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# Echoes of the War in Ukraine: Ramifications on the Estonian and Latvian Right

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## Abstract

This article deals with the domestic politics of Estonia and Latvia after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. It studies the cases of the Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE) and Latvia's National Alliance (NA). This piece concentrates on the cases of EKRE and NA with an interest in these parties' formation processes, outlooks on identity politics, their stances vis-à-vis the EU and developments in international politics, and their relations with other political actors in Estonia and Latvia.

EKRE and NA anchor their ideological prerogatives in the longer trajectories of ethno-nationalism in Estonia and Latvia. However, whereas NA transformed into a party of the national conservative right, open to cooperation with centrist and centre-right partners, EKRE has remained a party of the radical right with a staunchly anti-systemic rhetoric and agenda. This particularity is largely to account for NA's convergence with Latvia's major parties on the increased securitisation of relations with Russia and EKRE's divergence towards a rhetoric that urges a prioritisation of the national interest and a "pro-peace" stance vis-à-vis the war in Ukraine.

**Keywords:** Estonia; Latvia; Ukraine; Nationalism; radical right

## Introduction

This article focuses on the domestic politics of Estonia and Latvia after Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. It concentrates on the Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE) and Latvia's National Alliance (NA). The former is the second largest party at the Estonian national assembly (*Riigikogu*) after the elections of 5 March 2023. The latter has been participating in several governing coalitions in Latvia from 2011 to the present day. The main questions are: Why did the NA move further towards the political mainstream in Latvia, whereas EKRE did not do the same in Estonia? How does this impact the divergent reactions of these two parties to the war in Ukraine?

Recent treatises have dealt with the systematic removal of Soviet-era monuments across Estonia and Latvia (Ricci 2024; Sazonov and Yatsyk 2024), domestic and external securitization (Schulze and Pupcenoks 2025; Andžāns 2023), and the toll that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has taken on the popularity of certain political actors (Kascian 2024). Nevertheless, the impact that this development has exerted on parties of the radical (EKRE) and the national conservative (NA) right remains understudied. Research on this topic concentrates on case studies of either Estonia or Latvia without a comparative outlook on these two adjacent contexts (Makarychev 2023; Auers 2023; Jakobson and Kasekamp 2023; Ploom, Sazonov, and Foster 2023).

This article is empirical and aims at updating the academic literature on Ethnopolitics and European Politics. It is a timely endeavor to study how and why ethno-nationalism can interfere with the engagement of influential radical and national conservative right-wing parties inside specific political and sociocultural contexts. This piece articulates the notion of the “broader right” (consisting of the radical, the national conservative, and the extreme right) as it operates across Central and Eastern Europe. The core component of this study concentrates on EKRE and NA with a keen interest in these parties’ formation processes, outlooks on identity politics in their societies, their stances vis-à-vis the EU and groundbreaking developments in international politics, and their relations to other political actors in Estonia and Latvia.

EKRE and NA anchor their ideological prerogatives in the longer trajectories of ethno-nationalism in Estonia and Latvia. Whereas NA transformed into a party of the *national conservative* right, open to cooperation with centrist and centre-right partners, EKRE has remained a party of the *radical* right with a staunchly anti-systemic rhetoric and agenda. This particularity is largely to account for NA’s *convergence* with Latvia’s major parties on the increased securitization of relations with Russia and EKRE’s *divergence* towards a rhetoric that urges a prioritization of the national interest and a “pro-peace” stance vis-à-vis the war in Ukraine.

Although sharing a similar historical background, functional democratic institutions, and a common Euro-Atlantic orientation in international politics, the party systems of Estonia and Latvia are also characterized by qualitative differences. For instance, since the 1990s, the lower minimum party membership count in Latvia (500 members) in comparison to Estonia (1000 members) resulted in a multiplicity of relatively small political actors inside the former context (Auers 2018, 347 and 349).

The ensuing state of fragmentation at the political macro-level, combined with ethno-cultural heterogeneity within the Latvian society, occasionally intensified the employment of ethno-nationalism (that is, the practice of “ethnic-outbidding” — Stewart and McGauvran 2020, 406), also by mainstream actors (for example, the centre-right “New Unity”/Jaunā Vienotība). As clarified in greater detail later, “ethnic outbidding” in Latvia has often been directed by parties of the centre and the centre-right, against “potentially unreliable/pro-Kremlin” forces (for example, the nominally centre-left party of Harmony/Saskaņa) (Braghioli and Petsinis 2019, 438). Although often consisting of short-lived governing coalitions, the Estonian party system has generally been less fragmented and volatile in comparison to the Latvian.

Nevertheless, parties of the “broader right” across the Baltic States have been keen on systematizing their institutional cooperation from an early stage. On 28 August 2013, EKRE, NA, and their Lithuanian partners, the Nationalists Union (*Tautininkų Sąjunga*), signed the Bauska Declaration in Bauska, southern Latvia (EKRE, 2013). The requirement to repair the damage and reverse the trauma inflicted on the Baltic nations during the Soviet era forms a major component of the Bauska Declaration (Petsinis 2022, 94–95). In particular, the document demands “compensations for the occupation by the Soviet Communist regime and acknowledgement of the occupation (by Russia)” (ibid). This is coupled with references to the necessity to prevent “any violation of our sovereignty and any external intrusions to our domestic affairs.”

In accordance with the latter standpoint, as early as 2016, EKRE’s Martin Helme warned that “Russia has been on the warpath since the Georgian conflict in 2008. ... it has been becoming more and more aggressive, and it is not an exaggeration to contend that the danger of a Russian invasion is imminent for all Baltic States” (Interview with the chairman of EKRE, 12 October 2016, Tallinn). At around the same time, a former Secretary General of NA underlined that “Russia is ready to strike when their rivals show weakness (for example, Georgia and Ukraine)” (Interview with a former Secretary General of NA, 17 October 2017, Riga). Since 2014/2015, NA, in particular, systematized its cooperation with right-wing partners in Ukraine (for example, *Svoboda*/“Freedom”) through donations and other assistance to the Ukrainian military in Donbass (for example, IT support, sponsorship on social media, etc.) as well as on the ideological level (Kott 2017; Timofejevs and Wierenga 2023). Taking into consideration this common ideological trajectory, it is of great interest

to discern the reason behind the divergent reactions of these two parties to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (24 February 2022). This qualitative enquiry has relied on the method of comparative-historical analysis (Collier 1998; Mahoney 2015). The main features that render this method suitable for the purposes of this research are its: (a) focus on clearly defined national (political and societal) contexts; (b) concern with temporal flow and with the unfolding of causal processes through time; (c) utilization of systematic comparisons to generate and/or assess explanations of outcomes at the level of national politics (Mahoney 2015, 77; Collier 1998, 1–2).

The contextual focus of comparative-historical analysis on temporal settings helps comprehend how the effect of a given variable on developmental outcomes can change, depending on its temporal location (Mahoney 2015, 81; Collier 1998, 5; Pierson 2004). It also simultaneously allows for the study of phenomena such as path dependence and identifying the historical sources of certain patterns in politics (Mahoney 2015, 81). All these aspects are of particular relevance to studying why and how: (a) although sharing common origins, the developmental trajectories of EKRE and NA pursued divergent paths through time; (b) these divergent paths have been subject to both the contextual specificities of the party-systems as well as the persisting legacies of ethno-nationalism in Estonia and Latvia.

In greater detail, this article is structured as a *paired comparison* (Tarrow 2010). This is an intermediate step between a single case study, which suggests a general relationship, and a multi-case analysis that tests or refines a theory. This paired comparison is anchored in a qualitative and content analysis (Schreier 2012; Hermann 2008) of official documents such as legal texts, party programmes, declarations, and statements issued by selected political actors in Estonia and Latvia (EKRE and NA, in particular).

Policymaking reports, surveys, and articles from the international press have been of complementary importance. This piece incorporates a set of research interviews (political representatives and government officials), four in total, conducted in Estonia and Latvia, between 2016 and 2019, under the auspices of research funding from the Swedish Institute, Stockholm (Visby Programme/*Visbyprogrammet*) and a Marie Skłodowska-Curie research project (project ID: 749400-MERWBKBS).

The qualitative content analysis concentrated on specific sections of the party documents, the research interviews, and the other sources of primary data that contain information about the fundamental ideological and policymaking prerogatives of EKRE and NA (as well as their evolution) on: ethno-nationalism, identity politics, and the management of interethnic relations in Estonia and Latvia; security-related issues (*vis-à-vis* Russia), foreign policy, and bilateral relations with supranational institutions (EU and NATO); outlooks on major political actors in Estonia and Latvia. Regarding domestic politics, the coding process concentrated on the intensity of anti-establishment rhetoric, as employed by the two parties, and its evolution (either maintenance or alleviation) through time. Regarding foreign policy and, in particular, bilateral relations with Russia, the coding process focused on the intensity (or not) of calls for the securitization of Estonia's/Latvia's relations with Russia and their evolution through time — especially against the background of the war in Ukraine (24 February 2022) — .

## **EKRE and NA: From beginnings to consolidation**

### ***EKRE: Formation process and ideological prerogatives***

EKRE was founded in 2012 after a merger between the erstwhile (centre-right) People's Union of Estonia/*Eestimaa Rahvaliid* and the more nationalistic pressure group Estonian Patriotic Movement/*Eesti Rahvuslik Liikumine*. In 2011, the remainder of the People's Union commenced talks with the Estonian Patriotic Movement, which comprised EKRE's current chairman, Martin Helme. By that time, Mart Helme's (Martin's father, EKRE's founder, and chairman between 2013 and 2020) nationalist faction had taken over the People's Union. EKRE's "Konservatiivne Programm"

(2015) pledges to enhance the institutional status of the Estonian language in the public sector and establish an adequate command of Estonian as a basic condition for election to the *Riigikogu* and the municipal bodies of administration (“*Riik ja valitsemine*” section).

Although regarding Estonia’s ethnic Russians as an essentially migrant community, EKRE subscribes to the state-sponsored integration strategy for ethnic Russians, with a non-regulated citizen status (“stateless persons”)<sup>1</sup> who were born in the country. However, naturalized individuals must give up any previous nationality and possess only Estonian citizenship (“*Kodanik ja Kodanikuühiskond*” section). Meanwhile, EKRE has warned that “we are very sceptical towards the migration waves from Slavic countries (Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine) to Estonia ... it might not be an exaggeration to assert that, in 30 years from now, the majority population in Estonia will be Russian speaking” (Interview with the chairman of EKRE, 12 October 2016, Tallinn).

EKRE’s prerogatives on citizenship have been structured in such a way as to interlink the question of the ethnic Russian minority in Estonia with the area of foreign policy — emphasizing the necessity to prolong the securitization of relations with the eastern neighbor. EKRE has been insisting that Estonia must upgrade its security status vis-à-vis Russia, and its leadership has demanded compensation from Russia for the damage inflicted under Soviet rule (“*Konservatiivne Programm*,” “*Välis ja julgeolekupoliitika*” section) (Petsinis and Wierenga 2021, 5).

EKRE’s Euroscepticism interlinks the party’s commitment to the main premises of Estonian ethno-nationalism with geopolitics. The party argued that the core states within the EU have allegedly underestimated the security threat that Russia represents for the Baltic States. EKRE contended that membership of the EU did not enhance Estonia’s security status vis-à-vis Russia (Eurovalimiste Platvorm 2014). Moreover, it expressed its discontent towards Germany’s alleged apathy vis-à-vis Russia’s aggressive stance towards the Baltic States and the cooperation with Moscow in energy issues prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Petsinis and Wierenga 2021, 6).

Alongside commitment to ethno-nationalist prerogatives, EKRE has anchored its active policy-making in anti-establishment rhetoric and grassroots activism (Saarts 2024, 10–13). As early as 2012, the party judged that “the current state of political affairs in Estonia favours the interests of specific segments within the society in a one-sided manner” and that it is characterized by an “excessive, often undemocratic, centralization of power with no independent vision of development” (“*Konservatiivne Manifest*” 2012).

The pledge to combat “political corruption” forms an important component in EKRE’s rhetoric. The party aspired to develop a code of ethics for politicians and put politicians and political parties that are “harmful or dangerous to the state in the spotlight” (“*Konservatiivne Programm*” 2015: “*Õigus ja Korrakaitse*” section). In 2019, EKRE placed additional emphasis on “the right of popular initiative to hold binding referendums” and “direct instruments for making political decisions” (“*Riigikogu* 2019”). Therefore, as early as the mid and late 2010s, its leadership had succeeded in fashioning EKRE as a modern party of the European radical right that, alongside commitment to Estonian ethno-nationalism, was capable of castigating symptoms of corruption and capitalizing on nascent Euroscepticism (Braghiroli and Petsinis 2019, 437; Trumm 2018; Saarts et al. 2021, 361–362).

### **NA: Formation process and ideological prerogatives**

NA evolved out of the merger between TB/LNNK (“For Fatherland and Freedom”/“Latvian National Independent Movement”) and “All for Latvia!”/*Visu Latvial!* on 23 July 2011. NA, like EKRE, fits the prototype of a “cadre party” that came into being after the unification of two pre-existing entities.

Ethno-nationalism forms an essential pillar for NA. In the “Extensive Programme for the 13th *Saeima* (national assembly)” (2018), the party summarized its core values as “... the Latvian nation, language and culture, honour and remembrance of heroes, independence and growth of Latvia”

(NA 2018a, 1). NA calls for the “... spiritual continuation of the Latvian people — strengthening the Latvian language, culture, collective memory and sense of belonging” (ibid.). The party underlines that “maintaining the national culture and Latvian language is a crucial priority for the country’s growth and an essential precondition for a cohesive society” (ibid., 110).

In a similar fashion to EKRE, NA has insisted on upgrading Latvia’s security status vis-à-vis Russia. To safeguard sovereignty, NA has pledged to: (a) prevent “pro-Russian forces” (namely, the party of Harmony) from entering the government; (b) upgrade the armed forces under the auspices of NATO (NA 2018a, 87–90; NA 2018b; Petsinis and Wierenga 2021, 7–8). On the naturalization process of “stateless persons,” NA, throughout 2017, contested the *Saeima*’s proposal for the provision of Latvian citizenship to the children born to “stateless” families without the necessary assent of one of the two parents (Interview with a NA MEP, 13 October 2017, Riga).<sup>2</sup> Along similar lines to EKRE, the party also holds that “the Russian-speaking migrant community in Latvia is self-sufficient ... expanding the Russian-speaking migrant community by attracting new (Russian-speaking) migrants from the post-Soviet space cannot be supported” (NA 2018a, 22–23).

NA’s Euroscepticism, like that of EKRE, interlinks a commitment to the main premises of Latvian ethno-nationalism with geopolitics. NA voiced skepticism over the extent to which EU membership can enhance Latvia’s security status vis-à-vis Russia (Petsinis and Wierenga 2021, 8–9). In particular, its leadership had stated in 2016 that “Germany may not like it, but we must protect our national interests. It is obvious that this project (Nord Stream II) threatens the security of Latvia and the Baltic States, therefore we must not remain silent about it.”<sup>3</sup>

According to Auers and Kasekamp (2013, 75), “All for Latvia!” “... ticks all the necessary boxes for a modern radical right populist party. It has followed the rhetorical master frame of the radical right and has a charismatic leader in Raivis Dzintars, the founder and driving force behind ‘All for Latvia!’” Nevertheless, in contrast to EKRE, the anti-systemic tones in NA’s political engagement progressively eroded. For instance, although occasionally levying criticism at the media, the party’s affiliates have refrained from conceptualizing Latvia’s media-sphere as part of the “corrupt establishment” (Petsinis and Wierenga 2021, 21).

Furthermore, although generally maintaining a sovereigntist stance on European politics, unlike EKRE (“Eurovalimiste 2019”; Points 1, 4, and 5), NA never hinted at the right of member states to leave the EU. NA’s “de-radicalization” and transformation into a party of the national conservative right have been subject to its continuous participation in four government coalitions: 2011, 2014, 2019, and the current one. This is indicative of the idiosyncratic particularities that characterize the Latvian party system vis-à-vis the Estonian one.

Before proceeding to an empirical discussion of the qualitative differences between the Estonian and Latvian party-systems and how they have impacted the political engagement of EKRE and NA, to enhance the reader’s understanding, it is essential to: (a) introduce the umbrella-concept of the “broader right” as a multifaceted notion whose internal boundaries are not fixed, but “porous,” and malleable; (b) provide a contextual overview of the fluidity and transformative trajectories among contemporary parties of the radical, national conservative, and extreme right across Europe.

### Mapping the “broader right” in Central and Eastern Europe

One can sketch out a set of features which are endemic in radical right-wing parties: (a) varying shades of ethno-nationalism, nativism, and Euroscepticism; (b) anti-establishment rhetoric and an overriding distinction between the people and the elite (Betz and Johnson 2004; Mudde 2010); (c) insistence on “hard borders” and law and order.

Instead of clustering all actors beyond the (conservative) centre-right under the umbrella of the “radical right,” this piece counter-proposes an alternative scheme. This scheme introduces the *broader right* as a multifaceted notion, paying attention to political origins, evolutionary trajectories, and patterns of active engagement alongside ideology. The boundaries inside this scheme are

not fixed, but “porous” and malleable. “Broader right” comprises the sub-categories of the radical, the national conservative, and the extreme right.

Resulting from the impact of domestic and international politics, it is possible for political actors to reform and either “de-radicalize” or “radicalize” — transitioning from one of these categories to another. The last decade has witnessed the transformation of political actors, previously oscillating between the radical and the extreme right, into “moderate” parties of the conservative right (for example, Hungary’s Jobbik). Meanwhile, radical right-wing parties may also host more militant wings (for example, AfD’s *Flügel* “Wing” and EKRE’s *Sinine Áratul* “Blue Awakening” youth organization) (Pirro 2023, 108; Saarts et al., 2021).

The European radical right comprises influential political actors such as Austria’s Freedom Party/FPÖ and Czechia’s Freedom and Direct Democracy/SPD. These parties scrutinize the constitutional order but promote their political cause(s) via the parliamentary institutions. Radical right-wing parties may be by-products of top-level formation processes that came into being after the: (a) reformation or merger of already existing parties (for example, the Finns Party in Finland and EKRE in Estonia); (b) secession of “splinter groups” from larger parties (for example, the Independent Greeks/ANEL and the Hellenic Solution/EL in Greece). On some occasions, radical right-wing parties joined governing coalitions (for example, the Finns Party in Finland, EKRE in Estonia, and ANEL in Greece).

One more category of right-wing parties beyond the mainstream centre-right is the *national conservatives*. These parties maintain ethno-nationalist and nativist components, as well as pledges to protect “naturally ascribed” gender norms and religious values, but their anti-establishment tones are less emphatic in comparison to the radical right. Prominent examples from Central and Eastern Europe are FIDESZ in Hungary, PiS in Poland, and the Homeland Movement/DP in Croatia.

Bustikova (2020, 1–10) addresses the cases of FIDESZ and PiS as “radicalized” parties of the (formerly mainstream) conservative centre-right. Throughout the last decade, the “radicalization” of these parties has consisted of defending their opposition to immigration and/or the introduction of controversial policies contradicting the rule of law.

As soon as FIDESZ and PiS entered the halls of power, their objective became to consolidate their dominant status. Correspondingly, they refashioned their active patterns of policymaking from anti-establishment rhetoric and mass mobilization towards the adoption of quasi-authoritarian governance. In this piece, such political actors are treated more accurately as parties of the (established) national conservative right rather than parties of the radical right with an articulate pattern of a “bottom-up,” anti-systemic engagement in politics.

Lastly, parties of the extreme right may attempt to subvert or substitute state institutions (for example, the organization of self-styled “patrolling operations”). Such parties have come into being via processes spearheaded by a grass-roots nucleus, often aided by semi-paramilitary groupings, opting for a militant engagement (for example, against political rivals and/or immigrants). Parties of this category with a non-negligible public appeal became active across Central and Southeastern Europe and include “Our Slovakia” (*Ludová Strana Naše Slovensko*), Bulgaria’s “Ataka,” and Greece’s Golden Dawn (Ellinas 2015; Sygkelos 2015; Drábik 2022). Their anti-democratic inclinations resulted in clashes between extreme right-wing parties and the state (for example, the conviction of Golden Dawn and “Our Slovakia” by the Greek and Slovak courts of justice based on criminal charges in October 2020).

This comparative overview is necessary to situate EKRE and NA more accurately inside the map of the European “broader right.” Of greater importance is to highlight how the fact that EKRE is a party of the *radical* right, whereas NA is a party of the *national conservative* right, can shape not solely their patterns of engagement in domestic politics but also their reactions to the impact of groundbreaking developments in global politics, such as the war in Ukraine. As part of this multifaceted process, the specificities of the Estonian and Latvian party systems have been of pivotal significance for the evolutionary trajectories of these two political actors.

## How the party-systems of Latvia and Estonia shaped the political physiognomies of NA and EKRE

### Latvia: A state of continuity

Barring the party of Harmony from the government emerged as a necessity for several centrist and centre-right parties (for example, The Conservatives, “Development For!” and New Unity) across Latvia’s political spectrum. Launched on 10 February 2010, Harmony triggered the apprehension of the predominantly “Latvian” parties based on its: (a) largely ethnic Russian bases of support; (b) calls for a foreign policy of appeasement vis-à-vis Russia (Petsinis 2022, 109).

Between 2010 and 2018, Harmony, in its own right, finished as the largest party in a sequence of parliamentary elections and joined the Socialists and Democrats at the European Parliament. Nevertheless, due to its lack of credibility among the majority of Latvia’s political forces, Harmony had been essentially treated as an “outcast” party (Braghiroli and Petsinis 2019, 438). The objective to keep Harmony away from power and the ensuing formation of heterogeneous, often fragile, coalition governments benefited the NA in certain ways.

NA was granted ample opportunity to promote its standpoints — especially those pertaining to “demographic issues” (ibid., 439). Between 2015 and 2018, the *Saeima* approved the party’s proposals for parental and dependent child benefits and incorporated them into the state’s legislation (NA 2018a, 43). Moreover, the Ministry of Welfare was assigned to NA in several governments. NA’s uninterrupted spell in government was a major catalyst that gradually alleviated its early anti-systemic speech, transforming it into a party of the national conservative right.

### Estonia: “Situational adaptability”

As in Latvia, (a lesser degree of) fragmentation also resulted in the formation of a series of coalition governments since Estonia regained its independence. Whereas the Latvian party system hints at a continuity in its relations with “unreliable” political actors, a “situational adaptability” can be detected in Estonia since the mid-2010s. This “adaptability” has been subject to the impact of “pragmatic” decision making at a party leadership level amid lower levels of volatility in comparison to Latvia’s party system (Saarts and Sootla 2023).

For instance, the (centrist/centre-left) Centre Party/*Eesti Keskerakond* is a party that, in a comparable fashion to Harmony, has: (a) built a support base within Estonia’s ethnic Russian minority; (b) called for a foreign policy of appeasement vis-à-vis Russia. This generated a considerable level of apprehension vis-à-vis the Centre Party among powerful political actors within Estonia — for example, the (liberal, centre-right) Reform Party/*Reformierakond*. Nevertheless, in contrast to the *cordon sanitaire* around Harmony, the Centre Party was admitted into two coalitions during the 2000s (2002 and 2003 — together with the Reform Party) and into two more during the 2010s (2016<sup>4</sup> and 2019).

Moving to EKRE, this party’s anti-systemic tones were the main reason why EKRE was excluded from negotiations for the formation of government coalitions until November 2016. However, in March 2019, EKRE was accepted in a coalition together with the Centre Party and the (conservative/centre-right) *Isamaa* (“Fatherland”) as the third, smaller partner. Political pragmatism came into play through a mutual focus, by the leaderships of EKRE and the Centre Party, on those policy-making areas where a common ground could be detected while downplaying sources of friction.

Two areas where a common ground was found were: (a) the increase of child and family benefits and incentives for Estonians who emigrated abroad to return (Jakobson et al. 2020); (b) the shared objections of the Centre Party and EKRE to the European Commission’s refugee quotas (Petsinis 2022, 114). EKRE’s inclusion in the government (2019–2021) granted the party an opportunity to promote its prerogatives. Unlike NA, though, this did not bring about an alleviation of EKRE’s anti-establishment rhetoric and patterns of policymaking.

## **EKRE and NA on Ukraine (24 February 2022–) “Hyper-securitization” in the Baltic States (2014–2022)**

Russia’s invasion of Georgia (1–16 August 2008) generated shockwaves across the Baltic States. Nevertheless, it was Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbass (February–April 2014) that intensified the calls for increasing the securitization of bilateral relations with Russia. Andžāns (2023) argues that these developments resulted in a “hyper-securitization” of the relations between the Baltic States and Russia.

*Securitization* in Political Science and IR can be tentatively defined as “the inability to solve a problem as a part of normal political practice” (Buzan et al. 1998, 29; Andžāns 2023, 139). The principal agents that securitize a referent object (usually a given state or society) can be the state institutions, the political establishment, or interest groups with an influential status and role within a society (Andžāns and Sprūds 2021, 192). In the traditional sense, securitization is conducted via a speech act (Buzan et al. 1998, 29). The success of a securitizing project is measured by the extent to which the securitizing agents manage to convince their audience (usually the society at large) that the referent object (for example, a given state) is facing an existential threat (Buzan et al. 1998, 21–42; Andžāns and Sprūds 2021, 192). Of greater interest for the purposes of this piece is the concept of *hyper-securitization*.

Buzan conceptualized hyper-securitization as “a tendency both to exaggerate threats and to resort to excessive countermeasures arising from an exaggerated sense of insecurity and anticipation of a high level of security” (Buzan 2004, 172). In light of “hybrid” (for example, cybernetic) warfare and its increasing significance, Hanssen and Nissenbaum reconceptualized hyper-securitization no longer as an “exaggerated” but as an occasionally rational response to threats lurking within the continuously expanding web-sphere (Hanssen and Nissenbaum 2009, 1164). Attention here is paid to Andžāns’ reformulation of hyper-securitization as “securitization processes advancing significantly beyond the previous levels of securitization in terms of securitization intensity and the number of securitizing actors” (Andžāns 2023, 143).

This conceptualization is of direct relevance to Estonia and Latvia, where, since 2008, the post-Soviet space has been regarded by policymakers as a geopolitical whole — capable of generating developments that can exert immediate ramifications on domestic politics and societal stability in these two states. Of crucial significance have been anxieties over information and cyber warfare, emanating from Russian-based agencies, against Estonia and Latvia — especially following the “Bronze Soldier” riots (26–29 April 2007) in Estonia (Interview with a policy adviser at the Government Office of Estonia, 1 December 2017, Tallinn)<sup>5</sup> and the language referendum of 18 February 2012 in Latvia (Ijabs 2016, 10–12).<sup>6</sup>

### **Estonia: The peak-point of hyper-securitization**

Annus (2020, 8–12, 18–19) argues that, in the 2010s, Estonian policymakers placed a more pronounced stress on novel imageries that visualized Estonia as a successful and globally outgoing “eco-digital” nation. Nevertheless, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine rendered Estonian ethno-nationalism, especially its “de-Sovietization” component (Annus 2012; Peiker 2016, 114; Petsinis 2022, 93–94), increasingly relevant again while bringing its geopolitical implications back to the fore. This manifested in both foreign and domestic politics. For the purposes of this article, in Estonia, the political “mainstream,” regarding stances on the war in Ukraine, can be schematically defined as comprising the three parties of the governing coalition (*Reformierakond*, the centre-left Social Democrats/SDE, and the centrist/neoliberal *Eesti 200*) together with *Isamaa*.

On 24 February 2022, the *Riigikogu* condemned the invasion and, in October 2022, voted to declare Russia a “terrorist state” (Riigikogu 2022; Jakobson and Kasekamp 2023, 118). When a proposal to declare Russia an international sponsor of terrorism appeared before the European Parliament, all Estonian deputies, including EKRE’s MEP Jaak Madison, granted their approval

(Jakobson and Kasekamp 2023, 118). By February 2023, Estonia provided shelter to 123,000 Ukrainian refugees — being the largest recipient of Ukrainian refugees on a per capita basis globally (ibid., 119).

This decision resonated with the welcoming disposition among Estonians toward the accommodation of Ukrainian refugees (Turu-Uuringute AS 2023, 11). Throughout 2024, Estonia increased its defence spending to 3 percent of its GDP and became one of the most generous supporters of Ukraine worldwide (Jakobson, 2024, 140). Jakobson and Kasekamp (2023, 119) argue that “... in certain ways, the more liberal right-wing parties have begun to move into EKRE’s nationalist and authoritarian niche [after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022].” One characteristic example was a joint proposal, submitted to the *Riigikogu* by the Reform Party and *Isamaa* in 2022, to revoke the right of permanent residents who are citizens of Russia to vote in local elections (as recommended by EKRE in 2017) (Ibid.; Schulze and Pupcenoks 2025, 7–12).

Meanwhile, a series of Soviet-era war memorials were systematically removed from Tartu, Pärnu, Narva, Rakvere, and elsewhere (Sazonov and Yatsyk 2024, 1–2; Schulze and Pupcenoks 2025, 10–11). Minister of Interior, Lauri Läänemets from SDE, and other party representatives (for example, *Eesti 200*) approved this decision as a move towards the ultimate ‘de-Sovietization’ of the Estonian society and public space (for example, “monuments of the Soviet era glorify foreign domination” and “it is a high time to officially bid farewell to this [the Soviet] period”), (Sazonov and Yatsyk 2024, 4).

### **EKRE reacts: The domestic dimension**

EKRE granted its assent to the removal of Soviet-era monuments. Martin Helme approved the project, adding that “... anyone who expresses support for Russian aggression in Estonia, whether they are marching with Russian flags and St. George ribbons on May 9<sup>th</sup> or praising ‘de-Nazification’ on Facebook, must be immediately expelled from the country” (Raid 2022). Other EKRE-affiliates underlined that “Red memorials are symbols of suffering” and reckoned that “it is high time to do so [that is, remove these memorials]” (Sazonov and Yatsyk 2024, 5–6).

One might argue that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine bolstered, by default, EKRE’s project for an intensive “de-Sovietization” of the society and a decisive break from any remaining Soviet vestiges. It also provided the party with another trajectory to construct a discursive bridge between the Soviet legacies in Estonia and Russia’s contemporary geopolitical objectives across the post-Soviet space. In this light, EKRE’s stance on the removal of the Soviet-era memorials represents a “linear” continuity with the party’s founding prerogatives for an ultimate “decolonization” from the Soviet era.

However, EKRE voiced certain objections to the accommodation of Ukrainian refugees in Estonia and proposed their repatriation when the war is over (Jakobson 2024, 142). Amid allegations over the spread of HIV and prostitution,<sup>7</sup> EKRE’s leadership judged that the settlement of, largely Russian-speaking, migrants in Estonia can backfire and accelerate the “Russification” of the Estonian schools and the society at a time of demographic decline (Jakobson and Kasekamp 2023, 19). Here, one can discern one more continuity in EKRE’s rhetoric — regarding allegations over the perils of “East Slavic immigration,” Mart Helme’s opposition to “blue-collar” immigration from Ukraine (2019), and older endeavors to incorporate health-related concerns (for example, the spread of COVID-19 in 2020) into EKRE’s platform against immigration (Petsinis and Wierenga 2021, 11–12). More on this issue is said later when placing EKRE’s anti-systemic disposition into context.

### **EKRE reacts: The international dimension**

Nevertheless, it was the “external” dimension of the war in Ukraine that generated the greatest controversy. Although condemning the invasion, EKRE’s public statement (10 April 2022)

reiterated that there exist limits to the military aid that Estonia can provide to Ukraine and the number of refugees that it can accommodate.<sup>8</sup> EKRE's MP Leo Kunnas underlined that "the goal to assist Ukraine is noble ... however, it should not be carried out at the expense of Estonia's own defence capability" (1 October 2022).<sup>9</sup> On top of all, Mart Helme assessed that "the best solution would be a peace treaty, no matter how hard it would be for both sides ... We are not on Russia's side, and we are not on Ukraine's side; we are on the side of peace" (27 October 2022).<sup>10</sup>

At first glance, one might argue that Helme's statement resonates with the "pro-peace" trend, which has been a regular occurrence among ideologically akin to EKRE, parties of the European "broader right" (for example, Hungary's FIDESZ, France's National Rally/RN, and the Alternative for Germany/AfD). This "pro-peace" stance generally stems from those parties' proclaimed commitment to a foreign policy that prioritizes sovereignty and the national interest — irrespective of any alliances in global politics (Chryssogelos 2021). In the case of EKRE, though, one should pay attention to the specificities of Estonian politics and this party's pattern of anti-systemic engagement.

### **What does EKRE's anti-systemic disposition have to do with it?**

EKRE view themselves as the most "ideological" party in Estonia with regard to their devotion to founding principles and political values (Saarts et al. 2021, 356 and 362). Moreover, EKRE's policymakers pride themselves as "the party that stands for the *average* Estonian" (Interview with the chairman of EKRE, 12 October 2016, Tallinn). Russia's invasion of Ukraine indirectly bolstered EKRE's prerogatives for a definitive dissociation from any Soviet legacies. However, the Russian invasion simultaneously triggered a renewed commitment of the governing coalition (Reform Party, *Eesti 200*, and SDE) to Estonian ethno-nationalist principles.

Since 2022, this has brought about a complicated situation for EKRE. On the one hand, the party cannot revise its allegiance to the fundamental principles of Estonian ethno-nationalism or reassess its stance on the ramifications that geopolitical developments across the post-Soviet space can exert on domestic politics. On the other hand, though, it appears that EKRE's policymakers do not want to create the impression that they "passively" align with the policies of Estonia's governing coalition on the war in Ukraine, either.

The latter aspect is of great significance, considering that EKRE hosts an extensive infrastructure of mass mobilization (for example, *Sinine Äratust* and the party's websites) that has assisted the party in communicating its anti-establishment rhetoric (Saarts 2024, 10 and 12). For instance, during the migrant crisis (2015–2016), EKRE not only accused the government of "lying to the public" about the EU's refugee quotas (Petsinis 2022, 116). It also mobilized its supporters through public protests against the settlement of migrants from MENA in Estonia (ibid.).

To demonstrate that it still "stands for the average Estonian," EKRE, between 2022 and 2023, shifted its focus on inflation<sup>11</sup> and the increase in electricity prices.<sup>12</sup> This emphasis on the troubled economy, whether interlinking it with the impact of the war in Ukraine (for example, FIDESZ in Hungary) or purported governmental inefficiency (for example, Croatia's Homeland Movement), emerged as a frequent practice among parties of the "broader right" during that period. Although blaming the increasing energy prices on the EU's "Green Deal"<sup>13</sup> and not the war, EKRE kept defending its "pro-peace" stand on Ukraine as an indication of its commitment to the national interest.

At this point, one should keep in mind that this was not the first occasion, during recent years, when EKRE's leadership caused controversy over questions pertaining to Ukraine in their attempts to promote the party's nativist and anti-establishment principles. In September 2019, Mart Helme, as former Minister of Interior in the then governing coalition, issued a (rejected) proposal for the unilateral revocation of the visa-free regime for Ukrainian citizens along the lines that "... we are facing immigration pressure from the East, especially Ukraine .... the people who are coming here are not really Ukrainians, rather they are Russians from Eastern Ukraine, or Russified Ukrainians,

or just *Homos Sovieticus*.”<sup>14</sup> On that occasion, Mart Helme made use of a perceived internal divide within Ukraine (for example, East “versus” West; Russian-speakers “versus” Ukrainian-speakers) to promote EKRE’s nativist prerogatives.

One should also consider that EKRE has recently been endeavoring to approach Estonia’s ethnic Russian minority more systematically. In 2021, the party appointed ethnic Russian candidates from the region of Ida-Virumaa (northeastern Estonia) and elsewhere for the municipal and local elections.<sup>15</sup> Of particular interest was EKRE’s attempt to engage the ethnic Russian minority along the lines of “shared conservative concerns” and over questions such as same-sex marriage (Braghioli and Makarychev 2022; Ploom, Sazonov, and Foster 2023). One might argue that EKRE’s engagement within the ethnic Russian community could have provided an additional incentive for the party’s adoption of a “pro-peace” line over the war in Ukraine. Nevertheless, there is evidence that EKRE’s highly (Estonian) ethnocentric agenda still puts off ethnic Russians from voting for it.<sup>16</sup> More importantly, this enquiry prioritizes a focus on the interaction among different actors in party politics, the “broader right” in particular.

In any case, the period between 2022 and 2024 witnessed a steady decline in EKRE’s popularity. In the European elections (2024), EKRE claimed 14.8 percent of the vote and finished fourth — after *Isamaa*, SDE, and the Reform Party.<sup>17</sup> More importantly, MEP Jaak Madison and other high-profile members departed from the party in June 2024. EKRE’s ambiguous stance vis-à-vis the war in Ukraine purportedly functioned as a major catalyst behind their decision.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding its growing popularity, one might classify *Isamaa* as a party that is currently oscillating between the sub-categories of the mainstream conservative and the national conservative right. One might argue that this party’s ostensibly more “consistent” and stable programmatic standpoints on maintaining bilateral relations between Estonia and Russia securitized render *Isamaa* a more reliable option for the right-leaning electorate than EKRE — especially since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.<sup>19</sup> A relatively stable national conservative platform, combined with feeble anti-systemic stances, emerges as a common denominator between *Isamaa* in Estonia and NA in Latvia — the latter being a party with an uninterrupted presence in the halls of power.

### **Latvia: The peak-point of hyper-securitization**

As in Estonia, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine rendered Latvian ethno-nationalism, especially its “de-Sovietization” component (Jirgens 2006, 45; Veinberg 2017, 3), increasingly relevant again — impacting foreign and domestic policy. On 24 February 2022, the *Saeima* issued a resolution that condemned “the military aggression of the Russian Federation and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine” (Andžāns 2023, 144). President Egils Levits urged the international community to impose “the harshest possible sanctions to punish Russia and send it into isolation” (ibid.).

Between 2022 and 2023, Latvian envoys joined their Polish, Lithuanian, and Estonian counterparts in their calls for an increased securitization of relations with Russia on the part of international organizations. The Latvian deputies urged for an upgrade in military aid to Ukraine from NATO<sup>20</sup> and the EU,<sup>21</sup> and Russia’s expulsion from the Council of Europe.<sup>22</sup> These stances resonated with the positive inclinations among Latvian citizens on the provision of military aid to Ukraine (second only to Estonia on the basis of GDP) and the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees in Latvia (Auers 2023, 207, and 2024, 257).

In April 2022, Latvia shut the Russian consulates in Liepāja and Daugavpils in an act of protest against the invasion and as a gesture of solidarity with Ukraine.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, the systematic removal of Soviet-era memorials was put under way (Schulze and Pupcenoks 2025, 15–16). This project culminated with the dismantlement of the “Victory” monument from Riga on 25 August 2022 (Ricci 2024, 8–10). As in Estonia, political actors from across the centrist and centre-right spectrum (for example, the New Unity, The Conservatives, and the United List) greeted this decision as a move towards the ultimate “de-Sovietization” of the Latvian society and public space

(ibid., 10–14). PM Kariņš (New Unity) underlined that “these relics of the occupation times can be regarded as a reminder of some sort that has no place in our country anymore” (Schulze and Pupcenoks 2025, 15).

### **NA reacts: Domestic and international dimensions**

As with EKRE, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine bolstered, by default, NA’s project for an intensive “de-Sovietization” of the society. It equally provided the party with another trajectory to construct a discursive bridge between the Soviet legacies in Latvia and Russia’s contemporary geopolitical objectives across the post-Soviet space.

Correspondingly, NA applauded the dismantlement of “Victory,” which it dubbed “a pillar of shame” (Ricci 2024, 13). The party interlinked Latvia’s identity and memory politics under Soviet rule with Russia’s contemporary objectives by assessing that Soviet-era memorials represent “a daily reminder of our years of oppression and the aggressive policies of our eastern neighbor today” (ibid.). NA also advocated a securitization of domestic politics as a bulwark against lurking sympathizers of Vladimir Putin and the “Russian World/*Russkiy Mir*” (ibid.; Schulze and Pupcenoks 2025, 14).

According to Auers (2023, 208), the Russian invasion “shifted Latvia’s political centre to the right” and “mainstreamed” several of NA’s standpoints (for example, on the removal of Soviet-era monuments and the imposition of restrictions on the use of the Russian language in education and the public administration). Here, the term “mainstream” is employed to schematically categorize a multitude of political actors ranging from the centre/centre-right to the centre-left, inside as well as outside the governing coalition (for example, New Unity, The Conservatives, “Development For!,” and The Progressives/*Progresīvie*) — regarding their stances vis-à-vis the war in Ukraine and from a wider perspective. Although some of these actors (for example, New Unity) have occasionally capitalized on the practice of “ethnic outbidding,” they did not oppose the institutional/public use of the Russian language or lobby for the removal of Soviet-era monuments to the same extent that NA did.

This “shifting process” emboldened NA to reiterate formerly “taboo” proposals such as the deportation of individuals (mainly foreign citizens) with “a proven pro-Kremlin record.”<sup>24</sup> However, unlike EKRE, NA did not: (a) step out of line, in a confrontational manner, with its governmental partners; (b) oppose the accommodation of Ukrainian refugees in Latvia; (c) shift the focus on other policymaking areas (for example, the economy). Here, one might discern a “linear continuity,” regarding the party’s accommodating stances vis-à-vis its political partners, with other precedents from Latvia’s recent history (for example, the management of the migrant crisis of 2015–2016 and the COVID-19 emergency in 2020–2021) (Petsinis 2022, 119–123).

NA did not step out of line with the government in the field of foreign policy, either. The party never adopted a “pro-peace” platform or opposed military aid to Ukraine along the lines of safeguarding the national interest. Instead, its affiliates advocated a tougher stance vis-à-vis Russia in the international organizations. Between 2023 and 2024, NA’s MEP Rihards Kols, in particular, issued a series of calls against disinformation campaigns emanating from Russia<sup>25</sup> and urged for Russia’s expulsion from major forums of international cooperation (for example, OSCE).<sup>26</sup>

### **What does NA’s accommodating stance have to do with it?**

Here, one should pay attention to the contextual specificities of Latvia and NA’s accommodating pattern of engagement in domestic politics. NA’s “linear” participation in coalition governments since 2011 has concretized a strategy that consists of advancing the party’s main prerogatives (for example, on interethnic relations and “demographic issues”) from within the halls of power.

In contrast to EKRE, this accommodating tactic enabled NA to benefit from the “right-wing shift” among Latvia’s centrist and centre-right political forces after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This manifested through the removal of “Victory” and other Soviet-era monuments; the imposition of restrictions on Russian and Belarussian passport-holders who reside in Latvia (Schulze and Pupcenoks 2025, 13–14)<sup>27</sup>; the reconsideration of proposals for the establishment of a “unified and more viable” educational system and a (state-sponsored) media sphere with Latvian as the main language of instruction and broadcasting, respectively (ibid., 14–15).

NA’s programme for the 14<sup>th</sup> *Saeima* reiterates the party’s standpoints for: (a) a ban on those media and the deportation of individuals that spread Kremlin’s propaganda; (b) the full transition to teaching in Latvian at all levels of public education; (c) the dismantlement of monuments that “glorify Soviet occupation” (NA 2024; “Safe Latvia” and “Latvian Latvia” sections). At the same time, NA insists on the: (a) provision of “family,” “demographic,” and other benefits (for example, to young couples and families with many children, pensioners, startup entrepreneurs, and small producers) with the objective to reverse demographic decline and reduce social inequalities; (b) revitalization of less developed regions along the eastern borderline (namely, Latgale), (ibid.; “Growing Latvia” section). This combination of ethno-nationalist and “pro-welfare” standpoints enabled the party to maintain a grip on its electorate in the ethnically more homogeneous (Latvian) constituencies in Vidzeme (northern Latvia), Zemgale (Central-Western Latvia), and Riga — especially those clustering in the lower middle class (Petsinis 2022, 103).

In contrast to EKRE’s decline in popularity, the period between 2022 and 2024 witnessed an increase in electoral support for NA. In the European elections (2024), NA garnered 22.07 percent of the vote and finished second after the New Unity (25.09 percent).<sup>28</sup> Harmony’s steady decline in popularity in the national (2022) and European elections was a catalyst that additionally invigorated NA’s status. For the first time in its history, Harmony did not elect a single deputy to the *Saeima*. Harmony’s underperformance was interpreted as a consequence of its ambiguous stance and initial reluctance to condemn the Russian invasion — as well as the emergence of intra-party dissent and splits (Schulze and Pupcenoks 2025, 13 and 17; Kascian 2024, 144 and 150; Auers 2024, 251).<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, this is not to understate NA’s situationally adaptive engagement and the way that it enabled the party to capitalize on the turbulent state of domestic politics in Latvia amidst the external ramifications of the war in Ukraine.

## Conclusions

EKRE and NA are two geographically adjacent parties. Since their beginnings, they have professed a commitment to the fundamental principles of ethno-nationalism within their national contexts. Furthermore, both parties urged for an increased securitization (if not *hyper-securitization*) of the relations between Russia and Estonia/Latvia.

Nevertheless, the last decade witnessed a crucial divergence in the evolutionary paths of the two parties. NA transformed into a party that, although retaining its ethno-nationalist principles, softened its anti-systemic disposition. Meanwhile, EKRE remains a party with a pronounced anti-systemic component. NA promoted several of its proposals through an uninterrupted participation in governing coalitions and the adoption of an accommodating stance vis-à-vis its partners. EKRE did not compromise its anti-establishment rhetoric and patterns of active policymaking even during its short spell in the government (2019–2021). Whereas NA crystallized into a party of the national conservative right, EKRE remains a par excellence radical right-wing party.

This process impacted the two parties’ reactions to developments in domestic and global politics. Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine (24 February 2022), NA has never stepped out of line with the government — neither domestically nor in the international organizations. This strategy enabled NA to advance ethno-nationalist standpoints and augment its popularity. Meanwhile, not creating a false impression that they “passively” align with the Estonian government on the war in Ukraine, therefore risking their anti-systemic credentials, emerged as a top priority for EKRE. In an

attempt to differentiate themselves from the Estonian government, EKRE adopted a “pro-peace” stance akin to that of other parties among the European “broader right” (for example, FIDESZ, RN, and AfD). This was met with an internal split and a steady decline of EKRE’s popularity between 2022 and 2024.

This comparative study demonstrates that the internal boundaries within the European “broader right” are not firm and fixed but rather porous and malleable. Resulting from the combined impact of domestic and international politics, it is always possible for political actors to reform and either “de-radicalize” or further “radicalize” — therefore, transitioning from one of these categories to another. For instance, “All for Latvia!” and its longstanding tradition of grassroots activism did not obstruct NA’s transformation into a party of the national conservative right. Furthermore, the more essentialist (ethno-nationalist and nativist) components are of paramount significance for the ideological physiognomies of radical right-wing parties. Nevertheless, as the case of EKRE demonstrates, one should not underestimate the persistence of their anti-establishment prerogatives, either.

This persistence of anti-establishment prerogatives can also shape, or transform, the foreign policy patterns espoused by political actors of the “broader right.” EKRE and NA have long expressed a preference for “global unipolarity.” Both parties adopted pro-Atlantic stances that revolved around the preponderant status of the US and NATO in the international system as a bulwark against any security threats emanating from Russia. This differentiated EKRE and NA from other parties of the European “broader right” (for example, FIDESZ, RN, and AfD) and their occasional quests for “alternative” partners in global politics (for example, Russia) throughout the last decade. NA still prioritizes NATO as an external provider of security for the Baltic States. Meanwhile, EKRE’s adoption of a “pro-peace” stance on the war in Ukraine, as largely dictated by its anti-establishment and sovereigntist prerogatives, hints, if just implicitly, at a potential change of course regarding the party’s “Atlantic-based” understanding of regional security.

Furthermore, this comparative enquiry provides some empirical insights about how and why groundbreaking developments in global or regional politics can readjust the internal balances within the political “mainstream” in certain contexts or even shift this “mainstream,” altogether, further towards the right (or, on other occasions, the left) — at least regarding specific policymaking areas such as identity politics (namely, the gradual adoption of a stricter line on the management of interethnic relations by the governing parties of the centre/centre-right and the centre-left in Estonia and Latvia).

The cooperation between academic experts in ethno-nationalism and those dealing with the “broader right” needs to become more systematic and extensive. This cooperation will enable academic experts in the “broader right” to formulate new models about how right-wing political actors embed their agendas inside the pre-existing political cultures of ethno-nationalism and particularistic identity and memory politics. It will also help clarify why and how, even geographically adjacent right-wing parties that operate in societies with a highly comparable historical experience, may utilize the symbolic capital originating from these longer trajectories of ethno-nationalism in a distinct manner.

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## Notes

- 1 In 1991, the bulk of post-war settlers in Estonia and Latvia (mostly ethnic Russians) were rendered “stateless” and had to start a complex process of naturalization to obtain the citizenship of the independent republics.
- 2 A compromise was reached, and the new law (valid from 1 January 2020) granted automatic citizenship to children of non-citizens unless the parents opted for another nationality (Petsinis 2022, 105).

- 3 <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/latvia-has-the-duty-to-save-europe-from-drowning-in-the-swamp-of-political-correctness-national-alliances-opinion-in-debates-about-annual-report-on-foreign-policy-2016/> (accessed 1 February 2021).
- 4 The pro-welfare disposition shared by the Centre Party and the (centre-left) Social Democrat Party/SDE provided a common ground for the formation of a coalition between the two parties and *Isamaa* as the third, smaller partner.
- 5 The decision to remove the Soviet-era “Bronze Soldier” monument from the Tallinn city centre caused bitterness among ethnic Russians. Riots ensued, combined with cyber-attacks originating from Russia.
- 6 The result of the referendum was against the motion to recognize Russian as the second state language (74.8 percent), but reflected the ethno-cultural divisions within the society and grievances among the ethnic Russian population.
- 7 <https://news.err.ee/1608566371/backlash-sparked-by-helme-claiming-ukraine-refugees-will-bring-back-hiv> (accessed 20 January 2025).
- 8 [https://www.baltictimes.com/ekre\\_statement\\_\\_putin\\_s\\_war\\_in\\_ukraine\\_threatening\\_estonian\\_statehood/](https://www.baltictimes.com/ekre_statement__putin_s_war_in_ukraine_threatening_estonian_statehood/) (accessed 20 January 2025)
- 9 [https://www.baltictimes.com/ekre\\_mp\\_\\_estonia\\_should\\_not\\_assist\\_ukraine\\_at\\_expense\\_of\\_own\\_defense\\_capability/](https://www.baltictimes.com/ekre_mp__estonia_should_not_assist_ukraine_at_expense_of_own_defense_capability/) (accessed 20 January 2025).
- 10 <https://news.err.ee/1608767248/politicians-criticize-mart-helme-for-pro-peace-in-ukraine-comments> (accessed 20 January 2025).
- 11 <https://news.err.ee/1608621295/helme-consumption-taxes-should-be-lowered-to-reduce-inflation-s-impact> (accessed 20 January 2025).
- 12 <https://news.err.ee/1608689173/opposition-demands-electricity-reform-ekre-threatening-mass-unrest> (accessed 20 January 2025).
- 13 <https://news.err.ee/1608882152/ekre-candidate-investors-wary-of-green-transition-not-attracted-to-it> (accessed 21 January 2025)
- 14 <https://estonianworld.com/security/estonias-hard-line-interior-minister-wants-to-unilaterally-revoke-visa-freedom-to-ukrainians/> (accessed 14 January 2025).
- 15 <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2021/10/15/what-to-watch-in-estonias-upcoming-local-elections/> (accessed 11 June 2025).
- 16 In the municipal elections of 2021, EKRE did not pass the threshold of 5 percent in Narva, the largest urban centre in Ida-Virumaa with a dense ethnic Russian population. On this issue, see: <https://news.err.ee/1608372906/estonia-s-local-elections-2021-results> (accessed 11 June 2025).
- 17 <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/estonia/> (accessed 20 January 2025).
- 18 <https://news.err.ee/1609367441/ekre-chair-martin-helme-calls-henn-polluaas-holy-war-claims-defamatory> (accessed 20 January 2025).
- 19 One might also contend that *Isamaa* has been simultaneously enhancing its status vis-à-vis *Reformierakond*, especially following the controversy surrounding the alleged Russian business links of (former PM) Kaja Kallas’ husband, revealed in 2023. On this issue, see: <https://www.politico.eu/article/kaja-kallas-husband-russian-business-ties-estonia/> (accessed 11 June 2025).
- 20 <https://www.rusi.org/news-and-comment/rusi-news/president-latvia-reflects-natos-future-and-threat-russia> (accessed 21 January 2025).
- 21 <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/edgars-rinkevics-calls-eu-not-delay-providing-military-support-ukraine> (accessed 21 January 2025).
- 22 <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/diplomacy/25.05.2023-rinkevics-russians-shouldnt-be-working-for-council-of-europe.a510150/> (accessed 21 January 2025).
- 23 <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/latvia-closes-russias-consulates-general-and-expells-their-staff> (accessed 21 January 2025).
- 24 <https://www.delfi.lv/193/politics/55162954/arlietu-ministrija-kludijas-ielaizot-latvija-krievijas-medijus-uzsver-snore> (accessed 21 January 2025).
- 25 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=562797573344303> (accessed 21 January 2025).

- 26 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7i\\_8tdp3gs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7i_8tdp3gs) (accessed 21 January 2025).
- 27 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/21/latvia-is-going-on-offense-against-russian-culture/> (accessed 21 January 2025).
- 28 <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/latvia/> (accessed 21 January 2025).
- 29 The party of “For Stability!”/ *Stabilitātei!* (established in 2021) might have also claimed a certain percentage of the vote among those segments of the ethnic Russian electorate that displayed inhibitions to condemn the Russian invasion. On this issue, see: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/09/latvian-elections-visions-of-a-fractured-saeima/> (accessed 12 June 2025).

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### Interviews

- Interview with a policy adviser at the Government Office of Estonia, 1 December 2017, Tallinn.
- Interview with a former Secretary General of NA, 17 October 2017, Riga.
- Interview with a NA MEP, 13 October 2017, Riga.
- Interview with the chairman of EKRE, 12 October 2016, Tallinn.