

## **Democratic Gains Falter With Tighter Security in Central Europe**

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### **Body**

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Since the terror attacks in the United States on Sept. 11, several governments in **Central Europe** have called for **tighter security** precautions, possibly reversing the direction of **democratic gains** the nations have made since the fall of Communism.

One critic of the trend is Amnesty International. In a report being put out on Thursday in London, the rights group warns that "In the name of fighting 'international terrorism,' " governments have rushed to introduce new measures that threaten the human rights of their own citizens, immigrants and refugees."

It cited a wave of attacks on Muslims and other foreigners in the United States, **Europe** and Australia and efforts by governments from Hungary to China to increase the powers of the police and **security** officials.

The situation is delicate in **Central Europe**, where some leaders now in office spent time in jail in the Communist era for their protests on behalf of human rights. The Czech president, Vaclav Havel, who spent five years in prison, has said that some rights may have to be restricted after the attacks in order to protect larger freedoms. But he criticized a growing climate of intolerance for dissenting political opinions in the country.

"Expressing critical thought is considered to be favoring the terrorists," Mr. Havel told a newspaper. "That is what I consider extremely dangerous."

In the Czech Republic, the lower house of Parliament rushed to approve a bill easing the access of the police and intelligence services to private records, including telephone records, without judicial oversight. Another proposal would limit certain rights of asylum seekers. The proposal has critics in the upper house, which has yet to act on the bill.

Shortly after the attacks, the police arrested the leader of an extremist group who had praised the attacks at a public rally.

In Hungary, authorities confined in a single camp at least 812 Afghans still in refugee camps, an action that rights groups say is a direct violation of international conventions.

In Russia, the Justice Ministry has proposed toughening laws to let the police detain those suspected of links to terrorism for up to 30 days.

"A lot of institutions characteristic of the police state and Communism have returned," said Ferenc Koszeg, president of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. He said that some of the country's hard-won freedoms began to erode five years ago when a wave of organized crime swept the country.

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"Generally speaking," he said, "there is an atmosphere of more severe control of asylum seekers and other foreigners."

The extremist arrested in the Czech Republic -- Jan Kopal, the chairman of the fringe National Social Bloc -- was charged with approving a criminal act. He had applauded the attacks, saying the United States "deserves no less than such an attack" for "murdering citizens of Yugoslavia." If convicted, he could face a year in prison.

"It is his own opinion, to which he has a right, no matter how stupid it is," said Zdenek Zboril, a professor at Charles University in Prague and an expert on extremism. "We are seeing politics interfering in police work and that's dangerous."

In its report, Amnesty also warned that overzealous antiterrorism measures could limit free speech.

"Some of the definitions of terrorism under discussion are so broad that they could be used to criminalize anyone out of favor with those in power," the report said.

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