

Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Hungary at the Beginning of the 21st Century

by Miroslav Mareš

Abstract

Right-wing extremist violence in Hungary seriously impacted the development of the country in the first two decades of this century. Some manifestations can be seen as an important challenge to current research on terrorism – mostly the cases of the so-called Death Squad and the Hungarian Arrows National Liberation Army. This article deals with the modi operandi of these groups within the context of political development in Hungary and in East Central Europe in recent times. The first of these groups murdered and injured Romani people with Molotov cocktails and shotguns; the targets of the second group were mostly political opponents. This group used arson attacks and explosives, but did not kill people.

Keywords: Right-wing terrorism, Hungary, racist violence, Roma minority

Introduction

Right-wing extremist political violence is a significant challenge to democratic development in East-Central Europe. The most serious forms of this violence can be found in Hungary in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The so-called Death Squad (Halálbrigád) and the Hungarian Arrows National Liberation Army (Magyarok Nyilai Nemzeti Felszabadító Hadsereg – MNMFH) are relatively unusual phenomena in the European context.[1] The violent right-wing extremist scene arose at the same time as illiberal tendencies were strengthening in East Central European politics, after a relatively successful post-Communist transformation and after Hungary's access to Euro-Atlantic structures.

The goal of this article is to explain the specific character of both the above-mentioned Hungarian terrorist groups, particularly their modi operandi. Historical traditions of violent right-wing extremism in modern Hungarian history are outlined, because legacies play an important role in the ideological background of recent militant groups. The activities of those groups with a terrorist character are analysed within the context of general political development in Hungary. Militant campaigns in Hungary are categorized within a research framework of terrorism and violent extremism, which is outlined in this short introductory section and revisited in the final analysis. It is important to mention, according to Hungarian law, the scientific conceptualization of terrorism can differ from the legal assessment of individual cases. Unclear and undiscovered attributes of these groups as well as ongoing and incomplete trials related to violent extremist activities are obstacles to obtaining information for an exact analysis. However, there are sufficient sources available to enable relevant research in this field.

Research Framework for Right-Wing Extremist Violence and Terrorism

Right-wing extremist terrorism is a category based on the ideological background of terrorist organizations or individuals. As Michael Logvinov states, right-wing terrorists use the construct of the nationally homogeneous society, based on subjectively perceived identity. This society – from their point of view – is threatened and weakened by external influences and they feel called to serve as its protectors.[2] Right-wing terrorism can be linked to several ideologies, mostly by various forms of nationalist right-wing authoritarianism (such as the “lone wolf” Franz Fuchs in Austria with his one-man “Bajuvarian Befreiungsarmee” [Bavarian Liberation Army] in the 1990s), by Fascist and Neo-fascist or Nazi or neo-Nazi ideologies (such as the National Social Underground – NSU – in Germany) or by the “new alt-Right” (such as Anders Breivik in 2011).[3] In some cases, we can find “primitive” racist or chauvinist attitudes without deeper ideological roots, such as seems to

be the case for some Russian violent gangs with terrorist tendencies in the 2000s.[4]

In the classical typology of terrorism by Schmid and Jongman, right-wing terrorism is subsumed under the category of social-revolutionary terrorism.[5] However, vigilante terrorism in the same typology is defined as a specific category (in addition to social-revolutionary terrorism). Many authors frequently connect vigilante terrorism with right-wing extremist ideological backgrounds.[6] Ehud Sprinzak even defined vigilante terrorism as one of six subcategories of right-wing terrorism, in addition to revolutionary terrorism, reactive terrorism, racist terrorism, millenarian terrorism and youth counterculture terrorism.[7]. In fact, in concrete cases we can find a mixture of these analytical categories. A vigilantist strategy can be used for social-revolutionary goals if vigilante terrorists demonstrate through brutal acts their capability to restore a hard “law and order” situation, without subjectively perceived “anomalies” (minorities, homeless people, criminals etc.). They can win public support from people with authoritarian and racist attitudes. However, right-wing extremist terrorism can also use a conventional campaign focused on political, ethnic or racial targets, with the goal of threatening a broader audience and/or governmental representatives.[8] As Peter Waldmann wrote, right-wing terrorists do not always count on a terrorist calculus focused on an excessive reaction of the state. They are satisfied with the spread of fear; in many cases, they do not even publish explicit claims of responsibility since their brutal acts speak, as it were, for themselves.[9] However, right-wing terrorism can also be used with the strategic intention of provoking a counter-terrorist or massive governmental reaction, with the goal of initiating unrest or even civil war. A specific case is the so-called “strategy of tension” connected with “false flag operations”, which was typical for Italian neo-Fascist terrorism during the 1960s and 1970s.[10]

Right-wing terrorism belongs to a broad spectrum of right-wing extremist violent activities. The borderline between non-terrorist and terrorist violence is in many cases fuzzy. Fear can be spread by street violence committed by subcultural racist gangs (as we know from the Skinhead era of the 1990s) and this can turn into terrorist violence, or at least into propaganda about such violence (as in the case of the group Combat 18). Right-wing terrorists can also initiate broader and more serious violence with terrorist acts, such as a revolution or a civil war. They are in many cases influenced by historic legacies, not only (or even not at all) by terrorist models, but also by historical warriors, commanders, paramilitaries, guerrilla fighters etc. Due to this fact, it is important to take into account the legacy of right-wing extremist militancy in relation to the right-wing extremist subjects being researched.

It is difficult to identify general causes and conditions of right-wing terrorism, among other reasons due to a lack of major comprehensive studies. Right-wing terrorism is usually researched thematically (lone wolves etc.) or regionally (Western Europe etc.) in focused analytical or comparative studies or in single case studies. Jacob Ravndal identified two “causal recipes” of right-wing terrorism in Western Europe. Firstly, the North European recipe “involves the combination of high immigration, low electoral support for anti-immigration (radical right) parties, and extensive public repression of radical right actors and opinions”.[11] Secondly, the South European recipe “involves the combination of socioeconomic hardship, authoritarian legacies, and extensive left-wing terrorism and militancy”.[12] “[A] highly polarised conflict” between far-right activists and their enemies represents a necessary condition for extensive right-wing terrorism to occur.[13] In East Central Europe – notably in Hungary – it is important to add to this the presence of national minorities (perceived as “problematic” by right-wing extremists) and the irredentist interests of right-wing extremism.

Ravndal’s necessary condition – the existence of a highly polarized conflict - can be connected with this issue, and not only with the antagonism of an extreme left. Donatella Della Porta uses the term “competitive escalation” in her research on clandestine political violence in the sense of socialization of militants to violence “during harsh social conflicts that involved competitive relations not only with outsiders but also within the social movement family.”[14] An adaptation of the above-mentioned criteria to the conditions and societal environment in Hungary will be explained towards the end of this article.

Historic Legacies of Right-Wing Extremist Violence in Hungary

Hungarian right-wing extremist violence has its modern roots in the paramilitary activities of nationalist groups after the First World War. These patriotic forces fought against the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of Bela Kun (March to August 1919) as well as against other political opponents. In addition, they were also active in borderland conflicts[15] (the so called Rongyos Gárda – Ragged Guards – was a well known force in this era). Repressive “White Terror” (in opposition to Communist “Red Terror”) characterized their activity. As successor to the defeated Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Hungary lost a large part of its former territory due to the Treaty of Trianon of 1920. Millions of Hungarians have lived since that time outside the borders of their former motherland.[16] The so-called “Trianon victim complex” determines Hungarian politics to the present day and is likely to continue to play an important role in the future (among other ways, in relation to the 100th anniversary in 2020).

In the interwar period, the authoritarian regime of regent Miklós Horthy ruled in Hungary.[17] At the end of the 1930s, voluntary irredentist paramilitary groups, supported by governmental bodies, attacked Czechoslovak borderlands. The renewed Rongyos Gárda and the newly formed Szabadcsapatok (Free troops) used guerrilla and terrorist tactics.[18] Despite the right-wing authoritarian character of the Horthy regime, more extreme groupings arose in the 1930s. Ferenc Szálasi was a militant politician who founded the Arrow Cross Party – Hungarist Movement (Nyilaskeresztes Párt – Hungarista Mozgalo) in 1939.

Hungary fought on the side of the Axis powers during the Second World War. In 1944, the Arrow crosses (a popular name of the party) took over power in Hungary with German support, and from October 1944 until the end of World War Two April Szálasi led a terror regime (his government was, among many other things, responsible for multiple anti-Semitic atrocities). Two Hungarian SS Divisions – 25th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS “Hunyadi” (1st Hungarian) and the 26th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS (2nd Hungarian) – were established.[19] The common fight of the German and Hungarian Nazis against the Allies at the end of the war created an important propaganda tool for Hungarian neo-Nazis – alluded to up to the present day. An annual “Day of Honour” is organized each February to remember the Battle of Budapest in 1945. It also serves as an occasion for bringing together members of the European neo-Nazi scene.[20]

The Communist regime in Hungary during the Cold War eliminated the activities of right-wing extremists on Hungarian territory. Small Fascist cells surfaced during the democratic anti-Communist and anti-Soviet uprising in Hungary in 1956, but had no significant impact on the course of events. The successors of the Arrow Cross party worked in exile in Western countries.[21] After the fall of the Iron Curtain, they supported the development of right-wing extremism in Hungary.

A new militant right-wing extremist Hungarian scene grew in the late Communist period in the 1980s. Racist Skinhead subculture came from the West into Hungarian society in the era of specific national Communism. In the 1990s, many local groupings with links to the racist Skinhead and Hooligan scene were formed in various parts of Hungary. Branches of transnational networks were also established – mostly the Hungarian Hammerskins and Blood & Honour Hungary. Racist Skinheads attacked political opponents and ethnically and racially defined enemies (mostly Romani people). In the 1990s, this subcultural milieu created a basis for further development of violent structures, including the formation of Death Squad (see below). In addition to these youngsters, the older generation of right-wing extremists was also actively engaged in militant groups – especially Istvan Györkös (born 1940). In 1992, he founded the Hungarian National Front (MNA).[22]

The historic legacy of Hungarian right-wing extremism can also be characterized by a high level of violence and by an ethos of paramilitary formations using terrorism. From the ideological point of view, militant right-wing extremism in Hungary can be divided into 1) “Hungarists” (linked to the legacy of the Arrow Cross party), 2) internationalist National Socialists (linked to the global neo-Nazi scene) and 3) “national radicals” (the strongest part, linked to intolerant nationalism with historic roots, but without strong acceptance of the Szálasi era). Hungarian right-wing extremist organizations carry out their activities not only on current Hungarian territory, but also in traditional Hungarian diasporas in neighboring countries and in new Hungarian emigrant diasporas in the world. Irredentism, anti-Romani attitudes, anti-liberalism and (in many cases) anti-Semitism

are typical elements of the ideological background of Hungarian right-wing extremism.

Contemporary Hungarian Militant Right-Wing Extremism

The rise of more recent Hungarian right-wing extremism is closely connected with protests against the Socialist government in September 2006. A new generation of right-wing extremist organizations was engaged in these protests, mostly the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom – HVIM), an irredentist association founded in 2001 by young journalist László Toroczkai (born 1978). The new Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik Magyarorszáért Mozgalom), founded in 2003, also took an active part. Several demonstrations in Budapest turned violent. It was mostly Hooligans and members of racist groupings that clashed with the police. Toroczkai called for violence to stop after several days of riots; however, right-wing extremists were responsible for the radicalization of the protests.[23]

One year later, the leader of the Jobbik Gábor Vona initiated the creation of the Hungarian Guard (Magyar Garda). This uniformed paramilitary unit patrolled in areas with a strong Romani population. Despite the fact that it avoided the use of direct physical violence, it manifested a potential threat. The original Hungarian Guard (with approximately one thousand members) was banned in 2009;[24] however, several successor paramilitary organizations were founded. The MG inspired a wave of vigilantism in the East Central European area.[25] On the other hand, in 2009 members of the Hungarian Guard and the HVIM protested several times in front of the Slovak embassy in Budapest against the new Slovak minority language act (it was considered as instrument against the Hungarian minority in Slovakia). After these protests, Molotov cocktails hit the Slovak embassy, although the perpetrator is unknown.[26]

It is important to mention that approximately at the same time as the Hungarian Guard arose, both militant groups with a terrorist character – the Death Squad and the MNNFH – carried out violent campaigns. Despite the fact that there is no evidence of their interconnection with the Hungarian Guard, they also spread fear and intimidated communities – mostly Romani people. Vigilante and violent anti-Romani activities were explained as a reaction to so-called “Gypsy crime” by Hungarian right-wing extremists.[27] Ideas of an ethnic conflict were propagated - which strengthened the impact of terror.

After the banning of the MG and the arrest of the Death Squad and the MNNFH, the level of right-wing extremist violence in Hungary slightly declined. However, some serious incidents still occurred in the second decade of the twenty-first century, such as the threatening of the Romani population in the village of Gyöngyöspata by members of the paramilitary group Szebb Jövőért (For a Better Future).[28] The migration crisis led to the emergence of a new type of paramilitary vigilante units in East-Central Europe.[29] Some of these units were under strong Russian influence. These groups started training and operations (patrolling, hunting, etc.) against migrants.

István Györkös, the already mentioned leader of the MNA, changed his organization into a well-trained and well-equipped paramilitary group. According to governmental sources, officers of the Russian military intelligence service GRU were in charge of some of the training. The National Bureau of Investigation searched for illegal weapons in Györkös's house in Böni on 26 October 2016. Chief detective major Péter Pálvölgyi died after shooting between Györkös and the police broke out. Shortly after the incident, the perpetrator was captured.[30] Györkös's case was labelled as terrorism by some media;[31] however, he was charged with murder and indicted for illegal use of firearms.[32] The trial began on 25 April 2018 and had not finished at the time of the submission of this article.

Militants from Hungarian communities abroad [33] were also active. The prosecution of two Hungarian irredentists – István Beke and Zoltán Szócs – from the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement in Romania, was a topical case in the years 2015–2017. They were investigated by the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) due to the suspicion of preparing a terrorist attack. They allegedly “instigated the members of the HVIM cell in Târgu Secuiesc to make an improvised explosive device that would be

detonated during the demonstrations on Romania's national day celebrated in Târgu Secuiesc in 2015.”[34] However, they were sentenced in April 2017 to “only” ten and eleven months in prison, for an attempted action against the constitutional order and unlawfully using pyrotechnics. The cases of the Death Squad and the Hungarian Arrows National Liberation Army remain the most important cases of terrorist right-wing violence in recent times.[35]

Death Squad

The so-called “Death Squad” (Halálbrigád) in Hungary was a group of four perpetrators responsible for ten attacks in 2008–2009, resulting in the killing of six Romani people with many more suffering injuries (the so-called “Roma-Murders” – Roma-gyilkosságok). With the exception of the first attack (a shooting at a refugee camp) all the attacks were focused on the Roma community. The above-mentioned names were used by the media; the original name of the group is not known (if it has one). The group did not publish communiqués, and the perpetrators did not testify during police investigation or during the trial. This means that information about their motivation and modus operandi is based on investigations and on external sources.

The members of the group were brothers Arpád Kiss (43 years old at the time of arrest) and István Kiss (34), Zsolt Pető (34) and István Csontos (29).[36] If we look at the individual biographies of members of this group, we can find significant differences in age between the oldest Arpád Kiss and the youngest István Csontos. However, all members of this group had experience of the subcultural milieu – either racist Skinheads (allegedly including “elite” Hammerskins in the case of István Kiss) or football Hooligans. When István Kiss was 19, he had set on fire the Torah in the synagogue in Debrecen; however, he was found not guilty by the court.[37] István Csontos was a former soldier in the Hungarian army (he also served two years in Kosovo) and allegedly was an informant for the country's military intelligence (with the task of informing about unrest and dissatisfaction in the army). His role and possible links to the secret service were not clarified.[38] At the time of their detention, all the perpetrators were employed in “ordinary jobs” (sound engineers at the local discotheque, cook and pastry cook).[39]

The criminal activities of the group started on 7 March 2008, when the brothers Kiss and Pető robbed the house of a professional hunter in Besenyszög and stole seven hunting weapons. On 2 June 2008, the perpetrators tested these weapons and fired two shots at a refugee camp in Debrecen (one person was slightly injured). On 20 June 2008, an anti-Romani campaign began in Galgagyörk, followed by attacks in Piricse on 7 August, in Nyíradony-Tamásipuszta on 4 September and in Tarnabod on 28 September. These attacks were aimed at houses inhabited by Romani people (only in Tarnabod the perpetrators mistakenly targeted another house), the perpetrators used firearms and Molotov cocktails; however, nobody was killed (the victims were, however, injured and intimidated). The first two victims were killed during an attack in Nagycséc on 2 November 2008. The attack in Alsószolca on 18 December 2008 followed. The next two victims (a father and son) were killed during an attack in Tatárszentgyörgy on 23 February 2009, one person (a Roma worker) died after an attack in Tiszalök on 22 April 2009 and the last victim (the mother of a 13-year-old daughter, who was seriously injured), died during an attack in Kisléta on 2 August 2009. The perpetrators were apprehended on 21 August 2009 in Debrecen (the FBI assisted the Hungarian police in the last phase of the investigation).[40] In 2013, the brothers Kiss and Pető were sentenced to life imprisonment, and István Csontos to 13 years in prison. In 2016, Hungary's Supreme Court affirmed the verdict.[41]

The primary targets of the group and all the murdered victims were Romani people. This group selected targets in relation to information about so-called “Gypsy crime” in various areas of Hungary, specifically in its eastern part, where the concentration of the Romani population is strongest. Individual victims were selected ad hoc. The “headquarters” of this group was in the town of Debrecen in this area. The murderers combined the use of Molotov-cocktails and rifles, sometimes “only” shooting at Romani people or houses with firearms, without subsequent arson attacks. In total, 6 victims were killed and 55 injured; 63 shots were fired and 11 Molotov cocktails were used. Primarily, the perpetrators (from their point of view) “punished” the Roma community for alleged “crime and parasitism”; however, the final goal of the perpetrators was to incite retaliation against

ethnic Hungarians from the Romani people and thus to provoke an ethnic war “in which the Roma would be exterminated.”[42]

As I wrote in a previous article:

“They used maps and satellite imagery, choosing some targets at random and others according to media reports, including those where there was increased tension between the Roma and the majority. They would drive to their destination, leaving their car parked at some distance and continuing on foot; then they would attack and withdraw. The attacks were mostly carried out at night, and the perpetrators used night-vision equipment. They started with attacks on property – though even in these there was the possibility of injuring or killing people – later shifting to purposeful murderous assaults on people. The group was very interested in how its activities were presented in the media, and this also contributed to the escalation of the group’s violence.”[43]

Anti-racist activist András B. Vágvölgyi described what was probably the most brutal act of the group in these words: “On February 22, 2009 they dropped Molotov cocktails on the roof of a Roma house, the last one in the village of Tatárszentgyörgy, firing off shotguns at the escaping family, killing a father, Robert Csorba (27 years old) and his young son Robert Csorba Jr (5 years old), and injuring his sister, Bianka (7 years old).”[44]

The group was not prosecuted as a terrorist association, and even the racist motivation was “unclear”, at least according to the investigators. The TE-SAT report from Europol stated: “Since November 2008, people of this minority group were killed in nine attacks. Although four right-wing extremists were arrested for these killings in Hungary, it is not proven at this stage of the investigation whether there was a racist intention behind the serial murders.”[45] The racist motivation and terrorist character of the activity of this group were, however, clear according to research.

The so-called “Death Squad” is an example of a well-organized group with highly motivated perpetrators. Experience from the Nazi-Skinhead milieu and strong racist nationalism determined its activity. The members were able to act while “underground”, without publishing any statements. The group used semi-random target selection – Romani people (including children), without focusing on specific individuals. The victims were attacked because of their ethnic origin. The activity of the group had also a transnational impact on the right-wing extremist scene. On the night of 19 April 2009, a group of four neo-Nazis attacked a house inhabited by a Romani family in Vítkov in the Czech Republic with Molotov cocktails. A small Roma girl (aged two at the time) suffered burns on 80 percent of her body. The perpetrators assessed the brutal attacks in Hungary at the same time as positive, as police investigation showed.[46]

On the other hand, the “Roma killers” mobilized the domestic and international anti-racist scene. The general context of racist homicides brought pressure on the Hungarian government and society with the aim of improving the position of the Romani people. Two important films were dedicated to this case – the 2013 documentary “*Judgement in Hungary*” directed by Eszter Hajdú [47] and the 2012 drama “*Just a Wind*” (Csak a szél) directed by Benedek Fliegauf.[48]

Hungarian Arrows National Liberation Army

The Hungarian Arrows National Liberation Army (Magyarok Nyilai Nemzeti Felszabadító Hadsereg – MNNFH) was another terrorist group active in Hungary between 2007 and 2009. While the trial of the Death Squad finished in 2016, the trial of the alleged members of the MNNFH is still ongoing. The Budapest Court of Appeal threw out the terrorism conviction against György Budaházy and his seventeen co-defendants and ordered a new trial on 19 April 2018 because of a problem with the legality of the evidence [49] (in 2016, Budaházy had been sentenced to 13 years in prison for terrorism by the court of first instance) [50]. This fact makes the description of the group problematic, mostly because it is not clear how strong the links to nationalist political circles in Hungary were. On the other hand, this group used communiqué to the media in several instances and its modus operandi can also be explained without knowledge of the individual perpetrators and

possible external drivers of the activity of the group.

According to media sources, the group was founded in spring 2007 by György Budaházy, a well-known figure in the right-wing extremist scene, and it was reportedly linked to the publicly active “Hunnia Movement”.[51] However, this fact has not yet been confirmed by court investigation. According to Hungarian police sources, the MNNFH was responsible for the following attacks:

- On 24 October 2007, Socialist politician László Ecsódi was attacked with a Molotov cocktail;
- On 11 December 2007, four masked men beat up and seriously injured Csintalan Sándort, a journalist with Hír TV and former Socialist deputy (four days later the group took responsibility in a communiqué which was sent to Hír TV);
- On 16 December 2007, the houses of Liberal politician and entrepreneur János Kóka and Socialist politician István Hiller were attacked with Molotov cocktails;
- On 8 February 2008, the houses of five Socialist politicians were attacked with Molotov cocktails;
- On 1 April 2008, a house in Budapest was attacked;
- On 3 September 2008, an arson attack was committed at the weekend house of György Szilvásy, at that time minister of civilian intelligence services;
- In January 2009, a threatening message was sent to liberal politician John Emese;
- On 6 March 2009, a bomb exploded in a bus. The MNNFH was, according to the police, responsible for this explosion.[52]

Members of the group were also “planning to blow up explosives hidden in footballs placed in front of the homes of four Members of Parliament (representatives of the government party).”[53]

According to the Athena institute, the group claimed responsibility for firebombing several clubs frequented by the Hungarian LGBT community and it “intended to intimidate members of the community and to prevent the yearly Gay Pride rally.”[54] The group also sent envelopes containing a white substance (a mixture of sugar and flour) to 33 socialist, liberal and conservative politicians (including Prime Minister Viktor Orbán). The police destroyed the core of the group in April 2009.[55]

The modus operandi of the MNNFH consisted of arson attacks against houses, a direct physical attack on a journalist, the production and use of explosives and sending threatening letters. The arson and explosive attacks caused damage to property only; the victim of the beating was injured. The goal of the group was probably not to kill people, but to threaten political opponents and the LGBT community. The group criticized the corruption and decadence of the established parties, mostly the Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt – MSzP), which was for a long time the strongest party in the Hungarian political system. The attacks on selected politicians during the era of huge political dissatisfaction were intended to win public support for right-wing extremist ideas, represented by the MNNFH in its statements.

Comparison of Right-Wing Terrorism in Hungary with the European Context

Hungarian groups play an important role in the European comparative context of right-wing extremist terrorism in the twenty-first century. On the one hand, they have many specific characteristic elements; however, they also show some similarities with other groups or individuals operating at this time. As follows from the above, the “Death Squad” and the MNNFH are different, at least regarding their modi operandi. This fact is important to take into account if we want to compare the situation in Hungary with the situation in other countries.

East-Central Europe is traditionally considered a region with a higher level of right-wing extremist violence than Western Europe.[56] The situation in Hungary in the second half of the first decade of the twenty-first

century shows an extraordinary growth of right-wing violent activities in comparison with in the first half. A similar tendency can be found in Russia at the same time - but with a broader scope of violence.[57] The Czech Republic was moving on a similar trajectory at the same time; however, it did not lead to such brutal results as in the case of the Death Squad or to such a sophisticated selection of goals as with the MNNFH. Who committed the wave of arson attacks in Silesia against Romani houses in 2007–2009 has never been solved, with the exception of the Vítkov attack from 2009. It may be that, on the periphery of the Czech Republic, the police action against the four attackers from Vítkov stopped a possible development towards neo-Nazi terrorism. At the same time, huge anti-Romani riots and vigilante patrols of right-wing paramilitary groups were organized in the Czech Republic.

Regarding the membership of terrorist groups, members of the “Death Squad” started their right-wing extremist careers in the racist skinhead subculture. The same was typical of the German NSU (Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund) [58] and the Belgian group Blood, Soil, Honour and Loyalty (Bloed, Bodem, Eer en Trouw – BBET). [59] A move to an organized terrorist group “improved” previous subcultural street violence. Members of the MNNFH came predominantly from more intellectual right-wing extremist circles, which shows similarities with the “old style” revolutionary right-wing terrorism in Italy or Germany in the 1960s–1980s.

The low number of core members of the Death Squad (four) is also comparable with the NSU (three), while membership of Russian groups or the BBET was higher (around ten). In Hungary, no case of a right-wing terrorist lone wolf is known (István Györkös was a member of the MNA, and his case is questionably labelled as terrorism). That is different from the Polish case of Brunon Kwiecień, from Anders Breivik in Norway, Pavlo Lapsyhn in the United Kingdom and from many other cases.[60] With a few exceptions (Beate Zschäpe from the NSU and some women affiliates of the BBET or to Russian gangs) right-wing terrorism in the twenty-first century is predominantly carried out by men, and there is no knowledge of important female roles in Hungarian right-wing extremism at this time.

The modus operandi of the Death Squad was characterized by brutal murders of members of a national minority. The message of the terrorists was included in the act itself; we can speak about a specific form of “propaganda by deed”. The case of the Death Squad shows some similarities with the German NSU case (ethnic selection of targets, no statements, alleged links to secret services). However, the focus on Roma is typical of central and eastern Europe. The strategy to provoke ethnic war is probably similar to the BBET (however, the Death Squad did not plan “false flag operations”). Ideologically, overlaps in the neo-Nazi legacies of the Death Squad, the BBET, the NSU and the Russian Nazi gangs can be seen.

The campaign of the MNNFH is relatively unusual. It was focused on selectively chosen Liberal and Leftist politicians and journalists, and the campaign was carried out continuously (however, without causing the death of victims). The selection of targets was based predominantly on political beliefs, and not linked to ethnic and racial issues. The Polish right-wing lone wolf Brunon Kwiecień had some similar anti-liberal motives. However, in his case anti-Semitism and inspiration from Anders Breivik in Oslo allegedly played a significant role[61] – in contrast to the “endogenous” Hungarian character of the MNNFH.

The specific element of the activity of the Death Squad was the focus on serial killings of Romani people and using firearms and Molotov cocktails with a threatening message for the Romani community. In the case of the MNNFH, the specific element was a selective approach to targets from the milieu of political opponents (with the exception of alleged bus attacks).

Analysis of Right-Wing Terrorism in Hungary in the 21st Century

The most serious phase of right-wing terrorism in Hungary occurred in the second half of the 2000s, despite the fact that its legal consequences are being resolved in the second half of the 2010s. To understand the activities of the Death Squad and the MNNFH, it is important to keep in mind the whole development in Hungary in this era. Brutal killers from the Death Squad and “selective” attackers from the MNNFH are only two of many

violent fringes of the right-wing protest wave in Hungary (which included vigilantism, street violence, etc.).

Despite the differences between these two groups, the use of terrorist or similar methods by parts of the Hungarian right-wing extremist scene can be assessed as an attempt to accelerate the radicalization of the whole society and as an effort to support a right-wing political change in the country. However, while the MNNFH allegedly had some links to the mainstream of the growing right-wing extremist political party scene (the court trial is still ongoing), the activities and membership of the Death Squad were limited to a small local neo-Nazi scene.

If we look at the character of the violence of these groups, we can find significant differences. The strategy of the MNNFH was purely social-revolutionary. It was aimed against established politicians with the goal of intimidating them while also winning public support. The strategy of the Death Squad mixed the vigilante approach (“punishment” of the community for alleged “Gypsy crime”) with revolutionary goals (to initiate ethnic civil war and as part of the war to eliminate the Roma community). The MNNHF used communiqués for communication with the public; for the Death Squad, “propaganda by deed” was sufficient. The MNNHF did not kill its victims (although it used physical violence, arson attacks, one bomb with a timer and also issued several written threats). The brutal murders committed by the Death Squad gained world-wide attention.

If we look at the factors that have a possible impact on right-wing terrorism from the research framework outlined, we can identify only some of them in Hungary in the second half of the 2000s. The migration level was low at that time; however, a strong role was played by the so-called “Roma issue” and by the so-called “Trianon complex”). After the migration crisis which hit Hungary in 2015 and later, no new terrorist wave in Hungary. On the other hand, vigilantism and paramilitarism increased again.[62]

The level of political repression against right-wing extremism was relatively limited in Hungary in the mid 2000s. However, police measures during anti-government riots in 2006 were perceived by right-wing extremist militants as unacceptable state violence. This caused anger in the right-wing extremist milieu. At that time, disillusion with socio-economic development was widespread in Hungarian society - the result of the negative impact of socio-economic transformations on the life standards of large parts of the population (mostly in peripheral regions). The resistance against the Socialist government exploded after the speech of Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány on 2 September 2006 at the party congress of the Hungarian Socialist Party, in which he admitted that he had previously lied to the public.[63]

In the mid 2000s, a decline in right-wing extremist party political representation occurred. After the success of the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja – MIÉP) in 1990, the Hungarian extreme right lost its parliamentary representation. The new party Jobbik arose in the second half of the 2000s and became a stable element in Hungarian parliamentary politics in 2010. Rejection of Socialist politics led to a return to national and authoritarian legacies by a large proportion of Hungarian voters.[64]

Left-wing extremist violence was and is very weak in Hungary in the twenty-first century.[65] This means that it has a different role than in Western Europe, because militant right-wing extremists are not confronted with violent political opponents. Ravndal’s “highly polarized conflict” and Porta’s “competitive escalation” should be related in the Hungarian context to competition with non-violent Socialists and Liberals and in the context of the subjectively perceived reaction of right-wing extremists to so-called “Gypsy crime”. These factors played a crucial role in the rise of the two most important Hungarian right-wing terrorist groups. However, the socio-psychological factors in the radicalization of small collectives should be taken into account if we want to understand why these two groups only turned to a significant degree to terrorist violence. (Unfortunately, the lack of official information about both these cases does not allow a more in-depth analysis)

From a contemporary perspective, we can see the decline of politically motivated direct physical violence in Hungarian society. The political situation in Hungary has changed since the mid 2000s. Socialist and Liberal enemies of the extreme right are marginalized in the current Hungarian political spectrum. The electoral success of the conservative party Fidesz as well as the growth of the extreme right Jobbik party led to illiberal[66] tendencies in Hungarian politics and society [67] Although we can see a limited decline in the

militant right-wing extremist scene, this scene still remains relatively strong. In the mid 2010s, the Jobbik party, which used violent protests from 2006 and the original Hungarian Guard for its purposes, began a process of stylized “de-extremization” (or de-demonization, as Michael Minkenberg calls it). However, some individual members of the party still share racist anti-Romani violent statements.[68] The migrant crisis and its possible development pose a new important topic for the Hungarian extreme right, including vigilantism. Irredentist tendencies may be strengthened in relation to the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon. Ongoing trials of alleged perpetrators of right-wing extremist violence radicalized some extreme-right supporters. A return to serious forms of right-wing extremist violence cannot be excluded in Hungary for the future. However, recent developments show the declining tendency of militancy (in contrast to the growth of right-wing politics, which has its roots in resistance to the failure of Socialist government in the mid- 2000s).

Conclusion

Two main right-wing terrorist groups were active in Hungary at the beginning of the twenty-first century and several violent incidents committed by other perpetrators occurred in Hungary or were caused by Hungarian right-wing militant activists abroad. The neo-Nazi serial killers of Romani people of the Death Squad were able to spread a threatening message to a vulnerable ethnic community, while the MNNHF with its legacy of the “Arrow Crosses” intimidated predominantly Liberal and Leftist politicians at a time following a great political crisis. These violent fringes of the right-wing in Hungary operated at the same time as vigilante and paramilitary formations arose in the country and national-conservative and right-wing extremist tendencies in Hungarian politics gained strength. While right-wing terrorism has recently declined in Hungary, the other above-mentioned issues continue to play an important role. The militant right-wing extremist milieu in Hungary still exists.

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About the Author: Miroslav Mareš (1974) is a Political Scientist and Professor at the Department of Political Science and researcher at the International Institute for Political Science, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. He is a member of the European Expert Network on Terrorism Issues (EENeT) and member of the Editorial Board of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN, 2015-2017). His research interest is focused on political extremism and terrorism and security policies in Central and Eastern Europe. He can be reached at mmares@fss.muni.cz

Notes

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