



Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs

Extremism as a Security Threat in Central Europe

(Summary of the roundtable discussion held on November 16th, 2012, in Berlin: "German Experiences from Countering Extremism – Implications and Recommendations for Czech Republic and Slovakia; Central European Influence towards Germany")

With support of the Open Society Foundations

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Introduction

Following the first round table, which was held in June 2012 in Bratislava, experts from Germany, Czech Republic and Slovakia met for the second time during the round table discussion in Berlin to continue in the discussion on the cooperation and influences between extremist groups of the three countries. This time, the main purpose of the round table was to discuss not only inspirations and influences between German, Czech and Slovak extremists, but the prevention and repressive measures and policies as well.

Round tables are organized by Centre for European and North Atlantic Affairs within the project "Extremism as a Security Threat in Central Europe" and are held in small groups in order to achieve fruitful and productive discussion and further develop the cooperation between Slovak, Czech and German experts on the growing extremist tendencies in the region.

I. Panel Discussion: "Transnational Transfers of Extremist Concepts and Ideologies"

The first panel discussion directly followed up on the topic of the first round table and was intended to provide an introduction to other discussions to follow on the possible responses to extremist actions. Participants discussed the common features of ideology and rhetoric of extremist groups which enable cooperation between them, and also influences and inspirations arising from the axis Germany – Czech Republic – Slovakia as well as possible reverse mode. Additionally, except for the influence within the

Central Europe and the neighboring countries, the influence from Russia and Italy is also visible. Even though the event was intended to consider extremist movements in general in line with the project, most of the remarks and contributions dealt specifically with right-wing extremism as it represent the biggest threat in all three participating countries.

Resulting from the discussion, the phenomenon of globalization is the first and most relevant feature, which should be taken into the account when analyzing ideological platform enabling cooperation of extremist groups across countries or even regions. Globalization is perceived as something that frightens people with regard to all problematic issues which are globalized (e.g. crime, migration), it also facilitates the communication and cooperation even between Western and Eastern European extremists. They may have different problems to deal with or different minorities they object to, but the principle stays the same. Globalization is in extremist's perception presented as a tool or weapon of mass culture destruction, and refers to cultural and economic imperialism of American culture exemplified by "faceless" Hollywood or Wall Street. It also refers to so-called "ZOG", or Zionist Occupied Government, a conspiracy concept of Jewish supremacy over the world. This is the topic most of extremist groups could share, which is reflected in mutual communication, and for instance in supportive statements by NPD chairman to Jobbik representatives regarding the fight against imperialism and for the freedom of the nations. Therefore this is one of the most important ideological foundations of the international cooperation of these groups.

However, more common goals and issues presented by extremists are those which enable trans-national cooperation. Also capitalism, ecology or homosexuality represent new topics and trends that are incorporated into the shared ideology and strategy of extremist groups, especially by neo-Nazi groups. What they all have in common is shared criticism of pluralism, parliamentary democracy and politicians.

Another form of cooperation is expressed through the perception of Eastern European countries as an “escape room” or “racist vacation”. Because of weak civil societies, these countries are seen as more open and favorable to freedom of expression and are used for publishing and selling of music. One example is the CD production in Czech Republic and subsequent import back to Germany, where they are distributed.

Paradoxically, globalization brings a huge advantage for extremist groups – the internet. It offers new possibilities to cross borders, at least virtually, to form a shared identity of international neo-Nazi movement and to reach significantly wider audiences, e.g. through social networks, with the added bonus of guaranteed anonymity.

Besides the common enemy, topics and compatible ideology, the search for shared, collective identity based on race and European identity presents yet another reason why cooperation and overcoming of national conflicts and quarrels is possible. Pan-Aryan ideology expressed in the statement “your race is your uniform” is for instance something all nationalist would agree on. Additionally, establishment of cooperation with organizations from other countries or creation of international network for cooperation helps to create the impression of a relevant and capable political actor. It is an additional reason to foster trans-national cooperation.

When analyzing trans-national transfers of extremist concepts and ideologies, various strategies can be incorporated, especially in the neo-Nazi movement as represented by the fight against common enemy. The discussion during the round table also covered ideas and concepts adopted in Slovakia and Czech Republic, such as leaderless resistance or autonomous nationalism from Germany, the Italian Casapound movement, and music style called Hardbass from Russia.

Nevertheless, not all these concepts can be fully incorporated in the Czech and Slovak republics. The

Casapound movement, based on providing wide range of social activities especially for young people, as well as on supporting of low income social groups with the aim of bigger public support by focusing on social issues, is a good example. This goal is considered unattainable in the Czech Republic or Slovakia, mainly because of lack of financial resources and strong repressive measures aimed at extremist groups, which prevents them organizing public cultural and educational activities.

Hardbass, on the other hand, is an example of a concept, which even though apolitical in its origins in the Netherlands, was incorporated in Czech and Slovak Republic especially from Russia and Ukraine, where it is popular among football fans and hooligans with neo-Nazi background. Hardbass is performed in public spaces and is based on provocation, threatening and demonstration of force. In general, inspirations coming from Russia usually have a violent element and military background.

Participants of the round table also discussed the possibility of reverse mode of inspirations and influences. Although influences from Germany towards the Czech Republic and Slovakia are most prevalent and Slovak and Czech extremists are more in the role as observers than new sources of inspirations, still some examples of influences from Czech Republic can be identified. For instance, the approach towards the Roma minority, including demonstrations and marches organized near the Roma settlements received positive mentions in the neighboring countries, including Germany. Slovakia is a very good example of this with its imitation of the Czech model on how to “treat” the Roma minority. In addition to different influences, in case of the Slovak Republic it is not only the German and Czech influence that should be taken into the account - because a strong inspiration from the neighboring Hungary is present as well. When looking at the Slovak neo-Nazi scene, many adopted concepts can be found, including those of autonomous nationalists from Germany and Czech Republic; newly established political party People’s Party Our Slovakia,

with election strategy based on anti-Roma marches inspired by the Czech scene; and rhetoric of “Gypsy criminality,” influenced by both Czech and Hungarian examples.

Partial conclusions

- *The strongest and most relevant vector of influence and dissemination is from Germany towards Czech Republic and then Slovakia. Although some minor inspirations or positive assessments in the opposite direction can be found, no significant reverse mode is observable.*
- *Fright resulting from globalization, focus on social issues and strong criticism of pluralism and politicians presented as the fight for freedom or justice are those main aspects of modern extremist movements which foster their growing support and popularity.*
- *With the emergence of new issues such as globalization, criticism of capitalism or economy and cultural “imperialism” of USA, common European pan-Aryan identity provides the basis of current transnational cooperation.*

II. Panel Discussion: "Prevention of Extremism – German, Slovak and Czech Experiences"

The aim of second panel discussion was to cover best practices and specific actions which should be undertaken in order to prevent growing tendencies of extremism in society. Participants from all three involved countries introduced the most relevant actions undertaken in order to prevent growing tendencies of support of extremism throughout the society and also presented the evaluation of current situation in their countries.

Speakers agreed that the prevention part of anti-extremism strategy should consist of three dimensions.

First one is government action; secondly security agencies are involved as well and last but not least civil society and nongovernmental sector plays crucial role.

Public opinion is the most important issue that has to be dealt with in relation to the prevention strategy. For instance, the public in Germany is becoming less sensitive towards hate crimes, which in turn are on the rise. The public opinion is shaped especially by politicians who do not hesitate to use arguments typical for right-wing extremist parties in order to gain wider public support, especially on social or minority issues. This is typical for all countries taken into consideration. While in Germany even center-left and center-right political parties often go beyond the limits of democratic arguments in an attempt to impress the voters, in Slovak Republic it is not only far-right parties that use nationalist and anti-Roma or anti-Hungarian rhetoric to get support, on the contrary, it is becoming a common feature of the agenda of all political parties. It is linked to the observable phenomenon of growing demands for right-wing extremist ideas and solutions among the public, which is reflected in several surveys in the region.

As was discussed later during the last panel discussion, all three countries rather tend to adopt repression than prevention anti-extremist measures. The predominant focus of preventive measures is on education, increasing the knowledge and fighting demagoguery.

Participants agreed that many similarities between all three countries exist. One of the most important ones is that even though we have a new quality of extremism, we have no adequate response. Moreover, almost every action which is undertaken or change of approach within the anti-extremism strategy is stimulated by reaction to some violent crime or sudden negative development in the country. Another problem is the inability of state security agencies to prevent hate crimes. Proven by increasing number of hate crimes and attack incidents in general, state agencies often fail to prevent right-wing extremist crimes. According to experts, the main reasons why state agencies in Europe

cannot prevent hate crimes are the lack of intelligence-sharing and competition between different state agencies in combination with insufficient understanding of the nature of extremism and hate crimes. The shift of attention towards different threats such as Islamic terrorism is also a contributing factor.

Conceptual inconsistency is another problem factor in this matter. Resulting from absence of agreement on the terminology (e.g. should we use “extremism” or rather “hate crimes?”), ineffective and unstable policies and measures are adopted, often not reflecting the constantly changing and developing extremist tendencies.

Especially in the field of prevention of extremism, non-governmental organizations should act as a complementary element to state actions. Their activities are usually aimed at data gathering, legal counseling, victim assistance, education, and shaping of public opinion. There are many examples of German, Czech and Slovak NGOs, which play an important role in the prevention of extremism in the society. Unfortunately, without sufficient cooperation with the state authorities and among each other as well, adequate prevention cannot be achieved. Considering the situation of non-governmental sector in Germany, Slovakia and Czech Republic, the prevailing problems are very similar. They consist particularly of the lack of resources, lack of cooperation between NGOs and government agencies and absence of networks of cooperating NGOs dealing with this issue. However, still several good practices can be found in this respect, including public campaigning, youth education, victim counseling or different forms of counter-demonstrations on important dates.

Platform or forum that enables state authorities to discuss know-how and recommendations with NGO experts would be a welcome initiative. This is especially important strategy because of different experiences and nature of information that are possessed by state institution on the one hand and non-governmental organization on the other. In addition,

NGOs often come up with visions and new initiatives and practices, while state agencies tend to technical aspects of the solutions. Nevertheless, problems often arise from the lack of shared perception of the problem due to diverging experiences. As was emphasized in the discussion, state officials often do not have any experience with NGOs and vice-versa. Additionally, the most common complication is the lack of interest from the state officials to attend this kind of meetings – partly because they tend to take criticism of the current situation as the criticism of themselves, and partly because governments have often no interest in giving up the monopoly on changing and controlling the policies.

Partial Conclusions

- *The situation in Germany, Czech Republic and Slovakia is similar in several respects. While state authorities are often unable to counter the changing nature of extremism because of lack of knowledge and awareness about the issue, NGOs cope with the same problems in every country (e.g. financial resources, lack of cooperation and knowledge-sharing, lack of qualification and experts etc.).*
- *In all three countries, repressive measures prevail over preventive measures, which are often insufficient or missing.*
- *Governmental and non-governmental organizations should act as complementary institutions, therefore sharing of information and recommendations should be a priority.*
- *The issue of conceptual agreement is also crucial. Without clear definition of extremist action, the preventive measures cannot be defined and implemented properly.*

III. Panel Discussion: "Repressive Measures to Combat Extremism"

The third panel focused on a core aspect of anti-extremist strategy, i.e. repressive measures adopted in order to fight extremist actions.

Repression measures contain several elements. Firstly, an approach of how to deal with extremists in the society should be chosen. Participants discussed two different approaches how to deal with the issue. First one – “not to catch the fish but to give away the water” – is one of the ways of social control, based on the assumption of interrupting of the extremists' surrounding through breaking of ties, e.g. by the encouragement of civil initiatives or gossips as the most powerful way of social control. The second approach is “to try to catch the fish so it cannot influence others” – and on the contrary it relies on the presence of police and state organs as well as on legislative and executive actions.

Monitoring and interrogation are other key parts of a repressive policy, which means the exploration of extremists' networks followed by their destruction and fragmentation. However, the final conviction of the extremist is the crucial part of the successful and effective monitoring action. Nevertheless, penalization is not always the most effective action; on the contrary, its impact can be wholly reversed. Penalization often ends up with martyrdom of the convicted person and jail can offer new possibilities for networking and contacts. Unless this issue is sufficiently addressed and resolved, penalization does not offer a satisfactory solution.

As was pointed out during the discussion, ideology should be taken into account as an important part of extremist activities, because not every person who is in the direct contact with extremists is also a radical (so-called “pizza-boy problem”).

Following the introduction of key elements of repression measures, the discussion covered also the

nature of anti-extremism strategy and the basis of the counter-extremism approach in the three countries. Speakers agreed that all counter-extremist measures are insufficient and ineffective because they do not address all aspects of the problem - the whole life cycle of the extremist. Firstly, successful counter-extremism policy should prevent the dissemination of radical ideas, and then protect citizens through ensuring public safety, and finally it should contain also de-radicalization program. All legal frameworks as well as structure- and capacity-building should be based on analysis, which is unfortunately missing. Because of lack of information and proper analysis, the dimension of capacity-building and proper strategy adoption is not possible.

Participants from Germany and Czech Republic labeled strategies in effect in their countries as predominantly repressive. Moreover, in the case of Czech Republic we can speak of military democracy, which is even more repressive than in Germany (e.g. in punishments, banning of political parties and civic associations or judicial rulings). However, in case of Slovak Republic the classification was not so clear and the ambiguous approach of fighting extremism, e.g. ad-hoc reaction to the extremist actions, seems to be the most relevant description.

Furthermore, similarly as in the case of prevention, similar problems can be identified in the repressive measures. The issue of conceptualization should be mentioned yet again – whether to use term “hate crime” rather than “extremism” etc. – and the question of symmetry or asymmetry of law against right-wing and left-wing extremism is also crucial, since the vast majority of anti-extremist measures, including the legislation and policies, are aimed almost exclusively on right-wing extremists.

Partial Conclusions

- *Successful and effective repression action requires a comprehensive approach. It*

means to include prevention, repression and also de-radicalization.

- *Additionally, all policies and strategies adopted should be built on careful and in-depth analysis, which is missing at present. Experts and sufficient structure and capabilities are also necessary to counter extremism effectively.*
- *More emphasis should be therefore given to proper analysis upon which legislative measures and policies should be consequently built. However, no less attention should be given to the action of monitoring and affecting destruction and fragmentation of extremist networks by breaking the ties or encouraging civil initiatives in the extremists' surrounding.*

Conclusions

The aim of the round table was to achieve open discussion in order to share ideas and best practices regarding the most effective and successful ways to combat extremism, whether in the field of prevention or repression. The necessity of common discussion and knowledge and information sharing was identified by participants as the core element of counter-extremism action. However, common discussion between representatives of NGOs and state authorities is often complicated by the lack of mutual trust. One possible solution proposed by the experts is to adopt the Chatham House Rules, which enables the participants to openly discuss their views in confidentiality with regard to sources of information. One of the many conclusions and recommendations of the round table is to involve also state officials in future discussions.

Among other conclusions is the necessity to approach the extremism problem on the basis of regionalism, i.e. to design counter-extremists approaches primarily based on the specificity of the region. More attention

should be also given to the education of professional groups, which are in direct every-day contact with radicals and extremists and to public opinion in general. ■

Speakers

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 Minkenberg 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 Papiěžová

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 involved in 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 a diploma in Political Science from the Faculty of Philosophy at the Trnava University in Trnava. In his thesis he focused on current manifestations of right-wing extremism. Mr. Nociar received PhDr. from the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. In his research he focused on the development and activity of the extreme right groups 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 a 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 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 as well as an analyst of the Slovak Centre for Strategic Studies. Dr. Ondrejcsák is

author and editor of numerous publications and lecturer at several universities.

Dr. Orkan Kösemen

Orkan Kösemen is project manager at the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Gütersloh, Germany in charge of the Leadership-Programme for Migrant Associations. Before that he was responsible for the Bertelsmann Stiftung Project “Strategies for Combating Right-Wing Extremism in Europe.” He holds a doctorate in social sciences (political science), which he obtained at the Humboldt University Berlin, where he was also a lecturer on domestic German politics. His areas of research include European Union enlargement policies, institutional change, the politics of Central-Eastern Europe, the European radical right, integration policies, leadership and immigrant associations.

Mgr. Radka Vicenová

Radka Vicenová received her Master’s degree in Political Science at the Faculty of Philosophy at the Comenius University in Bratislava. During her studies she focused on the issue of extremism in Central and Eastern Europe. She has long-standing experience in the non-governmental sector. As a project manager she cooperated with the civic association People Against Racism on several research projects in Slovakia and international networks (RAXEN, INACH, ENAR), focused on the analysis of the far right and neo-Nazi groups in Slovak Republic. She also participated on various projects in cooperation with civic associations People in Peril and PDCS. She joined CENAA in 2012.

Mgr. Václav Walach

Václav Walach is a post-graduate student of political science with focus on security theory at the Faculty of Social Science of the Masaryk University in Brno. Václav Walach focuses on political theory, social theory, and methodology of social sciences and issues of security in the context of the social exclusion.

Currently, he works on research focusing on the importance of security in the social discussion of regions with regard to social exclusion. During his studies, he also undertook an internship in the Paris-based NGO – European Grassroots Antiracist Movement. Václav Walach is a member of the Czech Criminological Society. He is the author of numerous analyses.

Astrid Bötticher, MA

Astrid Bötticher is a PhD Candidate at the University of Hamburg (Thesis: "Extreme ideologies in comparison"). Mrs. Bötticher holds a 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 behaviour. Mrs. Bötticher focuses 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 of political extremism. Mrs. Bötticher is a lecturer at the Private University Witten/Herdecke.

MSc. Pavol Draxler

Mr. Draxler begins his expertise in field during a study of internal European conflicts program in 1999 at Academia Istropolitana NOVA and University of Limerick. The same year he was appointed as NGO representative in the national Counter-extremism committee at Slovak MOI. In 2002 he was the representative of the minister of interior and in 2004 he was appointed as head of the Committee from where he left state service at 2006. He finished his studies at University of Linköping in 2009 where he was researching international aspect of extremism. In 2010 he was selected as Independent expert for the European Commission in the field of preventing and combating criminality: Prevention, Preparedness and

Consequence Management of Terrorism and other Security related risks. He is a member of EU RAN network and heads the security-society.org knowledge database.

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 Mr. Mareš 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. Barbora Padrtová

Barbora Padrtová holds a Masters degree in Security and Strategic Studies from the Faculty of Social Studies of the Masaryk University in Brno. In 2009 she graduated in International Relations and European Studies from the Metropolitan University in Prague. During her studies she studied International Relations and Political Science at the Universiteit Twente in the Netherlands. In 2011 she was working at the Political Section of the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in Washington, D.C. Currently she is working as a project manager at CENAA.