

# POPREBEL

**Populist rebellion against modernity in 21st-century  
Eastern Europe: neo-traditionalism and neo-feudalism**

**Working Paper no. 7**

**Report on radical right populism in Estonia and Latvia**

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# POPREBEL

## POPREBEL Working Paper series

POPREBEL (Populist rebellion against modernity in 21st-century Eastern Europe: neo-traditionalism and neo-feudalism) is a large Horizon 2020-funded research project on the rise of populism in Central and Eastern Europe. The aim of the project is to describe the phenomenon, create a typology of its various manifestations, reconstruct trajectories of its growth and decline, investigate its causes, interpret its meanings, diagnose its consequences and propose policy solutions.

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The POPREBEL consortium comprises six universities – UCL (co-ordinating institution), University of Belgrade, Charles University, Corvinus University of Budapest, Jagiellonian University and University of Tartu – and Edgeryders, a social enterprise.



# 1. Introduction

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the latest developments among the populist and radical right-wing and other ‘anti-establishment’ parties in the Baltic States. It examines the intersections between programmatic principles and the patterns of policymaking among the two main populist and radical right-wing parties in Estonia (Estonian Conservative People’s Party/EKRE) and Latvia (National Alliance/NA). Complementary attention is paid to a newer party in Latvia that can be clustered under the broader, populist, ‘anti-establishment’ category (‘Who Owns the State?’/KPV LV)<sup>1</sup>. The timeframe concentrates on the political engagement of these parties between 2015 and 2020. The structure of this report is as follows: First, attention is paid to the thematic areas of ethno-nationalism and national survival as well as nativism and opposition to immigration. Then, the thematic areas of anti-globalization and populism and anti-establishment politics are placed into context. Since ethno-nationalism and nativism constitute the ‘host ideologies’ of PRR parties (Rydgren, 2017), this report prioritizes these two thematic areas.

Ethno-nationalism is conceptualized as an ideology that, through its association with ancestral myths and symbols, possesses a powerful socio-psychological component which is crucial for mass mobilization within a given ethno-cultural community (Smith, 2000 and 2010; Connor, 1993; Billig, 1995). Meanwhile, national survival here is summed up as: ‘the essence of national interest...the protection of physical, political and cultural identity’ (Morgenthau, 1948: 12). Inside the contexts of post-Soviet Estonia and Latvia, independent statehood has been largely interpreted within the frames of ‘restoration’ and ‘decolonization’ nationalism from the Soviet, political as well as sociocultural, legacies (Annus, 2012; Peiker, 2016). Moreover, the model of ‘ethnic democracy’ (Smootha, 2001) has been implemented with the objective to manage the relations between the titular (national) majorities and the ethnic Russian minorities. The implementation of ‘ethnic democracy’ granted the Estonian and Latvian languages institutional primacy inside both contexts (public administration, the educational system, and the state media). Meanwhile, declining birth-rates and large-scale emigration place demography as one of the core components of national survival in the PRR narratives in these two countries and other parts of Central and Eastern Europe (Bustikova, 2018 and 2019). In Estonia and Latvia, regional security may also regularly become interwoven with ethno-nationalist narratives, in light of Russia’s disproportional leverage as the ‘external homeland’ for the ethnic Russian minorities based in the two states.

Nativism is conceptualized as a sub-branch of ethno-nationalism with a more pronounced stress on opposition to immigration. Nativists hold that primacy must be granted to the political rights, the economic needs, and the cultural identity of the ethnic/native members of the titular nations (Pappas, 2018; Minkenberg, 2017; Mudde, 2007). In this report, nativism is clearly demarcated from xenophobia. The latter notion can be summarized as a socio-psychological reaction that revolves around sentiments of apprehension vis-à-vis the influx of groups of people, cultural trends and manifestations which are perceived as ‘alien’ and/or ‘foreign’ in relation to the main body of a society (Bolaffi et al, 2003). Takis Pappas provides a qualitative and elaborate overview of nativism, as employed in the agendas of political parties, and its distinct features. The most topical ones for the purposes of this study can be categorized as follows: (a) the, predominantly, (conservative) right-wing ideological orientation of these parties; (b) their programmatic insistence on concrete ‘right-wing packages’ with an emphasis on anti-immigration; (c) varying shades of Euroscepticism, especially as far as opposition to free movement of people within the EU-space is concerned (Pappas, 2018: 151-152). In their rhetoric, prominent affiliates of EKRE and NA have interconnected the collective memories of older waves of migrations (e.g., the Russian-speaking settlers during the Soviet era) with the collective anxieties over the prospective arrival of new groups of migrants (e.g., refugees) in Estonia and Latvia.

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<sup>1</sup> KPV LV garnered a percentage of 14.25% in the latest parliamentary elections (6 October 2018), making it Latvia’s second largest party in its own right after (nominally centre-left) Harmony/*Saskaņa*. On 12 December 2020, KPV LV was renamed into ‘For a Humane Latvia’ and changed its leadership. For the purposes and timeframe of this report, the KPV LV designation is used and the focus is cast on the period under the leadership of party founder, Artuss Kaimiņš (2016-2020).



All thematic areas have been categorized in accordance with the glossary of the key concepts compiled together with the rest of the POPREBEL (WP3) researchers between 2019 and 2020. The focus on the policies and activities of the two main parties under study (EKRE and NA) designed to counter 'globalization' situates this report under the thematic umbrella of opposition to modernity inside POPREBEL. The specific objectives included:

- (1) Examining the endeavours by EKRE and NA to safeguard the Estonian/Latvian ethno-cultural character of the titular states and upgrade the security status of Estonia/Latvia in relation to Russia as well as their sponsorship of 'demographic measures' with the alleged incentive to boost the birth-rates in each state.
- (2) Demonstrating why and how, since 2015, EKRE and NA have been systematically opposing the EU's quotas scheme for the redistribution of refugees.
- (3) Highlighting that EKRE and NA tend to combine their ethno-nationalist and nativist principles, both in rhetoric and in political practice.
- (4) Placing into context the opposition of EKRE and NA to globalization, multiculturalism and 'manifestations of cultural Marxism' (e.g., the international LGBTQI movement, feminism, and political correctness).
- (5) Clarifying the, nominally soft, brands of Euroscepticism espoused by EKRE and NA (e.g., geopolitical Euroscepticism).
- (6) Placing into context KPV LV as a 'failed political experiment' in Latvian anti-establishment politics.
- (7) Stressing that EKRE has been more vocal than NA in the active promotion of its programmatic standpoints from within the governmental structures (2019-).

## **2. Activities carried out and results**

### **2.1 Research activities and methodology**

This report relies on a qualitative study and a content analysis (Schreier, 2012; Hermann, 2008). The empirical material consists of official documents such as: programmes and manifestos, electoral platforms, as well as statements and declarations, issued by EKRE, NA and KPV LV. Selected interviews and quotations of leading members of the three parties, monitored in the Estonian/Latvian press or other informative outlets (electronic and printed), expert reports and public, as well as independent, surveys have been of complementary importance. This report comprises data from a set of research interviews (three in total), conducted during autumn 2020, with prominent affiliates of EKRE and NA. The questionnaires elicited opinions in regard to the standpoints of EKRE and NA on: the management of ethnic relations; immigration and demographic policies; gender-related themes; economics; geopolitics (bilateral relations with Russia); outlooks on the EU; relations with the other political parties in Estonia and Latvia. The data accumulated from the interviews was utilized with the objective to assess the consistency between the programmatic principles of each party and its actual patterns of policymaking. The questionnaires were set up and the interviews were conducted in compliance with the guidelines on research ethics stipulated by the EC and the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Tartu.

### **2.2 Research hindrances and risk management**

The research interviews scheduled for spring 2020 were obstructed as result of the state of emergency declared by the Estonian and Latvian governments in the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis (12 March-18 May 2020 in Estonia). Moreover, since 11 September 2020, the Latvian state authorities have decreed that all arrivals from Estonia will need to isolate for a period of 14 days. Under these circumstances, the research interviews were conducted remotely, by e-mail and/or via the Zoom platform. In order to tackle these hindrances more efficiently, older research interviews, conducted by the senior and the junior researcher, were also consulted for the purposes of this study. This older material comprises two research interviews from the H2020 MERWBKBS-749400 individual research project, completed by the senior researcher, Vassilis Petsinis, under the auspices of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu, 2017-2019). The older research material also includes: (a) one



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interview conducted by Vassilis Petsinis during the course of his field research in Estonia (under the auspices of the *Visby Programme* stipend, granted by the Swedish Institute, spring-summer 2016); (b) six interviews conducted by the junior researcher, Louis Wierenga, (between 2016 and 2018) during the course of his PhD research at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu (PhD topic: ‘Digital Right: Party Leadership, Transnational Networks and Communication Strategies of the Far Right in the Digital Age’). The older interviews were consulted in order to enhance the analytical aspects and strengthen the argument of the report and do not form part of the POPREBEL research activities.

### **2.3 Ethno-nationalism and national survival: The case of EKRE (programmatic standpoints)**

Founded in 2012, EKRE has set as its priority to protect: ‘the (Estonian) nation-state; its culture and language’<sup>2</sup>. EKRE’s ‘Conservative Programme’ pledges to enhance the institutional status of Estonian language in the public sector and establish an adequate command of Estonian as a basic condition for election to the *Riigikogu* (national parliament) and the municipal bodies of administration (‘Konservatiivne Programm’ 2015: ‘Riik ja valitsemine’ section). The party prescribes that the highest posts in the state administration must be reserved only for Estonian citizens by birth (‘Kodanik ja Kodanikuühiskond’ section). EKRE formally subscribes to the state-sponsored integration strategy for ethnic Russians, with a non-regulated citizen status, who were born in Estonia. However, naturalized individuals must give up any previous nationality and possess solely Estonian citizenship (Ibid.). Furthermore, EKRE’s programme dictates that the Estonian state must possess a complete and regularly updated registry of Russian nationals living in the country (Ibid.).

EKRE’s prerogatives on citizenship are structured in such a way as to interlink this policy area with the necessity to upgrade Estonia’s security status in relation to Russia. The insistence on the securitization of Estonian-Russian relations also manifests in EKRE’s: (a) objections to the ratification of the Estonian-Russian border treaty (2005); (b) demands for compensations from Russia for the damage inflicted under Soviet rule, (‘Konservatiivne Programm’, ‘Välis ja julgeolekupoliitika’ section). In its platform for the 2019 parliamentary elections, the party reiterates its intention ‘to revoke the unconstitutional border agreement with Russia...we demand the return of the occupied Põhja- ja Lääne-Eesti alad and the area beyond Narva to Estonia and compensation for the damage caused by the continued occupation of these territories’ (‘Riigikogu 2019’)<sup>3</sup>. EKRE pledges to upgrade the national defence forces and ensure the more efficient cooperation between civic-military units (the Estonian Defence League/*Kaitseliit*) and the Estonian armed forces (Ibid.).

EKRE puts a paramount importance on ‘demographic issues’. The ‘Conservative Programme’ (2015) pledges to improve the parental benefit system and social security for parents on leave and increase benefits that would facilitate young families, families with many children, as well as single parents to rear their children (‘Perekond’ section). Particular attention is paid to ‘marriage support’ for people aged between 20 and 35 with the objective to help them establish stable families (Ibid). EKRE’s standpoints on the family primarily revolve around the party’s concerns over national survival and the overriding aim to provide incentives for an increase in Estonia’s birth-rate in an attempt to counterbalance the impact of emigration. The ‘Conservative Programme’ sets as an imperative that ‘the Estonian people must be able to reproduce themselves and preserve Estonian culture...cohesive family is the foundation of intergenerational continuity’ (Ibid). In its platform for the 2019 parliamentary elections, EKRE reiterates its pledge to strengthen family values and cover ‘up to 25% of the housing loan for young families and/or sponsor young families with the birth of every child’ (‘Riigikogu 2019’). In its platform for the European parliamentary elections (2019), the party encapsulates low demographic growth not as an exclusively Estonian but as a European problem and contends that ‘the EU must focus on promoting natural population growth in the Member States... the future of Europe cannot

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with an EKRE MP, (24 September 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>3</sup> For some information on the controversy over the formerly Estonian territories (Põhja- ja Lääne-Eesti alad) conceded to Russia by the Soviets in late 1944, see: Anderson, 1988 (197-214).



be sustained by immigration, but by a natural increase in European countries, which can be economically motivated by the EU' ('Platform for the 2019 European elections', point 12).

In regard to the educational system, EKRE's 'Conservative Programme' prescribes that 'a greater emphasis must be placed on patriotic education and subjects centred on Estonian history, culture and traditions ('Haridus ja kultuur' section). The party contends that 'the task of education and science must be to preserve the specificity of Estonian culture and national self-awareness' (Ibid). EKRE insists on the institutional primacy of the Estonian language in the public educational system from kindergarten to higher education level. In addition, the party-programme pledges the provision of national education to the Estonian diaspora and 'endangered' Finno-Ugric ethnic groups resident abroad (e.g., Russia), (Ibid).

When examined through the lens of ethno-nationalism, EKRE's Euroscepticism centres on geopolitical issues. Throughout the accession process to the EU, public surveys had detected that certain segments among the respondents prioritized Estonia's membership of NATO, on the basis of security concerns, over the country's bid for the EU (Kuus, 2002: 98; Pettai, 2005: 41-62). EKRE has relied on this longer trajectory and recast it. The party holds that the core states within the EU allegedly underestimate the security threat that Russia represents for the Baltic States. EKRE has contended that membership of the EU did not enhance Estonia's security status vis-à-vis Russia ('Eurovalimiste Platvorm', 2014). Moreover, EKRE has voiced its discontent over Germany's alleged apathy in light of Russian aggression and its cooperation with Russia on energy issues (Ibid.). The party's platform for the 2019 European parliamentary elections employs a more neutral language vis-à-vis the role of the EU on security issues, yet it urges the EU to firmly align with NATO's defence doctrine and not to create 'parallel defence structures' that might weaken the military capacity of the Alliance (Point 7).

#### **2.4 Ethno-nationalism and national survival: The case of EKRE (active policymaking)**

As an opposition party (2015-2019)<sup>4</sup>, EKRE adhered to its prerogative that the highest posts in the state administration must be reserved exclusively for Estonian citizens by birth. Consequently, the party contested the candidacy of Marina Kaljurand in the 2016 presidential elections. EKRE's second-in-command back then, Martin Helme, and other EKRE MPs hinted at the candidate's Latvian and Russian family origins. In their opinion, this caused a discrepancy with Article 79 of the Constitution and the basic requirement for presidential candidates to be 'Estonian citizens *by birth*' (Petsinis, 2016)<sup>5</sup>. This attempt to block Kaljurand's candidacy did not succeed but it stirred a parliamentary row between EKRE and representatives of other parties (e.g., the centre-left Social Democrat Party/SDE).

Throughout 2015, the party had been contending that Estonia must not proceed with the ratification of the Estonian-Russian border treaty before Russia acknowledges Article 2 of the Tartu Peace Treaty (1920) which recognized the independence of the interwar republic<sup>6</sup>. EKRE's campaign against the ratification of the 2005 border treaty was met with success in that the talks for the formation of the current government coalition (March 2019) comprised a separate agreement to temporarily freeze the approval of the treaty by the *Riigikogu*<sup>7</sup>.

The controversy over Estonia's Cohabitation Act (2016) and its clauses for same-sex couples provided one more opportunity for EKRE to interlink 'demographic issues' with national survival. The party-leadership protested that, in light of the declining birth-rate and persistent emigration, the government must work precisely towards the opposite direction and grant incentives for boosting the demographic growth<sup>8</sup>. EKRE's systematic campaign over 'demographic issues' was met with success in that the talks for the formation of the current government coalition (March 2019)

<sup>4</sup> Since April 2019, EKRE has been participating in a coalition government together with the (nominally centrist) Centre Party/*Eesti Keskerakond*, as the core-partner, and the (conservative right-wing) *Isamaa*/'Fatherland' party. EKRE won 17.8% of the vote (19 seats) and occupied the third spot in the parliamentary elections of 3 March 2019 (as compared to 8.1% and 7 seats in 2015).

<sup>5</sup> <https://news.postimees.ee/3657113/martin-helme-axe-laid-to-marina-kaljurand-roots> (accessed 20 March 2020).

<sup>6</sup> <https://news.err.ee/117354/ekre-pushing-for-treaty-of-tartu-mention-in-border-treaty>; <https://news.err.ee/115615/new-parties-oppose-speedy-border-treaty-ratification> (accessed 2 April 2020).

<sup>7</sup> <https://news.err.ee/936832/agreement-in-place-not-to-ratify-border-treaty-says-ruuben-kaalep> (accessed 3 April 2020).

<sup>8</sup> <http://uudised.err.ee/v/eesti/7b88fde5-ae2c-45c8-9b64-7f22fee78113> (accessed 3 April 2020).





placed a great emphasis on the increase of child and family benefits as well as the provision of incentives for Estonians who emigrated abroad to return to the country<sup>9</sup>. It should be added that EKRE's transnational engagement among the Estonian diaspora abroad (e.g., Finland) has also been centred on encouraging the remigration of Estonian immigrants back to Estonia (Jakobson et al, 2020: 21-38).

Throughout the 2019 electoral campaign, EKRE reiterated its commitment to safeguard the primacy of Estonian language in the educational sector and opposed the operation of 'parallel' Russian-language schooling institutions (OSCE, 2019: 11). Between 2019 and 2020, EKRE shifted its focus to the university sector. The party opposes the promotion of English-language curricula, under the aegis of internationalization, at the expense of the Estonian-language ones and has specified as one of the criteria for funding institutions in higher education: 'the extent that the university supports Estonian national culture and state'<sup>10</sup>. This pattern of policymaking correlates with EKRE's nativist standpoints and the party's simultaneous calls for the reduction in the numbers of foreign students admitted in Estonian universities. As an EKRE MP warns: 'we are losing our PhD-level, Estonian language, studies...we also have to protect Master's and Bachelor's studies (in the Estonian language)'<sup>11</sup>. EKRE's leadership has been seeking to ensure that the party's ethno-nationalist principles converge with its actual patterns of policymaking – before and after EKRE's entry to the government structures.

## **2.5 Ethno-nationalism and national survival: The case of NA (programmatic standpoints)**

In a comparable fashion to EKRE, ethno-nationalist prerogatives constitute a key component of NA's programmatic principles. In its 'Extensive Programme for the 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima (national assembly)', the party summarizes its core political 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 enhancement of: '...spiritual continuation of the Latvian people - strengthening the Latvian language, culture, collective memory and sense of belonging' (Ibid). NA interlinks the management of interethnic relations inside Latvia with state security and, in a similar fashion to EKRE, insists on upgrading Latvia's security status vis-à-vis Russia. From an early point in the party-programme, it is stressed that: 'the main threat to the Latvian nation is Russian imperialism...today's Russia poses a military, informational and political threat to the Latvian state' (Ibid: 2). NA's leadership remains adamant in its position that 'Russia continues to pursue a revanchist and aggressive foreign policy....destabilizing democratic nations, sowing distrust and distracting the public, while engaging in illegal military expansion and aggression, as well as attempts to rewrite history'<sup>12</sup>. More emphatically, the Secretary General of the party estimates that 'Latvia and the Baltic states are the next object of interest for Russia because we are in NATO and if Russia would manage to destabilize one of the Baltic countries, this would be a way to destabilize NATO and question US influence in Europe'<sup>13</sup>. In order to safeguard state sovereignty, domestically and externally, NA pledges to: (a) prevent allegedly 'pro-Russian forces' (namely, the party of Harmony/ *Saskaņa*) from entering the government (NA, 2018b); (b) upgrade the national defence forces under the auspices of NATO. The party advocates for the increase in military spending; the permanent presence of NATO international troops in Latvia; the reinstatement of compulsory military service; and the more efficient cooperation between civic-military units (e.g., the Latvian National Guard) and the armed forces (NA, 2018a: 87-90; NA, 2018b).

NA interlinks 'demographic issues' with national survival and has set demographic issues as a primary area of concern<sup>14</sup>. Two areas of paramount significance for NA are to: (a) facilitate the increase in the proportion of (ethnic) Latvians in Latvia; (b) boost the birth-rate (NA, 2018a: 1; NA, 2018b). The 'Extensive Programme for the 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima' reiterates the party's measures towards encouraging the growth of the birth-rate: (a) providing a substantial parental benefit up to the age of two; (b) increased relief for each dependent child; (c) introduction of a special 'third child'

<sup>9</sup> <https://news.err.ee/920943/centre-ekre-isamaa-discuss-social-issues-in-coalition-talks> (accessed 4 April 2020).

<sup>10</sup> <https://news.err.ee/1033587/ekre-wants-new-university-funding-model> (accessed 4 April 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Interview with an EKRE MP, (24 September 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>12</sup> Interview with a NA MP, (22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with the Secretary General of NA, (3 November 2020 – conducted via the Zoom platform).

<sup>14</sup> Interview with the Secretary General of NA, (3 November 2020 – conducted via the Zoom platform).



benefit (NA, 2018a: 43). Meanwhile, NA commits to ‘remove all obstacles to remigration’, thus enabling more people to return and shape their lives in Latvia’ (Ibid: 6).

In regard to the educational system, NA prioritizes the dominant status of Latvian language. The party-leadership subscribes to a unified educational system, at all levels, with Latvian as the sole language of instruction - thus opposing the operation of, ‘parallel’, Russian-language schooling facilities. As a NA MP notes, ‘society has become increasingly integrated, which has been a direct result of state policy on moving towards education in Latvian language, which serves a unifying purpose for the various cultures and ethnicities living in Latvia’<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, the party stresses that state-run education must ‘...reinforce the sense of belonging to Latvia’ (NA, 2018a: 28). In regard to the media, the Secretary General of NA assesses that: ‘...the main problem is the Russian-based media and the way they keep the Russian minority self-sufficient and in a completely different information space with different history, different politics, different views on everything that is happening in Latvia and in the world’<sup>16</sup>. NA objects to the arrangement of a Russian-language informational sector under the auspices of the Latvian national information agency. Instead, the party prescribes a centralized state-run media sector, broadcasting solely in Latvian, as the safest trajectory towards countering Russian ‘information warfare’ (NA, 2018a: 25-26).

Attention should be paid to Latvia’s sociocultural specificities and the ways that they shape the ethno-nationalist component of NA’s rhetoric. As result of the dense concentration of Russian-speakers in the capital city of Riga and the economic transactions with Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, adequate command of the Russian language has informally become a prerequisite for business entrepreneurship. NA legitimizes its project for a unified educational system, with Latvian as the sole language of instruction, also as part of the necessity to ‘protect Latvian youth against discrimination in the labour market due to their lack of knowledge of Russian’ (NA, 2018b). In addition, the party pays particular attention to the, ethno-culturally diverse, region of Latgale in the southeast where Russia has been accused of fomenting separatist tendencies (Berzina, 2016: 7-20). NA pledges to provide incentives for the economic development of Latgale and safeguard the regional dialect (Latgallian) and traditions as indissoluble components of Latvian cultural heritage (NA, 2018a: 53-54).

When examined through the lens of ethno-nationalism, NA’s Euroscepticism revolves around geopolitical anxieties. Along comparable lines to EKRE, NA has voiced its objections to: (a) the cooperation between powerful EU Member States (Germany and France) and Russia in energy issues; (b) the formation of defence structures ‘parallel’ to NATO on the EU level (e.g., the European Security Union) (NA, 2018a: 3). Especially with regard to the latter area of concern, a NA MP makes it clear that: ‘we would oppose the creation of an “EU Defence Union” that could create gaps in transatlantic cooperation’<sup>17</sup>. Just as EKRE, the party has been capitalizing on the longer trajectory of geopolitical anxieties and the ensuing prioritization of Latvia’s membership of NATO among a considerable percentage of Latvian citizens (Austers, 2016: 102).

## **2.6 Ethno-nationalism and national survival: The case of NA (active policymaking)**

NA’s continuous participation in Latvia’s governing structures, since 2011, has enabled the party to actively promote its ethno-nationalist prerogatives<sup>18</sup>. This was mainly the case with NA’s standpoints on ‘demographic issues’ and the educational system. Throughout 2015 and 2018, the *Saeima* approved the party’s main proposals for parental and dependent child benefits (NA, 2018a: 43) and incorporated them into the state’s legislation. Throughout 2017, NA’s engagement for the improvement of the demographic situation in Latvia played a pivotal part towards the adoption

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<sup>15</sup> The same NA MP also assesses that ‘Latvia has always been an open, multicultural country’ and judges that ‘the two-community arrangement (Latvians and ethnic Russians allegedly living parallel lives) today remains largely a myth, and the experiences of the country are the experiences of its entire society rather than just one many living here’ (Interview with a NA MP; 22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail). Interview with a NA MP, (22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with the Secretary General of NA, (3 November 2020 – conducted via the Zoom platform).

<sup>17</sup> Interview with a NA MP, (22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>18</sup> Since January 2019, NA participates in a governing coalition together with three conservative and liberal parties of the centre/centre-right (New Conservatives, Development/For! and New Unity as the core-partner) and most deputies from KPV LV. NA previously participated in the governing coalitions formed in 2011 and 2014.





of the Diaspora Law by the *Saeima*. This document provides for the maintenance and expansion of the ties between the Latvians abroad and Latvia - including the facilitation of remigration (NA, 2018a: 5-6)<sup>19</sup>.

During the same year, the party systematically contested the *Saeima's* proposal for the 'automatic' provision of Latvian citizenship to the children born to stateless ethnic Russian families. After a string of parliamentary debates, a compromise was reached and the new law (valid from 1 January 2020) grants automatic citizenship to children of non-citizens *unless* the parents opt for another nationality<sup>20</sup>. Likewise, between 2017 and 2018, NA spearheaded its proposals for a reform towards the centralization of the educational system with Latvian as the main language of instruction at all levels. Ethnic Russian interest-groups regarded these proposals as an endeavour to marginalize Russian-language schooling institutions<sup>21</sup>. After a string of parliamentary debates, a compromise was reached and '...as of 2022/2023, all general subjects in upper-secondary education level will be thought in Latvian, but ethnic minority students will continue study of their language, literature, and cultural subjects in their family language'.<sup>22</sup>

In regard to security issues, between 2015 and 2018, NA addressed a series of official statements to the *Saeima*, the Latvian government and the EC where it urged for: (a) the increased NATO international presence in Latvia<sup>23</sup>; (b) the maintenance of a hard approach vis-à-vis Russia, on the EU and NATO levels, in light of the prolonged occupation of Crimea<sup>24</sup>. The party's interventions in the security debate, between 2015 and 2016, frequently comprised elements of criticism vis-à-vis Germany and other core EU member-states over their ongoing cooperation with Russia in energy projects (e.g., Nord Stream II) and their alleged lack of solidarity to Latvia and the Baltic States<sup>25</sup>. In addition, safeguarding the memory of the Latvian Legionnaires during the Second World War from alleged attempts at defamation (by the Kremlin and its alleged 'affiliates' based in Latvia) forms a secondary area of concern for NA and its interventions at the *Saeima*.<sup>26</sup>

## **2.7 Ethno-nationalism and national survival: The case of KPV LV (programmatic standpoints)**

For the purposes of this report, KPV LV is treated as a complementary case study. The party's programme and other official documents regard the declining birth-rate and emigration as one of the existential challenges facing Latvian society. In its 'Principles', KPV LV contends that 'the greatest challenge to our nation's existence is the (demographic) extinction of the Latvian nation' ('Three Principles for a More Responsible Latvia' section). The 'Extensive programme for the 13<sup>th</sup> *Saeima* elections' (2018) assesses that 'the number of people leaving the country remains high and the population of Latvia continues to decrease due to the demographic decline' (KPV LV, 2018a: 1). In its 'Great Goals' document (2018), KPV LV sets 'a significant increase in the number of Latvian citizens' as one of its paramount

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/openly-about-national-security-threats-national-alliances-opinion-on-debates-concerning-the-annual-report-on-foreign-policy-2017/> (accessed 5 April 2020).

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/latvia-takes-important-step-toward-eliminating-child-statelessness> (accessed 5 April 2020).

<sup>21</sup> <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/education/legality-of-latvias-education-reform-to-be-considered-by-constitutional-court.a277041/> (accessed 10 April 2020).

<sup>22</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-34\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-34_en) (accessed 10 April 2020).

<sup>23</sup> <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 10 April 2020).

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/supporters-of-immigration-have-made-it-impossible-for-europeans-to-feel-safe-national-alliances-opinion-in-debates-about-annual-report-on-foreign-policy-2017/> (accessed 10 April 2020).

<sup>25</sup> In accordance to NA, 'Germany may not like it, but we have to 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'. On this issue, see: <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 10 April 2020).

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/latvian-legion-light-truth-2/> (accessed 11 April 2020).



objectives. In the same document, it is emphasized that ‘demographic growth is not the goal, but the true measure of a country's prosperity’.

KPV LV's extensive programme adheres to the consolidation of a unified educational system with Latvian as the sole language of instruction. Attention is paid to the kindergarten level because ‘it is at preschool age that the child's personality begins to develop, the value system is strengthened, basic skills are acquired, and communication habits with peers and the community are formed’ (KPV LV, 2018a: 5). In its brief declaration for the European parliamentary elections in 2019, KPV LV holds that ‘the inclusion of small EU languages (e.g., Latvian) in the development of smart technologies should be promoted in order to preserve the distinctiveness of these languages in the digital age’ (‘Culture Conservation’ section). Nevertheless, there is a qualitative distinction between this party's standpoints and those endorsed by EKRE and NA on ‘demographic issues’ and the educational system. KPV LV fashions itself as a pragmatic, anti-establishment, party with the ambition to contest the ‘old’ parties. The party's ‘Principles’ hold that ‘...current statesmen do not care...the granting of small allowances to families with children is a prime example of the failure of politicians to deal with the problem on its merits’ (‘Three Principles for a More Responsible Latvia’ section).

The party's ‘Great Goals’ document stresses that ‘the demographic issue must not be viewed narrowly, just as the birth of children and its promotion, as one of the parties in power (namely, NA) does naively and in a populist fashion’. KPV LV judges that ‘the benefits alone, whatever their size, will not produce the desired effect’ and advocates instead for the creation of ‘a set of conditions in public administration’ and clarifies that ‘we do not promise greater or gratuitous benefits, but we promise a more responsible policy’ (ibid.). Even KPV LV's proposals for the unification of the educational system with Latvian as the sole language of instruction are not justified through references to national survival but on the basis of cost-benefit calculations along the lines that: ‘the linguistic division of children at kindergarten age indicates that about 20% of our country's children belong to another cultural space and the state spends a considerable fraction of the annual budget for their further integration into the primary and secondary school levels’ (KPV LV, 2018a: 5). Moreover, by contrast to EKRE and NA, KPV LV's programmatic documents do not comprise references to security issues or attempts to interlink this area with the management of interethnic relations.

## **2.8 Ethno-nationalism and national survival: The case of KPV LV (active policymaking)**

KPV LV's intra-party split of February 2019 impacted negatively on its capacity to communicate its principles from within the governmental structures<sup>27</sup>. However, as early as during the negotiation talks for the formation of a coalition government (January 2019), the party-representatives recapped KPV LV's standpoints on the rational management of ‘demographic issues’ as one of the basic conditions for participating in the government coalition. In greater detail, KPV LV's nominee for the Ministry of Welfare and current Minister, Ramona Petraviča, objected to the formation of a separate Ministry of Demography and interpreted it as another attempt by NA to capitalize on this area and expand its political influence. Petraviča reiterated that ‘KPV LV also wants to improve Latvia's demographic situation but does not believe that this can be achieved by a “baby-boom alone”... appointing a minister in charge of demographic affairs is unlikely to trigger the baby-boom, at the first place’<sup>28</sup>. In other words, KPV LV placed paramount importance on the proper and transparent management of welfare provisions – while leaving implications regarding the mismanagement of these provisions by NA, in the past. Finally, a compromise was reached and, even though a separate Ministry of Demography was not set up, NA's Imants Paradnieks was appointed advisor on demographic affairs at the Ministry of Welfare. One year later, in May 2019, KPV LV maintained an ambivalent stance at the parliamentary vote for the naturalization of the children born to stateless ethnic Russian families. As the party's deputy Dzidzis Šmits stated: ‘adopting the bill would correct an error and make good for “a treason of sorts”’<sup>29</sup>. KPV LV's calls for a more efficient

<sup>27</sup> On 4 February 2019, KPV LV underwent a split when the faction led by Aldis Gobzems clashed with the core-faction around the founder of the party, Artuss Kaimiņš, and departed. The remainder of KPV LV became part of the Cabinet of Ministers under PM Krišjānis Kariņš from New Unity.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.baltictimes.com/national-alliance-insists-on-making-paradnieks-minister-for-demographic-matters-petravica/> (accessed 12 April 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Although the meaning here is not easy to grasp, the use of the word ‘error’ in this context probably refers to the prolonged ‘statelessness’ of certain segments within the Latvian society. The equally ambivalent expression ‘treason of sorts’ probably



management of ‘demographic issues’ (including the prospects for remigration) rendered the party an appealing option among the blue-collar Latvian immigrants in Western Europe<sup>30</sup>.

## **2.9 Nativism and opposition to immigration: The case of EKRE (programmatic standpoints)**

As early as 2014, EKRE had specified that ‘Estonia's demographic realities do not allow mass immigration from any direction...immigration must remain firmly under the competence of national legislation.’ (‘Eurovalimiste Platvorm’, 2014). The party’s ‘Conservative Programme’ (2015) prescribes that ‘a fixed immigration quota must be set and a thoughtful action plan that ensures the fast integration of immigrants into Estonian society and culture must be implemented’ (‘Konservatiivne Programm’, 2015: ‘Kodanik ja Kodanikuühiskond’ section). EKRE’s platform for the parliamentary elections of 2019 pledges to introduce ‘a quota for naturalization, which will not exceed 0.2% of the number of citizens by birth per year’ (‘Riigikogu 2019’). The ‘Conservative Programme’ (2015) also prescribes that ‘the residence permits of foreign nationals involved in hostile activities against Estonia must be repealed’ and that ‘the state can take over repatriation costs to the countries of origin, in cooperation with international organizations, if required’ (‘Kodanik ja Kodanikuühiskond’ section). The party’s platform for the parliamentary elections of 2019 reiterates the clause ‘to expel foreign citizens involved in activities hostile to the Estonian state’ (‘Riigikogu 2019’). More importantly, this document explicitly rejects the EC’s refugee quotas arrangement and pledges ‘to send people who reside in Estonia illegally out of the country’ (Ibid.). This clause is embedded into EKRE’s opposition to Euro-federalism and the party’s unwillingness to ‘implement regulations and directives that infringe on our sovereignty and fundamental constitutional principles’ (Ibid.).

EKRE interconnects the ‘new’ immigration debate in Estonia with the question of the ethnic Russian minority which the party regards as an essentially migrant community. An EKRE MP holds that ‘we are still having great difficulties to integrate them (ethnic Russians) into the Estonian society...there is still a large number of Russian-language schools and companies here’<sup>31</sup>. The same EKRE MP assesses that the influx of new migrants from Africa and/or the Arab states can exacerbate tensions between them and the Soviet-era migrants as the latter category may see the new arrivals as a threat to their ‘special minority status’ and as job-competitors<sup>32</sup>. The chief objective of the party-leadership is to highlight the (perceived) negative correlation between emigration out of Estonia and incoming immigration as well as its negative impact on national survival.

Apart from opposition to immigration, nativism, in EKRE’s programmatic documents, is interwoven with financial protectionism. EKRE holds that foreign nationals and companies must not be allowed to purchase land property in Estonia (‘Konservatiivne Programm’, 2015: ‘Regionaalareng ja kohalik omavalitsus’ section; ‘Eurovalimiste Platvorm’, 2014) and demands the taxation of tax-free foreign capital (‘Riigikogu 2015’). The party’s platform for the Estonian parliamentary elections of 2019 reiterates pledges to ‘restrict the sale of land and forests to foreign persons and foreign legal entities’, ‘tax the huge profits of foreign companies, which are currently exported tax-free from Estonia’ and stresses EKRE’s aim to ‘impose a restriction on the import of foreign labour’ (‘Riigikogu 2019’).

Opposition to immigration and the EU’s quotas arrangement for the redistribution of refugees within the EU constitutes the key-component of EKRE’s Eurosceptic speech. The party’s platform for the European parliamentary elections (2019) judges that ‘due to the rapidly growing number of Muslims in Europe, European identity and values are at stake...to stop this, we need to halt immigration and start returning illegal immigrants to their countries of origin’ (Point 2). Further in the same text, it is added that ‘immigration policy forms part of the sovereign governance of each Member State, which cannot be decided upon by the institutions of the EU...we will not allow the quota system to

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addresses the extent to which the new bill could contest the ‘ethnically Latvian’ character of the republic. On this issue, see: <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/saeima-endorses-presidents-proposal-to-eventually-end-non-citizen-status.a318446/> (accessed 12 April 2020).

<sup>30</sup> On KPV LV’s engagement among the Latvian diaspora in the United Kingdom, see: [https://www.baltictimes.com/kaimins\\_kpv\\_lv\\_party\\_to\\_establish\\_regional\\_branches\\_in\\_uk/](https://www.baltictimes.com/kaimins_kpv_lv_party_to_establish_regional_branches_in_uk/) (accessed 12 April 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Interview with an EKRE MP, (24 September 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with an EKRE MP, (24 September 2020 – conducted by e-mail).



become part of EU's legislation' (Point 9). EKRE demonstrates its intention to securitize migration issues, if necessary, by stating that 'each Member State must exceptionally have the right to independently reintroduce border control at the internal borders of the EU' (Point 10). Meanwhile, an EKRE MP contends that 'every country has the right to decide on its immigration policy...these countries that cannot take migrants in should provide financial incentives with the objective to send some of these migrants home'<sup>33</sup>.

## **2.10 Nativism and opposition to immigration: The case of EKRE (active policymaking)**

EKRE's patterns of active policymaking in regard to immigration have been subject to the distinction between the periods before and after entering the governing coalition. As early as July 2015, Martin Helme had dubbed the majority of asylum seekers 'illegitimate refugees who are looking for social welfare' adding that 'if we came to power, EKRE would deport them'<sup>34</sup>. Later, in autumn 2015, the party commenced its petition campaign for a referendum on the question of Estonia accepting refugees as a whole<sup>35</sup>. On 6 February 2016, EKRE intensified and internationalized its engagement via staging countrywide protests against 'the Islamization of Europe' (echoing Germany's PEGIDA and other grass-roots initiatives)<sup>36</sup>. Attention was paid to the wave of sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2016 and the ensuing 'necessity to protect Estonian and European women' (Petsinis, 2019: 222-224). Two factors that facilitated EKRE's active engagement over the migration crisis, between 2015 and 2019, were: (a) the shared reservations across the Estonian party-spectrum with respect to the proportional distribution of refugees within the EU<sup>37</sup>; (b) the public apprehension vis-à-vis the admission of refugees, especially following the New Year's incidents in Cologne and the Brussels bombings of March 2016. Quantitative surveys conducted between 2016 and 2018 detected a correlation between the intensification of the refugee quota debate, on EKRE's behalf, and the increase in the party's popularity<sup>38</sup>. EKRE does not host militant groupings under the umbrella of its organization but the party's grass-roots happenings over the refugee question also witnessed the presence of more extremist, anti-immigrant, initiatives (e.g., the Soldiers of Odin-Estonia), (Braghiroli and Petsinis, 2018).

EKRE's active promotion of its nativist principles on immigration, since 2019, has been characterized by a less powerful stress on grass-roots mobilization, the adoption of a milder rhetoric but, at the same time, an attempt to demonstrate consistency with the programmatic principles. In September 2019, the EKRE former chairman and Minister of Interior, Mart Helme, had proposed 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>39</sup>. This proposal was not approved by the *Riigikogu*. The temporary resurgence of the migration crisis in spring 2020 provided EKRE with one more opportunity to reiterate their nativist principles on the national as well as on the European level. As the EKRE MEP Jaak Madison stressed at his speech to the European parliament, during the tensions on the Greek-Turkish border (March 2020), 'these are economic migrants and we, the European peoples in various countries, have no obligation to solve the problems deliberately created by extreme leftist forces across Europe .... I come from Estonia and represent my people, and 65% of us do not support a common migration policy'<sup>40</sup>.

In April 2020, EKRE's policymakers spearheaded, via the Ministry of Interior, and achieved the introduction of amendments to the 'Aliens Act' and the 'Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act'. The main objective was to ensure

<sup>33</sup> Interview with an EKRE MP, (24 September 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>34</sup> <http://news.err.ee/v/8728b4fd-d8c5-4c5b-b89e-93a608f381f0> (accessed 12 April 2020).

<sup>35</sup> <http://news.err.ee/v/3f60bd89-68bc-43b3-96a8-bdc3ba15a9e5> (accessed 12 April 2020).

<sup>36</sup> <http://news.err.ee/v/6614e41a-1fb7-4b87-a205-987d4b1a77d5> (accessed 12 April 2020).

<sup>37</sup> <https://news.err.ee/115897/migration-crisis-polarizes-opinions-in-estonia> (accessed 13 April 2020).

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.postimees.ee/3637703/uuring-brusseli-terrorirunnak-tostis-ekre-toetuse-reformierakonna-kannule> (accessed 13 April 2020); TNS Emor, 'Toetused erakondadele' (<https://www.erakonnad.info/reiting.html>), (accessed 13 April 2020).

<sup>39</sup> <https://estonianworld.com/security/estonias-hard-line-interior-minister-wants-to-unilaterally-revoke-visa-freedom-to-ukrainians/>; <https://news.err.ee/979094/interior-minister-to-launch-inquiry-into-ukrainians-migrating-to-estonia> (accessed 13 April 2020).

<sup>40</sup> [https://www.baltictimes.com/compulsory\\_quotas\\_for\\_distribution\\_of\\_migrants\\_would\\_mean\\_end\\_of\\_eu/](https://www.baltictimes.com/compulsory_quotas_for_distribution_of_migrants_would_mean_end_of_eu/) (accessed 14 April 2020).



that foreign citizens from ‘third’ (non-EU) countries who have lost their jobs, after the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis and the ensuing state of emergency, would leave Estonia as soon as possible<sup>41</sup>. One month later, in May 2020, the Ministry of Interior announced the preparation of a new bill which would, amongst others, disallow university students from ‘third’ countries to study in Estonia, during autumn term 2020, even if they have the necessary visa or residence permit, due to fears of a resurgence of the Covid-19 coronavirus<sup>42</sup>. On 16 September 2020, Martin Helme reiterated that ‘our goal is to prevent the constant growth of communities from high-risk countries, and this is mainly due to learning mobility...the problem is the growing communities of nations in Estonia, which have a significantly different historical, cultural and religious background from us’<sup>43</sup>. This stance enjoys the assent of other members of EKRE’s parliamentary group who contend that ‘by increasing (the presence of) different kinds of immigrants the problems can increase...60% of the population is against mass immigration from the Third World, but we, of course, remain open to nations from within the EU’<sup>44</sup>. The Covid-19 crisis has granted EKRE the opportunity not solely to promote its nativist standpoints but also to impact, to varying degrees, on the governmental policies.

### **2.11 Nativism and opposition to immigration: The case of NA (programmatic standpoints)**

NA warns against ‘the efforts of certain interest groups to solve the (demographic) problem through new immigration’, pledges to ‘prevent irresponsible immigration policy’ and clusters ‘uncontrolled migratory flows’ among the main security threats facing Latvia (NA, 2018a: 1; NA, 2018b). The party-leadership holds that ‘demographic problems should not be solved by allowing workforce from third countries to come to Europe, be they economic migrants or asylum seekers’ and add that ‘we have the public support...according to a Eurobarometer poll, 86% of Latvians think that these migrants will contribute nothing to our country’<sup>45</sup>. As in EKRE’s programmatic principles, NA urges for a stricter regulation of immigration and contends that ‘limited recruitment of foreign workers is permitted only in exceptional cases and the average wage of foreigners must be at least average in the industry’ (NA, 2018a: 23). NA equally objects to the management of the migration crisis by the EC and embeds its reluctance to accept the refugee quotas inside the frame of opposition to the doctrine of Euro-federalism. The party holds that ‘the migrant quota scheme must be abolished...the transfer of migrants from one EU country to another does not work...migration policy is a matter of national competence’ and pledges to apply ‘a zero-tolerance policy towards illegal migrants’ (NA, 2018a: 3 and 23). In accordance to a NA MP: ‘we have always resisted mass migration of foreign nationals as Latvia’s recent history and the socioeconomic realities show that Latvia’s integration system may be overwhelmed by large-scale immigration which would deter socioeconomic and political integration and inclusion’<sup>46</sup>.

In a similar vein as EKRE, NA interlinks the ‘new’ immigration debate in Latvia with the question of the ethnic Russian minority and the prospects for the latter’s demographic reinforcement. The party holds that ‘the Russian-speaking migrant community in Latvia is self-sufficient...expanding the Russian-speaking migrant community by attracting new (Russian-speaking) migrants cannot be supported’ (NA, 2018a: 22-23). NA-affiliates have allegedly detected ‘...striking similarities in the present and Soviet time pro-migrant propaganda...they also advocated Russification through immigration just like the present welcoming forces do: a sign of progress, much needed labour force, enrichment, strength through diversity, and the like’<sup>47</sup>. NA’s programmatic declarations interlink the thematic areas of immigration, demography and national survival more explicitly than it is the case with EKRE. The party contends that ‘we want to prevent the situation when Latvians massively emigrate to the West in search of work, but are replaced by immigrants who fill

<sup>41</sup> <https://news.err.ee/1072360/foreigners-from-third-countries-who-lose-their-jobs-must-leave-estonia> (accessed 20 April 2020).

<sup>42</sup> <https://news.err.ee/1094317/third-country-students-may-be-barred-entry-to-estonia-come-autumn> (accessed 1 June 2020).

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.schengenvisa.info/news/estonia-amends-rules-of-entry-stay-for-international-workers-and-students/> (accessed 1 October 2020).

<sup>44</sup> Interview with an EKRE MP, (24 September 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/en/openly-about-national-security-threats-national-alliances-opinion-on-debates-concerning-the-annual-report-on-foreign-policy-2017/> (accessed 5 April 2020).

<sup>46</sup> Interview with a NA MP, (22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/en/the-new-pro-migrant-propaganda-is-just-like-the-old-one/> (accessed 14 October 2020).





jobs in Latvia for comparatively lower wages’ and adds that the contribution of immigration to the economy ‘cannot be viewed in isolation from the assessment of state security and social integration aspects in the Latvian context’ (NA, 2018a: 23). As the Secretary General of NA contends, ‘we believe that new migrants are not a good idea for Latvia...we oppose the lobby of cheap labour in Latvia’<sup>48</sup>.

As with EKRE, nativism, in NA’s programmatic documents, is interwoven with financial protectionism. The party assesses that ‘the situation allowed by the current regulatory provisions, which allows foreigners to have full control over critical objects of Latvia - ports, roads, railways and aviation companies - should be reviewed’ (NA, 2018a: 68). The financial dimension of NA’s nativism is less broad in comparison to that of EKRE and more centred on the activities of foreign entrepreneurs from specific countries. According to the Secretary General of NA, ‘...some of these (foreign) investors were families from Russia who rented a flat in Riga and this also badly influenced the housing market in Latvia. It made it difficult for Latvian families to rent a flat or buy a flat’<sup>49</sup>.

Opposition to immigration and the quotas arrangement for the redistribution of refugees within the EU forms the backbone of NA’s Eurosceptic rhetoric. In accordance to the party, ‘inviting migrants in, giving them ample benefits, then redistributing them throughout the EU...not only fails to solve the migration crisis, it even deepens it’<sup>50</sup>. NA judges that ‘any infringements launched by the EC against EU Member States, which have refused to accommodate asylum seekers relocated under the common EU scheme, should be considered undue interference with decision-making sovereignty of these states’<sup>51</sup>. In a similar vein as EKRE, a NA MP stresses that: ‘we believe in strong borders, no quotas or any mandatory schemes on immigration....it is not the amendment of conventions that seeks to impose quotas on migrants, but strong external borders that are the strongest weapon in curbing uncontrolled migration’<sup>52</sup>.

## **2.12 Nativism and opposition to immigration: The case of NA (active policymaking)**

As early as May 2015, NA’s faction at the *Saeima* voiced its objections to the refugee quotas along the lines that ‘Latvia has the right to determine its own migration policy rather than thoughtlessly follow the ideological framework set by the EC for resolving this refugee issue’<sup>53</sup>. Later, during the same year, the party’s MPs interlinked immigration with national survival and criticized the policies of certain West European states. Jānis Iesalnieks, a leading NA-affiliate and senior official at the Ministry of Justice, reflected on the Swedish precedent and warned: ‘Is this what we want in Latvia? 127,000 immigrants arrived in Sweden in 2014 but meanwhile 115,000 children were born (including immigrant families)’<sup>54</sup>. Meanwhile, NA actively opposed the Temporary Residence Permits trading scheme<sup>55</sup> because, according to the party, ‘90% of those who come to Latvia under this programme originate from the former Soviet republics’ (NA, 2018a: 23). As in Estonia, two factors that facilitated NA’s active engagement over the migration crisis were: (a) the reservations across the Latvian party-spectrum (including Harmony) with respect to the proportional redistribution of refugees within the EU<sup>56</sup>; (b) indications of public apprehension vis-à-vis the admission of refugees into the country<sup>57</sup>. As with the anti-immigration demonstrations organized by EKRE, NA’s public events throughout 2016 also

<sup>48</sup> Interview with the Secretary General of NA, (3 November 2020 – conducted via the Zoom platform).

<sup>49</sup> Interview with the Secretary General of NA, (3 November 2020 – conducted via the Zoom platform).

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/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 10 April 2020).

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/en/openly-about-national-security-threats-national-alliances-opinion-on-debates-concerning-the-annual-report-on-foreign-policy-2017/> (accessed 5 April 2020).

<sup>52</sup> Interview with a NA MP, (22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>53</sup> <http://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/politics/lawmakers-reluctant-to-take-in-refugees.a128591/> (accessed 14 May 2020).

<sup>54</sup> <http://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/refugee-numbers-known-in-a-month-says-pm.a135277/> (accessed 15 May 2020).

<sup>55</sup> This scheme aimed at facilitating the short-term trading activities of private entrepreneurs from ‘third countries’, outside the EU, in Latvia by granting them temporary residence permits.

<sup>56</sup> [http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/legislation/?doc=106034&output=d&ins\\_print](http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/legislation/?doc=106034&output=d&ins_print); <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/interior-minister-we-agreed-to-relocate-not-admit-531-refugees.a156528/> (accessed 15 May 2020).

<sup>57</sup> <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/majority-of-latvians-against-taking-in-refugees.a195952/> (accessed 16 May 2020).





witnessed the presence of more militant, anti-immigrant, groupings (e.g., the Fatherland Guards)<sup>58</sup>. Nevertheless, the active engagement of the party in grass-roots mobilization over the migration crisis was less intensive in comparison to EKRE. Instead, NA has been taking advantage of: (a) its longer participation in the governing structures; (b) the higher degree of fragmentation in Latvian, as compared to the Estonian, party-politics.

NA has opted for gradually promoting its nativist standpoints from within the halls of power. In 2016, the party's representatives in the *Saeima* accused the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of inconsistency and submissiveness to the directives of the EC, following the Ministry's decision to approve the quota of 776 refugees for Latvia<sup>59</sup>. In 2018, NA's parliamentary representatives opposed the signing of the UN Global Compact on Migration along the lines that two of its real intentions are, allegedly, to: 'facilitate consistent immigration and, whenever possible, ensure that irregular migrants are granted regular status...gradually stigmatize those who oppose migration'<sup>60</sup>. In domestic politics, the party has targeted its campaign against 'ultra-liberal' NGOs and think-tanks (e.g., the think-tank 'Providus') that allegedly aspire to '...influence Latvian school students and change their attitudes towards immigration and immigrants' adding that 'immigrant-lovers try to take on the most defenceless part of the society – the children!'<sup>61</sup>.

With respect to the Covid-19 crisis, the party duly endorsed the state of emergency and the temporary closure of borders as decreed by the governing coalition (March 2020). In contrast to EKRE, NA's leadership did not issue any unilateral proposals with the objective to further curb immigration. A NA MP holds that 'the Covid-19 crisis has

demonstrated in the clearest possible terms how interconnected and inter-dependent we are, all around the globe, thus reminding even those who still hold on to the illusions of the virtue and benefits of protectionist and isolationist policies that it cannot ever work'<sup>62</sup>. By contrast to EKRE's coordinated attempts to restrict the admission of foreign students from 'third' countries, the same NA MP judges that 'Latvia and its higher education institutions can only benefit from an influx of international students and international cooperation...there is also the added benefit – foreign students' contribution to the economy'<sup>63</sup>. However, as the Secretary General of the party clarifies, this excludes '...toxic business models of fake students and basically fake students that are cheap labour and they pay for these universities just to be in Latvia and work here (e.g., at kebab shops) while not actually being students'<sup>64</sup>. In conformity with the party's principles on financial protectionism, NA submitted a recommendation for the exclusion of offshore companies from the list of legitimate recipients of state aid to combat the impact of Covid-19. In accordance to NA's Rihards Kols, 'we cannot use state funds to support dishonest businesses and businessmen who have avoided supporting the country until now, sustaining themselves off offshore systems and tax optimization'<sup>65</sup>. This proposal gained the endorsement of the work-group led by the Finance Minister, Jānis Reirs from New Unity (6 May 2020).

### **2.13 Nativism and opposition to immigration: The case of KPV LV (programmatic standpoints)**

KPV LV's platform for the European Parliament elections (2019) specifies that: 'illegal immigration trafficking of weapons, drugs and human beings, smuggling and cyber-attacks are only part of the EU's security agenda' ('Security and Justice' section)<sup>66</sup>. The party pledges to 'strengthen the security of the EU's external border and Latvia's eastern

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.baltictimes.com/anti-refugee-rally-takes-on-latvian-government-26807166755c21627948b7/> (accessed 16 May 2020).

<sup>59</sup> <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 10 April 2020).

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/intervention-of-aleksandrs-kirsteins-mp-from-the-national-alliance-during-the-debate-against-signing-of-the-un-global-compact-for-migration/> (accessed 20 May 2020).

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/on-the-ultra-liberal-ngo-caught-in-a-lie-regarding-pro-immigration-project/> (accessed 21 May 2020).

<sup>62</sup> Interview with a NA MP, (22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>63</sup> Interview with a NA MP, (22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>64</sup> Interview with the Secretary General of NA, (3 November 2020 – conducted via the Zoom platform).

<sup>65</sup> <https://bnn-news.com/offshores-to-be-excluded-from-list-of-state-support-recipients-during-state-of-emergency-213029> (accessed 1 September 2020).

<sup>66</sup> <https://kampiedervalsts.com> (accessed 20 March 2020).



borderline with Belarus and Russia in order to reduce the risks of illegal migration and smuggling' (Ibid.). Meanwhile, KPV LV clarifies that 'every EU citizen (in Latvia) has the right to equal treatment, pay and access to employment, social protection and education, regardless of the circumstances' ('Solidarity and Inclusive Society' section). By contrast to EKRE and NA, KPV LV's programmatic documents do not comprise extensive references to migration issues and how to manage them.

#### **2.14 Nativism and opposition to immigration: The case of KPV LV (active policymaking)**

On 6 December 2018, KPV LV joined the majority of deputies from the other parties at the *Saeima* and voted against the ratification of the UN Global Compact on Migration<sup>67</sup>. However, in April 2019, the party proposed and achieved the introduction of amendments to the Law on Immigration that would allow foreign students to work 40 hours as opposed to the 20 hours per week which was the limit until then. KPV LV's deputies justified their proposal along the lines that 'there is demographic pressure and under the current regulations Latvia may be losing access to talent'. At the same time, one of the MPs who initiated the bill (Linda Liepiņa) admitted that her restaurant chain employed students from Uzbekistan<sup>68</sup>. By contrast to EKRE and NA, KPV LV's active engagement on immigration has been less subject to ideological principles and much more adaptive to the prevailing circumstances and short-term policymaking.

#### **2.15 Anti-globalization: The case of EKRE (programmatic standpoints)**

This report primarily focuses on the sociocultural dimension of globalization and the forms of opposition to it by the two main parties under study (EKRE and NA). On 28 August 2013, EKRE, NA and their Lithuanian partners (*Tautininkų Sąjunga*/Nationalists Union) signed the 'Bauska Declaration' in the homonymous town of southern Latvia. In the text of the declaration, the three co-signatories bemoan the impact of 'the looming ideas of cultural Marxism, postmodern multiculturalism and destructive liberalism' across Europe and add that 'our honour and love for our fatherlands will not let us walk the path of cosmopolitanism' (EKRE, 2013)<sup>69</sup>. EKRE defines itself as a party that upholds Christian values<sup>70</sup> and defends the traditional, nuclear family ('Konservatiivne Programm', 'Kodanik ja Kodanikkuuhiskond' section). The party leadership perceives radical feminists, cultural Marxists, and LGBTQI ideologists and activists as decadent forces which threaten Estonian society (Kasekamp et al, 2019). Kasekamp et al (2019), in an extensive study of EKRE's political communication, observed that the protection of family values was regularly underlined by affiliates of the party in the social media (Facebook and Twitter)<sup>71</sup>, (Wierenga, 2017). Marriage is defined by the party as a 'union between a man and a woman' and EKRE opposes Estonia's Cohabitation Act of 2016 as well as the right to adoption of children by same-sex couples ('Riigikogu 2019'). During his tenure as Minister of the Interior (2019-2020), Mart Helme, in an interview to *Deutsch Welle*, reiterated that marriage must be exclusively between a man and a woman. In the same interview, Helme stated that he looks unfavourably on homosexual people and was reported to have said that 'gay Estonians should run to Sweden if they are unhappy with (EKRE's) proposed referendum on same-sex marriage'<sup>72</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/saeima/saeima-rejects-un-migration-compact.a302055/> (accessed 26 May 2020).

<sup>68</sup> <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/saeima/mps-endorse-looser-work-rules-for-foreign-students-after-heated-debate.a317054/> (accessed 26 May 2020).

<sup>69</sup> A full text-version of the 'Bauska Declaration' in English is available on: <http://tautininkas.blogspot.com.ee/> (accessed 22 March 2020).

<sup>70</sup> However, it should be also kept in mind that EKRE's youth organization, *Sinine Äratus* ('Blue Awakening'), is said to have been engaging in Finno-Ugric, pagan practices (<https://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/eesti/sinine-aratus-valis-uee-juhi?id=74974755>; accessed 28 November 2020).

<sup>71</sup> In this study, the authors analysed 1,900 Facebook posts from EKRE and 300 Facebook posts from the youth organization of EKRE, *Sinine Äratus*, as well as over 1,550 tweets from the party's most active and influential tweeters – Ruuben Kaalep, Jaak Madison, and Martin Helme.

<sup>72</sup> However, Martin Helme maintained that the words of his father were mistranslated in Russian and that what he meant was that 'gays can run around in Sweden'. On this controversy, see: <https://news.postimees.ee/7089490/interior-minister-to-deutsche-welle-let-the-gays-run-to-sweden> (accessed 27 November 2020).



Supranational organizations (e.g., the UN) and international agreements are also topics that feature frequently in EKRE's discourse. In 2016, Martin Helme contested the Istanbul Convention on the grounds that: 'radical feminist ideology was smuggled into the Convention, which serves as a direct attack against traditional family, gender roles, and the natural identity of people'<sup>73</sup>. Mart Helme believes, and has conveyed to *Objektiiv*<sup>74</sup>, that cosmopolitanism, which is imposed by left-wing liberals is destroying nationalities and local traditions<sup>75</sup>. Mart Helme likens EKRE's political mission as a battle which is not limited to Estonia, but applies to the whole of Europe and the goal is to restore national and Christian values by means of a 'counterattack' on the 'liberal abduction' which has taken place<sup>76</sup>. Moreover, Mart Helme claims that people do not want multiculturalism, which is allegedly promoted by Democrats in the US and Socialists in Europe and Estonia, and globalization<sup>77</sup>. Mart and Martin Helme have been enthusiastic about Donald Trump's presidency since he won the US elections in 2016. Mart Helme, in his role as Minister of the Interior, prior to stepping down in November of 2020, said of the UN that there exists a group of leaders whose aim it is to turn the UN into a world government by 2030, adding that both EKRE and Donald Trump stand against this<sup>78</sup>.

## 2.16 Anti-globalization: The case of EKRE (active policymaking)

EKRE's active opposition to immigration and globalization converged during the debate on the UN Global Compact for Migration in 2018. Initially, EKRE called for a referendum on Estonia joining the pact on the grounds that the UN Compact: 'interferes with the sovereignty of the Estonian state, dictating moral and political directions on how to handle immigration'<sup>79</sup>. This proposal was made by the party's Deputy Chairman and current Speaker at the *Riigikogu*, Henn Põlluaas, who, in 2018, called for the referendum to be held on the same day as the national elections (3 March 2019). EKRE's proposal faced staunch opposition from SDE who were in the previous government coalition<sup>80</sup>. The parliamentary debate on the UN Compact generated an unrest<sup>81</sup> which was not limited to party politics. EKRE organized several protests in Tallinn, including one where an independent MEP, Indrek Tarand<sup>82</sup>, became engaged in a scuffle with EKRE supporters and was kicked after falling to the ground during an attempt to take the microphone away from Martin Helme<sup>83</sup>.

Another principal area of EKRE's active policymaking is the debate on same-sex marriages with a focus on the Cohabitation Act of 2016. The public debate on same-sex civil unions began in 2014 and was initiated by EKRE along with the Foundation for Protecting Family and Tradition /SAPTK (Kasekamp et al, 2019). EKRE did not succeed in repealing the Act, which was passed in 2014 and entered into force in 2016. Speaking to the party congress in the summer of 2019, Martin Helme credited the party with preventing further enforcement of the Cohabitation Act<sup>84</sup>. Together with SAPTK and other conservative grass-roots groupings, EKRE has been systematically contesting the Cohabitation Act up to

<sup>73</sup> <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/martin-helme-naiste-kaitsmiseks-pole-vaja-konventsiooni-vaid-reaalseid-tegusid/> (accessed 29 November 2020).

<sup>74</sup> *Objektiiv* ('Lens') is a pro-EKRE news portal.

<sup>75</sup> <https://objektiiv.ee/mart-helme-see-mida-globalistid-nimetavad-vordsuseks-havitab-vabaduse/> (accessed 2 December 2020).

<sup>76</sup> <https://poliitika.postimees.ee/6745246/mart-helme-meid-ootab-ees-tosine-lahing-andsin-meie-uksustele-lahinguulesanded> (accessed 3 December 2020).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Helme's interview with Tim Sebastian of *DW News* – DW Conflict Zone, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCmKWsdqg54>), (accessed 4 December 2020).

<sup>79</sup> <https://news.err.ee/879137/ekre-wants-referendum-on-un-migration-compact> (accessed 3 December 2020).

<sup>80</sup> <https://news.err.ee/880073/declaration-on-un-migration-compact-under-discussion-in-the-riigikogu> (accessed 3 December 2020).

<sup>81</sup> <https://bnn-news.com/un-s-global-migration-d-stirs-up-estonia-s-calm-politics-193971> (accessed 3 December 2020).

<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that, although independent, Indrek Tarand sits with the European Green Party in the European Parliament, and, at the time, was running for a national seat with SDE.

<sup>83</sup> <https://news.err.ee/904938/mep-indrek-tarand-to-take-ekre-to-court> (accessed 3 December 2020).

<sup>84</sup> <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/martin-helme-eeesti-koige-rokkivamast-opositsioonierakonnast-on-saanud-koige-joulisem-valitsuserakond/> (accessed 4 December 2020)



date. As Martin Helme vowed in 2019 after joining the government coalition, one of his intentions remains to ‘repeal the cohabitation law one day, anyway’<sup>85</sup>. Consequently, EKRE has been urging for a referendum on the Registered Partnership Act to be held at the same time as the presidential and municipal elections in October 2021. Martin Helme highlighted this as one of EKRE’s top policy objectives<sup>86</sup>. Chairman of the Constitutional Committee of the *Riigikogu* and EKRE member, Anti Poolamets stated that the second reading of the draft marriage referendum has been scheduled for 11 January 2021<sup>87</sup>. If EKRE’s proposal is approved, the referendum will ask Estonian voters whether marriage is defined as a union between one man and one woman<sup>88</sup>.

### **2.17 Anti-globalization: The case of NA (programmatic standpoints)**

In its extensive programme for the 13<sup>th</sup> *Saeima*, NA includes ‘(nuclear) family, (traditional) marriage...and God’ in the party’s fundamental values (NA, 2018a: 1). In 2017, in an official statement issued by MP and currently Vice-Chairman of NA, Jānis Dombrova, the party’s prominent affiliate summarized the multiple challenges which Europe allegedly faces. Amongst other potential perils, Dombrova’s list included ‘a clash of left-wing and conservative values’<sup>89</sup>. In a comparable fashion to EKRE, the leadership of NA views liberal, left-wing, and Socialist groups as aiming to undermine national identity and fuse nations into a ‘homogenous grey social mass’<sup>90</sup>. The perceived threat of cultural Marxism and the culture (or value) wars are addressed by NA inside the context of a ‘defensive nationalism’. The Secretary General of NA stresses that the culture wars do not exist in Latvia to the extent that they do elsewhere in Western European countries and the US<sup>91</sup>. However, as part of a pre-emptive action, the Secretary General prescribes that NA will need to shift their programmatic stances to issues such as ‘the (precise) definition of marriage, (restriction of) abortions, and all these issues that are very topical in, say, Poland’<sup>92</sup>. Furthermore, an article that appeared on NA’s official website, entitled ‘Migration and Political Correctness in Europe’, argued that political correctness is taking an increasingly grotesque form in Western Europe and the US, but has even reached Latvia<sup>93</sup>. The article (the author remains anonymous) listed as an example, an unnamed speaker in the *Saeima* who is said to have stated that it would be more politically correct to refer to the *Satversme* (‘Fathers of the [Latvian] Constitution’) as ‘parents of the Constitution’ so as not to offend one of the ‘three genders’<sup>94</sup>.

NA’s affiliates employ concepts such as ‘Marxism’, ‘cultural Marxism’ and ‘political correctness’ interchangeably in their speech. They may even link these concepts to the Soviet Union by contending that political correctness is being imposed in Western Europe and the US through operatives reminiscent of the KGB<sup>95</sup>. One opinion piece, published on NA’s official website, cites former CIA officer Kent Clizbe’s book (2011), *Willing Accomplices: How KGB Covert Influence Agents Created Political Correctness and Destroyed America*, which asserts that the KGB created the ideology of

<sup>85</sup> <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/martin-helme-eesti-koige-rokkivamast-opositsioonierakonnast-on-saanud-koige-joulisem-valitsuserakond/> (accessed 4 December 2020).

<sup>86</sup> <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/martin-helme-eesti-koige-rokkivamast-opositsioonierakonnast-on-saanud-koige-joulisem-valitsuserakond/> (accessed 4 December 2020).

<sup>87</sup> <https://news.err.ee/1209061/second-reading-of-marriage-referendum-draft-scheduled-for-january-11> (accessed 5 December 2020).

<sup>88</sup> <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/martin-helme-eesti-koige-rokkivamast-opositsioonierakonnast-on-saanud-koige-joulisem-valitsuserakond/> (accessed 4 December 2020).

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/openly-about-national-security-threats-national-alliances-opinion-on-debates-concerning-the-annual-report-on-foreign-policy-2017/> (accessed 4 December 2020).

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/openly-about-national-security-threats-national-alliances-opinion-on-debates-concerning-the-annual-report-on-foreign-policy-2017/> (accessed 4 December 2020).

<sup>91</sup> Interview with the Secretary General of NA, (3 November 2020 – conducted via the Zoom platform).

<sup>92</sup> Interview with the Secretary General of NA, (3 November 2020 – conducted via the Zoom platform).

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/migration-and-political-correctness-in-europe/> (accessed 4 December 2020).

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/migration-and-political-correctness-in-europe/> (accessed 4 December 2020).

<sup>95</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/political-correctness-ideologists-kgs-useful-idiots/> (accessed 5 December 2020).



political correctness in order to weaken America<sup>96</sup>. According to a leading member of NA's youth organization, Dace Kalniņa, these means were not created by the KGB, rather they were used as a means to reach their goals<sup>97</sup>. Kalniņa further discusses, citing Tony Judt's *Postwar* (2005), how left-leaning intellectuals during the Cold War era had to switch their sympathies to the 'oppressed classes' as the Stalinist repressions became more widely known<sup>98</sup>. Nevertheless, the NA's affiliates do not share a uniform outlook on the sociocultural dimensions of globalization – largely as result of the intra-party demarcation between those members originating from the national conservative TB/LNNK ('For Fatherland and Freedom') party and those belonging to the more nationalistic 'All for Latvia!' (Wierenga, 2019: 143)<sup>99</sup>.

### **2.18 Anti-globalization: The case of NA (active policymaking)**

On 24 March 2015, Gaidins Berzins stated, on behalf of NA in the *Saeima*, that the inauguration of a Cohabitation Law in Latvia would help resolve property-related issues, especially questions of inheritance. At the same time, though, Berzins underlined that NA subscribes to the official definition of marriage in the Constitution of Latvia ('the union between a man and a woman' as stipulated in Article 110)<sup>100</sup>. On 15 March 2018, the party's MPs joined the majority of other deputies in the national assembly and rejected a public initiative calling for the adoption of a Cohabitation Law<sup>101</sup>. One year later, on 20 June 2019, NA's parliamentary group also voted against the (rejected) draft Unmarried Couples Law proposed by MPs from the governing New Unity and coalition member Development/For! for the protection of cohabiting unmarried partners<sup>102</sup>. By contrast to EKRE, NA has not been particularly vocal in issuing unilateral proposals that pertain to policymaking areas such as gender-related themes. This has to do with the greater reluctance, in comparison to the Estonian *Riigikogu*, vis-à-vis the prospects of inaugurating a Cohabitation Law across the parliamentary groups in the *Saeima*<sup>103</sup>. Consequently, NA has been a lot more active in promoting its ethno-nationalist and nativist prerogatives from within the halls of power.

### **2.19 Anti-globalization: The case of KPV LV (programmatic standpoints and active policymaking)**

By contrast to EKRE and NA, KPV LV's programmatic documents do not comprise any references to policymaking areas such as the rights of sexual minorities or other gender-related themes. On 2 October 2018, the party-leadership were asked, during a press conference in Riga, about KPV LV's position on the adoption of a Cohabitation Act that would also provide a basis for legal relations for same-sex couples. The party-leadership maintained a neutral stance and answered that: 'KPV LV does not consider this a political matter, therefore we offer to call a referendum over legalizing same-sex marriage and cohabitation. We will support the outcome of this referendum'<sup>104</sup>.

### **2.20 Populism and anti-establishment politics: The case of EKRE (programmatic standpoints)**

For the purposes of this report, attention is paid to Cas Mudde's definition of populism as: a thin-centred ideology which 'considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the people" versus "the elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people' (Mudde, 2007; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). EKRE's 'Conservative Manifesto' (2012) establishes as one of the highest goals to 'preserve Estonian-ness, to ensure the sustainable development of the state and the people' ('Olukorras Riigis' section). The document stresses that only the Estonian people themselves can realise this aim (Ibid). The 'Conservative

<sup>96</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/political-correctness-ideologists-kpbs-useful-idiots/> (accessed 5 December 2020).

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/political-correctness-ideologists-kpbs-useful-idiots/> (accessed 5 December 2020).

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/political-correctness-ideologists-kpbs-useful-idiots/> (accessed 5 December 2020).

<sup>99</sup> TB/LNNK and 'All for Latvia!' officially merged into the National Alliance in 2011.

<sup>100</sup> <https://bnn-news.com/coalition-sceptical-approving-cohabitation-law-126989> (accessed 6 December 2020).

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/legislation/?doc=138544> (accessed 6 December 2020).

<sup>102</sup> <https://bnn-news.com/latvia-rejects-unmarried-couple-s-law-intended-for-cohabiting-partners-202120> (accessed 6 December 2020).

<sup>103</sup> Estonia is the first formerly Soviet state that passed a Cohabitation Law.

<sup>104</sup> <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/saeima/10-questions-to-kpv-lv.a294421/> (accessed 6 December 2020).





Manifesto' also contends 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' (Ibid). EKRE's 'Conservative Programme', equally advocates for 'a people-centred approach' and stresses that the President of the Republic of Estonia must be elected by the people ('Konservatiivne Programm', 2015: 'Kodanik ja kodanikuühiskond: Väärtused' section). The party lays out a plan to 'develop mechanisms for citizens' participation in politics (coordination procedures, referendums, web portals etc.)' (Ibid). These standpoints are reiterated in 'Riigikogu 2019' with an emphasis on 'the right of popular initiative to hold binding referendums', 'direct instruments for making political decisions' and a pledge to 'restrict the arbitrariness of the bodies of public administration'. The pledge to combat 'political corruption' forms another important component in EKRE's programmatic standpoints. The party aspires to develop a code of ethics for politicians and put politicians and political parties which are 'harmful or dangerous to the state' in the spotlight' ('Konservatiivne Programm', 2015: 'Õigus ja Korrakaitse' section). Of particular importance is EKRE's call to set up a special committee in the *Riigikogu* with the task of supervising the courts and prosecutor's office ('Riigikogu 2019').

In EKRE's programmatic documents, populism is often interwoven with Euroscepticism. High stress is placed on a foreign and domestic policy that is in the interest of the Estonian state and people – in accordance with the 'general will'. Most emphatically, EKRE's 'Conservative Programme' judges that 'Estonia has been transformed into a vassal state which represents the interests of the EU, foreign capital as well as career officials, rather than those of the Estonian people' ('Konservatiivne Programm', 2015: 'Eesti Algab Kodust' section). In its platform for the European elections of 2019, the party calls for an EU which is 'a union of nation states, not a federation!', where 'the Member States must be equal!', and where 'Member States which have acceded to the EU on the basis of the will of their people must also have the right to leave without hindrance if they so wish' (Points 1, 4, and 5). In the same document, EKRE calls for the Lisbon Treaty to be amended because 'it took a long step towards a federation, undermining the sovereignty of the Member States' (Point 3). In particular, EKRE has long concentrated its efforts on halting EU-funded infrastructure projects (namely, *Rail Baltica*)<sup>105</sup> with an allegedly detrimental impact on nature ('Eurovalimiste Platvorm', 2014). Martin Helme considers the *Rail Baltica* issue to be the 'most bitter pill' of the coalition agreement and harbours a strong desire for the project to 'collapse under its own weight'<sup>106</sup>. Moreover, in May 2020, Mart Helme stated that: 'the *Rail Baltica* project is not moving forward, and it is largely due to the efforts of EKRE'<sup>107</sup>.

## 2.21 Populism and anti-establishment politics: The case of EKRE (active policymaking)

EKRE's leadership perceives institutions such as the media as part of the establishment. Since spring 2019, the party has demonstrated its intentions to exert leverage over the Estonian media and press. Consequently, journalists who are perceived to harbour bias against the party have been frequent targets of critique from EKRE, mostly from Mart and Martin Helme, but also by some party activists<sup>108</sup>. Martin Helme, while a member of the supervisory board of the Estonian Public Broadcasting Agency (*ERR*), is said to have attempted to have several journalists fired, as he deemed them to be biased<sup>109</sup>. Statements from Helme and other party affiliates led to a debate in Estonia regarding media freedom. Ultimately, in 2020, Estonia's *Freedom House Independent Media* rating declined from 6.50 to 6.25<sup>110</sup>. This drop in score is credited to EKRE for two reasons. The first is growing concern over the editorial independence of certain media outlets while the second is due to an increase in verbal harassment towards journalists coming from

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.railbaltica.org/> (accessed 6 October 2020).

<sup>106</sup> <https://uueduudised.ee/uudis/eesti/martin-helme-eesti-koige-rokkivamast-opositsioonierakonnast-on-saanud-koige-joulisem-valitsuserakond/> (accessed 7 December 2020).

<sup>107</sup> <https://news.err.ee/1085131/mart-helme-rail-baltic-project-halted-thanks-to-ekre> (accessed 7 December 2020).

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2035820.html> (accessed 2 December 2020).

<sup>109</sup> <https://news.postimees.ee/6557244/helme-wants-to-punish-biased-journalists> (accessed 19 November 2020). It should be noted that one member from each party's faction in the *Riigikogu* sits on the supervisory board of *ERR* along with four specialists who are independent of parties.

<sup>110</sup> [https://freedomhouse.org/country/estonia/nations-transit/2020#footnote18\\_u48mz00](https://freedomhouse.org/country/estonia/nations-transit/2020#footnote18_u48mz00) (accessed 2 December 2020).





members of the ‘ruling coalition’<sup>111</sup>. The decrease in Independent Media rating led to a decline in Estonia’s Democracy Score, seeing it drop from 6.11 to 6.07<sup>112</sup>. Furthermore, the former editor-in-chief of the daily *Postimees* (Estonia’s oldest newspaper), which is one of two independent media outlets in Estonia, is Peeter Helme, the nephew of Mart Helme and the cousin of Martin. A public incident occurred in the spring of 2019 when a well-known journalist, Vilja Kiisler, stepped down from her position at *Postimees*, due to a disagreement with Peeter Helme. Kiisler had written an opinion piece<sup>113</sup> which was critical of EKRE and Peeter Helme took exception to this. Kiisler was not fired, but stepped down, citing that editorials which have appeared in *Postimees* have been lending support to EKRE’s positions as well as legitimizing them. In addition, one former host of a political talk show on *ERR*, Ahto Lobjakas, voluntarily stepped down citing managers at *ERR* asking him to tone down his critical rhetoric towards EKRE<sup>114</sup>.

However, one aspect raised by Lobjakas deserves further attention and that is the phone-calls to *ERR* made by party supporters who complained about him<sup>115</sup>. The coordinated activism of EKRE’s supporters occurs over social media and in person (Kasekamp et al, 2019). Two incidents of similar nature serve as a case in point. In the autumn of 2019, in the towns of Pärnu and Tartu, EKRE supporters appeared at an LGBTQI event held in each town<sup>116 117</sup>. In both instances, those who showed up were both party members as well as supporters who did not hold elected office. According to a countrywide survey conducted by the political sociologist Juhan Kivirähk for the Turu-uuringute AS agency (March 2018), anti-establishment rhetoric resonated with two-thirds of EKRE’s voters, who also professed low trust (the lowest level among all parties) in the parliament, government, and President<sup>118</sup>. EKRE has been very active in mobilizing their bases of support during the short time that they have been in government. In the words of Mart Helme, ‘every day when we are in government, this old system dies’.<sup>119</sup>

## **2.22 Populism and anti-establishment politics: The case of NA (programmatic standpoints and active policymaking)**

NA’s leadership has occasionally accused the Latvian media of playing a pivotal role in propagating ‘politically correct’ attitudes (e.g., allegedly trying to persuade the public to become more ‘receptive’ towards migrants)<sup>120</sup>. Nevertheless, throughout the party’s long presence in the governing structures since 2011, there is no evidence that NA ever mounted a coordinated campaign against unfavourable journalists comparable to the one recently engineered by EKRE. Furthermore, by contrast to EKRE’s ‘alternative’ news platforms (e.g., *Objektiiv* and *Uued Uudised*/'New News'), NA does not host a, party-based, media infrastructure. Overall, NA’s anti-systemic tones on domestic politics are remarkably feebler than those of EKRE – both on the levels of programmatic standpoints and political practice. NA is also significantly less Eurosceptic than EKRE, regarding its stances vis-à-vis institutional politics on the EU level. In its ‘Extensive Programme for the 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima’, NA summarizes its main position on the EU as follows: ‘...we have always been firmly committed to upholding the founding principles of the EU. It is counterproductive to talk about whether more or less Europe is needed. We need a better EU. Let us play an active role in building the EU as a strong union of nation states...’ (NA, 2018a: 2). Moreover, a prominent NA MP stresses that the party has always been pro-EU, ever since a referendum was held in Latvia on joining in 2003 (including NA’s constituent parties of TB/LNNK and ‘All for Latvia!’ as separate entities)<sup>121</sup>. The same NA MP also highlights areas where he judges that the EU could improve,

<sup>111</sup> [https://freedomhouse.org/country/estonia/nations-transit/2020#footnote18\\_u48mz00](https://freedomhouse.org/country/estonia/nations-transit/2020#footnote18_u48mz00) (accessed 2 December 2020).

<sup>112</sup> [https://freedomhouse.org/country/estonia/nations-transit/2020#footnote18\\_u48mz00](https://freedomhouse.org/country/estonia/nations-transit/2020#footnote18_u48mz00) (accessed 2 December 2020).

<sup>113</sup> The opinion piece by Kiisler was entitled: ‘It is Not about Rhetoric: The Content Is What Is Frightening’.

<sup>114</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/rise-of-estonias-populist-right-sends-journalists-packing/a-49376584> (accessed 2 December 2020).

<sup>115</sup> <https://www.dw.com/en/rise-of-estonias-populist-right-sends-journalists-packing/a-49376584> (accessed 2 December 2020).

<sup>116</sup> <https://news.err.ee/994179/ekre-members-supporters-crash-lgbt-event-in-parnu> (accessed 7 December 2020).

<sup>117</sup> <https://news.err.ee/998642/gallery-ekre-protest-in-tartu-attracts-lgbt-supporters> (accessed 7 December 2020).

<sup>118</sup> <https://www.err.ee/692131/kivirahk-tahtis-pole-see-mida-sinust-raagitakse-vaid-et-uldse-raagitakse> (accessed 7 December 2020).

<sup>119</sup> <https://poliitika.postimees.ee/6745246/mart-helme-meid-ootab-ees-tosine-lahing-andsin-meie-uksustele-lahinguulesanded> (accessed 15 December 2020).

<sup>120</sup> <https://www.nacionaalapvieniba.lv/l/en/migration-and-political-correctness-in-europe/> (accessed 7 December 2020).

<sup>121</sup> Interview with a NA MP (22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail).



including more extensive cooperation in the prevention of money-laundering and the struggle against corruption<sup>122</sup>. In all this, prominent party affiliates such as Jānis Dombrava reiterate and clarify that Latvia opts for an EU which is composed of sovereign states and not for a European federal state<sup>123</sup>.

### **2.23 Populism and anti-establishment politics: The case of KPV LV (programmatic standpoints and active policymaking)**

In its Party Statute, KPV LV adopts a technocratic platform and sets as its main goal to 'defend the interests of taxpayers in their relations with the Latvian state'<sup>124</sup>. Acknowledging that Latvia has become more prosperous, KPV LV notes that the confidence of the Latvian people in the state has become low (KPV LV, 2018a: 1). KPV LV also calls for the elimination of the governing Coalition Council, devoting a sub-section of their 'Extensive programme for the 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima elections' (2018) to this issue (Ibid). The party indicts the governing class of Latvia as being an 'unconstitutional organization' which 'trades secretly influence of political power and associated lobbies, not in the interests of people' (Ibid). KPV LV claims that as long as the status quo is maintained, political responsibility is not possible. Therefore, the party's 'Extensive programme for the 13<sup>th</sup> Saeima elections' proposes to reduce the number of ministers from 14 to 6 - along with the Prime Minister ('Subsequently reduce the number of ministers' section).

KPV LV generally supports Latvia's membership of the EU, advocating for further cooperation<sup>125</sup>. In addition, KPV LV's brief platform for the European Parliament elections (2019) promotes Latvia's active participation in the EU, with 'minor issues' remaining under the competency of each Member State<sup>126</sup>. In terms of economic policy, the party advocates for the development of the Eurozone and, with specific reference to Latvia, states as its aim to gain confidence of EU investors<sup>127</sup>. The party views the role of the EU as taking more responsibility in protecting EU citizens and their values and wishes to play a role in strengthening the security of the EU's external border and Latvia's eastern border with Russia and Belarus<sup>128</sup>. Nevertheless, throughout 2020, a priority of existential importance for KPV LV's leadership remained to reverse the declining popularity of the party (polling at around 2.8% and 2.0% in the public surveys conducted between mid-September 2019 and mid-February 2020 – then dropping down to 1% by the end of October 2020)<sup>129</sup>. This endeavour seriously obstructed the party's capacity to actively promote its standpoints on the reform of the system of public administration from within the governing structures.

## **3. Conclusions**

Ethno-nationalism is prominent in the programmatic principles and political practices of the two main parties (EKRE and NA) analysed in this study. In their programmatic documents and various statements of their party leaders, EKRE and NA espouse similar ideological principles, including: the dominant status of the Estonian/Latvian languages in the public sector (public administration, education and the state media); the increase of the (ethnically) Estonian/Latvian birth-rates and other 'demographic issues'; the securitization of bilateral relations between Estonia/Latvia and Russia and the prioritization of Estonia's and/or Latvia's membership of NATO over the EU. EKRE and NA have been actively promoting their ethno-nationalist ideas from within the halls of power (the *Riigikogu* and the *Saeima* as well as the

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with a NA MP (22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

<sup>123</sup> <https://www.nacionalaapvieniba.lv/l/en/openly-about-national-security-threats-national-alliances-opinion-on-debates-concerning-the-annual-report-on-foreign-policy-2017/> (accessed 8 December 2020).

<sup>124</sup> KPV LV Party Statute. Section 2. Objectives, tasks and methods of party activities. <https://kampiedervalsts.com> (accessed 19 August 2020).

<sup>125</sup> <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/saeima/10-questions-to-kpv-lv.a294421/> (accessed 1 December 2020).

<sup>126</sup> <https://kampiedervalsts.com> (accessed 19 August 2020).

<sup>127</sup> <https://kampiedervalsts.com> (accessed 19 August 2020).

<sup>128</sup> <https://kampiedervalsts.com> (accessed 19 August 2020).

<sup>129</sup> <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/politics/party-ratings-national-alliance-on-the-rise-kpv-crash-continues.a333608/>; <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/politics/opposition-parties-lead-the-way-in-january-ratings.a347829/> (accessed 15 April 2020); <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/latvia/> (accessed 1 December 2020).



European Parliament), emphasising parental benefits, the dominant status of the Estonian/Latvian languages in the state institutions and the maintenance of a hard stance vis-à-vis Russia on the EU and NATO levels. The reasons behind the heavy emphasis on ethno-nationalism by EKRE and NA are to be found in: (a) geopolitical anxieties over Russia's role as the 'kin state' for the ethnic Russian minorities based in the two states; and (b) the prioritization of Estonia's and Latvia's membership of NATO, on the basis of security concerns, over membership of the EU by a considerable percentage of the population in both countries. Consequently, EKRE and NA have been propagating a brand of (soft) geopolitical Euroscepticism which: (a) scrutinizes the extent to which EU-membership can upgrade the security status of Estonia/Latvia vis-à-vis Russia; (b) opposes the formation of 'parallel' to NATO defence structures on the EU level (e.g., the European Security Union).

In regard to nativism, the programmatic documents and the party leaderships of EKRE and NA place an equally great stress on the principle of hard borders, the regulation of immigration, and financial protectionism. Opposition to the EU's quotas scheme for the redistribution of refugees constitutes the main area of contention between EKRE/NA and the EU. In their rhetoric, EKRE and NA tend to: (a) interconnect older (during the Soviet era) with newer waves of migration to Estonia and Latvia; (b) postulate a solid nexus between their ethno-nationalist position on national survival and a hard nativist standpoint on immigration. Meanwhile, both parties have been actively promoting their programmatic stances on the regulation of immigration, financial protectionism and opposition to the EU's quotas scheme for the redistribution of refugees, both on the national and the European parliamentary levels. Throughout 2020, EKRE, by contrast to NA, has also been very active in the promotion of unilateral proposals for the restriction of immigration from 'third countries' to Estonia amid the Covid-19 crisis. The combination of ethno-nationalist and nativist standpoints in the speeches of EKRE and NA is often related to constructing a discursive bridge between collective memories of 'colonization' under the Soviets and the anxiety of becoming 'colonized' again by new groups of migrants (e.g., refugees).

The programmatic standpoints of EKRE and NA comprise calls for the institutional protection of the nuclear family and 'traditional' marriage as well as critical stances vis-à-vis LGBTQI rights, feminism, political correctness, 'left-wing trends', and the (perceived) sociocultural dimensions of globalization. From an ideological perspective, attention needs to be paid to the prerogatives of the 'Bauska Declaration' (2013), signed by both parties, especially its alarmism over 'the looming ideas of cultural Marxism, postmodern multiculturalism and destructive liberalism'. In all this, however, EKRE has been remarkably more active than NA when it comes to the promotion of policy proposals that pertain to gender- and sexual orientation-related themes (e.g., EKRE's pledge to repeal Estonia's Cohabitation Act of 2016). This difference in regard to the policymaking patterns of the two parties should be sought in the greater reluctance of the parliamentary groups in the Latvian *Saeima* to pass a Cohabitation Law. By contrast, the Estonian *Riigikogu* was the first legislature in a former Soviet republic to pass such a law.

EKRE has developed an anti-establishment platform which comprises calls for the direct participation of citizens in the decision-making procedures (referendums), anti-corruption speech, as well as allegations of democratic deficit on the levels of national (Estonian) and EU politics. The party has been very active in creating its own information outlets (e.g., *Objektiiv* and *Uued Uudised*) and cultivating support among its base as well as exerting leverage over the Estonian media and press. By contrast, NA has evolved into a predominantly national conservative party with a remarkably feebler anti-systemic disposition in comparison to EKRE (both in ideology and political practice). NA's continuous participation in a series of government coalitions (2011 until present day) and successful engagement from within the halls of power was the decisive catalyst that alleviated the intensity of this party's anti-systemic stances. By contrast, EKRE maintained the anti-systemic approach to its engagement in politics, regardless of it functioning inside or outside the government structures.



KPV LV adopted a technocratic platform and briefly aspired to reform the system of public administration in Latvia, while staunchly criticizing the political establishment, until it succumbed to intra-party fragmentation. The programmatic documents of KPV LV put importance on reversing demographic stagnation and safeguarding the dominant status of the Latvian language in the public sector but from a purely technocratic angle. Since January 2019, KPV LV had been actively promoting its standpoints on ‘demographic issues’ at the *Saeima* but largely in opposition to NA. KPV LV underlines the necessity to combat illegal immigration and smuggling activities but the party’s programmatic documents do not comprise an articulate platform on the management of immigration in Latvia. Furthermore, KPV LV has no programmatic standpoints on gender-related themes. Taking into consideration its steady decline in popularity and its refashioning into a new party (‘For a Humane Latvia’) by the end of 2020, the case of KPV LV has been covered as a ‘failed political experiment’ in Latvian anti-establishment politics. As a final remark, the party’s ambivalent and malleable policymaking patterns in specific areas (e.g., the management of interethnic relations and immigration) hint at a ‘thinner’ variant of populism in comparison to the ‘thicker’ and ideologically coherent (right-wing) one espoused by EKRE. The following table summarizes the centrality of the four thematic areas for all parties under study (programmatic principles and active policymaking):

Thematic areas	EKRE	NA	KPV LV
Ethno-nationalism	Strong	Strong	Moderate
Nativism	Strong	Strong	Moderate
Anti-globalization	Strong	Moderate	Weak
Populism	Strong	Weak	Strong

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<sup>130</sup> This website is no longer in function after the intra-party changes of 12 December 2020. All relevant party documents cited in this report were previously retrieved by the researchers. The new website of KPV LV can be found at: <https://www.kpvlv.com/> (accessed 20 December 2020).





### **4.3 Interviews conducted during the field research for POPREBEL (D3.1, WP3)**

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Interview with a MP of the National Alliance at the Latvian national assembly, *Saeima* (22 October 2020 – conducted by e-mail).

Interview with the Secretary General of the National Alliance (3 November 2020 – conducted via the Zoom platform).

