

2.5. Boots, braces and baseball bats: right-wing skinheads in the Czech Republic (1985-2015)

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the emergence and evolution of Czech extreme right after 1989 in the context of the formation of a skinhead subculture in the Czech Republic. It studies the relationship that exists (or existed) between both phenomena and the variables influencing it. It takes account of the basic layering of Czech extreme right and internal tensions within the skinhead subculture, both in terms of ideological divisions and in terms of attitudes to political activity within the racist stream (acceptance versus rejection). Then it analyses the possible combinations of these moments and their effects on the mobilization and demobilization of the extreme right in the Czech Republic depending on the attitudes of the racist stream.

Keywords: subcultures, skinheads, extreme right, extremism, neo-nazism, racism, populism, white power music.

Introduction

The skinhead subculture came to Czechoslovakia in the second half of the 1980s, yet it did not become truly widespread until the early 1990s. In the wake of the fall of the communist regime, Czech skinheads underwent politicization and quickly grew into one of the fundamental resources of the extreme right. They kept this role for the next almost 20 years. However, after 2010, the importance of subcultural moments within the Czech Republic's extreme right started to decline, and as a result, right-wing skinheads in the country decreased in numbers and importance (Charvát, in press, Novotná, 2008). Therefore, the central research question of this paper is as follows: *What is the relationship between the skinhead subculture and extreme right-wing politics in the Czech Republic?*

Conceptual and methodological framework

In the following text I am going to rely on several different approaches. First, I intend to undertake a social group case study focusing on the skinhead subculture in the Czech Republic after 1989.

I assume a causal relationship between the skinhead subculture (especially its racist stream), on one hand, and extreme right-wing politics, on the other hand. The basic hypothesis I am going to work with is that developments within the skinhead subculture shape the forms and actions of the extreme right. More specifically, what goes on inside the subculture affects the process of mobilization (and demobilization) of Czech extreme right after 1989. Under mobilization I understand an expansion of public activities, establishment of political organizations and purposeful efforts of extreme right-wing groups to become established in the country's political life.

In my research study I am going to attempt to identify dependent and independent variables that comprise this relationship. I am going to rely primarily on analysis of documents (above all, on those authored by the groups themselves such as declarations, fanzines, or music lyrics; and additionally, on scholarly studies on the skinhead subculture and the extreme right), and also on direct observation of the activities of the extreme right and the skinhead subculture. In my work I rely primarily on Czech writings on the subject matter, but also on international subculture scholarship (Hall & Jefferson, 1993, Hebdige, 2012, Kolářová, 2012) concerned both with racist (or extreme right) forms of the skinhead subculture in general (Dobratz, 1997, Moore, 1993) and with its Eastern European forms more specifically (Kurti, 2003, Mudde, 2000, Pilkington & Garifzianova & Omel'chenko, 2010). I also draw on works that focus on White Power music (Langebach & Raabe, 2013, King & Leonard, 2014) and, of course, on the extreme right as such (Mudde, 2007, Caiani & della Porta & Wagemann, 2012).

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Skinheads: a history

The skinhead subculture emerged in England during the second half of the 1960s, namely among young working-class men living in industrial rings around English cities (Marshall, 1993, 14–15). The subculture was originally non-political, albeit it did embrace elements of nationalism and a kind of proto-racism as well as elements of social protest and a strong class consciousness (Worley, 2013). The first stage of its evolution culminated at the end of the 1960s; in the following couple of years, the skinhead subculture lost its relative position among youth subcultures. Its comeback took place in the context of the late 1970s “punk revolution” (Marshall, 1993, 67–75). The entire subculture underwent a profound transformation, especially in terms of politicization (Travis, Hardy, 2012), and eventually, since the early 1980s, it divided into three main streams: a racist one (White Power/WP, National Socialist/NS, Rock Against Racism/RAC), a non-racist one (Traditional, Apolitical), and an anti-racist one (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice/SHARP). Over time, the latter stream crystallized as an openly leftist skinhead fraction (Red and Anarchist Skinheads/RASH) (Marshall, 1993, 131–151, cf. Bastl, 2001, Stejskalová, 2012).

Emergence of the extreme right in the Czech Republic

First signs of the extreme right in the Czech Republic were observed in the mid-1980s when the first (then utterly marginal) groups of fascism-inspired intellectuals formed, on one hand, and the first skinheads appeared, on the other hand (Mareš, 2003). At that time, the skinhead subculture did not have a clear ideological framing, its members identified with the punk subculture, and anti-communism was their key political attitude. Neither the emerging extreme right nor the skinhead subculture could truly flourish until the political liberalization after 1989. During the 1990s, the subculture became increasingly politicized and the extreme right crystallized. As a result, the internal structure of Czech extreme right formed analogously to what was traditional in Western Europe. In practice, three streams can be distinguished in the country: a populist (or conservative-authoritarian) one, a neo-fascist one, and a neo-Nazi one (Charvát, 2007).

The Czech extreme right did not evolve on a linear trajectory. Its history can be divided into several time periods.

1989–1993: Chaos in the wake of the revolution

The fall of communism brought about two phenomena that influenced the forming of right-wing politics in the Czech Republic. First, the society rejected communism *en masse*, often with outright aggression, and at times this grew into rejection of left-wing politics as such. Second, in the wake of the 1989 revolution, there were widespread concerns about changes and chaos in the society. The former factor helped establish anti-communist attitudes in the post-communist Czech Republic, while the latter importantly bolstered attitudes in favour of authoritarian rule. At the same time, Czechs started reviewing some of their ideological beliefs. Whereas the communist regime promoted internationalism, the post-communist society looked up to its patriotist traditions, which occasionally grew into nationalism or chauvinism. Also, many were suddenly eager to open the Pandora box of the “Roma issue”. All in all, the social climate in the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution was characterized by a number of attitudes that were typical of the extreme right repertoire, including anticommunism, nationalism and proto-racism (Charvát, 2007). Thus, it comes as little surprise that the *Orlík* band reached stardom at the exact same time. Established in 1988, *Orlík* was practically the first skinhead band in Bohemia. It popularized the nationalist and racist streams of the skinhead subculture in the Czech environment and subsequently contributed to the development of the subculture (Mazel, 1998) or, more specifically, of its racist part, which remained dominant in the country until about 2010. Albeit the country saw the emergence of anti-racist (Bastl, 2001) as well as non-racist skinhead groups (Stejskalová, 2012), those were definitely not predominant in numbers before 2010.

Simultaneously, the first groups emerged that did not consider the subcultural framework as essential and rather accentuated political issues – the predecessors of the extreme right in Czech politics. Thus, on one hand, the skinhead movement was evolving rapidly, influenced primarily by trends in neighbouring Germany (with its predominance of the racist stream) and oriented almost exclusively on young people. On the other hand, the country saw a somewhat slower emergence of the organizational structures of political groups that strived to be recognized by the society and become established within its political system. Founded on 24 February 1990 in Prague, the Association for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ) became the most important building part of the Czech extreme right. Although the party did not succeed in the general election of 1990, it did

win seats in the Czech parliament in 1992, with a 5.98% vote share (Mazel, 1998). Since its inception, the party identified with the extreme right, was oriented on the skinhead movement, among others; in its early days it cooperated with some of the movement's figures (Mareš, 2003).

However, SPR-RSČ was not the only organization of the emerging extreme right in the country. Most of the first-generation skinheads were not neo-Nazis. They were rather oriented towards "laypeople's" racism: hated the Roma or the Vietnamese (and did not necessarily share the neo-Nazi belief in "white supremacy") and called for authoritarian rule in order to bring an end to the post-revolutionary chaos. More generally speaking, they voiced the nascent fear of a social transformation which was about to take place at an unprecedented scale (Charvát, 2007). Until 1993, several groups of this type were founded that became important actors of the development of Czech extreme right, apart from the skinhead movement. From the very beginning of the 1990s, two different strategies were followed: some activists sought to legalize their activities through official registration with the Ministry of Interior, while others aimed at the subcultural underground and did not seek official registration.

Czech skinheads of the first generation, along with the *Orlík* band, promoted a set of nationalist ideas and so-called Calixtinism² (Utraquism). These were used in the campaign of the Patriot League (*Vlastenecká liga*, VL) that was officially registered in 1993. Originally an association of racist skinheads without neo-fascist or neo-Nazi orientation, the VL soon tried to distance itself from racism as such (at least in nominal terms) and act as a conservative-nationalist political group. In the mid-1990s, it became relatively popular and, as a result, got into a series of conflicts with the rest of the racist skinhead scene (Mazel, 1998).

Registered in the same year yet more radical than the VL, the Patriot Front (*Vlastenecká fronta*, VF) brought together Brno area skinheads. It combined conservative authoritarianism with fundamentalist/extremely conservative Christianity and Czech chauvinism – and in fact its stances were not far from traditional neo-fascism. In contrast to similar groups, the VF tried, from its inception, to present itself as a political organization and to distance itself from overt neo-Nazism (while it did cooperate with neo-Nazi groups) (Mareš, 2003).

Other emerging neo-Nazi skinhead groups did not strive for official registration. A number of such groups refused to legitimize the national government by requesting its recognition – e.g., the National Socialist Movement of Europe (*Nacionálně socialistické hnutí Evropy*) and the National Fascist Community (*Národní obec fašistická*) – but most of them did not last long, while the informal character of their ties makes it difficult to ascertain how strong they were. As an exception, skinheads of the Brno area formed *Bohemia Hammer Skinheads* (BHS), a local branch of the US-based international Hammerskins Nation. They started publishing neo-Nazi fanzines and organizing concerts of affiliated bands, especially from English-speaking countries (Charvát, 2007).

1994–1998: Subculture versus politics

In the electoral term of 1992–1996, the SPR-RSČ maintained parliamentary representation with almost 6% of the vote. In the 1996 elections, the party consolidated its position when it reached its historically highest vote share of 8.01%. (Mazel, 1998) Its politics did not change, and continued to evolve around populist resistance to government, security accents and racist Antiziganism. However, the SPR-RSČ significantly transformed its contacts with the skinhead scene. Whereas it was normal for skinheads to support the party in the early 1990s, a schism occurred later on. A large part of neo-Nazis turned away from the SPR-RSČ, primarily because a number of neo-Nazi activists rejected political activity as such. (Charvát, 2007) In the snap election of 1998, the party lost many votes and with 3.90%, it failed to obtain parliamentary representation (there is a 5% electoral threshold in the Czech Republic) (Mareš, 2003).

At that time, the Patriot Front only received marginal public attention. However, its popularity culminated in the mid-1990s as its members were able to openly identify with the skinhead movement without being linked to overt neo-Nazism. At the same time, the VL waged an escalating series of conflicts with the BHS, who accused it of effectively fragmenting the capacities of Czech extreme right. As a result, VL leadership explicitly distanced itself from the skinhead movement and the organization entered a stage of stagnation. It was practically non-existent by the end of the 1990s (Mazel, 1998).

² Calixtinism refers to the medieval tradition of the Hussites, which are inscribed in Czech collective memory as successful militarism combined with nationalism or anti-Germanism. It was especially followed up by 19th and 20th century Czech nationalists in their effort to counter the dominance of the German element. *Orlík* exploited just these themes with songs like "Jan Hus" or "Wagon Fort" that contained explicit references to nationalism and anti-Germanism, celebrating Czech bravery and pride.

The 1994–1998 period is also characterized by growth of the neo-Nazi stream of the skinhead movement, both in terms of music bands (about thirty were started in Bohemia and some of them, including *Buldok* and *Excalibur*, became globally renowned), and in terms of DIY fanzines (about 50 different titles) distributed through a network of post-office boxes. Thanks to their international contacts, most groups adopted a neo-Nazi ideological toolbox based on the values of subcultural radicalism and violence. In contrast, political activity was frowned upon. The first BHS flyer contained the following passage (Imperium, 1994):

Hammer Skins are NEVER going to have anything to do with a political party!!! Politics is Zionist-organized entertainment for gentiles, and politicians are too often ready to change what started as a radical stance. Skinheads have too often been used as a means to their stinking ends, only to earn their scorn and disrespect.

After Czech neo-Nazis committed several racially motivated murders, government authorities slowly changed their approach in the mid-1990s, and it was especially following the murder of Sudanese student Hassan Abdelradi in 1997 that the police started treating neo-Nazis more harshly. A number of leading activists were incarcerated and the BHS received extensive attention from the police, news media and human rights activists. As a result it practically ceased to exist around the turn of 1995 and 1996 (Mareš, 2003).

Positions from which the BHS retreated were quickly taken by a new generation of neo-Nazis, who attempted to establish a Czech branch of Blood and Honour (B&H, a UK-based international neo-Nazi organization under the motto of the German *Schutzstaffel*). With offices in Pilsen and Prague, the B&H assumed the BHS' role in holding concerts and publishing fanzines (Charvát, 2007).

While the Pilsen branch of the B&H went in the BHS footsteps and used skinhead symbolism, the Prague branch rather aimed at political activity. Prague B&H activists made a couple of attempts to establish a registered civic association and their ambition was to become a political party following the example of Germany's *Junge Nationaldemokraten*, an NPD-affiliated youth group. However, their efforts were unsuccessful. (Mareš, 2003) In any case, such an important change of style signaled that a new generation of neo-Nazis had taken charge and the times of strict rejection of official politics were over. In 1999, the Prague branch changed its name to National Resistance Prague (*Národní odpor Praha*), thus demonstrating a reorientation from English-speaking countries to Germany (the new name was a direct translation of *Nationaler Widerstand*, which stands for a network of German groups) as well from subcultural work to political activism (Charvát, 2007).

1999–2001: Political mobilization

On the eve of the new millennium, the extreme right lost its main political voice and sole parliamentary representative, the SPR-RSČ. This encouraged other extreme right-wing organizations to fight for seats in the country's legislature. As a result, the boundary between registered and underground organizations became increasingly blurred in that time period.

At the turn of 1998 and 1999, a new extreme right-wing organization entitled, National Alliance (*Národní aliance*, NA), was founded in the town of Rakovník and soon obtained registration from the Ministry of Interior. Originally a regional-level group with strong links to neo-Nazi skinheads, its mission gradually crystallized into political activism (Mareš, 2003).

Among other registered associations, the Patriot League was no longer active after 1998, while the Patriot Front reactivated itself and held a series of public appearances. In its ideology, the VF turned away from neo-fascism and Catholic fundamentalism and leaned more towards conservative nationalism. At the same time, it cooperated with openly neo-Nazi groups such as the National Resistance and the National Alliance, and the three together attempted to integrate into a new extreme-right political organization. In that process, conflicts within the VF surfaced and some of its activists defected. In the second half of 2000, the rest of the VF left the integration process and scaled down their activities (Mareš, 2003).

The integration process continued. When the National Alliance failed to establish its own party, it coalesced with the Patriot Republican Party (VRS) which had been established by a group of former SPR-RSČ members in 1996. At a VRS convention on 3 March 2001, the party was effectively taken over by National Resistance and especially National Alliance activists when it admitted a number of them as members. The party changed its name to National Socialist Bloc (*Národně sociální blok*) but failed to obtain Ministry of Interior registration. Therefore, it eventually became the Right Alternative (*Pravá alternativa*) (Charvát, 2007). It campaigned on a nationalist ticket with strong accents on social care, anti-immigration and anti-integration (isolationism). Contentious issues such as antisemitism

were carefully avoided. The party also used camouflage tactics to present extremist attitudes in a publically acceptable form. Its leaders literally took off their steel-capped boots and bomber jackets and instead wore white shirts and black ties for most of their public appearances. However, the Right Alternative never distanced itself from its predominantly neo-Nazi skinhead constituency (nor did it want to do so). Since it remained closely associated with the neo-Nazi scene for its entire lifespan, it never succeeded to mobilize ordinary electorate or join forces with established political organizations. Soon the party was struck by internal struggles and in spite of announcing candidacy before the general election of 2002, it fell apart as soon as in 2001. The high expectations of many Czech neo-Nazis were failed and the entire scene entered a visible decline, retreating to its former positions in subcultural underground.

2002–2005: Back to the underground

When the National Social Bloc fell apart, Czech extreme right a short-term period of “power vacuum”. At the same time, the neo-Nazi scene was strongly disillusioned and frowned upon official political activities. This is well illustrated by the following declaration published on the National Resistance website (www.odpor.com):

When the Right Alternative fell apart, we showed that the movement did not become disillusioned but instead took to the streets with renewed determination and along a new, perhaps better way. We have learned that the System cannot be defeated by official means, and we have responded by forming loose structures of National resistance – organizations without leadership. The System may outlaw parties and associations; yet it can never outlaw the revolution.

As a result, most former NSB activists joined the National Resistance and resumed their subcultural activities. Faced with such a crisis, some Czech neo-Nazis attempted to modernize the movement by importing the so-called autonomous nationalism, a new trend of German extreme right. In autonomous nationalism the extreme right draws inspiration from the methodology and symbolism of the extreme left. The trend’s success in the Czech context was only partial – only in the mid-term perspective. It captivated a new generation of activists which had some experience with the skinhead subculture but felt too restrained by it (Vejvodová, 2008).

The political positions from which neo-Nazis retreated were taken by officially registered groups campaigning on the ticket of conservative nationalism and populism. The power situation started to resemble that of 1994–1999. In 2003, a group of former SPR-RSČ members established the Workers’ Party, which campaigned as a party of “ordinary people”, accentuated social care, and included more-or-less overt elements of racism in its propaganda. The party verbally distanced itself from neo-Nazism, yet took up certain neo-Nazi symbols and its members took part in public events organized by neo-Nazis. (Charvát, 2012).

2006–2009: Political mobilization II

In anticipation of the general election of 2006, the National Party initiated talks with other organizations of the extreme right. Eventually the coalition of National Five (*Národní pětka*) was formed. However, before the election took place, the coalition was struck by conflicts between the National party, with its ambition to lead, and the Workers’ Party and the National Union, who were not comfortable with its position. Both latter parties left the coalition and founded a rival coalition entitled, Law and Justice (*Právo a spravedlnost*, inspired by Poland’s government party) (Charvát, 2012).

However, both coalitions failed in the elections, with a vote share of 0.17% for the National Party and 0.23% for Law and Justice (Charvát, 2012). The National Party’s long-term stake on populism did not compensate for its absence in most happenings on the extreme right. In contrast, the National Union and the Workers’ Party started collaborating with other extreme right wing organizations, and especially with the Patriot Front, the National Corporatism (*Národní korporativismus*, NK) and the Autonomous Nationalists (*Autonomní nacionalisté*). As a result, the Workers’ Party integrated its activities with National Resistance and Autonomous Nationalists groups.

In 2005, the National Corporatism emerged as a new extreme right-wing group. In spite of its roots in the neo-Nazi scene, it tried to campaign as a nationalist organization. It collaborated both with the Workers’ Party and with the National Resistance, and it organized a number of public appearances across Bohemia, especially in the years 2006 and 2007 (Mareš, 2003). In the elections of 2006, some NK members ran on the party list of Law and Justice. After the elections, the NK was shut down and its members were advised to join the Workers’ Party or one of the Autonomous Nationalist groups (Charvát, 2012). In the years 2008–2009, this time period climaxed in a series of major rallies, including attempted pogroms, in different cities of North Bohemia (areas struck by long-term poverty

and higher levels of social tension), where they were joined by numerous local residents. The rallies were held by the Workers' Party in collaboration with the Autonomous Nationalists, with the latter practically replacing the National Resistance as the key actor of the subculture-oriented extreme right. However, in their subcultural orientation, the Autonomous Nationalists frowned upon skinhead attributes and espoused "modern" trends on the neo-Nazi scene such as hip-hop music, hard core music or graffiti. (Vejvodová, 2008). Thus, the extreme right had a tendency to abandon its traditional skinhead image. In an attempt to present itself in a publicly acceptable way, the young generation of Autonomous Nationalists felt too restrained by the spoiled image of skinhead identity and introduced new subcultural models instead. At the same time, National Resistance members did not exhibit any public activity and merely participated in National Corporatism events. Instead of public appearances, they focused on organizing invitation-only events to strengthen camaraderie among members. The National Resistance at that time consisted mostly of older activists who continued to draw a link between neo-Nazi ideology and skinhead identity. This was met with certain opposition by the "autonomous" younger generation, who rather despised skinhead attributes. The declining popularity of the skinhead subculture was also evidenced by lower attendance at (and relevance of) White Power music concerts. In the previous time period, such events had been one of the pivots of the extreme right, bringing together activists from across the country, transferring ideological patterns, and generating considerable profits (Charvát, 2007 cf. Langenbach, Raabe, 2013), yet by 2009 the concerts ceased to play that role. Attendance declined not only with the growing use of the Internet (and especially YouTube) but also due to increased pressure by the police, which forced the organizers to conceal the exact location for as long as possible and distracted a large part of the audience.

2010–present: Crisis

In 2010 the Autonomous Nationalists officially distanced themselves from the Workers' Party (Charvát, 2012). They had become increasingly frustrated by unused opportunities to cooperate: while the Autonomous Nationalists saw themselves as agents of creativity and progress, they considered the Workers' Party too conservative, on one hand, and too autocratic, on the other hand. However, at the same time, the Autonomous Nationalists got into conflict with the orthodox skinhead stream of Czech extreme right, and this triangle of conflict eventually thwarted the popularity of extreme right as such. This was somewhat exacerbated by the judicial ban of the Workers' Party in February 2010. Given the immediate establishment of a successor Workers' Social Justice Party (*Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti*, DSSS), the ban did not have vital effects on activities of the extreme right yet the popularity of the DSSS steadily declined (then again, it had never been extremely successful, peaking at a vote share of slightly over 1% in the regional elections of 2008, the European Parliament elections of 2009 and the lower chamber elections of 2010) (Charvát, 2012). During 2014, the party was unable to respond to the emergence of new parties that were not affiliated with the old structures of Czech extreme right and campaigned on the islamophobia ticket. Led by the Islam Not Wanted in the Czech Republic (*Islám v České republice nechceme*, IvČRN) platform and its daughter political party, the Bloc Against Islam (*Blok proti islámu*, BPI), these groups mobilized unprecedented support (not only) amongst extreme right voters on a ticket that officially distances itself from racism but is effectively centred upon xenophobia. The traditional structures of Czech extreme right were unable to exploit this novel issue, which only attested to the state of disintegration in the extreme right scene.

In this time period, the skinhead subculture or, more specifically, its racist stream, became marginalized in the Czech Republic as well as elsewhere in Europe. Most music bands associated with the subculture no longer toured and the remaining ones typically played at invitation-only events. This is related to trends in Czech extreme right politics from about 2004 on, which were inspired by German autonomous nationalism (Vejvodová, 2008). These trends aimed at modernizing the neo-Nazi scene, avoid repression and reinvent the issues it communicated and the image it projected. Although Czech autonomous nationalism originally served merely as a camouflage for neo-Nazis, it crystallized into an independent ideological platform that was rather affiliated to European neo-fascism (turned away from racism and at least verbally embraced social care activities). By throwing away skinhead attributes *en masse* these activists were better prepared for public appearances; by opening themselves to new issues (environment, animal rights) as well as subcultural influences (hip hop, graffiti), they were able to broaden their publicity and make it more attractive, compared to the original accents on skinhead uniformity, machismo and primitive racism. However, this exact trend turned out to be toxic for groups like these. For a moment, the new trend seemed to show autonomous nationalist activists a promising way out of the skinhead ghetto; yet in actuality, it brought about a profound schism and subsequent decline to the extreme right scene. Uniformity and machismo

proved precisely the attributes that helped mobilize new members, while the openness to new influences was met with strong disdain from the old generation of racist skinheads – and the ensuing conflict effectively paralyzed the neo-Nazi scene. Acceptance of music styles like hip-hop that were inherently linked to African-American culture and the liberal niches of leftist subcultures put into question the fundamental neo-Nazi consensus that “inferior races” are culturally impotent and “Aryans are the supreme agents of culture. As a result, the autonomous nationalists gradually disintegrated and the National Resistance practically ended all its activities (Vejvodová, 2008). At present time, the extreme right scene in the traditional sense of the term (especially that linked with the skinhead subculture) is practically non-existent or at least is not exhibiting any significant activities in the Czech Republic.

Analysis

The periodization presented thus far serves not only to categorize the development of Czech extreme right but also to facilitate analysis. For example, the information above suggests that the scene went through three periods of mobilization (1989–1993, 1999–2001 and 2006–2009) and three passive periods (1994–1998, 2002–2005 and 2010–present). What were the causes?

Several different explanations can be derived from the data presented. First, a closer examination of the periodization itself reveals that Czech extreme right has been evolving in **cycles of 3–4 years** (or multiples thereof, as in the case of the 1993–1999 period). We can assume that the period of 3–4 years represents the lifespan of an “activist generation” – a time period during which a member of an extreme right group is able to mobilize for active involvement (such as running the headquarters, writing articles, organizing and taking part in public events and rallies, or possibly targeted acts of violence). After that time, most activists do not necessarily leave the extreme right or subcultural circles but tend to “demobilize”, exchanging the role of “agents” for that of “observers”. The second finding that can be derived from the periodization is that there are alternating periods of **increased and decreased public activity**. Closer examination reveals a clear link between both moments. Before describing it, though, I should bring attention to an important aspect: the skinhead subculture played a key role in Czech extreme right during the time period from 1989 to approximately 2010 (and around the year 1998, the two were indeed hard to tell apart). During that time period, it is precisely this close link between the skinhead subculture and the organized extreme right that can be treated as an independent variable. The other aspect lies in the ways the skinhead subculture relates to political activity – whether or not it accepts the traditional means of political expression. In my opinion, this relation represents a dependent variable throughout the time period studied. Each decline of Czech extreme right’s public activities was preceded by the fact that the skinhead scene predominantly rejected political activity and leaned towards subcultural activities. In these time periods the subculture came to view public campaigning as dysfunctional. This attitude logically translates into mistrust for public appearances or outright hostility towards political parties, including those of the extreme right (e.g., the SPR-RSČ in the mid-1990s or the Workers’ Party after 2010). Political activity is rejected openly and explicitly, as attested by mid-1990s publications of the BHS or by the National Resistance website after 2001.

At times, this attitude tends to be reassessed and political activity eventually wins acknowledgement. Then the skinhead scene looks for a political organization to represent it. Around the year 2000 no such organization existed and the skinhead scene had to form one using its own resources. This is how the National Social Bloc came to existence. The situation in 2008 was different because neo-Nazi and neo-fascist groups were able to rely on a relatively established Workers’ Party, which in turn – inspired by the NPD’s strategy – was willing to accept the symbiosis. In short, the situation can be described as follows: “As long as the extreme right consists primarily of the skinhead subculture, its mobilization depends on how the latter relates to political activity. The subculture mobilizes when that relation is positive, and becomes passive when it is negative.”

Conclusion

Observations in the Czech Republic after 1989 reveal a specific relationship between the skinhead subculture and the extreme right. The relationship is determined by several factors. First, Czech skinheads established primarily a racist subculture, which naturally gravitated towards the extreme right. Second, during the time period investigated, the skinhead subculture comprised an important and occasionally even the largest part of the extreme right in the country (an independent variable). While some extreme right-wing organizations formed outside the skinhead

subculture, Czech skinheads provided the main resource for the extreme right wing as a whole. Given these facts, the skinhead subculture was practically the main determinant of Czech extreme right until about the year 2010; its influence slowly declined after that date.

Based on the periodization presented, two patterns of behaviour can be observed in the ways the skinhead subculture relates to political life – a pattern of acceptance and a pattern of rejection (a dependent variable). Whenever political activity tends to be accepted, the entire extreme right mobilizes, new organizations emerge and public activities flourish, which at the same time overshadows attributes of the skinhead subculture. In contrast, whenever the subculture rejects politics, its subcultural attributes tend to prevail and the entire extreme right scene becomes rather passive. Since these patterns alternate in cycles of 3–4 years, one can assume that this amount of time represents the lifespan of one generation of activists.

This rhythm changed after 2010 as the ascending ideology of Autonomous Nationalism deprecated the skinhead subculture and as the entire extreme right scene entered stagnation. The close relationship between the extreme right and the skinhead subculture is also indirectly evidenced by the situation in 2015 when the migrant crisis exacerbated and the anti-immigrant and anti-Islam sentiment strongly resonated in Czech society: albeit established extreme-right organizations such as the Workers' Party tried to campaign on that ticket, the centre of political activity shifted towards brand-new groups such as the IvČRN, which combine the rhetoric of xenophobia and islamophobia but at the same time distance themselves from the extreme right (including the skinhead subculture).

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