

A stylized map of Europe composed of a grid of grey dots. Several dots are highlighted in red, indicating specific locations or points of interest. The title 'Right-Wing Extremism in Poland' is overlaid on the map.

Right-Wing Extremism in Poland

RAFAL PANKOWSKI
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- While the Polish extreme right does not have its own representation on the level of a parliamentary political party, the mainstream populist conservative party, Law and Justice (PiS) absorbed a big portion of the radical nationalist ideology and cadres during the last years. The far-right impact on mainstream politics could be recently observed in Warsaw, when in September 2012 a mass street demonstration was organized jointly by the PiS, Solidarity trade union and the far-right Radio Maryja movement.
- The extreme right places decidedly more emphasis on symbolic and identity politics than on economic and social policy. Although issues such as unemployment provide an important context to extreme-right activities, cultural factors remain decisive for right-wing groups.
- The majority of the Polish extreme-right groups subscribes to a Catholic fundamentalist ideology combined with a strongly radical ethnic version of nationalism including antisemitism. Their ideology is accompanied by a very traditionalist view on family and gender roles and concerning foreign policy marked by an opposition to the EU.



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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

FNS	National Socialist Front (<i>Front Narodowo-Socjalistyczny</i>)
HP	The Polish Regiments (<i>Hufce Polskie</i>)
INR	National-Radical Institute (<i>Instytut Narodowo-Radykalny</i>)
LPR	League of Polish Families (<i>Liga Polskich Rodzin</i>)
MW	All-Polish Youth (<i>Młodzież Wszechpolska</i>)
NOP	National Rebirth of Poland (<i>Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski</i>)
NSBM	Polish National-Socialist Black Metal
ONR	National-Radical Camp (<i>Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny</i>)
PiS	Law and Justice (<i>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość</i>)
PO	Civic Platform (<i>Platforma Obywatelska</i>)
PPP	Polish Labour Party (<i>Polska Partia Pracy</i>)
RSA	Alternative Social Movement (<i>Ruch Społeczny Alternatywa</i>)
SP	Solidary Poland (<i>Solidarna Polska</i>)
SN	National Party (<i>Stronnictwo Narodowe</i>)
SNS	New Forces Alliance (<i>Sojusz Nowych Sił</i>)

1. Introductory Remarks

There is no clear demarcation line between the Polish extreme right, the populist right and the mainstream right. The notion of a *cordon sanitaire* against the far right does not seem to have been accepted in Polish politics and the media. In reality, there are many overlaps between extreme-right and mainstream right circles in terms of both ideas and organisational connections. This lack of clear boundaries makes research on the far right problematic and hinders practical steps to counter the influence of extreme-right groups and ideologies in contemporary Poland. There is no doubt, however, that the significance of the extreme nationalist set of ideas spreads far beyond a narrow margin of the political spectrum.

While far-right groups occupied a generally marginal position in Polish politics throughout the 1990s, their influence grew in the next decade. In 2006–2007 extremist groups gained direct access to the mainstream through the government formed by populist right-wing parties. Many members of extreme-right and racist skinhead groups were rewarded with high-level appointments in government-controlled institutions in that period. This extraordinary situation ended with the 2007 general election, but the extreme right has retained some sizeable pockets of influence in terms of its cultural and organisational resources.

2. Main Extreme-Right Groups Today

As of 2012, the extreme right no longer has its own representation on the level of a parliamentary political party, which it did have in the form of the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR) and, to a degree, in Self-Defence (*Samoobrona*) until the autumn of 2007. However, it is clear that the mainstream populist conservative party, Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS), and its offshoot, Solidarity Poland (*Solidarna Polska*, SP) absorbed a big portion of the radical nationalist ideology and cadres.

The National-Radical Camp (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*, ONR) is arguably the most active right-wing extremist organisation currently active at the street level and among youth. Its name goes back to 1934 when a radical anti-Semitic movement was formed under the same name. The latter was banned after a few months but, after di-

viding into two rival factions, it continued its activity for several years in the mid- to late 1930s. Both ONR factions campaigned against Jews, socialists and democrats. They frequently engaged in violent actions, shoot-outs and street fights against members of »enemy« groups and occasionally against each other. The ONR tradition was directly inspired by the Italian and German fascist movements in the mid-1930s. The 1930s ONR serves as an important model for contemporary extremist groups.

The present ONR was formed as a loose organisation composed of racist skinheads active in several cities in the south of Poland in the early 2000s. By the late 2000s it had grown into a national youth movement, and it gained notoriety through organising provocative street marches using the original fascist-style uniforms and the Nazi (»Roman«) salute. The ONR adopted a swastika-style symbol, »the hand with the sword«, also known as the »Phalange«. One of its branches – in the town of Brzeg – was banned by the local court in 2009, but the other branches have been allowed to operate unhindered.

For several years the ONR has organised marches in Warsaw on Polish Independence Day (11 November). Initially, they attracted several hundred participants, mostly racist skinheads chanting anti-Semitic slogans. However, since 2010 the marches have attracted a much bigger turnout through cooperation with other extreme-right and nationalist organisations gathered under the label of the »March of Independence« Association (*Stowarzyszenie Marsz Niepodległości*). It is estimated that some 20,000 people took part in the march in 2011, many of them supporters of football clubs from across Poland. The march was accompanied by civil society protests and marred by violence (attacks by extreme-right marchers on the police and journalists).

Among the ONR allies engaged in co-organising the marches, All-Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*, MW) occupies a key position. Like the ONR, it also draws on a tradition of an extreme nationalist organisation of the same name active in the pre-war period. The original MW was responsible for numerous attacks on Jewish students in the years before the Second World War. It was re-launched by Roman Giertych in December 1989 and soon came to serve as a youth group for the re-formed National Party (*Stronnictwo Narodowe*, SN) and, since 2001, for the LPR.

The latter-day MW was composed largely of skinheads and also tended to use violence against political opponents. Its websites and publications proudly featured the historic anti-Semitic declarations of its pre-war predecessors. The anti-Semitic culture was discernable in MW ranks in the 2000s, too. For example, anti-Semitic books, such as Henry Ford's *The International Jew*, were used by the MW to educate its members. MW also organised white power concerts, such as that of the anti-Semitic skinhead band *Twierdza* (The Fortress), and skinhead cultural codes permeated the ranks. It also tended to use violence against political opponents and minorities. MW strong-arm squads intimidated opponents and sought to physically dominate public spaces.

By 2005, the MW clearly dominated the spectrum of youth-oriented right-wing extremist organisations. In the mid-2000s, through its involvement with the LPR, it gained temporary access to the political mainstream, and several of its members were appointed to high-level government posts, with the MW founder and LPR leader Roman Giertych becoming minister of education and deputy prime minister, which provoked a series of protests by civil society.

However, in the wake of scandals involving MW members engaged in neo-Nazi activities, the LPR was forced to officially distance itself from its youth organisation in 2007.

Today's MW has lost much of its previous strength, in terms of both influence and membership. With the electoral demise of the LPR (which has not recovered since polling a mere 1.3 per cent of the vote in 2007), the MW lost its chief vehicle of mainstream access and visibility. However, by joining forces with the more radical ONR through the regular street marches, the MW has returned to a more active mode. The formation of a new right-wing political party on the basis of the MW and ONR alliance is reportedly being planned, to be modelled on the example of the Hungarian extreme-right party, Jobbik.

The National Rebirth of Poland (*Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski*, NOP) is the main competitor of the ONR-MW axis on the extreme right. It also claims to continue the tradition of the pre-war ONR. The NOP was formed much earlier than the present-day ONR, and its history goes back to the early 1980s. The ONR and MW function as associations, while the NOP has been registered as a po-

litical party since 1994. In the 1990s the NOP was arguably the most dynamic extreme-right organisation in the country. It has received minimal electoral support (e. g. 0.06 percent of the national vote in the parliamentary election of 2005) but it has made its mark by influencing a generation of extreme-right subculture.

In 1994 the party was officially reorganised along authoritarian lines, granting supreme power to Adam Gmurczyk as its chairman. NOP leaders took over a nationalist journal *Szczerbiec* and transformed it into a radical party organ. In the course of the early 1990s the NOP underwent a process of rapid radicalisation, earning it a reputation as one of the most extreme nationalist and neo-fascist groups in Europe, despite its legal status. At that time it began to infiltrate skinhead groups, encouraging them to attack political enemies. The notorious attack of an NOP skinhead squad on the Warsaw office of a Polish Socialist Party faction in 1989 is frequently quoted as the first instance of extreme right-wing political terror in post-communist Poland.

The NOP recruited several hundred activists nationally, mostly from the neo-Nazi skinhead scene. The majority of the members were in their twenties and included both young working-class males and university students. The organisation has often recruited its members at football stadiums. The NOP drew its strength from the anti-Semitic culture that dominated many sports stadiums in Poland from the 1990s onwards, with rival gangs routinely calling each other's clubs »Jewish« as a term of abuse.

The main stated programmatic goal of the NOP is »national revolution«, implying a violent seizure of power. According to one of the programmatic statements, the National Radical takeover »will be violent – you should also expect blood«. The group promised the prohibition of political organisations it deemed »anti-national«, e. g. those who supported Polish membership of the EU and NATO. The party publication *Szczerbiec* suggested that guerrilla methods could be used against NATO troops in Poland. It also called for Polish volunteers to fight against the NATO intervention in Serbia on the side of the Serbian military.

Another feature of the NOP's ideology is its self-professed virulent anti-Semitism, openly declared by its leader Adam Gmurczyk: »Europe was great; it was

Christian – because it was anti-Semitic (...) anti-Semitism is a virtue that we must cultivate with great care.« The party members have not been known for any particular religious zeal but the NOP officially subscribes to the ideology of Catholic fundamentalism in the style of Marcel Lefebvre, and even to its more extreme version, so-called sedevacantism.

In the late 1990s the NOP became known for its particular focus on Holocaust denial. It published and distributed several books espousing so-called historical revisionism. Bartłomiej Zborski became the party's main specialist in Holocaust denial as the Polish translator and promoter of David Irving's books and articles. He also contributed his own anti-Semitic writings to party publications. Interestingly, Zborski remained employed as a senior editor at Bellona, the state-owned publishing house of the Ministry of Defence. Zborski planned to issue one of Irving's books through Bellona but the idea was dropped after it was exposed by the anti-fascist magazine *Nigdy Więcej*. Zborski has also managed to control the copyright on Polish translations of George Orwell's books in Poland, and thus to secure a considerable income.

As noted earlier, a large part of NOP activities have taken place at street level. They frequently result in violence and physical attacks on alleged enemies of the movement. In recent years, the NOP has organised its own Independence Day march in Wrocław, with the participation of fans of the local football team *Śląsk Wrocław*.

Without renouncing its revolutionary creed, the NOP tried to enter parliamentary politics for the first time in 2001. For this purpose a new front organisation was created under the name New Forces Alliance (*Sojusz Nowych Sił*, SNS), which became part of a broader nationalist political bloc, the Alternative Social Movement (*Ruch Społeczny Alternatywa*, RSA). The group of NOP candidates on the RSA lists included individuals such as Marcin Radzewicz, the former singer of the neo-Nazi-skinhead band Fatherland (*Ojczyzna*) and leader of the openly neo-Nazi National Socialist Front (*Front Narodowo-Socjalistyczny*, FNS). In the end, however, the ultra-radical NOP became an embarrassment for the RSA whose result was below 0.5 per cent of the vote. The bulk of the growing national-populist vote went to the LPR and Self-Defence in that period. Subsequently, the NOP's alliance with the RSA was dissolved. In one of the most curious transformations in contemporary Pol-

ish political history, some key leaders of the RSA soon thereafter founded the Polish Labour Party (*Polska Partia Pracy*, PPP), a self-styled radical-left group.

The NOP was officially registered as a political party and it has enjoyed all the benefits of state assistance provided for by the law on political parties, despite repeated calls from civil society and the media for it to be banned. It also operates through a number of front organisations, such as the National-Radical Institute (*Instytut Narodowo-Radykalny*, INR), which became its publishing arm, and HOS Records (named after a Croat paramilitary fascist organization), which has been responsible for distributing neo-Nazi-skinhead music. The Polish Regiments (*Hufce Polskie*, HP) are a paramilitary youth organisation linked with the NOP. Their main headquarters were in the small town of Radzyń Podlaski, where they were led by a local school history teacher (a future PiS candidate for the local council in 2006). By the late 1990s, the party had become one of the first in Poland to develop a prominent Internet presence with discussion lists, chat rooms, and an elaborate and regularly updated website with links to hundreds of similar groups in Poland and especially abroad.

The NOP enjoys the most extensive international links of all the Polish extreme-right groups. Importantly, the NOP became the Polish branch of the International Third Position (ITP, later renamed European National Front, ENF), an international alliance of European neo-fascist organisations created and managed by a group of Italian ex-terrorists involved in the 1980 Bologna bombing (which claimed 85 lives), led by Roberto Fiore (the founder of its Italian wing called New Force, *Forza Nuova*, FN, and a future MEP). The NOP organised international ideological and paramilitary training sessions for member groups of the ITP/ENF, including the German National Democratic Party (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, NPD). An NPD representative expressed his satisfaction at the fact that »for the first time since 1936 German and Polish nationalists are sitting at one table«. He added that during the Second World War »both sides made mistakes«, thus relativising the war guilt of the Third Reich. After the cooperation was publicised by the anti-fascist *Nigdy Więcej* magazine, the NOP's nationalist credibility was considerably compromised. Subsequently, it fell out with the NPD on issues such as Polish control over former East German territories and as a result even provoked a split in the ENF,

while still seeking Fiore's continued patronage. Fiore and several other foreign extremists, including David Irving, have been listed as members of the editorial team on the pages of *Szczerbiec*, the NOP publication distributed nationally by the state company Ruch.

The NOP collaborated with the US-based National Alliance of the late William Pierce (aka Andrew Macdonald). Among others, it promoted the Polish translation of Pierce's cult novels *The Turner Diaries* and *The Hunter* (both translated by Zborski), which contain an apocalyptic blueprint for racial genocide initiated by a group of neo-fascist terrorists. Characteristically, a 2002 edition of *Szczerbiec* eulogised Osama bin Laden.

The NOP was a self-declared anti-Semitic and racist revolutionary group aiming at the violent overthrow of democracy and not shying away from political violence in its daily activities. Although its mainstream access was never comparable with that of the MW, several ex-NOP members and sympathisers achieved a degree of success in mainstream politics. Their example shows that even the most radical expression of revolutionary nationalism would not be anathema for some currents on the Polish right. The NOP's emphasis on building a modern culture of Polish radical nationalism has brought some fruit: its significance should be seen in educating a generation of activists who in some cases went on to influence mainstream politics as members of other organisations. A similar role is sometimes played by neo-fascist »groupuscules« in Western Europe.

Piotr Farfał, an NOP activist and publisher of the crudely racist skinhead fanzine *Front*, became a leading member of the MW and LPR and deputy chairman of the board of Polish state TV in 2006. His nomination caused an uproar but he held on to the post and even became state TV chairman in December 2008 (holding the post until September 2009).

The ONR, MW and NOP all emphasise their commitment to a fundamentalist reading of Catholicism. The Catholic element is indeed a major feature of the vast majority of permutations of extreme-right ideology in Poland. Nevertheless, a parallel neo-pagan current also exists, albeit with a much narrower base. It is represented by the Niklot Association for Tradition and Culture and several other, smaller, organisations. It places itself in the tradition of Zadruga, a small group of Polish extreme na-

tionalists in the late 1930s. The ideology of Zadruga was extreme even by the standards of the radical nationalist groups of the 1930s. Its anti-Christian stance was closely linked with its anti-Semitism – it considered Christianity to be a Jewish invention. The main cultural resource for the contemporary extreme-right neo-pagan movement is to be found in the black metal music scene. Born out of an eccentric merger of Satanism and neo-Nazism, the Polish National-Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) scene followed its Western counterparts in discovering neo-paganism. Some members of Niklot with roots in the NSBM scene found their temporary political home in the Self-Defence Party. After the collapse of Self-Defence, some of them, led by Mateusz Piskorski, joined the Polish Labour Party. Niklot banners can often be seen at various extreme-right demonstrations and other events.

Finally, the extreme-right spectrum also includes openly neo-Nazi groups closely modelled on their Western European counterparts, using the labels of international neo-Nazi networks such as Blood and Honour. It has focused on organising concerts and promoting neo-Nazi rock music and has cooperated closely with its foreign partners, e.g. in creating its Internet hit-list known as Redwatch.

3. Orientations, Narratives and Influence of Polish Right-Wing Extremism

As noted above, the bulk of the contemporary Polish extreme right draws on the pre-war traditions of the National Radical and National Democrat movements. These traditions are frequently presented as distinct from fascism, and especially from the German National Socialist ideology. However, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that these distinctions are often a matter of rhetoric, and represent an attempt to appear more respectable and not tainted by associations with Nazism. At the same time, the Polish extreme right invokes a totalitarian, anti-democratic ideology which is similar to the fascist and extreme-right movements in other countries. It seems clear that especially the extreme-right subculture influencing the younger audience is permeated by the international codes and symbols of the European and North American extreme right. The core identity of the various extreme-right permutations is encapsulated in the idea of a homogeneous nation rejecting the basic values of a pluralist democracy.

The majority of the Polish extreme-right groups subscribe to a Catholic fundamentalist ideology with a strongly nationalist edge. As described above, a minority subscribes to a neo-pagan tradition (especially Niklot), but interestingly these differences do not prevent frequent cooperation between the two wings. The apparently irreconcilable views on religion give way to shared ideas of another order based on extreme nationalism and hostility to democracy. It is possible to argue, however, that religious markers in both cases are not theologically motivated, but fulfil the function of a strong marker of ethnic identity, especially vis-à-vis minority groups.

It is clear that Polish extreme-right groups believe in a radical ethnic version of nationalism. The oft-used slogan »Poland for the Polish« (a throw-back to the pre-war nationalist motto) includes a strongly exclusionary subtext based on an ethnic understanding of Polish identity, often supplemented by the additional identification of »true Polishness« with a Catholic background going back many generations.

Extreme-right ideology goes hand in hand with strongly traditionalist views on family and gender roles. The very choice of the name of the most successful radical nationalist grouping in recent history, the League of Polish Families, alludes to this. Despite their strongly anti-feminist stance, some of the Polish extreme-right movements have enjoyed particular popularity with the female electorate, the above mentioned LPR being the main example (we should note that it also had the highest percentage of female MPs among all the parliamentary parties in 2001–2005). This can be explained by a higher level of religious commitment among elderly women who are well represented among Radio Maryja listeners (see below). In this context it is also worth mentioning the politicisation of the gay issue: previously almost absent from Polish extreme-right discourse; aggressive homophobia rose to the top of the agenda in the 2000s.

The extreme right traditionally thrives on debates about history, especially when the integrity of the nationalist narrative is questioned. Thus, extreme-right groups and leaders are frequently active during symbolic conflicts such as the controversy around the 1941 Jedwabne pogrom and similar tragic events. The debates have polarised Polish society with respect to its relationship with the past, especially the issue of anti-Semitism. Among

other things, these debates have activated previously dormant anti-Semitic attitudes and thus inadvertently provided some discursive space for extreme-right protagonists.

Law and order issues, such as crime and corruption, are standard elements of the extreme-right discourse. Undoubtedly, the perception of corruption being omnipresent became widespread by the mid-2000s and it has featured prominently in nationalist-populist and extreme-right campaigns.

It can be argued that right-wing extremism arises out of structural issues affecting Poland such as the uncertainties of the global economy. On the other hand, the nature of the extremist response is largely determined by the cultural setting, which is often conditioned by the peculiarities of national traditions. The cultural context is crucial for determining the boundaries between socially acceptable and unacceptable ways of expressing social anger. The Polish extreme right places decidedly more emphasis on symbolic and identity politics than on economic/social policy. Although economic and social issues such as unemployment provide an important context for extreme-right activities, extreme-right activists channel socio-economic anxieties away from a structural and economic analysis. Both strongly social and radically free-market orientations can be identified among extreme-right leaders and activists. Both egalitarian and elitist elements can be found in extreme-right discourse, although social authoritarianism remains a stable undercurrent.

Although the Jewish community in contemporary Poland is numerically very small, anti-Semitism remains the main focus of the hatred of the extreme right. It often serves as a code for hostility to globalisation, diversity and pluralist democracy in general. An anti-elite discourse is one of the features which unite the extreme right with populist movements.

Other targeted groups include the Roma and other minorities as well as immigrants, including Muslims. However, in this context it is important to add that in Poland the majority of the victims of extremist physical violence do not belong to racial or ethnic minorities. Rather violence tends to be directed at political opponents, members of alternative youth subcultures and so on.

Different shades of the Polish extreme-right are united by their opposition to the EU. Most of them are hostile to Germany, in line with the tradition of the Polish nationalist movement. However, there are some exceptions, especially the openly neo-Nazi groups, which are more inclined to cooperate with their German counterparts. Right-wing journalist Piotr Zychowicz's newly published book (*Pakt Ribbentrop-Beck*, 2012) breaks a taboo by criticising Polish foreign policy in 1939 for not allying itself with Hitler's Germany against Soviet Russia. The book has won some acclaim from several influential radical right figures such as the columnist Rafał Ziemkiewicz.

Anti-Russian attitudes, often mixed with anti-communist rhetoric, are commonplace on the Polish right, too. In recent years they have frequently been accompanied by conspiracy theories concerning the 2010 Smolensk plane crash. However, not all of the Polish extreme right is anti-Russian. The National Democrat tradition includes a significant pro-Russian element which still informs some parts of the far right today. We may also note the consistently pro-Russian position of the Polish Slavophile neo-pagans, who find much common ground with the Russian extreme right.

Little or no sociological data are available on the supporters of the contemporary extreme right in Poland. However, the social base of the Polish extreme right can be partly characterised on the basis of sociological research on LPR voters. The party drew support primarily from the provinces in the east and south of Poland, including rural areas, where the support for traditional and religious values is strong and which are economically underdeveloped. It has drawn much support among the elderly but has pockets of influence among youth too.

In contrast, electoral support for Self-Defence was motivated not by radical right symbolic/identity politics but by populist protests over socio-economic/bread-and-butter issues and it was stronger in certain areas in the north and west of Poland.

While many former Self-Defence supporters and activists turned their back on politics, the former electoral base of the LPR was taken over almost completely by the PiS. In general, the bulk of these parties' former electorate and a big part of their former activist base found a permanent political home in Jarosław Kaczyński's Law and Justice party. Already in 2005, 38 percent of the

LPR voters of 2001 cast their votes for the PiS. By 2007, the party had taken over many more former LPR and Self-Defence voters, while it lost much of its former moderate urban support base to the centre-right Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO). By purging itself of the few remaining »liberals«, the PiS has moved further to the right. The party, once considered centrist, established itself firmly at the far right end of the spectrum, with just occasional forays into the political middle ground. While not an extreme-right party in itself, the PiS has absorbed the right-extremist surge through its radical, populist appeal to illiberal democracy.

As we have already mentioned, it is clear that socio-economic hardship provides a favourable breeding ground for extreme-right ideologies, but cultural factors are decisive when it comes to channelling socio-economic protest in Poland, which has routinely taken a far-right nationalist direction. Nationalist and populist tendencies in Polish politics have resulted from serious socio-economic tensions coupled with a political culture that prioritises national over social perspectives. The failure of trade unions to address the problem has been apparent; the Solidarity (*Solidarność*) trade union in particular provides a platform for nationalist statements.

Arguably, the quality of democratic culture in Poland leaves a lot to be desired and the neoliberal, value-less culture can sometimes, paradoxically, provide opportunities for right-wing extremists. The increasingly conservative outlook of the Polish Catholic Church – illustrated and influenced by the growth of the radical social movement around the xenophobic Radio Maryja – has often legitimised extreme-right and nationalist tendencies in recent years.

The far-right impact on mainstream politics could be observed in Warsaw on 29 September 2012, when a mass, 50,000-strong street demonstration under the controversial slogan »Poland, awake!« was organised jointly by the PiS, the Solidarity trade union and the far-right Radio Maryja movement led by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, combining various radical messages into a powerful voice.

It is important to note that the number of anti-Semitic, racist and extremist websites and messages on the Internet has mushroomed in recent years. Despite some efforts to tackle the problem (e.g. the »Delete racism« campaign) this remains an issue of serious public concern.



Another platform where extreme-right tendencies are manifest and widespread is Polish football stadiums. Extremist groups often draw strength from the anti-Semitic and racist culture which has dominated many stadiums and fan groups. The European Football Championship, which was held in Poland and Ukraine in 2012, improved the situation somewhat, not least through the much-publicized »Respect Diversity« campaign, but the problem remains deeply rooted.

4. Countermeasures

Legal reactions from the state apparatus to the activities of racist and extremist groups have been very rare indeed. Despite the existence of legal provisions against extreme-right activity, starting with Article 13 of the country's Constitution, their implementation has often been weak, prompting criticism. Apart from the local ONR branch in Brzeg, no extremist organisation has ever been banned. A Warsaw court initiative to ban the NOP was thrown out by the Constitutional Tribunal on technical grounds in 2011. At the same time, the rate of hate crime remains relatively high: according to the »Brown Book«, a register of xenophobic acts edited by Marcin Kornak, 343 incidents were recorded between 1 January 2011 and 31 March 2012.

On a positive note, critical interventions by independent media and civil society have been important in limiting the social respectability of extreme-right tendencies in Polish society. For example, they played a key role in the awareness-raising process leading to the electoral defeat of the extreme right in 2007, despite receiving rather little solidarity from institutions such as the EU. Parallel to the rise of the extreme right, the anti-fascist and anti-discrimination movement has been building its own cultural resources since the mid-1990s, with its own sources of legitimacy and its bases of support in vital cultural circles such as popular music. The successful campaign »Music against Racism« may serve as a prime example. As a result, the extreme right has faced a multi-faceted counter-movement to be reckoned with.



About the author

Dr Rafal Pankowski is a co-editor of *Nigdy Wiecej* («Never Again») magazine and a lecturer at Collegium Civitas in Warsaw.

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Phone: ++49-30-269-35-7726 | Fax: ++49-30-269-35-9250
<http://www.fes.de/international/moe>

To order publications:
info.moe@fes.de

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