The Environment and Populist Radical Right in Eastern Europe: The Case of National Alliance 2010–2018

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Abstract: Although the literature on populist radical right parties (PRRP) in Western and Eastern Europe has expanded considerably in the last two decades, relatively little is known about the views on nature and the environment of the PRRP in Eastern Europe. This study focuses on the Latvian PRRP "National Alliance" (NA), which has not only been a coalition government partner since 2011, but occupied a ministerial post tasked with environmental policy from 2014 to 2019. This article examines how the NA viewed nature, the environment, and governance for sustainability in the period 2010–2018, and more specifically, whether and to what extent the NA's vision of nature and the environment was compatible with its sustainable development position. The study employs qualitative content analysis examining the official party literature. The results indicate that the party's vision embraced the sustainable development position in its declaratory statements on nature and environmental policy. The NA's views on governance for sustainability demonstrate a strong statist preference, downplaying more participatory approaches, thus departing from the sustainable development governance position.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, populist and far-right parties have gained political and social momentum in several Western and Eastern European countries [1,2]. One type of populism, represented by the populist radical right parties (PRRP), expresses their support for authoritarian social attitudes and nativism [1]. PRRP criticize the supposedly out-of-touch political elites (the "establishment") and juxtapose those elites with the "ordinary people". PRRP have emerged not only as visible parliamentary parties, but also increasingly as coalition government partners or as support parties to coalition governments as in Western Europe (Austria, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Finland) and Eastern Europe (Estonia, Latvia).

Research on PRRP has grown over time, with recent emphasis on the role of PRRP in Eastern Europe [2–4]. How PRRP view environmental problems is of particular interest, given the increasingly salient policy problem of climate change [5]. Scholars have found that PRRP views on climate change vary, spanning from climate change skepticism to acknowledgements of anthropogenic climate change [6]. In addition, scholars hypothesize that a far-right party's position on environmental change depends on its more general ideological outlook. Ethnonationalist parties tend to stress environmental protection to a greater extent [7] than parties that stress populism, which tend to express skepticism towards the "climate change lobby" [8].

Other scholarship confirms that there is variation in how European "right-wing populist" parties view the scientific basis of policies aimed at mitigating climate change and how they vote on such

policies in the European Parliament (EP). While some espouse views that are either skeptical or hostile to the scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change, a smaller minority of such parties tend to affirm the scientific consensus [9]. The Latvian PRRP "National Alliance" (*Nacionālā apvienība*, NA) has been identified as one of the PRRP that is more positive towards the environmental agenda [9]. Additionally, the NA has—with some exceptions—a more pro-environmental voting record in the EP than other PRRPs [9].

This article contributes to the growing literature on far-right parties and their views on the environment and sustainable development. The aim is to systematically study one particular PRRP, namely, the NA, and its views on nature, the environment, and governance for sustainability (that is, which actors, institutions, or processes are seen as crucial to achieving sustainable development). The views of this party are relevant to study because not only is it one of the few PRRP that holds a seemingly pro-environmental position, but it also has been a coalition government partner since 2011 and occupied the post of Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Affairs from 2014 to 2019. This suggests that the NA most likely has a coherent vision of nature and the environment and has made efforts to implement its vision, which makes the study of how the party envisioned governance for sustainability especially relevant, yet it has not been systematically analyzed in the literature. In addition, as an exploratory case study, analysis of the NA's views on nature and the environment contributes to the growing body of literature on the views underlying PRRP's policies and provides insights into how broader ideological stances shape PRRP environmental policy more generally. Moreover, the PRRP that are more positive towards the environmental agenda can help build bridges with other PRRP that are more skeptical of environmental change [9]. This underscores the importance of understanding how the seemingly pro-environmental PRRP approaches the topics of nature and governance for sustainability.

The paper first summarizes the literature on the PRRPs in Eastern Europe and sets out a theoretical framework that will guide the empirical analysis. The subsequent section will present the research design and main arguments for the case selection, as well as discuss the material. This is followed by a presentation of results. The article concludes with a discussion of main empirical results and their significance in relation to the theme of this Special Issue.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Literature Review: Populist Radical Right Parties and Their Views on Nature and Environment

While the exact terminology is still debated, much of the literature agrees with the Dutch political scientist, Cas Mudde, that the ideology of the populist radical right consists of three components: populism, authoritarianism, and nativism [1–4]. Populism is understood as a "thin-centered ideology" that praises the common sense of the "ordinary" people and juxtaposes the "pure" people with the "corrupt" and "out-of-touch" elites, which have betrayed the people's interests [1]. Nativism is an exclusionary and anti-pluralist nationalism, which argues that the "pure" native people should be protected from the ethnically Other (immigrants, ethnic minorities, etc.) that by its mere presence pollute the homogenous nation [1]. In this context, authoritarianism is characterized by the beliefs that only a strong state can enforce this homogeneity, that society should be strictly ordered, and that those who infringe upon that order should be severely punished [1]. Studies on PRRP in Eastern Europe argue that the East European PRRP tend to be more extreme than their West European equivalents, and that instead of opposing immigration, their main issue and target tend to be ethnic minorities and historical grievances [2]. One such PRRP in the Eastern Europe is the NA. The party is an amalgamation of two previously independent parties—"For Fatherland and Freedom/Latvia's National Independence Movement" (*Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/Latvijas Nacionālās Neatkarības Kustība*, TB/LNNK), and All for Latvia (*Visu Latvijai*, VL). The two parties formed an electoral alliance, the "National Alliance", launching a common list in the 2010 parliamentary elections, and merged into one party just before the 2011 parliamentary elections. Relying on the above conceptualization of PRRPs, provided by Mudde,

Daunis Auers and Andres Kasekamp argued persuasively that the NA display not only nativist and authoritarian but also populist traits [10,11]. This article agrees with the classification of the NA as a PRRP.

PRRP are seen by some as an anti-modernist response to the 1968 emancipatory "revolution" and the following rise of the New Left and the Green movements [2]. For example, the Polish governing party "Law and Justice" (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) embraces both populist radical right ideology and a hostile position to the climate change agenda, especially criticizing and attacking any calls for changes in Polish energy policy [12]. PiS's virulent opposition to the calls for dismantling Poland's coal industry can be interpreted also as an electoral strategy aimed at addressing the concerns of mining unions that have links to PiS [12].

Nevertheless, there is some evidence that far-right parties are not entirely disinterested in, or hostile to, environmental issues [5]. In a now classical study of seven far-right parties and radical right ecological groups in Germany, Jonathan Olsen found that far-right ecologism views nature as ontologically linked to national identity because nature is posited as the "home" of the people [13]. Hence, environmental pollution figures prominently in far-right ecologist thinking, as it is perceived, along with immigration and other foreign influences as pollution of a naturalized national identity [13]. Two schools of thought in far-right ecological thinking can be distinguished. Eco-naturalism sees a nation as the product of nature, and nature provides an example of how to order and run a society [13]. On the other hand, eco-organicism stipulates that a nation (in German, *Volk*) is a unified and closed natural ecosystem; moreover, an already existing identity between nature and society is assumed, as the two are parts of an organism [13].

In addition, in the 1980s, the Dutch extreme-right Centre Party (*Centrumpartij*) called for environmental protection, a "radical change" in how nature and environment was viewed and treated, and for more support to scientific research on environmental problems [14]. Hungarian extreme-right party "Movement for a Better Hungary" (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*, Jobbik)—which is generally not considered to be a populist party—has voiced populist positions on agricultural and environmental matters, thus, addressing Jobbik's rural electorate [15]. Jobbik's populism consists of projecting a romanticized image of an environmentally friendly "Homeland-farming" that is juxtaposed to the external "Other" threatening the nationalistic idyll, for instance, large corporations or the European Union (EU) [15].

A recent scholarly anthology has studied systematically and comparatively how modern far-right parties, including PRRP, communicate their views on nature in general, and climate change and environmental protection. Scholars hypothesized that a far-right party's ideological position on environmental change depends on its more general ideological outlook [6]. If far-right parties tend to stress populist (that is, anti-establishment) positions, they tend to be wary of supporting the "globalist" scientific climate change consensus [8]. If, on the other hand, the parties stress the organicist aspects of their ethnonationalist ideology, stressing the importance of homeland (*Heimat*) as part of their concept of the "pure" nation, they tend to be more positive to environmental protection [7].

Links between ethnonationalism and environmental protection have been noted in the scientific literature before [5], among other European countries, and specifically in the case of Latvia [16–19]. Although not explicitly exploring party politics, one case study suggests that Latvian environmentalism is as an example of "green nationalism", which connects environmental protection with an agrarian lifestyle, livelihoods, and memories of past struggles for a national liberation from the Soviet regime, framed as the prime polluter of Latvia's nature [16]. Other work has noted the struggle over whether the small country, that joined the EU in 2004, should embrace the EU's biodiversity strategies, or maintain—or rather (re)construct—the countryside according to agrarian nationalist notions of how the Latvian countryside had been in the pre-Second World War era [17]. The deeply rooted notions of Latvia as a "nation of farmers" have also shaped the views on forests and forestry, resisting plans for further biodiversity conservation initiatives, thus asserting the view that forests are best kept cultivated and that cultivated, productive forests are the country's national treasure, its "green gold" [18].

However, the "liberal internationalist" view on sustainable development articulates a competing discourse, in which forestry is managed according to the post-materialist norms of sustainability, proposing that economic growth should be promoted by encouraging biodiversity for the sake of ecotourism development [19].

This short review of the literature on PRRP and their views on nature and the environment suggests that paying more attention to the case of the NA can be a worthwhile enterprise. Not only are the Baltic States and their PRRP often neglected in the literature, but the scholarly work on how the far-right views nature and the environment is still in its infancy and seems to be confined to specific themes (such as climate change). At the same time, earlier literature works suggest that Latvia and its emphasis on environmental protection is connected to key dimensions of national identity. This article will, therefore, contribute to the literature by examining not only a particular PRRP's view on nature and the environment, but also how it envisions governance for sustainability. This is the reason why the empirical material is analyzed using a point of departure in the literature that allows us to classify party positions to nature, the environment, and governance for sustainability in a more systematic way.

2.2. Framework for Analysis: How to Classify the Environmental Views of Populist Radical Right Parties?

The classification scheme, elaborated below, is inspired by the work of John S. Dryzek [20] and Kathryn Davidson [21]. While one of them distinguishes four generic discourses in environmental politics [20], the other elaborates a typology, based on the main political economy schools, comprising six ideological positions in the sustainable development debate [21]. Neither of the two typologies focuses, however, on classifying various political parties, and neither of them even acknowledges the existence of far-right political actors in the debate. However, both of them provide guidance on how to interrogate the empirical material systematically.

As noted earlier, this article focuses on two main dimensions—views of nature and environment, and views on governance structures and processes that promote sustainable development. The first dimension "nature and environment" revolves around the ontological question "how is nature and the environment viewed?" To put it differently, is nature and the environment seen mainly as the driver of economic growth or is it seen as having an intrinsic value in itself? Or is nature and the environment envisioned as being one of the three—mutually balanced—dimensions of sustainable development, as suggested by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report "Our Common Future" [22] and as confirmed by the United Nations (UN) Report "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" ("Agenda 2030") [23]. In short, this is about assessing whether the party espouses a strong or weak form of sustainable development, and three generic positions are here proposed: first, the instrumental position (nature is viewed as a repository of natural resources needed for economic growth); second, the radical position (nature as having intrinsic value in itself); and third, the holistic (or sustainability) position (that human needs and nature's intrinsic value are seen as coupled).

The second dimension "Governance for sustainability" asks the questions of how and through which mechanisms sustainable development is to be achieved according to the party. More specifically, which actors, institutions, or processes are crucial to protecting the environment and achieving sustainable development? The following types/positions are inspired by the cited typologies [20,21], the wider literature on governance modes—state, market, networks—that have characterized modern governance since the 1980s [24], and the WCED Report "Our Common Future" that stresses the need for a greater public participation in the planning and implementation of sustainable development policy [22]. As Table 1 demonstrates, there are five generic positions: neoliberal (favoring the market solutions), statist (favoring administrative regulatory solutions), democratic (favoring the outcomes produced through the "traditional" democratic process), network governance (favoring the outcomes produced through a wide network of various types of actors), and participatory (favoring comprehensive public participation in planning for sustainable development).

Table 1. The main analytical dimensions and types/positions.

Dimensions	Classificatory Criteria (Questions)	Type/Position	Indicators
Nature and environment	How is nature and the environment viewed?	Instrumental position	As repository of resources and subordinated to human needs
		Sustainability position	As ecosystems with both an intrinsic value coupled with human needs
		Radical position	As ecosystems with intrinsic value and agency (subjectivity) of its own
Governance for sustainability	How and through which mechanisms is sustainable development to be promoted?	Neoliberal	Markets, individuals, and enterprises
		Statist	Top-down administrative regulations
		Democratic	Public policy adopted by traditional political institutions, and, influenced by citizens, scientific expertise, and political actors
		Network governance	Variety of actors and mechanisms forming a complex network to shape policy
		Participatory	Participatory and deliberative democratic approach that leads to a comprehensive public engagement in sustainable development policy planning and implementation.

In connection to Table 1, it is worthwhile mentioning the ladder of sustainable development by Baker, which gives more details on the governance forms and values across weak and strong forms of sustainable development [25].

This classification scheme is a first step in a systematic typological effort to classify ideological positions of a particular PRRP on such dimensions as nature and the environment, and governance for sustainability. However, even if most classifications construct mutually exclusive types (in this case, positions), it is possible that this exploratory case study will demonstrate that there is some overlap among types or that new types must be added. If this is the case, this article, may contribute to a further refinement of conceptual treatment of how various far-right ideologies treat environmental issues.

3. Research Design and Method

The research design of this article is that of an exploratory case study. It is exploratory in the sense that there is relatively little scientific knowledge about how PRRP view nature, environment, and governance for sustainability. The NA was selected as a case strategically. First, from a perspective of the wider population of PRRP, the East European PRRPs have generally received less attention. The Baltic PRRP and their visions of nature and environment have received even less attention; however, see [10,11]. In short, this paper seeks to remedy the skew in the existing literature. Second, the NA was selected as a PRRP that has demonstrated a considerable longevity by being elected to the national parliament four times and being part of five coalition governments in the period from 2011 to 2019. In sum, the article contributes by examining not only an understudied PRRP in the Eastern Europe, but also examines the case of a party that has successfully overcome efforts to isolate it from the executive power and has had at least some control over the governmental agenda concerning nature and the environment.

The sources for this case study focus on the official party literature (party political platforms, electoral manifestos, party reports on environment, publications on the party's website) that is used typically used in the discipline of Political Science to classify the ideological position of political parties; see, for instance, [1,14]. Although a special report, presented at the party's conference on the Green

Economy, is included in the data material, it is argued here that the inclusion of the report does not compromise the overall traditional Political Science methodological approach, because the report is used to illustrate that environmental issues were discussed in the party. Moreover, the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists, a transnational party federation of which the NA is a member, had formally commissioned this report. As it was presented and discussed in a special conference of the NA, it is argued here that the report could be seen as part of the official party literature. Latvian political parties are expected to submit their electoral manifestos (*priekšvēlēšanu programmas*), consisting of no more than 4000 characters, to the Central Electoral Committee before elections. This means that the manifestos tend to be very concise documents, even if the political parties can also issue a longer version if they so desire. Latvian political parties also adopt political platforms (*programmas*) which outline their ideological principles and vision of the society that they wish to achieve. As platforms are more extensive, they are scrutinized here to a greater extent than the electoral manifestos.

The analysis of political platforms and electoral manifestos was carried out relying on qualitative content analysis [26], coding this official party literature systematically by generating codes (nodes) and subcodes (child nodes) in NVivo 12. There are several reasons for using qualitative content analysis in this particular case. The first is the rather small sample of four political platforms and four electoral manifestos, supplemented by the materials of the party conference on the Green Economy (in total, nine documents). Quantifying such a small amount of data would produce superficial and ambiguous findings, while the qualitative content analysis allows for a greater flexibility and delving deeper into the material. The coding was data driven, that is, the codes and subcodes were generated by reading and rereading the material several times, and comparing them to the main themes of interests (see Table 1 above).

4. Results

4.1. Views on Nature and Environment

The theme "Environment" (in Latvian, *vide*) was present as a separate chapter in all the political platforms adopted by the NA in the period under scrutiny (2010–2018). In the platform adopted in 2010, the chapter on the environment was among nine chapters in total; in the 2011 and 2012 platforms, one of 12 chapters were devoted to the theme; one chapter was devoted to the environment in the latest version of the political platform, adopted in 2018, which consisted of 21 thematic chapters in total. The theme of nature (in Latvian, *daba*) and (natural) environment was mentioned in total 16 times in two chapters in the 2010 political platform (preamble and "Environment"), while the 2018 political platform mentioned nature and environment in total 65 times in 12 chapters (apart from the preamble and the chapter on environment, it was mentioned in chapters dealing with energy and climate, forestry, regional development, mobility and transport, internal and external security, culture, science and education, information technologies, foreign policy, and the region of Latgale).

The prominence of the environment as a separate theme and chapter is not reflected in the 4000 character long electoral manifestos. In the 2010 manifesto, the support of forestry was only briefly acknowledged. In the 2011 manifesto, only the ambition of transforming Latvia into a green economy was mentioned. The 2014 manifesto states the political goal of transforming Latvia into one of the greenest countries in the world.

The question that is asked here is "How are the party documents treating the theme of environment and nature? Is nature and the environment seen predominantly as a repository of (natural) resources or is there any other (intrinsic) meaning attached to nature?"

Data show that there are at least three meanings of nature and the environment that appear in the NA's political platforms throughout the period 2010–2018. These meanings have been revealed by examining the material and identifying the common themes.

The first theme in all the platforms analyzed is that of nature and the environment as having a specific, intrinsic value. The 2010, 2011, and 2012 platforms declare that "natural environment is our

national treasure in which the people's spiritual strength is rooted" [27] (p. 8), [28] (p. 5), [29], (p. 5). This sentence—stipulating the rootedness of the (ethnically defined) people (in Latvian, *tauta*)—opens the platforms' chapters on the environment, and due to its declaratory nature, this statement is interpreted here as laying out the basic values underpinning environmental policy. This may seem as an over-interpretation of a short and lofty sentence, but in fact, it strongly suggests that the party views nature and the environment as an important part of the nation. The 2011 platform offers additional support to this interpretation of the party's thinking about nature and the environment. It calls on the state-owned enterprise "Latvia's national forests" (in Latvian, *Latvijas valsts meži*) to systematically purchase forest lands to increase the state ownership of forests in order to avoid forest land falling into "the hands of foreigners" [28] (p. 5). The 2018 platform does not contain any such explicit eco-organicist language. However, the preamble to the platform mentions nature as one of the party's basic values: "Our main values [are]: the Latvian nation, language, and culture, the honor and memory of our national heroes, the independence and growth of Latvia, welfare and justice, family and matrimony, human life, nature and God" [30]. Moreover, nature and the environment occupy a considerable place in the party's vision of the future. A recurring theme in the preamble to the three platforms is the vision of Latvia in the future as "the country with the highest environmental quality in the world" [27] (p. 1), [28] (p. 2), [29], (p. 2). The 2018 platform describes Latvia proudly as "one of the greenest and least urbanized territories of the European Union" [30].

The second theme is that of nature and the environment as resources for economic development. The preamble of the 2010, 2011, and 2012 platforms asserts that "environmental and natural resources" are among "the unique advantages of our country" that ensure "the economic growth and employment" [27] (p. 1), [28] (p. 2), [29], (p. 2). In addition, even if the three platforms stipulated that "the people's spiritual strength is rooted" in the environment, a qualification was added in the next sentence: "At the same time, it [environment] can promote the economic development of our nation" [27] (p. 8), [28] (p. 5), [29], (p. 5).

As forests cover more than half of Latvia's territory, it is not surprising that a significant space is devoted to the issues of forestry in the 2011 and 2012 platforms. The 2010 platform describes forests as "significant energy resources [that should be] used smartly, thinking about the country's future" [27] (p. 8). A similar statement is found in the 2011 and 2012 platforms, but here, the forests are not seen any more as "energy resources", but "resources" in a broader sense. Although there should be no doubt that there was a clear focus on economic values in the platforms' discussion of forests, the platforms emphasize that the forests should be used "smartly" and also in a future-oriented way. The 2011 and 2012 platforms contained the following statement on forestry policy: "Forestry policy is to be shaped in long term perspective, balancing the economic function with the preservation of biological diversity in the forest environment, as well as with the interests of the society and the forest owners in using the social values of forests" [28] (p. 5), [29], (p. 5). The cited policy imperative contains a reference to the concept of sustainable development, as defined by the WCED and the UN [22,23], especially to the prescribed balancing of economic, social, and environmental interests to satisfy the needs of present generations without compromising the needs of future generations.

A significant theme in the party's platforms is that of Latvia as a "green country", which is here classified as a subtheme of nature and the environment as factors of economic development. For instance, the 2010 platform argues: "Latvia so far has not sufficiently used its huge potential as a 'green country'", and it calls for the use of the network of environmentally protected areas for "promoting eco-tourism and other recreational events as much as possible" [27] (p. 9). Another passage calls for promoting "other types of entrepreneurship—developing organic food, production of organic cosmetics and medicines, creation of nature documentaries and sound records, [and] creation of environmentally friendly technologies" [27] (p. 9). Identical or very similar formulations also appear in the 2011 and 2012 platforms. Interestingly, the 2010 platform discusses agriculture in the section devoted to the environment and calls for a greater "orientation to organic agriculture, shaping the country as an area free of genetically modified organisms" [27] (p. 8). Moreover, the 2010 platform

outlines objectives that support the goal of transforming Latvia "into the globally leading brand of 'green' economy" which "at the same time would, critically, decrease Latvia's energy dependency on Russia, [thus] strengthening national security" [27] (p. 3). Similar statements are also found in the later platforms. In addition, the 2011 electoral manifesto promises "support to the green economy as one of the core directions of Latvia's economic development" and promises to adopt a "Green Economy Act" [31]. The 2014 Electoral Manifesto states that transforming "Latvia as one of the greenest countries in the world" is "a precondition for development of natural and cultural tourism" [32].

The theme of "green country" comprises the subtheme of "green economy", which was explicitly mentioned in the 2011 Electoral Manifesto. Analyzing the objectives outlined in the 2010, 2011, and 2012 political platforms shows that the party sees the promotion of the "green economy" as requiring major reforms in Latvia's energy, construction, and transport sectors and related policies, aimed at increasing energy saving and efficiency as well as increasing reliance on renewable energy sources. The 2018 Platform does not mention the concept directly in relation to energy policy, even though the chapter on energy policy contains several aspects discussed in the previous platforms.

The concept of the "green economy" is by no means new or pertaining to a specific, Latvian context. The United Nations Environment Program launched the Green Economy Initiative in 2008, aiming at promoting sustainable development in UN member states, and which forms a key part of sustainable development discourse of the EU [33].

As described in the section on sources, a special report on the green economy in the context of Latvia was presented at a special NA conference on 1 October 2012. The report "Towards the Green Economy: EU experience and practices for the developments in Latvia", authored by Mārtiņš Graudums, discussed the concept of "green economy", compiled various international examples of "best practices", and proposed policy recommendations for the Latvian context. According to Graudums, a green economy is an economy that "promotes an increase in the income and employment, a decrease in carbon emissions and pollution, improves the rational use of resources and energy efficiency, meanwhile preserving biological diversity and available ecosystem services" [34] (p. 4). According to Graudums, a green economy can be achieved only if the public and private sectors mutually interact, but it also requires public investments, political reforms, and new regulations [34].

The data suggest that at least one reason why this concept found a prominent place in the party's platforms is that there were strong advocates among the party's elite. The NA's Member of European Parliament Roberts Zīle (the former co-chair of the NA) and the parliamentary secretary (later the Minister) at the Ministry for Environmental Protection and Regional Development Einārs Cilinskis were actively involved in the conference.

The final, third theme is that of, at least a rhetorical, commitment to the sustainability position, found in the 2018 platform. The chapter on the environment highlights and describes in detail the main achievements in areas such as biodiversity conservation, waste management, and transition to the circular economy, and the "green public procurement for purchase of environmentally friendly products" [30]. The vision for environmental policy, as described by the 2018 platform, enumerates several goals: "An efficient and responsible management of resources (including natural [resources]), promoting the growth/development of the green economy, eco-innovational solutions and preserving a clean environment and biological diversity for a greater quality of life of [Latvia's] inhabitants. Sustainable governance of natural resources, comprising an innovative circular economy" [30]. One of the clearest statements in support of the sustainability position is found in the chapter on forestry. It begins with a reference to the UN resolution in Agenda 2030 [23], and it stipulates that "rational use of natural resources that is based on a true parity between environmental, economic and social interests is the fundament of our country's development" [30]. It goes on to assert that the general public "must understand the sustainable forestry and the principles of bio-economic development that will promote achievement of goals that are positive, [and] oriented to ensuring the national interests" [30]. Moreover, the chapter states that the strategic goal of Latvia is to "remain as a green country", and it asserts that the "forestry sector has a crucial role" in this respect [30]. The party's vision regarding the forestry

sector is that it is not only economically active, production-oriented, and competitive, but that wood residues are employed in the energy sector, thus "promoting the energy independence of Latvia and achievement of the climate goals" and that the "recreational potential of forests is used, reconciling the environmental and economic interests" [30].

In sum, the NA's views on nature and the environment are characterized by a recognition of the intrinsic value of nature, while seeing it as a resource for economic development. As part of the latter theme (nature and the environment as economic resource), a strong discourse encouraging Latvia's transformation into a "green country" with a "green economy" was found. Finally, the analysis shows that at least a rhetorical commitment to the sustainability position was espoused by one of the party's platforms.

4.2. Imagining Governance for Sustainability

"Governance for sustainability" is an academic concept, and as such, it was not mentioned in the empirical material under scrutiny here. The concept is understood here as a set of governance mechanisms that would help to steer society towards sustainable development. The question that is asked of the material here is "How and through which mechanisms is sustainable development to be achieved?" as envisioned by the party documents. Identifying actors, institutions, or mechanisms is not an easy task, as both political platforms and electoral manifestos are often rather generic and the issue of how the goals outlined in the document are to be achieved is often implied, not explicitly discussed. In order to address the question, the political platforms, especially their chapters on environment and sections (or subsections) that dealt with the green economy were analyzed.

The chapters on environmental policy in the NA's political platforms reveal that the main governance style desired for use in the promotion of sustainability is a combination of state and the market (or market mechanisms). However, the balance between the two shifted over time. The 2010 political platform sees the role of the state in a rather traditional light, acting as a regulatory actor, such as through imposing severe punishments for environmental pollution, and as an agent of (re)distribution, including through establishing financial compensation schemes for farmers or forest owners who are prohibited from cultivating and harvesting their lands or forests when their land is designated as an environmentally protected area. Less clear is the role of state in instituting a "progressive" agriculture policy [27]. A market-based approach is also embraced, especially in relation to assessing whether prohibitive norms relating to forestry should be abolished, or when it is proposed that tax breaks could incentivize private actor engagement in managing environmentally protected areas [27]. The 2011 and 2012 platforms widened the scope of the party's market-oriented approach by calling for deregulation to increase the competitiveness of Latvian forest enterprises in relation to those in Scandinavia [28,29]. Moreover, the NA called upon the state to encourage cooperation among forests owners, which would lead to more sustainable forest management [28,29]. However, the NA lays most of the responsibility for sustainable development governance on the shoulders of the state. For instance, the state was called upon to intervene in the forest market to avoid land falling into the hands of foreign owners [28,29]. State-paid compensation would be targeted not only at those whose lands or forests were environmentally protected and thus, uncultivatable, but also at those whose lands/forests had been designated as micro-reserves [28,29]. The state would also map and monitor the environmental risks [28,29] and be charged with the task of formulating forestry policy that would aim at reconciling the economic, environmental, and social interests [29].

The 2018 political platform embraced such pro-market reforms as cutting red tape in issuing environmental permits and introducing deposit systems to encourage recycling among consumers. However, even this document largely defined the governance for sustainability in terms of state-directed measures, which range from engaging in rebranding Latvia as a "green" country to improving its exports and encouraging ecotourism, increasing regulation regarding collection, management, and recycling of old car tires, punishing those private actors that do not abide by existing regulations, supporting local

governments in their efforts to improve drinking water quality, and broadening the compensation scheme for non-use of environmentally protected areas.

Analysis of the sections (or subsections) on green economy in the NA's political platforms between 2010 and 2012 reveals that views on which actors and instruments should be involved in transforming Latvia into a green economy varied over time. The 2010 platform seemed to favor only the state, which would establish norms stipulating energy efficient buildings, launch financing instruments to encourage construction according the energy efficiency norms, and establish a development bank to finance various development projects. The NA promised that, if in power, they would set of the goal of 60% reliance on renewable resources by 2020, the most ambitious goal in the EU. However, how this goal would be achieved, and which institutional actor would monitor its implementation, was not specified.

The 2011 and 2012 platforms paint a more complex picture, in which the state shares its responsibilities with private sector actors (business associations), experts, and the communities, but even these documents seem to envision governance as predominantly a statist project. The state would adopt and enact the Green Economy Act and would lay down the norms relating to increasing energy efficiency and hold key responsibilities for setting norms in the construction business [28,29]. The NA envisioned the establishment of a ministry for development that would deal, among other matters, with environmental impact assessment, construction planning, territorial planning, and reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies [28,29]. Moreover, the state would centralize energy policy making and establish high level and realistic goals for renewable energy use for 2020 and 2030 [28,29]. The 2012 platform envisioned even greater state intervention by establishing a systematic planning system for energy consumption at the municipal level to map the needs of every municipality and assess energy efficiency [29]. The NA also called for the nationalization of the gas provision network [29]. However, while promoting strong state governance, there is also a commitment to involve experts in energy policy planning and increase public participation in the territorial planning process [28,29]. Here we can see a willingness to adopt a participatory approach that would open up the political process to greater public engagement. Similarly, delegating what are perceived as "uncharacteristic" public functions to the construction business association [28,29] is classified here as falling under the category of a market or neoliberal approach.

5. Discussion

It should be highlighted that this case study of the NA's views contributes to a further understanding of how PRRP view nature and the environment. One of the main findings of this article is that the Latvian NA ranks among those PRRP that embrace a commitment to sustainable development. However, the NA's political platforms display several particularities—such as an eco-organicist view on nature and a narrow view on the green economy as being about energy efficiency. The party also emphasizes both the economic aspects of nature, viewed as natural resources, and the need to balance economic interests with social and environmental aspects of development. The composite views of the NA on nature and the environment suggest that the party does not easily fit in only one category outlined in the theoretical framework, which should therefore, be further refined. Additionally, this suggests that PRRP, in general, may be a difficult but not impossible partner in a wider political dialogue on how to tackle environmental problems. This case study suggests that the sustainability agenda resonates with at least some views held by PRRP.

In general, as previous research suggested, ethnonationalist parties, of which the NA is one case, tend to be positively disposed towards the environmental protection agenda because they see nature and the nation as part of the same "organism" [6–8]. While some eco-organicist language was found in the NA's political platforms, it does not come across as a strong feature of the NA's ideological makeup. Rather, the activism of "policy entrepreneurs" could account for the pro-environmental language in their political platforms, even if they may frame their causes in "organicist" language. Although explaining the origins of the NA's views on the environment and governance for sustainability is not

the aim of this article, it is suggested here that influential parts of the party's elite were most likely to push for incorporating "green" proposals in the platforms, such as the promotion of "Green Economy." In such a context, framing the "green" proposals (such as the ambition to develop Latvia into a "Green Economy") in organicist language provides a legitimizing rhetorical link with the NA's nationalist ideology and wider narrative on what constitutes a nation.

The striking feature about the NA's vision is the stress on the state as the main governance actor in the promotion of sustainable development. Although there are references to market mechanisms and even some references to a more participatory governance mode in some areas, the NA's political platforms focus mostly on the state as the main agent of change. In this respect, the NA departs from the WCED vision of involving civil society and key economic stakeholders through participatory governance in planning and implementing policies aimed at promoting sustainable development. Viewed through the wider, normative literature on the role of state, this position resonates with that of Eckersley, who theorized the "green" or "environmental state", arguing for strengthening the role of the state in dealing with modern environmental problems [35]. The shared ground is the emphasis on the nation state as the site in which legitimate political power resides [35]. Although this position does not preclude a state-driven dialogue with the wider society, it seems difficult to reconcile the NA's position with the WCED's vision of bottom-up participatory modes of governance. The NA's seemingly positive view on the role of public engagement in territorial planning and energy policy may clash with other imperatives—such as security (for example, avoiding foreign ownership of forests, strengthening energy independence from Russia)—which may be more important for the party than broad public engagement.

Relating these findings to the wider literature on PRRP [1–4], the NA's "statist preference" is perhaps not surprising. Even if PRRP are populist in aiming to "de-throne" the elites [1], they also hold a radical right ("authoritarian") ideology, preferring a strong state that would enforce their political vision [1,2]. This belief in the centrality of the strong state applies not only to enacting policies towards immigration or ethnic minorities, but also to the environmental policy arena.

Contextualizing the case of the NA in the literature on connections between nationalism and nature in Latvia [16–19], the NA is not an easy case for classification. The data show that the recurrent and composite views on nature and governance for sustainability are embedded in pre-existing, even if contradictory, discourses on nature. The party does emphasize the "agrarian nationalist" vision of forestry (stressing the cultivated forests), but it also, surprisingly, embraces the "liberal internationalist" view of promoting Latvia as a green country for ecotourism. Following Mudde's analysis of socioeconomic policies of PRRPs [1], it is suggested here that the NA included such contradictory, but secondary ideological themes in its platforms instrumentally, for instance, to flesh out its "thin" populist ideology or to maximize votes.

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