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ESSAYS

Radical Right-Wing Parties in Central Europe: Mutual Contacts and Cooperation¹

Pavla Dočekalová

Abstract: *The aim of this article is to analyse mutual contacts between and co-operation of the strongest extreme right-wing political parties in Central European countries, i.e. in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The article defines the extreme right, introduces its member parties in the region (those who had or still have parliamentary representation, namely the Association for the Republic – the Republican Party of Czechoslovakia, Hungarian Truth and Life Party, League of Polish Families and the Slovak National Party) and analyses what kind of bilateral or multilateral relations they have maintained. It explains the possibilities of and obstacles to the transnational cooperation of the Central European radical right. Special emphasis is placed on European Union structures and the question of whether EU membership has influenced the mutual contacts of these parties. The conclusion states that although radical right political parties have maintained mutual relations, these links have been rather limited. The main reason can be found in the very nature of the radical right: its ideology is based on nationalism, which means that these parties do not consider international cooperation beneficial. Furthermore, they often have contradictory interests and aims, and these parties are heterogeneous and prefer different strategies for transnational cooperation.*

Key words: *extreme right; Central Europe; transnational cooperation; political parties; party family*

Introduction

The activities of political parties that are situated on the far right of the political spectrum can be considered as one of the challenges to democracy and democratic governance. Obviously, this statement is valid for all democratic countries, and the Central European region is no exception, but radical right-wing parties differ in their and strength in various countries. In some the extreme right has gained parliamentary representation and even has become part of the executive. Such parties usually do not advocate total elimination of democratic systems, but they express certain ideas and attitudes that undermine the democratic system and are a clear contradiction of

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Central European Political Science Association Regional Conference, Bratislava, Slovakia, 18–19 May 2006.

democratic values. Radical right-wing parties do not only focus on activities within the arena of national, regional and local politics, but they also participate in European elections and seek representation in the European Parliament (EP). This supranational platform then provides a forum for cooperation of groups of ideologically alike political parties of different countries.

The aim of this article is to analyse mutual relations between radical right-wing political parties in the Central European region and the influence of European Union (EU) accession on these relations. Several questions are considered: do the radical right-wing parties in Central Europe maintain mutual contacts? Do they establish a common platform for cooperation? Has European Union membership increased their interactions?

There are several aspects of the topic of this text that need to be specified. The first is the geographical delimitation: for the purpose of this study, Central Europe is understood as the group of "Visegrád Four" countries (i.e. the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary), which have experienced certain similarities in their developments. Secondly, it is necessary to explain which radical right-wing parties are being analysed. This article deals only with the strongest representatives of the radical right: only those parties that were represented (or are still represented) in parliament are considered. This limitation is in accordance with the aim of this article explained above: to analyse to what extent the radical right in Central Europe has made use of the potential for cooperation offered by European integration structures. The study of small parties that have never attracted significant voter attention, or illegal extremist organizations, is beyond the scope of this paper.²

This article is divided into three parts. The first offers a general definition of the radical right. It is necessary to provide the explanation of the nature of the phenomenon since the character of the radical right influences mutual contacts of its member parties and determines barriers to cooperation within this party family. The second part offers an introduction to radical right-wing parties in the Visegrád countries; it briefly outlines their electoral support, the role they play within the respective party systems, and basic ideological features. The third part is dedicated to analyses of mutual contacts of the extreme right-wing parties in the studied region and explains factors influencing these relations.

Definition of the Radical Right

The radical right-wing party family has attracted scholars' attention for several decades, with research covering, for example, reasons for electoral support, analyses of the ideology and programmes of these parties, attitudes of established political parties towards the radical right, mutual relations of far right-wing parties, etc. Despite

² An in-depth analysis of transnational networks of various types of the extreme right in Central Europe is provided by Miroslav Mareš (2006).

numerous articles and books published on this party family, numerous questions still have been left unanswered, and this topic remains the subject of many debates. Scholars have not even agreed on a proper label for this party family and its definition, and consequently there is no consensus on which parties should or should not be classified as a part of the radical right. As Cas Mudde rightly said, “a large part of the debate on whether the party is or is not part of the extreme right-wing party family is, indeed, more a result of a difference of opinion on the definition of right-wing extremism” (Mudde, 1996: 235). This is true also in the case of Central Europe: the classification of some parties as “radical right” can be doubted (let us take the example of the Slovak National Party).

For various reasons defining a radical right-wing party family can be considered more difficult to define than other party families. Firstly, the phenomenon of “extreme right” has a very diverse and broad nature. It comprises both far-right parties that have representatives in the legislature and that seek (or in the case of some parties even succeed in gaining) participation in governments, as well as extremist movements and groups that fight against the establishment. The extreme right is not a “uniform type bearing essentially homogeneous traits”, but it can be described as “a political family whose constituent parts exhibit certain things in common, but that also may be divided into subtypes” (Hainsworth, 2000: 4–5).³

Secondly, the parties concerned do not use the name “radical right”. Some party families are easier to define since the majority of their members use common names, for example, “green”, “communist” or “socialist”. The name criterion cannot be used in the case of the extreme right because given the fact that the parties do not admit to being classified as radical right, they often refuse to present themselves as being right-wing or left-wing, and they define themselves as taking another (third) position (Eatwell, 2000: 410; Mudde, 1996: 233).

Thirdly, these parties clearly exhibit a lack of transnational cooperation. Other party families have transnational federations for the cooperation of national parties, and the membership of parties in these platforms thus suggests that they belong to that respective party family. However, this is not the case with the extreme right (Mudde, 1996: 233).

Many names have been used as a label for this group of parties: radical right; extreme right; extremist right-wing parties; populist right; neo-Fascist parties; neo-Nazi parties; ultra-right-wing parties; far-right; radical right-wing populist; racist parties; etc. (see e. g. Eatwell, 2000: 410, Mudde, 1996: 230–232). However, not all of these

³ Bearing in mind differences in organizational structures the extreme right, we stress that this article is limited to political parties only; other institutional structures such as non-registered movements or sub-cultures are not considered. Moreover, the text deals only with the extreme parliamentary right, that is, as defined by Jens Rydgren, the section of the extreme right that participates in elections and seeks to gain representation within established political institutions, thus accepting the democratic rules of the game (Rydgren, 2004: 10). Only those parties that have managed to get their representatives into the legislature of the respective country at least for one term, are considered.

terms are synonyms and should not be used interchangeably. Some of them can be used as a label for this party family; some of them are more adequate for various sub-groups within this party family.⁴ Since it is not the aim of this article to contribute to a “war of words” (Mudde, 1996) and search for a “proper” name for this party family, there is not enough space to define the aforementioned terms and analyse the possibilities of their use. It should be mentioned, however, that this article uses mainly the terms “radical right”, as well as “far-right” and “extreme right”, which are understood as umbrella terms for this heterogeneous phenomenon. These names are considered more or less as synonyms and are used interchangeably mainly for stylistic reasons.

In order to define the radical right-wing party family, it is necessary to outline not only ideological and programmatic features, but also to describe its common political style and discourse. Scholars tend to agree that the common core doctrine shared by the extreme right-wing parties is nationalism (Eatwell, 1998: 412; Mudde, 1999: 187; Hainsworth, 2000: 12; Fieschi, 2000: 519), which is usually accompanied by ethnocentrism and ethnopluralism (i.e. only one’s “own” nation is given positive qualities; foreign influences and cultures are perceived as threats to a nation and nations should be kept apart in order to preserve their qualities). Other features which are most often referred to are xenophobia, racism (usually cultural racism), support for a strong state, welfare chauvinism, emphasis on law and order, opposition to multiculturalism and immigration, etc.

These parties are usually representatives of populism. Kai-Olaf Lang defines populist style as comprising following elements: “the appeal to the “people’s will” and a strong anti-establishment attitude; oversimplification of problems and possible solutions; confrontation and antagonism; the construction of a dichotomy between “them” (establishment and bureaucracy) and “us” (the people) which cuts across the lines of social class and social layer; a high level of personalization based on strong leaders” (Lang, 2005: 7).⁵ Radical right-wing parties therefore often benefit from popular dissatisfaction with established parties (Hainsworth, 2000: 9). These parties appeal to emotions (mainly anxiety and insecurity) in their discourse. They overemphasize threats, and use stereotypes and prejudice. The representatives of these parties often use politically incorrect and socially unacceptable expressions and in some cases cross the boundaries of free speech.

Lang defines two categories of populism, soft and hard. Hard populism is further divided into three groups: national-populists; agrarian populists and left-populist. The

⁴ For example, Mudde rightly notes that the terms “neo-Nazism” and “neo-Fascism” should be used only for parties and groups that consider National Socialism or Fascism as ideological influences (Mudde, 1996: 230), and thus they should not be used as a label for the extreme right as such.

⁵ Similarly, far-right parties focus on the “people” or the “ordinary man” in their rhetoric and claim that the political system of their respective country does not work (Taggart, 1995: 36–37), they criticize other political parties (parties in government as well as the opposition) as being interested only in political power and money. This does not necessarily mean that they reject political parties as such: they criticize the way parties perform in the political system of their country (Mudde, 1999: 191–192).

national populist group comprises the Central European far-right parties, and Lang (2005: 7–8) mentions namely the Slovak National Party (SNS), the Party of Hungarian Truth and Justice (MIÉP), the Czech Republicans and the League of Polish Families (LPR) in this group. These parties are subject of this study and will be introduced in the following section (the countries are presented in alphabetical order).

Representatives of the Radical Right in Central Europe

Czech Republic

The only extreme right-wing party ever represented in the Czech parliament in the 1990s was the Association for the Republic – the Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (*Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa*, SPR-RSČ). Its development can be described, according to Miroslav Mareš, in three phases. The first started in late 1989 and lasted until the parliamentary elections of 1992. During this period the party was established outside parliament and soon started to dominate the far right of the political spectrum. Miroslav Sládek became its leading figure. The second stage is the period of parliamentary representation, which lasted for six years (1992–1998). In the third phase (which began after the 1998 parliamentary elections), the party experienced an internal crisis and financial problems and transformed itself into the Republicans of Miroslav Sládek (*Republikáni Miroslava Sládka*, RMS). The RMS can be considered as the successor of the SPR-RSČ (because there is a clear personal and programmatic continuity), but legally it is a new entity (Mareš, 2003: 187–188).⁶ Table 1 shows the electoral support of the SPR-RSČ and the RMS.

Table 1: Electoral support for the SPR-RSČ in parliamentary elections

Year	1990*	1992	1996	1998	2002**	2006
Votes (%)	1.00	5.98	8.01	3.90	0.97	–
Seats	–	14	18	–	–	–

Source: <http://www.volby.cz/>(23. 10. 2006)

* 1990 and 1992 Czech National Council elections; 1996, 2002 and 2006 elections to the Chamber of Deputies.

** SPR-RSČ replaced by Republicans of Miroslav Sládek (RMS).

The ideology of the SPR-RSČ was based on nationalism, and the Party presented itself as the party of “true patriots and brave people” (Novák, 1995). It emphasized the threats posed to the nation that were perceived as being caused by mutual interdependence among countries which, according to the party, leads to the destruction of national cultures, customs and traditions. The SPR-RSČ considered itself as the only party that can save the nation (Sládek, 1996). Other ideological features besides nationalism, included xenophobia and racism. The targets of xenophobic and racist assaults

⁶ For more information about the SPR-RSČ “transformation” to the RMS see Mareš, 2003: 200–201.

were mainly Roma people, whom SPR-RSČ rhetoric referred to as “Gypsies”⁷. In the party’s discourse only negative qualities were attributed to members of this ethnic minority; they were associated with crime and seen as an “inadaptable group”. This can be demonstrated by the following quotation: “Gypsies are responsible for 70 – 75 per cent of crime. If we want to lower the crime rate and clean our cities, first we have to solve the Gypsy problem” (Sládek, 1996). Other ideological and programmatic features were opposition to gay rights and multiculturalism (Mareš, 2003: 210), as well as the introduction of capital punishment. The party exhibited strong anti-establishment attitudes, e.g. the parliamentary parties between 1998 and 2002 being known as The Gang of Five. The Republicans accused the government of corruption and advocated direct democracy measures (Mareš, 2003: 222). Nationalism was visible also in the case of the foreign policy proposed by the SPR-RSČ, for example, in the opposition to NATO and EU membership, and in the strong anti-German rhetoric. Given that the leader of the SPR-RSČ became the leader of the RMS, the ideological profile of the RMS remained basically unchanged.

Hungary

The Hungarian Truth and Life Party⁸ (*Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja*, MIÉP) was established in 1993 by secession of a group of deputies of the Hungarian Democratic Forum. The party was unable to win representation in the 1994 parliamentary elections but was more successful four years later when it gained 14 seats in the Hungarian legislature (Benda, 2002: 239; Karsai, 1999: 146). The party lost its representation in parliament in 2002. Table 2 provides data on the electoral support of the MIÉP. The leader of the MIÉP is István Csurka. In 2005 the MIÉP formed an electoral alliance with the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik).

Table 2: Electoral support for the MIÉP in parliamentary elections

Year	1994	1998	2002	2006*
Votes (%)	1.6	5.5	4.4	2.2
Seats	0	14	0	0

Sources: <http://www.parties-and-elections.de/hungary2.html> (23. 10. 2006)

http://www.valasztas.hu/parval2006/an/08/8_0.html (23. 10. 2006)

* MIÉP-Jobbik. Percentage of list votes

The MIÉP is also a nationalist party. The “Hungarian truth”, or “Hungarian justice”, in the party’s name represents the demands of the MIÉP for the revision of frontiers and incorporation of the territories settled by Hungarians, into Hungary. “Hungary belongs to Hungarians” is one of the party’s slogans. Hungarian life, culture, values systems etc. are perceived as being threatened by global, American-style mass con-

⁷ The word “Gypsies” is seen as politically incorrect and has pejorative connotations in Czech.

⁸ The translation “Hungarian Justice and Life Party” is often used too.

sumption culture and materialism and from inside by “communist internationalism, liberal cosmopolitanism and a liberal media monopoly” (Benda, 2002: 240). Ethnic nationalism accompanied by xenophobia can be demonstrated also in the following example: in 1995 the party leader Csurka “tried to alarm his audience by saying that the aim of the governing socialist-liberal coalition is to eliminate pure-blooded, true-born Hungarians and replace them with Ukrainians, Russians, and Jews from the former Soviet Union, so that, as a result, ‘one third of the country will be Ukrainians, Russians, and Jews, and the other third Gypsies’” (Karsai, 1999: 137). The MIÉP is an anti-Semitic party; anti-Semitism is a component of Csurka’s discourse (Krizsa, 2004), as well as statements against the Roma minority. The party espouses Euro-scepticism, although, according to S. Riishøj, it saw problems related to Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries (i.e. in Slovakia and Romania) as more important than EU issues (Riishøj, 2004). József Bayer claims that although the MIÉP cannot be classified as a neo-Fascist party, it has used some expressions from Nazi vocabulary, such as “Lebensraum” or “Judeobolschewiken”. After gaining parliamentary representation the party somewhat moderated its rhetoric (Bayer, 2002: 274–275).

Poland

The strongest far-right party in Poland is the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR)⁹, which was established shortly before the 2001¹⁰ national elections that gave the party representation in both parliamentary chambers. The LPR was founded with the aim of uniting the Catholic-national right, which was fragmented into several small parties and movements, with programmatic as well as personal clashes. The effort of uniting this political stream was also supported by Radio Maryja.¹¹ The League of Polish Families consists of two main programmatic wings: the first is radical, supports orthodox Catholicism, nationalism, opposition to the European Union, often with features of anti-Semitism and xenophobia; the second promotes mainly the national interests of the Polish Republic. The League of Polish Families has undergone several internal conflicts, resulting mainly from its programmatic heterogeneity (Breindl, 2003). The party gained representation in the European Parliament in 2004, and one year later the LPR kept its representation in the Polish parliament. In 2006 it even became a member of government coalition of the Polish republic (together with Law and Justice and Self-Defence). The electoral support of the LPR is shown in Table 3.

⁹ Other members of the extreme right have been rather marginal. It is worth noting that Self-Defence is also often included as a member of the far right, but it is more often classified as an example of agrarian populism than of the extreme right.

¹⁰ The League of Polish Families does not deny it is ideologically inspired by traditionalist authoritarianism (Mareš, 2006: 2). The leader of LPR is Roman Giertych, whose grandfather was an ally of Roman Dmowski.

¹¹ Radio Maryja is a controversial conservative Polish radio station, whose founder is Tadeusz Rydzyk. It considers itself as a Catholic radio station, but the Vatican and international and Polish media have expressed several concerns about the station, whose message is often seen as exhibiting features of anti-Semitism, authoritarianism and intolerance.

Table 3: Electoral support for the LPR in parliamentary elections

Year	2001	2005
Votes (%)	7.9	8.0
Seats	38	34

Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.de/poland.html> (23. 10. 2006)

The League of Polish Families is a nationalist party (for example, we can mention a slogan “Poland for Poles” that was used in campaign before the referendum on Polish accession to the EU) (Czernicka, 2005: 17). The LPR exhibits clear signs of homophobia; it considers homosexuality as sexual deviance (LPR, undated) and the party is often criticized as being anti-Semitic. It is Euro-sceptic – it strongly campaigned against Poland joining the EU. According to the League of Polish Families, the main reasons for Poland not joining the European Union were: affairs would be managed from Brussels; EU laws would take priority over Polish laws and constitution; Polish agriculture would be damaged; and sexual deviance, killing of unborn children, euthanasia, cloning, etc. would be permitted (LPR undated). The LPR is strongly populist and criticizes the established political élite as being corrupt. Its electoral success can be partly explained by protest votes against the political élites (Czernicka, 2005: 17).

Slovakia

The Slovak National Party (*Slovenská národná strana*, SNS) was established in 1990.¹² At the beginning of the 1990s the party underwent a period of internal conflicts and clashes which were, among others, seen in the change of party leader. In 1994 the party chose Ján Slota as its head, and he managed to secure its internal stability. Having been represented in parliament since 1990, the party even was part of Mečiar’s government coalitions (Zetocha – Konečný, 2005). Internal conflicts became once more visible in the late 1990s, when Anna Malíková, leader of the parliamentary group of the SNS, tried to put an end to political isolation and proposed a more moderate party orientation. She replaced Ján Slota as party chair in 1999. Under the leadership of Anna Malíková some members of the party (who opposed her) were excluded, and others, supporting Ján Slota, left the party. In 2001 the “True Slovak National Party was formed under Slota’s leadership. The two parties ran on separate lists for the 2002 parliamentary elections, and none of them managed to cross the electoral threshold, thus losing their parliamentary representation. In the spring of 2005 both parties merged again, with Ján Slota being confirmed as leader (Zetocha – Konečný, 2005). Parliamentary representation was regained in the 2006 elections, following which the party joined Robert Fico’s government coalition (together with Direction-Social

¹² The party sees itself as the oldest political party in Slovakia, as an heir of the Slovak National Party, which existed in between 1871 and 1938 and was then forced to become part of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party. The decision to re-establish the Slovak National Party was taken in 1989.

Democracy and the People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia). The electoral support of the Slovak National Party is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Electoral support for the SNS in parliamentary elections*

Year	1990**	1992	1994	1998	2002***	2006
Votes (%)	13.94	7.93	5.40	9.07	3.32	11.73
Seats	22	15	9	14	–	20

Source: <http://www.statistics.sk/> (23. 10. 2006)

* 1990 and 1992 Slovak National Council elections; 1994, 1998, 2002 and 2006 elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic

** The True Slovak National Party gained 3.65 per cent of the votes.

*** The True Slovak National Party gained 3.65 per cent of the votes.

The Slovak National Party is a nationalist party, and it warns of the threat of irredentism, which, according to the SNS, is posed by the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia. Besides its negative attitudes towards members of the Hungarian minority, the party uses strong anti-Roma rhetoric and is also infamous for its homophobic statements – for example, homosexuality is perversion (SNS, 2004) according to Ján Slota. The party advocated the re-introduction of capital punishment for serious crimes (SNS, 1998) and referred to the Slovak State.¹³

Transnational relations of the Central European Radical Right

As Miroslav Mareš rightly puts it, due to many modern processes (such as the growing interconnection of internal and international politics), the transnational cooperation of political parties has become more and more important. For them, the main reason for maintaining contacts with their foreign counterparts is mutual ideological (sometimes also material) support aimed at reinforcing the role of an ideological movement within the respective country and region (Mareš, 2006: 6).

Mareš denotes various types of cooperation. According to the number of political parties involved, bilateral and multilateral cooperation can be distinguished. Another possible criterion is the geographical extent; cooperation can be maintained at the world, regional or sub-regional level. The third perspective focuses on the intensity of cooperation, in which M. Mareš defines following categories: “1. free, non-institutionalized cooperation (often even ad hoc); 2. more stable networks and consistent organizations with stable bodies formed from entities at the national level, and 3. transnational organizations forming national branches” (Mareš, 2006: 7, Mareš, 2001b: 8).

¹³ The Slovak State (1939–45) was a puppet state ally of Nazi Germany. One of the party main goals in 1998 programme was to present “the true testimony of history of Slovakia and Slovaks, which would be purged from intentional falsification and degradation of the Slovak nation and its representatives.” The party mentioned that the Slovak State was misunderstood. SNS wanted to rehabilitate the leading figures of this country (SNS 1998: 4).

In order to analyse the mutual relations of the radical right-wing parties in the Central European region we will deal with the multilateral cooperation at the European level (i.e. the regional level), where platforms for maintaining mutual contacts between radical right-wing parties are represented by a project called Euronat and also by EU structures, i.e. the possibility to form political groups within the European Parliament¹⁴ and political parties at the European level¹⁵. We will assess the intensity of cooperation of Central European radical right within these structures. It is important to mention that the bilateral relations of the Central European radical right have been rather limited and that no sub-regional Central European organization (Mareš, 2006: 14) has been founded by them.

Euronat

Euronat was a project advocated by the leader of French National Front Jean-Marie Le Pen. At the party congress in 1997, where representatives of several European radical right-wing parties participated, Le Pen suggested the creation of a platform for European nationalist parties. According to a report of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, at the 1997 party congress he said, “Why not call this ‘Euronat’ – a grouping of nationalist parties in Europe“ (JPR, 1999).

The aim of Euronat was to bring together all nationalist and patriotic parties and groups in Europe. It was a rather loose association, with attempts to coordinate the joint activities of the political parties concerned. It sought to present an alternative to a unified Europe (this alternative was a Europe of nations) and it stated its resistance against globalization). The Euronat youth organization Euronat Jeunesse was established in 1998, having followed the same ideological principles as Euronat (Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Justice, undated).

Le Pen’s invitation to the party congress, where he suggested launching Euronat, was rejected by the majority of Western European radical right-wing parties. However, Le Pen was more successful in inviting Central and Eastern European far-right parties

¹⁴ According to the EP rules, “19 Members are needed to form a **political group**, and at least five Member States must be represented within the group”, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/public/staticDisplay.do?id=45&pageRank=4&language=EN> (14 November 2006).

¹⁵ Regulation (EC) No 2004/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003 on the regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding defines the political party at the European level in a following way: “(a) it must have legal personality in the Member State in which its seat is located;

(b) it must be represented, in at least one quarter of Member States, by Members of the European Parliament or in the national Parliaments or regional Parliaments or in the regional assemblies, or it must have received, in at least one quarter of the Member States, at least three per cent of the votes cast in each of those Member States at the most recent European Parliament elections;

(c) it must observe, in particular in its programme and in its activities, the principles on which the European Union is founded, namely the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law;

(d) it must have participated in elections to the European Parliament, or have expressed the intention to do so” (EC, 2003).

to join it. Three of the parties that are the subject of this study had participated in the 1997 congress: the Hungarian MIÉP sent its leader, Istvan Csurka; the SPR-RSČ was represented by Jan Vik (the party's Vice-chairman) and Ján Slota represented the SNS (Fiala – Mareš, 2000: 15; Mareš, 2001a: 129–130; Mareš, 2003: 264–265; Mareš, 2006: 11–12). The LPR did not exist at that time and there were no representatives of the Polish radical right.

The activities of Euronat developed in 1998 and 1999, however, since then they have weakened, although mutual contacts of some of the parties have been still maintained (Mareš, 2001a: 129–130, Mareš, 2003: 264–265). Euronat has been more of an informal platform for cooperation between nationalist parties; it has not led to the institutionalized and transnational organization of these parties. Thus, it represented the first level of intensity of transnational cooperation as explained above (loose, non-institutionalized cooperation). As Mareš mentions, Euronat provided a platform where representatives of the Central European radical right could meet; however, they have not formed any Central European bloc within this wider project (Mareš, 2006: 14).

European Union Structures

The accession of the Central European countries to the EU provided a new platform for maintaining mutual contacts between political parties, although this platform has not been fully exploited by the extreme right. There is no evidence of cooperation of the Central European extreme right prior to the 2004 European Parliamentary Elections, and we can say that EU membership has not reinforced mutual contacts of these parties. The result of these elections also limited the potential cooperation of the Central European extreme right because only the League of Polish Families gained representation in the European Parliament. Table 5 shows the results of the parties concerned.

Currently, the radical right does not form a common political group within the EP¹⁶, and the various parties representing it are either members of the Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN)¹⁷, Independence/Democracy group (IND/DEM) or sit as non-attached¹⁸ MEPs. MEPs of the League of Polish Families are split between two groups: some of them are part of the Independence/Democracy group, some sit as non-attached MEPS. Within the Independence/Democracy group¹⁹ the LPR cooperates with other EU critics

¹⁶ The group of the extreme right-wing parties existed in the European Parliament between 1984 and 1994. Catherine Fieschi claims that the extreme right-wing parties were unable to work together, and they “were never afforded access to the normal channels for cooperation between parliamentary groups nor were they given any committee chairs” (2000: 523).

¹⁷ The Danish People's Party and Italian National Alliance.

¹⁸ French National Front, Austrian Freedom Party, Flemish Interest and Italian Social Movement – Fiamma Tricolore.

¹⁹ The IND/DEM political programme has the following aims: rejection of the European Constitution, rejection of a European Superstate, respect for traditional and cultural values, cooperation between sovereign states, respect for national differences and interests (freedom of votes for its delegations) (IND/DEM website).

and Eurosceptic parties, and two of them are often classified as contemporary radical right: the Italian Northern League and the Popular Orthodox Rally from Greece. The following sub-section tries to explain why the mutual contacts of the radical right are not as intensive as other party families.

Table 5: The electoral support of the strongest radical right-wing parties in the Visegrád Countries in the European Elections in 2004

Country	Party	Number of votes	Percentage of votes	Seats
Czech Republic	RMS	15 767	0.67	0
Hungary	MIÉP	72 177	2.35	0
Poland	LPR	969 689	15.92	10
Slovakia	SNS-PSNS	14 150	2.01	0

Sources: <http://www.united.non-profit.nl/pages/elect04.htm> (23. 10. 2006)

<http://www.volby.cz/> (23. 10. 2006)

<http://www.statistics.sk/volbyep2004/ep2004s/obvod/results/tab3.jsp> (23. 10. 2006)

Obstacles to mutual cooperation of radical right-wing parties

Various factors influence the mutual cooperation of the radical right and are applicable not only in the case of the Central European extreme right but generally to cooperation within this party family. The main obstacle to maintaining mutual contacts lies in the very nature of the extreme right. As these parties are nationalistic, they do not see any benefits resulting from possible international cooperation. Mutual cooperation is very difficult, especially in the case of the existence of historical nationalist disputes and where the national interests advocated by various radical right-wing parties clash (Mareš, 2001b: 8; Mareš, 2006: 7, 9). Should we use the example from the Central European region, it is impossible to imagine that the Hungarian Truth and Life Party, which advocates revisionism, could cooperate with the Slovak National Party, which is known for its negative attitudes towards the Hungarian minority and its rights (perceived, because of its alleged irredentism, as a threat to Slovak unity), in Slovakia. Given these fundamentally different views of history, the issue of borders and the position of minorities, it is perfectly understandable why there is no bilateral cooperation between the MIÉP and the SNS (Mareš, 2006: 9). A similar example of clashing nationalist interest is the SPR-RSČ advocating the unity of Czechoslovakia and the struggle of the SNS for Slovak independence at the beginning of the 1990s (Mareš, 2001b: 8; Mareš, 2006: 9).

The second factor influencing cooperation of the radical right is also found in the nature of the phenomenon; it is the heterogeneity of this party family. Its member parties embody different strategies in respective domestic politics, and they also prefer different strategies regarding maintaining transnational contacts. As a result, various radical right-wing parties are interested in different international projects. This is visible mainly within EU structures. For example, the League of Polish Families is

a member of the IND/DEM group, and as such the LPR might be also involved in the Alliance of Independent Democrats in Europe²⁰, while the SNS maintains contacts with the Union for Europe of the Nations and is considered as an associate member of the UEN (see for example the SNS or UEN websites).

Other factors explaining the rather limited mutual contacts between the Central European radical right could be due to the changing success of various parties. Some of them become relevant actors only for a limited time, and with the loss of representation and electoral support they could weaken the emphasis put on their international contacts. This is especially visible in the case of the EP – those parties which are not represented in the EP do not have to consider which political grouping to join. The RMS and the MIÉP thus do not have any link with the parties in the European Parliament.²¹ Some of the parties were formed later than others; the League of Polish Families did not exist when the MIÉP, the SNS and the SPR-RSČ met the other extreme right-wing parties at the FN congress in the 1990s, which makes it impossible to judge whether the LPR would or would not be interested in Euronat.

The last factor to be considered is the factionalism of the radical right, which is often fragmented even at the national level (Mareš, 2001a: 131). Internal splits and conflicts within far-right parties make it difficult for them to be successful at the international level as well as to pursue coordinated cooperation. Changes in leadership can also mean the changes of a preferred strategy. The SNS can serve as an example from Central Europe. Under the leadership of Anna Malíková it focused on more moderate projects of transnational cooperation, while Ján Slota originally supported Euronat (Mareš, 2006: 13).

Conclusion

In order to assess the mutual contacts and relations of the radical right-wing parties in Central Europe, it is very useful to quote Miroslav Mareš, who concludes that although the Central European extreme right-wing parties²² “had met in some Europe-wide projects (especially Euronat), they never formed anything like a consistent Central European bloc within these projects. They haven’t formed their own organiza-

²⁰ There is a lack of information about the Alliance of Independent Democrats in Europe (<http://www.adieurope.org/>), and from the available information it remains unclear whether this group is funded as a political party at the European level. The website indicates the participation of a Polish delegation but does not name any particular party or particular members. The leader of the Alliance is Patrick Louis, who is a member of the IND/DEM group in the EP.

²¹ The RMS still considers itself as a member of Euronat.

²² Miroslav Mareš (2006) categorizes cooperation of Central European extreme right-wing parties in three main groups: “protest-transformational” parties, “neo-(clerical) Fascist” projects and “neo-Nazi” networks. The quotation used in this text characterizes transnational contacts of the first defined group which basically involves those parties that are described in this article. For information on other categories of the extreme right in Central Europe and their mutual contacts see Mareš (2006).

tion within East Central Europe and their mutual bilateral relations were relatively limited. These parties lacked the need of mutual cooperation. (...) These parties didn't have any collective East Central European identity and therefore didn't promote it" (Mareš, 2006: 14). Mutual contacts have not been significantly reinforced with EU membership, and the Central European radical right-wing parties have been involved in different projects party groups within the EP and have been interested in different projects to form political parties at the European level.

Thus, the challenge of the radical right posed to democracy and democratic governance seems to be visible mainly at the national (and sub-national) level. Its parties are not creating stable institutions of mutual cooperation in order to promote their interests and policies at the regional (Central European) or European level. Further development of the European Union and further crystallization of its political parties and party system will tell us more about the relations that the Central European radical right-wing parties have with conservative, Eurosceptic and right-wing populist parties that they join in the UEN or IND/DEM platforms. As these groups do not clearly reflect the boundaries of party families, and the extreme right cooperates in these platforms with "non-extreme" right-wing parties, this might potentially lead to a moderation of their extremist discourse and demands. It is too early, however, to draw any precise conclusion. Future research on the behaviour of (not only) the Central European radical right in European Union structures seems to be necessary.

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