



NEO-  
NAZI

# The Rise of **neo-Nazism** in the Party Political System

## A REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT

Published on the occasion of the 14th WJC Plenary Assembly, Budapest, May 5-7, 2013



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

■ Parties with neo-Nazi leanings have seen a significant resurgence, particularly in Greece and Hungary where, respectively, Golden Dawn and Jobbik have either achieved double figures in elections or are polling at such levels in opinion surveys. Both have seen their support rise dramatically from small beginnings. For example, Golden Dawn polled just 0.1 percent at the 1994 European elections. By April 2013 the party was polling at around 11-12 percent, meaning that Golden Dawn's support has risen one hundred fold in less than 20 years. It has risen by as much as 40 fold since polling 0.29 percent at the 2009 elections.

■ There are good reasons for believing that governments are either conflicted or confused in their approach to neo-Nazi parties. In Greece, the government does not appear to know what to do. In Hungary the governing party wants Jobbik's votes at the next election, and in Germany, where the National Democratic Party does not have wide support but is feared for historical reasons, the government has backed away from outlawing it believing that its efforts would fail at the Constitutional Court.

■ Economic crisis is in some cases plainly a contributory factor in the growth of Neo-Nazi parties. The Greek economy has declined by 20 percent since the crisis began with general unemployment now standing at over 27 percent and youth unemployment at over 60 percent.

■ Anti-Semitism remains a central figure of neo-Nazi parties even though their main focus in many European countries is on non-white minorities. The anti-Semitic rhetoric is often extreme, as when a Jobbik parliamentarian last year called for a list to be drawn up of the country's Jews in order to assess whether they represented a security risk to Hungary.

■ Neo-Nazi parties, and parties which cannot properly be called neo-Nazi but do tag on to neo-Nazi themes, show a marked tendency for nostalgia, and denial about their wartime past. This has particular resonance in central and east European cases such as Hungary, Slovakia and Latvia where wartime regimes allied themselves and/or fought with the Nazis.

# INTRODUCTION

Few, if any, political parties in the 21st century, could be expected to be exact or near-exact replicas of the Nazi party that ruled Germany with such terrible consequences from 1933 to 1945. The socio-economic conditions have changed (though the “Great Recession”, as it is dubbed, provides a worryingly familiar backdrop); culture has changed; technology has changed; politics has changed.

Yet it is clear that the toxic combination of extreme anti-Semitic discourse, aggressive national chauvinism, and anti-capitalist and anti-socialist rhetoric that infused the thinking and actions of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party has proved enduring.

This has long been understood in terms of the existence of skinhead movements, racist gangs, extra-parliamentary fringe parties and maverick individuals. What is new and worrying, most particularly in Europe, is the emergence of electorally successful political parties espousing, or in some way aligning themselves with, ideological or historical trends reminiscent of Nazism.

This briefing uses three parties as case studies; each illustrating different aspects of the problems that governments, mainstream political parties and non-governmental actors face in seeking to confront the extremists. The parties are not identical, and the sense in which they could reasonably be described as neo-Nazi is more compelling in some cases than others.

The first is Golden Dawn, the Greek party that shot to prominence in the country’s general elections in 2012, garnering 7 percent of the vote. Since that time, it has grown considerably, with opinion polls now putting its support firmly in double figures. The party uses imagery, symbolism and rhetoric of the most extreme kind, and its members have been widely accused of translating rhetoric into physical violence against immigrants. The Heil Hitler salute from both leaders and supporters is a trademark activity at the party’s rallies.

The second case study is Jobbik in Hungary. Jobbik captured the attention of the civilized world in 2010 when it scored almost 17 percent of the vote at the Hungarian parliamentary elections. The party is less obviously neo-Nazi than Golden Dawn, (though it is not difficult to be less obviously neo-Nazi than Golden Dawn). But, among other things, its employment of anti-Semitic and, especially, anti-Roma rhetoric combined with its overt nostalgia for the regime of Admiral Horthy, which allied itself with Nazi Germany, provides a stark illustration of the problem now faced.

The third case study is the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD). Plainly a neo-Nazi party, it differs from the other two case studies in that the NPD has not enjoyed electoral success at the national level, though it has made inroads in some of the German states. Nationally, it polls little more than one percent. Nonetheless, for obvious historical reasons, its very existence has provoked intense debate both inside and outside the country’s Jewish community. To ban or not to ban is the question of the day. Crucially, that is not a question that can now easily be asked in Greece or Hungary where the parties in question may be too big to be outlawed without effectively disenfranchising significant sections of the electorate.

Should the NPD be banned now, before it has the opportunity to emulate the successes of Golden Dawn and Jobbik? The ins and outs of that question form the basis of the case study involving the NPD.

Following the three case studies, the briefing casts a wider net, embracing neo-Nazi challenges elsewhere. It should be noted that although the problem of neo-Nazism and anti-immigrant populism clearly overlap, this briefing has a sharper focus than to attempt to deal with all political parties, overtly anti-Semitic or otherwise, that could reasonably be described as Far Right. It is mainly limited to the problem of neo-Nazism, and how that particular issue can be confronted.



## CASE STUDY 1: GREECE, GOLDEN DAWN

*Arm raised in a Nazi-style salute, the leader of Greece's fastest-rising political party surveyed hundreds of young men in black T-shirts as they exploded into cheers. Their battle cry reverberated through the night: Blood! Honor! Golden Dawn!*

*"We may sometimes raise our hand this way, but these hands are clean, not dirty. They haven't stolen," shouted Nikolaos Mihaloliakos as he stood, floodlit, in front of about 2,000 diehard party followers filling an open-air amphitheatre at Goudi park, a former military camp near Athens. "We were dozens, then a few hundred. Now we're thousands and it's only the beginning," cried the leader of Golden Dawn. —*  
Extract from a report by Reuters, November 12, 2012.

It is a chilling image complemented by a chilling warning. Nikolaos Mihaloliakos also has a chilling message for the world's Jews:

*"There were no ovens, no gas chambers, it's a lie," he said in an interview on the Mega television channel in May 2012. "Auschwitz, what Auschwitz? I didn't go there. What happened there?"*

The party has also launched a direct, plainly anti-Semitic attack on WJC President Ronald Lauder, in the form of a boycott call for Estee Lauder:

*"We are not encouraging a boycott simply because Estee*

*Lauder is a Jewish owned business, we are encouraging such because of the actions its CEO and President of the World Jewish Congress have taken to undermine the freedom and self-determination of the Greek people. We will use our peaceful right to buy or sell, to make a statement, especially now that the tyrants have shown their real weakness and root of their power: their money."*

The quotation appeared on the front page of a Golden Dawn website in North America.

All this, combined with its anti-socialist and anti-capitalist rhetoric, make Golden Dawn's claims not to be a neo-Nazi party unconvincing. However, what cannot be doubted about Golden Dawn's claims is that it is a significant and growing force in Greek politics and society.

### Origins, development, context

Golden Dawn began life around a shadowy magazine in 1980. By 1985 it had formed itself into a political party which was formally recognized by the authorities in 1993. A year later, it took part in the European elections, taking just 0.1 percent of the vote.

It shot to national and international prominence in the May 2012 elections where it scored 7 percent of the vote. By April 2013 the party was polling at around 11-12 percent, meaning

that Golden Dawn's support has risen one hundred fold in less than 20 years, a stark reminder that extremist parties can make considerable advances from the smallest of beginnings. It is now the third most popular party in the country.

Its current success needs to be seen in the context of deep, and worsening economic depression. As of the end of 2012 the Greek economy had registered a 20 percent decline since the crisis hit in 2007-8. The Centre of Planning and Economic Research (KEPE), an official Greek policy institute, forecasts a further 4.1 percent decline by the end of 2013. General unemployment rates, which in February 2013 were estimated by the government at 27 percent, are seen by KEPE as crossing the 30 percent barrier by year end. Youth unemployment at the time of writing was estimated at 61.7 percent.

Against such a backdrop, it is not altogether surprising that there has been a shift away from center-Right and center-Left, towards the extremes. At the 2009 elections, before the full effects of the economic downturn had been felt, Golden Dawn polled just 0.29 percent of the vote, meaning that its support is up by as much as 40 fold since the downturn began.

However, since the far-Left also appeals to the socially and economically deprived, austerity and depression cannot on their own explain the success of Golden Dawn. Austerity and the resonance of the party's ideological platform need to be considered together.

### What does Golden Dawn stand for?

The party characterizes itself as a defender of the Greek race, tracing itself back to the paganism of ancient Greece, but also attempting to see Greek Christianity as in some sense a culmination of or successor to those ancient traditions. This is plainly contradictory. Its paganism is ideological and is designed to stress that it stands outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. Its support for Greek Orthodox Christianity is opportunistic and is designed to widen its electoral appeal. The contradiction can be borne because, on the political level, the party is capable of addressing different audiences at once and, on the philosophical level, because Nazism has a long tradition of revelling in irrationalism. In any event, the party's voter basis does not care.

Golden Dawn members have had links with the previous military dictatorship of 1967-74.

It used the slogan: "So we can rid this land of filth" in its 2012 election campaign, a clear attack on immigrants whom it blames for rampant criminality, and a somewhat more oblique reference to Jews, international finance and all other "external" forces it deems inimical to Greek culture and civilization.

The party is inherently anti-Semitic. Its leading figures appear to believe that there is a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. Nazi-type ideology thus motivates the hard core of party activists. However, as Dr. Ioannis Mazis Professor of Geopolitics at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens put it during consultations for this briefing: "The leadership cannot sell Nazism as a mass ideology". It therefore focuses on non-white immigrants and their descendants as well as offering itself up as a broad platform for disenchanted citizens seeking "Revenge against the system".

Dimitris Psaras, the author of a book on Golden Dawn, argues that "The people who vote for them want revenge against the political system, the European Union, the IMF. They just want revenge."

Golden Dawn therefore revels in controversy and outrageous utterances and behavior.

A frightening and spectacular example of this was the slapping incident on Greek television in June 2012. Golden Dawn parliamentarian Ilias Kasidiaris slapped female Communist MP Liana Kanelli three times (extremely hard, swinging with the full extent of his arms' reach while standing up) back and forth across the face during a live debate, having just thrown a glass of water at another parliamentarian.

Many commentators argued at the time that the incident would harm Golden Dawn's standing. On the contrary, in the eyes of its voter base the incident reinforced Golden Dawn's image as a party that will have no truck with "a discredited political system".

At the grass-roots level, Golden Dawn supporters and sympathizers have been involved in violent attacks on non-white immigrants. Vigilantism forms an important place in the party's claims to be a defender of the Greek people.

A 2012 report from Human Rights Watch — Hate on the Streets: Xenophobic Violence in Greece — highlighted the issue starkly. The report said: "One resident of [Athens] spoke approvingly of Golden Dawn's work in his neighborhood. The party, he said, "chased away all the blacks, who had flooded [us] ... even in my own building ... it was full [of blacks] ... but they left. Those who were the dirty ones and had all the diseases left, because they had to."

The party's anti-Semitism merges effortlessly into denunciations of Israel. Israeli and American flags were seen burning together in Golden Dawn election ads.

Golden Dawn is, of course, opposed to austerity, though its program for reforming the Greek economy is incoherent and essentially boils down to blaming foreigners.

# The Rise of neo-Nazism in the Party Political System in Europe and Beyond

## How have the government and the state responded?

There is widespread concern that law enforcement agencies are to a significant degree turning a blind eye to criminal activities committed by Golden Dawn supporters. Indeed, it is alleged that sympathisers within the police force may be providing them with assistance or cover.

Stung by criticism that it has not done enough to confront allegations of collusion between security forces and Golden Dawn's violent supporters, as well as other, more random groups, Public Order Minister Nikos Dendias has established a police unit to confront racism violence and incitement.

Nonetheless, the same Human Rights Watch report referred to above relates serious concerns about the willingness or ability of the authorities to deal with a growing problem of violent racism:

“The cases documented in this report demonstrate that migrants and asylum seekers have little chance of seeing justice done. Victims of violent racist and xenophobic attacks in Athens face countless obstacles in reporting crimes and activating police investigations.

“Undocumented migrants face the threat of detention and deportation if they report a crime. The authorities have thus far failed to aggressively prosecute racist and xenophobic violence for what it is.”

In terms of the government's response to Golden Dawn as a political party in the Greek parliament, it is widely argued that an essentially technocratic government designed to implement austerity measures demanded by the European Union feels too overwhelmed by the economic crisis to devote significant attention to extremism.

The international community is understandably concerned about Golden Dawn. Earlier in 2013, Council of Europe human rights commissioner, Nils Muiznieks raised the prospect of banning Golden Dawn if that proved necessary.

In his report on the matter, Mr. Muiznieks said:

“Ideological documents on the party's current website make clear the overtly racist underpinnings of “Golden Dawn”, similar to those of Nazism and fascism.”

He added: “It is... regrettable that the Greek Parliament's reaction to hate speech has been weak. On 18 October 2012, during a meeting of the parliament's plenary, the Golden Dawn MP, Eleni Zaroulia, referred to migrants in Greece as “sub-humans who have invaded our country, with all kinds of diseases.”

## What are Golden Dawn's plans and prospects?

The party is enacting ambitious plans to expand at home and abroad. For example, it is expanding its presence in Greek schools. Not content with using teenagers to spread its message in the country's high schools, Golden Dawn is now pushing hard in the primary school sector holding so called “National Awakening Sessions” for six to 10 year olds. In keeping with party ideology, the sessions present a vision of Greek history mixing elements of ancient Greek mythology with Greek Orthodox Christianity.

As The Economist put it: “Dozens of new Golden Dawn offices in provincial towns stage events designed to attract new supporters. Torch-lit gatherings and talks on Greek history with a fascist slant are popular. Selected members undergo military-style training at weekends. Volunteers support a blood bank, only for Greeks.”

The party is also seeking the allegiance of the Greek diaspora. In April 2013, The Guardian newspaper reported that Golden Dawn was now actively attempting to make good on its pledge to “create cells in every corner of the world”. Plans are afoot for offices in the United States, Canada, Germany, and Australia. Golden Dawn spokesman Ilias Kasidiaris was quoted in a Greek language newspaper in Australia as saying: “In our immediate sights and aims is the creation of an office and local organization in Melbourne. In fact, very soon a visit of MPs to Australia is planned.”

On the domestic front, analysts fear that the party may not yet have reached the peak of its support. Speaking of the Greek government, the aforementioned Dr. Azis said: “They are afraid Golden Dawn could get to 15 percent in the polls, which is very possible in my opinion.”

## Response of the Greek Jewish community

The Greek Jewish community is deeply worried. In response to Golden Dawn's access to the airwaves, the community's official representatives sent a letter to Ioannis Alafouzos, president of the SKAI media group saying the following:

“The Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece wishes to express its great indignation at the broadcasting, promotion and dissemination of the extremely racist sentiments displayed by Holocaust deniers and proponents of Nazism in Greece... We have repeatedly pointed out that the political system, the judiciary, civic bodies and the Mass Media have a duty to isolate and delegitimise ideologies that have resulted in crimes against humanity and the death of millions of people, including six million Jews.

Golden Dawn is a topic of continuous discussion inside the community.



## CASE STUDY 2: HUNGARY, JOBBIK

*“I think now is the time to assess ... how many people of Jewish origin there are here, and especially in the Hungarian parliament and the Hungarian government, who represent a certain national security risk for Hungary,”* Jobbik member of the Hungarian parliament and vice-chair of the foreign affairs committee Márton Gyöngyösi speaking at a debate about Israel and Gaza in November 2012.

The anti-fascist magazine Searchlight then reported that:

*“A few days later, inspired by the parliamentary debate, some 100 neo-fascists from the Guards of the Carpathian Homeland demonstrated through Budapest. Outside the foreign ministry, the neo-fascists shouted “dirty Jews” and “send them all to Auschwitz”. At the end of the demonstration, Jobbik parliamentary deputy Balázs Lenhardt set fire to an Israeli flag.”*

Gyongyosi’s now infamous call on the Hungarian government to draw up a list of Hungarian Jews to see whether they “represented a security risk for Hungary” is but one of many anti-Semitic outbursts attributed to members of or sympathizers with Jobbik.

But the party’s main obsession is with another ethno-national group that suffered alongside Jews at the hands of the Nazis. This is an extract from Jobbik’s website:

*“Jobbik ... took in charge as the only party to face one of the underlying problems of Hungarian society, the unsolved situation of the ever growing gypsy population. It stated — what everyone knows but is silenced by “political correctness” — that phenomenon of “gypsy crime” is real. It is a unique form of delinquency, different from the crimes of the majority in nature and force.”*

The party, which also stresses its opposition to both neo-liberalism and communism, claims to be neither anti-Semitic, nor racist, nor in any way comparable to neo-Nazi movements.

### Origins, development, context

Jobbik was formed as a youth organization in 2002 and registered as a party in 2003. At the 2006 elections it scored just 2.2 percent. Its first big electoral breakthrough was at the 2009 European elections where it placed third with 14.8 percent. The party captured the attention of the world when it took 16.7 percent of the vote at the 2010 general elections. In under a decade it has risen from nowhere to being a formidable force in Hungarian politics.

Over the last year the party’s support has, according to opinion polls, fluctuated between 6 and 14 percent. However, there are two related reasons why Jobbik’s support perhaps is

# The Rise of neo-Nazism in the Party Political System in Europe and Beyond

being underestimated — around half of the electorate is undecided; and Jobbik supporters may be more unwilling than the supporters of other parties to admit their preferences due to the opprobrium of polite society.

The growth potential for radical nationalism in Hungary is enhanced by an enduring, deeply felt sense of frustration and powerlessness at the way Hungary was reduced in size and scope following the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The post-World War I settlement (specifically the Treaty of Trianon in 1920), which cut Hungary to a third of its previous size and left substantial Hungarian minorities in Slovakia, Romania and the Serbian province of Vojvodina, is regarded as a national tragedy.

Trianon is seen as symbolic of an outside world that has victimised the Hungarian nation. Jobbik leader Gabor Vona speaks for many of his compatriots in describing Trianon as a “synonym for an attempt to liquidate the Hungarian nation”. Jobbik officials talk ominously about revisiting Trianon and redrawing the borders of central Europe.

Resentment at the legacy of the past combines with widespread disillusionment at the way the post-Communist transition has been handled by the main parties of the right and left. Jobbik has stepped into the gap, offering scapegoats for the country’s problems in the form of Roma (Gypsies), Jews, international financiers, and ex-communists who have retained their place in the system.

## What does Jobbik stand for?

The party describes itself in its official literature as, “a principled, conservative and radically patriotic Christian party. Its fundamental purpose is protecting Hungarian values and interests. It stands up against the ever more blatant efforts to eradicate the nation as the foundation of human community. Its strategic program takes into consideration the possibility of the crumbling of globalization as we know it in a chain reaction due to its internal weaknesses and its disconnect from the real processes of the economy.”

Its nationalist and socialistic preferences are thus openly stated, as are its countless denunciations of Hungarian Roma, as well as the aforementioned anti-Semitic outbursts.

Anti-Zionism and traditional anti-Semitism, as well as implied parallels between the Holocaust and Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians, coalesce to make for a formidable anti-Jewish platform.

In a November 2012 account of a Jobbik demonstration outside the Israeli embassy, Jobbik leader Vona was reported

by his party as saying that “while Israel keeps talking about the Holocaust, the country operates the world’s largest concentration camp with American assistance. This concentration camp is called Gaza.” In the same speech, Vona called, among other things, for “an inventory of all Israeli capital in Hungary”. He also said: “Hungary is Europe’s Palestine”. Jobbik adopts a friendly and approving tone towards Iran. Vona even went so far as to call on Iran’s Revolutionary Guard to be drawn in to monitor Hungary’s 2010 general elections.

Jobbik’s nostalgic yearnings, especially for the (anti-Semitic, and eventually Nazi-allied) Horthy regime, are well illustrated by this extract from an interview by Vona with the Austrian weekly, *Zur Zeit*, the unofficial paper of Austria’s far-Right Freedom Party with which Jobbik has close relations:

“Right after the tragedy of Trianon, under the Christian-Conservative era of Admiral Miklós Horthy, Hungary managed to achieve an extremely rapid consolidation. The Horthy-era released the positive energies of the nation: in a very short time Hungary managed to rebuild its infrastructure, industry, army and police force, it established a thriving economy with one of the most stable currencies of Europe, it had a strong and competitive education system, with flourishing cultural life. Under Horthy Hungary had a strong and impressive national elite that aimed at the revision of the unjust Trianon peace dictate and was ready to defend ethnic Hungarians across its borders by strong diplomatic or even military means if necessary. The will to reunite the nation was declared and partially achieved.”

The interview, posted on the Jobbik website in 2010, while fulsome with praise for Horthy, makes not a single reference to Horthy’s anti-Semitism or his role in the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz.

It’s nostalgia for the Horthy regime is paralleled by its supporters’ sympathies with the even more actively anti-Semitic Arrow Cross regime which followed Horthy in October 1944. The now outlawed Hungarian Guard, a paramilitary style outfit previously associated with Jobbik, was reminiscent to many of the Arrow Cross.

## How have the government and the state responded?

The most important point to note for the purposes of this case study is the relationship between Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s rightist Fidesz party and Jobbik. Fidesz itself has been widely accused of nationalist, populist and authoritarian leanings. Though the party is not in the same category as Jobbik, the Fidesz leadership is keenly aware that Jobbik splits the right-wing vote at elections.



This analysis from The Economist is instructive:

“Government officials admit they want Jobbik’s voters. Ministers have remained largely silent on the growing cult of Miklos Horthy, Hungary’s leader between 1920 and 1944. Admiral Horthy passed a series of anti-Jewish laws, dragged the country into war as an ally of Nazi Germany and stood by as Hungarian Jews were sent to their deaths. The government’s refusal to take a stand on his growing rehabilitation strengthens the far right, say critics. Hungary’s anti-Semites feel more emboldened. Orthodox Jews say they now expect to hear racist remarks almost as a matter of course while going about their business.”

Indeed, it is possible to argue that this understates the problem. In 2012, the Fidesz government’s new national curriculum for schools included the writings of József Nyírö, a notorious cultural ideologue under Horthy who later transferred his allegiance to the Arrow Cross regime which murdered tens of thousands of Jews.

Some members of Fidesz are known to be uncomfortable with this revisionist approach to the Nazi period, though most of them remain publicly silent. However, the brutal truth appears to be that in some of this historical revisionism many Fidesz luminaries are distinguishable from their Jobbik counterparts mainly in terms of emphasis and tone.

In relation to the notorious anti-Semitic outburst from Marton Gyongyosi about testing the loyalty of Hungary’s Jews, Prime Minister Orban did eventually issue a rebuttal in parliament, saying the remarks were “not worthy of Hungary”. Critics, however, said the prime minister was too slow to respond.

### **What are Jobbik’s plans and prospects?**

The party is extremely hopeful of its prospects at the 2014 parliamentary (and European) elections where it may end up as kingmaker. This is because of the collapse in popular support for the two leading parties of right and left.

Since the beginning of 2013 the ruling Fidesz party has been scoring an average of 22 percent in the opinion polls – nowhere near enough to form a majority government on its own, and far below the 52.7 percent it achieved at the 2010 election. The Socialists are polling at around 14 percent after 19.3 percent at the last election. No other party seems certain to get into parliament.

That leaves Jobbik, which has recently been polling in the 8-10 percent range.

This constellation of electoral preferences goes a long way to explaining why Prime Minister Orban is reluctant to attack Jobbik too hard. He wants their voters, but he may also need Jobbik to form a coalition or to give “silent support” from the opposition to a minority, Fidesz government.

### **Response of the Hungarian Jewish community**

The Hungarian Jewish community has been tireless in its efforts to bring the Jobbik issue to national and international attention. In compiling this briefing, the authors also encountered frequent concerns among Hungarian Jews that the government was not only failing to counter Jobbik (for the reasons discussed above) but that it was itself playing dog-whistle politics on Jewish issues.



## CASE STUDY 3: GERMANY, THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NPD)

*“Thousands of neo-Nazis hijacked official ceremonies marking the 60th anniversary of the Allied bombing of Dresden yesterday in the biggest demonstration by the German far right since the Second World War. More than 5,000 neo-Nazis overran the east German city with a mass protest against “Anglo-American bomb terror”*

*“The British and the Americans were bitterly criticized for the raid in February 1945 which was described as a “bomb holocaust” and example of “Anglo-American terror”.*

*“Ingolf Rossberg, Dresden’s Mayor, said yesterday that it had been impossible to ban the neo-Nazi demonstrations. “So long as the NPD is an established political party with seats in a state parliament, we cannot ban it from holding marches,” he said. — Extracts from a report by the Independent newspaper, February 14, 2005.*

The problem persists. How does the German state respond to a neo-Nazi political party that can stand in elections, hold meetings, disseminate information and draw on state funds?

The NPD case study differs from the previous two in that the party has not made significant inroads into the national political scene. However, it is important and not merely because of the obvious historical relationship between

Germany and Nazism. The German state is deeply conflicted as to how to confront the NPD. While it is treated with disdain by all mainstream parties and political luminaries, there is division over the question of whether the party should, or could, be banned. One of the key lessons from the cases of Golden Dawn and Jobbik is that parties once considered small and insignificant can quickly grow in popularity, at which point it is arguably too late to outlaw them.

### Origins, development, context

The NPD was established in 1964 and merged with the People’s Union in 2011. Its formal name is The National Democratic Party of Germany — People’s Union, though it is usually known simply by the (German) abbreviation, NPD. The government failed in an attempt to ban the NPD in 2003 (for reasons discussed below). It has no representation at the federal level, where it scored 1.5 percent of the vote at the 2009 federal elections, but does have representation in two of Germany’s 16 state-regional assemblies (both in eastern Germany — Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Saxony), where they achieved re-election.

German elections require parties to cross a five percent threshold in order to get into parliament.

## What does the NPD stand for?

In 2005, Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, said: [“Statements of the NPD document an essential affinity with National Socialism; its agitation is racist, antisemitic, revisionist, and intends to disparage the democratic and lawful order of the constitution.”](#)

The party also holds to other familiar neo-Nazi themes such as a twin rejection of liberal-democratic capitalism and socialism, as well as visceral hostility to non-white immigrants and their descendants.

It is particularly inclined to attempt to relativise the Nazi era by drawing spurious comparisons with Allied bombing during the Second World War. It has tied this issue to commemoration of the Holocaust. In a notorious example from 2005, the 12 elected NPD members of the state parliament in Saxony walked out of a minute's silence for the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz citing objections that the victims of the bombing of Dresden had not been similarly commemorated.

Its supporters also seek redress for such long-resolved historical matters as the expulsion of the ethnic German population of Czechoslovakia after the war. It adopts a revisionist approach to the borders with Poland and Austria — in the latter case it appears to believe that Germany and Austria should be one country.

## How have the government and the state responded?

This is the core of the matter for this case study. Earlier in 2013, the German government, led by Chancellor Angela Merkel, decided not to proceed with an attempt to ban the NPD ahead of the September federal elections. Sections of the German media were in agreement with the decision.

There appear to be several reasons for the government's decision. One is the fear that the attempt could backfire by giving the NPD publicity and that, in any case, such matters should be solved by political not legal means. The chairman of the Free Democrats, the junior coalition partner in Mrs. Merkel's government, quipped at the time of the government's decision not to proceed that [“you can't ban stupidity”](#), remarks that were widely quoted in the German press.

The influential center-Right Die Welt newspaper spoke for that line of thinking in the following terms:

[“It speaks a bit to the authoritarian dreams of the Germans that a high court decision could stamp out a political evil. This is an illusion. The abolition of the NPD and other unappetising parties has to happen at the ballot box.”](#)

Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich stated that the government would seek to aid the German states in their own plan to outlaw the NPD, but added: [“The government doesn't see that filing another application on top of that is necessary.”](#)

Another key concern for the government was the widely held view that a ban could in any case fail. This harks back to the botched attempt to outlaw the NPD at the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe in 2003. The court then ruled that it could not ban the NPD because the party had been so heavily infiltrated by the German security services and its informants that it was impossible to judge whether NPD policy was authentic to the party itself or had been influenced by its very penetration by the security services.

The issue is further complicated because the upper house of the German parliament, the Bundesrat, which represents the 16 federal states, had agreed in December 2012 to pursue its own effort to ban the NPD at the Constitutional Court. As stated above, the Cabinet said that it was unnecessary to duplicate the efforts of the Bundesrat. Yet, observers say the decision not to join it could itself undermine the Bundesrat's own attempt.

## What are the NPDs plans and prospects?

The NPD has little serious prospect of making headway in national politics. Given the discussion about banning the party, its primary aim is survival, a problem made worse for it by a cut in state funding over a fine it failed to pay for accountancy irregularities.

Hajo Funke, emeritus professor of political science at Berlin's Free University, was recently quoted by the news agency DPA as saying: [“The party is not in good condition. It's weak and in tatters.”](#)

## Response of the German Jewish community

The German Jewish community's senior representatives are disappointed in the government's decision not to pursue its own attempt to ban the NPD.

The president of Germany's Central Council of Jews, Dieter Graumann, said in a statement: [“The decision of the government is disappointing and politically completely wrong... Hesitation and procrastination instead of courage and determination... the government has missed the opportunity to send a clear and credible signal of a strong democracy.”](#)

Charlotte Knobloch, a vice-president of the World Jewish Congress and predecessor to Graumann, described the German government's decision as [“a grave mistake”](#).

## THE BROADER CONTEXT OF NEO-NAZI AND FAR-RIGHT PARTIES

*A quick, illustrative survey of some other neo-Nazi and related parties:*

**In Great Britain**, the leading party most closely approximating to the description of neo-Nazi, is the British National Party (BNP). The party has had limited electoral success at the local and European level. At the 2009 European elections the BNP saw two of its candidates elected to the European Parliament, taking an average of 9 percent of the vote in the regions in which they won seats. Nationally, the BNP took 6.2 percent of the vote. However, it should be noted that European elections (which take place under a proportional representation system) have a very low turnout compared to general elections — just 34.5 percent in 2009. BNP Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are shunned by their fellow British MEPs. (In researching this briefing, it was related by one Conservative MEP in Brussels that most British MEPs do not even say “Good Morning/Good Afternoon” to their BNP colleagues if they bump into them at the European Parliament.)

There is considerable evidence that the neo-Nazi components of BNP ideology — Holocaust denial etc — have been downplayed (at least publicly) by the party in recent years and do not resonate with a voter base that is almost exclusively concerned with immigration. Since the surge of the mainstream anti-EU party UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) in the last two years, BNP support has ebbed away — to two percent according to recent opinion polls — and is being soaked up by UKIP which also adopts a tough line on immigration. (UKIP is not anti-Semitic and in no way shape or form can be associated with neo-Nazism, which it strongly opposes.)

At general elections, the BNP has consistently failed to make inroads. As much as anything, this is due to the first past the post electoral system employed at UK parliamentary elections. First past the post hands victory to the candidate with the most number of votes in a given constituency, leaving all losing rivals with nothing. This makes it extremely difficult for small parties to get elected or to create forward momentum.

*Above all, the British example illustrates that in some cases parties that combine neo-Nazi ideology with pledges to curb immigration can see themselves marginalized if mainstream parties, having no truck with neo-Nazism, undermine their*

*appeal by attaching themselves to the immigration issue.*

**In France**, the Front National is now primarily an economically, socially and politically nationalist party concentrating on curbing immigration and adopting a hard-line on law and order. The party’s leader, Marine Le Pen, has sought to distance herself from some of the more extreme rhetoric sometimes employed by her father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, from whom she took over Front National leadership in 2011.

Jean-Marie Le Pen achieved notoriety, and was convicted by a Munich court, for describing the Holocaust as “a detail” of the Second World War. He first made the remarks in the 1980s but has defended and repeated them on several occasions since then.

By contrast, Marine Le Pen has called the Holocaust “the summit of human barbarism” and there is considerable polling evidence that the French people are less inclined these days to see the Front National as an extremist party. It does not make themes that could be considered central to neo-Nazism part of its policies or rhetoric.

The Front National emerged as the third biggest political force in France at the 2012 elections taking 18 percent of the vote.

*The example of the Front National and its “de-demonization” strategy suggests that parties that are willing to distance themselves from neo-Nazi rhetoric stand a decent chance of rehabilitating themselves in the eyes of many voters, though concerns still linger about past positions and rhetoric*

**In Austria** — The Freedom Party, formerly led by Jörg Haider and now led by Heinz-Christian Strache, is more of a far-Right, anti-immigrant populist party than a neo-Nazi party as such. However, members of the Austrian Jewish community say that it does play on latent anti-Semitic feelings and themes in Austrian society. Also, key personnel in the party are members of German-nationalist fraternities which are thought in some cases to provide a gateway between the far-Right and neo-Nazis.

The spokesperson for the party’s Vienna branch was fired in April 2013 for posting lyrics from wartime Nazi marching songs on his facebook page. The affair had echoes of an episode in summer 2012 when party leader Strache shared a cartoon of a financier with Star of David cufflinks and a

hooked nose. After a public storm, Strache changed the image to delete the Stars of David and alter the banker's nose.

Strache had also been the subject of a scandal in Austria when a photograph came to light in 2008 showing him in military fatigues alongside neo-Nazis and Holocaust deniers. It is widely thought that the photo dated back to 1990 when Strache is believed to have been connected at some level with Viking Youth which is an outlawed Nazi-style youth group.

Opinion polls in April put the party's support at around 19 percent. Elections are to be held in September.

*The case of the Freedom Party is illustrative of a party seeking to widen its electoral appeal which is sensitive to charges of neo-Nazi sympathies, while its senior officials, consciously or subconsciously, find it problematic to distance themselves entirely from such sympathies.*

**In the Benelux countries** (Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg), far-Right and populist parties mainly focus on immigration. The Dutch anti-Islam Party of Freedom led by Geert Wilders is well known internationally, but is not considered in any way neo-Nazi by most analysts. The party places itself firmly inside the Judeo-Christian tradition and supports Israel.

The most interesting relevant case in the region is Belgium's Flemish Vlaams Belang party, which seeks independence for Flanders. Vlaams Belang is the successor party to the Vlaams Blok which was banned in 2004 for "incitement to discrimination". Senior members of the party had been accused of anti-Semitism and attempts to diminish the Holocaust.

Nowadays, the party seeks wider legitimacy. In the 2010 elections to the Federal Parliament the party took 7.8 percent of the vote.

The party is not widely regarded as anti-Semitic these days. Like some other rightist parties in Europe it sees Israel as an ally against the common enemy of radical Islam.

*The Vlaams Belang/Vlaams Blok case illustrates that it may be possible to counter anti-Semitism and neo-Nazi tendencies through legal means. Banning Vlaams Blok led its successor party to curb some of its more extreme rhetoric.*

**In Scandinavia**, the shadow of Norway's Anders Breivik now hangs over all discussion of far-Right and neo-Nazi inclined parties and movements. Breivik, who murdered 77 people in bombing and shooting attacks in 2011, was motivated by

extreme, far-Right hostility to Islam and multiculturalism. He supports Israel as a bulwark against Islamism. Although, Breivik has had links with other groups his claims to have had accessories are now largely dismissed as bravado, and delusional.

The Sweden Democrats provide another example in Europe of a party with a dubious past that these days it seeks to distance itself from. The party now bills itself as socially conservative and seeks to restrict immigration. It entered the Swedish parliament at the 2010 elections, with 5.7 percent of the vote up from 2.9 percent at the elections in 2006.

In the 1990s, officials in the Sweden Democrats were widely accused of anti-Semitism and neo-Nazi tendencies. Former party leader Anders Klarström, for example, had previously belonged to the Nordic Reich Party, a now defunct neo-Nazi party. For reasons such as these, suspicions remain about the true ideological sympathies of the activist base.

*The Sweden Democrats illustrate that although parties with an extremist past may publicly seek to move away from the fringes, further investigation is needed about the ideological sympathies of core voters and activists.*

**In central and eastern Europe**, outside Hungary, extremist parties have had a checkered history in recent years. In Slovakia, the anti-Roma and anti-Hungarian, far-Right Slovak Nationalist Party (SNS) failed to enter parliament at the 2012 elections, having been a member of the coalition government which came to power in 2006. Though not a neo-Nazi party as such, it attracts the support of skinheads and other fascistic voters. The party has sympathies with Father Jozef Tiso's wartime clerico-fascist government which was allied to the Nazis. The regime actually paid Nazi Germany to deport the country's Jews.

In the Baltic states, the way in which political parties relate to the wartime past also comes strongly into play. One significant example is the ominously named All for Latvia-For Fatherland and Freedom Party (now the National Alliance), which is a member of the governing coalition. Party members have supported and taken part in annual marches to commemorate a Latvian Second World War SS division. The marchers and their supporters claim that they are merely commemorating opposition to Soviet oppression, but Jewish and other leaders are appalled that a "mainstream" nationalist party should be seen to be glorifying the memory of people who aided and abetted in the Holocaust.

*The Slovak and Latvian cases illustrate the enduring problem that some sections of political society in central and eastern Europe have in confronting their countries' collaborationist past with Nazi Germany.*

# The Rise of neo-Nazism in the Party Political System in Europe and Beyond

**In the wider world**, skinhead, white supremacist and other neo-Nazi type groups are present in countries as far afield as the United States and Australia. Yet they have rarely achieved noteworthy electoral success.

In Russia, the rise of far-Right, anti-Semitic groupings has been a depressing feature of the post-communist era. The autocratic nature of Vladimir Putin's Russia, however, means that they are effectively excluded from the corridors of power.

Holocaust denial and other neo-Nazi style ideas are plainly observable in significant parts of the Islamic world and there is considerable evidence that Islamist parties have imported aspects of Nazi ideology into their thinking. The emphasis has traditionally been on using the tropes and mantras of Nazi thinking to demonize and discredit the State of Israel.

However, the prevalence of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in many societies in the Arab world and beyond suggests that they have now become part of the furniture of the political culture.

In many parts of the world outside Europe, it remains debatable whether the term neo-Nazi is truly appropriate or helpful even where groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood adopt anti-Semitic discourse that would not itself have looked out of place in Nazi Germany.

Much depends on whether one views neo-Nazism as a specifically "White-European" ideology relevant primarily to the European context, or whether one focuses on extreme anti-Semitism as the defining feature of Nazism in which case the term could be applied more widely.

## CONCLUSION

The three case studies at the core of this briefing are designed to illustrate key problems with resurgent neo-Nazi or quasi neo-Nazi parties in contemporary Europe. Although neo-Nazi style movements and ideologies are present in other parts of the world, it is unsurprising that an ideology that was born in Europe should be most likely to show a resurgence in Europe inside the party political system.

This report does not claim to be exhaustive. But it does seek to highlight the nexus between economic malaise, latent Nazi-type tendencies and the party political system. There is considerable evidence that the authorities in the countries forming the heart of this briefing are either conflicted or confused in their responses to the problem.

In Greece, Golden Dawn represents a striking example of the way in which austerity has created the conditions for a neo-Nazi party with violent tendencies to flourish politically and widen its support at the grass roots level. A government preoccupied with the economy does not seem to have a functioning strategy to confront the problem, while there are widespread accusations of police collusion with the activities of Golden Dawn supporters at the local level.

In Hungary, Jobbik has established a powerful presence due to disillusionment with mainstream political parties, large

scale public hostility to the country's Roma (Gypsy) population and a widespread feeling of victimization by the outside world which translates into anti-Semitism, and denial about the country's wartime past as a Nazi ally. Crucially, the rightist government of Prime Minister Orban is hopeful of taking votes from Jobbik at next year's elections, a reality that helps explain his reluctance strongly enough to attack the party.

In Germany, the National Democratic Party, does not have the kind of electoral support as either Golden Dawn or Jobbik. But it provides an important illustration of the difficulties of the authorities in seeking to deal with it. The government has decided not to proceed with attempts to have the party banned at the Constitutional Court ahead of September's elections, fearing that it would fail in the same way that it did a decade ago.

As was stated in the introduction, the briefing deals primarily with neo-Nazis rather than the far-Right anti-immigration parties that have seen such a resurgence in recent years. However, as some of the examples show, there is an overlap between the two in so far as the far-Right may set the tone for many of the same issues that energise neo-Nazis, and also in so far as their thinking could end up in a very similar place to that of the neo-Nazis if left unchecked.

**Your support of the World Jewish Congress, American Section, will help the WJC confront the growing threat of neo-Nazi extremism.**



[www.worldjewishcongress.org](http://www.worldjewishcongress.org)