Nina Paulovicova

The far right ĽSNS in Slovakia and its reconstruction of the nation

Skrajna prawica ĽSNS na Słowacji i jej wizja odbudowy narodu

Abstract: Societies around the globe have been witnessing the emergence of the radical right, often seen as the result of neoliberal globalization. Democratic governance, liberalism, human rights, and values are being questioned while populist, authoritarian, and ethnonationalist forms of governance are being offered.
In the European Union, the tumultuous developments have been testing the viability of the identity marker of Europeanness and its perseverance in EU member states. What we are witnessing are significant shifts in the discourse about sameness and otherness, the convergence of left and right ideologies and the emergence of hybrid forms of authoritarianism and democracy that have been dubbed as illiberal democracy or authoritarian liberalism. The rise of the radical right and its mobilization across the EU member states is reflective of these processes, and it is the goal of this author to understand the mechanisms behind the empowerment, mobilization, and normalization of radical right through the case study of Slovakia. In particular, the effort of this paper is to understand how the far-right party Kotlebovci – Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko (ĽSNS) in Slovakia re-conceptualized the notion of nation and normalized far-right ideology as a pretext of a broader mobilization.
Keywords: far right, radical right, Kotlebovci – Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko, nationalism, transnationalism, civilizationism
Streszczenie: Społeczeństwa na całym świecie są dziś świadkami wyłaniania się radykalnej prawicy, często postrzeganej jako rezultat neoliberalnej globalizacji. Demokratyczne rządy, liberalizm, prawa człowieka i wartości są kwestionowane na rzecz populistycznych, autorytarnych i etnonacjonalistycznych form rządzenia. Burzliwe wydarzenia w Unii Europejskiej wystawiają na próbę stabilność wyznacznika europejskości i jego trwałośćw państwach członkowskich UE. Jesteśmy świadkami znaczących zmian w dyskursie o identyczności i odmienności, zbieżności lewicowych i prawicowych ideologii, a także pojawienie się hybrydowych form autorytaryzmu i demokracji, które zostały

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nazwane nieliberalną demokracją lub autorytarnym liberalizmem. Powstanie radykalnej prawicy i jej coraz szerzej zakrojone działania w państwach członkowskich UE są odzwierciedleniem tych procesów, a celem autorki artykułu jest zrozumienie mechanizmów umacniania się, mobilizacji i normalizacji radykalnej prawicy na przykładzie Słowacji. W szczególności zaś chodzi o przybliżenie w jaki sposób skrajnie prawicowa partia Kotlebovci – Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko (ĽSNS) na Słowacji ponownie skonceptualizowała pojęcie narodu i znormalizowała skrajnie prawicową ideologię jako pretekst do szerszej mobilizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: skrajna prawica, radykalna prawica, Kotlebovci – Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko, nacjonalizm, transnarodowość

Introduction[1]

The 1990s transition from communism to democracy offered ground for the emergence of the radical right in post-communist states. In comparison to the Western European radical right, its Eastern European counterpart was relatively weak, and as Cas Mudde pointed out, "somewhat pathetic: (far) more extremist, but (far) less successful."[2] The EU's 2004-2007 enlargement, when several post-communist states joined the EU, empowered radical right.[3] Polyakova argued that the unification of national economies and the adoption of a Eurocurrency "has amputated the economic arms of national governments," which disabled the states to "create protective social measures, as was the usual strategy before the adoption of the Euro."[4] Post-communist states suffered from a "status loss,"[5] which led disillusioned voters to support the extreme right. The recent scholarship has identified eco-

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1   This paper was presented at the 2019 Interdisciplinary Conference of Human Rights in Prague. Different version of the paper was published in this conference proceedings: https://www.aauni. edu/data/files/ichr-proceedings-2019.pdf.

2   'Central and Eastern Europe', ed. C. Mudde, in: *Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 249.

3   M. Minkenberg, 'The Rise of the Radical Right in Eastern Europe: Between Mainstreaming and Radicalization', *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, no. 1 (18), 2017, pp. 27-35.

4   A. Polyakova, *The Dark Side of European Integration. Social Foundations and Cultural Determinants of the Rise of Radical Right Movements in Contemporary Europe*, Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2015, p. 17.

5   U.M. Vieten, S. Poynting, 'Contemporary Far-Right Racist Populism in Europe', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, no. 6 (37), 2016, pp. 533-540; R.S. Jansen, 'Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach', in: *The Promise and Perils of Populism – Global Perspectives*, ed. C. de la Torre, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015, pp. 159-188.

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nomic and social challenges,[6] income inequality,[7] or other contextual factors and variables,[8] that empower radical right. Some argued that the economic impact of the EU unification or the "perceived economic ethnic threats" is a less critical factor behind the emergence of the radical right than "perceived cultural ethnic threats"[9] or policy hostility. Nevertheless, a recent example of Brexit reveals a subtle interplay between socio-economic and cultural factors in the identity-building accompanied by societal pessimism, disillusionment, frustration, and nostalgia – the factors that should not be underestimated.

The integration of post-communist countries in the EU was an uneasy process that inevitably involved tackling these states' problematic pasts to assure that their objective to join the EU involve sincere efforts to transform their communities towards respect for human rights, freedom, and democracy. Joining the EU came with a difficult task to address the crimes caused during the era of totalitarianism (1939-1989). In particular, coming to terms with the problematic past of the Holocaust was painful as it required admitting the responsibility of Nazi collaborators for the crimes against Jews, Roma, the victims of political persecution, LGBTQ community, Jehovah Witnesses, and other victims. The post-communist societies mostly bypassed the question of collaboration with the Nazis in silence and offered an exculpatory interpretation of the past based on the narratives of their victimization to avert the attention from its share of responsibility for past crimes. Although there were many examples, when the culture of the commemoration of the victims filled the public memory, col-

6   See for example H. Werts, P. Scheepers, M. Lubbers, 'Euro-scepticism and radical right-wing voting in Europe, 2002-2008: Social cleavages, socio-political attitudes and contextual characteristics determining voting for the radical right', *European Union Politics*, no. 2 (14), 2013, pp. 183-205; L. Ramiro, 'Support for radical left parties in Western Europe: Social background, ideology and political orientations', *European Political Science Review*, no. 1 (8), 2016, pp. 1-23.

7   K.J. Han, 'Income inequality and voting for radical right-wing parties', *Electoral Studies*, (42), 2016, pp. 54-64.

8   M. Rooduijn, B. Burgoon, 'The Paradox of Well-being: Do Unfavorable Socioeconomic and Sociocultural Contexts Deepen or Dampen Radical Left and Right Voting Among the Less Well-Off?', *Comparative Political Studies*, no. 13 (51), 2018, pp. 1720-1753.

9   G. Lucassen, M. Lubbers, 'Who Fears What? Explaining Far-Right-Wing Preference in Europe by Distinguishing Perceived Cultural and Economic Ethnic Threats', *Comparative Political Studies*, no. 5 (45), 2012, p. 551.

laboration with authoritarian regimes was pushed to the margins as the public discourse focused on the celebration of the rescuers of Jews.

The 1990s wave of nationalism, which in the case of Slovakia was reflective of an identity crisis, did not allow space for the acceptance of guilt and responsibility for the fate of thousands of Jewish and Roma victims of the Holocaust in wartime Slovakia. The nationalists applied "forgetting memory mode," while integrationists often resorted to political maneuvering to speed integration in the EU. Many feared that debates about the modes of collaboration with the Nazis during World War II would undermine the notion of Slovak victimhood (i.e., Slovaks as the victims of Nazism) and threaten nation-building and national confidence. Ethnonationalists resisted coming to terms with the dark past and rewired public mood from the feeling of guilt over the complicity in genocide towards national pride, and channeled social altruism towards one's kin. ĽSNS utilized certain discourses to reconstruct a proud Slovak nation – the concept that spilled from national to transnational context. The notion of a proud nation as a member of transnation or civilization of Slavs reveals the imagining of a New Europe – the one that omits the "corrupted and decadent West" and celebrates the brotherhood of Slavs and the leadership of Russia.

1. Defining the radical right: From the "homogenous nation" to transnationalism and civilizationism

The supporters of the radical right have been labeled as fascists, neo-Nazis, extremists, extreme populists, or the "third wave" right-wing parties and New Right. Minkenberg pointed to the proliferation of the definitions on the radical right that he described as mere "shopping lists of criteria rather than conceptually grounded definitions,"[10] and Cas Mudde pointed to "terminological chaos."[11] To overcome this lack of scholarly agreement, some classify radical right within the larger frame of populism. Betz and Johnson, for example, argued that "contemporary radical right represents a radical type of right-wing pop-

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[10]   M. Minkenberg, 'The Renewal of the Radical Right: Between Modernity and Anti-modernity', *Government and Opposition,* no. 2 (35), 2000, p. 171.

[11]   C. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

ulism whose proponents seek to transform liberal democracy into an ethnocratic regime, which gives supremacy to the interests of 'the people' defined in terms of the narrow conception of citizenship."[12] However, Rydgren cautions against defining the radical right parties as populist since ethnonationalism, rather than populism, is a primary feature of extreme right parties.[13] Instead of going into the depth of the definitional debate, Elisabeth Carter offers a minimalist definition to determine the common features across extreme right ideologies. Carter "strips the definitions back to their components in an effort to explore what (and how much) they have in common."[14] By doing so, she identified this common core as authoritarianism, nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and populism.[15]

At the core of all definitions is the ethnonationalist myth about "homogenous nation" as the fundamental stone of the far-right values. Slogans like "France to French," "Slovakia to Slovaks," or "Ukraine to Ukrainians" are at the heart of victimization discourses that promote the "imagery of cultural loss."[16] A prevalent amount of scholarly literature is misled as they approach ethnicity as an unquestioned stable entity and ethnonationalism as a starting point of analysis of the emergence of the radical right. Terms such as "ethnarchy," "ethnarchism," or "ethno-anarchism" and "nativism," which state that only members of "the native group" constitute a state, offer a limited understanding of the recent emergence of the radical right. The focus on ethnicity tempts scholars to treat pre-war and wartime fascism and Nazism as an identical twin of the recent radical right, which brings the risk of recycling the term *fascism* or using the term *neo-Nazism* as an effort to emphasize the continuity with the Nazi era. Some scholars worry that using terms like *fascism* and *neo-Nazism* to describe the late 20th

12   H.G. Betz, C. Johnson, 'Against the Current – Stemming the Tide. The Nostalgic Ideology of the Contemporary Radical Populist Right', in: *The Populist Radical Right. A Reader*, ed. C. Mudde, London–New York: Routledge, 2017, p. 111.

13   J. Rydgren, 'Radical right-wing parties in Europe: What's populism got to do with it?', *Journal of Language and Politics*, no. 4 (16), 2017, p. 486.

14   E. Carter, 'Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept', *Journal of Political ideologies*, no. 2 (23), 2018, p. 158.

15   Ibidem, pp. 175-177.

16   A. Polyakova, *The Dark Side of European Integration…*, p. 32.

and early 21ˢᵗ century radical right "become increasingly obsolete" as these terms "suggest a historical continuity."[17]

It is important to recognize, and yet not overstate, the importance of ethnonationalism as the core value of the radical right. There is an urgent need to approach the rise of the radical right as an "international phenomenon"[18] by bringing into the picture mostly neglected transnationalism and civilizationism. My attention will be shifted from a notion of a homogenous Slovak nation, as a core value of the radical right's ultranationalism, towards the transnational notion of Panslavism, which promotes Slavic unity and brotherhood under the leadership of Russia. The radical right discourse utilizes Panslavism to underscore tradition, religion, and family values of the Eurasian civilization as an alternative to what the radical right in Eastern Europe describes as "morally decadent" Western civilization – a nest of "dangerous sects and sexual deviations."[19] The far-right ĽSNS's pro-Russian orientation is reflective of real geopolitical threats of Russian influence in Eastern Europe. However, the discursive West-East split is paradoxically dissolved when negotiated with a geopolitical reality on the ground. Firstly, the competing ethnic nationalisms in Europe are concurrently united in their anti-European stance[20] and secondly, as a result of the refugee crisis, the radical right in Eastern Europe inevitably became "Westernized."[21] The fear of "Muslim hordes" invading Europe was widespread in the post-communist region and resulted in the alliances between Central-Eastern and Western European radical right.

17   M. Minkenberg, 'The Renewal of the Radical Right…', p. 171.
18   Ibidem, p. 170.
19   B. Simms, Ch. Laderman, 'The Longest Hatred', *New Statesman*, 9 May 2016, http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2016/05/longest-hatred [2017-08-05].
20   W. Baier, 'Europe on the Precipice: The Crisis of the Neoliberal Order and the Ascent of Right-Wing Populism', *New Labor Forum*, no. 3 (25), 2016, p. 52.
21   L. Buštíková, 'The Radical Right in Eastern Europe', in: *Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. J. Rydgren, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 4.

2. The Emergence of *Kotlebovci* – *Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko* (ĽSNS)[22]

The radical right that emerged after the fall of communism in Slovakia can be described as a heterogeneous block of the groups on society's fringes, extra-parliamentary, and mainstream parties.[23] As opposed to the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, whose radical right mobilize against "socially conservative issues," Slovakia displays the mobilization "against constitutive, larger ethnic groups with a high degree of politicization."[24] The ĽSNS, as the most successful actor on the radical right spectrum in Slovakia, is an anti-system party, an extreme faction of populism that represents "the fourth generation" of the alternative parties.[25] It is the party of "radical return," promoting the values of the wartime regime, the Holocaust denial, and relativization.[26]

The roots of the ĽSNS go back to the movement *Slovenská Pospolitosť* (Slovak Togetherness), established in May 1995, which, at that time, was the most notable emerging force of extreme right feeding on the general disillusionment, attacking parliamentary democracy and promoting hatred against Jews and Hungarians. Marian Kotleba joined *Slovenska Pospolitosť* in 2003 and worked on its transformation. On January 31, 2005, *Slovenská Pospolitosť – Národná Strana* (Slovak Togetherness – National Party, SP-NS) was registered as a political party that aimed to "build Slovakia on national, social and Christian principles" and change the existing political system.[27] Kotleba led radical SP-NS was banned in 2006 due to its calls to replace parliamentary democracy with a state based on the corporate principle and discrimination of the minorities. Despite the ban, Kotleba managed to participate in the 2006 elections as the candidate of *Slovenská*

22   English translation: Kotlebists – People's Party Our Slovakia. "Kotlebists" are the followers of Marian Kotleba, the leader of the radical right PPOS.
23   A. Kluknavska, 'Enemies Among Us: The anti-elitist and xenophobic discourses in Czech Republic and Slovakia Farming Strategies of Extreme Right Parties in Slovakia and Czech Republic', *Rexter časopis pro výzkum radikalismu, extremismu a terorismu*, (2), 2014, pp. 42-71.
24   L. Buštíková, *The Radical Right in Eastern Europe…*, p. 2.
25   O. Gyárfášová, 'The Fourth Generation: From Anti-Establishment to Anti-System Parties in Slovakia', *New Perspectives. Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics and International Relations*, no. 1 (26), 2018, pp. 1-25.
26   M. Shafir, 'Denying the Shoah in Post-Communist Eastern Europe', in: *Holocaust Denial: the Politics of Perfidy*, ed. R.S. Wistrich, Berlin–Boston–Jerusalem: DeGruyter, Inc., 2012, p. 31.
27   D. Vražda, *Odkiaľ prišiel a ako je možné že sedí v parlamente*, Bratislava: N Press, 2017, pp. 22-23.

Ľudová Strana (Slovak People's Party, SĽS) with a program similar to the banned SP-NS. With 0.16% of votes, the SĽS, however, suffered a significant defeat in the 2006 parliamentary elections.[28] Kotleba realized that the party needs to be built anew to attract more electorate. To lower the risk of the ban, Kotleba and his supporters tricked the system and joined the already registered party *Strana priateľov vína* (The Party of the Friends of Wine), which was soon renamed to *Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko* (ĽSNS) and since November 2019 the party is officially known as *Kotlebovci – Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko* (KĽSNS).[29] For his party to succeed, it was essential to get rid of the associations with the Nazis and fascists and "normalize" the image of Kotleba and his party in the eyes of the public.

Although the normalization of the ĽSNS was not the sole cause of its 2016 electoral success when ĽSNS won 8% votes, and fourteen seats in the Parliament, it had a considerable impact on the broader mobilization of its supporters. The normalization of the party in addition to long-term factors (the disillusionment over the process of transition, the emergence of ethnonationalism, antisemitic and anti-Roma sentiments, anti-Western mood, Euroscepticism, anti-Americanism discourses, instability of political parties and the sense that none of these parties deserves to be voted, widespread corruption, the crisis in the education system and health care) and situational factors (refugee crisis and the upsurge of alternative media) were responsible for Kotlebists' 2016 success.[30]

Kotleba has disseminated his extreme worldview under the pretext of civility, decency, and defense of the vulnerable. Such rhetoric has pooled more supporters for Kotleba's policies in the past ten years. Kotlebists gained 30 000 votes in 2010, and ten years later, in 2020, KĽSNS gained 230 000 votes.[31] In March 2020 elections, Kot-

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28 D. Vražda, *Odkiaľ prišiel a ako je možné...*

29 G. Mesežnikov, O. Gyárfášová, *Súčasný pravicový extrémizmus a ultranacionalizmus na Slovensku. Stav, trendy, podpor*, Bratislava: IVO, Nadácia Hannsa Seidela, 2016, p. 19.

30 Ibidem.

31 V. Bella, 'Psychológ Masaryk: Matovič spravil sám seba zrozumiteľným, je dokonalým politikom instagramovej doby', *Denník N: Voľby 2020*, 4 March 2020, https://dennikn.sk/1784165/psycholog-masaryk-matovic-spravil-sam-seba-zrozumitelnym-je-dokonalym-politikom-instagramovej-doby/?utm_source=follow_tags&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=mnt-tag.new.article-04.03.2020-16&utm_content=51343 [2020-04-16].

leba gained 20 000 more votes in comparison to the 2016 elections. Overall, it gained 8% votes and 17 mandates in the 2020 elections and gained three more mandates in comparison to the 2016 elections. This is a warning that democracy and its gatekeepers need to be firm in preventing Kotleba and his lackeys, such as Milan Mazurek, from spreading their messages of hate. Extremist ĽSNS is rewiring the system from within, using legitimate avenues while questioning and attacking existing mechanisms of democracy.

ĽSNS program is based on national, social and Christian pillars.[32] Mesežnikov and Gyárfášová pointed out that this party's "national" pillar is built solely on ethnonationalism and majoritarianism.[33] Secondly, the "social" pillar signifies "economic protectionism and social chauvinism" and "Christian" is a normalized term for "neoludak version of political Catholicism", representing historical-political continuity with the clerical-fascist heritage of the wartime Slovak Republic's *Hlinka Slovak People's Party – Hlinkova Slovenská Ľudová Strana* (HSĽS).[34] As this paper demonstrates, the ĽSNS's focus has expanded from ethnonationalism and majoritarianism, excluding minorities to transnationalism and civilizationism underlying the brotherhood of Slavs and a pro-Russian orientation.

3. Normalization Discourses – Decency, Civility and Security

In its program, the ĽSNS states that one of its goals is to reshape Slovakia to become "educated and cultural – as a proud country in the heart of Europe."[35] Kotleba and his followers reach out to the potential electorate while attaching normalized, i.e., publicly accepted and valued signifiers such as decency, rescuing, protecting, and caring to problematic signifiers such as racism, ethnic and religious hatred, illiberalism, and anti-systemness. As a decent nation of altruists and

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32 'About Us', *Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko. Odvahou proti systému*, http://www.naseslovensko.net/en/about-us/ [2018-02-02].

33 G. Mesežnikov, O. Gyárfášová, *Súčasný pravicový extrémizmus a ultranacionalizmus na Slovensku. Stav, trendy, podpor*, Bratislava: IVO, Nadácia Hannsa Seidela, 2016, p. 22.

34 Ibidem.

35 'About Us', *Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko...*

protectors of the socially weak, Slovaks, in the rhetoric of the ĽSNS, represent part of a new identity parcel of Slovaks as a "proud nation." The following sections will address the specific frames within which this new construct of the Slovak nation has been disseminated.

4. "Decent" Radical Right

The fiasco that Kotleba and the SĽS suffered in the 2006 election made the normalization of the image of the extremists a necessity. The dark blue uniforms with a double-cross on armbands that the members of earlier *Slovenská Pospolitosť* movement, the forerunner of today's ĽSNS were proudly wearing were very similar, although not identical, with the uniforms of *Hlinka guards* – the paramilitary group of *Hlinkova Slovenská Ľudová Strana* in 1938-1945.[36] The dark blue uniforms not only promoted masculinity and paramilitarism but also amplified the values of wartime HSĽS – ethnic nationalism, populism, antisemitism, and Roman Catholicism and its conservative values and traditionalism. Following the 2006 elections, the radicals stopped wearing dark blue uniforms and opted for civilian clothes. Kotleba replaced his uniform with a long black leather jacket and stopped shaving his head. Daniel Vražda described this transformation of appearance as Kotleba's need to "zľudovieť," which in English can be translated as "getting closer to people" in a sense that he would become accepted and ideally admired by the wider population.[37] The Kotlebists opted for a calming effect of dark green color T-shirts with Kotleba ĽSNS' logo. Some party members, such as the district leader of the ĽSNS in Levice Rastislav Jakubík, even removed a tattoo of *Haken Kreuz*. When asked about the Nazi symbol tattooed on his chest, Jakubík denied the association with Neo-Nazism as "an absolute nonsense" and explained that the tattoo was the act of his past youth rebellion.[38]

Another major step in the normalization of the image was the replacement of the problematic double-cross, resembling the wartime

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36   D. Vražda, *Odkiaľ prišiel a ako je možné...*, p. 16.

37   Ibidem.

38   'Okresný šéf kotlebovcov si dal odstrániť hákový kríž z hrude: Bola to vraj mladícka nerozvážnosť', *Topky.sk*, 14 December 2018, https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/1759025/Okresny-sef-kotlebovcov-si-dal-odstranit-hakovy-kriz-z-hrude--Bola-to-vraj-mladicka-nerozvaznost [2019-01-15].

fascist HSĽS' cross, with the Cyril-Methodius double-cross – the state sign of Slovakia. Milan Uhrík described this move as a "resolute distancing from any association with Nazism, fascism or any form of extremism" and claimed that the change of symbol is a message to "all decent and conscientious people not to be afraid of ĽSNS. Only those who steal from the state should worry."[39]

The normalization was also achieved by public gestures of altruism as an expression of social and Christian pillars of the party's policies in March 2017. Kotlebists donated money to low-income families with disabled children. On March 14, 2017, the ĽSNS representatives presenting themselves as altruists donated 1,488 EUR to the families in need. This gesture is imbued with multiple problematic messages: it was donated on March 14, the anniversary of the establishment of the wartime clerical-fascist Slovak republic; the number 14 represents fourteen words of the American racist David Lane, a neo-Nazi symbol, "We must secure the existence of our people and the future of white children."[40] The last two digits 88 refer to the Nazi greeting Heil Hitler – with H being the eighth letter of the alphabet.[41] These altruistic gestures signaled a new normalization strategy. The gesture of donating money to low-income families in public approximated the distance between the party and the potential electorate and mobilized the electorate via diffusion of the extremist ideology.[42] However, they also resorted to different strategies to spread extremism.

The Kotlebists defused the racist messages by disseminating the Nazi symbols of *Blood and Honor*, neo-Nazi *Triskele*, or white supremacist sign of KKK (Ku Klux Klan) in Kotleba's online business with English fashion called KKK. The business was opened in 2006 and was run by Kotleba and his two brothers (hence, allegedly, the name

39 R. Schlosár, 'Slovo Mariana Kotlebu. O smeráckej rošáde', *Náš Nitriansky Kraj*, April 2018, http://www.naseslovensko.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Noviny-LS-Nase-Slovensko-NR-april-2018.pdf [2019-02-12].

40 'Kotleba's far-right party faces prosecution for "1488" donation', *The Slovak Spectator*, 4 May 2017, https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20524510/kotlebas-far-right-party-faces-prosecution-for-1488-donation.html [2019-02-12].

41 Ibidem.

42 The term was used by A. Törnberg and P. Törnberg, 'Modelling Free Social Spaces and the Diffusion of Social Mobilization', *Social Movement Studies*, no. 2 (16), 2017, pp. 182-202.

with a triple capital K) until February 2017 when it was closed.[43] Kotleba did not hide his obsession with Nazi symbolism while running his business. If Kotleba's customers purchased the goods over 8,818 Sk, they received a gift – a telescopic police baton. The members of Slovenská Pospolitosť and police officers in Banská Bystrica district were offered an 8,8% discount. In addition, KKK enterprise promoted "akcia 1488" when the customers got a free tear gas spray if they spent over 1,488 Sk.[44] Such unabated spilling of Nazi symbols into public space pointed to a failure of democracy's gatekeepers to contain the spread of Nazi ideology and prosecute those behind it. The state's meager response not only sent out the message that such acts were tolerated but more importantly, the reluctance to prosecute such acts facilitated further normalization of radical right messages. Only years later, in September 2020 (as I write this chapter) Kotleba is facing a trial and potential imprisonment up to eight years for the distribution of "1488" donations – the trial that he has been trying to avoid.

The notion of decency has been embedded in the ĽSNS' program as it promised to build Slovakia that will be "safe for all decent citizens, so they are not terrorized by a gypsy or other extremists and corrupted politicians."[45] Repeated appeals to "slušné Slovensko" (decent Slovakia) resulted from the 2018 mass protests comparable to the scale of the 1989 Velvet Revolution. The 2018 protests were sparked by the murder of twenty-seven years old investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancé Martina Kušnírová in February 2018. The murder of Kušnírová and Kuciak, who investigated the links between an Italian crime network *Ndhraghetta* and the Slovak government, resulted in urgent calls to remove corrupt politicians and the fall of Prime Minister Robert Fico and the Minister of the Interior Robert Kaliňák. The non-violent mass protests revealed the determination to fight corruption and protect democracy at times when Slovakia's neighbors, Hungary and Poland, have slipped to illiberal models of democracy. Not

43   'KKK anglická móda. Kotleba zrušil biznis', *Aktuality.sk*, 22 March 2017, https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/426280/kkk-anglicka-moda-kotleba-zrusil-biznis/ [2018-11-26].

44   J. Benčík, J. Kotleba, 'Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko 1488', *Denník N*, 20 March 2017, https://dennikn.sk/blog/709155/kotleba-ludova-strana-nase-slovensko-1488/ [2018-06-15]; 'ĽSNS v kocke', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-TFXt_NYQM [2018-10-01].

45   'About Us', *Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko...*

surprisingly, the calls for "decent Slovakia" were readily appropriated by Kotlebists, who joined mass calls for the removal of the corrupted politicians. In March 2018 the party's representative Uhrík emphasized the decency of the party: "The opposition politics can be done differently. Without any compromises, but also decently and fairly. Just like we do. [...] We want to persuade all that ĽSNS is different – it is the positive change that all decent citizens of Slovakia have been waiting for a long time."[46]

5. Security discourse: Kotlebists as protectors and rescuers

Between 2006 and 2016, Kotlebists utilized four ethnic cards to instill the idea of the security threat: the antisemitic, anti-Hungarian, anti-Roma, and anti-Muslim cards. Although Kotlebists curtailed the expressions of the nostalgia for wartime fascist Slovakia, virulent antisemitism, as an indelible heritage of wartime republic, was not abandoned and was further exacerbated against a tiny remnant of 3,000 Jews currently living in Slovakia. The vast majority of Slovak Jewry was annihilated as a result of the antisemitic policies of wartime Tiso's regime, and many survivors facing antisemitism of the communist regime emigrated in the postwar era. Kotleba has used vicious antisemitism to define belongingness to the ethnic group. Externally, the antisemites in Slovakia attack the EU, NATO and the Western European elitist institutions that they see as being ruled by Jews.[47] Within the domestic context, the antisemites targeted internal enemies such as "Magyarophiles" and "Czechoslovakists" as a threat to ethnonational Slovakia and often turned their antisemitic attacks against Slovak elites. Before 2006, Kotleba and his followers attempted to mobilize the electorate by disseminating the fear of the "Hungarian expansionism." However, since the Slovak-Hungarian relations have been con-

46 M. Kotleba Náš Bratislavský kraj. Slovo Mariana Kotlebu o Šorošovi a jeho bábkach', *Noviny ĽSNS*, March 2018, http://www.naseslovensko.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Noviny-LS-Nase-Slovensko-BA-marec-2018.pdf [2018-08-18].

47 G. Mesežnikov, O. Gyárfášová, *Súčasný pravicový...*, p. 19.

solidated, the so-called "Hungarian card" has no longer proved to be an efficient mobilization tool.[48]

Kotleba's visit of Litvinov in the Czech Republic in fall 2008, where he witnessed one of the most brutal encounters between the radicals, and the Roma launched a new phase in the party's history. Following the Czech example, Kotleba utilized the "Roma question" to mobilize public support by disseminating fears of "black racism," a security threat posed by "Cigáň [a derogatory term used for Roma – NP] terror" and "Cigáň extremism."[49] The Romas mostly concentrated in Eastern Slovakian ghettos offered a convenient *raison' d'etre* for the party's racism. Kotlebists accused the government of the failure to "protect decent citizens" from "Roma parasites" and organized *domobrana*, community patrols at parks, theatres, railway stations or trains in the areas densely populated by Roma. Kotlebists called for the measures to curb the birthrates of "associals, parasites (Roma-NP) and immigrants", to increase the birthrate of "decent people," and organized the protests in the vicinity of the Roma's illegal settlements to reclaim the land of "the whites" back.[50]

The Roma ethnic card in the hands of the ĽSNS increased the number of party's sympathizers, but it was the refugee crisis that pushed normalization and acceptance of the radical right views to a new level as the mainstream parties slipped into fearmongering and fueled Islamophobia. Mainstream politicians often slipped into security discourse to defend the Slovak nation while producing the same xenophobic and racist views as the radical right. By doing so, the representatives of the mainstream "pierced the cordon sanitaire vis-à-vis extremism" and "lent indirect legitimacy to taboo ideas of extremist provenance, and effectively become agents of their mainstreaming."[51]

48   M. Minkenberg, 'The Rise of the Radical Right in Eastern Europe: Between Mainstreaming and Radicalization', *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, no. 1 (18), 2017, pp. 27-35, https://www.georgetownjournalofinternationalaffairs.org/online-edition/2017/12/22/the-rise-of-the-radical-right-in-eastern-europe-between-mainstreaming-and-radicalization [2019-01-17].
49   D. Vražda, *Odkiaľ prišiel a ako je možné...*, p. 16.
50   T. Rafa, *Docu film: Marián Kotleba "Veľké upratovanie" ĽSNS rómska osada Krásna hôrka*, 19 January 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAk_tZTI5v0 [2019-01-25].
51   A. Kallis, 'Far-Right "Contagion" or a Failing "Mainstream"? How Dangerous Ideas Cross Borders and Blur Boundaries', *Democracy and Security*, no. 3 (9), 2013, p. 225.

Slovakia experienced "fear of refugees without refugees."[52] Many Slovaks had never seen refugees in person. In 2016, the year of Slovakia's presidency in EU, Slovakia, along with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland voted against the EU scheme for refugee distribution according to which Slovakia was obliged to accept 2,600 refugees to help ease the pressure that Greece and Italy were exposed to as the result of the crisis.[53] In the repertoire of the ĽSNS, Islamophobia, like antisemitism, was a flexible tool utilized to define internal and external enemies. Whereas antisemitism is used as a tool to mock and attack the Western European elites or political enemies, anti-Muslim prejudice is an expression of "the fear of proximity of [*sic*] Muslim body" and an "external threat perpetrating, wars and invasions."[54]

6. The gendered lens of Security Discourse

The ĽSNS's effort to fight the "decadent West's liberalism" and its vices can also be seen as the "rejection of liberal emancipatory politics."[55] Similarly, as in Hungary, equality politics is condemned by Kotlebists and is a "symbol of everything that is wrong with a current state of politics. It is a metaphor for the insecurities and injustices created through the process of socio-economic transformation guided by the principles of the neoliberal policy consensus."[56] Grzebalska and Peto pointed out that the radical right attacks on liberalism are "grounded in very real inequalities and contradictions created by the globalized, neoliberal model" and describe these failures as "neoliberal neopatriarchy."[57] EU policies utilized gender as "a tool serving economic goals […] rather than a critical perspective serving equality per se."[58] Prioritizing economic goals over the principle of gender equality inevitably left gender grievances of masses of women unad-

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52 N. Paulovičová, 'Holocaust Memory and Antisemitism in Slovakia: The Postwar Era to the Present', *Antisemitism Studies*, no. 1 (2), 2018, pp. 4-34.
53 Ibidem.
54 Ibidem.
55 W. Grzebalska, A. Peto, 'The gendered modus operandi of the illiberal transformation in Hungary and Poland', *Women's Studies International Forum*, no. 68, May–June 2018, p. 165.
56 Ibidem.
57 W. Grzebalska, A. Peto, 'The gendered modus operandi of…'
58 Ibidem.

dressed while only "some token women" enjoyed power posts.[59] It is not difficult to see that the radical right grasped that opportunity to reach out to the disillusioned with an offer to "protect" them.

The gendered aspect is always amplified in security discourse to gain public sympathy and acceptance. Kotlebists identified multiple threats that women and girls have been exposed to. Firstly, Kotlebists call for the duty to rescue women from "the attacks of the Muslim hordes" as a result of the refugee crisis. Such calls excuse racial and ethnic minorities' persecution under the pretext of men's and boys' duty to protect women and girls from the "attacks" of non-Slovak "other." The Kotlebists called for the protection of women from the invasion of "Muslim hordes" and Islam, which Stanislav Mizík described as "satanic-pedophile work of the devil" during the 2016 Parliament session.[60] Secondly, the ĽSNS emphasizes the need to protect and rescue women from liberalism's vices such as drugs, homosexuality and pornography believed to be spread by Jews. The KĽSNS' approach to morality, respectability, nationalism and sexuality was clearly articulated at the occasion of the establishment of its youth organization *Ľudová mládež Naše Slovensko*, (People's Youth Our Slovakia). In his introduction, Milan Mazurek calls for a rescue mission of the youth in gendered terms:

> "Young boys are losing their onetime masculinity. New trends have been emerging in fashion, behavior, and hobbies, which only a decade ago were exclusively a part of the female portfolio. […] we have seen increasing addiction of young girls to cigarettes, alcohol and drugs, oftentimes comparable to the addiction level of boys. Their life [the life of girls – NP] has become a rollercoaster of social media, materialistic cravings linked to the permanent fall of the essence of their womanhood. Today, the desire to become a mother, raise children and dedicate their hearts to family concerns only a minority of girls."[61]

In the motivational video, Milan Mazurek offers the youth an alternative to a "mud of moral decadence." Mazurek appeals to the dis-

59   W. Grzebalska, A. Peto, 'The gendered modus operandi of…'
60   D. Vražda, *Odkiaľ prišiel a ako je* možné…, p. 30.
61   M. Mazurek, 'Nový projekt: Ľudová mládež ako hrádza proti vlne úpadku', *Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko. Odvahou proti systému*, 22 June 2017, http://www.naseslovensko.net/nasa-praca/novy-projekt-ludova-mladez-ako-hradza-proti-vlne-upadku/ [2019-01-08].

illusioned youth fed up with getting drunk in the pubs and those not afraid to work. He highlights patriotism, courage and dedication and appeals to boys to become "real men," i.e., physically strong and dedicated to their ideals." "To girls," Mazurek continues, "*we need to show*[62] that the meaning of life must not be found in promiscuity but rather in real desire to build a family."[63] The four-minute-long motivational video concludes with images of Mazurek and another young member, both muscular men, working out and lifting heavyweights in the gym while the slow-motion allows the viewers to notice the sweat and hard work involved. No images of girls are shown in the second part. The Kotlebists embraced existing neoliberal gender inequalities and appropriated them for their far-right agenda. Rather than assuring the rights of women, women's agency is not acknowledged as "girls have to be shown the right path." More importantly, girls and women are associated with all the vices that liberalism introduced. The ĽSNS feminized liberalism to highlight its vices.

Security discourse disseminated by the ĽSNS not only amplifies the perceived threat of "invasion" of Western and Muslim civilizations but also soothes the anxieties and fears of such invasion by offering a solution: a pro-Russian orientation as the path to a successful civilizational rescue mission. The brotherhood of Slavic nations under Russia's leadership is proposed as a viable solution to rescue Slovak women and girls from the claws of the Western and Muslim civilization "threats." In this regard, the idea of the revival of the nineteenth-century idea of Panslavism is not merely a nostalgic enterprise aiming to extend the historical roots of the nation, but rather reflect the "social, political, economic frameworks of Russia's presence in Slovakia" and its impact on the empowerment of the radical right.[64] Mesežnikov and Bránik, in their research, concluded that "the national security risk posed by pro-Kremlin paramilitary radicalization in Slovakia is among the highest in the region."[65] The authors point to Slovak ex-

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62 Emphasis added.
63 M. Mazurek, 'Milan Mazurek o vzniku Ľudovej mládeže', *Ľudová mládež*, www.ludovamladez.sk/pridaj-sa-k-nam/ [2019-01-08].
64 G. Mesežnikov and R. Bránik, 'Hatred, Violence and Comprehensive Military Training. The violent radicalisation and Kremlin connections of Slovak paramilitary, extremist and neo-Nazi groups', in: *Political Capital*, ed. L. Györi, Budapest: Political Capital, 2017, pp. 5-59.
65 Ibidem, pp. 8-12.

tremists' "long-term organizational or military cooperation with Russian officials or extremists." In addition to "paramilitary groups, civic associations and fringe media outlets" the ĽSNS represents an actor that helps the Russian government to weaken the EU from within by applying strategies such as promoting disinformation, "change[ing] the system of security architecture in Europe", in addition to discrediting the EU, NATO and state authorities.[66]

On a symbolic level, the ĽSNS emphasized its pro-Russian stance by taking down the EU flag, which Kotleba called "European occupation rag" or raising Russia's flag from his office in Banská Bystrica in May 2016 during the visit of Night Wolves, the biker gang supporting Putin.[67] To instill Panslavism and Slovak-Russian brotherhood ideas, the ĽSNS sanitizes history to produce simplified politicized messages. This sanitizing of the past is achieved by manipulating of the temporality of Slovak-Russian and Slavic-Russian relations. Selected historical events such as the nineteenth-century Panslavism and the 1945 liberation of Czechoslovakia by the victorious Red Army are simplified, sanitized, and collapsed in a timeless ideological capsule for the public consumption.

Conclusion

There is a general misconception of Europe as a pot of ethnic, racial, religious, and gender hatreds bubbling under the lid. Ethnic, racial, religious, and gender hatred are present in Europe, but it takes an effort to make them bubble. These hatreds are not subconscious fears ready to pour out, but rather carefully manipulated constructs that effectively normalize various kinds of hatreds by attaching them to the notion of civility, decency and security. The ĽSNS effectively spreads fear-mongering in the security discourse utilizing gender lens for calls to "rescue" Slovak women – the rhetoric that becomes normalized, rationalized, and widely accepted. The discourses about civility, decency and security represent building bricks of the concept of a proud, confident and strong nation ready to defend its own, i.e., Slovak, Christian "civilized"

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66 G. Mesežnikov, R. Bránik, 'Hatred, Violence and Comprehensive Military Training...'
67 'Do Bystrice prišli noční vlci. Kotleba vyvesil na župe ruskú vlajku', *HN Slovensko* 5 May 2016, https://slovensko.hnonline.sk/657800-do-bystrice-prisli-nocni-vlci-kotleba-vyvesil-na-zupe-rusku-vlajku [2019-11-02].

nation against the external "uncivilized (refugees and migrants), decadent, indecent, immoral and exploitative" (the West, NATO, EU) threat. Not only do these discourses affirm traditional values, soothe the anxieties over problematic past and boost confidence and strength of a small nation; they also clearly signal a reconceptualization of the very notion of Europeanness and reshaping of the geopolitics in the region.

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