

Towards a Transnational History of Right-Wing Terrorism. New Perspectives on Political Violence and Assassinations by the Far Right in Eastern and Western Europe since 1900

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A new global surge of right-wing extremism and violence is shaping the world around us. This new wave has also reanimated interest in the history of right-wing terrorism. The international conference in Erlangen facilitated an exchange of scholarly perspectives on the history of right-wing extremism and violence in Europe, East and West. The goal was to encourage a comparative and transnational debate on topics including the links between the emergence of right-wing extremist ideologies and politically motivated acts of violence, the role of supportive environments among the security organs and the political elites, and the reactions of politicians and the broader public to the assassinations.

In their introductory remarks Julia Obertreis (Erlangen), Gabriele Freitag (Berlin), Moritz Florin (Erlangen) and Johannes Dafinger (Klagenfurt) stressed the contemporary significance of right-wing terrorism in light of the significant number of attacks that took place in 2019 alone, in places such as Christ Church, Poway, El Paso, Halle, and Kassel.

CONSTANTIN IORDACHI (Budapest/Vienna), ANNETTE FINLEY-CROSWHITE (Norfolk, VA), NIKOLAY A. MITROKHIN (Bremen) and GIDEON BOTSCH (Potsdam) discussed definitions of right-wing terrorism, and asked to what extent it makes sense to work on this topic transnationally and what a comparative history of right-wing terrorism might look like. The panellists stressed the communicative aspect, as right-wing terrorists tried and try

to send a message – not only to the victims, but also to the public, the state and/or the authorities. A transnational approach seems appropriate because right-wing terrorist groups in the past kept in touch with each other, inspired each other, and were often financed by foreign states. In order to work out a simple and clear definition, it would be necessary, in a first step, to deal with the empirically ascertainable forms of right-wing extremist violence and, in a second step, considering the categories of terrorism research, to decide which forms of violence are to be assessed as right-wing terrorism.

The first panel on right-wing terror(ism) in pre-revolutionary Russia opened with a presentation by MORITZ FLORIN (Erlangen) on the origins of the concept of right-wing terrorism. In the 19th century, right-wing violence in Russia was not labelled as „terrorism,“ but rather as „pogrom.“ This term, though, proved problematic as it increasingly concealed the political dimension of the violence that it referred to. For this reason, some contemporaries preferred the term „black terror“ to describe the violence of the Black Hundreds, an ultranationalist movement in Russia in the early 20th century, and the term „white terror“ to emphasise the involvement of the autocratic state. The term „right-wing terrorism“ in turn was created as an analogy to left-wing terrorism, although right-wing terrorist acts did not necessarily represent an answer or an attempt to copy left-wing terrorism. Nevertheless, contemporaries often perceived an analogy between these two phenomena.

MARINA VITUHNOVSKAJA-KAUPPALA (Helsinki) followed Florin's lecture with her case study on the assassination of Mikhail Herzenstein, murdered on 18 July 1906 by members of the Black Hundreds. Although Herzenstein had converted to the Orthodox faith, he was considered Jewish by the members of the Black Hundreds because he was born into a Jewish family. That, as a member of the Duma, he had also been an exposed representative of the democratic movement in Russia and had been open to discourses on modernisation further demonised him in the eyes of the Black Hundreds. Both democracy and mod-

ernisation were perceived as a threat by the autocratic state and the Black Hundreds. The Tsar was therefore less interested in solving the case and punishing those responsible than in bringing the trial to an end as quickly as possible. When three perpetrators were finally sentenced to six years in prison, the Tsar immediately exercised his right to grant them amnesty. The proximity of the Black Hundreds to the Tsar caused great irritation in the left-liberal camp and among government officials and exacerbated the division of society. This led to a political crisis that finally culminated in the October Revolution.

The speakers thus pointed to the hitherto underestimated significance of right-wing terrorist violence in the immediate run-up to the Russian Revolution, as well as to a central aspect discussed at the conference, namely the interrelationships between state or quasi-state actors and right-wing perpetrators of violence.

The second panel was concerned with paramilitary and student violence in the aftermath of the First World War. BÉLA BODÓ (Bonn) approached this topic by focusing on the sources of right-wing paramilitary violence in Hungary during the counterrevolution, 1919 to 1921. He examined the motives of mainly middle-class men to arrest, torture and kill Jews and socialists. Bodó identified the ideology and mental universe of young militiamen; the peculiar structure and mode of operation of paramilitary units; militia and youth culture; and the role of the paramilitary groups as protectors of class interests and vehicles of social mobility as the four most important sources of violence.

By analyzing the assassination of the first president of the Second Polish Republic Gabriel Narutowicz in 1922, PAUL BRYKCYNSKI (Toronto) discussed the interplay of ideas and emotions in creating a fertile soil for terrorism and violence. In historiography, the assassination of Narutowicz was regarded as the work of a lonely, mentally unbalanced man. According to Brykczynski, however, the assassination put into action ideas from the centre of the Polish nationalist right's political discourse. Furthermore, the murder was greeted with approval by large parts of the Polish population, who

perceived the coalition with the Jewish minority and Narutowicz's appointment as president as Jewish takeover and treason.

ROLAND CLARK (Liverpool) centred on terror and antisemitic student violence in East Central Europe between 1919 and 1923. Anti-Semites attacked Jews and campaigned for student control of universities. Consequently, several universities introduced a *numerus clausus*, which limited the number of Jewish students allowed to enrol. In Austria, Jews were rejected with the argument that university places were needed for women, who were now allowed to study. In autumn 1922 riots broke out in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Poland and Romania. Even though each of these movements had their own constituencies, grievances and opponents, they adopted similar frames and repertoires. The subsequent discussion focused on the different forms and the communicative dimension of violence. Clark also referred to the transnational aspect of right-wing terrorist violence: The common features as well as the simultaneous occurrence of these anti-Semitic attacks suggest that right-wing extremist students were connected across national borders.

In the third panel on political attacks by the extreme right in the interwar period, MAGDALENA GIBIEC (Wrocław/Warsaw) centred on the assassination of the Polish Minister of the Interior Bronisław Pieracki by the Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) in 1934. Pieracki's daily routine made him an easy target. On the one hand, this assassination was one of the greatest successes of the OUN in attracting attention and subsequently gaining money. On the other hand, it was the most crushing defeat as after the assassination many OUN leaders were arrested and convicted, including Stepan Bandera. Gibiec was able to locate parts of the „Senyk Archives“ that were long considered lost. In 1933 it had been confiscated by the Czechoslovak intelligence and later made available to the Polish secret service. Containing valuable information concerning the structure, financing and activities of the OUN, the archives helped the investigators to indict many OUN members.

MARIO JAREB (Zagreb) focused on the assassination of the Yugoslavian King Alexan-

der I. in Marseille on 9 October 1934 – a „joint venture“ of the Croatian Ustasha and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), who both tried to destabilise Yugoslavia. The Ustasha was founded in Italy in 1929 by the jurist and politician Ante Pavelić, who in exile encountered members of the IMRO. According to Jareb, the assassination did not achieve its aim, but contributed to the end of the dictatorship and the liberalisation of Yugoslav political life.

ANNETTE FINLEY-CROSWHITE (Norfolk, VA) and GAYLE K. BRUNELLE (Fullerton, CA) addressed the terrorist activities of the Comité Secrète d'action révolutionnaire nationale (CSAR) in France, which became known to the public under the name *Cagoule*, and the development of this group into the Mouvement Social Révolutionnaire (MSR). Both groups were terrorist organisations with a pronationalist, anti-democratic, anti-communist and anti-Semitic base. The members of the *Cagoule*, mostly students and academics from conservative, wealthy circles, had considered themselves fascists. Their goal was to overthrow what they perceived as an incompetent and weak French popular-front government. The members of the *Cagoule* understood how to communicate their messages to the public, for example by the special way of stabbing their victims. Mussolini, Franco, Hitler as well as French industrialists supported the *Cagoule*. While the OUN, IMRO and Ustasha by using right-wing terrorism aimed at destabilising „their“ state in order to realise their separatist goals, the *Cagoule* was concerned with overthrowing the democratic government.

In the fourth panel on fascism and right-wing terrorism, WERNER ANZENBERGER (Graz) addressed the question of where the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate violence lies. As an example, he referred to the violent suppression of the Social Democratic „February Uprising“ against the Dollfuß-Schuschnigg regime in Austria in 1934, which according to Anzenberger was not legitimate but a crime. He described the actions of the state power as „right-wing terror.“ In doing so, he raised the question of how right-wing terrorism could be distinguished from state terrorism.

FRANK GOLCZEWSKI (Hamburg) outlined the relations of Ukrainian right-wing terrorists with Weimar and Nazi Germany. After the failure of Ukrainian nationalists to establish an independent state after World War I, they founded the Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO), which increasingly used terrorism to achieve its goals. In his revisionism towards Poland, Weimar supported the UVO and the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), founded in 1929. For lack of alternatives, the UVO-OUN continued to cooperate with the National Socialists and became increasingly radical.

CONSTANTIN IORDACHI (Budapest/Vienna) compared the Rumanian Iron Guard to the Croatian Ustasha: both organisations were similarly structured and organised, both aimed to capture power, were sacralising the nation and styling their fallen fighters into martyrs. The leader of the Iron Guard, Corneliu Codreanu, as well as the leader of the Ustasha, Ante Pavelić, were charismatic figures composing ideological writings. Both organisations are examples of underdogs using terrorism in their struggle to seize power. Golczewski and Iordachi showed how right-wing terrorism was used by (proto-)fascist groups as a political tool to achieve their goal – the establishment of an independent, authoritarian and ethnically largely homogeneous state.

In the fifth panel on right-wing terrorism as a legacy of war ÁKOS BARTHA (Budapest) addressed the special relations between the militias of the Arrow Cross Party, the *Rongyos Gárda* (Ragged Guard) and the *KISKA* auxiliary units in Hungary. Already at the end of the 1930s, many Arrow Cross members and future *KISKA* commanders participated in the reorganisation of the *Ragged Guard*, a Hungarian paramilitary unit supported by the government. The members of the *Ragged Guard* acted as guerrillas in Slovakia, Ruthenia and partly in Poland, to prepare a revision of Trianon. In 1944/45, the *KISKA* units were to secure the background for the German and Hungarian army, soon, however, became a cover organisation for Jews, leftists, deserters and resistance fighters.

DOMINIK RIGOLL (Potsdam) explained how the automatic arrest policy of the Al-

lies in occupied Germany after 1945 served as an instrument for combating right-wing terrorism. About 200,000 functionaries of military and party organisations were interned in camps in West Germany. The importance of this policy was later downplayed by historians, according to recent studies, though, there was a considerable danger of right-wing terrorism. For example, during the „Endkampf,“ about 8,000 people were killed by members of the Hitler Youth and other paramilitary groups in order to keep the „Volksgemeinschaft“ fighting. Subsequently, US military officials deployed National Socialists in their fight against the Soviet Union. Hence, numerous racists and nationalists were integrated into the German army, the German police and the French legion, thus occupying important post-war positions and forming transnational networks. According to Rigoll, these forms of right-wing terrorism were not a substitute, a legacy or continuities from the interwar or war period. Rather a transformation took place: Right-wing terrorists established their terrorist state in 1933. In 1945, a new situation arose when numerous Nazis agreed to fight against the Soviet Union together with the Allies. Thus, they had been able to establish an anti-communist state within the state, hence influencing the development of German democracy.

The last panel was concerned with the 1970s and 1980s as well as with recent trends in right-wing terrorism in Eastern and Western Europe. TOBIAS HOF (Munich) centred on the generation conflict within an Italian right-wing organisation, the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), which was responsible for 1,200 attacks with 186 dead and 572 injured between 1976 and 1982 alone. Inspired by the fantasy novels of John R. R. Tolkien, the youth of the MSI organised the first Campo Hobbit festival in 1977, which more than 3,000 people attended. Tolkien's popularity among young MSI members, who felt increasingly marginalised in their own country, was linked to their great dissatisfaction with the modern world. However, Tolkien was not the only idol of the MSI youth: The striking similarities between Tolkien's fantasy novels and Julius Evola's writings, such as the eternal struggle between good and evil, made it easier for

some young radicals to take up Evola's fascist, anti-modernist philosophy and use it to justify their terrorist deeds. It would be wrong, however, to describe Tolkien as Evola's mastermind.

In his contribution on recent trends of right-wing violence and terrorism in Germany, DANIEL KÖHLER (Berlin) referred to the new development of so-called hive terrorism – the increasing involvement of persons without prior links to the extreme right-wing environment in terrorist attacks or serious acts of violence, such as arson and bomb attacks. According to Köhler, the combination of three factors could theoretically have led to a lowering of the moral threshold for „normal“ citizens to take up contact with highly radicalised extremists: firstly, the influx of refugees; secondly, the difficulties of the security apparatus in clearly identifying serious right-wing extremist acts of violence as terrorism; and thirdly, subcultural change, i.e. the declining importance of right-wing extremist political parties in favour of subcultural forms of mobilisation. The resulting fluid, permeable networks are extremely difficult to grasp and therefore pose completely new challenges for the security authorities.

MIROSLAV MAREŠ and INA FUJDIÁK (Brno) focused on historical legacies and contemporary right-wing extremist violence in East Central Europe, analysing similarities and differences between the historical *modus operandi* and the ideological background of militant right-wing extremism in East Central Europe in the 1920s to the 1940s in comparison to the period of the 1990s to the 2010s. According to Mareš and Fujdiak, there was a wave of paramilitary violence in the interwar period. After the fall of communism, skinhead and hooligan violence occurred in Eastern Central Europe, primarily directed against Roma, political opponents and immigrants. Overall, Mareš and Fujdiak determined a stronger connection regarding ideology as to the *modus operandi*. Post-communist violence has no direct equivalent in the interwar period. Rather, some of the violent paramilitary groups can be seen as successors to the historical right-wing terrorist organizations of the interwar period.

In the final discussion, central questions

that had accompanied the conference were taken up again. As suggested by several participants, right-wing violence fits on a spectrum of different forms of violence, all of which are characterised by the fact that they pursue nationalist goals and come from a right-wing milieu. Given the fact that right-wing terrorists in different countries collaborated transnationally, influenced each other and were financed by foreign states, a transnational approach seems essential. Interesting research questions could arise particularly in the context of comparisons between Eastern and Western Europe. It has been shown that right-wing terrorism is changing, thus since the 2010s a new form has emerged, the so-called hive terrorism, which poses completely new challenges to the authorities. Right-wing terrorism has not only been a means by which underdogs have tried to seize power and draw attention to themselves and their political aims, but it has also been used by privileged groups such as the members of the Cagoule or the anti-Semitic student fraternities in order to defend their privileged position in society.

Conference overview:

Julia Obertreis (Erlangen), Gabriele Freitag (Berlin), Moritz Florin (Erlangen), Johannes Dafinger (Klagenfurt): Welcome note and introduction

Panel discussion: Towards a Transnational History of Right-Wing Terrorism

Chairs: Moritz Florin (Erlangen) / Johannes Dafinger (Klagenfurt)

Constantin Iordachi (Budapest/Vienna), Annette Finley-Croswhite (Norfolk, VA), Nikolay A. Mitrokhin (Bremen), Gideon Botsch (Potsdam)

Panel 1: Right-Wing Terror(ism) in Pre-Revolutionary Russia

Chair: Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal (Heidelberg)

Moritz Florin (Erlangen): Russia and the Birth of Right-Wing Terrorism: Autocratic Statehood, the News Media, and Political Violence, 1903-1911

Marina Vituhnovskaja-Kaupala (Helsinki): Right-Wing Terror in Russia and the High-

est Echelons of Authority during the Pre-Revolutionary Decade: On the Materials of the Case of the Assassination of Mikhail Herzenstein

Panel 2: Paramilitary Violence and Assassinations in the Aftermath of the First World War
Chair: Julia Obertreis (Erlangen)

Béla Bodó (Bonn): Interests and Motives: The Sources of Right-Wing Paramilitary Violence in Hungary during the Counterrevolution, 1919-1921

Paul Brykczynski (Toronto): From Discourse to Violence: Right Wing Politics of Hatred in Interwar Poland

Roland Clark (Liverpool): Terror and Anti-semitic Student Violence in East-Central Europe, 1919-1923

Panel 3: Political Assassinations by the Far Right in the Interwar Period
Chair: Moritz Florin (Erlangen)

Magdalena Gibiec (Wrocław/Warsaw): Did the Polish Minister of Interior Have to be Killed? Behind the Scenes of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists in the 1930s

Mario Jareb (Zagreb): Marseille 1934: The Death of the King

Annette Finley-Croswhite (Norfolk, VA), Gayle K. Brunelle (Fullerton, CA): Trading in Arms, Trading in Terror: The Cagoule and Transnational Terrorism in France, 1936-1941

Panel 4: Right-Wing Terrorism and Fascism
Chair: Johannes Dafinger (Klagenfurt)

Werner Anzenberger (Graz): The Anti-Modern Concept and the Violence: Right-Wing Terror in the First Austrian Republic and in Austrofascism

Frank Golczewski (Hamburg): The German Connection: Ukrainian Right-Wing Terrorists' Relations with Weimar and Nazi Germany

Constantin Iordachi (Budapest/Vienna): Fascism and Terrorism: Iron Guard and Ustasha in Comparison

Panel 5: Right-Wing Terrorism as a Legacy of War?

Chair: Gayle K. Brunelle (Fullerton, CA)

Ákos Bartha (Budapest): Brothers in Arms or Enemies? Arrow Cross Party Militias, Ragged Guard and KISKA Auxiliary Forces in Hungary (1938–1945)

Dominik Rigoll (Potsdam): A Security Custody for Potential Right-Wing Endangerers: Allied Arrest Policy as Transitional Security, 1944-1950

Panel 6: The 1970s and 1980s and Recent Trends in Right-Wing Terrorism. Eastern and Western Europe

Chair: Philipp Winkler (Erlangen)

Tobias Hof (Munich): „Of Hobbits and Tigers:“ Right-Wing Terrorism in Italy since the Mid-1970s

Daniel Köhler (Berlin): Recent Trends in German Right-Wing Violence and Terrorism: Contextual Factors behind Hive Terrorism

Miroslav Mareš / Ina Fujdiak (Brno): Historical Legacies and Contemporary Right-Wing Extremist Violence in East Central Europe

Final discussion and concluding remarks

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