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# Transformation of civil society in the context of political radicalism in eastern Europe

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## Abstract

The aim of the article was to identify the current state of the process of civil society transformation in the context of political radicalism in Eastern Europe. Comparative law and statistical analysis were the main methodological tools. The research showed that the development of political radicalism in Eastern Europe leads to the transformation of civil society. A more persistent and contentious public makes new demands on the political process. It also creates multidimensional tensions and conflicts. Representatives of radicalism gain strong positions in the political environment of society by supporting illiberalism, ethno-nationalism, culture wars and alternative knowledge. The process of merging militant and violent radicalism with family ethnonationalism is ongoing in the countries of Eastern Europe. It is concluded that this phenomenon requires constant implementation of political, legal and security strategies to prevent manifestations of political radicalism. The appropriateness and prospects of the activities of the Radicalization Awareness Network, developed by the European Union, were established.

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**Keywords:** nationalism; xenophobia; extremism; critical level of radicalization; protest culture.

## Transformación de la sociedad civil en el contexto del radicalismo político en Europa del Este

### Resumen

El objetivo del artículo fue identificar el estado actual del proceso de transformación de la sociedad civil en el contexto del radicalismo político en Europa del Este. El derecho comparado y el análisis estadístico fueron las principales herramientas metodológicas. La investigación mostró que el desarrollo del radicalismo político en Europa del Este conduce a la transformación de la sociedad civil. Un público más persistente y contencioso plantea nuevas demandas al proceso político. También crea tensiones y conflictos multidimensionales. Los representantes del radicalismo ganan posiciones fuertes en el entorno político de la sociedad al apoyar el antiliberalismo, el etnonacionalismo, las guerras culturales y el conocimiento alternativo. El proceso de fusión del radicalismo militante y violento con el etnonacionalismo familiar está en curso en los países de Europa del Este. Se concluye que este fenómeno requiere la implementación constante de estrategias políticas, legales y de seguridad para prevenir manifestaciones de radicalismo político. Se establecieron la idoneidad y las perspectivas de las actividades de la Red de Sensibilización sobre la Radicalización, desarrollada por la Unión Europea.

**Palabras clave:** nacionalismo; xenofobia; extremismo; nivel crítico de radicalización; cultura de protesta.

### Introduction

In modern democracies, protest is promoted by the difficulties currently facing political representation, and manifests itself within direct rather than representative democracy. The spread of protest attitudes and behaviour observed in many countries around the world is related to the current climate of widespread distrust of institutionalized and representative mediation in politics.

Recently, there has been a gradual growth of more critical forms of civic consciousness to the detriment of institutional forms of civic and political participation. A more demanding and protest political culture has led to

greater familiarity with a repertoire of protest thoughts and/or actions, as well as increased tendencies toward extremism and radicalization.

In today's world, the use of social media for news has often produced a potentially harmful effect on citizens' understanding of public policy. Social media platforms began to shape public discourse and contribute to a less informed and increasingly fragmented society. Various websites have contributed to a gradual increase in the level of radicalization of users due to the self-organizing nature of online digital content. Besides, there are also trends of decreasing interest in citizen participation, which are characterized by a decreased voter turnout and the eroded activity of civil society.

Civil society acts as a positive mechanism that works within the state and contributes to its development. It becomes politicized amongst a variety of new connections between traditional and non-traditional politics. But instead of working to strengthen and complement liberal political institutions only, civil society is being transformed to spread right-wing populism, radicalism, and xenophobia (Cossa *et al.*, 2021). The studies on civil disobedience emphasize the fragility of the border for the transition to radicalization.

Besides, the crisis caused by the pandemic has affected the citizens-government relationship, raising the ethical question of the privacy compromise in order to effectively restrain and track COVID-19 (Della Croce and Nicole-Berva, 2021). The borders of radicalization have also become more transparent, in particular at the polling stations. Protest voting and disposition to radical parties have become more common among young people than among the older generation.

Socio-psychological features of youth, their superficial and uncritical perception of social life determine the inclination of the representatives of the younger generation to protest-activist methods of raising their own life status (Mukhitov *et al.*, 2022). Confrontation and violence began to be used as a subversive force and affect at least the social system, if not the political one.

In view of the foregoing, the aim of the article is to consider the transformation of civil society in the context of political radicalism in Eastern Europe. The aim involved the following research objectives:

1. summarize the main directions of the development of political radicalism in Eastern Europe;
2. reveal the current state of civil society transformation in the context of political radicalism in Eastern Europe on the example of Ukraine and Poland;

3. consider the state of implementation of political, legal and security strategies to prevent political radicalism.

## 1. Literature review

In the current realities, Central and Eastern Europe is characterized by retreat from democracy, Euroscepticism, the rise of right-wing radical populism and a general authoritarian negative reaction in the entire post-communist space, which pose an open threat to democratic values (Mörner, 2022). The tone of more or less the entire political agenda began to shift toward a more isolationist or protectionist nationalism.

The socio-economic status is the main defining feature of party identity in developed democratic countries. In contrast to Central Europe, relevant cultural factors are dominant in ethnically and religiously heterogeneous societies, which is characteristic of many Eastern European countries (Bushtikova, 2018). Nationalism also plays an important historical role in the eastern region as the motivation of the opposition in the struggle against communist regimes.

Radical tendencies characterize both individual and group attitudes and behaviour, create a whole complex of values and actions, which are expressed in a wide variety of ways. Radical views are realized in the form of values and beliefs, and radical actions imply specific actions in a legal context. These include, in particular, participating in a demonstration or joining a radical organization.

The transformation of civil society under the impact of political radicalism can lead to the emergence of an illegal context, for example, committing acts of violence, causing damage to public or private property, and, as a result, can lead to terrorism (Burchett *et al.*, 2022). It is currently urgent to develop and implement political, legal and security strategies aimed at preventing manifestations of political radicalism remain relevant today.

The choice of the research topic correlates with the modern vectors of the theoretical research in different states. The work (Prislan *et al.*, 2020) became the background and the main tool for the article. In the course of research, the researchers summarized the grounds for defining the concept of civil society, and proposed their own definition. The work (Mörner, 2022) also had an influence on the author's position on the subject under research. The researcher's achievements allowed outlining the research vector of civil society transformations in the context of political radicalism in Eastern Europe.

In turn, the article (Umland, 2020) revealed the essence of the transition from the politics of right-wing parties to an “uncivil” society for the author. The findings (Muxel, 2020) on the dynamics of the development of political radicalism among the younger generation were taken into account during the research. The studies (Mukhitov *et al.*, 2022) on the analysis of the main structural measures to prevent radicalism among young people, as well as on the features underlying violence, communication, and civil disobedience deserve special attention.

The studies of Suraya and Mulyana (2020) used in the article emphasize the influence of digital media on the development of political radicalism among young people. The research (Burchett *et al.*, 2022) that focuses on the need to introduce innovative means of legislative prevention and combating criminal radicalism is worth noting. These works helped to trace the transformation of the main directions of the innovative approach to the processes of counter-radicalism politics.

The authors outline such relevant vectors as innovativeness (novelty), objectivity, subjectivity, purposefulness, demand, implementation in practice, efficiency. An active study of the problem confirms that the process of transformation of civil society in the context of political radicalism require special attention. It is necessary to continue to improve regulatory and legal initiatives aimed at preventing the development of political radicalism in order to ensure the well-being of civil society.

Therefore, it is urgent to conduct research with due regard to new research criteria.

## **2. Methods**

A qualitative research design of the study with the introduction of a set of practical and theoretical tools contributed to obtaining balanced research results (Figure 1).

The conducted research was based on the research design referred to above and the author’s selection of the sample according to the subject of the article. In particular, forty-eight sources were surveyed and covered in the article.

The authors obtained the research results through the use of particular methodological tools. The research methodology is based on a set of principles, where the principle of the unity of theory and practice is the main one. The research methodology is also based on the principles of historicism and objectivity, a combination of political history and comparative historical approaches. A comprehensive approach was used in the course of the research, and became the methodological background of the research and allowed to comprehensively review the selected issues.

Statistical analysis and comparative law were the main practical methods. These methods were applied to reveal the main indicators of the civil society transformation process. The comparative law allowed forming the author's position on the relationship between the political elite and representatives of political radicalism. This method was used to find common and distinctive features of radical political movements on the territory of Ukraine and Poland. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of statistical data became particularly important in the study for outlining the main vectors of the further development of political radicalism in the context of existing social trends.

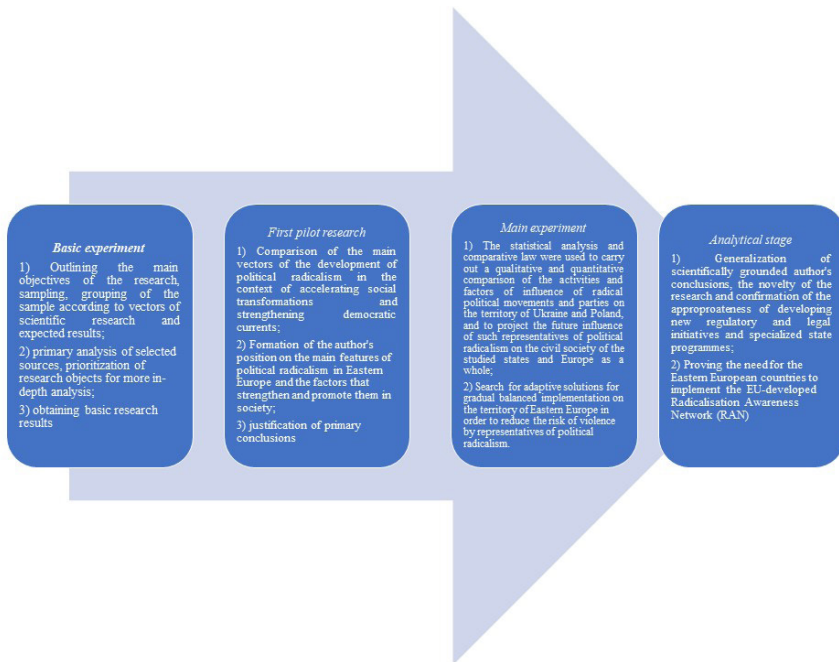


Figure 1: Research design

The historical genetic method was used to fulfil the research objectives and reveal the specifics of the development of political radicalism in the territory of Eastern Europe. The methodological tools referred to above also allowed tracing the dynamics of the development of political radicalism in relation to the changing internal political situation. The method of comparative politics turned out to be useful for considering different approaches of representatives of variable types of political radicalism to transformational social processes. A universal model of political risk

management in the activities of representatives of political radicalism was built by applying modelling of political processes.

### 3. Results

Political radicalism conveys a message about certain deviations in the socio-political environment and ensures the removal of social tension due to the release of accumulated discontent. It also exerts pressure on existing political institutions, the processes of preparation, adoption and implementation of political decisions, adjusts the political course. Violence can be part of a political strategy aimed at radical change in society or the destruction of its institutions (revolution, terrorism). The political radicalism is characterized by many-sided dispositions, forms of expression and action, the interpretation of which depends on the socio-historical and political context.

The political radicalism is institutionalized as a result of the emergence and spread of the influence of groups, movements, parties, and individual politically active individuals in a society. Left-wing and right-wing radicalism can be called the main types of radicalism (Figure 2).

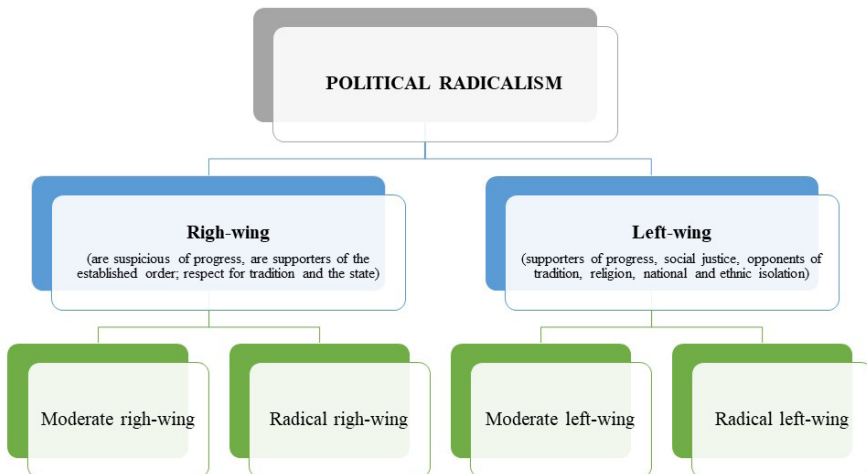


Figure 2: Typology of political radicalism in modern realities

The subject of political radicals' aggression are particular politicians and statesmen with whom social deformations are associated. Radical social



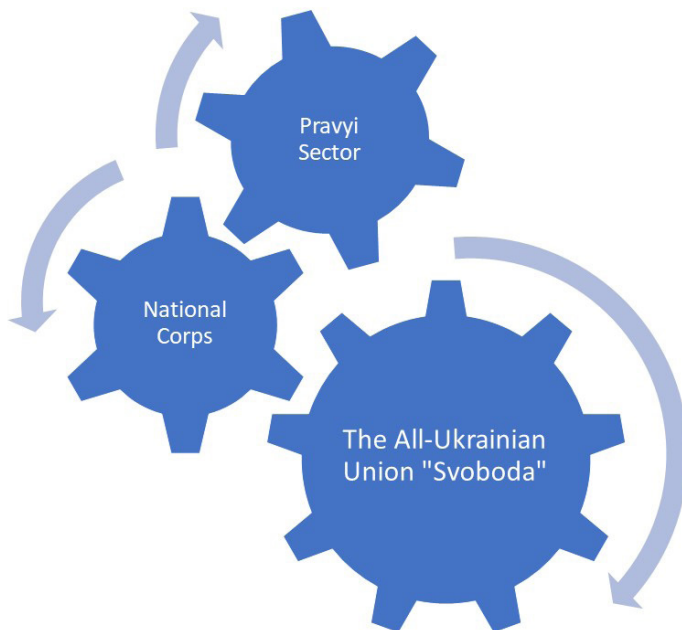
changes necessitated by the respective communities must take place by the redistribution of power through the legal or violent removal of political opponents. While the far right is inherently anti-democratic and, in some cases, legitimizes the use of violence to achieve its political goals, the radical right opposes liberal aspects of democracy (such as minority rights) and does not encourage the use of violence.

Radical right-wing parties declare against cultural values, social equality and socio-political structures of modern Western democracies, in addition to destroying their basis; advocate ethnic homogeneity in society. Their activity is also characterized by an orientation towards neoliberal economy, protection of every citizen of society from corruption and arbitrariness of state institutions. Such parties are usually headed by a charismatic leader. Centralized and hierarchically organized associations are a fundamental characteristic, which often use populism as a way of obtaining votes.

The far-right parties of Eastern Europe reflect this trend in view of the diversity of Eastern European countries in terms of ethnic heterogeneity, economic performance, and cultural heritage. Ethnicity and language create divisions that structure far-right politics in some countries, such as Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Estonia and Latvia. At the same time, ethnic divisions are less pronounced and right-wing radical politics focus either on anti-Roma mobilization or on social and religious issues linked to specific party systems in more ethnically homogenous countries, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland.

The division of parties into left-wing, centrist, and radical right-wing parties in Ukraine is characterized by political distribution based on language and culture. In 2019, a chronic deficit of trust in power institutions, current political parties and politicians facilitated the rise of the activity of political radicalism in Ukraine. More than 80% of respondents did not trust the President, the Verkhovna Rada, the Government and the political machinery. At the same time, only about 10% of respondents trusted political parties, while 80% did not (Razumkov Center Project, 2020). The radicalization of public attitudes in Ukraine is reflected in electoral preferences. The result of the elections of the respective parties is the implementation of a particular state policy and legislative regulation.

All Ukrainian radical nationalists are characterized by an ethnic interpretation of the nation, the desire to create a mono-ethnic Ukrainian state, a negative attitude towards Russia and Russians, and anti-communism.



**Figure 3: Ultra-right radical parties of Ukraine**

After the 2014 Ukrainian Euromaidan revolution and subsequent Russian aggression, nationalist views and groups gained considerable legitimacy in society at large. However, they never (except for the parliamentary elections of 2012) achieve significant success in the elections to the Verkhovna Rada. The parties National Corps, Svoboda (Freedom), Pravyi Sector, veterans and public organizations took part in the extraordinary parliamentary elections of 2019 as part of the United Nationalist Bloc.

In the 2019 parliamentary elections, the All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” received only 2.15% of the votes, thereby failing to pass the threshold. However, in November 2020, according to surveys of respondents, 2.5% of voters would vote for this party (Razumkov Center Project, 2020).

The rating of the All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” in the elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine among the age groups of the population was the following: 18-29 years — 1.6%, 30-39 years — 1.5%, 40-49 years — 2.1%, 50-59 years — 2.1%, 60 years and older — 2.5% (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, 2019). According to the results of regular elections for 2010-2020, the representation of the All-Ukrainian Union “Svoboda” in

local councils of all levels was: 2010 — 1.01%, 2015 — 1.32%, 2020 — 2.11% (Razumkov Center Project, 2020). According to sociological research, the national-radical trend most corresponded to the beliefs of citizens in 2020 in the following regions of Ukraine: west — 3.8%, centre — 3.8%, south — 0.8%, east — 1.7% (Razumkov Center Project, 2020). The main problem of Ukrainian right-wing radicals is the absence of the dominant need of the majority of Ukrainian citizens for extremely nationalist ideology, rhetoric and politics.

Pravyi Sector was initially an informal association of activists of a number of Ukrainian nationalist far-right organizations, which was formed during the protest actions in Kyiv (December 2013 - February 2014). In 2014, Pravyi Sector was transformed into a political party based on the legal and personnel background of the (the Ukrainian National Assembly — UNA) and a paramilitary wing (Ukrainian People's Self-Defence — UNSO) party.

The military wing of the movement is the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps (leader O. Stempitkyi), the political wing is Pravyi Sector party (O. Tarasenko). There is also a certain youth movement — Prava Youth. The party primarily adheres to “street politics”, while parliamentary politics is secondary. Cooperation with Ukrainian communities occupies a special place in its struggle. For the national liberation movement, Pravyi Sector is a means of carrying out nationalist revolutionary transformations both in society and in the state in general.

The Azov unit was originally formed as a volunteer group in May 2014 from the ultra-nationalist association Patriot of Ukraine and the neo-Nazi group Social National Assembly (SNA). The unit was headed by A. Biletskyi, who managed both Patriot of Ukraine (founded in 2005) and SNA (founded in 2008). After recapturing the strategically important port city of Mariupol from pro-Russian separatists on November 12, 2014, this unit was officially included in the National Guard of Ukraine and received high praise from the then President of Ukraine P. Poroshenko.

In 2016, A. Biletsky created the far-right National Corps party, with the core made up by Azov veterans. The unit received support from Ukraine's Interior Minister in 2014, as the government recognized that its own armed forces were too weak to fight pro-Russian separatists and relied on militarized volunteer units. A significant part of the population associates them with the struggle for independence, not with a radical ethnocentric or xenophobic ideology.

In 2016, the Azov Regiment was accused of violating international humanitarian law (United Nations, 2016). The UN report described incidents between November 2015 and February 2016 in which Azov used its weapons and forces and evicted residents from buildings after pillage of civilian property.

The unit was also accused of raping and torturing citizens detained in Donbas. In January 2018, Azov deployed its street patrol called the National Guard to “bring order” in Kyiv. Instead, the unit organized pogroms against the Roma community and attacked representatives of the LGBT community.

In 2018, the Israeli government’s annual report on anti-Semitism (Liphshiz, 2018) covered Ukraine extensively as having more incidents than all post-Soviet states combined. According to the Facebook’s policy on dangerous individuals and organizations, Azov was banned from its platforms in 2019. Facebook classified this group as a Tier 1 category, which includes groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and ISIS. Users glorifying, supporting or representing Tier 1 groups were also banned (Cacciatore *et al.*, 2018).

The National Corps platform advocates the political system of naciocracy, which defines nationalism as the main goal of the state. The wing supports a number of far-right and ultra-nationalist political positions, and also supports Ukraine’s return of nuclear weapons. Outside of Ukraine, Azov plays a central role in a network of extremist groups from California through Europe to New Zealand. More than 17,000 foreign fighters from 50 countries have arrived in Ukraine over the past six years.

On February 24, 2022, Russian troops invaded Ukraine. Demilitarization and de-Nazification of Ukraine, protecting people from Nazism and genocide by the Ukrainian government was declared by the Russian Federation as the purpose of the so-called “special operation”. Combat units clashed with fighters of the Azov Regiment in Mariupol, Kyiv, Kharkiv and other settlements. On February 24, 2022, after Russia began its invasion, Facebook lifted its ban, saying it would allow expressing oneself about Azov, supporting their role in the defence of Ukraine, or service in the Ukrainian National Guard.

In Ukraine, one can observe the presence of a number of “non-civilian” organizations — far-right radical movements and groups. The representatives of informal groups are politicized due to the rapprochement with the associations of political radicals and the gradual saturation of the consciousness of informal youth with politicized ideas. The activities of such organizations began to be based on radical fragments of various political and ideological doctrines. Their composition varies from several dozen to several hundred participants.

For the most part, they are not interested in the electoral political process, but are known for aggressive statements and illegal activities. The examples include: Bratstvo (Brotherhood), S-14, Karpatska Sich, Tradition and Order, National Resistance, Edelweiss, Municipal Guard, Centuria, Freikorps, Unknown Patriot, Demsokyra, Sokil, Ukrainskyi Stiah, etc. The period of 2020-2021 was characterized by a decentralized but organized

rise in political street violence in Ukraine (Marker, 2021; Marker, 2022). Statistics are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Recorded cases of political street violence in Ukraine for 2020-2021**

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>
Illegal activities of far-right radical movements and groups (including unidentified ones) – total number	119	177
Including cases of confrontation	38	89
Including the total number of cases of violence	81	88
Including are cases of violence against people	66 (106 people were injured, including 18 law enforcement officers)	58 (83 people were injured, including 29 law enforcement officers)

In turn, Table 2 shows the participation of the most prominent far-right parties, organizations, groups or their individual representatives in illegal activities committed in 2020 (Marker, 2021).

**Table 2. Recorded cases of involvement of far-right parties, organizations, groups or their individual representatives in illegal activities in 2020 on the territory of Ukraine**

	<b>The total number of recorded cases</b>	<b>Including violent illegal acts</b>	<b>Including violent illegal acts with victims</b>
<b>National Corps</b>	23	16	15
<b>Tradition and Order</b>	17	10	9
<b>Azov</b>	4	4	4
<b>National Resistance</b>	4	4	3
<b>Pravyi Sector</b>	4	3	3
<b>Edelweiss</b>	4	2	2
<b>S-14</b>	4	2	2

In 2021, the following far-right parties, organizations, groups or their individual representatives were detected in illegal activities the most – National Corps, S-14, Tradition and Order, National Resistance, Brotherhood, Ukrainyski Stiah (Marker, 2022). After 2014, far-right radicals in Ukraine maintained or partially expanded their contacts with relevant groups in Eastern and Central Europe (Poland, the Baltic states, Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, Belarus, Slovenia, Macedonia).

This activity evidences the transnational nature of their activities. The main branch of Azov engaged in international affairs is a branch of the movement called Intermarium Support Group. This group became a means of communication between the Ukrainian right-wing and radical nationalists from the Eastern European countries. Current Eastern European far-right discourses seek to establish a separate civilizational predominance in Eastern and Central Europe that will differ from both the liberal EU and authoritarian Russia.

A new concept of a multinational economic and defence bloc between the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic seas is being proposed, which will challenge both the pluralistic West and imperial Eurasia. In recent years, Intermarium conferences have gathered representatives and participants from 13 countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Prevention of political radicalization of civil society, which can lead to extremism, is one of the main directions of state policy on ensuring national security of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2018). According to the results of a representative sociological study “Youth of Ukraine – 2018» (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 579, 2021), 56% of youth in Ukraine do not know, are not interested, and do not show a desire and interest in participating in public life.

A total of 27.3% of young people were informed about certain forms of participation, know about various participation tools, hesitate and do not use them; 16.7% of young people participate in social life in one way or another. As of 2018, 71% of young people believed that the country needs radical changes (Sociological Group Rating, 2018).

The elimination of the causes for various forms of deviant behaviour should be the priority direction of preventing manifestations of political radicalism. In this sense, 2021 became a turning point in the formation and implementation of youth policy (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2021). The goal, tasks, basic principles, directions and mechanisms of implementing youth policy in Ukraine were determined. Figure 4 outlines the main priorities of the 2030 National Youth Strategy (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine, 2021).



**Figure 4: The main vectors of the 2030 National Youth Strategy of Ukraine**

The State Target Social Programme “Youth of Ukraine” for 2021–2025 (CMU Resolution No. 579, 2021) provides for the use of conceptually updated approaches and the use of a wide range of innovative mechanisms and tools for working with young people. The implementation of this programme is based on the implementation of the recommendations of the Council of Europe, the youth sector of the Council of Ukraine and international experts, the youth sector of the Council of Europe, the use of the experience of youth work in the EU countries, and the UN recommendations on supporting young citizens in all spheres of life.

Joint networks and practices involving the integration of civil society organizations and government programmes are considered the most effective in countering political radicalization. The active participation of youth in building youth policy and the implementation of youth work is ensured through various forms of their involvement, in particular through the development of youth councils and associations (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2021a). At the regional level, for example, in the Zaporizhzhia region in 2021, young people took an active part in the preparation of the main document of youth policy – the Youth of the Zaporizhzhia Region Programme for 2022-2026.



The Eastern European democratic system is regressing towards illiberal authoritarianism. Far-right parties are the main reason for this phenomenon. Far-right parties mainly participate in the political process, promoting nationalism and rejection of European integration as their prerogative. From Slovenia to Estonia, the far-right parties that exist in all the countries of Eastern Europe, are directing their efforts to achieve partnerships in ruling coalitions. The radical right-wing parties of Eastern Europe are primarily supporters of ethnic nationalism and xenophobia.

The nationalist profile emphasizes the interests of the indigenous population, the racial and cultural homogeneity of the country, opposing cultural minorities. All of them without exception usually represent policies aimed at combating migration and refugees. Besides, they also often adhere to authoritarian values that promote the existing social order while opposing progressive cultural changes such as feminism and LGBT rights. Euroscepticism is another ideology. Most of the radical right-wing parties are considered Europhobes who simply disregard European integration in general.

The sources that allowed right-wing radical parties to expand their dominance in Poland were an unstable system of political parties and a pessimistic view of socio-economic factors. The Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) party, which became the first far-right ruling party in Eastern Europe, reorganized the domestic political process into an illiberal authoritarian system after coming to power. The Prawo i Sprawiedliwość party strongly advocates a restrictive immigration policy and supports the religious principles of Catholicism in politics without separation from the state.

Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość, known as Konfederacja, which is a radical right-wing political party, won 6.81% of votes in the 2019 parliamentary elections in Poland. The Konfederacja's supporters routinely blame Jews in the online media for allegedly creating and spreading the COVID-19 pandemic. Konfederacja uses various conspiracy theories, social and economic fears of the people in its propaganda. At the same time, it positions itself as a respectable and "caring" political party that protects the interests of Polish families and Polish youth.

Many right-wing nationalist and right-wing radical organizations and parties appeared in Poland in the 1990's. All of them advocated the priority of Polish national interests and Polish sovereignty and denied pan-European unification. A number of right-wing radical formations were neo-fascist and neo-Nazi organizations.

They included, for example, the Nationalist Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe, SN), the All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska, MW), the National Revival of Poland (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski, NOP), and the



National Party (Szczerebiec). They gradually built up their social bases and networks at the local, regional, national and international levels over a long period of time. They have reached a wider circle of young people by focusing on new Internet communications and social networks.

For example, the All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska, MW) is a nationalist youth organization known for its radicalism in the form of anti-Semitism, opposition to abortion, feminism, LGBT rights, and the EU. It belongs to two interconnected Polish far-right ultra-nationalist youth organizations with a Catholic-nationalist philosophy.

Their agenda shows that the goal is to educate Polish youth in a Catholic and patriotic spirit. The Polish National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR) refers to at least three groups that are fascist, far-right, and ultra-nationalist Polish organizations with doctrines derived from World War II nationalist ideology. The current manifestation, revived in 1993, is a far-right movement in Poland, very similar to its historical predecessors.

It is often called fascist, sometimes neo-Nazi. Since 2012, the organization has been registered as an association of common interests. The ONR considers itself an ideological descendant of the National Radical Camp of the 1930's, an ultra-nationalist, patriotic and anti-Semitic political movement that existed in the Second Polish Republic before World War II. ONR regularly participates in the festive march in honour of Independence Day, which is organized by ONR together with Młodzież Wszechpolska.

In June 2021, more than 160 public figures supported an open letter to the Minister of Culture of Poland calling for an “end to the funding of fascism” after far-right groups received more than PLN 3 million (€660,000) in grants from the state-run Patriotic Fund. The organizers of Marsz Niepodległości (the March for Independence), an annual event started by the ONR, and Straż Narodowa (the National Guard), which aims to revolutionize the fight against far-left activists will receive the money. In 2022, Polish Prosecutor's rejected requests to ban ONR after a four-year investigation. It was stated that there was no evidence of gross or systematic violations of the law by the organization.

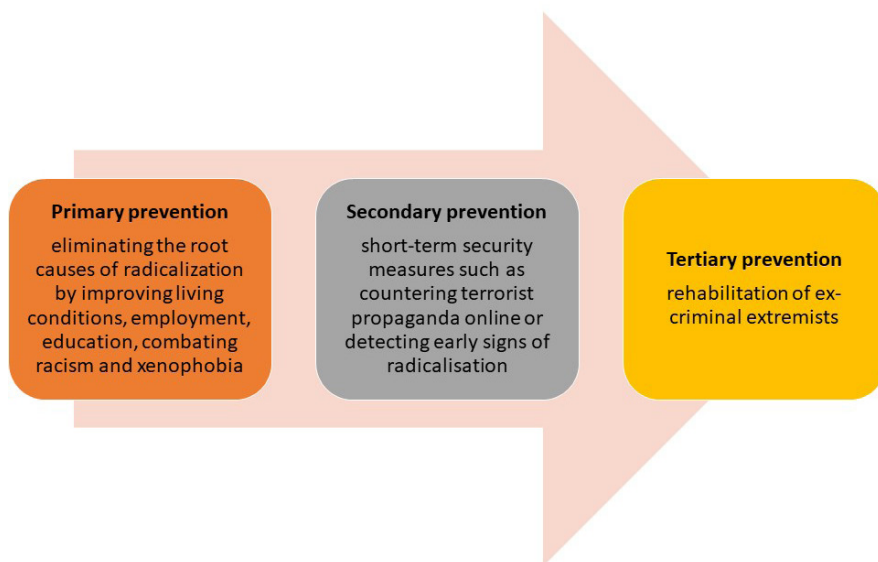
The events that took place in Poland after the Archbishop of Krakow, M. Jędraszewski, delivered a sermon on August 1, 2019 strongly condemning the activities of the LGBT community can be an example of the transformation of civil society. A 15-year-old Pole, J. Baryła, blocked an LGBT parade in August of the same year in the city of Płock, standing in the street with a crucifix wrapped in a rosary above his head (Nussman, 2019).

The teenager became a hero in radical Catholic, ethno-nationalist circles for trying to stop the LGBT march. The actions of J. Baryła became the focus of the struggle that is taking place both in Poland and in the Catholic

Church, between LGBT ideology and the Catholic faith. Later, in an interview on the YouTube channel, J. Baryła accused the left-wing parties of spreading LGBT ideology, Jews — of brainwashing children in Polish schools, Marshal J. Piłsudski — of killing hundreds of thousands of Poles.

This interview was viewed by 48,802 thousand people in a short period of time. This example demonstrates how the symbols and values of specific radical far-right groups in one national context move geographically in the global Internet space and receive support in another far-right national context.

Preventing radicalization is a core component of the EU's holistic approach to counter-terrorism. Figure 5 illustrates preventive actions that offer a wide range of solutions to different aspects of this problem.



**Figure 5: Preventive measures against terrorism on the territory of the EU in the context of political radicalism**

The Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) is one of the EU's flagship initiatives. The purpose of this transnational network is to bring together practitioners from all member states and beyond, such as prison guards, teachers, social workers, psychologists or communication specialists, to share experiences and knowledge. Activities organized through RAN are based on the provision of specific resources/guides such as handbooks,

toolkits. The structure of the organization comprises nine thematic working groups: Communications and Narratives (RAN C&N), Youth and Education (RAN Y&E), Rehabilitation (RAN Rehabilitation), Local Authorities (RAN Local), Prisons (RAN Prisons), Police and Law Enforcement (RAN POL), Victims/Survivors of Terrorism (RAN VoT), Mental Health (RAN Health), Families, Communities and Social Care (RAN FC&S).

On December 4, 2018, the Council of Europe adopted a resolution on a new Youth Strategy (European Commission, 2018). It identifies the needs and respond to the challenges that young Europeans face. The goals set for 2019-2027 include supporting the personal development of young people and developing the life skills they need to cope with a changing world. Particular attention is paid to encouraging young people to be active supporters of solidarity and change, inspired by European values and identity. One of the main goals is also the elimination of poverty and all forms of discrimination against young people, promotion of the policy of social integration of young people.

In 2013, Poland adopted the National Strategy of Regional Development 2030 with the aim, in particular, of stimulating the mechanisms of youth participation in social and political life and stimulating civic activity. An example of the development of the civic activity of the young generation can be the effective cooperation of the youth of 50 member states of the European Cultural Convention (including Ukraine and Poland) in the joint management of the Council of Europe, which includes the European Steering Committee for Youth as the governing element.

#### **4. Discussion**

Representative democracy is in crisis, and support for illiberal options for democracy and authoritarianism has become more popular than ever (Casal Bértoa and Rama, 2021). The transformation of civil society towards civil disobedience in the context of political radicalism always entails a deliberate violation of the law (Smaznova, 2021). The relevant actions are taken in order to convey the need for any legal or political changes to a wide audience, in particular, public authorities and the general public.

The reason for this behaviour is the desire to achieve the necessary changes in the shortest possible period (Baluta, 2018). Although violent protests are outside the scope of institutionalized politics, they originate in the actors' political consciousness (Muxel, 2020). The researcher notes that the growth of protest attitudes and behaviour in many countries (especially among the younger generation) is related to the existing climate of widespread distrust of institutionalized and representative mediation in politics.

The accountability mechanism through which citizen input can influence government actions is a strength of democracy. Otherwise, the problems of failure of the principal and agent, rent-seeking, outright corruption, etc. reduce effective management to meeting the needs of not all citizens (Desrues and Gobe, 2021). Citizens cannot be passive under such circumstances, and increased citizen participation in activities that challenge elites can improve the functioning of government, which can be a boon for modern democracies.

However, citizen participation in protests is more typical of rich democracies than of developing ones (Sadovskava *et al.*, 2019). Scholars emphasize that the authorities may seek to suppress protests as a threat to the new regime in countries with developing democracies, as a result some protests may have an anti-systemic purpose.

It is necessary to continuously implement measures to prevent manifestations of social radicalization in order to combat them. Special attention should be paid to the principle of democracy, openness and broad public participation. The future success of civil society and community engagement in counter-radicalization depends to a large extent on governments and law enforcement agencies and their willingness to change their attitudes and working methods, as well as to take into account the proposals of non-government actors and respond to their needs. This should be achieved through a change in mentality, work methods and adequate support (Prislan *et al.*, 2020).

Political knowledge is a powerful antidote for mitigating uncivilized behaviour in public discussion of collective grievances. Researchers emphasize that a clear understanding of the consequences of the spread of news in social networks is necessary in the context of the growth of global political polarization and radicalization – the illegal protest behaviour of citizens.

The process of preventing youth radicalism will be effective in case the process of youth socialization is managed (Mukhitov *et al.*, 2022). The educational institutions should continuously raise awareness of digital media literacy, especially Internet safety literacy, in adolescents and youth aged 12 to 20 years in order to prevent manifestations of radicalism (Suraya and Mulyana, 2020).

The ideological and political influence of Ukrainian far-right nationalists is more significant than one might assume, relying on their electoral support only (Rabotyzhev, 2020). The Azov movement managed to create a multidimensional and distinctly modern identity, which is attractive to part of the Ukrainian youth and has no regional limitations, unlike the predominantly Western Ukrainian support for Svoboda (Umland, 2020).

According to the researcher, the political and “non-civilian” branches of the Azov Regiment can become the most long-term right-wing extremist threat to the Ukrainian state. The development and application of a set of preventive measures of educational, socio-cultural, informational and psychological influence on the youth environment of Ukraine remains an urgent problem in the field of preventing and countering manifestations of radicalism (Vasilchuk, 2016).

### **Conclusions**

Radical right-wing parties maintain their power in Eastern European politics by taking advantage of the current political, economic and social disorder. They propose an idea based on traditional values such as family, Christianity and nation. The focus of representatives of right-wing radicalism is a person, not a group. Motivation is most often related to general discontent, and ideology is related to key issues of electoral politics.

The right-wing radical parties of Eastern Europe declared a course for a cultural counter-revolution aimed at the permanent marginalization of liberal-democratic elites, their civil society and their pluralistic, liberal democratic values. Right-wing radical Ukrainian political organizations such as Svoboda, Pravyi Sector and the National Corps, the Polish Nationalist Party, the All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska), and the National Revival of Poland (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski) are also considered extremist political entities, which follows from their ideology and activities. This indicates a departure from democracy in Eastern Europe.

The gradual transformation of associations of political radicals into special politicized subcultures with their own aesthetic preferences, values, internal ethics, logic and principles of relationships within their own communities are a characteristic feature of the development of political radicalism in Eastern Europe.

The right-wing radical symbols and discourses in the political, social and cultural life of citizens is a source of misinformation at all levels, including formal and informal organizations. This can contribute to a false cognitive and moral perception of reality by representatives of civil society. The transnational ties of the far right in Eastern Europe are directly dependent on social media. In this case, the use of the Internet contributes to the change and development of the necessary public opinion. Radical right-wing parties and organizations carefully adjust their communication strategies in order to expand their own influence, relying on the interest of the younger generation.

Radical political demands become a convenient excuse for representatives of criminal groups to commit various crimes, including seizing property, putting pressure on competitors, settling scores with them through the use of violence, etc. This is why the spread of political radicalism in civil society in Eastern Europe is caused by the difficult social situation of the population.

The crisis of the established mechanisms of socialization, adaptation and upbringing, the weakness of civil society institutions entail legal and cultural deformation of value attitudes and orientations of citizens. Moreover, young people are especially disposed to these changes. The result is a significant increase in the risk of involvement of citizens in illegal activities.

Radicalization is becoming a more serious threat, especially in view of the development of new technologies and the growing use of the Internet and social media. Therefore, overcoming radicalism has a cross-border dimension. However, the fight against radicalization is also strongly decentralized and must rely on the involvement of a wide range of local actors (local authorities, social services, security services, etc.).

The developed relevant regulatory and legal initiatives, as well as specialized state programmes facilitate the prevention of the growth of the radicalization of society in the Eastern European countries. The EU-developed Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) is an example of prevention of radicalization. Relevant experience can be initiated in all Eastern European countries and will require additional study of further adaptive practices.

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