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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

The (non) Europeanization of Latvia's Far Right

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Abstract

Latvia's far right has had a great deal of political influence since the late 1980s, when nativist movements played a key role in mobilizing political opposition to Soviet power. Far-right parties have been in 16 of the 22 government coalitions in Latvia between 1993 and 2023. Since 2010, the National Alliance (NA), a merger between an established far-right party and a more youthful political party, has come to dominate Latvia's far right and has been a part of every government coalition from 2011-2023. This article begins with a discussion of Europeanization, the Europeanization of political parties, and the qualitative methodology used in the article to examine the impact of Latvia's membership in the European Union on NA's international links and program. The article then outlines the development and influence of Latvia's far-right. The following sections examine links between Latvia's far right and Europe's far right and the impact of Europe on NA's ideology and program. It finds little evidence of Europeanization of Latvia's far right. Latvia's far right is more hawkish toward Russia than the West European right and also enjoys greater domestic influence and respectability. "New nativist" anti-immigration and cultural Marxism themes have lower salience in Latvia where Russian-speakers are perceived as a bigger and more immediate threat than Muslims or "Woke" activists.

Keywords: Latvia; far-right; National Alliance; Europeanization

Introduction

This article examines the impact of membership in the European Union (EU), a process known as Europeanization, on Latvia's far-right political parties. This Baltic state of some 1.8 million people makes for an illustrative case study largely because the far right has had a significant and uninterrupted legislative and executive influence since the anti-Soviet movement of the late 1980s. Indeed, far-right parties have been represented in 17 of the 22 coalition governments that have held office in the three decades between the first post-Soviet era elections in 1993 and 2023. Latvia has both a Russian-speaking and ethnic Latvian far right. However, the Russian far right is composed of local branches of far-right movements in Russia such as the national socialist Russian National Unity (RNE) and the Eurasianist National Bolshevik Party (Kott 2016, 2022; Muiznieks 2005), and these parties are tiny, fragmented, and have no salience in domestic politics. In contrast, the ethnic Latvian far right has been a major player in domestic politics throughout Latvia's three decades of renewed sovereignty.

This article focuses on the National Alliance (NA) party. There are other, much smaller, far-right political parties and organizations in Latvia, some of which are deeply critical of NA, often accusing it of 'selling out' core nativist principles in exchange for political power. An illustrative case came in February 2022 when NA was criticized by other far-right activists for remaining in the government coalition after parliament voted for a Holocaust restitution law that will see the state pay €40 million

in compensation to Latvia's Jewish community over the following ten years for historically unjust consequences of the holocaust and Soviet rule, despite being the only one of four government coalition parties to vote against the law (Bubola 2022; see also Latvijas Tautas Tribunāls 2020). Nevertheless, NA is the only salient far-right political force in contemporary Latvia since it was founded in 2010. Other far-right political parties have no permanent party organizations, little money, and struggle to collect more than one percent of the vote in national and municipal elections on the rare occasions when they muster themselves to compete in elections. Similarly, far-right organizations have but a handful of members and struggle to attract participants to their rallies and demonstrations. Latvia's State Security Service (2021), which monitors extremist activity in Latvia, dismisses these NGOs as irrelevant, arguing that they exist only on the internet. In contrast, annual NA-organized torch-lit parades through the center of the capital city of Riga on Independence Day attract tens of thousands of participants. A detailed study of NA paints a realistic picture of the state of Latvia's far right.

The far right is here understood as encompassing the radical right, populist radical right, and the extreme right. The radical right is defined by nativism and authoritarianism (Rydgren 2005, Mudde 2007). Nativism is "an ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state," while authoritarianism is "the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely" (Mudde 2007, 19). Of the two, nativism – the idea that the state must prioritize the cultural, economic and political needs and rights of the titular community – is the far right's *core* concept (Pappas 2018). Radical right *populists* have added populism – "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'" (Mudde 2007, 23) to their political range. However, as Tim Bale (2012, 261) has pointed out, if populism is tacked on to the radical right repertoire it can hardly be described as a core feature of these parties. While populism is a useful electoral tactic, it loses its luster and utility when the radical right has a long-term presence in government, as has been the case with NA. Finally, the extreme right encompasses anti-systemic parties and movements that seek to fundamentally change the existing political order.

Despite the long-standing political influence of the far right on the state, Latvia is frequently ignored in comparative studies of the far right and remains under-researched (Wierenga, 2019; Auers 2022). Some studies have excluded Latvia by focusing on Western Europe (for example, Mudde 2012; Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn 2016; and Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016), while in others Latvia is either subsumed into broader comparative chapters that cover all of Eastern Europe (Rydgren 2018) or is thrown together with the other two Baltic states of Estonia or Lithuania in one comparative chapter (Auers and Kasekamp 2013, 2015). More typically, Latvia is simply excluded. A recent study edited by Caiani and Císař (2018) had twelve country chapters of the radical right in Europe, but none analyzing Latvia or one of the other two Baltic states. Another volume studied six cases of the far right in government (Ehmsen and Starzmann 2018) yet ignored the Baltic states, despite Latvia's far-right holding office, as a part of multi-party government coalitions, for a majority of the last three decades. Two articles on the radical right in the European Parliament also ignored Latvia's far right, despite it being represented in the European Parliament since 2004 (Almeida 2010; McDonnell and Werner 2018).

The Latvian case is disregarded for a number of reasons. First, as a country of just 1.8 million people, it is sometimes considered to be too small to be of any broader relevance. Second, Auers (2022) argues that Latvia's NA is the key far-right player and over the last decade has become politically influential and merged into the political mainstream. This may be because of the lack of any sort of a *cordon sanitaire* between the far right and mainstream parties with the *cordon-sanitaire* instead being constructed around parties representing Latvia's Russian-speakers (Auers 2013; Auers and Kasekamp 2015). This mainstreaming results in NA being overlooked as a far-right party. Third, the public positioning of Latvia's far right may blur the research picture. NA sits in the

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European and Conservatives group (ECR) in the European Parliament rather than the Identity and Democracy group (I&D), which is home to an all-star line-up of established far-right parties such as Marine Le Pen's National Rally, the Alternative for Germany, Italy's Lega party, the Netherlands' Party for Freedom, as well as the neighboring Conservative People's Party of Estonia. Finally, manifestos and expert surveys provide useful comparative data sets that position a party on the left-right scale, but the *core* positioning of a party cannot be understood through these data sets alone. Manifestos inevitably impact post-election government formation. In the case of Latvia, NA has a reasonable expectation of being included in a government coalition. As a result, the party program simultaneously appeals to its voters while also sending signals to potential coalition partners who will typically be ideologically positioned closer to the political center. In this sense, far-right parties are Janus facing, with one office-seeking face looking to "normalize" the party, alongside another vote-seeking face appealing to core supporters and better reflecting the core values and attitudes of the party.

This article studies the impact of the EU on NA. The first part discusses how the Europeanization concept has been applied to the study of political parties and explains key concepts as well as the qualitative methodological approach used in the empirical section of the article. The second part then outlines the development of the far right in Latvia from the mid-1980s to the consolidation of the far right around the National Alliance in the 2010s. The third section analyzes the development of NA's international links while the fourth part considers the Europeanization of NA's party program, member website, and the social media communication of key leaders and reflects on the extent to which Europeanized new nativism and cultural Marxism issues have replaced old nativism concerns about the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia.

Methodology and Key Concepts

This section begins by addressing the study of political parties and the far right. It then moves on to introduce the concepts of Janus-facing backstage and front stage politics and discuss the qualitative methodology used in the third and fourth empirical sections of the article.

"Europe" appeared on the post-communist political agenda in the 1990s and was broadly conceptualized in favorable terms, as a wealthy, democratic counterpoint to the grey authoritarianism and comparative economic backwardness of the communist regimes. At that time, Latvia's far right was little concerned with the EU, focusing instead on domestic citizenship and civic rights issues as well as the role and place of the Latvian language and challenging narratives and physical representations of the Soviet era. In comparison to western Europe's far right, which had long been concerned with migration pressures and sovereignty issues brought about by European integration and associated processes of globalization, Europe only became salient in Latvia in the 21st century around the time of Latvia's accession to the EU in 2004.

Europeanization is here understood as the "process of domestic adaptation to the impact of the EU within member states" (Ladrech 2010, 1). In other words, Europeanization is concerned with the *consequences* of European integration processes on the policies and institutions of EU member states. Accession and then membership of the EU has impacted national institutions, and over time, "these [domestic] responses may themselves influence the direction of European integration" (Ladrech 2002, 389).

The focus of this article is far-right political parties and NA in particular. Political parties are impacted by the EU through their participation in organized political groups in the European Parliament, Europarties (which are funded by annual contributions from the EU budget which cover up to 90% of a Europarty's annual budget) as well as contact with European issues, laws, and norms in domestic legislative and executive politics. While there has been growth in the literature on the Europeanization of national party systems and political parties since the mid-1990s (for example, Poguntke and Aylott 2007; Hayward and Murphy 2010), the research remains sparse and sporadic (Poguntke et al. 2009, 1; Sedelmeier 2011, 20), and has not explicitly focused on far-right

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parties. As regards the far right, scholars have focused on the EU level, analyzing failed attempts at forming far-right groups in the European Parliament and how far-right MEPs have attempted to shape European policy outcomes (Fennema and Pollmann, 1998; Mudde 2007, 158–183; Almeida 2010). The impact of European integration on far-right parties has been neglected.

The EU does not have a *direct* impact on national political parties (there are, for example, no directives on how parties should be structured or operate), so any impact will be indirect (Ladrech 2015). Nevertheless, the deep penetration of European integration on national polities means that political parties will inevitably be impacted by a nation's EU membership. Robert Ladrech's (2002, 396) ground-breaking influential theoretical article on the study of political party Europeanization laid out five initial research directions for the study of the Europeanization of political parties: "(1) policy/programmatic content; (2) organizational; (3) patterns of party competition; (4) party-government relations; and (5) relations beyond the national party system."

This article focuses on the programmatic and international relations aspects of party Europeanization. Ladrech's second, third, and fourth points have little salience for the study of Latvia's far right. In the case of organizational change (as measured by changes in statutes or power relations), the expectation that MEPs will have a growing influence on party organizations is only relevant in cases where the European Parliament has a low status in domestic politics. The reverse is true in Latvia, where the European Parliament is both more trusted than the national parliament among voters and where there is an established trend for high-profile politicians to migrate from national politics to Europe and then back to national politics (Auers 2020). For example, in 2019, MEP Krišjānis Kariņš, who was first elected to the European Parliament in 2009 after a seven-year career in national politics that included a stint as Minister of Economics, left the European Parliament to become prime minister, just as Valdis Dombrovskis had done before him in 2009. Dombrovskis went on to serve as prime minister in three successive governments until 2014 before returning once more to the EU political system as a European Commissioner. In October 2022, the government led by Kariņš became the first to serve a full four-year term in Latvia's democratic history. As regards the far right, the then NA Minister of Culture, Dace Melbārde, left her ministerial post after being elected to the European Parliament in 2019. MEP Roberts Zīle was nominated as NA's candidate for prime minister in four parliamentary elections between 2010 and 2018. MEPs do not lack prestige in Latvia, are not marginalized, and have been integrated in party organizations since Latvia's accession to the EU in 2004.

Ladrech's third, party competition, research direction also has little salience because Latvia's membership of the EU is not a major politicized issue, with all parliamentary parties – including those of the far right – seeing membership of the EU, together with membership of NATO, as the two fundamental pillars of Latvian security (Auers 2020). Euroscepticism – critical attitudes towards the processes of European integration – has little salience in Latvia because of the security fears resulting from a shared border with Russia, Russia's 2014 and 2022 aggression against Ukraine, as well as recent historical experiences of Russian occupation. Russia is seen as a fundamental and existential security risk to continued Latvian sovereignty, and there is a broad political consensus that future security can only be guaranteed by membership of NATO and the EU.

Finally, this broad political and societal support for the EU means that there are few strains placed on government-party relations by EU issues. There have been occasional conflicts between government coalition parties on EU issues – in 2021, NA criticized the center-right prime minister for signing an EU leaders' letter criticizing Hungary's far-right leader Victor Orban – but these are intra government coalition spats rather than conflicts between party membership and government ministers.

This leaves two directions of research enquiry into the impact of Europe on Latvia's far-right parties: (1) Relations beyond domestic politics, including cooperation within the European Parliament and at the Europarty level and bilateral links that may lead to new organizational and

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programmatic actions and (2) policy and programmatic change resulting from the increased salience of the European level of politics after membership in the EU.

The following two sections of this article contribute to scholarly understanding of the Europeanization of the far right by, first, analyzing Latvian far-right party relations and links with other far-right parties within the EU. Bilateral and multilateral links through social media, festivals, and other socialization forums are not contingent on membership of the EU. As a result, the focus is on assessing the impact of European Parliament party group and Europarty membership.

The following section then examines the Europeanization of policies and programs. Programmatic Europeanization is here operationalized as the move from Russophobe "old nativism" concerning the role and place of the Russian language in Latvia, Russian minority schools, culture and citizenship issues to a Europeanized "new nativism" that is more concerned with non-European immigration, refugees, and cultural Marxism. This section conceptualizes far-right parties as Janus-facing, with a moderate "front stage" directed towards the broader public and mainstream political parties (potential government coalition partners) and a "backstage" that focuses on addressing and mobilizing party insiders and supporters (Van Donselaar 1991). The front stage is analyzed through, first, a qualitative content analysis of the 4,000-word programs that all parties competing in Latvian elections are obliged to submit to the Central Election Commission. Party programs from the 2006, 2010, 2011, 2014, and 2018 parliamentary elections are analyzed. Second, there is a deductive content analysis of NA's website's news section from 2013 to 2021 (which addresses both the front and back stages of a party's audience); and, third, the backstage is analyzed through a deductive thematic analysis of the twitter accounts of three influential far-right political leaders.

However, before the article turns to the empirical analysis, the following second section briefly outlines the development of Latvia's far right since the 1980s and explains how NA, the focus of the empirical analysis, has come to dominate Latvia's far right since 2010.

The Rise (and Rise) of Latvia's Far Right

Far-right movements and political parties were central to Latvia's drive for independence from the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980s and to Latvia's political development following the renewal of sovereign independence in 1991. There were two large competing Latvian nationalist blocks in the latter years of the Soviet Union. Moderate nationalists, who were anti-*Soviet* rather than anti-*Russian*, united with former-communist officials (rebranded as reform communists) and émigré Latvians in the Latvian Popular Front (*Latvijas Tautas Fronte*, LTF). Far-right nationalists, who were virulently anti-*Russian* as well as anti-Soviet, formed the Citizens' Congress (*Pilsoņu Kongress*, PK) in 1989. In contrast to the LTF, the PK pushed for an ethnically pure "Latvian" legislature with both the electorate and deputies composed of only citizens of interwar Latvia and their direct descendants, cleansed of Russian-speaking "occupiers." The LTF became the dominant player in the drive to independence after winning the largest share of the vote in the 1990 Latvian Supreme Soviet elections (which were boycotted by PK), and its moderate, center-right conservatism has dominated Latvian politics throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s.

At the same time, PK was the basis for the first-generation of Latvian far-right movements and political parties. The two most important movements, later established as parties, were For Fatherland and Freedom (TB) and the Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK), which later merged into the TB/LNNK party alliance, and then a unified party with the same name. LNNK traces its roots back to 1988, and existed parallel to PK (with which it closely cooperated), while TB, which was founded a few years later, grew directly from the PK movement. Both parties won seats in the first post-independence elections in 1993 but went from strength to strength after consolidating the nationalist vote through a merger in 1997. This led to a decade of electoral success. TB/LNNK spent just two years in parliamentary opposition between 1998 and 2010 and briefly even held the prime minister post from 1997 to 1998.

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However, by the late 2000s, TB/LNNK's long time in government left it open to criticism from a new, more youthful political party – All for Latvia! (*Visu Latvijai*, VL!) – which had successfully mobilized a new generation of youth activists. VL! proved adept at highlighting nationalist issues – such as protesting an exhibition at the Latvian Art Academy that allegedly trivialized Latvia's interwar dictator Kārlis Ulmanis, picketing half-naked outside the parliament with the names of Latvian territories handed over to Russia on the freezing winter day that the parliament voted on a new border treaty with Russia – and using the internet to build networks of young, energetic far-right activists. In 2006, VL! registered as a political party. However, VL! lacked the finances needed to successfully campaign in Latvian elections and failed to pass the 5% threshold in the 2006 parliamentary election. In contrast, TB/LNNK's years in power had allowed it to develop a substantial network of financial sponsors. However, those years in power had also seen it gradually shrink its share of the vote. An electoral alliance and then, from 2013 (although the initial decision to merge was made in 2011), a single unified party, made sense for both sides (Kott 2022). In his autobiography, Raivis Dzintars (2018, 15), the founder of VL! and the long-standing chairman of NA, wrote that it was always his ambition to unite Latvia's nationalists into a powerful, single political party. NA won 8 of parliament's 100 seats in 2010, 14 in the 2011 early parliamentary election, 17 in 2014, and 13 in both 2018 and 2022, which is remarkable consistency in a fragmented party system such as Latvia's, which sees few parties survive more than two or three election cycles (Auers 2013).

While there are other registered far-right parties in Latvia, they have little public support, with only a handful of members, and have no impact on the political system. National Power Unity (*Nacionālā Spēka Savienība*, NSS), which is on the extreme side of the far-right political spectrum, won a total of just 1,172 votes in the 2006 parliamentary election, and in 2014 was renamed the National Justice Union (*Nacionālā Savienība Taisnīgums*, NST) but is yet to compete in a national election under its new name. A Latvian Latvia (*Latviešu Latvija*, LL) also competed in the 2006 election but won a similarly small 1,130 votes. The Latvian Nationalists (*Latviešu Nacionālisti*, LN) list, an alliance of several small nationalist parties – Latvian Rebirth Party (*Latvijas Atdzimšanas Partija,* LAP), Inheritance of the Fatherland, (*Tēvzemes Mantojums*, TM), and Māra's Land (*Māras Zeme,* MZ) – collected just 0.5% (or 4,245 votes) share of the vote in the 2018 parliamentary election. NA has very much consolidated Latvia's far right around itself.

It is a similar story when it comes to far-right organizations, which have both first and second generations and a marginal influence. Throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, Latvia had an active and diverse network of far-right groups and publications (Muižnieks 2005, provides a detailed mapping of both first- and second-generation groups). For example, Thundercross (*Pērkonkrusts*) was a continuation of an antisemitic interwar organization updated with a virulently anti-Russian speaker position. It was broken up by Latvia's security police in the 1990s, following a botched attempt to blow up the Soviet-era Victory Monument. Only one of Thundercross' leaders – Igors Šiškins – is still active in the far-right movement. The Latvian (*Latvietis*) organization published a nativist newspaper, *A Latvian in Latvia* (*Latvietis Latvijā*), in the 1990s and still maintains a website with electronic back copies of the newspaper (*www.latvietis.lv*). Indeed, the first generation of Latvia's far right now exists largely in the virtual world.

A second generation of the far right emerged in the 2000s. *Klubs 415* was a young Latvian nationalist, hard Eurosceptic (opposing Latvia's then proposed accession to the European Union) movement that organized public events such as a 2001 rally marking the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact by standing in front of the Freedom Monument with flaming torches and T-shirts spelling out "decolonization" one letter at a time. It was renamed as the Latvian Nationalist Club (*Latviešu Nacionālistu Klubs*). In a 2002 interview, the leader of the movement, Jānis Sils, revealed that the organization had but 9 members and approximately 120 supporters (*TVNET,* 2002). Sils, a prominent political activist who is yet to be elected to political office, also founded the Fatherland Guards (*Tēvijas Sargi*¸TS) in 2004, providing military-style self-defense combat training. TS regularly posts videos of its military training courses on social media and briefly returned to public

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consciousness after half a dozen members, dressed in military fatigues, posed for menacing pictures outside a refugee processing center in 2015. The Latvian National Front (*Latvijas Nacionālā Fronte*, LNF) organized essay contests for high school students with far-right themes, such as what should Latvia do with its 700,000 Russian speakers and its provocatively named newspaper *DDD* (*Deoccupation, Decolonization, Debolshevization*) serialized a Latvian translation of the antisemitic "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." The second generation of the far right was more active in organizing rallies and using the internet and, eventually, social media to promote communication. However, in contrast to the consistent electoral success of TB/LNNK and then NA since the 1990s, the vibrant far-right movements of the 1990s and early 2000s have been in decline over the last decade. The Latvian State Security Service's (2021, 23–24) annual review emphasized that the threat from far-left and far-right groups in Latvia remained low and that extremists now primarily work alone or in tiny groups of like-minded individuals on social media, blogs, and online forums.

NA has successfully consolidated Latvia's far right. It has benefitted from the presence of both first and second generation far-right groups in Latvia's nationalist subculture, which, as Cas Mudde (2007, 245) has pointed out, can "directly feed important facilities and competent personnel" into far-right parties. There is little negative public stigma attached to NA. This is perhaps best illustrated by the now well-established torch-light march through Riga on the evening of November 18, Latvia's national Independence Day. The event was started in 2003 by a small group of All for Latvia! activists but grew to more than 20,000 marchers before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Latvia. The march through the street is headed by leaders of the National Alliance leading the crowd in "official" chants including "Latvia is Ours!" and a now traditional chant of "We are Latvians!" by the statue to Latvia's interwar dictator Kārlis Ulmanis. The November 18 rally and other regular NA public events are both "rituals and symbols" that play a key role in constructing party identity and uniting militants (Caiani, della Porta, and Wagemann 2012, 107).

The Latvian far right's electoral success has also stretched to Europe, where first TB/LNNK and then NA have won seats in every European Parliament election since 2004. As a result, the empirical section focuses on the impact of Latvia's membership of the EU on NA's international links and program.

European Contacts and Links

Contemporary far-right parties and movements have both expanded their activities beyond their national borders and grafted a transnational dimension onto their national political agendas. Political developments, such as elections to the European Parliament, membership of party groups in the European Parliament, Europarties, and bi-lateral links with partners from neighboring countries, as well as changes to the European social milieu (not least from EU legislation), such as cheap air travel and accessible internet, have significantly cut the costs of party cross-border links and activities. However, the scope and nature of this Europeanization of the far right has been little researched, especially when compared to the extensive body of work on the international links of the far left, which, of course, have historically had a greater focus on international cooperation and collaboration (Caiani 2018). However, these links can be critical in supporting the far-right's "diffusion of ideas, norms and values" (Caiani 2018, 571) and sharing successful policies and strategies. This section focuses on the international links of NA. As outlined above, NA has roots in both first and second generation far-right activism. The second generation, which dominates the modern party leadership, is far more open to these links than the first generation. The second generation has better English, German, and Russian language skills (while the first generation was largely limited to Russian language knowledge) as well as greater tech savviness. Moreover, the second generation grew up in a Western-facing world, rather than the Soviet-facing decades of the first generation.

Political relationships have both formal and informal characteristics. Formal links take the form of participation in transnational political party groups, typically clustered around the European

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Parliament, as well as common pacts, declarations, and cooperation contracts with individual political parties. Informal contacts exist at both party and individual levels and are built through various internet channels and cemented by physical connections at music festivals, political forums, and other events bringing together the far right. However, these informal contacts can also be forged independently of membership in the EU and are therefore not explicit examples of Europeanization. Empirical evidence for these informal links is also more sporadic, not least because their informality means that the links are not recorded and may sometimes deliberately kept secret. This is illustrated by the case of Raivis Zeltīts, NA's General Secretary between 2013 and 2020 (and analyzed in more detail in Kott 2022). In 2019, the Bellingcat investigative journalist group published data from the self-identified neo-Nazi/white supremacist Iron March message board. Zeltīts – using the name "Latvian_Integralist" – had been an avid poster on the message board, but in 2012 wrote to the message board's moderator Benjamin Raymond (founder of the extreme right National Action organization in the UK, later banned after it was classified as a terrorist organization.) to request that fragments of previous posts be deleted because:

> We are now very careful about our public image, because one mistake is all that the media needs. I have responsibility for my party not to do anything that would harm our image… some in the party leadership say that we should start a mass movement for 4th national awakening, where our party would be political wing of the movement, but there would also be choirs, sport clubs, paramilitary and other civic organizations committed to our goal – Latvia for Latvians… these plans definitely shouldn't be known publicly. Our liberal wing and radical wing often work on their own, instead just of being the different expressions of same spirit. Public doesn't need to know about our inner weaknesses. (LSM 2019a)

This points towards the broad umbrella nature of NA, having both more liberal and radical wings, and that some things "shouldn't be known publicly." As a result, it can be difficult to piece together the extent and nature of these informal links. The message board's moderator, Benjamin Raymond, and fellow National Action supporter Paul Hickman (on whose radio show – "Voice of Albion" – Zeltīts appeared in 2014 while General Secretary of NA) visited Latvia in 2015, taking part in NA's March 16 rally in honor of Latvia's Second World War Waffen SS Legionnaires and visiting NA's central party office (*LSM*, 2019b). In December 2021, a British court sentenced Raymond to eight years in prison for being a member of National Action.

Bilateral links may also not be contingent on membership of the EU but the EU may well shape the nature of the bilateral relationship. NA's closest bilateral links are, unsurprisingly, with far-right organizations in the neighboring two Baltic states of Estonia and Lithuania. The three states shared a common path of breaking away from the Soviet Union in the 1980s, and the first generation of the far right forged close ties across the three states at this time. Estonian and Lithuanian flags are a regular presence at NA's major demonstrations – the March 16 rally for Latvia's Waffen SS veterans and the November 18 torchlit parade through Riga – and there are myriad personal and organizational links between the far right in the three countries.

On August 23, 2013 (the anniversary date of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact), NA, Estonia's Conservative People's Party of Estonia (*Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond,* EKRE), and Lithuania's Nationalist Union (*Tautininkų Sąjungos*, TS) signed the Bauska declaration. A few months later, the three youth movement wings of these organizations signed a similar pact (on Latvia's national Independence Day – November 18, 2013). The declaration encourages deeper cooperation and coordination between the three parties and outlines common values and policy directions. The first three paragraphs of the Bauska Declaration (2013) lay out the key common values of the three parties:

> We affirm the supremacy of our national sovereignty over the supranational institutions, and we stand against any attempt to absorb our independent nation states by any kind of European Super State.

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> We see the immigration policies of Western Europe as a warning example. The demographic situation in our countries does not allow any new massive immigration into our lands.
>
> We hold the values of family and patriotism to be fundamental, despite of the looming ideas of cultural Marxism, postmodernistic multiculturalism and destructive liberalism. Our honor and love for our homelands will not let us walk the path of cosmopolitanism. (Bauska declaration, 2013)

The first paragraph of the declaration indicates a certain level of Europeanization of the Baltic far right, in that a "European Super State" is identified as the first foe of the far right, rather than Russian-speaking minorities and the Russian state, as was the case for the first wave of the Baltic far right. This is then followed by the threats of immigration, cultural Marxism, multiculturalism, liberalism, and cosmopolitanism, all of which are drawn from the European far rights' "new nativist" talking points. Thus, the Bauska declaration rallies the Baltic far right to the defense of the Baltic nations from the threat of Europeanization.

An analysis of NA's website's "news" section from 2011 to 2021 also highlights the salience of the Baltic relationships for NA. In the early years of NA, the news section of the website was regularly updated with articles outlining the activities of "nationalists" in Estonia and Lithuania, focusing on programmatic issues and tactics.[1] In April 2018, Kaspars Gerhards (2018), NA's Minister of Local Government and the Environment, gave a speech at EKRE's annual party congress where he discussed the nature of policy-learning between the two parties:

> Be sure that NA strongly supports EKRE's positions on language, the Kremlin's war in Ukraine, migration and refugees in the EU and attacks on traditional and family values. I am delighted that we can learn from the best practice of our northern neighbors on these issues, and I am equally happy that you have been inspired by NA's activities. The Independence Day torch rally tradition was born in Latvia and I am delighted that it has been adopted across the Baltic states.

NA and EKRE, both of which are established in their national parliaments, have been elected to the European Parliament (although they sit in different groups, which is discussed later in the article), have served in national government coalitions, and have a particularly close relationship. The relationship between the youthful VL! wing of NA and the equally youthful EKRE is particularly close. Thus, there are myriad institutional and individual links between the Baltic far right as well as active exchanges of ideas, policies, and political strategies. While these links could also be forged outside membership of the EU, the salience of EU themes, as evidenced by the Bauska declaration, indicates that the EU also impacts these far-right regional relationships.

The direct impact of the EU on parties is felt in the European Parliament and at the Europarty level. Latvia's far right has been represented in the European Parliament throughout Latvia's membership of the European Union. In the 2004 European Parliament election, TB/LNNK won four of Latvia's nine seats, but in 2009 and 2014 won one, but then doubled this to two seats in 2019 (although one of the two MEPs defected to a more centrist party in 2022). Roberts Zīle, a former minister of finance and minister of transport, has been elected to the European Parliament in all four elections and is considered a senior statesman in NA. In 2004 and 2009, he was elected to the European Parliament from the TB/LNNK list and in the latter two European Parliament elections from the NA list. After the 2004 European Parliament election, TB/LNNK joined the heterogenous Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN) group, which was home to various parties of the radical right, including the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*, DF) and Italy's *Lega Nord*. In 2009, TB/LNNK joined the new ECR group which is typically described as Eurosceptic or Eurorealist (the group prefers the latter description) and was founded on the initiative of the British Conservative party, which had felt increasingly uncomfortable in the pro-European federalist center-right European Peoples Party (EPP) group. After the merger of TB/LNNK and VL!, NA has remained

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a stalwart of the ECR group and the ECR Europarty (which was previously known as the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists and then the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe).

Why did TB/LNNK and NA choose to sit in the UEN and ECR groups in the European Parliament, rather than, for example, the more explicitly far-right I&D group, which is home to NA's close Estonian partner party, EKRE, as well as other major far-right parties such as France's National Rally (*Rassemblement National,* RN) and Alternative for Germany (*Alternative fur Deutschland*, AfD)? Scholars have identified two major factors driving European Parliament group membership: Policy congruence (Maurer, Parkes, and Wagner 2008; McElroy and Benoit 2010) and office-seeking (Bressanelli 2012). Group affiliation increases access to senior committee and *rapporteur* positions guiding legislation through the legislature. Domestically, it also gives national political leaders a channel to coordinate positions and influence decisions in the Council of the EU or the European Council. In addition, Almeida (2010, 246) has argued that "three patterns of horizontal interactions between radical right parties in the European Parliament can be delineated: (i) institutionalized ties with radical right parties; (ii) institutionalized ties with other parties and (iii) isolation." The first strategy can bring policy-harmonizing advantages but, as with the third strategy, can have a negative impact in terms of political influence (with the political mainstream marginalizing the influence of radical groups in the EP) and domestic legitimacy. In contrast, affiliation to a more mainstream group can bring advantages in terms of policy influence in the European parliament as well as greater domestic legitimacy.

Policy congruence and office-seeking appear to be the best explanations for NA's party group membership in the European Parliament. There is certainly policy congruence between UEN, ECR and NA, in terms of a soft Euroscepticism that is opposed to deeper EU integration but not the existence of EU as an organization. I&D is far more critical of the EU. As the ECR party's Reykyavik declaration (2013) states: "The ECR party believes in a Europe of independent nations, working together for mutual gain while each retaining its identity and integrity." Moreover, NA does not have a firm position in many of the more technical EU policy areas, giving its MEPs the flexibility to support the ECR group's position on most votes. Indeed, Votewatch Europe (2022) data from January 2022 reveals that Roberts Zīle had voted together with the ECR whip on 87.9% of votes. While there are members of NA that would disagree with the latter sentence in the Reykyavik declaration that the ECR "rejects all forms of extremism, authoritarianism and racism," this is hardly an issue where the party would be prepared to openly adopt a hardline position.

Office-seeking offers another powerful motivation for NA to remain in the ECR group. NA's long-standing MEP Roberts Zīle is one of the founding members of the ECR. His status in the group – as a former minister of finance and transport as well as a co-chair of NA – is high, and this was leveraged into a Vice-chair of ECR's Executive position. In December 2021, the ECR group put forward Zīle as a candidate for Vice-President of the European Parliament, the first Baltic MEP to be nominated for this post (and he was duly elected to the post in January 2022). This high status in an established party group gives Zīle (and NA) the opportunity to "punch above its weight" in the European Parliament. In the 2019 MEP Ranking index, which ranks MEPs according to the level of their rapporteur and opinion activity, positions held and attendance, Zīle was ranked as the twenty-third most influential MEP (of 751). This influence could not be achieved in the Identity and Democracy group, or its predecessors, which are far less organized, more marginalized, and not embedded in the working life of the European Parliament. This in turn feeds into Zīle's high reputation in Latvia, where he was NA's candidate for the post of prime minister in national elections between 2010 and 2018.

Membership of the ECR also has the valuable function of maintaining NA's domestic credibility as a mainstream government coalition partner. In the Voice of Albion podcast mentioned above, NA's General Secretary Raivis Zeltīts was asked why NA had not joined other far-right parties in a common European Parliament group – he emphasized that many of these parties had financial and personal links to Russia and Russia's president Vladimir Putin, and that NA preferred to keep a

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cordon sanitaire around these parties (Renegade Broadcasting 2014), which certainly removes a potential criticism, and barrier, to executive coalition power in Latvia. This also points towards the continuing salience of Russian issues for NA, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. Membership of ECR also keeps NA more distanced from other far-right parties in Europe, and NA rarely participates in pan-European far-right forums such as the December 2021 Warsaw summit of far-right parties. This also limits diffusion of ideas and policies between NA and much of Europe's far right.

Programmatic Europeanization

Since the 1980s the Latvian far-right's ire has been directed towards the substantial Russian-speaking community in Latvia, which largely settled in Latvia's urban regions during the near half-century of Soviet occupation (1944–1991). The extreme wing of the far-right advocated for derussification and decolonization. The radical right recognized that extreme policies would not be supported by the international community, would provoke conflicts with Russia, and could potentially endanger Latvia's integration with the EU and NATO and perhaps even the nation's hard fought sovereign independence. In the 1990s, TB/LNNK instead focused on the pace and extent of integration of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia, with citizenship and language policies being the central policy focus. In practical terms, this initially meant successfully pushing for automatic post-1991 Latvian citizenship being limited to pre-Soviet occupation-era citizens and their direct descendants, as well as squeezing the Russian language and Soviet symbols out of the public sphere. Thirty years after regaining sovereign independence, these three policy areas – which are here referred to as "old nativism" – remain red-button issues for Latvia's far right and are central to NA's policy and values.

In 2018 and 2019, NA fiercely opposed legislation automatically granting Latvian citizenship to children born to families resident in Latvia with "non-citizen" status (largely Russian speakers that had not gone through the process of gaining citizenship in Latvia who have residency rights but cannot vote or work in parts of the public sector; non-citizens make up 10% of Latvia's population). In terms of the labor market, in 2018, NA pushed an amendment to the labor law banning employers from asking job seekers to have specific language skills if knowledge of the language is not a direct part of their duties. This amendment was passed in response to increasing hospitality sector demands for Russian-language knowledge in job advertisements. NA believed that this undermined the status of the Latvian language in the state, as well as being discriminatory against younger ethnic Latvians, who tend to speak English rather than Russian. Finally, NA has long defended the memory of the two divisions of the Latvian Legion, which were part of the Waffen SS, and fought on the Eastern front against Soviet forces. March 16 has been publicly observed as a Remembrance Day for the Legionnaires since the 1990s, although NA's annual alley of flags honoring the Legionnaires by Latvia's Freedom Monument has been criticized by Russia, Israel, and other states as glorification of Nazism. Nevertheless, March 16 is one of NA's four key annual public events (alongside the November 18 Independence Day torchlight rally through Riga, the August 23 candle commemoration of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact by the Freedom Monument, and the May 15 "Unity" rally of hundreds of cars draped in the Latvian flag driving around Latvia on the date that marks the 1934 authoritarian coup in Latvia). In December 2021, NA criticized a panel of 15 international historians called to review a 2018 monument – "the Latvian Beehive" – in Zedelgem, Belgium, the site of a prisoner-of-war camp for Latvian Legionnaires, and who subsequently recommended removing the monument, having concluded that it "paid homage to the Nazi regime" (*Brussels Times*, 2021).

At the same time, however, there has been a gradual shift toward more European and international issues. However, this is not targeted at membership of the EU as such. Early work on far-right parties had expected them to oppose European integration both because of their core nationalism (Hooghe et al. 2002) and because European integration was driven by the established,

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mainstream political class (Taggart 1998). As a result, anti-integrationism was considered central to the European policies of the radical right (Almeida 2010). However, the Euroscepticism of the Front National and other contemporary far-right parties in Western Europe was not as prevalent in the post-communist countries that joined the EU in 2004 – and certainly not in Latvia. This is largely because of the looming, ever-present threat of Russia to Latvia's East.

Some sections of Latvia's far-right initially objected to integration with the EU (inevitably drawing similarities between the Soviet Union and the European Union), and the VL! wing of NA was quite Eurosceptic. An op-ed from the movement's founder (and long-standing NA chair) Raivis Dzintars in May 2002 was entitled "nationalism against the European Union." Dzintars (2002) stressed that:

> Membership of the European Union cannot be tied with a Latvian Latvia. The European Union only sees Latvia as a market for its goods and as a location to place migrant flows. The European Union will fight Latvian nationalism and will always defend the interests of Russian-speakers… no nation can survive if it must share its state with colonists who make up almost 50% of the population… yet the EU tells Latvia to naturalize the colonists who are very different to Latvians… This is the right time for Latvia to raise the DDD question. (Deoccupation, Decolonization, Debolshevization)

However, Dzintars, VL, and NA's position has subsequently been moderated; and today, NA is a firm supporter of the EU, and even campaigned in favor of Latvia adopting the Euro in 2014. Much of the far-right and NA see membership of the EU (together with membership of NATO) as a prerequisite for Latvia's continued sovereign independence. As a result, the EU has not been criticized by Latvia's far right with the same sort of language as in Western Europe, where the very basis of integration is questioned. Nor is there a great deal of discussion about the rather more controversial policy areas of the EU – such as the single currency (and more recently the banking union) or the Green Deal. Criticism of the EU has evolved rather more gradually and increasingly focused on the salience of European *values* rather than on the existence of the Union per se.

The following section considers the extent to which Latvia's far right has expanded its range of salient issues beyond old nativism to encompass two interconnected issues that mobilize Western Europe's far right: (1) Non-European immigration, particularly refugees and Muslims, which is here referred to as "new nativism"; and (2) cultural Marxism, a broad term that pools together many different forms of perceived political correctness as well as liberal attitudes towards gender and LGBTQ issues.

Non-European immigration remains the key hot-button issue for the far-right. It has several component parts. A central concept is welfare chauvinism, which is the belief that public spending should be focused on the native population rather than immigrants or other foreigners. In relation to the EU, which has no welfare policy, it is typically expressed by the post-communist far right as a debt that the West owes the post-communist states for their suffering under a half-century of communism and that EU funds should be directed to them rather than non-European refugees (Vachudova 2019, 700). This then logically leads to the far right challenging the core values of the EU with a "demand to decouple EU membership from the values and the processes of liberal democracy" (Vachudova 2019, 702). Cultural Marxism is rooted in claims that there is a long-running conspiracy to destroy traditional Western family values and capitalism. The contemporary far-right exploits cultural Marxism as a 'meta-theory' to explain "liberal" attacks on a whole host of "traditional" values and institutions (Richardson 2015, 202).

Tracking the growing salience of new nativism and cultural Marxism poses methodological challenges. Political parties can be Janus-facing, with a moderate "front stage" addressing the public and potential mainstream coalition partners as well as a "back-stage" targeted towards party insiders and supporters and reflecting the inner, partially hidden, core values of the party (Van Donselaar 1991).

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This article analyzes both faces of NA. The "front stage" is analyzed through a qualitative content analysis of the official "short" party programs submitted to Latvia's Central Election Commission in the 2006, 2010, 2011, 2014, and 2018 parliamentary elections. A manual deductive content analysis of the "news" section of NA's web site serves as an intermediate source that encompasses elements of both front and backstage (on the one hand being edited but on the other hand being primarily targeted at party members), while a deductive thematic evaluation of the twitter accounts of three key party leaders provides back-stage insights. Twitter accounts give their users a great deal of autonomy in terms of operating outside established party hierarchies (Benkler 2006). Indeed, in the 21st century a social media presence both complements and reinforces a traditional written election program, being far more flexible and reactive to events than the more static program, written only once every few years. Of course, parties and leaders also have other closed forms of communication in WhatsApp, Signal, and other secure messaging applications but this data is not available. Nevertheless, this section seeks to identify the salient issues that NA communicates to both front and back stages.

Turning first to the front stage, Latvia's election law demands that competing parties submit a 4,000-character electoral program in the Latvian language, which is subsequently published and stored on the Latvian Central Election Commission's (2021) website. This is the source for the four National Alliance electoral programs (for the 2010, 2011, 2014 and 2018 parliamentary elections as well as the 2006 parliamentary election when VL! and TB/LNNK each competed separately). A manual content analysis of the six texts identified the frequency and type of 'European' themes in the text.

There has been very little Europeanization of NA's front-stage program. In 2006, when VL! and TB/LNNK competed separately, VL!'s program had just two mentions of Europe (the party aimed to (1) keep Latvia's sovereignty intact by opposing federalization of the EU and (2) to fight for more equal direct payments to Latvia's farmers) while TB/LNNK's had none. In the 2010 joint electoral program, there were no mentions of Europe while in the 2011 early election program there was just one mention (calling for increased European financial support for the manufacturing sector). In 2014, there were two mentions of Europe but in 2018 just one. In 2014 NA promised that construction of the Rail Baltica, a new rail line linking the Baltic states and central Europe and 85% financed by the EU's Trans-European Transport Network Program, would be started on time and that EU structural funds would be directed towards development and construction of new "cultural objects." In 2018, the program returned to the theme of VL's 2006 program and reiterated that NA supports the EU as a union of sovereign states and opposes any attempt to federalize the EU. There were no themes connected with new nativism or cultural Marxism. Thus, there is no evidence to support any Europeanization of NA's policies over the last decade on the front stage. Indeed, the 2018 program laid out the key aims and values of NA, which also have a distinctly domestic focus: "NA's main objective is a Latvian Latvia. Our values are the Latvian nation, language and culture, honour and commemoration of our nation's heroes, independence and growth, prosperity and justice, family and marriage, human life, nature and God."

A manual deductive content analysis of the "news" section of NA's website (www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/) paints a similar picture. The website has been operational since 2011, although there were just seven entries in the first two years of operation. The news section of the website has been regularly updated since March 2013, when NA campaigned in Latvia's municipal elections. Between March 2013 and December 31, 2021, a total of 1,471 articles were posted in the news section (see Table 1). These articles were coded into three categories: (1) party news, (2) old nativism, and (3) new nativism and cultural Marxism. The first category contains articles covering NA's day-to-day political activities at the local, national, and government levels, including photo opportunities, interviews, party congress information and resolutions, as well as policy statements that did not fall into the second and third coding categories. The second old nativism category features articles discussing Latvian language and education policy, the civic rights of the Russian-speaking minority, as well as national symbols, dates, and nativist political rallies. The third

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category comprises articles addressing new nativist issues concerning refugees and Muslim migration, as well as cultural Marxist themes such as the Istanbul Convention and LGBTQ rights.

Internal party news dominates this section of NA's website, typically making up two-thirds to three-quarters of the articles on the news page every year (see Table 1 below). Interestingly, there is a steady and pronounced decline in the quantity of articles published every year, from a high of 286 in 2014 to just 55 in 2021. This could be indicative of a growing distance between NA and its rank-and-file members, as its central office and party leaders settle into a pattern of government, rather than opposition. It might also reflect that the mainstream media extensively reports on the work of the party, as a party of government, and so there is less reliance on its own media. It also likely reflects a growing reliance on social media – especially Facebook and Twitter – to engage with party supporters.

The data reveal that old nativism themes are covered far more frequently than new nativism and cultural Marxism issues. Defense of the Latvian language, Latvian citizenship, and cultural history were consistent issues. In August 2019, there was a storm about a shortage of kindergarten places in the capital city of Riga that led to some Latvian families having to place their children in kindergartens where the primary language of communication was Russian. In 2018, NA pushed for a higher content of Latvian music on public and private radio stations and refused to send a representative to a pre-election debate to be held in Russian on Latvia's public television. In September 2019, NA continued to oppose granting automatic Latvian citizenship to children whose parents were "non-citizens." In the same month, NA complained about a store in a Riga shopping mall selling T-shirts with Soviet-era symbols. Earlier that year, there were several articles pushing for a ban on wearing Soviet-era military uniforms in public places, while in November 2021, an article on the website celebrated a new law, pushed by NA, banning the use of the Ribbon of Saint George – a Russian military symbol commemorating the veterans of the Second World War's Eastern Front – in public demonstrations and rallies. The news part of the website also frequently advertised essay contests for schoolchildren pushing old nativism themes such as "why we should decolonize Latvia" (2015) or a vision for a "Latvian Latvia in 2040" (2020).

In contrast, there were few articles covering new nativism themes. The exception came in 2015 and 2016 when Europe's migration crisis came to a peak. In 2015, the only year that new nativism themes exceeded old nativism themes, a majority of articles raged against the EU's emergency relocation scheme, emphasizing that the country was still feeling the effects of the Soviet Union's

Table 1. Conceptual text analysis of National Alliance Website's "News" section. 2013–2021

	(number of articles / percentage of total)			
Year	Party news	Old nativism	New nativism and Cultural Marxism	Total number of articles
2013	145 (68.4%)	67 (31.6%)	0	212
2014	200 (70.0%)	85 (29.7%)	1 (0.3%)	286
2015	132 (62.0%)	36 (16.9%)	45 (21.1%)	213
2016	140 (68.3%)	43 (21.0%)	22 (10.7%)	205
2017	117 (67.7%)	48 (27.7%)	8 (4.6%)	173
2018	96 (61.6%)	54 (34.6%)	6 (3.8%)	156
2019	72 (68.5%)	32 (30.5%)	1 (1.0%)	105
2020	50 (75.8%)	12 (18.2%)	4 (6.1%)	66
2021	39 (70.9%)	12 (21.8%)	4 (7.3%)	55

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post-war migration of Russian-speakers to Latvia and that any further migration was unacceptable. In response to the crisis, in 2015, the NA website also directed its readers toward a recent Latvian translation of British Conservative politician Enoch Powell's famous nativist "Rivers of Blood Speech," while in 2016 it reported on the publication, in Latvian, of the French author Jean Raspail's 1973 dystopian *The Camp of Saints* novel.

There were even fewer articles tackling cultural Marxism themes. Those few relevant publications were connected to "family" and demographic issues that have salience because, similar to other east and central European states, Latvia has seen a substantial decline in birth rates coupled with large-scale emigration in the 21st century. This has placed demography and traditional family's that "produce" children as central to the continued survival of ethnic Latvians (Bustikova 2018, 2019). One 2018 article by NA's then Minister of Justice, Dzintars Rasnačs, laid out his motivation for opposing Latvia's ratification of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – he argued that use of the term "gender" could lead to a redefinition of the sexes in Latvia. There were occasional articles decrying Gay Pride marches, and, in January 2021, several articles pushing for amendments to the constitution clarifying that marriage was an act between a man and a woman. In 2021, there were also articles expressing solidarity with Hungary, including NA's mayor of the small town of Ogre illuminating a central bridge in the colors of the Hungarian flag as a protest to Latvia's prime minister signing a joint EU leader letter criticizing Hungary. Clearly, old nativism issues still have the greatest salience in NA's internal communication with its members.

The analysis now turns to the unfiltered "back stage" of NA's social media. Twitter allows individuals to spontaneously express their thoughts and opinions to the broader public without the constraints of a censoring hierarchy and without the need for a mediating institution (such as a newspaper or an electronic media channel). Naturally, political parties are not homogenous and least of all NA, which is a merger of first and second wave national parties (although NA is perhaps rather more homogenous than other successful far-right parties, having just 1,040 members in 2021; Egle 2021). NA has a correspondingly small leadership group that is dominated by the youthful VL! wing of the party and which has a long history of professional and personal socialization. The analyzed tweets have not been censored or criticized by NA's leadership and, with just one exception, have not impacted the career trajectory of the three leaders.

There were two key criteria for identifying suitable NA leaders for analysis: (1) they should be long-term leading members of the party who have served on the party's board and whose actions and comments have not been sanctioned by party leaders and thus reflect the party's "back-stage" narrative and (2) they should be active, personal users of social media. This excluded Ināra Mūrniece, NA's speaker of the Latvian Parliament from 2014 to 2022 (and Latvia's Minister of Defense since December 2022) and MEP Roberts Zīle, who have communications teams. Other party leaders, such as Raivis Dzintars, are less active tweeters. This left Jānis Dombrava, Jānis Iesalnieks, and Raivis Zeltīts as the remaining three key party leaders that best fit these criteria. Jānis Dombrava has been one of NA's members of the Latvian parliament since the alliance first competed in a national election in 2010 and has also long served on the party's board. Jānis Iesalnieks has been one of the most visible NA spokespeople since 2010 and has served as a parliamentary assistant, the Ministry of Justice's Parliamentary Secretary (essentially a Junior Minister post), and as a member of parliament since 2018 (he also sits on the party's board). Raivis Zeltīts was a former leader of NA's youth organization and then served as the party's General Secretary, and a member of the party board, from 2014 to 2020. Both Dombrava and Iesalnieks, together with party chairman Raivis Dzintars, were the Latvian signatories to the Baltic nationalist parties' 2013 Bauska declaration. All three are active Twitter users, having joined the social media platform more than a decade ago. By January 2021, Iesalnieks (@JanisIesalnieks) had chalked up more than 46,000 tweets, Dombrava (@JanisDombrava) over 5,000, and Zeltīts (@RaivisZeltits) over 13,000. All three are politically engaged and tweet and engage in debate on a wide variety of political issues.

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Old nativism themes are a constant feature of NA leaders' twitter activity. On June 29, 2021, Iesalnieks, who first came to broader public attention on December 24, 2013, when he tweeted pictures of his wife's home-baked swastika shaped cookies hanging on his Christmas tree (which led to him agreeing to not stand for election to the Latvian parliament in 2014, although he was elected in 2018), tweeted that the president of the Latvian Journalists Association, who has an ethnic Russian background, "should return to the fatherland [*Roģina*] if he can't read Latvian." On May 1, 2018, in response to a demonstration against school reforms organized by a pro-Russian-speaker party, Iesalnieks had tweeted that "if someone here doesn't like Latvia and wants everything in Russian they are welcome to return to their fatherland," accompanied by a picture with the text, in Russian, stating "Suitcase, Train Station, Russia." In a similar vein, on July 30, 2013 Iesalnieks had written that Latvia should agree to hand over alleged Latvian hacker Deniss Čalovskis, who has an ethnic-Russian heritage, to US authorities because "getting rid of people like this is in line with NA's position." While Iesalnieks is far more direct in his old nativism, all three leaders use twitter to consistently support old nativism themes supporting the Latvian language and criticizing Russian-speakers – one Dombrava tweet from May 9, 2016 (the day that Russian speakers in Latvia congregated at a Soviet-era monument to mark Soviet victory in the Second World War) featured a picture of two disheveled men wearing Russian *telnyashka* military undershirts and accompanied by a text ironically stating that "many educated engineers and scientists once emigrated to Latvia. Let's hope they soon go home."

As was the case with NA's website, new nativism themes first appeared on NA leaders' social media in 2015 and 2016, together with the EU's migration crisis and returned with urgency in the summer of 2021 as a new migration crisis unfolded on Latvia's (and also Lithuania and Poland's) border with Belarus. All three NA leaders have shared videos and memes criticizing liberals for supporting "open doors" migration policies (calling them "velkomisti"), linking immigration with crime and terrorism as well as emphasizing that middle eastern and African immigrants do not fit with "European values." However, in contrast to the self-generated old nativist tweets, new nativist tweets were mostly shared content tweets from other sources. One of the rare occasions when these themes were explicitly tied to Latvia was on May 17, 2018, when Dombrava tweeted a link to his own opinion-editorial article entitled "International students – Kebab cooks" where he criticized Latvia's immigration authorities for being too lax in allowing "fake" non-European students to enter Latvia on fake student visas. Cultural Marxist themes started appearing on NA leaders' social media agenda only from 2018 and were most often tied together with support for the policies of the governments of Hungary and Poland, particularly in terms of limiting LGBTQ rights.

NA has clearly undergone only limited programmatic Europeanization. NA's electoral programs continue to focus on domestic themes, and Europe is usually seen as a source of development of finance rather than a threat to values. NA's website had a spike of articles on European new nativism during the 2015–2016 migration crisis, but it rarely tackles cultural Marxist issues, preferring instead to focus on old nativist themes. This is also reflected in the twitter accounts of NA's leaders who retweet anti-immigration videos and memes during periods of crisis but typically focus on old nativism themes. The conclusion reflects on why NA has only undergone a limited Europeanization over the last decade.

Conclusion: Why So Little Europeanization?

This article tracked the Europeanization of NA, one of the most successful, albeit frequently ignored and misclassified far-right parties in Europe. The first section defined key concepts and introduced the methodology used in the empirical section. The second section outlined the sustained domestic political influence of Latvia's far right since the 1980s and tracked the emergence of the National Alliance, uniting the first and second generation far right, as an electoral and executive force since 2010. The third section revealed that NA has established a broad number of formal links with the ECR Group in the European Parliament and the ECR party across Europe, but the closest cooperation partners are to be found in Estonia and Lithuania with whom NA signed the 2013

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Bauska Declaration. At the same time, there are relatively few links with other far-right parties, both in the European parliament and elsewhere. Moreover, outside the 2015–2016 immigration crisis there has been almost no Europeanization of NA's front stage policy, although the backstage of social media shows more evidence of engagement with new nativism and cultural Marxism, while NA tends to be a consumer rather than a producer of policies and issues in this sphere.

NA has clear benefits from its membership in the ECR group. There is policy congruence in terms of soft Euroscepticism (while the far-right parties in the Identity and Democracy group tend to be hard Eurosceptics), and NA's long-term membership in the group gives MEP Roberts Zīle access to high-level positions. It also keeps NA "within the realm of democratic acceptability" in Latvia by distancing itself from the more pro-Russia parties of Identity and Democracy (Almeida 2010, 247).

The minimal penetration of new nativist and cultural Marxism themes in NA's programs can be explained by their lower salience in Latvia. There are few visible minorities, Muslims, or refugees in Latvia, so these issues rarely feature in day-to-day debates. Only in times of high tension, such as the refugee crisis of 2015–2016 and the Belarussian border crisis of 2021, do these issues touch the Latvian polity. However, NA can rapidly switch from old nativism to new nativism and cultural Marxism because the key concern is with keeping Latvia culturally and ethnically homogenous. This nativism, after all, is the core component of Europe's far-right parties. These issues, which have dominated far-right rhetoric since the 1980s, can be equally applied to non-European immigrants as well as Russian-speakers. As Latvian politics and society increasingly Europeanizes, with higher levels of inward migration and more centrist parties supporting the liberal agenda that the far right describes as cultural Marxism, NA or future far-right successor parties could swiftly pivot to this agenda.

To conclude, Latvia's far right remains distinct from Western Europe's far right largely because of different over-arching security concerns (Russia) and a different society where Russian speakers – rather than non-European immigrants or Muslims –are seen as the primary threat to the existence of the Latvian nation. Deeper Europeanization of society and politics in the future could lead to more Europeanization of the far right. For the moment, however, the Latvian far right fits the principle that the unique domestic features and nature of EU member states leads to "domestic adaptation with national colours" (Green Cowles, Caporaso, and Riise 2001).

Disclosure. None.

Note

1 For example, National Alliance, 2013, "Lithuanian nationalist activities in October 2013," https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/aktualitate/lietuviesu-nacionalistu-aktivitates-oktobri/. (Accessed December 10, 2022.)

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