# *Organized Intolerance*

## *Examining a Right-Wing Extremist Social Movement in Post-Communist Slovakia: The Case of the Skinheads*

**By**
**Peter Csicsai**

**Submitted to Central European University**
**Department of Public Policy**

*In partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Public Policy*

Supervisor*:* Professor Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl

Budapest, Hungary
2007

# ABSTRACT

The primary aim of conducting this study is to provide a systematic analysis of the Skinhead movement within a scholarly debate and to offer general policy recommendations that can be utilized as sources of advice for addressing the problems associated with the recent proliferation of discriminatory, racist and ultra-nationalist sentiments in Slovakia. Considering the negative social consequences of racially motivated organized activity in Slovakia, this study argues that it is absolutely imperative to preclude further development of the Skinhead movement through strategic policy developments. The emergence of the Skinhead movement in post-socialist Slovakia should not only be perceived as a response to the disrupted family psycho-dynamics, decreasing educational standards, soaring unemployment rates and substance abuse patterns that have plagued Slovakia since the fall of communism, but also as a reaction to the socio-economic retrenchment and political instability that has provided new opportunity structures for the rise of extremist ideologies. Consequently, this study analyzes the socio-economic and political effects of the post-socialist transition with specific reference to the emergence of the Skinhead movement and draws on existing theoretical scholarship concerned with the macro-structural, micro-social and family psycho-dynamics underpinning the choice to become a movement member.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to those who have supported me throughout this endeavor. My thesis supervisor, Professor Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl has been particularly encouraging and supportive not only during this exciting process, but also throughout my academic experience in the Department of Public Policy at Central European University. My partner, Paulina Eliza Sedalska, my family and Professor Alex Fisher have also been exceptionally helpful and supportive in shaping my ideas and visualizing unique approaches to the topic.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

Since the demise of the iron curtain that shielded the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) from Western influence for nearly half a century, there has been an emergence of right-wing extremist social movements and related socio-political forces espousing ultra-conservative, jingoistic, racist, homophobic and xenophobic ideologies (Hockenos 1993, Hellen 1996, Ramet, Williams and Cibulka in Ramet and Griffin 1999, Merkl in Merkl and Weinberg 2003, Braun in Braun and Scheinberg 1997, Tarasov 2001). The appearance of right-wing extremist social movements within the unique socio-political milieu of post-socialist CEE has been especially salient in the case of Slovakia where a particularly racist faction of the Skinhead movement emerged in the wake of the *Velvet Revolution (1989)* engaging in exceedingly violent behaviors ranging from random physical attacks to organized homicides. Partially adhering to the ultraconservative principles espoused by the evolving political forces in Slovakia while romanticizing the ideological core of Nazism, the Skinhead movement has become a major threat to the security of Slovak society and its citizens, ensuing in a discourse of anti-Semitism, racial supremacy and extreme nationalism.

Members of the Skinhead movement have engaged in countless racially motivated physical attacks predominantly directed towards the Roma, Hungarian and sexual minorities, the homeless, foreign students, immigrant workers, "and a long list of *ad hoc* victims" (Merkl in Merkl and Weinberg 1997, p. 40). The Roma population in Slovakia has been particularly affected by the rise of the Skinhead movement. In its report, the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) notes: "A pressing problem in Slovakia is posed by racial violence and harassment, often perpetrated by

1

Skinheads against members of the Roma/Gypsy community" (in Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 223, Council of Europe 2004). The report identifies "racist extremist Skinheads as a serious problem in Slovakia and urges the government to take decisive steps against these extremist groups" (ECRI in Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 223, Council of Europe 2004). Although various political forces, the media and legal authorities in Slovakia have downplayed the increasing frequency of racially motivated violence to random and isolated events "both the number of such incidents, the methods used and the outcome of the attacks belie any notion of isolated outbursts of spontaneous anger" (Karvonen in Merkl and Weinberg 1997, p. 91). Bjorgo and Witte (1993) note that the outcome of these violent incidents does not only result in severe "injuries and loss of property…[but also] loss of life" (in Karvonen in Merkl and Weinberg 1997, p. 91). Hence, individuals involved in these acts can no longer be characterized as loosely organized street gangs with little potential to dangerously obstruct the freedom and security of Slovak citizens; rather, the Skinhead movement is continuously on the rise with enhanced organization, improved infrastructure and targeted violence.

In contemporary Slovak society the Skinhead movement has also acquired a reputation of an increasingly politically oriented movement (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 220). Although the movement is predominantly involved in the distribution of White Power music, various anti-Semitic publications and material goods with neo-Nazi symbolism, its influence within the domestic political arena cannot be overlooked. Through enhanced organization and emergent opportunity structures, the Skinhead movement has gained an inimitable capacity to exploit socio-economic and political cleavages that have persisted in the country since the fall of communism. Moreover, the

2

movement is able to locate a noteworthy ideological support within the current

government, namely the Slovak National Party (SNS) and previous Prime Minister

Vladimir Meciar's People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS).

Although the Skinhead movement shares parallel ideological precepts with the existing

government, it opposes state policies that advocate for enhanced social welfare, economic

interventions and a surrendering of state sovereignty to the European Union (EU) and

other international organizations (Gunther and Diamond 2001, p. 30). Seeking to advance

its political agenda, the Skinhead movement is increasingly concerned with eradicating

irredentism and minority influence within the society while seeking to establish the

conservative order of the past where tradition, identity and security remain the focus of

social, political as well as economic development.

Notwithstanding the political pressure from the international political arena

throughout the 1990s[1], the activities of the Skinhead movement have not been curtailed in

any significant degree. Though the Slovak political elite has recognized the movements'

potential threat to democratization and to the process of transition in general, they remain

very passive on the subject. Despite of the forthcoming EU negotiations, growing media

attention and escalating scrutiny from the international community, the Slovak

government did not only conceal the topic beneath *more pressing issues*, but failed to

instigate any systematic studies attempting to understand the movement and the

behavioral predispositions of its members. Hence, while some studies of the Skinhead

movement have been conducted in Canada, the United States and now in Russia, most

contemporary knowledge of the movement is predominantly generated from journalistic

---

[1] The European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are most
responsible for generating political pressure on Slovakia throughout the 1990s.

material, which more often than not sensationalizes the movement. In doing so, the media fails to provide systematic evidence that could be utilized in the development of prudent policy strategies designed to prevent and reduce the negative effects of the Skinhead movement.

Against this background, the primary aim of conducting this study is to provide a systematic analysis of the Skinhead movement within a scholarly debate and to offer general policy recommendations that can be utilized as sources of advise for addressing the problems associated with the recent proliferation of discriminatory, racist and ultra-nationalist sentiments in Slovakia. This study analyzes the socio-economic and political effects of the post-socialist transition with specific reference to the emergence of the Skinhead movement and draws on existing theoretical scholarship concerned with the macro-structural, micro-social, educational and family dynamics underpinning the choice to become a movement member. Consequently, the emergence of the Skinhead movement in post-socialist Slovakia should not only be perceived as a response to the disrupted family psycho-dynamics, decreasing educational standards, soaring unemployment rates and substance abuse patterns that have plagued Slovakia since the fall of communism, but also as a reaction to the socio-economic retrenchment and political instability that has provided new opportunity structures for the rise of extremist ideologies.

After all, as argued by Piero Ignazi, "the current resurgence of extreme right movements and activities…should be investigated…as a largely new and disturbing phenomenon…largely caused by recent conditions and circumstances" (in Merkl and Weinberg 1997, p. 18). More specifically, it is the social tensions and problems

4

associated with the political transition of post-socialism in CEE that generate

revolutionary protest attitudes within the social order. For this reason, the discussion

pertaining to emergent right-wing extremist social movements that appeared in the wake

of the transition in Central and Eastern Europe must be understood within the framework

proposed by Berke; that of the interactive feedback loop (1995, p. 6). Berke contends that

during times of societal discontent, economic decline and political instability individual

citizens engage in an interactive dialogue with existing socio-economic and political

structures; this does not only stimulate the rise of new extremist social movements, but

also reinforces existing ones (1995, p. 6).

This study attempts to provide a unique perspective on the emergence of the

Skinhead movement and hopes to influence future policy makers by highlighting the

effects of the transition on the rise of extremist ideologies and related socio-political

forces. To develop prudent policy strategies that comprehensively address the problems

associated with the Skinhead movement, this study underscores the need to focus on both

facets of the interactive feedback loop (Berke 1995, p. 6). In this endeavor, policy makers

must depart from conventionally established norms of policy developments aimed at the

deterrence of hate groups by merely addressing the familial, educational or psychological

experiences of its members and strive to address the problems rooted in their experiences

caused by the broader socio-economic and political climate of the transition.

Accordingly, policy makers should not only focus on policy solutions, which typically

converge within the traditional cleavages of family intervention, social work and

multicultural education; rather, policy options designed to address the effects of the

5

socio-economic and political problems caused by the transition should be thoroughly explored.

## *STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY*

Chapter 1 presents a review of existing theoretical scholarship pertinent to the motivational factors underpinning the choice to become a member of the Skinhead movement, the meanings that members attach to their membership and to the movement's relation to the rest of society. Chapter 2 opens the debate with a historical examination of the Skinhead movement, its proliferation in Central and Eastern Europe and its emergence in Slovakia in the wake of the post-socialist transition. Subsequent to this discussion is a detailed analysis of the socio-economic cleavages and political opportunity structures that have materialized in Slovakia since the fall of communism. The remainder of Chapter 2 is dedicated to a comprehensive assessment of the psychological, familial and educational experiences of Skinhead affiliates in Slovakia. Chapter 3 offers general policy recommendations that address judicial and legislative guidelines, civil society development, education and awareness raising, family intervention and strategies for the social re-integration of defected members.

# CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

## 1.1 MACRO-STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS

Existing theoretical scholarship that examines the influence of the factors entrenched within the broader socio-economic and political discourse on the proliferation of deviant social movements is limited. However, several general themes can be identified. Commencing with the seminal work of Albert Cohen (1955) the first general theme emerges; this theme is characterized by the perception that deviance and delinquency functions as a "solution" to unrewarding, alienating or otherwise problematic social conditions" (in Young and Craig 1997, p. 180). Cohen hypothesized that individuals are motivated to join youth movements by factors entrenched in "political disenfranchisement, economic inequality, and dissatisfaction with mainstream society" (in Sarabia and Shriver 2004, p. 272) Hence, the arguments headed by Cohen focus on the emergence of the youth sub-culture as a form of resistance to dominant collective structures. Such resistance allows members to devise novel behavioral norms, which Cohen et al consider an "adaptive pattern" (in Young and Craig 1997, p. 180) of deviance. In this context, youth subcultures experience an idiosyncratic normative perception of acceptable behavior, which essentially relegates its members to the "periphery of the larger society's value system" (Sarabia and Shriver 2004, p. 272).

Further scholarship reveals that most members of deviant youth movements have been subject to major economic disadvantages typically either by virtue of the economic situation of the wider society or by the socio-economic standing of their families. As suggested by Hamm[2] (1993), in a period of socio-economic retrenchment the

---

[2] Hamm has primarily commented on the American neo-Nazi Skinhead movement.

"climate…[is] favorable to the resurgence of forms of intolerance (in Young and Craig 1997, p. 177); this phenomenon epitomizes the emergence of extremist social movements within the conditions presented by the post-communist transitioning society. The rhetoric of subsequent social movement literature reflects the key assertion that individuals consciously engage in collective behavior with a normative precept to address or solve a commonly understood social problem such as an economic recession or political instability (Turner and Killian in Curtis and Aguire 1993, p. 15, Hagopian 1984, p. 198, Blumer in McLaughlin 1969, p. 8). Underpinned by "factors such as ideological base, social-psychological characteristics of the members, or the general context of societal change" (Curtis and Zucher in Curtis and Aguire 1993, p. 231), the process of establishing norm engendered social action involves a two-step interactive process.

On the one hand, "in the beginning it is about events – extraordinary conditions or a precipitating incident – that a norm justifying extra–institutional action emerges" (Turner and Killian in Curtis and Aguire 1993, p. 15). This can be exemplified by political revolutions or major social transformations. On the other hand, the event that stimulates the interaction acts as a catalyst for the emergence of new, established or *ad hoc* groups engaged in a process of norm development (Turner and Killian in Curtis and Aguire 1993, p. 15). In this case, the establishment of new norms serves as a justification for the atypical behavior of movement affiliates, which originates and is underpinned by the ideological or socio-psychological dispositions pervading the mainstream society. These sociological dispositions are engendered through an interactive process of historical, social as well as cultural substance and are often reinforced by the contemporary political landscape.

8

In recent years, analysts have become unwavering to the fact that "youth subcultures are, in many respects, aligned closely with mainstream society…[and] tend to embrace values that are largely consistent with the parent culture" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960, Cohen 1980, Young and Craig 1997 in Sarabia and Shriver 2004, p. 272, Young and Craig 1997, p. 180). This theme shadows cultural studies approaches, which explore the "possibility of the simultaneously transformative and reproductive capabilities of subcultures" (Young and Craig 2004, p. 180). These later propositions are in sharp contrast to the earlier work pioneered by Cohen who perceived the behavioral patterns of movement members characterized by a limited capacity to conform to dominant social standards (Cohen, Cloward and Ohlin in Young and Craig 1997, p. 180). Drawing on a common theme pervading this later scholarship, it can be argued that youth subcultures are perceived as an assemblage of adolescents that "do not exhaustively – behaviorally, stylistically or otherwise rebel at all" (Young and Craig 2004, p. 180). This theme has been echoed in research conducted in Canada, the US and Britain where the Skinhead movement is perceived as "complex…multidimensional" (Young and Craig 1997, p 175) and heterogeneous, which, albeit in often contradictory ways, offers its members "a range of behavioral and ideological opportunities" (Young and Craig 1997, p 175).

## 1.2 MICRO-SOCIAL AND FAMILY PSYCHO-DYNAMICS

Research concerned with the micro-social and family dynamics that underpin the motivation to become a member of an extremist social movement reveals that affiliates "are drawn from homes characterized by extreme violence and oppression" (Baron 1997, p. 125). Scholars argue that these conditions engender a susceptibility to behavioral tendencies typified by aggression, enmity and intolerance towards family members, peers

9

and authority figures (Ezekiel 2002, p. 58-59, Merkl in Merkl and Weinberg 1997, p. 37).

Within the context of post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe, Merkl argues that one of

the primary causes for member integration into extremist social movements is rooted in

the failure of "post-communist parents…to socialize their young to the most elementary

standards of human, non-violent, coexistence (in Merkl and Weinberg 1997, p. 27).

Through a process of emulation and repetition, adolescents that have been reared in

oppressive homes are likely to utilize violence and aggression as a "means of problem

solving and/or gaining compliance" (Baron 1997, p. 128-129).

This process does not only stimulate coping strategies entrenched in deviance and

violence, but also incites a lack of emotional intelligence to aggressive behaviors (Siegal

and Senna 1994 in Baron 1997, p. 129). Siegal and Senna (1994) remind us that this type

of invincibility to violence encourages youth "to be swayed by a broader tolerance of, or

expectation for, violence…[which] may result from their placement in structural

locations where violence is expected, or from the more micro influence of peers" (in

Baron 1997, p. 129). In line with this logic, Ezekiel argues that a significant factor that

makes adolescents vulnerable to joining radical social movements is the presence of an

extremist group (2002, p. 59). Hence, "where there are no groups and where there is no

effort at recruitment, recruitment is probably unlikely" (Ezekiel 2002, p. 59).

Drawing on the theory of differential oppression[3], an affiliate of an extremist

youth movement has likely experienced further societal oppression in the school

environment, which interacts with the oppressive family background to stimulate deviant

behaviors (Regoli and Hewitt in Baron 1997, p. 129). In this context, "Regoli and Hewitt

---

[3] Framework first presented by Regoli and Hewitt in 1991.

note that children can also be victimized by the school…[which] is characterized by hierarchical relationships in which children are placed at the lower rung of the ladder, while adults assume the highest level of authority" (in Baron 1997, p. 129). The theory of differential oppression, however, does not assume that all children are equally subjugated under the authoritarian pressure of the institution; rather, "like parents, teachers share preconceptions about children and their place in society, and oppress children who defy their ideas of acceptable behavior" (Baron 1997, p. 129). Functioning in conjunction with familial experiences, the systematic oppression experienced in the school environment represses children both spiritually and psychologically and as such "stifles independence and free thinking" (Coles 1967, Regoli and Hewitt 1991 in Baron 1997, p. 129).

Tarasov (2001) contends that although the educational system has the potential for structural oppression, its role within the transitioning society is indisputably requisite for the intellectual nourishment of the young generation. In this view, Tarasov argues that the post-communist adolescent cohort has grown up in an era of reforms that have engendered an anomic and asocial generation "characterized by its total break with tradition, social values, and social attitudes" (2001, p. 56). In due course, adolescents subjected to a combination of differential levels of societal oppression throughout the 1990s had attempted to expel their aggravation and anxiety through a pattern of violent and often-destructive behaviors.

# CHAPTER 2: EXAMINING THE SKINHEADS

## 2.1 THE HISTORY OF THE SKINHEAD MOVEMENT

Contemporary scholarship concerned with the rise of the Skinhead movement identifies its embryonic stage of development as the *first wave* of a subculture that "evolved in Britain's working class areas and emerged as a youth class culture of protest against the official bourgeois culture and against the counterculture of the 1960s" (Tarasov 2001, p. 44, Anti-Defamation League, Skinhead International 1995, Berlet and Vysotsky 2006, Sarabia and Shriver 2004, Tarasov 2001, Young and Craig 1997, p. 176). Espousing, "traditional conservative values, hard work, patriotism [and] defense of local territory" (Young and Craig 1997, p. 176), first-wave Skinheads began manifesting behavioral tendencies characterized by violence, enmity and disdain for anyone who did not embody the elements of their ideal way of life. Early targets of the first-wave Skinheads did not only include sexual deviants and certain minorities, but also subcultures that shared many of the same stylistic elements and historical trajectories; this included the *Mods*, *Punks*, *Teddy Boys*, and the *Hippies* (Sarabia and Shriver 2004, p. 269). Hence, the rise of the Skinhead subculture acutely amplified class distinctions not only between working class youth and the upper echelons of British society, but also within the various contemporaneous subcultures of the ""worker aristocracy" and the "lower middle class"" (Tarasov 2001, p. 47).

An interesting dynamic that defines first-wave Skinheads in working class Britain is the Skinhead style (Brake 1985 in Young and Craig 1997, p. 176, Tarasov 2001, Sarabia and Shriver 2004). Commenting on the role of sub-cultural style in the development of a distinctive identity, Berke identifies three main components of this

lucid concept: "image, which includes costume and accessories; demeanor, which includes gait, posture and practice; and argot, or the use of a distinct vocabulary" (in Young and Craig 1997, p. 176). Complementary to the ideological values shared by early Skinheads characterized by an all-embracing resistance towards the higher social order and contempt for certain groups, first-wave Skinheads adopted an intimidating dress code composed of "big industrial boots, jeans rolled up high to reveal them, hair cut to the skull, [and] braces" (Brake in Young and Craig 1997, p. 176). In essence, the adoption of this style permitted first-wave Skinheads to distinguish themselves from the social majority while allowing them to dramatize their unique social landscape. This reinforced the development of a distinctive ideological orientation permeated by an assiduous struggle for independence and a refusal to accept popular notions of style.

## 2.2 CONTEMPORARY SKINHEADS

Although the history of first-wave Skinheads appears to have materialized from the bourgeois of blue collar workers, during the 1980s the movement emerged from a social order characterized by an economic crisis, rising unemployment and an array of unsuccessful government recipes that ultimately led to the disintegration of firms, businesses and state funded welfare benefits and social support systems (Merkl in Merkl and Weinberg 1997, p. 37, Tarasov 2001, p. 46). In Britain, under the rule of Margaret Thatcher who took office in the latter part of the 1970s, urban centers ultimately "became an arena of youthful rebellion" (Tarasov 2001, p. 47) ensuing in the disintegration of traditional family values with little parental support for their increasingly troubled youth (Brown 2004, p. 161). Hence, the social landscape that permeated most regions in Britain during the 1980s became a fertile environment for the rise of the *second-wave* of the

13

Skinhead movement. The second-wave of the Skinhead movement began distinguishing itself from the first-wave by associating with political parties that shared a right-wing extremist ideological orientation. The notorious National Front is most pertinent to this discussion (Berlet and Vysotsky 2006, p. 31, Sarabia and Shriver 2004, p. 271, Brown 2004, p. 162).

Emerging within an analogous landscape typified by socio-economic disenfranchisement and political instability while sharing many of the tribulations confronting their younger and less experienced counterparts, the National Front perceived the Skinhead sub-culture as a viable source of member integration. Rather than blaming the Thatcher government for Britain's economic instability, the National Front and other radical right-wing political groups began strategically recruiting Skinhead members to participate in their "street demonstrations…[where they]…attacked people of color – Asians, Africans, and people from the West Indies" (Tarasov 2001, p. 47). A crucial event that established the Skinhead movement within the domain of right-wing extremism was the so-called *Southall Riot*, which took place in July 1981 at the "Hambourgh Tavern in the predominantly Asian Southall suburb of London" (Brown 2004, p. 162). In events like these, Asians and other immigrant minorities became the scapegoats for the socio-economic and political hardships experienced by disenfranchised Skinhead youths and radical right-wing political activists alike.

When the Skinheads emerged on the West German, Scandinavian, French, Canadian, American, Belgian, Australian, Danish and Swiss scenes during the mid-to-late 1980s their right-wing extremist reputation was already solidified. The media had contributed to this redefined representation of the Skinhead affiliate. This time the media

14

had indulged in sensationalizing the movement by directly referencing its fascist ideological tendencies, which permeated virtually all other aspects of the Skinhead lifestyle. This included music, undergrounds clubs, organizations and *skinzines*, or privately distributed magazines and articles advocating fascist propaganda, anti-immigration policies, racism, xenophobia, nationalism and homophobia.

Sustained through systematic and deliberate recruitment by German neo-fascist groups, the Skinhead movement gained the most prominence in West Germany, where neo-Nazi Skinheads "soon became known as an extremely aggressive and ultra-politicized force" (Tarasov 2001, p. 50, Brown 2004, p. 161). Under the auspices of their fascist predecessors while "aided by…the traditionally conservative West German courts" (Tarasov 2001, p. 50), German Skinheads soon became known as the "most politically sophisticated" (Tarasov 2001, p. 50) facet of the sub-culture. They engaged in politically oriented mass action that targeted anti-fascist organizations, trade union meetings and anti-fascist demonstrators (Tarasov 2001, p. 50). These actions did not only acquire German Skinheads the legacy of political activism and stringent neo-Fascism, but often resulted in the deaths of their victims.

### 2.3 THE PROLIFERATION OF THE SKINHEAD MOVEMENT IN CEE

This newly acquired status of the Skinhead movement, however, did not remain confined to the borders of West Germany. Serving as a frame of reference, West-German Skinheads soon became the symbol for the profound sentiments of anger, hopelessness and despondency experienced by youth in former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Emulating the history of second-wave Skinheads in 1980s Britain, "after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, Skinheads appeared in Poland, the Czech Republic,

15

Hungary, Slovenia…Bulgaria" (Tarasov 2001, p. 51) and Slovakia where they filled the voids of socio-economic disenfranchisement and political uncertainty by offering a new solution to the ubiquitous problems associated with the transition. As previously noted these include political instability and change, cultural factors, social tensions and economic adversity (Cibulka in Ramet and Griffin 1999, p. 109, Williams in Ramet and Griffin 1999, p. 38-45).

In consequence, policy makers in Central and Eastern Europe were suddenly confronted with an all-embracing social disintegration comprised of angry, desperate, and unemployed youth seeking to locate a suitable outlet to release their volatile sentiments. Recognizing the undercurrents of the transitioning social society, Skinhead leaders quickly proliferated the *Eastern Block* through the dissemination of their materials including *White Power Rock and Roll* commonly known as *'Oi'* music, concerts and rallies, and *skinzines*, which primarily advocated for the solution of the *Gypsy Problem,* anti-immigration and anti-communism. In essence, the international Skinhead movement exploited the vulnerability of disillusioned youth in the transitioning societies of Central and Eastern Europe who accepted the Skinhead code as a motif for their despair and frustration.

## 2.4 THE SKINHEAD MOVEMENT IN POST-COMMUNIST SLOVAKIA

Penetrating the Slovak society through the Czech Republic, the Skinhead movement, has gained significant prominence in Slovak society. In contemporary Slovakia "some thirteen active groups of racist extremists claim to be part of the Skinhead movement" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 218); this includes two prominent Skinhead groups: Slovakia Hammerskins (SHS) and Blood & Honor Division Slovakia

(B&H) (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 218). Although initially "composed of ad hoc groupings, without any defined character and structure" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 212), the movement has since its first entry into the country transformed from a loosely organized group of street deviants to an internationally recognized organization with several divisions all of which have ties to the international *White Power* community.

Unlike their British predecessors of the 1960s and 1970s, the current Skinhead faction in Slovakia represents a *White Power* group that is progressively concerned with the political behavior of the country's leaders seeking to establish greater political control and influence over decision-making processes. Despite the fact that some literature discounts the political capacity of the Skinhead movement in general, the Slovak faction is becoming better organized with connections to other radical and violent groups such as Combat 18 – a terrorist group originally from the US, which possesses significant arms and is a potential threat to the existing government  (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 221).

### 2.4.1 A STYLE COMMUNITY

Emulating the Skinhead movement that appeared in the wake of the transition in Russia and other CEE countries, the emergence of the Skinhead movement in Slovakia was initially stimulated by stylistic copycatting from their Western counterparts; German and Czech Skinheads being most influential (Tarasov 2001, 52). Media analysts have noted the influence of the international Skinhead subculture by alluding to emerging musical groups in Slovakia during the initial phases of the transition. Musical groups such as *Orlik, Edelweiss, Front 18*[4] and *Judenmord (Jew Killing)* quickly proliferated the

---

[4] In the Skinhead scene the number 18 correspond to AH – Adolf Hitler's initials.

Slovak musical scene with lyrical content predominantly concentrated on right-wing extremism and associated ideological orientations.

Although the content of this lyrical point of reference bombarded the popular media, its appeal primarily flourished within the working class facet of the society. Approximating the former social situation that transpired in Germany and Britain, the music quickly became an instrument and an "accompaniment to a rising tide of racist and anti-immigrant violence" (Brown 2004, p. 157). Although the Slovak popular culture shared many stylistic and expressive elements with the Skinhead subculture with overlapping contemporary socio-political commentary, the Skinhead movement rapidly adopted an extremist perspective to current events. Hence, songs such as *"The Gypsy Problem" (Ciganski Problem)* by *Zona A* soon became an indirect initiator of racially motivated violence that swept the country with unprecedented force during the initial stages of the transition (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 218 – emphasis added).

In the wake of the transition, violence also became an instrument of recruitment techniques to the *Skinhead style community*, as younger members were required to complete a series of duties to establish their merit (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 218). In this case, the ideological *training* is a fundamental precept of the Skinhead organizational behavior with older members "lead[ing] the group ideologically" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 219). In some Skinhead groups in Slovakia, namely the notorious Slovakia Hammerskins (SHS), younger members are required to complete a three to four year trial period before they gain the status of full-membership. During this period of indoctrination affiliates are exposed to *ideological training*, which encompasses the fundamental precepts of the Skinhead movement including the National Socialist

18

message of the Slovak State propagated by the wartime fascist leader Jozef Tiso and RAHOWA[5], or the racial holy war.

## 2.4.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLEAVAGES

The economic retrenchment consequential of the reforms during the early 1990s is particularly relevant to the proliferation of the Skinhead movement in post-communist Slovakia, as the disastrous economic decline during the transition left many Slovak citizens unemployed and poor. Besides the emergent class struggle, Slovak citizens experienced growing anxiety in the face of a changing social milieu resultant of the withdrawal of "guaranteed full employment, state paternalism in the areas of education and health care and other social programs[6]" (Tarasov 2001, p. 55). With growing sentiments of mistrust, increasing unemployment rates, plummeting educational standards, economic and political instability and escalating illegal activities disillusioned youth throughout the country, unable to deal with the hardships of the transition, began searching for alternative sources of community, belonging and security. As argued by Tarasov, this process did not only lead to a "material but to a psychological disaster" (2001, p. 55), which eventually materialized in Slovakia in the form of increased incidences of alcoholism, family violence, crime, and substance abuse patterns.

Associated with their inequitable socio-economic experiences, numerous youth in post-communist Slovakia began adopting the Skinhead style as a convenient source of security and shared belonging. This provided newly established Skinhead members not only with a viable source to release their sentiments of frustration and anxiety, but also

---

[5] This is typically an American concept.
[6] For example, subsidized housing, communal services and public transportation.

with a foundation for a shared community that is at once resistant and transformative with the dominant culture. What's more, responding to their inimitable socio-economic conditions emergent Skinhead affiliates had engaged in a process of identity formation that involved the development of new meanings, ideas, norms and values. While occupying a distinctive spatial and temporal location from their German and British predecessor, the Skinhead movement in Slovakia utilized the dominant culture as well as the original Skinhead style as an idiosyncratic point of reference for the development of a new meaning of the *Skinhead* (Brown 2004, p. 168).

In this context, Brown argues that Skinhead members continuously engage in a process of "communicative linkages" (2004, p. 168) where new meanings are shaped by contemporaneous socio-political and economic circumstances. In such circumstances, virtually every facet of sub-cultural standards, norms and practices are redefined ensuing in the development of "new configurations…[as] the movement moves through space, occupying new geographic and cultural locations" (Brown 2004, p. 160). Hence, under the influence of new socio-economic circumstances this process results in the reorientation of sub-cultural form and content, which ensues in the development of novel forms of acceptable behavior. Consequently, Slovak Skinheads had adopted novel standards of acceptable behavior, which better suited and reflected the distinctive socio-economic climate of their society.

## 2.4.3 POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

The emergence of the Skinhead movement in post-communist Slovakia is far more complex and should be analyzed with particular reference to the political circumstances that transpired in Slovakia following the collapse of communism. In this

20

context, the rapid growth and consolidation of the Skinhead movement in Slovakia during the early 1990s can be attributed to the rise of radical parties espousing right-wing extremist political ideals. Through ideological reinforcement domestic party politics in Slovakia contributed to the manifestation of the Skinhead movement by propagating right-wing extremist values in their political platforms. In this case, the racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Hungarian, anti-Roma, ultra-nationalist and ultra-conservative ideals representative of the Slovakian Skinhead faction became emulated within various policy developments, media reports, and political messages of the ruling political elite. Hence, within the unique socio-political landscape of post-communist Slovakia, Skinhead members adopted the ideals espoused by emergent right-wing extremist and autocratic political parties such as the *SNS (Slovak National Party)* and political leaders[7] and utilized them as a primary source of their ideological orientation.

Analogous to the youth paramilitary organizations that emerged in Nazi Germany[8], the Slovak National Party (SNS) was instrumental in fashioning the *Slovak National Youth (SNM)*, thereby presenting the necessary opportunity structures for extremist political mobilization. Acting as a radical opportunity structure for right-wing extremist and politically oriented youth in Slovakia, the SNM has endorsed a political platform that appeals to the ideological core of the Skinhead subculture. Therefore, as noted by Milo, "the whole structure of local branches of the SNM is made up of members of the Skinhead movement, who in this way gain space and a basis for the development of their activities" (in Mudde 2005a, p. 218). In this context, the dialogue that transpires between members of the Skinhead movement and their political counterparts reinforces

---

[7] Specific reference to Vladimir Meciar – former Slovak Primer Minister.
[8] Reference to *Hitler Jugend – Hiter's Youth.*

21

and propagates the interactive *feedback loop;* this phenomenon highlights the ideological conceptions shared between the higher political order and emergent extremist social movements in post-communist Slovakia.

Although strategically and politically allied, the SNM and leaders of foremost Skinhead groups in Slovakia, however, are beginning to depart from their previously shared ideological precepts. This is due to the fact that "many Skinheads…perceive the SNM as not radical enough" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 218). Although unstable, new opportunity structures are being formulated to accompany the increasingly extremist ideological tendencies of the Skinhead movement with the *National Socialist*[9] platform being most influential in the Eastern part of the country[10]. Consequently, while no stable opportunity structures exist within the contemporary Slovak political arena, new prospects for political mobilization are continuously emerging to satisfy the political proclivity of the Skinhead movement.

Though some studies tend to underscore the movement's ability to stimulate political change and to influence the political decision-making processes within transitioning societies in any significant way, other literature clearly exposes that the Skinhead ideology embraces a "dangerous cohesive political identity" (Baron 1997, p. 125). Although there is "no consensus among scholars on what factors are dominant in setting a democratic transition in motion" (Hellen 1996, p. 17), the Skinhead movement can be a potential threat to this development. Accordingly, given the socio-economic, political as well as cultural vulnerability generated by the process of the transition, the Skinhead movement is a definite threat to the principles of democracy. Clearly, it is

---

[9] Political ideology of the German Nazi Party.

[10] Eastern Slovakia is most notorious for Skinhead activity.

22

indispensable for the Slovak political elite to address the problems associated with the

Skinhead movement in a coherent and vigorous manner; to closely monitor the

movement's activities; implement policies targeted at educating youth on the movement's

potential harms; and provide a pertinent institutional framework to manage the

movements' behaviors. Yet to develop effective policy solutions, it is essential to

understand the experiences of the movement's members on the micro level. The

following section is dedicated to this endeavor by providing an examination of the

familial experiences and educational backgrounds of Skinhead affiliates.

### 2.4.4 FAMILY EXPERIENCES

In post-communist Slovakia the family could be considered the primary societal

institution of oppression where youth are subjected to varying degrees of violence,

substance abuse and neglect. A demographic survey of Skinhead groups in Slovakia

reveals that members are predominantly drawn "from lower social backgrounds and

dysfunctional families" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 219). Although the evidence

documenting the family experiences of Slovak Skinheads is limited, their experiences do

resemble many of the oppressive family dynamics experienced by Skinhead affiliates in

other countries. Recognizing the limitation of existing empirical evidence on the family

experiences of Skinhead members in Slovakia, it is instrumental to utilize scholarship

drawn from other countries that are recognized for prominent incidences of the Skinhead

movement. The countries selected to supplement the lack of empirical evidence generated

on the Skinhead subculture in Slovakia are Russia and Canada.

A survey of Skinhead groups in Canada reveals that members are primarily drawn

from "broken homes, or families where they experienced neglect and abuse (Came 1989,

Fowler 1993, Kaihla 1989, King 1988, Kinsella 1994 in Baron 1997, p. 134, Schafer and Navarro 2003). These dysfunctional family dynamics often result in the development of adaptive coping mechanisms such as the *fight or flight* response. This way, disrupted family relationships and the parents' inabilities "to provide atmospheres conducive to satisfactory child rearing" (Rodman and Grams 1967, Trojanowicz and Morash 1987 in Baron 1997, p. 134) provoke premature departures from family homes. Baron notes that in due course "youths in these homes seem to lose respect for their parents and are often forced outside the home to escape the hostility, leaving them vulnerable to the influences of delinquent peers" (Baron 1997, p. 134). Unsurprisingly, the reasons underpinning the motivation to join the Skinhead movement in Canada resemble those found in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. These include the desire to escape broken family dynamics with the hope of gaining "a sense of belonging and security" (Young and Craig 1997, p. 184) through their newfound membership in a youth movement such as the Skinheads.

Drawing on the influential study conducted by Stephen W. Baron (1997) in the city of Edmonton[11] it appears that the unique socio-economic inequalities experienced by the majority of Skinhead members correspond to their disruptive family relationships and dysfunctional family dynamics. These sentiments are echoed in the research conducted by Hamm who notes that the rise in popularity of the neo-Nazi movement in Canada and the United States parallels an era of socio-economic retrenchment characteristic of the 1980s during which the gaps between the rich and the poor drastically amplified and family life became significantly fragmented (in Young and Craig 1997, p. 177). During

---

[11] Canadian city known for substantial Skinhead activity.

24

such "socio-economic retrenchment, Hamm suggests, the climate was favorable to the resurgence of forms of intolerance" (Young and Craig 1997, p. 177). Exacerbated by their parents' inability to deal with the socio-economic retrenchment during the 1980s, numerous Canadian youth eventually fled the family home, which had resulted in a substantial increase of chronic homelessness throughout the country (Baron 1997, Young and Craig 1997). While some studies tend to disregard the connection between the broader structural inequalities and family experiences[12], results illustrate that this connection has factual consequences (Baron 1997). Rooted in the theoretical framework of differential oppression, the family dynamics are said to interact with the broader structural inequalities to generate psychological intrusions on natural child development, which often result in emotional, intellectual and social pathologies (Baron 1997, 129-131). These can include, but are not restricted to, an inability to form long and lasting relationships, a vulnerability to substance abuse and criminal activity as well as a tendency to engage in violent and aggressive behaviors towards others.

In the context of Central and Eastern Europe, the proliferation of the Skinhead movement has been particularly acute in Russia where membership escalated within a 10-year period from few dozen to somewhere between 10,000 and 50,000 members throughout the country (Tarasov 2001, p. 52-60). The results generated by Alexandr Tarasov[13] (2001) parallel the incidence of dysfunctional family dynamics and socio-economic erosion in post-communist Russia that had transpired in Canada during the 1980s. More specifically, Tarasov (2001) articulates the emergent family dynamics in Russia with specific reference to the collapse of the communist regime. This way,

---

[12] These studies tend to focus on the violent tendencies of deviant youth.

[13] Leading sociologist concerned with the rise of right-wing extremism in post-communist Russia.

Tarasov (2001) perceives the flare-up of Skinhead activity as a reaction to impaired family dynamics, increased violence and substance abuse patterns as well as declining standards of traditional values that resulted from the broader socio-economic and political impairments experienced by post-communist Russia. These complex yet interrelated dynamics are consequently attributed to the emergent political complicity, "economic crisis…collapse of the educational system" (Tarasov 2001, p. 55) and decreasing family and moral standards that materialized in Russia since the fall of communism.

In effect, as pointed out by Tarasov the process of the Russian transition had set in motion a progressive disintegration of "tradition, social values and social attitudes" (2001, p. 56). As children began "running away from home because of hunger, brawls, and intolerable living conditions" (Tarasov 2001, p. 55), the Russian society was suddenly confronted with countless unemployed and homeless individuals. The surge of juvenile criminal activities, substance abuse patterns and an outbreak of sexually transmitted diseases contributed to this social epidemic, as parents, teachers or the state could no longer manage the situation. Hence, the oppressive family experiences resultant of the Russian economic crisis following the collapse of communism combined with disintegrating social standards and political instability "transformed Russia…into a country of aggressive nationalists" (Tarasov 2001, p. 57). With the rehabilitation of Russian fascist ideals along with the "total confusion that reign[ed] in adolescent minds" (Tarasov 2001, p. 61), the Russian generation of post-socialist youths have suitably materialized into organized street gangs of Skinheads who sleep in dilapidated and abandoned buildings, commit abysmal crimes to satisfy their substance abuse needs and

26

engage in racially motivated attacks primarily targeting "persons…with an insufficiently Aryan appearance" (Tarasov 2001, p. 44).

## 2.4.5 EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS

Analogous to the theoretical conceptions that perceive the school as the secondary institution of societal oppression, members of the Skinhead movement in post-communist Slovakia experience targeted victimization by their instructors as well as their peers. These experiences are often exacerbated by "their lack of attendance, their behavior, or their overall performance" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 219). In due course teachers and other school authorities utilize existing power structures entrenched in the hierarchical relationships of the educational system to target individuals who display unacceptable patterns of deviant behaviors. These behaviors are often rooted in inequitable socio-economic experiences and negative family dynamics, which contribute to an increased propensity to engage in violent and abnormal behaviors. In essence, the incidence of oppressive relationships entrenched within the interpersonal affairs of the school environment and the wider society predisposes adolescents to surrender to a reinforcing cycle of abusive behaviors.

The school environment has also occupied an additional function in stimulating the rise of violent street gangs of Skinheads in post-communist Slovakia. Milo points to the instrumental nature of the school environment as a depository of extremist ideas and ideals endorsed by higher-ranking members of the Skinhead movement (in Mudde 2005a, p. 219). Considering that the majority of Skinhead members in Slovakia fall within the age range of 14-26, most members come into contact with the Skinhead subculture in their "last years of grammar school and the early years of high school" (Milo in Mudde

2005a, p. 219, Schafer and Navarro 2003, p. 2). The exposure to the visual elements, musical styles as well as the ideological precepts of the Skinhead subculture typically occur under the influence of more experienced Skinhead members who engage in mass recruitment strategies that target young disillusioned youth who display deviant behavioral patterns and a general contempt for the existing state of affairs.

These recruitment techniques typically utilize the Skinhead style and its 'macho' appearance as decoys to the underlying ideological precepts of the movement, which include but are not limited to Slovak National Socialism, Hungarian irredentism, staunch racism and a celebration of Nazism. Besides receiving ideological indoctrination during their first exposure to the movement, new Skinhead members typically "receive a recruitment package, which includes a swastika armband, a T-shirt with white supremacist slogans…literature…band stickers, and other supremacist materials" (Schafer and Navarro 2003, p. 2). Troubled youth who often join the movement based on their desire to resolve their marginal social status by gaining "respect and admiration from their peers" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 219) may rarely realize the potential consequences of their actions. In sum, it can be argued that while the school environment in post-communist Slovakia may be regarded as an instrument of social oppression thereby contributing to the manifestation of deviant behaviors and the fabrication of extremist youth subcultures, it also serves as a depository of disillusioned youth who become the primary targets of strategic recruitment by senior members of the Skinhead movement.

Drawing on the empirical research conducted in Canada, Stephen W. Baron articulates the results of his interviews with specific reference to the low academic

achievements of most Skinhead members with the "average level of education completed by the respondents [being] grade nine"[14] (1997, p. 136). Although some theoretical scholarship perceives Skinheads as blue-collar workers who hold at least a high school education, research conducted in Canada and Russia clearly explicates that youth who tend to join the Skinhead movement are predominantly elementary or high school dropouts with limited prospects for meaningful employment (Tarasov, 2001, Baron 1997, Schafer and Navarro 2003).

Baron argues that disillusioned youth who join Canadian Skinhead groups have likely experienced similar school experiences distinctive for deep-seated oppression that is rooted in the "teachers' narrow definition of correct student behavior…[and a] dictatorial distribution of regimentation" (1997, p. 137). Typically, respondents informed Baron that such experiences fueled their propensity to engage in violent behaviors directed not only towards other peers, but also towards educators, other academic authorities as well as school property (1997, p. 137). Clearly, these adolescents tend to share common perceptions of the school environment in which violence is perceived as the only source of escape, confrontation or retribution. Baron contends that the "respondents' violent reactions to the school and its authorities appear to be the extreme manifestations of the anger and frustration that these youths hold for this institution of perceived oppression" (1997, p. 137).

The empirical evidence generated in Russia and Canada clearly illuminates that Skinhead members are drawn from dysfunctional families, lower socio-economic backgrounds, are unemployed and lack basic educational standards (Milo in Mudde

---

[14] The mean: 9.28.

2005a, Baron 1997, Tarasov 2001, Schafer and Navarro 2003, Brown 2004). By highlighting the family as a repressive force and the school environment as a depository of extremist ideas and ideologies, these results are instrumental in devising a pertinent framework for understanding the factors, which underscore a member's motivation to join the Skinhead movement in post-communist Slovakia. Based on existing evidence, it can be argued that predicated on feelings of repression and subjugation Skinhead affiliates in Slovakia have likely joined the movement as a reactionary force towards the family, the educational system as well as the broader socio-economic and political conditions of the transitioning society.

While the family experiences of most Skinhead affiliates were responsible for their initial departure from the home, the school environment has in fact proven to play a crucial role in the development, synthesis and exposure to extremist ideas and ideologies. In this context, the educational arena has served as a suitable milieu for the exchange of ideas and worldviews with other individuals who share similar experiences and frustrations not only with their imminent educational and familial surroundings, but also with the broader structural elements posed by the socio-economic retrenchment and political instability consequential of the transition. These relationships have been elementary to the progressive development of disillusioned adolescents who have overwhelmed the country since the fall of communism by engaging in group-approved deviant acts involving racially motivated violence, incitement of hatred and harassment of others. In sum, the available evidence on the Skinhead movement from Canada and Russia is instrumental in revealing parallel estimations that strive to capture the

motivation of Slovak adolescents to join the Skinhead movement. To fully comprehend

the scope of this comparison, however, further empirical evidence needs to be generated.

# CHAPTER 3: EXISTING LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## 3.1 INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Throughout the 1990s, Slovakia was under significant international pressure to adopt legal instruments in the field of human rights and minority protection, "including the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, the *European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,* and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities"* (Mudde 2005b, p. 170 – emphasis added). These legal instruments "firmly espouse the principles of non-discrimination and equal protection…[and] hold that most instances of discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity infringe on universal human rights, violate basic moral principles, and impede positive social interaction and the functioning of political institutions" (Open Society Institute – On the Margins 2001, p. 7). These legal standards, which are espoused by various international bodies,[15] also emphasize that antidiscrimination and equal protection provisions do not only apply to direct discriminatory practices, but also to indirect discrimination. This focus thereby highlights seemingly irrelevant forms of discrimination such as verbal abuse, which includes but is not limited to organized hate speech, anti-Semitic and racist publications and White Power music (Open Society Institute – On the Margins 2001, p. 7).

In accordance with "Article 7, paragraph 5 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, human rights agreements ratified by the Slovak Republic have precedence over national law, if they secure a broader range of basic rights and freedoms" (Milo in Mudde

---

[15] For example, the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe and the Organization for Co-operation and Security in Europe (OSCE).

2005a, p. 222).  However, despite the fact that Slovakia has ratified the most important

international legal instruments addressing racial and ethnic discrimination, several

indicators reveal that the adoption of these instruments has remained a formal

commitment rather than a long-term strategy for a systematic solution (OSI – EU

Accession Monitoring Process 2002, p. 17). As a foremost non-governmental

organization (NGO) in the CEE region, the Open Society Institute (OSI) has alluded to

this issue in its report on the *EU Accession Monitoring Process*. In the report, the OSI

demonstrates that efforts of the Slovak government to exhibit compliance with the

aforementioned political criteria have been merely instrumental, rather than a "genuine

and permanent commitment" (EU Accession Monitoring Process 2002, p. 17). Martina

Kubanova, a Coordinator at the Slovak Governance Institute (SGI) alludes to the

governments' inadequate planning and research, lack of a systematic evaluation of policy

options, institutional failure, futile human resources and above all a lack of political drive

to improve the situation in Slovakia as underlying causes for this problem (2005, p. 1).

Yet, to assume that the Slovak government has utterly failed in adopting and

implementing pertinent policy strategies designed to combat discrimination and human

rights violations would be misleading. The pressure from the international arena has in

fact stimulated the development of several anti-discrimination and minority protection

policies[16] on the domestic level; however, "the issue of racist extremism has not featured

that often" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 222). The majority of these developments were

stimulated by the European Union and a consortium of other international organizations

---

[16] These are most pertinent to the treatment of the Roma minority in Slovakia.

and NGOs who had recognized the human rights violations[17] that had transpired in Slovakia and as such had declared themselves responsible for combating discrimination, racism, all forms of xenophobia and racially motivated violence in all new accession states including Slovakia. Yet again, Mudde argues that although international pressure has stimulated several developments in protecting minorities from state authorities in Slovakia, protection from non-state actors such as the Skinheads "has generally been addressed by NGOs" (2005b, p. 171). The lack of capacity in Slovakia for civil society engagement, however, has precluded the development of any systematic measures addressing the problems associated with the Skinheads and other extremist groups.

### 3.2 DOMESTIC LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND PRACTICE

Although the capacity for civil society engagement in Slovakia has been limited, the Slovak Parliament adopted several legal measures that could be perceived as satisfactory legal standards concerning racism and discrimination (Hrubala 2001, p. 6). More specifically, Article 12, Paragraph 2 of the Slovak Constitution[18]makes clear that the "equality of all citizens regardless of their nationality, religion, worship, and social status" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 224, Mudde 2005b, p. 172, Hrubala 2001, p. 7) must be upheld in all matters concerning civic, political, cultural and economic life. The Constitution further identifies all actions pertaining to "racially motivated violence and crimes committed by extremists" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 224) within the legal jurisdiction of the Penal Code, which implements anti-discrimination laws based on international standards. Under the Penal Code, all discriminatory actions are subject to

---

[17] Particular reference to the Roma and to a lesser extent the Hungarian minorities.
[18] Adopted by the Slovak Parliament on September 01, 1992.

strict penalties and apply to extremist manifestations on the levels of verbal abuse and racially motivated violence. Within the scope of verbal abuse, violations are prosecuted under the Penal Code if individuals or groups "publicly incite hatred of any nation or race, or…incite the restriction of rights and freedoms or persons belonging to a nation or race" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 224-225, Mudde 2005b, p. 173). In the framework of general violence, the Slovak Penal Code utilizes criminal motive as a benchmark for determining the severity of punishment and applicability of a higher penalty. In this case, punishment is stricter if the crime committed involved a motivation based on the "victim's race, ethnic origin, nationality…[or] religion" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 225). Although Slovakia seems to have a well-established legal framework with regards to racist extremism on paper, "there are important shortcomings in implementations" (Mudde 2005b, p. 173, Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 225). As noted by Milo, the principal reason for the deficient implementation of anti-discrimination laws in cases of racially motivated violence lies in "the difficulty in proving racial motives behind these acts" (in Mudde 2005a, p. 225).

Another facet of the Slovak Constitution that directly relates to the issue of racist extremism in Slovakia is Article 4(a) of the Act on Association of Citizens (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 225). This legal provision "explicitly prohibits the creation of associations whose aim is to deny or restrict personal, political or other rights of citizens on the grounds of their national origin, sex, race, birth, political affiliation or conviction…to incite hatred and intolerance on these grounds…[or] to foster violence or otherwise violate the laws in force" (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 225). Under these legal provisions, participation in such organizations is punishable by law. Enforcement of such

provisions, however, remains a practical problem for Slovak authorities, as participation

is difficult to establish not only due to the elusive nature of many extremist organizations

in Slovakia, but also due their clandestine character and underground appeal. As such,

racist extremist organizations and movements such as the Skinheads are able to locate a

noteworthy subversive appeal without having to declare their existence through legal

registration. Although the Ministry of Interior[19] has steadfastly denied the registration of

emergent extremist political organizations through administrative proceedings, their

jurisdictional capacity is limiting in cases of racist street youth gangs such as the

Skinheads (Mudde 2005b, p. 172). As a result, very few Skinhead organizations have

been banned through legal proceedings and continue to flourish beyond the jurisdictional

capacity of the Slovak legal system.

### 3.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Although Slovakia has ratified several international and domestic legal

instruments designed to combat the proliferation of the Skinhead movement and other

extremist groups, racially motivated crimes and interrelated extremist activities continue

to pose a major threat to the security of Slovak citizens. While it is recognized that

appropriate implementation of existing policies and legal instruments is essential in

ensuring greater protection from extremist activity, their scope remains inadequate. As a

result, the following section offers several general policy recommendations that could

serve as benchmarks for future policy developments aimed at the deterrence of the

Skinhead subculture and other organized hate groups in post-communist Slovakia.

---

[19] The Ministry of Interior is responsible for the legal establishment of civic or otherwise political organizations or associations (Milo in Mudde 2005a, p. 225).

### 3.3.1 POLICE/JUDICIAL GUIDELINES

- Slovak authorities should adopt specific guidelines that closely monitor the activities of Skinhead members to ensure that persons involved in activities in contradiction with the Slovak Constitution are prosecuted accordingly.

- To facilitate this process, Slovak judicial authorities should take extra measures to increase the effectiveness of the implementation process concerning existing criminal law provisions in the fields of anti-discrimination, anti-racism and anti-extremism.

- Specific financial resources should be allocated to the systematic investigation and prosecution of Skinhead members who have committed racially motivated crimes. In this endeavor, initiatives targeted at the deterrence of Skinhead activity must be clearly identified, well planned and consistently applied. Upon the development of such initiatives, clear instructions and guidelines should be provided to police officers and prosecuting authorities responsible for the delivery of such programs and services.

- It is recommended that police officers and officials working in the judicial system involving prosecutors and judges receive specific training to properly investigate and prosecute crimes related to racism and intolerance. To enhance professional motivation, the Slovak government should adopt specific programs designed to offer incentives to police officers including promotion and bonus packages in response to proper implementation and monitoring of projects.

- Slovak authorities should take the necessary measures to increase public awareness concerning the legislative instruments designed to combat racism, discrimination and intolerance. Awareness-raising measures should also involve a focus on elucidating

the legal consequences for associating with extremist groups whose primary function is to disseminate and publicly incite hatred or to restrict the freedoms of any group or individual.

- Finally, accurate statistical evidence regarding the number and outcomes of racially motivated crimes reported to the police should be compiled and maintained by Slovak authorities.

### 3.3.2 DEVELOPMENT OF MONITORING GROUPS/CIVIL SOCIETY

- The Slovak government should set up specialized civic bodies whose powers and functions remain within the jurisdiction of the Slovak Constitution and whose primary role is to monitor the activities of the Skinhead movement; to prevent its proliferation through organized campaigning and awareness raising; and to identify the individuals involved in the movement.

- Specialized civic bodies designed to monitor the activities of the Skinhead movement should be granted unique powers and competences, which apply to the activities of governmental departments and other domestic legal authorities. This way, these specialized civic bodies can act as liaisons between state authorities and individual citizens who have become victims of racist or discriminatory offences and who wish to report these incidences to responsible officials.

- To enhance the effectiveness of such bodies, it is recommended that Slovak authorities provide political, financial and professional support for the delivery of specialized programs and services designed to combat organized hate activity.

### 3.3.3 IMPROVING THE GENERAL WELFARE OF TARGET POPULATIONS

- Recognizing that the socio-economic retrenchment consequential of the transition has stimulated the rise of extremist organized hate groups in Slovakia, targeted programs aimed at enhancing the living standards of specific populations should be developed in high risk areas such as urban inner-city ghettos and poor rural areas. This includes the development of planning and housing programs, which ensure the provision of basic amenities and infrastructure. Further, these programs should focus on the de-segregation and de-isolation of high-risk neighborhoods and communities.

- Slovak authorities should take the necessary steps and measures to improve the general employment situation of target populations residing in high-risk areas. To achieve this, responsible governmental agencies should develop programs and offer services that promote the recruitment of disadvantaged individuals into the labor market both in the public and private sectors and intensify education and training opportunities for individuals residing in high-risk communities.

- To facilitate the development of prudent policy programs and services aimed at reducing the general level of poverty in high-risk areas, it is recommended that the Slovak government allocate financial as well as political support to existing as well as new agencies responsible for the delivery of such programs and services.

### 3.3.4 EDUCATION AND AWARENESS-RAISING

- Slovak authorities should introduce specific guidelines to incorporate education on racism, discrimination and the effects of racist extremism into the public school curriculum. To facilitate the delivery of these educational programs, it is recommended that educators receive specific training in presenting this subject.

39

- Topics on multiculturalism and human rights should be incorporated into the curriculum beginning in the elementary school level. The revised curriculum should involve information concerning the history and culture of minority groups with specific focus on the Roma and Hungarian minorities.

- Slovak authorities should initiate specific programs designed to gradually integrate individuals belonging to minorities into the mainstream educational system with a focus on exposing children to different ethnic, language and religion-based groups.

- Finally, teachers should receive specific training on strategies designed to recognize troubled youth who come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and to intervene when necessary.

### 3.3.5 INTRODUCTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS/FAMILY INTERVENTION

- Recognizing disrupted family dynamics as a fundamental factor contributing to the motivation to join the Skinhead movement, the Slovak government should design programs and deliver services, which introduce social workers into targeted communities known for high rates of extremist activity.

- The Slovak government should enhance its current policies related to the protection of children by ensuring that adequate funding is allocated to agencies and governmental departments responsible for the delivery of social services.

- Family intervention strategies that focus on the relocation of vulnerable family members to protected locations should be promptly utilized and exercised when necessary.

40

### 3.3.6 PROTECTION FOR DEFECTED MEMBERS/SOCIAL RE-INTEGRATION

- Given the sensitive and problematic nature of member defection including the potential for pressure group retaliation or subsequent re-integration into the movement, it is recommended that the Slovak government adopt specific legal measures that offer protection for defected members of the Skinhead movement and other extremist groups. In particular, Slovak authorities should set up independent investigatory mechanisms that monitor defected members and take the necessary steps to re-locate them, if possible, into specialized protected institutions.

- To ensure that defected members of the Skinhead movement and other extremist groups receive adequate protection and fair treatment, the Slovak government must provide clear instructions to police officers and judicial authorities on the appropriate measures when dealing with such individuals.

- Finally, it is recommended that the Slovak government develop specific programs focused on the social re-integration of defected members. To facilitate this process, social workers should be introduced into specialized institutions in which defected members receive ongoing support, psychological counseling, life skills guidance, continuing education and employment training.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is pertinent to point out that the socio-economic, political, historical and cultural forces that have stimulated the emergence of the Skinhead movement in post-communist Slovakia are comparable to those experienced by pre-Nazi Germany and other transitioning societies. In fact, history reveals that in periods of societal discontent, economic adversity, political instability, and "tribal, religious, cultural, or technological change" (Berke 1995, 4-7), numerous societies have experienced a proliferation of disrupted family psycho-dynamics, decreasing educational standards, soaring unemployment rates and substance abuse patterns. In the case of pre-Nazi Germany, the social conditions that provided a fertile environment for the rise of Hitler's Nazi government can be attributed to the "psychic, economic, and political distress" (Dreijmanis 2005, p. 120) consequential of Germany's "defeat in World War I, the revolution and the collapse of the monarchy, followed by hyperinflation and mass unemployment" (Dreijmanis 2005, p. 120, Berke 1995, p. 4-7).

During the German economic depression and in the face of escalating unemployment rates along with intimidating prospects for the future, individuals progressively coalesced into an array of organized groups that ranged from loosely structured neighborhood gangs to refined political parties. This context essentially provided a public discourse for members to express their frustrations with the current socio-economic and political state of affairs. Analogous to the situation that transpired in pre-Nazi Germany, the strains of economic transition along with an unfinished process of democratization fueled a comparable development in post-communist Slovakia where street gangs of Skinheads composed of disillusioned youth appeared in the wake of the

42

transition seeking avenues to vent their frustrations. Unavoidably the social conditions in both Slovakia and pre-Nazi Germany stimulated a similar outcome producing not only a drastic increase in the incidences of racially motivated violence, but also in the proliferation of ultra-nationalist, racist, discriminatory, xenophobic, homophobic and anti-Semitic ideologies.

The similarities between the social circumstances that stimulated the rise of right-wing extremist socio-political forces in post-communist Slovakia and those of pre-Nazi Germany are striking and are a cause for serious concern. Although some scholars dismiss their capacity for political mobilization, members of the Skinhead movement are entering a new era of extremism in Slovakia with enhanced organization, improved infrastructure and increasingly targeted violence. The urgency of the matter calls for the development of prudent policy solutions that systematically address and continuously monitor the movement at the political as well as individual spheres of life. To facilitate the development of comprehensive and binding policy solutions, this study highlights the necessity for policy makers in Slovakia to first gain the necessary understanding of the Skinhead movement. In this context, this study emphasizes the need to generate systematic evidence on the movement as a prerequisite to the development of policies that are both sustainable and effective in the long-term.

Moreover, to develop prudent policy solutions, policy makers must understand the Skinhead movement within the context of the transitioning society. In the context of Slovakia, policy makers should reflect on the unique socio-economic, political and cultural conditions that have materialized in the wake of the post-communist transition. Contextualizing their understanding of the Skinhead movement within its broader social

43

context will not only reveal the emergence of the movement as a response to the disrupted family psycho-dynamics, decreasing educational standards, soaring unemployment rates and substance abuse patterns that have plagued Slovakia since the fall of communism, but also as a reaction to the socio-economic retrenchment and political instability that has provided new avenues for the proliferation of extremist activity. In this case, the framework proposed at the onset of this study – that of the interactive feedback loop – serves as a valuable instrument that addresses extremism and related socio-political forces at both the political as well as individual levels of society. The value of this framework lies in its all-embracing capacity to extend beyond the street level to the political arena of regulatory decision-making.

Utilizing the proposed policy recommendations as sources of general advise, policy makers in contemporary Slovak society should develop solutions that strive to address the familial, educational as well as psychological experiences of Skinhead affiliates. Rooted in the framework of the interactive feedback loop, it is also necessary to address the socio-economic and political cleavages that provide opportunity structures for the Skinhead movement to gain increased power and influence within the domestic socio-political arena. It is anticipated that policy makers will utilize this study as a foundation for addressing the problems associated with the Skinhead movement with a critical aim to systematically eradicate the proliferation of discriminatory, racist or nationalist sentiments and ideologies. In sum, I hope that this study provides a prudent discussion for the development of strategic policy solutions that are formulated with an understanding of the conditions that are responsible for the emergence as well as the persistence of the Skinhead movement in post-communist Slovakia.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anti-Defamation League 1995, Online:
http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/orgs/american/adl/skinhead-international/skins-scene.html.
Viewed on: June 02, 2007

Balcerowicz, L. 2005, *Post-Communist Transition: A Comparative Perspective.*
International Center for Banking and Monetary Studies. Geneva.

Baron, S. 1997, *Canadian Male Street Skinheads: Street Gang or Street Terrorists?*
University of Windsor. Submitted to the Annual Meetings of the Academy of Criminal
Justice Sciences in Boston, 1995.

Berke, J. H. 1995, *When Little Men Become Big.* History Today: 45 4-7.

Berlet, C. and Vysotsky, S. 2006, *Overview of White Supremacist Groups.* Journal of
Political and Military Sociology: 34 (1) 11-48.

Braun, A. and Scheinberg, S. *(eds)* 1997, **The Extreme Right: Freedom and Security
at Risk.** Westview Press: Boulder, Oxford.

Brown, T. S. 2004, *Subcultures, Pop Music and Politics: Skinheads and "Nazi Rock" in
England and Germany.* Journal of Social History: 157-178.

Curtis, R. L. and Aguirre B. E. *(eds)* 1993, **Collective Behavior and Social Movements.**
Allyn and Bacon-A Division of Simon & Shuster Inc: Needham Heights MA.

Dreijmanis, J. 2005, *A Portrait Of The Artist As A Politician: The Case Of Adolf Hitler.*
Social Science Journal: 42, 115-128.

Council of Europe 2004, *Third Report on Slovakia:* European Commission Against
Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). Adopted on 27 June 2003. Strasbourg.

Ezekiel, R. S., 2002, *An Ethnographer Looks at Neo-Nazi and Klan Groups. The Racist
Mind Revisited.* American Behavioral Scientist. 46 (1) 51-71.

Gunther, R. and Diamond, L. *(eds.)* 2001, **Political Parties and Democracy.** The John
Hopkins University Press: Baltimore.

Hagopian, M. N. 1984, **Regimes, Movements, and Ideologies: A Comparative
Introduction to Political Science.** Longman Inc: New York.

Hellen, T. 1996, **Shaking Hands with the Devil: Origins of the Political Right in
Central Europe.** The Finish Society of Sciences and Letter [and] The Finish Academy of
Science and Letters: Vammala.

Hockenos, P. 1993, **Free to Hate: The Rise of the Right in Post-Communist Eastern Europe.** Routledge: New York, London.

Hrubala, J. 2001, *Legal Analysis of Anti-Discrimination Legislation: A Comparison of the EU Racial Equality Directive & Protocol No. 12 with Anti-Discrimination Legislation in Slovakia.* European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), Interights and Migration Policy Group (MPG).

Kubanova, M., 2005. *The Missing Link: Monitoring and Evaluation of Roma-related Policies in Slovakia* [online]. Available from: http://www.eumap.org/journal/features/2005/romadec [Accessed July 19, 2007].

McLaughlin, B. *(ed.)* 1969, **Studies in Social Movements: A Psychological Perspective.** The Free Press: New York.

Merkl, P. H. and Weinberg, L. *(eds)* 2003, **Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century**. Frank Cass: London.

Merkl, P. H. and Weinberg, L. *(eds)* 1997, **The Revival of Right Wing Extremism in the Nineties.** Frank Cass: London.

Minkenberg, M. 2002, *The Radical Right in Postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe: Comparative Observations and Interpretations.* East European Politics and Societies. 16 (2) 335-362.

Mudde, C. 2000, **The Ideology of the Extreme Right.** Manchester University Press: Manchester.

Mudde, C. *(eds.)* 2005a, **Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe.** Routledge: New York.

Mudde, C. 2005b, *Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe*. East European Politics and Societies. 19 (2) 161-184.

Open Society Institute, Zoon, I. 2001. *On the Margins Slovakia: Roma and Public Services in Slovakia.* New York: Open Society Institute.

Open Society Institute, 2002. *Monitoring the EU Accession Process: Minority Protection.* New York: Open Society Institute.

Ramet, S. *(eds)* and Griffin, R. *(after-word)* 1999, **The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe Since 1989.** Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, PA.

Sarabia, D. and Shriver, T. 2004, *Maintaining Collective Identity in a Hostile Environment: Confronting Negative Public Perceptions and Factional Divisions within the Skinhead Subculture.* Sociological Spectrum. 24: 267-294.

Schafer, J. R. and Navaro, J. 2003, *The Seven Stage Hate Model: The Psychopathology of Hate Groups.* FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin.

Stratton, J. 1985, *Youth Subcultures and their Cultural Contexts.* ANZJS: 21 (2) 194-218.

Tarasov, A. 2001, *Offspring of Reforms – Shaven Heads Are Skinheads: The New Fascist Youth Subculture in Russia.* Russian Politics and Law: 39 (1) 43-89.

Young, K. and Craig, L. 1997, *Beyond White Pride: Identity, Meaning and Contradiction in the Canadian Skinhead Subculture.* University of Calgary.