

A 'Moral' Crusade: Central-Eastern European Nationalism, Xenophobia, and Far-Right Extremism in Response to the 'Refugee Crisis'

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Abstract

In light of the so-called refugee crisis, many European states have seen a rise in support for far-right and/or populist political movements and xenophobia directed towards those perceived to fit into the highly politicized category of 'refugee.' This paper examines the rhetoric disseminated by these political groups surrounding refugees and migrants from Muslim majority countries to discuss how far-right and xenophobic groups in Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic have bolstered support through fear-mongering and the scapegoating of Muslim and Middle Eastern migrants and refugees. We further discuss how fear-based ethnic nationalisms have been exploited in order to generate rhetoric which works to garner support for xenophobic and extremist ideologies among mainstream populations in Central-Eastern Europe. We seek to provide an analysis of of Central-Eastern European responses to the 'refugee crisis' which exposes the historical, economic and political roots of nationalism and xenophobia in ways which neither justify these phenomena nor explains them using Cold War stereotypes of 'Eastern' Europeans as inherently backwards.

Introduction

- “What is scary about Islam is the way it evokes the spectre of puritanical Christianity, a moral crusade ... an attack on permissive society.” (Werbner 2005)
 - Does this speech constitute an attack on European values, possibly more so than the perceived threat of Islam or refugees?
- Consequences of Targeted Political Rhetoric
 - World Policy Institute research linking hateful political rhetoric and genocide (Benesch 2012)
 - Amnesty International 2012 report- Discrimination of Muslims in Europe

Background

Central-Eastern Europe (CEE):

-Austro-Hungarian Empire

-WWII & Holocaust

-Communist period

→ Refugees

-Post-socialism



European 'Refugee Crisis':

-Syrian Civil War

-Over 1 million arrivals in Europe in 2015

→ Primarily of Syrian origin
→ Germany

-Mediterranean deaths:
→ 2015: 3,700
→ 2016: 5,000+

-Geneva Convention, EU refugee policy

CEE and Nationalism

- Linguistic and ethnic repression under Austria-Hungary

- Repressive communist regimes

 - Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Prague Spring of 1968

 - Narratives of victimization

- Postsocialism

 - Economic instability & class stratification

 - Limited experience with mass migration

CEE and Xenophobia

Antisemitism

→ Part of the development of Hungarian, Czech and Slovak nationalisms in the late 19th century

→ Holocaust

- Invasion and victimization vs. complicity

Anti-Roma racism

→ Holocaust

→ Forcible/coercive sterilization, segregation in schools, hate crimes, overrepresentation in prison

Far Right and Islamophobia

- "Racism is the lowest form of stupidity; Islamophobia is the height of common sense!"
(SIOE quoted in Abdul Bari 2012)
- Is Islamophobia based in racial, ethnic or religious terms? (Taras 2013)
- Previously, a generally positive relationship between extreme-right and Islam and Muslims. (Mareš 2014)
- Crisis of identity in the West, especially East Central Europe (Moreno 2010)

Czech Republic

President Miloš Zeman

→ Muslim migrants will impose 'Sharia law' and "we will lose the beauty of women because they will be covered head to toe in burqas."

Public Opinion Research Center Poll:

-61% unwilling to accept refugees at all, 82% see refugees as a threat to
CZE

Treatment of refugees

→ (Illegal) detentions, numbers written on arms, refugee facilities and detention centers do not meet EU standards

Slovak Republic (Slovakia)

Prime Minister Robert Fico

→ “Islam has no place in Slovakia”

Naše Slovensko

→ Awarded 14 seats (8%) in Slovak parliament in 2016

Public Opinion Research Center Poll:

-70% of respondents ‘worried’ about refugees, 40% see refugees as the Slovakia’s most pressing problem

Hungary

- PM Viktor Orban announced platform after Charlie Hebdo attacks to “Keep Europe Christian” (Rev 2015)
 - Views the West as falling into a moral decay, resists EU pressures
 - Won reelection against extreme right party Jobbik with Islamophobic rhetoric rather than anti-Semitic language.
- “Trojan Horse of Terror” (VOA 2017)
- Orban responded to EU criticisms of “abysmal” refugee camps as “charming human rights nonsense” (Board 2017)

Conclusion

- Values claimed and values performed
 - Open borders for some
 - Liberalism and Humanitarianism
 - Progressive, anti-racist
- Real vs. imagined fears
- Threats to Human Rights

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