



**NATIONAL AND RIGHT-WING RADICALISM
IN THE NEW DEMOCRACIES:
Hungary**

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When the panic is over – Emerging right radicals and the quality of democracy in post-communist central Europe

Social reformers in the late period of state socialism saw practically no likelihood of the appearance of any form of political extremism. They thought that there should be no proponents of left radicalism, at any rate, in the wake of the collapse of the state socialist system. They also thought that during the period of the construction of democracy and a market economy at the same time, when new middle classes are quickly emerging, there may be little or no possibilities of right radicalism at any rate. Political analysts did not rule out the possibility of some earlier communist elite groups making attempts at restoring the previous regime. But they considered the possibility of radical right-wing groups trying to rehash pre-1945 ideological constructions to be equal to zero, as it was not even state socialism itself that cleared these political culture elements, individuals and organisations, in terms of form, off the scene from 1948-1949 on. They disappeared after their defeat in 1945 and between 1945 and 1948 the societies of Central Europe ultimately proved that they were quite capable of functioning without them.

Moreover, the changes in Central Europe in year 1989 were facilitated by important external sponsors and patrons in the US and in West Europe. These entities also found it difficult to imagine that a trend that is independent of them could appear and thrive without them and, in some sense against them, in the market of political ideologies. Some communist type attempts could still fit in with their model because in their view, such attempts could have expected to be able to count on Russian forces which, though forced out of government in the nineties, still had substantial potentials (indeed, other communist governments of more remote countries could have also been expected to help). But who on earth would have sponsored radical right wing or even neo-fascist or other reconstructive national trends in Central Europe, from the outside? And since no such external sponsor seemed to be lurking on the horizon at that time and the 1945 ceasure was regarded to be impossible to override, indeed, even the appearance of such forces was considered to be practically ruled out, so when they did enter the scene nonetheless, the presence of such forces was regarded as an anomaly in history, a mere malfunction in the process of the system change. And since such groups were using pre-1945 parlance not only in countries where they had been widely used even before 1945 (including some East-German provinces, Romania and Hungary) but also in countries that had definitely been its enemies (such as the Czech Republic and Russia), it all came all the more as a surprise. Some liberal analysts responded to this phenomenon by what could be

best described as moral panic. The first reactions included indignation, isolation and stigmatising, rather than analysis and efforts to understand the process. It was not even possible to talk about strategies, since that would have taken recognition of the fact that these were not ad hoc or occasional movements that are easy to remove from the scene but some more durable formations, ones whose eradication takes longer and requires coordinated efforts. Applying force to isolate such movements, however natural a solution this could have appeared to the leftist and liberal public, was simply out of the question. In the post-1989 political public, shaped much more on the basis of American, rather than European (particularly German) models, such techniques qualified as strictly illegitimate. After all, the new democracy - so its external sponsors thought - could not be endangered by such marginal attempts. Why, then, should effective legal solutions have been sought for in order to quickly force them out of the legitimate spaces? After all, such tools - thought many an internal and external representative of the liberal side - would not only have been disproportionate to the dangerousness of those movements but they would also have created conceptual precedents for restricting the freedom of speech that could later on be applied elsewhere, against others. Though some examples were known from countries governed by the rule of law (German and Austrian solutions), which could reconcile the forcing out of the radical right from the political field to the principles of a democratic system, yet even the most pessimistic saw no similarities, to be taken seriously, between the level of support enjoyed after 1945 by the German far right and the post-1989 Hungarian or Romanian far right movements, which could have justified tough prohibitions. All of these, however, intensified, rather than rule out, the debate about what to do.

Debates relating to right-wing radicalism have, since the 1990s, almost nowhere been limited to searching for ways to deal with extremist groups. To the contrary, the space in which subcultures of tough radicalism - incidentally, with politically and technically negligible power for the time being - evolved, was outlined by the unexpected appearance of neo-nationalism, and the old and new types of populism. Some of the focal points of the debate need to be mentioned here:

Nationalism. In the first half of the nineties old community ideologies - religion and nation - appeared on the stage in parallel with the break-up of communist-socialist collective identities. Almost everywhere ethno-national nation concepts gained dominance over state-national and territorial identities. Some of these movements - particularly in South-East Europe: in Serbia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and, indeed in Slovakia - rekindled a

variety of militant ethno-national traditions as well. An array of techniques for forcing ethnic groups out of the arena, along with manifestations of distrust and discrimination against minorities, appeared (and at that time no one saw how durably) again. As 'long forgotten' antagonists of the post-soviet historical models, the Croatian Ustasas, the Serbs' anti-Tito partisan units from World War II, Tiso's Slovakia, Antonescu in Romania, Hungary's participation in World War II on the eastern front or auxiliary troops of Ukrainians, Estonians, Latvians on the German occupants' side, turned into positive or at least understandable movements and political solutions.

Winners and losers. This dual concept was one of the most-discussed issues in public opinion polls and in social policies pursued in the nineties. It was widely held back then that losers had not been prepared for the possibility of their becoming 'losers' of the changes. Thus at the beginning they did not really understand what had happened to them, how come they were not nearly as fortunate as many others. The first surveys took the concept of subjective loss or its threat as their point of departure and they revealed sentiments and self-justifying views of the world. They did not separate economic, income-related, political or life-quality type losses from and gains. At the same time, it became quite commonplace to declare that disappointed losers are more prone to seek revenge for their failures by political means and that losers are more sensitive and responsive to radical or extreme ideologies, for if they failed, the new world must surely be unjust. On the one hand, it has been proven in all of the different countries of this region, with their different social and cultural environments and atmospheres, that in principle, people who have failed in any relevant aspect will make up a larger proportion of proponents of extreme views and political ideologies. Having stated this, however, we have said nothing about the types of radicalism people are made more responsive to by failures and losses [really and/or actually] suffered in what types of areas. Or about what cultural media 'absorb', dampen or neutralise most effectively the loss of status [dispensing thereby the responsiveness to radicalism] and which are the ones that simply leave people on their own - together with their unpredictable successes and almost predictable defeats. Nothing has been said about whether there are any differences between different countries in this respect either. Incidentally, right radicalism seems to be easier to learn and, particularly, it is adopted by people in groups easier than by individuals separately. That is, there is a need for some confirmation for one thinking that the world is badly put together to choose none other but right-radical (RR) programmes and views of the world from among the

multitude of possible answers. If right radical is chosen by others around me as well, they are practically offering me to refrain from choosing anything else.

RR is a social fantasy that does not, in itself, automatically lead to violence. But if the social medium concerned is characterised by a marked presence of the culture of violence, it may offer a foundation for RR fantasies which the latter may, in return, actively strengthen and intensify. We hold that changes in our culture of violence and in the level of violence in a given society are driven, in a sense, by their own independent forces. And the essential task is to prevent the development of the above types of interconnections, even by some special solution of social engineering, if there is no other means. We believe that East-Central European problems are aggravated here in this respect by the fact that - according to criminologists [e.g. Major General Dr. Kacziba, Budapest] - massive centres of violence have been developing in the Central European region since the early nineties: the number of criminal acts committed by young men has been on the increase, the exposure of minors to crime has been growing and the participation of women in criminal activities has been expanding. Sub-cultures of gang violence have been spreading. The directions and determinations of these are fully independent of RR. However, if RR absorbs some of this culture of violence, it may create explosive combinations that are very difficult to tackle. Some are of the view that legalising right-radical political parties and their integration in the parliamentary system will render this peculiarly tinted violence manageable as well. Indeed, some are convinced that there is really no other way to access this social medium, and in this way we may manage to introduce some regulations into them too. At any rate in the new Central Europe these are still merely theoretical considerations. Similar regulatory attempts have in some instances lead to situations quite the opposite of what had been intended. RR parties began, after a while, to function as political umbrellas for such subcultures and made it even more difficult to tackle by means available for the police as would have been necessary.

The weakening of integration relationships are considered by most analysts to be contributing to the spreading of RR cultures. Individuals who have been left to their own resources and who have been stripped of recognition become exposed to all sorts of simplified explanations of the world. Even if they are not permanent havens, the small communities offered by RR present some appreciation-substitute for many. So far, this is commonplace. What we do not understand, however, is why is only RR capable in the post-1989 societies of offering relatively large numbers of such community havens and why can such havens not really evolve left of centre?

Little is known about the hardness of the dividing lines around RR and of their political and social permeability or impermeability in the various countries. In contrast to the well-defined dividing lines between centre-right and local right radical in West European countries, centre-right and right radical in Central Europe are joined by gradual transition or divided by rather soft dividing lines. Liberals and left-of-centre politicians wish to see their own centre-right partners in Parliament to distance themselves from the RR in a conservative manner as is observed in West Europe and to see RR quarantined. As a consequence of Central European social histories no such 'hard dialisms' are really likely to evolve in this region.

Moreover, the picture in Central Europe is further complicated by the fact that even right-left polarisation itself has not been granted in an unchanged form over a longer period of time in most local political systems [consequently, RR will be rather difficult to analyse and interpret in itself]. The reason for this is that RR is replaced or overridden, from time to time, by authoritarian-libertarian opposition [like in Slovakia twice, in Poland around year 2006, and then very likely in Hungary from 2010]. If that were the case or if this is the case, then the question is what impacts such transitions have or will have on RR's attempts to gain positions. In what cases can they find themselves up against the new polarisation of the political system and in what cases will they be able to tackle the challenge?

Studies of radicalism in East-Germany underlined the propensity of young people with low qualifications and with integration difficulties to adopt and follow RR ideology elements. What is going to be left of this now in East-Central Europe? For a very large proportion of those with little or no qualifications here belong to the Roma community and they are surely not going to find RR explanations for their grievances. On the other hand, a young social group facing temporary difficulties in finding employment, somewhat over-qualified in fact in comparison to the existing level of economic advancement, has also appeared. What proportion of these people will, even if temporarily, give up their efforts at finding jobs just to find themselves under RR influences? Or is this process already underway?

There is a need for a new interpretation of the relationship between radicalism and the middle classes in the Central European space. Historical and international examples show that frightened lower-middle class and, indeed, middle class groups tend to respond most quickly and to join the proponents of RR. Those examples also show that they may respond to suddenly growing uncertainty in their milieu by panic. And RR is a panic response. Social middle classes - old and new alike - are extremely fragmented in Central Europe and so are their typical responses. Many of the elements of those responses may mutually extinguish one

another. What needs to be clarified here is what comes after panic, what their responses will be like in the near future, will these social groups be able to learn in such contexts and if the answer is yes, how could this learning process be accelerated and stabilised.

It is clear, on the whole, that the attribute 'extreme right' is misleading and that issues to be tackled here are linked not to social marginal groups or marginal ideologies, but to broader and in some sense more central problems of modernisation, social cohesion, personal recognition and status loss as well as efforts at eliminating exclusion mechanisms.