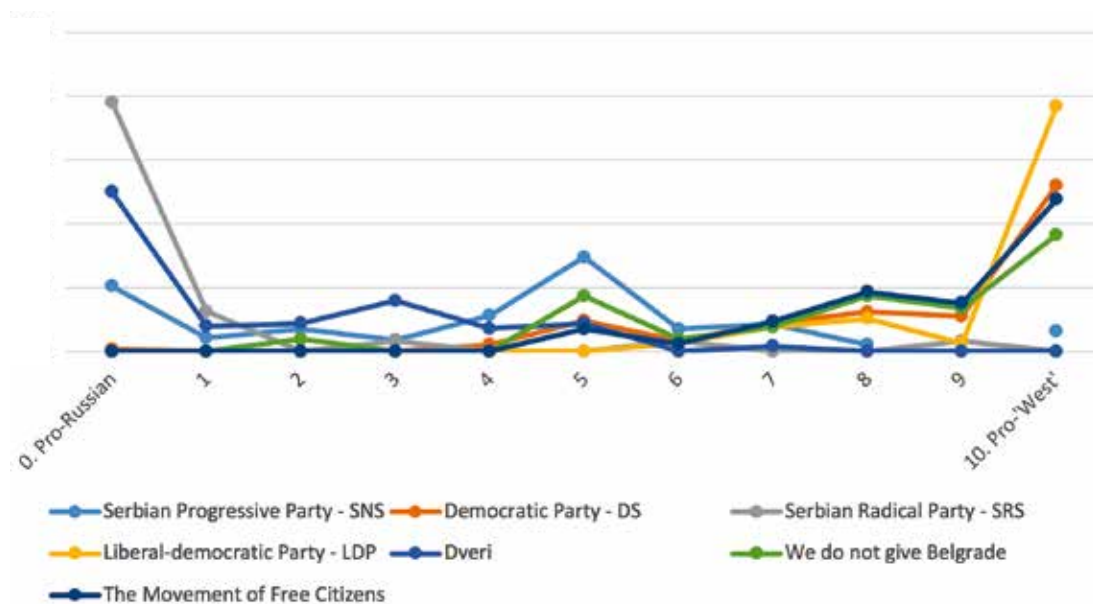
Source: JMS 2018 online survey (N=627)

state and the people") and *ingroup cohesion and solidarity* (centralization, unity agenda, e.g. "We advocate the unicameral National Assembly which is the expression of the unitary and centralized state"; "[...] regionalization and autonomy for the territorial subunits is nothing but the way to dissolve the Serbia"). *Nation-state independence* (political and economic anti-imperialism, anti-EU; e.g., "We must end the fatal EU dogma"; "We advocate urgent ending of EU-has-no-alternative politics") or, at best, *pro-'East' orientation* (pro-Russian and pro-Asian agenda; e.g. "[...] getting closer to Russia in political, military, economic and cultural areas"; "Why spend enormous energy and resources for second-class membership in the Atlantic alliances, when, on the basis of our identity and history, we are already an important state and group of people within the Eurasian area?") is strongly advocated.

Conclusion

This short and exploratory analysis has shown that the main elements of identity politics narratives can be easily identified in Serbian (far) right political parties and movements. It is typically developed on the grievance and threat motifs, which depicts the majority ethnic group,

the Serbs, as the target of attacks from various sides and one that needs protecting from "them" who have many faces.

"We" is primarily identified by ethnic criteria; "our own people first" is quite an adequate description of the principle that guides the selection of policy positions that are advocated. These include the usual facets of rightist ideology. However, our analysis points to a relatively specific function that these identity narratives have – these specific policies and, as a unifying theme, general ideology is, in part, justified by the need to protect those with a shared identity. The parties' and movements' programs and manifestoes are not just an ideological "menu", evidence of policy agenda, but an "instrument" of persuasion, strongly addressing group-related and existential motivation. The threat narrative represents a sort of coded hostility towards outgroups (people, institutions, ideologies) that not only justifies the often radical policy stances but frame it as an unavoidable act for the "greater good" and necessary when faced with adversity and imminent threat to the group "survival".

Shared identity most often means shared *ideological*, not necessarily ethnic identity.

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> **The economic cleavage is depicted mostly from the angle of the (assumed) underdog perspective within the global scene.**

"We" are the Serbs, but "They" are not primarily members of an ethnic outgroup but, broadly speaking, ideological dissidents. Despite recent history, "They" are more often the Liberals or Neoliberals than Albanians, and almost never Croats or Bosniaks.[22] The economic cleavage is depicted mostly from the angle of the (assumed) underdog perspective within the global scene, presenting Serbia and Serbs as being threatened by the current global configuration of forces.

One reason for the predominance of "foreign" and "Western" over the ethnic neighbors as defining "they" is that the conflict with local national and ethnic groups is often perceived as being caused, or at least encouraged, by those global forces and actors. One often encountered view is that without such malign foreign influence, there would be no real conflicts in the Balkans or that Serbia would handle these conflicts easily if there were no interference from foreign powers.

This overall picture seems to be an expression of the pervasive and long-lasting ideological polarization in Serbia described in terms of East-West division. As shown in the this analysis, there is, for example, a prominent advocating of non-cooperation with Western countries and closer association with Eastern and Asian countries. It is an issue that has been very salient in Serbian public opinion and media discourse for decades. One quick look at Figure 3 is enough to spot a very prominent trend of more pro-Russian ideological orientation among those who support rightist political parties and more intense pro-Western orientation among those who support other parties. Just like their ideological counterparts in Western societies, which protect the "Western civilization"[23] more than the ethnic ingroup, the Serbian right seems to be more of a protector of "civilization" or an ideological world-view, just the Eastern version of it (see Figure 3).

Finally, it should also be mentioned that the manifestoes and programs examined contain abundant populist references, especially among those parties close to the SNS. They tend to emphasize the threat posed by domestic "enemies" – the allegedly corrupt parties and individuals that represent the liberal opposition. While the SNS leadership leaves the expression of extreme nationalism to the lower party functionaries, the smaller extreme right parties are free in expressing their anti-liberalism, against both domestic opponents and foreign ones.

An obvious weakness of the adopted approach is the focus on party programs. These are often simply listings of good wishes, with carefully chosen words in order not to antagonize those whose cooperation a party or movement might once want to obtain. For instance, the SNS program is full of references to cooperation with all countries and ethnic groups. However, in practice, it is very dependent on particular interests at stake and daily circumstances. So, for instance, enemies are not the USA, but Democrats in the USA, while Trump and his administration were portrayed as friends of Serbia. Once the US government changed, the rhetoric of the top party functionaries became much more careful.[24] Future research should include a wider variety of sources and combine quantitative and qualitative approaches more thoroughly. ●

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Romania

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13 See below for the parties' description and acronyms; we will mostly use Serbian version of the parties' acronyms throughout the paper.

14 This is not an exhaustive list. The area of extreme right groups, organizations, movements, and sometimes political parties is in constant flux. However, the included list covers the most important ones, judging both according to their presence in the public sphere, and their recent electoral performance.

15 At the 2020 parliamentary elections, SRS obtained 2.05% of the valid vote, but failed to enter parliament. However, despite their poor electoral performance, the party is quite present in the public sphere due to extensive media exposure given to its leader V. Šešelj (convicted of war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia).

16 The main reason is the party's populist character and careful evasion of any open ideological positioning. This enables them to manoeuvre almost without limits. At one time they could be anti-EU, at other times they would be cordially greeting Angela Merkel and talking about Serbia's bright EU perspective. Yet what seems constant through all these years is the 'extreme' language directed against the domestic opposition. Not a day goes by without a post on their website about the opposition parties, mostly depicting their leaders as 'tycoons' who robbed the country, despite the fact that SNS has been ruling it for nearly a decade. For example, the post published on November 12, 2021, stated: "Đilas [authors' note: the former DS leader] continues to squander his political decay. [...] His hunger for power is incurable, and in the abstinence from plucking the budget of Serbia, the crisis of Dragan Đilas is obviously for a madman's shirt!" (https://www.sns.org.rs/novosti/saopstenja/bozic-djilas-nastavlja-da-rasipa-svoju-politicku-trulez)

17 A recent event could illustrate the point. It concerns the mural on a wall of a building in central Belgrade depicting Ratko Mladić, a convicted war criminal from the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The mural was a scene of conflict between the extreme right groups and liberal activists who wanted to paint over the mural. The police, some of them in civilian dress, arrested several liberal activists. SNS announced that police were not protecting the mural but public order. So, while on the surface it was a conflict of small radical groups, it was actually SNS, which holds power in Belgrade and Serbia, who protects the mural, but avoids saying so explicitly. Moreover, in 2007 current president of SNS himself organized replacing the street sign named after Zoran Đinđić with signs stating "Ratko Mladić Boulevard" (*"Street signs bearing Đinđić name vandalized"*. B92. July 6, 2007. Retrieved September 18, 2018.).

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22 However, the underlying ethnically motivated sentiments are often manifested in suitable situations (sports matches, etc.), although it is not much evident in the official programs and manifestoes.

23 E.g., Keskinen, 2013.

24 An example of the vague and non-committal expressions is this quote from the SNS's program (2011), about culture: "[SNS] believes that the preservation of Serbian cultural identity is one of the most important tasks of the state, but with the development of the authenticity of Serbian culture, it will be open to all cultures in Europe and the world". So, the state should protect "Serbian culture", but in order not to give impression that this is a nationalist concept of culture, they add that this culture will be "open", whatever that might mean.

"Decent People". Dissecting Ľ SNS's Identity Construction

by **Nina Paulovicova**

The upsurge of the extreme right has introduced an abundance of debates about its causes, factors, and origins along with efforts to identify models of possible transitionary and autochthonous societal processes as culprits. The increasing volume of scholarship offers a typology of transitionary processes such as autocratization, i.e. erosion or "decline of core institutional requirements for electoral democracy,"[1] a backsliding paradigm, i.e. "destabilization or even a reversal in the direction of democratic development,"[2] or a hollowing of democracy broadly classified as "the general European problem of declining popular involvement in politics",[3] or emphasizes the reactive nature of the extreme right as a backlash against certain phenomena among which rights of growing minorities[4] and EU integration which "amputated the economic arms of national governments"[5] are frequently highlighted. Another stream points to autochthonous factors and cautions that illiberal elements have been always present in society. This stream is skeptical about the scholarship of "transitology"[6] and the notions of slipping or backsliding to illiberalism and offers as an alternative the concept of a parallel society or "polypore state" as a type of illiberal state feeding on the existing institutions of democracy.[7] Although different in nature, these concepts often name common denominators such as overall disillusionment, inferiority complex, frustration over the post-communist region's marginalization by the West and the lack of social trust as unmistakable signs of an identity crisis. Such a widespread sense of insecurity fueled the extreme right which instrumentalized securitization discourse for voter mobilization.

That said, the goal of this author is to focus on the securitization discourse, at the core of which is an effort to protect the interests of Slovaks as "decent people", and to reflect on extreme right identity construction to better grasp the nature of the diffusion of extreme right ideology by the most successful extreme right player in Slovakia – *Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko* [People's Party Our Slovakia]. Ľ SNS's identity politics is multidimensional in the sense that identity is constructed by mnemonic actors chronologically towards past, present and future and geographically from local, regional levels towards national and transnational levels. At the core of this temporal and spatial dimension of extreme right ideology is Ľ SNS's fervent defense of "Our Slovakia" and ethno-populism

which "intertwine(s) the defense of 'the people' with the defense of an ethnicity, culture, nation, religion and/or race."[8]

Built on national, Christian, and social pillars, ĽSNS's ethnopopulism is "tripartite"[9] in the sense that it divides society into three categories: "the 'bloodsucking' elite" at the top, the "virtuous people" in the middle and the racialized "freeloading underclass" at the very bottom of the society.[10] The "virtuous" or "decent people" are the victims of the system, preyed upon by the elites and "freeloading underclass" of refugees, immigrants, Roma, people of color, non-Christians, Muslims, Jews and the LGBTQ community who are all excluded and objectified for the securitization discourse and instrumentalized for voter mobilization. Such identity construction is not contained nationally; it spills into a transnational realm with an additional discursive layer articulating ĽSNS's civilizational alliance with Slavic nations under the leadership of Putin's Russia.

The goal of this article is to provide an insight into these specific blocks in ĽSNS's identity-building, centered on the construct of "decency", and assess their place in extreme right ideology dissemination. To better understand the structure of the discursive clusters produced by ĽSNS I complement the study with graphs generated from the codes I assigned to the content of sixteen quarterly ĽSNS newspapers collected between 2015 – 2021.[11] These newspapers provide not only a summary of the themes that were at the center of ĽSNS's attention in recent years but closer scrutiny of these texts allows us to better grasp the occurrence, links, frequency and proximity of certain themes which are connected in extreme right discourse and feed into each other to achieve greater impact on the audience. Such an approach does not aspire to be conclusive since the mapping of the ĽSNS's identity discourse disseminated via quarterly news is partial, as ĽSNS benefits from multiple online platforms such as VK, Instagram, Twitter or Facebook where in 2017, Kotlebists administered about 140 FB pages.[12] This study aspires to contribute to the discussions about the construction of

problematic extreme right discourses and its effect on the mobilization of ĽSNS voters.

ĽSNS – the Most Successful Player of the Extreme Right in Slovakia

ĽSNS is an extreme right-wing ethno-populist and anti-system party of "the fourth generation," i.e. the generation of post-1989 alternative parties that radicalized.[13] It is a party of "radical return" that preserves the heritage and traditions of the controversial wartime Slovak republic (1939 – 1945) and promotes a "neo-ludak version of Catholicism" in addition to ethnonationalism, anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial and relativization, Islamophobia, Romaphobia, antigypsyism, homophobia, racism, economic protectionism, paternalism and social chauvinism.[14] If set in a broader chronological comparative perspective, ĽSNS is "more similar to the French Front National and the Italian Lega Nord than to interwar fascists or current neo-Nazi movements."[15] Looking closely at its membership, ĽSNS represents a *Männerpartei* due to the prevalence of male membership – a defining feature of all radical right parties in Europe.[16] What sets ĽSNS apart from other parties is the level of its female MPs' activism which is higher in comparison to other Slovak female MPs as well as male MPs in all political parties (RR and non-RR).[17]

The movement *Slovak Togetherness* [*Slovenská Pospolitosť*] established in 1995, with its prevalent young white cisgender male membership promoting anti-systemness, ethnonationalism, virulent anti-Semitism and attacks against Hungarians, provided a platform against which the ĽSNS later formed after Marian Kotleba, a former teacher of informatics, joined the movement in 2003.[18] Kotleba's political aspiration to run in the parliamentary elections resulted in the re-shaping of *Slovak Togetherness* into *Slovak Togetherness-National Party* [*Slovenská Pospolitosť-Národna Strana*] in January 2005. Even though the party was banned due to its effort to undermine parliamentary democracy and build a state on the corporate principle, it continued to mobilize voters as the Ministry of Interior failed to uphold the party's ban. This

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Figure 1. The word cloud generated from sixteen ĽSNS's newsletters published between 2015 and 2021 reveals the key words that indicate core themes in ĽSNS's identity construction and voter mobilization. Terms "Slovakia" ("Slovensko") and "Our" ("Naše") are the most dominant followed by "People," ("Ľudia"), "Government," ("Vláda") etc.

failure was a welcome window of opportunity for some members of Kotleba's party who were able to run in the 2006 parliamentary elections after the extreme right Slovak People's Party (SPP) [*Slovenská Ľudová Strana*] enlisted them in leading positions on its ticket.[19] But the 2006 parliamentary elections turned into a fiasco due to a dramatic drop in the party's membership. 2006 thus represented a turning point in the history of ĽSNS when its leadership was forced to rethink the strategies of voter mobilization.[20]

Within a span of the next ten years (2006 to 2016), ĽSNS distanced itself from associations with the Nazis and fascists and normalized its image to mobilize voters from a broader pool of the nationalist conservative electorate.[21] The strategy of "normalization" manufactured messages which attach publicly valued signifiers of decency, rescuing, protecting, and caring to problematic signifiers such as racism, ethnic and religious hatred, illiberalism, and anti-systemness.[22] As I mentioned elsewhere,[23] the replacement of the double-cross, resembling the wartime fascist HSĽS' cross, with the state sign of Slovakia – the Cyr-

il-Methodius double-cross – was interpreted as a "resolute distancing from any association with Nazism, fascism or any form of extremism" and as a message to "all decent and conscientious people not to be afraid of ĽSNS."[24] The party's image as decent was normalized by ĽSNS's social events, St. Nicholas celebrations for kids, sports events, goulash cooking competitions or youth summer camps organized for more than five hundred children and young people from socially vulnerable families.[25] ĽSNS's normalization was successful as it a) drew support from a broader pool of conservative nationalist voters domestically and b) sent an important transnational signal to the Kremlin that the party can pragmatically adjust and temper its problematic extreme right ideology if needed.

Normalization did not mean that the Kotlebists abandoned their worldview; instead, they opted for different means of extreme right ideology diffusion as they continued to disseminate Nazi symbolism via displays of altruism in the form of monetary donations to socially weak families.[26] Such dubious Dr Jekyll-Mr. Hyde tactics backlashed and resulted in the crackdown against far right extremism and

the sentencing of Kotleba to four years and four months in prison, which provoked party in-fighting over leadership and resulted in the split of the extreme right *Hnutie Republika* [Movement Republika] from ĽSNS earlier this year.[27] Though rivals, *Hnutie Republika* and ĽSNS share the same ideological DNA: strong anti-EU and anti-NATO views, support of Putin's Russia, ethnonationalism, anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial and relativization, racism, homophobia, Islamophobia, Romaphobia and an anti-immigrant stance among others. Hnutie Republika under the leadership of Milan Uhrík, formerly Kotleba's key loyalist, is currently a challenger of ĽSNS's status as the most successful extreme right player in Slovakia.[28]

In addition to normalizing ĽSNS's image in public, ĽSNS rethought its mobilization strategy against a range of societal issues with a promising potential to attract voters. The effort to attract voters by appeals to the ethno-nationalist wartime Slovak republic's heritage, or the Hungarian ethnic card which lost its appeal after the consolidation of Slovak-Hungarian relations, proved to be insufficient and meagre tools for large-scale mobilization. On the other hand, the growing ascendance of the Roma minority which represents the second largest ethnic group in Slovakia,[29] and the European refugee crisis in 2015, opened a welcome window of opportunity for ĽSNS.

The decade of ĽSNS's image normalization (2006–2016) along with a shifted focus to antigypsyism in 2009 and attacks against refugees was a success for party mobilization. In 2013, Kotleba won regional elections and became the regional councillor of the Banská Bystrica region. Kotleba's victory in Banská Bystrica was interpreted as a sign of citizens' revolt against the state of politics and also the biggest blow to democracy in Slovakia.[30] Kotleba was elected with the single biggest voter support in the whole country.[31] However, Kotleba's bigger victory was yet to come. His followers wanted to build their strength on the personality cult of Kotleba, which became more obvious in November 2015 when Kotleba's party was registered as *Kotleba-Ľudová*

Strana Naše Slovensko [Kotleba-People's Party Our Slovakia]. In 2016 parliamentary elections Kotleba's ĽSNS won 8% of the votes and 14 seats in the parliament and its firm place in politics was confirmed by the 2020 elections which proved stable voter support of Kotlebists who won 8% of the votes and an increase from previously 14 to 17 seats in Parliament.[32] Overall, Kotleba's ĽSNS benefited from the loss of votes by the ruling Robert Fico's *Smer–Sociálna Demokracia* [Smer-Social Democracy] as a result of mass demonstrations organized by teachers and nurses, poor governance, corruption scandals and mass protests ignited by the murder of 27-year-old investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová in 2018. ĽSNS's feet in parliament signalled the weakness and failure of the judicial system and police to decisively halt the dissemination of extreme right ideology.[33]

Identity Framing as an Efficient Mobilizing Tool

Unstable identities

The successful mobilization of the far right can be negotiated within the supply-demand frame approach which allows for the contemplation of multiple long-term and situational factors behind the rise of ĽSNS to power.[34] On the supply side, intergroup tension and prejudice as "a strategic expression of intergroup identity" plays a vital role in the mobilization of the radical right in Slovakia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe.[35] These two factors did not emerge in a vacuum but represent an indelible part of an ongoing nation building process in the course of which Slovaks were one of a few relatively short-term states "with borders on the move"[36] and alliances in flux. After the fall of the Habsburg monarchy Slovaks, Czechs and other minorities formed interwar Czechoslovakia (1918–1939). Although interwar Czechoslovakia is generally referred to as the island of democracy, the entry of some minorities such as Hungarians, Germans or Jews into the new Czechoslovak Republic was bitter. In the late 1930s when the political climate deteriorated due to Nazi Germany's aggression, Slovaks declared their own Slovak Republic (1939–

> They continued to disseminate Nazi symbolism via displays of altruism in the form of monetary donations to socially weak families.

Belarus
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Czech Rep.
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Hungary
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Belarus

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Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

> 'Unstable identities' were the source of fears and concerns over the threat of all-pervasive 'others'.

1945) under the pressure of Nazi Germany and became reunited with Czechs and other minorities in post-war Czechoslovakia under Soviet control for more than four decades. The uneven impact of neoliberal economic policies in post-1989 Czechoslovakia, which "turned Prague inhabitants into neoliberals and Slovaks into their antithesis," fast-paced privatization accompanied by widespread corruption, "ideological dissonance" between Czech and Slovak political elites, separatist rhetoric and the rise of ethnonationalism are the major culprits behind the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the birth of the Czech and Slovak Republics in 1993.[37]

The accommodation of Slovak and non-Slovak minority rights in the 21st century evolved along shifting borders and geopolitical contexts which inevitably accelerated territorial insecurities and produced "unstable identities" that defined nation building processes across Eastern Europe. "Unstable identities" could either translate into pragmatic amphibianism[38] when individuals, especially multilinguals, living in border areas could declare one national identity over another if the geopolitical context made a case for such choices during challenging times of war or an authoritarian regime's pressure. But more often, "unstable identities" were the source of fears and concerns over the threat of all-pervasive "others", feeding prejudice towards other ethnicities and nationalities. Kende and Krekó found intergroup tensions and prejudice "inseparable from territorial revisionism, the fear of the extinction of the nation, and collective angst".

These factors historically played a critical role in extreme right mobilization in the wartime era and post-1989 context when "unstable identity" translated into the search for nation's roots amidst the uncertainty of the transition from authoritarianism to liberal democracy. The concept of unstable identity is built on the frustration that the survival of Slovakia is conditioned by "the dependence on others" – a state of mind, which in the view of Michael Gayer "[...] is an unnerving condition, prone to panics and to the recurrent dissolution of the

certainty of oneself, of sense-security."[39] The ethno-nationalists and extreme right are hyper-sensitive towards the presence of other minorities and collectives and soothe such panic by a tireless search for nation's roots and the effort to ground its historical presence in spatial-temporal and moral terms. The following lines will briefly identify minorities excluded from ĽSNS's imagined collective and reflect on how the excluded groups are instrumentalized and weaponized in securitization discourse.

ĽSNS's imagined collective: Who is "in" and who is "out"? Building blocks of ĽSNS's identity construct of "decent people."

At the core of ĽSNS's securitization discourse is the notion of belongingness to the collective which translates along the lines of inclusion versus exclusion from the imagined polity. Those identified as belonging to "Our Slovakia" are projected as victims in need of protection, defense, rescue and caring whereas those identified as excluded from the imagined polity are subjected to the slur of verbal attacks coded in moralizing language to amplify the plight and outrage of the victimized polity's insiders. The following will briefly reflect on those who are "in" and "out" to better grasp the dynamics of moral agency as a tool of extreme right voter mobilization and political capital extraction.

ĽSNS's mobilization feeds on the country's ethnocentrism and hyper-focus on "Our Slovakia," (Fig. 1) which directly correlates with the protection of "decent" white Christian cis-gender Slovaks on the one hand and xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia and targeting Roma, refugees, migrants and foreigners on the other.[40] ĽSNS's attacks against Roma and effort to police the Roma community by ĽSNS's community patrols *Domobrana* are at the core of ĽSNS's antigypsyism – "a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of dehumanization and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among other things, by violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatization and the most blatant kind of discrimination."[41] ĽSNS's racist approach is embedded
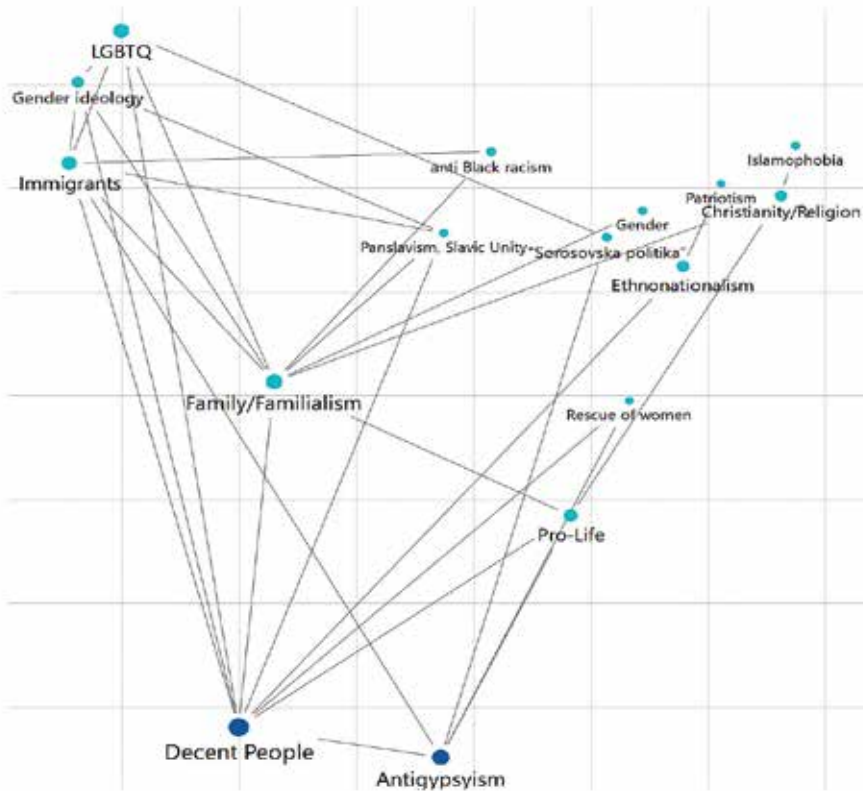
Figure 2. Lines indicate the relations between the coded themes that emerged in sixteen newspapers published by ĽSNS between 2015 – 2021. The cluster map also indicates proximity between the notion of "decent people" and ĽSNS's antigypsyism. The short distance between "decent people" and "antigypsyism" as demonstrated in Figure 2 points to the Roma's essential place in ĽSNS's identity politics, which is deeply embedded in the notion of othering.

in the second point of ĽSNS's program called "Ten Commandments" which originally called for the abandoning of "preferential treatment of all social parasites, including gypsy parasites", while a later version promised to get rid of "preferential treatment of asocial people over decent people."[42]

The party upholds traditional values and prides itself on white supremacy embedded in the notion of "decent people" which emerged alongside the majority's concern over the accommodation of minority rights. Expanding the Hungarian or Roma minorities' rights posited a threat to the majority's ethnic nationalism and prompted a fierce defence of "constitutional priority of the ethnic majority interests"[43] and became one of the triggers of radical right mobilization.[44] Accommodation of Hungarian minority rights, which mainly evolved around language policies and the Hungarian ethnic party MKP joining the 2002 coalition, provided momentum for the mobilization of the declining ethnonationalist populist radical right party Slovenská Národná Strana [Slovak National Party] as well as extreme right

factions.[45] But as the Hungarian ethnic card's potential to mobilize waned after Slovak-Hungarian relations consolidated, in 2009 ĽSNS shifted their focus to the Roma minority's growing influence which offered a nurturing ground for the racialized notion of the Slovak majority as "decent people."

A rising proportion of Roma among the total population, along with accommodation of Roma minority rights, represented one of the key factors on the supply side of extreme right mobilization in Slovakia. One recent study noted that "there are 804 Roma settlements in Slovakia in 584 municipalities" where Roma are either dispersed or segregated. More specifically, the Roma community is segregated from non-Roma in up to one third (153) of municipalities with Roma settlements.[46] The research concludes that regions with segregated Roma settlements represent a breeding ground for the mobilization of extreme right voters with "a substantial increase [of LSNS voters -NP] [...] noticeable in micro-regions with 25.1 to 45.0% of Roma, where ĽSNS won about two percentage points more votes in the 2010 elections than in areas without any Roma presence (in 2012,
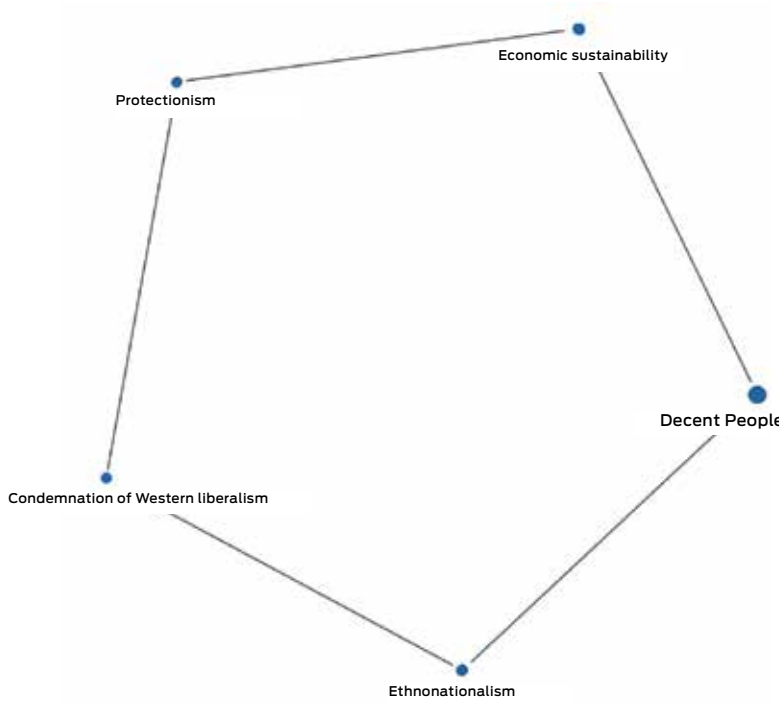
Figure 3. The cluster map generated from the sixteen ĽSNS's quarterly newsletters "Naše Slovensko" published between 2015 and 2021 reveals the proximity and relatedness of themes centered around the racialized concept of "decent people."

the figure was about 1.5 percentage points)."[47] The fact that ĽSNS scored lower in areas with a dispersed Roma population point to the critical importance of the inclusion of Roma communities in Slovak society.[48] Accommodation of Roma minority rights, the increasing Roma population, and the level of Roma inclusion in society represent strong factors on the supply side of ĽSNS mobilization and explains ĽSNS's efforts to vilify and police the Roma minority. (Fig 2)

The proximity of the notion of "decent people" and antigypsyism in the messages embedded in ĽSNS's newspapers published in the past few years indicate that the construct of "decent people" prevalently feeds on ĽSNS's antigypsyism, which in part explains the aggressive nature of ĽSNS's attacks on the Roma community. ĽSNS often uses the derogatory and racist term "*cigánsky problém*"[49] and stereotypes Roma as "aggressive settlers" ("*agresívni osadníci*")[50] or "antisocials who refuse to adjust, ("*neprispôso-biví asociály*").[51] As a result, Roma agency is tackled within the limited fear inciting frames

of terror, violence, crime and filth/hygiene. In the 2020 elections, ĽSNS promised a series of laws to "fight asocial people, to implement social justice and eliminate the discrimination of decent people"[52] with promises of "no preferential treatment"[53] and social support for Roma as well as the proposed employment of Roma in building roads and infrastructure.[54]

The implicit racism (excluding Roma from the "decent people" collective) embedded in the notion of decency is normalized, moralized and soothed when paired with the notions of respect towards elders or working morale as guidelines for youth education: "The education of children and young people will materialize in a spirit of decency, hard work, respect for elders and ancestors."[55] Slovaks are implicitly motivated to embrace the identity of "decent people" by the promise of defending their wellbeing and economic interests. A closer look at the discourse clusters indicates the proximity and circular interrelationship of the ethnonational Slovak polity of "decent people" and ĽSNS's promises to safeguard their economic interest mainly via calls for economic sustainability, protectionism and condemnation of Western liberalism. (Fig 3)

ĽSNS ethno-populists, just like populists in neighboring Poland or Hungary, conflate the wrongdoings of neoliberalism (such as a socio-economic gap between the rich elite and poor masses or neoliberalism's impact on sustainability and the environment) with liberal democracy, which translates into the fight against democracy as a system. Ethno-populists, in the words of Vasudova, "signal that moving away from neo-liberal economic policies also necessitates dismantling liberal democracy."[56] This effort resonates in ĽSNS public messages as a condemnation of the "rotten" West's necropolitics, "degeneration" and "death culture" which serve to A) underscore its own agency of rescuer and protector of the "Our Slovakia" polity and B) state its anti-West geopolitical orientation. During the 2020 elections, ĽSNS stated that " 'Our Slovakia,' [...] 'should follow the example of Orbán's Hungary and conservative Poland to be more sovereign
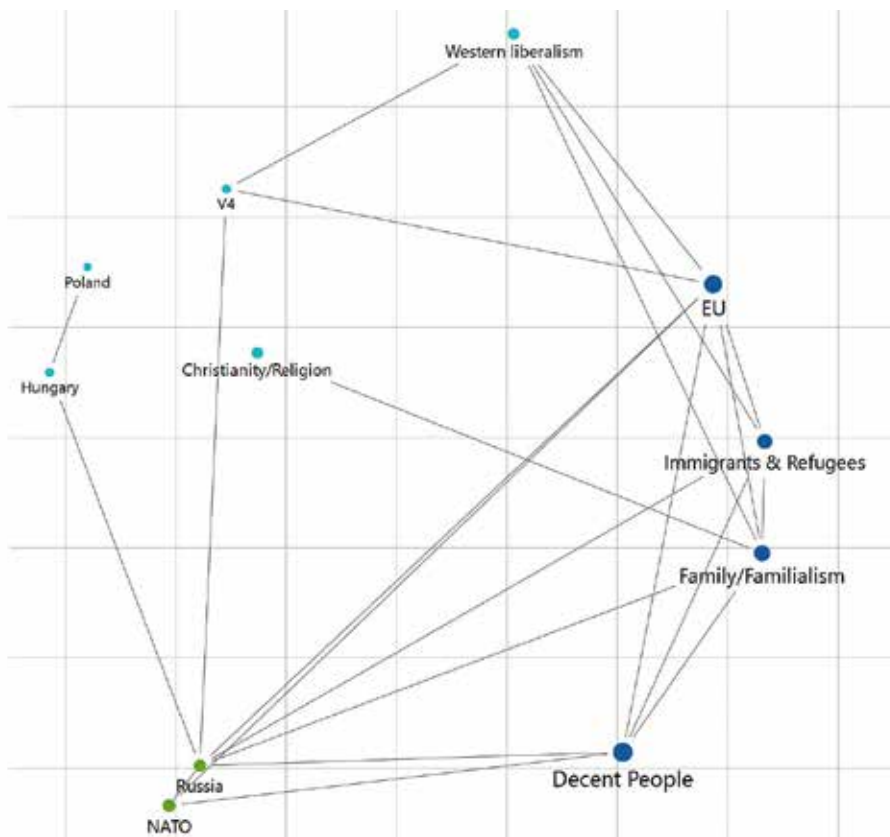
Figure 4. The concept of "decent people" is negotiated in transnational and geopolitical contexts, more prominently in anti-West/pro-Russian securitization discourse. Colored dots indicate the frequency behind the emergence of the specific themes in published newspapers. The largest blue dots indicate that the topics of decent people, family, immigrants, refugees and EU were prominently represented in the concept of "decent people." Smaller green dots indicate that mentions of Russia and NATO took second place in terms of occurrence in "decent people" concept. The smallest light blue dots indicate the presence of other themes that represented an indelible part of ĽSNS's "decent people" identity package, although they were mentioned less frequently in comparison to those marked by green and dark blue colors.

and confident'"[57] and insisted on balancing Slovakia's "one sided orientation to the rotten West" with "a cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation."[58]

ĽSNS as a party of radical return[59] builds the historical roots of its collectivity on the ideological foundation of the wartime Slovak Republic as an ultimate source of national self-respect, confidence, and empowerment. ĽSNS displays a nostalgia for the controversial wartime Slovak Republic, its ethnic nationalism, traditionalism, conservativism, Christian values, disrespect of minorities, anti-Semitism (which unfurls into the Holocaust relativization and denial) as well as anti-Roma sentiments. To revive the heritage of the controversial wartime Slovakia, Kotleba proudly wore a uniform resembling that of the Hlinka Guard – the paramilitary organization that took an active part in the deportation of Jews from Slovakia –, mimicked the wartime HG's torchlight marches and disseminated Nazi and white supremacy symbols in the public space via monetary donations to socially weak "decent"

families and various discounts in product sales in his business.[60] Such acts instrumentalized anti-Semitism and Nazi symbols to evoke continuity of the wartime republic's heritage with the 1993 Slovak republic and appropriated anti-Semitism as a defense mechanism against foreign, non-Slovak, "Western external other" interests of the EU, NATO, USA, World Bank, "corrupted" domestic politicians and NGOs that ĽSNS sees as the long arm of the "decadent West." ĽSNS utilizes anti-Semitism as a geopolitical tool, associating the West, EU or NATO with the immoral Jew-exploiter stereotype to underscore Slovaks' historical victimhood and decency, distancing themselves from the Western colonizer and allying themselves with the Slavic states of Eastern Europe and Putin's Russia in particular. In a country with a minuscule number of Jews, ĽSNS transformed anti-Semitism into a vague pointer of *all* of its enemies: "The Jew is Behind Everything! [...] All dirt, evil, terror, war and poverty [...] is the art of Zionist America and Jewish Israel," stated ĽSNS in Bardejov.[61] ĽSNS's internal and external enemies are routinely subjected to an-

Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

> **More than a decade of corruption scandals followed by mass protests represented a learning moment for voters.**

ti-Semitic slurs: denouncing Angela Merkel as a "Jewish dwarf," accusing the former Ministry of the Interior, Daniel Lipšic, of being an Israeli secret agent, condemning political opponents in OĽaNO, SaS, KDH or Progressive Slovakia as "Šoroš minions"[62] [minions of George Soros] and the state of politics in Slovakia as "*šorošovská politika*" [Soros politics] are just a few examples of ĽSNS's anti-Semitic tropes.[63] Anti-Semitism is not only a sign of ĽSNS's religious bigotry but more importantly, a handy instrument of political maneuvering, especially prior to election time.[64]

Anti-elitism, anti-corruption as the base of key identity markers "decent" and "our Slovakia"

Let us step away from the category of race and have a closer look at the concept of "decent people" through the lens of class. Despite the increase of GDP [Gross Domestic Product] by 1,210 EUR since 2000 and the decrease of the unemployment rate by 2.5%, a series of invisible socio-economic factors empowered the right-wing extremism.[65] The ineffective health care system, the poor state of service and the widespread trend of bribing staff to assure quality health care services helped Kotleba to broaden ĽSNS's electorate[66] as his 2016 election promises included free healthcare, healthcare reforms, a common insurance company for all and eradication of bribery.[67] The endless surfacing of yet more corruption cases divided society along decency/corruption lines into "decent people" ("*slušní ľudia*") versus corrupt elites and resulted in mass protests. *Protest Gorilla* [Protest Gorila], one of the largest-ever Slovak protests, was sparked after sensitive information on corruption was leaked from secret service files. The file revealed the implementation of severe economic reforms that benefited a narrow circle of former well-situated communists who acquired a new status as business elites after the fall of communism. The protests resulted in SDKÚ-DS (Prime Minister Dzurinda's right-wing party) losing the 2012 parliamentary elections[68] and the removal of MPs' criminal immunity. Yet a failure to prosecute those mentioned in the "Gorilla" files introduced a state of societal disillusion-

ment, apathy, helplessness, and resignation. But soon, a new wave of demonstrations that exceeded the size of Velvet Revolution mass protests swept over Slovakia following the murder of 27-year-old journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancé Martina Kušnírová in 2018. The young couple's murder due to Kuciak's investigation of ties between top politicians and Italy's organized crime group 'Ndrangheta sparked mass demonstrations which resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Robert Fico and Minister of the Interior Robert Kaliňák. The trope of "decent Slovakia" that emerged as a resistance to uncontrolled corruption in society and politics was a powerful trope and a guiding moral principle signaling society's desperate hunger for change.

ĽSNS jumped at this opportunity, dressed in the garb of "decent" extreme right and posed as a protector of "decent citizens" from the claws of "corrupted" domestic elites accused of servility to the West and its elites, often denounced via anti-Semitic slurs. The moralistic divide rooted in the idea of decency ran along class lines, as socially vulnerable "decent families" were exploited by the corrupt elites, and emerged as a part of national, transnational, and civilizational discourse. More than a decade of corruption scandals followed by mass protests represented a learning moment for voters who no longer blindly follow politicians but rather question their competence and actions on moral grounds. According to Mudde, "cognitive mobilization" behind questioning of the elite's integrity and competence represents an important factor behind receptiveness of people to radical right populism and can be also identified as one of the factors behind the overall populist Zeitgeist.[69]

ĽSNS looks East
Pan-Slavism and "Decent People" in transnational and civilizational contexts

The notion of decent Slovaks was securitized domestically and transnationally. ĽSNS instrumentalized the notion of decency in order to draw the line between those included by and excluded from the white Slovak ethnonational polity, while concurrently shifting the gear from ethnonationalism to civilizationism and

pan-Slavism as a means to amplify distancing from the West and proximity towards Slavic nations and Putin's Russia in particular. In the past decade, ĽSNS has put more emphasis on the transnational construct of pan-Slavism, which Maxwell broadly described as the "belief in Slavic unity, and especially the desire to promote it."[70] Pan-Slavism has been often mistranslated in scholarly interpretations: the 19th century revivalist concept of "dialect" was juxtaposed with "language" and the 19th century notion of "tribe" was juxtaposed with "nation." This practice obliterated the original Pan-Slavist focus on literary unity and appropriated 19th century pan-Slavism for the needs of the state and ethnonational unity.[71] In the past few years, we have witnessed the revival of pan-Slavism by extreme right ethno-populists to distance themselves from the morally "decadent West" and align with Putin's Russia. This type of transnational identification unfurled into the securitization discourse which begs us to consider the role of "items (targeted themes of effective mobilization), actors, mechanisms, and channels" (history, memory, politics) as important elements of ĽSNS's "ideational diffusion."[72]

ĽSNS's embrace of Pan-Slavism as a unifying civilizational collective of the implicitly decent Slavic polity as an alternative to the "decadent and corrupt West" needs to be addressed within the broader context of Russian-Slovak relations, as Pan-Slavism is promoted by actors from all sides of the political spectrum. The 2021 Globsec report which surveyed 1,000 respondents from 9 countries described Slovakia as a "bear hugger" – someone who does not see Russia as a political threat.[73] 50% of Slovak respondents agreed with the claim that "Western countries unjustly accuse Russia of unlawful [...] behavior." On top of that, an additional 8% agreed that "Russia is our Slavic brother" and "relations with Russia should be nurtured."[74] This difference is starker when compared with Poland where 68% of Poles perceived Russia as a danger to their country.

Except for post-war communism, when Russophilia paved the path to Stalinization and became deeply embedded in the structure of the communist regime as means of control, in most historical eras Russophilia was harnessed as a tool of political pragmatism to safeguard the vital interests of Slovaks. Russophilia was instrumentalized in this way towards the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, towards the recognition of the 1939 wartime Slovak state by the Soviet Union, or as a means of gradual distancing from Nazi Germany when it was obvious that the Wehrmacht was losing WWII. In the post-war era, Russophilia paved a path towards Stalinization and sovietization as a part of the system and control. In Slovakia, the communist regime reconciled anti-Western sentiments, nationalism and Russophile traditions and emphasized rural traditional conservative culture. By doing so, communists created what Juraj Marušiak described as "the paradoxical symbiosis of communist ideology and the tradition of conservative currents in Slovak thought."[75] This paradoxical symbiosis explains why Slovakia was a latecomer in confronting the communist regime in comparison to other Central European countries and displayed lower popular support for integration of Slovakia into the EU as a result of Meciar's policies and pro-Russian stance (1994–1998).

The extreme right-wing ĽSNS seems to follow the same pragmatic course and appropriates the pantheon of 19th century Slovak national revivalists, promoting Pan-Slavism as a symbol of friendly ties with Russia and distancing from the liberalism of the West. ĽSNS condones Russia's aggressive behavior in the region and Kotlebists' effort to turn Slovakia away from the EU and NATO overlaps with Russia's goal to undermine EU from within. However, the shared goal of ĽSNS and the Kremlin to undermine Euro-Atlantic structures needs to be seen as a temporary pragmatic alliance of two players whose historical identity-value package is difficult to reconcile.

ĽSNS promotes the values of the controversial wartime Slovak republic, a satellite of Nazi Germany. Kotleba's ĽSNS venerates wartime president-priest Jozef Tiso, promotes Holocaust denial and relativization, disseminates racism and anti-Semitism and condemns the 1944

Promoting Pan-Slavism as a symbol of friendly ties with Russia and distancing from the liberalism of the West.

> The idea of Pan-Slavism is thus instrumentalized as a tool for the mobilization of 'decent people'.

Slovak National Uprising as a putsch against the Slovak nation and a death blow to the first Slovak ethnic state. The Soviet Union played a critical role in the Slovak National Uprising and the liberation of Czechoslovakia in 1945. For Putin, any re-assessment or casting doubt on the 1945 victory of the Red Army over Nazism is a threat and provocation, as it does not recognize the incredible suffering and human loss of the Soviets and, more importantly, questions the geopolitical triumph of Russia and its rightful place in the region. ĽSNS's problematic identity package was flagged in the 2019 report of the Russian Federation's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It condemned ĽSNS's "'racially motivated extremism,' racism targeting Roma, anti-Semitism and ĽSNS's effort to "create a nationally- and socially-oriented state (National Socialism) based on the model of the pro-fascist Slovak Republic during the Second World War,"[76] as unacceptable for Russia whose identity is heavily built around the Red Army's victory over Nazism. In Putin's eyes, failure to recognize the importance of the Soviet liberation of Europe which centered its identity on "Never Again" means a denial of Russia's place in Europe as a key geopolitical player.

In the past few years, ĽSNS overcame this ideological rift and jumped on the bandwagon of the dissemination of Putin's WW II trope which turned attention away from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet Union's responsibility for the outbreak of WW II, towards the Munich Agreement and the West's responsibility for the war. This interpretation was set out on several occasions in 2019 by Miroslav Radačovský, a lawyer, a member of ĽSNS and also an MP in the European Parliament.

Securitization discourse: Kotlebists as protectors and rescuers

Now let us zoom into discourses of securitization that nurtured connections with certain ecosystems of power in Russia.[77] A securitization discourse with a gendered trope, manufactured against the backdrop of the 2015 refugee crisis, allowed Kotlebists to amplify the "decent people" polity's belongingness to Slav civilization.[78] In 2016 the Kotlebists called for the protection of women from the invasion of "Muslim hordes" and amplified the threat of "invasion" of Western and Muslim civilizations. In 2018 ĽSNS published a 27-minute video, *Lost Europe*, on its website www.stratenaeuropa.sk, prompting the audience to comment on its content.[79] The video follows the travels of Milan Mazurek in Sweden, Denmark and Germany and points to the threat of immigrants and "gender ideology." The narrative evolves around the theme of the fall and extinction of European nations while underscoring the "sex attacks," "sex crimes," "rape wave," or "rape epidemics" caused by the immigrants of color who are presented as Muslims.

A brief look at statistics does indeed reveal an increase in cases of rape in some Western countries during refugee crises. For example, Germany recorded an increase in sexual assaults by foreign nationals of almost 13% in 2016 compared to 9.2% in 2015. Overall, 39.8% of the perpetrators of sexual assaults were non-German nationals. In 2015, 3 out of 10 sexual assaults were committed by foreigners in Germany and a year later, in 2016, the ratio jumped to 4 out of 10.[80] Although these numbers point to the increase in cases of rape committed by foreigners, we should be careful not to take them at face value as several factors need to be accounted for. Firstly, a greater fear of foreigners (as opposed to locals) is behind a higher likelihood of reporting these rapes in comparison to rapes committed by native-born men. It is difficult to say to what degree the statistical record of increased sexual transgression skewed by increased fear of foreigners, refugees, and migrants.[81] To complicate the matter further, the cases of foreign asylum-seeking women and unaccompanied children who are easy targets of sexual exploitation and violence by both non-white and white males receive less international coverage concerning the refugee crisis.[82] To sum up, sexual violence is a global problem, but not all cases of sexual violence receive international attention. Only the cases that feed the existing securitization discourse, vilifying the unwelcomed foreign "other," attract international media coverage.[83] The suffering and trauma of sexual assault that
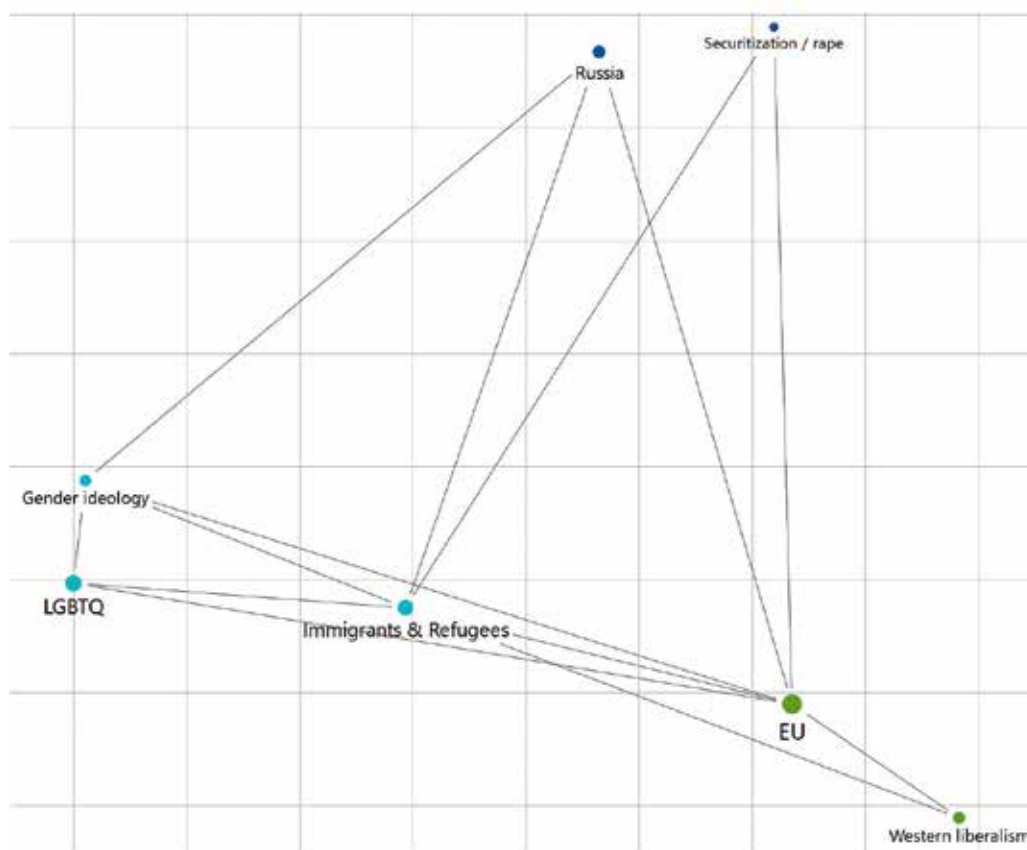
Figure 5: The cluster map indicates key building blocks of civilization discourse. The map displays the proximity of securitization discourse centered around the threat of rape (allegedly committed by immigrants and refugees identified as Muslims or Black) and Russia as a defender and protector against immigrants and refugees. Refugees and immigrants are routinely proximated with LGBTQ, gender ideology, EU and Western liberalism as a cluster of themes/values that ĽSNS condemns.

some white women endured during the refugee crisis should not be underestimated and all acts of all sexual violence must be condemned in the strongest terms. But we also need to be aware of the media's hyperfocus on cases of rape of white native women and girls by foreign "others," i.e. asylum-seeking migrants, refugees, or immigrants, which nurtures the stereotype of "immigrant rapist" and spreads anxiety and fear.[84]

That said, the fearmongering video warning to "keep your women and children safe" produced by Kotlebists was shared by 3,5k followers on FB and similar messaging can be traced in multiple ĽSNS' platforms, including ĽSNS newspapers which warn readers of the "invasion" and "flood" of immigrants and condemn the EU approach that will "destroy European culture and mix our citizens with African immigrants."[85] Kotlebists' messages, however, balance the anxiety by offering a solution: a pro-Russian orientation as the path to a successful civilizational rescue mission. Kotlebists utilize Pan-Slavism to underscore

the tradition, religion, and family values of Eurasian civilization as an alternative to what they see as "morally decadent" and "sexually deviant" Western civilization" invaded by refugees and migrants.[86] The brotherhood of Slavic nations under Russia's leadership is proposed as a viable solution to rescue Slovak women and girls from the claws of the Western and Muslim "threats" to civilization. The idea of Pan-Slavism is thus instrumentalized as a tool for the mobilization of "decent people" across Slav civilization against Western civilization and Muslims in place, time, history, and memory. Kotleba's taking down the EU flag, which he called the "European occupation rag", and raising Russia's flag from his office in Banská Bystrica in May 2016 during the visit of the Night Wolves, the biker gang supporting Putin, are symbolic demonstrations of Pan-Slavic civilizational identity building.[87]

Conclusion

The construct of "decent people" is ĽSNS's core ethnonational, racial and civilizational identity

marker. The identity concept displays multiple layers at the intersections of ethnicity, race, gender, economy, politics, morality, identity, belongingness, inclusion, and exclusion that permeate from national to transnational and civilizational frames. As the closer scrutiny of ĽSNS's newspaper demonstrates, "decent people" is part of the discursive clusters that signify different meanings and moral messages. "Decent people" is ĽSNS's core identity marker as it consistently emerges in all pertinent areas of ĽSNS's interest. The construct of "decent people" was offered to the public in multiple connected contexts and hence offered a more holistic extreme right ideology for voter mobilization. This construct permeates ethnonational and transnational contexts as a stable identity centerpiece and helps to remedy syndromes of unstable identity, soothe socio-economic and geopolitical anxieties and boost national confidence. ●

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Tajikistan

Nationalism and Authoritarianism in Emomali Rahmon's Tajikistan

by **Edward Lemon** and **Oleg Antonov**

On September 9, 2021, Tajikistan celebrated the 30th anniversary of its independence. President Emomali Rahmon, the longest serving leader in the region, stated that "state independence is the greatest and most sacred blessing, the highest embodiment of the national mentality, pride and patriotism, a symbol of the existence of the ancient nation and independence, the basis of happiness and the pride of the people of Tajikistan."[1] His words came three weeks after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and four months after a deadly border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the bloodiest interstate conflict in Central Asia since 1991.[2] By that time, Rahmon has increasingly burnished his credentials as "Leader of the Nation," a title officially bestowed on him by law in 2015.

Rahmon has increasingly claimed to represent not only the population of Tajikistan, but also the estimated 10 million ethnic Tajiks living in Afghanistan. In his Independence Day speech he noted that, "the situation in Afghanistan directly affects the situation in the countries of Central Asia," continuing that "the world community, including the countries concerned, have no moral right to leave the Afghan people alone with the problems that have arisen." Where other Central Asian governments have opted to open dialogue with the Taliban, the Tajik government has taken a more confrontational approach. Just days after the fall of Afghanistan, Rahmon stated he would not recognize a government "created by humiliation and ignoring the interests of the people of Afghanistan as a whole, including those of ethnic minorities, such as Tajiks, Uzbeks, and others."[3] Rather than being driven by a concern over the plight of ethnic kin over the border, Rahmon's claims are driven more by domestic concerns.

As we demonstrate in this article, for Rahmon's authoritarian regime, discourses on patriotism and national identity form a tool for

> Rather than being driven by a concern over the plight of ethnic kin over the border, Rahmon's claims are driven more by domestic concerns.

Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

Tajikistan wants to revive an ancient Aryan festival of Tirgan.
PHOTO: TAJIK PRESIDENT'S PRESS SERVICE

legitimation and the unification of the people. Increasingly Rahmon himself, who has been head of state for 29 years, is intertwined with the nation itself. As academic Rustam Khaidarov stated, "We Tajiks have a national idea, the pivotal components of which are precisely patriotism and national unity" and "the Tajik national idea should be the slogan put forward by the President of the country, respected Emomali Rahmon – Tajikistan, forward!"[4] Nationalism helps mobilize support for the regime and distracts the population from the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finding the Origins of the Ancient Tajik Nation

While nationalist discourses have become more prominent in 2021, they are not entirely new. After independence Tajikistan was plunged into civil war. With the cessation of hostilities in 1997, the government attempted to build its concept of national identity around the concepts of "peace" and "national reconciliation." In seeking to trace the ethnogenesis of the Tajik people, the government turned to Aryanism, declaring 2006 to be the year of Aryan civilization in Tajikistan.[5] In doing so, the government drew on Soviet-era thinking on the autochthonous nature of the Tajik nation. In his famous *The Tajiks* (*Tojikon*) published in 1947, Bobojon

Ghafurov[6] argued that Tajiks were not Uzbeks who had forgotten their language as Uzbek nationalists claimed, but descendants of Aryan inhabitants of Central Asia such as Bactrians, who emerged in around 2500 BCE, and Sogdians, who occupied what is now northern Tajikistan from the 5th century BCE. This went in lock-step with efforts to promote Tajikistan's pre-Islamic Zoroastrian heritage, an effort to forestall calls for Islam to play a more prominent role in public life. The government declared 2001 to be the 2700th anniversary of the Zoroastrian religious text Avesta.[7]

At the time of Tajikistan's 15th anniversary of independence, the government organized a Great Aryan Forum which, according to officials, brought together "solid Germans, proud Ossetians, recalcitrant Iranians, and Slavs -- western and eastern". The president published *Emomali Rakhmonov: The Year of Aryan Civilization,* the last volume of the president's "historically significant" works.[8] "For our ancestors, the Aryan civilization marked the beginning of history [*oghozi ta'rikh*]," Rahmon declared in 2006.[9] Banners with swastikas cropped up around Dushanbe. These were supposed to convey two simple truths to the residents and guests of the capital. First, the Tajiks trace their ancestry back to the ancient Aryans.

President Emomali Rahmon Attends Gala Events celebrating State Language Day.
PHOTO: TAJIK PRESIDENT'S PRESS SERVICE

Secondly, Emomali Rahmon is the father of the people from which most of the peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia originated.[10] That same year Tajikistan held its presidential election. The appeal to history and to the Aryan civilization became one tool to support Rahmon's personality cult. Unsurprisingly, in November 2006, Rahmon won the elections with 79.3% of the vote.[11] While the appeal to Aryanism has been less public since then, it remains the hegemonic primordialism narrative on the origins of the Tajik nation.

Purging Foreign Influences: Toponymic Overhaul in Tajikistan

Having won another term in office, Rahmon announced that he would de-Russify his surname, dropping the "ov."[12] Speaking at his annual meeting with the intelligentsia, he called on representatives and the population of the republic to follow his example and remove the Soviet-Russian suffixes (ov and ova) from their surnames and use historically correct national toponymy in order to return to their cultural roots.[13] In addition, he called on representatives of the intelligentsia to also change the names of historical places, monuments of national culture.[14] The move on names was later codified into law as Tajikistan banned the issuance of new documents with Russified names in 2020.[15]

In 2009, Russian was downgraded as a state language, with Tajik increasingly promoted in its place as the sole official language. The government has also targeted Farsi, a language that is similar to Tajik. Since 2015 the government has also focused on renaming places in the county, removing the Slavic, Turkic or Soviet-era names.[16] By 2018, 1,100 places had been renamed by the government.[17] In August 2016, the State Committee on Language and Terminology announced that it would issue fines for violating Tajik language norms, claiming "the purity of the language has been lost because of the common use of Persian loan words."[18]

Nationalism and Authoritarianism in Tajikistan

The government frames nationalism in terms of loyalty to the state, framing it as the key task for the government. During his speech in parliament in 2019, Rahmon stated that "educating young people in the spirit of national identity, loyalty to the state and people, tolerance, patriotism and respect for national values is the most important task of all structures, bodies and society as a whole."[19] In many of his speeches he stresses the notion that "the glorious Tajik people have always been distinguished by a sense of patriotism and national pride, and thanks to these qualities they can achieve even more and

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Serbia

Slovakia

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turn their beloved homeland into a developed advanced country, marching on a par with the modern world."[20]

If nationalism is defined as loyalty to the state, then those who express divergent views can be labelled "enemies of the people" and "traitors." While Rahmon's government has rewritten history to erase the role of the opposition in helping build peace in the country after the civil war, he has framed himself as the "Founder of Peace," a part of the official title bestowed on him in 2015.[21]

Each year on June 27, the day of the signing of a peace agreement and the end of the civil war in Tajikistan, the country celebrates National Reconciliation Day. This celebration, along with other holidays such as Women's Day (March 8), Navruz (March 21–23), Constitution Day (November 6) and Flag Day (November 24), are occasions for nationalist mobilization by the regime. Increasingly, national holidays are centered around Rahmon himself. Rahmon was anointed one of six National Heroes of Tajikistan in 1999.[22] In subsequent years, a burgeoning personality cult has emerged around the president. A new law moved language day from July 22 to October 6 (Rahmon's birthday) in 2009. Rustam Khaidarov states that "the co-incidence of the day of the state language with the birthday of the president is deeply symbol-ic."[23] Since 2016, the anniversary of Rahmon's elevation to the position of head of state on November 16, 1992 has been President's Day. Ahead of the celebration of the 29th anniversary of Rahmon becoming head of state, residents of his native Danghara proposed building a statue in his honor.[24] While Rahmon's image is festooned over buildings across the country, there are no statues in his honor, unlike former president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev or Turkmen president Gurbanguly Berdymu-hamedow.[25] In September 2021, Abdumajid Dostiev suggested renaming the picturesque Lake Iskanderkul, named for Alexander the Great, after the president, proposing it be named Rahmonkul.[26]

One of the most striking illustrations is Rahmon's recent speech in the spirit of widespread

nationalism Language Day, when he noted that "our native language is the property of the nation and a symbol of national statehood, and we show boundless respect and reverence for it, since it is an invaluable treasure of cultural heritage and is considered one of the highest national shrines" and "for us, Tajiks, our native language is the basis of our national identity and self-awareness."[27] In other words, the people should be grateful that thanks to Rahmon's efforts, the Tajik language and statehood continue to develop and exist.

Academics have continually reinforced the state narrative. According to Saidali Siddiq and Sobirjon Samadov, at the 2016 constitutional referendum, "people voted for progress, peace, stability and for the Leader of the Nation Emomali Rahmon who has historical services to the nation and the savior of the Tajik state."[28] In an article entitled, "Our Leader, Our Pride (*Peshvoi Mo- Iftikhori Mo*), Saltanat Salmonova from the Avicenna Tajik State Medical University stated that "today all the achievements and progress we see are due to the merits of this selfless (*fidokor*) person [Rahmon], and we must prove our loyalty to this state and nation."[29] Academics were some of the first to propose that President Rahmon become "Leader of the Nation." Kholmakhmad Samiev, dean of the Faculty of International Relations at the Tajik National University, penned a piece in April 2015 proposing he be given that title.[30]

Rising Nationalism Amid the Pandemic and Taliban Takeover

But since the pandemic, the government's rhetoric has become increasingly nationalistic, an effort to distract the public from the pandemic, which had caused growth to slow to 1% in 2020. Despite declaring the country Covid-free in January 2021, deaths from Covid-like symptoms continued through the spring and summer.[31] Two recent events led to an outpouring of nationalist rhetoric. The first occasion was after the head of the Kyrgyz security services, Kamchybek Tashiev, suggested that the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan exchange land to settle their border disputes. Days later Rahmon travelled to the proposed

site of the swap, Vorukh, reassuring residents that "there is no possibility for it."[32] As tensions mounted, the Tajik government initiated a military build-up on the border, eventually launching an attack on April 29, with almost 100 killed and 51,000 displaced in the clashes. The conflict, which was the deadliest between two countries in Central Asia since independence, caused a groundswell of nationalist sentiment on the social media, with many Tajiks, including many usually critical of the government, professing their support for Rahmon's defense of the nation, blaming the Kyrgyz side for solely causing the conflict and denigrating those calling for moderation. Briefly, the social media space developed a level of toxicity similar to that seen between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The governments in both countries attempted to monopolize the production of information about the conflict. But their effort to control the information flow led to the circulation of disinformation.[33]

A second opportunity arose with the Taliban takeover, which allowed Rahmon to position himself as the champion of Tajiks not only at home, but abroad too. Tajikistan has hosted the ethnic Tajik-led National Resistance Front, which opened an office in Dushanbe in October.[34] The government has been persistent in its criticism of the Taliban regime, calling for an inclusive government. Rahmon's move has galvanized support in the country, with many who normally criticize the government backing his position. As Rahmon looks to strengthen support for his regime as he considers a transition of power to his 33-year-old son Rustam, who became second in line to the presidency in April 2020, he will rely on nationalism to unify the people and bind them to him. But his successor as "leader of the nation" and "founder of peace" will not have the same legitimacy, the same position as the embodiment and champion of the nation. Rahmon looks set to loom large of Tajik politics for years to come. ●

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Ukraine

In January 1, 2009, the 100th anniversary of Bandera's birth (1909–1959) was celebrated with a rally organized by Svoboda.

PHOTO: VASYL BABYCH/ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Far Right, Revolution and Symbols in Ukraine

by **Vyacheslav Likhachev**

Ukraine is far from the most stable state in Eastern Europe. The political landscape can change in a few years dramatically due to the dynamism of social processes. Among other reasons, it is this dynamism that motivates us to pay special attention to the analysis of the movement which presents a clear threat to the democratic development of the country – far-right radicals. Far-right political groups promote anti-democratic values. With their xenophobic propaganda, they undermine the inclusive consolidation of society, which is so important in a situation of external threat. Moreover, they practice violence against their political opponents and some minorities.[1] Assessments of the degree of influence of far-right groups on the processes in the country can differ, even be diametrically opposite.[2] In any case, it is important to consider that they operate in a highly volatile social context.

Eight years after the Euromaidan protests, also known as the Revolution of Dignity, Ukraine is still at an unstable point of post-Sovi-

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> The state blue-yellow flag acquired symbolic value for the citizens of the country when Ukrainians began to die for it.

et transit. The very independence of the country is being questioned from the outside. External aggression and ongoing hostilities in eastern Ukraine affect domestic political life. Democratic institutions are not yet sufficiently strong to ensure that the positive changes of recent years can be confidently considered irreversible. On the contrary, such negative phenomena as corruption, lack of transparency in many economic and political processes, and the tendency of the authorities to neglect legal mechanisms have not disappeared anywhere. The standard of living continues to remain low, as does the degree of public confidence in state institutions. In the recent past, people's dissatisfaction with the government led to mass protests and a sharp change in the political situation twice, in 2004 and in 2013–2014 (Orange Revolution and Revolution of Dignity, or Euromaidan, respectively). Although each time a unique set of problems led to speeches, significant parts of the "background" factors continue to be relevant today.

At the same time, many observers pay attention to the intensive processes of the formation of a new Ukrainian national, cultural, and political identity. The widespread statement "the Ukrainian political nation was born on the Maidan"[3] [that is, in the course of the Revolution of Dignity] is, of course, a metaphor, but behind it lie quite real processes. For example, according to the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, while in 2012 less than half of the respondents chose the option "citizen of Ukraine" as the one that most corresponded to their feelings out of a number of self-identification options offered to them (which ranged from an identity associated with a place of residence to self-identification with Soviet Union), in 2014 more than 65% of respondents chose this option.[4]

Ukrainian society hesitated about the geopolitical and cultural direction of development, choosing between the pro-European and pro-Russian vectors, for two and a half decades. With the outbreak of war, the scales confidently tipped to the West.[5] Since a nation is, to some extent, a public consensus on a common project for the future,[6] it seems that for Ukrainians it really took shape precisely in 2014.

The Russian aggression that began immediately after the victory of the Revolution of Dignity had a certain impact on the crystallization of the identity of the mobilized civil nation. The state blue-yellow flag acquired symbolic value for the citizens of the country when Ukrainians began to die for it. People began to hang it on the balconies of their apartments, sew and attach ribbons on clothes and backpacks, wear them in the form of bracelets on their hands, even paint pillars and fences in yellow-blue colors to "mark" the urban space visually as "Ukrainian".

In this context, it is especially interesting to understand what place the ultra-right occupies in Ukrainian social and political life, and how this place changes over time. Separately, it seems justified to examine the issue of how far the ultra-right agenda influences the formation of a new Ukrainian identity.

Metamorphoses of Slogans

Ten or fifteen years ago, the far-right movement in Ukraine was associated primarily with street youth groups. They were more subcultural than political in the strict sense of the word. In the evenings, on the streets of Lviv, Kyiv or Kharkiv, one could see flocks of teenagers, often tipsy, with a characteristic appearance – high laced heavy boots, rolled-up jeans, very short-cropped or shaved heads. Stripes with Celtic crosses and runes used in SS symbolism coexisted on their short "bomber" jackets with the emblems of football clubs and a red and black flag. Actually, the latter was the only symbol used by those young people which testified to adherence to Ukrainian nationalism. Since 1940, this flag was used by the "revolutionary" faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) led by Stepan Bandera (with the outbreak of World War II, the movement was split into rival groups). Subsequently, it became a generally accepted national radical symbol, partly an addition, partly an alternative to the general civilian yellow-blue flag, which became the state one.

For a passer-by with a non-European appearance, meeting such a group did not bode well. The wording "Remember, alien, a Ukrainian is

the master here" was one of the popular slogans among this social circle.

When young people from such groups went to public actions, they always chanted "Glory to Ukraine – glory to the heroes!" as well. This slogan was a historic OUN greeting. It was widely used, however, not only by street radicals, but also by the more respectable politicians of the national democratic camp. In particular, Viktor Yushchenko, the president who made the patriotic politics of national memory a priority during his cadency in 2005–2010, used this phrase. The National Democrats turned to the symbolic language of the fighters for Ukrainian independence in the middle of the 20th century in an effort to emphasize the historical continuity of the national movement. The legacy of the OUN was perceived uncritically in this environment. In Viktor Yushchenko's time, the episodes of cooperation between the leadership of various groups of the OUN and Nazi Germany were ignored or justified in official memory policy . The scale of ethnic cleansing against Poles by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA),

a militarist structure created by the Ukrainian underground during the war, was understated. Special attention was paid to the armed struggle between the UPA and the Soviet regime, which was undeniably courageous and truly unique in scale and duration. Viktor Yushchenko, by his decrees, conferred the title of Hero of Ukraine on Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych (commander of the UPA). Under the next president, Viktor Yanukovych, the court ruled that these decrees were illegal.

If the slogan "Glory to Ukraine!" was common to the entire Ukrainian national-patriotic spectrum, from moderate national liberals to street extremists, other formulations marked a specifically ultra-right segment. These included "Glory to the nation – death to the enemies!" and "Ukraine is above all!"

During three months of continuous public actions on the Maidan at the turn of 2013 – 2014, the symbolic line, previously exclusively owned by the far right, became part of the common language of protests. The national radicals themselves constituted an insignificant

minority in the total mass of the Maidan partici-
pants, and they did not have a significant impact
on the protests in general.[7] But in a situation of
forceful confrontation, first with police special
forces and "*titushki*",[8] then with representatives
of pro-Russian groups, Euromaidan activists
naturally turned to the symbolic tradition that
had formed in the era of armed struggle. That
was the tradition of the nationalist language.
The slogan "Glory to Ukraine – glory to the
heroes!" became widespread on the Maidan. Al-
most all public speeches began and ended with
these words, people greeted and said goodbye
by using this slogan, etc. Slogans "Glory to the
nation!" and "Ukraine above all" went beyond
the narrow national-radical segment of the pro-
testers as well. Apart from the national radical
tradition, there was simply no other developed
and well-established speech culture that was
appropriate in this situation. True, even the
Maidan taught Ukrainians the tradition of
collective performance of the national anthem.
Previously, it was rarely performed spontane-
ously, even at political events. As noted above,
in 2014, the state flag began to be widely used
as well.

During the Euromaidan I lived in Israel.
After another round of escalation of vio-
lence in Kyiv, when the authorities began to kill
protesters, we – a group of Israelis – organized
a solidarity action in front of the Ukrainian
embassy in Tel Aviv. Taking into account the
fact that in the Russian media, broadcast in
Israel, the participants of the Kyiv protests were
portrayed as national radicals, in the process
of planning the public action we separately
pronounced the messages that we wanted to
convey to society. We unanimously decided
that of course we would use the slogan "Glory
to Ukraine!". The idea that this was some kind
of specific nationalist slogan seemed strange by
January 2014 – it was just Maidan's verbal code
number one. However, we were going to keep
the participants of the action from chanting
"Glory to the nation!" We felt that in Israel, with
its reasonably wary, to put it mildly, attitude to-
wards European nationalism, this would be in-
appropriate and could be misinterpreted. After

> **Homophobia
continues to be
an important
element
of far-right
mobilization.**

our first action, which was attended by about
fifteen people, a banner "Glory to Ukraine!"
stayed at the gates of the embassy.

With the beginning of the occupation of
Crimea, public actions in support of Ukraine
quite logically moved to the building of Rus-
sian embassy in Tel Aviv. Hundreds of people
already reached them. Several independent
organizing committees were formed. It was
impossible not only to control, but also even
to trace all the posters, banners, and slogans of
the participants in the actions that were taking
place all the time. Therefore, we could only
come to terms with the fact that the slogans
"Glory to the nation – death to the enemies!"
and "Ukraine is above all!" became a completely
natural part of these events, along with "Glory
to Ukraine!" In the end, the participants in the
rallies, Jews and Israelis (a significant part of
them with roots in Ukraine, but far from all),
did not see anything shameful in these slogans.
Wishing death to the enemies in the emotional
atmosphere of that period, even in Israel, began
to be perceived as something quite appropriate
at the walls of the embassy of a country that
was unleashing a large-scale armed aggression
before our eyes.

In Ukraine itself, this process of appropria-
tion by society of a symbolic language previous-
ly inherent only to marginal groups was even
more perceived as completely natural and did
not meet any resistance. There were only not
very confident attempts to "balance" the bias
towards nationalist discourse in the symbolic
language of the Maidan. For example, activists
of one of the non-governmental organizations
came up with the idea to supplement the
standard set of slogans with the slogan "Human
rights are above all!". This slogan also caught
on, but only among some liberal segments of the
protesters, without seriously competing with
the former versions.

In September 2021, I took part in the Equal-
ity March in Kyiv – the main annual public
event dedicated to the rights of the LGBTI+
community. During the event itself, numerous
volunteer assistants coordinated the movement
and initiated the chanting of slogans according

Equality March, Kyiv, September 19, 2021.
PHOTO: KIYV PRIDE

Belarus

Croatia

Czech Rep.

Germany

Hungary

Lithuania

Poland

Romania

Russia

Serbia

Slovakia

Tajikistan

Ukraine

to a list prepared in advance by the organizers. Significant parts of the slogans were invented specifically for this action, and were unfamiliar and partly incomprehensible for the bulk of the participants. Even short rhythmic "chants" were picked up without much enthusiasm.

At the end of the march, several thousand of its participants created a "traffic jam" at the entrance to the lobby of the metro station. Left to themselves, but still in a state of group dynamics, the participants in the just-ended action began to chant slogans spontaneously. They chanted both "Glory to Ukraine – glory to the heroes!" and "Glory to the nation – death to the enemies!"

Today, the Equality March is almost a teenage happening, but just a few years ago, those going to such events were exposed to real danger from aggressive homophobes. The most brutal and organized attacks were carried out by activists of right-wing radical organizations. Homophobia continues to be an important element of far-right mobilization. Of course, the participants in the LGBTI+ rights event are well aware of this. Previously, representatives of ultra-right groups constantly attacked participants in the Equality March. Actually, this year, too, the March was held under heavy police protection.

Along with chanting slogans, the March participants sang songs – for example, the anthem of Ukraine and "Chervona Ruta" – simply a popular Ukrainian pop song of the 1970s, sung by Sofia Rotaru, a singer of Moldovan ethnicity. The average age of the participants in the event was, by eye, 20 years. Obviously, most of these young people did not take part in the Revolution of Dignity, if only because of their age. They grew up already in a social situation when the slogans that previously marked a specific marginal position, on the one hand, became ubiquitous, and, on the other, lost their initial aggressive meaning. "Glory to the nation – death to the enemies!" took its place in the verbal code of a completely liberal young Kyivite somewhere between the state anthem and pop classics of the Soviet period.

This, of course, is not only about verbal formulations. The black and red flag began to be encountered much more often – not only on Kyiv balconies and stripes on the camouflage of volunteers at the front, but also on billboards in Stanytsia-Luhanska and on a flagpole near the regional administration building in Dnipro.

October 14 – the Orthodox holiday of the Intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos, (central in for instance Cossack military tradition), has become a public holiday – the Day of Defenders of the Fatherland. Thus, symbols previously associated with a marginal nationalist tradition gradually become part of the public mainstream, while simultaneously losing their radical meaning.

Belarus
Croatia
Czech Rep.
Germany
Hungary
Lithuania
Poland
Romania
Russia
Serbia
Slovakia
Tajikistan
Ukraine

Avenues of Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych have appeared in the Ukrainian capital. In this context, a natural question arises – how did the ultra-right groups themselves take advantage of this seemingly favorable social situation for them? In order to answer it, it makes sense to start with a cursory overview of the evolution of the Ukrainian far-right movement over the past thirty years.

Ukrainian Far Rightists in Search of Their Own Face

For the first twenty years of the Ukrainian independence far-right groups stayed far on the sidelines of socio-political processes. In the Eastern European regional context, this was the exception rather than the rule. The difficulties of the transition period, the collapse of the traditional model of identity, and the aggravated national feelings after the liberation from communism have ensured significant popularity of the ultra-right parties in many neighboring countries since the 1990s. Against this background, the utter electoral helplessness of the Ukrainian far right is quite remarkable.[9]

It seems that at least one of the reasons for the weakness of the Ukrainian right-wing radicals was their lack of any relevant agenda. For a long time, the main content of the Ukrainian nationalist "credo" was "You will attain a Ukrainian state or perish fighting for it".[10] The Ukrainian state appeared on the political map of the world, and by no means because of the activities of nationalists. Moreover, independence was largely the fruit of the efforts of the Ukrainian communist political elite (by the way, like the collapse of the USSR as a whole), which was rapidly becoming the Ukrainian state elite. In this context, the radical nationalists turned out to be completely confused. They were unable to offer society any new relevant ideas.

The most notable organizations of Ukrainian nationalists in the 1990s were the Social National Party of Ukraine (SNPU), more represented in the western regions, and the scandalous Ukrainian National Assembly (UNA). The most resonant form of UNA activity was participation in armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space. UNA has formed small detachments of

volunteers who went to fight in Transnistria (together with local separatists and Russian nationalists against Moldova), in Abkhazia (together with Georgia against local separatists), in Chechnya (together with local separatists and against the Russian army). In Ukraine itself, ultranationalists have been more successful in racketeering than in political activity. In addition, they tried to support the new independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which was not recognized by the Orthodox world, but rather discredited it with their violent activity.

In the western regions, the ultra-right tried to compete with moderate national democrats for the legacy of the symbolic capital of the Ukrainian nationalist movement of the mid-20th century. In the national-democratic camp, the radicals have an image of provocateurs – and, quite possibly, this opinion was not unfounded in relation to some groups and personalities.

At the same time, the elections invariably demonstrated not just low support for national radicals – the average voter either did not know about the existence of these organizations at all, or at least did not take them seriously. UNA received ridiculous support in the elections – 0.37% of the vote in the parliamentary elections in 1998, 0.04% in 2002, 0.06% in 2006.

SNPU chose a more successful strategy. In 2004, the party undertook a rebranding, abandoning openly ultra-right symbols and changing its name to the All-Ukrainian Association "*Svoboda*" [Freedom]. The obvious appeal was to the Austrian Freedom Party, which in 1999 achieved unprecedented success for the postwar ultra-right movement. The party was headed by the charismatic Oleh Tyahnybok, who managed to get into parliament in a single-mandate majoritarian district. In 2006, *Svoboda* received 0.36% of the vote in the elections, and 0.76% in the 2007 elections.

In the same period, more radical groups began to appear. They did not hesitate to use neo-Nazi symbols and rhetoric and were prone to violent practices. The breeding ground for such groups was, as in other European countries, football hooliganism. Most often they remained at the level of a weakly organized sub-

cultural movement, but sometimes they took shape in more institutionally stable structures. Unlike more traditional organizations based on the West Ukrainian historical nationalist tradition, such groups often arose in the east of the country. A striking example was the organization "Patriot of Ukraine" headed by Andriy Biletsky with the center in Kharkiv. In many ways, such groups copied the more developed Russian subculture of Nazi skinheads, whose main form of activity was street violence against labor migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia (of which there were indeed quite a few in Russia, unlike Ukraine).

On the eve of the 2010 presidential campaign, *Svoboda* leader Oleh Tyahnybok tried to find new ideas that would be attractive to voters. He began to copy the European far right, shifting the emphasis in propaganda to anti-immigration rhetoric. However, this trend simply illustrated the intellectual helplessness of the Ukrainian right-wing radicals. Socio-demographic realities in the country did not give the slightest real basis for such rhetoric. Street skinheads took part in the few rallies organized by *Svoboda* against "illegal immigration", but it was impossible to gain widespread popularity with such a campaign. Oleh Tyahnybok received 1.43% of the vote.

However, it was precisely with the 2010 presidential elections that national radicals began to emerge from the marginal niche. Viktor Yanukovych's victory and his policy created the most favorable conditions for them. The persecution of the opposition began almost immediately. Yulia Tymoshenko, Viktor Yanukovych's main rival in the elections, was arrested, like a number of other popular politicians. At the same time, the ruling Party of Regions established itself as an incredibly corrupt political elite, even by Ukrainian standards. In addition, Viktor Yanukovych persistently pursued a pro-Russian policy, which was perceived as a betrayal of national interests not only by radicals, but also by a significant part of society.

In the face of the defeat of the systemic opposition forces, the ultra-right appeared to be an acceptable alternative to the "anti-national"

government (which the national radicals themselves began to denote by the term "internal occupation regime") for many voters. In the 2012 parliamentary elections, *Svoboda* achieved unprecedented success, receiving 10.44% of the vote. According to sociological research, the voters who voted for this party did not support its xenophobic and Eurosceptic position at all. The main motive for them was the choice of the toughest and most consistent opposition to the regime of Viktor Yanukovych.

Public Legitimation and Political Marginality

The Revolution of Dignity 2013–2014 provided the far-right groups with access to big politics. Representatives of *Svoboda* entered the interim transitional government briefly in the spring of 2014. Groups of former football hooligans or skinheads, with their experience of street clashes, were in demand during the period of violent confrontation during the revolution itself and immediately after. The symbols of protest were not the leaders of the "old" political parties, who were not particularly popular with ordinary participants in the Maidan, but such personalities as Dmitro Yarosh. Previously, he headed the small youth organization *Trysub* [Trident] *named after Stepan Bandera*, which is primarily involved in military sports activities. On the Maidan, Dmitro Yarosh headed the *Pravy sector*, a coalition formed on the basis of *Trysub*, other insignificant national-radical organizations (including UNA), and groups of football hooligans. It is the *Pravy sector*, despite its small number, which has become a symbol of power confrontation in the mass consciousness.

In anti-Maidan propaganda, first the media controlled by the ruling Party of Regions, and then the Russian media, began to exaggerate the role of far-right radicals, trying to portray all the protesters as neo-Nazis. In a certain audience, this propaganda worked, but for those who supported the Maidan, it had the opposite effect. Personalities such as Dmitro Yarosh began to be perceived as strong and decisive leaders. Information about the real neo-Nazi background and the views of such people as Andriy Biletsky, mentioned above, simply ceased to be given attention.

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Belarus

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Czech Rep.

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Hungary

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Romania

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Ukraine

The war radically changed the place of the far right in the Ukrainian socio-political landscape. On the basis of the *Patriot of Ukraine* asset, Andriy Biletsky created the *Azov* volunteer battalion (later the National Guard regiment), which gained prestige in society after the successful operation to liberate Mariupol in June 2014. Dmitro Yarosh headed the *Pravy Sector* Ukrainian Volunteer Corps. The Corps soldiers were the first to reach the blockaded Donetsk airport, the defense of which has become a symbol of resistance to Russian aggression.

Active participation in hostilities has made far right leaders famous and popular, and their groups have provided widespread public legitimacy. Ukrainian nationalism is now associated not with aggressive street teenage gangs, but with volunteer battalions. Any attempt to criticize the views of national radicals is ignored now, or even provokes an aggressive reaction, perceived as Russian propaganda.

Paradoxically, the above-described mainstreaming of the ultra-right symbolic language and the public legitimization of the leaders of radical nationalists were accompanied by the marginalization of the far-right political organizations proper.

The combined result of the two national-radical parties that took part in the parliamentary elections in 2014, *Svoboda* (4.71%) and *Pravy sector* (1.8%), was barely half the result of *Svoboda* in 2012 year. Due to their personal popularity (as military commanders), some far-right leaders, including Dmitro Yarosh and Andriy Biletsky, entered parliament in single-mandate majoritarian districts, but in general, the representation of national radicals in parliament fell from 37 to 13 deputies.

The 2019 parliamentary elections were even more revealing. This time, all Ukrainian ultra-rightists managed to unite and form a common list under the brand name of the most popular political party in this segment, *Svoboda*. Nevertheless, this did not help them in any way. The result obtained, 2.15% of the votes, in turn, turned out to be only half that of 2014. The ultra-right was able to get only one deputy through a single-mandate majoritarian district.

Active participation in hostilities has made far right leaders famous and popular, and their groups have provided widespread public legitimacy.

Society respects the contribution of the radical nationalists to repelling Russian aggression, but does not consider it necessary to support them as a political force. Moreover, the far right have found themselves in a deep crisis. They have learned to communicate the war with society – but they are not able to communicate anything else.

At the same time, the securitization of the entire political discourse, natural in the conditions of war, took place. The president of Ukraine, elected in 2014, Petro Poroshenko, went to the next elections in 2019 with a slogan that ten years ago would have seemed appropriate only for a nationalist politician – "Army! Language! Faith!" Although he lost, he was the main rival to the new president, Volodymyr Zelensky. However, it seems that it was not the influence of the far-right propaganda that provided a general change in the agenda and the very language of political struggle in Ukraine, but changes in the situation as a whole. What worried only paranoid conspiracy theorists in normal times has become part of the political agenda of the entire society in conditions of a very real existential threat to the country.

Conclusions

By virtue of their active and visible participation in the Revolution of Dignity and in repulsing Russian aggression, far-right groups received wide public legitimacy. However, they were unable to convert the social capital gained into electoral support. Moreover, the popularity of ultra-right political parties has fallen several times compared to the times of Viktor Yanukovych's presidency.

At the same time, once exclusively ultra-right symbols and slogans have become widespread, and concern about protecting national identity has become a noticeable part of the mainstream political agenda.

It seems that this did not happen due to success of far-right propaganda. As we saw above, the voice of the far-right movement is almost inaudible. In the case of the dissemination of nationalist symbols, slogans, and memorable dates, we deal not with the popularization of the ultra-right discourse, but with a kind of cul-

tural appropriation of the symbolic language. Using the phrase "Glory to Ukraine!" or even "Glory to the nation!" no longer means, as it did ten years ago, a xenophobic anti-democratic ethno-nationalist position.

Simultaneously and independently of this process of "appropriation" of the (ex-) far-right symbolic language, a significant shift to the right of the entire political spectrum took place. The parties that positioned themselves as "leftists" left the political scene altogether. They were partly discredited by the support of the pro-Russian irredentist movement, and partly they could not withstand state pressure in the framework of the process of "decommunization". Political parties, positioning themselves as pro-European, liberal or national-democratic, turned to such topics as the protection and strengthening of the state role of the Ukrainian language, the formation of an independent Orthodox Church, etc. However, these changes, even at a stretch, cannot be associated with the influence of far-right propaganda.

The nationalism of the political mainstream continues to be civic and inclusive. The unprecedented level of support (73% of the vote) that an ethnic Jewish presidential candidate received in 2019 is just one example of the inclusiveness of the concept of nation that dominates Ukrainian society. The fact that, after becoming president, this ethnic Jew quite organically began to use the slogan "Glory to Ukraine!" in the appropriate context illustrates what unexpected metamorphoses the far-right symbolic repertoire can experience in the complex Ukrainian context. ●

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Summary

Right-Wing Radicalism: In Many Countries a Part of Mainstream Society

by **Tora Lane** and **Joakim Ekman**

The aim of the *CBEES State of the Region Report 2021* is to map out the current rise of the far right in Central and Eastern Europe. Today the region is typically described in both scholarly research and news media as particularly marked by Euroscepticism, illiberalism and increasing tendencies towards authoritarianism. It hardly needs to be said that there are also several parallels to recent political developments in other EU member states, and in the world at large. It is telling that, in March 2021, the *Economist*[1] published a piece on revanchism and conspiracism in American politics, based on the Capitol riots, noting at the same time that far-right extremism has become a global threat. In early 2021, *Foreign Affairs*[2] published an article pointing to far-right extremism as a global threat to democracy. In December 2021, in an article in *The Nation*,[3] it was argued that the far right's opportunities for global expansion are presently particularly strong.

In this report we focus on issues of national identity in the far right in contemporary Eastern Europe. To this end, we invited authors to contribute with comments, analyses, and discussions of crucial features of far-right movements in separate countries and in the region at large. The report gathers in-depth analyses of this development in 13 countries. It draws out certain common themes, but also highlights the diversity of far-right politics in the region.

On a general level, the "far right situation" in Central and Eastern Europe appears similar to the situation in other regions of the world. We can recognize the ideological content, i.e. the four-fold combination of nationalism, xenophobia, law and order, and welfare (or

welfare chauvinism). At the same time, the far right seem to have become more acceptable in mainstream media in the post-communist region than elsewhere in Europe, as is evident in Michlich's contribution on the current situation in Poland. Also, in Central and Eastern Europe in particular, illiberal tendencies present comparatively more serious challenges to democracy and the rule of law, as for instance in Hungary, not to mention Russia and the former Soviet states.

The question that we wanted to address here, therefore, was the role and nature of politics surrounding national identity in the region. With the fall of Communism, the countries that had previously belonged to the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc embarked upon projects of national identity that went hand in hand with a process of finding their place in the European Union and other supranational organizations. How did the projects of developing national and regional identity after the fall of Communism pave the way for a spread of popular discontent with the so-called liberal elite of Brussels, a discontent that is kindled by populist politics that fairly often plays into the hand of nationalist xenophobic sentiments?

As this report shows, far-right parties with a clear xenophobic message have entered parliament in a series of countries in the Eastern part of Europe, e.g. in Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Croatia. Although some seem to have seen the twilight of their popular support, having to leave parliament, they have retained an influence on the shaping of the political agenda and within the power elite, as is the case with the Polish far

right. It appears that this process of regaining or continuing the work with and formation of a national identity is not without ideology, or at least an ideological appendix. In many countries, and on the transnational level, there is a complex relation to the legacy of nationalist dissident movements, exile groups and organizations and the international opposition towards Communism, as we can see in particular in the contributions on national symbols and memory in Ukraine by Likhachev and Rudling, respectively, and in the contribution on Belarus by Kotljarchuk. This is not only a question for governments, but also for opposition movements today in their resistance towards Russian influence in the region.

With regard to the growth of the far right, many countries show strikingly similar tendencies although of course the political and cultural discourses differ. However, some countries stand out in this process as different from the others: Eastern Germany and Russia. Communist Eastern Germany was replaced with unified Germany, thus leaving a complex historical legacy of a country that no longer exists which fuels resentments in the eastern part of the country, as Weisskircher clarifies in his contribution. In Russia, in turn, the situation is different, as Shenfield highlights in his article, since the very national idea of Russia today is also imbued with the legacy of the imperial and Soviet past, and the idea of a multinational state thus coincides with the notion of Russian spheres of influence. The countries of Central Asia also differ in the way that nationalism has more or less become equal to authoritarianism, as Lemon and Antonov demonstrate with the case of Tajikistan.

From this report it becomes clear that it is important here to stress the supra-national dimension. In the European far right, nationalism has come to be combined with a particular brand of supra-nationalism, since we are dealing with a political landscape that consists of networks and webs of identities that go beyond the nation. As this report demonstrates, cultural distinctions are frequently made between empires, civilizations, spheres of identities, influences, powers, and oppositions such as east and west, and north and south; all play a role both in relation to the current political agenda and to the memory or narratives of the past. As Bassin shows in his essay, in many cases the identity of the nation is tied to that of

> **" There is growing discontent with ideas of tolerance, equality, and open-mindedness.**

Europe, and there are significant transnational far-right networks. In many cases, what the far right opposes is not the European Union as such, but a certain liberal idea of Europe that is identified with the EU. There is growing discontent with ideas of tolerance, equality, and open-mindedness, in combination with protectionism for the sake of strengthening the nation within the EU. In this way, extreme right-wing actors in Eastern Europe can obviously find close allies in Western Europe.

Considering the need for a rebirth of the nation in a reconfiguration of Europe and the world, it is perhaps no wonder that issues of national and regional (Eastern European or European) community-building have been legion, and that they are interconnected, as shown in the contributions by Ulinskaitė and Garškaitė on Lithuania, Gherghina on Romania and Balogh on Hungary. Although many far-right leaning parties in the region have gained popular support through a typical (nationalistic) critique of high-brow white collar Brussels – for example in Croatia, Serbia and again, the Czech Republic – it also becomes apparent from articles in this report that many far-right parties actually want to identify themselves as European (and/or as members of the European Union).

In other words, Euroscepticism does not necessarily mean a push towards disintegration. Equally important for an understanding of the relation to Europe is the impact of identity politics in all respects. Thus, as exemplified by Paulovicova in her in-depth examination of the political agenda of the far right in Slovakia, one can identify the development of an ethno-populism framed by identity politics, which appeals to people who have a sense of being an under-represented or even repressed minority. And thus, as is apparent in Lithuania, Poland, and Hungary, the far right proposes an idea of Europe today that is not hegemonic in the political discourse of the European Union, but builds on traditional values such as family, Christianity, and the nation. Perhaps these are two sides of the same coin, since traditional values appeal in particular to people who have the sense that social welfare is encumbered by the European Union's austerity measures.

In several post-Communist countries, far right movements seem to occupy a space that until recently was associated with the political left: in East Germany, as

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Weisskircher notes, the AfD wants to reenact the GDR (without Communism); in Poland, the PiS party advocates increased social welfare; and in Russia, Putin has gained popularity by raising pensions and salaries for state officials, while also restoring the memory of the Soviet past.

The transnational ties of the far right in the global world that we inhabit are also a consequence of the way that social media has changed the sphere where the dynamics of public opinion evolves. Today, we can see how far right actors have adjusted their communicative strategies for the sake of expanding their influence in this semi-official public sphere. This is neatly illustrated in Zavatti's contribution on the far right's engagement with national identity issues in online spaces. Zavatti demonstrates that while the far right is highly engaged in exploring the opportunities offered by online social movements, the Internet also plays well into the hands of their appropriation of identity politics. Here, the far right can present themselves as victims of both Communist history and the liberal consensus of the contemporary political establishment. Thus, he shows how the online space offers a way of making political issues privatized and polarized, and historical facts politicized and contested.

Another development that pertains to the region is related to the way that the far right has come to shape projects of national identity, in an essentially illiberal direction. In her discussion of the illiberal polypore state, Petö analyzes strategies for a re-ideologization of state institutions in the name of nationalism/the far right. Instead of – or in a new combination with – propaganda, the illiberal state can exert influence on universities and cultural institutions through the use of coercive soft power, i.e. by lobbying, dominance in executive boards, and through networks. Petö convincingly demonstrates that these developments are far from harmless. Not only independent media and investigating journalists are targeted by the right-wing forces, but also academia and individual researchers.

Finally, the politicization of the use of history is yet another common denominator of the far right in general, which has become particularly acute in Central and Eastern Europe. The instrumentalization of the past through memory agencies and the application of criminal law is a phenomenon which has gained increased popularity across post-communist Europe in recent decades. This phenomenon is felt most strongly in the region's outright non-democracies, but also in EU member states with governments pursuing authoritarian polices. The political use of history, as a far-right practice, is related to the legacy of Communism and in particular to the fact of Central and Eastern Europe having been the "bloodlands" of Europe – the location of the fiercest battles between Communism and Nazism.

The desire to control the writing of history is of course not solely a phenomenon pertaining to Eastern Europe, and it shows alarming transnational features too. Scholars beyond these states, dealing with topics sensitive to or deeply unpopular with radical right-wing groups, have for a long time been forced to reckon with pressure from various parties outside of academia. In this report, this is illustrated by Rudling's analysis of the far right as a transnational phenomenon, organized through emigre communities. Rudling's article describes attempts by Ukrainian radical nationalists in the diaspora to use political, economic, legal, and social pressure to restrict inquiry into certain topics, thereby policing and controlling historical and social culture. The far right's occupation with historical memory is no coincidence. Politics, as Andrew Breitbart stated, lies downstream from culture.

We aimed to contribute to the discussion and analysis of the nature and rise of the far right in Central and Eastern Europe with the multidisciplinary approach that is a feature of this report and the work of the *Centre for Baltic and East European Studies*. Currently, it seems that this phenomenon will only demand increasing attention. ●

> **" The far right's occupation with historical memory is no coincidence.**

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The Many Faces of the Far Right in the Post-Communist Space

The aim of the *CBEES State of the Region Report 2021* is to map out the many varieties of far-right parties and movements in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe, a region typically described as marked by Euroscepticism, illiberalism and increasing tendencies towards authoritarianism. The report gathers in-depth analyses of the development and crucial features of far-right actors in 13 countries. It draws out certain common themes, but also highlights the diversity of far-right politics in the region.

In the individual contributions of this report, the participating researchers depict a nuanced picture of the far right and the relative importance of, for example, the legacy of nationalist dissident movements, exile groups and organizations, and far-right actors' different notions of empires, civilizations, spheres of identities, powers, and oppositions such as east and west, and north and south; all play a role both in relation to the current political agenda and to the memory or narratives of the past.

In sum, we are witnessing a general turn away from the pro-European liberalism towards a more isolationist or protectionist – not to say xenophobic – nationalism.

The report is the second in a series of annual reports from CBEES (Centre for Baltic and East European Studies), reporting and reflecting on the social and political developments in the Baltic Sea Region and Central and Eastern Europe, each year from a new and topical perspective. The overall purpose with this initiative is to offer a publication that will be of great interest to fellow researchers, policy makers, stakeholders, and the general public.

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