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Right-wing Extremists in Europe

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Throughout world history, times of rapid change have stirred up antagonisms and paranoid views of either immigrants or minorities. We are witnessing the same phenomenon in Europe today -- the latest of which spurred a Norwegian to commit mass murder in the name of his beliefs.

In the last 20 years, Europe has witnessed a surge in right-wing extremism. This trend is connected to the political dissatisfaction and loss of trust in government by a growing percentage of the population of European Union. These radical groups demand a strong but small government; they are in favor of strong nationalism and homogeneity, and express strong hostility towards asylum seekers and illegal immigrants. These groups oppose cultural pluralism and giving equal weight to the desires of the minority over the majority.

This trend is stronger in the northern parts of Western Europe like Austria, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands, and Germany, but it is not limited to the West. Similar tendencies have appeared in Eastern European countries. The author of this paper presents a comparative analysis of several far-right organizations/parties in Western Europe as well as the characteristics of right-wing extremism in Eastern Europe.

The paper identifies the concerns that led to the popularity of these groups as well as the consequences for political stability and democracy in the European Union. The author examines the response of domestic institutions and external bodies, such as the European Union, and the attempt to stop or prevent the spread of these groups. To exemplify this trend, special attention is directed towards Germany and Russia.

An Intelligence Report from 2001 showed that resentment against immigrants is present across Europe. Here are some numbers to demonstrate this attitude, as revealed in an intelligence report (Southern Poverty Law Center 2001):

**Austria** – population 8 million
- 37% of Austrians would not shake hands with a Jew.
- 15% of Austrians find people of different nationalities disturbing.

**France** - population 60 million.
- 27% believe that there are too many blacks in France
- 56% of French believe there are too many Arabs in the country.
Germany - population 82 million.
38% of Germans find the presence of people of other nationalities disturbing.
There are 75 extreme-right organizations.

Hungary - population 10 million.
70% of Hungarians believe that the Roma population is a threat to society.

Great Britain – population 60 million.
1 out of 5 Britons wants the expulsion of the immigrants.

Russia - population 145 million.
38% of Russians are anti-Semitic.
There are 37 ultranationalist publications.
There are 10 ultranationalists groups with a membership between 100-5000.

Slovakia - population 5.4 million.
60% believe that refugees carry diseases.
The Roma population is described as “mentally ill” (Former Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar).

The list goes on. Since this report was published in 2001 it is fair to assume that the number increased recently.

Scholars from different fields have attempted to offer explanations detailing why significant portions of the present day European population have embraced this right-wing extremism and why the popularity of these groups has increased in the last two or three decades. Some authors believe these groups are a backlash to the far-left parties which are supporting feminism, ethno-pluralism and minority rights. All these movements or concepts could be targets to be vilified by far-right groups in a world marked by economic instability and globalization.

Bolaffi, a professor in Rome, wrote that “Apparently, without the leftists, especially the Italian ones, there would be no skinheads, neo-Nazis, right-wing terrorists, or radical members of the parliament.” (Schmidt 1993) Still, it is debatable if the far-right groups are opposing left-wing groups or the established parties for supporting the issues of the left. (Karapin 1998)

Bernt Hagtvet (Hagtvet 1994), from the Christian Michelsen Institute in Bergen and the University of Oslo, put forward a psychological explanation. He claimed that there are individuals attracted by these organizations because they hate confusion and uncertainty. On one hand, people have more freedom to choose their style of life and careers. On the other hand, they have to fight to earn success and for that they have to compete with their countrymen and people from (and in) other countries, due to the
process of globalization.

This brings in the sociological explanation and the xenophobia noted by the same author. The structure, the economy and the political landscape of Europe has changed drastically in the last decades.

International migration follows a certain pattern. In search of opportunity, people move from less developed countries to more developed countries. It is true that, as part of globalization, many corporations have relocated their manufacturing plants to poor countries, where labor is cheap and there are fewer regulations. However, despite the fact that in poor countries those working for foreign companies are paid better, jobs in Western Europe remain more attractive, even the low-paying jobs.

In the 1950s and 1960s, many workers migrated to Europe for temporary jobs, as guest workers but, in time, they settled and brought their families into the host countries. After the fall of communism, the number of immigrants increased dramatically, as people from the former communist countries looked for opportunities to better themselves. As the number of immigrants increased and jobs in manufacturing decreased, there was concern in the host countries regarding employment and housing. European governments were faced with the challenge of extending citizenship rights to newcomers who were reluctant to integrate and who wished to stick to their traditions, for instance the Muslims in France.

Most nations in Europe are used to viewing themselves as homogenous and feel very threatened by large numbers of foreigners. Workers in manufacturing industries feel threatened by these changes. They are competing for low paying jobs and housing with immigrants. Many believe that foreigners are treated better than the natives and have more benefits. They feel that their way of life has changed and that their culture is being eroded. As a result, they oppose the concept of plurality and cultural mixing. (Hagtvet, 1994) Right-wing extremism appeals to those with a low level of education and those who are benefitting from the welfare system, to people who are afraid of their prospects in a fast changing society and economy.

Xenophobia is fueled, in many cases, by the media, especially television, which focuses on racially motivated attacks, on stories pitting the immigrants against the whites, and on the “negative” aspects of foreigners. The Internet can incite violence and hate. It can also mobilize people for demonstration or recruit new people for jihad.

Professor Bernt Hagtvet draws a comparison with the fascist movements during the 1930s-1940 (Hagtvet 1994). He emphasizes the fact that during that period the fear of communism and a weak middle class were among the factors that contributed to the rise of nationalism. He indicates that the Germans, in the 1930s, feared the rise of the
working class and the left-wing struggle to obtain power. Although the present day movement has some parallels to fascism (such as the populist nature, nationalism, strong leadership and the use of violence against certain groups), it differs from those of the past because it doesn’t have desire for expansion in foreign countries. In addition, support for democracy in the Western countries is still very strong.

Suzette Brokhorst, Secretary-General for the International Network Against Cyber Hate (INACH) in Amsterdam, argued that the earlier radical groups and the present ones are not different (Bronkhorst 2010). It is mainstream society that changed. As of 20-30 years ago there was little support for racism and anti-Semitism. Nowadays, many in mainstream society are in favor of radical ideas (Bronkhorst 2010, Page Two):

The extreme right, the neo-Nazis, the populists, all those did not change. It is the reaction of the society at large, the mainstream that has changed. There is more acceptance for racism and the cocktail of economic crisis, influx of migrants, terrorism and equating terrorism with Islam - and more crimes leads to feelings of uncertainty and fears.

Other experts come with different ideas. Roger Eatwell considers the concept of citizenship to be another factor that might have contributed to the rise of extreme right-wing movements. In his article, “Ten Theories of the Extreme Right,” he identifies three types of citizenships (Eatwell 2003).

- The first is the French model of citizenship. According to this concept, anyone who wants to be assimilated in the culture can become a citizen of that specific country. The key here is that the individual must adopt and embrace the culture. Out of all the European countries, France has the largest Muslim population. Most of these individuals are immigrants (and their children) coming from the former French colonies. The French believe in equality of all citizens. This is based on acquiring citizenship. Newcomers must adjust to French culture and learn the language. The outcome of this should be assimilation.

- The German model is based on “blood” ties. One is a citizen because one is born with German ancestry. When West and East Germany united, the West German government assimilated the population from the Eastern part. With the fall of communism, many German-speaking people from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union required repatriation (approximate 2.3 million people, according to Zimmerman). They got full benefits of German citizenship including housing, employment and other subsidies.
They were also spared being victims of regular attacks against asylum-seekers that others confronted. The protection and the support they got helped a lot with their integration.

- The last model, the British one, makes it more difficult to delineate exactly who is and who is not a citizen. The British model is not so exclusive due to the fact that the British Empire was a multi-national one. The British were more exposed to different races and religions. The British support the Parliament and organizations and agencies that would mediate between the groups.

The first two models are more exclusive. They are very ethno-centrist and use racism in their politics. They are against immigrants, gays, and Jews. All three models “justify”, more or less, the resentment felt towards those who are of different race or religion.

European right-wing extremists believe that true democracy is possible only in homogenous communities. To achieve this homogeneity, they assume a populist attitude and portray themselves as true democrats who are defending the people against the establishment. The best method for reaching their goals is the use of the referendum as “direct democracy.”

Since 1970s there were many politicians who pushed for referenda on immigration. For example in Switzerland, James Schwarzenbach, a far right politician, organized the Action Committee against the Foreign Domination of People and Homeland. He asked for a referendum requiring the deportation of about 300,000 workers within a four year period. This measure was defeated but only by a small margin. (Merkl 2003) However, in 1998, a small town in Sweden, led by one of the local officials, used the referendum to keep foreign refugees out of their community. A total of 67% of the people favored this measure and the town of Sjoba set a precedent for other communities to follow and had serious consequences. (Institute of Race Relations 2010)

The far right set out to intensify the anti-immigration campaign, especially against Roma and Muslims. Across Europe, parties such as People’s Will Against Mass Immigration (Sweden), Freedom Party (Austria), National Front (France), Northern League and Alleanza Nazionale (Italy), Danish People’s Party, Progress Party (Norway), German Rightist Party and Republican Party (Germany) and many others adopted a very strong anti-immigration stand combined with hatred and racist remarks.
For instance, Franz Schonhuber, leader of the Republican Party, became a celebrity when he said “Sham refugees out! … We’re not a welfare office for the Mediterranean.” (Schmidt 1993) He urged the German people to “protect the German’s people ecological Lebensraum against the foreign infiltration.” (Schmidt 1993)

In 1991, Jurgen Rieger, a lawyer from Hamburg and a supporter of the National Front said; “We make foreigners living here feel as uncomfortable as possible.” (Schmidt 1993) The National Front published the “Ninety Point Plan for Foreigner Repatriation” that included an integration tax of 50,000 marks per year for every employed foreigner; the stipulation that publicly-supported housing should be reserved for Germans only, and the demand that government cut allowances for family and education of foreigners. (Schmidt 1993) In Austria, 1992, the Freedom Party demanded the government close the borders to all asylum seekers because, as its leader Jorg Haider stated, “Austria is not a country of immigrants.” (Institute of Race Relations 2010)

In 1996, in Switzerland, a referendum initiated by the Swiss Democratic Party was held to ban those who were looking for asylum from working. Although the referendum was rejected by a small margin, it showed that there was great support for such a measure.

Sometimes, the anti-immigration sentiments can become violent. In 1988, an activist from the National Front Party in Germany burnt down a house, killing 3 Turks. In 1992, also in Germany, two skinheads killed a man in a bar by setting him on fire. Members of the NF Party, engaged in military training and hateful propaganda, inciting the population to fight for “racial socialism.” It proclaims that it is a successor of the SA, and organizes celebrations for Hitler’s birthday. In 1992, after many incidents, the NF Party came under investigation for attempting terrorism and was banned. At the trial of one of its members, Thomas Dienel of Weimar (who was accused of hate speech) said, “We will see to it that Turks, Chinese, Vietnamese and Negroes no longer exist in Germany.” (Schmidt 1993)

A further characteristic of this trend is Islamophobia. This trend intensified after the September 11 attack and following the London, Madrid, and Moscow bombings. The growing number of Muslim residents in EU was presented by some as threatening to the entire nation. Clearly, the violent acts of some Islamic radicals have contributed to the growing perception that all Muslim are terrorists.

Dr. John J. Le Beau, professor at George C. Marshall European Center for Security Study in Germany, said that another attack would lead to “spontaneous violent reaction on the part of others. … I think this would be very dangerous because… it runs the risk of sectarianizing or “Balkanizing Western Europe.” (Johnston 2010)
Jorg Haider, leader of Austrian Freedom Party, said the following about Muslims (Betz 2003):

The social order of Islam is opposed to our Western values. Human rights and democracy are as incompatible with the Muslim religious doctrine, as is the equality of women. In Islam, the individual and his free will counts for nothing, faith and religious struggle-jihad, the holy war, for everything.

The same climate of hostility is in Netherlands. Geert Wilders, leader of the Freedom Party, expressed his opposition to the immigration and Muslims, in particular, in a very aggressive tone. He demanded a tax on the headscarf and banning the Koran from the Netherlands. Although he was tried for hateful and discriminatory statements by the Dutch government, he has strong support in the country because he is fighting the “Islamization of Netherlands.” (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Forum Berlin 2010)

In 1989, in France, a conflict broke out regarding the wearing of the headscarf by Muslim girls in school. The whole country was divided on this issue. Some on the left favored non-religious education and women’s emancipation. But the far-right National Front Party used the incident to prove that the Muslims are trying to colonize France – to change the very core of the French culture.

The recent law prohibiting the burqa is another example of an attempt by the French government to force integration of Muslims into the French culture. The question remains whether the French should allow religion in the school system, changing their tradition, or whether the Muslim minority should abandon its traditions? Should the state try to change the Muslim tradition regarding the relationship between genders? Should the immigrants follow the laws of the country they have adopted or should they adhere to the laws of the country and society they have left? The French population generally turned hostile towards Muslims for refusing to integrate while French Muslims perceived this law as discriminatory; it alienated a good percentage of them. (Pierre Brechon 1992).

One strategy for preventing Muslims from immigrating into a country is to make the process of naturalization very difficult. For instance, in Switzerland, people used a citizens’ initiative in 1994 to vote against the federal government proposal to make access to Swiss citizenship easier. This method was used against all foreigners (such as Christians from Yugoslavia), Muslims, Africans, Asians, and, the last but not the most loved, the Roma population.

The attack on minorities of Muslim religion shifted after 2001 to preventing the building of mosques and minarets. John Dalhuisen, a researcher who is working for Amnesty International, stated that utilizing the political process known as an initiative
protects the majority and not the minority. The Swiss example was copied by Germans who are considering banning minarets in their own country and by the Italians as well. Christian fundamentalists are also trying to prevent the recognition of any non-Christian religion. (Institute of Race Relations 2010)

Another trait of the right-wing extremism is anti-Semitism, which is present in the Western and in the Eastern part of Europe. In 1998, Roger Karapin published an article (Karapin 1998) in which he stated that the neo-Nazis hold rallies, carry Nazi symbols, and want to re-write history by denying the Holocaust and playing down the devastation created by Hitler and his regime for all Europe. For most people, the Third Reich is associated with images of men, women, and children being herded towards the gas chambers.

The neo-Nazis would like to rid themselves of this stigma. They cannot attract people to their ideology as long as Nazism is considered emblematic of a period that people must never experience again. Many Germans suffered too because of Hitler and they lived for decades with a sentiment of guilt, like a burden. The German government tried to take all the necessary steps to prove to the world that Hitler did not represent all the Germans and that they believe in democracy and equality of all people.

The new right wing radical groups are focusing on “decriminalizing” the history of Germany. In 1991 the head of the German Republican Party, Franz Schonhuber, former SS, addressed the committee chair of the German Jews, Heinz Galinski (Schmidt 1993):

Shalom Her Galinski -- it’s time for you to finally leave us in peace and to stop talking your nonsense. We do not want to hear it any longer, we cannot hear it any longer, and we will not allow ourselves to be humiliated any further. You are to blame if contemptible anti-Semitism should once again come to this country.

In 1991, Rudolf Augstein published an article in Der Spiegel with the title Germany and the Germans. There, he tried to explain that anti-Semitism was not only in Germany, but it was spread all over Europe. The Germans should not be blamed for the actions of one person – that is, Hitler. The Nazi era was “a case of bad luck.” It was Hitler, an Austrian, not German, who “made the Jews responsible for the lost world war and convinced the very differently inclined Prussian-German generals to join him.” He states, “The real guilty party was Adolf Hitler.” (Schmidt 1993) One of the neo-Nazi came with a practical slogan: “Everybody participates...no one is responsible!” (Schmidt 1993)
One of the most disturbing trends is the attempt by Neo-Nazi groups to deny the Holocaust. It is an attempt to bring new “truths” to light in order to rid themselves of the guilt of war and the guilt of the crimes in the gas chambers. David Irving, a writer from Great Britain, published a trilogy on Hitler. In his book, David Irving argued that Hitler did not know about the gas chambers or any other crimes committed in his name. Here is what his opinion was about the death camps (Schmidt 1993):

So, just as the gas chamber in Dachau was a dummy built in the first post war years, the gas chamber that the tourists see in Auschwitz was built by present day Poland right after the Second World War. The evidence exists, the grounds have been chemically analyzed and we have now published the facts all over the world. And I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen, they will make quite a sensation. Our enemies will faint from the shock.

His distorted and perverted view of the Holocaust outraged a great number of people. Deborah Lipstadt, an American citizen of Jewish descent, sued David Irving who lost the trial and claimed that he was a victim of the Jewish conspiracy. The German government barred him from entering the country.

Thies Christofersen, a well known neo-fascist from Denmark, published a book with the title The Auschwitz Lie. In this book, Christofersen suggested that as an eye witness to the Auschwitz camp, he saw nothing wrong there. He stated that what impressed him the most was the “elegance of the prisoners.” (Schmidt 1993)

The revisionists do not deny the camps but they argue that deaths were the result of natural causes and not execution by gas. They allege that the high number of victims claimed by the Jews is exaggerated because they wanted more money from the German government.

It should be noted that anti-Semitism is present even in a country like Switzerland which historically is very democratic. Christopher Blucher, leader of the Swiss People’s Party, took a strong stand against allegations regarding his country’s role in WWII. He sympathized with those elderly people who are offended by the criticism of Switzerland.

He said, ”We are not ashamed of our history “ and “ The people of Switzerland cannot be blackmailed.” He was referring to the Jewish World Congress’ criticism of his country and went even further by comparing the threats of the Jewish organization to boycott Swiss goods to the boycott of Jewish goods in Nazi Germany. The Swiss People’s Party became very strong by its opposition to what was perceived as political correctness and affirmative action and it advocated replacing them with politics based on “common sense of the people.” (Betz 2003)
Xenophobia, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism are part of a larger movement called the White Resistance, according to Hans Georg Betz, the author of the article “The Growing Threat of the Radical Right.” In his article he explained this movement with a quotation from David Duke, the leader of the American Ku Klux Klan (Betz 2003):

White Resistance groups “blame the systematic and planned extermination of an entire national, racial, political or ethnic group… on low birth rate, abortion, mass immigration from developing countries, affirmative action (“anti-white prejudice”) and particularly on intermarriage (all of) which are supposed to integrate whites out of existence or at least, to a controllable level.”

All revisionist groups who deny the Holocaust or who try to take Hitler’s name out of this dark period are part of this movement – the White Resistance. Resentment against globalization is part of this movement because the infiltration of immigrants into Western Europe is seen as destroying the character of the nation. Members of these radical groups demand racial cleansing. (Betz 2003) They view their attempt as an effort to save Western culture. That is why the war in Kosovo between the Serbs (Christians) and the Albanians (Muslims) was seen by many as a religious war to defend Europe from being taken over. (Betz 2003)

This is not only a Western European phenomenon. The eastern part of Europe was not spared the surge in advocacy of racism, ultra-nationalism, anti-Semitism and neo-fascism. There were some common traits with right extremism in Western Europe but also some significant differences.

After the demise of the communist regimes, Eastern European countries went through a transition period marked by hyper-inflation, corruption, and a dramatic increase in the crime rate. There were sweeping economic and social changes that affected a large number of people. Traditional family values seemed to disappear. Sexual emancipation brought the issue of gay pride to public discussion. The number of poor people in Eastern Europe increased after the end of the Cold War from 4% to 45%, according to World Bank report. (Martin A. Lee 2001)

Most of people in the East felt that the world around them didn’t make sense any more. They were alienated, frustrated, and disenchanted with governments that could not provide relief to their problems. Right-wing groups and neo-fascists, appearing after the demise of communism, turned this climate to their benefit by manipulating old prejudices. Their agenda included ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and hateful rhetoric against the Roma or other groups. There were numerous communists who became part of this trend and identified themselves as the only alternative to difficulties facing their countries.
With the exception of Russia, Eastern European countries did not have immigration problems because unemployment was very high and there were no jobs available.

However, some minority groups were targets. For instance in Bulgaria the leader of Ataka, a right-wing party, stated (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Forum Berlin 2010): “Roma are all criminals”, “Homosexuals are sick”, and “Politicians grunt like pigs.” In Poland, Lech Kaczynski, the leader of the very conservative Law and Justice Party, united with Self Defense of the Republic of Poland and Nationalistic League of Polish Families, both far right organizations. In Hungary, the Jobbik Party gained popularity by describing the Roma as “thieves who evade work, while cashing in on state benefits.” (Bronkhorst 2010, Page One)

These statements sum up the main ideas of the Eastern European right-wing groups today. Hard core nationalist factions demand ethnic purity. The war in the Balkans is a good example illustrating the bloodshed that can result from ethnic conflicts and how easily it can degenerate to cause a whole area to become volatile.

Anti-Semitism was present in Russian-controlled Eastern Europe, the setting for violent pogroms in the 19th and 20th centuries, although officially there was no discrimination against the Jews. Many Jews managed to escape and settle in Israel during the communist period. After the fall of communism, those who remained behind faced anti-Semitism again. Countries like Hungary or Romania blamed their respective governments for selling their countries out to “a Jewish-led conspiracy.” (Martin A. Lee 2001)

Out of all the Eastern European countries, Russia witnessed the most racist tendencies, ones that created a dangerous brand of Slavic fascism. During the Gorbachev administration there was an increase in extremist groups and periodicals. People got used to racism, anti-Semitism and a large majority approved strong nationalism. After the fall of communism, there was a transition period that was very disruptive. The public often turned against the West, America, Jews and ethnic minorities. This shows that there remains a strong connection between poverty and extremism.

In the past, due to the process of Russification, many Russians lived in the non-Russian republics and they were the privileged group there. With the fall of communism and the creation of newly independent states, Russians living in these new states found themselves marginalized. They were no longer the privileged group. That led to great tensions between the Russians and the non-Russians. Some Russians wanted to get back into the Russian Federation. That added to the number of immigrants looking for jobs from the Caucasus and Central Asia. Like in the West, the influx of immigrants led to a surge in radical groups who put forward the concept of “Russianness” which is determined by blood ties. This means that ethnic groups
should be expelled or deprived of their rights.

This kind of rhetoric was used in the elections, particularly in the 1990s. Some of these groups are militarized. One of them is RNU, the Russian National Unity Party. It is involved in crimes that are racially motivated. (Tolz 2003) There are also Cossack units which, occasionally, act together with the RNU. In 1995 they attacked a village with Turks in Krasnodar Krai. Their goal was to push the Turks out of the village. The attack of the Chechen terrorists in Moscow, in the town of Budennovsk, and the horrific attack on a school in Beslan fueled hatred in Russia against people from the Caucasus region. In 1995, members of Liberal Democratic Party of Russia proposed the deportation of all people from the southern regions. (Tolz 2003) This kind of inflammatory rhetoric was used to defend the first military Russian intervention in Chechnya in 1994.

Jews make up a group that was systematically targeted by the Russian authorities and the Orthodox Church. After the fall of communism, this prosecution did not stop. Jews were perceived as enemy number one by the Russians. They were blamed for the Christianization of Kievan Rus in 988 because Christianity is influenced by Judaism.

The result of this propaganda was the setting up of a neo-pagan movement in the 1980s. The founder of this movement was Victor Bezverkhii, a lecturer at the Military Academy in Leningrad. This new religion is a mixture of pre-Christian Slavic paganism and Vedic culture. Jews were also blamed for the Russian Revolution of 1917 that destroyed imperial Russia. (Tolz 2003)

Anti-Semitism is banned by the Russian constitution, but there is sympathy for those opposing Judaism. In 1994, Viktor Korchagin published and distributed 100,000 copies of a very anti-Semitic brochure – “The Catechism of a Jew.” He was tried, but not convicted because of a lack of evidence. Although the mainstream population does not support anti-Semitism, it is obvious that a certain percentage sympathizes with it. This situation gives a sense of security to the extreme groups who will continue their racist propaganda. (Tolz 2003)

All these activities created great concern for Western and Eastern governments, as well as for the members of the European Parliament. They feared a revival of authoritarian regimes based on racism, extreme nationalism, and violence.

There was also concern that the European institutions would provoke a wave of nationalism in the EU’s new member states by individuals who might perceive their national identity fading away, or by those who fear that they are being forced to follow some rules and regulations that are not in their best interests.
These extreme groups have substantial popular support and have acted as an alternative to the established governments. They were the product of dissatisfaction with the traditional governments, with their refusal to deal with some of the concerns of the people. To exclude these groups could be unconstitutional in many countries because they represent people who are protesting their government.

One strategy for addressing these concerns is for a conservative party to ally with a far right party, as has happened in Austria. Once a far right party becomes legitimate, it has to modify the rhetoric to appeal to larger groups of people. In essence, they are forced to be more inclusive. Also, the reaction of the West towards Austria may create a backlash especially in the newly accepted countries. Thus, here is what a leader of the Slovak party had to say not so long ago (Hall and Perrault 2000, Page Nine):

The reaction of the West against Austria reminded me that the doctrine of limited sovereignty could be put into question. We have just obtained our independence. We do not want to lose it again, as we know from 1968: The Russians then taught us about the choice of the electors.

Western European governments are based on democracy and they encourage people’s participation in decision-making. Nevertheless, using direct democracy, in which people make their own rules, can become dangerous for the minority groups because of the issues that are debated. That is why it is important to listen to the concerns of the people while preserving human rights for all.

In 1966, UN held a Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racism and there were measures taken to prevent racist propaganda. France and Netherlands ratified the measures. Germany and Britain already had legislation in place to deal with this issue. Denial of the Holocaust was declared an offence in French criminal law in 1972. Germany had a similar law after WWII. Other Western countries have similar laws to deal with the revisionists. (Donselaar 2003)

Most of the Western countries will ban demonstrations if serious riots are expected. However, this is very seldom done. In Germany, after 1990, the banning of radical right wing demonstrations became the rule because of the violence that marked some demonstrations.

Another way to fight these extreme groups is to isolate them, to show clearly that they are not supported by the mainstream population. This is seen more in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, but less in Great Britain where the conservative government tolerated the extreme groups to a certain extent.
All governments that are taking these measures intended to stop the spread of radicalism are facing what Jaap van Danselaar called in his article “Patterns of Response to the Extreme Right in Western Europe” (Donselaar 2003) a dilemma of repression. He pointed to the fact that governments would take drastic steps to curb the activities of the radical groups but they also had to do it within the framework of political freedom. The rights to assembly, free speech and the rights of association should be defended.

He also mentioned a possibility that these measures might backlash. If an organization is prosecuted, then the confrontation in court could be lost by the government that would increase the popularity of that particular organization. If the radical organization loses, then people might perceive this outcome as the result of a repressive government that doesn’t respect basic rights of the people.

Although the actions of the extreme right are of concern, the legitimate governments of Europe and different organizations for human rights are taking steps to combat the trend while keeping Europe a continent with strong democratic values. Civic groups in every country must push the governments to take actions against racism. However, the European governments must address the concerns of the people that they represent.

The German government is debating the passing of a new immigration law that would specify the skills required on the German market. This law would limit the number of immigrants allowed to come to Germany but at the same time, those admitted would get political support and lot of support for integration. (Zimmerman 2003)

Education, or rather a lack of education, has a lot to do with the rise in popularity of right-wing groups. Most of the members of these groups have little education and are working in low paying jobs. Also threatened by the issues of competition are those with very small family businesses. It is important for people to acknowledge the differences and see what the real problems are. Schools should expose the students to diversity to make them understand that there are different cultures beyond their own.

It is also important to eliminate the economic discrepancies within the European Union. The marginalized countries provide a potential breeding ground for the recruitment of extreme individuals. Some Eastern European countries feel a certain hostility towards supranational institutions such as the EU, and the regulations being imposed on these new member states make some within them question the benefits of membership in EU. (Hall and Perrault 2000)

Yet, it is also evident that extremist groups should decline in the face of economic prosperity and relative progress within the European Union, as its structures facilitate the sense of a common European future
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