



The youth leaders are carrying the Latvian flags in a procession on March 16, 2023, the Remembrance Day of the Latvian Legionnaires. The Latvian Legion was part of the Waffen SS.

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Making tomorrow's leaders

by **Pēteris F Timofejevs**
& **Louis John Wierenga**

The transnationalism of radical right youth organizations in the Baltic Sea area, 2015–2019

abstract

Radical right parties (RRPs) have been extensively studied throughout the past two decades. One neglected aspect is the youth organizations (YOs) of RRP and their transnational networks. This article analyzes the transnational links between the YOs of RRP in Estonia and Latvia. The article contributes to the literature by arguing for four findings relating to the transnational links between the YOs of RRP, which provide a window into the future of the parties being analyzed.

KEYWORDS: EKRE; The National Alliance; radical right parties; youth wings; transnational networks.

Introduction

Over the last 20 years, the literature on political parties with a radical right or nationalist conservative agenda and ideology has evolved into a well-established field of political science. Knowledge about far-right parties has greatly advanced, covering such aspects as their organization, electoral performance and participation in coalition governments. Yet very little is known about the youth organizations associated with these parties, apart from the literature on more extremist groups, such as skinheads, neo-Nazis and the alt-right.

As radical right parties (RRPs) have substantially increased in popularity throughout most of Europe since 2015, gaining an average of between 12–15% of the national vote, and in some cases more, the likelihood of their longevity is high. As Cynthia Miller-Idriss notes, there is a consensus in scholarship that political attitudes that are developed and formed in adolescence and early adulthood usually persist over time,¹ thereby increasing the likelihood that many people involved in the youth organizations (YOs) of RRP will become future leaders and elected representatives.

This highlights the dual importance of research on the YOs in RRP. First, that parties which have become permanently embedded in the national electorate of their countries are pushing to restructure socio-cultural values, as well as taking a stance towards Euroscepticism and European integration.² Second, as the Overton window³ has expanded – both for radical right *parties* and in radical right *politics* – the nature of discourse and, in some cases, ideology, is changing. We expect that in most cases, the YOs in RRP will hold more right-wing views on socio-cultural issues than the mother party. Michael Minkenberg highlights an important difference between RRP in Eastern and Western Europe.⁴ His central argument is that the post-communist transition and unfinished nation-building has led to radical right parties in the region being both ideologically more extreme and more organizationally fluid than their Western counterparts.⁵ There is a small and continuously growing body of literature on the radical right in Central and Eastern Europe, yet the Baltic States remain understudied. This study intends to fill this gap.

Acknowledging that scholarship on the youth organizations of far-right parties, their relationship with the mother party and each other (i.e., transnational links) is still in its infancy, we present a comparative case study of two youth organizations of radical right parties that are and have been represented in both the Estonian and Latvian parliaments. Using a paired comparison, we explore the transnational linkages of the youth organization of the National Alliance (*Nacionālās apvienības jaunatnes organizācija*, henceforth referred to as NAJO)⁶ in Latvia, Blue Awakening (*Sinine Āratus* henceforth referred to as SĀ) and the youth organization of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (*Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond*, henceforth referred to as the EKRE). As much as this paper is about presenting preliminary findings, its hypotheses aim to explain the transnationalism of the youth organizations of RRP.

Research questions

The paper analyzes the transnational dimension of two youth organizations of RRP in the Baltic Sea region. In particular, we map and describe the transnational interactions of two Baltic

cases, namely, SĀ and NAJO, specifically between 2015 until late 2019. We ask whether a transnational RR youth elite is emerging, mapping the transnational networks of both case studies.

The overarching research question that this paper examines is as follows: to what extent do youth organizations of RRP engage in transnational activities? There are also two sub-questions: First, what type of transnational interactions do youth organizations engage in? Second, how can their patterns of interactions be explained?

Transnationalism

In this section, we define the transnationalism of political parties, and especially what we understand by the transnational dimension of the youth organizations of RRP. What we call “transnationalism” is the phenomenon of ideas, people and capital moving across borders. One of the earlier attempts to conceptualize transnationalism argues that one of the characteristics of “complex interdependence” between nations is the existence of multiple channels connecting societies, among them, transnational channels employed by such non-governmental actors as multinational corporations, banks and trade unions.⁷ In an earlier article, “transnational relations” are defined as “contacts, coalitions, and interactions across state boundaries that are not controlled by the central foreign policy organs of governments”, and “transnational interactions” are, in essence, the “movement of tangible or intangible items across state boundaries when at least one actor is not an agent of a government or an intergovernmental organization”.⁸ Thomas Risse-Kappen fine-tuned the definition stating that transnational relations are “regular

interactions across national boundaries when at least one actor is a non-state agent or does not operate on behalf of a national government or an international organization”.⁹ In this paper we understand “transnationalism”, “transnational dimension” and “transnational relations” synonymously as interactions of YOs and their representatives across national borders. These interactions need not always be in person, they can take place through digital channels of communication, for instance, various social media outlets, especially Facebook and Twitter.¹⁰

WE UNDERSTAND transnational interactions rather broadly as being not “just” contacts between youth organizations, but also a more permanent form of cooperation that entails a certain level of intensity and regularity of cross-national interaction. Transnational interactions can be conceptualized as both institutionalized (for instance, an international association comprising several youth organizations) and non-institutionalized. The latter may include cross-national contacts and interactions, either bilaterally or multilaterally (including several youth organiza-

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tions). As we demonstrate below, there is literature that addresses the efforts of RRP to institutionalize multilateral cooperation at the European level, similar to the way in which mainstream political parties institutionalize their cooperation in the form of European political parties and political party groups at the European Parliament. Below we summarize the main findings of the literature that addresses the transnational interactions of far-right parties.

Bilateral links

However, while the transnational dimension of political parties is a well-established field of research, there has been relatively little research on the transnational activities of RRP, and even less has been written about the transnationalism of their youth organizations.

A unique contribution is that of Graham Macklin, who examined the transnational networking between the British National Party (BNP) and the National Democrat Party (NDP) of Germany, even though these parties tend to be classified as belonging to the extreme right. As he noted, there have been “cordial relations between the Young BNP and the *Junge Nationaldemokraten*” ever since the BNP youth wing was established¹¹.

Multilateral institutionalized cooperation

Most of the focus of the literature has been on the efforts to establish multilateral transnational cooperation between RRP at the European level. In an early work that reviewed the international contacts and efforts to establish a more structured cooperation at the European level (particularly in the European Parliament), Cas Mudde cautioned against engaging in “quasi-paranoid conspiracy theories” about an emerging or existing “Nationalist International”.¹² Indeed, European RRP engage in international cooperation with other like-minded parties, but such cooperation has been far from successful, as indicated by several failed attempts to establish something more structured.¹³

Nicholas Startin examined one such unsuccessful attempt, namely, the establishment and short-lived existence of “Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty” (ITS), a far-right party group in the European Parliament that lasted from January to November 2007.¹⁴ In Startin’s assessment, the potential emergence of transnational cooperation in Europe in the future was “unlikely”.¹⁵ However, in 2009, several far-right parties established the Alliance of European National Movements, a Europarty with the aim of forming a common parliamentary group in the European Parliament.¹⁶

While focusing on the role perceptions of individual Eurosceptic Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from what she called the “untidy right” (i.e. the far right), Nathalie Brack pointed to the role of ideological heterogeneity among radical right MEPs,

their role perceptions and institutional context as the main reasons for their lack of closer cooperation and joint impact.¹⁷ In contrast, Petra Vejvodová argued that nationalism, which is at the center of the RRP, as well as a charismatic leadership style, which contributes to bitter personal conflicts among party leaders, are in themselves obstacles to creating a lasting cooperation.¹⁸

Diffusion of ideas

The diffusion of ideas has been the focus of another strand of research. While Macklin explored how the BNP and the NDP made an effort to find a “master frame” that would allow for a closer relationship and common activities,¹⁹ Farid Hafez examined the transnational contacts of European far-right activists and RRP, including exchange of ideas, and found an ideational shift in their political rhetoric from anti-Semitism to Islamophobia.²⁰ Also, he pointed to Islamophobia as a shared common ideological ground for building a more cohesive European cooperation, and as the potential for building bridges with both the Israeli and US far right.²¹ Tamir Bar-On focused on the intellectual and ideological influence of the French *Nouvelle Droite*, especially Alain de Benoist, and their pan-Europeanist, anti-liberal democracy, anti-capitalist and anti-West project on the ideological underpinnings of the European New

“THE MAIN EFFECTS OF TRANSNATIONAL INTERACTIONS CAN BE CATEGORIZED AS FALLING INTO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING THREE CATEGORIES: CONTAGION, DIFFUSION AND DEMONSTRATION EFFECTS.”

Right.²² Marina Peunova mapped the influence of the European New Right on the work of Russian intellectual Aleksandr Panarin, whose version of Eurasianism (and that of Aleksandr Dugin) has been especially influential in Russia’s foreign policy discussions.²³ In the context of the diffusion of ideas in the transnational radical right websphere, the importance of Twitter has been highlighted.²⁴

Effects of transnational interactions:

diffusion, contagion and demonstration effects

The main effects of transnational interactions can be categorized as falling into one of the following three categories: contagion, diffusion and demonstration effects. When networking and interacting, it is possible that youth organizations may find some of their partners’ experiences (organizational or campaign strategies, ideological frameworks, etc.) valuable or worthwhile to emulate or adapt to the particular national context. At its core, this dynamic of social learning or lesson drawing constitutes the effects of diffusion. While it is reasonable to expect a certain degree of diffusion after regularized contacts, it should, however, not be presumed or taken for granted. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect that such diffusion can take place through different channels. First, diffusion can take place through formal *direct* channels of communication when leaders of youth organizations make contact with each other and establish formal ties. Second, it is likely that informal indirect channels of communication can facilitate transnational diffusion, for instance, when



There were pagan and esoteric activities at the Blue Awakening (Sinine Äratuse, SÄ) summer camp of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond, EKRE) 2016.

PHOTO: SININE ÄRATUS

members of a youth organization meet or interact with members of another youth organization across national boundaries, or when they read each other's written work posted on various websites. This distinction between formal and direct and informal and indirect channels of diffusion was first described by Jens Rydgren who focused on what he called "extreme right-wing populist" parties,²⁵ but can also be used for our purposes.

Second, transnational interactions can lead to demonstration effects, which were theorized by Kitschelt who, focusing on the populist variant of RRP, noted that "in terms of geographical space, a radical right-wing party's electoral success in one country may produce a demonstration effect that helps equivalent parties even in countries where demand- and supply-side conditions are less favorable for the rise of such parties".²⁶ Translating this statement from a party context into a statement that is meaningful for the context of youth organizations – if one youth organization has had substantial success and has established reputational capital, noticed across national boundaries, this can help another youth organization – in another national context – which is also striving to emulate the success story.

The fact that a party or youth organization has experienced considerable success does not in itself lead to automatic diffusion or demonstration effects. Rather, it is reasonable to assume that, precisely like political parties, youth organizations will establish transnational contact and interact with such youth organizations that fulfill certain (pre-)conditions. First, a necessary but not sufficient in itself condition for establishing transnational links and adopting a certain practice, ideological framework or organizational innovation through diffusion is that it is deemed as being successful in achieving certain political goals.²⁷ Based on sociological research, it is barely plausible that an agent would want to emulate an unsuccessful kind of behavior, while notable examples of successful behavior may lead to "contagion effects" when an increasing number of agents may want to emulate the kind of behavior that is "rewarded".²⁸ Second, it is likely that transnational

interactions and diffusion will be established among youth organizations that are similar in terms of their goals, ideological profile and values.²⁹ The third condition concerns the geographical proximity between youth organizations that may engage in diffusion. It goes without saying that those youth organizations that are closer to each other geographically are more likely to interact and cooperate than youth organizations from far-away countries.

FINALLY, THERE ARE parties and youth organizations which, despite their success and high profile, are deemed as being a threat to a person's own legitimacy and reputation. Elisabeth Ivarsson has shown that parties that have a "reputational shield" can fend off accusations of being extremists. However, we reason that these reputational assets can be endangered if one youth organization associates (interacts and formally cooperates) with another youth organization that does not have such a reputational shield and (or) has a particularly negative reputation.³⁰ Association with such actors may have detrimental effects on a youth organization, which will therefore avoid publicly associating itself with or contacting such a contagious counterpart. In short, we posit that youth organizations engage in a certain cost-benefit calculation about potential transnational interactions and cooperation and that they are keen to avoid incurring domestic-political or reputational costs in the domestic political arena, either for themselves or their mother parties. Such calculations have influenced how radical right parties make choices about their parliamentary party group membership in the European Parliament, and sometimes such concerns for domestic respectability have been more important than ideological considerations.³¹

Based on the literature on the transnationalization of far-right parties and adapting this literature to the purpose of this article on youth organization, the following four expectations can be formulated:

- 1 Youth organizations that are similar in terms of their politi-

- cal goals, ideological profiles and values are more likely to engage in transnational interactions with each other.
- 2 Youth organizations that are in geographical proximity are more likely to engage in transnational interactions with each other.
 - 3 Youth organizations are more likely to adopt the ideas, strategies and other models from those youth organizations that are perceived as successful.
 - 4 Youth organizations are more likely to cooperate with other youth organizations if the benefits of such cooperation outweigh the costs.

Data, methods and research design

In assessing both cases, the tip of the iceberg metaphor seems particularly apt. Our partial impression is that researching transnational interactions between YOs using an interview method did not reveal the whole truth.³² As the questions about the transnational activities of YOs covered one of several themes, it could be that the interviewees felt that they did not want to delve too deeply into their transnational relations with their partners in other countries. The data from social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook and other websites offer a valuable addition, and we studied the photographic evidence and links to other websites. Moreover, the photographic evidence only indicates that a particular representative from one of the YOs we studied has been at the same meeting or on the same march as some other representative of another YO. We are unsure as to whether the people from different organizations actually interacted meaningfully at such events, and we know even less about the nature of such interactions. Thus, the interviews and social media analysis³³ will complement each other in informing our conclusions regarding the extent of the transnational international interactions and activities of the YOs under study.

We proceed with a paired comparison in order to present a thorough and in-depth analysis of both cases. Despite the geographical proximity of Estonia and Latvia, this does not serve as the sole justification of our case selection. We move beyond geographic proximity and focus on neighboring cases because a transnational ideological alliance was made between the mother parties, along with the Lithuanian Nationalist Union (LTS), which presents several existing similarities. Further, as the RR is largely limited to Europe, case selection is already limited. We follow Michael Minkenberg's research as our point of departure in that the radical right in Central and Eastern Europe has noticeable differences, being ideologically more extreme and organizationally more fluid than their West European counterparts.³⁴ Additionally, as will be explained below, another reason why we limited our cases to Baltic YOs whose mother parties are in government is due to the duality of "others", national minorities *and* migrants, present or potential, originating from outside Europe.

OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEWS were conducted with board members of NAJO and SÄ. The data retrieved from these interviews inform us about the structure of each YO, why the participants decided to become involved in politics, as well as the nature of their activi-

ties in the YO, which, in both cases, included transnational contacts and activity. Social media analysis was our secondary methodological approach. We mapped the transnational links based on data collected from official YO Facebook pages, as well as the accounts of board members, Twitter accounts and the website The New Nationalism (later called New Prometheus), which was managed by a member of NAJO and served as a nationalist think tank and news site for Central and Eastern Europe.³⁵ We should also mention that this research strategy of employing online resources presents its own risks. As early observers noted: "On the Web everything is in a state of flux and is subject to continuous change."³⁶ For instance, Twitter accounts can be deleted or suspended, or websites can cease to exist, or their content can be transferred to another domain. For this reason, we have worked with the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, and in cases when we have identified broken links, websites that have ceased to exist and similar, we have reported this.

Finally, we need to justify the time frame in which the research was conducted. It could be reasonable to expect that at least two events in recent history have fueled or at least contributed to increased transnationalism among RRP and their YOs – the surge of RRP in the 2014 European Parliament election and the 2015 migration crisis. Our "fieldwork" (data collection) stopped in late 2019, even though we also refer to events after 2019. This was due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war against Ukraine, which triggered a further dynamic resulting in the re-alignment of some European RRP (especially vis-à-vis Russia). Thus, this inter-crises period provides an opportunity to test our expectations in "normal" conditions, which are not overly influenced by extraordinary events, even though the Brexit referendum in the UK and the 2016 US presidential election arguably are two extraordinary events that created favorable conditions (or at least expectations) for intensified transnational cooperation among RRP in Europe.

The Baltic region

Two primary factors influence the radical right in the Baltic region. The first factor is a shared history, which includes Soviet occupation and the policies of Russification. As noted by Daunis Auers and Andres Kasekamp, a distinct brand of nativism has been evident in the Baltics, directed towards the Russian-speaking population.³⁷ This is in line with other researchers who assert that national minorities have been a key focus for the radical right in the broader region of Central and Eastern Europe in the absence of large-scale migration from outside Europe.³⁸

While migrants from outside Europe remain rare, as do the numbers of refugees resettled by the European Commission after the 2015 crisis, the arrival of very low numbers of refugees and the potential for future refugees has brought this to the forefront of the radical right agenda in Estonia and Latvia. Given that YOs comprise young people, they have come of age during in an era in which issues beyond the presence of Russian speakers have entered the agenda of the radical right, including refugees/migrants, foreign students, and gender politics. This is likely to influence the radical right in the region for years to come.

The second factor is the unity between the two parties under study and the Lithuanian Nationalist Union, which can be found in the Bauska Declaration. This declaration outlines a nationalist worldview specific to nationalists from the Baltic states. While Euroscepticism is a component of all parties in the RRP family, and it is quite common for RRP to regard Putin and the Russian Federation as allies, this is understandably not the case for the EKRE and the National Alliance. However, the Bauska Declaration (2013) makes it abundantly clear that both parties are against a European superstate and advocate for control of their borders.³⁹ Also, all the signatories are opposed to mass migration. A notable difference from many other RRP is their vocal opposition to Russia – in terms of both a resurgent Russia threatening the territorial sovereignty of the Baltic States and the former USSR.⁴⁰

The Lithuanian Nationalist Union (*Lietuvių tautininkų ir respublikonų sąjunga*, LTS in Lithuanian) was excluded from our sample as it does not wield any significant political power and is not represented at the national level. Both the EKRE and the National Alliance have been part of coalition governments in Estonia and Latvia, respectively, and have well-functioning youth organizations.

The Baltic cases

The Baltic Sea region is by no means an exception when it comes to the new wave of far-right political parties. In this section we will review the main youth organizations of RRP in the region.

In Latvia, the far-right niche is filled by the National Alliance (*Nacionālā apvienība*, NA), which is a merger between 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). Concerning the NA, questions have been raised as to whether the NA is an RRP⁴¹. It seems that the classification of TB/LNNK attracts the most controversy as it has been described as a “nationalist right-wing” party,⁴² and previously a radical party, although non-radical from the mid-1990s onwards.⁴³ Others have classified TB/LNNK as a “radical right party”⁴⁴. The TB/LNNK's ideology has been described as a form of “romantic ultranationalism”⁴⁵. In short, it is possible that TB/LNNK's ideological focus had shifted over time, but it is argued here that until its merger with VL, it fulfilled the criteria of being classified as an RRP.

The classification of VL has been less contentious. Although VL did not exist as a political party in 2005, it (as an independent youth organization) was described as “racist”.⁴⁶ After VL was registered as a political party in 2006, it was classified as an “extreme-right” party,⁴⁷ or “right-wing nationalist”.⁴⁸ All in all, according to the definitions provided in the section describing the main features of RRP, this paper follows the more up-to-date contributions that regard the NA as a populist variant of RRP.⁴⁹

AFTER VL AND TB/LNNK joined in an electoral alliance “National Alliance VL/TB-LNNK” in 2010, over a period of one year, the mainstream parties imposed a *cordon sanitaire* against the then two parties VL and TB/LNNK. However, after the snap elections in 2011, the balance of power in Latvia's parliament changed and the previously doubt-ridden coalition partners asked the then newly formed NA to join in a coalition government. It seems that the presence of the “old guard” from TB/LNNK – which had been a coalition partner in almost all governments since the late 1990s – in the NA, provided a “reputational shield” to the younger politicians, with a background in VL. TB/LNNK had a presence in the European Parliament as a member of the Euro-

pean political party “Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists” (since 2018, European Conservatives and Reformists Party, ECRP) and its political party group in the European Parliament European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). Moreover, it had previously held ministerial positions in numerous Latvian cabinets. Having such a reputational shield meant that the NA could lean on it when their more radical political positions were called into question.

NAJO was established in 2013, and while its beginnings were rather informal – as a youth group in the mother party – with various activities aimed at engaging party youth, it was established as a more formal organization in 2015 when the Statutes of NAJO were adopted by the board of NA. Ideologically, NAJO and the NA seem to be united in support of “Latvian values”, and the Statutes of NAJO set out the organization's aims as follows:

1.4.1 Implementation of VL-TB/LNNK's policy, popularization of [its] positions and ideas, actualization of national, social, educational and cultural issues in a wider society, defense of the interests of the Latvian people, support for the Latvian value system and morality, cultivation of Latvian traditions and understanding of the Latvian way of life.⁵⁰

NAJO's vision is summed up in Section 1.4.2:

The safe future of a national, democratic and economically thriving State of Latvia in the community of European states as a guarantee for the existence, development and human welfare of the Latvian nation.⁵¹

The ideological congruence was probably reinforced by the fact that one of the founders of NAJO, Raivis Zeltīts, was appointed Secretary General of the NA in November 2014.⁵² This position gave him the opportunity to serve as an informal link between NAJO and the mother party. Zeltīts was the key figure behind a transnational nationalist website, *The New Nationalism* (later *The New Prometheism*). The other primary contributor to this site is

“THE BALTIC SEA REGION IS BY NO MEANS AN EXCEPTION WHEN IT COMES TO THE NEW WAVE OF FAR-RIGHT POLITICAL PARTIES.”

another NAJO member, Dace Kalnina. This site existed for nationalists in the Intermarium Region, which is Central and Eastern Europe from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Given that Zeltīts was Secretary General of the mother party until early 2020, it is likely that this was accepted by other party leaders, as well as NAJO.

The case of the youth organization of the National Alliance

Being an integrated part of its mother party, the NA, NAJO could be expected to have formal links with other like-minded parties in the European Parliament and their youth organizations. The NA is part of the parliamentary party group European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and its Europarty ECR Party which unites, among its 42 members, such parties as the British Conservative Party, the Polish governing party Law and Justice, Spanish Vox, the Dutch Forum for Democracy and the Sweden Democrats. NAJO has been a member of European Young Conservatives (EYC), a group comprising the youth organizations of European conservative parties,⁵³ which has had a non-exclusive relation with the ECR Party. Its current membership status is not clear, however. Although it was listed as one of the members as late as 2017,⁵⁴ NAJO is no longer an active member but has not notified the EYC of its withdrawal from the EYC⁵⁵. Although it is not clear why this has happened, it may be to do with the withdrawal of the Finns Party Youth (*Perussuomalaiset Nuoret*, PSN) from the EYC and the expulsion of SÄ in 2017. Both organizations criticized the actions of the government of Turkey, especially its human rights abuses.⁵⁶ As will be later shown, NAJO has relatively close ties with Blue Awakening, and it is possible that the inaction of NAJO may be a coordinated response to the exclusion of SÄ from the EYC.

BASED ON AN ANALYSIS of the interview data and photographs published on the social media platforms Twitter and Facebook in October and November 2019, it seems that NAJO had three primary transnational contacts: the SÄ in Estonia, the Lithuanian National Youth Union (*Lietuvių tautinio jaunimo sąjunga*, LTJS) and various Ukrainian right-wing youth politicians from both the All-Ukrainian Union “Freedom” (*Всеукраїнське об’єднання «Свобода»*, Svoboda) and the National Corps (Національний корпус, NC). In 2018, NAJO made contact with the Finnish PSN, which would appear to be the fourth organizational partner.

In general, it seems that the forging and maintaining of transnational contacts are not a major part of NAJO’s activities. As Raivis Zeltīts, the then chair of NAJO⁵⁷, admitted:

[We] have some type of acquaintance, [we] have contacts, but, well, we may not have time for such a systematic [cooperation]. In general, everyone is busy with the current matters of their own country, thus it happens, well, in such a natural way, that we have the closest contact with the countries that are the closest [to us geographically]. The Baltics, the Baltic Sea region.⁵⁸

In this segment, Zeltīts not only describes NAJO’s contacts with

its partners in other countries as unsystematic, he also touches on the theme of geographical proximity as being an important criterion for cooperation. This theme was also raised by Ginta Vilcāne, the former chair of NAJO:

We certainly cooperate more with our neighbors [laughs] the Estonians and Lithuanians [...] And [we] also have contacts with Ukrainians [...] with the representatives of Svoboda, there we have a regular information exchange, and they have attended our major events, the torchlight procession on November 18. We, in turn, try to visit Estonia and Lithuania every year.⁵⁹

When she was asked to specify the Lithuanian party to which its partner youth organization is affiliated, Vilcāne declined to answer. Instead, she seemed to indicate that NAJO has a closer relationship with SÄ in Estonia than with the LTJS in Lithuania.

Asked to characterize the transnational contacts regarding the type of contacts (visits, participation in various events, etc.), Vilcāne described them as follows:

Well, yes, there are common events, visits to events, conferences. They invite us, we invite them, they attend our major congresses, and then we invite [them] to different types of events that happen in our country or attend events in their country. We also communicate online.⁶⁰

Zeltīts also confirmed that the transnational contacts are primarily about visits and communication with each other. However, Zeltīts noted that NAJO tries to follow its partners’ performances in electoral campaigns and to “draw some conclusions” and “communicate” with its partners.⁶¹ Asked about whether transnational contacts are important to NAJO and whether he thinks it is important to work on them in the future, he stated:

It’s important [to have transnational contacts], yes, definitely, because [...] [it’s] always important [inaudible] a larger context to what is happening and... [it] is always useful to obtain information and learn from others [...] in order to develop [our organization]. So yes, we definitely consider this to be [an] important [matter] and [...] we move in that direction, we make an effort to broaden these contacts.⁶²

In addition, when prompted, Zeltīts answered that he does not have “private” relations with his transnational contacts. However, he noted that, in his view, it is not important to formally belong to a certain community or group. The aim of transnational contacts is to establish “friendly relations” that are based on the “understanding about a type of common values” and “common interests”⁶³.

Ukraine

The events in Kyiv and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 sent shock waves throughout Latvia, and the NA, as an integral part of

the Latvian coalition government, took a sympathetic approach to the post-Maidan Ukrainian government. The official account of NAJO (Twitter handle: @NA_Jaunatne; this account is suspended) retweeted tweets related to Ukraine on at least three occasions. On one occasion, NAJO retweeted a tweet by Ritvars Eglājs⁶⁴ who had retweeted UNHCR's (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) tweet on internal refugees in Ukraine, which included a map of Ukraine. Eglājs' response to comment on this tweet was: "Real refugees do not flee miles and miles away." (*Īsti bēgļi nebēg pāri trejdeviņām zemēm.*)⁶⁵ On January 4, 2016, NAJO retweeted a tweet by Dace Kalniņa (Twitter handle: @DaceKalnina; this account has been deleted), a NAJO activist, who had posted four photos from what seemed to be three demonstrations of solidarity with Ukraine organized in the three Baltic capitals (the photos were followed by the text: "This evening in Rīga, Vilnius, Tallinn. #don't_forget_ukraine"), and, as one of the demonstrations was organized outside the Ukrainian embassy in Riga, it attracted the attention of Yevhen Perebynis, the then Ambassador of Ukraine in Latvia, who retweeted photos from the event with the following text: "Latvian youth stand in solidarity with Ukraine today at the Embassy in its fight against Russian aggression" (Латвійська молодь сьогодні провела біля Посольства акцію солідарності з Україною в її боротьбі проти агресії Росії).⁶⁶ The ambassador's tweet was subsequently retweeted in the official account of NAJO.

THE SOLIDARITY WITH Ukraine was demonstrated in other ways, too.

For instance, on August 23, 2015 and 2016, some female activists of NAJO were photographed posing at the Statue of Independence in Riga, clad in the traditional costumes of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine, as part of events by the NA and NAJO to commemorate the "Baltic Way", an iconic event in 1989 when thousands of Baltic people formed a human chain in protest at the Soviet regime and in commemoration of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact⁶⁷. In the 2015 event a tweet by the user "Впертий Націоналіст" [The Stubborn Nationalist] shows a photo of four female activists in Ukrainian, Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian ethnic costumes posing with Egīls Levits, the then Member of the European Court of Justice (now – the President of State) with the Statue of Liberty in the background; the caption reads: "Україна, Латвія, Литва, Естонія – цьогорічний День "Балтійського шляху" у Латвії" [Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia – this year's Baltic Way Day in Latvia].⁶⁸ While it is not clear from the textual and photographic evidence that these female activists were Ukrainian, it is still a clear demonstration of solidarity with Ukraine.

Although Vilcāne claimed that NAJO had cooperated with Svoboda youth politicians, no photographic or textual evidence could be found to support this claim. Some photographic and textual evidence shows that NAJO had been in touch with Olga

Semenyaka, representative of the Ukrainian far-right party the "National Corps". In Bauska, in September 2018, Semenyaka gave a speech "The 3rd millennium Intermarium as a key to the Greater Europe of Free Nations" on the idea of Intermarium, thanking the Latvian team behind the *The New Nationalism* website – Dace Kalniņa and Raivis Zeltīts – for providing a platform for discussions about Intermarium.⁶⁹

Lithuania

There is some evidence to suggest that NAJO has been in contact with the Lithuanian National Youth Union (LTJS). For instance, Raivis Zeltīts participated with Lithuanian nationalist activists in the march celebrating Lithuania's Independence Day on February 16, 2015. Although his Twitter message did not specify either who Zeltīts had met or the identity of the people in the photographs, Zeltīts explained in the tweet that he had met with "Lithuania's nationalists" to celebrate Lithuania's independence⁷⁰. A similar tweet was posted by the official account of NAJO a year later, on February 17, 2016, and this time the tweet contained a link to a Facebook photo album, which included the identity of the organizers of the march – LTJS.⁷¹

On September 21, 2015, the official account of NAJO retweeted a tweet by the then NAJO activist, later the chair, Ginta Vilcāne, who posted a photo, showing a fire, flags and people, with the following text (translated into Latvian by PT): "The Day of Baltic Unity was spent with brother Lithuanians, observing the

traditions of ancestors. @NA_jaunatne."⁷²

The leader of the LTJS, Mindaugas Sidaravičius, is listed as following Raivis Zeltīts on Twitter, but little is known about their interactions.⁷³

Estonia

Most evidence, both textual and photographic, indicates that NAJO's main international partner is the Blue Awakening (SÄ). Not only has the evidence shown that NAJO activists have visited the congress of the EKRE, the mother party of SÄ, or an NA MP tweeting about the electoral success of EKRE,⁷⁴ there is photographic evidence that also shows that NAJO activists visited SÄ's torchlight processions, for instance, in 2018, when SÄ organized a torchlight procession to celebrate Estonia's Centennial Jubilee.⁷⁵

Participation in these large "memorial events" seems to bring together different youth activists from different countries. At least one of the photos taken at the Centennial Jubilee torchlight procession shows not only Estonian flags, but also the flags of Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden. In another photo, Christian Mattsson from the Swedish extreme right-wing youth organization Nordic Youth (*Nordisk ungdom*, NU) stands shoulder to shoulder with Dace Kalniņa, a NAJO activist.

However, there are also other types of transnational interac-

"[...] THE NA, AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE LATVIAN COALITION GOVERNMENT, TOOK A SYMPATHETIC APPROACH TO THE POST-MAIDAN UKRAINIAN GOVERNMENT."

tions between NAJO activists and their Estonian counterparts. On June 11, 2015, Dace Kalniņa, a NAJO activist, tweeted a photo from an Estonian anti-immigration demonstration, seemingly organized by the EKRE (at least two EKRE flags were discernible in the photo): “Yesterday, many thousands of Estonians protested against the government’s decision to agree on a ‘voluntary’ refugee quota”.⁷⁶ On February 24, 2016, NAJO posted a comment on its Facebook page congratulating SÄ on the Independence Day of Estonia.⁷⁷

The Finns Party Youth

In December 2018, NAJO made formal contact with the Finns Party Youth (PSN), which led to the PSN visiting Latvia. While the interviews only touched upon this theme, the photographic evidence posted on Twitter and Facebook suggests that it was a high level visit. From the PSN, the first vice-chair of the board (also responsible for international relations) Liina Veronica Isto, the third vice-chair Toni Jalonen, and Henri Hautamäki, a member of the board and responsible for national defense and security policy, were present. Another photo makes it evident that Antti Eskelinen (board member of the youth wing of the Finns Party) was also present at this meeting. From NAJO’s side, both the chair and members of the board were present at the meeting.⁷⁸

In July 2019, NAJO reciprocated the visit and sent a delegation to Finland. Both the chair and the members of the board posed at the monument of Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim and the twitter message reads as follows: “Visiting @PS_Nuoret, NA youth became acquainted with both the past and present Finland. A valuable and impressive weekend.”⁷⁹

Other transnational interactions

It seems that NAJO has no transnational interactions with other actors than those discussed above, at least, none of the interactions that were found were of a regular nature. They are looser in nature, because in most cases they were retweets of messages penned by other actors. Thematically, most of the transnational interactions described below revolved around immigration (the consequences of it and the resistance to it) and only one of the retweets had an anti-abortion theme, while another tweet had a historical theme. I also describe an article about Baltic history in a conservative news site run by a French-Hungarian far-right activist.

First, while NAJO seems to position itself as conservative with regards to family and reproductive issues, we found only one example of retweeting a message penned by a foreign actor. In June 2015, the official account of NAJO retweeted a tweet by the National Right to Life Committee, which is described as the oldest and largest anti-abortion organization in the USA. The tweet contained the following message: “Woman rejects abor-

tion after she sees her baby on ultrasound <http://nrlc.cc/1f2MRly#prolife>”.⁸⁰ The tweet contains a link to the story and a photo of what appears to be an ultrasound of a fetus.

Second, most transnational interactions about the issue of immigration took place in the fall of 2015 at the height of the migration crisis. It seems that some of the interactions were initiated by NAJO itself, by expressing its support of the Hungarian migration policy in 2015. On October 1, 2015, Ēriks Eriksons published a YouTube video entitled “Tavaszi szél vizet áraszt” [The spring wind makes the waters rise], which depicted nine members of NAJO holding a sign saying “Kösz” [Thank you] and singing the Hungarian folk song “Tavaszi szél vizet áraszt”.⁸¹ The description field of the YouTube video described it as follows: “Latvian National Alliance Party supports Hungary in adopting a responsible immigration policy.”⁸² The text was provided in Latvian, Hungarian and English. The official account of NAJO spread on Twitter, receiving 15 retweets and 11 likes⁸³. On October 5, 2019, the Hungarian pro-government media outlet *Hungary Today* published a news article on the video “Latvian Youths Pay Tribute To

Hungary’s ‘Responsible’ Immigration Policy By Singing Famous Folk Song – Video!” recounting that this event was staged in front of the Hungarian embassy in Riga and that the video had, in just a matter of days, attracted around 13,000 views.⁸⁴

THIS INTEREST IN Hungarian immigration policy continued throughout 2015, even if it did not involve any direct transnational interactions on the part of NAJO. On October 30, 2015, the official account of NAJO retweeted a

tweet by Ritvars Eglājs, who had retweeted Breitbart London’s tweet with the comment “Who would have thought of it – fences do work!” [Kas to būtu domājis – žogi darbojas!].⁸⁵ The original tweet of Breitbart London reported that “Hungarian Border Fence So Effective Illegal Immigrants Are Now At Pre Migrant-Crisis Levels”, providing a link to its news story.

Also, later that year, the official account of NAJO retweeted another tweet by R. Eglājs who had retweeted a tweet penned by the user “The Real Goat Says” with the comment: “Racist French authorities seize the Muslim prayer objects” [*Rasistiskās Francijas varas iestādes konfiscē musulmaņu lūgšanu piederumus*].⁸⁶ The original tweet by “The Real Goat Says” contained the following text: “look what the French found in the mosques”, linking to two other tweets and a news article by *France 24*. None of the links worked when the data were collected.

In October 2015, the official account of NAJO retweeted a tweet by signature “Fjordman” (pseudonym of Norwegian far-right blogger Peder Are Nøstvold Jensen): “Europe: Desperate Muslim ‘refugees’ complain about slow Internet connection and lack of money to buy cigarettes”.⁸⁷ The tweet linked to a YouTube video, which was not available when the data were collected in 2019.

“THE EDITORIAL LINE IS ‘UNAPOLOGETICALLY NATIONALIST’ AND IS BASED ON OPPOSITION TO THE ‘AGGRESSION OF THE KREMLIN’ AND ‘LEFTIST MULTICULTURALISM.’”

In late 2015, the official account of NAJO retweeted a tweet by the signature “Norse Vår” stating: “More than 40,000 hear various anti-Islam speakers at biggest anti-Islam rally held in Europe to date. #edl #pegida”.⁸⁸ The tweet contains a picture of a crowd, with some people holding flags of Germany and other countries, gathered around what seems to be a fire. The hashtags (#edl and #pegida) are also significant and comprise the acronyms EDL – meaning English Defence League – and PEGIDA – meaning Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident [*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*]. The two organizations, with their origins in the United Kingdom and Germany respectively, have been described as being anti-Muslim and far right.

Third, although NAJO regularly tweets about various historical events, only one example of a transnational interaction on a historical theme was found. In October 2015, the official account of NAJO retweeted a tweet by user “Régi Képek|Old Pics”: October 23, 1956. #Hungary stands up to Soviet Oppressors. #hungarianrevolution #1956 @AmerikaiMagyar @otmarianna”,⁸⁹ which also contained four apparently historical pictures from the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

Finally, there is at least one example of an NAJO member interacting with French-Hungarian media outlet *Visegrad Post*. In 2016, Dace Kalnina published an article called “The Baltic Way” on the historical theme of the 1989 demonstration when a human chain was formed in solidarity for Baltic independence from the Soviet Union.⁹⁰ The *Visegrad Post* states that it is funded by donations, that its editorial line is “conservative and Christian” and that it represents the “view point of Central Europeans”.⁹¹ The *Visegrad Post*’s editor-in-chief Ferenc Almássy has been described as a European identitarian who is waging a struggle against mainstream media outlets.⁹² In an interview, Ferenc Almássy listed the French far-right media outlet *TV Libertés* as one of its collaborating partners and stated that the *Visegrad Post* has received government support from Hungary.⁹³

Indirect transnational interactions: *The New Nationalism*

In 2016, the then former chair of NAJO, by now the Secretary General of the NA, Raivis Zeltīts, established the *The New Nationalism* website to serve as a “platform for national conservatives in Europe, with the focus on the Intermarium Region”.⁹⁴ More specifically, the website defines its main function as being a “national-conservative news site for the promotion of new forms of nationalist theory and practice, and for a new geopolitical concept of Intermarium”.⁹⁵ The editorial line is “unapologetically nationalist” and is based on opposition to the “aggression of the Kremlin” and “leftist multiculturalism”.⁹⁶ This is an expansion of the Bauska Declaration in an attempt to move beyond the Baltics to create a site for all nationalists in the region.

The website is organized along six tabs with their respective content (i.e. articles), which fall into one of (or into several of) the following categories (tabs): home, news, nationalism, Intermarium, videos and “members’ area” (which is only accessible to registered members). Registered members can leave a comment

below the articles. The website is run by an editor – who also publishes articles – and who would appear to be Kristaps Gulbis (as his articles carry the tag “editor”), who served as Deputy Chair of NAJO in 2019 when data were collected and went on to become the Chair of NAJO in 2020. While we do not have any data on the readership numbers for *The New Nationalism*, 2621 people were following the website’s Facebook page in 2019.⁹⁷

AMONG OTHER ITEMS, the website publishes interviews with various nationalist and far-right activists. For instance, on July 15, 2019, *The New Nationalism* published Raivis Zeltīts’ interview with Olga Semenyaka,⁹⁸ the international secretary of the Ukrainian political party National Corps, which has its origins in the Azov Battalion of the Ukrainian National Guard.⁹⁹ On July 17, 2019, Dace Kalniņa’s interview with Gustav Kasselstrand, chair of Alternative for Sweden (*Alternativet för Sverige*, AfS) was published.¹⁰⁰ The same author published an interview with Alexander Schleyer, one of the leaders of the initiative “Defend Europe” targeted at the activities of the humanitarian NGOs in the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁰¹ On August 1, 2019, Zeltīts published his interview with Liina Veronica Isto, First Vice-Chair of the Finns Party Youth.¹⁰² Also, an interview was published on the website with Alvaro Peñas, activist in the Spanish party Vox.¹⁰³ While Vox and the Finns Party (consequently its youth wing, too) are the NA’s partner parties in the ECR, the political party group in the European Parliament, the AfS, does not have such links with the ECR. Moreover, until 2017, Schleyer served as an assistant to an Austrian MP from the Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*) – which, at the European level, is part of the European political party “Identity and Democracy Party” – and more recently he has been linked with the far-right Austrian Identitarian Movement (*Identitare Bewegung Österreich*, IB).¹⁰⁴

In short, some of the articles on *The New Nationalism* showed that, at the very least, NAJO members (if not NAJO as an organization) had a higher number of transnational interactions with various nationalist and far-right activists and leaders than was revealed by the interviews with the two leaders of NAJO and other sources of data. While some of NAJO’s contacts are from a similar ideological background as the NA (Isto from the PNS and Peñas from Vox), others are from a more radical, even identitarian background (e.g., Kasselstrand from the AfS and Schleyer from the IB).

The case of Blue Awakening

Blue Awakening was established in 2012 by its former chair and current EKRE MP, Ruuben Kaalep. SÄ elects a board comprising four board members and a chair, who is elected by the board.¹⁰⁵ The position of chair is largely a representative position and the board functions as a collective leadership.¹⁰⁶ However, it was evident in the interviews that Ruuben Kaalep was the driving force behind SÄ.¹⁰⁷ Tasks are divided among members and there are no titular positions such as secretary, or treasurer, aside from the chair. There are around 127 active members, and the group is continuously growing.

Transnational relations with other nationalist youth organiza-

tions and various types of political and metapolitical actors is an important component of SÄ. Two members of SÄ specifically handled this, Kaalep and Fedor Stomakhin, with Kaalep being replaced by Rantanen in this capacity. Transnational networks are a high priority for SÄ as it regards transnational contacts as being necessary because it views nationalism and issues important to nationalists such as protecting culture and borders as a pan-European problem that is better addressed in unity. Both interviewees mentioned that individual parties would not be successful in achieving their goals if they did not work together. SÄ board member Fedor Stomakhin sees transnational links as national, international or meta-national and mentions that when members of youth transnational networks come to power it will be geopolitically and diplomatically advantageous for their existing networks to also be in power.¹⁰⁸ Further, it was emphasized that online right-wing communities were a source of strength for their members and that some of them are from such online communities.¹⁰⁹

The functioning of transnational relations and associated groups

In keeping with our second expectation, the YOs with which SÄ has had the most contact, as well as the longest standing, are NAJO, LTJS and PSN. However, it is of significance that our first expectation – that youth organizations that are similar in terms of their political goals, ideological profiles and values are more likely to engage in transnational interactions with each other – is very obvious in the case of SÄ and to a greater extent than with NAJO. SÄ also has connections with the Conservative Political Action Coalition (CPAC), USA. This is a growing trend for much of the radical right, which points to its mainstreaming.¹¹⁰

The group that was described as being the closest friend of SÄ is Kryptis, a Lithuanian youth organization not currently linked to any established political party. The other groups that have transnational linkages are the Azov Battalion, the National Corps, the All-Polish Youth, as well as some other smaller groups in Poland which were not mentioned by name, Jobbik and Our Homeland Movement in Hungary,¹¹¹ Lega Subelpena from Italy, several figures from the American alt-right, the London Forum, as well as groups in Germany, France, Croatia and “all over Europe”.¹¹²

The main transnational activities involve attending nationalist events in other countries, as well as hosting transnational contacts for Estonian Independence Day and the ensuing torchlight procession, as well as conferences. SÄ has attended Independence Day marches in Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Finland. SÄ got the idea to hold a torchlight procession on the eve of Estonian independence from its Latvian contacts, and, in turn, the Lithuanian contacts started to hold the same event because of SÄ, thereby constituting an important aspect of transnationalism.¹¹³

The other primary activity for transnational networks is conferences. SÄ members speak at conferences abroad, as well as holding the Etnofutur conference in Estonia on the day before the Independence Day march. This particular conference attracts speakers from numerous far-right organizations, as well as the alt-right. The issues discussed all revolve around identity and ethnonationalism.

Discussion: Preliminary comparison of NAJO and SÄ

It seems that the commonalities of NAJO and SÄ can be easily identified. Both of the YOs have had transnational interactions with other YOs of RRP or YOs that are not affiliated with a specific political party. It seems that none of the two organizations have functioning relations with the European Young Conservatives (EYC), the affiliated YO of the ECR Party at the European level. While SÄ was excluded from the EYC in 2017, NAJO is formally a member of the EYC, but does not interact with it. Instead, the two YOs have forged their own (at least) partially overlapping bilateral networks of transnational contacts. Both SÄ and NAJO cooperate with each other, and both have established cooperation with the Finnish PSN, Lithuanian LTJS and Ukrainian National Corps. The bilateral transnational contacts comprise various visits to each organization to participate in commemorative events, congresses or specific seminars/conferences. There also seems to be a certain – but not very distinct – affective dimension to these events, for instance, demonstrating solidarity with Ukrainian activists fighting against Russia's aggression, but also more private visits.

There would also appear to be certain differences between the organizations. NAJO activists have established – most likely with explicit or implicit consent from the mother party – an online platform for nationalist activists in the region. *The New Nationalism* website (later *The New Prometheism*) can be also seen as a record of their joint activities and transnational interactions. Both Zeltīts and Kalniņa interviewed a diverse group of politicians from various youth groups and political parties, which extended from more accepted political parties such as the Finns Party and Vox to more extremist parties such as the AfS and the National Corps. It also highlights the use of the tip of the iceberg metaphor because none of the more extremist parties were mentioned as partners in the interviews with the NAJO activists. Equally, SÄ does not seem to shy away from being open about its partners.

Taking into account the four expectations that we formulated at the beginning of this paper, it seems that both YOs seem to comply with the first and second expectation. They interacted with representatives of YOs or party politicians that were close to them in their political goals and ideological profiles and values. As outlined above, this was particularly emphasized in the interview with the chair of NAJO. The contacts and interactions seem to be more intense when the YOs and their partners are in geographical proximity. However, it is not clear how much learning has taken place as a result of transnational interactions. While *The New Nationalism* website was set up by NAJO activists to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas, it is difficult to measure how and to what extent learning has taken place and which models or strategies were adopted.

For our first three expectations, we found that they all held. Much like the Bauska Declaration, which called for the unification of Baltic nationalists, NAJO and SÄ have similar ideological profiles, values and goals, though they appear to be more on the individual level for NAJO. Our second expectation also holds,

especially for SA, as its closest contacts, as disclosed in the interviews, were from Lithuania, Latvia and Finland. Azov/National Corps is also very close to both groups and can be considered in the region, which is a key component of the Intermarium transnational network.

Our third expectation also held. The torchlight processions on the evenings of national independence days began in Latvia, were brought to Estonia by SÄ and to Lithuania by Lithuanian nationalists after witnessing the continuously growing numbers of attendees in Riga and Tallinn. Finally, in terms of the costs and benefits, our findings indicate that there are no strikingly negative costs of cooperation for SÄ and no apparent costs for NAJO,¹⁴ although this organization appears to be the more cautious about the two cases we analyzed.

Conclusion

We support our previous statement that likens our research to the tip of an iceberg. Despite the breadth of sub-topics in the literature on RRP in Europe, YOs remain an anomaly, despite the important role they play in producing future leaders of mother parties. With some exceptions,¹⁵ YOs maintain a relatively low profile compared to the media and other kinds of public exposure that RRP enjoy. It could be argued that RRP in smaller countries that are in close geographical proximity have more reason to engage in transnational activity as they are smaller in number than their counterparts in larger countries, with larger parties, such as the FPO and the RN. It was emphasized that common issues of importance, seen through the guise of a common threat or problem, gave greater grounds to engage in transnational cooperation. Data from SÄ place this emphasis in an ethnonationalist framework. Finally, it seems that SÄ is more open about the positions they hold and the groups they associate with. Further research that addresses the structure of YOs and internal ideological coherence would complement the literature. A large-N research design which included the YOs of every RRP in Europe might address the transnational aspect of this party phenomenon at large, arriving at important inferences and empirical generalizations.

However, due to the very aspect that for so long has kept RRP from forging concrete and enduring alliances with each other, a small-N, comparative case study provides a roadmap for future studies to generate studies that have a larger case selection, and which examine the transnational connections made and maintained by YOs in the RRP family. While concrete conclusions for the transnational contacts and activities of the RR throughout Europe cannot be drawn from this study, it has provided an in-depth analysis of two RRP, shedding light on the nature and extent of transnational networks of the radical right in the Baltics. These contacts are not limited to the Baltic countries and extend

outside of Central and Eastern Europe. However, most YOs and groups with which NAJO and SÄ are in contact would arguably be outside the comfort zone of many mother parties in Western Europe. As the Overton window increased in the aftermath of the 2015 migrant crisis and the ongoing culture wars, it is highly likely that “tomorrow’s leaders” who are current members of YOs will have more of an incentive to engage in transnational cooperation and will be less cautious about the company they keep. However, we found a certain degree of variance between our two cases.

Finally, although this paper is restricted to the period from 2015 to 2019, we should also mention the two organizations in the present context of Russia’s war against Ukraine. Both NAJO and SÄ – as well as their mother parties – had no ideological dissonance in condemning Russia’s war effort. In fact, NAJO and SÄ have been some of the most active supporters of Ukraine and have organized both support demonstrations for Ukraine, as well as protest demonstrations against Russia since February 24, 2022. This is in sharp contrast to sev-

eral European RRP in Western Europe, which experienced a period of soul-searching regarding how to accommodate their previously pro-Russian sympathies with the rapidly changing global environment. All in all, the two cases examined in this paper show that the two YOs were not only consistently pro-Ukraine, but they had also established at least a rudimentary network and personal ties with Ukrainian politicians. In future, it could be expected that Baltic youth leaders are well placed to serve as East European nodes in a wider pan-European network of RRP, especially if they decide to continue their political careers in the mother parties. ❌

Pēteris F Timofejevs is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Science, Umeå University.

Louis John Wierenga is a Lecturer in International Relations at the Baltic Defence College and PhD fellow at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu.

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“TRANSNATIONAL RELATIONS WITH OTHER NATIONALIST YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS AND VARIOUS TYPES OF POLITICAL AND METAPOLITICAL ACTORS IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF SÄ.”

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