



REGERINGSKANSLIET

Justitiedepartementet

INSTITUTE *for*
STRATEGIC DIALOGUE



Preventing and Countering Far-Right Extremism:

European Cooperation

COUNTRY REPORTS

About the Project

From 2012 to 2014, the Swedish Ministry of Justice and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) are partnering on a pan-European project aiming to enhance understanding of what works in preventing and countering far-right extremism. These reports were commissioned as part of the project to document the history, existence and varieties of far-right extremism in 10 countries (Sweden, UK, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Slovak Republic). Over the course of the two year project, the Ministry and ISD will carry out research and country visits to identify measures taken at the policy level and by civil society, and gather best practices in preventing and countering far-right extremism. The project will produce a policy recommendations report; a best practices handbook; and an e-learning tool to provide practical training for practitioners; and will seed a long-term network of experts and practitioners working to counter far-right extremism.

The project is led by **Hanga Sántha**, a jurist specialised in public international law at the Division for Democratic Issues at the Swedish Ministry of Justice, and **Vidhya Ramalingam**, a Projects Coordinator at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

About the Editors

Vidhya Ramalingam is a Projects Coordinator at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, where she leads ISD's work on right-wing extremism and integration.

Alex Glennie is a Programme Manager at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, where she oversees a range of projects on security and integration.

Sebastien Feve is a Programme Associate at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, working across a range of issues related to international security, counter-terrorism policy and extremism.

Acknowledgements

The Swedish Ministry of Justice and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue are grateful to the European Commission for its financial support for the project. We are grateful for the support of the governments of Finland, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands, as well as Exit Fryshuset as associate partners on this project. We also extend thanks to the authors for the papers presented in this volume.

© Ministry of Justice, Sweden and Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2012.

This material is offered free of charge for personal and non-commercial use, provided the source is acknowledged. For commercial or any other use, prior written permission must be obtained from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. In no case may this material be altered, sold or rented. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue does not generally take positions on policy issues. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organisation.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



With financial support from the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union European Commission – Directorate-General Home Affairs

Cover design by Carol Enright

Cover photo: The bombed government building in Oslo, Norway, after a far-right terrorist attack on 22 July 2011.

Preventing and Countering Far-Right Extremism:

European Cooperation

COUNTRY REPORTS

POLAND

Rafal Pankowski

The history of right-wing extremism

The history of contemporary right-wing extremism in Poland goes back to the 1920s and 1930s. In 1922, a right-wing extremist assassinated the first President of Poland, Gabriel Narutowicz, who had been elected with the support of the left and national minorities. The right-wing nationalist (National Democrat) movement led by Roman Dmowski became increasingly influenced by the radical model of anti-democratic and fascist movements which appeared in other European countries. Anti-Semitism in particular became a key element of the radicalised version of the nationalist political identity. The nationalists enjoyed support from the Catholic Church and were particularly active among the young, for example through the student organisation All-Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszepolska*, MW). A more radical splinter group appeared in 1934: the National-Radical Camp (*Oboz Narodowo-Radykalny*, ONR). This was banned by the Polish authorities, but it continued its activities and gained some support, especially among youth.

During World War II, the majority of the radical nationalists were simultaneously anti-German and anti-Soviet. Although anti-Jewish pogroms took place in some Polish towns (such as in Jedwabne in 1941), the organised extreme right generally did not collaborate with the Nazis during the German occupation, which helped its reputation in the decades that followed.

Some former members of the ONR were allowed to continue their political activity throughout the communist period (in the form of the Catholic Association *PAX*), and the communist regime occasionally resorted to anti-Semitic propaganda itself (disguised in crude “anti-Zionist” rhetoric). In 1968 this resulted in a wave of emigration of several thousand Jews who had been living in Poland.

Since the early 1990s there has been a clear resurgence of the extreme nationalist movement in Poland. A large number of radical groups appeared on the scene at this time, recruiting members from the violent skinhead subculture. The most notable of these extremist groups has been the National Rebirth of Poland (*Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski*, NOP) which adopted a “national-revolutionary” position. The racist rock music scene developed in Poland in the 1990s, while Polish football stadiums became places where neo-Nazi symbols were commonplace and extreme-right groups often recruited hooligans into their ranks.

Characteristics of the contemporary extreme right

The Polish extreme right is characterised by a strongly anti-Semitic ideology which has persisted in spite of the fact that the number of Jews living in Poland today is very small (approximately 10,000 in a country with 38 million inhabitants). Nevertheless, anti-Semitic discourse remains widespread. The

hostility to real or imagined Jews allegedly ruling Poland is emblematic of a more general hostility to diversity and liberal democracy.

Since the early 2000s, aggressive homophobic statements and activities have become another feature of the extreme right discourse in Poland. The violent opposition to gay rights has allowed the Polish far right to find allies across the broader spectrum of conservative political opinion. Other groups that have been singled out by the far-right include the Roma and other ethnic minorities, Muslims and other religious minorities, migrants, political opponents including members of feminist and anti-racist groups, and youth subcultures which are deemed “foreign” (such as reggae music fans). This hostility to various “enemy groups” is frequently accompanied by violence.

A distinguishing ideological feature of many extreme right groups in Poland is their self-professed devotion to a fundamentalist version of Roman Catholicism which is promoted, among others, by Radio Maryja, a mass-audience Catholic radio station which often airs anti-Semitic and xenophobic content. On a number of occasions, Radio Maryja and its leader, Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, have openly endorsed the activities of extreme right groups. Over the years, Rydzyk has built a large social movement and a media conglomerate including its own TV station and a daily newspaper.

Two main contemporary extreme right groups have laid claim to the traditions and ideology of the 1930s radical nationalist groups by adopting their names: the National-Radical Camp (ONR) and the All-Polish Youth (MW). The MW was re-formed by Roman Giertych in 1989 and the current-day ONR was re-established by skinhead activists in the early

2000s. Originally, the MW and ONR represented slightly different versions of the nationalist ideology (the ONR being more radical than the MW), but recently both groups have joined forces through common activities aimed at an “overthrow of the system”.

Each of them has a core activist base estimated at several hundred people (no detailed figures are available), but their mobilising potential is much larger. The annual Independence Day march in Warsaw on 11 November 2012, organised by the ONR and the MW, attracted numerous other right-wing groups, football fans from across Poland and far-right activists from several other countries, with at least 20,000 participants. The creation of a new organisation, the National Movement (*Ruch Narodowy*, RN) was announced by the ONR and MW leaders on that occasion. The RN is a political movement which is expected to transform itself into a political party. It is widely believed to be modelled on the Hungarian extreme-right party Jobbik, and its newly-formed strong-arm squad, the Independence Guard (*Straz Niepodleglosci*), is modelled on Jobbik's paramilitary wing, the Hungarian Guard.

The National Rebirth of Poland (NOP) led by Adam Gmurczyk, remains a key rival to the ONR-MW alliance among the most radical elements of the far-right spectrum. Although ideologically similar, it opposes the newly-formed RN, competing for support among nationalist-minded youth. The NOP enjoys support among skinhead groups and some football supporters, especially in Wroclaw where it organises its own annual march on 11 November (in 2012 it attracted some 5,000 participants). The NOP is strongly connected with international extremist networks such as Roberto Fiore's European National Front (formerly the International Third Position). It

also maintains friendly relations with the Ukrainian *Svoboda* party. The NOP creed includes a particular emphasis on Holocaust denial, and it has promoted publications such as “The Turner Diaries”, popular among violent right-wing extremists internationally. Its membership is estimated at several hundred hard-core activists.

In addition to the NOP, there are several other smaller and/or local groups active in Poland, including cells of the international neo-Nazi networks, Blood & Honour and Combat 18. There are also some smaller fringe groups espousing an anti-Christian, neo-pagan version of the radical nationalist ideology (such as *Niklot* or *Zadruga*).

Incidents, arrests and convictions

Article 13 of the Polish Constitution (adopted in 1997) states that:

Political parties and other organisations whose programmes are based upon totalitarian methods and the modes of activity of Nazism, fascism and communism, as well as those whose programmes or activities sanction racial or national hatred, the application of violence for the purpose of obtaining power or to influence the State policy, or provide for the secrecy of their own structure or membership, shall be prohibited.

However, the above provision has hardly been used in practice, even in the cases of the most extreme groups. The only instance of a right-wing extremist organisation having been banned for its unlawful activity is the Brzeg branch of the ONR, which was prohibited by a regional court in 2009. In 2011, the Constitutional Court dropped a case brought by a

lower level court on a possible ban against the NOP on procedural grounds.

The penal code includes provisions against hate speech (article 256). Nevertheless, the Polish legal system has frequently been criticised for failing to deal effectively with cases of hate speech and hate crime.

Many of the documented cases of racist abuse have taken place at football grounds. For example, on 26 October 2012, during a top division game between Podbeskidzie Bielsko-Biala and Lechia Gdansk, local supporters directed racist chants at a black player from the visiting team (a Burkina Faso national team player, Abdou Razack Traoré), shouting profanities and “We are a white team”. Due to counter-measures and fines introduced by the Polish Football Association in cooperation with the anti-racist “Never Again” Association, racist and fascist symbols appear in stadiums less frequently than some years ago, but they are still displayed occasionally.

Arrests have usually been made in connection with large-scale riots involving the far right. As a result of violent clashes provoked by radical nationalist and football hooligans before the Poland-Russia game (during the European Football Championship) on 12 June 2012, approximately 200 people were detained, 59 perpetrators were sentenced within a week, including 18 prison sentences, with some other cases taking more time. One hundred and seventy-four right-wing extremists were detained by the police during clashes accompanying the 11 November 2012 far-right demonstration in Warsaw, when 22 policemen were injured (see above).

In a recent publicised case of a potentially deadly plot by a small extreme right cell, on 20 November 2012 the authorities revealed that a few weeks earlier they

had arrested a 45-year-old chemistry professor from Krakow who planned to detonate 4 tonnes of explosives during a session of the Polish Parliament, with the aim of killing the President and other key figures. The suspect was known to hold right-wing extremist and anti-Semitic views and he was allegedly inspired by the example of killings committed by Anders Breivik in Norway in 2011 and by Timothy McVeigh in Oklahoma City in 1995.

According to this register, the first ten months of 2012 saw a 30 per cent increase in the number of recorded cases compared to a similar period in the previous year, with several hundred cases noted each year. Since the early 1990s, 62 murders have been documented as committed by members or sympathisers of right-wing extremist groups in Poland.

The current state of data on right-wing extremism

State institutions publish a very limited amount of data on right-wing extremist activity and hate crime. As such, the vast majority of available data on the subject comes from civil society organisations such as the “Never Again” Association which publishes the *Brown Book*,¹ the most extensive register of racist incidents and other xenophobic crimes committed in Poland. Since 1994 “Never Again” has produced a regular publication in the form of *Nigdy Wiecej* (“Never Again”) magazine, providing information and analysis on hate crime and on extremist and racist groups operating in Poland. Recent statistics are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Far-right hate crime cases registered in “Brown Book”

Year	Recorded crimes
2009	234
2010	264
2011	306
2012 (to October)	305

Source: “Never Again” Association, 2012

1. See <http://www.nigdywiecej.org/brunatna-ksiega> for more details.