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RUSSIANS, REFUGEES AND EUROPEANS: WHAT SHAPES THE DISCOURSE OF THE CONSERVATIVE PEOPLE'S PARTY OF ESTONIA?

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ABSTRACT

The Conservative Peoples' Party of Estonia (EKRE) presents a unique case in the study of far-right parties for two reasons. First, the 'others' to which they juxtapose Estonians are the Russian-speaking minority, who are white, historically Christian, and to a large extent, share many of the socially conservative values of EKRE. Second, there has been a trend for European far-right parties to look towards the Russian Federation for ideological support due to shared socially conservative ideological positions, and an opposition to the EU and NATO. EKRE takes a different stance towards the Russian Federation than many other far-right parties in Europe. Interviews were conducted with members of EKRE, as well as members of other political parties in Estonia, primarily focusing on the post-migrant crisis relationship between EKRE and the Russian-speaking population in Estonia, as well as other core issues related to EKRE. The aim of this article is twofold: first, it serves as an introductory piece, introducing EKRE to the broader literature on populist, radical right parties. Secondly, this article asks the questions "is the presence, or the possibility of the presence of a foreign, racially and religiously different 'other' enough to attract a significant portion of a national minority to vote for and become members of a PRR party?" and "is the presence, or the possibility of the presence of a foreign, racially and religiously different 'other' enough to entice a PRR party to cooperate with a national minority which was previously their target?" This article argues that EKRE is open to Russian-speakers becoming party members, but will not extend their reach to them as Russian-speakers. Rather, they would welcome Russian-speakers as party members provided they are Estonian nationalists who adhere to the party constitution and see Estonia as a sovereign nation which they seek to protect.

Keywords: Estonia; The Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE); populist radical right parties; national minorities; nationalism; Russian-speakers; Baltic politics; Intermarium; The New Nationalism; Ethnofuturism

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INTRODUCTION

This article is one of the first to present an English language analysis of the Estonian party, *Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond* (Conservative People's Party of Estonia – henceforth, EKRE) in light of their election to the Estonian Parliament in 2015. EKRE presents a unique case study for nationalist and populist radical right political (PRR) parties for two reasons. First, the “other” to which they have initially juxtaposed ethnic Estonians is the Russian-speaking minority, who are white, historically Christian and, to a large extent, share many of the socially conservative values of the EKRE. Second, there has been a trend within the PRR to establish relationships with the Russian Federation due to shared socially conservative ideological positions, and a critical approach, to the EU and NATO. While EKRE can be placed within the same party family as many PRR parties, they take an unfavourable stance towards the Russian Federation. The purpose of this article is twofold: first, it contributes to thus far limited English language academic scholarship on EKRE after they entered the Estonian parliament in 2015. Secondly, this article aims to analyse the potentially changing relationship between EKRE and Estonia's Russian-speaking community in light of the refugee crisis.

This article provides an analysis of EKRE by analysing interviews conducted with party members, as well as members of other Estonian parties who provide useful commentary. The interviews analyse EKRE's views towards the European Union after the migrant crisis, the party's potentially changing relationship with the Russian-speaking population in Estonia and their stance towards the Russian Federation. Using a qualitative, inductive approach, this article poses two questions. First, “is the presence, or the possibility of the presence of a foreign, racially and religiously different “other” enough to attract a significant portion of a national minority to vote for and become members of a PRR party?” Second, “is the presence, or the possibility of the presence of a foreign, racially and religiously different “other” enough to entice a PRR party to cooperate with a national minority which was previously their target?”

This article argues both that EKRE is open to Russian-speakers becoming active members of the party, but will not extend their reach to them as Russian speakers, rather as Estonian nationalists and, secondly, that more Russian-speaking Estonians have shown an interest in becoming involved in EKRE. Both of which are a direct result of the refugee crisis. Prior to this development, EKRE has taken a staunch anti-Russian stance and in some ways still does. Further, Russian-speakers in Estonia

overwhelmingly support *Eesti Keskerakond* (Estonian Centre Party – henceforth, the Centre Party).

Background of EKRE

Estonia is new to the almost unanimous list of European countries with a PRR party represented in Parliament. For many years, Estonia lacked a successful right-wing, nationalist party (Auers and Kasekamp 2015). One of the primary reasons for the lack of a successful far-right party was the absence of a prominent and charismatic leader (Auers and Kasekamp 2013). This aspect is no longer missing. Father and son, Mart and Martin Helme, successfully moulded EKRE out of a merger between *Eestimaa Rahvaliid* (the People's Union of Estonia) and *Eesti Rahvuslik Liikumine* (The Estonian National Movement) in 2012. This merger was a marriage of a political party and a social movement.

Aside from the Russian-speaking population, there are relatively few ethnically different inhabitants in Estonia. Therefore, memory politics has been, up until now, the primary agent for the Estonian far-right in the 21st century (Auers and Kasekamp 2013) and the Russian-speaking population has been the group to which Estonian nationalists have identified themselves against. EKRE first gained parliamentary representation in 2015, securing seven, out of a possible 101, seats in the Estonian Parliament. This is relatively late considering that all of Estonia's neighbours have a successful PRR party. There have been several attempts to label and categorise parties who are nationalist, conservative, opposed to immigration and hold a critical, if not hostile, view towards the European Union. The common aspect that unites these parties is maintaining a nativist stance by combining nationalist and xenophobic attitudes (De Lange and Mügge 2015; Hartevelde et al 2015; Mudde 2007). Cas Mudde (2007) coined the authoritative term in academic literature, populist radical right (PRR), to label parties in this family. This article will define a PRR party as a party that takes a strong nativist stance, vocalising an exclusionary attitude towards immigration and multiculturalism, as well as utilising the tactic of juxtaposing political elites to everyone else in an attempt to appeal to whom they deem as 'ordinary citizens'. Using Mudde's (2007) categorisation, this article firmly places EKRE within this party family.

Auers and Kasekamp (2013) note, that there is a distinct brand of right-wing politics in post-Soviet Baltic States, which directs nativism towards the Russian-

speaking population who arrived during the Soviet occupation (Auers and Kasekamp 2013). Bustokova and Kitschelt (2009) allude to a significant difference which sets the PRR in post-communist countries apart from the PRR in Western Europe, namely, that the “other” constitutes ethnic groups who have been inhabiting the region for centuries, even prior to the Soviet period. In the case of Estonia, this has not been centuries, but decades, as the Russian-speaking minority arrived during Soviet occupation.

Further, Minkenberg (2002) makes two important and unique observations about the radical right in Central and Eastern Europe. First, that parties in these countries share similar characteristics which differentiate them from the PRR in Western Europe. Namely, that they are ideologically more extreme, more anti-democratic and that they are more of a social movement phenomenon (Minkenberg 2002 & 2013).¹ Minkenberg indicates that the new radical right has softened its approach to anti-democratic rhetoric (ibid), yet it should be noted that EKRE does not espouse anti-democratic rhetoric. Second, Minkenberg (2002) recognises, that the PRR in Central and Eastern Europe is a fluid concept, constantly evolving and likens studying this phenomenon to shooting at a moving target with clouded vision (Minkenberg 2002). The PRR parties in Central and Eastern Europe to which EKRE has the most in common with is the Latvian National Alliance.² There has not been an anti-democratic attitude prevalent within EKRE and, although a grassroots mobilising force has played a part in the party’s history, there is no militant wing of the party similar to the Magyar Gárda affiliated with Jobbik or the Slovak Brotherhood affiliated with Kotleba – People’s Party Our Slovakia.³

- 1 Minkenberg (2002) notes an important difference between political parties and social movements. Whereas parties participate in elections and try to win public office, social movements mobilise support, but do not run for public office. Instead, social movements identify with a network of networks which have a well-defined collective identity and offer interpretative frames for problems.
- 2 It should be noted that the two parties which EKRE has the closest relationship with are the National Alliance and the True Finns, thus putting them in a sphere of influence between Nordic and Eastern Europe, another factor which makes them a unique case.
- 3 Although the European-wide street patrol group Soldiers of Odin exists in Estonia, it is a separate organisation from EKRE. There is, however, some convergence as recently members of Soldiers of Odin marched alongside EKRE and other nationalist and far-right actors in the annual torchlight parade on Estonia’s Independence Day.

EKRE and Europe

The presence of a pro-democratic ethos is particularly evident in the party's stance regarding Swiss style direct democracy. This can be seen most adequately in their position on Estonia's membership in the European Union. This can be seen most adequately in their position in Estonia's membership in the European Union. Vasilopoulou (2009) points out that Euroscepticism is not a monolithic entity and identifies three types of Euroscepticism: rejecting, conditional, and compromising. This article places EKRE between the conditional and rejecting categories of Euroscepticism. While being highly critical, EKRE does not *directly* advocate for Estonia leaving the EU. Rather, they would like to give the Estonian people a chance to decide their future in the EU. In April of 2017 at the party congress, where Chairman Mart Helme was re-elected by an overwhelming majority, the congress called on Estonian citizens to have a say on their country's membership in the EU (Cavegn, 2017). Sovereignty is the primary issue that EKRE takes with the EU, especially when it comes to the migrant crisis, security issues, and the presence of non-Estonians in Estonia.⁴ The congress, in its call for the Estonian people to reassess EU membership, advocates for the preservation of 'Estonianness' and for the guarantee of well-being for Estonia's indigenous population (Cavegn, 2017).

In interviews with key EKRE members, it was stressed that the EU has changed since 2004 when Estonia joined. EKRE MP and deputy chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee, Jaak Madison, stated in an interview that the EU is one of the most undemocratic systems, citing penalties for not accepting EU mandates and rules.⁵ At the same time, Madison revealed that neither he, nor the party, had ever said that they wished to leave the EU; rather, that the migrant crisis and the reasons behind Brexit should be discussed more frequently in Estonia.⁶ What Madison did discuss is the issues behind why other countries have had parties that brought exiting the EU to the agenda. According to him, if the EU continues towards a path of creating a federation, citizens will be highly critical of this. Madison, while confirming that neither he nor EKRE wished for an Estonian

4 Interview with Martin Helme and Interview with Jaak Madison.

5 Interview with Jaak Madison.

6 Ibid.

exit, stressed that if there was a Brexit style vote in Estonia, the main question would be the migration crisis to which the majority of Estonians are opposed to.⁷

EKRE Deputy Chairman, Martin Helme, stressed the issue of sovereignty. According to Helme, a large part of Estonian society along with EKRE do not accept the quota system or the mandatory placement of migrants into Estonian society.⁸ Helme discussed the failure of both the EU and the Estonian government with regards to this issue. According to Helme, an EU external border does not exist and EKRE strongly advocates for restoring Estonian border control.⁹ Helme blames the Estonian government for entirely failing to represent and defend Estonian interests in Brussels and applauds Austria and the Visegrád countries for strongly defending their position and their borders against mandates from Brussels.¹⁰ It is this perceived failure which Helme feels has turned many Estonians against the EU.¹¹

A devil you don't want to dance with

Another aspect of EKRE that differentiates them from a number of parties within the PRR party family is their position towards the Russian Federation. Many PRR parties, agitated with the European Union, have turned their ideological gaze eastward. It has been a growing trend for European PRR parties to openly support Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Hungarian think tank, Political Capital Institute, has labelled three types of PRR parties vis-à-vis their stance towards the Russian Federation: committed, open/neutral, and hostile (Political Capital Institute, 2014). Most PRR parties fall under the committed category, while some fall under open and neutral. The smallest category is hostile. Although they are not mentioned in this study, the author places the EKRE in the hostile category. EKRE has not shown any willingness to cooperate with or support Vladimir Putin and Russia. Martin Helme acknowledged that there has been some interest in the

7 Interview with Jaak Madison. Though it was also mentioned in this interview that, although many in Estonia were critical or against Estonia accepting refugees, not all who held this view voted for EKRE.

8 Interview with Martin Helme.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

Russian Federation shown by PRR parties in Western Europe and expressed that EKRE is “very, very mindful of the fact that there has been some naivety and cynicism on the part of western anti-immigrant parties toward Russia” and that he has explained to them that this is “a devil that you don’t want to dance with.”¹² Helme alludes to the fact that countries such as France and the Netherlands do not have the same historic experience with the Russian Federation as Estonia.¹³

Helme believes the Russian Federation is manipulating the existential crisis that Europe is experiencing with mass migration to their benefit in an attempt to sow discord with the end goal of restoring the Russian Empire.¹⁴ If discourses from the majority of other PRR parties in Europe are analysed, this narrative is largely absent. There has been some speculation that EKRE has been covertly flirting with Russia and rumours about financing have been discussed.¹⁵ Martin Helme is aware of such rumours and mentioned that EKRE has been accused of doing Putin’s dirty work because indeed, there are several political positions which EKRE has in common with Vladimir Putin.¹⁶ Helme also mentioned that it is common knowledge that no one can present any evidence that EKRE has collaborated with the Russian Federation so people have “given up.”¹⁷ Given the political positions that EKRE has taken, which this paper will now turn to, along with the fact that they actively try to persuade other PRR parties not to align themselves with the Russian Federation¹⁸, there is no evidence that the party sympathises with Putin.

Blue Awakening, Ethnofuturism and transnational alliances

Ruuben Kaalep, chairman and founder of EKRE’s youth organisation, *Sinine Äratust* (Blue Awakening), advocates for a closer union between Baltic and Eastern European countries. Kaalep noted an increasing divide in ideology between Western

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Interview with Valdo Randpere.

16 Interview with Martin Helme.

17 Ibid.

18 Interviews with Ruuben Kaalep and Kert Urmas Raudvere.

and Eastern European countries and cited the migrant crisis as the primary indicator of such a phenomenon.¹⁹ As was pointed out by Minkenberg (2002 & 2013), Auers and Kasekamp (2015), and Bustikova and Kitschelt (2009), the PRR in post-communist countries differ ideologically from their western counterparts. According to Kaalep, in Eastern Europe the presence of Soviet history has “vaccinated Eastern Europeans against leftist ideology.”²⁰ The second issue that differentiates Eastern Europe, according to Kaalep, is that national identity is much more alive in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe.²¹

Although a youth organisation, the ideology and discourse of Blue Awakening is especially important, because, as the future of the EKRE, their young members will likely be the next generation who hold elected office for this party. Blue Awakening is very active in recruiting members for EKRE, maintaining an online presence and fostering transnational connections with other nationalists. Therefore, their ideas and positions should be taken into account in an assessment of the party. Fielitz and Laloire (2016) point out that the European far-right is currently undergoing a process of restructuring where new actors have appeared and successfully gained influence in the political sphere. These new actors draw on new forms of mobilisation and transnational networking, incorporating certain aspects which have been previously absent in the far right (Fielitz and Laloire, 2016).

Blue Awakening is a driving force behind the creation of new alliances amongst Eastern European nationalists. Ruuben Kaalep and fellow Blue Awakening member, Kert Urmas Raudvere discussed EKRE's close alignment with the youth wing of the Latvian National Alliance (NA). Overall, the NA is the closest party to which EKRE is allied in terms of collaboration and networks, but the party also has ties with the True Finns and the Freedom Party of Austria, two very successful PRR parties.²² Two fairly recent developments in the form of transnational networks are the Bauska Declaration and Intermarium.

The former is part of a Baltic-wide alliance of nationalists, which align under their proclaimed Bauska Declaration.²³ This consists of the Latvian National Alliance,

19 Interview with Ruuben Kaalep.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Interview with Jaak Madison.

23 Bauska Deklaratsioon. <https://ekre.ee/bauska-deklaratsioon/>

the Lithuanian Nationalist Union, and EKRE. This alliance goes beyond the youth movements as the two EKRE signatories were party Chairman Mart Helme along with Ruuben Kaalep. The declaration calls for the maintaining of family values and the fatherland and cautions against an immigration policy like that of Western Europe.²⁴ The declaration also calls for a new nationalist awakening and encourages cooperation between the three Baltic nations to defend against external threats and global challenges.²⁵

Further, Blue Awakening maintains very close alliances with Polish, Slovak, Ukrainian, Hungarian, and Swedish nationalists²⁶ as well as the alt-right in the U.S. It is their goal to foster alliances with as many other nationalists as possible. Blue Awakening members Ruuben Kaalep and Kert Urmas Raudvere discussed a counterbalance to both Western European influence and Russian imperialist ambitions in the form of a large Eastern European nationalist block. Both cited an alternative to the Europe envisioned by Brussels in the form of an Eastern European block that would serve as an ideological alternative to the liberal values promoted by Brussels.²⁷

As several PRR parties view Vladimir Putin's Russia as a nationalist and conservative alternative to what the Brussels elite have offered, the Intermarium strategy is part of a nationalist movement to provide an ideological substitute to *both* the EU and the tendency to look towards the Kremlin as a viable political alternative. Kert Urmas Raudvere stressed that this would not be against Western Europe *per se*, only ideologically different – more right-wing, more conservative and more nationalist.²⁸

Intermarium, named after the historical interwar plan, is a strategy promoted by the nationalist group, 'The New Nationalism', which 'links the far right from the Baltic to the Black sea.'²⁹ This network consists of nationalists mostly from youth organisations of PRR parties throughout Eastern Europe and Swedish nationalists.³⁰

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Interview with Kert Urmas Raudvere.

27 Interview with Ruuben Kaalep and Interview with Kert Urmas Raudvere.

28 Interview with Kert Urmas Raudvere.

29 The New Nationalism. <http://thenewnationalism.com/>

30 It should be noted that the Swedish organisation that Blue Awakening has the most contact with is Nordisk Ungdom, a far-right, extra parliamentary group.

As the Visegrád countries have been somewhat defiant towards Brussels in light of the refugee crisis and the nationalist, far-right is empowered in all of these countries with the exception of the Czech Republic, this would be a notable political shift.³¹ While this is largely a youth movement, the likelihood of many of the youth members eventually holding elected office is quite probable. In Latvia, the National Alliance is in government and has become a normalised part of the Latvian political system. In Hungary, Jobbik is the third largest political party and Slovakia has two PRR parties in Parliament. EKRE does not wield as much power as the aforementioned parties, but is influential in both Estonian politics and the Intermarium ideology as one of the driving forces behind the project.

The philosophy behind intermarium, known as 'ethnofuturism', is part of a new nationalist approach driven by Ruuben Kaalep and Raivis Zeltīts, the secretary general of the Latvian National Alliance and head of their youth organisation. Ethnofuturism is a nationalist doctrine intended to create a new European civilization based upon identity and roots and led by Eastern Europe (London Forum, 2017).³² The driving principle behind this is that Eastern Europe is caught between two major global spheres of interest: The U.S. and the Russian Federation (ibid). The concept of ethnofuturism is based on identities and stands against imperialism which is seen as a force detrimental to identity based nationalism.

Bringing about the destruction of both American and Russian imperialism and replacing them with white ethnostates is a goal of ethnofuturism (Red Ice TV, 2017).³³ This philosophy stresses cooperation between nationalists. However, given the historic and contemporary experiences of the nationalities in the region, getting nationalists from diverse Eastern European backgrounds to cooperate with each other could prove to be challenging. Kaalep emphasises that the mission of all European nationalists should be to cooperate to save Europe; once this is achieved nationalists can return to fighting each other.³⁴ However, once Europe is

31 Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland is by most accounts, a right-wing, national-conservative party. However, after they came to power in 2015, during the heat of the refugee crisis, I consider PiS to be a radical right actor. See, "The Polish Boomerang: How Warsaw's Adaption of the 'Budapest Model' Could Threaten the Original in Hungary." By Cas Mudde, 2016.
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cas-mudde/the-polish-boomerang-how-_b_8961896.html.

32 London Forum: Ruuben Kaalep – "The Principles of Ethnofuturism."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMcAsYsioqA>

33 Red Ice TV: Ruuben Kaalep – Blue Awakening: Estonian Nationalism – Identitarian Ideas IX.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0AkqRUpoO20>

34 Ruuben Kaalep: "The Principles of Ethnofuturism."

'saved', perhaps there will be no need for further fighting amongst European nationalists (ibid).

So far, this has been successful. On 24 February 2017, commemorating Estonian Independence, EKRE hosted the fourth annual torchlight parade. Attendance for this event has gone from 120 people to 3500 (Red Ice TV, 2017). Not all in attendance were Estonian. Polish, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian nationalists – old enemies, were brought together, "marching for unity" (ibid). In the case of both Latvia and Estonia, cooperation amongst nationalists is of particular importance with regard to the Russian-speaking population.

EKRE and Russian-speakers in Estonia

In neighbouring Latvia, there is strong evidence that the Latvian and Russian community have found a common ground on the refugee crisis. Namely, that they may not be the closest, but that they have a mutual distrust of asylum-seekers (Ragozin, 2015). Muravska (2015) and Ragozin (2015) allude to the fact that politicians in Latvia and more than half of the population are opposed to taking in refugees. Ragozin (2015) goes so far as to say that the two groups in Latvia are "united" on the issue (Ragozin 2015). Kott (2016) has also found that nationalist leaning ethnic Latvians and Russians in Latvia have found a common ground in the discourse of 'endangered whiteness' stemming from even the idea that people of a foreign background might come to Latvia. According to Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics, Latvia has the most negative attitude towards refugees in the European Union (Muravska 2015). What is telling is that in Latvia, Harmony, the political party which caters to Russian speakers, helped nationalists to push a law which would stop the government from accepting more refugees without first putting the issue to a vote in parliament (Ragozin 2015).

Whereas their Latvian counterparts, the National Alliance is part of a three-party coalition, EKRE was elected to the Estonian Parliament for the first time in March of 2015 and is not in government. As a nationalist party, the question of whom they define as Estonian might change with the arrival, or the potential arrival, of a number of others outside of the traditional ethnic make-up of Estonia. Although Estonia has taken a very small number of refugees, it should be noted that the concern over refugees is not necessarily about the numbers that have been

accepted, but the *potential* for a massive influx of foreigners into Estonian society. This is what EKRE has successfully capitalised on in the past two years.

It has been stated in several interviews that many Russian-speakers are more against Estonia taking refugees than Estonians.³⁵ Centre Party MEP, Yana Toom, noted that the refugee crisis is the main issue that unites Estonians and Russian-speakers in Estonia.³⁶ Yana Toom also mentioned that there were some former Centre Party supporters who had shifted their support to EKRE.³⁷ The Estonian Centre Party recently replaced its long-time, controversial leader, former-Mayor of Tallinn, Edgar Savisaar, after an internal power struggle. The new leader, Jüri Ratas, was elected as Centre party leader on 5 November 2016. Just weeks later, on 23 November, the Centre Party entered government with Ratas as Prime Minister after the Reform Party lost a vote of no confidence. Less than one month prior, in an interview with the author, Yana Toom predicted that Jüri Ratas would likely replace Savisaar as head of the Centre Party and was unsure if “the majority of Russian-speakers would like this.”³⁸ Yana Toom also felt that there would be more Russian-speakers who would switch their allegiance to EKRE in the future.³⁹ Centre Party Member of Parliament, Oudekki Loone, did not share this view. She stressed that as long as EKRE stuck with the argument that Estonia should be an ethnic state, they would not get enough of the Russian vote.⁴⁰ However, according to Loone, if they dropped this, the Centre Party would be in a dangerous position.⁴¹

EKRE is not opposed to Russian-speaking members joining the party. In fact, there has never been any principle that all party members should be ethnic Estonians, rather, one must simply be an Estonian citizen.⁴² There has been an increasing number of Russian-speakers who have become friendly to Estonian nationalism and who are opposed to any new migration and some who have become members, largely due to the refugee crisis.⁴³ This is more pronounced in

35 Interview with Yana Toom; Interview with Martin Helme; Interview with Urmas Paet; Interview with Valdo Randpere; Interview with Jaak Madison.

36 Interview with Yana Toom.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Interview with Oudekki Loone.

41 Ibid.

42 Interview with Ruuben Kaalep and Interview with Jaak Madison.

43 Interview with Ruuben Kaalep.

Blue Awakening. Jaak Madison even stated that one member of Blue Awakening who was born in the Russian Federation and moved to Estonia when she was ten years old, is one of the “biggest patriots.”⁴⁴ All of the interviews conducted with members of EKRE and with politicians from other political parties in Estonia acknowledged the potential for EKRE to attract more Russian-speakers on the basis of that portion of Estonian society holding slightly more conservative values, as well as being more sceptical of Estonia accepting migrants.⁴⁵

During a speech at the annual American Renaissance conference, Ruuben Kaalep was asked a question by a Polish nationalist as to whether or not EKRE attempted to reach out to the Russian population in Estonia. His answer was that “whenever two white nations together face something that is not white, they will see that eventually it is better to work together” (American Renaissance, 2016)⁴⁶. The question to what extent is EKRE an ethnic, as opposed to strictly an Estonian nationalist party and would they be accepting of Russian-speaking Estonians as members can be answered based on interviews with several key EKRE members. The conclusion is reached that EKRE is an Estonian nationalist party and would accept Russian-speakers as members provided that they speak Estonian and present themselves as Estonian nationalists. The party would accept this type of Estonian nationalist, with a Russian background, but will not change their campaign literature to the Russian language.⁴⁷

Interestingly, there are plans to campaign in areas of Tallinn with large numbers of Russian-speaking residents.⁴⁸ According to Jaak Madison, the party plans on approaching Russian-speakers, not as Russian-speakers, but as people who support traditional, conservative values and who would be receptive to a party that vows to protect Estonia in light of the migrant crisis.⁴⁹ Madison further noted that EKRE will not campaign in these areas in Russian, but that they will send Russian-speaking members to campaign for EKRE because “if these people are Alexi or

44 Interview with Jaak Madison.

45 Interview with Oudekki Loone. Interview with Jaak Madison; Interview with Valdo Randpere; Interview with Yana Toom; Interview with Kert Urmas Raudvere and Interview with Urmas Paet.

46 American Renaissance: Ruuben Kaalep: A call to action from a small white country.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIRue1635YA&t=304s>

47 Interview with Ruuben Kaalep and Interview with Jaak Madison

48 Interview with Jaak Madison. The Russian-speaking population of Tallinn is near 40% of the city's overall population.

49 Interview with Jaak Madison.

Natalia and a member of EKRE, then they are not fascists.”⁵⁰ Thus the party is an ethnic nationalist party that wishes to conserve the ethnic makeup of Estonia, but would consider Russian-speaking Estonians who speak Estonian and pledge their allegiance to Estonia as allies in light of the refugee crisis. The line in the sand EKRE has drawn with the country’s minority group becomes linguistic with this political development.

While MPs from other parties are certainly aware of the rise in support for EKRE, many feel that this will not drastically alter the political landscape of Estonia. According to Reform Party MP, Valdo Randpere, although the migrant crisis was an area of great concern in Estonia in the beginning, things had calmed down and people were not as alarmed once they realised that Estonia would accept only a modest number of refugees.⁵¹ Regardless, EKRE, according to Randpere, “still wants to ride this horse... which is maybe not dead, but quite tired.”⁵² Reform Party MEP, Urmas Paet, elaborates further on this issue, pointing out that the issue of refugees has been on the political agenda for two years and not much has happened.⁵³ According to Paet, EKRE will have a limited amount of time to play on fears about refugees and migrants arriving in Estonia, if they do not come in large numbers, EKRE will need some other elements in their agenda.⁵⁴ Therefore, although the party has attracted some Russian-speaking members, and is willing to cooperate with other European nationalists, they have not sought them out and the refugee crisis alone might not be enough to attract Russian-speakers in large enough numbers to drastically impact the Estonian political landscape.

CONCLUSION

EKRE presents a unique case within the PRR party family as they are not in the position to be overly critical of the EU and NATO, like the majority of other PRR parties in Europe, due to their close proximity to and historic relationship with the Russian Federation. However, this rhetoric is increasing in the aftermath of the

50 Ibid.

51 Interview with Valdo Randpere.

52 Ibid.

53 Interview with Urmas Paet.

54 Ibid.

2015 migrant crisis in Europe. Further, the fact that the largest minority group to which they have previously identified themselves against is white and historically Christian, makes them a suitable ally in light of the migrant crisis and the ideology of ethnofuturism reinforces this position. It remains to be seen exactly where Russian Estonians fit with EKRE vis-à-vis the ethnofuturism discourse. As this project stresses cooperation between 'white' nations in a time where they are seen to be facing a mutual threat, but also suggests that cooperation should not cease once the goals of this project are met, this presents an interesting future discourse between the two groups. EKRE mandates that Russian-speaking members present themselves as Estonian nationalists and affirms that the party will not campaign or converse in Russian. This suggests that language is the decisive factor, not ethnicity.

EKRE does not advocate for Estonia to leave the EU, rather, they present an alternative vision for European cooperation which is more nationalistic, more conservative, and focused around Eastern Europe. They are not one of the numerous PRR parties who have a flirtatious or cozy relationship with Vladimir Putin and rather serve as a counterbalance within the realm of PRR politics to the Kremlin's influence on this party family. There have been some Russian-speakers who have joined EKRE as a direct result of the refugee crisis. However, the number is not staggering and is not enough to drastically alter the political landscape of Estonia yet, though this is a new and unlikely alliance. This is in large part because the number of refugees that have come to Estonia has been quite modest and will, in all likelihood, continue to be. Given that Blue Awakening is heavily promoting the concept of ethnofuturism and intermarium, it seems likely that EKRE will continue to be open to Russian-speakers who adapt to EKRE's stipulations for membership, though as of yet, they have not sought them out. To answer the research questions, in the case of EKRE, it appears that the *possibility* of the influx of a foreign, racially and religiously different 'other' has begun to change the dynamics of the relationship between a PRR party, EKRE, and the Russian-speaking population in Estonia. However, it remains to be seen whether a significant amount of Russian-speakers will gravitate to EKRE and if having more Russian-speaking members in the party will attract others.

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