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Comparing Radical-Right Populism in Estonia and Latvia

Daunis Auers and Andres Kasekamp

Introduction

2011 saw sharply contrasting parliamentary elections in neighbouring Estonia and Latvia. The 6 March 2011 poll in Estonia was the first election in post-communist Europe to feature an unchanged line-up of competing political parties, indicating a high level of political stability despite the financial and political turmoil that marked much of Europe in 2011 (Pettai et al. 2011). In contrast, the same year Latvia experienced its first early election, triggered by a referendum, on the recall of Parliament, called by the Latvian president in protest to a perceived ‘privatization of democracy in Latvia’ (Zatlers 2011). Moreover, the radical-right populist *Visu Latvijai!/Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK* (National Alliance of All for Latvia!/For Fatherland and Freedom/Latvian National Independence Movement) almost doubled its share of the votes it won in the October 2010 regular election, and then subsequently took up government office in a new three-party coalition. In contrast, the Estonian Independence Party (Estonia’s leading radical-right populist party) claimed just 0.4 per cent of the votes in March 2011.

This chapter examines and explains the contrasting fortunes of radical-right populist movements in Estonia and Latvia. We first analyse the status quo of radical-right populist parties in Estonia and Latvia and describe the recent emergence of the National Alliance as a credible and competitive party in Latvia.¹ We then compare political party rhetoric along three key radical-right populist dimensions – nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Mudde 2007, 2010). Finally, we argue that there are two key long-term explanations for the emergence of the National Alliance as a credible force in Latvia. First, the language of radical-right populists has long been

¹ There are no major *extreme* right parties (i.e. those rejecting the democratic system) in Estonia and Latvia.

a part of the Latvian political mainstream, but has only sporadically appeared in the Estonian discourse (see Auers & Kasekamp 2009). In this sense, radical-right populism can be seen as a 'pathologically normal' part of Latvian politics (Mudde 2010), and this *normalization* of radical-right populist rhetoric allowed the National Alliance to emerge as a credible political force without the negative stigma often attached to radical-right parties elsewhere in Europe. Second, the younger partner in the National Alliance (All for Latvia!), which has effectively taken control of the party alliance (following the merger of the two parties on 23 July 2011), is a genuine grassroots movement that has both an enthusiastic and active grassroots membership as well as a firm set of political principles that stand in sharp contrast to the 'thin' élite political constructions of the major Latvian parties, which are both ideologically weak and lacking a widespread membership. It has used this grassroots movement to mobilize young voters and to draw a sharp contrast between itself and the older, more élite parties, thus giving substance to its core populist rhetoric. As with other successful radical-right populists, the National Alliance also has a charismatic leader in Raivis Dzintars. In contrast, the Eesti Iseseisvuspartei (Estonian Independence Party, EI) lacks both a grassroots organization and charismatic leader and is politically marginalized because of its radical discourses.

The historical context

During their first periods of independence between the two world wars, radical-right proto-fascist movements were on the rise in the Baltic States, as elsewhere in Europe. The Estonian Vaps movement (The Estonian War of Independence Veterans' League) gained mass support and appeared to be on the verge of obtaining power through democratic elections when the incumbent government headed by Konstantin Päts declared a state of emergency in March 1934 and imprisoned the Vaps leadership. In Latvia, the Pērkonkrusts (Thunder Cross) movement gained adherents with its call for a 'Latvian Latvia', but shared the same fate as its Estonian comrades, when Prime Minister Kārlis Ulmanis established an authoritarian regime two months after Päts. Some members of these movements who managed to survive the Soviet occupation in 1940–1 re-emerged during the subsequent German occupation, and former members of Pērkonkrusts collaborated in the holocaust on Latvian territory (Kasekamp 1999).

During the re-establishment of independence in the early 1990s, Päts and Ulmanis were revered as the respective fathers of their nations and their mild authoritarian rule is recalled fondly by many. Indeed, the latter's great nephew, Guntis Ulmanis, an amiable, mid-ranking, Soviet-era bureaucrat, was elected the first president of post-Soviet Latvia (1993–9) largely on the strength of his surname. Although the extremist movements of the interwar era were revived by small groups of enthusiasts in the 1990s (notably Pērkonkrusts), they have had no electoral success or direct impact on the political system.

The first years of post-Soviet transition witnessed the emergence of a plethora of small, mainly marginal, new radical-right political parties. Only Eesti Kodanik (Estonian Citizen), led by the retired US colonel Jüri Toomepuu, made it into the

Estonian Parliament (receiving 7% of the vote in 1992). Nationalism was the driving force behind these movements. Soviet rule had brought about a dramatic demographic shift: at the end of the Second World War the population of Estonia was more than 90 per cent ethnically Estonian and nearly 80 per cent of the inhabitants of Latvia were ethnic Latvians. However, following large-scale immigration of Russian-speaking industrial workers and managers during the Soviet era, by the end of the 1980s, the Estonian share of the population had decreased to 63 per cent and the Latvian share to just 52 per cent (Kasekamp 2010: 155). Many of these parties sprang from the grass roots citizens' committees (the Congress of Estonia and the Citizens' Congress of Latvia) created in 1990 – independence movements which championed restitution and opposed the dominant and more moderate Popular Fronts which had gained control over Soviet institutions. Their emphasis was on restorationism, that is, purging the country of its Soviet legacy and defending the principle of legal continuity with the first period of independence. This meant cleansing public institutions of the influence of former Communist Party members and 'decolonization' – encouraging Soviet-era migrants, mainly Russians, to return 'home'.

A catalyst for the reactivation of the Estonian radical right in the twenty-first century was the 'war of monuments' or battle over memory politics that erupted in the mid-2000s after accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004. The first triggering event was the Estonian government's removal of a monument to those who had fought in German uniform during the Second World War, which was erected by a veterans' group in the provincial town of Lihula in 2004. This incident in turn led to the relocation of a Soviet war memorial, the 'Bronze Soldier', in Tallinn in 2007, which occasioned rioting by mainly Russian youths and an international crisis with Russia (Brüggemann & Kasekamp 2008). In the same way, the first decade of the twenty-first century in Latvia has been marked by conflicts over the role and place of the Latvian and Russian languages in public schools as well as markedly differing interpretations of twentieth-century Latvian history, essentially revolving around the issue of whether Latvia was 'occupied' by the Soviet Union in 1940. These debates have kept ethnic tensions high and ensured that radical voices have a place in public discourse.

Indeed, Russia has continued to attempt to influence politics in the Baltic States. Russian politicians, officials and media have frequently contributed to stoking up ethnic tensions (Muižnieks 2008, Pelnēns 2009: 50, 138). Russian media typically utilize isolated cases of extremism to label the Baltic States hotbeds of neo-Nazism or to point to a 'revival of fascism'. Moreover, ethnic Russian extreme-right groups affiliated with opposition parties in Russia, such as the National Bolsheviks, were active in the Baltic States in the late 1990s, although they have been supplanted in recent years by newer, more sophisticated and networked Kremlin-backed groups such as Nashi or the Anti-Fascist Committee. Latvia has also seen the establishment of single-issue groups with close ties to Russian organizations. Thus the 'Russian School Defence Staff' flowered in 2003 and 2004 in opposition to new regulations on the teaching of Latvian in Russian-speaking schools, while in 2011 the 13 January Movement organized a successful signature gathering drive to force a referendum on the introduction of Russian as an official second language in Latvia. While these Russian nationalist groups are significant in terms of providing rhetorical opposition to titular radical Latvian and

Estonian nationalist organizations, our focus in this chapter is on ethnic Latvian and Estonian parties. We now turn to look first at radical-right populist movements and parties in Estonia and Latvia.

Radical-right movements and parties

Eesti Rahvuslik Liikumine (the Estonian National Movement) appeared at the time of the debates surrounding the removal of the Soviet war monument in Tallinn and in the past few years has been the most coherent and influential radical right populist political force, though it did not register itself as a political party. In March 2012 it merged with Eestimaa Rahvaliid (the Estonian People's Union), the party traditionally representing the rural population which lost its representation in Parliament following the March 2011 election, to form the new Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (The Estonian Conservative People's Party). The only radical-right populist party to have contested national elections in Estonia in recent years is the Estonian Independence Party, but it has achieved paltry results: 0.4 per cent in the 2011 parliamentary election, 0.2 per cent in 2007 and 0.5 per cent in 2003. The 5 per cent threshold for obtaining seats in Parliament is an effective institutional barrier against the proliferation of small parties. A chronic impediment to the success of the radical right in Estonia has been the lack of a well-known and charismatic leader. Estonians tend to look to their northern neighbour and linguistically kin nation, Finland, for models. Most recently, after the triumph of the Eurosceptic populist True Finns in the 2011 Finnish election, an initiative group was set up for a Põliseestlased (True Estonians) party (Põliseestlased 2011), which, however, appears to have petered out.

In contrast, Latvia has a great number of radical and extreme right movements and organizations, including a small network of self-styled national socialist organizations. The internet, with its low start-up costs and relative anonymity, has seen a flowering of these radical organizations. Latvijas Republikas Tautas Tribunāls (the Latvian People's Tribunal) is one such case. It is run by veterans of the Latvian radical movement, which can trace its activities back to the independence movement of the 1980s. Its website consists of a list of people perceived to have betrayed the Latvian state. The accusations are often coloured with the claim that the facial features of the individuals show them to be members of some inferior caste (most frequently the accusation is that they are Jewish).² The 'Latvian' organization published an extremist newspaper, *Latvietis Latvijā* ('A Latvian in Latvia') between 1999 and 2001 and now hosts an internet site.³ A higher profile organization is the Latvijas Nacionālā Fronte (Latvian National Front), which regularly publishes an antisemitic xenophobic newspaper that has serialized *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and is provocatively named DDD (standing for Deoccupation, Decolonization, Debolshevization) (Muižnieks 2005: 111). Anti-Semitism remains a key ideological position for the Latvian radical right.

² <<http://tautastribunals.eu/>> [accessed 5 December 2011].

³ <<http://home.parks.lv/latvietis/saturs.htm>> [accessed 5 December 2011].

Nacionālā Spēka Savienība (National Power, NSS) is a younger and more publically active organization whose leader, Viktors Birze, has adopted a high profile at both nationalist and anti-homosexual gatherings. In April 2011, for example, NSS proposed repatriating the body of Herberts Cukurs, a Latvian aviator who perpetrated war crimes during the Second World War (and was assassinated by Israeli Mossad agents in Uruguay in 1965). Although these organizations are on the extreme fringes of the far-right movement in Latvia, and have little public support (NSS won just 0.13% of the vote when it competed in the 2006 parliamentary election), they do have ad-hoc contacts with mainstream Latvian parties and even appear in newspapers and mainstream television current affairs programmes (Auers & Kasekamp 2009).

In addition to far greater grass-roots activity, Latvia has also seen greater success for populist parties, although a successful and genuinely radical-right populist party only emerged in 2010. Indeed, Latvia has experienced three populist waves since 1991. The first phase in 1995 saw a disparate group of nationalists and populists win one-third of the seats in Parliament. Demokrātiskā Partija 'Saimnieks' (The Democratic Party 'Master') and Tautas Kustība Latvijai–Zīgērīsta Partija (The People's Movement for Latvia–Siegerists Party) combined an explicitly nationalist rhetoric with a direct appeal to the 'losers' in the first years of the economic transition (the elderly, rural dwellers, industrial workers and public sector employees), offering to imprison corrupt officials and businessmen as well as promising universal high levels of welfare. However, the populists had weak party organizations and significant internal differences between party leaders and thus quickly fragmented and collapsed.

The second phase came at the turn of the century, when political corruption had increasingly appeared on the public agenda following the publication of damning reports from the European Commission, the World Bank, Transparency International and other reputable organizations. Jaunais Laiks (New Era), a 'new centrist populist party' with a charismatic leader, flexible political ideology and central anti-corruption message, swept to victory in the 2002 election (Ucen 2007: 51). These first two party waves were clearly populist, but not radical-right populist. They were essentially 'orthodox' parties that supported 'the need for market reforms, a democratic form of government, Western integration' and had moderate nationalist appeal (Pop-Eleches 2002, Sikk 2006).

In contrast, the third and most recent wave of Latvian populism, from 2010 onwards, saw the emergence of a genuinely radical-right populist party – the National Alliance. The oldest part of the alliance is the Latvijas Nacionālās Neatkarības Kustība (Latvian National Independence Movement, LNNK) which can trace its roots back to 1988 and Tēvzemei un Brīvībai (For Fatherland and Freedom, TB) which developed from the Latvians Citizens' Committee (discussed above). These two parties enjoyed a successful alliance that lasted over a decade, spending only two years in opposition between 1998 and 2010. However, they became moderated by governmental responsibility and were losing their share of the nationalist Latvian vote to a new radical grassroots movement recently registered as a party – Visu Latvijai! (All for Latvia, VL!) – that had been building up its support through a series of high profile public demonstrations and an aggressive critique of the existing political élite. However, VL! failed to reach the 5 per cent threshold in the 2006 parliamentary election and was unlikely to do so in

2010, largely because it lacked the level of financing needed to successfully compete in Latvian elections. At the same time, TB/LNNK lacked support in the polls but had built up a substantial network of financial sponsors through its many years in national and municipal government coalitions. This made for a perfect political marriage. V! brought youth, vigour and a legitimate radical-right populist message unsullied by years of government to the table, while TB/LNNK brought political experience and cash. The National Alliance won eight seats in 2010 and then 14 in the 2011 early parliamentary election.

The National Alliance ticks all the necessary boxes for a modern radical-right populist political party. It has followed the rhetorical master frame of the radical right and has a charismatic leader in Raivis Dzintars, the founder and driving force behind V!. Indeed, charismatic leadership, in the Weberian sense of a close bond between leader and followers, is one of the key internal factors to the success of the radical right, particularly in the early phase of party development as the party attempts to attract members and break through into the public's consciousness (Taggart 2000, Eatwell 2003, Mudde 2007). The Latvian electoral system uses an ordinal ballot with voters marking candidates on their preferred party list with a positive or negative mark. The final order of deputies is compiled according to these marks. In the 2010 election, Dzintars received twice as many positive marks as the second-placed candidate on the National Alliance candidate list. A year later, in the early 2011 parliamentary election, Dzintars received three times as many positive marks as the second-placed candidate (Latvian Central Election Commission 2011).

Radical-right populist discourses in Estonia and Latvia

The radical-right populist party family also shares a common successful 'master frame' of policies (Mudde 2007, 2010) that is communicated and diffused between related parties in different states (Rydgren 2005). This frame has three key components: nativism, authoritarianism and populism.

Nativism

Nativist discourse, which remains the central component of radical-right populism, is oriented around the belief that the state should be congruent with the titular nation. As a result, nativism has two core dimensions: 1) That the non-native population is a threat to the continued existence of the titular nation (xenophobia); and 2) that the titular nation should have privileges in order to ensure its continued existence (nationalism). However, this nativism is not framed as racism (as with interwar fascism), but rather focuses on ethnopluralism, which stresses the equality but incompatibility of different ethnicities living together (Rydgren 2005). As a result, radical-right populists are opposed 'to the social integration of marginalized groups' (Betz 1993: 413). Indeed, it is also claimed that the 'out groups' have also changed, with the anti-Semitism of the twenty-first century often being replaced with an Islamophobic message, although there is variation from country to country according to domestic historic and demographic factors (Hale Williams 2010).

The nature of radical-right populist nativism in post-communist Europe is fundamentally different to that in the Western European states. Lubomir Kopeček (2007) has pointed out that this is largely due to the virtual absence of third-world immigration in the region during the communist era, while comparatively low levels of economic development coupled with restrictive immigration policies have also limited immigration in the post-communist years. For example, between 2000 and 2007, just 10,326 persons immigrated to Estonia, equalling about 0.1 per cent of the population (Kovalenko et al. 2010: 10). Indeed, more than half of these were non-visible immigrants from neighbouring Finland and countries of the former Soviet Union. There are very few visible minorities in the Baltic States.

However, this does not mean that nativism has no salience in Estonia or Latvia. Rather than being aimed at Muslims or other visible minorities, it is primarily directed towards the Russian speakers that migrated to the Baltic States during the Soviet era. The independence movements in all three Baltic States were largely driven by these demographic concerns. Even the political mainstream used what would now be considered to be radical language – talk of decolonization and forced repatriation of Russian speakers – in order to ‘cleanse’ the Baltic States and return them to their interwar state. After independence, both Estonia and Latvia initiated restrictive citizenship laws that granted automatic citizenship only to those people, and their descendants, who had held citizenship before 1940. In 2011, approximately 8 per cent of permanent residents in Estonia and 20 per cent in Latvia were still classified as ‘resident aliens’ without any citizenship.

Andres Kasekamp (2003) has observed that during the first decade of independence, the first generation of Estonian radical-right populist parties were primarily concerned with combating the Soviet legacy, while in the twenty-first century their focus turned to opposing the EU. Thus the Estonian parliament is accused of ‘treason’ for having contravened the Estonian constitution by transferring Estonian sovereignty to Brussels (EIP 2007, Leito 2011). The alleged prostrate position of Estonia within the EU is equated to that of when it was in the Soviet Union. In contrast, Latvian radical-right populists continue to focus their ire on Russian speakers, only making oblique reference to Europe in exceptional circumstances, for example, following the Anders Breivik massacre in Norway in July 2011. Even then, the target was European immigration policy in the abstract rather than specific institutions or policies of the EU.

Indeed, Breivik’s murderous rampage resulted in defensive comments that revealed the thinking of the radical right in the Baltic States. The leader of the Estonian Independence Party, Vello Leito, initially characterized Breivik’s action as an ‘international conspiracy’ to blacken the reputation of European ‘patriots’ (Delfi 2011).⁴ The Estonian National Movement likewise claimed that the beneficiaries of Breivik’s insane act are the proponents of multiculturalism who seek to discredit nationalists and that the policy of multiculturalism is itself to blame (Põlluaas 2011). Jānis Iesalnieks, one of the Latvian National Alliance’s most prominent board members

⁴ Breivik’s manifesto mentioned two Estonian groups: the Estonian Independence Party and the Estonian National Movement, though there is no evidence of any contact. The National Alliance in Latvia was also named.

and a prolific blogger, tweeted that Breivik's actions were quite understandable in light of the continuing high rates of immigration and the 'failed' policy of multiculturalism in Europe. His comments were quickly disowned by the party leadership and Iesalnieks stepped down from the board and announced that he would not stand in the September 2011 parliamentary election. Indeed, the threat of non-white immigration has sporadically appeared in Latvian discourses. In 2002, the newly formed Freedom Party aired a television advertisement of an African wearing the uniform of a Latvian soldier guarding the freedom monument and kissing a Latvian girl, which played on fears of mass immigration (Eglitis 2005). More recently, Latvian politics has seen an anti-Islam discourse enter the fringes of political debate. In the run-up to the 2011 Latvian parliamentary election, Jānis Ādamsons, a deputy from the pro-Russian Harmony Centre (which advertises tolerance as a core value), stated that he believed that the current Latvian government was planning on hosting 40–60,000 'Arabs'. Ādamsons went on to declare this a mistake, because while Latvians would always find a common dialogue with white Europeans, no such possibility existed for peaceful cooperation with non-Europeans (Diena 2011).

However, Russian speakers are the typical targets of both mainstream and radical-right parties in Latvia. Indeed, it is a feature of contemporary Latvian politics that even mainstream political parties contain individuals prone to outbursts of nationalist rhetoric (see Auers & Kasekamp 2009: 251–2). Moreover, there are enduring links between mainstream parties and the extremist fringes. For example, following the 2010 election, a Latvian WikiLeaks-type website published email correspondence between the new Minister of Foreign Affairs (Girts Valdis Kristovskis, one of the co-chairs of the governing Unity Alliance) and Aivars Slucis, a radically nationalist Latvian-American. Slucis, a medical doctor who has funded nationalist Latvian movements since the early 1990s (Muižnieks 2005), complained that he was unable to return to live and work in Latvia because he 'would not be able to treat Russians in the same way as Latvians', to which Kristovskis replied: 'I agree with your evaluation of the situation' (Lapsa 2010). While Slucis was quickly disowned by the Unity Alliance (which also returned his financial contribution), the National Alliance vigorously supported Slucis, both personally and his views on the Russian minority in general.

This reflects the more radical brand of Latvian nationalism represented by the National Alliance and particularly its youthful VL! wing. They are the only party publically to support the annual 16 March rally of Latvian Waffen SS veterans, with party members creating an 'alley' of Latvian flags to honour the veterans. VL! has previously also demonstrated against the signing of a border treaty with Russia. Its brief 4,000 figure election manifestos present a nativist vision of Latvia, declaring (in 2006) that Latvian citizenship should only be granted to 'loyal and trustworthy' people, while individuals with a 'hostile' attitude to the state would be deported. The 2011 manifesto began with a declaration that 'Latvians must feel at home in their ethnic homeland' (National Alliance Manifesto 2011).

Russian speakers remain the major 'out group' in Latvia, although there have also been occasional outbursts of nationalist language aimed at non-white groups. There is also a level of anti-Semitism in the political discourse. However, this is typically addressed indirectly. As a WikiLeaks cable from the US Ambassador stated, 'hidden

below the surface in Latvian life [is] a strong current of intolerance, including anti-Semitism' (US Embassy Riga 2008). Only the radical-right populist VL! has addressed anti-Semitism directly, with the above-mentioned Iesalnieks causing a national scandal in the run-up to the 2010 election when he publically argued that 'intelligent anti-Semitism', a diffuse concept that he could not explicitly explain, had a place in public discourse (Margēviča 2010). More typical is the indirect anti-Semitism that underlies criticism of American philanthropist George Soros and the Soros foundation, which stands accused of undermining Latvian identity and independence, and of supporting 'cosmopolitan' values.

Authoritarianism

Political and cultural authoritarianism is a key feature of the political right in general, but particularly the radical right (Kitschelt 1995, 2004). This authoritarianism entails belief in an ordered hierarchical society with a strong focus on state power as well as law and order issues. Essentially, the authoritarian dimension, which can be visualized as being on a libertarian–authoritarian axis, is measured by the extent to which parties advocate limits on individual freedom.

There is a strong strain of support for authoritarianism in the Baltic States that stretches back to the popular authoritarian regimes of the 1930s and which is evidenced by continuing high levels of public support (hovering between 30–40 per cent in Latvia between 1995 and 2004) for 'getting rid of parliament and elections and having a strong leader who can decide everything quickly' (see New Baltic Barometers 1995–2004). However, this is much less pronounced in Estonia. Initial Estonian admiration for Päts has largely been replaced by condemnation of his supine capitulation to the Soviets in 1939–40. In contrast, in 2003, Latvia erected a statue of the dictator Karlis Ulmanis in the centre of Riga, and in 2009 a complimentary new musical ('Leader') about Ulmanis debuted in Latvia's National Theatre.

Support for the Ulmanis regime remains central to the National Alliance's ideology. One of the key moments in the early development of VL! was a protest against art students staging an exhibition of works of art critical of Ulmanis. Moreover, Ulmanis is central to the National Alliance's ceremonial celebration of Latvia's Independence Day (18 November), with the party staging an evening torch rally from Ulmanis' statue to the Freedom Monument. VL! also has a strong militarist component. The pages of its party newspaper are adorned with pictures of leading party cadres posing in military uniforms, and the party advocates the expansion of the role and activities of the Zemessargi (home guard).

Populism

The third of the above-mentioned dimensions of the radical right, populism, divides society into two halves, envisaging a corrupt élite on one side and a pure 'common people' on the other. Populists argue that the established élites have betrayed the trust of the people (Canovan 1999). Jens Rydgren (2005) argued that radical-right parties have framed their populist rhetoric in this way because they cannot hope to be electorally

successful by being anti-democratic in societies where the overwhelming majority of the public support democracy as the form of government, and are thus anti-élite rather than anti-systemic. They also argue that 'the people' should be given a greater role in politics through increased use of the tools of popular democracy, such as referendums and citizens' initiatives. Of the three components of the master frame, populism is the most established part of post-communist politics and populist rhetoric has not been a barrier to entry into governmental coalition (Mudde 2000). However, populism in the Baltic States is a disputed concept, with Sikk (2006) arguing that anti-corruption rhetoric is not necessarily populist when reputable comparative international research indicates that there are genuinely high levels of élite corruption (see, for example, the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index or World Bank Corruption in Transition reports). Moreover, Sikk argues, new parties will inevitably be anti-élite simply because of the fact that they are *new* and, as such, have to justify their formation and existence.

The most successful populist in Estonia has been an individual rather than a party. Astonishingly, in the 2009 European Parliament election, Indrek Tarand received one-quarter of the entire national vote, nearly equalling the total for the winning Estonian political party. His anti-party rhetoric helped him confound all predictions and achieve the extremely rare feat of an independent candidate being elected to the European Parliament (Ehin & Solvak 2012). However, it should be noted that Tarand's success came in a second-order election, allowing citizens to register their protest vote but continue supporting the mainstream parties in the March 2011 general election (in which Tarand did not participate). The charismatic and provocative Tarand once more employed his anti-establishment rhetoric as the unsuccessful opposition candidate for the presidency in 2011. In November 2011, a petition calling on Prime Minister Ansip to resign and for a new party to be formed by Tarand was circulated online (Avalik kiri 2011). Tarand enjoys being a loose cannon, and has not yet affiliated himself with any Estonian party (though he has previously been close to the mainstream anti-communist nationalists). Though he has aligned himself out of necessity with the Greens in the European Parliament, Tarand's main support comes from the same population segment that votes in general elections for the centre-right governing parties (Ehin & Solvak 2012). Another sign of the potential fertile ground for a new populist party was the NO99 theatre troupe's staging, in 2010, of a series of theatre performances imitating the process of the launching of a new populist political party ('United Estonia'). Their shows garnered record ticket sales and extensive media commentary, since many genuinely expected that a new political party would actually emerge from them.

In contrast, populist rhetoric is an established feature of both mainstream and radical-right populists in Latvia. Indeed, Latvia has long been marked by a powerful anti-corruption rhetoric, most recently in the early 2011 parliamentary election that saw a party formed a little over one month before the election surge to come second in the polls. The Zatlera Reformu Partija (Zatlers Reform Party) was formed by ex-president Valdis Zatlers, who had initiated the process that led to the recall of Parliament in protest at the influence of three 'oligarchs' on the democratic process in Latvia. The 2011 election was not about policies or ideologies but, as with the 1995, 2002 and 2010 elections, corruption. Indeed, together with nationalism, corruption is

the central cleavage in contemporary Latvian politics (Auers 2012). On the one side, the anti-corruption parties blame Latvia's economic and social problems on distortions wrought by the oligarchs and the parties they control. On the other, the 'oligarch' parties counter that they defend Latvia's national interests from liberal internationalists, most particularly George Soros. Indeed, the Green-Farmers Union candidate for Prime Minister, Aivars Lembergs, stated that the Latvian parliament had been dissolved because of Soros' influence, repeatedly referring to a 2010 meeting between Zatlers and Soros in New York (Lembergs 2011). Soros has been a frequent target of the 'oligarch' parties, which identify their political opponents and critics as 'Sorosists', claiming that they have been bought off by Soros through the guise of grants from his philanthropic Soros Foundation. They claim that Soros' ultimate aim is to take power in Latvia. While the Jewish background of Soros himself is never directly addressed, it is presented through references to the 'cosmopolitanism' of the liberal internationalists.

The National Alliance was, unsurprisingly, on the side of the anti-corruption parties in this debate, emphasizing that it had consistently voted for strengthening state law and order. Moreover, it made much of the fact that it had introduced a new political culture into Parliament, allowing its deputies a free vote on all issues, regularly tweeting and blogging on what was happening behind the scenes in the corridors of power. Moreover, the National Alliance regularly uses the tools of popular democracy, most recently collecting signatures to trigger a referendum on the use of Latvian in public schools and on a directly elected presidency in Latvia.

Conclusions: Explaining the difference between Latvia and Estonia

Radical-right organizations and discourses are clearly far more prevalent in Latvia than in Estonia. Latvia has a greater number of grass roots movements, a more widespread rhetoric that encompasses both mainstream and more radical parties, and a parliamentary radical-right populist party that entered government in late 2011. Why this divergence between Estonia and Latvia? It has been argued that radical-right populism emerges in times of crisis, and is thus a form of protest against the existing political system (Betz 1994). However, both Latvia and Estonia went through severe economic crises during 2008–10, with GDP plummeting in 2009 in Latvia by 18 per cent and in Estonia by 14 per cent. Nevertheless, in both cases, the prime ministers, who were forced to make drastic cuts in public expenditure, were re-elected in 2011. Institutional as well as supply and demand arguments are more illuminating.

In institutional terms, the rules governing the registration of Estonian political parties were tightened in 1998, with the introduction of a requirement for a minimum 1,000 members, resulting in the elimination of several small parties and a higher hurdle for the creation of new political parties (Toomla 2011: 49). The law governing political parties in Latvia requires just 200 individual members to register a party, making it far easier for small, radical groups to become political parties. A further difference is that established Estonian political parties receive the lion's share of their funding from the state budget, which places start-up parties at a distinct disadvantage. Public financing

for Latvian parties was only introduced in 2012 and parties are still permitted to receive private donations. Thus wealthy sponsors can contribute to a party's success in Latvia.

Supply and demand side perspectives also explain these differences. In supply side terms, the abundant weaknesses of the Estonian Independence Party have been highlighted above. The National Alliance in Latvia, on the other hand, is a 'thick' party that has adopted the radical-right populist master frame and has a charismatic young leader. It has successfully united the financial stability of the For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK party with the energetically mobilized membership of VLI, and entered government in October 2011.

From a demand-side perspective, we can see that the economic and social situations in Latvia and Estonia began to diverge from the mid-1990s onwards. Estonia has generally been more successful in its state-building and European integration than Latvia (Norkus 2011: 30). Bustikova (2009: 224) has argued that the success of the extreme right in post-communist Europe is best understood as 'a reaction to corruption and the absence of political accountability . . . Extremists thrive in competitive democracies where the rule of law is weak'. To some extent this explains the variation between Latvia and Estonia. Estonia is perceived to have far lower rates of corruption, and international rankings place it in a higher category as regards its quality of democracy. Indeed, Estonians are significantly more satisfied and optimistic than Latvians (Lauristin & Vihalemm 2011: 19–21). This, naturally, means that the core message of the populists and radical-right populists – a drive the rascals out rhetoric – has far less impact. Moreover, the larger Russian minority in Latvia, combined with hitherto looser financing laws, has led to the development of a more strident Russian nationalist position (such as the February 2012 referendum on introducing Russian as a second official state language) that mobilizes Latvian nationalists.

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