



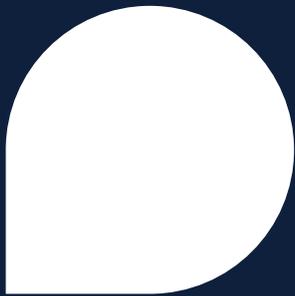
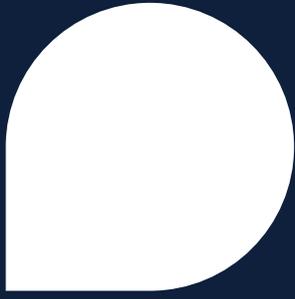
FAR-RIGHT MOVEMENTS AND SYMBOLISM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS: A HANDBOOK

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1. Preface

Echoing a worldwide trend, the Western Balkan 'far-right' is becoming more visible, bold, and cohesive. These groups, aided by the internet, proudly display their ideological messages of hatred across their 'territory' through a variety of public manifestations: symbols on flags, insignia, memes or messages, and images spray painted on walls. A complex series of coded symbols and terms evolved, which, to the uninitiated, are easy to ignore or misunderstand. This has happened in part because the traditional symbols of the far right, such as the Swastika, are outlawed and their usage sanctioned. Now emboldened by the political climate, these symbols and slogans are emerging in the public space (alongside older, already banned symbols).

This handbook serves as a guide to recognizing and understanding the far-right symbols used in the Western Balkans.

This document presents the results of our preliminary research, carried out with the aim of mapping the illustrative landscape of far-right symbols in the Western Balkans. This topic has not been extensively researched, thus this publication represents one of the first attempts at identifying and explaining symbolism used by far-right groups, both in the Western Balkans and elsewhere. The far-right and its symbology are becoming increasingly transnational.

This handbook is written primarily for researchers, journalists, and security services in order to provide insight and enable the identification of far-right actors. The list of symbols presented in this Handbook are the most common, though it is not exhaustive.



2. Executive Summary

This briefing provides an overview of common symbolism and language used by supporters of the far-right and extreme right wing in the Western Balkans (WB), namely, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia), Croatia and Serbia.

The images and slogans included below provide a snapshot of the symbolic tropes popular amidst the far-right groups.

This report demonstrates that sentiments recognised as being “far-right,” or at least bearing much in common with the “far-right,” is common across the Western Balkans, concentrated amidst nationalist groupings in Croatia, Serbia, north Kosovo, areas in Bosnia where Bosnian Croats are dominant, and Bosnia’s second entity, the Bosnian-Serb dominated Republika Srpska.

Croatian far-right nationalism (found in Croatia and Bosnian-Croat regions of Bosnia) is perhaps the most easily recognisable as “far-right”, drawing much from Nazism and Islamophobia, and with an extra element of Serb-hatred.

Serbian nationalism (found in Serbia and Bosnian-Serb dominated regions of Bosnia) is rooted in anti-Ottoman narratives and victimhood, with an element of anti-Muslim and Albanian hatred.

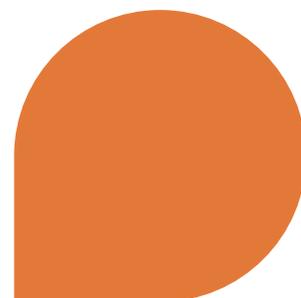
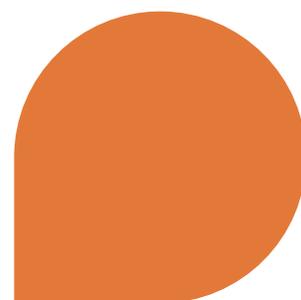
Much of this far-right sentiment is transmitted via graffiti, murals, popular and traditional music, social, political, and academic discourses. This is most notable in the behaviour of football fan groups, commonly known as ‘Ultras’.

Local governments have been slow, and indeed unwilling, to outlaw these expressions of nationalism, partly, we suspect, out of sympathy with their sentiments. Where laws do exist, they are rarely fully enforced.

The transmission and transfer of ideas and symbols is greatly aided by social media. It is through social media networks that local far right groups are reaching out and building ideological and practical connections. Tracking and assessing this growth is difficult, as is deciphering the discourse in general, as it is transmitted primarily through coded language and memes in particular.

These far-right groups frequently receive institutional support (of a discreet kind) from both the Catholic and Serb orthodox churches.

Previous analyses of the region have focused on the threat posed by Muslim extremists. This report should help readers and researchers to understand that while signs of Muslim extremism are still present, it is the local Far-Right movements who provide the region’s greatest source of security threats.



3. Introduction

The phrase "Far-Right" in the Western Balkans (WB) is a complex one to unpack. The generic understanding of the phrase, *prima facie*, is taken to imply connections with, or emerging from, fascism, Nazism, Hitler, etc. While this framework is too simplistic to be applied across the region, there are certain growing commonalities between far-right movements across the WB and the rest of Europe and America.

There are two main far-right groupings in the region. The easiest to understand conceptually is the Croatian / Bosnian-Croatian far-right, which has its roots in the Croatian, Nazi-allied Ustasha movement that dominated much of present-day Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and parts of Serbia. Their brutality, which even the SS found distasteful, was aimed primarily at the region's Serbs, but they were equally efficient and eager killers of Roma and local Jews. The Yugoslav authorities, who ruled the region following WWII, failed to deal with the legacy of these killings. Thus, resentment persisted locally, serving as a driver for the conflict that erupted in the 90's, breaking the region apart. Croatian nationalists reprised the symbols, language and much of the ideology used by the Ustasha. Entire units celebrating this WWII heritage existed in Croatia's regular armed forces. There was, for example, a unit named after Ustasha leader, Jure Francetić, who was responsible for the massacres of Serbs and Jews in Bosnia during WWII. Again, they directed much of their violence against the Serbs who remained in Croatia, and Bosniaks in Bosnia. With the end of the war, Croatia began its path towards Europe, and at moments seemed to be trying to deal with the past. Despite this, the popularity of the far-right and its symbolism did not, and has not, died away fully. Evidence for this remains in the widespread graffiti across Croatia and parts of Bosnia, chants at football matches, the popularity of nationalist singers and songs, and the rhetoric of some of the more extreme politicians.

The second far-right grouping, found in Serbia and Serb-dominated areas of Bosnia, does not have as clear of a far-right heritage, and does not draw direct inspiration from Nazism and fascism. The Serbian

far-right is best defined as primarily anti-Croat/Catholic, anti-Muslim, anti-Western, pro-Orthodox-nationalist, and pro-Russian. The anti-Croatian sentiment arises from the Ustasha legacy of WWII. One central ideological pillar is the fixation on the issue of Kosovo, over which many Serbs believe that they have a spiritual and ancestral claim. The other is the belief that areas of Bosnia (and to a certain extent, Croatia) also belong to Serbia. Given that these areas, Kosovo, and large parts of Bosnia, are inhabited in part by Muslims, anti-Muslim sentiment, which draws inspiration from old resentments felt towards the Ottoman empire (which occupied the region), is a key ingredient of the Serbian "far-right." This manifested itself at several moments throughout Serbian history, for example in old poetry and songs that have remained popular throughout the ages. More modern examples are found in the conduct of the Serb nationalist guerrilla bands (known as Chetniks) who massacred Bosniaks living in Montenegro, south Serbia, and eastern Bosnia en-masse during WWII. These massacres repeated themselves in the last war, culminating in the genocide in Srebrenica. The symbology of this hatred, found in (again), graffiti, murals, songs, literature, and academic and political discourse, has been consistently present. Contemporary Serbian "far-right" nationalism remains a complex mix of historical grievances, most of them imagined, few of which coincide with the traditional values of the European and American "far-right." There has been, of late, a conscious effort made by the members of the various groups to draw closer to each other. Islamophobia is one of those points around which the global far-right is able to coalesce.

Within the WB's other majority population, the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), very little sentiment that we might recognise as 'far-right' seems to exist. Much external concern has been directed towards possible Muslim extremism within the region's Muslim populace - and there have been limited examples of this - but in general, there is no form of extremism that we might understand as being similar to that of the far-right. The external focus on, and scaremongering about, radical, violent extremism is

rather a product of the narratives generated by the far-right groupings in Serbia, Croatia and their 'cousins' in Bosnia, who frequently seek to justify - both internally and internationally - their own extremism by constructing an enemy.

4. Methodology

The researchers' objective was to identify and map the major far-right movements that exist in BiH today, to highlight their engagement with historical revisionism and genocide denial, and to highlight the growing connections with the Global Far-Right. One of the best ways to do this was by analysing the symbology displayed online, and in the real world in the form of flags, tifos (football fan club displays), and graffiti. Following that, the next step was to generate a series of recommendations for stakeholders to begin to counter this phenomenon.

4.1 Selection Process

Why choose Graffiti as an object of analysis? The walls of towns, villages and cities across the region are covered with graffiti. These expressions of art in the public sphere are more than simple acts of vandalism, they are political and ideological, and therefore require further investigation: *"symbol politics is more about politics than about symbols."*¹

The political function of symbols is to *"provide short cuts to the group they represent"* and are *"by nature referential, subjective and boundary-creating."*² They *"not only represent the general concept "nation," but also condense the knowledge, values, history, and memories associated with one's nation [or group]."*³

Many of these symbols, expressed in graffiti form around the region, might well be dismissed as acts of *banal nationalism*⁴ (a concept formulated by scholar Michael Billig) but it is their boundary-creating

intention that renders the images on the following pages anything but banal. Their purpose is to cause 'symbolic strife'⁵ - and they should certainly not be dismissed.

In the preface, it was observed that far-right symbology has, for the most part, developed in the darker corners of the internet, on forums such as Reddit, but more specifically, 4chan and 8chan. Now they are being used more publicly than ever. In a particularly useful breakdown by Anna Presnall, the reasons for this increased display are that:

1. They [the far right] want to openly announce their support of the group/ideology
2. They want to intimidate,
3. They intend the symbols to be messages to others similar to them.⁶

Presnall further observes that contemporary users of these hate symbols work to ensure their ideologies are recognizable to like-minded people but not to the point that they might be prosecuted or understood by the wider population.

This understanding can also be applied to the western Balkans, with the added caveat that rather than disguising their meanings, the native far-right and the societies within which they move, understand the images intimately - and their display in the public domain is a direct message to society.

Why are graffiti and murals so popular with the far-right as modes of expression? Much of the existing research, most of it from a liberal and left-wing perspective, has focused on the role of the public space, and the public's interaction with it, as indicative of a desire to give expressions to issues deemed important to the groups using them. They are powerful visual indicators of *'cultural conditions, social dynamics, and power structures in a society.'*⁷

While much of the academic research sees this ability to express important issues as inherently positive, in the context of the WB, it often isn't.

¹ Pål Kolstø, 'National Symbols as Signs of Unity and Division', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 4 (July 2006): 676-701, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870600665409>, p34.

² G Elgenius, *Symbols of Nations and Nationalism: Celebrating Nationhood*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2018), <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5598506>. p13

³ David A. Butz, 'National Symbols as Agents of Psychological and Social Change', *Political Psychology* 30, no. 5 (October 2009): 779-804, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2009.00725.x>. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2009.00725.x>Butz.

⁴ A concept formulated by scholar Michael Billig.

⁵ Kolstø, 'National Symbols as Signs of Unity and Division'.

⁶ Anna Presnall, 'Uncovering Hate: Revealing Not-So-Secret Hate Symbols - UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog', UAB Institute for Human Rights Blog, 2 April 2021, <https://sites.uab.edu/humanrights/2021/04/02/uncovering-hate-revealing-not-so-secret-hate-symbols/>.

⁷ Mitja Velikonja, *Post-Socialist Political Graffiti in the Balkans and Central Europe*, *Southeast European Studies* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2020). p4

The far-right graffiti that appears on the walls of WB cities might well be expressions of power, and challenges to other sources of power, but it is often genocidal in its origins and in its messaging.

Another contrast between political graffiti in Western Europe or America and the graffiti found in the Western Balkans is that in the former, it is normally a got-to method of expression and awareness-building by minority groups. In the latter, however, it is indicative of the opinion of the majority, even of the state.

Why do the Far-Right use graffiti specifically? It can be assumed that the Western Balkan Far-Right relies heavily on graffiti to communicate its messages because it is a visible and powerful way to annex and dominate spaces and to serve as either comforting, affirming reminders to the in-group, and a warning to the out-group. Furthermore, materials are cheap and the former Yugoslavia's crumbling socialist architecture provides ample blank spaces upon which to plaster their messages.

Why search online?

As Velikonja highlights, walls, both online and physical, have become interchangeable over the past decade, so understanding the online environment is vital for understanding the physical environment. The growth of social media has facilitated the spread of Far-Right messages and symbols and one of the specificities of this research is its demonstration of the drawing together of the global, online, Far-Right and local Far-Right movements. In an article dealing with Bosnian Far Right Groups, Bethan Johnson, from the Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right, describes the process of online radicalisation, which: *"...largely happens online now through social media, or at least initially on social media, and then increasingly moves from open source, open facing platforms like Facebook or Twitter, Instagram, and moves towards end to end encrypted sites and platforms like Discord and Telegram, among others."*⁸

Following the conceptual efforts of Baele, Brace and Coan, we see the Far-Right online as an 'ecosystem,' an entity made of *"an ever-changing number of different components whose natures and interconnections are in constant evolution."*⁹ Bale et al's approach defines the far-right online ecosystem as comprising four key elements, each corresponding to a level of analysis: **entities, communities, biotopes, and whole network**". The above mean, in brief: an **entity** is a highly individualised unit, a small group or an individual; a **community** is seen as: a group of entities grouped around specific themes, often in reaction to specific local circumstances. Moving up a level, the **Biotope** is said to comprise a limited number of groups defined by a: *"shared ideological, thematic, or cultural sub-identity within the general umbrella of the far-right ecosystem writ large."* The final unit of classification within the Far-Right ecosystem is the "whole network" category, simply meaning, the vast, evolving, and overarching whole network.¹⁰

Adopting such an approach to understanding the online Far-Right means we can adopt the conceptual flexibility needed in approaching such a vast and complicated - but overall highly heterogeneous - network of hatred.

4.2 Selecting and gathering the material

Having established why the choice was made to focus on graffiti and online displays of far-right sentiment, how did we go about gathering images to be included for this report?

What qualifies graffiti / images / text as being far-right - and thus worthy of being included in this report? Often, the graffiti can be explicit in its message, but when it is less so, the decision to include them is based upon previous/innate knowledge drawn from living in the region. Often, it becomes possible to understand the meaning of a symbol from explanations and meanings given to them from the groups who use them. In addition,

⁸ Nermina Kuloglija, 'Ultra-Right Groups Show Their Face in Bosnian Town', Detektor (blog), 12 May 2020, <https://detektor.ba/2020/05/12/desnicarske-i-neonacisticke-organizacije-neometano-isticu-simbole-u-prijedoru/?lang=en>.

⁹ Stephane J. Baele, Lewys Brace, and Travis G. Coan, 'Uncovering the Far-Right Online Ecosystem: An Analytical Framework and Research Agenda', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30 December 2020, 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1862895>.

¹⁰ Ibid

desk research was undertaken to gather existing domestic and international studies, documents, policy, and media reports and analyse them in order to understand broader trends, symbols, and memes within the far-right sphere. The authors also consulted 10 individuals, representatives of key stakeholders, researchers, journalists and academics with specialist knowledge. Following this, the data collection and selection process followed.

Most of the symbols depicted here were first displayed publicly in the form of graffiti or displayed on the internet. From there they were collected in aggregate form by journalistic or other types of reports. Images and symbols were also collected through personal research, by searching known portals and online sites. Finally, some of the images below were photographed en situ by the **author**.

Following this, the recommendations were generated.

5. Definitions: the “Far-Right”.

One final point of clarification is necessary. What do we mean by the phrase “far-right,” given that the context in the WB is, as demonstrated above, slightly different to the rest of Europe, America, etc.?

Much work has been done, over the years, to define the broader concept of the “far-right.” With regard to the Western Balkans, a whole range of different terms are used when discussing this phenomena (including radical right, extreme rights, right-wing extremist, neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, neo-populist, anti-immigrant, ultra-right or far right, new right and right populist).¹¹ For the purposes of this work, building on the previous definitions but developing them a little more to fit the local context, we have adopted the framework outlined by the 2019 UK-govt sponsored “Helpdesk Report,” commissioned and published by the UK Department for International Development (DfID), which characterises the nationalist movements in the Western Balkans to be largely defined by:

- 1) Advocating ethnically based politics.
- 2) Continual reference to the 1990s wars.
- 3) Glorification of war criminals and ethnic cleansing [and genocide] from the 1990s.
- 4) A belief in victimisation.
- 5) A desire to redraw boundaries on ethnic lines.
- 6) Hatred or ‘securitisation’ of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) groups.
- 7) The use of violence.
- 8) Anti-Nato and anti-EU politics.
- 9) Pro-Russian attitudes and links.
- 10) Links with organised crime.¹²

To this list, we add (key elements omitted by the above report):

- 11) Islamophobia (perhaps better defined as anti-Muslim sentiment)
- 12) Genocide Denial

The final consideration is highlighted by Kelly, who notes that “most right-wing groups [in the Western Balkans] advocate some form of border change based on ethnicity.”¹³

Elsewhere throughout the following report, we refer to the “Global Far-Right,” a loosely framed grouping by which we mean all of the Far-Right entities and ecosystems external to the Western Balkans. We also understand this “Global Far-Right” to be loosely connected both in terms of symbols and ideas. We do not mean to imply that the Global Far-Right exists in any supra-institutional or organisational sense (yet).

6. Literature Review

Recently there have been some serious works written on the Far-Right in the Balkans, including Stojarová’s *Far Right in the Balkans*¹⁴ and more recently, Mitja Velikonja’s *Post-Socialist Political Graffiti in the Balkans and Central Europe*¹⁵. They are foundational texts for anyone wishing to dig deeper. The news outlets including Balkan Insight and Istraga, have kept up a constant stream of valuable reportage and analysis of the constant development and growth of the Far-Right in the Western Balkans.

¹¹ Věra Stojarová, *The Far Right in the Balkans* (Manchester University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526112033.p14>.

¹² Luke Kelly, ‘Overview of Research on Far Right Extremism in the Western Balkans’, Helpdesk Report (University of Manchester: K4D Research Helpdesk (Institute of Development Studies), 4 June 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d309f7aed915d2fe9ea6aec/620_Western_Balkans_far_Right.pdf.

¹³ Luke Kelly, ‘Overview of Research on Far Right Extremism in the Western Balkans’, Helpdesk Report (University of Manchester: K4D Research Helpdesk (Institute of Development Studies), 4 June 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d309f7aed915d2fe9ea6aec/620_Western_Balkans_far_Right.pdf p3

¹⁴ Věra Stojarová, *The Far Right in the Balkans* (Manchester University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526112033>.

¹⁵ Mitja Velikonja, *Post-Socialist Political Graffiti in the Balkans and Central Europe* (Routledge, 2019)

Other useful context has been provided by the UK Foreign Office's analyses, published in the form of 'Helpdesk Reports' and the reports written by British Council's Western Balkans Extremism Research Forum.

7. Far-Rights Symbols, Insignia and Graffiti in the Western Balkans

For the sake of simplicity, the following analysis of the Far-Right symbols follows the categories created by the Far-Right themselves. We analyse first the Bosnian/Bosniak Far-Right, second the Croatian Far-Right, and finally the Serbian Far-Right. The latter two have much more to work with than the former. Each section gives a brief overview of local symbols and highlight how these symbols are now being used alongside internationalised Far-Right symbols.

7.1 The Bosnian Far Right

Previously, much of the world's focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina has been held by the spectre of Muslim extremism, which has by and large failed to manifest itself in any serious form. In the meantime, the Far-Right in Serbia, Croatia and the Bosnian-Serb/Bosnian-Croat dominated areas of BiH has thrived. Recently, however, a new, small counter-movement ecosystem has emerged: the Bosnian Far-Right. Until recently these entities have remained understudied, primarily due to their limited size and scope. Poster campaigns and the sprouting of a series of Facebook pages¹⁶ have prompted the BiH media to examine the phenomenon more closely, bringing the issue to light.

At this point in time, the Bosanski pokret nacionalnog ponosa (the Bosnian Movement of National Pride - BPNP), who operate under the slogan Bog, Bosna, Bosnjaci (God, Bosnia and Bosniaks¹⁷ - BBB), seem to be the primary far-right organisation in Bosnia. The reason for highlighting

them, as opposed to the others is that, based on our research, the BPNP present the most coherent ideology, with (according to their own propaganda) a presence beyond the internet. For the other groups, much of the activism is purely internet-based, mainly on Facebook. Following the BPNP, the two most popular internet-based groups are the BNPP (Bosanski Nacionalni/ Patriotski Pokret - the Bosnian National / Patriotic Movement) and the Pokret Bosanskih Nacionalista (Movement of Bosnian Nationalists), who also go by another moniker: Handzar Pokret, the significance of which is explained later.



¹⁶ On a methodological note, one of the chief difficulties in researching the Far-Right on social media, particularly Facebook, lies in the multiplicity of ways in which organisations can represent themselves: some list themselves as businesses, some as blog-pages, some as NGO's, etc. Further to that, some organisations might run both a Facebook page, and a Facebook blog, and one might have more appeal than the other. Calculating popularity and reach becomes difficult. Secondly, a wide spread of Facebook pages - in this case there were eight - does not indicate widespread support, rather a fragmentation of support for an idea, between a range of different parties, some in competition with each other.

¹⁷ Bošnjak / Bosniak is the endonymic ethonym that describes people closely linked to Bosnia, its culture, history and Islam.

Bosnian Movement of National Pride



Screenshot: BPNP Website – Ancient swastika, carved onto a Stećak – an ancient gravestone, located near Ozren, Sarajevo

Ideology

In comparison to the other Bosnian Far-Right groupings - whose numbers and composition we remain unsure of - the BPNP is by far the most coordinated with the closest thing to a considered ideological position, which is outlined extensively on several pages of their website. Essentially, the group has adopted national socialism (as per the Nazi party) and sought to apply it within the framework of the Bosniak identity. This results in a fairly typical list of beliefs and subsequent commitments:

- 1) Bosnia is primarily for Bosniaks, to be ruled by Bosniaks for the benefit of Bosniaks (the group has an ethnic/racial view of Bosniak identity, rather than religious).
- 2) Bosniak society should be guided by the principles of national socialism (Nazism).
- 3) Immigrants are unwelcome
- 4) Zionism and global Jewry need to be resisted, as does Communism, Multiculturalism and Liberalism. Only traditional Bosniak values (seen as compatible with Nazism) are permitted.

Output

Rather than graffiti, of which we were unable to find any reliable evidence, the group has relied primarily on poster campaigns in Bosnian cities and social media output to highlight their message.

Primarily active until 2019, the BPNP is now seemingly now dormant. Currently, their twitter account boasts only 43 followers, whilst on Facebook, the groupings become more diverse, with several pages claiming to be the page of the Bosnian Far Right. Some of these pages are still active. Here, much content is generated, most of which relies on what is perceived as traditional Bosniak symbolism, but occasionally draws on other Far-Right symbology from further afield.



BPNP Symbol



The following pages give examples of the posters and images the group have created to promote their messages and ideology. Most of these were saved as screenshots from either Facebook, Twitter or other fora. The BPNP's shield, shown to the right features at its centre, the traditional shield of BH, featuring gold Fleur de Lys.



Poster by BPNP „Be Proud of Your Own“ featuring figures key to the Bosnian identity

The next image highlight shows a poster put up by the BPNP in Sarajevo, as part of a campaign urging Bosnians to “Be Proud of their Own.” The picture features images of figures key to the Bosnian identity, including Ban Tvrtko I, Ban Kulin, Queen Katharine of Bosnia and, in the background, Husein-kapetan Gradaščević, an anti-Ottoman Bosniak leader known as Zmaj od Bosne (the Dragon of Bosnia).

Many of the other posters shared online display contemporary political messages that the group wished to express at the time. One of the most interesting posters is to be found freely available to download on the group’s website (indeed they encourage the website’s visitors to download and share) and can be seen on the following page. It serves as a classic example of the marriage of local and international Far-Right imagery.



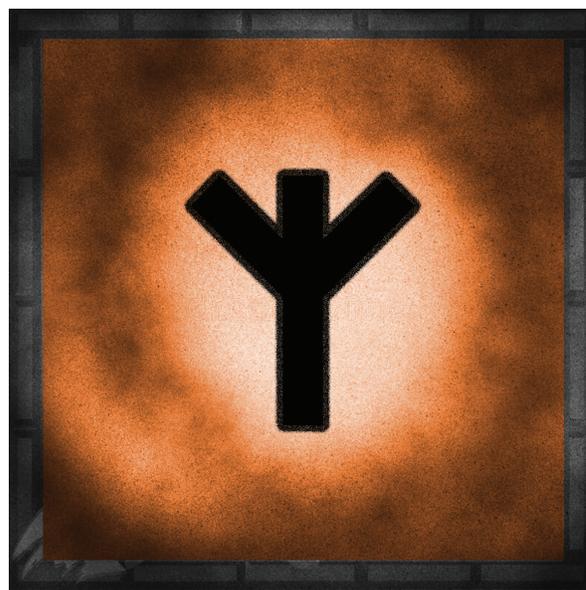
Poster by BPNP „New European: Choose our movement“ and „Avant-garde: Choose the way of the fight“ featuring swastika and SS soldier (Source: <http://bosanskinacionalisti.org/>)

The poster neatly summarises the BPNP’s conflation of Nazi imagery and ideas with Bosnian nationalism. The swastika on the Stećak, the SS soldier, are very clear. The text on the top part of the poster reads: “New European: Choose our movement,” while the text on the bottom reads “Avant-garde: Choose the way of the fight/struggle.” It is unclear what is meant by using the term “Avant-garde” in this context, possibly it indicates the usage of ‘new’ and ‘experimental’ ideas and methods proposed by the BPNP, or perhaps it is used in its original form, the old French term for a military vanguard.

Also worth noting is the usage of the 'Life Rune' (see left) in the bottom right corner, overlaid with the text "Nacionalni Front" (National Front). The Life Rune, more correctly known as the Elhaz, or Elgiz rune is defined by the Anti-Defamation League as a 'hate symbol' and was used extensively within the Nazi movement, which drew heavily on pagan symbolism, to signify honor, nobility, or protection. It was also a key symbol within the SS's Lebensborn project, which encouraged SS troopers to have children out of wedlock with "Aryan" mothers and which kidnapped children of Aryan appearance from the countries of occupied Europe to raise as Germans.¹⁸ Another interesting insight into the BPNP's mindset, but also into the influence that the global far right has on the movement can be seen on the group's 'recommended reading' list which suggests that members of the BPNP read works by a wide-range of fascist, far-right thinkers such as Julius Evola, Kerry Bolton, Guillaume Faye, Houston Stewart Chamberlain and, of course, Hitler. To what extent the BPNP is present and popular in the Bosnian body-politic is hard to judge.

Other examples of the Bosnian Far Right

Whilst the BPNP appears to be the most coordinated of the Far-Right groups in Bosnia, they do not have a monopoly, and there are several other entities



The Black Sun symbol

operating within the Bosnian Far Right ecosystem. These too, borrow heavily from the symbology of the global Far Right. The following, taken from a Bosnian Far Right Facebook group, called Pokret Handzar (which in appearance, looks very similar to the BPNP), creates content such as the following which, once again, marries the localised Far Right images with those of the global Far Right. Apart from the military figure, and the text (top: "Struggle for a better Bosnia." Bottom: "Our last chance."), the two things that stand out are:

- a) The inclusion of the Black Sun symbol, underneath the Bosnian (Kotromanić) Shield.
- b) The name given in the bottom left-hand corner: Pokret Handzar



Poster from a Bosnian Far Right Facebook group „Pokret Handzar“

The Black Sun (in this case in blue) was a symbol used in Nazi Germany, that has remained popular with neo-Nazis, particularly with neo-Nazi satanists. It has been used by the Azov Battalion, Christchurch Mosque shooter Brenton Tarrant, and most recently, by the terrorist responsible for the mass shooting in Buffalo, New York in May 2022. The phrase "Pokret Hanzar" translates roughly to mean "Handzar Movement." During the Nazi occupation of the Balkans during WWII, two divisions were formed, one of which, the 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS (also known as the SS Handschar Division) was comprised mostly of local Muslims and Croats. The division was not a military success, nor did it exist for long. Nevertheless, it seems they continue to serve as a source of inspiration for Bosnian Far Right extremists.

¹⁸ 'Life Rune' (Anti-Defamation League, 20 July 2016), <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/life-rune>.

In terms of graffiti, there is little in the way of material to share. Examples of Bosnian Far Right graffiti have proven to be few and far between, with only isolated examples. The picture below was taken in 2015, in Visoko. The acronym BHF, stands for BH Fanaticos, a group primarily formed to support Bosnian and Herzegovinian sports teams. To the left of the door, the text in yellow and red reads: "We need to castrate you all, so that you don't multiply", whilst to the right of the door, in blue, the text reads: "A dead chetnik is a good chetnik" (Chetnik is a term used to describe Serb nationalists)¹⁹. (ref - NKB)



Far Right graffiti picture taken in 2015 in Visoko

7.2 The Serbian Far-Right

Over the following pages, we refer to the "Serbian Far-Right", a term we use to mean Far-Right entities and groupings found in both Serbia, and Bosnia's Republika Srpska.

It is important to understand that Serb nationalism, to a certain extent, pre-dates what we now define as the Far-Right and traces its roots back to the end of the Ottoman Empire's colonisation of the Western Balkans and the movements to overthrow Ottoman Rule. This nationalism, and the tradition and symbols associated with it, continue to exert power over the Serbian society even today. Many of the tenets of Serb nationalism are naturally cohesive with those of the global Far-Right, and it is there that we see the transfer of ideas and symbols between the Serb/Bosnian Serb ultranationalists, and the global Far-Right.

The Serbian Far-Right is, like the Bosnian Far-Right, a complex mix of seemingly oppositional ideas, all firmly grounded in a very real sense of historical grievance which manifests itself in a loud, proud Far-Right movement that stretches across the Bosnian-Serb dominated regions of Bosnia, all the way down to the Kosovar border.

Much work has been done in researching, defining, and analysing the Serbian Far-Right, especially over the past few years. As of March 2022, there are six far-right political parties operating in Serbia (though most of them have not made into parliament), with a further seven Far-Right groupings operating in the public sphere - and here we can see the great difference between the Bosnian Far-Right and the Serbian Far-Right. Whilst the Bosnian Far Right is limited in scope and size, the Serbian Far Right is a different beast; not only is much bigger, but it is much better connected to the Serbian and Bosnian Serb body-politics. As a result, the following analysis follows a different path to the previous chapter. Rather than analyse one particular entity, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, dominated the ecosystem, this chapter will perform an analysis of the Serbian ecosystem itself. This is necessary because, whilst Bosnian nationalism is focused around one, small group, the Serbian Far-Right comprises many large groups - and it would take too much space to analyse each of these groups.

Background

Though Serb nationalism has its antecedents in the nationalist movements that swept the Balkans in the early years of the last century, for the sake of brevity, this analysis begins with WWII.

Like the Bosnian Far-Right, the Serbian Far-Right can trace its roots, in part, to WWII and the Serbian quisling government led by General Milan Nedić and the support of the Nazi occupiers. However, far more important to their contemporary ideology are the symbols, ideas and actions of the movement known as the Chetniks. These bands of rebels formed during the Wehrmacht's occupation of Serbia, motivated by loyalty to the deposed Yugoslav king, and a deep sense of nationalism. The group proved to be ineffectual in its resistance to the Wehrmacht (who were especially brutal in Serbia),

¹⁹ 'BH Fanaticosi: Grafiti u Visokom Nisu Djelo Naše Grupe', NPK.ba, 22 January 2015, <http://www.nkp.ba/bh-fanaticosi-grafiti-u-visokom-nisu-djelo-nase-grupe/>.

and switched between fighting either the Axis forces, or increasingly, against the Partisans. Ideologically, they were committed to the idea of a "Greater Serbia" - a Serbia that had subsumed the surrounding nations and emptied them of those they deemed unworthy of living there. The Chetnick modus operandi was to inflict genocidal terror on those living in the areas they claimed, and during the war, they were responsible for massacres of Bosniaks and Catholics living across the region; they were not beyond killing their fellow Serbs either. After WWII, the organisation was banned in socialist Yugoslavia and its nationalism condemned, but support for it remained constant, especially in the more remote areas of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia. This support was reawakened during the break-up of Yugoslavia, when Serb nationalists across the three countries reprised the identity of the Chetniks and entered into combat alongside the Serb-dominated Yugoslav national army. This wave of violence culminated in the genocide in Srebrenica, mass executions, the creation of concentration camps and rape camps, and the wholesale destruction of the lives and property of Bosniaks, and to a certain extent, Bosnian Croats as well.

Following the war, which resulted in the capture and "cleansing" of roughly 50% of the territory of Bosnia and the creation of the entity Republika Srpska, Serb nationalism engendered by the war has remained strong to the present day. Meanwhile, a mere four years after the end of the war and genocide in Bosnia, Serbia launched another disastrous offensive in the semi-autonomous, Albanian-dominated region of Kosovo, to which Serbia had long laid claim. Whilst the Kosovar Albanians were guilty of committing atrocities against their aggressors, this last great convulsion of Serb nationalism once again produced a familiar pattern of massacres, rape, and wholesale destruction of Albanian property. Unlike in the case of Bosnia, the international community was quicker to respond, and NATO launched a bombing campaign against the Serb army which hastened the end of the conflict. As this campaign was underway, NATO bombs tragically hit Serb civilian targets. Unlike (again) in Bosnia, however, the Serb nationalists were unsuccessful and fully lost control

of much of the territory of Kosovo, with the exception of several pockets in the north, and Kosovo gained independence and statehood in February 2008.

What differentiates the Serbian Far-Right from other Far-Right movements is its proximity to the Serbian state and politics; and those of Bosnia's Republika Srpska. A recent investigative report from The Times noted that *"Investigators have recorded more than 1,000 phone calls between key political figures in Serbia, including President Vucic, his brother and the chief of police, and the leader of a violent far-right movement co-founded by a notorious British nationalist."*²⁰

Nationalism remained a key component of Serb and Bosnian Serb society, politics and academia. Over the past 10 years or so it has grown outwards to meet the globalised Far-Right movement(s) and the transfer of ideas and symbols has taken place across the differing ecosystems, as the images over the following pages will indicate.

Key ideas / ideologies

- 1) Irredentist Greater Serb Ultranationalism (especially regarding the issue of Kosovo)
- 2) Hatred of Muslims
- 3) Hatred of Roma
- 4) Clerofascism (emanating from the Serb Orthodox Church)
- 5) Pan-Slavism / Russophilia
- 6) Anti-west / NATO (especially since the 90's)
- 7) Hatred of Croats

They have also embraced more fully the following ideas from the Global Far-Right:

- 8) Anti-Semitism
- 9) Homophobia
- 10) Anti-Immigration
- 11) Anti-black racism

And what has the Global Far-Right gained from its association with the Serbian Far-Right? In a word, inspiration. Whilst the works of Serbian nationalist scholars are not (as yet) widely read outside of Serbia, and Serbian nationalist symbols and tropes have not

²⁰ Hannah Lucinda Smith and Milivoje Pantović, 'World at Five: How Europe's Far-Right Found Friends in Serbia', The Times, 23 March 2021, [Online] edition, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/serbian-president-vucic-regularly-spoke-to-leader-of-violent-far-right-group-mp-claims-r8m35kbnd>.

fully spread across the global Far-Right ecosystems, there are several occasions where Serb nationalism has served to inspire others from the Far-Right, around the world.

On 22 July, 2011, terrorist Anders Breivik killed 77 of his fellow Norwegians in a terrorist attack. Breivik was/is a self-identified neo-Nazi and was driven to attack his fellow countrymen because he saw them as *“trainee members of the Marxist political elite that he holds responsible for “Islamic colonization.”*²¹ Breivik detailed the extent to which he had been inspired by Serb nationalism and went into great detail about the supposed ‘demographic threat’ posed by Albanians and Bosniaks.

When Brenton Tarrant murdered 49 people in a terror attack on two mosques in Christchurch in New Zealand, he too drew inspiration from Serb nationalism, playing a Serbian nationalist song as he drove into the city towards the mosques and writing the names of famous historical Serbian nationalist figures on his gun.²²

The song played by Tarrant on his way to the massacre is another example of how Serb nationalist symbols and ideas are being adopted by the Global Far-Right. In 1993, Serbian soldier, Željko Grmuša, penned a song to lift the spirit of fellow Serb soldiers, entitled *“Karadžiću, vodi Srbe svoje”* [Karadžić, lead your Serbs. It also goes by the name: *God Is a Serb and He Will Protect Us*].²³ A performance of the song was recorded by Grmuša, Novislav Đajić and Nenad Tintor, along with others. All of them were also soldiers. The song’s lyrics (standard fare at the time) celebrate now-convicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić, leader of the Bosnian Serbs, and make genocidal threats towards the Bosniaks and Croats standing in their way. Incidentally, the accordion player, Novislav Đajić, was sentenced to 5 years in

prison for killing and torturing 14 people (there were accounts on 27) victims in two villages in Bosnia during the war. Now known as *“Dat Face Soldier”*, his meme-ified face is now spread across Far-Right chat rooms.

Over the years, the song - renamed *“Serbia Strong”* or *“Remove Kebab”* (a codified way of saying *“remove Muslims”*), has grown in popularity in the Far-Right chatrooms and message boards. Indeed, it is more popular outside of the Balkans than within. A recent report by the Center for the Analysis of the Radical Right, highlighted incidents of the song being sung in China, Slovakia and Poland, as well as by Tarrant as he psyched himself up for the massacre as evidence of the song’s continued popularity.²⁴

The following pages detail the extent of penetration, adoption, and adaptation of Global Far-right symbols in everyday expressions of nationalism within Serbia and Bosnian-Serb dominated areas of Bosnia.



„Dat Face Soldier” meme-ified face of Novislav Đajić, a convicted war criminal

²¹ Barry Richards, ‘What Drove Anders Breivik?’, *Contexts* 13, no. 4 (November 2014): 42–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504214558216>. p45.

²² Chris Arsenault, ‘Unpacking the Alleged New Zealand Mosque Killer’s Bizarre Fascination with Medieval Balkan Fighters | CBC News’, CBC, 20 March 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/new-zealand-mosque-massacre-bosnia-serbia-ottomans-1.5062886>.

²³ V. Nestorović, ‘Željko Objasnio Kako Je Zaista Nastala Njegova Pesma Uz Koju Je Tarrant Počinio Pokolj Na Novom Zelandu! - Alo.Rs’, Alo, 15 March 2019, <https://www.alo.rs/vesti/region/zeljko-objasnio-kako-je-zaista-nastala-njegova-pesma-uz-koju-je-tarrant-pocinio-pokolj-na-novom-zelandu/217132/vest>.

²⁴ Balsa Lubarda, ‘Remove or Defend Kebab? Radical Right, Music of the Yugoslav Wars, and the Perils of Simplifying Narratives’, Centre for Analysis of the Radical Right, Insights (blog), 2 December 2020, <https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2020/12/02/remove-or-defend-kebab-radical-right-music-of-the-yugoslav-wars-and-the-perils-of-simplifying-narratives/>.

The Global Far-Right in Serbia

Several organisations have done excellent work in tracing the developing and evolving relationship between the Global Far-Right and Serbian nationalists, and how these nationalists are increasingly adopting the ideas and symbols of the Global Far-Right, giving rise to what we might call a "Serbian Far-Right" - a movement that remains firmly Serb-nationalist in its daily life, while increasingly building connections with other Far-Right ecosystems. Much of this growth has been documented in the excellent reportage by Balkan Insight, who have, over the past years, documented the following with regard to the Serbian Far-Right:

- 1) Cooperation between nationalists in Serbia and the Far-Right in the UK²⁵, the USA²⁶ and other pan-national Far Right groups²⁷.
- 2) Bosnian Serb leadership cooperation with foreign Far Right political groupings²⁸.
- 3) More recently, the support for Putin's campaign in the Donbass, and the subsequent war in Ukraine²⁹.

Output

The following pages highlight how this evolving cooperation manifests itself on the walls and webpages of the Serbian Far-Right. In the photo below, taken in Novi Sad (Serbia) in November 2020, we see an interesting mix of traditional Serb-nationalist graffiti (in red), with the text 'Ratko Mladić, Serbian Hero'. Next to it, on the glass, and just below the window there is the Serbian Cross, with the four 'Cs' (the letter S in the Cyrillic alphabet - this sign is the standard symbol for all Serb nationalists and is extremely prevalent across all Serb dominated regions. Also interesting, however, is the inclusion of the 'Black sun' motif, and just above that, the Celtic Cross - a symbol that is appearing increasingly across the region.) This graffiti display was intended as an attack on the journalist, Dinko Gruhonjić, in response to his publishing a story on the celebration of the Srebrenica genocide.³⁰



Far Right graffiti picture taken in 2020 in Novi Sad

Many such crosses can be found in ancient graveyards in Ireland and elsewhere. This symbol is one of the most important and commonly used white supremacist symbols. Although usually called a Celtic Cross by white supremacists, its origins date to the pre-Christian "sun cross" or "wheel cross" in ancient Europe. Norwegian Nazis used a version of the symbol in the 1930s and 1940s. After World War II, a variety of white supremacist groups and movements adopted the symbol including the British National Front, neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, Ku Klux Klan members and virtually every other type of white supremacist. It has also achieved notoriety as part of the logo of Stormfront, the oldest and largest white supremacist website in the world.³¹ Seemingly innocuous, the symbol is now increasingly used in both Serbia and Croatia, alongside more locally specific forms of graffiti.

²⁵ Jelena Cosic, Lawrence Marzouk, and Ivan Angelovski, 'British Nationalist Trains Serb Far-Right for "Online War"', Balkan Insight (blog), 1 May 2018, <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/05/01/british-nationalist-trains-serb-far-right-for-online-war-04-30-2018/>.

²⁶ Nermina Kuloglija, 'The "Awakening": American Right-Wing Extremist Finds Allies in the Balkans', Balkan Insight (blog), 13 April 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/04/13/the-awakening-american-right-wing-extremist-finds-allies-in-the-balkans/>.

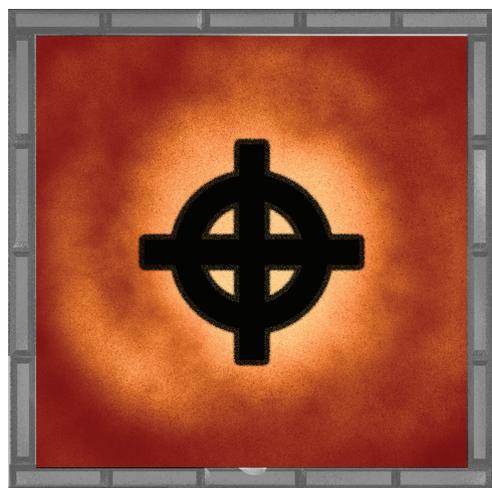
²⁷ Elenora Vio, 'Young Patriots': Serbia's Role in the European Far-Right', Balkan Insight (blog), 19 November 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/19/young-patriots-serbia-role-in-the-european-far-right/>.

²⁸ Danijel Kovacevic, 'Bosnia's Dodik Looks Far Right for Foreign Friends', Balkan Insight (blog), 18 February 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/02/18/bosnias-dodik-looks-far-right-for-foreign-friends/>.

²⁹ Nermina Kuloglija, 'At Pro-Russian Balkan Rallies, a Who's Who of the Far-Right', Balkan Insight (blog), 10 March 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/03/10/at-pro-russian-balkan-rallies-a-whos-who-of-the-far-right/>.

³⁰ 'SafeJournalists: Serbia - Journalist's Doorstep Sprayed with Neo-Nazi Symbols and Hate Speech', BH Novinari, 20 November 2020, <https://bhnovinari.ba/en/2020/11/26/safejournalists-serbia-journalists-doorstep-sprayed-with-neo-nazi-symbols-and-hate-speech/>.

³¹ 'Hate Symbol: Celtic Cross', ADL, 29 August 2016, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/celtic-cross>.

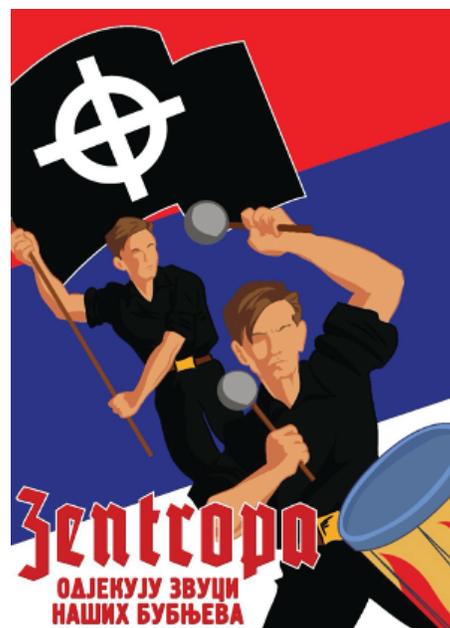


The Sun Cross Symbol

This picture (to the left) shows the graffiti attack on the premises of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in the center of Belgrade. The Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) had been removing a Ratko Mladić mural and returned to find these messages, along with the Sun Cross, sprayed on the doorway to their offices. The text reads: "Ratko Mladić, Serbian Hero" (x2).

Perhaps the image that best demonstrates the blending of the Global Far-Right and the Serbian Far-Right is the one below, taken by Michael Colborne for investigative journalism group, Bellingcat.

In this image, we see the Celtic Cross displayed on a flag, with a design that is reminiscent of Nazi propaganda. The text below the word "Zentropa" is the phrase: "The sound of our drums echo." The font used on the poster is similar to a style used by the Nazis. Zentropa is a right-wing organisation that originates outside of Serbia and is said to be present in other European countries, including France and Germany.



Far Right poster in Serbia



Graffiti that demonstrates the blending of the Global Far-Right and the Serbian Far-Right

The report³², filed by journalist Michael Colborne, detailed the visit made to Serbia by American Far-Right leader Robert Rundo. Amidst a range of networking and promotional activities, Rundo took time to spray paint the mural onto a building near the Danube. First, the two web addresses advertise various websites (Serbon being a Serbian, nationalist clothing brand). It's worth noting the inclusion of the Tyr rune (the upward arrow) in the centre of the 'O' in the word 'Serbon.' The Tyr rune was used by the SS in WWII³³. The text in Cyrillic written on the bottom of the mural reads "Freedom for all nationalists." The phrase "Free R.A.M" means, "Free Rise Above" - Rise Above being the name of the Far-Right movement Rundo led in America, several members of whom are now in prison. Behind the figures in the mural, there can be seen the Celtic Cross. At the time of writing we had been unable to establish the identity of the male figures in the centre



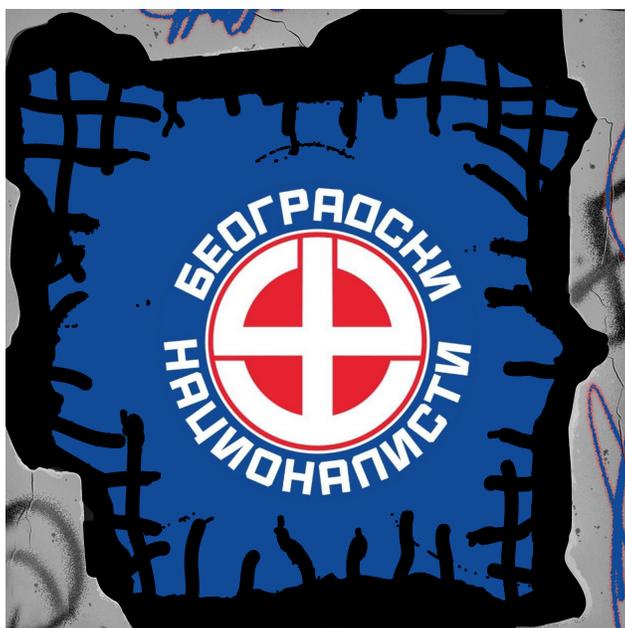
Graffiti attack on the premise of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Belgrade

³² Michael Colborne, 'An American White Supremacist's New Home in Serbia', Bellingcat, 18 November 2020, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/11/18/an-american-white-supremacists-new-home-in-serbia/>.

³³ Hate Symbol: Tyr Rune', ADL, 25 June 2016, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/tyr-rune>.

According to local media reports, while in Belgrade, Rundo worked with local nationalist groups to establish an umbrella group known as the “Beogradski Nacionalisti” (Belgrade Nationalists), created to coordinate the efforts of the many splintered far-right groups to be found in the region. Once again, the Celtic cross features at the very heart of the logo.

While the number of Far-Right groups in Serbia and Republika Srpska are in a state of constant flux, the Helsinki Committee put the number at 23 in 2021. The Far-Right in Serbia is increasingly connected to the Global Far-Right.



Symbol of the local nationalist group „Beogradski Nacionalisti” (Belgrade Nationalists)

The Celtic Cross again makes an appearance in this anti-left wing graffiti in northern Serbia, in the city of Novi Sad. Also notable are the slogans “Good night, Left Side” and ‘FCK AFA”, short for “Fuck AntiFa.”

The phrase, “Good Night, Left Side” is categorised as hate speech and was originally coined by ‘skinhead’ Far-Right groups in the UK in the 1970s and has spread from there. It is now a widely used Far-Right slogan³⁴. AntiFa is a contraction of the phrase “anti-fascist” and refers to a decentralized network of far-left militants that oppose fascist, racist, right-wing extremists. Adherents frequently blend anarchist and communist views. One of the most common symbols used by AntiFa combines the red



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OUEST CASUAL 2.11.21



From Novi Sad 🇷🇸

Far Right graffiti in Novi Sad

flag of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the black flag of 19th century anarchists. In terms of size, numbers and coordination, AntiFa are best understood as a small, leaderless series of groups and individuals, whose reach doesn’t expand much beyond the US. Research from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies notes:

“Based on a CSIS data set of 893 terrorist incidents in the United States between January 1994 and May 2020, attacks from left-wing perpetrators like Antifa made up a tiny percentage of overall terrorist attacks and casualties. Right-wing terrorists perpetrated the majority—57 percent—of all attacks and plots during this period, particularly those who were white supremacists... In comparison, left-wing extremists orchestrated 25 percent of the incidents during this period.”³⁵

Until recently, there was little record of AntiFa, in the form described above, being present in the Western Balkans. Anti-Fascism as an idea, however, had long been present, rooted in the Partisan’s resistance to the Nazis in WWII. Thus, there remain many organisations that claim to be anti-fascist, several of whom use the phrase (like the Women in Black³⁶) to signify a rejection of fascism, rather than sympathy with an organisation. These organisations do occasionally clash with the Far-Right but are not in any way similar to the way in which the American AntiFa organisations operate.

³⁴ ‘Good Night Left Side’, Reporting Radicalism, accessed 14 June 2022, <https://reportingradicalism.org/en/hate-symbols/movements/modern-racist-symbols/good-night-left-side>.

³⁵ Seth Jones G., ‘Critical Questions: Who Are Antifa, and Are They a Threat?’, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 4 June 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/who-are-anti-fa-and-are-they-threat>.

³⁶ Vesna Anđić, ‘Protest podrške pokretu Antifa u Beogradu’, Radio Slobodna Evropa, accessed 14 June 2022, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/antifa-protest-zuc-beograd/30659134.html>.

This next image, taken in an undisclosed town in Serbia, is notable for three reasons. First, the flag at the very centre depicts an Orthodox Christian representation of the Cross being driven through the AntiFa symbol. Second, the image is taken at night, outside a church. Third, if examined closely, it can be seen that the participants mostly have their hands raised, displaying one of two gestures: a splayed three fingers, including the middle, index and thumb, or the other version; the same three fingers pinched together to form a point. Some argue that these gestures are ancient, religious in nature (three fingers being used to reflect the trinity of God) and have little to do with nationalism at all. It is increasingly difficult to believe that explanation however, as for the last two and half decades, these gestures have been used by Serb nationalists continuously.

Nazi-era figures (including Nedić), such as Dimitrije Ljotić and, in particular, Corneliu Codreanu, the fanatic leader of the Iron Guard (Romanian, Nazi-allied, orthodox fascists)³⁸.



Far-Right group „Serbian Action“ is known to share a Nazi-era figures on their social media

This image, taken from the social media page of the group „Фондација Јунак“ (Fondacija Junak - Hero Foundation), a group claiming to serve Serbian veterans. The Junak Foundation's flag interestingly features an outline of Kosovo, a country to which Serbia continues to lay territorial claim. On the far left, we can see the symbol of the Kolovrat (the local name for the Black Sun symbol), above the name of the Serbian Far-Right clothing company, Serbon. The flag on the right is for the Far-Right group, Pokret Kormila (Rudder Movement), a group focused on preservation of the Serbian identity.³⁹



Symbol of the Far-Right group „Serbian Action“



Far Right graffiti in Far-Right demonstration in Belgrade Novi Sad

This picture, taken during a Far-Right demonstration in Belgrade, again shows the blending of Far-Right imagery. The flag in the foreground, in colours reminiscent of those used in Nazi Germany, features the profile of Milan Nedić, atop a Cross and what appears to be a crown of thorns, perhaps suggesting the quisling leader as a Christ-like martyr.

The second, smaller flag bears the symbol of the Far-Right group Serbian Action, who define themselves as an ultra-nationalist, hard-line orthodox group, but eschew any connection to the Far-Right. While there is little in their symbology that is directly connected to the Far-Right, the emblem in the centre of the flag appears to be part wreath of corn, part Cogwheel. The Cogwheel is a far-right symbol, used by the Far-Right as a frame for other symbols. It was first used in Nazi Germany³⁷. Nevertheless, along with their nationalism, they do share an

³⁷ 'Monitoring Discriminatory Signs and Symbols in European Football' (London: Fare Network, 2016), https://www.farenet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Signs-and-Symbols-guide-for-European-football_2016-2.pdf.

³⁸ Ispanović, 'In a Belgrade Bar, "Forbidden" Books Fan Far-Right Flames', Detektor, 6 April 2022, <https://detektor.ba/2022/04/06/in-a-belgrade-bar-forbidden-books-fan-far-right-flames/?lang=en>.

³⁹ 'Ultrasnesničarski pokreti odraz nacionalne frustracije: Kormilo', Autonomija (blog), 31 March 2022, <https://autonomija.info/voice-ultrasnesnicarski-pokreti-odraz-nacionalne-frustracije-kormilo/>.



Image from the social media page of the group „Fondacija Junak“ (Hero Foundation)

The poster on the right, depicting a masked, armed man in front of an industrial backdrop, behind which a black, green-edged Othala Rune can be seen, was created by the group Srpski Front, whose badge can be seen in the top right-hand corner.

The badge itself is worth analysing. Alongside the group's name, written in a runic style font, Serbian Front, two Celtic crosses can be seen, similar in style to the one used by the Belgrade Nationalists. Beneath the emblem is the Iron Cross. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), when the Iron Cross is used in isolation, it is not to be considered a hate symbol.⁴⁰ When the cross is used with another symbol however, depending on what that symbol is, it can be a hate symbol. In this case, the symbol superimposed atop the Iron Cross, is a reduced Serbian coat of arms with a double-headed eagle and the four 'C' (or 'S'). This particular version of the Serbian coat of arms was used by the Hitler-allied quisling government installed in Belgrade



Poster by the Far-Right group „Srpski Front“ (Serbian Front)

by the Nazis during WWII, under the leadership of General Milan Nedić. The image of the previously disgraced Nedić is in the process of being rehabilitated by the Serbian Far-Right.

Looming large in the poster's background is the Othala rune, with the added 'feet' pointing upwards at the bottom. During WWII, the Othala was used on the badge of the SS Race and Settlement Main Office, which was responsible for maintaining the racial purity of the SS. It was also the emblem of ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) operating within the 'Prinz Eugen' 7th SS Volunteer Mountain Division operating during World War II in the Nazi Germany-sponsored Independent State of Croatia. It continues to be a popular symbol for the global far right, adopted as part of their attempt to reconstruct a mythic "Aryan" past.⁴¹ The wider context behind the poster itself, is that the group, Srpski Front (Serbian Front) has, along with several other local far-right groups, positioned itself as a defender of the environment. The text at the bottom of the poster reads: "Protect Serbia: Revolt Against Rio Tinto." This was in response to the proposed development of a highly polluting Rio Tinto mine (depicted in the chimneys in the poster).



Symbol of the Kolovrat

⁴⁰ 'Iron Cross | Hate Symbols Database | ADL', accessed 10 June 2022, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/iron-cross>.

⁴¹ Othala Rune, Anti-Defamation League, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/othala-rune>

The next poster, taken in Banja Luka, also combines traditional Serb nationalism with global far-right motifs. First, the poster is celebrating the 9th January “Day of Republika Srpska” - a holiday declared illegal in Bosnia. The map shows Republika Srpska with the text “Happy Birthday Homeland [sic].” Below the map, we can see in the centre, the shield used by the Nedić government, as discussed on the previous page. Most interestingly, on either side of the shield we have the words ‘Blood’ and ‘Honour’. ‘Blood and Honour’ is a well-known Nazi slogan (Blut und Ehre) that served as the motto for the Hitler Youth. It was then reprised by a British Far-Right group, which in turn became an international racist skinhead umbrella group⁴², with particular prominence in the US.⁴³ The ADL notes, however, that the slogan no longer belongs to any particular group. It is now frequently used simply to express affiliation with and sympathy for the Far-right ideology.

A 2020 report by Detektor journalist, Nermina Kuloglija revealed yet another usage of Far-Right series of graffiti in the Bosnian town, Prijedor, in Republika Srpska.⁴⁴ In the first picture, the phrase “Борба 18” (Borba 18), the translated version of the name “Combat 18”, the name of a Far-Right group in the UK who have been, over the years, extremely violent. The “18” in the name refers to the first and eighth letters of the English alphabet, A and H, for Adolf Hitler. The group is known to be present in Serbia⁴⁵.



Far-Right graffiti in Prijedor



Poster from the celebration of the unconstitutional day of Republika Srpska featuring traditional Serb nationalism and global far-right motifs.

⁴² 'Hate Symbol: Blood and Honour', ADL, 2022, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/blood-honour>.

⁴³ 'Blood and Honour', Southern Policy Law Centre, accessed 13 June 2022, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/blood-honour>.

⁴⁴ Nermina Kuloglija, 'Ultra-Right Groups Show Their Face in Bosnian Town', Detektor (blog), 12 May 2020, <https://detektor.ba/2020/05/12/desnicarske-i-neonacisticke-organizacije-neometano-isticu-simbole-u-prijedoru/?lang=en>.

⁴⁵ 'Combat 18', Counter Extremism Project, 2022, <https://www.counterextremism.com/supremacy/combat-18>.

Both of these pictures featured in the Detektor report feature the phrase (in Cyrillic lettering) 'Krv' and 'Čast' (Blood and Honour). In addition to the Celtic Cross, both these pictures feature the three-pointed swastika, the triskele, or triskelion, which, according to the Anti-Defamation League, is an ancient pagan symbol that has been adopted by the Far-Right globally as a hate symbol, most commonly associated both with the slogan "Blood and Honour", but more specifically with "Blood and Honour" a network of neo-Nazi-skinheads, founded by Screwdriver-frontman Ian Stuart Davidson (Screwdriver was a Far-Right band). It operates internationally and can be found in nearly every European country.⁴⁶ The second picture features the triskele between a 'B' the 'H' - showing the initials for the group in English. The blogs advertised on the wall (now removed) featured the below picture of Bosnian Serbs in Prijedor parading with fascist, Islamophobic banners.

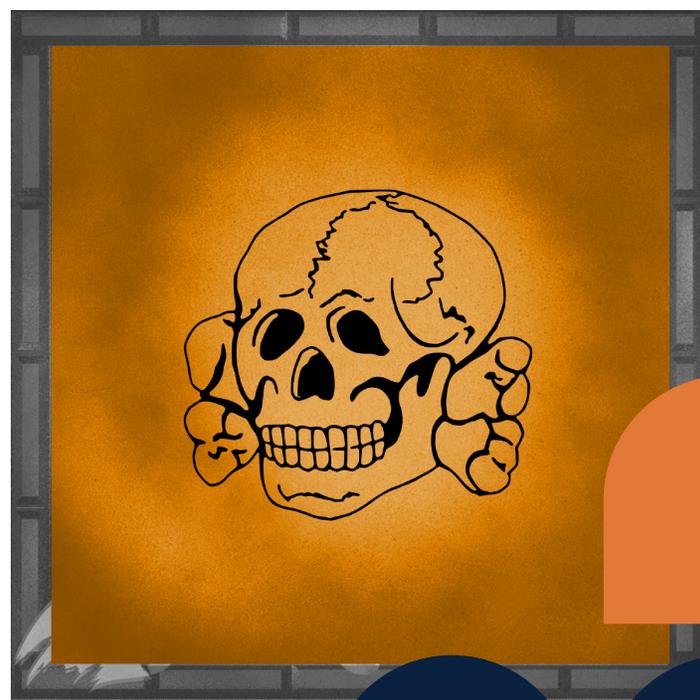


Picture of young men with far-right symbols and islamophobic banner

This image brings together symbolism from the local and global Far Right movements perfectly. There is the internationalised Blood and Honour banner, a Serbian flag featuring the same slogan, as well as the phrase "Combat 18". At the centre is the Nedić flag, harkening back to Nazi era Serbia. Along with their islamophobic banner (a sentiment shared by the Far-Right across Europe), the young men are wearing Totenkopf masks. Totenkopf is German for the "death's head" or skull. During the Nazi era, Hitler's Schutzstaffel (SS) adopted one particular Totenkopf image. Since World War Two the image has been adopted by neo-Nazis and white supremacists⁴⁷.



Triskele or triskelion – a symbol of three-pointed swastika



TotenKopf masks represent "death's head" or skull

⁴⁶ 'Hate Symbol: Triskele', ADL, 25 May 2016, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/triskele>.

⁴⁷ 'Totenkopf | Center on Extremism', accessed 16 June 2022, <https://extremismterms.adl.org/glossary/totenkopf>.



Far-Right graffiti in Prijedor

As recently as January 2022, more Far-Right graffiti was spotted, again in Prijedor. The slogan “blood and honour, was spray-painted around the town in several different locations, along with the slogan “Nož, Žica...” (see below). This time, however, the graffiti is a little more direct, featuring a swastika, and a Celtic Cross. In another report from Detektor, journalist Aleksandar Drakulić, documented this picture featuring a Swastika, along with the Celtic cross, and the numbers ‘14’ and ‘88.’⁴⁸ Both of these numbers are of significance to the Far-Right. The number 88 white supremacist numerical code for “Heil Hitler.” H is the eighth letter of the alphabet, so 88 = HH = Heil Hitler⁴⁹. The number ‘14’ is a reference to the 14 word slogan coined by white supremacist, David Lane: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children”. This hate slogan is incredibly popular with Far-Right groups worldwide⁵⁰.

Serb nationalist symbols

The above shows that, to a certain extent, we are seeing the growing usage of Global Far-right symbols, alongside the traditional symbols of Serb nationalism.

The Chetnik movement remains an important part of the Serbian nationalist identity. The black flag, with the skull and crossbones bears the phrases: “For the King and the Fatherland” and “Freedom or Death.” The Chetnik movement itself remains still very much alive, boasting members across Bosnia’s Republika Srpska and Serbia, where the banner frequently



The black flag with the skull and crossbones, symbol of the Chetnik movement



Smurf is a newly-adopted symbol of Serb nationalists in Montenegro. Picture taken in Kula, Serbia.

displayed at rallies and demonstrations by nationalists.

This image, taken in Kula, Serbia is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the Serbian Cross, seen in the foreground, indicates the mural’s nationalist nature. The prominent display of the Smurf, known locally as a “Štrumpf”, is (somewhat oddly) a newly-adopted symbol of Serb nationalists in Montenegro. The symbol became popular during the recent political unrest between Serbia and Montenegro as Belgrade sought to reassert its control over the country. It’s not certain how the cartoon figure was adopted, but it has proven to be very popular.

⁴⁸ Aleksandar Drakulić, ‘Novi neonacistički i desničarski grafiti u Prijedoru’, Detektor, 13 January 2022, <https://detektor.ba/2022/01/13/novi-neonacisticki-i-desnicar-ski-grafiti-u-prijedoru/>.

⁴⁹ ‘Hate Symbol: 88’, ADL, accessed 17 June 2022, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/88>.

⁵⁰ ‘Hate Symbol: 14 Words’, ADL, 20 October 2016, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/14-words>.



Nationalist graffiti in Serbia

Nationalist Graffiti doesn't always rely on obscure symbolism, however. Often, as in the message in the graffiti to the right, the message is more direct: "Fuck your Turkish Mothers" ('Turk' being the racist epithet Serb nationalists use to describe Balkan Muslims). The image above the text is of the Chetnik movement's most brutal WWII leaders, Konstantin Pećanac, who eventually lead his faction to collaborate extensively with the occupying Nazi forces, fighting even against other Chetnik units who remained loyal to the absent Serbian king. He was assassinated by other Chetniks in 1944, but is currently being rehabilitated.

Support for war criminals is also extremely common in Serbia and the Serb-dominated areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Murals such as the one shown here are to be found in at least twenty locations around Serbia and the Serb-dominated areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This picture, taken in 2020, shows a Mladić mural painted on the side of a primary school in Bosanska Gradiška, in Bosnia's Republika Srpska. The young men in front of the mural are giving the three-fingered salute, another Serb nationalist symbol. Along with the celebration of convicted criminals, comes the denial of genocide, particularly in Srebrenica. The following picture shows a billboard situated just outside the town of Rogatica in Republika Srpska. The text reads simply: "It wasn't. We know." The meaning is clear: Srebrenica was not a genocide.



Support for Genocidaires in Serbia

It's not just limited to denial however. Often, Serb nationalists express a certain triumphalism as with regards to the genocide in Srebrenica, as can be seen in the somewhat cryptic banner below, displayed on a football stadium's terrace in Banjica, Belgrade in 2012

The text at the top reads "Solve the puzzle", followed by a depiction of a knife, followed by wire. Then, the chemical symbol for silver, Ag (which in the local language, is called Srebro) and the drawing of an eye, with the pupil highlighted. The word for 'pupil' (in the Serbian dialect) is 'zenica' - these two things when put together, can be used to roughly form the word "Srebrenica". The words for knife (Nož), and wire (Žica) are combined to form the following chant: Nož, Žica, Srebrenica (Knife, wire, Srebrenica), and are often sung by Serb nationalists, especially at sports events.



Support for genocide at a football match



Support for genocide on a billboard in Rogatica

7.3 The Croatian Far-Right

As with the previous section, the phrase "Croatian Far-Right" applies to wherever Croatian Far-Right activity has emerged, primarily in Croatia and Croat-dominated areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unlike either of the previous two Far-Right communities discussed, little of the ideological complexity and cognitive dissonance these groups employ is present in the Croatian Far-Right. This is reflected in their symbology, with seamlessly blends Nazi symbolism and Ustaša symbolism. Throughout the process of research, there was little evidence of any ideational conflict or contrast, even subconsciously, between the Global-Far Right and the Croatian Far Right. The following chapter is thus somewhat shorter, as less explanation is needed. It is also interesting to note that the Croatian Far-Right does not:

a) rely particularly on contemporary far-right symbolism, with usage of obscure pagan, nordic symbols, but in its preference for the Swastika, is more open and confrontational (especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

b) have a wide range of its own, pre-WWII symbology and ideology, but rather, especially in terms of graffiti and other similar cultural displays, relies on a closed linked set of symbols, each connected primarily to the NDH.

Background

The ideological lineage and heritage of the Croatian Far Right are much clearer and easier to trace (and understand). As mentioned earlier, Croatia's Far-Right tradition was firmly established through its WWII alliance with Nazi Germany (though some might argue earlier). During this period, Croatia was known as the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska), whose initials - NDH - continue to occupy an important place in contemporary Far-Right symbology.

The NDH was ruled by a clero-fascist group named Ustaša. The brutality of their rule, which covered most of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, is well detailed by historians such as Ivo Goldstein⁵¹. The Ustaša regime was extremely barbaric, killing thousands of Roma and Jews. The primary targets of their hatred were the region's Serbs, of whom they killed tens of thousands, most notably in the concentration camp, Jasenovac.

Much of their symbology, ie. propaganda materials, drew heavily from the Nazi milieu, lacking any authenticity, but remains popular with the Croatian Far Right today.

At the end of the war, Ustaša and other civilians and sympathisers fleeing the oncoming Yugoslav and Red Armies, tried to escape into British held territory in Austria. They were refused entry and gathered on the Slovenian/Austrian border at Bleiburg. There they were captured by the Partisans massacred. This

event has gone on to take a mythologised place within the Croatian nationalist discourse as a Croatian "Way of the Cross."

Following WWII, the victorious Yugoslav authorities took an incredibly hard line towards signs of nationalism of any kind. Croatian fascism was kept alive primarily by their extensive diaspora, which was deeply sympathetic to the Ustaša⁵². Indeed, between 1962 and 1982 Croatian Far-Right terrorists based in the diaspora embarked on a violent, often murderous terrorist campaign against the Yugoslav state⁵³.

This sentiment did not fully die away, but remained hidden, nurtured and justified by the memories of Bleiburg.

As Yugoslavia broke apart and Croatian society attempted to reorganise after decades of socialist centralism, the Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica - HDZ), under Franjo Tuđman, emerged as the strongest, most popular political party, running on a platform of Croatian nationalism⁵⁴. Many "long distance nationalists"⁵⁵, such as Gojko Sušak returned from the diaspora to support the new president. NDH symbols and rhetoric were revived as the Serb nationalist rhetoric grew in response.

Following the wars of the 90s, after which Croatia gained independence once again, a culture of permissiveness grew towards the legacy of WWII and the Ustaša legacy, lead in particular by Tuđman, who published a book (Wastelands of Historical Reality) wherein he not only played down the seriousness of the Ustaša crimes in Jasenovac, but also went on to deny the Holocaust. The nationalist HDZ had, with brief interruptions, maintained a hold on power since it was founded. The diaspora also continued to serve as a source of nationalism⁵⁶.

⁵¹ Ivo Goldstein, *Jasenovac* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2018).

⁵² David Bruce MacDonald, *Balkan Holocausts? Serbian and Croatian Victim-Centred Propaganda and the War in Yugoslavia*, *New Approaches to Conflict Analysis* (Manchester; New York: New York: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA by Palgrave, 2002). p135

⁵³ Mate Nikola Tokić, *Croatian Radical Separatism and Diaspora Terrorism during the Cold War*, *Central European Studies* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2020).

⁵⁴ Adis Maksić, *Ethnic Mobilization, Violence, and the Politics of Affect: The Serb Democratic Party and the Bosnian War*, 1st ed. 2017 (Cham: Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-48293-4>. p80

⁵⁵ Zlatko Skrbis, *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities* (Routledge, 2017), <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1550431>.

⁵⁶ Sven Milekic, 'Croatia's Far Right Draws Strength from Diaspora', *Balkan Insight*, 5 January 2018, <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/01/05/croatian-far-right-draws-strength-from-diaspora-01-04-2018/>.

Key ideas / Ideologies

Key elements of the contemporary Far-Right in Croatia and Bosnian-Croat dominated areas of Bosnia are:

- 1) Antisemitism
- 2) Hatred of Serbs (including the glorification of their slaughter at the hands of the Ustaša in WWII)
- 3) More recently, Islamophobia.
- 4) Hatred of Roma
- 5) Hatred of immigrants
- 6) Homophobia

Over the years, Croatian Far-Right sentiment has consolidated itself amidst the fan clubs of various sports groups, particularly football fans, but also in academia, politics and the media. It is physically expressed in the form of:

- a) Graffiti (examples of which follow)
- b) Street, square and place names (in both Bosnia⁵⁷ and Croatia⁵⁸)
- c) Domestic Wikipedia articles (denying the Ustaša legacy⁵⁹)
- d) Croatian Catholic dogma, services and publications (such as masses for Ustaša leader, Ante Pavelić⁶⁰)
- e) Football chants⁶¹, banners⁶² and other actions (such as the Swastika embedded onto a football pitch for an international match⁶³)
- f) The defacement and destruction of memorials and monuments connected to the Partizan era, or to WWII, commemorating Jews, Serbs and/or Roma. (For example, the dramatic recent destruction of the Partizan monument in Mostar, see below).
- g) Academic publications (see for example, the 2021 publication of the (elegantly titled) book: *Jasenovac and the Post-War Jasenovac Camps: The Geostrategic Centre of Greater Serbian Politics and the Propaganda Driver of its Spread To the West*⁶⁴, which denies the reality of Jasenovac)

h) Far-Right media. The Croatian Far-Right participates in and are known on many of the global Far-Right media outlets. In the Croatian media, the Far-Right (especially the tabloids) are often at best, reluctant to criticise the Far-Right, and at worst, openly sympathetic. On TV, the most popular Far-Right figure is TV host, Velimir Bujanec, whose show, *Bujica*, airs on several local TV stations. The show is a haven for Far-Right views, and Bujanec's guests have included everyone on the Croatian Far Right, as well as more mainstream political figures such as former president, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović.

i) Popular Culture (see for example, the popular, pro-Ustaša songs by Marko "Thompson" Perković, a successful Croatian singer).⁶⁶

i) Popular Culture (see for example, the popular, pro-Ustaša songs by Marko "Thompson" Perković, a successful Croatian singer).

j) Far-Right political parties and their rhetoric, see for example, the most recent elections wherein the far-right party, the Homeland Movement, led by former HDZ member, Miroslav Škoro, proved to be incredibly popular (though he did not command the electoral results he hoped for). "If you can flirt or these days be openly pro-Ustasha, you will get a big amount of the vote," noted a Croatian political scientist at the time⁶⁷. There are three Far Right parties active in Croatia at the time of writing: the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP); the Croatian Pure Party of Rights (HČSP) and the Autochthonous Croatian Party of Rights (AHSP). One might point out however, that these groups also experience little electoral success. This is, according to some analysts, because Croatia's main political party, the HDZ has moved right to occupy the space the above parties previously occupied⁶⁸.

k) Online groups: as with both the Serbian and Bosnian Far-Right, the internet plays a key role in allowing the Croatian-Far right to express itself. A recent report by the Resonant Voices Initiative noted that at least 10,000 users in Croatia posted Ustasa related content on Facebook at least once⁶⁹.

⁵⁷ Rodolfo Toè, 'Bosnia MPs Try to Change Mostar's Ustaša Street Names', *Balkan Insight*, 23 June 2016, <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/06/23/streets-in-mostar-celebrate-nazi-collaborationists-06-23-2016/>.

⁵⁸ Vladislavjević, 'Croatian Street Names Still Bear Names of WWII Fascists', *Detektor* (blog), 10 April 2021, <https://detektor.ba/2021/04/10/croatian-street-names-still-bear-names-of-wwii-fascists/?lang=en>.

⁵⁹ Sven Milekić, 'Croatia Wikipedia Alters Jasenovac Camp Entry Again', *BIRN*, 29 August 2018, <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/08/29/croatia-wikipedia-further-disputes-research-on-jasenovac-camp-08-29-2018/>.

⁶⁰ Sven Milekić, 'Memorial Mass for Croatian Nazi Slammed as "Disgrace"', *Balkan Insight*, 30 December 2014, <https://balkaninsight.com/2014/12/30/memorial-service-for-croat-fascist-dictator-condemned/>.

⁶¹ Florian Bieber, 'Ready for the Homeland? Simunic and a Bit of Normal Fascism', *Balkan Insight*, 21 November 2013, <https://balkaninsight.com/2013/11/21/ready-for-the-homeland-simunic-and-a-bit-of-normal-fascism/>.

⁶² Darko Janjević, 'Croatian Fans Detained over Vulgar Anti-Serbian Banner', *Deutsche Welle*, 12 June 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/croatian-fans-detained-over-vulgar-anti-serbian-banner/a-53792729>.

⁶³ Doug Bolton, 'Croatia Apologises for Massive Football Pitch Swastika', *The Independent*, 13 June 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/european/croatia-apologises-after-swastika-displayed-on-the-pitch-during-euro-2016-qualifier-10317752.html>.

⁶⁴ Stipo Pilić and Blanka Matković, *Jasenovac i poslijeratni jasenovački logori: geostrateška točka velikosrpske politike i propagandni pokretač njezina širenja prema zapadu*, Drugo (nepromijenjeno) izdanje, Samostalni istraživački projekt Hrvatska povijest Serija Jasenovac, knjiga 6 knjiga 1 (Zagreb: Hrvatska družba povjesničara 'Dr. Rudolf Horvat', 2021).

⁶⁵ Vedran Obućina, 'International Policy Analysis: Right-Wing Extremism in Croatia' (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09346.pdf>, p.3, 9.

⁶⁶ Marija Ristic et al., 'Far-Right Balkan Groups Flourish on the Net', *Resonant Voices*, 5 May 2017, <https://resonantvoices.info/far-right-balkan-groups-flourish-on-the-net/>.

⁶⁸ Valery Hopkins, 'Croatia's Nationalist Revival Points to Role for Far-Right', *Financial Times*, 3 July 2020, [Online] edition, <https://www.ft.com/content/2a3a4601-ee1-41ef-8c22-171471e176e6>.

⁶⁹ Marija Ristic et al., 'Far-Right Balkan Groups Flourish on the Net', *Resonant Voices*, 5 May 2017, <https://resonantvoices.info/far-right-balkan-groups-flourish-on-the-net/>

The Global Far Right in Croatia

Given Croatia's emergence within central Europe as a "crucible of hyper-nationalism,⁷⁰" made permissible through the actions of everyone from football fans to presidents, it is no surprise that various global Far Right ecosystems should be closely linked to the Croatian ecosystem. Recent reports have noted how the Ukrainian Far Right and the Croatian Far-Right were developing increasingly close relations⁷¹. Just as Serb volunteers went to fight alongside the Russians in eastern Ukraine, so too have Croatian volunteers gone to join Ukrainian forces fighting against the Russians.⁷² Recently, political figures in Croatia have sought to make links with the Far-Right in other local countries, including Hungary, Bulgaria, Estonia and Latvia. As part of that effort, a party known as the 'Generation of Renovation' was founded, which models itself on the American 'Alt-Right'⁷³. Recently, the flags of other European Far-Right parties have appeared in demonstrations⁷⁴.

Output

In terms of graffiti, murals, banners etc, the Far-Right in Croatia and Bosnian-Croat dominated areas of Bosnia does not resort to mysterious symbols rarely understood by the general population. Their approach is often more direct.

The following photos were taken in Mostar, over several years, at the site of the Partizan memorial. Mostar is located in Herzegovina, the region's largest town. Herzegovina has a significant Bosnian Croat population, and many of the leading Ustaša members were from the region. As the Partizans were the prime enemy of the Ustaša during WWII, there is little fondness for Partizan memorials. The one in Mostar is regularly desecrated, as can be seen below.



Far-Right graffiti at the Partisan Cemetery in Mostar

This image, taken at the Partisan Cemetery in Mostar, blends Nazi swastikas with the Ustaša symbol, a U with a cross atop. On one side, the message "Ustaše Mostar" signifies that the Ustaša mentality is still proudly present in Mostar.⁷⁵ The phrase "Gazi Balije!" means "step on the Balija." Balija is a highly racist term used for Bosniaks by both Serbian and Croatian nationalists. During WWII, the Ustaša movement was sympathetic to Bosniaks and indeed, a number of Bosniaks joined the Ustaša and participated in their brutality. However, the majority of Bosniaks were against the Ustaša and only a minority supported them. The attitude of Croatian nationalists changed during the most recent war, when they attempted to carve out their own independent state from Bosnia during the 90s. This led to a brutal conflict in Mostar, wherein Croatian armed forces bombarded the city and killed Bosniaks in an attempt to take the city. Bosniak prisoners were kept in concentration camps, often alongside Serbs. Since then, the Croatian Far Right has identified Bosniaks (and Muslims) as an enemy, as the graffiti shows. The photo below shows once again, the violation of the memorial, with new graffiti sprayed on top of the. The text reads "Tito is dead".

⁷⁰ Denijal Jagic, 'Croatia Is a Crucible of Hyper-Nationalism', AlJazeera, 6 March 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/3/6/croatia-is-a-crucible-of-hyper-nationalism>.

⁷¹ 'Croatia Key to Ukrainian Far-Right's International Ambitions', Balkan Insight (blog), 18 July 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/18/croatia-key-to-ukrainian-far-rights-international-ambitions/>.

⁷² Hikmet Karčić, 'The Balkan Connection: Foreign Fighters and the Far Right in Ukraine', New Lines Institute, 1 May 2020, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/eurasia/the-balkan-connection-foreign-fighters-and-the-far-right-in-ukraine/>.

⁷³ Patrick Strickland, 'Croatia's "Alt Right": A Dangerous Group on the Margins', AlJazeera, 17 March 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/3/17/croatias-alt-right-a-dangerous-group-on-the-margins>.

⁷⁴ 'US Embassy Condemns Far-Right March With US Flag in Croatia', AP / VOA, 27 February 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-embassy-condemns-far-right-march-us-flag-croatia/3741884.html>.

⁷⁵ A.S., Natpisi "Gazi balije", "Ustaše Mostar" i "Balije u provalije" osvanuli na Partizanskom groblju u Mostaru, 15 February 2020, Faktor, <https://faktor.ba/vijest/natpisi-gazi-balije-ustase-mostar-i-balije-u-provalije-osvanuli-na-partizanskom-groblju-u-mostaru/70476>



Far-Right graffiti from the memorial in Mostar

This photo, again from the memorial, shows still more Far-Right graffiti. The messaging on the top panel is hard to make out, but the Celtic Cross is clear. The message "pratimo vas" (We're following you), appears on the lower panel. More recently, each of the several hundred tombstones at the Partisan Cemetery were destroyed in the course of one night, showing that the attack was not an isolated incident but rather, part of a larger organised movement.

Analysts have identified that some supporters of the Bosnian Croat football club, Zrinjski, based in Mostar, follow far-right ideology and are linked with other far-right movements, such as the AZOV military battalion in Ukraine.⁷⁶



Ustaša salute „Za Dom, Spremni“ (For the homeland, ready) can be found on many walls around Croatia and the Bosnian-Croat dominated areas of Bosnia

The phrase "Za Dom, Spremni," or ZDS (For the homeland, ready), the World War II Ustaša salute, can be found on many walls around Croatia and the Bosnian-Croat dominated areas of Bosnia. The picture below, taken by Duško Marušić in Dalmatia for Slobodna Dalmacija combines not only the ZDS, but also a Celtic cross, the Ustaša symbol and a swastika⁷⁷.

In the following photo, we once again see a blending of Croatian Far-Right symbols and Global Far Right symbols. The "Serbian Family Tree" graffiti is an image used by the Croatian Far-Right to celebrate the Ustaša's killings of Serbs in WWII.⁷⁸ Next to it, the 'SS bolts', derived from the "sowilo" or "sun" runes⁷⁹. This symbol was used by the SS and remains a popular sign of the Global Far-Right.



Far-Right graffiti



A blending of Croatian Far-Right symbols and global Far-Right symbols.

⁷⁶ Nermina Kuloglija, "In Bosnian River Town, Far-Right Symbols and a Link to Ukraine", Detektor.ba, November 6, 2020, <https://detektor.ba/2020/11/06/in-bosnian-river-town-far-right-symbols-and-a-link-to-ukraine/?lang=en>

⁷⁷ Davor Krile, 'Ustaški Pozdrav: Ima li zabrana 'Za dom spremni' šanse u Hrvatskoj? Stručnjak za 'Slobodnu': Ovo će samo razotkriti čuvar HDZ-ova pečata. Pupovac je definiran onom svojom izjavom...', Slobodna Dalmacija, 22 February 2022, <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/ima-li-zabрана-za-dom-spremní-sanse-u-hrvatskoj-stručnjak-za-slobodnu-ovo-će-samo-razotkriti-čuvare-hdz-ova-pečata-pupovac-je-definiran-onom-svojom-izjavom-1169714>.

⁷⁸ "Tko vješa Srbe na vrbe?", Antifašistički Vjesnik, 25 February 2017, https://www.antifašistički-vjesnik.org/hr/vijesti/3/Tko_vjesa_Srbe_na_vrbe_/125/

⁷⁹ 'Hate Symbol: SS Bolts', ADL, 2022, <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/ss-bolts>.

The photo below, taken by Nikola Šolić for index.hr⁸⁰ shows a group of football fans of the Zagreb based football fan club, the Bad Blue Boys. The banner (note the Ustaša U symbol) reads: "Jebat ćemo srpske žene i djecu" (We will fuck Serb women and children). This slogan has occurred on several occasions - so it is not a one off.⁸¹



A group of football fans of the Zagreb-based fan club with an Ustaša banner



The black flag of the HOS (Croatian Defence Forces), a paramilitary unit



Far-Right graffiti in Croatia

In the top photo, there can be seen, unclearly, the black flags of the HOS. The HOS insignia is commonly associated with the Croatian Far Right, as it was the badge of the Hrvatske obrambene snage (Croatian Defence Forces), a paramilitary unit made up of Croats, German /Austrian neo-Nazis and even some Bosniaks during the Croatia War (1991-1995). The HOS borrowed heavily from NDH imagery and the Ustaša movement. For example, the HOS logo carries the Ustaša coat of arms centrally on top of a blue knot pattern similar to the NDH coat of arms, including "Za dom spremni". The abbreviation "HOS" is a deliberate reference to the name of the army of the fascist NDH state (Hrvatske oružane snage / HOS, "Croatian Armed Forces")⁸².

⁸⁰ Davor Tomšić, 'Doznali smo nove detalje o Gnjusnom Transparentu "Je*at Ćemo Srpske Žene i Djecu"', Index.hr, 12 June 2020, <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/doznali-smo-nove-detalle-o-gnjusnom-transparentu-jeat-cemo-srpske-zene-i-djecu/2189915.aspx>.

⁸¹ Goran Borković, 'Dogadaj Na Kustošiji Nije Izolirani Incident + Fotogalerija', Novosti, 13 June 2022, <https://www.portalnovosti.com/jucerasnji-dogadaj-na-kustosiji-nije-izolirani-incident-fotogalerija#gallery-3>.

⁸² 'Symbols of Croatian Fascism', no-ustasa.at, accessed 29 June 2022, <https://www.no-ustasa.at/en/general-en/2836/the-austrian-authorities-and-the-ustasa-meeting-2/>.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Although the symbols used by the far-right have roots in the past, many new ones appear online. As a result, this research has presented only the most widely used examples. The introduction of coded hate speech and symbols has been on the rise with the greater public discussion of criminalising hate speech. Thus, it is expected that more hidden hate symbols and messages will be visible both online and on the ground. There are groups, including the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, doing valuable work to monitor and publicly react against Far-Right ideas in the Western Balkans.

In regard to findings of this research, the following recommendations should be considered:

The criminalisation of far-right hate symbols.

Develop and support resources for recognizing hate symbols, especially in the online sphere.

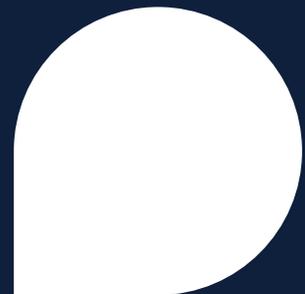
Establish effective intervention measures against hate symbols online.

Build effective cooperation between agencies working in cyber security.

Organise programmes to develop resilience among youth in the educational system.

Establish a national task force with the aim of monitoring far-right activity in the country.

Support further research on the origins, trends and future perspectives of far-right ideology.



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