



**Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs**

## **Extremism as a Security Threat in Central Europe**

(Summary of the roundtable discussions held on June 7, 2012  
in Bratislava, topic: Cross-border Cooperation of Extremist Groups)

With support of the Open Society Foundations

Barbora Padrtová, Radka Vicenová (eds.)

Barbora Padrtová, Radka Vicenová (eds.)

## **Extremism as a Security Threat in Central Europe**

*(Summary of the roundtable discussions held on June 7, 2012 in Bratislava, topic: Cross-border Cooperation of Extremist Groups)*

### **Introduction**

Extremism is currently one of the most pressing issues affecting the security environment in the region of Central Europe. Growing extremist tendencies in Europe as well as the missing platform for discussion of experts on this issue were an inspiration for organizing the roundtable on the international cooperation of extremist groups. The roundtable was first of a series of activities held within the project aimed at combating the growing extremist tendencies and their implications for the internal security of states. Participation of a broad range of experts from Slovakia, Czech Republic and Germany representing governmental institutions as well as the non-governmental sector was one of the many positive outcomes of the event.

The aim of the roundtable was to provide the opportunity for experts to exchange experiences about the most recent issues and tendencies of extremist groups. While in the first panel the participants discussed current issues of financial, ideological and organizational cooperation of extremist groups in Central and Eastern Europe, the second panel discussion was mainly about the attitudes toward the issue and proposals of strategies for addressing the growing activity and popularity of extremist groups.

### **Financial, Ideological and Organizational Cooperation of Extremist in the Central Europe**

Experts agreed that cyberspace currently poses one of the most important dimensions of the fight against extremism. Internet's trans-national nature and possibilities it offers means that activities of extremist groups cannot be approached solely from the national or regional level, but any approach has to take on an international dimension. This is why a more involved expert discussion in neighboring countries is more than welcome. The participants are indeed aware that the absence of the discussion on the international level as well as between the public and the NGO sector is the major cause of complications for efforts to address the situation. International, particularly European, initiatives aimed at combatting the extremist activity in cyberspace should therefore become a priority. Moreover, emphasis should be placed on stemming the spread of new applications and games with extremist content, which is still an issue that is poorly controlled and addressed by public institutions and the educational system.

Speakers also discussed international cooperation of extremists, agreeing on the importance of targeting the organizational dimension such as the cooperation within organized structures of in legal (e.g. political parties, interest groups), as well as illegal sphere (neo-Nazi and military groups with trans-national reach such as Blood&Honour or Hammerskins Nations). It is a well-known fact that organizational cooperation is closely related to the ideological dimension and involves cooperation between similar ideological streams, e.g. neo-fascism, neo-nazism and the so-called "new right" parties, which usually serve as a springboard for extremist groups into the political life i.e. the legitimate, legally accepted sphere.

In the case of neo-Nazi groups, traditional nationalist conflicts are sometimes put on hold for the sake of extremist cooperation, although transnational cooperation is to a great extent limited whenever irredentist efforts spring up again in neighboring countries. Cooperation of Slovak and Hungarian nationalist groups is one such example of efforts to overcome nationalist issues, although e.g. in the Balkan countries the situation still remains complicated and mutual communication is therefore limited. Contradictory nationalist tendencies leading to ultimate disagreement between extremist organizations could be observed even in the case of German-Polish dispute within the European National Front, an organization which was established to represent far right parties and neo-Nazi groups in Europe. Conflicts resulted in the dissolution of the organization, whereas only groups within the "Berlin-Madrid-Roma Axis", i.e. National Democratic Party of Germany, Falanga in Spain and Fuerza Nuova in Italy, have remained active in cooperation. Similar examples of international cooperation may be observed even between extremist groups in Serbia, Albania and Croatia.

Regarding financial cooperation, mutual indirect support is equally important (e.g. propagation of white power music events abroad, which serves as a potential source of money for managers, music bands, dealers, etc.).

Within the network of military groups, initiatives aimed at providing support to imprisoned activists (so-called "prisoners of war") are also common. It means that financial solidarity exists between particular national extremist groups (e.g. staging benefit events, where financial contributions for imprisoned and prosecuted activists abroad are collected, or accounts for contributions are opened). However, financial cooperation is largely pre-determined by the organizational and ideological cooperation. Mutual financial support indeed depends on the

extent and strength of the organizational and ideological cooperation between particular organizations.

Participants agreed that Germany is one of the countries with the strongest extremist tendencies and at the same time serves as the source of inspiration for similar groups in Central and Eastern Europe. The spread of the so-called "free nationalism" and "autonomous nationalism" from Germany to the Czech Republic and Slovakia is only one example of this cross-border export, even if these models of nationalism are not quite as successful and popular as in Germany, because of lesser support for paramilitary groups here. Therefore, extremist groups in the Czech and Slovak republics primarily use chauvinism, anti-Roma rhetoric and xenophobia as their primary strategy.

Latent anti-Semitism is perhaps the one unifying characteristic of all extremist groups. Although the conventional wisdom may dictate this premise, the participants agreed that it is no longer a defining feature and the Roma issue remains the primary battle cry for mobilization.

Other issue discussed was the phenomenon of close cooperation between extremist groups in various Slavic countries, despite lacking institutional basis that takes the form of friendly group meetings. Slovak Togetherness, a leading Slovak extremist group, preferred maintaining contacts with organizations in the neighboring countries, and with Serbia, Romania and Ukraine. Slovak Togetherness was also one of the organizations participating in the project of European National Front. Currently, it is in close cooperation with Czech Workers' Party, as is manifested by mutual participation in many public events in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Participants also agreed that in the case of anti-Roma rhetoric as the main agenda of Slovak Togetherness and its associated political party,

People's Party Our Slovakia, we may observe the influence of the Czech extremist scene. The series of anti-Roma demonstrations held in 2009 and 2010, organized with the motto "against the thieves and parasites" is indeed very similar to the marches previously held in the Czech Republic. After 2008 we also observed a growing willingness of Slovak extremist groups to cooperate also with Hungarian associations, especially The Hungarian National Front, something that was entirely absent in the organization's beginnings. For instance, in 2010 along with Hungarian National Front and Serbian National Guard the Slovak Togetherness participated in the common project "March Against Chauvinism", a ground-breaking event in the relations between Slovak and Hungarian nationalist organizations, something that would not be thinkable earlier due to competing nationalist views.

Regarding the newly established cooperation, some conference participants have pointed out that these two organizations are ideologically close, therefore it is necessary to primarily explore the ideological dimension of cooperation. While Slovak extremist groups generally hold a positive attitude to Putin and Medvedev's policies in Russia, ties and personal connections to Russia are not as significant as to the Czech Republic. On the other hand, Czech extremists are mainly inspired by Germany, Italy, even adopting some ideas and trends from Russia. The ideology-first view is also supported by some efforts by the Czech extremist groups to cooperate with their Hungarian counterparts as was observed in the 2007 meeting between Jobbik and The Hungarian Guard on one side and National Party and National Guard on the other. In the end, this initiative failed because of different views on some aspects of history.

The main reason for the difference in the extent and intensity of international cooperation of Czech and Slovak extremist groups is the lack of

developed organizational structure and financial resources of the latter preventing it from establishing trans-national cooperation. On the other hand, we should not underestimate the importance of the Internet in overcoming the physical distance and becoming a part of international structures at least in cyberspace.

### *Partial Conclusions*

The discussion in the first panel can be summed up as follows:

- Within Europe, we can observe tendencies towards the decline of support for autonomous nationalist and paramilitary groups. On the other hand, there is growing support for subjects with less radical program platforms, which take advantage of growing dissatisfaction in the society.
- International cooperation of extremist groups is to a great extent influenced by traditional nationalist conflicts between countries. The strongest cooperation can be observed between Slavic countries, nevertheless recently new efforts to establish cooperation between conflict-prone nations such as Slovakia and Hungary has appeared.
- The extent and intensity of cooperation between extremist groups is limited by organizational and financial constraints, nevertheless the Internet provides the new means for extremist groups to reach international structures at least virtually. This also poses the biggest challenge for the future.

## Counter-extremist Measures

Discussion in the second panel focused mainly on the evaluation of the government's approach as well as the contribution of non-governmental organizations to combating extremism. Experts mentioned the problem of lack of funding in the NGO sector, but also inefficiency and lack of consistency of programs and strategies for combating extremism.

Experts considered the pros and cons of programs aimed at de-radicalization of society and prevention of the rise of extremist tendencies. In addition to strategies of repression and the fight against extremism directed by the state and its security forces, these programs are in fact an essential part of the NGOs activities in this regard. Speakers agreed in the debate that it is not enough to continually criticize and point out the negative manifestations of extremist groups, because in the end the pursuit of rational arguments against a dogmatic ideology is doomed to failure. Nor is it sufficient to focus on the institutional aspects in the fight against extremism, because banning extremist organization does not address the situation, quite the contrary. The representatives of extremists groups are usually presented to the public as heroes of resistance, fighters for justice and representatives of the popular will. Therefore, it is necessary to build on a positive character of activities and not focus solely on criticizing and discouraging the extremist manifestations without offering alternatives. Thus, prevention should focus mainly on increasing the resilience of the population at risk of becoming targeted for recruitment by the extremist ideology (e.g. the economically or socially disadvantaged). However, measures against extremism should be comprehensive, and not focus solely on support and activities in the social or economic sphere, but also include legal support and education of civil society.

As fundamental was seen the question of identity, especially regarding the need for increasing the awareness and promotion of democratic structures and institutions of civil society, with special support for educating people to democracy, its theory, practice and values. Speakers focused mainly on the question of whether the democratic identity presents a strong enough alternative to the neo-Nazi or neo-fascist identities, with which extremists identify themselves particularly through signs and symbols, which are absent in democracy.

Experts also discussed the so-called Exit programs and their potential use in Central and Eastern Europe. The programs consist of efforts to allow extremists safe departure from the neo-Nazi scene and break up the social ties that exist within it, whereas the emphasis is primarily on the renunciation of violence, change in worldview, and replacement of the extremist ideology with other values. The aim is to achieve a cognitive or behavioral change in the individual. However, the feasibility and effectiveness of such programs in Central and Eastern Europe remains to be seen. The small, compact geographic area of these countries complicates the efforts for the departure of the individual from his/her environment even further undermining the potential for the individual's displacement to another city, as the prerequisite to the program's success. Denmark was mentioned as one of the inspirations, where despite a small area the program is successful. What's more, when implementing the Exit programs, it is essential to ensure to employ the cooperation of several stakeholders, including the social and labor institutions, psychologists, family and friends, as well as government, security forces, the judiciary, and last but not least the NGOs sector. However, there is a problem of the lack of political will to put these strategies into action.

Experts agreed that it is not enough to focus only on the work with extremists and de-radicalization efforts, but to primarily achieve prevention of recruitment to the neo-Nazi sub-culture. As a solution may serve educational and awareness programs providing alternatives to extremist attitudes and ideological assumptions as well as education toward democracy and democratic values at an early age in the school system. In this respect, there is a key role for the NGOs, whose activities should focus not only on socio-economic causes of radicalization, but also on education and not least on the transfer of know-how and cooperation with the state sector. As yet another serious problem in Central and Eastern Europe the participants identified the lack of cooperation between NGOs and international organizations and initiatives associating organizations dedicated to anti-extremist projects within the European continent. The rate of participation of NGOs from Central and Eastern Europe is substantially lower and far from adequate, particularly in comparison with Western Europe.

### *Partial Conclusions*

Discussion in the second panel has drawn the following partial conclusions:

- The growing share of transnational cooperation of extremist movements indicates that when developing and implementing strategies to combat extremism, it is no longer sufficient to focus only on the national level.
- In the name of efficiency and effectiveness in the fight against extremism the repressive bodies of the state should be complemented by activities aimed at prevention and de-radicalization within the society, which

leaves room especially for the NGOs sector.

- It is particularly important to support education and training projects toward democratic values and practices. A key concept of de-radicalization is mainly a question of identity, which must be effectively replaced by identification of the individual with the democratic principles and values, especially in the case of neo-Nazi ideology.
- In addition to the so-called Exit programs focused on assisting extremists in their departure from the neo-Nazi environment, prevention of the recruitment of new individuals should be made a part of the strategy.

### **Conclusion**

The current development trends marked by the increased popularity of extremist groups and growing transnational cooperation among extremist organizations in Europe should be reflected in the counter-extremist strategies. The cooperation of state bodies and NGOs in the international networks in this regard is not sufficient. Moreover, strategies for dealing with extremism only at the national level are not effective enough, as was agreed by experts during the roundtable discussion on cross-border cooperation of extremist groups. The space for far-ranging expert discussion on sharing of experiences and views is therefore set.

The problem area which should be given increased attention remains the mutual cooperation of state authorities, especially the police and the NGO sector - each with a crucial role in the fight against extremism. Experts also agreed that repression and continual public criticism of extremist ideologies is proving

insufficient because of their dogmatic nature. Especially given that the strategies adopted by the extremists are largely based on the presentation of themselves as fighters for injustice and heroes of resistance with the courage to stand up to the state authority. Also adequate attention should be given to supporting projects that stem the support of such groups in society, and lead to increasing the memberships in extremist organizations. In particular it means putting more focus on education and training of young people in terms of democratic values and not least increased support for the development of civil society in order to prevent extremism taking a firmer hold. A separate chapter consists of the deradicalization Exit programs, which in some countries in Western and Northern Europe successfully operate. However this approach to combating extremism is not adopted in Central and Eastern Europe. It was concluded that continued discussions of experts on extremism at the international level are desirable and could prove especially beneficial in terms of sharing experiences among countries with a long experience with the implementation of anti-extremist projects and those that have similar programs just starting up. ■

### Speakers

- Doc. JUDr. PhDr. Miroslav Mareš, PhD.
- Mgr. Michal Miklovič
- Astrid Bötticher, MA
- JUDr. Daniel Milo
- Thomas Grumke, Dr. phil., MA
- Mgr. et Mgr. Petra Vejvodová
- PhDr. Tomáš Nociar
- PhDr. Róbert Ondrejcsák, PhD.

#### **Doc. JUDr. PhDr. Miroslav Mareš, PhD.**

Miroslav Mareš is an Associate Professor at the Masaryk University (MU) in Brno. He is Head of the Section of the Security and Strategic Studies of the Department of Political Science of the Faculty of Social Studies MU. In 2005-2010 Mares was a leading researcher at the Institute of Comparative Political Research of the MU. In 2001-2008 he was an expert advisor at Regional Court in Brno (criminology). He is one of the leaders of extremism-related research in Central Europe. He focuses on research of extremism and terrorism, security analysis, party research. He is an author of number of expert publications.

#### **Mgr. Michal Miklovič**

Michal Miklovič holds diploma in Political Science from the Faculty of Humanity Studies at the Trnava University in Trnava. In 2003-2004 Mr. Miklovič worked as an analyst in a civic association "Aliancia Fair-play". Since 2003 he focuses on the research of political extremism in Slovakia, in which he cooperates with several NGOs. Since 2005 Mr. Miklovič works as an expert assistant at the Nation's Memory Institute, since 2009 he is editor at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, he specializes on research of foreign intelligence in the years 1948-1989. In the field of his research Mr. Miklovič is author of several expert studies.

**Astrid Bötticher, MA**

Astrid Bötticher is a PhD Candidate at the University of Hamburg (Thesis: "Extreme ideologies in comparison"). Mrs. Bötticher holds diploma in Political Science (Thesis: "New and traditional radical right – an ideology comparison"). With her research interest in theory and methodology of Extremism/Terrorism, she aims to advance the knowledge of social processes of political deviant behavior. Mrs. Bötticher is focused on Ideology, its strategies of survival, its functions and determinations in the ideology-customer, as well as effects of ideology on groups and society. Particularly, she pays attention to the field of social-psychology, sociology and political science within her research on political extremism. Mrs. Bötticher is a lecturer at the Private University Witten/Herdecke.

**JUDr. Daniel Milo**

Daniel Milo studied law at Comenius University in Bratislava and holds Doctor of Law degree in criminal law. His main field of expertise is extremism and hate crimes and he published or co-authored several publications on this issue. He worked for 7 years in People Against Racism - national anti-racist NGO in Slovakia - as a lawyer and chairman. In 2008 he joined OSCE-Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights as the Adviser on Combating Racism and Xenophobia, where he was responsible for law enforcement training on combating hate crimes and cyber hate related activities. Currently, he works at the Slovak Governments' Office, Department for Human Rights and National Minorities.

**Thomas Grumke, Dr. phil., MA**

Dr. Thomas Grumke studied political science and German literature in Osnabrück, Ottawa, Berlin, New York and Frankfurt/Oder. Mr. Grumke holds doctorate in „Right-Wing Extremism in the United States“ (advisors: Professor Michael

Minkenbergs and Professor Hans Joas). He was a Research Fellow of the German Marshall Fund of the United States in 1997 and of the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC, in 1998. From 2000-2004 Dr. Grumke worked at the Bertelsmann Foundation, Gütersloh, and the Center for Democratic Culture, Berlin. Since 2004 he is a specialist on right-wing extremism at the Interior Ministry of the State of Nordrhein-Westfalen. Since 2005 Dr. Grumke is associate lecturer for political science at Heinrich-Heine-University Düsseldorf. He is an author of various publications and articles on political extremism in German and English.

**Mgr. et Mgr. Petra Vejvodová**

Petra Vejvodová is a research fellow and PhD. Candidate at the Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University in Brno. In her research she is focusing on political extremism and radicalism in Europe. She works as a project manager in non-profit organization ERUDITIO PUBLICA o.p.s. Mrs. Vejvodová is devoted to projects to promote democratic culture and projects in the field of lifelong learning. She has written numerous expert studies on extremism, such as Autonomous Nationalism (Rexter 2008), Transnational Cooperation of the Far Right in the European Union and Attempts to Institutionalize Mutual Relations (in the publication The Extreme Right in Europe, editors Uwe Backes and Patrick Moreau, Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2012), co-author of publication Extreme Right and Extreme Left in the Czech Republic (Grada 2011).

**PhDr. Tomáš Nociar**

Tomáš Nociar holds diploma in Political Science from the Faculty of Philosophy at the Trnava University in Trnava. In his thesis he focused on current right-wing extremism. Tomáš Nociar received PhDr. from the Faculty of Political

Science and International Relations at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. In his research he focused on the development and activity of the extreme right in Slovakia. In the past Mr. Nociar cooperated with the Institute for Civic Education (Inštitútom pre občianske vzdelávanie), where he was co-author of "Report on the implementation of security policy on extremism in 2008". He is also co-author of the research paper "Right wing extremism in Central Europe" (2011). Currently, Mr. Nociar is an external PhD Candidate at the Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University in Bratislava.

**PhDr. Róbert Ondrejcsák, PhD.**

Dr. Róbert Ondrejcsák holds PhD. in International Relations, Mgr in Political Science, History and Philosophy. In 2010-2012 Dr. Ondrejcsák was State Secretary of Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. In 2007-2010 he was a Director of Center for European and North Atlantic Affairs (CENAA) and lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations at Matej Bel University. Previously Dr. Ondrejcsák was a Director of the Institute for Security and Defence Studies, he also served as a Deputy Chief of the Mission of the Slovak Embassy to Hungary, as well as Foreign and Security Policy advisor to Vice-Chairman of the Slovak Parliament, advisor of the NATO Department at the Slovak Ministry of Defence and analyst of the Slovak Centre for Strategic Studies. Dr. Ondrejcsák is author and editor of numerous publications and lecturer at several universities.

**2012**

**Center for European and North Atlantic Affairs**

Sládkovičova 7

811 06 Bratislava

[www.cenaa.org](http://www.cenaa.org)