

Spring 4-28-2017

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

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## Recommended Citation

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

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May 10th, 2017

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 by particular groups and politicians 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.

Keywords: Islamophobia, far-right politics, Central Eastern Europe, European Refugee Crisis, xenophobia, nationalism, refugees.

## I. Research Paper

### **Introduction**

In recent years, many European and Western countries have seen a rise in populism, nationalism, and rightist extremism. As Matthew Feldman, the director of the Radicalism and New Media Research Group at the University of Northampton, observed in an interview with CNN in May of 2012, “Instead of open racial attacks, they play up a threat to national identity and criticize multiculturalism, particularly as it relates to Islam<sup>1</sup>.” Nearly five years later, the power of these trends has grown, particularly in light of what has been termed the “European refugee crisis.” In this paper, we explore these trends in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary in relation to the refugee crisis and discuss the ways in which historically entrenched fears, economic anxieties, and weak civil societies in these countries have allowed xenophobic and Islamophobic ideologies to blossom and influence state responses to the refugee crisis. Using an Orientalist framework and taking into account the legacy of post-socialism in the region, we discuss not only the roots of these trends but also their implications for Middle Eastern (especially Muslim) refugees in the region. We suggest that hate speech, especially when

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<sup>1</sup> Smith-Spark, Laura, "Anger At Austerity, Immigration Feeds Far Right's Rise In Europe - CNN.Com". *CNN*, 2017 Accessed February 19 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/05/08/world/europe/europe-far-right-austerity/>.

adopted by popular political figures, decreases the quality of life for minorities and increases hate crimes and oppressive legislation, with the chance of genocide, as Susan Benesch of World Policy Institute has researched<sup>2</sup>. It is important to research and understand the ways in which hate speech is utilized and endorsed outside of fringe politics, especially in areas housing particularly vulnerable populations like migrants and refugees. The Czech Republic, Hungary and the Slovak Republic all have endorsed Islamophobic rhetoric in central political debates and are areas that will play an important role in any solutions devised by the EU; as such, investigating the roots and implications of these countries' responses to the refugee crisis is crucial for the future of refugees in Europe.

### **Historical Background of CEE**

The region known as Central Europe or Central-Eastern Europe (often referred to by the abbreviation CEE) is comprised primarily of four or five countries in the heart of the continent. These include the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and, in some cases, Slovenia. These countries are classified as Central European based partially on their geographic locations, but also on their cultures, histories, and contemporary political and economic characteristics. In this paper, we focus on three of these countries: the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. When analyzing the response to the migrant crisis in these countries, it is important to take several historical and cultural factors into account. It is significant that all three were once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Under this regime, Czechs and Slovaks in particular faced numerous challenges based on ethnicity. Many Czechs regarded Austrian rulers as invaders of

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<sup>2</sup> Benesch, Susan. 2012. "Dangerous Speech Along The Path To Mass Violence". *World Policy Institute*. Accessed February 19 2017. <http://www.worldpolicy.org/content/dangerous-speech-along-the-path-to-mass-violence>

their land and oppressors of their cultural, linguistic and economic rights. Slovaks also faced similar repression under Hungarian authority. This history is an important part of the foundation upon which Czech and Slovak ethnic nationalism are based because previous cultural repression has generated a certain level of ethnic and linguistic pride. Though Hungarians did not experience the same level of repression, the subordination of the Hungarian language below German also created a similar dynamic.

Also significant to the historical development of ethnic consciousness and nationalism in these countries is the forty years of communist rule experienced in the region. Following World War II, during which all three populations saw the invasion of Nazi forces and the subsequent mass murders of Jews, Roma, and political dissidents, Hungary and reunited Czechoslovakia quickly came under the influence of the Soviet Union and communist regimes were established. Hungary and Czechoslovakia experienced varying degrees of repression during this period, but the “iron” rule of their governments and their Soviet counterparts did not go unchallenged. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was a result of dissatisfaction with the regime; the uprising was crushed by the Soviet Army, but remains a symbol of resistance and national pride in Hungary today. In 1968, Czechoslovakia underwent liberal reforms intended to move towards “socialism with a human face.” This period is referred to as the Prague Spring, and much like the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, was ultimately crushed when approximately one million Warsaw Pact troops, led by the USSR, invaded the country and reinstated repressive rule.

Following the sudden and unpredicted fall of the Soviet Union and other communist regimes throughout the region beginning in 1989, Czechoslovakia and Hungary were thrust into the world of market capitalism and “democracy.” In 1993, Czechoslovakia split into separate

Czech and Slovak republics in what is called the “Velvet Divorce.” In 2004, all three countries acceded to the European Union, meaning that they had reached the economic, political and social requirements of the EU. With access to the EU market and the benefits associated with being a part of the Schengen Zone (such as free movement, the right to work in other EU countries, and integration into a larger economic system) Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic have, on the surface, distinguished themselves from many of their post-socialist neighbors. Slovakia and Hungary have also experienced a spike in religiosity and have become some of the most heavily Catholic countries in the region. Interestingly, the Czech Republic is now one of the most atheistic countries in the world with approximately seventy percent of the population reporting no religious affiliation or atheism. While the Czech Republic’s low religiosity has led the country to be (at least superficially) more liberal in regard to some social issues, many of the political and social trends seen in Slovakia and Hungary are reflected in the Czech Republic as well.

### **History of far-right and xenophobic political movements in CEE**

Politically and socially, a trend towards conservatism and/or right-wing nationalism has been observed in all three countries in the post-socialist period. Generally, this is described as a sort of backlash against the previous decades of communist rule with which these populations’ most horrendous memories are associated. This can be seen, for example, in the persistence of anti-Roma racism and homophobia. Many Western scholars have also noted a regression of women’s rights seen in the feminization of poverty and the return of women to the home. Popular narratives of Central/Eastern Europe in the West often include the portrayal of the region and its people as inherently ‘backwards’ and therefore prone to conservatism, bigotry and other

oppressive ideologies. While it is important to remember that this image relies heavily on demi-Orientalist views of “Eastern” Europe and that examples of culture-specific progressivism and social liberalism can be found in the histories of these countries, the historical foundations upon which contemporary nationalist, populist and far-rightist ideologies are based cannot be ignored.

Perhaps the most damning example of xenophobia seen in Czech, Slovak and Hungarian history is anti-Semitism. Long before Adolf Hitler came to power, manifestations of anti-Semitism appeared in Central Europe. Anti-Semitic attitudes can be seen, for example, in Czech music, literature and visual arts of the late 19th century.<sup>3</sup> Leopold Hilsner became one of the best-known victims of Czech(oslovak) anti-Semitism after he was falsely accused of murdering a Czech girl in 1899 and lived out the rest of his life in prison, escaping the death sentence only because of future president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk’s intervention.<sup>4</sup> Connections between Hungarian national identity and anti-Semitism are also widely acknowledged, and Hungarian cooperation with the Nazis in persecuting and deporting the country’s Jews was both a result of decades of normalized anti-Semitism and a precedent for the rise of contemporary neo-Nazi movements<sup>5</sup>.

### **Review of refugee crisis**

The Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia are all party to the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. The 1951 Convention outlines what constitutes a refugee and what rights states must provide to refugees, including protections against

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<sup>3</sup> Sayer, Derek, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 113

<sup>4</sup> Sayer, 145

<sup>5</sup> Hirschberger, Gilad, Anna Kende and Shoshana Weinstein, “Defensive representations of an uncomfortable history: The case of Hungary and the Holocaust,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 55 (2016): 32-43



refoulement. Since the 1951 Convention only addressed refugees inside of Europe, the 1967 Protocols expanded the 1951 Convention to include the rest of the world. As part of the European Union, these three states fall under the jurisdiction of the Common European Asylum System. This system was put in place to equally distribute responsibility and care for asylum-seekers in the EU, including broader international protections for asylum seekers and international fund to provide for the asylum seekers. The system was intended to ensure that the border EU states did not carry the full burden of asylum seekers and refugees, as they would under the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol. However, there are many criticisms of the Common system and attempts by governments to maneuver around responsibility.<sup>6</sup> While the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary have not historically been popular destinations for refugees and do not have extensive experience with immigration in comparison to many Western European states, they have participated in refugee resettlement since the fall of their communist regimes, both before and after joining the European Union in 2004.

The phenomenon commonly referred to as the European refugee/migrant crisis is a direct result of the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War and the rise of the so-called “Islamic State” (or Daesh) in 2010. The highly destructive nature of the wars in Syria and Iraq has caused the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people since 2010. Most of those who have left Syria or Iraq have sought asylum in neighboring countries such as Jordan and Turkey, but due to overcrowded refugee camps and abysmal conditions, many have looked towards Europe. In 2014, more asylum applications were filed in Europe than at any time since 1992, and that

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<sup>6</sup> Schuster. Liza, “Common sense or racism? The treatment of asylum-seekers in Europe,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 37, no. 3 (2003): 233-256.

number was doubled by 2016, according to Eurostat.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Italy pulled the majority of their search and rescue operations from the Mediterranean sea, leading to high death tolls throughout 2015, with the International Organization for Migration placing the death toll amongst migrants crossing the Mediterranean at nearly 2,000 people before the month of April<sup>8</sup>. International attention for the crisis was amplified after the image of a three-year old Syrian boy washed up on Turkish beach after a failed attempt by his family to get to Greece.

Now, much of the attention has been moved to Turkey, Greece, the Balkans and Central Europe as more migrants and refugees attempt to make the journey from crowded camps in Turkey, Jordan and Greece to Western Europe, with most hoping to reach Germany or the United Kingdom. However, due to EU policies and state actions, many migrants and refugees have been stopped in Eastern Central Europe, countries that do not have the economic ability or public desire to settle or care for the influx of migrants. Since 2015, Hungary has acquired a particularly bad reputation due to its treatment of migrants and refugees, especially after the construction of fence on the Serbian border and the detention of thousands of migrants and refugees in poorly organized camps under appalling conditions. Continuously, EU policies have left the border countries such as Hungary and Greece with the enormous burden of the continuing crisis. With migrants and refugees still entering the continent in large volumes, many countries in the EU have adopted national policies informed by fear and nationalistic ideals.

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<sup>7</sup> "Asylum Statistics - Statistics Explained". 2017. Ec.Europa.Eu. Accessed March 28 2017. [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics)

<sup>8</sup> "IOM Monitors Migrant Arrivals, Deaths In Mediterranean," *International Organization For Migration*, 2015, Accessed March 28 2017. <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-monitors-migrant-arrivals-deaths-mediterranean>

## **Literature Review**

For the purposes of our research, background knowledge on the history of far-right, populist, and xenophobic politics in our selected countries is important. For example, Cas Mudde's article, "Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe" in the journal *East European Politics and Societies* provides a brief political history of racist organizations, subcultures, and political parties in post-communist Europe. His analysis spans from the fall of communism (circa 1989) to 2006 when the article was published. Much has changed since 2006, but Mudde's work provides important historical context. Numerous scholars have also studied right-wing and populist politics in each of our individual country. Daniela Skutová's piece "The Important Issues of the Slovak Right-Wing Politics" in *Politické vedy* examines this phenomenon in Slovakia (2013); Martin Kreidl and Klára Vlachová investigate right-wing politics in the Czech Republic in the years immediately following the fall of communism in "The Rise and Decline of Right-Wing Extremism in the Czech Republic in the 1990s," published in *Czech Sociological Review* (2000); in his 2009 article "Political Conservatism in Post-Communist Hungary" in the journal *Problems of Post-Communism*, Gergely Egedy explores Hungary's tendency towards right-wing politics in the post-communist period.

Nationalism is another important topic with which our research will engage. In the case of Central Europe, nationalism and right-wing politics are interconnected, but the complexities and the power of nationalisms in our three countries are so remarkable that we will need to investigate nationalism both in relation to and separate from the world of politics. Virág Molnár's work presented in "Civil society, radicalism and the rediscovery of mythic nationalism" published in *Nations and Nationalism* provides insight to the ways in which

nationalism has both shaped and been influenced by civil society in Hungary, and also explores this in relation to the rest of post-communist Europe (2016). Hilde Weiss' "A Cross-National Comparison of Nationalism in Austria, the Czech and Slovak Republic, Hungary, and Poland" in *Political Psychology* examines the roots of nationalism in Central Europe in the post-communist period, paying special attention to ethnic tensions, socio-economic class, and neo-liberal capitalism (2003).

Looking at Islamophobia and Orientalism is important to our research, as it informs naturalized citizens' views of refugees and migrants, and the themes are noticeable in the rhetoric surrounding far right groups. Islamophobia, the fear of Islam and its adherents, appears to be a straightforward term. However, it has generated some debate. As Fernando Bravo López explains in his article, it is unclear if Muslims are discriminated against due to race, ethnicity or religion, and Bravo Lopez also asks if Islamophobes hate the religion or the adherents<sup>9</sup>.

However it is defined, Bravo Lopez attests "What is scary about Islam is the way it evokes the spectre of puritanical Christianity, a moral crusade". The same 'moral' reaction to Islamophobia is demonstrated in modern-day Central Europe, manifested as far right politics. Raymond Taras echoes the complicated definition and implications of Islamophobia in "Islamophobia never stands still': race, religion, and culture"<sup>10</sup>. In further research, it is important to understand if Islamophobia is manifested on racial, ethnic or religious terms, or a mixture of both, and 'moral' defense the far right constructs to justify this standpoint.

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<sup>9</sup> Bravo López, Fernando. 2011. "Towards a definition of islamophobia: Approximations of the early twentieth century." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34 (4): 556-73.

<sup>10</sup> Taras, Raymond. 2013. "Islamophobia never stands still': Race, religion, and culture." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36 (3): 417-33.

Islamophobia is informed by, and works in conjunction with, Orientalism. Edward Said adopted the term to denote a discourse surrounding how the West imagines the East. Said's Orientalism attests that the West views the East in no other terms than the "other", constructing the East as a poorly defined opposition that is both repulsive and intriguing to Western imagination<sup>11</sup>. There are power relations imbued in Orientalism, namely that the West defines the East, and that the East has no power to represent itself; this power imbalance is replicated in European politics, since refugees and migrants have no voice to represent themselves in political debates. The West views the people of the East as numerous, threatening, evil and effeminate. They are illogical and irrational people, the natural enemies of the morally and intellectually superior West. These images and ideas are prevalent in rhetoric surrounding the Middle East and Muslim and Middle Eastern refugees and migrants. The ideas that Islam and Muslims are inherently dangerous and incompatible with Western life and society fuel much of the language behind far right politics.

Many scholars have noted a link between Islamophobia and far right rhetoric in European countries, and others have noted how it is a common theme across national and linguistic boundaries.<sup>12</sup> Islamophobia, nationalism, and xenophobia are all important elements in constructing the fear of Muslim refugees in far right politics in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. In looking at these elements, we hope to investigate how the fear of refugees has

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<sup>11</sup> Said, Edward W. 1994. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books

<sup>12</sup> Hafez, Farid, "Shifting borders: Islamophobia as common ground for building pan-European right-wing unity," *Patterns of Prejudice* 5 (2014): 479-499; Marranci, Gabriele, "Multiculturalism, Islam, and the clash of civilisations theory: rethinking Islamophobia," *Culture and Religion* 5 (2004): 105-117; Doerr, Nicole, "Bridging language barriers, bonding against immigrants: A visual case study of Transnational network publics created by far-right activists in Europe," *Discourse and Society* 28, no. 1 (2017): 3-23; Zuquete, Jose Pedro, "The European extreme-right and Islam: New directions?" *Journal Of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 3 (2008): 321-344.

bolstered far right politics in Central Europe and how international and national policy towards refugees may be altered to better protect refugees and to prevent escalation of hate speech and hate crimes.

### **Nationalism and CEE**

Nationalism in Central Europe has historically been ethnically based. As previously established, this tendency has its roots partially in experiences with cultural and linguistic repression under the Austrian-dominated Austro-Hungarian Empire. However, Central European nationalisms have taken on new characteristics in the post-socialist period. As laid out by Hilde Weiss, many these developments stem from the chaos and insecurity brought on by the ‘transition’ from state socialism to capitalist democracy. As Weiss observes, “In the countries previously governed by communism, people will be particularly susceptible to nationalist and ethnic attitudes if they are disappointed and deprived with respect to their social status or material conditions.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, those who have faced the most uncertainty and loss under the imposed market capitalist regime - those lower down in the newly stratified class system, for example - are likely to adhere to ideas of national or ethnic superiority because of the security brought by in-group belonging. Because this nationalist ideology is predicated upon notions of inclusion and exclusion, distrust and/or fear of those excluded grows. As a result, populists who have pinpointed those fears are able to exploit these weaknesses with ease by scapegoating the feared “Other” for problems facing their constituency.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Weiss, Hilde, “A Cross-National Comparison of Nationalism in Austria, the Czech and Slovak Republic, Hungary, and Poland,” *Political Psychology* 24:2 (2003), 383-384

<sup>14</sup> Weiss 380

In Weiss' 2003 study of nationalist sentiments in Central Europe and Austria, respondents from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary all expressed attitudes which are in line with the aforementioned defensive trends and also reflect cultural anxieties. The results of the study suggests that sizeable portions of the Czech, Slovak and Hungarian populations feel safest when their own ethnic group is the majority (81%, 83% and 59% respectively). Many (44%, 35%, and 28%) also responded that they believed same-ethnicity marriages were "better" and that young people's primary duty should be "to honor the national history and its heritage" (75%, 79% and 84%).<sup>15</sup> These results indicate that distrust, ethnic intolerance, and strong legacies of national pride are intricately woven into the national consciousnesses of Central Europe.

### **Islamophobia: The New Xenophobia**

The relationship between far-right politics and Islam is far more complicated than present politics would seem to indicate. As Miroslav Mareš explores in the article "The Extreme Right's Relationship with Islam and Islamism in East-Central Europe," past, and some present, Nazi and far right groups have had positive relations with, and views of, Islam. In the past, and for some groups persistently, Islamic groups are linked to Nazism over the common views of anti-Semitism.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, some extreme right sympathizers support Iran since they view the state as an adversary of Israel and the Western powers that support Israel. Other such sympathizers admire Muslim actions to preserve traditional ways of life.<sup>17</sup> However, as Mareš

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<sup>15</sup> Weiss 386-387

<sup>16</sup> Mareš, Miroslav. "The extreme Right's relationship with Islam and islamism in east-central Europe: From allies to enemies," *East European Politics & Societies and Cultures* 28, no. 1 (2014): 205-24.

<sup>17</sup>Mareš, 2014

notes, even extreme right supporters of Islam as a common ally do not want Islamic forces or politics in Europe.

Most far right groups, however, are staunchly anti-Islam and Islamophobic. In many ways, these groups, which are considered slightly more moderate than the openly anti-Semitic groups, swapped their vehemently anti-Semitic messages for Islamophobic themes and motifs. As one French far right leader expressed in José Pedro Zúquete's article "The European extreme-right and Islam: New directions?," politics should be focused on real and present threats, which many far right groups identify as Islam and Muslims, especially after the 9/11 attacks."<sup>18</sup> The group Stop the Islamization of Europe (SIOE), for example, uses the slogan "Racism is the lowest form of stupidity; Islamophobia is the height of common sense!"<sup>19</sup> This message has clearly gained support in Europe. The rhetoric surrounding Jews and Judaism no longer paints Jews as the outsiders or as a threat to nationalistic identity in many areas of Europe. In part, Zuquete attributes this change to the creation of Israel which, for many Westerners, represents ideals of democracy and freedom that far right groups envision themselves as protecting. This is not to say that anti-Semitism does not exist in European politics, but, rather, that that Islamophobia is a more acceptable political tool than anti-Semitism is in the modern day.

Before the 2000s, the idea of Islamic politics having a presence in East-Central European countries was laughable. The Muslim populations in the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Slovak Republic were miniscule, and almost no members of these groups were advocating for Sharia law or Islamism in politics. However, the sudden influx of refugees and migrants who were largely Muslims or hailed from Muslim majority countries triggered an old fear in many of

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<sup>18</sup> Zuquete, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Bari, Mohammad, "Islamophobia: Europe's new political disease," *Al Jazeera*, May 6, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/05/201255112042394786.html>



these countries. In order to understand the Islamophobia in these three countries, it is also important to understand the historical narrative in these countries concerning the Ottoman Empire and earlier threats from the East. From the Middle Ages into the Modern Era, the territories that constitute our three countries in question were in many ways the barrier between Christian Europe and multiple threats from the East, whether it be the Mongols or the Ottoman Empire. There is also the history of being under Ottoman rule for a number of Central-Eastern European countries, notably Hungary. This has helped to inform the collective memory that places these states as barrier against the East, which is viewed in racial and religious terms.

A common term used amongst a number of far-right politicians in Europe to embody many of the Islamophobic and xenophobic attitudes is the idea of “Eurarabia.” To justify a number of laws targeted at Muslim minorities in several European countries, politicians have used the idea of a Eurarabia to fear-monger support. The idea behind the term is that Muslims and Muslim majority countries present a threat to European sovereignty and identity. Many Europeans believe that Islam is incompatible with European values and ideals, which has been untrue for many Muslim communities across Europe. As Leora Moreno describes in the article “Fearing the Future: Islamophobia in Central Europe,” many Europeans see the presence of mosques or outward symbols of religious affiliation as a failure to integrate, despite the fact that many European Muslims share many “European” values, in spite of religious affiliation<sup>20</sup>. Secondly, many far-right politicians cite low birth rates amongst Europeans in comparison with Muslim and Middle Eastern birth rates as a reason to fear the growth of Muslim populations..

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<sup>20</sup> Moreno, Leora, “Fearing the future: Islamophobia in central Europe,” *The New Presence* (2010): 73-78.

However unbiased or exaggerated the fears are, the term is used pervasively in conversations surrounding Middle Eastern immigrant and Muslim populations.

Along these same lines, Monero states in the article that, after the fall of communism, Central Europe needed a new enemy.<sup>21</sup> It is important to understand that, without the enemy of Communism, national identity in Central Eastern Europe suffers a crisis. Identities are formed in opposition to others, and a national identity is no different. As mentioned before, these countries had the historical roles of being barrier between the Christian West and the East. By reviving this idea, it provides a sense of identity. However, it requires reliance on the idea that the Middle East and Islam in general are natural and incompatible enemies to Europe. As Said writes “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience....European culture gained strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient.”<sup>22</sup> Just as colonialist forces found support in their endeavours by promoting barbaric and mystical ideas of the Orient, far right politicians are creating an image of refugees and migrants that work to bolster their national identities through the fear of Islam.

### **Case Studies**

There are many ways in which Central Europe’s response to the refugee crisis can be analyzed. For our purposes of illustrating how nationalism and Islamophobia have enabled the success of populism and conservative extremism in the region, we look at particular political leaders in each of our countries and then move to a discussion of how these politicians’

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<sup>21</sup> Moreno 2010, 74

<sup>22</sup> Said 1994, 2-4

behaviors and publicly-held views have impacted public opinion and are representative of broader societal trends.

### Czech Republic

The Czech Republic's current president, Miloš Zeman, has been in office since 2013 and has developed a reputation as a hot-headed leader with a gift for controversy and vulgarity. Many Europeans have noted that Zeman seems to spend a great deal of energy pandering to Russian President Vladimir Putin and more recently, he has drawn attention for his vocal support of US president Donald Trump.<sup>23</sup> Like many Czech politicians, Zeman has dealt with dissatisfaction from his constituents, but in the past few years his approval ratings have seen a relative increase, a trend which has been widely attributed to his comments on the refugee crisis.<sup>24</sup> Some of these statements include, but are unfortunately not limited to, comments on the impossibility of integrating Muslims into European society, an allusion to the refugee crisis as an "invasion,"<sup>25</sup> and a comparison of Islam to Naziism.<sup>26</sup> In a fascinating display of multi-layered bigotry, Zeman justified his stance on refugees in 2015 by drawing an irresponsible connection between Muslim migrants and "Sharia law," claiming that Muslim asylum-seekers surely would implement restrictive religious law in Europe, an imaginary situation which would be detrimental to Czech

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<sup>23</sup> Janda, Jakub, "Czech president is Russia's Trojan Horse," *Euobserver*, June 10, 2016

<sup>24</sup> Culik, Jan, "Meet Miloš Zeman - the Czech Republic's answer to Donald Trump," *The Conversation*, December 9, 2015

<sup>25</sup> Ng, Kate and Ashley Cowburn, "Milos Zeman: Czech President says integrating Muslims is 'practically impossible,'" *Independent*, January 18, 2016

<sup>26</sup> Tait, Robert, "Miloš Zeman: the hardline Czech leader fanning hostility to refugees," *The Guardian*, September 14, 2016

society because “we [Czech men] will lose women’s beauty because they will be covered head to toe in burqas.”<sup>27</sup>

While it is tempting to pass off Zeman’s comments off as mere populist babble, this commentary provides an interesting look into how Czech public opinion is shaped, and reflects general attitudes towards Muslim migrants among the Czech population. A poll conducted in March of 2016 found that sixty-one percent of Czechs opposed accepting refugees at all and thirty-one percent were in favor of allowing refugees to stay in the country, but only until their home countries were safe. Only three percent of respondents indicated that they accepted the idea of refugees remaining in the Czech Republic long-term. Eighty-two percent saw migrants as a major threat to Czech security and ninety-two percent believed that they present a threat to the security of the EU as a whole.<sup>28</sup> The discontent exemplified in these numbers has manifested itself in the form of anti-refugee and anti-Muslim protests by nationalist groups, often involving thousands of people. One of the more serious incidents took place after a protest in February 2016, when around twenty people gathered near a refugee center in Prague, throwing Molotov Cocktails at the facility and injuring one person.<sup>29</sup>

State responses to the refugee crisis have also demonstrated problematic impulses. In September of 2015, the number of refugees crossing into Czech territory on their way to Germany increased rather suddenly, and police began to detain them, though the legal precedent

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<sup>27</sup> Calamur, Krishnadev. “European Refugee Crisis: A ‘Systematic’ Violation of Human Rights”. *The Atlantic*. 22/10/2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/czech-republic-un-human-rights-refugees/411862/>

<sup>28</sup> “Poll: Sixty percent of Czechs against accepting refugees”. *Prague Daily Monitor*. 30/3/2016. <http://praguemonitor.com/2016/03/30/poll-sixty-percent-czechs-against-accepting-refugees>

<sup>29</sup> “Attackers set refugee center on fire in Prague hours after anti-Islam rally”. *Daily Sabah: Europe*. 6/2/2016. <http://www.dailysabah.com/europe/2016/02/06/attackers-set-refugee-center-on-fire-in-prague-hours-after-anti-islam-rally>

for such behavior is dubious. During this time, police confiscated refugees' personal belongings, effectively making them pay for their own detention.<sup>30</sup> The Czech Defender of Human Rights, Anna Šabatová, has publicly condemned the state of the facilities in which migrants have been detained, indicating that the conditions found in detention centers border on human rights violations.<sup>31</sup>

Efforts to counter Islamophobic rhetoric in the Czech Republic have been limited. As demonstrated in public polls, a majority of the Czech population harbors negative attitudes towards (Muslim) refugees. In 2016, UNHCR Central Europe released a video portraying the story of Josef and David Hlavatý, a father and son pair who escaped communist Czechoslovakia in 1988 via a homemade hanglider. The title of the video reads "Sami jsme byli uprchlíci" - "We were also refugees."<sup>32</sup> This video represents a valiant effort on the part of the UNHCR to remind Czechs of their own history as a repressed people who have also sought refuge elsewhere and benefited from the hospitality of others; however, there is no evidence that this emotional appeal has impacted the ways in which Czech society views Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

### Slovakia

Slovakia's Robert Fico has expressed agreement with many of Zeman's comments. As Prime Minister (2006-2010, 2012-present), Fico is known as a populist and a nationalist, though much of his behavior may look rather tame compared to that of Zeman.<sup>33</sup> Fico's public

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<sup>30</sup> Calamur 2015

<sup>31</sup> "Czech ombudsman criticises conditions in refugee facility". *Public Defender of Rights: Ombudsman*. 15/10/2015.

<http://www.ochrance.cz/en/news/press-releases-2015/czech-ombudsman-criticises-conditions-in-refugee-facility/>

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR Central Europe, "UNHCR v České republice. Sami jsme byli uprchlíci," Youtube Video, 01:10, posted February 24, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0dILKFfFgE>

<sup>33</sup> Burzova, Petra, "Towards a new past: Some reflections on nationalism in post-socialist Slovakia," *Nationalities Papers* 40:6 (2012), 881

opposition to welcoming refugees has appealed largely to the country's deeply, and newly invigorated, Catholic tradition. In an attempt to justify Slovakia's reluctance to accept a quota system designed by the EU in an effort to balance responsibility for refugees among member states, Fico stated simply, "Islam has no place in Slovakia."<sup>34</sup> By invoking, and perhaps exaggerating, religious tensions and reinforcing an Islamophobic hierarchy which places Christianity above all other beliefs, Fico has centered the discussion on religion, ignoring supposedly Christian values of tolerance and compassion. The religious aspect of Slovak politics is represented concretely in a statement released in 2015 announcing that the country was willing to accept two hundred refugees - but only if the asylum-seekers in question happened to be Christian.<sup>35</sup> Fico made headlines in April of 2016 after he was treated in a Slovak hospital by, ironically, a Dr. Mongi Msolly, a former refugee of Tunisian origin who has been in Slovakia for over thirty years.<sup>36</sup>

In March of 2016, Slovakia's parliamentary elections left much of Europe in a state of concern after the notorious Marian Kotleba's neo-Nazi party, *Naše Slovensko* ("Our Slovakia"), won fourteen seats in the parliament for the first time. Fico, who heads the Social Democratic *Smer* party, was reluctant to openly denounce Kotleba's party, stating simply that building a new government would be a "complicated" affair.<sup>37</sup> Though *Naše Slovensko* is still a minority party in the Slovak parliament, its official entrance into the government is nonetheless a decided victory

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<sup>34</sup> Tharoor, Ishaan, "Slovakia's leader said Islam has 'no place' in his country. Now he's taking a leadership role in the E.U.," *The Washington Post*, June 21, 2016

<sup>35</sup> Tharoor, Ishaan, "Slovakia will take in 200 Syrian refugees, but they have to be Christian," *The Washington Post*, August 19, 2015

<sup>36</sup> "Anti-Migrant Slovak PM Robert Fico treated by refugee doctor," *The Daily Sabah*, April 20, 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/europe/2016/04/20/anti-migrant-slovak-pm-robert-fico-treated-by-refugee-doctor>

<sup>37</sup> "Neo-Nazis elected to Slovakian parliament for the first time," *RT*, March 6, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/334706-neo-nazis-elected-slovakia/>

for Slovak neo-Nazis and other right-wing extremists. Furthermore, Fico's tacit acceptance of the party's legitimacy represents a broader trend within Slovakia. The New York Times, for example, notes a rise in extreme-rightist political activity in Slovakia between 2012 and 2016.<sup>38</sup> In a poll which mirrors the views of their Czech neighbors, around 40% of Slovak respondents indicated that they considered migrants to be the greatest problem facing the country and 70% said that they were "worried" about refugees in Europe.<sup>39</sup>

These fears have been reflected in protests across the country, though many have not been thoroughly covered by international media due to Slovakia's small population and relative obscurity in the view of major world players. One of the largest demonstrations took place in June of 2015 in response to the EU's proposals to impose refugee quotas on member states. Thousands of protesters gathered in Bratislava to voice their discontent with the "Islamization of Europe" and the demonstration eventually descended into violence.<sup>40</sup> The state's treatment of refugees crossing Slovak territory has also come into question, particularly in light of an incident in May of 2016 during which a Syrian refugee was shot and wounded on the Slovak-Hungarian border by police forces.<sup>41</sup>

The UNHCR has not produced a video targeted specifically at Slovaks, presumably because it was assumed that the Czech "Sami jsme byli uprchlíci" would suffice - the Czech and Slovak languages are mutually intelligible, and the clip depicts a story from the time in which the

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<sup>38</sup> Aisch, Gregor, Adam Pearce and Bryant Rousseau, "How Far Is Europe Swinging to the Right," *The New York Times*, March 20 2017,

[https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/22/world/europe/europe-right-wing-austria-hungary.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/22/world/europe/europe-right-wing-austria-hungary.html?_r=0)

<sup>39</sup> Galanova, Mira, "Refugees confronted with Slovakia's 'national project'," *Euobserver*, July 20, 2016, <https://euobserver.com/migration/134408>

<sup>40</sup> "Slovakia to Slovaks': Thousands join anti-Islamization protest in Bratislava, dozens arrested," *RT*, June 20, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/268615-slovakia-islamization-protest-arrested/>

<sup>41</sup> Squires, Nick, "Syrian refugee shot by Slovakian border guards," *The Telegraph* May 9, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/09/syrian-refugee-shot-by-slovakian-border-guards/>

two republics were united as Czechoslovakia. While the persistence of anti-refugee sentiments in Slovakia undoubtedly paints a bleak picture, examples of altruism are present. Milan Nič of GLOBSEC Policy Institute in Bratislava sheds light on grassroots humanitarian assistance which has aided refugees crossing the Hungarian border by providing healthcare and legal advice. Nič also notes the efforts of the Health Care College from Bratislava's St. Elisabeth University to provide free healthcare to refugees at the Croatia-Slovenia border beginning in December of 2015.<sup>42</sup> While these examples are clearly not representative of mainstream attitudes in Slovakia, they illustrate that the country is not totally devoid of pro-refugee organizations and individuals, and Nič's analysis serves as a reminder that in the case of Central-Eastern European countries which are themselves subject to demi-Orientalist categorization and are dominated by populist politics, acts of compassion are often silenced or overlooked.

### Hungary

Hungary has quickly developed a reputation for poor treatment of migrants and refugees since the beginnings of the so-called Refugee Crisis. Many of the human rights lapses and atrocities have been supported by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Orbán is a political fissure in Hungarian politics, with his start in a center-left party in mid to late 20th century. He moved the party, Fidesz, in a conservative direction and, as head of the party, assumed the role of Prime Minister first in 1998-2002. Fidesz narrowly lost elections to the Socialist party in the next two elections. However, Orbán's new party, the Christian Democrats, won the vote in 2010 and

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<sup>42</sup> Nič, Milan and Claire Sturm, "Solidarity With Refugees Is Not Exclusively Reserved For The 'West'," *Social Europe*, May 19, 2016, <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2016/05/solidarity-refugees-not-exclusively-reserved-west/>



Orban resumed his role as Prime Minister with overwhelming support that carried into the 2014 elections. When faced with competition from the neo-Nazi political party Jobbik, Orban turned to xenophobic rhetoric to bolster support, according to specialist Istvan Rev in the New York Times piece “Hungary’s Politics of Hate”<sup>43</sup>. As the next round of elections nears in the midst of the on-going crisis, Orban continues to support his platform using nationalist and islamophobic rhetoric and supporting human rights violations against refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants.

In the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo terror attacks in Paris, Orban announced his campaign platform to “Keep Europe Christian”<sup>44</sup>. The statement here, and the subsequent acts under Orban, demonstrate strong nationalistic and islamophobic attitudes. First, the idea that Europe was Christian beforehand is not necessarily true. This statement erases the presence of both Jewish and Muslim communities that have existed in Europe for many centuries. Secondly, Orban chose the time following the shocking attacks in Paris to launch his campaign, framing Muslims, particularly refugees, as those who threaten “Christian Europe”. In this statement, Orban frames all non-Christians as a threat, and as people who should be kept out of Europe. It is classic Orientalist thinking, and its implications mirror that of racial hate groups calling for White Europe or a White America. How, then, are these statements permissible, especially for a politician who condemned racist rhetoric earlier in his careers? The paradox follows the thinking of the statement “Racism is the lowest form of human stupidity, but Islamophobia is the height of common sense”, which emerged from the Polish party Stop the Islamisation of Europe (SIOE)

<sup>45</sup>. Islamophobia is now seen as a defense tactic, rather than a form of prejudice. Istov Rev

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<sup>43</sup> Rev, Istvan. 2015. "Hungary's Politics Of Hate" *New York Times* Accessed March 28 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/opinion/hungarys-politics-of-hate.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/26/opinion/hungarys-politics-of-hate.html?_r=0).

<sup>44</sup> Rev 2015

<sup>45</sup> Mareš 2014, 218

attributes Orbán's endorsement of Islamophobic attitudes and avoidance of anti-semitic language as a main reason why his party did not lose the 2014 election to the more extreme Jobbik party. As Hungary and other states in this bloc view Western Europe as falling into a moral decay, the moral idea that Hungary and like-minded Central European countries must remain vigilant even against EU pressure is a potent political tool.

The moralizing against the migrants and refugees in his country did not end after the election. In March of 2017, Orbán described the refugee crisis as a "Trojan Horse of Terror"<sup>46</sup>. In this comment, he is solidifying the idea that Muslims, particularly those entering his country, are in fact at a state of war with Hungary and all of Christian Europe. It ignores the fact that the overwhelming majority of refugees and migrants are victims of terrorist actions themselves and are not hiding under false pretenses, but rather are seeking sanctuary. This statement further galvanized the populace to act as if they are at war with migrants and Islam in general, and to remain constantly vigilant against them. Reports out of Hungary tell of a new militia to fight against this imaginary trojan horse. These new 'border hunters', as a New York Times article calls them, will be armed and directed to "[beat] refugees away from borders"<sup>47</sup>. These statements and actions mobilize the public against refugees and migrants, people who are in desperate need of help, and removes all sympathy or moral obligation to respect them. It is a clear example of how political rhetoric is concretely and negatively affecting the quality of life and human dignity of hundreds of thousands migrants and refugees in the country. When the EU confronted Orbán on the use of internment style camps for asylum seekers and refugees, Orbán

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<sup>46</sup> "Hungary's Leader Calls Migration 'Trojan Horse' Of Terrorism," *VOA*, 2017, <http://www.voanews.com/a/hungary-migrants-terrorism/3752755.html>

<sup>47</sup> Board, T. 2017. "Hungary Plays The E.U.," *The New York Times*, .March 13 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/13/opinion/hungary-plays-the-eu.html>

called the complaints “charming human rights nonsense.”<sup>48</sup> The dehumanization and subsequent denial of basic human rights is a hallowing foreshadowing to what kind of treatment of Muslims and refugees may come in this country. Despite the horrifying rhetoric, Orban remains popular during this campaign season and it is all too likely that he and his party will serve another term leading the country. Many commentators and politicians cite Orban’s hard stance on refugees and migrants as a contributing factor to his popularity and success.

### **Conclusion**

It is a cheapened form of democracy when the most powerless amongst us are used as tools for fear mongering. It goes against Christian morals of charity and compassion to expunge those who need protection and sanctuary. However, by disparaging immigrants, refugees and Muslims as a whole, far right politicians are constructing an identity that poses them as protectors of Christian, democratic Europe. This is done through galvanizing nationalism and essentializing Islamophobia in debates surrounding refugees and migrants. As long as political leaders continue to use refugees as pawns, there is little hope for equitable, humanitarian solutions to arise in Central Eastern Europe for the Refugee Crisis.

The rhetoric used to bolster the Far Right is creating a war that does not exist, with armies of starved and peaceful civilians. It is creating an identity that cannot be sustained without an enemy, which will hobble relations with any Middle Eastern country. As can be seen with the construction of internment camps in Hungary, there is a humanitarian and moral crisis already upon us. It is important, therefore, to identify the underlying biases in political rhetoric and

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<sup>48</sup> Board 2017

challenge false narratives on all fronts. By seeking out the underlying causes and discourses, better policy can be enacted and further bigotry can be discouraged.

## II. Policy Paper

As previously illustrated, the issues accompanying the so-called “refugee crisis” are countless, multifaceted, and multilayered. Because of the complex nature of this phenomenon, finding thoroughly impactful and workable solutions is difficult, and it is always possible that some policies will have unintended consequences. Since the onset of the “refugee crisis” around 2014, groups across Europe, from the EU Council to national-level NGOs, have scrambled to come up with solutions for the many problems encompassed in the “refugee crisis.” Germany’s brief suspension of the Dublin Regulation in 2015, for example, was a humanitarian attempt to alleviate the “burden” carried by first-entry countries like Greece and Hungary.<sup>49</sup> The EU’s proposed quotas come with a similar intent, but as previously discussed, quota proposals have not been well-received by the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary and have done little to curtail anti-refugee sentiments in Central-Eastern Europe. In Central-Eastern Europe itself, attempts to address the needs of refugees have been less visible than in countries like Germany and Sweden, but instances like St. Elisabeth College’s attempts to provide medical services to asylum seekers crossing the border into Slovakia suggest that such efforts are present, though not particularly wide-reaching. The UNHCR’s “Sami jsme byli uprchlíci” campaign was an attempt

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<sup>49</sup> “Germany reinstates Dublin rules for Syrian refugees,” *Deutsche Welle*, November 10, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/germany-reinstates-dublin-rules-for-syrian-refugees/a-18842101>

at a persuasive tactic designed to appeal to the emotions of Czechs (and perhaps Slovaks as well), but it is unclear whether the video has had a true impact on attitudes in the region, and the UNHCR's status as part of the world's largest Western-centric international organization bodes ill for the campaign's success. If similar efforts have been made in Slovakia and Hungary, they have not been widely publicized. Our policy recommendations will take into account the successes and failures of the aforementioned approaches and will focus on specific changes that can be made by different actors in order to address underlying rhetorical conflicts, the material needs of refugees and asylum seekers, and sources of hostile discourse and misleading information.

### Linguistic

According to the understandings of discursive psychology, the language we use informs our social actions, as Simon Goodman et al discusses in relation to the Refugee Crisis in “The evolving (re)categorisations of refugees throughout the ‘refugee/migrant crisis’”<sup>50</sup>. Since the conception of the idea of the European Refugee Crisis, the media has depicted refugees and migrants, and the crisis itself, in a myriad of ways. After deaths on the Mediterranean sky-rocketed and the highly publicized drowning of 3-year old Syrian Alan Kurdi, the response from the media was a humanitarian one. Most outlets produced stories aimed at increasing international attention about the suffering of the refugees and lead to many refugee-positive policy changes, such as the international recommitment to search and rescue in the Mediterranean and Germany's outpouring of support for asylum-seekers.

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<sup>50</sup> Goodman, Simon, Ala Sirriyeh, and Simon McMahon, “The evolving (re)categorisations of refugees throughout the ‘refugee/migrant crisis’” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 27, no. 2 (2017): 105-14.

However, the change died quickly. The good hearted sentiment did not find a counterpart in national policy, leaving many European countries scrambling to find accommodations for an unprecedented influx. In the wake of terror attacks in Paris and attacks in Cologne, European sentiment towards refugees plummeted. Notably, the ‘crisis’ was less likely to be referred to as the Refugee Crisis, and more likely to be named the Migrant Crisis. The connotations of these words are deeply important: host countries have no international obligation to migrants, migrants move by choice, often illegally; migrants are seeking economic gains, and not seeking to stay permanently or to add to existing communities. Goodman et al states “In this case, “migrant” refers to an immoral and problematic group that are to be excluded”<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Holmes and Castaneda state in “Representing the ‘European Refugee Crisis’ in Germany and Beyond: Deservingness and difference, life and death”, ‘migrants’ represent a group a state must protect itself from, while ‘refugees’ represent a group deserving of protection <sup>52</sup>Hence, when all incomers are referred to as “migrants”, it erases the diversity of motivations and needs of incomers and any moral obligation the host country has to these populations. Importantly, Goodman et al identifies subcategories within the descriptions of migrants; the “morally superior” minority of refugees, and the criminal, entrepreneurial network of “traffickers”, who, in reality, were offering better pathways to safety for refugees than most established channels, even considering the devastating death tolls and the exorbitant costs of fare.

It should be noted in this discussion that, in many circumstances, the quality of life for a migrant in their home country can be just as bleak and violent as that for a refugee. The

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<sup>51</sup> Goodman 2017

<sup>52</sup>Holmes, Seth M., and Heide Castaneda, “Representing the ‘European refugee crisis’ in Germany and beyond: Deservingness and difference, life and death: Representing the “European refugee crisis”. *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 1 (2016): 12-24.

definition of refugee is something that many groups oversimplify. According to UN 1951 Convention on Refugees defines a refugee

*"A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."* -Article 1 (A:2), United Nations 1951 Convention on Refugees

This definition, while it works to encompass quite a number of groups, ignores individuals fleeing from indiscriminate violence, natural disasters, or abject and inescapable poverty. Later charters and treaties addressed issues of indiscriminate violence and natural disasters, but other issues are still unaddressed. For example, an oil spill in the Nigerian delta have left many communities without drinkable water, farmable lands, or economic opportunities. This spill has been linked to an increases in sectarian violence and the steep drop of living standards. For many Nigerians, life is as unstable and violent as the lives of Syrians or Iraqis. Yet, since the cause of their suffering is not recognized under the UN definition, they are left with the title of migrant when they flee. Because of these discrepancies, many experts have chosen to use the term "forced migrants" to better reflect the realities of many migrants in today's global system.

Returning to the discursive psychology, the way that we imagine and represent incomers in the media and political rhetoric has real, concrete consequences to how states and the public treat these populations. With this in mind, we recommend that the EU takes an active stance to refer to the populations in terms such as 'refugee', 'asylum seeker' or 'forced migrants'.

secondly, the tendency to refer to the crisis as the “European Crisis” is also problematic, Goodman explains. This narrative positions Europe as the victim of the global events, rather than Syria, or Syrians, or Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, who are collectively hosting three times as many refugees as Europe has received. It is important to emphasize that it is highly unlikely that the demographics of Europe would change so drastically to present anything resembling a crisis to European politics or quality of life due to the influx of refugees and forced migrants, and the self-victimizing, narcissistic narrative has little basis in reality. Hence, we recommend referring to the phenomenon as the Refugee Crisis or the Syrian Crisis. Lastly, Holmes and Castaneda state “the discourse of deservingness displaces responsibility from historical political and economic policies supported by powerful actors in Europe and the United States and instead locates it in displaced people themselves,”<sup>53</sup> With this in mind, the change in linguistic representation may hopefully result in state policies that enhance both the incomers’ quality of life and the moral character of Europe, rather than wasting valuable time and effort assigning human worth and political blame on fleeing populations. We recommend that humanitarian organizations in Europe contact local political leaders and media outlets to suggest better representation and vocabulary. With this change, we hope that general public opinion in Central Eastern Europe would shift to recognize incomers as people who deserve moral and decent treatment. We have seen treatment of incomers by state and non-state actors to be very reactionary to the ways that the media and political rhetoric has represented these groups, hence a change in language should, in theory, result in similar reactions.

### Facilitative

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<sup>53</sup> Holmes 2016



Lastly, we recommend that the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary enforce higher journalistic standards for media organizations operating under their jurisdictions, mobilize resources to identify false information, and, in Hungary's case, reinstate full freedom of the independent press. As identified by the Czech group *Zleva proti xenofobii*, misinformation and misleading messages are major sources of anti-migrant attitudes among everyday people in Central-Eastern Europe.<sup>54</sup> For example, media portrayals of newly arrived asylum seekers as being primarily young men, accompanied by selective rage over instances of European women being sexually assaulted by "Middle Eastern" men has worked to provoke reactions of fear among Europe's population.<sup>55</sup> If journalists and media organizations were to work with the UNHCR and EU refugee agencies to relay more accurate information on the demographic makeup of refugees - that 51.5% of Syrian refugees are male and 48.5% are female - the exploitation of the image of Muslim men as sexually aggressive could be reduced.<sup>56</sup>

In the last decade, former East Bloc countries like the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary have become increasingly susceptible to "fake news," especially that which originates in Russia. In response to this potential threat to its democracy and sovereignty, the Czech Interior Ministry founded the Centre Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats (CTHH MV), which aims to identify "fake news" and propaganda spread to Czech citizens via the Internet.<sup>57</sup> Though the agency was designed to target misleading content disseminated by the Kremlin, it acknowledges that disinformation can come from other sources and that the creators of this material are not as

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<sup>54</sup> "Prohlášení," *Zleva proti xenofobii*, accessed March 18 2017, <http://zlevaprotixenofobii.cz/prohlaseni/>

<sup>55</sup> Lohaus, Stefanie and Anne Wixorek, "Immigrants Aren't Responsible for Rape Culture in Germany," January 8, 2016, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/rape-culture-germany-cologne-new-years-2016-876](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/rape-culture-germany-cologne-new-years-2016-876)

<sup>56</sup> "Syria Regional Refugee Response," *UNHCR Data Portal*, April 30, 2017, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

<sup>57</sup> Cameron, Rob, "Fake news: Czechs try to tackle spread of false stories," *BBC Europe*, February 2, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38808501>

important as the threat presented by the content itself. Notably, in 2017 the organization debunked a story shared on a Facebook page which claimed to be based on a video of Muslim migrants attacking a young girl “somewhere in Europe.” The video, which was taken from security footage in Prague, actually featured Czech citizens involved in a drug-related brawl.<sup>58</sup> Unsurprisingly, Miloš Zeman has criticized CTHH, seemingly because of his well-known support of Vladimir Putin and Russian foreign policy. Though the agency is young and its efficacy has yet to be fully seen, it seems conceivable that in light of the refugee crisis its resources could be mobilized to target misleading “news” sources spreading anti-refugee vitriol, and that Slovakia could create its own agency based on that of its Czech neighbor.

The status of independent media and free press in Hungary presents a unique challenge. One characteristic of Orbán’s regime has been suppression of media organizations which openly oppose his policies and indirect support of those which do. Freedom House reports that press freedom has declined from “free” to “partly free” since Orbán came to power in 2010.<sup>59</sup> This has especially negative implications for asylum-seekers and refugees because, as previously discussed, Orbán promotes vehemently anti-refugee sentiments; if the administration has direct or indirect control over the information given to the Hungarian populace, public opinion towards refugees could be even further damaged. For example, the opposition newspaper *Nepszabadsag* was shut down in 2016, reportedly because of its uncovering of corruption within the regime and, more significantly, because of its harsh criticism of Orbán’s anti-refugee policies.<sup>60</sup> *Al*

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<sup>58</sup> Cameron 2017

<sup>59</sup> “Freedom of the Press: Hungary,” *Freedom House*, 2015, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/hungary>

<sup>60</sup> “The murky future of Hungary’s private media,” *Al Jazeera*, October 16, 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2016/10/murky-future-hungary-private-media-161016073223936.html>

*Jazeera* also reports that foreign-run media organizations have been pulling out of Hungary in recent years, which has further damaged the quality of information available to Hungarians.<sup>61</sup>

Because of Orbán's quasi-dictatorial ruling style, solutions for Hungary's media problem may be difficult to formulate and enact; Hungarian citizens have been taking part in protests against Orbán's suppression of the media since 2010, but little has come of these demonstrations.<sup>62</sup> We suggest that one possible course of action to address this issue could come from the European Union itself. As a member of the EU, Hungary is subject to the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, which stipulates in Article 11, section 2 that "the freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected."<sup>63</sup> The European Commission is not unaware of the problems in Hungary, and acknowledges that the Orbán administration and the Fidesz party have been interfering with Hungary's media since 2010.<sup>64</sup> According to Freedom House, Hungary was referred to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in 2012 in response to the premature termination of the director of Hungary's National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information and the subsequent appointment of a new director hand-picked by Orbán; this action was declared a violation of EU law, but this decision alone has not been particularly successful in curtailing Orbán's crusade against opposition media and free press.<sup>65</sup>

The next step would be for the EU to take concrete steps to either pressure the Hungarian government to comply with EU standards of free press or, alternatively, to take legal action

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<sup>61</sup> "The murky future of Hungary's private media"

<sup>62</sup> "The murky future of Hungary's private media"

<sup>63</sup> "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union," *Official Journal of the European Union*, C83/389, March 30, 2010 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:0389:0403:en:PDF>

<sup>64</sup> Kroes, Neelie, "Media freedom remains under threat in Hungary," *European Commission: Archives*, July 28, 2014,

[http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission\\_2010-2014/kroes/en/blog/media-freedom-remains-under-threat-hungary.html](http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_2010-2014/kroes/en/blog/media-freedom-remains-under-threat-hungary.html)

<sup>65</sup> "Freedom of the Press: Hungary"

through the ECJ. Though it would take time to push these kinds of actions through the EU's bureaucracies, taking an authoritative stand against these violations of EU law would send a clear message to the Hungarian government that repression of the press will not be tolerated. Despite Orbán's anti-EU stance, Hungary ultimately benefits economically and politically from being a member of the Union: Therefore, a threat to its standing within the EU may be seen as a threat to Hungary itself and may provoke a willingness to restore the press' freedom to pre-Orbán levels.

Clearly, the countless problems associated with the "refugee crisis" are extremely complex and require creative and dedicated responses from a variety of actors if they are to be resolved. Some changes - like using the word "refugee" instead of "migrant" and expanding the legal definitions of "refugee" - can be small but impactful. Debunking misinformation spread by dubious "news" sources in the Czech Republic and Slovakia will certainly not reverse anti-refugee sentiments overnight, but the provision of balanced and accurate information to Czechs and Slovaks may be able to provide a foundation upon which re-educative measures tackling historical fears and xenophobia can be addressed. Challenging anti-democratic measures taken by the Hungarian government to manipulate the kinds of information spread its citizens will be particularly challenging and will require a great deal of attention from the EU's legislative and legal entities, but such actions are necessary not only because Viktor Orbán's assault on independent and free press is a threat to the wellbeing of asylum seekers in Hungary, but also because it endangers Hungarian democracy in its entirety.

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