

State reactions on radical movements in Slovakia

This study aims to map State reactions to radical movements in the Slovak republic since 1990. When we refer to State, we refer to all State, self-government and judicial bodies: central government and national parliament, regional governments, local governments, police and courts.

1990 – 2003: no public activities, no media attention, no specific state policy

The first radical movements and ideas penetrated Slovakia in the late 1980s years of 20th century and especially after the fall of communism in 1989. These movements evolved from an underground music scene whose foundations were based on a mixture of music and racist ideology. During the early period of this extremist 'scene', the regular targets of hatred were Slovakia's ethnic minority groups such as Roma, Czech nationals and Jews. After break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the situation changed, in the sense that Czechs ceased to be considered enemies. The radical movements began to find their heroes in Slovak history. Between 1939 and 1945, the leaders of the Slovak republic offered a unified ideology of racism and nationalism.



The tomb of Jozef Tiso, who was president of the Slovak republic during the Second World War, became the site for

regular meetings for extreme Right-wing groups, particularly on 14th of March each year (the anniversary of 1939 declaration of the Slovak republic).



An organisation named Slovensky Narodny Front (*Slovak National Front*), made up of 'skinheads', is one such group. But the Ministry of Interior prohibited the registration of this organisation, due primarily to having the word "front" as part of its name (it sounded 'too militaristic'). After some internal wrangling, the Slovak National Front was divided into Ludova Strana¹ (*People's Party*) and Slovenska Pospolitost².



There are numerous movements with radical characteristics in Slovakia. They tend to operate either as registered civic associations or without official registration, as underground movements.

¹ Ludová strana is a political party that continues to be registered with the Ministry of Interior, though its activities are limited. It participated in the parliamentary elections in 2002, though not in 2006.

² The Ministry of Interior registered Slovenska Pospolitost as a civic association.

As stated above, it is possible to divide the movements into two types of organisational groups. The first type consists of those organisations that have statutes, an official address, a clear leadership structure, and are officially registered with the Ministry of Interior. Such organisations, formed with the intention of carrying out their activities in public, will openly seek support for their objectives. The second type of organisational group are those without official registration and which operate as 'underground' entities, often around the aforementioned mix of ideology and particular 'underground' music groups.

During this period, the public activities of radical movements were not considered to be so provocative as to be interesting for Slovakia's media nor its politicians. Only police and the Slovak Information Service (*Slovak intelligence service*) monitored their activities. Their activities were deemed to be of criminal character, though without the potential to threaten the democratic political system in Slovakia³. As for these radical movements' membership numbers, the Slovak Information Service estimated them to be in the "several hundreds". In 2002, the Service monitored the political ambitions of some of the movements.⁴ The following year, the Slovak Information Service observed the amalgamation of several small radical movements into larger units that had clear political aims.⁵

³ Annual report of the Slovak Information Service for 2001.

⁴ Annual report of the Slovak Information Service for 2002.

⁵ Annual report of the Slovak Information Service for 2003.

2003 – 2005: radical movements becoming increasingly public in their activities, significant media attention, ad hoc reaction of state

The initial radical movements' activities that first drew cross-media attention occurred in July 2003, during a protest march of Slovak nationalists in Komarno.



There, they attended a public meeting to debate the conflict that had arisen between the regional branch of Matica Slovenska⁶ in Komarno (a predominantly Hungarian city) and Komarno's city hall.



The dispute concerned the placement of sculptures of St. Cyril and Method. It was planned that the sculptures would be erected in front of Matica Slovenska's residence in Komarno. The city hall had refused permission for the project to go ahead, but Matica Slovenska and its supporters insisted that they had the right to proceed with it.

⁶ The Slovak national cultural institution for promoting Slovak culture was established in 1863. It was dissolved by the Hungarian government in 1875 and re-opened in 1918. A special law on Matica slovenska and its operation and financing existed (No. 68/1997 Coll.).



Police accused Slovenska Pospolitost's marching members on the basis that the group displayed Fascist propaganda (such as wearing uniforms that were identical to those worn by the fascist 'Hlinkova Garda' during World War Second).



The protest march was the first of several marches carried out by Slovenska Pospolitost. Their second outing occurred a month later, in August 2003, in Ruzomberok on the 65th anniversary of the death of Andrej Hlinka – who was both a priest in Ruzomberok and a Slovak politician (he had chaired the Slovak People's Party from its origin in 1918 to Hlinka's death in 1938). Approximately twenty young males attended this official meeting, which had been organised by Slovak Government. Police monitored the event but no action was taken against the group.

Around thirty supporters of the same radical movement, Slovenska Pospolitost, met again in July⁷ 2005 - again in Komarno. This time, some forty members of a Hungarian radical movement (made up of both Hungarian and Slovak nationals) met on parallel march. This meeting, perhaps due to the presence of police, did not break into violence, though verbal assaults were volleyed between the groups.

⁷ Slovakia celebrates the 5th July as a holiday of St. Cyril and Method, the apostles of the Slavs.

In August 2005, Slovenska Pospolitost organised a further four meetings - so-called "torch marches". Four Slovak towns (Ruzomberok, Martin, Banska Bystrica and Zvolen) are situated in the heart of the territory where the Slovak National Uprising had taken place against the fascist government of Slovakia and German Nazi troops in August 1944. Slovenska Pospolitost and other Slovak radical movements regard the Slovak National Uprising as a coup against the Slovak republic and its nationhood. Each of Slovenska Pospolitost's torch-marches had been announced to local governments beforehand. All the local governments in question claimed that they did not have the power to cancel or dissolve the marches. State and local police forces only monitored the marches. Local councillors in Zvolen issued a proclamation against all radical and extreme movements. One Zvolen MP, Boris Krsnak, organized a counter-demonstration - a so-called "white march", in Zvolen simultaneously with Slovenska Pospolitost march in Zvolen.

The torch marches triggered a series of State responses to radical movements. Firstly, The League Against Racism appealed to the Ministry of Interior, asking them to dissolve the political wing of Slovenska Pospolitost ('Slovenska Pospolitost National Party). This political party had been registered by the Slovak republic's Ministry of Interior in January 2005. Chair of The League Against Racism, Mr. Daniel Milo, claimed that the activities of Slovenska Pospolitost - National Party violated paragraph two of the law (No. 85/2005 Coll.) on Political Parties. This law forbids political parties from violating the Constitution, the laws and the

international agreements of the Slovak republic. Milo also urged local governments to use law No. 84/1990 Coll. on public gathering, in order to prevent meetings of radical and extremist organisations.



Secondly, police prepared a proposal of legal measures that eventually lead to the arrest of Mr. Marian Kotleba, head of Slovenska Pospolitost. However, Mr. Kotleba was prosecuted without being jailed. He and his colleagues

were subsequently arrested several times after their marches, though only kept in custody for a short period.

Slovenska Pospolitost continued their public activities by marching in the town of Hlohovec, in Cernova (village near Ruzomberok where fifteen people had been killed and more than seventy injured by Hungarian police in 1907).

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%8Cernov%C3%A1_tragedy



In October 2005, two other marches were held in Modra, a small town where Ludovit Stur⁸ died, and in the town of Presov. Police arrested Kotleba in Cernova, dispersed a meeting in Modra and special police officers pushed supporters of Slovenska Pospolitost out of Presov. Following those marches, the General Attorney of Slovakia, Dobroslav Trnka, submitted a

⁸ Ludovit Stur was Slovak politician and novelist lived in 19th century, leader of Slovak national movement in 30s and 40s of 18th century. He was leader young generation of Slovak intellectuals and Slovak National Revolution in 1848 – 49, chaired Slovak National Council during revolution. He is also co-founder of official Slovak language.

proposal to the Supreme Court requesting the dismissal of Slovenska Pospolitost - National Party as a legal unit.

From 2005: ad hoc activities against radical movements continue but State policy develops against extremism



On 4th November 2005, twenty-one year old student Daniel Tupy was murdered in Bratislava. Radical right-wing movements were accused of Daniel's murder. Tupy was neither an activist against racism nor member of a minority, police supposed to be killed by extremist only as a demonstration of their power.⁹ The media gave widespread publicity to this crime and its investigation. That same month, several incidents occurred as protests were held against extremism and neo-Nazism. The media offered a financial reward to assist in tracking down Daniel's killers. This case has been kept alive, and Daniel has become the symbol of the fight against extremism. In November 2006, on the first anniversary of Daniel death, a memorial was unveiled in honour of victims of racism and neo-Nazism. Daniel Tupy's killers were never found.

As further provocation, the supporters of Slovenska Pospolitost revealed their intention to call a meeting to demonstrate against the Slovak

⁹ As witnesses claimed, group of men dressed as neonacists attacked Tupy and his friends.

government's policies. The gathering was held on 17th November 2005, outside the Slovak President's residence, at Hodza¹⁰ square in Bratislava. This date was the anniversary of the 1989 "Velvet Revolution", which had brought an end to the rule of communism in Czechoslovakia. The local government of Bratislava's Old Town initially claimed that there was no possibility to forbid Slovenska Pospolitost's meeting from taking place. But the General Attorney, together with his regional and district colleagues, warned the city's Old Town officials that the protest would, in fact, be a violation of the law. Consequently, the local government ceded to the General Attorney's will, and the Slovenska Pospolitost gathering at the city's Hodza square was banned. Several lawyers questioned the legality of the ban. A few days before the meeting was due to take place, police arrested three members of Slovenska Pospolitost.

Slovenska Pospolitost - National Party intended to join the country's parliamentary elections, which were planned to take place in June 2006. The previous February, the party had been formally registered for election after it had raised the five hundred thousand Slovak crowns required to take part in the election. However, on the 1st of March 2006, Slovakia's Supreme Court decided to dismiss the political wing of Slovenska Pospolitost (Slovenska Pospolitost - National Party) due to the content of its political manifesto; the manifesto pledged to change the political system from democracy to the type of fascism inspired by Tiso between

¹⁰ Milan Hodza – Slovak politician of first half of 20th century. He was first Slovak prime minister in Czechoslovak government.

1939 and 1945 (society should be strictly divided and organised by classes. All other political parties welcomed the decision of the Supreme Court.

Despite this, immediately after the Supreme Court's ruling, the chair of Slovenska Pospolitost, Marian Kotleba, revealed his intention to join the June parliamentary elections. The Slovak People's Party offered Kotleba a vacancy on their list of candidates for the elections. However, the Slovak People's Party gained only 3,815 votes - which amounted to a mere 0.16 per cent of the total votes cast.

Slovenska Pospolitost and its chair, Marian Kotleba, continued in their activities. Their next move, in August 2006, resulted in the prosecution of some of the group's members, including Kotleba himself, who was present with his supporters on the 62nd anniversary celebration of the Slovak National Uprising, in Banska Bystrica.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHI4Jzecx1Y>

Police arrested and briefly questioned them. Shortly afterwards, the regional government of Banská Bystrica asked the Director of one of Banská Bystrica's High schools to fire Mr. Kotleba, when it was revealed that Kotleba was employed at the school, as a teacher of computing. The President of Banská Bystrica's regional government, Milan Murgas, requested that the School Inspector visit the high school in question. Politicians insisted that Kotleba be dismissed from his position with immediate effect, though it was soon discovered that there was no possibility to do this legally. Later, Kotleba and the Director of the high school agreed to have Kotleba's position within school changed – from a teacher to a webmaster.

Radical political movements emerged as a serious topic for the Slovakian media at this time. It also became an agenda for the country's politicians. The awarding of a Government grant to the NGO 'Jednota Mládeže Slovenskej (*United Slovak Youth*) and the election of a new chair to the Nation's Memory Institute¹¹ helped to attract this attention.



Jednota Mládeže Slovenskej (*United Slovak Youth*), a youth organisation, applied for a grant from the Ministry of Education. In January 2006, the media revealed the fact that Jednota Mládeže Slovenskej (*United Slovak Youth*) had been successfully awarded the grant. Public opinion leaders reacted angrily. They insisted

¹¹ Institute was founded in 2002. The mission of the Institute is to provide access to up-to-date undisclosed records of the activities of the the Slovak and Czechoslovak states between 1939 and 1989. Its founder and chair, Jan Langos, died in June 2006. For more information go to www.upn.gov.sk.

that Jednota Mládeže Slovenskej (*United Slovak Youth*) was in fact a radical organisation, mainly because of the organisation's manifesto and the presence of its supporters at marches in Modra and Cernova, alongside those of Slovenska Pospolitost, in the autumn of 2005. In February 2006, opposition political parties in the national parliament put forward a proposal to have the Minister of Education, Martin Fronc, recalled. At the forefront of this proposal was the issue of the grant which had been awarded to Jednota Mládeže Slovenskej (*United Slovak Youth*).



The new chair of The Nation's Memory Institute was due to be elected at the national parliamentary session in January 2007.

The leading candidate was young historian Ivan Petransky, who tried to explain the reason for his sitting next to the head of Slovenska Pospolitost (Kotleba) during a one historical conference. The apparent 'coincidence' was viewed with suspicion throughout wider society.¹²

Radical movements ranked high on the agenda of the national parliament in November 2005, following a series of Slovenska Pospolitost marches and meetings (torch marches etc.) throughout the summer and autumn of that year. At its session on 9th November, the parliament requested that the Slovak government prepare Resolution No. 1970/2005, which would act against the violence, intolerance and extremism that was simmering in Slovakia. The Ministry of Interior prepared a report for the government,

¹² The main argument put forward by Petransky was that it was an open conference and his intention was only to hear a lecture given by one of his young colleagues.

submitting it to its session on 7th December 2005¹³ and then to parliament. Parliament accepted it as an imperative political issue and reacted immediately to condemn Slovenska Pospolitost.

The report monitored the police's activities in this field between 2002 and 2005. It concluded that more attention to radical movements was devoted only in the period after 2001. Two major institutional changes were carried out in this period: firstly, in 2003, the Ministry of Interior created a so-called Central Commission for the coordination of activities against extremism. That Central Commission is composed of all the relevant departments of the police force. Representatives of the General Attorney's office as well as the Ministry of Justice were also in attendance. Similar commissions were also created at regional level. Furthermore, a special Department was created in January 2004 in order to take up the fight against racism and extremism within the police force.

The first government strategy against extremism was unveiled in 2006. The first draft of this proposal, as a conception of the fight against extremism¹⁴, was submitted to the session of the Slovak government on 11th January 2006; the government, however, did not discuss it. It was again submitted to the 3rd of May 2006 governmental session – and

¹³ Správa o boji proti prejavom násilia, intolerancie a extrémizmu, <http://www.minv.sk/pk/2005/ARCHIV/KM-279/zoznam.htm>.

¹⁴ <http://www.rokovania.sk/appl/material.nsf/0/DBC7E8BA0E3F11BC12570EA004B76DF?OpenDocument>

government approved the document¹⁵. The strategy put forward included new tasks to be carried out by all ministries, and proposed the creation of a new cooperation between all relevant actors, including NGOs, by 2010. It was agreed that the Minister of Interior should submit a report annually, on 30th April each year, based on the progress of the adopted measures. Government obliged the Minister of Interior to prepare, in cooperation with the offices of the Attorney General and Ministry of Justice, a legal proposal to help combat extremism - and submit it to the governmental session in September 2006.

In September 2006, the Minister of Interior submitted a legal proposal on the fight against terrorism and extremism¹⁶ through a process of Governmental consultation. This document contains a set of measures created to fight terrorism and extremism (changes of 17 Acts including Act No. 34/2002 Coll. on Foundations, Act No. 83/1990 Coll. on Civic Associations etc.). However, it is merely a proposal and has yet to be submitted to the session of the Slovak government.

In March 2007, the media disclosed news that members of Slovenska Pospolitost had changed their leader, with an Ivan Sykora replacing Marian Kotleba. Analysts believed, however, that the reason for the re-shuffle hinged on the fact that Kotleba attracted too much police attention. Hence Slovenska Pospolitost, under its new leadership, appears

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<http://www.rokovania.sk/appl/material.nsf/0/F55F4967244D37BFC125715D003E174E?OpenDocument>

¹⁶ <http://www.minv.sk/pk/2006/ARCHIV/KM-184/zoznam.htm>

to have adopted a new strategy. Neither Slovenska Pospolitost nor any other extremist organisations have organised openly provocative activities, such as torch marches, since. In April 2007, they again held a demonstration at the tomb of Mr. Tiso, this time peacefully. At this juncture, radical movements and the activities they carry out appear to be gradually ebbing away from public debate in Slovakia.

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<http://www.visegradfund.org/>