



EUROPE

# From Hungary, a far-right export

Right-wing nationalist groups in eastern Europe are sharing ideas and tactics. At the network's heart: Hungary's Jobbik

BY MARCIN GOETTIG AND CHRISTIAN LOWE

## EUROPE FROM HUNGARY, A FAR-RIGHT EXPORT

WARSAW, APRIL 9, 2014

In a rented public hall not far from Poland's parliament, about 150 people gathered one afternoon late last year to hear speeches by a collection of far-right leaders from around Europe.

The event was organised by Ruch Narodowy, or National Movement, a Polish organisation that opposes foreign influences, views homosexuality as an illness and believes Poland is threatened by a leftist revolution hatched in Brussels.

Chief attraction was Marton Gyongyosi, one of the leaders of Hungarian far-right party Jobbik.

In a 20-minute speech, Gyongyosi addressed the crowd, mostly men in their thirties and forties, as "our Polish brothers," and railed against globalisation, environmentalists, socialists, and what he called a cabal of Western economic interests.

Poles needed to resist the forces hurting ordinary people, he said, before urging "regional cooperation between our countries."

It is a familiar rallying cry. Far-right groups have emerged or grown stronger across Europe in the wake of the financial crisis, and they are increasingly sharing ideas and tactics. Reuters has found ties between at least half a dozen of the groups in Europe's ex-Communist east. At the network's heart, officials from those groups say, sits Jobbik.

The party won 20.54 percent of the vote in Hungary's parliamentary election on April 6, up from the 15.86 percent it won in 2010, cementing its status as by far the largest far-right group in Eastern Europe.

From its strong base at home, Jobbik has stepped up efforts to export its ideology and methods to the wider region, encouraging far-right parties to run in next month's European parliamentary elections, and propagating a brand of nationalist ideology which is so hardline and so tinged with anti-Semitism, that some rightist groups in Western Europe have distanced themselves from the Hungarians.



ON THE UP: Jobbik chairman Gabor Vona after the party increased its vote in Hungarian elections.

REUTERS/BERNADETT SZABO

“The way Jobbik grew big, why could the same thing not happen elsewhere?”

**Marton Gyongyosi**

Jobbik official

The spread of Jobbik's ideology has alarmed anti-racism campaigners, gay rights activists, and Jewish groups. They believe it could fuel a rise in racially-motivated, anti-Semitic or homophobic street attacks. Longer-term, they say, it could help the far-right gain more political power.

In a statement sent to Reuters, Jobbik said that it hoped the people of central and eastern Europe would unite in an "alliance that spreads from the Adriatic to the Baltic Sea," to counter what it called Euro-Atlantic suppression.

Jobbik rejected any link between the growing strength of radical nationalists and violence. "Jobbik condemns violence, and its members cannot be linked to such acts either," it said.

### SPREADING IDEOLOGY

The day after Gyongyosi's speech last November, Jobbik's leader, Gabor Vona, addressed another rally in a Warsaw park.

"The path to final victory involves a million small steps," he told the crowd, through a translator. "You should take up this challenge. Take part in the European elections."

The crowd chanted: "Poland and Hungary are brothers!"

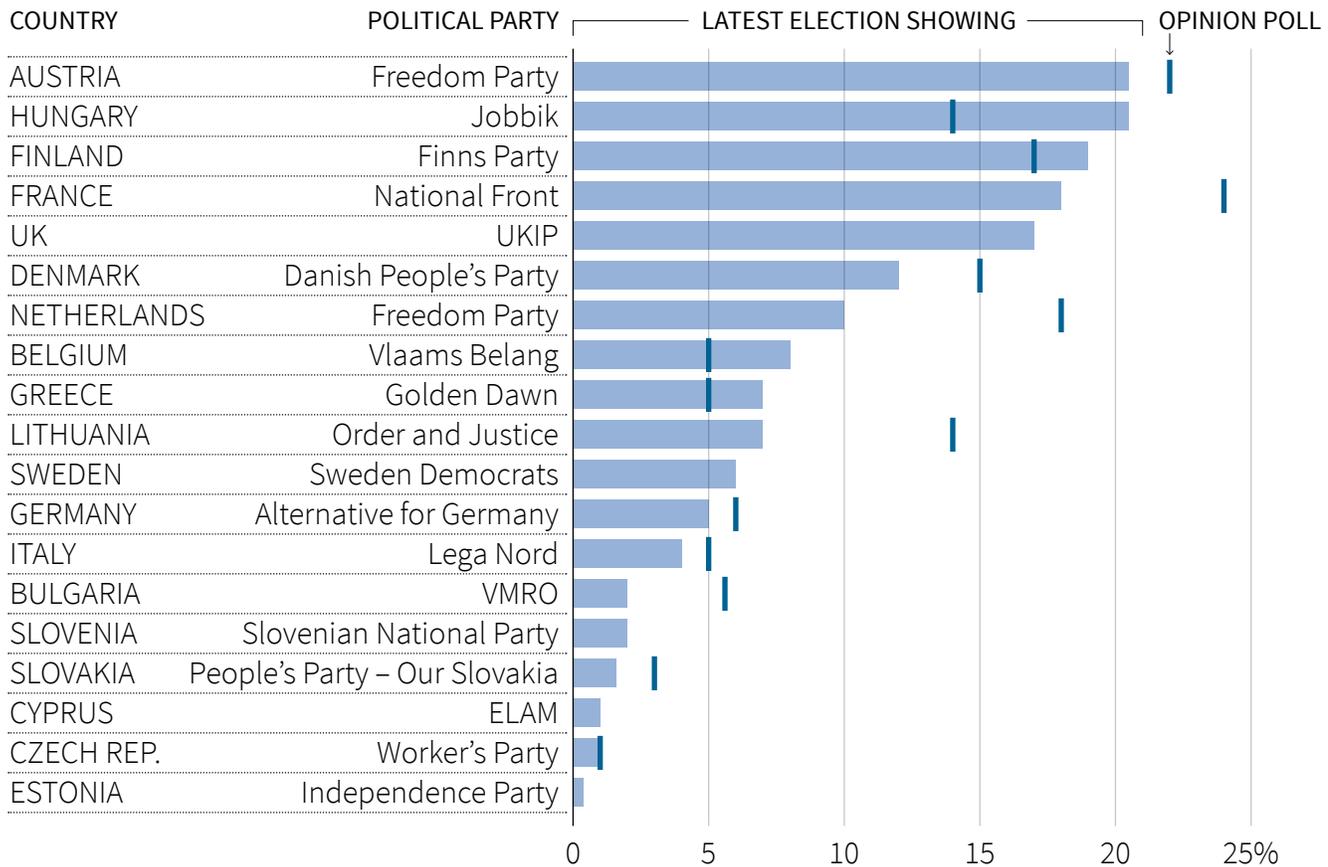
As they marched through the city earlier that day, some of the Polish participants fought pitched battles with police and set fire to a rainbow sculpture erected as a symbol of diversity.

Poland is not the only example of Jobbik's regional outreach. Far-right groups in Poland, Slovakia, Croatia, and Bulgaria told Reuters they have ties with fellow parties in several countries in the region. Jobbik sat at the centre of that web, the only one with contacts with all the parties.

Nick Griffin, leader of the British National Party (BNP), one of the few far right parties in Western Europe with close relations with Jobbik, said the Hungarian

# Right swing ahead?

Support for far-right and nationalist parties is growing across Europe. In the east, Hungary's Jobbik has been leading the way.



Sources: Election commissions of individual countries; Reuters bureaux.

party is the driving force behind efforts to forge a far-right coalition.

Other groups say they admire the party because of its success in Hungary and its organisational muscle.

Jobbik appears to operate on a shoestring. It has an annual budget of \$2.34 million, according to the Hungarian state audit office, most of it from a state allowance to parties in parliament. Jobbik denies giving financial aid to other groups, but it can afford its own staff, travel, and facilities

- all factors that enhance its influence.

"Jobbik is a market leader of sorts," Gyongyosi said. "There are shared values, and the way Jobbik grew big, why could the same thing not happen elsewhere?"

## "AGAINST THE DICTATES OF BRUSSELS"

Broadly speaking those shared values include a strong opposition to Brussels, a dislike of immigrants, and a suspicion of Jews and of the Roma, an ethnic minority

who number about 10 million in Eastern Europe and who have faced centuries of discrimination.

Hromoslav Skrabak, leader of 19-year-old Slovakian group Slovenska Pospolitost, has argued for racial segregation and "humanitarian" methods to reduce Roma fertility. Skrabak said his group cooperates with far-right groups in Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Serbia to jointly fight "against the dictate

*Text continues on page 5*

## EUROPE FROM HUNGARY, A FAR-RIGHT EXPORT



ON THE MARCH: Last September, far-right organizations in Warsaw marched (above) to honor former Polish, anti-Soviet and anti-Nazi forces. Two months later, a march on Poland's national day of independence (below) drew a more militant crowd. **REUTERS/KACPER PEMPEL**



## EUROPE FROM HUNGARY, A FAR-RIGHT EXPORT

of Brussels,” and to spread the idea of pan-Slavism, a union of ethnic Slavs.

Frano Cirko, a member of the Croatian Pure Party of Rights, said cooperation between far-right groups helped take on “neo-liberal” capitalism, which he said threatened national values in Europe and made it too easy for foreign firms to buy Croatian companies.

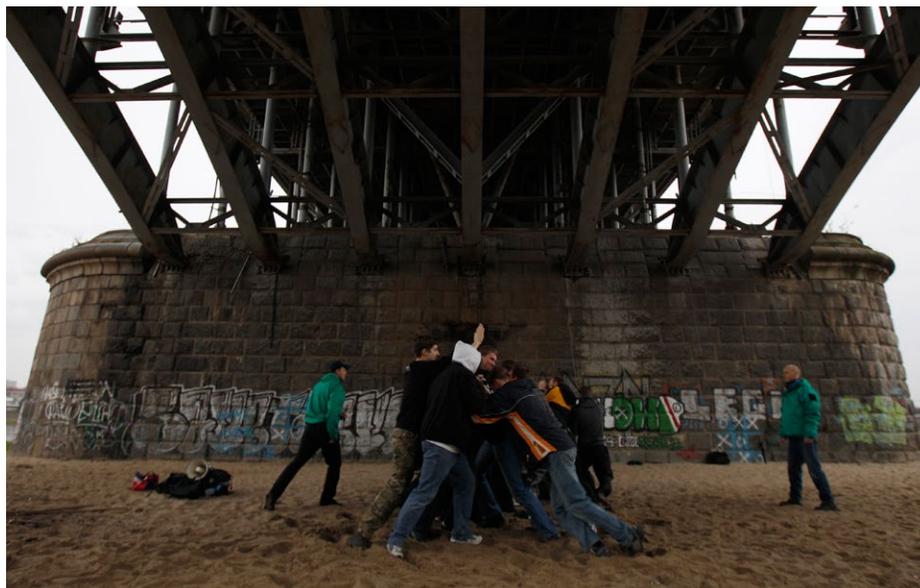
Angel Dzhambazki, deputy leader of Bulgaria’s VMRO, a movement that has its roots in the late 19th century and was revived in 1990, said its “close cooperation” with Jobbik and a Croatian group had helped it grow. “We invite them to participate in our meetings, and at the same time we take part in events organised by them.”

VRMO is in the process of forming a coalition with a new populist party called Bulgaria Without Censorship. A poll by Bulgaria’s Institute of Modern Politics showed that, together, the parties would have 5.6 percent support for the European Parliament election, putting them third and giving them a chance of winning one of Bulgaria’s allocation of 17 seats. The elections for the European Parliament take place on May 22-25 in all 28 member states of the bloc.

### WESTERN FRONT

Jobbik has had less success in Western Europe, where more established nationalist parties reject its anti-Semitic views. In 2012, Jobbik’s Gyongyosi told the Hungarian parliament that Jews were a threat to national security and should be registered on lists. He later apologised and said he had been misunderstood. But parties such as the Dutch Party of Freedom, which is staunchly pro-Israel, and France’s National Front, which has sought to move away from its anti-Semitic past, are both wary of the Hungarian group.

Jobbik’s principal ally in Western Europe is the British National Party. Griffin, its leader, said the BNP and Jobbik were working together on building a functioning



TRAINING: Men practice during a training session of paramilitary guards ahead of last November’s Independence Day march in Warsaw. **REUTERS/KACPER PEMPEL**

bloc of nationalists within the European Parliament.

“I would say probably I do more of the work in eastern and southern Europe than they (Jobbik) do, whereas they tend to concentrate on the centre and the east,” Griffin said in a telephone interview.

Opinion polls in Britain suggest the BNP will lose the two seats it currently holds in the European parliament.

One far-right party that polls predict will win seats in Brussels is Greece’s Golden Dawn, which says it wants to rid the country of the “stench” of immigrants. But Jobbik told Reuters Golden Dawn was “unfit” for the Hungarian party to cooperate with. Golden Dawn spokesman Ilias Kasidiaris said there was no official cooperation with Jobbik.

Cas Mudde, assistant professor at the School for Public and International Affairs at the University of Georgia in the United States, said that Jobbik is driven in part to look for allies “to show that it is not some kind of marginal phenomenon. There are two ways to do that: You can do it nationally, which is very hard, or you can do it

internationally by saying: ‘Look, we have friends all over the place.’”

### “THIS IS DANGEROUS”

Last May, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) urged European governments to consider banning neo-Nazi parties that threatened democracy and minority rights. The WJC met in the Hungarian capital Budapest to underscore its concerns about Jobbik.

Rafal Pankowski from Never Again, a Polish anti-racist association that tracks cases of racially motivated violence, said he feared that Jobbik’s efforts to spread its tactics and ideology could lead to more violence against minorities.

“This is dangerous,” he said of Jobbik’s international influence. “If similar groups in other countries copy this model ... then the situation might worsen.”

Robert Biedron, a gay member of the Polish parliament, said Polish far-right activists ran a website called Red Watch where they posted pictures and personal details of people they described as “queers and deviants,” as well as lists of left-wing

## EUROPE FROM HUNGARY, A FAR-RIGHT EXPORT

activists and Jewish academics.

Biedron reported to police that he was beaten up in Warsaw at the end of February in what he believes was a homophobic attack.

Biedron said he did not expect Ruch Narodowy to win seats in this year's European election, but the Polish party's support was rising, and it had a chance in next year's Polish parliamentary polls. If that happens, he said, it will use parliament to promote its rhetoric "based on hate for others."

Jobbik's network-building has been most successful in Poland in part because Poland and Hungary have no historical claims on each other's territory, an issue that has often hindered cooperation between Jobbik and nationalists from other neighbours.

### PARAMILITARIES

On a sandy riverbank in the shadow of a bridge over the river Vistula, members of the paramilitary arm of Ruch Narodowy rehearsed for their role as stewards before November's rally in Warsaw.

Some looked like the stereotype of far-right skinheads. Others were middle-class professionals. One showed up in an Audi saloon, another in an expensive sports utility vehicle. The unit's leader, Przemyslaw Czyzewski, said several members were lawyers.

A diagram of the organisation's structure showed it had a military-style hierarchy, and units called "choragiew", a word which was used in the past to describe Polish cavalry formations.

Explaining why he decided to join the unit, one man said he wanted to defend Polish values under threat from foreign influences. "I finally had to do something," said the man, in his thirties, who did not give his name.

The group denies it takes its inspiration from Hungary, but it has striking



IN THE FRAME: Robert Winnicki, leader of Polish far-right group Ruch Narodowy, in Warsaw last year. REUTERS/KACPER PEMPEL

similarities with Jobbik's paramilitary wing, called "Magyar Garda," or Hungarian Guard. In 2008 a court ruled that Magyar Garda threatened the dignity of Roma and Jewish people. The group disbanded but was quickly replaced by a similar organisation.

Robert Winnicki, the bookish, bespectacled 28-year-old leader of Ruch Narodowy, has described homosexuality as "a plague" and talked of creating a "new type of Pole" disciplined enough to take on the country's enemies.

He told Reuters that the aim of his movement's contacts with foreign peers was to "exchange experiences, learn from each other."

Winnicki travelled to Hungary in March last year to address a rally of Jobbik activists.

"Inspired by your example, we are organising a national movement today in Poland," he told his Hungarian hosts, according to a published transcript.

"An army is quickly growing in Poland which soon, on its section of the front, will join the battle that you are conducting. And together we will march to victory."

*Additional reporting by Marton Dunai in Budapest, Renee Maltezou in Athens, Tsvetelia Tsolova and Angel Krasimirov in Sofia, Robert Muller in Prague, and Zoran Radosavljevic and Igor Ilic in Zagreb; Edited by Simon Robinson and Sara Ledwith*

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### **Marcin Goettig, Correspondent**

marcin.goettig@thomsonreuters.com

#### **Christian Lowe, Bureau Chief, Central Europe and the Balkans**

christian.lowe@thomsonreuters.com

#### **Simon Robinson, Enterprise Editor, Europe, Middle East and Africa**

simon.robinson@thomsonreuters.com

#### **Michael Williams, Global Enterprise Editor**

michael.j.williams@thomsonreuters.com