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Research Article

'We Will Protect Our Countryside without a Green Deal': The Populist Radical Right and the Environment in Czechia and Slovakia

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Abstract: The electoral success of the populist radical right parties (PRRPs) is currently increasing across Europe. These parties are also increasingly commenting on environmental issues. On the one hand, the PRRPs highlight the beauty of nature and strive to preserve the landscape's traditional rural character. On the other hand, PRRPs deny global climate changes and criticise solutions to reverse these, such as the Green Deal. The study aims to explain Czech and Slovak PRRPs attitude towards environmentalism using the concepts of nationalism, globalism, and populism. The empirical analysis is based on analysing official political texts and statements by selected PRRPs in both countries. The results show that Czech and Slovak PRRPs use nature's aesthetic, symbolic and material aspects to create an image of a traditional, rural country that the nation can be proud of, and which is crucial to protect. In contrast, the PRRPs are ambivalent on global environmental change, the efforts to mitigate it and environmentalists. Finally, the PRRPs use the environmental issue for populist strategic considerations, demonstrating authenticity and creating part of a chain of equivalence.

Keywords: populist radical right, environment, nationalism, globalisation, populism, Czechia, Slovakia

Highlights:

- The Czech and Slovak PRRPs draw attention to local or national ecological problems
- The Czech PRRPs associate the environment with criticism of the European Union
- The Slovak PRRPs linked pollution and nature devastation to the Roma minority

1. Introduction

The electoral success of populist radical right parties (PRRPs) has increased in Europe over the first two decades of the 21st century. Open nativist narratives have recently also entered mainstream political and public discourses. The accomplishments of PRRPs include, among others, Marine Le Pen advancing to the second round of the French presidential election, third place for Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in the German federal election, Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti; DF) reaching their electoral peak, or the Dutch Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid; PVV) securing second place in parliamentary elections. All these triumphs of nativism took place during or shortly after the so-called refugee 'crisis' which culminated in Europe between 2015 and 2016. PRRPs have also been successful in the European Parliament elections despite their criticism of this institution. In Czechia and Slovakia, PRRPs' electoral support has increased since 2010, with new PRRPs succeeding in parliamentary elections.

The growing importance of environmental protection and global climate change in the first two decades of the 21st century is also noticeable. The European Union wants to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 via its Green Deal; countries signed onto the Paris Agreement to reduce climate change in 2016; and environmental activists such as Greta Thunberg have highlighted climate issues in the media. There is also more frequent talk about the problem of droughts, water resource and forest protection, and renewable energy use. Thus, it is unsurprising that the PRRPs are also increasingly speaking out on environmental issues.

The relationship of the European PRRPs to the environment and climate change has been the subject of relatively few studies. However, their number has been increasing in recent years. Gemenis et al. (2012) analysed the attitudes of the PRRPs in twelve countries in Western, Southern and Northern Europe. He found that, except for Greece's Popular Orthodox Rally (Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós; LAOS), all parties reject or are critical of global climate change and renewable energy. Forchtner and Lubarda (2023) analysed PRRPs positions in the European Parliament. They pointed out that the PRRPs partially reject human impact on global warming. When they do admit this, they claim the European Union cannot do anything about it because there are more significant polluters in other parts of the world. Boukala and Tountasaki (2019) analysed the attitudes of the French National Front (Le Front National; FN) towards environmentalism. They found that the FN bases its green policy on highlighting the French countryside, the protection of local products and the fight against globalism. Vihma et al. (2021) analysed the environmental position of PRRPs in Denmark, Finland and Sweden and suggested that environmental attitudes of the PRRPs could be divided into three political strategies: climate science denialism ('climate change is not real'), climate policy nationalism ('it is not our problem') and climate policy conservatism ('let's do it only if it is cheap'). Studies into the DF show that the party does support renewable energy but only in the context of achieving energy self-sufficiency for Denmark (Forchtner & Kølvrå, 2015; Kølvrå, 2019). DF also considers measures against global warming unnecessary because Denmark produces a small amount of CO₂ emissions compared to other countries; therefore, investing money and time into such measures makes no sense. Studies in Germany (Boecher et al., 2022; Forchtner & Özvatan, 2019; Jeffries, 2017; Küppers, 2022; Otteni &

Weisskircher, 2022) show that AfD also denies climate change, strongly supports coal and nuclear power plants, is critical of renewable energy sources and highlights the protection of German nature and forests. In contrast, the Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs; FPÖ) tries to protect its country by promoting renewable energy sources, rejecting the use of glyphosate in agriculture and holding a strongly negative attitude toward nuclear power, as Voss (2019) and Tosun and Debus (2021) have shown in their studies.

There are even fewer publications on the attitude of the PRRPs towards the environment in the post-socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe. The most common studies deal with Poland (Bennett & Kwiatkowski, 2019; Fuksiewicz & Klein, 2014; Riedel, 2021; Szulecki, 2017), where they mainly discuss the attitude of the governing party, Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość; PiS). When in opposition, the party strongly supported coal power and rejected renewable energy sources. Since coming to power in 2015, PiS has had to maintain some form of renewable energy policy under pressure from the European Union, but it remains critical. Tarant (2019) examined this issue in Czechia. He studied the political positions of various PRRPs up to 2017 and showed that the PRRPs in Czechia support nuclear power plants, are critical of renewable energy sources and reject global warming or human influence in increasing it. In Hungary, the relationship between environmentalism and the PRRP, the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom; Jobbik), was discussed by Kyriazi (2019). Jobbik positions itself as the only true environmentalist party because it sees the protection of nature as an expression of patriotism. However, it regards attempts to reduce global climate problems as a globalist threat. Doiciar and Crețan (2021) partially analysed environmental attitudes of Alliance for the Union of Romanians (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor; AUR). AUR presents itself as a strong critic of the export of Romanian grains and the import of poor-quality food products. It also supports the protection of nature by banning the shooting of bears. In other post-socialist states, such as Slovakia, a deep analysis of the relationship between the PRRPs and the environment is lacking. Certainly, this topic deserves more attention as well as studies comparing attitudes in several countries, of which there are only a few.

From literature review it is visible that the PRRPs have divergent attitudes toward the environment. That can be seen, for example, in the case of electricity generation. While some parties support coal or nuclear power and reject renewables entirely, other PRRPs accept renewables as a possible source for energy self-sufficiency, and the last group rejects nuclear power entirely and prefers renewables exclusively. However, there are several points where the PRRPs in Europe share the same attitudes towards environmentalism. One of them is highlighting the national nature and the countryside and pointing out the importance of their protection. The second one is critics of globalisation, which adversely affects parties' attitudes toward global environmental problems. Moreover, another is the negative attitude of the parties towards the functioning of the European Union, which leads to criticism of the European Union's environmental policy and an overall negative attitude towards environmental issues.

There are three concepts of how to view the relationship between the PRRPs and environmentalism. Forchtner and Kølvråa (2015) argue that the PRRPs' divergent attitudes towards the protection of national landscapes and global climate change are rooted in ideological principles of nationalism. The second concept views the PRRPs and the environment from a globalist perspective. Lockwood (2018) argues that the PRRPs' relationship with environmental issues relies on the economic and political marginalisation of those left behind due to globalisation and technological change. This group of people are sensitive to environmental issues because cosmopolitan elites often mention them. The third concept links them through populism. Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach (2021) argue that the PRRPs use environmental issues for populist strategic considerations. Kazharski (2018) suggests that nature and environmentalism are one topic which creates a populist chain of equivalence. Kazharski and Makarychev (2020) argue that pivoting to nature is a strategy among these parties to perform authenticity.

Based on a systematic analysis of PRRPs materials in post-socialist Czechia and Slovakia, this study aims to show all three of the above concepts in which PRRPs and environmentalism are linked. I hope to contribute to studying PRRPs stances on the environment in three ways. First, I will shed light on this little-researched area of PRRPs view on environmental issues in post-socialist states. Second, I will provide insight into the Czech and Slovak PRRPs, using them as cases to explore how ideological fundamentals influence their political stances. Finally, I will highlight the importance of nationalism, globalism and populism concepts and their interconnectedness.

In this study, I consider the PRRPs to be those that fulfil all three of Mudde's (2007) criteria: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. I will discuss populism in section 2.3., so I will now describe the other two criteria. Nativism, according to Mudde (2007), also combines with xenophobia on the populist radical right. Thus, nativist political parties are characterised, on the one hand, by anti-immigrant attitudes and xenophobia towards minorities, whether national (e.g., Romaphobia), religious (e.g., Islamophobia) or otherwise (e.g., homophobia), and by highlighting threats to the state from outside. On the other hand, they emphasise the nation and advocate economic protectionism. Mudde (2007) does not necessarily consider the anti-democratic attitudes of parties to be the only sign of authoritarianism. He also takes authoritarianism as a belief in a strictly ordered society in which violations of this order are severely punished (Mudde 2007). The PRRPs highlight themes of criminality, harsh punishments for criminals (e.g., the establishment of the death penalty, stricter sentences, the introduction of new penalties) and the imposition of order in the state.

In the following section, I will discuss concepts in more detail, followed by a brief history of the PRRPs in Czechia and Slovakia. In the methodological section, I will justify the selection of PRRPs I have analysed. I will also describe the systematic analysis of the materials. In section five, I will present the analysis results. I will conclude by discussion and summarising how the PRRPs in Czechia and Slovakia approach the issue of environmentalism.

2. The Populist Radical Right and the Environment: Theoretical Concepts

2.1. Nationalism and environment

The first method of conceptualising the PRRPs' relationship to the environment is nationalism. Originating in the later part of the eighteenth century, there is now consensus within the literature on the definition of nationalism (Gellner, 1983; Hobsbaw, 1992). Nationalism is a political doctrine that proclaims the congruence of a political unit, the state, and a cultural unit, the nation (Mudde, 1995). Koch (1991) distinguishes two forms of nationalist political programmes. One is internal homogenisation (a nation without foreign elements), and the second is external exclusiveness (differentiation from surrounding nations and protection from outside influence, e.g., defence against globalisation or interference from other states). That is why the PRRPs emerge from nationalism and why nationalism is one of its essential features (see Mudde, 1995, 2007; Rydgren, 2007).

Some authors argue that the PRR works with the theme of nature and the environment from a nationalist perspective. Olsen (1999) argues that That is why the PRRPs emerge from nationalism ecology view the nation and its people as an ecological organism, complete and self-contained. For him, nations are unified and closed ecosystems in which people are connected to a national nature, and hence, the protection of nature is essential. According to Hamilton (2002), nationalist movements use environmental discourse to bolster the legitimacy of their grievances and widen their electoral appeal. Kulin et al. (2021) point out that nationalist ideology significantly influences PRRPs' attitudes towards the environment. Forchtner and Kølvråa (2015) argue that, on the one hand, there is an understanding of (national) state territory in material terms, which refers to limited resources and people's right to use them. On the other hand, PRRPs understand nature as a profoundly symbolic space and aesthetic object. These three dimensions—*aesthetic, symbolic and material*—provide a connection between the PRRPs and the environment.

As regards the *aesthetic dimension*, the idea of nature in nationalism is not only based on the concept of nature as something to be dominated and controlled but also on the romantic notion of its untouched beauty. Palmer (1998) argues that the appreciation and enjoyment of nature as a backdrop to everyday activities create an emotional connection between the countryside and people. As Sörlin (1999) points out, the idea of a national landscape does not include all forms of nature present in a given territory but only those chosen to represent emblematically the homeland's beauty. National parks or natural monuments, as well as the foregrounding of beautiful national landscapes in many national anthems, are institutional expressions of such selectivity. The *aesthetic dimension* of nature in nationalism includes notions of its preservation as something beautiful and inviolable and as a right or privilege among national subjects to enjoy their landscapes. The *aesthetic dimension* is thus present whenever nature is thought of in terms of its enjoyment, as a set of pleasant places or beautiful scenery, often implicitly contrasting the natural splendour of the national landscape with the ugliness of urban or industrial modernity (Forchtner & Kølvråa, 2015).

The *symbolic dimension* of nationalist discourses on nature is linked to a community's claim to sovereignty over a particular part of the earth's surface and, hence, to the construction of its cultural distinctiveness from other communities. Thus, in the *symbolic dimension*, landscape and nature are intertwined with national character and signify the historical primacy of the national community on that territory, its cultural distinctiveness and freedom from foreign domination, influence or mixing. The *symbolic dimension* is thus present whenever nature becomes judged in terms of its significance to the community and its historical continuity or its freedom and sovereignty. This is in contrast to the domination of foreign powers, corrupt elites or non-indigenous groups (Forchtner & Kølvråa, 2015).

The last dimension is the *materialistic dimension*. Hobsbawm (1992) points out that economic nationalists look at the country with respect to the resources it provides for the population and the economy. Economic nationalists often promote ideas of self-sufficiency, especially food and energy. This ideal persists in nationalist thought and often combines material and symbolic dimensions through fears that the nation is becoming too dependent on foreign powers and resources. The *materialistic dimension* is thus present whenever nature is considered in terms of its ability to provide resources or raw materials for consumption, and, as such, whenever issues of supply and demand, economic problems and opportunities, or resource scarcity and competition serve as primary topics of discussion (Forchtner & Kølvråa, 2015).

2.2 Globalisation and environment

The second view of the PRRPs' relationship to the environment is linked to the impact of globalisation. In general, globalisation affects electoral outcomes in so far as neoliberal globalisation's economic and cultural processes cause traditional political parties on the left and right to have similar electoral agendas regarding the functioning of the state's economy. They cannot afford to deviate much from other countries should they wish to remain economically competitive (Vowles & Bean, 2006). However, Boix (1998) argues that, while the increasing globalisation of the economy is causing political parties to converge on macroeconomic policy issues, he also highlights the different strategies political parties must pursue vis-à-vis supply-side economics (e.g., through tax cuts or deregulation).

Thanks to global processes, new types of political parties are coming to the fore. According to Vowles and Bean (2006), green parties agree with certain elements of globalisation but often oppose its economic aspects. The PRRPs, in turn, are vehemently opposed to the current neoliberal global system and profiles itself as a defender of national, economic, and cultural interests (Worth, 2017). These parties are more likely to be voted for by workers and craftspeople who see them as protectors against the impacts of globalisation (Beirich & Woods 2000). These voters argue that globalisation threatens their quality of life by making local businesses unable to compete against cheap labour from other countries, leading to significant layoffs, rising unemployment and underdevelopment across the entire region. Betz (1994) calls this group of voters the 'losers of modernisation', Stefanovic (2008) calls this group the 'potential losers', whereas recent studies call this group the 'left behind' (e.g., Abou-Chadi et al., 2021; Furlong, 2019; Rothmund et al., 2020). In post-socialist countries, PRRPs tend to point to the United States or the European Union as the main culprits of globalisation, aiming to dominate these countries' economies (Ghodsee, 2008; Samardzija & Robertson, 2012).

Norris and Inglehart (2019) however suggest that economic effects are not the main reason why this group of voters has come together; rather, it is cultural. According to their cultural backlash theory, voter attitudes towards a globalised society are influenced by age. As a result of the silent revolution (for more about this concept, see Norris & Inglehart, 2019), society is becoming culturally progressive. This cultural progressiveness is evident in the younger population, but the older population feels threatened by this progressiveness, dividing society into young progressives and old conservatives. However, as Schäfer (2022) notes, the cultural backlash theory finds little empirical support, and, according to him, this theory does not hold.

As per Lockwood (2018), the structuralist approach of globalisation suggests that supporters of the PRRPs have suffered from the economic effects of globalisation and modernisation, of which climate policy now forms one element and worsens their plight. Many sectors affected by globalisation and technical change, like heavy industry and coal mining, are the most carbon intensive. Thus, left behinders are threatened by climate policies and that is a reason why the PRRPs are sceptical of global climatic changes like global warming. Studies by Tvinnereim and Ivarflatsen (2016) and Bechtel et al. (2019) confirm that workers in high-carbon industries are more hostile to the climate agenda. However, Lockwood (2018) points out some difficulties with the structuralist approach. One is that the PRRPs are also popular with groups other than left behinders. Another is that high-carbon industries are more threatened by technological change and globalisation than by climate policies. Thus, Lockwood (2018) proposed the ideological approach, which better explains why the PRRPs are so hostile to climate change.

The ideological approach of globalisation assumes the PRRPs have socially conservative and nationalist values. These values are manifested, among others, in the exclusionary and anti-egalitarian preferences of PRRPs (negative views on, e.g., multiculturalism and feminism; see Jylhä &

Hellmer 2020). This masculine, conservative aspect of the PRRPs (Coffé, 2018; Mudde, 2007) creates hostility to the climate agenda because this agenda is espoused by liberal and cosmopolitan elites threatening national and conservative interests (Hultman et al., 2019). Moreover, this approach also assumes that elites are corrupted by special interests, represented by climate scientists and environmentalists in the case of the climate agenda (Lockwood, 2018). The ideology of the PRRPs is reflected, for example, in energy policy. PRRPs try to advocate energy self-sufficiency, particularly by supporting nuclear and coal power stations. In the case of energy insufficiency, the PRRPs also partially support renewable energy sources (see Forchtner & Kølvrå, 2015; Voss, 2019).

2.3 Populism and environment

The third concept is populism. The notion of populism has been used a lot in recent academic publications, but there is no consensus on a precise definition of the term. Different authors define populism as an ideology, a movement or a syndrome. For example, Kazharski and Makarychev (2020) understand populism as a performative and transgressive political style which cannot be defined in ideological terms. However, in the literature, populism is most often characterised as a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde, 2007; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Rydgren, 2007; Stanley, 2011). In this sense, it is populism that influences the attitude of some political parties towards environmental issues (Huber, 2020; Vihma et al., 2021).

There are several perspectives as to how populism influences attitudes towards nature and the climate. Buzogány and Mohamad-Klotzbach (2021) state that the PRRPs use environmental issues for populist strategic considerations. These considerations can be seen as cynical reactions designed to maximise support, either by attracting new voters or by reacting to the increasing success of other parties, such as green parties. The PRRPs are here taking a stance on environmental issues to satisfy its voters (Tosun & Debus, 2021), claiming that their perspective is grounded in common sense and general will (Boecher et al., 2022). Kazharski (2018) suggests that nature and the environment are part of a distinctly populist strategy of building an integral enemy through chains of equivalence. This perspective views people as represented by chains of equivalence that contain several unsatisfied demands, but each demand has something in common with the others. Thus, it is not possible to comment on the topic of environmentalism without considering other topics related to it. Kazharski and Makarychev (2020) discuss the pivot to nature as a strategy for performing authenticity, with the quest for authenticity being the defining feature of populism as a political style. The PRRPs try to use various actions related to nature to demonstrate authenticity and tradition outside institutionalised politics.

3. The History of the Populist Radical Right in Czechia and Slovakia

Before presenting the relations between the PRRPs and environmentalism, it is first necessary to briefly introduce the PRRPs’ history in Czechia and Slovakia. Although the first fascist parties had already appeared with varying political success during the First Czechoslovak Republic (see, for more information, Krivý et al., 1996; Kostelecký et al., 2014), after 1945, these parties were banned until the fall of the socialist regime in 1989.

Although Czechia and Slovakia were a single state until 1993, the development of the PRR’s popularity and history differed. In the 1990s, the Rally for the Republic—Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (Sdružení pro republiku—Republikánská strana Československa; SPR-RSČ) was a successful PRRP in Czechia. Its chairman was the former Communist censor, Miroslav Sládek. The party was characterised by strongly anti-Roma rhetoric, opposition to the Czech entry into the European Union and NATO and demands for the annexation of Carpathian Ruthenia to Czechoslovakia and, respectively, to Czechia. Economically, the party opposed the privatisation of state companies and supported investment in rural development and housing construction (Mareš, 2003). However, after the party failed in the 1998 elections, no other PRRP was able to enter parliament again until 2013.

The most notable PRRP in this period was the Workers’ Party (Dělnická strana; DS), which continued the policies of SPR-RSČ because its chairman was former Republican Party member Tomáš Vandas. Under his leadership, the party proclaimed it was against corruption and political elites, demanded leaving the European Union and NATO, fitted itself as a defender of the traditional family and used strong anti-Roma and anti-migrant rhetoric (Mareš, 2012). Because of its extremist views, the party was banned, but Tomáš Vandas went on to find its successor, the Workers’ Party of Social Justice (Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti; DSSS).

This situation changed after the 2013 elections when a new PRRP, the Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit přímé demokracie), entered parliament. This party sought to promote the principles of direct democracy and largely criticised the functioning of the government and the European Union. After the party chairman Tomio Okamura left, he established a new political party, Freedom and Direct Democracy (Svoboda a přímá demokracie; SPD). SPD has a similar program to Dawn’s but is more concerned with immigration and Islamisation.

A new political party, the Free Bloc (VOLNÝ blok), created after the departure of some SPD members and led by Ľubomír Volný, also ran in the 2021 parliamentary elections but was unsuccessful. The Free Bloc profiled itself as Eurosceptic and nationalist. It called for a withdrawal from the European Union and NATO, defined itself against ‘Western progressivism’ and criticised the approach to the coronavirus pandemic.

The oldest and longest-running PRRP in Slovakia is the Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana; SNS). SNS is the oldest Slovakian party; it was founded in 1871 but in 1938 was defunct. From its refounding in 1990, SNS was one of the few political entities that demanded Slovakia’s independence from Czechoslovakia (Žatkuliak, 2004). However, the party became much more radicalised in 1994 when Ján Slota became the party’s chairman. He promoted patriotic, nationalistic and chauvinistic views and was particularly critical of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia (see Kern, 2011; Kupka et al., 2009). A split in the party occurred in 1999 when Anna Malíková was elected as the party’s new chair. This caused Ján Slota to leave the party and found the True Slovak National Party (Pravá Slovenská národná strana; PSNS). However, the failure of SNS and PSNS in the 2002 parliamentary elections led to their unification and Ján Slota became the leader of SNS again. He led the party until 2012 after SNS again was unable to enter parliament. He was replaced as party leader by Andrej Danko. The party also abandoned its anti-Hungarian rhetoric and began to focus more on anti-Roma issues. It took on an anti-immigration stance, positioned itself as a defender of the traditional family and had antagonistic attitudes toward NATO (Gurňák & Mikuš, 2012; Mikuš & Gurňák, 2019). Thanks to these changes, SNS managed to get back into the Slovak parliament in 2016 but was unsuccessful again in the next elections in 2020. Interestingly, SNS is the only PRRP in either country that has been part of the government.

The second PRRP that managed to get into the Slovak parliament is the People’s Party Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko; ĽSNS). In 2010, Marian Kotleba became the party’s chairman, and, after his election, the party began to take a strongly chauvinist orientation and anti-

system attitude (Gyárfášová, 2018). In its early days, the party glorified the wartime Slovak state and made racist statements about the Roma. Party members even went to regions experiencing Roma crime, thus gaining the sympathy of the local population. A well-known case was the protest against the Roma population after the Krásna Hôrka castle fire (Mikuš & Gurňák, 2019). The party's first success was the victory of Marian Kotleba in the 2013 regional elections. The party also changed the issues it tried to highlight. ĽSNS began to criticise the government's regional development policy, European Union subsidies and the globalised economy. Thanks to this, the party was able to gain votes in regions that were suffering the consequences of the economic crisis and dysfunctional regional development (Buček & Plešivčák, 2017). Similarly, its anti-migrant attitudes, criticism of Islam and accent on the importance of traditional families and values brought ĽSNS success in the 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections. However, in autumn 2020, the party's leader Marian Kotleba was convicted of extremism; in 2021, six members of the Slovak parliament left the party; and in 2022, Marian Kotleba lost his mandate as a member of parliament.

In 2019, former Justice Minister, Supreme Court judge and unsuccessful presidential candidate Štefan Harabin announced that he would run for the 2020 parliamentary elections as the electoral leader of the party Homeland (VLASŤ). In its electoral programme, Homeland stressed features of nativism (such as praise of the Slovak nation, economic protectionism), authoritarianism (establishing order, stricter punishments) and populism (praise for ordinary people, criticism of political elites). However, the party received less than three per cent of the vote in the elections and did not make it into the Slovak parliament.

The newest PRRP in Slovakia is the Republic (REPUBLIKA). It was founded in 2021 by former ĽSNS members and is led by Milan Uhrík, Milan Mazurek and Miroslav Suja. Although the party leaders try to represent the party as national conservative, their attitudes towards migration, the European Union, NATO and homosexuals fulfil criteria characterising the PRRPs (see Mudde, 2007).

4. Data and Methods

In Czechia, four political parties fulfil all three PRRPs criteria: DSSS, the Free Bloc, SPD and SPR-RSČ. In Slovakia, four parties do this: Homeland, ĽSNS, the Republic and SNS. These political parties have different representations in parliament and different electoral preferences. However, to achieve the most comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the PRRPs and the environment in Czechia and Slovakia, I will analyse all eight of the above-mentioned political parties.

In analysing the relationship between PRRPs and environmentalism, I used the same method and procedures as Tarant (2019) to maintain the continuity of PRRPs research in Czechia. Thus, this study is based on a content analysis of websites, newsletters and official videos published by the selected PRRPs in Czechia and Slovakia from January 2020 to June 2022. I chose this period because it covers parliamentary elections in both countries, and the previous period was analysed for Czechia by Tarant (2019). To cover a sufficient sample for systematic analysis and evaluate the importance of environmental topics in the PRRPs discourse in general, an analysis of electoral programmes, entire websites, official videos and all newsletters' issues was performed where possible (see Table 1.). I choose this type of material because they are the main ways in which parties present their attitudes and communicate with their potential voters. The source material for the Czech PRRPs included the SPR-RSČ electoral programme and website; the electoral programme and full offline mirror of the Free Bloc website; SPD's electoral programme, official videos and website; the electoral programmes and websites of both DSSS and the Workers' Youth as well as one issue of Dělnické listy (Workers' newsletter). The source material for Slovak PRRPs included the electoral programme and entire offline mirror of the Homeland website; SNS's electoral programme and website; the Republic's electoral programme, official videos, website and one issue of Republika (Republic newsletter); and ĽSNS's electoral programme, official videos and entire website, as well as ten issues of the party newsletters Naše Slovensko (Our Slovakia) and Stranícke zvesti (Party rumours).

Table 1. The number of analysed populist radical right articles and videos about environmental issues between January 2020 and June 2022 in Czechia and Slovakia.

Czech party	SPD	DSSS	The Free Bloc	The Republican Party
Number of articles and videos	58	5	4	1
Slovak party	ĽSNS	The Republic	SNS	The Homeland
Number of articles and videos	38	35	13	8

The type of analysis is in accordance with the nature of the source material: I used hand coding for physical copies and videos and automated keyword searches, checked personally by reading the results, in the case of websites. The source material was coded for notes on environmental issues, such as nature, climate, landscape, ecology, natural diversity, environment, global warming, ozone layer, pollution, recycling or waste management. The analysis is designed to show how PRRPs respond to these issues and how they incorporate them into their discourse, with a hypothesis that the PRRPs' attitudes to the environment would show signs of nationalism, anti-globalism, and populism.

It must be noted that used method has several limitations. First, the list of texts and videos analysed is not entirely complete for several reasons. Some parties no longer had a functioning website, so a digital archive of the website had to be used, which may have covered only some of the original websites. Also, some videos may have already been deleted before data collection. Speeches made by political party leaders in parliament or at political rallies were also not analysed unless they were generally available on their official websites or publications. However, given that those materials from their primary promotional media have been analysed, it is possible to provide sufficient insight into how Czech and Slovak PRRPs perceive the topic of the environment.

5. The Populist Radical Right and the Environment in Czechia and Slovakia

5.1. Nationalism and environment

According to nationalism, PRRPs work with nature's aesthetic, symbolic and material dimensions. The aesthetic dimension is mainly manifested as a constant scenic backdrop in party programmes, posters and videos, for example, through images of the national landscape and indigenous animals, plants and flowers. A typical example was a video featuring SPD's anthem (see YouTube, 2021b). In this video, shots of landscapes, historical buildings, happy people and party representatives alternated to evoke the national pride that was evident in the anthem's lyrics. The Slovak and Czech populist parties also used the aesthetic dimension of nature when pointing to threats to the landscape and nature. Parties often pointed this out when agricultural land was covered with, for example, solar panels or environmentally unfriendly crops (Okamura, 2021e; SNS, 2020a).

While the aesthetic dimension of nature was equally visible in both Czech and Slovak parties, the symbolic dimension was more noticeable in Slovak PRRPs, as is evident in the names of the parties themselves. Names like Homeland or Our Slovakia evoke the symbolism of the Slovak nation and Slovak nature. The symbolic dimension of nature in Slovak parties was visible in their promotional materials as well. All four Slovak parties used images of the Tatra Mountains as a national symbol in their materials, with specific emphasis on the Kriváň hill, the unofficial symbol of Slovakian freedom and Slavic cohesion (see Figure 1; Naše Slovensko, 2021b; REPUBLIKA, 2022). Czech parties did not place nature symbolism as prominently in their materials. However, both Slovak and Czech parties included a symbolic dimension of nature in their materials in that they drew attention to preserving the environment and nature for future generations (e.g., SNS, 2019).



Figure 1. The use of nature in the promotional materials of populist radical right parties. As can be seen, some parties use the same scenic backdrop – the Kriváň hill. Upper is the pamphlet of the LSNS (Naše Slovensko, 2021b); below is the propagation material of the Republic (REPUBLIKA, 2022).

The material dimension of nature was also visible in the materials of the Czech and Slovak parties. This dimension manifested itself in several frequently recurring themes. The first was the protection of agricultural land, forests and mineral resources against foreign investors. The Free Bloc, for example, claimed that 'Czech agricultural land must remain in the hands of Czech, not foreign owners' (Česká televize, 2021). The parties also had similar positions in their materials on timber exports abroad (e.g., Denník REPUBLIKA, 2021c). A typical example was Homeland's statement, which also highlights the party's name: 'Today, there are cases when our Slovak wood is illegally exported from our HOMELAND to other countries for an extremely low price' (Cíсарová, 2020c). Another big theme in the parties' materials was food and energy self-sufficiency. This theme appeared in all the analysed parties, with materials on food self-sufficiency (e.g., Kotlebovci, 2022c; Okamura, 2021d; SNS, 2020a; SPR – RSČ, 2016; YouTube, 2021c) and energy self-sufficiency, mainly by atomic energy (e.g., Kotlebovci, 2022b; SPD, 2020), forming a relatively significant part of their attitudes towards the environment. The parties argued that local food helps the environment because there is less waste, less greenhouse gas production and a lower carbon footprint (Cíсарová, 2020b).

5.2. Globalisation and environment

While the PRR often draws attention to local or national ecological problems (e.g., Cíсарová, 2020c; Dělnická mládež, 2014; Kotlebovci, 2021b; Okamura, 2021c), global environmental issues are not among the topics with which the PRRPs have a positive relationship. This is due to their often-hostile attitude towards globalism. From a structuralist approach, the ambivalent attitude of the PRRPs towards global climate change can be attributed to the economic disadvantages the population face due to globalisation and modernisation. The Czech and Slovak PRRPs claimed, for example, that farmers and wood processors are losing their jobs due to globalisation (Denník REPUBLIKA, 2021c; YouTube 2022a), and, moreover, importing these resources from abroad increases the threat to the environment. The parties also argued that, due to globalisation, transnational corporations use specific crops that are not environmentally friendly, artificial fertilisers that damage the soil and groundwater and genetically modified food because their interest is profit, not sustainable agriculture (Cíсарová, 2020a, 2020c; David, 2020; SNS, 2020a). In terms of energy, they pointed to rising energy costs caused by the push for renewable energy intended to reduce the impacts of global climate change. Their main argument was that it is useless to use renewable energy sources so heavily because they are energy unstable (Okamura, 2021b). Finally, the parties claimed Czechia and Slovakia are not among the world's biggest environmental polluters, so these measures will not stop global climate problems (Denník REPUBLIKA, 2021a; Okamura, 2022a; SPR – RSČ, 2016).

From an ideological approach, the ambivalent attitude of the PRRPs to global environmental issues is tied to their fight against corrupted liberal cosmopolitan elites and transnational organisations like the European Union. The criticism of the European Union and its green policies under the Green Deal is, according to the PRRPs, based on the fact that they are not proposed by experts but by liberal cosmopolitan eco-fanatics and that these policies lead to the enslavement and impoverishment of ordinary people and the suppression of national interests (e.g., Kotlebovci, 2022f; Okamura, 2022a, 2022b; Rozvoral, 2021). The most visible critics of the European Union's green policy were SPD (e.g., David, 2021c; Okamura, 2022b) and the Republic (e.g., Denník REPUBLIKA, 2022a; Denník REPUBLIKA, 2022b), which have representatives in the European Parliament. No less critical of the European Union's ecological policy were the Free Bloc (e.g., VOLNÝ blok, 2021) and ĽSNS (e.g., Kotlebovci, 2021a, 2022f), which vigorously demanded an exit from the European Union. In addition, the Czech and Slovak PRR often criticised and ridiculed scientists and environmental activists by pointing out that global warming is natural (Okamura, 2022a), that they are incompetent (SNS, 2021; YouTube 2022b), or by calling them derogatory terms like 'Brussels globalist minions' (VOLNÝ blok, 2021), 'climate-hysterical' (Okamura, 2022a), 'eco-crazies' (Denník REPUBLIKA, 2022b) or just 'green fanatics' (David, 2021c).

5.3. Populism and environment

As was mentioned in previous sections, there are several ways in which populism affects PRRPs attitudes to environmental issues, and they were visible in both Czech and Slovak PRRPs. One of these is using environmentalism and nature for populist strategic consideration. The crucial point in this respect is the protection of ordinary people against incompetent officials and activists. In Czechia and Slovakia, this was manifested by deriding government members as unconcerned about their citizens as regards food and energy prices (Okamura, 2021f). For example, they mentioned the government's implementation of unnecessary rules to reduce the carbon footprint together with its failure to address real environmental issues, such as effective waste sorting (Kotlebovci, 2022a; SNS, 2020b; SPD, 2020). The Slovak specificity was the long-standing criticism of the Ministry of the Environment by the PRRPs. SNS, ĽSNS and the Republic claimed that the minister of the environment is incompetent and should resign from his position (SNS, 2021). As the main reasons for the minister's incompetence, the parties mentioned a failure to handle the overpopulation of bears (Kotlebovci, 2022e; YouTube, 2022b) or a lack of communication with ordinary people (Denník REPUBLIKA, 2021b).

The second way populism has affected environmental issues is the creation of chains of equivalence. The PRRPs connect environmental issues with other crucial points. A specific feature of the Slovak PRRPs was the connection of nature protection with the issue of the Roma minority. Homeland (Cíсарová, 2020c), ĽSNS (Kotlebovci, 2021b) and the Republic (YouTube, 2021a) pointed out that illegal waste dumps, increased water pollution and the plundering of forests are taking place in the surroundings of Roma settlements. In doing so, these parties presented themselves as the only ones who dared to draw attention to the problems with Roma settlements.

The PRRPs also connect environmental issues and create a chain of equivalence with leaving the European Union. Except for SNS, all Czech and Slovak PRRPs had this agenda item in their programmes. In order to point out the disadvantages of membership in the European Union, they used criticism of the Green Deal (David, 2021c; VOLNÝ blok, 2021) or the Common Agricultural Policy (David, 2021b). In particular, SPD published various articles which, in its view, show the insane proposals of the European Union—consider these headlines, for example: 'Brussel wants farmers to measure how much their cows' fart' (Okamura, 2021a) or 'Irish EU parliamentarian wants to feed cows with charcoal to stop them from farting' (David, 2021a).

Czech and Slovak PRRPs also used nature to demonstrate authenticity. Slovakia's SNS and ĽSNS organised events at memorials surrounded by nature at which they recall historical events important to the Slovak nation (Kotlebovci, 2022d; SNS, 2022). Slovak PRR parties also organised trips to Slovak mountains traditionally associated with the Slovak nation (Denník REPUBLIKA, 2021e). Another way of demonstrating authenticity is via the organisation of environmental actions. PRRPs thus put themselves in the position of true nature protectors. Among the Czech parties, such actions were found only in the youth section of DSSS's website, describing young party members who regularly went to collect garbage from the countryside (Dělnická mládež, 2020, 2021). However, these were only local events regularly in the same places. The Republic promoted environmental actions in Slovakia (e.g., Denník REPUBLIKA, 2021f; YouTube, 2022c), but the most active in this sphere was ĽSNS. The party had ten

posts on their website about picking up garbage or planting trees in Slovakia (e.g., Kotlebovci, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f), and they wrote articles about these actions in their party newsletters (Naše Slovensko, 2021a; Straničné zvesti, 2021).

6. Discussion

The results of the analyses of the materials of the Czech and Slovak PRRPs showed that they have similar attitudes towards environmental issues as other European PRRPs. For these parties, the protection of nature within the state comes first, and they like to highlight the beauty of local forests and mountains, similar to PRRPs in Germany (Forchtner & Özvatan, 2019) or France (Boukala & Tountasaki, 2019). From an energy perspective, energy self-sufficiency is essential for the Czech and Slovak PRRPs. Therefore, unlike the Austrian parties, they do not see nuclear power primarily as a threat to the population (Voss, 2019) but as a necessary option for a stable energy source. Therefore, the main criticism of renewable energy sources from the point of view of these parties is their energy instability. The Czech and Slovak PRRPs also criticised renewables for taking agricultural land and destroying an idyllic landscape view.

The results also showed that the often critical attitude of Czech and Slovak PRRPs towards global environmental issues and renewable resources is linked to their negative attitude towards the functioning of the European Union. By supporting green policies to protect nature, these parties oppose the European Union and use these proposals to criticise the European Union (Forchtner & Lubarda, 2023). Interestingly, however, the SNS party, which was part of the government, is thus less critical of the functioning of the European Union than the opposition PRRPs. Thus, a trend similar to that in Poland is evident, where the PiS party came to government and somewhat moderated its criticism of the European Union's environmental policies (Bennett & Kwiatkowski, 2019).

Finally, the analysis showed that the Czech and Slovak PRRPs use the theme of nature protection and environmentalism in terms of populist promotion of the party and its viewpoints. They organise environmental actions to present themselves as the only real protectors of nature, like Jobbik in Hungary (Kyriazi, 2019). Pointing to pollution and deforestation in the neighbourhood of Roma settlements is just a continuation of the PRRPs' activities aimed at attacking the Roma minority in Slovakia, similar to the anti-Roma march of the ĽSNS after the fire at Krásna Hôrka castle (Mikuš & Gurňák, 2019).

The use of environmental issues for populist purposes in PRRPs can be seen in the different attitudes towards bear conservation in Slovakia and Romania. While in Romania, the AUR advocates the protection of bears by banning their shooting (Doiciar & Crețan, 2021), the Slovak PRRPs call for a more effective solution to the problem of overpopulated bears. Besides this, Romanian and Slovak PRRPs have similar reasons for these different attitudes – criticism of the government and government institutions. In Romania, the topic of bear conservation became popular after the largest bear in Romania was shot and the government failed to prevent it (Doiciar & Crețan, 2021), while in Slovakia, the topic of bear overpopulation became famous after several bear attacks on the people and the inability of the Ministry of Environment to prevent it.

7. Conclusion

In this study, I have shown that the PRRPs in Czechia and Slovakia used environmentalism from the perspectives of nationalism, globalism, and populism. By nationalism, Czech and Slovak PRRPs worked with nature's aesthetic, symbolic and material dimensions as proposed by Forchtner and Kølvrå (2015). Slovak and Czech populist parties used the aesthetic dimension of nature when pointing to threats to the landscape and nature or as a scenic backdrop in party programmes. The symbolic dimension was manifested in attempts to preserve the environment and nature for future generations. Moreover, the symbolic dimension was also expressed by linking nature with national history. Finally, the material dimension was displayed through efforts to protect agricultural land, forests and mineral resources against foreign investors and through the aims of food and energy self-sufficiency.

There are two approaches to how globalism affects the attitude of the PRRPs to environmental issues. The structuralist approach was visible when the Czech and Slovak PRR argued that farmers and wood processors are losing their jobs due to globalisation and importing resources from abroad increases the threat to the environment. From an ideological approach, the ambivalent attitude is due to the fight against corrupted liberal cosmopolitan elites and transnational organisations like the European Union. This was visible in their criticism of the European Union's green policy.

In terms of populism, the PRRPs use environmental issues for populist strategic considerations, demonstrating authenticity and creating one part of a chain of equivalence. Populist strategic considerations were visible in the protection of ordinary people against incompetent officials and activists, in the promotion of food and energy self-sufficiency, and in emphasising common sense nature protection. Primarily, Slovak PRRPs tried to demonstrate their Slovak and populist authenticity through nature. The Czech and Slovak PRRPs also connected environmental issues with other issues important to it (e.g., the Roma minority or criticism of the European Union) and thus created part of a chain of equivalence.

The analysis of materials from the Czech and Slovak PRRPs also showed that nationalism, globalism and populism are often thematically intertwined. For example, the European Union, from a nationalist perspective and according to the PRRPs, is an institution that prevents the achievement of food and energy self-sufficiency. From a globalist perspective, its green policies were criticised within the framework of the Green Deal. From the point of view of populism, the European Union was seen as an institution from which it is necessary to leave, and that, together with the environment, forms part of a chain of equivalence.

I have also shown that the attitude of the PRRPs towards environmentalism differed between Czechia and Slovakia. The Czech PRRPs were characterised by their association of the environment with criticism of the European Union and their support for food and energy self-sufficiency. Moreover, the Czech PRRPs used the symbolic dimension of nature much less than the Slovak PRRPs. In contrast, the Slovak PRRPs organised environmental events to a greater extent and were more critical of the Ministry of the Environment. Slovak PRRPs also linked pollution and the devastation of forests to the Roma minority.

It must be noted that this study has several limitations. First, I analysed the populist radical right's attitude towards the environment using materials from eight political parties. I did not cover all the existing populist radical right parties in Czechia and Slovakia. However, the unanalysed parties do not even reach one per cent of the votes in the parliamentary elections. I also did not analyse minority parties, which may have different attitudes toward environmental issues. The method used also had limitations mainly related to the material collection.

Despite these limitations, my study offers several contributions to the nascent literature about the connection between the PRRPs and environmentalism. First, I have brought to light the PRRPs' views on environmental issues in post-socialist states, and, more specifically, I have provided insight into these attitudes as regards Czech and Slovak PRRPs. Thus, I contribute to the existing literature with perspectives from coun-

tries where the connection between environmentalism and the PRPs has seldom been analysed. I have also highlighted the importance of nationalism, globalism and populism and their interconnectedness. This topic could be analysed in future research not only by using quantitative methods of text analysis but also by using qualitative methods. In-depth interviews with representatives of these parties have the potential to provide new insights into the PRPs' relationship with the environment.

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