What Do Far-Right Parties Talk About When They Talk About Green Issues? ĽSNS in 2016–2020 Parliamentary Debates[1]

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What Do Far-Right Parties Talk About When They Talk About Green Issues? ĽSNS in 2016–2020 Parliamentary Debates. Nature has always had an important symbolic function in the ideology of the far right, reflected, in many cases, in the calls for local environmental protection that form an integral part of their nationalist and protectionist narratives. However, research also suggests that the far right uses green issues to gain legitimation and enter the mainstream political discourse. Our aim is to study how green issues are communicated by Slovakia's far-right political party, Kotlebovci – People's Party Our Slovakia. We analyze party members' speeches in the Slovak national parliament and argue that green issues are used as a proxy for communicating the party's ideological positions and to push other elements of the far-right agenda.

Key words: *Climate policy; environmental policy; far right; green issues; parliamentary debate*

Introduction

With the growing support for far-right parties across Europe (and elsewhere) an increasing amount of research has looked into the factors behind their electoral success, their main themes, and the way they communicate their messages (Duina – Carson 2020; Van Hauwaert 2019, etc.). One of the issues that has recently been attracting scholarly attention is these parties' positions on green issues. On the one hand, the existing research has shown that far-right parties adopt a critical stance on climate policy (Forchtner 2019; Lockwood 2018), suggesting a connection between populism, i.e. one of the key definitional aspect of far right, and (climate) science scepticism (Yan – Schroeder – Stier 2021), further amplified by internet and social media, contributing to the polarization of public discussion on green issues (Moernaut et al. 2020). On the

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other hand, these parties have also been found to support environmental protection (Forchtner 2020; Tosun – Debus 2021) and in some cases even the energy transition towards an environmentally friendly economy (Hess – Renner 2019). The existing scholarship thus indicates that the far-right parties in fact adopt a contrasting position on environmental issues (related to conservation, pollution, and nature protection) versus climate issues (climate change agenda). This distinction is important as overlooking it may lead to the conclusion that the far right is 'hostile towards the environment', which, as Lubarda argues, is not the case (2020: 1).

Although from a policy perspective it seems contradictive to distinguish between environmental and climate issues, considering the far-right ideology, such a distinction is consistent. On the one hand, far-right parties consider climate change a 'cosmopolitan elite agenda' (Lockwood 2018: 713) that goes against their main ideological stances, characterized by nationalism, opposition to globalization, and criticism of political elites subscribing to the climate-change discourse. On the other hand, environmental protection forms part of far-right party ideology (Forchtner 2020) as 'it helps to strengthen their anti-establishment, nativist, and authoritarian-restrictive profile' (Tosun – Debus 2021: 2). The protectionist attitude of far-right parties becomes much stronger when a direct connection can be made to a specific territory belonging to a specific nation (Forchtner – Özvatan 2020), and it is at this point that environmental issues can be seen as fully compatible with nationalism (Kyriazi 2020).

Far-right parties are interested in joining in discussions on green issues as they are part of the mainstream discourse that helps them gain legitimization (Mix 2009). Our research question asks how far-right parties communicate their positions in their efforts to participate in such discussions. We argue that green issues serve as a proxy for these parties to present other positions within the mainstream discourse and are used opportunistically to push other far-right agendas. We build on studies that provide an understanding of the ideological sources of the far right's environmental positions, particularly those on nature protection as an integral part of far-right ideology (Forchtner – Kølvraa 2015; Olsen 1999) and studies examining how the far-right misuses environmental issues, mostly in relation to immigration (Neumayer 2006; Turner – Bailey 2022). To answer our research question, we examine how members of the Slovak national parliament (the National Council of the Slovak Republic; Národná rada Slovenskej republiky) elected for the Slovak far-right political party Kotlebovci-People's Party Our Slovakia (Kotlebovci-Ľudová strana Naše

Slovensko; ĽSNS) communicate green issues. The party first entered the parliament in 2016 after gaining 8.04% of the vote in the general election and 14 seats (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2016). Although the party had won regional elections previously, its nation-wide success – repeated in the March 2020 general elections with 7.97% of the vote and 17 seats (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2020) – enabled the party members to present their positions at the national level and participate in the legislative process.

We examined all speeches made by ĽSNS members of parliament during the 2016–2020 parliamentary term, which makes this analysis unique from three perspectives. First, the academic literature focused specifically on green issues within the agenda and narratives of the far right is still very limited. Existing research focuses especially on in-depth explorations of the political communication of green issues by the far right (Kulin et al. 2021), the complexity of conditions under which the far right tends to adopt green issues into its agenda (Forchtner 2019), and integrity of the far right's environmental positions from an ideological perspective, examined through the concept of ecofascism (Campion 2021; Moore – Roberts 2022). Second, positions on green issues by far-right parties have not been – to the best knowledge of the authors – examined within national parliamentary setting before (for EU parliament setting see Schaller – Carius 2019). Existing literature focuses mostly on analysis of the environmental issues incorporated into the far-right manifestos and public statements (e.g. Huber et al. 2021; Szenes 2021; Turner – Bailey 2022; Jeffries 2017) or even online presence of the far right (Mix 2009), examination of the attitudes of far-right electorate or broader public in relation to the support for far right and populist politics in general (Huber 2020; Jylhä et al. 2020; Kulin et al. 2021) or analysis focused on theoretical aspects of the far-right ideology and environmentalism (Meyer 2008). Third, there has been no previous examination of ĽSNS activities over a full parliamentary term. Despite the limitations of the case study in terms of the generalization of its results, its key contribution lies in the comprehensive empirical data it offers. An extensive and thorough empirical analysis offering in-depth insight into the opportunism of the far right is valuable as it promotes our understanding of far-right communication strategies (see also the Conclusion).

The first section of the paper presents the existing literature and places our research within the broader discussion on far-right parties and their position on green issues. The second part introduces the research design and is followed by an analytical third section. The conclusion summarizes the main findings of the

paper, considering them within a broader perspective, and suggests avenues for further research.

Far right and green issues

The paper focuses on political parties on the extreme right of the political spectrum, referred to as the 'far right'. Its ambition is not to join the extensive and ongoing theoretical discussion on the definition of the far right, its key elements, or the term itself. While acknowledging the existing works that deal with these matters in a comprehensive manner (for example Caiani – Císař 2019; Kiess et al. 2016; Mudde 2002; Mareš 2003), our observations on the theoretical framework of the far right are limited to those definitional elements that are relevant for this study and its purpose.

First, the far right mostly centres on nationalism, with the emphasis on the nation as the superior entity (Mudde 2002). The nation is exclusively defined as the primary 'we-group', enforcing the myth of its homogeneity (Minkenberg 2013), putting the nation before individual and civil rights, and opposing the principles of liberal and pluralist democracy (Minkenberg 2003). The nation may also be defined through its territorial bonds (Forchtner – Kølvraa 2015), with the threat of foreign territorial conquests being replaced by 'defensive separation from external (state) forces, international institutions and domestic "non-indigenous" minorities' (Saull 2015: 6). Moreover, through the pheno-menon of 'othering' (xenophobia, chauvinism, and distinguishing in-groups (us) from out-groups (them)), far-right ideology is closely associated with discrimination or even violence against minorities (Mudde 2005). This may have socio-economic implications and manifest in calls for social benefits to be reserved predominantly for the in-group (Mudde 2002). In addition to these two core elements of far-right ideology, some theorists include reactionary views or ultraconservatisms (Mareš 2005), anti-pluralism and anti-parlia-mentarism (Carter 2005), or hostility towards the principles of liberal democracy in general (Minkenberg 2013; Mudde 2014).

Second, scholars consider far-right political actors to be exclusively and narrowly focused on a limited number of issues, which basically revolve around their key ideological components. Political parties belonging to the far-right political family are considered to limit their scope mostly to immigration and/or integration issues (Mudde 2016), building their electoral mobilization around the economic and cultural grievances associated with globalization (Castelli Gattinara – Pirro 2018; Langenbacher – Schellenberg 2011), or even the crisis of political representation and national identity (Langenbacher –

Schellenberg 2011). This, however, suggests that although there is no consensus on the universal core issues typically associated with the far right, nor on a universally applicable ideological definition setting out the features typical of these actors, scholars generally – directly or indirectly – include the nation and the superiority of the nation into the centre of the political agenda communicated by the far right.

While various issues have been attributed to the far-right, nature has always had a special symbolic position in far-right ideology. As green issues are attracting more and more attention and becoming the subject of public discourse, political actors are responding to this development. The far right holds a specific position on green issues, mostly determined by the tension between the primary focus on the nation – the local and territory-bounded perspective – and the physical space of the country versus the global nature of green issues that transcend the boundaries of any one country.

While nature plays an important role in far-right ideology because of its symbolic function for the nation, the traditional definitional criteria of the far right do not explicitly indicate the role green issues play in their agenda. Two views are found in the literature. First, the far right's position on the role and needs of the nation shapes other areas of public policy as well. From this perspective, green issues are simply another element through which the nation and its needs are defined. Forchtner and Kølvraa's (2015) study of the far right's position on environmental issues found it was rooted primarily in the nationalist ideology. They argue that "nature" represents beauty and the idolized symbol of the homeland, the symbolic territorial demarcation of sovereignty, and is the source of the nation's resources that enables them to pursue maximum independence in relation to other countries, whilst being closely related to the native inhabitants.

In far-right ideology, this symbolic aspect is accompanied by mysticism or spirituality with regard to ties to the land, most visible in countries with a Christian tradition (Lubarda 2020). Nativism, which encompasses these assumptions, has recently been accepted as part of the definition of the contemporary far right, including in Mudde's most recent conceptualization of populist radical right parties in Europe (2007). He describes nativism as an ideology that emphasizes the homogeneity of the nation-state and the exclusivity of the native group members as the inhabitants of that state, and as encompassing both nationalism and xenophobic attitudes. At the core of this approach lies an exclusively defined ethno-racial community tied to a specific territory, while its resources or nature are nationalist symbols (defined as

völkisch; Forchtner et al. 2018) and return to nature is seen as a way of restoring the strength of the community, which is the key aspect of the concept of *ecofascism* (Campion 2021).

A substantial part of the literature on the far-right agenda also deals with climate scepticism and climate change denial. Lockwood (2018) suggests that there are two theoretical explanations for the far-right focus on these: (1) a structuralist one: changes in the global economy brought about by climate change have negative consequences for far-right party supporters and (2) an ideological one: the climate agenda is opposed because of it is associated with liberal, cosmopolitan, and elitist policies that go against national interests (Jylhä – Hellmer 2020). Right-wing political parties, populist, and extreme right-wing parties in particular, are generally thought to oppose the climate change agenda to a greater extent than left-wing parties do (Forchtner 2019). This argument has been supported by several empirical cases showing that right-wing populist governments in the USA, Poland, and Hungary openly express hostility towards climate policies (Lockwood 2018). Moreover, a key element associated with such negative attitudes towards climate issues is disinformation and the link to 'alternative media sources' as opposed to the 'traditional' media. In what is often called post-truth politics, generally accepted values are questioned and both the politics and the science are challenged for being politicized and elitist (Fraune – Knodt 2018).

The relevance of green issues for far-right seems to be attracting scholarly interest, which in turn reflects the amount of attention far-right actors pay to these issues. Looking at the Central and Eastern European region, the green agenda in far-right politics seems to be diverse (Kulin et al. 2021): in some cases the far right increasingly focuses on these issues in response to the growing popularity of green issues with the public, while trying to balance this focus with its rather sceptical and denialist attitudes towards aspects of green policies perceived to have been implemented by external/foreign actors (as in the Czech example; Tarant 2020). The symbolic nature of the parties' green positions and the way they are interwoven within the far-right framing has also been noted, and makes the green agenda a means whereby the far right can reach mainstream politics (Bennett – Kwiatkowski 2020).

There is a gap in in-depth examination in Central and Eastern European countries (Kulin et al. 2021), moreover the position of the Slovak far right on green issues has not been examined in detail. The existing research focuses on its ideological sources and core nationalist and xenophobia positions (Mareš 2003; Minkenberg 2013), issue adaptation (Kluknavská – Smolík 2016), and

social media presentation (Kluknavská – Hruška 2019). Connections between green issues and nationalistic positions have only been observed beyond far-right ideology. Filčák and Škobla (2019) examined inter-community conflicts regarding waste management problems in Eastern Slovakia, where anti-Roma and racist elements were elicited through addressing environmental justice issues. Similarly, a radical nationalist movement in cooperation with *Matica Slovenská* (a nationalistic cultural institution) pursued environmental issues through a nationalist lens, interfering not only with democratization and modernization processes, but also with the development of sustainable energy (Podoba 2007).

Method

Case selection
In this paper, we analyse how a Slovak far-right party, ĽSNS, communicates green issues in the national parliament. We chose to analyze ĽSNS positions specifically during the 2016–2020 parliamentary period, i.e. one complete term. This period marks not only the first time a far-right political party entered the Slovak parliament, but also presents the only opportunity at that time to provide a complex and comprehensive analysis of a full parliamentary term completed by the far right in Slovakia. In the case of some MPs' departure from the party and their withdrawal from the parliamentary club over the course of the term, we considered only those parliamentary activity they undertook as official members of the ĽSNS party.

Such an analysis is important for at least two reasons. First, it will contribute to general knowledge about far-right parties' positions by offering in-depth insight into how green issues are incorporated into their political agenda. ĽSNS MPs voted against the Paris Agreement, which suggests opposition to the climate change agenda; however, environmental protection is declared to be one of the party's ten priorities and MPs join in (and sometimes even initiate) debates on these issues in parliament. As demonstrated in the party's 2016 election manifesto, nature is described as one of the key national symbols as well as a source of the national pride: 'God gave us the most beautiful country in the world' (ĽSNS 2016: 4).

Secondly, although the ĽSNS used to be (until the disintegration of the party and creation of a new far-right party called *Republika* in 2021, i.e. after the studied period) the strongest political representation of the far right in Slovakia and is officially considered a far-right political party by the Ministry of Interior of the SR because of its anti-minority (particularly anti-Roma),

strongly nationalist, anti-EU, and anti-NATO stance (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic 2015), we have only limited knowledge of the party's political performance. When the party won seats in the parliament in 2016, it was the first time in modern Slovak history (post-1993) that a far-right political party had gained entry into the national parliament. Our research will therefore shed more light on how the ĽSNS communicate on green issues, while also contributing to the overall knowledge about the position of ĽSNS within Slovak politics. The investigation of parliamentary speeches presents also a novel contribution to the dynamics of far right and green issues more generally.

Green issues
As used in this paper, the term 'green issues' includes all relevant environmental and ecological themes in the broad sense. Despite acknowledging the distinction between environmentalism and ecologism as highlighted by some scholars (Dobson 2007), our use of this term is all-encompassing (for instance, with respect to energy linked to the environment) rather than restrictive. We understand these as a set of issues that inform policies aimed at achieving a sustainable society and decreasing the size of the human footprint on the environment. It therefore includes all environmental, ecological, and climate issues. Although this term is not ideal, we chose it to avoid any confusion over what we are investigating. Different terms can be found in the literature – Tosun and Debus talk about environmental policy and refer to climate policy as 'a domain adjacent to environmental policy' (2021: 2), while Forchtner's edited volume (2020) talks of the 'natural environment' (p. 15), but includes chapters on climate policy. In papers examining climate scepticism among far-right parties, the use of terminology is much clearer (Byrne 2020; Forchtner et al. 2018); however, they usually cover only a limited aspect of what is, we argue, a much broader issue. Reflecting on similar challenges to ours, Lubarda (2020) presents a criticism of ecofascism and suggests that 'far-right ecologism' is a more suitable concept, but it does not include climate issues.

Data collection and coding
We collected and analysed our data in three steps. In the first step, we collected all speeches made by ĽSNS MPs in the parliamentary plenary sessions in the 2016–2020 parliamentary term, compiled on the parliament website. There were 58 sessions altogether, starting on 23 March 2016 and ending on 26 March 2020 (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2020). The party won 14 seats in the election, but there were changes to the ĽSNS parliamentary party in

the period studied and so we examined the transcripts of the speeches of all the 16 ĽSNS MPs who sat in parliament during that period. In total, we collected 2,265 speeches by ĽSNS MPs to the parliamentary debates.

In the second step, we selected all the speeches by ĽSNS MPs referring to green issues. To create our data corpus, we chose keywords related to environment, climate, and energy sector. We included the energy sector because it is a major emissions emitter (80% in the EU; EEA 2020) and thus features heavily in the discourse on green issues. More general keywords were included, such as "climate" and "emissions", as well as more specific ones, relating, for example, to renewable energy sources (see Appendix A for a list of keywords used). We identified green issues only in 65 speeches made by ĽSNS MPs in 39 different parliamentary debates. We did not limit our primary selection to MPs contributions to debates on green issues as we expected the speeches relating to these issues to occur in debates on other issues as well. While we identified 18 parliamentary debates directly connected to green issues in which ĽSNS MPs presented their positions (for example, protecting forests), these MPs also discussed green issues during 21 debates that were related to other issues (for example, abortions, healthcare, education law or public policy law). In this way, we identified 180 individual claims (a complex argument communicated by an actor) in speeches connected to green issues. We then examined which 'green' keywords were mentioned by the ĽSNS MPs in their speeches and how often.

However, to answer our research question about how green issues are communicated, we had to go deeper and study not only whether ĽSNS MPs use green keywords, but especially in which context this occurs. Therefore, we looked at the identified claims more broadly and studied the context in which green keywords were used by utilising the building blocks of discourse analysis (Leipold et al. 2019). Such an approach allowed us to examine the message conveyed and thus shed light on how ĽSNS MPs communicated green issues in the Slovak parliament during the 2016–2020 term. To be able to do this, we needed a benchmark that would allow us to identify the individual claims. For this purpose, we used the far-right party operationalization provided by Mudde (2002; Appendix B).

The main reason we decided to use Mudde's far-right party operationalization is that it includes green dimensions ('Ecologism' and 'Environmentalism'). This enabled us to differentiate between claims presenting positions on green issues (meaning that the claim was supposed to convey a green message) and claims that – although they include a green keyword, making

them relevant to green issues – conveyed an argument that was linked to other dimensions of the operationalization (and thus to other aspects of far-right). Our assumption was that all claims made within speeches connected to green issues could then be coded 'Ecologism' or 'Environmentalism' if conveying a green message without communicating other issues. While other codes could be used to indicate that the green argument served as a vehicle to communicate another, non-green, positions of ĽSNS.

Due to the complexities of defining and conceptualizing the far right, we chose an existing approach rather than developing our own as that would require a complex discussion. Chosen strategy enabled us to focus on our research question and avoid arbitrary decisions over the operationalization. Mudde's conceptualization has been revised (Mudde 2007) to produce a more inclusive concept of the populist radical right that responds to recent developments in many European countries, as well as the US. However, we decided to use Mudde's earlier definition of the far right as it enables us to focus on the extreme end of the spectrum – which a much wider populist radical right concept would complicate – and thereby contribute to a much more focused – albeit narrower – area of research.

Results and discussion

In total, 11 (out of 16) ĽSNS MPs contributed to 39 parliamentary debates, which revolved around different legislative proposals. Thirteen proposals were introduced by the ĽSNS (9 bills and 4 constitutional bills) and 26 proposals were introduced by other actors. Eighteen proposals and the associated debates were directly related to green issues, out of which 8 bills were proposed by the ĽSNS.

In the first part of our analysis, we examined speeches by ĽSNS MPs and identified the various green issues mentioned by these MPs during the parliamentary debates (see Figure 1). Most of their attention was on the need for forest conservation (protecting the forests and controlling logging, 40% of claims) and nature protection in general (17% of claims). The ĽSNS MPs also contributed to the debate on energy sources (12% of claims), especially on the extraction of shale gas and crude oil. They spoke up in relation to the energy market (10% of claims), especially to criticize the privatization of Slovak energy companies, and energy prices. The party proposed a bill on alternative fuel use, which is why green transport features in 8% of claims. To a lesser extent, the ĽSNS MPs discussed waste management (4% claims), soil

protection (2% claims), and climate change in connection to the Paris Agreement (1.5% claims). The remaining issues were marginal.

The ĽSNS MPs mentioned climate issues only rarely: in the case of the 2016–2020 parliamentary term, only to criticize the Paris Agreement during the ratification process in September 2016. The Paris Agreement was adopted by a huge majority: only the 14 ĽSNS MPs (out of a total of 150 MPs) voted against (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2016). In the parliamentary debate on the Paris Agreement, only three claims by two ĽSNS MPs were identified: from Natália Grausová and Stanislav Mizík, who did not deny climate change, but criticized the agreement as a 'diktat' from abroad. Mizík argued (2016), '[f]rom an expert point of view, thumbs up. I only disagree with the term "economic and climate migration". What is happening now is a controlled Muslim invasion'. MP Grausová appealed 'to the politicians, especially to the coalition MPs, […] if they have any sense of justice, conscience and reason, do *not be servile* […] do not vote for this agreement. Please do not vote for the Paris Agreement" (Grausová 2016; italics added). Excerpts like these support the argument that green issues serve as a proxy for the ĽSNS for presenting their ideological stances within the mainstream discourse (in this case the debate on the Paris Agreement); they are not driven by interest in the green policy itself. However, to substantiate this claim a more thorough investigation was needed.

Based on Mudde's (2002) operationalization, in the second part of the analysis we identified eight main categories of ideological features and themes in the speeches of these MPs, which we further divided into 12 subcategories (see Figure 2). The analysis indicates that the MPs were not, in most cases, communicating green issues *per se*, but using them to communicate other themes belonging to the core of far-right ideology. The environmental position ("Ecologism", "Environmentalism") was communicated by the MPs in 49 claims (27%). This means that in 73% of cases, MPs were commenting on green issues; however, they used the opportunity to communicate other issues than the green ones. In most cases, such communication related to "Socio-economic policy" (57 claims, 32%; most notably the "Welfare chauvinism" subgroup with 40 claims, 22%) that is rooted in the protection 'of the national economy against foreign competition' (Mudde 2002: 189).

Figure 1: **Overview of themes connected to green issues in speeches by ĽSNS MPs**
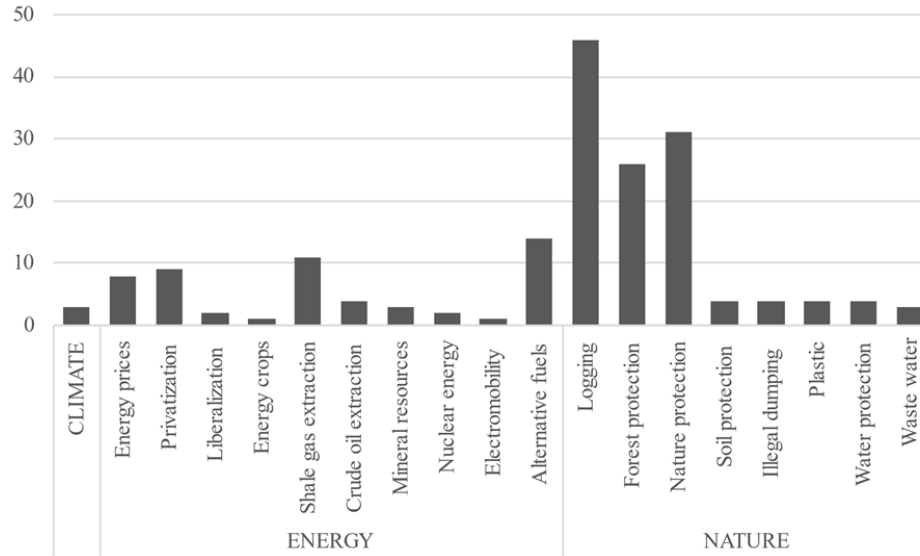
Source: Authors

Figure 2: **Ideological features and themes of speeches by ĽSNS MPs based on Mudde (2002)**
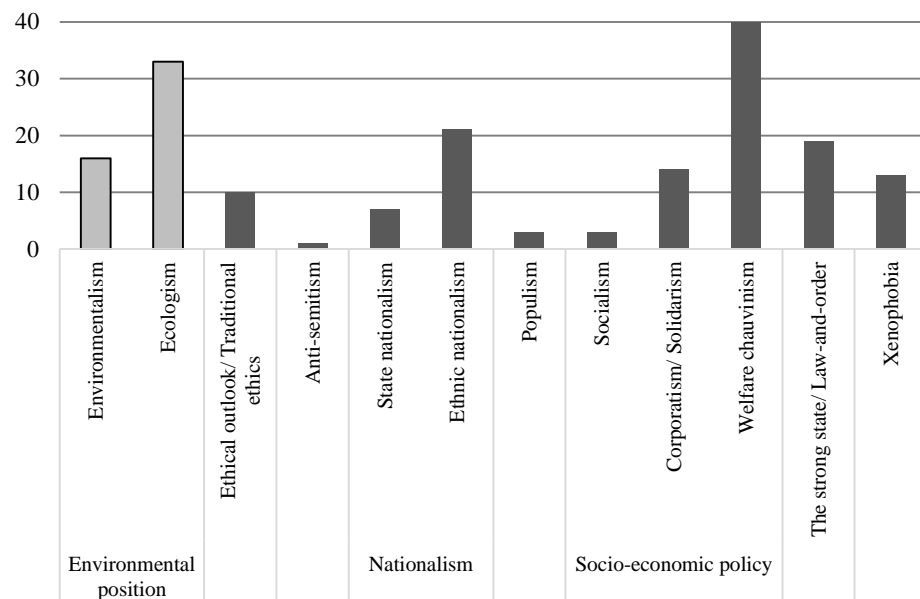
Source: Authors
Note: Environmental positions are highlighted

Themes linked to "Nationalism" (subthemes "Ethnic nationalism" and "State nationalism") were found in 28 claims, 16%) and "The strong state" ("Law-and-order") featured in 19 claims (11%). Thirteen claims (7%) were identified as referring to "Xenophobia" and ten claims to 'Ethical outlook" ("Traditional ethics") features. "Populism" was identified in three claims (2%) and "Exclusionism" ("Anti-semitism") in one claim (less than 1%), when the parliament adopted its Resolution on the Definition of "Anti-semitism" with all ĽSNS MPs voting against (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2018).

ĽSNS MPs were mostly communicating green issues as a means of criticizing foreign companies ("Welfare chauvinism"). They focused on three main areas in their speeches: wood logging, exploitation of energy sources, and the energy market. The MPs were not primarily concerned with the environmental consequences of excessive logging but criticized the government for allowing foreign companies to export wood from Slovakia. They emphasized the need to stop the 'legal or illegal export of wood from Slovakia' (Kotleba 2016), which had led to the 'loss of job opportunities in the [Slovak] wood processing industry' (Grausová 2017). In order to prevent such activities, ĽSNS MPs introduced a constitutional bill on 'wood as a strategic commodity of national importance deserving constitutional protection' (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2017), but it did not pass the first reading in parliament. The MPs argued that wood should be considered a strategic commodity and enjoy the same kind of constitutional protection as water (Beluský 2017). They were referring to a 2014 constitutional amendment that had banned the export of drinking and mineral waters via pipelines and water tanks (Mikušovič 2017). The general provisions of the Slovak constitution (Art. 4) state that 'mineral resources, caves, underground waters, natural healing sources, and streams are the property of the Slovak Republic'.

ĽSNS MPs also pointed to the role of foreign companies in the exploitation of energy sources. During the debate, Mora (2016) asked, 'which side will you take, will you stand by the people or on the side of the American mining company?' One of the most vocal critics of foreign companies was Milan Uhrík, who was elected to the European Parliament in May 2019. He claimed that criticism of foreign – that is Western – companies was linked to the EU accession and liberalization processes (2016):

> The consequence is that, from those privatized strategic companies that we had to liberalise because of the Union, more than 8.3 billion euro was taken from Slovakia to the EU. These are the dividends that are gone, they have been taken to the West […] Although in the past these companies were filling up the

Slovak state treasury, today the West benefits from them. Today we are chipping in for the wealth of Western foreign owners.

The MPs criticized the government for privatizing the energy companies, arguing that Slovaks were paying high energy prices and that foreign companies were making a profit. Consequently, foreign companies and foreign investors were blamed for the rising energy prices. Renewable energy sources were opposed in the context of high prices by MP Drobný, who argued that renewable energy sources do not 'bring additional value to our energy market, and in many cases, not for nature either' (Drobný 2018). The MPs also drew on arguments belonging to the environmental position, especially when discussing their own bills on alternative fuels, arguing that these would mean a decrease in emissions, or criticizing the possible negative environmental impact of fracking, which was discussed in relation to the mining law amendment.

In the parliamentary discussions, ĽSNS MPs often pointed to the need to protect "Slovak", "our", or "our own" nature and forests. Claims that stressed the national dimension of conservation were coded as "Nationalism" (see Figure 2). The need to protect our "own" Slovak nature contrasts strongly to global environmental protection, which is seen as being imposed by foreign countries. MP Mora (2017) asked, 'for how long will we allow foreign investors to violate the rights of Slovaks, the right of Slovaks to live, work, and decide on [issues connected to] their home country'? Stanislav Mizík criticized the European Union for a similar reason, linking the environment with agriculture. He doubted that 'the environment would have been much worse without [the European Union]' (Mizík 2017).

"The strong state" themes and features were found in 19 claims (11%). All these claims came under the "Law-and-order" subcategory, which emphasized the need for strong state authority. These arguments were a direct criticism of the state (government) being unable to protect Slovak forests against illegal logging by companies and especially the Roma minority. The ĽSNS calls for stricter control of "criminality", including illegal dumping and demands that the government guarantee a higher level of personal property protection. The Roma minority was the primary target. As Kotleba (2018) claimed, 'we are in a position in Slovakia today, in a legislative situation and, unfortunately, also in the practice of explicit bullying […] bullying decent owners of agricultural land who are unlucky to have either illegal dumps or illegal gypsy settlements on their land'. The arguments relating to "The strong state" theme often overlap with a hatred of the Roma minority.

Green issues were also used to present openly "Xenophobic" arguments against the Roma population. These were found in appeals to protect the forests especially. People from the Roma minority are referred to as "low life" and "wood thieves". MP Mazurek (2017) argued that

> In addition to the mass export of wood beyond the borders of the Slovak Republic, our forests are also subjected to illegal logging, mainly by the inhabitants of low life gypsy communities, but also by other thieves motivated mainly by economic profit. It is visible in those parts of Slovakia where the communities of antisocial inhabitants are represented to the greatest extent because of their percentage share of the population of the region; there the situation is worst. Every year the volume of forested land in these regions decreases drastically.

We identified ten claims belonging to the "Ethical outlook" category, all falling under "Traditional ethics". All of these occurred in the debates on the abortion bills, including one introduced by the party itself. MP Mora (2018) claimed that

> The legislation you have mentioned […] protecting everything from animals to trees and bushes is nice, often necessary […], but these should be some kind of sub-laws only after the basic protection of human life is resolved, not only ones that have been born, but those yet to be born.

These debates were particularly interesting from the green issues point of view: the ĽSNS MPs criticized the environmental protection initiatives for not requiring equally strict protection of human life, as is demanded in connection to the environment.

Conclusion

In this paper we aimed to show how green issues are used opportunistically to push other far-right political agendas into the mainstream discussion. Our research – based on parliamentary speeches by MPs belonging to the Slovak far-right party ĽSNS – suggests that even though we cannot claim that ĽSNS is completely indifferent to green issues, more often than not these issues serve as a vehicle for expressing other aspects of the far-right ideology that ĽSNS is trying to push into the mainstream political space. Indeed, only 27% of the claims relating to green issues were identified as free of any other far-right ideological elements. For instance, while ĽSNS MPs raised issues such as forest conservation or nature protection, they linked them to other elements of

their political agenda, such as protecting the national economy against foreign competitors or protecting national (natural) treasures from minorities (especially the Roma population).

At the same time, contrary to their appeals for nature protection on the local level, the appeals for protecting the environment on the global level (i.e. climate change) were rare in parliamentary speeches of ĽSNS MPs. This reflects the ambiguity of the relationship between the far right and green issues as depicted by existing research (Forchtner et al. 2018), mostly by highlighting the necessity to protect the nature in the immediate vicinity, while denying global challenges, such as climate change (Lockwood 2018). However, even though ĽSNS's claims do appeal for local environment protection, the party articulated its opposition to climate change only once in the studied period, which is not in line with existing research.

Moreover, ĽSNS MPs placed emphasis on issues connected to the energy sector, which they frequently linked to environmental issues. This was done either through criticism of the share of foreign companies in the Slovak energy sector or the local environmental impact of specific energy sources. Last but not least, it should also be highlighted that the low number of claims (found in 65 out of 2,265 examined parliamentary speeches) related to green issues during the select four-year parliamentary term suggests that green issues are not in the centre of the party's interest at all.

The presented research has limitations stemming from the nature of the case study and the small number of claims identified and examined. However, we believe that the contribution of our research to the existing scholarship on far-right parties and their relationship to green issues is three-fold. First, we have compiled and analysed a unique dataset on far-right MPs' speeches in a national parliament. This contributes to the academic discussion on the positions far-right parties hold on green issues (Forchtner 2020; Hess – Renner 2019; Tosun – Debus 2021), but also on how green issues have been misused in particular areas of public policies, such as immigration policies (Neumayer 2006; Turner – Bailey 2022), where many questions have yet to be resolved. Secondly, our conclusion that green arguments are utilized as a vehicle (proxy) for communicating other far-right issues contributes to the scholarship by offering an in-depth insight into how such arguments are used by the far right, further contributing to literature explaining the newest trends in far-right parties (Huber et al. 2021; Jeffries 2017) and their adaptation to mainstream political discourse (Mix 2009). Recently successful far-right European parties have started to embrace progressive principles such as gender equality or gay rights.

These are, however, still framed within nationalist values and a belief in the superiority of Western civilization and the claim that European citizens are worth protecting – vis-à-vis Muslim immigrants (Duina – Carson 2020). Third, researchers have faced challenges when trying to generalize the positions of far-right parties on green issues (Hess – Renner 2019). We hope that our research sheds some new light on this puzzle.

We believe that our study will act as a stimulus for further research on the far right and their position on green issues. Future analyses should examine how ĽSNS's way of communicating green issues is reflected in the positions and perceptions of their voters and how the way the party links its environmental arguments to other non-green issues resonates among its supporters. Moreover, investigating a regional dimension, for example, Central and Eastern Europe, would prove valuable as well.

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Appendix A: **Key words for identifying green issues for developing the dataset**

General	energy, energy policy, energy transition	Fossil fuels	natural gas, pipeline, exploitation, gasoline, diesel cars, excise
	EU energy and climate policy, Paris Agreement		coal, mines, lignite, hard coal, mining
Climate	climate change, global warming, decarbonisation	Nuclear	Mochovce NPP, Jaslovské Bohunice NPP, nuclear waste
	air, emissions, greenhouse gasses, carbon dioxide	Renewables	wind turbines, photovoltaic, biomass, biogas, hydro, geothermal
Environment	environment, sustainability, forests, logging, waste	Other	incineration, recycling, hydrogen, clean energy, subsidies, market, regulation
Efficiency	buildings, certificates, refurbishment, insulation	Electricity	distribution, electromobility

Appendix B: **Operationalization of the far right** (Mudde, 2002)

Nationalism	State nationalism	**Populism**	Populism
	Ethnic nationalism	**Anti-party sentiments**	Extremist anti-party sentiments
	Internal homogenisation		Populist anti-party sentiments
	External exclusiveness	**The strong state**	Law-and-order
Exclusionism	Racism		Militarism
	Ethnopluralism	**Environmental position**	Ecologism
	Ethnocentrism		Environmentalism
	Anti-semitism	**Ethical outlook**	Traditional ethics
Xenophobia	Xenophobia		Religious ethics
Anti-democratic features	Elitism		Libertarianism
	Führerprinzip	**Socio-economic policy**	Corporatism/solidarism
	Monism		(Neo-)Liberalism
	Organic vision of the state		Socialism
	Technocracy		Welfare chauvinism