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Russia and the European Far Right

by

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Anton Shekhovtsov, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis explores contemporary relations between various Russian actors and European far right ideologues, movements, organisations and parties. The thesis demonstrates that each side of this relationship is driven by evolving and, at times, circumstantial political and pragmatic considerations that involve, on the one hand, the need to attain or restore declining or deficient domestic or international legitimacy and, on the other hand, the ambition to reshape the apparently hostile domestic or international environments in accordance with one's own interests.

Introduction discusses the research background of the thesis, and outlines its conceptual framework, methodology and structure.

Chapter 1 discusses pro-Russian elements of the European far right milieu before the Second World War.

Chapter 2 looks at the active cooperation between Russian and Western far right politicians after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Chapter 3 examines the right-wing authoritarian evolution of Vladimir Putin's regime – an evolution that facilitated the deepening of the relations between Russian pro-Kremlin actors and the European far right.

Chapters 4 and 5 consider two areas of dynamic cooperation between various Russian actors and European far right politicians and organisations aimed at supporting and consolidating alternative institutions that aim at challenging and undermining liberal-democratic practices and traditions: electoral monitoring and the media.

Chapter 6 looks at openly pro-Russian activities that Austrian, French and Italian far right parties have carried out in their national contexts, and identifies several types of operators who furthered cooperation between them and Russian actors.

Chapter 7 explores the performance of European far right politicians on high-profile discussion platforms in Moscow and at sessions of the European Parliament in Strasbourg and Brussels, and analyses the narratives that they promote within these settings.

Conclusion presents main findings of this research.

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Abbreviations

AAFER	Association Alliance France-Europe Russie (Association France-Europe-Russia Alliance)	France
ACLR	Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia (Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association)	Italy
ADFR	Association Dialogue Franco-Russe (French-Russian Dialogue Association)	France
AfD	Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)	Germany
ALDE/ADLE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group	European Union
BIB	Bundesinstitut für internationalen Bildungs- und Technologietransfer (Federal Institute for International Education and Technology Transfer)	Austria
BNP	British National Party	United Kingdom
BZÖ	Bündnis Zukunft Österreich (Alliance for the Future of Austria)	Austria
CEDADE	Circulo Espanol de Amigos de Europa (Spanish Circle of Friends of Europe)	Spain
CEO	Chief executive officer	International
CFR	Collectif France-Russie (France-Russia Collective)	France
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency	United States of America
CIS	Commonwealth of the Independent States	International
CIS-EMO	Commonwealth of the Independent States – Election Monitoring Organisation	Russia
CPE	Coordinamento Progetto Eurasia (Eurasia Coordination Project)	Italy
DF	Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People’s Party)	Denmark
DNR	“Donetsk People’s Republic”	Ukraine
DVU	Deutsche Volkunion (German People’s Union)	Germany

ECAG	Europejskie Centrum Analiz Geopolitycznych (European Centre of Geopolitical Analysis)	Poland
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists	European Union
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union	International
EFD	Europe of Freedom and Democracy	European Union
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy	European Union
ELF	European Liberation Front	United Kingdom, international
ENR	European New Right	Europe
EODE	Eurasian Observatory for Democracy & Elections	Belgium
EPP	European People's Party	European Union
ESM	Evraziyskiy soyuz molodezhi (Eurasian Youth Union)	Russia
EU	European Union	International
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation	United States of America
FCRB	First Czech-Russian Bank	Russia
FeS	Führungsring ehemaliger Soldaten (Leadership Committee for Former Soldiers)	East Germany
FN	Front National (National Front)	France
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria)	Austria
FRM	Fond "Russkiy Mir" (Russian World Foundation)	Russia
FSB	Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)	Russia
GRECE	Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne (Research and Study Group for European Civilisation)	France
Greens/EFA	The Greens – European Free Alliance	European Union
GRU	Glavnoe Razvedyvatel'noe Upravleniye (Main Intelligence Directorate)	Russia
GSN	Gruppe Sozialrevolutionärer Nationalisten (Group of Social Revolutionary Nationalists)	German Empire

GUD	Groupe Union Défense (Defence Union Group)	France
GUE-NGL	United Left/Nordic Green Left	European Union
IDC	Institute of Democracy and Cooperation	Russia
IPA CIS	Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member Nations	Russia
IsAG	Istituto di Alti Studi in Geopolitica e Scienze Ausiliarie (Institute of Advanced Studies in Geopolitics and Auxiliary Sciences)	Italy
JAfD	Junge Alternative für Deutschland (Young Alternative for Germany)	Germany
KGB	Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)	Soviet Union
KPÖ	Kommunistische Partei Österreichs (Communist Party of Austria)	Austria
KPRF	Kommunisticheskaya partiya Rossiyskoy Federatsii (Communist Party of the Russian Federation)	Russia
LAOS	Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós (Popular Orthodox Rally)	Greece
LDPR	Liberal'no-demokraticheskaya partiya Rossii (Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia)	Russia
LN	Lega Nord (Northern League)	Italy
LNR	"Luhansk People's Republic"	Ukraine
LPR	Liga Polskich Rodzin (League of Polish Families)	Poland
MED	Mezhdunarodnoe evraziyskoe dvizhenie (International Eurasianist Movement)	Russia
MEP	Member of the European Parliament	European Union
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	International
MNA	Magyar Nemzeti Arcvonal (Hungarian National Front)	Hungary
MP	Member of Parliament	International
NA	Nacionālā apvienība (National Alliance)	Latvia
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation	International
NBP	Natsional-bol'shevistskaya partiya (National-Bolshevik Party)	Russia

NDI	National Democratic Institute	United States of America
NDPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National-Democratic Party of Germany)	East Germany
NDV	Nationaldemokratischen Verband (National Democratic Union)	Austria
NI	Non-Inscrits (independent MEPs)	European Union
NL	Nationale Liga (National League)	Austria
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National-Democratic Party of Germany)	West Germany/Germany
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)	Third Reich
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights	International
ORFG	Österreichisch-Russische Freundschaftsgesellschaft (Society of Austrian-Russian Friendship)	Austria
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe	International
ÖVP	Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People's Party)	Austria
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe	International
PCE	Parti Communautaire Européen (European Communitarian Party)	Belgium
PCN	Parti Communautaire National-Européen (Communitarian National-European Party)	Belgium
PDF	Parti de la France (Party of France)	France
PRM	Partidului România Mare (Greater Romania Party)	Romania
PS	Perussuomalaiset (The Finns)	Finland
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom)	Netherlands
RBM	Rassemblement bleu Marine (Marine Blue Gathering)	France
RIM	Rossiysko-Ital'yanskaya molodyozh (Russian Italian Youth)	Italy/Russia

RNE	Russkoe natsional'noe edinstvo (Russian National Unity)	Russia
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats	European Union
SD	Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats)	Sweden
SMA	Soviet Military Administration	East Germany
SNS	Slovenská národná strana (Slovak National Party)	Slovakia
SPÖ	Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (Social Democratic Party of Austria)	Austria
SRP	Sozialistische Reichspartei (Socialist Reich Party)	West Germany
SRS	Srpska Radikalna Stranka (Serbian Radical Party)	Serbia
SS	Schutzstaffel (Protection Squadron)	Third Reich
TT	Tvarka ir teisingumas (Order and Justice)	Lithuania
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	
UKIP	UK Independence Party	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations	International
US	United States	
USA	United States of America	
USAID	United States Agency for International Development	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	
VB	Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest)	Belgium
VdU	Verband der Unabhängigen (Federation of Independents)	Austria
VoR	Voice of Russia	Russia
WCF	World Congress of Families	International
XA	Laïkós Síndesmos – Chrysí Avgí (Popular Association – Golden Dawn)	Greece

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing concern in the West about the convergence or, at least, marriage of convenience between Vladimir Putin's Russia and far-right forces in the West, most notably in Europe. Indeed, we have witnessed the increasing number of far-right politicians' statements praising Putin's Russia and contacts between the European far right and Russian officials and other actors.

Concerns about these developments seem to be even more pronounced given the present condition of the West characterised – among many other ills – by the threat of terrorist attacks, migration and refugee crises, austerity policies, the Eurozone crisis and perceived lack of effective leadership. Moscow's apparent cooperation with the far right, which blame liberal-democratic governments for the West's woes, is often interpreted, especially in the Western mainstream media, as an attempt to weaken the West even further and undermine liberal democracy internationally. For example, an article in *Foreign Policy* argues that "Russian support of the far right in Europe has [to do] with [Putin's] desire to destabilize European governments, prevent EU expansion, and help bring to power European governments that are friendly to Russia".¹ An article in *The Economist* presumes that the rise of the far right "is more likely to influence national politics and to push governments into more Eurosceptic positions" and this will make it harder "for the Europeans to come up with a firm and united response to Mr Putin's military challenge to the post-war order in Europe".²

Relations between Russia and the European far right are a complex and multi-layered phenomenon which cannot be explained by any single causal factor. The overarching hypothesis of this research is that each side of this relationship is driven by evolving and, at times, circumstantial political and pragmatic considerations that involve, on the one hand, the need to attain or restore declining or deficient domestic or international legitimacy and, on the other hand, the ambition to reshape the apparently hostile domestic or international environments in accordance with one's own interests. Putin's corrupt and authoritarian regime enjoyed, especially during his first presidential term (2000-2004) domestic and international legitimacy, but started to feel increasingly threatened by the processes of democratisation in Russia's immediate neighbourhood

¹ Mitchell A. Orenstein, "Putin's Western Allies", *Foreign Affairs*, 25 March (2014), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-25/putins-western-allies>.

² "Russia's Friends in Black", *The Economist*, 19 April (2014), <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21601004-why-europes-populists-and-radicals-admire-vladimir-putin-russias-friends-black>. See also Katerina Safarikova, "Putin and the European Right: A Love Story", *Transitions Online*, 16 April (2014), <http://www.tol.org/client/article/24262-putin-and-the-european-right-a-love-story.html>; Benjamin Bidder, Gregor Peter Schmitz, "Putins rechte Freunde", *Spiegel Online*, 2 May (2014), <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/putin-in-ukraine-krise-rechtspopulisten-in-europa-stuetzen-russland-a-967155.html>.

as it perceived these processes as a Western attempt to bring about a regime change in Russia. These assumptions on the part of the Russian ruling elites led to their gradual opening to European far-right politicians who had tried to court Putin's regime even before Russian pro-Kremlin actors decided to turn to them to use them, first, as one of the sources of political legitimacy in the domestic environment and, thus, consolidation of the regime, then as tools of Moscow's foreign policy in the Russian neighbourhood, and, eventually, as an instrument of destabilisation of European societies. In the latter case, Moscow's intentions are, to a certain degree, underpinned by the understanding that the far right are more potent today than they have ever been before in the post-war era and are posing a growing threat to Western liberal democracy. Moreover, radical right-wing parties no longer need to vindicate themselves and be at pains over proving political eligibility of their ideas. Today, they refer to Putin's Russia as the model of an alternative political order opposing liberal democracy. By expressing their ideological kinship with contemporary Russia, which is far from being a fringe country, and winning different forms of support from Moscow, radical right-wing parties may claim *alternative* political legitimacy and represent themselves not simply as the opposition to the mainstream parties, but essentially as the *alternative* mainstream.

0.1. Research background

Until 2014, apart from occasional references to pro-Russian statements of some European far-right leaders, few scholars and experts observed a growing rapprochement between European radical right-wing parties and Putin's Russia. Arguably the first investigation that reported on this development was a report titled "Russia's Far-Right Friends" and published in 2009 by the Hungary-based Political Capital Institute.³ On the basis of their research, its authors argued that "far-right parties in several eastern European countries [had] become prominent supporters of Russian interests and admirers of the Russian political-economic model" and that, for Russia, "forming partnerships with ultranationalists could facilitate its efforts to influence these countries' domestic politics [...] until Moscow finds an even more influential ally elsewhere on the political spectrum".⁴

In 2010, Angelos-Stylianos Chryssogelos analysed the foreign policy positions of the radical right-wing National Front (Front National, FN) and Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ), as well as of the German left-wing populist The

³ Péter Krekó, Krisztián Szabados, "Russia's Far-Right Friends", *Political Capital*, 3 December (2009), http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends_349.html.

⁴ Ibid.

Left (Die Linke), and specifically focused on their attitudes towards the US, transatlantic relations, NATO and Russia. He concluded that these parties were united in their aversion of NATO and American influence in Europe, but, at the same time, they looked favourably at Putin's Russia. According to Chryssogelos, "populist parties see Russia as a source of energy and military clout as well as an attractive partner with similar cultural traits as Europe has", while by discarding "issues of human rights and democracy in their relations with Russia", these "populists reinforce their vision of sovereign nation states furthering their interests without reference to universal values or prior institutional commitments".⁵ The author, however, did not elaborate on the Russian agenda behind the cooperation with the European far right.

The international academic and expert community in general started to pay attention to the relations between Russia and the European far right in 2013-2014. For example, Marcel Van Herpen noted that West European far-right parties were moving away from "their traditional anti-communist and anti-Russia ideologies, with many expressing admiration – and even outright support" – for Putin's regime.⁶ Van Herpen asserted that, since Putin's regime did not "openly reject democracy or explicitly advocate a one-party state", it might serve as a model for the far-right parties, which could not "openly advocate an authoritarian regime or a one-party system".⁷ Moreover, through its specific policies and practices, Putin's regime was able to demonstrate to the illiberal European political forces "how to manipulate the rules of parliamentary democracy [...] to serve authoritarian objectives".⁸

The Political Capital Institute continued working on the phenomenon of "Russian influence in the affairs of the far right" seen as "a key risk for Euro-Atlantic integration at both the national and the [European] Union level".⁹ The Institute's 2014 report distinguished – in the context of their views on Russia – between "committed", "open" and "hostile" European far-right parties. The "committed" category would include parties that openly professed their sympathy for Russia. The "open" category would refer to parties that could either "show sympathy based simply on considerations in relation to foreign and economic policy and realpolitik, without regard to Putin's economic and social regime as a model", or "in most cases display a negative or neutral attitude toward Russia", but at the same time would "support the Russian position [on some important

⁵ Angelos-Stylianos Chryssogelos, "Undermining the West from Within: European Populists, the US and Russia", *European View*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2010), pp. 267-277 (273).

⁶ Marcel H. Van Herpen, "Putinism's Authoritarian Allure", *Project Syndicate*, 15 March (2013), <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/putinism-as-a-model-for-western-europe-s-extreme-right-by-marcel-h--van-herpen>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Political Capital, "The Russian Connection: The Spread of Pro-Russian Policies on the European Far Right", *Political Capital Institute*, 14 March (2014), http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf.

issues] even in the absence of genuine motivation”.¹⁰ Finally, the “hostile” category would include far-right parties coming “primarily from countries in conflict with Russia”.¹¹ In 2015, the Political Capital Institute also published four collaborative country-specific reports on the relations between various Russian stakeholders and the far right in Hungary,¹² Greece,¹³ France¹⁴ and Slovakia.¹⁵ Marlène Laruelle, who co-authored the France-related report, edited an insightful collection of chapters that looked at the relations between Russia and the far right through the perspective of the spread of the ideology of Russian neo-Eurasianism, as well as focusing, in particular, on the cases of France, Italy, Spain, Hungary and Greece.¹⁶

In recent years – apart from the studies on the specific phenomenon of the relations between various Russian actors and European far right – there has been a number of reports conducted by think-tanks concerned with Russia’s disinformation and influence operations in Europe.

Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss analyse what they call the Kremlin’s weaponization of information, culture and money as part of its non-linear war against European nations.¹⁷ They argue that, through the state-controlled media, official Moscow “exploits the idea of freedom of information to inject disinformation into society”, but the desired effect is not persuasion or earning credibility, but “to sow confusion via conspiracy theories and proliferate falsehoods”.¹⁸ The authors show that the Kremlin supports far-right, far-left, green movements, as well as anti-globalists and financial elites in order “to exacerbate divides [in Western societies] and create an echo chamber of Kremlin support”.¹⁹ Pomerantsev continues his analysis of Russian information warfare in a report co-authored with Edward Lucas and looking at the ways the Kremlin “promotes conspiratorial discourse and uses disinformation to pollute the information space, increase polarization and undermine democratic debate” in Central and Eastern

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Attila Juhász, Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó, András Dezső, “*I Am Eurasian*”: *The Kremlin Connections of the Hungarian Far-Right* (Budapest: Political Capital Kft./Social Development Institute Kft., 2015)

¹³ Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó, Angelos Chrysosgelos, Paris Ayiomamitis, Judit Takács, “*Natural Allies*”: *The Kremlin Connections of the Greek Far-right* (Budapest: Political Capital Kft., 2015).

¹⁴ Marlène Laruelle, Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó, Dóra Haller, Rudy Reichstadt, “*From Paris to Vladivostok*”: *The Kremlin Connections of the French Far-right* (Budapest: Political Capital Kft., 2015).

¹⁵ Péter Krekó, Lóránt Győri, Daniel Milo, Juraj Marušiak, János Széky, Anita Lencsés, *Marching towards Eurasia: The Kremlin Connections of the Slovak Far-right* (Budapest: Political Capital Kft./Social Development Institute Kft., 2016).

¹⁶ Marlène Laruelle (ed.), *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

¹⁷ Peter Pomerantsev, Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money* (New York: Institute of Modern Russia, 2014).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Europe.²⁰ The authors maintain that Putin's Russia accelerates "the declining confidence in international alliances and organizations, public institutions and mainstream media", as well as exploiting "ethnic, linguistic, regional, social and historical tensions, and promotes anti-systemic causes, extending their reach and giving them a spurious appearance of legitimacy".²¹ Some of the tools that allow the Kremlin to exploit "ethnic, linguistic, regional, social and historical tensions" are analysed in a report by the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies that looks at Russia-funded organisations operating in Europe with the goal of shifting "public opinion towards a positive view of Russian politics and policies, and towards respect for its great power ambitions".²²

To a certain extent, today's cooperation between various Russian pro-Kremlin actors and European far-right politicians may be seen as an integral part of Moscow's attempt to weaken and undermine Western unity. However, it seems to be oversimplification to limit the relations between Russia and the European far right to the Kremlin's subversive actions, at least because such an assumption would reduce the agency of the other major element of this relationship, namely European far-right political organisations themselves.

Despite the rising number of journalistic investigations, expert analyses and academic studies of the phenomenon, we still lack a general picture of the relations between Russia and the European far right, and this thesis is set to address considerable gaps in our understanding of this under-researched yet important aspect of international relations.

0.2. Conceptual framework

0.2.1. The phenomenon of the European far right

The term "far right" is used here as an umbrella term that refers to a broad range of ideologues, groups, movements and political parties to the right of the centre right. It is probably impossible to define an umbrella term such as "far right" as anything less vague than a range of political ideas that imbue a nation (interpreted in various ways) with a value that surpasses the value of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Thus,

²⁰ Edward Lucas, Peter Pomerantsev, *Winning the Information War: Techniques and Counter-strategies to Russian Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe* (Washington: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2016), p. 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

²² Vladislava Vojtišková, Vít Novotný, Hubertus Schmid-Schmidfelden, Kristina Potapova, *The Bear in Sheep's Clothing: Russia's Government-funded Organisations in the EU* (Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2016), p. 11.

the concept of a nation is central to all manifestations of the far right, but they differ in the ways they imagine the “handling” of a nation.

The exponents of fascism, which was the very first far-right ideology to have acquired worldwide significance, offered arguably the most radical approach to “handling” of a nation. This thesis subscribes, methodologically, to a dominant school within contemporary fascism studies (see the discussion below) that considers “fascism” as a generic concept and posits fascist ideology as a form of revolutionary ultra-nationalism, where the latter is understood as an illiberal form of nationalism. This approach is most extensively elaborated by Roger Griffin who defines “fascism” as:

a revolutionary species of political modernism originating in the early twentieth century whose mission is to combat the allegedly degenerative forces of contemporary history (decadence) by bringing about an alternative modernity and temporality (a “new order” and a “new era”) based on the rebirth, or palingenesis, of the nation. Fascists conceive the nation as an organism shaped by historic, cultural, and in some cases, ethnic and hereditary factors, a mythic construct incompatible with liberal, conservative, and communist theories of society. The health of this organism they see undermined as much by the principles of institutional and cultural pluralism, individualism, and globalized consumerism promoted by liberalism as by the global regime of social justice and human equality identified by socialism in theory as the ultimate goal of history, or by the conservative defence of “tradition”.²³

In the interwar period, fascist groups, movements, organisations and parties operated across entire Europe, but only two European countries, namely Benito Mussolini’s Italy and Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich, “successfully” implemented essential tenets of fascism on the state level and were, thus, fascist *regimes*. Italian and German fascisms differed largely in that Italian Fascists conceived the nation in ethnic terms, whereas German National Socialists articulated their idea of the nation in racial terms, or to be more precise, in terms of the *Volk*, a metaphysical notion incorporating the concepts of race, German history and culture. The difference in these interpretations of the nation as the core concept for the definition of fascism allows for distinguishing a very specific form of fascism, namely National Socialism or Nazism, that emphasises a specifically racist or *völkische* interpretation of one’s own nation. However, both regimes strove to revive and renew their allegedly decadent nations through, among other

²³ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 181.

actions, eradicating ethnic and social elements, which they perceived as both causing the national decadence and impeding the national rebirth. Both regimes were also totalitarian, as – in terms of Emilio Gentile – each of them “destroy[ed] or transform[ed] the previous regime and construct[ed] a new state based on a *single-party regime*, with the chief objective of *conquering society*”; sought “the subordination, integration and homogenisation of the governed on the basis of the *integral politicisation of existence*”; and aimed “to shape the individual and the masses through an *anthropological revolution* in order to regenerate the human being and create the *new man*”.²⁴

After the joint forces of the Western liberal democracies and the Soviet Union had crushed the war machine of the Third Reich, fascism in Western Europe was largely forced to evolve into three major forms. Revolutionary ultranationalists retreated to the fringes of socio-political life in the West. As they still remained true to the idea of an alternative totalitarian modernity underpinned by the palingenesis of the nation – however unrealistic its implementation was in post-war Western Europe – their doctrines were termed as neo-fascist (but sometimes simply fascist) or neo-Nazi. In terms of organisation, Western post-war conditions gave birth to a phenomenon of neo-fascist groupuscules, “intrinsically small political (frequently meta-political, but never primarily party-political) entities formed to pursue palingenetic (i.e. revolutionary) ideological, organizational or activist ends with an ultimate goal of overcoming the decadence of the existing liberal democratic system”.²⁵ Neo-fascist groupuscules and larger organisations, in most cases, refrained from, or were too ideologically extreme for, participation in electoral processes, but, at the same time, they actively built contacts with like-minded groupuscules and organisations across the West, and these activities kept alive their faith in the imminence of a fascist revolution. Some post-war fascist groups even formed pan-European alliances, such as the New European Order (Nouvel ordre européen) or Spanish Circle of Friends of Europe (Circulo Espanol de Amigos de Europa) widely known by its Spanish acronym CEDADE, but their influence was limited only to the fascist “choir”.

The second form of post-war “evolution” of fascism was associated with the originally French, though subsequently cross-national network of think tanks, journals, and conferences, labelled the New Right or, later, European New Right (ENR).²⁶ The

²⁴ Emilio Gentile, “The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2000), pp. 18-55 (19). Emphasis in the original.

²⁵ Roger Griffin, “From Slime Mould to Rhizome: An Introduction to the Groupuscular Right”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2003), pp. 27-50 (30).

²⁶ On the New Right see Roger Griffin, “Between Metapolitics and Apoliteia: The Nouvelle Droite’s Strategy for Conserving the Fascist Vision in the ‘Interregnum’”, *Modern & Contemporary France*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (2000), pp. 35-53; Alberto Spektorowski, “The New Right: Ethno-regionalism, Ethno-pluralism and the Emergence of a Neo-fascist ‘Third Way’”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 8,

ENR emerged with the creation of the French think tank Group for Research and Studies on European Civilisation (Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne, GRECE) founded by journalists, writers, university professors, and other intellectuals under the leadership of Alain de Benoist. All the “nodes” that make up the broad ENR network are self-sufficient and have individual doctrines, but they share common ideological origins and are characterised by the same set of distinctive features, which allows to assign these “nodes” to a common school of thought.

The first feature is the ENR’s inherent opposition to individualism, multiculturalism and egalitarianism. According to the ENR thinkers, these liberal democratic policies are the causes for the alleged contemporary crisis of the Europeanised world. Instead of them, the ENR longs to revive and revitalise Europe by implementing the principles of a hierarchically structured organic community and ethno-pluralism in a new post-liberal order. Alberto Spektorowski defines ethno-pluralism as “multiculturalism of the Right” that “endorses a radical conception of multiculturalism in order to undermine the intellectual basis of liberal multiculturalism”.²⁷ In his turn, Jens Rydgren argues that “the notion of ethno-pluralism states that, to preserve the unique national characters of different peoples, they have to be kept separated. Mixing of different ethnicities only leads to cultural extinction”.²⁸ Essentially, the ethno-pluralist theory champions ethno-cultural pluralism globally but is critical of cultural pluralism (multiculturalism) in any given society. By distorting a democratic call for the right of all peoples and cultures to be different,²⁹ the theory thereby attempts to legitimise European exclusionism and rejection of miscegenation. In ethno-pluralist terms, the “‘mixing of cultures’ and the suppression of ‘cultural differences’ would correspond to the intellectual death of humanity and would perhaps even endanger the control mechanisms that ensure its biological survival”.³⁰ However, ethno-pluralism should not be confused with biological racism: “contrary to the traditional conception of racism, the doctrine of ethno-pluralism, as such, is not hierarchical: Different ethnicities are not necessarily superior or inferior, only different, incompatible, and incommensurable”.³¹

The second feature is the ENR’s extensive adoption of the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci’s doctrine on cultural hegemony. This doctrine is based on the concept that a revolution can only be successful if based on the cultural domination over a given

No. 1 (2003), pp. 111-130; Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

²⁷ Spektorowski, “The New Right”, p. 125.

²⁸ Jens Rydgren, “The Sociology of the Radical Right”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 33 (2007), pp. 241-262 (244).

²⁹ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (New York: United Nations, 2008), pp. 1-2.

³⁰ Etienne Balibar, “Is There a ‘New Racism’?”, in Etienne Balibar, Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 17-28 (22).

³¹ Rydgren, “The Sociology of the Radical Right”, p. 244.

society by implanting certain ideological messages through newspapers, conferences, and higher education. The ENR's "right-wing Gramscism" – together with the adoption of specific New Left ideas, especially its sophisticated anti-capitalist rhetoric, as well as regionalist and ecological stances – has certainly been a novel strategic move to veil its fascist agenda in post-war Europe.³² Having abandoned both the milieu of revolutionary fascist groupuscules, and the sphere of parliamentary contestation the ENR preferred to focus on the battle for minds, thus choosing the way of so-called metapolitical fascism. The fascist nature of the ENR, however, is disputed by some scholars who argue that the ENR thinkers have moved beyond fascism and the older revolutionary right-wing project toward "a unique post-modern ideological synthesis".³³

Far-right organisations and parties that still wanted to participate in the political process in post-war period had to dampen dramatically their revolutionary ardour and translate it "as far as possible into the language of liberal democracy".³⁴ This strategy gave birth to the third form of post-war far-right politics, namely the phenomenon of radical right-wing political parties,³⁵ on which more below.

The above-mentioned major forms of the contemporary, post-war far right need to be treated as "ideal types" in the Weberian sense of the term. The ideological boundaries between them are often blurred, while their various permutations – including those adopting elements of other, non-right-wing ideologies – embodied in the plethora of groups, movements and organisations have acquired new names such as, for example, national-revolutionary and national anarchist movements, Radical Traditionalism, Third Position, and Identitarian movement. National-revolutionaries are inspired by fascism, German Conservative Revolution, nationalisms of the Third World, and the Soviet and left-wing propaganda.³⁶ National-anarchists, according to Graham Macklin, promote "a radical anti-capitalist and anti-Marxist 'anarchist' agenda of autonomous rural

³² On the fascist nature of the ENR see Roger Griffin, "Plus ça change! The Fascist Pedigree of the Nouvelle Droite", in Edward J. Arnold (ed.), *The Development of the Radical Right in France: From Boulanger to Le Pen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 217-252; James G. Shields, *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 143-157.

³³ Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, p. 134. For this scholarly position, besides Bar-On's research, see Pierre-André Taguieff, *Sur la Nouvelle Droite: jalons d'une analyse critique* (Paris: Descartes & Cie, 1994).

³⁴ Griffin, "From Slime Mould to Rhizome", p. 38.

³⁵ On radical right-wing parties see, in particular, Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1994); Herbert Kitschelt with Anthony J. McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Elizabeth L. Carter, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Terri E. Givens, *Voting Radical Right in Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁶ Nicolas Lebourg, "Qu'est ce que le nationalisme-révolutionnaire?", *Fragments sur les Temps Présents*, 7 June (2013), <https://tempsresents.com/2013/06/07/nicolas-lebourg-definir-le-nationalisme-revolutionnaire-2/>.

communities within a decentralized, pan-European framework”.³⁷ Radical Traditionalism draws upon the anti-modern, elitist and racist ideas of the Italian fascist thinker Julius Evola who imagined that the current period of “decadence” would be succeeded – through a “revolt against the modern world” – by a new “golden era” of racial hierarchy.³⁸ The far-right Third Position declares its opposition to both capitalism and communism, but at the same time features strong ultranationalist political ideas and far-left economic views. The Identitarian movement is influenced by the ENR, but stresses the need for the creation of “a Europe of nations” that would protect the European identity against foreign cultural and religious influences, especially Islam.³⁹

The ENR, as the more intellectual movement within the post-war far-right milieu, was particularly efficient in exerting influence on other types of the far right. In particular, the majority of European radical right-wing parties embraced the ENR’s doctrine of ethno-pluralism, while some fascist groupuscules adopted ENR’s right-wing Gramscian tactics and tried to influence society, especially young people, through cultural production, for example right-wing music.⁴⁰

Radical right-wing political parties are today arguably the most widespread form of far-right politics, which Roger Griffin identifies as “ethnocratic liberalism” arguing that “it enthusiastically embraces the liberal system, but considers only one ethnic group full members of civil society”.⁴¹ In his turn, Michael Minkenberg defines right-wing radicalism as “a political ideology, whose core element is a myth of a homogeneous nation, a romantic and populist ultranationalism directed against the concept of liberal and pluralistic democracy and its underlying principles of individualism and universalism”.⁴² He argues that “the nationalistic myth” of right-wing radicalism “is characterized by the effort to construct an idea of nation and national belonging by radicalizing ethnic, religious, cultural, and political criteria of exclusion and to condense the idea of nation into an image of extreme collective homogeneity”.⁴³

Cas Mudde provides yet another insightful interpretation of what he calls “radical right-wing populism” suggesting that it can be defined as a “combination of three core

³⁷ Graham D. Macklin, “Co-opting the Counter Culture: Troy Southgate and the National Revolutionary Faction”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2005), pp. 301-326 (301).

³⁸ On Julius Evola see Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

³⁹ See Fabian Virchow, “‘Identitarian Movement’: What Kind of Identity? Is it Really a Movement?”, in Patricia Anne Simpson, Helga Druxes (eds), *Digital Media Strategies of the Far Right in Europe and the United States* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 177-190.

⁴⁰ On right-wing music see Kirsten Dyck, *Reichsrock: The International Web of White-Power and Neo-Nazi Hate Music* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016).

⁴¹ Roger Griffin, “Interregnum or Endgame? The Radical Right in the ‘Post-Fascist’ Era”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2000), pp. 163-178 (173).

⁴² Michael Minkenberg, “The Radical Right in Postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe: Comparative Observations and Interpretations”, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2002), pp. 335-362 (337).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

ideological features: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism”.⁴⁴ As Mudde argues, nativism “holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (‘the nation’) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state”; authoritarianism implies “the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely”; and populism “is understood as a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’”.⁴⁵ Jan-Werner Müller offers a similar, but more extensive and nuanced definition of populism, arguing that populism is:

a particular *moralistic imagination of politics*, a way of perceiving the political world that sets a morally pure and fully unified — but [...] ultimately fictional — people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior. [...] In addition to being antielitist, populists are always antipluralist: populists claim that they, *and only they*, represent the people. Other political competitors are just part of the immoral, corrupt elite [...].⁴⁶

There is less academic consensus on the differences between the *radical right* and the *extreme right*. In the 1990s and 2000s, Anglophone scholars who studied radical right-wing parties predominantly preferred to use either the term “radical right” (e.g. Hans-Georg Betz, Herbert Kitschelt, Michael Minkenberg, Terri Givens, Pippa Norris, David Art) or “extreme right” (e.g. Piero Ignazi, Roger Eatwell, Cas Mudde, Kai Arzheimer, Elisabeth Carter) to refer to the object of their research. In the recent years – and especially after the publication of Mudde’s seminal *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* – there has been a growing consensus in the Anglophone world that is conceptually reasonable to distinguish between right-wing radicalism (or radical right-wing populism) and right-wing extremism. Such an approach largely draws on the long-standing practices in Germany where state authorities distinguish between radicalism and extremism. Thus, Germany’s Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution indicates that political radicalism is associated with intentions “to tackle social problems and conflicts” radically, but at the same time “radical political opinions have their legitimate place in [the German] pluralist social order”. In contrast, extremism, according to the Federal Office, aims to abolish “the democratic constitutional state” and “associated basic principles of [the German] constitutional order”, as well as eliminating

⁴⁴ Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, p. 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁶ Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 19-20. Emphasis in the original.

“the fundamental values of liberal democracy”.⁴⁷ In other words, right-wing radicalism harshly criticises liberal democracy, while right-wing extremism fully rejects it. In this sense, the ideological difference between right-wing extremism and fascism (or neo-Nazism) is often negligible.

The blurring of the boundaries between various forms of far-right politics is also reflected in the ideological heterogeneity of the electorally most successful far-right parties of today, namely the radical right-wing parties. Many of these parties have long political histories, and, over the years, they have integrated many activists coming from the movements and organisations of varying degrees of radicalism or extremism. Activists who have fascist, neo-Nazi or extreme right background may and usually do moderate under the pressure of the party leadership who – for political or tactical reasons – believe that extremist ideas and rhetoric will be harmful for electoral success.

The de-radicalisation process has become a common stage for the most successful European far-right parties today. The Norwegian Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet), which was considered a radical right-wing party in the past,⁴⁸ has gradually removed or toned down most of its hardliners and now perhaps cannot be even considered a far-right party anymore. In the European Parliament, the Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti, DF) and The Finns (Perussuomalaiset, PS) prefer to cooperate, since 2014, with conservative parties such as the UK’s Conservative Party and Poland’s Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) within the framework of the political group European Conservatives and Reformists, rather than with the radical right-wing populists represented, for example, by the FN,⁴⁹ FPÖ⁵⁰ or Italy’s Northern League (Lega Nord, LN)⁵¹ that are members of the Europe of Nations and Freedom political group in the European Parliament. However, the FN, FPÖ and LN have taken steps to moderate too. For example, under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, the FN even expelled her father and the FN’s long-time president Jean-Marie Le Pen for his radicalism. In the recent years, Hungary’s radical right-wing Jobbik party,⁵² too, has considerably toned down its anti-Semitic and anti-Roma rhetoric, and the de-radicalisation strategy has proved to be relatively successful: at the time of the writing, Jobbik is the second most popular party in Hungary. There is a historical precedent for this process: the most notable early

⁴⁷ “Extremismus/Radikalismus”, *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*, <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/service/glossar/extremismus-radikalismus>.

⁴⁸ Anders Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2015), p. 83.

⁴⁹ On the FN see Peter Davies, *The National Front in France: Ideology, Discourse and Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*.

⁵⁰ On the FPÖ see Göran Adamson, *Populist Parties and the Failure of the Political Elites: The Rise of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2016).

⁵¹ On the LN see Andrej Zaslove, *The Re-invention of the European Radical Right: Populism, Regionalism, and the Italian Lega Nord* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011).

⁵² On Jobbik see Péter Krekó, Attila Juhász, *The Hungarian Far Right: Social Demand, Political Supply, and International Context* (Stuttgart: ibidem Press, 2017).

example of de-radicalisation of the far right is the refashioning of the fascist Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano) into a “post-fascist” party in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was followed by the expulsion of right-wing extremists and transformation into the national-conservative National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale) in 1995, and, eventually, the merger of the National Alliance into Silvio Berlusconi’s now defunct centre-right People of Freedom (Popolo della Libertà) in 2009.

De-radicalisation has contributed to the growing popular support for the “moderated” radical right-wing parties, allowing them to enter sectors of the political spectrum that mainstream parties have long abandoned. Compared to the 1990s, the “moderate” radical right now have even more appeal to liberal voters concerned about identity issues, to the working class on labour and immigration issues, and to conservative voters anxious to preserve so-called traditional values.

De-radicalisation is not a mandatory condition for the electoral success of the far right, which is corroborated by the electoral fortunes of the Greek neo-Nazi Popular Association – Golden Dawn (Laïkós Sýndesmos – Chrysí Avgí, XA)⁵³ at the parliamentary elections in 2015 or the Slovak extreme right Kotleba – People’s Party Our Slovakia (Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko)⁵⁴ at the parliamentary elections in 2016. However, in general, the more radical the far-right parties are, the less electoral support they have, and vice versa.⁵⁵ Some of the more extreme far-right parties of today, for example, the British National Party (BNP),⁵⁶ Italian New Force (Forza Nuova),⁵⁷ National-Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, NPD) or Party of the Swedes (Svenskarnas parti) have rarely had any tangible electoral successes. Even if many citizens of Western countries are seeking existential refuge in national identities, they are predominantly repulsed by blatant right-wing extremism and racist rhetoric. Some elements of the electorate of radical right-wing parties may clearly be driven by more extreme views than those espoused by their political favourites, but the majority of the voters do not seem to be racists or ultranationalists. Elaborating on the observation made by Laurent Fabius, France’s Socialist Prime Minister (1984-1986), who said in 1984 that the FN’s Jean-Marie Le Pen asked the right questions but came

⁵³ On the XA see Antonis A. Ellinas, “Neo-Nazism in an Established Democracy: The Persistence of Golden Dawn in Greece”, *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2015), pp. 1-20.

⁵⁴ On the Slovak far right in general and Kotleba in particular see Alena Kluknavská, Josef Smolík, “We Hate Them All? Issue Adaptation of Extreme Right Parties in Slovakia 1993-2016”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2016), pp. 335-344.

⁵⁵ Carter, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe*, p. 203.

⁵⁶ On the BNP see, in particular, Nigel Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁵⁷ On Forza Nuova see Giovanna Campani, “Neo-fascism from the Twentieth Century to the Third Millennium: The Case of Italy”, in Gabriella Lazaridis, Giovanna Campani, Annie Benveniste (eds), *The Rise of the Far Right in Europe: Populist Shifts and “Othering”* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 25-54.

up with the wrong answers, one can suggest that the greater part of the electorate of radical right-wing parties make their electoral decisions because they are tempted by the right questions that the more moderate far-right politicians raise – about the efficiency of the liberal-democratic establishment, economic inequalities, job security, social cohesion, immigration, religious traditions and identity.

0.2.2. Radical right-wing populism and foreign policy

Foreign policy positions of radical right-wing parties stem from their ultranationalism, or nativism, as a constituent element of their ideologies, as well as ethno-pluralism adopted from the ENR. The approaches of radical right-wing parties to international relations are arguably best characterised by their attitudes towards globalisation, the USA, NATO and European integration.

The overwhelming majority of radical right parties consider globalisation, for economic, political and socio-cultural reasons, as a destructive process. First, globalisation – as a process of de-regularisation and liberalisation of goods and labour markets – is blamed for undermining the welfare state, impoverishing small and medium businesses in favour of transnational corporations, cutting wages and rising unemployment.

Second, international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank or World Trade Organisation, as well as currently proposed trade agreements like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, are seen as limiting economic and political sovereignty of European nation-states.

While these positions could potentially be also articulated by (radical) left-wing parties, these critical approaches to globalisation are – in the case of the radical right – underpinned by their ultranationalism. Concerns about the survival of the welfare state in a globalised world are part of the radical right-wing ideological package that can be called “welfare state chauvinism” suggesting that welfare benefits should be restricted to the indigenous population and, thus, implicitly cementing the inequality between “Us” and “Them”. Similar ultranationalist implications can be found in the radical right narratives associating globalisation with the rise of unemployment and salary reductions: globalisation fosters immigration, and immigrants “take our jobs and drive down wages”. Moreover, describing the IMF or World Bank as instruments of “international finance” enables the radical right’s flirtation with anti-Semitism, as the term “international finance” is a coded reference to the Jews.⁵⁸ The combination of “leftist” criticism of globalisation

⁵⁸ John E. Richardson, Ruth Wodak, “Recontextualising Fascist Ideologies of the Past: Right-wing Discourses on Employment and Nativism in Austria and the United Kingdom”, *Critical Discourse Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2009), pp. 251-267 (256).

and nativist undertones allows the radical right to mobilise “losers of globalisation” more efficiently in comparison to the radical left; as Hanspeter Kriesi and others argued, “fears about national identities” are more important for the “losers of globalisation” than “the defence of their economic interests”.⁵⁹ The majority of “losers of globalisation”, who vote for the far right, come from the working class – a development that Hans-Georg Betz called a “proletarianization of the radical populist Right’s electoral basis”.⁶⁰ He also suggested that, from the point of view of economic programmes, already in the early 1990s, “a number of radical right-wing populist parties resembled Socialist and Social Democratic parties more than any other of the established parties”.⁶¹

Finally, radical right-wing parties directly blame globalisation, which – to a certain degree – implies free movement of persons, for uncontrolled immigration and erosion of national cultures. Immigrants from Africa and Asia receive special attention of far-right parties that believe that real or imaginary cultural differences between Africans and Asians, on the one hand, and Europeans, on the other, are too great to allow for a peaceful co-existence of these peoples in the European space and for a successful integration of Africans and Asians into European societies. These arguments are underpinned by different but often overlapping motives ranging from overtly racist to Islamophobic to ethno-pluralist ones. The racist motive relates to a belief in the superiority of “white race” over any other “races”: Africans and Asians are thus seen not only as inferior to white Europeans but also a direct threat to the existence of “white race”. The Islamophobic motive alludes to the incompatibility of Islam with European societies; some far-right parties would defend a concept of a Christian Europe and argue that Islam has threatened Christian Europe for many centuries, some others would insist that Europe is secular, while Islam rejects secularism. The ethno-pluralist motive, unlike the overtly racist one, does not presume superiority of Europeans over Africans and Asians, but glorifies cultural diversity of different ethnic communities – a diversity that should be maintained, and, hence, different ethnic communities should have as low influence on each other as possible.

The rejection of globalisation by the majority of radical right-wing parties is closely associated with their general scepticism towards to the USA. As Christina Schori Liang sums up,

Anti-Americanism has become one of the dominant foreign policy themes of the populist radical right since the end of the Cold War, and the United States is widely

⁵⁹ Hanspeter Kriesi, Edgar Grande, Romain Lachat, Martin Dolezal, Simon Bornschier, Timotheos Frey, *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 19.

⁶⁰ Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, p. 166.

⁶¹ Ibid.

perceived as the main state adversary of Europe. [...] The United States is viewed by many populist radical right parties [...] as having hegemony over international institutions [...] and international business. The United States is also represented as a warmonger, forcing countries to join in unwanted conflicts and instigating and forcing political, economic, and cultural integration.⁶²

According to Lars Rensmann, “in general, anti-Americanism is now at the top of the agenda of extreme right parties all over Europe, from *Lega Nord* to *Front National*”,⁶³ but exceptions do exist, while the attitudes of far-right parties towards the US may change with time. For example, the FN was strongly pro-American until the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989-1991 and the beginning of the US-led Gulf War that the FN strongly criticised; the FPÖ, under the leadership of Jörg Haider, looked at the US with favour until the beginning of the 2000s when Haider started to cooperate with Saddam Hussein; and the Belgian Flemish Block (Vlaams Blok) was “virtually the only open supporter of American foreign policy in contemporary Belgium”.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of far-right parties remain, in a varying degree, anti-American. The election of President Donald Trump, who has been often seen as a racist⁶⁵ and American isolationist,⁶⁶ and whose presidential campaign was led by one of the ideologues of the Alternative Right (or alt-right) movement Steve Bannon,⁶⁷ exerted an impact on many European far-right parties who embraced his election – if only in hope that Trump, as an isolationist, would limit American presence in Europe – but it is too early to say whether Trump’s election will reverse the deeply rooted anti-Americanism of the European far right.

Contemporary attitudes towards NATO on the part of radical right-wing parties are similar to those towards the US, but during the Cold War the European far right predominantly supported membership in NATO; their anti-communism underpinned their belief that NATO was an efficient instrument to contain and deter the Soviet Union. After the fall of socialism and communism in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and the

⁶² Christina Schori Liang, “Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right”, in Christina Schori Liang (ed.), *Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 1-32 (9).

⁶³ Lars Rensmann, “The New Politics of Prejudice: Comparative Perspectives on Extreme Right Parties in European Democracies”, *German Politics & Society*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (2003), pp. 93-123 (119). Italics in the original.

⁶⁴ Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, p. 78.

⁶⁵ German Lopez, “Donald Trump’s Long History of Racism, from the 1970s to 2016”, *Vox*, 16 February (2017), <http://www.vox.com/2016/7/25/12270880/donald-trump-racism-history>.

⁶⁶ “Donald Trump Reveals His Isolationist Foreign-policy Instincts”, *The Economist*, 22 March (2016), <http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2016/03/aipac-and-foreign-policy>.

⁶⁷ Joshua Green, “This Man Is the Most Dangerous Political Operative in America”, *Bloomberg*, 8 October (2015), <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/graphics/2015-steve-bannon/>. On the alt-right see

demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, most far-right parties switched to anti-NATO positions. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and communism were considered as a bigger threat than the US, but after the 1989-1991, the US became to be seen as the only remaining superpower, and NATO – as an instrument of the American imperialism.⁶⁸

However, there have been exceptions too. The FPÖ supported Austria joining NATO in the 1990s, even if, ironically, the majority of Austrians favoured the country's neutral status.⁶⁹ The Greater Romania Party (Partidul România Mare, PRM) considered NATO – at least until the death of its long-time leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor in 2015 – “the only possible instrument to protect the strategic interests of Romania”,⁷⁰ while the DF is still a resolutely pro-NATO far-right party. The All-Ukrainian Union “Freedom” (Vseukrains'ke Ob'yednannya “Svoboda”) sees NATO as an instrument of resisting Russia's aggressive behaviour towards Ukraine, and, therefore, supports the idea of the country joining NATO.

With respect to the EU, the majority of West European radical right-wing parties supported European integration through to the signing, in 1992, of the Treaty on European Union that was seen as a step leading to the loss of national sovereignty and creation of a European super-state, in which national and ethnic particularities would be eradicated. Cas Mudde suggested arguably the most useful typology of contemporary far-right parties with regard to their approach to the EU by distinguishing between Euroenthusiasts, Europragmatists, Eurorejects and Eurosceptics.⁷¹ Euroenthusiasts, who express “support for both the underlying ideas of European integration and the EU itself”,⁷² represent the smallest part of the European far right, and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (Bündnis Zukunft Österreich, BZÖ), when it was still a radical right-wing populist party under the leadership of Jörg Haider (2005-2008), was a notable example of a Euroenthusiast far-right party. Europragmatists are no larger group within the far-right milieu: “they do not believe in the underlying ideas of European integration, but they do support the EU”,⁷³ and the PRM, among very few others, could be categorised as a Europragmatist party. Eurorejects are a broader group of far-right parties: they oppose membership of their country in the EU, as they see it “as an infringement of or a threat to national independence” and criticise the “democratic deficit” of the EU.⁷⁴ Some of the far-right parties in the Euroreject category are the BNP, DF, League of Polish Families

⁶⁸ Liang, “Europe for the Europeans”, p. 16.

⁶⁹ Givens, *Voting Radical Right in Western Europe*, p. 12.

⁷⁰ Markéta Smrčková, “Comparison of Radical Right-Wing Parties in Bulgaria and Romania: The National Movement of Ataka and the Great Romania Party”, *Středoevropské politické studie*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2009), pp. 48-65 (53).

⁷¹ Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, pp. 161-165.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

(Liga Polskich Rodzin) and Bulgarian Attack (Ataka). Eurosceptics are the majority of radical right-wing populist parties; they “believe in the basic tenets of European integration, but are skeptical about the current direction of the EU”.⁷⁵

Apart from concerns about the “EU-inflicted” loss of national sovereignty and erosion of national distinctions, as well as the ghost of a European super-state, the far right accuse the EU of the democratic deficit referring to the fact that neither the Council of the European Union nor the European Commission – the major EU institutions – is elected directly by the peoples of the EU. However, the far right often combine harsh, yet sometimes legitimate criticism of the functioning of the EU with conspiracy theories. One of most widespread conspiracy theories about the EU is that its elites allegedly promote mass immigration of Africans and Asians into Europe to replace the Europeans who are blocking the creation of a European super-state.⁷⁶

0.2.3. Russia as a “beacon of hope” for the European far right

Up until Vladimir Putin became Russia’s president for the third time in 2012, the European far right largely lacked any coherent attitudes towards Russia. The exception were avowedly anti-Russian far-right parties in particular European countries that were either Soviet republics until 1991 or part of the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War. Thus, radical right-wing populist parties in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania,⁷⁷ Poland⁷⁸ and Ukraine⁷⁹ defined their negative attitudes towards Russia on the basis of the historical grievances about the Soviet Union and the perceived threat coming from contemporary Russia. There is also a positive correlation between anti-Russian and pro-NATO sentiments (although not necessarily pro-EU). However, not all the far-right parties in the post-Soviet/post-socialist Europe have been anti-Russian, and in Slovakia, Bulgaria, Serbia – and even in Ukraine and Poland – one can identify certain radical right-wing organisations that would be pro-Russian and willing to reject European integration in favour of a Russia-led political alliance or to (re-)enter the Russian sphere of influence.

Nevertheless, consistent approaches towards Russia have been absent in the European far-right milieu in the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. This may be explained by the fact that Russia under President Boris Yeltsin and during Putin’s two first

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

⁷⁶ See, for example, Markus Willinger, *A Europe of Nations* (London: Arktos, 2014), pp. 19-20.

⁷⁷ On the far-right parties in the Baltic states see Daunis Auers, Andres Kasekamp, “The Impact of Radical Right Parties in the Baltic States”, in Michael Minkenberg (ed.), *Transforming the Transformation? The East European Radical Right in the Political Process* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 137-153.

⁷⁸ On the Polish far right see Rafał Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁷⁹ On the Ukrainian far right see Andreas Umland, “A Typical Variety of European Right-Wing Radicalism?”, *Russian Politics and Law*, Vol. 51, No. 5 (2013), pp. 86-95.

presidential terms (2000-2008) did not play any significant role on the international scene, and positioned itself as a democratising country, which was of little interest to the European far right. For example, during his visit to Austria in 2001, Putin apparently met with Jörg Haider, who by that time had stepped down from the leadership of the FPÖ but remained the party's "gray cardinal". In the period 2000-2002, the FPÖ was a minor coalition partner in the government formed with the conservative Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP), so Putin met with Haider as one of the top Austrian politicians. Describing the meeting in an interview to a Russian newspaper 2003, Haider said: "During Putin's visit to Austria, we had a very interesting conversation, and he invited me to visit Russia. I hope to use this invitation in the coming years".⁸⁰ However, Haider never visited Russia and died more than five years after the interview. In 2003, the FN's leader Jean-Marie Le Pen argued that "the actions of monsieur Putin" were reasonable, "he made a great step forward".⁸¹ In 2004, Le Pen said that he "found the politics of the Kremlin and Putin very sensible and wise"; it was "on the right track".⁸² Still, these arguments were different from the lavish praise of Putin's regime on the part of the French far right after 2010-2011.

With the increase of anti-Western and anti-American sentiments of the Russian ruling elites, the situation started to change. The positive narratives on Russia produced by the far right since Putin's third presidential term can be divided into the narratives on Russia in general and those on Putin's Russia. The former narratives were broadly underpinned by anti-Americanism of radical right-wing populists: they welcomed Russia as a geopolitical counterweight to the US and NATO, as a state that could help Europe liberate itself from American influence. The narratives on *Putin's* Russia followed a similar pattern that had, however, its peculiarities.

One of the very first far-right narratives on Russia under Putin's rule was that the country "got up off its knees". Andreas Mölzer of the FPÖ wrote that Putin "had managed to steer the post-communist, crisis-ridden Russia into calmer waters".⁸³ His fellow party member Johann Gudenus argued that, in the 1990s, Russian people "were desperate, the country was characterised by high mortality rates, economic collapse. [...] And when Putin emerged – it was a salvation for Russia. He did a lot, if compared to the 1990s,

⁸⁰ Aleksandr Kuranov, Eduard Shtayner, "Yorg Haider: khochu v Rossiyu. Glavnoy tsel'yu svoey politiki lider avstriyskikh ul'trapravvykh schitaet zabotu o 'malen'kom cheloveke'", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, No. 135, 7 July (2003), p. 6.

⁸¹ Igor Chernyak, "Kak my pogovorili s glavnyim frantsuzskim 'natsi'", *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, No. 40, 5 March (2003), p. 5.

⁸² Konstantin Kachalin, "Gost' 'RV'. 'Budushchee Evropy – za severnoy dugoy'", *Rossiyskie Vesti*, No. 44, 8 December (2004), p. 4.

⁸³ Andreas Mölzer, "Russland und die Muster-Demokraten", *Andreas Mölzer, Mitglied des Europaparlaments*, 6 March (2012), <https://andreasmoelzer.wordpress.com/2012/03/06/russland-und-die-muster-demokraten/>.

and the results are evident”.⁸⁴ In a later interview, Gudenus alleged that Yeltsin was not only “controlled by oligarchs”, he was “a puppet of the West”. Putin, at the same time, put “the country back on its feet and consolidated Russia. He disciplined a large part of the oligarchs”.⁸⁵

The “anti-oligarchic” theme was indeed popular among the far right in their interpretation of Putin’s Russia. Márton Gyöngyösi, who is responsible for the foreign policy of the Hungarian Jobbik, largely echoes Gudenus’ argument saying that “throughout Boris Yeltsin’s ten-year reign, the oligarchs and the West nearly drove Russia to dire straits, and the people of Russia were suffering”.⁸⁶ The FN’s leader Marine Le Pen admitted that Putin “inspired respect for his attempts to counter a group of oligarchs who had appropriated Russian national resources”.⁸⁷

Some far-right activists and ideologues imbued the “anti-oligarchic” narrative with their own specific messages. For example, the BNP combined this narrative with the anti-Semitic message inherent in the party ideology and claimed that Putin “moved to stop the oligarchs who had grabbed control of the vast wealth of Russia looting any more. And nearly all those oligarchs happened to be Jewish and with close ties to international Zionist organisations”.⁸⁸

Closely related to the argument that Putin “got Russia up off its knees” is the idea that, under Putin, the Russians started to be proud of their nation again. In one interview, Marine Le Pen said she admired Putin because he “managed to restore pride and contentment to a great nation that had been humiliated and persecuted for 70 years”.⁸⁹ Le Pen’s then fellow party member Aymeric Chauprade, who was her advisor on international relations until 2015 when he left the FN, argued that Putin “restored Russia’s positions in the economy and geopolitics, and Russia enjoyed deep respect in the world”.⁹⁰

The European far right deplore the alleged loss of national sovereignty to Brussels, and consequently praise Putin for preserving Russia’s sovereignty – an argument that

⁸⁴ Natalya Barabash, “My s Kadyrovym nashli obshchiy yazyk”, *Vzglyad*, 10 May (2012), <http://www.vz.ru/politics/2012/5/10/578121.html>.

⁸⁵ “A Strong Russia Is Good for Europe!”, *Manuel Ochsenreiter*, 18 April (2014), <http://manuelochsenreiter.com/blog/2014/4/18/a-strong-russia-is-good-for-europe>.

⁸⁶ Horváth Bence, “Keleten senki nem bízik Orbánban”, *444*, 30 March (2015), <http://444.hu/2015/03/30/jobbik-kulpol-gyongyosi/>.

⁸⁷ Darya Aslamova, “Marin Le Pen: ‘Evrosoyuz – eto SSSR v evropeyskom masshtabe. I tak zhe poterpel krakh’”, *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, No. 35, 11 March (2012), p. 6.

⁸⁸ “Watch out – Warmongers about!”, *British National Party*, 24 April (2014), <https://web.archive.org/web/20140425212744/http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/watch-out-%E2%80%93-warmongers-about>.

⁸⁹ “Le Pen: I Admire ‘Cool Head’ Putin’s Resistance to West’s New Cold War”, *Euronews*, 1 December (2014), <http://www.euronews.com/2014/12/01/le-pen-i-admire-cool-head-putin-s-resistance-to-west-s-new-cold-war/>.

⁹⁰ Galina Dudina, “V Evrope pribavilos’ kraynikh”, *Kommersant. Daily*, No. 84, 20 May (2014), p. 7.

Putin himself liked to stress during his later speeches. The LN's leader Matteo Salvini calls Putin "a statesman who does not serve the interests of the globalists",⁹¹ and argues that he "defends the interests of his own people regardless of the world technocrats and Brussels' biddings".⁹² A far-right conspiracy theorist F. William Engdahl maintains that Russia, "especially after Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin, [...] made it very clear that it was going to defend its sovereignty, national interests and borders".⁹³ Marine Le Pen considers Putin a patriot who "cares about the sovereignty of his people".⁹⁴

Another important far-right narrative on Putin's Russia is the acceptance of the conservative posture of Putin's regime and even its self-appointed global leadership in defending the so-called traditional values. For example, Chauprade trusts that "thanks to Putin, other people acquire hope and opportunity to defend family values. For the West, Russia is a beacon of hope".⁹⁵ Fabrice Sorlin, the leader of the French Catholic ultranationalist organisation "Day of Wrath" (Dies Iræ) and former candidate for the FN, compared "Russia's anti-gay stand to its protection of Europe against the Mongol hordes and against fascism in the twentieth century".⁹⁶ The Italian far-right National Front (Fronte Nazionale) expressed its support for Putin's "courageous position against the powerful gay lobby", as well as his political backing of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, through dozens of posters in Rome announcing "I am with Putin!".⁹⁷ Jobbik's Gyöngyösi claims that the party's main enemy is liberalism, and "the main ally in the fight against liberalism is Russia that has recognised traditional values. We will need the full cultural and economic weight of Russia to win in this struggle".⁹⁸

Putin's talk about Christian values did not go unnoticed by the European far right. Marine Le Pen's partner and the FN's vice president Louis Aliot claims that Putin's Russia is "one of the last European defenders of the Judeo-Christian values that form the basis of our civilisation".⁹⁹ Roberto Fiore, the leader of the Italian fascist New Force

⁹¹ Niva Mirakyan, "Evronadezhda na Rossiyu", *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, No. 184, 15 August (2014), p. 6.

⁹² Evgeniy Tarasyuk, "Est' i drugaya Evropa", *Zavtra*, No. 42, 15 October (2014), p. 2.

⁹³ Uil'yam Engdal [F. William Engdahl], "Rossiya – v avangarde sozdaniya novogo mira", *Nevskoe vremya*, No. 126, 17 July (2015), <http://www.nvspb.ru/tops/rossiya-v-avangarde-sozdaniya-novogo-mira-58230>.

⁹⁴ "Putin verteidigt Europas Zivilisation", *Kurier*, 17 May (2014), <http://kurier.at/politik/eu/marine-le-pen-putin-verteidigt-die-werte-der-europaeischen-zivilisation/65.991.041>.

⁹⁵ Elena Chinkova, "Vladimir Yakunin, glava RZhD: Propishite v Konstitutsii, chto takoe 'brak'!", *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, No. 103, 11 September (2014), p. 11.

⁹⁶ Miranda Blue, "Globalizing Homophobia, Part 2: 'Today the Whole World Is Looking at Russia'", *Right Wing Watch*, 3 October (2013), <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/globalizing-homophobia-part-2-today-whole-world-looking-russia>.

⁹⁷ Fronte Nazionale Uffic., "Io sto con Putin", *Facebook*, 5 September (2013), <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=615875215114378>.

⁹⁸ Darya Aslamova, "Vengerskiy politik Marton D'endeshi: My stali vassalami SShA i administratsii Evrosoyuza", *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, No. 137, 4 December (2014), p. 6.

⁹⁹ Jędrzej Bielecki, "Putin bohaterem Frontu Le Pena", *Rzeczpospolita*, 20 March (2014), <http://www.rp.pl/temat/84807.html>.

(Forza Nuova) goes even further and alleges that “Russian people have a particular role in history, which is to represent the rebirth of Europe and the rebirth of Christian Europe”.¹⁰⁰

The “salvation” narrative regarding Putin’s Russia and its potential role in defending or liberating Europe has also been popular among particular far-right activists. According to Gianluca Savoini, a spokesman for the LN’s leader Matteo Salvini, Putin “has clearly stated his intention to protect the identity of peoples from the chaotic migration, international financial lobbies, and pressure from the influential external forces”.¹⁰¹ Jobbik’s Béla Kovács maintains that “mother Russia will have to save Europe”,¹⁰² while Gudenus argues that “a strong Russia gives [Europe] more independence, more freedom”.¹⁰³ According to the Austrian magazine *Info-Direkt* associated with the far-right Community of Austrian Compatriots (Österreichische Landsmannschaft), “Putin is the beacon of hope for those who want to counterpose something to the challenges of global economic competition, namely something based on identity, homeland, and cultural rootedness”.¹⁰⁴ The authors of the Austrian far-right “Free Austria” (Freies Österreich) blog believe that the “Russia of Vladimir Putin [...] will give the people of Europe an incentive, a necessary external impulse, to rise against their anti-popular governments, with the mandate of their peoples and to reflect a policy of the identitarian return to eternal traditional, spiritual, ethnic values”.¹⁰⁵

Some far-right party leaders in Russia’s European neighbourhood spoke in favour of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as the alternative to the EU. In his lecture at the Moscow State University in 2013, Jobbik’s leader Gábor Vona said that Hungary would have to decide whether to stay in the EU, join the EEU, or try to remain independent. One way or another, Jobbik would have Hungary leave the EU, “give way to transcendent values and quit the matrix of global capitalism”.¹⁰⁶ In a later interview, Vona referred to the works of the Russian theorist of Eurasianism Nikolay Trubetsky and Russian neo-Eurasianist Aleksandr Dugin, and argued that “the advantage of Eurasianism is that it allows for the preservation of the independence of the regions, and is based on the continental cooperation in contrast to the exploitation by the European

¹⁰⁰ Alliance for Peace and Freedom (APF), “Fiore Speaks in Russia – Moscow Is the Third Rome”, *YouTube*, 17 May (2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAt1a2_EiOg.

¹⁰¹ Mirakyan, “Evronadezhda na Rossiyu”, p. 6.

¹⁰² Galina Sapozhnikova, “Deputat v Evroparlamente ot Vengrii Bela Kovach: Spasat’ Zapad opyat’ pridetsya Rossii”, *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, No. 116, 13 October (2014), p. 8.

¹⁰³ “A Strong Russia Is Good for Europe!”.

¹⁰⁴ “Wir wollen einen wie Putin”, *Info-Direkt*, No. 1 (2015), pp. 6-9 (7).

¹⁰⁵ “In eigener Sache, März 2014”, *Freies-oesterreich.net*, 30 March (2014), <http://freies-oesterreich.net/2014/03/30/in-eigener-sache-maerz-2014/>.

¹⁰⁶ “Gábor Vona Had a Lecture at Lomonosov University in Russia”, *Jobbik*, 24 May (2013), http://www.jobbik.com/g%C3%A1bor_vona_had_lecture_lomonosov_university_russia.

Union”.¹⁰⁷ While Putin’s project of the EEU had little to do with the Russian classic Eurasianism or Dugin’s fascist neo-Eurasianism, Vona clearly identified it as such. Likewise, the Greek neo-Nazi XA welcomed the creation of the EEU and referred to it as “Dugin’s dream and the nightmare of the American-Zionists”, as well as the “rival to the EU”.¹⁰⁸ The political programme of Bulgarian Attack at the 2014 European elections stated that the future belonged to “Eurasia, to the combination of resources of Russia and technologies of other European countries”.¹⁰⁹ Addressing the nation at the end of 2014, Attack’s leader Volen Siderov claimed it was time for Bulgaria to choose: “whether we continue breathing the Euro-Atlantic dust until we suffocate, or whether we will start searching for our roots of an old Eurasian people of state-builders”.¹¹⁰ Siderov himself evidently preferred the second option and called for a referendum on Bulgaria’s withdrawal from NATO and the EU. While campaigning for the holding of the referendum, Siderov declared that Bulgaria needed to align itself with the EEU.¹¹¹

The perceptions of Putin’s Russia by particular European far-right activists and ideologues demonstrate the uncritical and largely uninformed nature of these attitudes. They seem to be based on the self-descriptions of Putin’s regime, and it is hardly incidental that some of them largely coincide with the arguments put forward by Putin at the meetings of the Valdai International Discussion Club, a soft power tool of Russian foreign policy established in 2011. Evidence suggests that individual far-right activists either participated in these meetings or, at least, closely followed them. For example, Aymeric Chauprade participated in the Valdai meeting in 2013, while the then leader of the BNP Nick Griffin and Marine Le Pen’s niece and FN member Marion Maréchal-Le Pen were recommended by the Valdai organisers for participation in 2014.¹¹² Several far-right politicians and authors made statements on Russia with direct references to Putin’s speeches at Valdai.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ “Lider partii ‘Yobbik – Za luchshuyu Vengriyu’ Gabor Vona o evroatlantizme, Rossii, Gruzii, Sirii, rusinakh, Transil’vanii i Serbii”, *IA REX*, 22 January (2014), <http://www.iarex.ru/interviews/44688.html>.

¹⁰⁸ “Σφοδρό χτύπημα στην εξωτερική πολιτική των ΗΠΑ: Ιδρύεται σήμερα η Ευρωασιατική Οικονομική Ένωση στο Καζακστάν”, *Χρυσή Αυγή*, 29 May (2014), <http://www.xryshaygh.com/enimerosi/view/sfodro-chtuphma-sthn-ejwterikh-politikh-twn-hpa-idruetai-shmera-h-eurwasiat>.

¹⁰⁹ “Ataka – Evrozibory 2014”, *Ataka*, <http://www.ataka.bg/ep2014/>.

¹¹⁰ “Siderov ot parlamentarnata tribuna: Da sprem da dishame evroatlanteskiya prakh, zashtoto shche se zadushim”, *Ataka*, 5 December (2014), http://www.ataka.bg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7108&Itemid=1.

¹¹¹ “Siderov: Da se orientirame kam Evraziyskiya sayuz”, *Novini*, 13 June (2014), <http://www.novini.bg/news/210146-сидеров-да-се-ориентираме-към-евразийския-съюз.html>.

¹¹² “The Interpreter Obtains List of Prospective Attendees for Russian Valdai Club Annual Meeting”, *The Interpreter*, 15 October (2014), <http://www.interpretermag.com/the-interpreter-obtains-list-of-prospective-attendees-for-prestigious-russian-valdai-club-annual-meeting/>.

¹¹³ Guillaume Faye, “Poutine: le De Gaulle russe?”, *Guillaume Faye*, 19 November (2014), <http://www.gfaye.com/poutine-le-de-gaulle-russe/>; “L’Associazione Lombardia Russia”,

0.3. Methodology

The thesis is an empirically-driven and in-depth study that attempts to answer the core research question: Why do relations and cooperation exist between various Russian actors and the European far right, against the background of the declared animosity of Putin's Russia towards historical and contemporary manifestations of the far right, and the legacy of the far right's enmity to communism and capitalism?

To address this empirical puzzle, I will answer the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent were the antagonistic stances of the European far right towards Soviet Russia all-encompassing? What pragmatic and/or ideological considerations underpinned the pro-Soviet "minority faith" of the European far right?

2. What triggered the intensification of cooperation between the European far-right and Russian actors after the collapse of the Soviet Union? What was the nature of this cooperation, and what specific actors were involved in it?

3. How and why did Russia under Putin's presidency change in terms of paving the way for mainstreaming the cooperation with the European far right?

4. What are institutionalised forms of cooperation between the European far-right and Russian actors?

5. In what pro-Russian efforts are radical right-wing parties in European countries involved, and what structures and individuals represent the Russian side?

6. What narratives do European pro-Russian far-right activists promote at high-profile events?

Methodologically, this thesis is anchored in fascism studies. The latter is an emergent interdisciplinary field, the theoretical foundations for which were laid in the 1990s with the publication of Roger Griffin's *Nature of Fascism*¹¹⁴ and the subsequent discussions of the main theses of Griffin's work. Challenging the existing interpretations of fascism presented by Marxist and non-Marxist scholars before him, as well as drawing on Max Weber's theory of "ideal types",¹¹⁵ Griffin suggested his own approach, which, in particular, featured the following theses: (1) fascism is a unique, full-fledged ideology, which can be described as a form of revolutionary ultra-nationalism; (2) fascism is a generic phenomenon: it is not limited to Italian Fascism or German National Socialism; (3) fascism is a transhistorical phenomenon: while it was born in the first half of the twentieth century and became the ideological basis of two autonomous regimes (Italy and the Third Reich), manifestations of fascism transcended the interwar period and the

Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia, 5 February (2014), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/associazione/lo-scopo>.

¹¹⁴ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991).

¹¹⁵ Edward A. Shils, Henry A. Finch (eds), *Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1949), pp. 90-99.

Second World War, and can be found today too; (4) fascism is not an exclusively European phenomenon: it is international, and movements, organisations and parties ideologically based on fascism in its various permutations can be found elsewhere in the world.

Griffin's arguments were supported by a number of authoritative scholars of fascism such as Stanley Payne¹¹⁶ and Roger Eatwell¹¹⁷, which led to the emergence of the so-called "new consensus" – at that time at least in the Anglophone academic world – on the nature of generic fascism.¹¹⁸ Already at the end of the 1990s, even some critics of the "new consensus", such as the Marxist historian Dave Renton, considered it a foundation of the field of fascism studies: in 1999, Renton argued that he had written his book *Fascism: Theory and Practice*¹¹⁹ "as a reply to the new discipline of 'fascism studies'",¹²⁰ that he identified with the works of Griffin, Eatwell, Payne and some other scholars of fascism.

The "new consensus" proved to be productive in terms of scholarship, not least because its emergence coincided with, or was perhaps even underpinned by concerns about, the rise of far-right parties in Europe and some post-Soviet states in the 1990s. Hence, one of the most significant results of the "new consensus" was that it greatly contributed to the studies of contemporary far-right movements and parties, as it provided these studies with a historical perspective on the subject. In this context, some of the notable examples of the contribution of the "new consensus" include the French case studies such as Peter Davies' *Extreme Right in France, 1789 to the Present*¹²¹ and James Shields' *Extreme Right in France*,¹²² as well as Nigel Copsey's *Contemporary British Fascism*¹²³ and Stephen Shenfield's *Russian Fascism*.¹²⁴

As the "new consensus" consolidated and while scholars subscribing to it to a varying degree produced more research applying its analytical framework not only to investigations of modern political developments, but also to the studies of eugenics,¹²⁵

¹¹⁶ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

¹¹⁷ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Allen Lane, 1996).

¹¹⁸ Roger Griffin (ed.), *International Fascism: Theories, Causes and the New Consensus* (London: Arnold Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹¹⁹ Dave Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹²¹ Peter Davies, *The Extreme Right in France, 1789 to the Present: From De Maistre to Le Pen* (London: Routledge, 2002).

¹²² Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*.

¹²³ Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism*.

¹²⁴ Stephen D. Shenfield, *Russian Fascism: Traditions, Tendencies, Movements* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001).

¹²⁵ Marius Turda, Paul Weindling (eds), *"Blood and Homeland": Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900-1940* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007).

architecture,¹²⁶ theatre,¹²⁷ music,¹²⁸ aviation,¹²⁹ translation¹³⁰ and other phenomena, it became increasingly clear that a new field, fascism studies, was emerging. Institutionally, the field was reinforced by the launch of two book series “Extremism and Democracy” (2002) and “Fascism and the Far Right” (2015) the Routledge publishing house, as well as the start of publication of the academic journal *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* (2012).

As the editors of the *Fascism* journal imply, fascism studies, as a field, encompasses not only research of generic fascism and its manifestations in different national and historical contexts, but also explorations of how various aspects of fascism are expressed in art, culture, ritual and propaganda, and how they are related to national and international crises, revolutions, totalitarianism, capitalism, communism, extremism, terrorism, etc.¹³¹ Already in 1968, Stuart Woolf argued that the studies of fascism offered an ideal meeting ground for historians, political scientists, sociologists and economists,¹³² and today, “fascism”, as “a sufficiently sharp” and “heuristically useful” term, is “broadly and productively applied in empirical analysis”, and “has found application within the study of extremely anti-egalitarian ideas in a number of fields including comparative politics, contemporary history, political anthropology, and cultural studies”.¹³³

However, fascism studies, as an interdisciplinary field of research, too, employ concepts and methods not only from “traditional” – for the studies of historical and contemporary fascism – fields such as history or political science, but also from many other disciplines across humanities and social sciences, especially religious studies, political geography, political psychology, linguistics, sociology and cultural studies.

The thesis uses a number of methods that are, on the one hand, part of the repertoire of methodological tools available to fascism studies, and, on the other hand, adopted from a number of disciplines.

¹²⁶ Aristotle A. Kallis, *The Third Rome 1922-43: The Making of the Fascist Capital* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹²⁷ Günter Berghaus (ed.), *Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925-1945* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996).

¹²⁸ Anton Shekhovtsov, “Apoliteic Music: Neo-Folk, Martial Industrial and ‘Metapolitical Fascism’”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 43, No. 5 (2009), pp. 431-457.

¹²⁹ Fernando Esposito, *Mythische Moderne: Aviatik, Faschismus und die Sehnsucht nach Ordnung in Deutschland und Italien* (Berlin: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2011).

¹³⁰ Christopher Rundle, “Translation and Fascism”, in Jonathan Evans, Fruela Fernandez (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2018), forthcoming.

¹³¹ “Fascism”, *Brill*, <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/22116257>.

¹³² Stuart Joseph Woolf, “Introduction”, in Stuart Joseph Woolf (ed.), *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), pp. 4-5.

¹³³ Andreas Umland, “Diachronic and Cross-Cultural Comparison: Toward a Better Understanding of International Fascism”, *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2012), pp. 62-63 (62).

The overarching method used throughout this thesis is comparison. I use several frameworks of comparative research utilised in different fields of studies:

1. Cross-cultural comparison, employed in cultural studies.¹³⁴ While the thesis does not discuss alleged cultural differences between Russia and Europe, its underlying premise is that Russia, as a state that officially denounces historical and contemporary ultranationalism in Europe, and the European far right, as a conglomerate of movements, groups and organisations that espouse ultranationalist ideas, indeed represent two different cultures. Hence, cross-cultural comparison helps us identify patterns of coherence and sources of coherence in different types of relations between Russian actors and European far-right ideologues, activists and politicians, as well as determine whether that coherence is due to evident or less evident self-subscribed identities, common interests, political tactics, modes of adaptation to changing political environments, etc.

2. Diachronic comparison, employed in historical studies.¹³⁵ The thesis discusses relations, as well as attitudes informing these relations, between the European far right and (Soviet) Russian actors in different periods of time that also represent different political situations. These different periods of time are: (1) the interwar period, (2) the post-war period characterised by the traumatic war experience, (3) the period of the immediate post-Soviet political “honeymoon” between post-Soviet Russia and Western liberal democracies, and (4) the current period, which is given special attention in the thesis, that started with the evident anti-Western turn of Putin’s Russia in 2004-2005. The use of this method, especially in combination with cross-cultural comparison, shows the different developments in each period throughout time and indicates the importance of political environments and other social factors affecting the depth, efficacy and transparency of the relations between two objects of research. More specifically, this method enables us to determine what and why specific forms of relations between the European far right and (Soviet) Russian actors succeeded or failed during different historical periods.

3. Most-similar systems design, employed by political science.¹³⁶ Using this method, “we choose as objects of research systems that are as similar as possible, except with regard to the phenomenon, the effects of which we are interested in

¹³⁴ See Carol R. Ember, Melvin Ember, *Cross-cultural Research Methods* (Lanham: Altamira, 2001); Michael Pickering, Gabriele Griffin (eds), *Research Methods in Cultural Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2008).

¹³⁵ See Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Jürgen Kocka, “Comparative History: Methods, Aims, Problems”, in Deborah Cohen, Maura O’Connor (eds), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-national Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 23-39; Stephen Chrisomalis, “Comparing Cultures and Comparing Processes: Diachronic Methods in Cross-Cultural Anthropology”, *Cross-Cultural Research*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (2006), pp. 377-404.

¹³⁶ Adam Przeworski, Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1970).

assessing”.¹³⁷ In this thesis, systems are European countries, in particular, Austria, Italy and France, which are similar in terms of Western culture, political domination of the liberal democratic consensus and the presence of pro-Kremlin far-right parties, but differ with regard to the dependent variable, i.e. the level of cooperation between the pro-Moscow far-right parties and the Russian actors, as well as the political and/or bureaucratic status of the latter. Hence, the use of this method helps us identify independent variables that presumably determine the difference in the dependent variable, and, in doing so, explain why similar political contexts produce different, in their intensity and significance, forms of relations between the European far right and Russian state officials and party-political elites.

Despite the theoretical efficacy of the methods discussed above, the thesis can use them only to a limited extent. This problem is caused by the limited access to the data that has direct relevance to the research. It would not be an exaggeration to say that relations between the European far right and Russian actors are a sensitive topic, and, due to several reasons, parties involved in these relations are not prepared to disclose publicly relevant details that would be of research interest. On the one hand, official Russia resolutely declares animosity towards the far right, and, while some relations are impossible to conceal, there is no political willingness to publicise the nature and the scope of these relations. On the other hand, European far-right parties, which are involved in cooperation with Russian actors, seem to have to follow the “rules of the game” and do not disclose sensitive information that could potentially discredit them or the Russian side. Therefore, particular data is not registered in any publicly accessible form, and this constitutes the major methodological limitation of the research presented in the thesis.

However, the multi-language sources of information selected for the thesis allow to answer research questions. These sources can be divided into eight categories.

1. Primary sources produced by the European far right. These include:

a) official documents, and reports on the activities, of European far-right activists, groups, movements and parties, registered and publicly available on their websites, in their newspapers, booklets, press releases, interviews, videos, photos, social media (Facebook posts and blogs);

b) ideological and geopolitical writings found in books, articles in print and online resources (magazines, newspapers, websites), interviews magazines, newspapers;

c) published leaked communications of European far-right activists.

2. Primary sources produced by Russian actors. These include:

¹³⁷ Carsten Anckar, “On the Applicability of the Most Similar Systems Design and the Most Different Systems Design in Comparative Research”, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 11, No. 5 (2008), pp. 389-401 (389).

a) reports on the activities, as well as speeches, of Russia's President Vladimir Putin;
b) reports on the activities of the Russian State Duma and its committees;
c) reports on the activities of the ruling "United Russia" party;
d) articles, editorials and opinion pieces published in the Russian state-controlled media, as well as in the Russian media politically loyal to the Russian authorities.

3. Academic literature on the European far right and Russian domestic and foreign policies, including monographs, chapters in edited volumes, articles in peer-review journals, PhD theses.

4. Coverage of the activities of the European far right and Russian actors, as well as relations between them, found in the print and online news reports, as well as journalistic analyses and investigations.

5. Documents, reports and resolutions produced by national European parliaments, European Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

6. Declassified or originally public materials collected and published by European and American intelligence and security services.

7. Analyses produced by European and American policy institutes.

8. Official databases featuring information on registrations of organisations, results of the electoral processes.

As this thesis relies heavily on the analysis of texts, speeches and statements, it also draws on discourse analysis as a method originating in sociolinguistics.¹³⁸ This method has already been successfully applied for research of far-right discourses,¹³⁹ and offers a possibility to analyse texts and social realities reflected through them. In particular, discourse analysis is applied in this thesis to analyse how European far-right politicians and Russian actors rationalise, justify and communicate ideas that lay the ground for, enable or advance cooperation between them.

0.4. Structure of the thesis

This thesis aims to explore relations between the European far right and various Russian actors in all their complexity by scrutinising their most important aspects. The fact that some initial analyses of the pro-Russian sentiments of the contemporary European far right started to appear only in 2009-2010 does not imply that these sentiments did not exist before, and it is almost impossible to understand them without

¹³⁸ Marianne Jørgensen, Louise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage Publications, 2002).

¹³⁹ See, for example, Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-wing Populist Discourses Mean* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015); Ruth Wodak, John E. Richardson (eds), *Analysing Fascist Discourse: European Fascism in Talk and Text* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

examining their nature and historical manifestations. Thus, Chapter 1 goes back as far as the interwar period to show that, even then, particular elements of the far right sided with Russia, and then explores how the far-right pro-Russian attitudes developed in the West during the Cold War. Chapter 2 discusses the active cooperation between Russian and Western far-right politicians after the fall of the Soviet Union; while their attempts at building more structured relationships largely failed at that time, they facilitated and contributed to the deepening of the relations between Russian pro-Kremlin actors and the European far right when more favourable conditions arose in the second half of the 2000s. The emergence of these conditions was determined by the internal evolution of Putin's regime from an authoritarian kleptocracy into an anti-Western right-wing authoritarian kleptocracy in the second half of the 2000s, and Chapter 3 discusses this evolution. Chapters 4 and 5 consider two areas of dynamic cooperation between various Russian actors and European far-right politicians and organisations aimed at supporting and consolidating alternative institutions that aspire to challenge and undermine liberal-democratic practices and traditions: electoral monitoring and the media. Chapter 6 looks at openly pro-Russian activities that Austrian, French and Italian far-right parties have carried out in their national contexts, and identifies several types of structures and individuals who furthered cooperation between them and the Russian actors linked to the Kremlin. Finally, Chapter 7 explores the performance of European far-right politicians on high-profile discussion platforms in Moscow and at sessions of the European Parliament in Strasbourg and Brussels, and analyses the narratives that they promote within these settings.

Chapter 1

The European Far Right and Soviet Russia: Ideology, Collaboration, Active Measures

1.1. Introduction

To properly understand the contemporary relations between the Western far right and various Russian actors, it is essential to place them in a historical perspective and examine concepts, strategies and practices that existed before and after the Second World War, and supposedly exerted impact on, inspired, and/or served as a model for, the current developments.

Raising questions about the European far-right perceptions of Soviet Russia or Soviet approaches towards the European far right may appear to someone a dishonest intellectual exercise. The invasion, in 1941, of the Soviet Union by the Axis powers led by the Third Reich seems to provide an ultimate, self-explanatory reply to this question: European far-right regimes and movements wanted to destroy Soviet Russia. After the defeat of the Third Reich and its allies, if there were any sentiments between the far right and the Soviets, they could only be summed up as mutual hatred. The fierce drama of the war and dozens of millions of individual tragedies were not the only reason for this hatred, as it was also underpinned by the alleged irreconcilability between the evident fascist ultranationalism of the Axis powers and the declared anti-fascist internationalism of the Soviet Union.

However, even before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939, there was a limited space where ideological and political confluence between some elements of the European far right and Soviet Russia was possible, and where various ideas about rapprochement between the Soviets and German fascists thrived as a complex and heterogeneous minority faith.

Two major, largely overlapping factors enabled the existence of this space. The first factor is that fascism and communism are revolutionary and totalitarian ideologies. As defined by Emilio Gentile, totalitarianism is:

an experiment in political domination implemented by a revolutionary movement that has been organized by a party with military discipline and an all-absorbing concept of politics aimed at the monopoly of power, which on taking power by legal or illegal means destroys or transforms the previous regime and builds a new state founded on a single-party regime with the principal objective of conquering society, that is, the subjugation, integration, and homogenization of the ruled on the basis of the totally political nature of existence, whether individual or collective, as interpreted by the categories, myths, and values of an institutionalized ideology in

the form of a *political religion*, with the intention of molding individuals and masses through an *anthropological revolution*, in order to regenerate the essence of humanity and create a *new man* devoted body and soul to the realization of the revolutionary and imperialist projects of the totalitarian party, and thus a *new civilization* of a supranational nature.¹⁴⁰

The fact that both fascism and communism are revolutionary and totalitarian ideologies does not mean that they are identical. Their core myths and values, at least on the theoretical level, are drastically different. The central myth of fascism is that of a rebirth of a nation; fascism sacralises a nation (or race in the case of Nazism) as the highest form of human existence. Communism is internationalist, while its core myth is a classless society that implements collective control over the means of production. Therefore, even if fascism and communism aspire toward a monopoly of power and a totalitarian regime to carry out an anthropological revolution, the prospective utopian societies of fascism and communism are different. However, it is the palingenetic thrust towards a new society, social regeneration and, ultimately, a new civilisation that characterises both fascism and communism, and this “spiritual” concurrence is one of the two major factors that enable the existence of space where fascism and communism may converge.

The second factor is that fascism and communism envision two modernities, which – while dissenting from each other – concurrently challenge yet another modernity, the one that is represented by liberalism. Thus, political confluence between fascism and communism is possible if particular exponents of both ideologies feel that the spread of “decadent and degenerate” liberalism poses an existential threat to them, and they decide to join forces against it. What results from an alliance of fascism and communism against liberalism is a political discourse that attacks capitalism and “Western imperialism”.

This chapter explores how particular European far-right activists and ideologues experimented with these two factors mixing revolutionary, palingenetic, nationalist, totalitarian, modernist and socialist narratives in the ideological and political space that, in their view, enabled cooperation with Soviet Russia. First, the chapter looks into the phenomenon of National-Bolshevism that emerged in interwar Germany. Second, it briefly discusses the pro-Russian activities of the neutralist far right in post-war West Germany and Austria, and how the Soviet and socialist counterintelligence services exploited far-right groups in these countries – a development that provides important insights into the rationale behind the cooperation between various Russian actors and the European far right today. Finally, the chapter analyses the writings and activities of

¹⁴⁰ Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 46. Emphasis in the original.

Francis Parker Yockey and Jean Thiriart, who were arguably the two most important pan-European fascist ideologues calling for an alliance with Soviet Russia.

1.2. National Bolshevism in Interwar Germany

In interwar Germany, the ideological and political confluence between specific strands of German fascism and the Soviets was manifested through National Bolshevism. In relation to German National Bolshevism, it is possible to distinguish two major contrasting interpretations of the phenomenon. One interpretation, which can be considered restrictive, is suggested by Erik Van Ree, who – following the arguments presented by Louis Dupeux¹⁴¹ – defines it as “that radical tendency which combines a commitment to class struggle and total nationalization of the means of production with extreme state chauvinism”.¹⁴² The second, inclusive interpretation employs the term “National Bolshevism” to refer to various currents in the political thought of (1) German interwar revolutionary ultranationalists who favoured the rapprochement with Soviet Russia and particular elements of socialism, and/or (2) German communists who embraced ultranationalism.¹⁴³

National Bolshevism emerged in 1919 and was largely a reaction to the Treaty of Versailles and the dire economic situation in Germany after the end of the First World War: some German ultranationalists associated capitalism with the Entente and believed that cooperation with Soviet Russia would help Germany to resist and fight back against “Western imperialism” of France and the United Kingdom. Despite the initial rejection of National Bolshevism by the Soviets – Vladimir Lenin renounced “the crying absurdities of ‘National Bolshevism’”,¹⁴⁴ – Karl Radek, a Soviet expert on Germany and future Secretary of the Comintern, accepted the idea of National Bolshevism “as a possible means to pierce the admitted isolation of Soviet Russia by capitalist powers”.¹⁴⁵

German National Bolshevism garnered more support from Soviet Russia after the occupation of the Ruhr valley by the French and Belgian troops in 1923. After the occupation, Radek, then Secretary of the Comintern, delivered a speech that was

¹⁴¹ Louis Dupeux, *National bolchevisme: stratégie communiste et dynamique conservatrice* (Paris: H. Champion, 1979).

¹⁴² Erik Van Ree, “The Concept of ‘National Bolshevism’: An Interpretative Essay”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2001), pp. 289-307 (289).

¹⁴³ Klemens von Klemperer, “Towards a Fourth Reich? The History of National Bolshevism in Germany”, *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1951), pp. 191-210; Abraham Ascher, Guenter Lewy, “National Bolshevism in Weimar Germany – Alliance of Political Extremes against Democracy”, *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1956), pp. 450-480; Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984), pp. 179-187.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism: A Study in the Origins of the State Party* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. 94-95.

¹⁴⁵ Klemperer, “Towards a Fourth Reich?”, p. 200.

officially addressed to the Enlarged Executive of the Comintern in Moscow, but was in effect was addressed to those German fascists, “who honestly want[ed] to serve the German people”: “With whom do [German people] wish to ally themselves: with the Russian workers and peasants in order to throw off the yoke of the Entente capital together, or with the Entente capital for the enslavement of the German and Russian peoples?”.¹⁴⁶

Radek’s speech drew a positive response from particular left-wing and right-wing circles. For example, a special issue of the daily *Red Flag* (Rote Fahne) published by the Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands) featured essays written by *völkische* intellectuals Ernst Graf zu Reventlow and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, a leading figure of the Conservative Revolution. Although Reventlow and Moeller were critical of Radek’s idea, they argued that “both *Völkische* and Communists put their trust in Russia, which, as an oppressed and ‘proletarian nation’, was the natural ally of ‘proletarian Germany’ against the West and all it stood for”.¹⁴⁷ At the same time, in a later work, Moeller argued that *völkische* socialism could only be realised “with the elimination of all Jewish influence, a step that the Communists, both in Germany and in Russia, would have to take to prove themselves acceptable allies”.¹⁴⁸

Arguably the most prominent representative of German interwar National Bolshevism was former Social Democrat Ernst Niekisch. In the second half of the 1920s, he founded the Resistance Movement (Widerstandsbewegung) for which he chose the slogan “Sparta – Potsdam – Moscow” and the emblem that featured a Prussian eagle, a hammer, a sword and a sickle.¹⁴⁹ Niekisch also published a pamphlet titled “*Decision*” (Entscheidung) in which he argued for the creation of a Prussian-inspired “Germanic-Slavonic bloc” from Vladivostok to Vlissingen.¹⁵⁰ Niekisch also maintained that Soviet Russia had discovered a national form of the class struggle and that the German people had to “promote the global political Russian-Asian advance on Europe and become part of this thrust (because Germany can regain itself only against Europe)” and “destroy all things Western in its borders and approve of everything that the West abhorred: anti-liberalism, anti-individualism, autocracy, and open commitment to violence”.¹⁵¹

Niekisch’s activities influenced Karl Otto Paetel who founded, in 1930, the emphatically National Bolshevik Group of Social Revolutionary Nationalists (Gruppe Sozialrevolutionärer Nationalisten, GSN) that “stood for overthrow of the Versailles

¹⁴⁶ Karl Radek, “Leo Schlageter, der Wanderer ins Nichts”, *Marxists.org*, <https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/radek/1923/06/schlageter.html>.

¹⁴⁷ Ascher, Lewy, “National Bolshevism in Weimar Germany”, p. 466.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Klemperer, “Towards a Fourth Reich?”, p. 200.

¹⁵⁰ Ernst Niekisch, *Entscheidung* (Berlin: Widerstands-Verlag, 1930).

¹⁵¹ Hans Buchheim, “Ernst Niekischs Ideologie des Widerstands”, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1957), pp. 334-361 (346).

Treaty, repudiation of foreign economic and financial controls, alliance with Soviet Russia, and prosecution of the class struggle against international capitalism and imperialism".¹⁵² Like Niekisch's Widerstandsbewegung, the GSN was also ardently anti-Western, as its members saw the West as "corrupting and ruining Germany" through urbanism, liberalism, and parliamentarism.¹⁵³

Despite the relative rise of National Bolshevism in the beginning of the 1930s, it was marginalised with the consolidation of the Nazi regime and, especially, after the Night of the Long Knives, which killed prominent left-wing Nazis such as Gregor Strasser and Ernst Röhm. However, National Bolshevism exerted long-lasting impact on post-war far-right activists in Western Europe – the impact that enabled, in ideological terms, their collaboration with various Soviet agencies.

1.3. Far-right neutralism in West Germany and Austria

The defeat of fascism's war machine crushed in 1945 by the joint forces of the Western liberal democracies and the totalitarian Soviet Union dismayed European fascists. It led many of them, who remained faithful to the visions of ultranationalist palingenesis, to revise their strategy in the post-war period. As the winners divided Europe in two – the division was institutionalised in 1949 and 1955 with the creation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact respectively – the far right felt that they found themselves between the liberal Scylla and the communist Charybdis.

However, these geopolitical concerns did not impede the re-appearance of pro-Russian and pro-Soviet sentiments among European fascist circles. In post-war Europe, these sentiments had two major, sometimes interconnected, sources. One was the legacy of National Bolshevism; the other was the rise of internationalist, pan-European fascism.

The legacy of National Bolshevism was especially evident in the ideology of the "Brotherhood" (Bruderschaft), a semi-secret extreme right group formed in the British occupation zone of West Germany in 1949. Its main ideologue and co-chair was Alfred Franke-Gricksch, a former close associate of Otto Strasser and, later, an SS-Obersturmbannführer (a senior storm unit leader of the Protection Squadron (Schutzstaffel, SS)). The other co-chair was Helmut Beck-Broichsitter, a former officer of the Greater Germany Tank Division. Although the founding members of the "Brotherhood" renewed the secret oaths of loyalty to the NSDAP at their inaugural

¹⁵² James J. Ward, "Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics? The Group of Social Revolutionary Nationalists in the Weimar Republic", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (1980), pp. 513-532 (518).

¹⁵³ Ascher, Lewy, "National Bolshevism in Weimar Germany", p. 475.

meeting,¹⁵⁴ they understood that the official relaunch of the Nazi party was hardly possible, and decided to concentrate on winning “the key positions in all areas of public life” and infiltrating “the major political parties and movements through civil service posts”.¹⁵⁵

Originally critical of both the US and the Soviet Union, the “Brotherhood” envisaged the revival of Germany and its restoration as a dominant power within “Nation Europa”¹⁵⁶ – a united Europe free of any foreign occupation. According to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which kept the “Brotherhood” under close observation, this Europe “would withdraw from close political and military cooperation with the US and, although opposing international Bolshevism and Soviet interference in European affairs, could take a neutral position between the US and USSR or even enter as an equal partner into alliance with the USSR”.¹⁵⁷

In the beginning of the Cold War, neutralism became a major topic in the foreign policy debates in West Germany.¹⁵⁸ Pro-Western Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, the leader of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands), ardently promoted the idea of the rearmament of Germany and its membership in NATO. The Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) was critical of Adenauer’s foreign policy, arguing that West Germany’s neutralism would open the path to the restoration of a unified and independent Germany that would position itself not in the West or the East, but between the two geopolitical poles. Neutralist arguments could also be found across other major parties.

The Soviet Union supported the idea of a neutralist West Germany and opposed its membership in NATO. The KGB was heavily involved in undermining pro-NATO ambitions and pro-American sentiments in West Germany through various active measures.

In general, active measures were “conducted overtly through officially-sponsored foreign propaganda channels, diplomatic relations, and cultural diplomacy”, while covert political techniques included “the use of covert propaganda, oral and written disinformation, agents of influence, clandestine radios, and international front

¹⁵⁴ Beate Baldow, *Episode oder Gefahr? Die Naumann-Affäre*. Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades (Berlin: Fachbereich Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften der Freien Universität Berlin, 2012), p. 35.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁵⁶ The concept of Nation Europe originates from the writings of British fascist Oswald Mosley, see below.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Richard Breitman, Norman J.W. Goda, *Nazi War Criminals, U.S. Intelligence, and the Cold War* (Washington: National Archives, 2010), p. 57.

¹⁵⁸ Rainer Dohse, *Der dritte Weg. Neutralitätsbestrebungen in Westdeutschland zwischen 1945 und 1955* (Hamburg: Holsten, 1974).

organizations”.¹⁵⁹ Arguably the most prominent among many other front organisations aiming at achieving Soviet foreign policy objectives was the World Peace Council founded in 1948.¹⁶⁰ The World Peace Council operated through smaller “peace-loving” front organisations – some of them were based in the West – to discredit the “warmongering” US and Western countries in general. However, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union implemented active measures with the help of the far right too.

Many West German right-wing extremists sided with the neutralists. The perceived trauma of fascism’s defeat in the war rendered the imperialist arguments about *Lebensraum* inappropriate – a more pressing and eminently fundamental issue was a problem of two Germanies divided by the Elbe. Most of the post-war far-right neutralists opposed the rearmament of West Germany and its membership in NATO, because they believed that these steps would deepen and, eventually, fix the division of Germany.

A certain ambivalence of geopolitical attitudes of the “Brotherhood” registered by the CIA in the above-mentioned quote reflected a conflict between Franke and Beck who expressed contrasting views on international relations. Kurt Tauber, in his monumental study of the post-war German far right, epitomised this conflict as follows:

Franke – Russophile in foreign-policy orientation, national-Bolshevik in ideology, opportunist in his desire for Eastern reinsurance in facing the hated West – had suggested the Russo-German alliance as part of the matrix within which Germany’s rebirth must be effected. Part of this policy was the permanent weakening of the defensive power of the West. Beck, on the other hand, was clearly an attentist in his approach to the problem of German rebirth. Probably no less anti-Western in his resentments than Franke, his primary goal was not so much the permanent weakening of the West as the enforcing of conditions which would make West German rearmament possible only after the rehabilitation, and with the well-rewarded assistance, of the National [i.e. far-right] Opposition.¹⁶¹

Over time, the divisions between Franke’s and Beck’s lines became even more distinct. Franke radically rejected all Western defence structures and advocated the development and signing of a pact with the Soviet Union along the lines of the Treaty of Rapallo.¹⁶² Conjuring up the language of National Bolshevism, Franke argued that:

¹⁵⁹ Richard H. Shultz, Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey’s, 1984), p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ János Radványi, *Psychological Operations and Political Warfare in Long-term Strategic Planning* (New York: Praeger, 1990), p. 43.

¹⁶¹ Kurt P. Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika: German Nationalism since 1945*. Vol. 1 (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), p. 166.

¹⁶² The Treaty of Rapallo was signed by Germany and Russia in 1922 and laid the foundations of cooperation between the two countries. The Treaty did not mention any military collaboration, but the latter was laid down in a secret Soviet-German Military Pact, and Gordon H. Mueller argued that this Pact had been motivated by Germany’s wish to secretly rearm in violation of the Treaty of Versailles and to build an alliance with the Soviets against Poland; see Gordon H. Mueller, “Rapallo Reexamined: A New Look at Germany’s Secret Military Collaboration with Russia in

The torch of racial and cultural rebirth has fallen from the enervated hands of once proud peoples and has been retrieved by the sinewy young Slavs and Germans, who have become the real founders of a revolutionary order. The Prussian eagle and the Russian bear are the symbols of a new synthesis in which German idealism and Slavic materialism will be raised to a new dialectical level.¹⁶³

In his turn, Beck adopted a more favourable position towards the Western Allies and was not that uncompromisingly opposed to Germany's rearmament, possibly under the pressure from the former Wehrmacht officers who hoped for re-employment in the military.¹⁶⁴

Despite the differences, both Franke and Beck tried to establish contacts with the representatives of the Soviet authorities in East Germany.¹⁶⁵ To date, however, it is still not clear who attempted to manipulate whom. Following his attentist, "wait-and-see" strategy, Beck tried to establish relations with the Soviets and the Americans simultaneously. A CIA officer James Critchfield suggested that the "Brotherhood" "had been penetrated and controlled by the East German communists as an 'active measure' to attract public and international interest and opposition to German remilitarization – a high priority of the Soviet KGB".¹⁶⁶

The "Brotherhood" ceased to exist in 1951, but a wider far-right neutralist movement had already come into existence by that time.

One of the leaders of this wider movement was Wolf Schenke, a former editor of Hitlerjugend's *Will and Power* (Wille und Macht) and Far East correspondent for the NSDAP's *People's Observer* (Völkischer Beobachter).¹⁶⁷ In 1950, he founded the Third Front (Dritte Front), an emphatically nationalist-neutralist organisation that hosted some other former Hitlerjugend's officials. For Schenke, the main characteristic of the post-war period was not the West-East opposition, but rather – and there one could detect traces of National Bolshevik Third-Worldism and a narrative about "proletarian nations" – "the

1922", *Military Affairs*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (1976), pp. 109-117. However, even the Soviet-German Military Pact was only a formal, albeit secret, acknowledgment of the military collaboration between Germany and Soviet Russia that had started before the signing of the Pact. In particular, the so-called Schwarze Reichswehr (Black Imperial Army), the Reichswehr's underground section consisting primarily of ultranationalist volunteers (Freikorps among them), had been granted training facilities in Soviet Russia; see William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), p. 150; Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 115.

¹⁶³ Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika*, p. 167.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 167, 169.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163. Tauber wrote that they attempted to establish relations with the Soviet Military Administration (SMA) in 1950, which was hardly possible as the SMA ceased to exist in 1949, with the creation of the German Democratic Republic. In 1949, the SMA was replaced by the Soviet Control Commission that existed until 1953, and that was probably what Tauber meant.

¹⁶⁶ James H. Critchfield, *Partners at the Creation: The Men Behind Postwar Germany's Defense and Intelligence Establishments* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003), p. 121.

¹⁶⁷ Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika*, p. 171.

anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist struggle of the peoples of the Third World against the imperialist industrialised nations”.¹⁶⁸

In terms of the immediate strategy, the Third Front favoured contacts with the Soviet occupation zone, and Jurzek visited East Berlin in 1951 to hold private talks with the leader of East Germany’s official socialist youth movement Free German Youth (Freie Deutsche Jugend)¹⁶⁹ that was a member organisation of the National Front (Nationale Front), the ruling political alliance in East Germany. Upon his return to West Germany, the Third Front launched the newspaper *German Observer* (Deutscher Beobachter; the name suggested a reference to *People’s Observer*) that revealed strong affinities with the agenda of the National Front.¹⁷⁰ Because of these overt affinities, however, the newspaper suspended publication. The Third Front continued the attempts to build the neutralist movement and, in 1951, contributed to organising the German Congress that hosted 130 West German neutralists of different ideological creeds.¹⁷¹

Yet another prominent far-right neutralist organisation was the Socialist Reich Party (Sozialistische Reichspartei, SRP) that was led by a former Wehrmacht officer Otto Ernst Remer and “propagated a typically Nazi doctrine of the Reich as a kind of mystical blood union of the German people, openly expressed their admiration for Hitler and his regime, and violently attacked the leaders of the West German government”.¹⁷² Although the SRP was neutralist, Remer, like many other West German neutralists, was more inclined to embrace the Soviets, rather than the Americans. He even suggested posting “ourselves as traffic policemen, spreading our arms so that the Russians [could] find their way through Germany as quickly as possible ... [and] pick the [British and American] lords and ladies out of their silken beds!”.¹⁷³ It was hardly surprising that the SRP presumably received financial support from the Soviets.¹⁷⁴

The SRP was founded in 1949 and even had some electoral success, but the West German authorities considered the SRP too extreme and outlawed it in 1952. Many former members of the SRP joined the German Imperial Party (Deutsche Reichspartei) that urged West Germany to withdraw from NATO and the European Common Market,¹⁷⁵ which was in the interests of the Soviet Union and East Germany.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Stöss, *Vom Nationalismus zum Umweltschutz – Die Deutsche Gemeinschaft/Aktionsgemeinschaft Unabhängiger Deutscher im Parteiensystem der Bundesrepublik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1980), pp. 145-146.

¹⁶⁹ Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika*, p. 172.

¹⁷⁰ “Propaganda”, *Der Spiegel*, No. 26 (1951), p. 4.

¹⁷¹ “Ist jemand Kommunist?”, *Der Spiegel*, No. 13 (1951), p. 5.

¹⁷² Richard S. Cromwell, “Rightist Extremism in Postwar West Germany”, *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1964), pp. 284-293 (286).

¹⁷³ Quoted in Tete H. Tetens, *The New Germany and the Old Nazis* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 78.

¹⁷⁴ Martin Lee, *The Beast Reawakens* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1997), p. 74.

¹⁷⁵ Cromwell, “Rightist Extremism in Postwar West Germany”, p. 288.

During the 1950s, there were many conferences and meetings that aimed at uniting West German neutralists from the far right, far left and centre, but none of the attempts produced any lasting result. Apart from the ideological differences between the neutralists and continuous conflicts over leadership, one factor that impeded the creation of a unified neutralist front was a persistent suspicion of the Soviet or communist money involved in all these initiatives. As they “were fighting hard to prevent the Federal Republic’s alignment with the Western bloc”,¹⁷⁶ the Soviets encouraged all neutralist activities in West Germany even if the groups and organisations involved in them did not favour the Soviet Union. As Ladislav Bittman, a former agent of the Czechoslovak security services and expert in disinformation campaigns, observed,

In early Soviet disinformation campaigns, KGB operatives were somewhat hesitant to use slogans and propagandists evidence that did not *directly* support Soviet policies. They found later that they could be more effective by hiding behind any kind of political mask, including left-wing organizations or even neo-fascist movements, as long as they served Soviet interests.¹⁷⁷

This was precisely the case with West German neutralists of any political stance. While it would be too far-fetched to argue that all neutralist groups in West Germany were paid stooges of the Soviet Union, the suspicion that there was indeed Communist money involved even in the workings of the far-right neutralist groups was not ungrounded.

In 1950, the National-Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, NDPD),¹⁷⁸ a Communist-controlled party in East Germany created to reintegrate former members of the NSDAP and Wehrmacht into the socialist society, appealed to all former supporters of the Third Reich to oppose the continued partition of Germany.¹⁷⁹ While Moscow and East Germany’s National Front created various front organisations pretending to be “peace”, “women’s organisations”, “youth”, “sports” and “cultural groups” in West Germany,¹⁸⁰ the NDPD helped form, during the 1950s, “numerous pressure groups, newspapers, and ‘study circles’ for former officers”¹⁸¹ through its West German contacts among former Nazis and Wehrmacht officers. For

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 291.

¹⁷⁷ Ladislav Bittman, *The KGB and Soviet Disinformation: An Insider’s View* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey’s, 1985), p. 77.

¹⁷⁸ The NDPD is not to be confused with the neo-Nazi National-Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, NPD) founded in 1964 in West Germany.

¹⁷⁹ Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika*, p. 192.

¹⁸⁰ K. W., “Rot und Schwarz-Weiß-Rot”, *Die Zeit*, No. 48 (1955), <http://www.zeit.de/1955/48/rot-und-schwarz-weiss-rot>.

¹⁸¹ Cromwell, “Rightist Extremism in Postwar West Germany”, pp. 291-292.

these purposes, the NDPD received 700,000 East German Marks a month from a Soviet bank.¹⁸²

One of the joint initiatives of the NDPD and its contacts in West Germany was the creation of the extreme right, anti-Semitic Leadership Committee for Former Soldiers (Führungsring ehemaliger Soldaten, FeS) in 1951. In geopolitical terms, as their leaders argued, the FeS was anti-Western, anti-Eastern, German, pro-European, friendly to Russia “regardless of her inner political orientation”, insofar as Russia did not interfere in the affairs of Germany.¹⁸³ However, the rhetoric of their publication, Circular Letter (*Rundbrief*), was pro-Eastern rather than equally anti-Western *and* anti-Eastern. As some leaders of the FeS argued, “the so-called dangers from the East, against which West German rearmament was to guard, were little more than hobgoblins of the overheated imagination of Western [Hans Joachim] Morgenthau boys. On the contrary, the East [...] was more than willing to arrive at an understanding”.¹⁸⁴ During their meetings, their political position generously sponsored by the Soviets was even clearer: “The Soviet Government managed to rouse the youth to its banner. If there should be a war, I’d rather go to the enthusiastic youth of the East who surely will win if pitted against the lame West. The youth of the East Zone still believe that they have something worth defending”.¹⁸⁵

Yet another example of the involvement of the East in funding of the far-right neutralist initiatives in West Germany was provided by the activities of Rudolf Steidl, a dedicated Nazi and a regular contributor to the FeS’s *Circular Letter*. In 1955, he revealed that a Communist official approached him in 1951 with a proposal to start publishing an information bulletin that would promote extreme right and anti-Western neutralist ideas. For his activities, Steidl obtained 2,363,000 Deutschmarks in the period 1951-1954.¹⁸⁶ He used these funds for publication of the *International Military Correspondence* (Internationale Militärkorrespondenz; 1952), *Military Political Forum* (Militärpolitische Forum; 1952), *German National Newspaper* (Deutsche National-Zeitung; 1953), and *The Nation* (Die Nation; 1954).

The contents of these publications were similar to the production of other West German far-right philo-Soviet neutralists who drew on the legacy of National Bolshevism, Conservative Revolution and/or left-wing Nazism of the Strassers, as well as criticising

¹⁸² H. Berlin, “Infiltration der Soldatenbünde”, *Die Zeit*, No. 48 (1953), <http://www.zeit.de/1953/48/infiltration-der-soldatenbuende>.

¹⁸³ Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika*, pp. 193-194.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

¹⁸⁶ Stöss, *Vom Nationalismus zum Umweltschutz*, p. 166.

the policies of Adenauer and calling for a new Tauroggen.¹⁸⁷ The *International Military Correspondence* concussed that “a German contribution to the Western ‘defensive posture’ was not only futile but highly dangerous”, and “that the military interests of Germany demanded now, as they had constantly done since the time of Frederick the Great, an agreement with the East”.¹⁸⁸ The *German National Newspaper* wrote about the “continued efforts of the Soviet Union to come into a conversation with the Western powers”.¹⁸⁹

Despite all the neutralist initiatives, West Germany joined NATO in 1955. Conferences and meetings of West German neutralists continued until the end of the 1950s, but they became increasingly irrelevant. However, the tradition of far-right, philo-Soviet neutralism exerted important ideological influence on many successive far-right movements across the West.

In the beginning of the 1950s, a small far-right neutralist movement also existed in Austria that, at that time, was under the Allied occupation.

The emergence of the Austrian far-right neutralist phenomenon was underpinned by a combination of domestic and international politics. On the one hand, the Social Democratic Party of Austria (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ) was fighting against its primary rival, the Austrian People’s Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP), and, to undermine its electoral base, welcomed the creation of the far-right Federation of Independents (Verband der Unabhängigen, VdU) that appealed to the nationalist voters and former Nazis, and siphoned votes from the ÖVP. On the other hand, the Soviets and the Soviet-controlled Communist Party of Austria (Kommunistische Partei Österreichs, KPÖ) feared that the “bourgeois parties”, i.e. the SPÖ, ÖVP and VdU, would come to dominate the Austrian politics leaving no political space for the pro-Soviet forces, and the Soviets, therefore, attempted to make inroads into the far-right camp. For them, the political situation in Austria became especially problematic after the 1949 parliamentary elections in which the far-right and pro-Western VdU obtained 11.67% of the votes and became the country’s third largest party, while the KPÖ secured only 5.08% of the votes.

To undermine support for the VdU, the communists followed the same line they adopted in West Germany with the creation of the NDPD. The first attempt at this endeavour was associated with Josef Heger, a former regional chairman of the VdU who was expelled from the party “for fraudulent claims to the title of engineer and high military

¹⁸⁷ The Convention of Tauroggen was an armistice signed in 1812 between a Prussian army corps and the Imperial Russian Army that resulted in Prussia falling away from Napoleon’s France and aligning itself with Russia against France.

¹⁸⁸ Tauber, *Beyond Eagle and Swastika*, p. 196.

¹⁸⁹ Berlin, “Infiltration der Soldatenbünde”.

rank and decorations”.¹⁹⁰ According to a declassified confidential despatch of the CIA, Heger “had passed through a Soviet indoctrination camp after his capture on the Russian front”,¹⁹¹ and thus his membership in the VdU could be an element of the Soviet infiltration effort. In 1950, Heger founded the far-right National Democratic Union (Nationaldemokratischen Verband, NDV) that, unlike the VdU, promoted the neutralist agenda, and was “composed mostly of former SS officers who mingled a fanatical German nationalism with totalitarian communism”.¹⁹² As the leader of the NDV, Heger was reported to regularly meet with the Soviet High Commissioner of Austria Vladimir Sviridov and the Soviet political representative in Austria Mikhail Koptelov. According to the CIA files,

Heger was even to have obtained Soviet approval of a secret ten point platform which included: (1) An attempt to split the VdU; (2) advocacy of a radical social program; (3) the use of radical tactics to instigate and promote strikes; (4) opposition to US influence and the MARSHALL Plan; (5) denunciations of Allied dismantling in Germany and Western intelligence activities in Germany and Austria.¹⁹³

The NDV, however, turned out to be unsuccessful and soon disappeared from the Austrian political landscape.

The second attempt at building the far-right neutralist movement in Austria was associated with Adolf Slavik, a former Hitlerjugend organiser and SS-Obersturmführer. Because of the de-Nazification laws, he could not officially lead any organisation, yet he was the unofficial founder and leader of the far-right National League (Nationale Liga, NL) that was established in 1950 and whose rhetoric was characterised by “a crude mixture of pro-Soviet and neo-Nazi propaganda”.¹⁹⁴

The NL’s manifesto titled “What Does the National League Want?” appeared relatively moderate, while its neutralist position manifested itself through the demands for “the national characteristics and the sovereignty of all peoples” to be respected, “the neutrality of Austria and a policy of true agreement *a/so* with the Eastern countries”, and “a planned economy which will serve only the national interests of our national economy”. At the same time, the NL professed what it called “German national ways”, regarded “the restoration of German unity as an essential prerequisite to the recovery of Europe”, and

¹⁹⁰ “Subject: The National League – An Impotent Communist Front of Ex-Nazis”, *Central Intelligence Agency*, 2? April (1954), p. 2, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/SLAVIK,%20ADOLF_0031.pdf.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁹² Charles W. Martin, *The Nihilism of Thomas Bernhard: The Portrayal of Existential and Social Problems in His Prose Works* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), p. 218.

¹⁹³ “Subject: The National League”, p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ Wolfgang Mueller, *Die sowjetische Besatzung in Österreich 1945-1955 und ihre politische Mission* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2005), p. 214.

demanded “immediate naturalization of all Volksdeutsche willing to work, but eviction of all alien parasites”.¹⁹⁵

The NL’s newspaper, *Austrian Observer* (Österreichische Beobachter), was less moderate, and frequently published openly Nazi and pan-German texts. The office of the *Austrian Observer* was located in the Soviet sector in Vienna and in the same building that also hosted the office of the KPÖ-associated newspaper *Diary* (Tagebuch).¹⁹⁶ In December 1950, *Austrian Observer* was banned for two months, and during this period was published under the title *Austrian National Newspaper* (Österreichische National-Zeitung). The Western occupation authorities protested the publication of this “new” newspaper, but the Soviet authorities disagreed with the Western allies, and the publication of *Austrian National Newspaper* continued.¹⁹⁷

According to an informant of a CIA agent in Austria, the funding for the NL came from the Administration for Soviet Property in Austria.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, Slavik claimed that he had managed to secure leading positions in the Administration for Soviet Property for 30 former SS chiefs.¹⁹⁹ The CIA believed that Slavik also travelled “through West Germany, ostensibly on official business for the Administration of Soviet Property in Austria, but actually to establish an intelligence network ‘on behalf of an eastern service’”.²⁰⁰

While the Soviet authorities in Austria never admitted that the NL was a Soviet front organisation, the Soviets described it the following way:

The National League is a new democratic organisation that features representatives of the Austrian intelligentsia, workers and civil servants, petite bourgeoisie dissatisfied with the policies of the Austrian government [and] the reactionary parties (ÖVP, SPÖ and VdU). A significant element of the supporters of the National League comprises of former National Socialists dissatisfied with the pro-American policies of the Austrian government and aspiring to establish friendly relations with the Soviet Union and countries of popular democracy.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁵ “English Translation of Platform of the National League” as a supplement to the CIA’s confidential despatch “Subject: The National League”, pp. 1-3.

¹⁹⁶ Mueller, *Die sowjetische Besatzung in Österreich*, p. 216.

¹⁹⁷ “Subject: The National League”, p. 6.

¹⁹⁸ “Re: Dr. Slavik about the Early History and Aims of His Movement. 11 October 1950”, in the CIA’s report “Activities of Dr Adolf Slavik, Austrian National League Leader, in 1950-1953 (Excerpts)”, *Central Intelligence Agency*, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/SLAVIK,%20ADOLF_0001.pdf.

¹⁹⁹ “Re: Slavik Manages to Get USIA Positions for Incriminated National Socialists. 9 October 1950”, in the CIA’s report “Activities of Dr Adolf Slavik, Austrian National League Leader, in 1950-1953 (Excerpts)”.

²⁰⁰ “Adolf Slavik”, *Central Intelligence Agency*, 23 February (1968), p. 2, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/SLAVIK,%20ADOLF_0111.pdf.

²⁰¹ Kuranov, “Spravka Otdela propagandy SChSK po Avstrii ‘Natsional’naya liga’. 4 avgusta 1950 g.”, in Gennadiy Bordyugov, Wolfgang Mueller, Norman M. Naimark, Arnold Suppan (eds),

Because of the NL's links to the Soviets, Austrian media often attacked it referring to the organisation as "Kommunazi" and "National Bolsheviks". In May 1950, the Austrian newspaper *World Press* (Weltpresse) published an article on the NL that argued: "The Russian occupation authorities use former SS officer Adolf Slavik for recruiting former frontline officers and National Socialists who would take part in the struggle for the National-Bolshevik ideals in Austria".²⁰²

The NL existed for a longer period than the NDV, but it ceased to exist by 1955. In the second half of the 1960s, Slavik was arrested in Istanbul and sentenced to 12 years of imprisonment on the espionage charges. The Austrian newspaper *Express* reported that, during the trial, Slavik told the Istanbul Military Court that he was a KGB agent running the Middle East espionage network.²⁰³

1.4. Francis Parker Yockey and Jean Thiriart: Towards the European-Soviet Empire

National Bolshevism was a primary ideological source of pro-Russian attitudes within the European far-right neutralist movements, but pro-Soviet tendencies appeared in yet another post-war movement, namely pan-European fascism.

Internationalist trends in European fascism emerged already in the interwar period. As Roger Griffin argues, "certain strands of interwar fascism", albeit marginal at that time, "were actively concerned with resolving the decadence brought about by the status quo as a whole, not just in a particular nation, and thus thought of rebirth in pan-European or even Western terms".²⁰⁴ However, the concern of pan-European fascists in interwar Europe was *both* American liberalism and Soviet Bolshevism. It was equally true for the first post-war pan-European fascists: unlike the majority of West German far-right neutralists who might officially condemn both the Americans and the Soviets, but then evidently side with the latter, the first pan-European fascists were predominantly and sincerely critical of the two global forces, and were intrinsically more neutralist than the self-styled neutralists themselves. Major pan-European fascists imagined Europe as a "Third Force" that would "extricate itself from the grip or influence of both the United

Sovetskaya politika v Avstrii. 1945-1955 gg. Sbornik dokumentov (Moscow: AIRO-XXI, 2006), pp. 379-390 (389).

²⁰² Quoted in "Spravka Otdela propagandy SChSK po Avstrii", p. 389.

²⁰³ Quoted in a CIA's secret report from Vienna, 20 February (1968), http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1705143/SLAVIK,%20ADOLF_0113.pdf.

²⁰⁴ Roger Griffin, "Europe for the Europeans: Fascist Myths of the European New Order, 1922-1992", in Roger Griffin, *A Fascist Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 132-180 (135).

States and the Soviet Union” and be absolutely neutral “between the alien and inimical Powers in the East and the West”.²⁰⁵

Given the critical approach of the first pan-European fascists towards both the US and Soviet Union, it is a historical irony that one of the key ideological attempts at building a pan-European fascist movement not only originated in the US, but also welcomed, although only at a later stage, the involvement of the Soviet Union. This attempt was associated with the works and activities of Francis Parker Yockey, an American political philosopher and one of the most prominent exponents of post-war pan-European fascism.

Yockey’s major work, *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics*,²⁰⁶ was critical of Russia and clearly associated it, along with the US, with the “extra-European forces” threatening Europe. As he wrote in *Imperium*, the only mission that Russia had was to destroy the West, and – to implement that mission – Russia would exploit “any inner agitation within the West” itself: “class-war, race-war, social degeneration, crazy art, decadent films, wild theories and philosophies of all kinds”.²⁰⁷

However, Yockey gradually started to shift ideologically to pro-Soviet positions. In 1948-1949, he founded, while in the UK, the European Liberation Front (ELF) set to free Europe from its enemies and to fly “the European banner” over Europe’s “own soil from Galway to Memelland and from North Cape to Gibraltar”.²⁰⁸ Already during the formation of the ELF, Yockey suggested helping “organize secret partisans in Western Germany who would be prepared to collaborate with the Soviet military authorities in action against the Western occupying powers”.²⁰⁹ Moreover, in his book on American neo-Nazism, William Goring speculated that the ELF had been “secretly encouraged and, possibly, financed in part by the Soviet Union”.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Kurt P. Tauber, “German Nationalists and European Union”, *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (1959), pp. 564-589 (576).

²⁰⁶ Ulick Varange [Francis Parker Yockey], *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics* (London: Westropa Press, 1948). Henceforth, however, all the citations are from a different edition of the book: Francis Parker Yockey, *Imperium: The Philosophy of History and Politics* (New York: The Truth Seeker, 1962).

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 582-583.

²⁰⁸ Francis Parker Yockey, *The Proclamation of London of the European Liberation Front* (London: Westropa Press, 1949), https://archive.org/details/TheProclamationOfLondon_284.

²⁰⁹ Lloyd O. Bogstad, “Francis Parker Yockey”, pp. 1-25 (11). This FBI report dated 8 July 1954 can be found in Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Subject: Francis Parker Yockey. File number: 105-8229 Section 2”, https://archive.org/details/foia_Yockey_Francis_P.-HQ-2, pp. 11-12.

²¹⁰ See William Goring, *The National Renaissance Party: History and Analysis of an American Neo-Nazi Party* (Springfield: National Information Center, 1970).

Following the anti-Semitic trials in Eastern Europe in the beginning of the 1950s – the “Night of the Murdered Poets”,²¹¹ the Slánský trial²¹² and “Doctors’ Plot”²¹³ – Yockey started praising Soviet Russia for “a war-declaration [...] on the Jewish-American leadership”.²¹⁴ In his view, by “playing off Russia against the Jewish-American leadership”, Europe could “bring about its Liberation” and put an end to “the American hegemony of Europe”.²¹⁵

Yockey’s pro-Russian turn gained momentum simultaneously with his deepening anti-Americanism. In his *The Enemy of Europe* published in 1953 in German language, Yockey identified the US as the main enemy of Europe.²¹⁶ Moreover – although he still referred the Russians as “barbarians” – Yockey seemed to welcome a specific form of the Russian occupation of Europe:

A Russian occupation would develop along one or the other of two lines. The first possibility is an endless series of European uprisings against Russia that could result only in the expulsion of the demoralised barbarians. The second possibility would result from Russia’s introducing a clever regime and according Europe extensive autonomy and magnanimous treatment. Within a few decades, this Europe would naturally aim at infiltrating horizontally the whole Russian seat of origin, its technical, economic, social, and, finally, military and political life. Instead of the Russification of Europe, [...] would result [in] the Europeanisation of Russia once again, and this time in far stronger degree. [...] An attempt by Russia to integrate Europe into its power-accumulation peacefully would eventually result in the rise of a new Symbiosis: Europe-Russia. *Its final form would be that of a European Imperium.*²¹⁷

None of the previous post-war pan-European fascists or interwar National Bolsheviks had ever gone as far as Yockey did in his geopolitical envisioning of the Europe-centred regeneration of the world with the aim of creating “the Culture-State-Nation-Imperium of the West”.²¹⁸ Yockey’s embrace of Soviet Russia and socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as, later, Third-World authoritarian regimes had a practical angle too. According to a prominent American fascist and Yockey’s close associate Harold Keith Thompson, Yockey did “a brief courier job” for the

²¹¹ Joshua Rubenstein, Vladimir P. Naumov (eds), *Stalin’s Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2001).

²¹² Igor Lukes, “The Rudolf Slánský Affair: New Evidence”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (1999), pp. 160-187.

²¹³ Jonathan Brent, Vladimir P. Naumov, *Stalin’s Last Crime: The Plot against the Jewish Doctors, 1948-1953* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

²¹⁴ [Francis Parker Yockey], “What Is behind the Hanging of the Eleven Jews in Prague?”, *National Renaissance Bulletin* (1952), <https://archive.org/details/CollectedWorksOfFrancisParkerYockey>.

²¹⁵ [Yockey], “What Is behind the Hanging”.

²¹⁶ Ulik Varange [Francis Parker Yockey], *Der Feind Europas* (N.a.: N.a., 1953). Henceforth, all the citations are from an English edition of the book: Francis Parker Yockey, *The Enemy of Europe* (York: Liberty Bell Publications, 1981).

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82. My emphasis.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

Czechoslovak intelligence in the 1950s.²¹⁹ In 1953, Yockey also met in Cairo with the future Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser.²²⁰

As Coogan put it, the “nagging suspicion that Yockey was working with *both* the Nazis and the Communists to encourage the spread of anti-American sentiment in Europe and the Third World is what led Washington to become so concerned with him”.²²¹ The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) eventually arrested him in 1960, and, shortly afterwards, he committed suicide in custody by taking a cyanide pill.

During Yockey’s lifetime, his ideas about anti-American pan-Europeanism and the alliance with the Soviet Union remained marginal and failed to convince his far-right contemporaries. However, certain European far-right movements rediscovered Yockey’s ideas a few decades after his death. He was then retrospectively hailed as a “Spenglerian visionary” and “the prophet of the Imperium”.²²²

National Bolshevism and Yockey’s ideas influenced yet another prominent post-war pan-European fascist ideologue, namely the convicted Belgian collaborator Jean Thiriart.

Similar to Yockey, Thiriart was originally critical of both the US and Russia. The slogan of his major work, *An Empire of 400 Million People* (Un Empire de 400 millions d’hommes), which was published in 1964, was “Neither Moscow nor Washington”. In the book, Thiriart, who was then the leader of the neo-fascist groupuscule Young Europe (Jeune Europe), wrote that it was necessary to liberate Europe from the American and Soviet influences, and, furthermore, envisioned the “European state” from Brest to Bucharest that would emerge after the liberation of Eastern Europe “enslaved by the communist dictatorship and foreign occupation”.²²³ The liberation of Europe would allow for co-existing peacefully with Russia and building “relations based on equality” with the US.

However, even before the publication of *An Empire of 400 Million People*, Thiriart’s Young Europe provided a theoretical opening towards Russia and even a possible embrace of it – at the same time denying this to the US. This idea was evident in the first manifesto of Jeune Europe, *The National-European Revolution* (La révolution nationale-Européenne), written apparently by the organisation’s chief ideologue Emile Lecerf and

²¹⁹ Coogan, *Dreamer of the Day*, pp. 264-265; Lee, *The Beast Reawakens*, p. 107.

²²⁰ Coogan, *Dreamer of the Day*, p. 17.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17. Emphasis in the original.

²²² Théodore J. O’Keefe, “The Tragic Life of a Spenglerian Visionary”, *The Occidental Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2002), <https://web.archive.org/web/20060614084128/http://theoccidentalquarterly.com/vol1no2/to-coogan.html>; Francis Parker Yockey, *Le prophète de l’Imperium: Francis Parker Yockey* (Paris: Avatar Éditions, 2004).

²²³ Jean Thiriart, *Un Empire de 400 millions d’hommes: l’Europe* (Brussels: [self-published], 1964). Henceforth, all the citations are from an English edition of the book: Jean Thiriart, *Europe, an Empire of 400 Million People: A Nation Built from a Historic Party* (Brussels: [n.a.], 1964), p. 1.

published in 1962.²²⁴ This manifesto was characterised by “the virtual disappearance of the anti-Soviet discourse in favour of the total stigmatisation of the USA”.²²⁵ Breaking free from “American imperialism” would allow Western Europe to take shape, and then it would “extend its hand to its Eastern sister, so that she can shake off the Communist yoke, and in turn draw Russia to the European revolution”.²²⁶

Thiriart’s *An Empire of 400 Million People* provided an insight into a similar idea, which he alluded to already in 1962 in his article on a “new Treaty of Rapallo”²²⁷ and which he further elaborated later – the idea that the liberation of Eastern Europe and consolidation of the European state from Brest to Bucharest would allow for extending Europe as far as to Vladivostok:

In the short period we must hope for an anti-Russian thrust by the Chinese and in the long period do everything to help the Russians contain the Asian flood. We must weaken Russia but not conquer it. [...] Siberia occupied by an overwhelming majority of whites from European Russia will, in future, constitute the embankment of Europe.²²⁸

Thiriart’s tactical, initially theoretical resort to China for its help in weakening the Soviet Union was soon followed by an ideological transformation that was most evident in the doctrine of the European Communitarian Party (Parti Communautaire Européen, PCE) that substituted Young Europe in 1965 as Thiriart’s major organisational initiative. The ideology that Thiriart started to profess was “national-European communism”, as well as praising, on the pages of *The European Nation* (La Nation européenne), “national-communist” regimes in Josip Broz Tito’s Yugoslavia, Nicolae Ceaușescu’s Romania and Ho Chi Minh’s Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Thiriart was also willing to reach out to the Chinese. In 1966, he met, while in Bucharest, with Zhou Enlai, the first Premier of the People’s Republic of China under Mao Zedong.²²⁹ During the conversation with Enlai, Thiriart asked for money that would be spent on publications and for a “sanctuary for the organisation” that would be used for “the preparation and building of the political-military apparatus of the European revolution”.²³⁰ Enlai referred him to the Chinese services, but the collaboration with the Chinese apparently never materialised.

²²⁴ Emile Lecerf, *La révolution nationale-Européenne* (Nantes: Ars Magna, 1962).

²²⁵ Nicolas Lebourg, *Les Nationalismes-révolutionnaires en mouvements: idéologies, propagandes et influences* (France; 1962-2002), These pour obtenir le grade de Docteur de l’Université de Perpignan, discipline: Histoire, présentée et soutenue publiquement par Nicolas Lebourg Le 11 mars 2005 (Perpignan: Université de Perpignan, 2005), p. 167.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 167.

²²⁷ Tisch [Jean Thiriart], “L’Europe et l’URSS, un Rapallo européen: pourquoi pas?”, *Nation Belgique*, No. 85 (1962).

²²⁸ Thiriart, *Europe*, p. 5.

²²⁹ Lee, *The Beast Reawakens*, p. 175.

²³⁰ Thiriart quoted in Luc Michel, ‘De Jeune Europe aux Brigades rouges, anti-americanisme et logique de l’engagement révolutionnaire’, *Conscience européenne*, No. 1 (1985).

Thiriart's argument about a "sanctuary for the organisation" articulated during his conversation with Enlai was a reference to the important concept that Thiriart developed in the second half of the 1960s, namely the "outside lung" (*poumon extérieur*) or "outside springboard" (*tremplin extérieur*). As he explained, all revolutionary actions required "local and national fertile soil" and they rarely could "succeed without an outside lung", or a "springboard", that played "a critical role in any subversive action" against the American presence or influence in Europe. Thiriart was convinced that "the European Revolution" could "begin on the ground only when it [found] a sanctuary for its logistical bases, not before".²³¹ In other words, an "outside lung" implied a country run by an anti-American regime that would provide financial and logistic support for the European national-revolutionaries, and serve as "a refuge from repression in the militants' native country" or "a training ground for future 'direct action'" in Europe.²³²

Yet another important concept that Thiriart elaborated alongside the notion of "outside lung" was that of "European brigades". European national-revolutionaries would organise themselves in "European brigades" and participate in armed conflicts in Third-World countries to receive real life training and, thus, form "the political and military avant-garde of the European revolution".²³³

However, Thiriart's efforts to secure an efficient "outside lung" or build a "European brigade" never came to fruition. Crushed by the failure, he almost completely withdrew from politics in 1969 and largely focused on his professional activities as an optometrist for the next 10 years.

Thiriart returned to the far-right circles in the beginning of the 1980s and introduced a new concept: the Euro-Soviet Empire from Vladivostok to Dublin. In 1981, he declared that he would publish a book titled *L'empire Euro-Sovietique de Vladivostock a Dublin*, but it never appeared. However, Thiriart elaborated on the concept of "Euro-Soviet Empire", "a hyper-nation-state equipped with a de-Marxified hyper-communism",²³⁴ in articles and interviews. For Thiriart in the 1980s, the Soviet Union was "historically and geopolitically a European power in essence": "the last independent state in Europe",²³⁵

²³¹ See Jean Thiriart, "Inventaire de l'anti-americanisme", *La Nation Européenne*, No. 23 (1967), pp. 12-18.

²³² Jean-Yves Camus, "A Long-Lasting Friendship: Alexander Dugin and the French Radical Right", in Laruelle (ed.), *Eurasianism and the European Far Right*, pp. 79-96 (83).

²³³ See Jean Thiriart, "USA: le declin d'une hegemonie", *La Nation Européenne*, No. 18 (1967), pp. 4-8; Jean Thiriart, "Les Arabes et l'Europe", *La Nation Européenne*, No. 29 (1968), pp. 10-13.

²³⁴ Thiriart quoted in Edouard Rix, "Jean Thiriart: The Machiavelli of United Europe", in Greg Johnson (ed.), *North American New Right*. Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Counter-Currents Publishing, 2012), pp. 262-269 (268).

²³⁵ Jean Thiriart, "L'empire Euro-Sovietique de Vladivostock a Dublin", in *L'empire Euro-Sovietique de Vladivostock a Dublin l'après-Yalta: la mutation du communisme: essai sur le totalitarisme éclairé* (Charleroi: Edition Machiavel, 1984), pp. 2-10 (3).

“a ‘Eurasian’ Europe, a Very Great Europe, the New Rome”.²³⁶ Alluding to himself as “a pan-European National Bolshevik”,²³⁷ Thiriart praised the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and argued that the Soviet Union was, “geopolitically speaking, the heir of the Third Reich. The enemies of Hitler’s Third Reich became the enemies of the USSR”.²³⁸

Thiriart envisaged “a Europe made by the USSR”, but he uncompromisingly rejected the Russification of Europe:

If Moscow wants to make Europe Russian, I will be the first to recommend armed resistance to the occupier. If Moscow wants to make Europe European, I preach total collaboration with the Soviet enterprise. I will then be the first to put a red star on my cap. Soviet Europe, yes, without reservations.²³⁹

Thiriart in the 1980s arrived at almost the same conclusions that Niekisch and Yockey, whose works Thiriart knew well, did in the 1930s and 1950s correspondingly: Niekisch argued that National Bolsheviks should “promote the global political Russian-Asian advance on Europe”, while Yockey defended the idea of a “clever regime” of the Russian occupation of Europe that “would eventually result in the rise of a new Symbiosis: Europe-Russia”, “a European Imperium”.²⁴⁰

The collapse of the Soviet Union seemed to distress Thiriart, and he wrote that “political and military partition of the USSR” was and would always remain “an unforgivable historical mistake”. In his view, after the demise of the Soviet Union, the “great Russia” no longer had any chance of being a great power. “Russia only”, i.e. the Russian Federation without its former colonies and satellites, was “a country without a future”, “a Brazil with snow”.²⁴¹ This despondence notwithstanding, Thiriart visited Moscow shortly before his death in 1992 and spent there a few months meeting with the leaders of the opposition to President Boris Yeltsin.

1.5. Conclusion

German interwar National Bolshevism was arguably the first significant movement that conceived Germany and Soviet Russia as natural allies in their struggle against international capitalism and “Western imperialism”. National Bolsheviks saw the

²³⁶ “Jean Thiriart: Responses to 14 Questions. Submitted by Gene H. Hogberg”, *Geopolitika*, <http://geopolitika.org/jean-thiriart-responses-to-14-questions/>. On the basis of Thiriart’s responses, we can assume that he replied to the questions in 1987.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ Thiriart quoted in Coogan, *Dreamer of the Day*, p. 546.

²³⁹ Thiriart quoted in Coogan, *Dreamer of the Day*, p. 546; and Rix, “Jean Thiriart”, p. 268.

²⁴⁰ Yockey, *The Enemy of Europe*, p. 82.

²⁴¹ Jean Thiriart, “L’Europe jusqu’à Vladivostok”, *Nationalisme & République*, No. 9 (1992), https://web.archive.org/web/20141231140053/http://www.voxnr.com/cc/d_thiriart/EpApFFluyyzgDwIWdS.shtml.

Germans and Soviets as “young proletarian nations” that suffered under the yoke of the “predatory West” at that time represented mainly by Britain and France. National Bolsheviks did not support the idea of the Russification of Germany, but were eager to use the Soviet military force to liberate Germany from the capitalist oppressors.

National Bolshevism exerted influence on post-war far-right neutralist movements in West Germany and Austria. Most of these movements originally protested against the influence of both the US and the USSR, but increasingly shifted towards philo-Soviet positions. Some far-right neutralists collaborated with the Soviet and socialist agencies, while the Soviets encouraged and often sponsored the pro-Soviet shift of West German far-right neutralists in the 1950s to prevent West Germany from joining NATO, as well as supporting far-right neutralists in Austria to damage the pro-American far right.

Pan-European fascism, albeit strictly neutralist at early stages, was influenced by National Bolshevism too and gave rise to two most influential post-war exponents of rapprochement between European fascism and the Soviet Union, namely Francis Parker Yockey and Jean Thiriart. Although the start of the most active part of Thiriart’s political career largely coincided with the death of Yockey, their ideological trajectories revealed striking similarities. Originally critical of both the US and Soviet Union, they gradually adopted more sympathetic attitudes towards Soviet Russia and, eventually, brought forward the idea of building the anti-American, anti-liberal geopolitical alliance in cooperation with the Soviets: European Imperium (Yockey) or Euro-Soviet Empire (Thiriart). Furthermore, much like individual National Bolsheviks and post-war West German far-right neutralists, Yockey and Thiriart were ready to collaborate with Soviet and socialist authorities to advance their anti-American agenda.

While various Soviet politicians and counterintelligence services sometimes exploited pro-Soviet and pro-Russian attitudes of certain far-right forces as part of the Soviet active measures against the West, these attitudes emerged independently of the direct Soviet influence. They were products of ideological discussions about the geopolitical positioning of European nations or Europe as a whole, and imagined an alternative Europe that would be radically different from all the liberal-democratic European projects. The far-right Europe would be illiberal, cleansed of the influence of the US, and, instead, aligned with the totalitarian Soviet Union.

The concepts, arguments and narratives that National Bolsheviks, far-right neutralists and pan-European fascists had developed since the 1920s until 1980s, comprised a set of powerful ideological tools that have been employed by contemporary Western far-right activists and ideologues to ideologically justify their cooperation with the Russian ultranationalists after the demise of the Soviet Union and, eventually, with Putin’s regime.

The next chapter focuses on the determinants, nature and scope of the first direct contacts between Russian and Western far-right politicians in the period between the end of Perestroika and the end of Putin's first presidential term.

Chapter 2

Russia's Opening to the European Far Right

2.1. Introduction

Contacts between the Soviet Union and the Western far right were officially unimaginable after the end of the Second World War. The reason was obvious: prevailing anti-communism of the Western far right clashed with the official communist ideology of the Soviet Union. However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, the unofficial contacts between the Soviets and Western far right were far from non-existent, as the Soviet Union was interested in manipulating the Western far right for propaganda, intelligence and subversion purposes.

At the end of the Perestroika era, that became to be characterised by the thaw in relations between the USSR and the West, as well as by much more relaxed conditions of travelling between Western Europe and the Soviet Union, Russian ultranationalists started building ties with their Western counterparts. In the course of Russia's first post-Soviet President Boris Yeltsin's rule, these contacts were further intensified.

This chapter explores the nature, scope and development of the relations with Western far-right activists, authors and organisations forged by two Russian far-right politicians, namely Aleksandr Dugin and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, during the Yeltsin era. These international contacts were by no means limited to those established by the above-mentioned politicians. The focus on these particular figures is determined by the intensity of their international relations and the influence they gained in the Putin era. Finally, the chapter discusses the first, unsuccessful initiatives to connect the interests of the Russian state to the developments in the European far-right milieu during Vladimir Putin's first presidential term.

2.2. Aleksandr Dugin and the "red-brown" alliance

The first substantial contacts between the European far right and their Russian counterparts in the Yeltsin era were established by Russian fascist Aleksandr Dugin, who has, during the 1990s, elaborated the ideology known as neo-Eurasianism. It can be defined as a form of a fascist ideology centred on the idea of revolutionising the Russian society and building a totalitarian, Russia-dominated Eurasian Empire that would challenge and eventually defeat its eternal adversary represented by the US and

its Atlanticist allies, thus bringing about a new “golden age” of global political and cultural illiberalism.²⁴²

Dugin’s most fruitful and sustained contacts with the European New Right (ENR) apparently began in 1990 with meeting the important far-right intellectual and publisher Claudio Mutti,²⁴³ a prominent Italian disciple of Jean Thiriart. One of the many outcomes of Dugin’s meeting with Mutti was that, in 1991, Mutti’s Parma-based Edizioni All’insegna del Veltro published Dugin’s book *Continente Russia*,²⁴⁴ thus introducing Russian post-Soviet fascism to its first West European audience.

As Jean-Yves Camus suggests, it is also through Mutti that Dugin met Alain de Benoist, the head of GRECE, in June 1990 in Paris.²⁴⁵ In the same period, Dugin apparently met Belgian New Right author and translator Robert Steuckers.²⁴⁶ Steuckers was, at times, close to the extreme right New Belgian Front (Front nouveau de Belgique) and Flemish Block, and founded, in 1981, the group European Studies, Research and Orientations (Études, recherches et orientations européennes) modelled on GRECE.

It was Steuckers who introduced the concept of National Bolshevism to Dugin but the latter did not embrace it until after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, it was presumably Steuckers too, who introduced geopolitics to Dugin: of all Dugin’s early West European contacts, Steuckers was the only one who wrote on geopolitics.

In 1991, Dugin participated in two important conferences which exerted notable influence on his further activities. First of all, Dugin took part, in March 1991, in the XXIVth Colloquium of GRECE in Paris where he presented a paper titled “The Soviet Empire and Nationalisms in the Perestroika Era”.²⁴⁸ This Colloquium was also attended by three leading figures of GRECE, namely de Benoist, Jacques Marlaud and Charles Champetier, as well as Roger Garaudy, a former French communist author and then a Muslim convert, and Luc Pauwels, the founder of the publishing house Deltastichting and

²⁴² On Dugin and his ideology of neo-Eurasianism see Andreas Umland, “Aleksandr Dugin’s Transformation from a Lunatic Fringe Figure into a Mainstream Political Publicist, 1980-1998: A Case Study in the Rise of Late and Post-Soviet Russian Fascism”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2010), pp. 144-152.

²⁴³ Stéphane François, *Tradition, écologie et identité. Études sur la Nouvelle Droite et ses dissidences*, forthcoming. See more on the early contacts between Dugin and the West European far right in Anton Shekhovtsov, “Alexander Dugin and the West European New Right, 1989-1994”, in Laruelle (ed.), *Eurasianism and the European Far Right*, pp. 35-53.

²⁴⁴ Aleksandr Dugin [Aleksandr Dugin], *Continente Russia* (Parma: Edizioni All’insegna del Veltro, 1991).

²⁴⁵ Camus, “A Long-Lasting Friendship”, pp. 79-96 (85).

²⁴⁶ “Entretien avec Alexandre Douguine, éditeur traditionaliste à Moscou”. Propos recueillis par Robert Steuckers et Arnaud Dubreuil”, *Vouloir*, Nos. 71-72 (janvier-février 1991), pp. 15-18 (15).

²⁴⁷ “Dugin Aleksandr Gel’yevich (r. 1962)”, *Pravaya.ru*, 22 February (2006), <http://www.pravaya.ru/ludi/451/6742>.

²⁴⁸ Alexandre Douguine [Aleksandr Dugin], “L’empire soviétique et les nationalismes à l’époque de la perestroika”, in *Nation et Empire. Histoire et concept. Actes du XXIVe colloque national du GRECE, Paris, 24 mars 1991* (Paris: GRECE, 1991).

editor of the Belgian New Right journal *Texts, Commentaries and Studies* (Teksten, Kommentaren en Studies).

In April 1992, Dugin invited de Benoist and Steuckers to Moscow. They took part in a panel discussion at the office of the newspaper *Day* (Den', later renamed into *Tomorrow* (Zavtra)). Dugin worked as a journalist at *Day*, a self-styled "Organ of the Spiritual Opposition" edited by Alexander Prokhanov, a writer and ideologue of the Russian extreme right.²⁴⁹ Also present at the panel discussion were: Dugin, Prokhanov and the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (Kommunisticheskaya partiya Rossiyskoy Federatsii, KPRF) Gennadiy Zyuganov.²⁵⁰ They discussed the problems of "social and national justice", liberalism, capitalism, the "cultural aggression of the USA", "Russian patriotism and metaphysics" and other issues.²⁵¹ The second meeting took place at the General Staff Academy of the Armed Forces of Russia, where Dugin taught as a guest lecturer.²⁵² The round-table, which discussed "European security issues and possible ways of Russia's and Europe's development", was attended by de Benoist and seven top military officials of the Academy, including General-Lieutenant Nikolay Klokotov.

In August 1992, Dugin met, in Moscow, with the Jean Thiriart. Although the latter was distressed by the demise of the Soviet Union, he appeared to be willing to try his luck with post-Soviet Russia as a prospective "liberator" of Europe. Therefore, he was interested in establishing relations with the anti-liberal and anti-American opposition to Yeltsin – commonly named as the "red-brown" due to the collusion of Russian national-communists and fascists – that he hoped could come to power in Russia and implement Thiriart's geopolitical project.

In 1991, Thiriart joined the European Liberation Front (ELF) – a national-revolutionary group named after the organisational initiative of Francis Parker Yockey and founded by a French far-right author Christian Bouchet, also the leader of the French National Bolshevik organisation New Resistance (Nouvelle Résistance). To promote the ideas of the new ELF and build contacts with the Russian "red-brown" groups, Thiriart went to Moscow in August 1992. For his Moscow trip, he was joined by Michel Schneider, former adviser to the FN's contemporary leader Jean-Marie Le Pen and editor of the far-

²⁴⁹ Umland, "Aleksandr Dugin's Transformation from a Lunatic Fringe Figure into a Mainstream Political Publicist, 1980-1998", p. 147.

²⁵⁰ Despite the name of the party, the ideology of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation can be interpreted as right-wing extremist, see Andreas Umland, "Toward an Uncivil Society? Contextualizing the Decline of Post-Soviet Russian Parties of the Extreme Right Wing", *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2002), pp. 362-391.

²⁵¹ "Natsional'noe i sotsial'noe (Krugly stol v gazete 'Den')", *Arktogeya*, <http://arcto.ru/article/1343>.

²⁵² Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 201. According to Clover, Dugin's teaching materials then formed the basis of his seminal work *Osnovy geopolitiki* (The Foundations of Geopolitics), see Aleksandr Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki. Geopoliticheskoe budushee Rossii* (Moscow: Arktogeya, 1997).

right journal *Nationalism and Republic* (Nationalisme et République). Other representatives of the ELF delegation to Moscow included Italian New Right activists Carlo Terracciano, a member of the groupuscule Antagonistic Movement (Movimento Antagonista), and Marco Battarra, editor of the far-right journal *Orion*.

Thiriart's activities in Moscow were intense: he participated in various round-tables and discussions, did interviews and presentations. Apart from Dugin, Thiriart and his colleagues met with Prokhanov, the KPRF's Zyuganov and Yegor Ligachyov, the leaders of the ultranationalist Russian All-People Union (Rossiyskiy obshchenarodny soyuz) Sergey Baburin, Viktor Alksnis and Nikolay Pavlov, and other representatives of the "red-brown" opposition.²⁵³ Thiriart's visit to Russia turned out to be his last attempt at building a Russian-European National Bolshevik alliance: he died in November 1992, shortly after his return to Belgium from Russia, and Dugin wrote a long obituary praising Thiriart as "the Last Hero of Europe".²⁵⁴

In March 1993, Mutti, Battarra and Terracciano visited Moscow again and took part in the round-table "dedicated to the oppressed peoples of the New World Order" chaired by Dugin, as well as other events involving many of those who were present at meetings with Thiriart in August 1992.²⁵⁵

Already as a leader and the main ideologue of the National Bolshevik Party (Natsional-bol'shevistskaya partiya, NBP) that he co-founded with Eduard Limonov,²⁵⁶ Dugin visited Spain in June 1994 and signed the "National-Bolshevik Act" with the Spanish member of the ELF, the political association European Alternative (Alternativa Europea) led by José Antonio Llopart.²⁵⁷ José L. Rodríguez described the ideology of the European Alternative as a mixture of Thiriart's pan-European fascism, Conservative Revolution and Spanish national syndicalism of Ramiro Ledesma.²⁵⁸

After June 1994 and until the beginning of the 2000s, Dugin had scarce contacts with European far-right activists and organisations. To a varying degree, his contacts in the 1990s were one-sided relationships, as it was Dugin who was influenced by theories, practices and experiences of the ENR rather than the other way around. Through them, Dugin was introduced to, or reinforced his interest in, National Bolshevism, geopolitics,

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Aleksandr Dugin, "Sumerki geroyev", in Aleksandr Dugin, *Konservativnaya Revolyutsiya* (Moscow: Arktogetya, 1994), <http://arcto.ru/article/24>.

²⁵⁵ Marco Battarra, "Una visita a Mosca", *Aurora*, No. 5 (1993), <http://aurora.altervista.org/05battarra.htm>.

²⁵⁶ On the NBP see Shenfield, *Russian Fascism*, especially the chapter "Dugin, Limonov, and the National-Bolshevik Party", pp.190-219.

²⁵⁷ Xavier Casals, "La ultraderecha española: ¿Una modernización imposible?", in Manuel Pérez Ledesma (ed.), *Los riesgos para la democracia. Fascismo y neofascismo* (Madrid: Iglesias, 1997), pp. 171-194 (192); "Rusia. Declaración de la oposición revolucionaria", *Tribuna de Europa*, No. 7 (1994), pp. 6-7.

²⁵⁸ Rodríguez Jiménez, "Antisemitism and the Extreme Right in Spain".

conspiracy theories and Integral Traditionalism. Moreover, following the example of his West European colleagues, Dugin started publishing several journals and established a publishing house “Arctogaia”.

Dugin originally built the above-mentioned relations to satisfy his interest in European esotericism, fascist mysticism and contemporary interpretations of the works of René Guénon²⁵⁹ and Julius Evola, but then he used his contacts to consolidate and strengthen his position in the Russian ultranationalist and mainstream circles. In his autobiography, Eduard Limonov recollected that, in 1992, Dugin “unwarrantedly usurped the contacts between the patriotic opposition with the Western right wing”.²⁶⁰

Although it was Dugin who benefited the most from the relationships with the ENR, there was still a degree of reciprocity in these relationships. ENR activists were interested in Dugin because he was apparently the first representative of the Russian far right who spoke the same language with them – both literally²⁶¹ and intellectually – and could not only enlighten them on Russian phenomena from a native’s point of view, but also disseminate their own ideas in Russia. Moreover, in 1992-1993, the West European far right – especially the “philo-Soviet” groups – supported the Russian “red-brown” alliance, as they were increasingly interested in political developments in Russia that could lead to a much-hoped right-wing revolution and, as the likes of Thiriart hoped, contribute to the “liberation” of Europe.

2.3. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and money politics

Dugin, as Limonov put it, might have, to a certain degree, “usurped” the contacts of the Russian ultranationalist camp with the European far right, but Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the leader of the misleadingly named far-right Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (Liberal’no-demokraticheskaya partiya Rossii, LDPR),²⁶² also tried to forge relationships with European radical right-wing parties.

The LDPR’s ideology is a mixture of ultranationalist and imperialist ideas. In his arguably major political work, *The Last Dash to the South* (published in 1993), Zhirinovskiy argued that Russia should restore the empire and, to prevent instability presumably spreading from the southern countries to Russia, make the “last dash to the

²⁵⁹ On René Guénon see Robin E. Waterfield, *René Guénon and the Future of the West: The Life and Writings of a 20th-Century Metaphysician* (Wellingborough: Crucible, 1987).

²⁶⁰ Eduard Limonov, *Moya politicheskaya biografiya* (Saint-Petersburg: Amfora, 2002), p. 25.

²⁶¹ Dugin speaks several European languages, including French, English, German and Italian.

²⁶² On Zhirinovskiy and his party see Shenfield, *Russian Fascism*, especially the chapter “Zhirinovskiy and the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia”, pp. 85-112; Andreas Umland, *Vladimir Zhirinovskii in Russian Politics: Three Approaches to the Emergence of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia 1990-1993*, Dissertation, Promotionsausschuß FB Geschichtswissenschaft (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 1997).

South” occupying and incorporating Turkey, Afghanistan and Iran into Russia. Russia, for Zhirinovskiy, was part of the world’s North that also included Western states. This theoretically allowed Russia to avoid confrontation with the West, and later Zhirinovskiy even suggested to create the Russian-Western-Japanese alliance that would divide the world into the spheres of influence, but his anti-Westernism radicalised dramatically in the 2000s.

In the 1990s, however, Zhirinovskiy was still trying to build alliances with the European far right. Limonov, while living in France, introduced Zhirinovskiy to Jean-Marie Le Pen in autumn 1992.²⁶³ Their meeting turned out to be beneficial to Zhirinovskiy, as later the FN “provided logistical support [to the LDPR], including computers and fax machines, in short supply in Moscow at that time”.²⁶⁴

Already during his first meeting with Le Pen, Zhirinovskiy suggested establishing the “International Centre of Right-wing Parties” in Moscow and invited Le Pen to Russia’s capital. Le Pen, according to Limonov, “confined himself to commending the project”.²⁶⁵ In 1996, when Le Pen eventually visited Moscow and took part in a press conference with Zhirinovskiy, the latter spoke of founding a pan-European far-right alliance again, under the name “Union of Right-wing Forces of Europe”. Zhirinovskiy also argued that “a new political union” should be formed in Europe – otherwise, a war between Russia and the West was inevitable.²⁶⁶ At that time, Zhirinovskiy project of a pan-European far-right forum was not implemented, but he revived – and, to some extent, materialised – this idea after Putin became president (see below).

Zhirinovskiy’s other major foreign contact in the Yeltsin era was the far-right German People’s Union (Deutsche Volkunion, DVU) led by now late Gerhard Frey, “the multi-millionaire media czar” who owned and published several nationalist newspapers.²⁶⁷ The relations between Frey and Zhirinovskiy “began apparently in April 1992 when Frey’s son was an official guest of the Third LDPR Congress”,²⁶⁸ and, later, Zhirinovskiy and Frey spoke at each other’s party conventions.²⁶⁹ Moreover, following his staggering victory in the 1993 elections to the State Duma (Russian parliament) – the

²⁶³ Limonov details Zhirinovskiy’s meeting with Le Pen, whom Limonov himself had not met before, in Eduard Limonov, *Limonov protiv Zhirinovskogo* (Moscow: Konets veka, 1994), pp. 134-139.

²⁶⁴ Victor Parfenov, Marina Sergeeva, “Sowing Nationalist Grapes of Wrath”, *Russia Today*, 7 August (1998), <http://www.tol.org/client/article/5275-russia-sowing-nationalist-grapes-of-wrath.html>.

²⁶⁵ Limonov, *Limonov protiv Zhirinovskogo*, p. 138.

²⁶⁶ Danila Dubshin, “U nikh uzhe sto millionov polozhili”, *Limonka*, No. 33 (1996), http://limonka.nbp-info.com/033_article_1226837526.html.

²⁶⁷ Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 60.

²⁶⁸ Umland, *Vladimir Zhirinovskii in Russian Politics*, p. 201.

²⁶⁹ Gerhard Hertel, *Die DVU – Gefahr von Rechtsaußen* (Munich: Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung e.V., 1998), p. 27; Vadim Rossman, *Russian Intellectual Antisemitism in the Post-Communist Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press for the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2002), p. 20.

LDPR obtained 22.92% of the votes – Zhirinovsky met with Frey again in Munich on his way to Austria where the leader of the LDPR spent a few days in the company of Edwin Neuwirth, “a local industrialist, Holocaust denier and proud former member of the Waffen SS”.²⁷⁰ In 1994, the LDPR and DVU signed a friendship accord.²⁷¹

According to Russian journalist Leonid Mlechin, Frey provided financial support to the LDPR “in exchange for the promise to return the Kaliningrad region to Germany after Zhirinovsky became president of Russia”.²⁷² Frey himself wrote that “if Mr. Zhirinovsky came to power in Russia he would negotiate with Germany about the return of the lost province of East Prussia”.²⁷³ Indeed, in his book *The Last Thrust to the South*, Zhirinovsky suggested restoring Germany to its 1937 borders.²⁷⁴ Zhirinovsky’s readiness to part with the Kaliningrad region seemed important to the DVU that insisted that Pomerania, Silesia and East Prussia should be returned to Germany.

Zhirinovsky also had contacts with a circle of convicted unrepentant Holocaust-deniers led by a Toronto-based publisher Ernst Zündel who published, in particular, one of the most infamous Holocaust-denial pamphlets *Did Six Million Really Die?*.²⁷⁵ Zündel sponsored, in 1992 and 1993, two visits to Moscow of his German associate, Bela Ewald Althans, “a roving ambassador for the neo-Nazi cause”, who was particularly interested in developing international links and had managed to establish contacts, in particular, with the FN’s Yvan Blot and the leaders of CEDADE.²⁷⁶ Zhirinovsky’s LDPR was hardly the main target for Althans; rather, he tried to probe all available Russian far-right activists and organisations. For instance, Althans contacted Aleksandr Barkashov’s Russian National Unity (Russkoe natsional’noe edinstvo, RNE), the major fascist organisation in Russia at that time.²⁷⁷ Apparently, Zhirinovsky looked more credible and politically significant to Althans, and both Zündel and Althans were invited by Zhirinovsky to visit Russia in 1994.

²⁷⁰ “Austrian Police Seek More Nazis for Bombings”, *Searchlight*, No. 224 (1994), p. 15.

²⁷¹ “Zhirinovsky’s Party and German People’s Union Sign Friendship Accord”, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 10 August (1994).

²⁷² Leonid Mlechin, “Vechernie posidelki v nemetskoy kontrrazvedke”, *Izvestiya*, No. 235, 10 December (1995). The claim that the LDPR was provided financial assistance by Frey is supported by other sources, see Umland, *Vladimir Zhirinovskii in Russian Politics*, pp. 202-203; Michi Ebata, “The Internationalization of the Extreme Right”, in Aurel Braun, Stephen Scheinberg (eds), *The Extreme Right: Freedom and Security at Risk* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 220-249 (225).

²⁷³ Quoted in Craig R. Whitney, “Russian Nationalist Stirs Up a Storm in Germany”, *The New York Times*, 23 December (1993), <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/23/world/russian-nationalist-stirs-up-a-storm-in-germany.html>.

²⁷⁴ Vladimir Zhirinovsky, *Posledniy brodok na Yug* (Moscow: Izdanie Liberal’no-demokraticeskoy partii Rossii, 2007), p. 42. The book was originally published in 1993.

²⁷⁵ Richard E. Harwood, *Did Six Million Really Die? The Truth at Last* (Richmond: Historical Review Press, 1974).

²⁷⁶ Lee, *The Beast Reawakens*, p. 261.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

Zhirinovsky's international relationships were never exclusively ideological, as they had a considerable element of financial interest. For example, in 1994, German authorities investigated whether Zhirinovsky was financed by the money of the defunct East German regime through his German contact Werner Girke who handled foreign financial holdings for the East German communists and was believed to have helped them covertly invest those funds in Western companies.²⁷⁸ In 1996, Italian police suspected Zhirinovsky of the involvement in the trade of nuclear materials that also involved Licio Gelli,²⁷⁹ a prominent fascist activist since the 1930s and Grand Master of the Masonic lodge Propaganda Due (better known as P2).

Zhirinovsky's other far-right contacts in the Yeltsin era included Zmago Jelinčič, the leader of the Slovenian National Party (Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka),²⁸⁰ and Vojislav Šešelj, the founder and leader of the Serbian Radical Party (Srpska Radikalna Stranka, SRS).²⁸¹ Furthermore, in 1997, Zhirinovsky supported the secessionist move of the LN that was at that time led by Umberto Bossi and attempted to create a state called "Padania" in Northern Italy. Bossi was excited about the support for his secessionist project received from "the third political force of the Russian parliament", while Zhirinovsky took part in the opening sitting of the Padanian "parliament" and stated that, were he Russian president, he would recognise the independence of Padania.²⁸²

2.4. "The Patriotic International": lobbying for Iraq and Russia

In the course of the 1990s, Dugin and Zhirinovsky occupied different positions in the Russian political system. Dugin was a fringe politician yet an influential ideologue of neo-Eurasianism and National Bolshevism who was engaged in metapolitical, rather than political, struggle against liberal democracy. Zhirinovsky was the leader of the LDPR – a party that won the 1993 parliamentary elections and finished second in the 1995 parliamentary elections. The two of them never cooperated with each other to any significant degree, but they shared similar views underpinned by Russian ultranationalism and aversion to liberal democracy. Furthermore, Dugin was in the

²⁷⁸ Andreas Förster, "Ein SED-Vermögensverwalter findet zu den Nationalisten Schirinowski – Suche nach Finanziers und Partnern im Parlament: 'Verschweizertes' Geld aus dunklen Kanälen", *Berliner Zeitung*, 6 January (1994).

²⁷⁹ Andrew Gumbel, "Zhirinovsky Link in Arms Racket", *The Independent*, 2 June (1996), <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/zhirinovsky-link-in-arms-racket-1335019.html>.

²⁸⁰ Rudolf M. Rizman, "Radical Right Politics in Slovenia", in Sabrina P. Ramet (ed.), *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 147-170 (152).

²⁸¹ Ognjen Pribičević, "Changing Fortunes of the Serbian Radical Right", in Ramet (ed.), *The Radical Right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, pp. 193-211 (208).

²⁸² Pavel Negoitsa, "Bossi v vostorge ot Zhirinovskogo", *Trud*, No. 210, 12 November (1997); Anna Cento Bull, Mark Gilbert, *The Lega Nord and the Northern Question in Italian Politics* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 112.

opposition to president Yeltsin and, hence, to the contemporary regime in Russia. Zhirinovskiy also claimed to be in the opposition to Yeltsin, and, formally, his party indeed was critical of some of his policies, but it essentially supported the regime on the crucial issues.²⁸³

While Dugin and Zhirinovskiy were apparently interested in implementing some of the ideas of their European far-right associates in Russia, they seemed to understand that those ideas clashed with Yeltsin's regime, and they were too far removed from the state power to either associate themselves with the state or act on its behalf or instrumentalise the Western far right against the perceived *external* adversaries of the Russian state. For Dugin and Zhirinovskiy, the immediate enemy was still *inside* Russia, so at that time they could only use their Western far-right contacts to strengthen their own positions inside the country.

This situation started to gradually change after Putin became president, and Zhirinovskiy was arguably the first Russian politician who attempted to connect the interests of the Russian state to the developments in the far-right milieu in Europe by reviving his idea of creating a Moscow-based far-right international that he had proposed to Le Pen already in 1992 and 1996.

On 14 September 2002, following his visit to Baghdad amid international discussions of the possible US-led military action against Iraq, Zhirinovskiy, then Deputy Chairman of the State Duma, convened a meeting of the representatives of "patriotic parties". This meeting hosted Zhirinovskiy's old friend Gerhard Frey, now late Vice President of the FN Dominique Chaboche, the LN's contemporary deputy chairman Francesco Speroni, Mitsuhiro Kimura of the Japanese far-right Issuikai group, and a number of other far-right activists, as well as journalists and envoys from Iraq, Iran, Libya, North Korea, India, and Afghanistan.²⁸⁴ The meeting had two aims: to declare support for Iraq and launch the World Congress of Patriotic Parties to take place in Moscow the following year.

The Iraq connection was anything but accidental. The cooperation between Zhirinovskiy and Saddam Hussein apparently started already in 1992; Zhirinovskiy regularly travelled to Iraq, and there were reasonable suspicions that Hussein provided financial assistance to the LDPR.²⁸⁵ Hussein, who had been increasingly isolated due to Iraq's aggressive international behaviour and repressive domestic policies, needed support from sympathetic politicians outside the country and was ready to pay for such

²⁸³ Galina Kozhevnikova, Anton Shekhovtsov et al. *Radikal'ny russkiy natsionalizm: struktury, idei, litsa* (Moscow: Tsentr "Sova", 2009), p. 264.

²⁸⁴ Valeriy Panyushkin, "Natsionalisticheskiy internatsional sozdan v Moskve", *Kommersant-Daily*, No. 166, 16 September (2002), p. 4; "Treffen in Moskau", *Antifaschistische Nachrichten*, No. 23, 7 November (2002), p. 2.

²⁸⁵ Umland, *Vladimir Zhirinovskii in Russian Politics*, pp. 196-198.

a support. Zhirinovskiy and high-ranking members of the LDPR were essentially Iraqi lobbyists in Russia; moreover, Zhirinovskiy “regularly led delegations of Russian businessmen to Baghdad to arrange lucrative deals”.²⁸⁶ Zhirinovskiy did not deny that Hussein financially supported the LDPR, while Zhirinovskiy’s contemporary deputy, Aleksey Mitrofanov, admitted that the party had also “received money from Russian companies that got contracts in Iraq thanks to Zhirinovskiy’s help”.²⁸⁷ Furthermore, the CIA’s *Duelfer Report* argued,

Iraqi attempts to use oil gifts to influence Russian policy makers [to gain support for lifting the sanctions in the UN Security Council] were on a lavish and almost indiscriminate scale. Oil voucher gifts were directed across the political spectrum targeting the new oligarch class, Russian political parties and officials. [...] The Liberal Democratic Party leader Zhirinovskiy was a recipient, as was the Russian Communist party [i.e. KPRF] and the Foreign Ministry itself, according to Iraqi documents.²⁸⁸

A report of the Independent Inquiry Committee, which was appointed in 2004 by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to look into alleged corruption in the UN’s “Oil-for-Food Programme” in Iraq, also documented Zhirinovskiy’s links to Hussein’s regime and argued that, “according to Iraqi officials and Iraqi Ministry of Oil records”, Zhirinovskiy was allocated 73 million barrels of oil “because it was believed that he would advocate for political positions favorable to Iraq”.²⁸⁹

It was, therefore, hardly a coincidence that Zhirinovskiy eventually decided to revive and materialise his idea of an explicitly pro-Iraqi far-right international against the backdrop of the growing pressure on Hussein’s regime and the latter’s consequently increased need for outside support. By the time of the Moscow meeting of far-right forces in September 2002, Zhirinovskiy travelled to Baghdad three times that year, and it is conceivable that he secured financial backing for his far-right international initiative from Hussein’s regime.

Zhirinovskiy was far from being the first far-right politician who cooperated with Hussein. In the beginning of the 1990s, and especially during the Gulf War, praise for Hussein and his authoritarian anti-Western regime became an evident trend among the European far right. Gerhard Frey launched a “phoney anti-war campaign, branding the

²⁸⁶ Peter Baker, Susan Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin’s Russia and the End of Revolution* (New York: Scribner, 2005), p. 219.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

²⁸⁸ *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq’s WMD, with Addendums (Duelfer Report)*. Vol. 1 (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, 2005), p. 39.

²⁸⁹ Independent Inquiry Committee into the United Nations Oil-for-Food Programme [Paul A. Volcker, Richard J. Goldstone, Mark Pieth], *Manipulation of the Oil-for-Food Programme by the Iraqi Regime*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20051101012944/http://www.iic-offp.org/documents/IIC%20Final%20Report%2027Oct2005.pdf>, pp. 29-30.

United States and its allies as criminal for waging war on Saddam Hussein”,²⁹⁰ “all members of the [French] radical right were unanimous in defending Saddam Hussein and lauding the heroism of Arab soldiers waging a desperate struggle against the [Zionist] ‘lobbies’”.²⁹¹ Already in the beginning of the 1990s, the assumed cooperation between the European far right and Hussein’s regime had not only an ideological, but a practical angle too. As *Searchlight* argued, “far right leaders internationally [had] been popping backwards and forwards to Baghdad, clearly more interested in getting financial support from Saddam Hussein’s regime than in giving any real political commitment to it”.²⁹²

In the beginning of the 2000s, many Western far-right politicians also cooperated with Iraqi authorities. Jean-Marie Le Pen, Mitsuhiro Kimura, Jörg Haider in his capacity of one of the leaders of the FPÖ,²⁹³ Vadim Tudor of the Greater Romania Party (Partidului România Mare, PRM) and Vojislav Šešelj of the SRS had relations with Hussein, while some of them, for example Le Pen, Haider, Šešelj and Kimura, visited Baghdad to meet Hussein personally.

The details about their dealings with Hussein are scarce, but some information is available on the relations between the FPÖ, FN and Hussein’s regime. Like Zhirinovskiy, Haider travelled to Baghdad three times in 2002. He actively remonstrated against Washington’s sanctions against Baghdad and apparently organised humanitarian medical aid to Iraq, while another member of the FPÖ, Ewald Stadler, founded the Austrian-Iraqi Society. Documents found in Baghdad after the demise of Hussein’s regime have revealed that Haider and Stadler, during their visit to Baghdad in May 2002, signed an agreement with the Iraqi authorities. According to that agreement, Haider and Stadler would act as Hussein’s lobbyists in Europe and receive \$5 million for their services (\$1,250,000 for Haider and \$3,750,000 for Stadler).²⁹⁴ The relations between Le Pen and Hussein, however, remain a more obscure case. Le Pen had criticised the imposition of the sanctions by the UN Security Council since 1990, while his wife Jany Le Pen had been presiding, since 1995, over the non-transparent non-governmental organisation (NGO) “SOS Enfants d’Irak” (SOS Iraq’s Children) that allegedly supplied

²⁹⁰ “Neo-Nazi Mercenaries Sign on for Desert War”, *Searchlight*, No. 189 (1991), pp. 5-6 (5).

²⁹¹ Pierre Birnbaum, “The French Radical Right: From Anti-Semitic Zionism to Anti-Semitic Anti-Zionism”, *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2006), pp. 161-174 (169).

²⁹² “Editorial: Out of Control”, *Searchlight*, No. 188 (1991), p. 2.

²⁹³ Haider was a chairman of the FPÖ in 1986-2000.

²⁹⁴ Michael Nikbakhsh, Ulla Kramar-Schmid, “Jörg Haiders geheime Geldgeschäfte mit dem irakischen Diktator Saddam Hussein”, *Profil*, 7 August (2010), <http://www.profil.at/home/joerg-haiders-geldgeschaefte-diktator-saddam-husseini-274862>.

medical aid to Iraqi children as well as protesting against the sanctions against Iraq.²⁹⁵ Already at the end of the 1990s, Jean-Marie Le Pen's interest in the developments around Iraq was "widely speculated to include acting as a go-between on Iraqi oil deals".²⁹⁶

The First World Congress of Patriotic Parties took place in Moscow on 18 January 2003 and hosted 44 representatives of "patriotic" organisations from Europe, Asia and Africa. They adopted a resolution that stressed the need "to defend the interests of [their] countries and peoples, their national and cultural distinctive character, spiritual values", "to render every assistance to each other", and "to express solidarity with the people of Iraq in its aspiration to defend its independence".²⁹⁷ The resolution was signed, inter alia, by Zhirinovskiy himself; FN's Dominique Chaboche; DVU's Liane Hasselbarth; Mitsuhiro Kimura; Makis Voridis, the leader of the Greek far-right Hellenic Front (Ellinikó Métopo); Matti Järviharju, the leader of the Finnish ultranationalist Patriotic People's Movement (Isänmaallinen Kansanliike); Miroslav Sládek, the leader of the Czech far-right Republicans of Miroslav Sládek (Republikáni Miroslava Sládka); and representatives of pro-Russian and/or anti-US organisations from Armenia, Belarus, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Georgia, South African Republic, Tajikistan, Transnistria, and some other countries and territories.

An important development related to the World Congress of Patriotic Parties that made it different from Zhirinovskiy's earlier contacts with the European far right was that, already at the meeting in September 2002, he stressed that he greeted the delegates as Deputy Chairman of the State Duma, rather than the leader of the LDPR.²⁹⁸ No longer did Zhirinovskiy position himself as just a party leader, but rather as a statesman who spoke in the name of the Russian state. The significance of this change in rhetoric was reinforced on the eve of the First World Congress of Patriotic Parties when Zhirinovskiy, appealing to the state, declared:

the new union of patriotic parties will do everything for the normalisation of international relations.

I believe that, today, Moscow – through the workings of the First World Congress of Patriotic Parties – can have leverage in world politics in the interests of all the people on the planet.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ "SOS Enfants d'Irak", *Index des ONG*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110827112629/http://www.observatoire-humanitaire.org/fusion.php?l=FR&id=28>.

²⁹⁶ Mark Hunter, "Nationalism Unleashed", *Transitions*, No. 5 (1998), pp. 18-28.

²⁹⁷ "Patrioty vsekh stran ob'yedinyayutsya", *LDPR*, No. 2 (2003), p. 3.

²⁹⁸ Panyushkin, "Natsionalisticheskiy internatsional sozdan v Moskve", p. 4.

²⁹⁹ "V. Zhirinovskiy: Vsemirny Kongress patriotov – eto ryuchag vliyaniya Moskvy na mirovuyu politiku", *Tsentrazia*, 18 January (2003), <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1042901340>.

The logic behind Zhirinovsky's argument – that Russia could influence international political processes through far-right parties – was apparently informed by Zhirinovsky's own role as a Russian ultranationalist lobbyist for Hussein's regime. As the fate of Hussein and his regime showed, however, neither Zhirinovsky nor his West European counterparts were particularly successful in defending Iraq on the international stage due to their limited political significance, but the process itself was apparently profitable for those engaged in it. By suggesting an idea of instrumentalising the far right to the benefit of Russian foreign policy, Zhirinovsky might have hoped to become a paid mediator between the Kremlin and European far-right politicians, yet, at that time, there was no indication that the Russian authorities were interested in his initiative.

The fall of Hussein's regime in 2003, as well as the lack of political support from the Kremlin, determined the marginalisation Zhirinovsky's "patriotic international" enterprise over the following years. Few far-right activists went to the Second World Congress of Patriotic Parties that took place on 21 February 2004 – Zhirinovsky apparently had neither funding nor appeal to lure major far-right politicians to Moscow again. The overwhelming majority of the participants were representatives of pro-Russian parties and organisations from the former Soviet states and Asian anti-US organisations. On 24 April 2006, the third meeting hosted representatives of only two European far-right parties, namely the SRS and the Belgian National Front. The Fourth World Congress of Patriotic Parties took place on 20 May 2010 and was as marginal as the previous one.

Zhirinovsky's initiative of creating a functional far-right international, through which the Russian authorities would be able to influence the West, seems to have failed for one major reason: bad timing. Zhirinovsky explicitly articulated this idea in 2003, but, at that time, the Kremlin could still efficiently cooperate with Western mainstream actors, such as Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi or German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. When the Russian authorities could have been theoretically interested in supporting Zhirinovsky's idea, i.e. after 2005 (see Chapter 3), the World Congress of Patriotic Parties had become a marginal project that failed to attract major European far-right politicians.

2.4. Conclusion

After the Second World War, the Soviets covertly collaborated with individual Western fascists for the purposes of intelligence gathering, as well as undermining and discrediting West European societies, but it was not until Perestroika and the opening to the West that Russian actors started to openly cooperate with far-right politicians and organisations in the West. The first contacts with the far right in France, Italy, Spain,

Germany, Belgium, and some other countries were established by Russian ultranationalists Aleksandr Dugin and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. These two Russian politicians introduced European far-right publicists and activists into the Russian radical right-wing milieu, as well as turning them into a factor of Russian far-right politics: contacts with international counterparts increased the perceived political significance of the Russian ultranationalists.

European far-right activists were interested in developing their Russian contacts as many of them believed that the fall of Communism and the demise of the Soviet Union offered an opportunity of joining forces with the Russians against the US. For them, the strategic cooperation with Russia was underpinned by theoretical considerations about the need for engaging Russia in the fight against liberal democracy – the considerations that gained currency in Third Positionist, National Bolshevik, New Right and other far-right circles after the Second World War.

Apart from these, as well as ideological, reasons, the cooperation between the Russian and European far right was sometimes also driven by purely pragmatic considerations – this was the case of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy who apparently received money from his Western associates. Yet of all the Russian relatively important and successful far-right politicians, it was Zhirinovskiy who was the first to offer an idea of using the Western far right as a tool of promoting Russian foreign policy in the West. With his experience as a paid lobbyist for Saddam Hussein's regime, Zhirinovskiy implicitly suggested that Putin's regime could use Hussein's tactic and try to legitimise Russian politics on the international level through the far right. At the time when Zhirinovskiy came up with this idea, i.e. during Putin's first presidential term, it was not supported by the Kremlin, but representatives of the Russian establishment started implementing it several years later.

The next chapter discusses the nature of Putin's regime and demonstrates that these were changes inside the regime that allowed it to claim political legitimacy from Western illiberal political forces, to lay groundwork for future cooperation with the Western far right, and to position Putin's Russia as a "beacon of hope" of the far right's fight against liberal democracy.

Chapter 3

Putin's Russia, an Authoritarian Kleptocracy with a Twist

3.1. Introduction

On 17 October 2014, Russia's President Vladimir Putin and the leader of the Italian far-right LN's Matteo Salvini had a talk during a break at the Asia-Europe summit in Milan, and then – both smiling and shaking hands – posed for photos. Such a picture was unimaginable during the Cold War or even ten years before that meeting in Milan.

What has changed in these ten years? The two previous chapters demonstrated that some elements of the Western far right have always favoured Russia – whether Soviet or post-Soviet – so the “variable” of the Western far right has remained relatively constant. Hence, one can suggest that it is Russia that has changed over the ten years, or, more precisely, Putin's regime has.

One explanation of the change is that there is nothing unnatural in the contemporary relations between Putin's Russia and the Western far right, because the former is allegedly a fascist or, at least, a radical right regime. Zbigniew Brzezinski was arguably the first prominent commentator who compared Putin to Benito Mussolini as early as 2004:

The Fascist regime evoked national greatness, discipline, and exalted myths of an allegedly glorious past. Similarly, Putin is trying to blend the traditions of the Cheka³⁰⁰ (Lenin's Gestapo, where his own grandfather started his career), with Stalin's wartime leadership, with Russian Orthodoxy's claims to the status of the Third Rome, with Slavophile dreams of a single large Slavic state ruled from the Kremlin.³⁰¹

A number of other commentators and officials echoed Brzezinski's argument. For example, claiming that Putin was “a Russified Pinochet or Franco”, Nicholas Kristof maintained that Putin was “not guiding Russia toward free-market democracy, but into fascism”.³⁰² Former CIA Director James Woolsey, in a 2005 interview, said that “the Russian administration under Putin” was “generally behaving more and more like a fascist government”.³⁰³ In a similar manner, Putin's Russia is fascist or fascistoid

³⁰⁰ “Cheka” is a short term for “Chrezvychaynaya komissya” (Emergency Committee), the first Soviet state security agency founded in 1917.

³⁰¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Moscow's Mussolini”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 September (2004), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB109563224382121790>.

³⁰² Nicholas D. Kristof, “The Poison Puzzle”, *The New York Times*, 15 December (2004), <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/15/opinion/15kristof.html>.

³⁰³ “World: James Woolsey, Former CIA Director, Speaks to RFE/RL at Forum 2000”, *RFE/RL*, 10 October (2005), <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1062001.html>.

according to Alexander Motyl whose own peculiar definition of fascist states is “authoritarian states that glorify strength and vigor in the ruling elites and whose subject populations also glorify strength and vigor in the ruling elites”.³⁰⁴

Marcel van Herpen takes a more balanced approach to defining Putin’s regime and argues that Putinism “could certainly not be subsumed under existing categories” and “seemed to present a system of its kind, a totally new political formation that challenged existing political models”.³⁰⁵ Still, van Herpen defined Putinism – with a reference to the largely historical phenomena – as “a right-wing radical system” and “a hybrid mixture of Mussolinian Fascism, Bonapartism, and Berlusconiism”.³⁰⁶

It seems, however, misleading and unhelpful to define Putin’s regime as fascist or even radical right-wing. First, the current system in Moscow does not qualify as fascist in the academic sense. Commenting on the application of the term “fascism” to Putin’s Russia, Roger Griffin argues:

From the perspective of comparative fascist studies Putin’s Russia is not fascist. By this, I mean it is not officially or even practically a single party state using mass organizations to create a New Russian man, and it does not use state power to engineer an alternative form of modernity on the basis of a revolutionary ideology of racist ultranationalism. Putin is a pragmatist, a master of *Realpolitik* without a utopian vision of a new type of modern state. He shows no interest in using the power he has accumulated to erect a modernist totalitarian state devoted to carrying out an anthropological and temporal revolution. Hence, Putin is not technically a fascist.³⁰⁷

Andreas Umland criticises Motyl’s notion of “Putin’s fascist Russia” from the perspective of conceptual pragmatism and terminological consistency stating that the issue with Motyl’s interpretation is that “‘fascism’ is conceptualized in a way that would lead to a general augmentation of ‘fascisms’ in contemporary history, and thus to a loss of the heuristic, classificatory and communicative value of the term”.³⁰⁸

While the right-wing consolidation of Putin’s regime in the recent years cannot be ignored, one of the essential arguments of this thesis proceeds from the underlying premise that Putin’s ultimate aim is not the revival of Russia, restoration of the Russian empire or the well-being of the Russian nation, but rather the preservation of the existing regime at any cost. Furthermore, this thesis interprets the essence of Putin’s regime in

³⁰⁴ Alexander J. Motyl, “Is Putin’s Russia Fascist?”, *The National Interest*, 3 December (2007), <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/inside-track-is-putins-russia-fascist-1888>.

³⁰⁵ Marcel H. van Herpen, *Putinism: The Slow Rise of a Radical Right Regime in Russia* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 202.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

³⁰⁷ Roger Griffin’s comment provided to the author in a private e-mail on 4 June 2016.

³⁰⁸ Andreas Umland, “Challenges and Promises of Comparative Research into Post-Soviet Fascism: Methodological and Conceptual Issues in the Study of the Contemporary East European Extreme Right”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 48, Nos 2-3 (2015), pp. 169-181 (174).

non-ideological terms, following the research by Henry Hale,³⁰⁹ Vladimir Gel'man,³¹⁰ Karen Dawisha³¹¹ and Andrew Wilson.³¹² Although they use different terms, the concept of corruption, for these authors, lies at the heart of their interpretations of the politico-economic order in modern Russia. Hale sees Putin's regime as one of the manifestations of patronalism, which he defines as "a social equilibrium in which individuals organize their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishments".³¹³ Gel'man considers the nature of post-Soviet Russia as neopatrimonialism or as "crony capitalism in its patrimonial form", arguing that "neopatrimonial political institutions [...] were deliberately and purposefully built after the Soviet collapse to serve the interests of ruling groups in Russia [...] and consolidate their political and economic dominance".³¹⁴ Discussing Putin's Russia, Dawisha and Wilson refer to an authoritarian and kleptocratic regime. A kleptocracy can be defined as the state that "is controlled and run for the benefit of an individual, or a small group, who use their power to transfer a large fraction of society's resources to themselves".³¹⁵

Hale and Wilson, while not engaging directly in the discussion of any ideological qualities of Putin's regime, argue that ideological elements are not necessarily alien to patronalism or authoritarian kleptocracy. Hale insists that "patronalism is an ideal-type concept, and notes that "even the most patronalistic environments will experience moments in which people mobilize around imagined communities".³¹⁶ In his turn, Wilson writes that Putin's Russia can adopt "ideological mixes", such as the mix of "nationalism based on Russian ethnicity and language" and "the imperial notion of 'Eurasia' and the 'conservative values' agenda" as a "cover story for a kleptocratic regime".³¹⁷

This thesis argues that Putin's Russia is intrinsically an authoritarian kleptocracy that nevertheless seeks to be considered – to gain internal and external legitimacy – a peculiarly Russian form of democracy. The Kremlin's violent crackdown on the political opposition at home and aggressive foreign policy often expressed in military action against neighbouring states – rather than being attributes of a fascist, imperialist system

³⁰⁹ Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

³¹⁰ Vladimir Gel'man, "The Vicious Circle of Post-Soviet Neopatrimonialism in Russia", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 5 (2016), pp. 455-473.

³¹¹ Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

³¹² Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

³¹³ Hale, *Patronal Politics*, p. 20.

³¹⁴ Gel'man, "The Vicious Circle of Post-Soviet Neopatrimonialism in Russia", p. 457.

³¹⁵ Daron Acemoglu, Thierry Verdier, James A. Robinson, "Kleptocracy and Divide-and-Rule: A Model of Personal Rule", *Journal of the European Economic Association*, Vol. 2, No. 2-3 (2004), pp. 162-192 (162).

³¹⁶ Hale, *Patronal Politics*, p. 481.

³¹⁷ Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, p. vii.

– are instead results of Moscow’s increasing inability to secure socio-economically based legitimacy and preserve the regime by any other means, either through soft power, diplomacy or even soft coercion.³¹⁸

This chapter discusses the nature of Putin’s regime and argues that, since the end of Putin’s first presidential term, he started to feel that his authority incurred a deficit of international and domestic legitimacy. The resulting feeling of unsustainability eventually locked Moscow in a spiral of self-fulfilling prophecies: the more repressive Putin’s regime became against the largely imaginary threats, the less legitimacy it enjoyed internationally, the more threatened Putin felt. This chapter also shows that, since Putin’s second term, Moscow increasingly positioned itself as a power whose legitimacy derived from *alternative*, illiberal political ideas, some of which clearly originated from the far right.

3.2. “The Potemkin state”

In the 1990s, Russia’s transition from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy turned into a catastrophe for the Russian society. As David Satter put it, the course of reforms in Russia was shaped by a set of attitudes that included “social darwinism, economic determinism, and a tolerant attitude toward crime”.³¹⁹ While the population became impoverished, money was concentrated “in the hands of gangsters, corrupt former members of the Soviet nomenklatura,³²⁰ and veterans of the underground economy. Resources were controlled by government officials”.³²¹

The Russian state itself turned into what can – in an exaggerated form – be called “a mafia state”. Behind this sensationalist epithet was the fact that:

Corruption in Russia has penetrated the political, economic, judicial, and social systems so thoroughly that has ceased to be a deviation from the norm and has become *the norm itself*. By pursuing poorly thought-out actions during its transition to a market economy [in the 1990s], *the state became a generator of crime*; in other words, *the authorities became criminal-based institutions* generating asocial behavior.³²²

All-permeating corruption became a major foundation of the “virtuality” of Russia as a democratic state. This “virtuality” was further advanced by the development of a

³¹⁸ James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia’s Influence Abroad* (London: Chatham House, 2013).

³¹⁹ David Satter, *Darkness at Dawn: The Rise of the Russian Criminal State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 38.

³²⁰ *Nomenklatura* is an umbrella term for the Soviet ruling elites that included party and government officials, senior army officers, top bureaucrats, senior managers, etc.

³²¹ Satter, *Darkness at Dawn*, p. 38.

³²² Serguei Cheloukhine, Maria R. Haberfeld, *Russian Organized Corruption Networks and Their International Trajectories* (New York: Springer, 2010), p. 53. My emphasis.

new class of people who helped the ruling elites run the country, namely political technologists, “ultra-cynical political manipulators who created a fake democracy because Yeltsin couldn’t build a real one, and who distracted the population with carefully scripted drama because the energy wealth had temporarily stopped flowing”.³²³

The West played a detrimental role in this process: not only did Western capitals ignore the negative developments in Russia, “the Western community [also] allowed the Russian elite to turn its banks and business structures into machines for laundering Russian dirty money”.³²⁴

Putin became President in 2000, and already during his first presidential term (2000-2004), it was obvious that his regime differed from that of Yeltsin.³²⁵ “The Kremlin established a monopoly of manipulation [...]. Instead of politics being a competition of rival puppet-masters”, the Kremlin, or more specifically the Presidential Administration, became *the* political technologist.³²⁶ Putin’s Presidential Administration started building a “Potemkin state”: a pyramid-like kleptocratic system based on informal networks with Putin at the top – a system that would still present itself as a state but where state organs degenerated into imitations of real institutions.³²⁷ The formal executive would be supplanted by a personified system of power; the parliament would become a rubber-stamp assembly; the power of the judiciary would only be directed against the opponents of the regime or presumptuous loyalists.

Reinstating state control over major mass media in Russia was the cornerstone of Putin’s rise to authoritarian power. The freedom of press was far from ideal under Yeltsin, but those were media tycoons, or oligarchs, rather than the state, who set the political agenda for the media resources they owned and/or controlled. Putin understood well the power of the mass media, especially the major TV channels. Hence, Putin spent his first term crushing disloyal oligarchs Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky who controlled the most popular NTV and ORT TV channels respectively. Gradually, Putin re-established state control over all major mass media in Russia. Putin’s regime used repressions, including “lawsuits, bureaucratic obstruction, crude intimidation, and hostile

³²³ Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, p. 19. See also Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

³²⁴ Lilia Shevtsova, *Odinokaya derzhava. Pochemu Rossiya ne stala Zapadom i pochemu Rossii trudno s Zapadom* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010), p. 43.

³²⁵ On post-Soviet Russian politics and Putin’s regime see, in particular, Simon Pirani, *Change in Putin’s Russia: Power, Money and People* (London: Pluto Press, 2010); Stephen White, *Understanding Russian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Fiona Hill, Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2012).

³²⁶ Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, p. 19.

³²⁷ On Putin’s *sistema* see Alena V. Ledeneva, *Can Russia Modernise? Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

corporate takeovers”, to coerce independent voices into silence.³²⁸ As Ben Judah puts it, “TV editors would get calls from ‘up top’ setting the agenda; the secret services would call reporters to tell them they had gone too far, and journalists were frequently murdered”.³²⁹

Other oligarchs, not necessarily connected to the media, were subdued: “Putin wanted the oligarchs to understand that they would have rents from [their] companies only as a reward for loyal state service. But for an oligarch loyal to Putin there would be no restrictions on the profits that could be realized”.³³⁰

Behind the suppression of the oligarchs lay Putin’s belief that he would not have been able to preserve the regime had he not put under control those who could have funded rival political forces. The last prominent oligarch to be crushed during Putin’s first term was the richest person in Russia and head of the YUKOS corporation Mikhail Khodorkovsky who dared to support political forces that were opposed to Putin. The arrest and subsequent imprisonment of Khodorkovsky was the last warning to the oligarchs who were presented with a choice:

either to support the regime in all its undertakings, or retire to the sidelines. No longer can Russia’s business elite establish their own parties and engage in open criticism of the government. [...] In this new social order there is no place for opposition, unpredictable elections, or insubordinate nouveaux riches [...].³³¹

Apart from the increasing centralisation of state power, suppression of the oligarchs and major mass media, an important difference from Yeltsin’s era was the gradual rise of the so-called *siloviki*³³² – former or current representatives of the “force institutions” such as the KGB, Federal Security Service (FSB, post-Soviet successor of the KGB),³³³ Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defence, its Main Intelligence Directorate (or GRU), Foreign Intelligence Service, Federal Guard Service, Federal Drug Control Service, etc. By the end of Yeltsin’s rule, 17.4% of the ruling elite were

³²⁸ Alex Lupis, “Increasing Press Repression in Russia”, *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (2005), pp. 118-120 (119).

³²⁹ Ben Judah, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell in and out of Love with Vladimir Putin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 41.

³³⁰ Dawisha, *Putin’s Kleptocracy*, p. 277.

³³¹ Olga Kryshstanovskaya, Stephen White, “The Rise of the Russian Business Elite”, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2005), pp. 293-307 (306).

³³² The word “siloviki” derives from the Russian word “sila” (force).

³³³ On the increase of political significance of the FSB in Putin’s Russia see Andrei Soldatov, Irina Borogan, *The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia’s Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010).

represented by the *siloviki*, yet every fourth member of Putin's ruling elite was a *silovik* by 2002.³³⁴ By 2008, the share of the *siloviki* in the ruling elite would rise to 31.5%.³³⁵

Already in autumn 2003, Gleb Pavlovsky, one of the main political technologists of Putin's regime who was opposed to the *siloviki*, voiced concern over their rise. He warned that they were forming "a parallel centre of authority" that would subsequently replace the official one. In his view, one of the major threats of the rise of the *siloviki* was the redistribution of property in their favour on the pretext of defending the state interests: "the destroyed oligarchic system is being replaced by the new 'force' oligarchy" that "focuses on using the levers of the state and administrative resources for achieving its goals".³³⁶

It was during Putin's first presidential term when the core of the *siloviki* group was formed: Igor Sechin, Viktor Ivanov, Sergey Ivanov, Nikolay Patrushev, Sergey Shoygu, Sergey Naryshkin, Vladimir Yakunin, Sergey Chemezov, Rashid Nurgaliyev, Mikhail Fradkov, Viktor Cherkosov, and some others. The overwhelming majority of them have remained important members of the ruling elite to date and have occupied prominent positions in the economic sphere. As Russian economic expert Vladislav Inozemtsev argues, huge revenues from oil and other Russian major Russian exports

allowed Putin's power elite [i.e. *siloviki*] to commit practically any administrative error, tolerate unprofessional decision making, and engage in all kinds of acts of favoritism, as oil revenues pushed the country forward despite ever-growing corruption. Starting in the critical period of 2003-04, public office became regarded as a special kind of "business" that would bring the biggest amount of cash with a minimum of risk and responsibility. And Russia's president, whose close friends had already turned into oligarchs, made it repeatedly clear – using increasing bellicose terms – that he would not tolerate any attempt to change the country's course.³³⁷

Shevtsova, too, notes that "Putin's regime that relies on the power structures and their control over property is genetically repressive and incapable of modernisation", while the "praetorian [i.e. *silovik*] character of the authorities makes a struggle for its survival more violent and fierce".³³⁸ Possibly, already during his first presidential term, Putin and the *siloviki* arrived at a decision to never give up power, and were ready to do

³³⁴ Olga Kryshtanovskaya, Stephen White, "Putin's Militocracy", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2003), pp. 289-306 (294).

³³⁵ Olga Kryshtanovskaya, "Novaya russkaya elita", *New Times*, No. 16, 21 April (2008), <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/4324>.

³³⁶ Gleb Pavlovsky, "O negativnykh posledstviyakh 'letnego nastupleniya' oppozitsionnogo kursu Prezidenta RF men'shinstva", *Russkiy zhurnal*, 2 September (2003), http://old.russ.ru/politics/20030902_gp-pr.html.

³³⁷ Vladislav L. Inozemtsev, "Russia of 2010s: How to Live with It and How to Outlive It", *DGAPkompakt*, No. 7 (2015), p. 2.

³³⁸ Lilia Shevtsova, *My: zhizn' v epokhu bezvremen'ya* (Moscow: Politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 2014), pp. 117, 158.

everything to preserve the existing regime. However, it would be inaccurate to perceive the *siloviki* as a monolithic group: military, security, and intelligence services “are often divided, competitive, and poorly tasked”.³³⁹ Moreover, Putin “is presumably well aware of the danger in giving any one agency too much power”, and “he plays agencies off against each other, encouraging rivalries”.³⁴⁰

The *siloviki* – due to their education in the military and security institutions permeated with the spirit of the Cold War – were raised on the Soviet, anti-Western narratives, so it might have been expected that their rise would immediately bring anti-Westernism to the heart of Putin’s foreign policy. This did not happen in 2000-2004, because the increasing economic integration of post-Soviet Russia into the globalised world and the opportunities that the West offered to the Russian elites – ranging from money laundering to education for their children in the world’s best universities – dampened their intrinsic anti-Westernism. However, the “wartime mindset” has been an intrinsic feature of the *siloviki*: “even before the worsening of relations with the West, they appear genuinely to have felt that Russia was under serious, even existential threat, which demanded extreme responses”.³⁴¹

The period 2000-2004 was Putin’s personal political honeymoon with the West in general and the US in particular. A first significant degradation of democracy in Russia was evident already in 2000-2001, but US President George Bush would still say in 2001 that he “was able to get a sense of [Putin’s] soul” and found him a “very straight forward and trustworthy” man who was “deeply committed to his country and the best interests of his country”.³⁴² In 2002, at the G8 summit in Kananaskis, Western leaders even noted “the remarkable economic and democratic transformation that ha[d] occurred in Russia in recent years and in particular under the leadership of President Putin”.³⁴³

Just as in the 1990s, the West provided external legitimacy for Putin’s regime.³⁴⁴ By turning the blind eye to all the non-democratic, corrupt practices in Russia, as well as assisting Russian ruling elites in laundering money in Europe, Western leaders not only emboldened those who were involved in these practices, but also created a very specific image of the West among the ruling Russian elites. The latter understood their own nature well, but the evident acceptance of their dubious practices by the West informed them that Western political and business leaders were as corrupt and double-faced as

³³⁹ Mark Galeotti, “Putin’s Hydra: Inside Russia’s Intelligence Services”, *European Council on Foreign Relations Policy Brief*, No. 169 (2016), p. 2.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁴² Caroline Wyatt, “Bush and Putin: Best of Friends”, *BBC*, 16 June (2001), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1392791.stm>.

³⁴³ “Russia’s Role in the G8”, *2002 Kananaskis Summit*, 26 June (2002), <http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2002kananaskis/russiasrole.html>.

³⁴⁴ Shevtsova, *Odinokaya derzhava*, p. 53.

they were. “Western values” were nothing more than a cover for the same dealings that characterised Russia under Yeltsin or Putin, “camouflage for Westerners who are motivated solely by money”.³⁴⁵

3.3. The revival of anti-Westernism

Putin’s regime became convinced that the West accepted Moscow’s rules of the game, but the paranoid nature of the *siloviki* manifested itself in 2004, during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. The Orange Revolution was not a revolution, but a series of mass protests against the fraudulent victory of Ukraine’s corrupt, pro-Russian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich in the presidential election.³⁴⁶ These protests led to the second run-off of the presidential election in which Yanukovich’s contender, pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko, won. The Kremlin was both furious and frightened. It was furious because Putin and the *siloviki* interpreted the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, which Moscow had always considered part of its sphere of influence, as a breach of an informal agreement between the West and Putin’s Russia, as an act undermining the external (Western) legitimation of Putin’s kleptocracy.

With their Cold War mentality and bitterness over the demise of the Soviet Union, the Russian ruling elites perceived the “loss” of Ukraine after the Orange Revolution as a continuation of the breakdown of the Soviet empire, as they never came to terms with the independence of Ukraine. Yet this was not the only reason why the Russian ruling elites were frightened. Not only did they intrinsically refuse to accept Ukraine’s independence, they also truly believed that Russians and Ukrainians were one, wrongfully divided nation. Apart from its emotional and apparently imperialistic connotation, this argument had a very pragmatic implication closely related to the idea of the preservation of the existing regime in Russia. If Russians and Ukrainians were the same people, then Russians were – as the Ukrainian example had demonstrated – also capable of staging successful mass protests against the corrupt regime. Even more importantly, if Ukrainians were to transform, modernise and democratise their country along the Western lines, it would imply that the same was possible in Russia too – a development that would necessarily lead to the collapse of Putin’s regime. It is with the aim of preventing countries such as Ukraine from modernising and democratising that Russia rejected their sovereign right to seek membership in the EU and NATO.

³⁴⁵ Edward Lucas, “Rethinking Russia: The Paradox of Paranoia”, *Center for European Policy Analysis*, No. 34, 28 January (2013), p. 1, <http://www.cepa.org/sites/default/files/documents/CEPA%20Report%20No.%2034,%20Rethinking%20Russia.pdf>.

³⁴⁶ On the Orange Revolution see Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

The year 2005 became a turning point for Putin's authoritarian kleptocracy, as it turned to the anti-Western measures to ward off the alleged "Orange threat" to the regime.³⁴⁷

The significant contribution of young, active Ukrainians to the success of the Orange Revolution prompted the Russian establishment to launch a pre-emptive defence force by reviving, mobilising and consolidating a pro-regime youth movement. In order to counter the largely imaginary "Orange threat" in Russia, the authorities sanctioned the creation of several "patriotic" youth movements. In February 2005, the declined youth organisation "Walking Together" (Idushchie vmeste) was revitalised as "Ours" (Nashi) under the leadership of Vasiliy Yakemenko. The same month, Aleksandr Dugin's movement declared the formation of its National Bolshevik youth wing, Eurasian Youth Union (Evraziyskiy soyuz molodezhi, ESM), headed by Pavel Zarifullin and Valeriy Korovin. In April, a member of the State Duma Maksim Mishchenko founded the "Young Russia" (Rossiya molodaya) movement. In November, the declined youth organisation of the ruling party "United Russia" (Yedinaya Rossiya) was reformed as the "Young Guard" (Molodaya gvardiya) under the leadership of Tatyana Voronova.

Two major ideas behind the agenda of these youth movements were anti-Westernism (especially anti-Americanism) and the protection of Putin's regime. "Ours" claimed that the West was "engaged in a great geopolitical game on the territory of the former USSR under the slogans of democracy and freedom – a game aimed at 'squeezing' Russia out of the world politics and introducing external control over Russia itself".³⁴⁸ The ESM declared that the US, "a civilisation of the wild West", "smashed our Fatherland to pieces, cast the cobweb of dark presence over the continent, the whole world".³⁴⁹ The "Young Russia" insisted that "the sober-minded youth had to unite in order to prevent revolutions and coups leading to the colonisation of Russia", and that only the unity could "defend our Motherland from the Western expansion, terrorism and corruption".³⁵⁰ The "Young Guard" claimed that they wanted to live in a country "in which 'great upheavals' or revolutions would never happen again", and they would "never become a generation witnessing the end of the Russian state".³⁵¹

In February 2005, Putin created a new subdivision of the Presidential Administration, namely the Presidential Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries. Officially, it aimed at "providing assistance to

³⁴⁷ On the Kremlin's responses to the "Orange threat" see, in particular, Robert Horvath, *Putin's 'Preventive Counter-revolution': Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

³⁴⁸ Igor Yakovlev, Yuliya Ryshkina, Elena Loskutova *et al.* (eds), *Molodezhnye politicheskie organizatsii. Programmy i lyudi* (Moscow: ROO Tsentr "Panorama", 2007), p. 56.

³⁴⁹ "Katekhizis chlena Evraziyskogo Soyuza Molodezhi", *Evraziyskiy soyuz molodezhi*, 21 February (2005), <http://www.rossia3.ru/katehizis.html>.

³⁵⁰ *Molodezhnye politicheskie organizatsii*, pp. 78-79.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

the President in implementing foreign policy”.³⁵² Russian journalists, however, interpreted the creation of this directorate as Putin’s yet another instrument of thwarting “colour revolutions”. Public relations expert Modest Kolerov was appointed to head the directorate on 22 March 2005, and a few days before his appointment, he published, on his website *Regnum*, a manifesto titled “A Front against Russia” that argued that Western-inspired “colour revolutions” in the post-Soviet space targeted Russia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity: “Today, the undisguised aim of Western ‘bad cops’ is dismemberment of Russia; that of the ‘good cops’ – ‘external control’, restriction of its sovereignty, international supervision of its nuclear self-defence”.³⁵³

Gazprom’s *Tribuna-RT*, too, alleged that Russia was the main aim of the “colour revolutions” staged by “Western political technologists”.³⁵⁴ The most popular Russian tabloid *Komsomol Truth* (Komsomol’skaya Pravda) asserted that “colour revolutions” were “orchestrated not only to force pro-Russian elites from the former republic of the USSR, but also to destabilise Russia itself”.³⁵⁵ *Russian Newspaper* (Rossiyskaya Gazeta), the official daily of the Russian government, claimed that “the US-led West and Russia fought a political battle over the control of the post-Soviet space”.³⁵⁶

The Russian Orthodox Church did not stand on the sidelines either, and launched, in July 2005, the SPAS TV channel aimed at “forming a worldview and a system of moral coordinates required for the efficient development of the state on the basis of the indigenously Orthodox values”.³⁵⁷ The SPAS TV would feature special programmes hosted, among others, by Aleksandr Dugin, Natalya Narochnitskaya of the far-right “Motherland” (Rodina) party, and Ilya Goryachev, the leader of the neo-Nazi organisations Combat Organisation of Russian Nationalists (Boevaya organizatsiya russkikh natsionalistov) and “Russian Image” (Russkiy obraz), as well as offering interviews with far-right ideologues such as Alain de Benoist, Lyndon LaRouche and some others.

Not that anti-Westernism was absent from the Russian political culture before; on the contrary, it had a very long history and manifested itself, in particular, in the concept of Russia’s “special path”,³⁵⁸ as well as being an integral ideological part of the “red-brown”

³⁵² “Presidential Executive Office Subdivisions”, *President of Russia*, <http://en.kremlin.ru/structure/administration/departments>.

³⁵³ Modest Kolerov, “Front protiv Rossii”, *Regnum*, 18 March (2005).

³⁵⁴ Konstantin Orekhov, “Kogda milee chuzhoy interes”, *Tibuna-RT*, No. 3, 13 January (2005), p. 7.

³⁵⁵ Aleksandr Tsipko, “Rossiya zapolykhaet, esli vlast’ ne stuknet kulakom”, *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, No. 51, 29 March (2005), p. 3.

³⁵⁶ Vitaliy Tret’yakov, “Mozhno li peredemokratit’ Zapad?”, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, No. 42, 3 March (2005), p. 3.

³⁵⁷ “Pervy obshchestvenny pravoslavnyy telekanal ‘SPAS’”, *Telekanal “SPAS”*, 28 July (2005), <http://spas-tv.ru/history.html>.

³⁵⁸ See, for example, Peter J.S. Duncan, *Russian Messianism: Third Rome, Revolution, Communism and after* (London: Routledge, 2000).

opposition to Yeltsin's regime. What Putin's regime started doing after 2004 was bringing to the forefront the anti-Western narratives that were previously either constrained or contained on the fringes of the society. This resulted in the de-marginalisation of the carriers of these narratives – they were moved into the mainstream to help the regime protect and legitimise itself by pushing the idea of a “besieged fortress”.

Russian elites needed to deliberately mainstream anti-Americanism, as the most explicit manifestation of anti-Westernism, through previously marginalised figures because, as Vladimir Shlapentokh argues, “anti-Americanism in Russia [...] does not come from below, from the general Russian population, but rather from above, from the elite. It is the elite, through its ability to control and manipulate the media, education and literature, which has the power to either foster or stifle xenophobia”.³⁵⁹

In his study on conspiracy theories in post-Soviet Russia, Ilya Yablokov explained that the process of mainstreamisation of the anti-Western conspiracy theories was helped by the arguments presented by First Deputy Chief of Russia's Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov who offered a new narrative on Russia-West relations: the West was not “the ultimate enemy” of Russia, but its “shrewd competitor”. However, this particular reconceptualisation, rather than discarding anti-Western conspiracy theories, relocated them “from the margins of Russian political discourse to its centre” and made “criticism of the West – when framed within the conspiratorial narrative – a legitimate part of official political and media discourse”.³⁶⁰

Importantly, Putin's regime had sufficient financial resources to indulge anti-Westernism. In comparison to 1999, the windfall gains from oil revenues totalled \$133.7 billion in 2000-2003, but they were already \$153.6 billion in 2005 alone, and they amounted to \$894.4 billion in the period 2005-2008.³⁶¹ The increase in oil revenues was “Dutch courage” for the ruling elites in their attitudes towards the perceived Westernising developments in Russia's neighbourhood, but the resulting accumulation of wealth, at the same time, made them even more scared of losing it.

Putin's speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy in 2007 was an ultimatum to the West: “the Kremlin was ready for the deterioration of the relations with the West”, if the US refused to review the rules of the game established after 1991.³⁶² In his speech, Putin, in particular, claimed that the US had “overstepped its national borders

³⁵⁹ Vladimir Shlapentokh, “The Puzzle of Russian Anti-Americanism: From ‘Below’ or from ‘Above’”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 5 (2011), pp. 875-889 (878).

³⁶⁰ Ilya Yablokov, *Conspiracy Discourse in Post-Soviet Russia: Political Strategies of Capture of the Public Sphere (1991-2014)*. A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2014), pp. 91, 116.

³⁶¹ Inozemtsev, “Russia of 2010s”, p. 1.

³⁶² Shevtsova, *Odinokaya derzhava*, p. 56.

in every way” and that it was “visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies” which the US allegedly imposed on other nations.³⁶³

Putin’s authoritarian kleptocracy felt threatened by the West, and urged the formation of “the architecture of global security”, based on “a reasonable balance between the interests of all participants in the international dialogue”.³⁶⁴ Outside the diplomatic doublespeak, this implied that Putin refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of “smaller nations” in Russia’s neighbourhood with regard to their political orders and foreign policy orientations, and called on the West to accept the existence of Russia’s sphere of influence in Eastern Europe that would serve as a buffer against “colour revolutions” allegedly posing a threat to Putin’s regime. Furthermore, Russia’s East European sphere of influence would serve as a platform for further integration of the Russian financial structures into the body of Western economies with the aim of creating or deepening dependence on the workings of Putin’s regime. As James Sherr argues, Russia’s “overarching aim” is “the creation of an international environment conducive to the the maintenance of its system of governance at home”.³⁶⁵ And, of course, possessing a sphere of influence recognised as such by the West and, most importantly, by the US, would produce a feeling that Russia was a great power again – a feeling for which the *siloviki* including Putin himself yearned since the demise of the Soviet Union.

The *siloviki* naturally benefitted from Moscow’s embrace of anti-Westernism. As a report on the developments within the Russian elites in 2013 argued, “the use of the rhetoric of the external threat, [and the use of] power structures and anti-corruption campaign to solve domestic issues resulted [...] in the *siloviki* consolidating their position” in the ruling elites.³⁶⁶

Putin’s rhetoric tactics worked, and major powers of the West recognised the existence of Russia’s sphere of influence with regard to Georgia and Ukraine. At the 20th NATO Summit held in Bucharest in April 2008, Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel and France’s President Nicolas Sarkozy refused to offer NATO Membership Action Plan to Georgia and Ukraine, which had applied for NATO membership, as it “would be an unnecessary provocation to Russia”.³⁶⁷ Taking advantage of this decision, Russia purposefully provoked a war with Georgia, which attacked the South Ossetian city of

³⁶³ Vladimir Putin, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy”, *President of Russia*, 10 February (2007), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion*, p. 96. The original italics omitted.

³⁶⁶ Yevgeniy Minchenko, “Politbyuro 2.0’ nakanune perezagruzki elitnykh grupp”, *Minchenko Consulting*, 19 February (2013), http://www.minchenko.ru/netcat_files/File/The%20Politburo%202_0%20%20on%20the%20eve%20of%20elite%20groups%20reload.pdf.

³⁶⁷ “NATO’s Eastward Expansion Rift to Dominate Summit”, *Deutsche Welle*, 2 April (2008), <http://www.dw.com/en/natos-eastward-expansion-rift-to-dominate-summit/a-3232477>.

Tskhinvali, in August 2008 – President Dmitry Medvedev called this war a “peace enforcement operation”³⁶⁸ – and occupied the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The West failed to meet the Russian aggression against Georgia with sufficient fortitude, just as it failed to respond to Russia’s massive cyber-attack on Estonia, a member of NATO, in 2007.³⁶⁹ In 2009, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) approved a resolution that condemned “the recognition by Russia of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia” in violation of the international law, as well as “the Russian non-mandated military presence and the building of new military bases within the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia”.³⁷⁰ Moscow ignored the resolution, and went unpunished.

3.4. The twist

Shevtsova writes that one of the main reasons that pushed Moscow to embrace “anti-Western revisionism” was the fact that Putin’s regime lacked – in contrast to the Soviet Union – an ideology that would consolidate the society; anti-Westernism was the only idea that could fill in the vacuum.³⁷¹ This is not entirely correct: while anti-Westernism has indeed been the main cross-cutting idea behind the Kremlin’s attempts to present Russia as a “besieged fortress”, Moscow has experimented with various ideologies and ideological constructs to legitimise its anti-Western posture and to consolidate the Russian society to protect the kleptocratic regime. In a later work, Shevtsova reassessed her earlier argument stating that Putin was “restlessly seeking new ideas to justify his claim to unrestrained rule. [...] For the Kremlin, ideas are instrumental. If an action is deemed necessary, ideas will be found to justify it”.³⁷²

In contrast to the totalitarian regimes that seek totality of an anthropological revolution of a deliberately politicised society, authoritarian regimes do not need ideology to the same extent. Putin’s regime – already authoritarian in 2000-2004 – did not require an elaborate and all-encompassing ideology to legitimise his Potemkin state, and Putin himself claimed, in 2003, that “a single state ideology [was] a sign of a totalitarian

³⁶⁸ “Press Statement Following Negotiations with French President Nicolas Sarkozy”, *President of Russia*, 12 August (2008), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/1072>.

³⁶⁹ Arthur Bright, “Estonia Accuses Russia of ‘Cyberattack’”, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 17 May (2007), <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0517/p99s01-duts.html>.

³⁷⁰ “Resolution 1647 (2009). The Implementation of Resolution 1633 (2008) on the Consequences of the War between Georgia and Russia”, *Parliamentary Assembly*, 28 January (2009), <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17708>.

³⁷¹ Shevtsova, *Odinokaya derzhava*, p. 135.

³⁷² Lilia Shevtsova, “Forward to the Past”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2015), pp. 22-36 (25).

state”.³⁷³ For once, Putin was right. Prominent Spanish political scientist Juan Linz, who contrasted authoritarian regimes to totalitarian ones, defined the former as “political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development”.³⁷⁴

As Sherr argues, “unlike the Soviet Union, Russia [under Putin] does not seek a ‘social reordering of the world’”.³⁷⁵ It only syringes very specific ideas into the body of the Russian society in order to achieve particular purposes. This is a typical mode of operation for authoritarian, not totalitarian, states that occasionally, rather than permanently, engage in political mobilisation of the society.

Every social development seen as potentially problematic for the Kremlin is resolved with an ideological tool honed for a specific situation. An example here is the tripartite series of Moscow’s non-violent measures that fragmented and virtually destroyed the Russian opposition movement formed at the end of 2011. This movement emerged as a result of the protests against apparently fraudulent elections to the State Duma in December 2011. The protests, described by Miriam Lansky and Elspeth Suthers as “the first real challenge to President Vladimir Putin and the political system that he ha[d] established in Russia”,³⁷⁶ continued for several months and intensified after the presidential elections in March 2012 in which Putin won in the first round. The Kremlin was scared of the opposition movement as it was scared of the repetition of the “Orange scenario” in Russia in 2005: “the street protests of late 2011 and early 2012 came as a shock to Putin and his group. The dangers of ‘colour revolutions’ became a stock Kremlin warning”.³⁷⁷ The police suppressed the protests, but the authorities predominantly took non-violent measures to fend off the threat of an imaginary “colour revolution”. First, the Kremlin sensationalised the minor, allegedly sacrilegious performance of the Russian punk band Pussy Riot in Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Saviour to bring division into the opposition movement on religious grounds.³⁷⁸ Second, it adopted the anti-LGBT³⁷⁹ propaganda law officially to protect children from “information advocating for a denial of

³⁷³ Vladimir Putin, “Excerpts from a Transcript of the Meeting with the Students of Kaliningrad State University”, *President of Russia*, 27 June (2003), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22042>.

³⁷⁴ Juan J. Linz, “An Authoritarian Regime: Spain”, in Erik Allardt, Yrjö Littunen (eds), *Cleavages, Ideologies, and Party Systems: Contributions to Comparative Political Sociology* (Helsinki: The Academic Bookstore, 1964), pp. 291-342 (297).

³⁷⁵ Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion*, p. 92.

³⁷⁶ Miriam Lansky, Elspeth Suthers, “Outlawing the Opposition”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2013), pp. 75-87 (75).

³⁷⁷ Keir Giles, Philip Hanson, Roderic Lyne, James Nixey, James Sherr, Andrew Wood, *The Russian Challenge* (London: Chatham House, 2015), p. 51.

³⁷⁸ See Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, “The Pussy Riot Affair and Putin’s Démarche from Sovereign Democracy to Sovereign Morality”, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (2014), pp. 615-621.

³⁷⁹ LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

traditional family values”, but essentially to splinter the opposition movement exploiting the divisive LGBT issue. Third, to further minimise perceived Western influence, Russian authorities changed the law on non-profit organisations declaring that those organisations, which were engaged in vaguely defined political activities and received foreign funding, were obliged to register as “foreign agents” – a term, which in Russian language is almost an equivalent to “foreign spy”.³⁸⁰

The fact that Moscow has exploited so many different ideological tools produces an impression of Putinism as “an eclectic and goal-oriented assemblage of precepts and philosophies that blends communist and Tsarist, nationalist and internationalist symbols together with disparate events and personalities from Russian history”.³⁸¹ Yet here is the twist: locked in a spiral of self-fulfilling prophecies, in which Moscow responded to each perceived anti-Russian move of the West with an increase in anti-Western rhetoric and further repression against the political opposition seen as the agents of the West, the Kremlin drove itself to a point where it *needed* to present a real ideology or at least a consistent ideological vision that would continue justifying Moscow’s existential concern over the preservation of the authoritarian kleptocracy.

Mimicking the practices of the Soviet Union, Putin’s regime globalised its self-preservation drive in the form of assuming the role of a leader of the international movement struggling for a multipolar world, but intrinsically – against the US. Anti-Westernism and “ideological syringes” would still be used, but they alone were no longer considered sufficient for Russia’s self-appointed global role.

Ten years after he claimed that “a single state ideology [was] a sign of a totalitarian state”, Putin voiced a different political opinion: “It is evident that it is impossible to move forward without spiritual, cultural and national self-determination. Without this, we will not be able to withstand internal and external challenges, nor will we succeed in global competitions”.³⁸² Putin said these words in 2013 at a meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club (or simply Valdai), a soft power tool of Russian foreign policy established in 2011. Despite the fact that Putin effectively called for the creation of a Russian ideology, his speech also crowned several years of developing such an ideology by various pro-Kremlin actors: by declaring that it did not exist, he admitted that his regime ultimately failed to invent any consistent ideological system.

³⁸⁰ See Françoise Daucé, “The Duality of Coercion in Russia: Cracking Down on ‘Foreign Agents’”, *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2015), pp. 57-75.

³⁸¹ Janusz Bugajski, “Russia’s Pragmatic Reimperialization”, *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2010), pp. 3-19 (9).

³⁸² Vladimir Putin, “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club [2013]”, *President of Russia*, 19 September (2013), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>.

Several reasons determined this failure. First, it was questionable whether any member of the ruling elite of the authoritarian kleptocracy actually believed in any ideology. Even when the regime wanted to exploit a certain ideological construct to mobilise the society for a particular cause, it “outsourced” the task to the “ideologues for hire” – true believers in religious fundamentalism, fascism, Russian ultranationalism, conservatism, etc. The regime cynically instrumentalised them, but never took them as anything more than political technologists or even looneys. Second, there was always an oversupply of ideologies – each of them could potentially serve as the main pro-Putin doctrine. But this oversupply reflected the diversity of often contrasting political opinions in the Russian society, so picking one doctrine would necessarily alienate the adherents of all others and, thus, fail as a consolidating worldview. Third, it seems that Putin was still wary about declaring a particular ideology as a state doctrine. Not so much because he could be accused of totalitarian practices, but mainly because having a single ideology would make the regime predictable and easily challenged in intellectual terms – a development that the Kremlin was always trying to avoid.

What is important in the context of this study is less Moscow’s eventual failure to invent a state doctrine ideology than the complex of ideological constructs developed by pro-Putin forces and presented as a means of seeking international and domestic legitimation of the preservation of the kleptocratic regime. It would take nothing less than several separate volumes to explore these ideological constructs.³⁸³ Here it suffices to briefly summarise the ideas on which Putin focused in his speech at Valdai in 2013, as they largely reflect the above-mentioned corpus of the elaborated ideological constructs.

In his speech, Putin rejected three ideologies: Soviet communism, Western liberalism, and Russian nationalism. While he also expressed criticism towards “fundamental conservatism” that idealised “pre-1917 Russia”,³⁸⁴ he seemed to be inclined to support conservatives in general. Embracing conservatism as a potentially consolidating ideology became the most popular idea among the top functionaries of the “United Russia” party since 2005. Over the years, the party organised several round-tables and workshops, often featuring Western politicians and experts, to discuss conservative trends in Europe. In the beginning of 2005, it also launched the Centre of Social-Conservative Politics founded on the “principles of consistency of social and economic tasks, implementing reforms based on the Russian society’s values,

³⁸³ See, for example, some of the existing scholarship on the issue: Marlène Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2009; Konstantin Sheiko, Stephen Brown, *History as Therapy: Alternative History and Nationalist Imaginings in Russia, 1991-2014* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2014); Pål Kolstø, Helge Blakkisrud, *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000-15* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

³⁸⁴ Putin, “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club [2013]”.

inadmissibility of any forms of extremism”.³⁸⁵ In August 2008, the contemporary leader of “United Russia” and former Minister of Internal Affairs Boris Gryzlov officially declared that conservatism was the ideology of his party.³⁸⁶ At the party congress at the end of 2008, Gryzlov specified that the ideology of the party was “Russian conservatism”.³⁸⁷

For several years, Putin had seemed to remain uninterested in the idea of having “Russian conservatism” as the underlying ideology of the regime, as he was satisfied with occasional instances of mobilising the society on the basis of various, rather than one, doctrines. The change in approach was largely a result of the perceived challenge of the Russian opposition movement that developed in 2011-2012. Just as in the period immediately after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the Kremlin radicalised its anti-Western stances, as the establishment believed that the West or, more specifically, the Americans were behind the protests of the Russian opposition. While the Kremlin used the above-mentioned tripartite series of the non-violent measures to partially disintegrate the opposition, it started probing for an outlook more efficient than anti-Westernism and more consistent than the eclectic mix of situational “ideological syringes”.

As late as 2012, Putin attempted to simultaneously flirt with, and address the issue of, Russian nationalism – a move most likely informed by the fact that the protests in 2011 started with an unofficial protest rally organised by the ultranationalist organisation “The Russians” (Russkie) that called for Putin’s resignation. In his article published in the beginning of 2012, Putin called Russia “a unique civilisation” whose “fabric” was held together by ethnic Russians, i.e. “ruskiy narod”, rather than “rossiyskiy narod” – a term that refers to all the citizens of Russian Federation. At the same time, Putin rejected the idea of a “Russian ‘national’, monoethnic state” that, in his view, was at odds with Russia’s “millenary” history. “The self-determination of the [ethnic] Russian people is a polyethnic civilisation fastened together with the Russian cultural core. And this choice was confirmed by the [ethnic] Russian people again and again – and not by plebiscites or referendums, but by blood”.³⁸⁸ This argument implied that not only ethnic Russians were deprived of a possibility to build a Russian nation-state because of the alleged sacredness of Russia’s “millenary” history, but all the other peoples of Russia were refused their own self-determination too, because ethnic Russians chose to have a “polyethnic civilisation”. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly, Putin also stressed that Russia developed as “a civilisation-state bonded by the Russian people,

³⁸⁵ “O TsSKP”, *TsSKP*, <http://www.cscp.ru/about/>.

³⁸⁶ Gennadiy Ryavkin, “Konservatizm vsemu golova”, *Novgorodskie vedomosti*, No. 25, 9 August (2008), <http://novved.ru/politika/24040-konservatizm-vsemu-golova.html>.

³⁸⁷ Boris Gryzlov, “Ot partii zhdut generatsii idey”, *Strategiya Rossii*, No. 12 (2008), http://sr.fondedin.ru/new/fullnews_arch_to.php?subaction=showfull&id=1229686015&archive=1229686413&start_from=&ucat=14&.

³⁸⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Rossiya: natsional’ny vopros”, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, No. 7, 23 January (2012), http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html.

Russian language and Russian culture”. He insisted that, in order for Russia to be a “sovereign and influential country”, it had to “secure a firm spiritual and moral foundation for our society”, and “support the institutions that [were] the carriers of traditional values”.³⁸⁹ The focus on “morality”, “spirituality”, and “traditional values” was already merely a step away from officially embracing conservatism.

Since 2013, Putin started talking about conservatism in a rather consistent manner. During an interview on the eve of the G20 (Group of Twenty) Summit in 2013, Putin said that he could call himself “a pragmatist with a conservative perspective” who always took “lessons from the distant and recent past into consideration”.³⁹⁰ At the end of the same year, Putin argued: “the point of conservatism is not that it obstructs movement forward and upward, but that it prevents the movement backward and downward. That, in my opinion, is a very good formula, and it is the formula that I propose”.³⁹¹

Putin’s official embrace of conservatism was determined by domestic and international factors.³⁹² In the domestic context – despite Putin’s arguments that conservatism was not “about some kind of self-isolation and reluctance to develop”³⁹³ – his support for this ideology in 2013 was largely a response to the failure of the modernising drive declared by President Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012). Instead of progress and reform proposed by Medvedev, Russia continued a peculiar form of covert de-modernisation – a trend partially explained by the extractive, oil-dependent nature of its economy, and partially – by the lack of genuine willingness on the part of the ruling class (primarily the *siloviki*) to reform the country against the background of continuous windfall gains from oil revenues.

At least for some functionaries of “United Russia”, conservatism was simply an antithesis of liberalism. According to one head of a regional executive committee of the party, “Russian conservatism has little in common with classic conservatism. [...] We had little choice: subscribing to liberal views or trying to build a political life without cataclysms and upheavals”.³⁹⁴ “Russian conservatism”, or its pro-Kremlin, instrumental interpretation, is *okhranitel’stvo* – a Russian term that does not properly translate into English and is derived from the Russian word *okhranyat’* (to protect). *Okhranitel’stvo* implies protection

³⁸⁹ Vladimir Putin, “Address to the Federal Assembly”, *President of Russia*, 12 December (2012), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118>.

³⁹⁰ “Interview to Channel One and Associated Press News Agency”, *President of Russia*, 4 September (2013), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19143>.

³⁹¹ “News Conference of Vladimir Putin”, *President of Russia*, 19 December (2013), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19859>.

³⁹² On the official “conservative” turn of the Kremlin see also Marlène Laruelle, “Conservatism as the Kremlin’s New Toolkit: An Ideology at the Lowest Cost”, *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 138 (2013), pp. 2-4.

³⁹³ Vladimir Putin, “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club [2014]”, *President of Russia*, 24 October (2014), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/46860>.

³⁹⁴ “Na X s’yezde ‘Eidinoy Rossii’ predsedatel’ vysshego soveta partii Boris Gryzlov nazval novoy partynoy ideologiy rossiykiy konservatizm”, *Zvezda*, No. 169, 25 November (2008).

of the authority that, in its turn, protects what is considered traditional values. Inozemtsev, too, refers to “Russian conservatism” as *okhranitel'stvo*, and writes that “conservatism” of “the Russian establishment and the politological crowd that services it” derives largely “from the repudiation of the necessity of progress as such. ‘Conservatism’ in Russia is a synonym of reactionary or, more precisely, retrograde politics”.³⁹⁵

In the international context, “Russian conservatism” became a starting point for seeking legitimation of Putin’s regime from a variety of Western political sources ranging from genuine conservatives to right-wing extremists. Moreover, Putin positioned Russia as a leader of international conservatism. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly at the end of 2013, he declared:

We will strive to be leaders, defending international law, striving for respect and national sovereignty and peoples’ independence and identity. [...]

We know that there are more and more people in the world who support our position on defending traditional values that have made up the spiritual and moral foundation of civilisation in every nation for thousands of years: the values of traditional families, real human life, including religious life, not just material existence but also spirituality, the values of humanism and global diversity.³⁹⁶

Putin addressed these words to the domestic audience, trying to reassure the Russians that their country was not isolated in the world and that his regime found support – and, therefore, external legitimacy – from the like-minded Western forces. The same argument addressed to the Western audience was more specific and seemed to aim at garnering support from ultraconservatives, far right and Christian fundamentalists:

We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual. They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, belief in God with the belief in Satan. [...]

I am convinced that this opens a direct path to degradation and primitivism, resulting in a profound demographic and moral crisis. [...]

Without the values embedded in Christianity and other world religions, without the standards of morality that have taken shape over millennia, people will inevitably lose their human dignity. We consider it natural and right to defend these values. One must respect every minority’s right to be different, but the rights of the majority must not be put into question. [...]

In Europe and some other countries so-called multiculturalism is in many respects a transplanted, artificial model that is now being questioned, for understandable reasons. This is because it is based on paying for the colonial past. It is no accident that today European politicians and public figures are increasingly

³⁹⁵ Vladislav Inozemtsev, “Konservatsiya Rossiyskoy Federatsii”, *Moskovskiy komsomolets*, No. 143, 8 July (2014), p. 3.

³⁹⁶ Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly”, *President of Russia*, 12 December (2013), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825>.

talking about the failures of multiculturalism, and that they are not able to integrate foreign languages or foreign cultural elements into their societies.³⁹⁷

In other words, for Putin, Europe and the West in general were decadent, plagued by same-sex marriages, moral crisis, failing multiculturalism, and disrespect for the rights of the majority – these are the main narratives of the European far right. Putin claimed that “the institutions of international law and national sovereignty” were almost eroded, because the “unipolar, standardised world [did] not require sovereign states; it require[d] vassals”.³⁹⁸ The mastermind behind the “unipolar world” was never named, but the US was tacitly implied as such.

Already in 2012, Putin demonstrated somewhat of a sympathy with the European far right – a sympathy that would later develop into coded overtones to the far right. For example, the specific language of Putin’s article published in 2012 seemed to demonstrate his *understanding* of the agenda of the “radical forces” in Europe as he explained that “the rise of xenophobia among the native indigenous population” was a result of “people being shocked by the aggressive pressure on their traditions [and a] familiar way of life, and [of people] being seriously scared of losing a nation-state identity”.³⁹⁹

As he increasingly started using arguments popular among the European far right, Putin presented Russia as an alternative to the allegedly degenerate West: “the desire for independence and sovereignty in spiritual, ideological and foreign policy spheres is an integral part of our national character”.⁴⁰⁰ Moreover, to resist the alleged unipolarity and Western decadence, Russia would develop a geopolitical alternative to the EU – the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU, sometimes called the Eurasian Union), “a project for maintaining the identity of nations in the historical Eurasian space in a new century and in a new world”.⁴⁰¹

Despite the fact that the EEU would be presented as a mere successor to the Customs Union founded in 2010 by Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, i.e. post-Soviet states,⁴⁰² and despite the assurances that Moscow would not intend to set the process of Eurasian integration “against other integration projects including the more mature European one”,⁴⁰³ one suspects that Putin imagined the Eurasian project to eventually extend to the entire European continent leading to the end of the “decadent” EU. The conceptual rationale of the Russia-led Eurasian integration was underpinned not only by concerns about “maintaining the identity of nations” but also by references to allegedly

³⁹⁷ Putin, “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club [2013]”.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Putin, “Rossiya: natsional’ny vopros”.

⁴⁰⁰ Putin, “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club [2013]”.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² The Customs Union would later be joined by Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

⁴⁰³ Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly”.

peaceful and mutually beneficial co-existence in Eurasia: “the processes of the Eurasian integration contribute to the formation of a new architecture of economic cooperation on the territory from Lisbon to Vladivostok for the purposes of providing sustainable socio-economic development of the whole region”.⁴⁰⁴ The idea of extending the Eurasian project to the European continent is generally accepted by the Russian “intellectual elites” loyal to the Kremlin. For example, one of the leading Russian academics Sergey Karaganov, the dean of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs at the Higher School of Economics, also envisages the incorporation of Europe into Eurasia upon the pretext of “preventing further destabilisation of the international community in the future”: “We want to become a centre of a greater Eurasia, a zone of peace and cooperation. The European subcontinent will be included in this Eurasia”.⁴⁰⁵

Putin’s use of right-wing populist language has become more pronounced in recent years. It was hardly a coincidence that, during his annual “direct line” in April 2014, Putin declared that talking directly to the peoples of the West was more important than talking to their leaders.⁴⁰⁶ “Talking directly to people” is a trope used by European populist parties that contrast “ordinary people” to the “political elites”. Likewise, there was a reason why Putin noted, during the same communication, that the electoral successes of Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian far-right party Jobbik, and the FN’s leader Marine Le Pen evidently testified to the rise of “conservative values” in the European countries.⁴⁰⁷ By the end of 2013/beginning of 2014, it became clear that Putin’s regime no longer appealed exclusively to European *mainstream* political forces for the legitimisation of his authoritarian kleptocracy as a normal state. Rather, the regime increasingly appealed to European *illiberal* forces in its desperate quest for recognition as a global leader of “conservative forces” and a truly sovereign state that challenged Western mainstream politics.

3.5. Conclusion

Russia in the Yeltsin era was a virtual state in which political manipulation played a greater role than the workings of its weak political institutions, while corruption largely substituted normal economic exchange. At the same time, Yeltsin’s Russia was characterised by strong regional leaders and multiple centres of social and economic

⁴⁰⁴ “Sovmestnoe zayavlenie Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii i Prezidenta Respubliki Balarus”, *Prezident Rossii*, 31 May (2012), <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/1226>.

⁴⁰⁵ Christian Neef, “Interview mit Sergej Karaganow: Putin-Berater droht mit Vernichtung von Nato-Waffen”, *Der Spiegel*, 11 July (2016), <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/russland-sergej-karaganow-droht-mit-vernichtung-von-nato-waffen-a-1102108.html>.

⁴⁰⁶ “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin”, *President of Russia*, 17 April (2014), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796>.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

power – some of them belonged to the oligarchs and especially to those who controlled major Russian TV channels. This division of authority created an image of a weak, but still a democratic state.

When Putin became Russia's president, he took immediate steps towards liquidating or neutralising alternative centres of power in the country – a development that emerged as a vertical centralisation of the state structure. It turned out to signify the building of an authoritarian patrimonial system, in which ruling elites were recruited on the basis of loyalty to the president. Putin's regime monopolised political manipulation and corruption, and, while purging disloyal oligarchs, it kept the loyal ones, but also created a new class of oligarchs that consisted of the *siloviki*.

Similar to Yeltsin, Putin enjoyed external legitimation of his regime on the part of Western mainstream politicians, but started to feel threatened after a number of democratic, pro-Western developments in Russia's neighbourhood, first and foremost associated with "colour revolutions" – successful protests against electoral fraud in favour of pro-Russian politicians. To fend off an imaginary threat of a "colour revolution" in Russia, Putin's regime increasingly turned to anti-Western and especially anti-American rhetoric. This turn resulted in the de-marginalisation of fascist, imperialistic and ultraconservative ideologues (and their ideas) who, until 2004-2005, had remained on the fringes of the socio-political discussions in Russia. Moreover, the anti-Western, conspiratorial worldview of the *siloviki* increasingly became the new normal among the Russian ruling elites.

The anti-Western, anti-American turn of Putin's regime became even sharper after the anti-Putin protests in 2011-2012 allegedly inspired by the US. In addition to the repressions against the opposition, the Kremlin used various right-wing "ideological syringes" to divide the opposition, but gradually came to understand that it needed a proper ideology that would consolidate Putin's rule and mobilise the society to the defence of his regime. In foreign relations, this anti-Western turn implied presenting Russia as a leader of the international struggle for multipolarity, a global defender of "traditional values" and a guardian of "spiritual and moral foundations of civilisation". Institutionally, this posture would be implemented on the international level as part of the agenda of the Eurasian Economic Union as a rival alternative to the alliances of the "decadent" West, in particular the EU.

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Russia's anti-American turn, the perceived challenge it posed to the EU, the Kremlin's appeal to "traditional values", national identity and rights of the majority, as well as Putin's populist language of the divide between the elites advocating for "failing multiculturalism" and people shocked "by the aggressive pressure on their traditions" allowed Putin's right-wing authoritarian kleptocracy to claim external legitimacy from illiberal political forces in the West, especially far-right

ideologues, movements and parties, who started to consider Russia as a “beacon of hope”, a leader of the international crusade against the decadent West with its liberalism, multiculturalism and minority protection. For them, Putin’s Russia has important symbolical value too. Since the end of the Second World War, far-right parties and movements have been on the fringes of socio-political life in their countries, while far-right worldviews were marginalised. Now, however, far-right politicians may claim that their ideology is congenial to that of Putin’s Russia, and this claim – together with a reference to Russia’s geopolitical importance – appears to them as legitimising their politics as no longer marginal within their own societies.

The next chapter examines how the Kremlin’s concerns about “colour revolutions” in post-Soviet space and the anti-Western turn of Putin’s regime encouraged the emergence of the first institutionalised form of cooperation between Russian actors and the European far right, namely the network of political or politicised organisations and far-right activists involved in the politically biased electoral observation aimed at promoting Moscow’s domestic and foreign policy interests.

Chapter 4

Far-right Election Observers in the Service of the Kremlin's Domestic and Foreign Policies

4.1. Introduction

In his comparison of political systems in Russia and China, Ivan Krastev argues that “observed from afar, [Putin’s Russia] certainly looks like a democracy”, as it, in particular, “enjoys a democratic constitution, runs elections, has a multiparty political system, [and] has some free media”.⁴⁰⁸ At the same time, all these democratic institutions are largely a façade that is used to legitimise the authoritarian regime both domestically and internationally; “Russia clearly has elections, but no rotation of power. [...] In the Russian system elections are used as the way to legitimise the lack of rotation”.⁴⁰⁹

Electoral authoritarianism, according to Andreas Schedler, has today become “the modal type of political regime in the developing world”:

A large number of political regimes in the contemporary world [...] have established the institutional façades of democracy [...] in order to conceal (and reproduce) harsh realities of authoritarian governance. [...]

Electoral authoritarian regimes play the game of multiparty elections by holding regular elections for the chief executive and a national legislative assembly. Yet they violate the liberal-democratic principles of freedom and fairness so profoundly and systematically as to render elections instruments of authoritarian rule rather than “instruments of democracy”.⁴¹⁰

In the post-Soviet space, to be sure, a number of attempts were made to confront electoral authoritarian regimes that posed as electoral democracies. After the Cold War, due to the increased focus on commitment to democracy in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as some other parts of the world, it became a norm that “governments committed to democratic elections invite international monitors”.⁴¹¹ According to the “Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation” adopted at the UN in 2005, international election observation “assesses election processes in accordance with international principles for genuine democratic elections

⁴⁰⁸ Ivan Krastev, “Is China More Democratic than Russia?”, *Open Democracy*, 12 March (2013), <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/ivan-krastev/is-china-more-democratic-than-russia>.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Andreas Schedler, “The Logic of Electoral Authoritarianism”, in Andreas Schedler (ed.), *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), pp. 1-23 (1, 3).

⁴¹¹ Susan D. Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat’s Dilemma: Why Election Monitoring Became an International Norm* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 158.

and domestic law”, and “has the potential to enhance the integrity of election processes, by deterring and exposing irregularities and fraud and by providing recommendations for improving electoral processes”.⁴¹² The most influential and reputable organisations involved in international election observation in the post-Soviet space are the OSCE, its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), European Union, PACE and European Commission. Since the mid-1990s, these organisations have conducted numerous election observation missions, and their evaluation of the fairness, openness and credibility of elections has become an important factor in assessing the level of democratisation of political systems in the post-Soviet space.

While international monitoring is not a panacea from electoral authoritarianism, “negative reports from observers can lead to reduced international benefits and international observers can reduce election day fraud directly”, therefore international election monitors are “more costly to pseudo-democrats than to true democrats”.⁴¹³ The significance of the international electoral observation missions has increased even more following a series of “colour revolutions” in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005). The “Revolution of Roses” in Georgia in November 2003 was largely modelled on the Serbian “Bulldozer Revolution” (which had led to the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević’s regime in 2000) and prevented Eduard Shevardnadze from “winning” the fraudulent presidential elections. After the “Revolution of Roses”, but especially after the “Orange revolution”, Vladimir Putin’s regime realised the threat of “colour revolutions” to the Russian domination in post-Soviet space and started taking countermeasures against international election observation missions whose conclusions about unfair electoral procedures played an important role in mobilising societies against electoral fraud. One countermeasure was a failure: Russian representatives at the OSCE “advocated reduced funding for OSCE/ODIHR missions and otherwise attempted to undermine the organization’s work as an independent but prodemocracy judge of election quality”,⁴¹⁴ but were unsuccessful. Other countermeasures were more sophisticated, and, following Rick Fawn, they could be placed in three categories in terms of tactics:

- (1) “asserting that double standards exist in the process” and “advancing an alternative language for democratization”;
- (2) “establishing alternative mechanisms and practices for [international election observer missions] that aim to give legitimacy to that alternative conception of democracy”;

⁴¹² “Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers”, OSCE, 27 October (2005), <http://www.osce.org/odihr/16935>.

⁴¹³ Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat’s Dilemma*, pp. 158, 156.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

(3) “using those tactics to deceive their own populations and undercut domestic opposition”.⁴¹⁵

The second tactic refers to “a shadow market for election monitoring” implying “a supply of lenient monitoring organizations”⁴¹⁶ whose objective is anything but providing independent observation of elections. In particular, their activities may conceal practices of electoral authoritarianism or aim at legitimising elections that are deemed illegitimate by the international community. While these organisations may even present some methodology of conducting proper monitoring, they never use it and effectively turn the idea of independent electoral observation into a postmodern joke.

This chapter explores several organisations of this type, but specifically focuses on the far-right element of the “alternative” electoral observation missions that consistently employ evidently pro-Russian and/or controlled monitors who would attempt to legitimise controversial and/or unfair elections and, by doing so, assert Russian foreign policy interests in the post-Soviet space. First of all, the chapter discusses the history and activities of the most important organisation in this context, namely Commonwealth of the Independent States – Election Monitoring Organisation (CIS-EMO), that has been monitoring controversial elections in the post-Soviet space since 2004 and has pioneered in engaging ideologically loaded, far-right observers in their observation missions. Then the chapter looks at two European organisations, which have been associated with CIS-EMO, and considers their activities, as well as connections between them and other Russian organisations involved in politically biased electoral observation.

4.2. CIS-EMO

The history of CIS-EMO is closely linked to the figure of Aleksey Kochetkov who headed the organisation from 2004 until 2013.⁴¹⁷ Kochetkov first rose to relative prominence in 1992 when he became editor of the *Russian Order* (Russkiy poryadok), a newspaper of Aleksandr Barkashov’s notorious fascist organisation RNE.⁴¹⁸

The RNE took an active part in the violent part of the 1993 Russian constitutional crisis – a conflict between President Boris Yeltsin and a group within the Russian

⁴¹⁵ Rick Fawn, “Battle over the Box: International Election Observation Missions, Political Competition and Retrenchment in the post-Soviet Space”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 6 (2006), pp. 1133-1153 (1133).

⁴¹⁶ Judith G. Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy: When International Election Observation Works, and Why It Often Fails* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 45.

⁴¹⁷ On CIS-EMO and Kochetkov’s background see also Robert Horvath, “Fabricating Legitimacy: Russian Ultrationalism and Election Monitoring in the Former Soviet Space”, forthcoming.

⁴¹⁸ Vyacheslav Likhachev, Vladimir Pribylovsky, *Russkoe Natsional’noe Edinstvo. Vol. 1. Istoriya i ideologiya, 1990-2000* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2005), p. 27. On the RNE also see Shenfield, *Russian Fascism*, especially the chapter “Barkashov and the Russian National Unity”, pp. 113-189.

parliament heavily influenced by Russian ultranationalists and led by Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoy and Chairman of the parliament Ruslan Khasbulatov. The conflict between Yeltsin and the parliament ended in the shelling and consequent storming of the parliamentary building, and hundreds of fighters of the RNE were involved in fighting with the police and army forces loyal to Yeltsin. Kochetkov, among other members of the RNE, was arrested, but then granted amnesty in the beginning of 1994. In September 1995, Barkashov expelled several top members of the RNE, including Kochetkov, for alleged attempts at subversive activities and collaboration with security services and political movements opposing the RNE.⁴¹⁹

In the second half of the 1990s, Kochetkov, like many former and actual members of Russian far-right groups, started a career of a *piarshchik* – a Russian term for a person involved in political consultancy promoting various candidates at elections in Russia.⁴²⁰ This work was hardly ideological; all that mattered was money, although Kochetkov did indeed favour customers such as Sergey Baburin or Viktor Alksnis⁴²¹ who not only participated in various far-right movements but were also actively involved in the defence of the Russian parliament against pro-Yeltsin forces in October 1993.

Founding CIS-EMO was a joint idea of Kochetkov, his then wife Marina Kochetkova and yet another *piarshchik* Viktor Karmatskiy. Marina Kochetkova did not have any political background, but, instead, had business acumen. Karmatsky was engaged in Yeltsin's presidential campaign in 1996, managed relations between Yeltsin's Presidential Administration and political parties in 1996-1997, and worked at the public relations office of the Ministry of Fuel and Energy in 1997-1999; he later resumed his career of a *piarshchik*.

In September 2003, when CIS-EMO was founded in Nizhny Novgorod under the name "Autonomous Non-commercial Organisation for Monitoring Elections in CIS States", it was not yet obvious that the project would be a success. "Alternative mechanisms and practices" became relevant only after the "colour revolutions" had taken place in Georgia and Ukraine, and Russian authorities became concerned with the perceived threat to Russia's electoral authoritarianism posed by organisations such as the OSCE/ODIHR.

At that time, Russia did have a state-controlled organisation that was involved in monitoring elections: this was one of the functions of the Russia-dominated Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member Nations (IPA CIS). Democratisation researchers see the IPA CIS as politically biased and only created to water down

⁴¹⁹ Likhachev, Pribylovsky, *Russkoe Natsional'noe Edinstvo*, p. 64.

⁴²⁰ The term "piarshchik" derives from the English abbreviation PR standing for "public relations".

⁴²¹ Interview with Oleh Vernik, former employee of CIS-EMO (2004-2013), conducted in Kyiv on 12 September 2014.

criticisms coming from the OSCE/ODIHR. For example, Susan Hyde argues that the IPA CIS “has earned a reputation for praising blatantly fraudulent elections in former Soviet states and issuing reports that are in direct opposition to the conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR missions”.⁴²² In a similar vein, Judith Kelley writes that the monitoring activity of the IPA CIS “is widely discredited and regarded as having been created merely to counter the criticisms of the OSCE in the former Soviet region”.⁴²³ The problematic nature of the IPA CIS and its dependence on Russian foreign policy were too obvious, and the organisation never had the credentials of independence and impartiality comparable to those of the OSCE/ODIHR. This evidently irritated Moscow, but another problem was that Russia itself was a participating state of OSCE, and, while it had its grievances against the workings of this organisation and even wanted to reduce funding for OSCE/ODIHR observation missions, the Kremlin could not – at least at that time – straightforwardly challenge it.

CIS-EMO, which was formally an NGO, was neither formally nor substantively an alternative to OSCE/ODIHR, but the Russian authorities could capitalise on its status of an NGO to strengthen the “impartial image” of the IPA CIS. Roman Kupchinsky made a similar argument:

One possible explanation [for the creation of CIS-EMO] is that after so many discrepancies between CIS [i.e. IPA CIS] monitors’ conclusions and those arrived at by OSCE election observers, a “neutral” NGO was needed to lend legitimacy to the official CIS reports and to thereby reinforce Russian policy goals.

A certain amount of confusion resulted from the fact that this NGO had a very similar name to the official CIS monitors, and that its reports were almost carbon copies of those filed by the official CIS monitors.⁴²⁴

Kochetkov apparently used his older contacts to prominent ultranationalist politicians like Baburin, Alksnis and others, with whom he worked as a *piarshchik* in the past⁴²⁵ in order to make his organisation visible in the world of Russian political technology and assert its usefulness for the Russian foreign policy interests. At that time, Alksnis was an MP, while Baburin became the Deputy Chair of the Russian parliament in the beginning of 2004. Karmatskiy, who had several years of civil service experience, also seemed to have contributed to establishing the links between CIS-EMO and the authorities.

⁴²² Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat’s Dilemma*, p. 159.

⁴²³ Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy*, p. 52. Note that both Hyde and Kelly refer to IPA CIS as simply “CIS”, but this is not entirely correct.

⁴²⁴ Roman Kupchinsky, “Monitoring the Election Monitors”, in Ingmar Bredies, Andreas Umland and Valentin Yakushik (eds), *Aspects of the Orange Revolution V: Institutional Observation Reports on the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Elections* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2007), pp. 223-227 (227).

⁴²⁵ Interview with Oleh Vernik.

Despite the arguably good start of the organisation's work, its observation of the 2004 presidential election in Ukraine was almost a disaster for the organisation. The election was marked by a political struggle between pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich and pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko, and Moscow sent to Ukraine its best political consultants – including the Kremlin's "gray cardinal" Gleb Pavlovsky – to help Yanukovich with the electoral campaign. Kochetkov himself acted as a *piarshchik* of Yanukovich's election campaign team, openly supporting his Party of Regions (Partiya rehioniv), and warning against Serbian and Georgian revolutionary "scenarios" in Ukraine after the presidential election,⁴²⁶ thus violating the principles of international election observation that insist on the strict impartiality of observers and unacceptability of any bias or preference in relation to political contenders.

Yanukovich, who was Prime Minister of Ukraine at that time, had almost all the advantages of administrative leverage that allowed him and his high-ranking supporters to rig the election and "win" the second round. Yet the fraudulent nature of both rounds of the election was so obvious that even Dmitry Rogozin, then the leader of the "Motherland" party's parliamentary faction in the State Duma had to admit:

These elections in Ukraine – its first round, as well as the second round – demonstrated that administrative leverage can do more harm than good. The administrative leverage destroyed the opportunities that Yanukovich could have seized had he not been Prime Minister. [...] Ukraine is doubtlessly facing a crisis of political power. International observers will unlikely declare these elections valid given the numerous violations that they have observed.⁴²⁷

Rogozin was right, as the international observers neither from OSCE/ODIHR, nor from the EU, PACE or NATO Parliamentary Assembly declared the elections free and fair. However, the political stakes were so high for the Kremlin that the Russian authorities had to keep insisting on the legitimacy of Yanukovich's "victory". Vladimir Rushaylo, then chair of the executive committee of the CIS and head of the CIS observation mission, stated that some flaws and downsides "had not exerted a significant impact on the free expression of the voters' will" and "Ukraine's presidential elections were legitimate, free and fair";⁴²⁸ Kochetkov, as head of CIS-EMO claimed the same.⁴²⁹ In his turn, Putin declared that the OSCE's negative conclusions were "inappropriate"

⁴²⁶ Tatyana Ivzhenko, "Prezumpsiya vinovnosti. Zapad mozhet ne priznat' itogi predstoyashchikh vyborov prezidenta na Ukraine", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, No. 178, 23 August (2004), p. 6.

⁴²⁷ "Ukraina raskololas' po Dnepru", *Vremya novostey*, No. 214, 23 November (2004), p. 2.

⁴²⁸ Olga Klyueva, "Nablyudateli ot SNG nazvyvayut vybory v Ukraine chestnymi i otkrytymi", *Podrobnosti*, 1 November (2004), <http://podrobnosti.ua/podrobnosti/2004/11/01/156053.html>.

⁴²⁹ Viktor Tolokin, "Oranzhevaya oppozitsiya rastoptala zakon", *Pravda*, No. 133, 25 November (2004), p. 1.

and – turning to usual “whataboutism”⁴³⁰ – criticised the OSCE election observation missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo.⁴³¹

The Kremlin eventually failed to secure Yanukovich’s presidency in 2004, as Yushchenko won in the second run-off of the presidential election in December 2004. Despite the poor performance of CIS-EMO in Ukraine, its subsequent success was one of many other consequences of the Orange Revolution, as the Kremlin had to adapt its domestic and foreign policies to the perceived threats to Russia’s dominant position in what it considered to be its sphere of influence. CIS-EMO, which had a status of an NGO but was intrinsically loyal to the Kremlin, promoted Moscow’s interests in the post-Soviet space and Europe. According to Nicu Popescu, “Russian authorities have been boosting a CIS election monitoring organisation (CIS-EMO) whose verdicts for elections conducted in the CIS have always been diametrically opposed to OSCE opinions on the elections”.⁴³² After the Orange Revolution, Kochetkov started cooperating with Modest Kolerov,⁴³³ who, in March 2005, became the head of the Russian Presidential Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries that was aimed at preventing the spread of “colour revolutions” in the post-Soviet space.

Since 2005, CIS-EMO took part in more than 40 observation missions at elections in countries such as Azerbaijan, Estonia, France, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine, as well as in generally unrecognised, breakaway states such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria.

CIS-EMO’s activities in each case corresponded to the interests of the Russian authorities in a peculiarly implicit manner. When CIS-EMO observed “elections” or “referenda” in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, i.e. the “states” that Russia helped to separate from Georgia and Moldova to undermine their pro-Western aspirations, the objective was to *legitimise* those plebiscites by mere presence of international observers that would make the imitation of the normal electoral process more credible.

In Estonia, on the other hand, which Russia had been trying to discredit as a democratic member state of the EU, the objective was to draw attention to the allegedly discriminated Russian-speaking population and to dispute the democratic nature of the electoral process in Estonia.

⁴³⁰ On “whataboutism”, i.e. the rhetorical tactic of shifting the focus of the discussion from one’s own national context to that of the critics, see “Whataboutism”, *The Economist*, 31 January (2008), <http://www.economist.com/node/10598774>.

⁴³¹ Andrey Kolesnikov, “Vladimir Putin nauchil Evropu ukrainskoy demokratii”, *Kommersant. Daily*, No. 220, 24 November (2004), p. 2.

⁴³² Nicu Popescu, “Russia’s Soft Power Ambitions”, *CEPS Policy Brief*, No. 115 (2006), p. 2.

⁴³³ Horvath, “Fabricating Legitimacy”.

In Turkey, where the Kremlin wanted to diminish cooperation with NATO and the US, CIS-EMO concluded that “in terms of economic recovery, the democratic Islamisation on the basis of its own resources [had] turned out to be more efficient than the military administration under the aegis of NATO or following the principles of ‘Washington consensus’ of the International Monetary Fund”.⁴³⁴

While there is no evidence that the CIS-EMO’s activities were directly sanctioned by the Kremlin, the agenda of its work always complied with Russia’s foreign policy. As Jakob Hedenskog and Robert Larsson argue,

Several of [CIS-EMO’s] observation missions have been controversial, as their findings have often been in sharp contradiction with the findings of other international organisations such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe, or the European Union. The CIS elections observation missions, which are often in fact purely Russian and which are labelled CIS in order to improve their legitimacy, are naturally often accused of being subservient to Kremlin foreign policy.⁴³⁵

Russian authorities seemed to appreciate CIS-EMO’s work, and it received official support, in particular, from Russia’s Foreign Ministry. For example, when Kochetkov and his colleague were arrested in Moldova for a brawl in July 2005,⁴³⁶ it was Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov himself who called the arrest “an unacceptable act” and warned that it could “damage Russian-Moldovan relations even further”.⁴³⁷

Apparently hacked communications of Kochetkov provide further insights in the internal workings of the CIS-EMO. In the context of the 2010 presidential election in Ukraine, Kochetkov wrote:

We have built a long track record of working in the area of the electoral processes of all levels that allows us to work not only in the capacity of independent arbiter of specific elections, but also to exert influence on the coverage of the electoral process, as well as its development (and, consequently, results of the elections). The implementation of the project will allow [us] to create an efficient mechanism of influencing the voters (shaping public opinion, attitudes towards a specific candidate, increasing or lowering voter turnout). Furthermore, the project will provide the information support for countering the structures engaged in the anti-

⁴³⁴ “Ekspertnaya otsenka monitoringovoy gruppy CIS-EMO po itogam parlamentskikh vyborov v Turtsii 12 iyunya 2011 goda”, *CIS-EMO*, 17 June (2011), <http://www.cis-emo.net/ru/news/ekspertnaya-ocenka-monitoringovoy-gruppy-cis-emo-po-itogam-parlamentskikh-vyborov-v-turtsii-12>.

⁴³⁵ Jakob Hedenskog, Robert L. Larsson, *Russian Leverage on the CIS and the Baltic States* (Stockholm: Totalförsvarets Forskningsinstitut, 2007), p. 26.

⁴³⁶ The Moldovan authorities never accredited CIS-EMO to observe any elections in their country. In March 2005, CIS-EMO monitors were deported from Moldova where they went to illegitimately observe the parliamentary elections. In July that year, Kochetkov and his colleague went to Moldova apparently to monitor – again, without any accreditation – the Chişinău mayoral election. See Vladimir Solov’yov, “Moldaviya vytyanula rossiyskuyu notu”, *Kommersant. Daily*, No. 127, 13 July (2005), p. 10.

⁴³⁷ “Sergey Lavrov zhestko prokomentiroval zaderzhanie moldavskimi vlastyami rossiyskikh grazhdan”, *Pervy kanal*, 13 July (2005), <http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/53563>.

Russian activities during the electoral campaign (supposedly OSCE ODIHR, UCCA [Ukrainian Congress Committee of America], NDI [National Democratic Institute], IRI [International Republican Institute], organisations that are financed by the US State Department, etc.). As a result, the implementation of the project will allow for exerting influence on the elections in the interests of the Russian Federation.⁴³⁸

According to one investigative journalist, Kochetkov wrote this in a memorandum addressed to Sergey Vinokurov who headed Russia's Presidential Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries in 2008-2012.⁴³⁹ At that time, Vinokurov was also in charge of Moscow's relations with Transnistria and South Ossetia, and his position might be the original link between him and CIS-EMO that observed the "electoral processes" there. It is unknown whether Kochetkov's "project" was approved by Vinokurov, but CIS-EMO did send an observation mission consisting of 416 people to monitor the 2010 presidential election in Ukraine.

Documents recovered after the 2014 Ukrainian revolution from one of the offices of the Ukrainian Party of Regions headed by former President Yanukovich provide further proof that CIS-EMO's services were a paid job. CIS-EMO monitored the regional elections in Ukraine in autumn 2010, and the documents testify that the total daily allowance for 65 observers amounted to \$10,500, while the remuneration for the entire mission amounted to \$51,000.⁴⁴⁰

The details about potential or actual payments for the work of CIS-EMO suggest that, rather than following someone's orders, the organisation offered its services to the interested parties, the choice of which was determined by Kochetkov's understanding of Moscow's foreign policy interests.

One of the features of CIS-EMO is that they have been inviting election observers not only from the CIS states, but from the EU too. This became possible after CIS-EMO had been re-registered in Moscow in October 2005 under the awkwardly worded name "Autonomous Non-commercial Organisation 'International Organisation for Monitoring Elections 'CIS-EMO'". Widening the scope of the organisation's activities allowed for observing elections outside the CIS and engaging international, i.e. non-CIS, monitors – these changes became one of the factors of success for CIS-EMO.

⁴³⁸ Sergey Il'ko, "Na vybory v Ukraine opredelen smotryashchiy ot Kremlya?", *UNIAN*, 23 February (2012), <http://www.unian.net/politics/612744-na-vyiboryi-v-ukraine-opredelen-smotryaschiy-ot-kremlya.html>.

⁴³⁹ Kolerov was dismissed from the post in 2007 and replaced by Nikolay Tsvetkov who headed the Directorate in 2007-2008.

⁴⁴⁰ "Yak Yanukovych namahavsya kupyty loyal'nist' svitu (dokumenty)", *Espresso TV*, 21 May (2014), http://espresso.tv/article/2014/05/21/yak_yanukovych_namahavsya_kupyty_loyalnist_svitu_dokumenty.

Considering the CIS-EMO's loyalty to the Kremlin's foreign policy, the choice of observers that CIS-EMO could involve in their observation missions has always been largely limited to two main categories: election monitors taking part in CIS-EMO missions would be either pro-Russian or willing to turn the blind eye to the organisation's pro-Russian orientation. The majority of monitors – in terms of their ideological dispositions – have been actual or former members of pro-Russian, far-right and/or (far-) left movements or parties.

The far-right element of CIS-EMO's observation missions has been particularly visible. This can be explained by two factors. The first reason is both pragmatic and ideological. Kochetkov's background in the fascist RNE and his own views determined specific ideological affiliations of the people he could trust and, thus, engage in observation missions. There might also be an element of Kochetkov's gratitude to and/or dependence on his original patrons such as Baburin and Alksnis. Among the around 100 CIS-EMO's election monitors who made an unsuccessful trip to Moldova in March 2005 to illegitimately observe the parliamentary elections, there were, in particular, members of the ultranationalist party "Popular Will" (Narodnaya Volya) party led by Baburin and Alksnis, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's LDPR and Eduard Limonov's NBP.⁴⁴¹

The ideological factor was also important with regard to non-Russian observers. Despite the fact that, by the time of the foundation of CIS-EMO, Kochetkov was not a known member of any far-right organisation, he still maintained right-wing views. At the same time, in the course of his work at CIS-EMO and under the influence of the individuals he worked with, Kochetkov seems to have shifted towards New Right and Eurasianist positions. As a sign of this shift, the website of the Centre for Monitoring Democratic Processes 'Quorum', which he founded in 2008 and which was merged with CIS-EMO, featured articles by the Italian New Right geopolitical theorist and Dugin's associate Tiberio Graziani, then editor of *Eurasia: Review of Geopolitical Studies* (Eurasia: Rivista di studi geopolitici). In these articles, Graziani, fully conforming to Eurasianist principles, attacked "the hegemony of Washington", condemned "liberalist practices imposed by the US" on Europe, and praised Russia as "the backbone of Eurasia" and "the keystone of the multipolar system".

Two EU-based organisations acted as major subcontractors for CIS-EMO for several years recruiting international monitors for joint election observation missions: the Belgium-based Eurasian Observatory for Democracy & Elections and the Poland-based European Centre of Geopolitical Analysis. The next two sections focus on these organisations.

⁴⁴¹ Denis Usov, "Moldavskiy gambit", *Novy Peterburg*, No. 12, 17 March (2005). Usov is a member of the Narodnaya Volya.

4.3. Eurasian Observatory for Democracy & Elections

The Eurasian Observatory for Democracy & Elections (EODE) was founded by Belgian Luc Michel in 2007 as an “electoral monitoring organisation”. Although it claimed to be “a non-aligned NGO”, its political affiliation and ideological dispositions suggest otherwise.

Michel started his political life as a member of various fascist movements and groupuscules. In 1984, he founded the Communitarian National-European Party (Parti Communautaire National-Européen, PCN). The ideology of the PCN can be termed as National Bolshevik, while the organisation is an heir to the Communitarian National Party (Parti Communautaire National) founded in 1965 by Jean Thiriart. Michel was a personal secretary and close associate of Thiriart from 1982 until the latter’s death in 1992.⁴⁴²

Following Thiriart, Michel and his PCN promoted the idea of the “Euro-Soviet Empire from Vladivostok to Dublin” and strove to create a pan-European movement that would unite and consolidate the far-right and far-left tendencies. Their main enemy was the US and a “false ‘European’ project” that was said to be modelled on “Atlantism and Americano-Zionist imperialism”. Their ideal Europe was a “European State-Nation, republican, unitary and socialist”; a Europe “liberated of Yankee colonialism”; a “Great-Europe, from Reykjavik to Vladivostok and from Quebec to the Sahara”.⁴⁴³

After Thiriart’s death in 1992, Michel kept occasional contact with the Russian far right. Dugin and Prokhanov published Michel’s texts in their periodicals *Elements* (Elementy) and *Tomorrow* respectively, while the two of them had a chance to meet Michel in 1996 at the “anti-mondialist” congress in Tripoli⁴⁴⁴ organised on the initiative of Muammar Gaddafi of whom Michel had been a long-time supporter.⁴⁴⁵ After Dugin created, in 2003, his International Eurasianist Movement (Mezhdunarodnoe evraziyskoe dvizhenie, MED), the PCN welcomed the creation of this organisation that was, in their point of view, fighting against “Yankee new colonialism, its ‘New World Order’ and its military force: NATO, Hollywood, MacDonald’s, [and] Coca-Cola”.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² “Who Is Luc Michel?”, *Parti Communautaire National-européen*, <http://www.pcn-npc.com/editos/en/bio.htm>; Lee, *The Beast Reawakens*, p. 479.

⁴⁴³ “Their ‘Europe’ Is Not Ours: PCN-NCP, the Party of the Unitary and Communitarian Europe, Says ‘No’ to the American False Europe of NATO and Capitalism!”, *Nation-Europe*, No. 43 (May 2005), pp. 39-41 (39).

⁴⁴⁴ Aleksandr Dugin, “Liviyskie impressii: po sledam poezdki v Dzhamakhiyru”, *Evrasiya*, 1 March (2011), <http://evrazia.org/article/1590>. Also present at the congress in Tripoli was Ruslan Khasbulatov.

⁴⁴⁵ Pierre-André Taguieff, *La judéophobie des Modernes: Des Lumières au Jihad mondial* (Paris: Jacob, 2008), p. 638; Jean-Yves Camus, “Les amis de la Libye: rendez-vous estival à Paris”, *Actualité juive*, No. 807 (July 2003).

⁴⁴⁶ “The Eurasian Vision of Another Europe!”, *Nation-Europe*, No. 43 (May 2005), p. 46.

It was not until 2006, however, when Michel and his PCN established closer and more significant contacts with Russia. On 17 September 2006, Michel, as well as PCN's General Secretary Fabrice Beaur and a member of the party's political bureau Jean-Pierre Vandersmissen, took part – on the invitation from CIS-EMO – in observing the “Transnistrian independence referendum”. In Tiraspol, they were joined by a cohort of other observers of whom many were far-right activists: Baburin and Alksnis from the “Popular Will”; the ESM's leader Pavel Zarifullin and his associates; Natalya Narochnitskaya, an MP nominated by Rogozin's “Motherland”; Yves Bataille, the leader of the French extreme right People's Struggle Organisation (Organisation Lutte du Peuple); and Stefano Vernole and Alberto Ascari, leaders of the Italian Eurasianist group Eurasia Coordination Project (Coordinamento Progetto Eurasia), among others.

During their visit to Transnistria both Michel and Vernole did not fail to promote the ideas of Thiriart. At a press conference held before the “referendum”, Michel declared that his PCN was committed to the “unification of a Large Europe from Dublin to Vladivostok”,⁴⁴⁷ while Vernole claimed that “the consensus on the Transnistrian issue could contribute to the formation of the integrated space on the territory of the EU countries and the Russian Federation – from Reykjavik to Vladivostok”.⁴⁴⁸ After the “referendum”, Michel praised Tiraspol's anti-Americanism as “a healthy self-defence movement” and argued that “European views of Tiraspol” were reminiscent of those of “‘European Communitarianism’ – namely a Eurasian Greater Europe that is not limited to the small European Union and the ideological horizon of which stretches from the Atlantic to Vladivostok”.⁴⁴⁹

The referendum was not recognised either by the OSCE or the EU, but the CIS-EMO's international observers concluded that the “referendum” “complied with the national [i.e. Transnistrian] law, recognised principles and norms of organising and holding democratic elections, the majority of which are equally applicable to democratic referenda”.⁴⁵⁰

Following the PCN's observation mission in Transnistria, they decided to establish their own electoral monitoring organisation. In August 2007, they registered the EODE, with the aim of “promoting democracy (especially patterns of expression of direct democracy that fully exercises the power of the people)” and “controlling, monitoring and

⁴⁴⁷ “Deputat Evroparlamenta: ‘Rossiya – neot'yevlemaya chast' Evropy””, *Regnum*, 16 September (2006), <http://www.regnum.ru/news/706227.html>.

⁴⁴⁸ “Evropeyskie nablyudateli: ‘Esli strany ES ne priznayut referendum v Pridnestrov'ye, znachit oni ne priznayut demokratiyu””, *Regnum*, 16 September (2006), <http://regnum.ru/news/706222.html>.

⁴⁴⁹ “Etudes de Luc Michel”, *Parti Communiste National-européen*, <http://www.pcn-ncp.com/editos/fr/ed-061218-1.htm>.

⁴⁵⁰ “Mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli prinyali zaklyuchenie po itogam referendum v Pridnestrov'ye. Polny tekst”, *Regnum*, 17 September (2006), <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/706323.html>.

assessing the workings of democracy, especially electoral process and political, legal and constitutional systems”.⁴⁵¹ The PCN’s Michel, Beaur and Vandersmissen became leading figures in the EODE.

The launch of the EODE was heralded by the publication of Michel’s extensive report on Transnistria that was written, according to the author, “for the mission of expertise and analysis conducted by European lawyers” in Transnistria “under the direction of Mr Patrick Brunot”.⁴⁵² Brunot, a lawyer who, in 1997, represented Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in a libel case against the French magazine *The New Observer* (Le Nouvel Observateur), is also known for his long-time sympathies towards, and contacts with, the Russian far right. In particular, he published a book of his conversations with Zhirinovskiy,⁴⁵³ while Rogozin wrote a preface to Brunot’s book on “the false friends of America”.⁴⁵⁴

The EODE claims to be “committed to a multipolar world” and to “the unity of Eurasia, designed as geopolitical entity” within the “multipolar world”.⁴⁵⁵ They trace its “Eurasian vision” back to the ideas of Thiriart and Michel – “the vision of EODE was born in early 1980, with the Euro-Soviet School of Geopolitics”⁴⁵⁶ – and argue that this vision “is now shared by many governmental and political spheres, including the current Russian leadership and V.V. Putin”.⁴⁵⁷

The members of the EODE took part in several election observation missions on the territories occupied by the Russian forces. In 2007, Michel and Beaur – then as part of the Transeuropean Dialogue’s international observation mission⁴⁵⁸ – monitored the “parliamentary elections” in Abkhazia, a breakaway region of Georgia. Political parties loyal to now late “President” Sergey Bagapsh won the “elections”. Commenting on the “elections”, Michel declared: “Today, we have become convinced that you have, indeed, a democratic state, while the information conveyed by Georgia does not correspond to

⁴⁵¹ See the website of *La Direction de l’information légale et administrative*: <http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr>.

⁴⁵² Luc Michel, *La “Pridnestrovskaja Moldavskaja Respublika” (PMR): Construction d’un nouvel état européen et expérience de démocratie directe* (Brussels: EODE, 2007).

⁴⁵³ Vladimir Jirinovski [Zhirinovskiy], Patrick Brunot, *Jirinovski m’a dit...* (Paris: [self-published], 1995).

⁴⁵⁴ Patrick Brunot, *Les Faux Amis de l’Amérique* (Coulommiers: Dualpha éd., 2006).

⁴⁵⁵ “Contact”, *Eurasian Observatory for Democracy & Elections*, <http://www.eode.org/contact/>.

⁴⁵⁶ “EODE: A Non-Aligned NGO!”, *Eurasian Observatory for Democracy & Elections*, <http://www.eode.org/eode-a-non-aligned-ngo/>.

⁴⁵⁷ “Contact”, <http://www.eode.org/contact/>.

⁴⁵⁸ The Transeuropean Dialogue was a short-lived organisation founded in 2007 and headed by Marina Kochetkova. The initial aim of founding another election monitoring organisation was to move away from the CIS-EMO’s disrepute. To present the Transeuropean Dialogue as an organisation separate from CIS-EMO, Kochetkova even used her maiden name, Klebanovich, in public documents.

the actual state of affairs”.⁴⁵⁹ As a sign of gratitude, Bagapsh invited Michel and Kochetkova to his private birthday party.

For the EODE, participation in the election observation activities was followed by other Russia-related events. In July 2007, Michel and the PCN’s General Secretary Fabrice Beaur visited the Seliger camp, an annual “educational forum” that had been held at the Seliger Lake by the pro-Kremlin “Ours” youth movement since 2005. The Seliger camp is a high-profile series of lectures, debates, and conversations, and Putin himself visited the camp several times and delivered speeches there. It is not clear what exactly the PCN delegation was doing at the Seliger forum. In Michel’s words, they “had the honour of participating as trainers”, and Michel lectured “on the geopolitics of the ‘Greater Europe’”. At this forum, Beaur also met “a senior officer” of “Ours” whom he later married and, for this reason, moved to Russia.⁴⁶⁰

Throughout its history, the EODE has cooperated, apart from CIS-EMO, with a few other election monitoring organisations, in particular with the Poland-based European Centre of Geopolitical Analysis, a long-time partner of CIS-EMO. Since 2012, the EODE has also cooperated with the International Expert Centre for Electoral Systems established in 2005 in Israel and headed by Alexander Tsinker. Through Tsinker’s Centre, the EODE sent Beaur, as well as the VB’s Frank Creyelman and Johan Deckmyn, to observe the 2012 parliamentary elections in Ukraine. In March 2014, when the EODE observed the illegitimate “referendum” on the independence of the Ukrainian Autonomous Republic of Crimea that was followed by the annexation of the region by Russia, Michel coordinated the organisation’s activities with the European Centre of Geopolitical Analysis and the Russia-based Civic Control Association (see below).

4.4. European Centre for Geopolitical Analysis

Mateusz Piskorski, who founded the European Centre of Geopolitical Analysis (Europejskie Centrum Analiz Geopolitycznych, ECAG) in 2007 in Poland, started his international election monitoring career in 2004 when he was sent to observe parliamentary elections in Belarus⁴⁶¹ by now late Andrzej Lepper, the leader of the right-wing populist Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland (Samoobrona Rzeczpospolitej

⁴⁵⁹ Ekaterina Pol’gueva, “Garantii prav obespecheny”, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, No. 30, 6 March (2007), p. 3.

⁴⁶⁰ “PCN TV Moscow: Interview of Luc Michel by Fabrice Beaur”, *The Jamahiriyan Resistance Network*, 22 November (2011), <http://www.elac-committees.org/2011/11/22/pcn-tv-moscow-interview-of-luc-michel-by-fabrice-beaur/>.

⁴⁶¹ Rafał Pankowski, “Poseł ze swastyką w podpisie”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, No. 19, 23 January (2006), p. 17.

Polskiej).⁴⁶² According to the joint report of OSCE and ODIHR, the 2004 parliamentary elections in Belarus “fell significantly short of OSCE commitments”, while “the Belarusian authorities failed to create the conditions to ensure that the will of the people serves as the basis of the authority of government”.⁴⁶³ Piskorski’s conclusion, however, was predictably positive: “There was nothing suggesting any violations”.⁴⁶⁴

Piskorski’s political career did not start with Self-Defence which he joined in 2002. In the late 1990s, he was an active member of the Association for Tradition and Culture “Niklot”, a neo-pagan, “metapolitical fascist” group that was influenced by the ideology of the Polish interwar neo-pagan fascist Zadruga movement. Apart from the indigenous Polish interwar influences, Niklot was inspired by *völkisch* ideology, writings of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist.⁴⁶⁵ The group was also characterised by its Slavic ultranationalism and opposed “the intermixture of cultures, languages, peoples and races”.⁴⁶⁶ The following quote from one of Niklot’s articles provides a telling glimpse into its ideology: “Considering the decay and multiraciality of the West, only a united Slavdom – the northern empire of the rising sun – is the hope for the White Race and anyone in the West who does not support the Slavs betrays the White Race and himself”.⁴⁶⁷

A neo-pagan, pro-Slavic worldview became an ideological link between Polish and Russian neo-Nazis. By invitation of Pavel Tulaev, head of the Russia-based far-right Cultural Exchange Association, former co-editor of the journal *Ancestral Heritage* (Nasledie predkov)⁴⁶⁸ and co-editor of the neo-pagan racist journal *Ateney*, Piskorski and Niklot’s Marcin Martynowski, as well as members of other Polish neo-Nazi groups, paid their first visit to Russia in August 2000. They held meetings with leaders of several Russian far-right organisations to discuss prospects of cooperation between the two countries. Stressing their Slavic ultranationalism, Polish visitors expressed their concerns about the German influence in Poland. As Piskorski summed up in his article for the Russian far-right newspaper *I Am Russian* (Ya – ruskiy), “what is now going on

⁴⁶² For a discussion of Self-Defence’s ideology and the terms used to describe it see Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland*, pp. 135-146.

⁴⁶³ OSCE/ODIHR, *Republic of Belarus. Parliamentary elections. 17 October 2004. OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission. Final Report* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2004), p. 1.

⁴⁶⁴ Pankowski, “Poseł ze swastyką w podpisie”, p. 17.

⁴⁶⁵ Christoph Wagenseil, “Mittendrin: Rechtspopulistische Parteien in Mitteleuropa”, *Religionswissenschaftlicher Medien- und Informationsdienst*, 30 June (2014), <http://www.remid.de/blog/2014/06/mittendrin-rechtspopulistische-parteien-in-mitteleuropa/>; Marta Zimniak-Hałajko, “Kultura słowiańska jako alternatywna”, *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, No. 4 (2009), pp. 113-122 (116).

⁴⁶⁶ “Jesienny zaciąg Leppera”, *Newsweek*, 6 October (2002), <http://polska.newsweek.pl/jesienny-zaciag-leppera,25460,1,3.html>.

⁴⁶⁷ Rafał Pankowski, “Polish Antisemite Takes Charge of Education”, *Searchlight*, July (2006), p. 33.

⁴⁶⁸ The name of the journal seems to be a clear reference to Ahnenerbe (Ancestral heritage), an institute in Nazi Germany that focused on the history of the Aryan race.

between Poland and Germany is not a fair and open war, but a covert German economic invasion, inherently a kike method of penetration”.⁴⁶⁹

In the beginning of the 2000s, Niklot was successful in infiltrating established political parties and often joined protests alongside Self-Defence. This was a point of entry for Piskorski and some other Niklot’s top members, including Martynowski, into the party. Piskorski rapidly progressed up the career ladder and became an important ideologue of Self-Defence and the party’s international relations officer. It was apparently through Piskorski that representatives of Self-Defence took part in a conference of “European environmental, peace and alternative movements” co-organised by the PCN and held in the Villepinte suburb of Paris in 2003.⁴⁷⁰

Initial contacts between Piskorski and Dugin’s MED/ESM were established already in 2004, when Piskorski and Zarifullin observed the 2004 parliamentary elections in Belarus. Piskorski and Martynowski visited Moscow in 2005; in particular, they discussed the creation of the Polish branch of the MED, but this project was never fully implemented.

In December 2005, Piskorski visited Transnistria as an observer of the “parliamentary elections”. At a press conference of international observers, Piskorski declared that he would do everything to convince the Polish authorities to recognise Transnistria as an independent state.⁴⁷¹ Piskorski’s trip to Transnistria and his statement provoked a scandal in Poland. Consequently, Self-Defence’s leader Andrzej Lepper, who aimed at securing the position of Deputy Prime Minister following the party’s success at the 2005 parliamentary elections that made it the third biggest party in the Polish parliament, threatened Piskorski to expel him from Self-Defence for his visit to, and behaviour in, Transnistria.⁴⁷² In other respects, however, the Transnistrian trip was beneficial to Piskorski as it was his first experience of working with CIS-EMO.⁴⁷³

Through CIS-EMO, Piskorski, as well as the EODE, built a variety of contacts with Russian officials, and their “election observation” in favour of the Kremlin’s interests became an entrance ticket to participation in other Russia-related activities. On 24 November 2006, a few days before the 19th NATO Summit in Riga, Moscow hosted a conference titled “NATO and Security in Eurasia” that featured more than a hundred of representatives of the Presidential Administration, Russian government, MPs, public and

⁴⁶⁹ Mateusz Piskorski, “Bratskaya Pol’sha”, *Ya – ruskiy*, No. 51 (September 2000).

⁴⁷⁰ Mateusz Piskorski, *Samoobrona RP w polskim systemie partyjnym. Rozprawa doktorska* (Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2010), p. 386.

⁴⁷¹ Alena Get’manchuk, “Pridnestrov’ye ‘obnovilos’. OBSE protiv”, *Zerkalo Nedeli*, No. 49 (2005), https://zn.ua/POLITICS/pridnestrovie_obnovilos_obse_protiv.html.

⁴⁷² Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland*, p. 150.

⁴⁷³ Michał Kaciewicz, Michał Krzymowski, “Euroazjaci w Warszawie”, *Newsweek*, 15 January (2013), <http://swiat.newsweek.pl/euroazjaci-w-warszawie,100369,1,1.html>.

political figures, and foreign guests. Given the rising anti-Western sentiments in Russia, the conference was essentially criticising the “expansion of NATO to the East”.

The problem for the organisers of this predominantly anti-NATO conference was that not many Western politicians and public figures were ready to participate in it. Naturally, the conference featured several pro-Russian politicians from ex-Soviet countries, as well as pro-Russian European lobbyists and academics such as Alexander Rahr, but the organisers presumably thought that these participants did not sufficiently signify the allegedly wide scale of anti-NATO sentiments in the West.

This seems to be the reason why the conference also hosted far-right activists and politicians such as Aleksey Kochetkov, Mateusz Piskorski, Luc Michel, Yves Bataille, Stefano Vernole, and one of the leaders of the Polish far-right League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR) Sylwester Chruszcz – all of them were known as supporters of Putin’s regime, as they had been engaged in pro-Kremlin electoral monitoring.⁴⁷⁴ Despite the different type of activity, the Russian organisers invited them to the conference with a similar purpose: to condone anti-NATO and anti-American sentiments of Putin’s regime. The far-right participants met the expectations. Thus, Bataille delivered a speech in which he maintained that NATO aimed “at attacking the space of great Russia, [and] the former Soviet space”, while Vernole argued that the US aspired “to hamper the trade of Russian gas and oil, and force Russia to direct its supply streams through the corridors controlled by the Pentagon”.⁴⁷⁵

In January 2007, Piskorski and his associates registered their own organisation, the ECAG, that would provide electoral monitoring services to the interested parties. Piskorski’s ECAG featured several Self-Defence members, including Martynowski, Konrad Rękas and Marcin Domagała, as well as Polish right-wingers such as Przemysław Sieradzian and Kornel Sawiński who would later become representatives of Dugin’s MED in Poland.⁴⁷⁶

In 2009, there was an attempt to expand the ECAG internationally, and, in addition to the pre-existing organisation in Russia, a branch of the European Centre of Geopolitical Analysis was established in Germany under the management of Piotr Luczak, a member of the left-wing populist Left party. In its promotional booklet, the ECAG, as an international structure, did not conceal its Russo-centric nature. It claimed that their “monitoring services [had] been already twice highly estimated by the Central Electoral Commission of Russian Federation”, while its intended activities as a “Euro-

⁴⁷⁴ “Conferenza Internazionale. La Nato e la sicurezza eurasiatica”, *Eurasia: Rivista di studi Geopolitici*, 22 November (2006), https://web.archive.org/web/20071026074029/http://www.eurasia-rivista.org/cogit_content/articoli/EEyuEIVFukysALSNUV.shtml.

⁴⁷⁵ “NATO is bezopasnost’ v Evrazii”, *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 47, 8 December (2006), p. 22.

⁴⁷⁶ “Polyaki podderzhali Rossiyu”, *Evraziyskiy Soyuz Molodyozhi*, <http://www.rossia3.ru/politics/foreign/polyakizaosetiu>.

Russian dialogue platform” included “publishing articles and/or interviews in Russian journals and on Russian websites, publishing books in Russian translation, participating in conferences, seminars and roundtables in Russia, [and] giving interviews for the main Russian massmedia”.⁴⁷⁷

The ECAG provided over 20 monitors for the CIS-EMO observation mission at the 2010 presidential election in Ukraine. Apart from the functionaries of the ECAG, more than half of the Polish component of the mission consisted of actual and former members of Self-Defence (including Lepper) and the LPR. Both far-right parties were minor coalition partners of Jarosław Kaczyński’s national-conservative Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość); their coalition government ruled Poland in 2006-2007. Moreover, Marian Szolucha, who was then vice-president of the ECAG, was close to the All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska), a youth organisation that was for some time affiliated with the LPR, so he might have helped engage its members in observation missions.

The pro-Kremlin nature of the entire ECAG/CIS-EMO cooperation manifested not only in their activities, but also in publications indirectly linked to their electoral monitoring. In 2009, Kochetkov and Piskorski – together with Aleksey Martynov, director of the International Institute of the Newly Established States – co-authored a Russian language book *South Ossetia: Armed Aggression and Peace-Making War* in which they attempted to condone Russia’s war against Georgia in August 2008.⁴⁷⁸ While grounded in the Kremlin’s official narrative of Russia’s “peace enforcement operation” in Georgia, the authors’ argument condoning Russia’s war went beyond this official line and represented a point of view of Russian imperialism:

An empire has a right for intervention beyond its borders. It has a sphere of influence and a sphere of strategic interests. Before 8 August 2008, the entire world was considered a sphere of influence of the USA. After that day, it became evident that the second military and political pole exists – the Russian Federation.⁴⁷⁹

The ECAG and CIS-EMO, however, have dramatically reduced cooperation since 2010-2011. They started accusing each other of the the links to the far right, while Kochetkov also alleged that Piskorski was earning money from electoral monitoring and became associated “with various structures [in Russia] including the Kremlin”.⁴⁸⁰ However, these reasons were hardly a viable explanation for the decreasing cooperation: both Kochetkov and Piskorski were far right, and both advanced the Kremlin’s interests.

⁴⁷⁷ *European Center of Geopolitical Analysis* (Moscow: [n.a.], 2009), p. 2.

⁴⁷⁸ Aleksey Kochetkov, Aleksey Martynov, Mateusz Piskorski, *Yuzhnaya Ossetiya: Vooruzhennaya agressiya i mirotvorcheskaya vojna* (Moscow: Knizhny mir, 2009).

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁴⁸⁰ Interview with Aleksey Kochetkov conducted by Sanita Jemberga (*Re:Baltica*) in Warsaw on 30 September 2014.

A more likely explanation for the break between them could be a conflict over personal issues (Marina Kochetkova would divorce Kochetkov and partner with Piskorski) and competition for Russian financial support. Polish investigative journalists Michał Kaciewicz and Michał Krzymowski suggest that Piskorski and the ECAG decided to establish direct – i.e. bypassing Kochetkov and CIS-EMO – relations with Russian actors who allocated financial resources provided for monitoring missions.⁴⁸¹ It is not clear what organisations or individuals provided these resources. A multinational investigation into the so-called “Russian Laundromat”, which was a scheme to move \$20-80 billion out of Russia in 2010-2014 through a network of banks and letterbox companies – the scheme was named “the biggest money-laundering operation in Eastern Europe” by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project⁴⁸² – shows that, in May 2013, the ECAG received €21 thousand for “consulting services” from Cyprus-based Crystalord Limited that participated in the process of laundering Russian money.⁴⁸³

4.5. Cooperation with Civic Control

In 2011, another Russian electoral monitoring organisation, namely the Civic Control Association, started playing a more significant role in coordinating international observers at controversial elections. Civic Control is what can be called a “GONGO”, i.e. a “government organised non-governmental organisation”, as the groups that compose this association are loyal to the Kremlin, while the key figures in the management of the association are members of – or, at least, closely associated with – the State Duma and the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation. The implicit objective of Civic Control is to legitimise controversial elections and declare them free and fair, to criticise results of international monitoring missions from democratic institutions such as the OSCE, and, occasionally, to disapprove of the electoral procedures in Western countries such as the US.

As a consequence of the break-up between the ECAG and CIS-EMO, they started sending separate missions to elections. Since 2011, the backbone of the ECAG’s observation missions has been a combination of far-right and left-wing political forces. The far-right element consisted of members of the LPR, Jobbik, VB, BNP, Attack, Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV),⁴⁸⁴ Social Movement Social Movement –

⁴⁸¹ Kaciewicz, Krzymowski, “Euroazjaci w Warszawie”; Michał Kaciewicz, Michał Krzymowski, “Robił to jawnie”, *Newsweek*, No. 23 (2016), <http://www.newsweek.pl/plus/polska/mateusz-piskorski-kulisy-zatrzymania-rosyjskiego-szpiega,artykuly,386415,1,z.html>.

⁴⁸² “The Russian Laundromat”, *OCCRP*, 22 August (2014), <https://www.reportingproject.net/therussianlaundromat/russian-laundromat.php>.

⁴⁸³ Wojciech Cieśla, Endy Gęsina, “Operacja Laundromat”, *Newsweek*, No. 13 (2017), <http://www.newsweek.pl/plus/spoleczenstwo/sledztwo-pralnia-brudnych-pieniedzy-z-rosji-w-polsce,artykuly,407167,1,z.html>.

⁴⁸⁴ On the PVV see Koen Vossen, *The Power of Populism: Geert Wilders and the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Tricolour Flame (Movimento Sociale – Fiamma Tricolore), and individual right-wing activists. The left-wing element was represented largely by the members of the German Left party.

The change of the Russian coordinator did not have any impact on the work of the ECAG/EODE-affiliated European observers. After observing the 2011 parliamentary elections in Russia, which the OSCE characterised as such that did not meet “the necessary conditions for fair electoral competition”,⁴⁸⁵ Jobbik’s Béla Kovács presented a report produced by his team of monitors that concluded that the elections had been held “in compliance with the international electoral standards”.⁴⁸⁶

Nick Griffin, then the leader of the BNP, who was a member of the ECAG’s observation missions in Russia (2011)⁴⁸⁷ and Ukraine (2012), praised these “young democracies” and expectedly attacked electoral procedures in the UK:

[In Russia], I was stunned to discover instead a robust, transparent and properly democratic system that made me even more aware than ever of the truly shocking failings of the archaic and corrupted shambles that masquerades as free and fair elections in Great Britain.⁴⁸⁸

The systems and checks and balances in place in Ukraine are hugely superior to the undemocratic farce that would make Britain an international laughing stock if the reality was exposed.⁴⁸⁹

Griffin was not the only observer who praised Russia’s “robust, transparent and properly democratic system” in order to criticise the democratic workings in their home countries. After observing the 2012 presidential election in Russia, Ewald Stadler of the right-wing populist Alliance for the Future of Austria (Bündnis Zukunft Österreich, BZÖ) stated: “The elections in the Russian Federation were conducted fully in accordance with democratic standards. There was no single election poster of any candidate by the polling stations, while in Austria this is happening very often”.⁴⁹⁰ It was the same Stadler who, together with Jörg Haider, concluded a \$5 million agreement with the Iraqi authorities in 2002 for lobbying Hussein’s interests in Europe.

⁴⁸⁵ OSCE/ODIHR, *Russian Federation, State Duma Elections, 4 December 2011: Final Report* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2012), p. 1.

⁴⁸⁶ Maksim Dronov, “Mezhdunarodnye nablyudateli nazvali vybory ‘chestnymi i demokraticeskimi’”, *Moskovskiy komsomolets*, No. 278, 7 December (2011), p. 2.

⁴⁸⁷ Officially, Griffin was invited to Russia by Civic Control.

⁴⁸⁸ “Russian Elections ‘Much Fairer than Britain’s’ – Initial Verdict from Nick Griffin”, *British National Party*, 9 December (2011), <https://web.archive.org/web/20120107204013/http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/russian-elections-%E2%80%9Cmuch-fairer-britain%E2%80%99s%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%93-initial-verdict-nick-griffin>.

⁴⁸⁹ “Ukraine Elections Put Britain’s to Shame”, *British National Party*, 20 November (2012), <https://web.archive.org/web/20121123045633/http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/ukraine-elections-put-britains-shame>.

⁴⁹⁰ Maksim Makarychev, “Ne nado pouchat’ Rossiuu”, *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, No. 51, 8 March (2012), p. 3.

Civic Control seemed to have entrusted the ECAG and EODE with drawing up the main list of international observers for the Crimean “referendum” in March 2014;⁴⁹¹ then this list was passed to the Crimean parliament that officially issued invitations to prospective election monitors. The international observation mission – as Russian political scientist Dmitry Oreshkin put it – consisted of “trusted people who would not question its results”.⁴⁹² These “trusted people” included both Michel and Piskorski, who later confirmed that he coordinated “the international observation mission in Crimea”,⁴⁹³ as well as other members of European far-right organisations such as Jobbik, VB, LN, FPÖ, Attack, Tricolour Flame, and Platform for Catalonia (Plataforma per Catalunya) among others. A number of representatives of the left-wing parties such as The Left and the Communist Party of Greece (Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas), as well as pro-Kremlin “trusted people”, observed the “referendum” too.

The ECAG, EODE and Civic Control were also involved in organising the monitoring mission at the “parliamentary elections” that were held on 2 November 2014 in the “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DNR) and “Luhansk People’s Republic” (LNR) – the territories in Eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian separatists and Russian troops. On the eve of these “elections”, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon deplored “the planned holding by armed rebel groups in eastern Ukraine of their own ‘elections’ on 2 November, in breach of the Constitution and national law”.⁴⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the pro-Russian separatists held the “elections” and arranged the arrival of more than 40 observers including members of the VB, Jobbik, Attack, centre-right Forward Italy (Forza Italia), ultranationalist Movement for Serbia (Pokret za Srbiju), and the Marine Blue Gathering (Rassemblement bleu Marine, RBM), a right-wing populist coalition created by the FN’s Marine Le Pen in 2012.

One of the observers, Austrian politician Ewald Stadler, then the leader of the Reform Conservatives (Die Reformkonservativen), chose not to take notice of the massive presence of the armed men at the “polling stations”, arguing in an interview to British self-described “NewGonzo journalist” Graham Phillips, that “there [was] no pressure to the people. Soldiers and people with guns [were] outside, not inside.

⁴⁹¹ “Predstaviteli ‘Grazhdanskogo kontrolya’ budut osushchestvlyat’ nablyudenie na referendumе v Krymu”, *TASS*, 11 March (2014), <http://tass.ru/politika/1036824>.

⁴⁹² Anastasiya Kornya, Polina Khimshiashvili, “Osoboe priglashenie”, *Vedomosti*, No. 44 (3548), 14 March (2014).

⁴⁹³ Sergey Naryshkin (ed.), *Novye izmereniya parlamentskogo dialoga v sovremenny period. Materialy tret’yego Mezhdunarodnogo parlamentskogo foruma* (Moscow: Izdanie Gosudarstvennoy Dumy, 2014), p. 57.

⁴⁹⁴ “Secretary-General Deplores Unconstitutional Elections Called by Armed Rebel Groups in Ukraine”, *United Nations*, 29 October (2014), <http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm16291.doc.htm>.

Everybody [could] vote here free”.⁴⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the number of irregularities at the “parliamentary elections” in the DNR/LNR was apparently too high even for many an observer loyal to the Kremlin’s foreign policy, and Jobbik’s Márton Gyöngyösi acknowledged “the fact that due to a close to six-month military conflict conditions for election [had been] far from ideal and the fighting represent[ed] a serious challenge for the region”. However, this did not prevent Gyöngyösi from declaring that Jobbik recognised “the election as transparent, reflecting the will of the electorate”.⁴⁹⁶

4.6. Conclusion

As Moscow perceived the “colour revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan as a Western, US-led conspiracy against Putin’s regime and Russia’s perceived domination in the post-Soviet space, the Kremlin became genuinely concerned with independent international election observation missions whose findings played an important role in mobilising societies against fraudulent elections. The Kremlin therefore supported “alternative mechanisms and practices” that aimed at legitimising elections in the post-Soviet space which organisations such as the OSCE and ODIHR would unlikely consider free, fair or, in some cases, even legitimate.

Formally an NGO, CIS-EMO became one of the most important “alternative” organisations that tried to legitimise practices of electoral authoritarianism and always remained loyal to the objectives of Russia’s foreign policy in the post-Soviet space. Hardly surprisingly, results of CIS-EMO’s observation missions generally contradicted those of the OSCE and ODIHR.

A salient characteristic of CIS-EMO and the organisations, through which it invited election observers outside the post-Soviet space, namely the Belgium-based EODE and Poland-based ECAG, is that they were all established by former and actual members of far-right organisations. The heads of these organisations have a positive view of Putin’s regime and Russia’s foreign policy, and are influenced by ideologies – first and foremost, neo-Eurasianism, National Bolshevism and Slavic ultranationalism – that praise Russia as a major anti-American and generally anti-Western power that is challenging the post-war liberal-democratic status quo. Thus, these election monitoring organisations are ideologically predisposed to take pro-Russian viewpoints and approve of practices of electoral authoritarianism. Moreover, the backbone of the EODE’s and ECAG’s election observation missions comprises of members of European radical right-wing movements and parties. Other members of these missions are often representatives of pro-Russian

⁴⁹⁵ “Ewald Stadler – International Observer – on Donetsk Elections”, *YouTube*, 2 November (2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssxP9KZ4dgw>.

⁴⁹⁶ Cited in Juhász *et al.*, “*I Am Eurasian*”, p. 47.

left-wing political forces that support the allegedly anti-globalist (in effect, anti-American) agenda of the Kremlin.

Russian media rarely, if ever, mention the ideological stances or political affiliations of far-right international observers engaged in monitoring elections. When referring to the monitors' favourable evaluations of controversial elections, they are usually presented as simply "international observers" or "experts" from particular countries. Some of them (for example, Michel and Ascari) are misleadingly presented as "members of the European Parliament"⁴⁹⁷ – a false description aimed at giving a greater degree of credibility to their words.

The assessments of CIS-EMO, ECAG, EODE and Civic Control – like those of other (politically or ideologically) biased electoral monitoring organisations – are usually disregarded by OSCE/ODIHR monitors, representatives of genuinely independent monitoring organisations and the international democratic community. However, Judith Kelley assumes that the activities of pseudo-observers "may nonetheless be useful with some domestic audiences or with other autocratic governments, and [...] they may be useful in limiting the influence of more critical monitoring organizations".⁴⁹⁸ More importantly, the results of their work contribute to political consolidation of the international illiberal scene providing it with an "alternative" institution of electoral monitoring.

Finally, it should be noted that Michel and Piskorski have gone beyond their activities as heads of international election monitoring organisations and have performed other services to the Russian authorities. In particular, they are often invited to conferences, discussion tables and other events in Russia to reinforce pro-Kremlin and anti-Western narratives.

Piskorski has also become a regular commentator for Russian state-controlled media such as RT (former "Russia Today"), the Voice of Russia and Sputnik, and the next chapter explores yet another institutionalised form of cooperation between Russian actors and the Western far right, namely the cooperation between Russian pro-Kremlin media and far-right politicians and activists.

⁴⁹⁷ See "V Pridnestrov'ye nakanune referendumu spokojno, otmechayut nablyudateli", *RIA Novosti*, 16 September (2006), <http://ria.ru/politics/20060916/53957224.html>; "Pridnestrov'ye sdelalo shag v storonu Rossii", *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, No. 174, 19 September (2006), p. 3.

⁴⁹⁸ Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy*, p. 46.

Chapter 5

Undermining the West through Mass Media

5.1. Introduction

As argued in Chapter 3, the state control over the major Russian mass media in Russia was a cornerstone of the authoritarian kleptocracy that Vladimir Putin has built during his presidency. Silencing (sometimes even through murders of journalists) and/or marginalising independent voices and alternative sources of information have eventually resulted in cultural hegemony of the ruling elites over the majority of population.

In 2004-2012, i.e. during Putin's second term and Dmitry Medvedev's presidential term, the repressions against, and murders of, journalists still took place. At the same time, the media increasingly developed self-censorship skills.⁴⁹⁹ By Putin's third term (2012-today), the number of murdered journalists decreased, but the relative decrease of the repressions against the mass media in general testified to a new trend that was long in the making. It manifested itself as media conformism that implied "both opportunism and routinized willingness to accept unquestioningly the usual practices or standards, which were originally imposed through coercion".⁵⁰⁰ Rather than being subjected to narratives produced by the Kremlin and then "imposed coercively onto media personalities and reporters",⁵⁰¹ the major media produced their own – and genuinely creative – narratives that they perceived as being expected by the authorities.

The Russian mass media have thereby made a crucial contribution to the consolidation of Putin's regime by propagating conformist, pro-Kremlin ideas and marginalising rival views on Russian politics. Apart from this, Russian media succeeded, domestically, in creating a distorted image of Russia itself and international relations between Russia and other parts of the world. As Andreas Umland argues,

The primary reason for Putin's popularity in Russia is his far-reaching control over the media and the incredible propaganda campaign that is going on there every day on several channels in parallel. This is a huge brainwashing operation that has created, for tens of millions of Russians, an alternative reality.⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹ Masha Gessen, "Fear and Self-Censorship in Vladimir Putin's Russia", *Nieman Reports*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (2005), pp. 115-118.

⁵⁰⁰ Elisabeth Schimpfoss, Ilya Yablokov, "Coercion or Conformism? Censorship and Self-Censorship among Russian Media Personalities and Reporters in the 2010s", *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2014), pp. 295-311 (297).

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁵⁰² Šarūnas Černiauskas, "Andreas Umland: Putin Created Alternative Reality for Russians", *Delfi*, 28 January (2015), <http://en.delfi.lt/central-eastern-europe/andreas-umland-putin-created-alternative-reality-for-russians.d?id=67020074>.

In addition, Putin's regime invested heavily in launching or reviving the Russian media operating outside the country, including TV, radio, Internet and printed resources. Especially in post-Soviet states, Russian or Russia-controlled media proved "a useful instrument for influencing public opinion and political elites".⁵⁰³ Furthermore, as Janusz Bugajski writes,

An additional measure for influencing public and political opinion is the purchase of major media outlets in targeted states, especially television stations and popular newspapers with a wide audience. Russian businessmen with ties to the Moscow authorities have endeavored to acquire majority shares or outright ownership of media outlets in a number of countries. This provides a valuable means for airing opinions, commentaries, and discussions that enhance Moscow's foreign policy offensives.⁵⁰⁴

Today, Russian media operate in several foreign languages promoting, to various international target groups, Russian foreign policy, misinforming and/or confusing these audiences about the developments in Russia and the world, as well as subverting and undermining Western mainstream views on Russia.⁵⁰⁵

The use of international media as an important mechanism of soft power, public policy or propaganda is, naturally, not an exclusive invention of the Russian authorities: the major nations involved in the Cold War extensively used their international media in order to undermine their adversaries.⁵⁰⁶ However, there are crucial differences between the Russian mass media and, for example, their Western mainstream counterparts. One difference is that, especially in recent years, the Russian media, which also include state-controlled media, started to engage with politicians, activists, publicists and commentators coming from the fringes of their countries' socio-political life, namely the far right, far left, conspiracy theorists, isolationists, etc. who approve of, or sympathise with, Russia's domestic and foreign policies.

This chapter looks at two particular aspects of the cooperation between the Russian media and the far right, but before doing this, the chapter discusses why this cooperation became needed in the first place. Then it examines how mainstream Russian media engage with far-right politicians, activists and publicists, and looks at the ideas and beliefs

⁵⁰³ Janusz Bugajski, *Cold Peace: Russia's New Imperialism* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), p. 33.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Andrew Wilson, "Four Types of Russian Propaganda", *Aspen Review*, No. 4 (2015), pp. 77-81; Pomerantsev, Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality*.

⁵⁰⁶ See, for example, Frederick Charles Barghoorn, *Soviet Foreign Propaganda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); John Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Nicholas John Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

they articulate to justify the logic and direction of Russian foreign policy and to subvert the liberal-democratic consensus in the West. Finally, it explores the structural relations between Russian media and certain media initiatives of the European far right.

5.2. Failing soft power

Evidence suggests that engaging with far-right commentators is a relatively recent trend within Russian media the origins of which can be traced to 2008. Several important developments marked that year.

In August 2008, Russia invaded Georgia. Although Russia easily won this short war and the Russian society believed in the legitimacy of Moscow's actions in Georgia, the Russian establishment felt that it had lost the information warfare on the international level. One pro-Kremlin Russian journalist provided an insight into the establishment's thinking:

The Russian military campaign in the Northern [sic⁵⁰⁷] Caucasus can be considered a victorious one, but Russia has definitely lost the information war that the US waged on us. In the eyes of almost all the countries of the world, Russia is seen as an aggressor that has attacked a weak Georgian state.⁵⁰⁸

Discussing the international response to the Russian war on Georgia at a meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, Putin himself noted the "power of the West's propaganda machine".⁵⁰⁹ At the same time, the Russian establishment realised that not only had the existing Russian international media failed to convince Western audiences of the alleged legitimacy of Russia's actions in Georgia; rather, the entire approach based on the traditional soft power concept of presenting an "attractive image" of Russia had failed. In other words, the simple message that "Russia is good" did not work.

The Russian media found a different approach to their Western audiences, and Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss have argued that "no organization better traces the transformation of Kremlin thinking from soft power to weaponization than the Kremlin's international rolling news channel, RT".⁵¹⁰ RT was established in 2005 under the name "Russia Today" and aimed – in Putin's own words – at breaking "the Anglo-Saxon monopoly on the global information streams".⁵¹¹ Since then, Russia Today "has

⁵⁰⁷ Georgia is situated in the South Caucasus.

⁵⁰⁸ Anton Vuyma, "Pobediv Gruzuyu, Rossiya proigrala informatsionnyuyu voynu", *Rosbalt*, 31 August (2008), <http://www.rosbalt.ru/main/2008/08/31/518977.html>.

⁵⁰⁹ Maksim Tovkaylo, "Vladimir Putin udivilsya moshchi zapadnoy propagandy", *Gazeta*, No. 173, 12 September (2008), p. 5.

⁵¹⁰ Pomerantsev, Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality*, p. 14.

⁵¹¹ "Visit to Russia Today Television Channel", *President of Russia*, 11 June (2013), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/18319>.

gained a reputation for serving as the Kremlin's 'propaganda machine',⁵¹² but in 2009, in order to prevent the Western audiences from immediately associating the TV channel with official Moscow, all Western versions of Russia Today were rebranded as RT.⁵¹³ The content of its programmes changed too: less coverage of Russia, more deliberate provocations and conspiracy theories that were first advertised under the slogan "Any story can be other story altogether" [sic] which later transformed into "Question more" – an appeal to Western audiences to question the credibility of their national mainstream political leaders.⁵¹⁴

RT's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan explained the transformation of Russia Today into RT in purely business terms: "When we were a quiet, little-noticed channel telling stories from Russia, our audience was negligible. When we started being really provocative ... our audience started to grow".⁵¹⁵ However, in comparison to political goals, business considerations seemed to be of less importance to RT as a propaganda source and a tool of Russian public diplomacy. Critics of RT maintained that "far from improving Russia's image abroad, the channel [had] instead morphed into a platform for conspiracy theorists and other like-minded figures on the margins of debate – especially for those who espouse[d] anti-American views".⁵¹⁶ Thus, a departure from the approach based on soft power, was – as software developers sometimes say – "not a bug, but a feature": since "Russia is good" did not work, then a combination of the "Russian is good" narrative and that of "the West is bad"⁵¹⁷ might do. A similar change of approach characterised other Russian international media too.

However, the new approach encountered a problem. The workings of the international media imply that these are international commentators, rather than domestic ones, who play a leading part. The anti-liberal policies implemented in Russia in recent years and the country's aggressive foreign policy alienated many Western liberal-democratic politicians from commenting positively on Russian domestic developments and international behaviour. Besides, they would hardly be ready to elaborate on the "bad West" narrative anyway.

⁵¹² Ilya Yablokov, "Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool: The Case of Russia Today (RT)", *Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 3-4 (2015), pp. 301–315 (301).

⁵¹³ The TV channel's management, however, maintained the reference to Russia in its Arab version, *Rusiya Al-Yaum* (Russia Today).

⁵¹⁴ Geir Hågen Karlsen, "Tools of Russian Influence: Information and Propaganda", in Janne Haaland Matlary, Tormod Heier (eds), *Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe* (N.a.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 181-208.

⁵¹⁵ Nikolaus von Twickel, "Russia Today Courts Viewers with Controversy", *The Moscow Times*, 17 March (2010), <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-today-courts-viewers-with-controversy/401888.html>.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁷ As Pomerantsev and Weiss argued, RT was focusing on "making the West, and especially the US, look bad", see Pomerantsev, Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality*, p. 15.

The increasingly racist nature of post-Soviet Russian society⁵¹⁸ excludes the feasibility of engaging primarily with Black, Asian or Latin American politicians or activists from particular Third-World regimes who could potentially push anti-Western arguments. Only *White* Europeans and/or Americans can be seen as those whose views will be deemed as fully legitimate by Russian society. Therefore, the Russian media had to continue to rely on an ever-decreasing pool of Western mainstream politicians who would hold pro-Kremlin views or be interested in providing the required commentary. At the same time, they had to turn to White Europeans or Americans who would expose illiberal and/or anti-Western views, and, thus, corroborate the “West is bad” argument.

As indicated earlier, as a result of the gradual radicalisation of the anti-Western sentiments in Russia since 2005, one could witness the growing ideological affinity between, on the one hand, mainstream discourse in Russia, which represented an amalgamation of various – sometimes conflicting, sometimes “Russian conservative” – political concepts and myths, and, on the other hand, the scope of narratives produced collectively by the far right, far left, Christian fundamentalists, and conspiracy theorists. In other words, Russia’s mainstream socio-political discourse has created an alternative reality that, in the West, overlapped with the outlooks of the fringes of its socio-political life. Thus, fringe activists became uniquely suited to offer favourable political views of Putin’s regime. On the part of the Russian media, this was “nudge propaganda” that “works by finding parties, politicians, and points-of-view that are already sure of their world-view [...], and giving them a nudge – so long as these views are usefully anti-systemic”.⁵¹⁹

To engage with the far-right, anti-establishment figures and conspiracy theorists on the part of the Russian pro-Kremlin media such as RT seemed to be a deliberate decision. One former employee of the French edition of RT recalls: “Initially, the idea [of the management] was to give voice to people we saw rarely in the media, including the left [...]. But [from October 2015] we were pressured to interview people of the extreme right”.⁵²⁰ Liz Wahl, an American journalist who worked for RT for two and a half years and publicly resigned on air over RT’s coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, says that journalists working for RT in the US generally fall into two groups: those who see this job as “a start, a chance to work in Washington D.C. and cover stories of real international significance” and those “who come from anti-establishment movements with anti-Western views. [...] The more willing you are to twist the truth and spread

⁵¹⁸ See, in particular, Nikolay Zakharov, *Attaining Whiteness: A Sociological Study of Race and Racialization in Russia* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2013).

⁵¹⁹ Wilson, “Four Types of Russian Propaganda”, p. 78.

⁵²⁰ Dominique Albertini, Jérôme Lefilliâtre, “Russia Today: allo Paris, ici Moscou”, *Libération*, 8 April (2016), http://www.liberation.fr/futurs/2016/04/08/russia-today-allo-paris-ici-moscou_1444970.

conspiracy theories, the more likely you are to get a show on RT”.⁵²¹ Wahl also acknowledges that, while covering domestic US politics, she always had to get her stories approved by “the Russian news director. And you learned it would only get approved if it fit a general mould of making the US or the West look bad”.⁵²²

Russian state-controlled media engage with fringe anti-establishment commentators not only on the international level, but also domestically with a view to consolidate the Russian society. Working with the domestic audience, the Kremlin’s media aim to show that Russia and its citizens are not isolated, that their country is not a “lonely and castaway state”⁵²³ and that, despite all the flirtations with the concepts of particularist “Russian conservatism”, Eurasianism or Russia’s “special path”, the country is still considered part of the European civilisation by White Europeans or Americans themselves. By conveying pro-Kremlin views of Western illiberal activists, Russian state media strive to prove that Russia does appeal to particular Western politicians, and, furthermore, these particular politicians embrace Russia as the real Europe, in contrast to the degenerate Europe of liberal-democratic values, the “Gayropa”.⁵²⁴

The Russian media operating domestically and internationally tend to omit the peculiar ideological credentials of the fringe politicians and activists they turn to, as well as relying heavily, especially in the international context, on *narrative laundering*. This process implies the movement of narratives in the media sphere, where the original source that produces these narratives is either forgotten or impossible to determine. Social networks with their frequent negligence towards the origins of shared information,⁵²⁵ insufficient public expertise on particular socio-political phenomena and unpreparedness of other media actors for aggressive disinformation campaigns facilitate such narrative laundering. The Russian media that implant propagandistic narratives in the international media sphere are interested in a loss of their origin, so they cannot be traced back to Russia or to fringe commentators. When narrative laundering is successful, propagandistic narratives can become part of the mainstream media sphere. This process is also similar to a particular type of the Soviet active measures that Andrew Wilson refers to as “an echo chamber effect”: even the most “blatant lies [that the Soviets disseminated] took on a life of their own through the sheer insistence of their repetition”.⁵²⁶

⁵²¹ Karolina Zbytniewska, “Former RT Presenter: Russian Disinformation Is a Weapon”, *EurActiv*, 22 December (2016), <http://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/interview/former-rt-presenter-russian-disinformation-is-a-weapon/>.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Shevtsova, *Odinokaya derzhava*, p. 218.

⁵²⁴ Oleg Riabov, Tatiana Riabova, “The Decline of Gayropa?”, *Eurozine*, 5 February (2014), <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-02-05-riabova-en.html>.

⁵²⁵ Peter Pomerantsev, “Why We’re Post-Fact”, *Granta*, 20 July (2016), <https://granta.com/why-were-post-fact/>.

⁵²⁶ Wilson, “Russian Active Measures”.

5.3. Bringing the rebels

In historical terms, the international Russian media granted space for propagating Western right-wing extremist views as early as 1996. That year, a Toronto-based German neo-Nazi and Holocaust denier Ernst Zündel made an agreement with the Voice of Russia (VoR), the Russian government's by now discontinued international radio broadcasting service,⁵²⁷ to broadcast his weekly one hour medium-wave radio shows called "Voice of Freedom" from Kaliningrad.⁵²⁸ In his broadcasts, which reached Germany, Zündel presented "long monologues and quotations from the works of various Holocaust deniers" that were banned in Germany.⁵²⁹ Zündel's radio shows produced an international scandal, and the VoR terminated his programme pleading that the management had been unaware of the contents of his broadcasts. It was not Zündel's first attempt to reach out to wider audiences, and while there is no direct connection between his earlier endeavours and the use of far-right activists by the Russian media today, an introduction to Zündel's "Voice of Freedom" programme that he had launched in Canada before his cooperation with the VoR provides insight as to why activists like Zündel have become valuable for the Russian media in recent years:

the "Voice of Freedom" [...] is an attempt by us to bring you a [...] TV programme that differs from the mainstream media, because we [...] hope to bring you uncensored news, uncensored commentary. [...] We hope to be politically incorrect, uncorrect. [...] We want to bring you the rebels.⁵³⁰

More than a decade later, "bringing the rebels" turned into major *modus operandi* for the Russian TV channels as they started to engage with European and American far-right activists, racists and conspiracy theorists to promote directly or indirectly the pro-Kremlin agenda of undermining or eroding the mainstream political and social narratives in the West. Already in 2010, Sonia Scherr had called attention to the fact that RT "reported with boosterish zeal on conspiracy theories popular in the resurgent 'Patriot' movement, whose adherents typically advocate[d] extreme antigovernment doctrines".⁵³¹ She observed that RT had been regularly giving exposure to fringe figures who promoted conspiracy ideas about September 11 attacks being "an inside job";

⁵²⁷ In November 2014, the VoR and Russia's international news agency RIA Novosti were replaced by the international multimedia news service called "Sputnik".

⁵²⁸ Roger Boyes, "Neo-Nazis Fight to Take Over Extremist Publishing Empire", *The Times of London*, 14 November (1996).

⁵²⁹ "Zündel Silenced", *Searchlight*, No. 258 (1996), p. 20.

⁵³⁰ Lightbringer741, "Ernst Zundel – Introduction to Another Voice of Freedom (Part 1)", *YouTube*, 28 October (2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=is_DH4plBvo.

⁵³¹ Sonia Scherr, "Russian TV Channel Pushes 'Patriot' Conspiracy Theories", *Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Report*, No. 139 (2010), <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2010/fall/from-russia-with-love>.

Barack Obama having been born outside the US and, thus, being ineligible for the presidency; or the US being a “tool of the New World Order”. Analysing conspiracy theories as an inherent feature of RT’s contents, Ilya Yablokov identifies two types of conspiratorial ideas on RT: “the first includes genuinely American conspiracy theories; and the second includes ideas of conspiracy in relations between the US and Russia”.⁵³² Yablokov argues that RT employs these ideas “to undermine US domestic and foreign policies”, as well as supporting “the Russian government’s actions, helping Russia’s leadership to become a ‘spokesperson’ on the side of the global community of ‘the people’ against the global ‘Other’ – the US”.⁵³³

The September 11 conspiracy theories promulgated by RT were not limited to those voiced by US commentators. For example, the FN’s then member Aymeric Chauprade appeared in RT’s show “9/11: Challenging the official version”.⁵³⁴ The TV channel introduced Chauprade as “a dissident voice in the French academic world” and “a critic of Western policies towards Russia”, and asked him to discuss his dismissal from a chair at the Collège interarmées de défense following an accusation of supporting conspiracy theories around the September 11 attacks in his book *Chronicle of the Clash of Civilisations* (*Chronique du choc des civilisations*).⁵³⁵

American far-right activist Lyndon LaRouche obsessed with the idea of the Britons being instigators of almost every turbulent event in contemporary history is a darling of RT and some other Russian media too. In the wake of the Russian-Georgian War, when the pro-Kremlin media aspired to justify the Russian aggression in Georgia in August 2008, RT conducted an interview with LaRouche and highlighted his belief that “the Georgian assault on South Ossetia was probably a British-led operation with US support”.⁵³⁶

In their attempts to justify the Russian invasion of Georgia not only internationally but also domestically, the Russian media turned to FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache. In October 2008, i.e. after the Russian-Georgian War, he took part in the conference “Europe-Russia-Georgia: Peace Building I” that was held in Vienna by the Austrian Technologies GmbH managed by FPÖ member Barbara Kappel.⁵³⁷ At this conference, he made statements critical of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili known for his pro-Western views. The Russian media picked up these statements and quoted Strache as saying that Saakashvili “had installed a dictatorial regime”, that Russia “had not acted as

⁵³² Yablokov, “Conspiracy Theories as a Russian Public Diplomacy Tool”, p. 307.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ “9/11: Challenging the official version”, RT, 11 March (2010).

⁵³⁵ Aymeric Chauprade, *Chronique du choc des civilisations* (Périgueux: Éditions Chronique-Dargaud, 2009).

⁵³⁶ “Interview with Lyndon Larouche”, RT, 21 August (2008).

⁵³⁷ See more details on these conferences in Chapter 6.

an aggressor” in its war on Georgia and that “the EU member states should not take their cue from the US” in response to Russia’s actions in Georgia.⁵³⁸

By turning to far-right politicians and activists for comments, the Russian media also tried to capitalise on particular soft spots of the EU, like the cohesion of the Eurozone or immigration, to prove the alleged failure of the democratic policies and integration agenda of the EU. When discussing, in one of its reports, an upcoming meeting of Eurozone finance ministers who would consider boosting the EU bailout fund in 2011, RT quoted three MEPs, none of whom could have possibly provided any optimistic or even neutral view on the future of the Eurozone: Nigel Farage and Godfrey Bloom of the Eurosceptic UK Independence Party (UKIP), and Morten Messerschmidt of the far-right Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti, DF).⁵³⁹

The Russian media coverage of the riots in Stockholm suburbs in May 2013, which broke out after police had shot to death a machete-armed elderly man of non-Swedish origin, was also indicative of the strategy to insinuate that the integration project of the EU was failing. For example, out of seven people cited in RT’s TV report “They don’t want to integrate”,⁵⁴⁰ four belonged to the far-right and racist circles: Kent Ekeroth, MP of the far-right Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD); Ingrid Carlqvist and Lars Hedegaard, editors of the racist newspaper *Dispatch International*; and Gerolf Annemans, then chairman of the far-right VB. In a similar manner, the Italian service of the VoR interviewed Roberto Fiore of the fascist New Force asking him about his opinion on the immigration issue and whether Italy had a future in the EU.⁵⁴¹ (Ironically, in 2009, RT had called Fiore a “convicted fascist terrorist”,⁵⁴² but, four years later, the VoR considered him a legitimate commentator). Such out-of-balance reports – prioritising far-right and generally fringe commentators over the mainstream or established ones – aimed at presenting views sceptical of, or even antagonistic towards, the EU project as of equal value with sober analyses of these problematic issues.

The Russian media also involved the far right to comment on topical international issues such as the challenges to the democratic transition in Libya or the civil war in

⁵³⁸ Yuriy Politov, “Saakashvili – prestupnik”, *Izvestiya*, No. 198, 22 October (2008), p. 2; Darya Yur’eva, “Diktator nedostoin diplomatii”, *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, No. 220, 22 October (2008), p. 2; Vadim Novichikhin, “V Vene Saakashvili ne ponyali”, *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, No. 73, 21 November (2008). None of these reports on the conference mentioned that the FPÖ was a far right or a nationalist party.

⁵³⁹ “Europe Cannot Afford Euro – MEP”, *RT*, 18 January (2011), <http://rt.com/news/cannot-afford-euro/>.

⁵⁴⁰ “‘They Don’t Want to Integrate’: Fifth Night of Youth Rioting Rocks Stockholm”, *RT*, 23 May (2013), <http://rt.com/news/stockholm-violence-outbreak-fires-671/>.

⁵⁴¹ Ekaterina Sinitsyna Santoni, “Immigrazione e fallimento dell’Europa, intervista al leader di Forza Nuova”, *La Voce della Russia*, 4 December (2013), http://it.sputniknews.com/italian.ruvr.ru/2013_12_04/Immigrazione-e-fallimento-dell-Europa-intervista-al-leader-di-Forza-Nuova/.

⁵⁴² “Ultra-nationalists Gaining Steel-toed Foothold in Europe”, *RT*, 5 June (2009), <https://www.rt.com/politics/ultra-nationalists-gaining-steel-toed-foothold-in-europe/>.

Syria. For example, for comments on the Libyan and Syrian questions, RT turned, among other far-right activists, to Richard Spencer, president of the US-based think-tank National Policy Institute, whom the Anti-Defamation League called “a leader in white supremacist circles that envision[ed] a ‘new’ right that [would] openly embrace ‘white racial consciousness’”.⁵⁴³ Despite these credentials, RT did not hesitate to transmit Spencer’s ideas either to demonstrate the alleged failures of the West and, especially, the US in their “Libyan affair”, or to “prove” the involvement of the US in the civil war in Syria: “Russia is on the side of [Syria’s] established sovereign authorities. [...] And Washington is playing a kind of dangerous game of both desiring hegemony in the region and trying to achieve that by creating chaos and riding the wave of Muslim discontent”.⁵⁴⁴

While one could observe a trend in the Russian media of engaging far-right politicians and activists already since 2008, this method became particularly evident in 2013-2014. That was the period of massive media-backed political mobilisation of the Russian establishment in connection with the imminent signing of the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, the Ukrainian revolution (which was seen by 75.7% of Russian elites as an American creation⁵⁴⁵), Russia’s annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine, and the consequent Western sanctions against Russia. Russian media extensively relayed – on a scale unseen before – narratives justifying Russia’s foreign policy both to the domestic and international audiences.

In one of its shows, the VoR, discussing the prospective signing of the Association Agreement, noted “some experts inside the EU” who said that Ukraine would “lose its economic sovereignty as a whole number of its economic branches [would] be governed directly from Brussels”. However, only one such “expert” was named in the programme: the “prominent Polish geopolitical analyst Mateusz Piskorski”.⁵⁴⁶

Piskorski, indeed, became an important communicator of pro-Moscow narratives in Russian mass media – a status hardly commensurable to his limited political significance or the negligibility of his European Centre of Geopolitical Analysis in his home country, Poland. With a few exceptions, up until the second half of 2013, the

⁵⁴³ “Richard Spencer: A Symbol of the New White Supremacy”, *Anti-Defamation League*, 14 May (2013), <http://blog.adl.org/extremism/richard-spencer-a-symbol-of-the-new-white-supremacy>.

⁵⁴⁴ “Washington Ratcheting up Tension It Can’t Afford”, *RT*, 10 August (2013), <http://rt.com/op-edge/usa-russia-tensions-snowden-333/>. See also *RT*’s interview with Spencer: “Democratic Libya: ‘Weak State Marred by Chaotic Infighting’”, *RT*, 9 July (2012), <http://rt.com/news/libya-democratic-elections-results-685/>.

⁵⁴⁵ Sharon Werning Rivera, James Bryan, Brisa Camacho-Lovell, Carlos Fineman, Nora Klemmer, Emma Raynor, “Russian Elite 2016: Perspectives on Foreign and Domestic Policy”, *Hamilton*, 11 May (2016), <https://www.hamilton.edu/documents/russianelite2016final1.pdf>.

⁵⁴⁶ Andrey Fedyashin, Artyom Kobzev, “Kiev Makes Historic Choice: Free Trade with EU instead Customs Union?”, *The Voice of Russia*, 21 September (2013), http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/2013_09_21/Kiev-makes-historic-choice-Free-trade-with-EU-instead-Customs-Union-7461/.

Russian media mentioned Piskorski only in relation to his “election observation” activities. Later, however, they started asking him to comment on other issues, and he readily talked on how “a particular element of the ‘Ukrainian’ protest had been developed and prepared in a local US embassy”;⁵⁴⁷ how the Ukrainian opposition parties during the revolution were “calling for major violations of human rights”;⁵⁴⁸ or how the Americans would “continue to use the situation in Ukraine as a means of destabilizing European Union countries and Russian Federation”.⁵⁴⁹

As mentioned earlier, Piskorski is usually described in the Russian media as “a prominent geopolitical analyst” or “geopolitical expert”, but he is also pictured as a representative of a particular, “nonconformist” trend in the EU. In a similar vein, presenting a narrative favourable to Russia’s foreign policy as part of this trend, the VoR aired an interview with the FN’s Marine Le Pen and introduced her as category witness that “not everyone in Europe believes that Ukraine made a mistake by refusing to sign an association agreement” at the Eastern Partnership Vilnius Summit of 2013.⁵⁵⁰

Le Pen has become a regular commentator for pro-Kremlin media since the end of 2013. It is worth noting that, before this time, the media in Russia mentioned Le Pen largely as a *newsmaker*. However, with the beginning of pro-European protests in Ukraine, she started to appear in the Russian mainstream media sphere as an *opinion-maker* offering her views on the “legitimacy” of the Crimean “referendum”, the “need” for the federalisation of Ukraine (an idea promoted by Russia), the EU “waging Cold War on Russia”, Russia bringing multipolarity back to the world, or the “stupidity” of Western sanctions against Russia. These messages were, in particular, communicated by the most popular, state-controlled TV station First Channel (Pervy kanal),⁵⁵¹ the central state news agency ITAR-TASS,⁵⁵² and the most popular Russian tabloid *Komsomol Truth*.⁵⁵³ These media also readily conveyed her arguments about the allegedly counterproductive

⁵⁴⁷ “Opiat’ Maydan. Opiat’ Takhriir?”, *Nevskoe vremya*, No. 214, 3 December (2013), <http://www.nvspb.ru/tops/opyat-maydan-opyat-tahrir-53008>.

⁵⁴⁸ “Human Rights Violated by Ukraine’s Coup-appointed Govt – European NGO”, *RT*, 12 March (2014), <http://rt.com/news/ukraine-human-rights-violated-402/>.

⁵⁴⁹ “US to Use Situation in Ukraine for Destabilizing EU, Russia – Geopolitical Expert”, *The Voice of Russia*, 23 April (2014), http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/2014_04_23/US-to-use-situation-in-Ukraine-for-destabilizing-EU-Russia-geopolitical-expert-0743/.

⁵⁵⁰ “European Union Has No Right to Demand Anything’ – Marine Le Pen”, *The Voice of Russia*, 14 December (2013), http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/2013_12_14/European-Union-has-no-right-to-demand-anything-Marine-Le-Pen-1583/.

⁵⁵¹ “Lider frantsuzskogo Natsional’nogo fronta Marin Le Pen prokommentirovala sobytiya v Kieve”, *Pervy kanal*, 14 December (2013), <http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/248339>; “Lider Natsional’nogo fronta Marin Le Pen dala interv’yu Pervomu kanalu”, *Pervy kanal*, 13 April (2014), <http://www.1tv.ru/news/polit/256384>.

⁵⁵² Anton Dolgunov, “Marin Le Pen: Evropa neset otvetstvennost’ za proiskhodyashchee na Ukraine”, *ITAR-TASS*, 1 June (2014), <http://itar-tass.com/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1230269>.

⁵⁵³ Elena Chinkova, “Marin Le Pen: Sanktsii dadut obratny effect”, *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, 12 April (2014), <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26219.7/3102470/>.

nature of the EU's sanctions, the anti-Russian Cold War, and a US-led conspiracy to extend its sphere of influence in Europe and the world.

The Russian media also utilised other leaders of the FN. For example, Chauprade started to appear in the Russian media regularly since the second half of 2013 – and Pervy kanal started using his comments from the start of the pro-European protests in Ukraine. Shortly before illegally going to the Russia-occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea to observe the “referendum” on the status of this region, Chauprade denied the fact that Russia invaded Ukraine, yet admitted that Russia could “reserve its right to support ethnic Russians in Crimea with force”, as well as pointing at the US that, in his view, tried “to solve any conflict in any part of the world by interfering into it with force”.⁵⁵⁴

In 2014, Russian media again invoked the “expertise” of Strache who was largely forgotten after 2008, setting aside occasional references to electoral gains of the FPÖ. In an interview for *Parliamentary Newspaper* (Parlamentskaya Gazeta), the official newspaper of the State Duma, Strache repeated the unfounded, yet persistent, rumours about the involvement of Western security services in the Ukrainian revolution and a ban on the Russian language in Ukraine, as well as calling for lifting Western sanctions against Russia and proceeding with building South Stream, a pipeline project intended to transport Russian gas to the EU via the Black Sea bypassing Ukraine.⁵⁵⁵ In a long article in *Tribune* (Tribuna), an official newspaper of the Civic Chamber of the State Duma, that discussed the impact, in Austria, of the Russian counter-sanctions that banned agricultural imports from the EU, Strache was *the only* Austrian politician who was cited by the newspaper: “Already in a couple of days after coming into effect, the [Russian] sanctions have damaged our agriculture”.⁵⁵⁶

Strache was not the sole representative of the European far right who was concerned about the problems of agricultural exports to Russia as communicated by the pro-Kremlin media. Discussing these problems in one of its reports, RT referred – of all the Italian politicians – to the LN's leader Matteo Salvini who wrote in one of his Facebook posts: “Only fools, Brussels and Rome, could decide to impose economic sanctions against Russia, which now sends us back tons of Italian agricultural products worth more than €1 billion. Who will pay our farmers? [Matteo] Renzi? [Angela] Merkel?”.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ “French Journalist Accuses Ukraine's New Government of Infringing Human Rights”, *The Voice of Russia*, 3 March (2014), http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/2014_03_03/French-journalist-accuses-Ukraine-s-new-government-of-infringing-human-rights-8056/.

⁵⁵⁵ Aleksandr Sobina, “Haints-Kristian Shtrakhe: S Rossii neobkhodimo snyat' vse sanktsii”, *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, No. 38, 31 October (2014), p. 26.

⁵⁵⁶ Aleksandr Sobina, “Rossiya v izgoi ne goditsya”, *Tribuna*, No. 44, 27 November (2014), p. 6. See also “Sanctions bite-back: Bickering, EU infighting over Russia retaliation”, *RT*, 11 August (2014), <http://rt.com/news/179348-russia-sanctions-europe-protests/>.

⁵⁵⁷ Matteo Salvini's post on Facebook, 14 August (2014), <https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/posts/10152321781968155>; “EU Sanctions Like

Since 2014, Salvini appeared often on RT, in both its English and Spanish versions, and some other established Russian media. It hardly seemed mere coincidence that this process ran concurrently with a marked deepening of the cooperation between Russian structures and the LN that resulted in the LN effectively turning into the Russian front organisation in Italy.⁵⁵⁸ In October 2014, the LN even launched a group called “Friends of Putin” in the Italian parliament.⁵⁵⁹ As for the “enemies of Putin”, Salvini’s views were unambiguous and duly reported by RT: “Whoever plays against Putin is an imbecile. Those who want NATO tanks on the border with Russia are leading to a cold war that nobody wants”.⁵⁶⁰

Nor was the FPÖ’s Strache the only one to mention South Stream in his comments. Discussing the suspension of South Stream in 2014, *Russian Newspaper* asked for his opinion Alexander Simov, head of the Russophiles group within the Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bulgarska sotsialisticheska partiya), as well as Tiberio Graziani and Guillaume Faye, without mentioning the far-right credentials of the latter two.⁵⁶¹ The three commentators predictably argued that the suspension of South Stream delivered damage to the economy of their countries, and Faye and Simov blamed Washington and Brussels for the failure of the project. Faye had already appeared on the front page of *Russian Newspaper* earlier that year, when he had talked about how Washington “put obstacles to building a just world order”. A journalist of the newspaper presented Faye to the Russian readership as “an ideologue of the ‘New Right’, an adherent of an imperial and federal great Europe that should be united with Russia in ‘an inseparable union’”.⁵⁶²

The introductions of far-right commentators in the Russian media were sometimes overtly impudent. This was the case, for example, of Jobbik’s Márton Gyöngyösi who, in 2012, urged the Hungarian government to draw up lists of Jews who posed a “national security risk”.⁵⁶³ In an introduction to the interview with him in *Komsomol Truth*, the female journalist described Gyöngyösi as an “elegant, handsome 37-year old man”, a “way-up and sophisticated [...] ardent patriot of Hungary” who “could not care less” that “he had been called an anti-Semite and a neo-Nazi”.⁵⁶⁴ The journalist of *Komsomol Truth*,

‘Shooting Oneself in the Foot’ – Hungary PM”, *RT*, 15 August 15 (2014), <http://rt.com/business/180564-eu-russia-sanctions-hungary/>.

⁵⁵⁸ See Chapter 6.

⁵⁵⁹ “Paolo Grimaldi sozdaet gruppu ‘Druzya Putina’ v parlamente Italii”, *Arsenyevskie vesti*, No. 42, 21 October (2014).

⁵⁶⁰ “Político italiano: ‘Quien juega contra Putin es imbecil’”, *RT*, 12 December (2014), <http://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/160119-juegos-contra-putin-estupidez-politico-italia-salvini>.

⁵⁶¹ Leonid Pchel’nikov, Nikita Krasnikov, Niva Mirakyan, Vyacheslav Prokofev, “Bez ogliadki na Zapad”, *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, No. 275, 3 December (2014), p. 2.

⁵⁶² Vyacheslav Prokofev, “Komu nuzhny novye steny?”, *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, No. 258, 13 November (2014), p. 1.

⁵⁶³ Marton Dunai, “Anger as Hungary Far-right Leader Demands Lists of Jews”, *Reuters*, 27 November (2012), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/27/us-hungary-antisemitism-idUSBRE8AQ0L920121127>.

⁵⁶⁴ Aslamova, “Vengerskiy politik Marton D’endeshi”, p. 6.

which earlier reported on anti-Semitic activities of Jobbik, apparently needed this whitewashing and distracting introduction to play down Gyöngyösi's anti-Semitism and lend credibility to his words that the EU was a colony of the US and that the CIA, the US State Department, George Soros and European politicians had allegedly orchestrated the Ukrainian protests.⁵⁶⁵

Arguably, the most regular far-right commentator and opinion-maker on RT has been Manuel Ochsенreiter, the editor of the German magazine *At First!* (*Zuerst!*), which, in the words of its editorial staff, is "committed only to the life and survival interests of the German people and the precious heritage of our European culture".⁵⁶⁶ As described by Adam Holland, "in a format familiar to readers of mainstream news magazines, *At First!* promotes Neue Rechte [New Right] and Völkisch ideas such as the preservation of 'German ethnical (sic) identity', burnishing the image of the Third Reich in popular culture and opposing what it regards as the humiliating legacy of denazification".⁵⁶⁷

RT first involved Ochsенreiter, alternately introduced as a "political analyst", "German journalist" and "Syria expert", in 2013 to provide his opinion on "the German government [selling] the privacy of German citizens to the US government"⁵⁶⁸ and the US government's and, in particular, CIA's alleged involvement in the "Syria conflict" which he called a "proxy war".⁵⁶⁹ In March 2014, like Piskorski and Chauprade, Ochsенreiter illegally travelled to Russia-occupied Crimea to observe the "referendum". On 21 April, in an interview for the VoR, Ochsенreiter denied the Russian occupation of Crimea,⁵⁷⁰ although on 17 April Putin had himself admitted the deployment of Russian special ops units and troops in this Ukrainian republic.⁵⁷¹

The year 2014 saw a surge of Ochsенreiter's comments for RT. In numerous interviews, he expounded his views on the situation in Ukraine from a pro-Kremlin perspective and even went so far as to declare that Ukraine was governed by people imposed by NATO and the EU, and effectively ceased to exist as a sovereign state.⁵⁷²

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ "Über uns", *Zuerst!*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130326111023/http://www.zuerst.de/uber-uns/>.

⁵⁶⁷ Adam Holland, "RT's Manuel Ochsенreiter", *The Interpreter*, 21 March (2014), <http://www.interpretermag.com/rts-manuel-ochsenreiter/>.

⁵⁶⁸ "German Government Sells the Privacy of German Citizens to the US", *RT*, 8 July (2013), <http://rt.com/op-edge/german-government-sells-privacy-us-780/>.

⁵⁶⁹ "US Military Intervention in Syria Is not off the Table", *RT*, 14 September (2013), <http://rt.com/op-edge/us-syria-crisis-intervention-867/>.

⁵⁷⁰ "Crimea: No Russian Invasion, Happy People – Manuel Ochsенreiter", *The Voice of Russia*, 21 April (2014), http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/2014_04_21/Crimea-No-Russian-invasion-happy-people-Manuel-Ochsенreiter-9307/.

⁵⁷¹ "Putin Admits Russian Forces Were Deployed to Crimea", *Reuters*, 17 April (2014), <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/04/17/russia-putin-crimea-idUKL6N0N921H20140417>.

⁵⁷² "Protesters in Eastern Ukraine See Kiev Govt as a 'Gang of Oligarchs'", *RT*, 2 May (2014), <http://rt.com/op-edge/156280-east-ukraine-civil-war/>.

Far-right activists also appeared, as commentators and opinion-makers, in national non-Anglophone versions of the VoR that broadcast and ran a website in 16 European languages. For example, by the end of December 2014, the French version of the VoR had aired around 20 interviews with Chauprade and Jean-Yves Le Gallou, a leading member of the far-right National Republican Movement (Mouvement National Républicain). Moreover, the same service aired 37 interviews with, and longer comments from, Luc Michel, the head of the PCN and director of the EODE. The Polish version of the VoR had broadcast 38 interviews with Piskorski in the period from 2010 to 2014, and more than half of these interviews had been aired in 2014 alone. In the same period, the Polish VoR aired more than 20 interviews with Konrad Rękas and Marcin Domagała who, like Piskorski, were presented as experts of the ECAG. To its Italian-speaking audience, the VoR aired six interviews with Salvini in the period from December 2013, when he became the chairman of the LN and started developing relations with Russia, to the end of 2014. The same service offered around 50 articles, longer comments and interviews with Graziani from 2009 to 2014. The Hungarian version broadcast six interviews with Jobbik's leaders Gábor Vona and Márton Gyöngyösi from 2013 to 2014. The Hungarian VoR also demonstrated particular cynicism when it reported, in 2012, on the anti-Semitic scandal that resulted from Gyöngyösi's suggestion to draw up lists of Jews who posed a "national security risk",⁵⁷³ but a year later interviewed Gyöngyösi – in a neutral way – on the anti-Semitic sentiments in Hungary only to allow him to dispel "illusions" about threats to Hungarian Jews!⁵⁷⁴

Not all far-right activists, however, have been equally solicited by the national services of the VoR. For example, the only long comment of RT's star Ochsenreiter appeared on the German VoR in October 2013. It appears that national perceptions of particular far-right activists play a certain role in the national editorial policies of the VoR. The Anglophone audience of RT may not be very well familiar with Ochsenreiter's background; hence, it is "safe" to invite him for comments and interviews to English-language RT, but in Germany his *At First!* is generally considered a "right-wing extremist" magazine,⁵⁷⁵ so the VoR's German-language service would not risk discrediting its pro-Kremlin and anti-Western narratives by engaging with a person with such a reputation.

⁵⁷³ Artyom Kobzev, "Magyarországon a Jobbik szeretné, ha listát készítenének a veszélyt jelentő zsidókról", *Oroszország Hangja*, 30 November (2012), http://hungarian.ruvr.ru/2012_11_30/Magyarorszagon-a-Jobbik-szeretne-ha-listat-kesz-tenenek-a-veszelyt-jelento-zsidokrol/.

⁵⁷⁴ János Erős, "Gyöngyösi Márton: mocskos politikai játszmába sodorják Magyarországot", *Oroszország Hangja*, 21 October (2013), http://hungarian.ruvr.ru/2013_10_21/Gyongyosi-Mart-on-mocskos-politikai-jatsz-maba-sodorjak-Magyarorszagot/.

⁵⁷⁵ Andreas Speit, "Plaudern mit Neonazis", *TAZ*, 7 March (2011), <http://www.taz.de/!66991/>; Tilman Tzschoppe, "Wider die 'herrschende Meinungsdiktatur der politischen Korrektheit': Magazin 'Zuerst!'", *Netz-gegen-Nazis*, 16 April (2010), <http://www.netz-gegen->

Some of the names of the above-mentioned far-right commentators appear in a document titled “Countries and persons, where [sic] there are grounds to create an elite club and/or a group of informational influence through the line of ‘Russia Today’” that was leaked by the Anonymous International hacktivist group.⁵⁷⁶ The document was prepared by Aleksandr Dugin in December 2013 and sent to Georgiy Gavrish, a close associate of Dugin and of Russian ultranationalist oligarch Konstantin Malofeev.⁵⁷⁷ In a footnote to the document, Dugin wrote that he or his representatives had met with all those people personally, and had talked directly or indirectly about a possibility of their participation “in the organisational and/or informational initiative of the pro-Russian nature”. Among around 60 individuals based in the EU member states such as France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, Dugin listed, in particular, Ochsenreiter, Piskorski, Chauprade, and Graziani. Other notable activists and politicians included Jobbik’s Gábor Vona and Béla Kovács; the leading French New Right publicist Alain de Benoist; Italian “Nazi-Maoist” Claudio Mutti; and Przemysław Sieradzan, a representative of Dugin’s MED in Poland. The list also featured Roman Giertych described as the leader of the far-right Liga Polskich Rodzin, which implies that Dugin’s knowledge of the European far-right scene, although impressive, was still limited: not only had Giertych left the LPR already in 2007, but he had also renounced far-right ideology by 2013.

There is no evidence that Dugin’s list has influenced the interviewing policies of state-controlled media in Russia. Apart from Ochsenreiter, Piskorski and Chauprade, who established themselves in the Russian media space without any help from Dugin, the Russian media rarely, if at all, turned for comments to other far-right activists listed in the memo. The only exception might have been Gábor Vona, but it is not clear whether Dugin indeed played any role in promoting Vona as a commentator for the Russian media.

The memo might have served another purpose other than finding useful commentators for the state-controlled media. At the end of 2014, Malofeev’s associates launched a think-tank called “Katehon” aiming at defending “the principle of a multipolar world” and challenging “any kind of unipolar world order and global hegemony”.⁵⁷⁸ Presided by Malofeev himself, the supervisory board of Katehon featured a number of notable figures, in particular, Dugin,⁵⁷⁹ presidential advisor Sergey Glazyev, Leonid Reshetnikov, a retired Lieutenant General of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service and

nazis.de/artikel/wider-die-herrschende-meinungsdiktatur-der-politischen-korretheit-zuerst-das-deutsche-nachrichtenmagazin-5554.

⁵⁷⁶ “Cherny Internatsional: Malofeev i Dugin”, *Anonimny internatsional*, 27 November (2014), <https://b0ltai.org/2014/11/27/черный-интернационал-малофеев-и-дуги/>.

⁵⁷⁷ For more information on Malofeev see Chapter 6.

⁵⁷⁸ “About Us”, *Katehon*, <http://katehon.com/about-us>.

⁵⁷⁹ Dugin left Katehon in 2017.

then Director of the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies,⁵⁸⁰ and Andrey Klimov, a senior member of the “United Russia” party and deputy head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of Russia’s Federation Council of the Federal Assembly. Dugin was an editor of Katehon’s website that offered materials and commentary in eight European languages and Arabic. The website featured many authors mentioned in Dugin’s memo, hence it might have been Katehon that Dugin referred to as “the informational initiative of the pro-Russian nature”.

5.4. Pro-Kremlin “Re-information” Efforts and Structural Media Relations

The frequent participation of Francophone far-right politicians in the broadcasts of the French service of the VoR does not only corroborate a tendency of the Russian media to engage with the European far right, but also reveals a seminal development, namely the establishment of structural relations between Russian state media and certain EU-based pro-Russian media outlets managed by far-right activists.

On 5-7 July 2012, Russia’s central state news agency ITAR-TASS held a summit titled “Global Media: Challenges of the 21st Century”. As the agency stated, “over 300 top managers presenting 213 media outlets from 102 countries”, including “the leaders of such major news agencies, TV and radio channels as Associated Press, BBC, Reuters, NBC, Al Jazeera, Kyodo, Xinhua and MENA” arrived in Moscow “to discuss pressing problems facing the media society”.⁵⁸¹ President Vladimir Putin and Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, as well as UN Secretary General Ban ki-Moon via a video-link, greeted the participants of the summit.

The summit was also visited by Gilles Arnaud, Guillaume Tastet and Joseph-Marie Joly who represented Agence2Presse, a branch of the French association Groupe EDH Communication working in the media sphere. The association is headed by Arnaud and, apart from Agence2Presse, incorporates TVNormanChannel, Agence2Presse and Editions d’Héligoland – all headed by the same Arnaud. He is a former regional advisor of the FN in Upper Normandy and contemporary member of the far-right Party of France (Parti de la France, PDF) that was founded in 2009 by Carl Lang and united many former members of the FN.

⁵⁸⁰ Reshetnikov is also a member of the Supervisory Board of the Russian bank Tempbank, which, according to the US Department of the Treasury, provided millions of dollars to al-Assad’s regime in Syria. For his position in Tempbank, Reshetnikov was sanctioned by the US in December 2016, see “Syria Designations; Counter Proliferation Designations”, *US Department of the Treasury*, 23 December (2016), <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/Pages/20161223.aspx>.

⁵⁸¹ “Executives of leading media flock to Moscow for World Media Summit”, *ITAR-TASS*, 4 July (2012), <http://itar-tass.com/en/archive/678277>.

At the summit in Moscow, Arnaud and his colleagues had an opportunity to present their own TV project, namely the regional TVNormanChannel, founded by Agence2Presse and the identitarian regionalist Normandy Movement (Mouvement normand),⁵⁸² as well as establishing contacts with ITAR-TASS and, especially, the VoR. Upon Arnaud's return to France, he gave an interview that suggested that the Groupe EDH Communication had received funding from Russia for the development of a new TV channel in France. Arnaud said that his team always wanted to create a national TV that would become "a re-information source" providing a platform to people with worldviews similar to those of Arnaud's team, but they constantly lacked funding. He believed that it was easier to work in Russia: "When the decision is taken, once the project is studied and human contacts made, funds are made available. We can focus on the mission, without wasting time on excessive politeness or begging for the next instalment of funding".⁵⁸³

Aleksandr Orlov, Ambassador of Russia to France, helped arrange signing of the contract between Arnaud and the Russian state media outlet. In September 2012, Arnaud launched the web-based TV channel under the ingenuous name "ProRussia.TV", for which he received €115,000 for the first year of operation and €300,000 – for the next one.⁵⁸⁴ With servers located in Russia and brandishing a logo closely resembling the logo of "United Russia", ProRussia.TV became yet another branch of the Groupe EDH Communication and was a product of the collaboration between Agence2Presse, which provided technological infrastructure, ITAR-TASS, the Russian news agency Interfax, VoR and the Iranian Mehr News Agency.⁵⁸⁵

Arnaud referred to ProRussia.TV and Agence2Presse as agencies of "re-information". As explained by the author of this concept Jean-Yves Le Gallou, "re-information" implies propaganda of "alternative views" which can be applied to all far-right media: "Political correctness is imposed on the political, administrative and intellectual spheres through the traditional media. The principle of re-information is

⁵⁸² Founded in 1969, the Normandy Movement was originally close to GRECE headed by Alain de Benoist, see Jean-Yves Camus, "Strömungen der europäischen extremen Rechten – Populisten, Integristen, Nationalrevolutionäre, Neue Rechte", in Uwe Backes (ed.), *Rechtsextreme Ideologien in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), pp. 235-260 (257). In 2012, De Benoist himself wrote that he had been a member of the Normandy Movement for about 40 years, see Tamir Bar-On, *Rethinking the French New Right: Alternatives to Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2013), p.19.

⁵⁸³ "C'est toujours à l'Est que se lève le monde", *Le Magazine National des Seniors*, No. 16 (2012), pp. 4-6 (6).

⁵⁸⁴ Vincent Jauvert, "Poutine et le FN: révélations sur les réseaux russes des Le Pen", *L'OBS*, 27 November (2014), <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/politique/20141024.OBS3131/poutine-et-le-fn-revelations-sur-les-reseaux-russes-des-le-pen.html>.

⁵⁸⁵ See <http://www.livestream.com/prorussiatv>.

therefore to provide information and alternative points of views facing such a censorship”.⁵⁸⁶

Apart from Arnaud, the editorial staff of ProRussia.TV included, in particular, Alexandre Ayroulet, an employee of Editions d’Héligoland and a former head of the National Front of Youth (Front national de la jeunesse); Joseph-Marie Joly, a spokesperson of the identitarian Normandy Wave (Vague Normande) group; and Sylvie Collet, a former member of the FN, treasurer of the Editions d’Héligoland, and – like her husband Arnaud – contemporary member of the PDF.⁵⁸⁷

ProRussia.TV developed a strong partnership with the French service of the VoR. They shared materials, some members of their staff worked for both services, while Sylvie Collet presented a weekly news bulletin produced in collaboration with the VoR.

The content of ProRussia.TV’s programmes was unequivocally pro-Kremlin, anti-American and very critical towards the workings of democracy in the EU. The TV channel broadcast interviews with EU-based far-right and Eurosceptic politicians, as well as representatives of the Russian establishment such as Yevgeniy Fyodorov, chairman of the Committee on Economic Policy and Entrepreneurship of the State Duma and the leader of the violent, extreme right National-Liberation Movement (*Natsional’no-osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie*).⁵⁸⁸ Despite the similarities between ProRussia.TV and the French VoR, the former was more radical in its editorial policy and sometimes engaged with far-right politicians, such as the FN’s Marion Maréchal-Le Pen or Jobbik’s Gábor Vona, whom the French VoR would not have.

A few weeks after he founded ProRussia.TV, Arnaud attempted to launch yet another TV project called “Our Antenna” (Notre Antenne), in collaboration with Philippe Milliau, a co-founder of the Identities Network (Réseau identités), a “community that defends the identity of the white peoples, [and] regional, national and European identities”.⁵⁸⁹ Milliau was also a former GRECE’s member who was one of the first representatives of that movement who put forward an idea of joining the FN. He was consequently a regional advisor of the FN in Île-de-France,⁵⁹⁰ then left this party for the

⁵⁸⁶ Jean-Yves Le Gallou quoted in Adrien Sénécat, “Wikistrike, Quenel+, TV Libertés: dans la nébuleuse des sites de ‘vraie information’”, *L’Express*, 3 December (2014), http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/wikistrike-quenelle-liberte-tv-dans-la-nebuleuse-des-sites-de-vraie-information_1628541.html.

⁵⁸⁷ See also Stéphane Jourdan, Anya Stroganova, “Quand la Russie flirte avec le FN”, *Slate*, 16 July (2013), <http://www.slate.fr/story/75047/russie-fn>.

⁵⁸⁸ Founded in 2013, Fyodorov’s National-Liberation Movement aims at “liberating the Russian Federation from colonial dependence on the US through the renewal of Sovereignty” where “Sovereignty” means the “restitution of Russia’s territorial integrity lost in 1991”, the year when the Soviet Union collapsed. See “Tseli i zadachi”, *Natsional’no-osvoboditel’noe dvizhenie*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140430164707/http://www.rusnod.ru/nod3.html>.

⁵⁸⁹ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20160202053814/http://www.reseau-identites.org/>.

⁵⁹⁰ Madeleine Rebérioux, *L’Extrême droite en questions: actes du colloque* (Paris: Études et documentation internationales, 1991), p. 49.

National Republican Movement, and, after 2008, became involved in the identitarian movement.

On 22 September 2012, Arnaud and Milliau registered the web-based Notre Antenne TV. Describing the agenda behind the new TV channel, Milliau said:

It is time for the Patriots to go beyond the quarrels of individual chapels or bloated egos and identify the common enemy; it is also time to understand that what unites us is stronger than what divides us. We must unite all forces available against a globalist system that brings people to their knees. We must defend our children against debilitating curricula; against philosophical theories, such as gender, presented as scientific dogmas; against the excesses of globalisation and multicultural society [...].⁵⁹¹

The Notre Antenne TV project involved several far-right politicians. Most prominent of them were Yvan Blot and Jean-Yves Le Gallou who, in 1974, co-founded the New Right Clock Club (Club de l'Horloge) that is described by Jean-Yves Camus as “symptomatic of that faction of the [French] extreme right which wishes to become part of a large conservative coalition, combining populism with a racist approach to national identity”.⁵⁹² Some other far-right activists involved in the development of “Our Antenna” included Michel Marmin, one of the founding members of GRECE; Roger Holeindre and now deceased Pierre Descaves – both former members of the right-wing terrorist Organisation of the Secret Army (Organisation de l'armée secrète) and the FN, as well as contemporary members of the PDF; Paul-Marie Coûteaux, founder of the Sovereignty, Independence and Freedom (Souveraineté, indépendance et libertés), a party close to the FN; and far-right writers Jean Raspail and Renaud Camus.⁵⁹³

The Notre Antenne TV project, however, proved to be short-lived, and Milliau moved on to another far-right TV project, on which more below. Milliau explained that some of the members of Notre Antenne TV were not happy with taking Russian money and wanted to be independent of the Kremlin's political agenda.⁵⁹⁴ Apparently, these were Blot and Le Gallou who did not want to be openly associated with the Russian money. The Clock Club, which they co-founded, was influenced by the economic theories of Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, and its pro-capitalist and pro-

⁵⁹¹ Pierre Cassen, “Philippe Milliau: Il nous faut une télévision internet alternative ouverte à tous les patriotes”, *Riposte Laïque*, 22 October (2012), <https://ripostelaique.com/philippe-milliau-il-nous-faut-une-television-internet-alternative-ouverte-a-tous-les-patriotes.html>.

⁵⁹² Jean-Yves Camus, “Political Cultures within the Front National: The Emergence of a Counter-ideology on the French Far-right”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 26, No. 1-2 (1992), pp. 5-16 (10).

⁵⁹³ Olivier Faye, Abel Mestre, Caroline Monnot, “La télé identitaire, la drôle d'agence de presse et le ‘soft power’ russe”, *Droite(s) extrême(s)*, 29 January (2013), <http://droites-extremes.blog.lemonde.fr/2013/01/29/la-tele-identitaire-la-drole-dagence-de-presse-et-le-soft-power-russe/>.

⁵⁹⁴ “Une autre information: naissance de TV Libertés”, *Observatoire des Journalistes et de l'Information Médiatique*, 17 February (2014), <http://www.ojim.fr/une-autre-information-naissance-de-tv-libertes/>.

American attitudes put the Clock Club at odds with GRECE and other French far-right organisations and parties that were critical of neo-liberal economic models.⁵⁹⁵ Moreover, when Blot and Le Gallou joined the FN in the mid-1980s, they – along with another member of the Clock Club Bruno Mégret – managed to modernise “the FN’s economic outlook, confirming the party in its turn away from neo-corporatism towards the neo-liberal economics”, while Jean-Marie Le Pen’s “claim to have been a Reaganite before Reagan owed much to the infiltration of the FN by the Club de l’Horloge’s ideas”.⁵⁹⁶

The economically neo-liberal agenda of Blot and Le Gallou does not imply, however, that they are anti-Russian or critical of the Kremlin’s foreign policies. The decision of Milliau, which was presumably backed by Blot and Le Gallou, to distance from the Russian funding most likely stemmed from the willingness to shift the balance in the symbolic power relations within the political agenda of the TV channel. The direct Russian funding would position the project as evidently pro-Kremlin, while the idea was to present the new project as pro-French rather than anything else without excluding, however, the pro-Russian aspect. That Blot is hardly sceptical about Putin’s regime is also proven by the fact that he is a member of the board of the openly pro-Moscow French-Russian Dialogue Association (Association Dialogue Franco-Russe, ADFR) established in 2004 under the patronage of Putin and France’s then President Jacques Chirac, and co-chaired, since 2012, by Yakunin and Thierry Mariani, a prominent member of Sarkozy’s conservative Union for a Popular Movement (Union pour un mouvement populaire).⁵⁹⁷

The considerations about the funding of a new TV project resulted in the creation of the web-based TV Libertés that was launched in the beginning of 2014. Apart from Milliau, Blot and Le Gallou, the following far-right activists became involved in the project: Robert Ménard, a co-founder of the international NGO Reporters Sans Frontières and mayor of Béziers who revealed his far-right sympathies in 2013; Martial Bild, a former member of the FN and contemporary member of the PDF; and Philippe Conrad, a historian and member of GRECE.

Without being overtly subservient to Russian foreign policy – as ProRussia.TV seemed to be – TV Libertés, nevertheless promoted unequivocally pro-Russian views on the international relations. In the beginning of September 2014, TV Libertés was the only TV channel allowed to cover a meeting with the then Chairman of the State Duma

⁵⁹⁵ Michael Minkenberg, “The New Right in France and Germany: *Nouvelle Droite, Neue Rechte*, and the New Right Radical Parties”, in Peter H. Merkl, Leonard Weinberg (eds), *The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 65-90 (72); Spektorowski, “The New Right”, p. 116.

⁵⁹⁶ Shields, *The Extreme Right in France*, pp. 245-246.

⁵⁹⁷ In 2015, the party changed its name to Les Républicains (Republicans).

Sergey Naryshkin⁵⁹⁸ held at the Russian Embassy in Paris⁵⁹⁹ and organised by the ADFR.⁶⁰⁰ Furthermore, when the DNR and LNR held, on 2 November 2014, illegitimate “parliamentary elections”, TV Libertés accompanied a French “election monitor” Jean-Luc Schaffhauser of the RBM.

At the end of 2013, Putin ordered establishing an international information agency Rossiya Segodnya (translated as “Russia Today” but not be confused with RT) “to provide information on Russian state policy and Russian life and society for audiences abroad”.⁶⁰¹ The same order discontinued the VoR. In spring 2014, Margarita Simonyan, the appointed editor-in-chief of Rossiya Segodnya, said that they would “stop using obsolete radio broadcasting models, when the signal [was] transmitted without any control and when it [was] impossible to calculate who listen[ed] to it and where”.⁶⁰² Discontinuing the VoR automatically implied suspension of funds for ProRussia.TV. The last programme of the TV channel was aired in spring 2014, and the website of ProRussia.TV was disabled in autumn 2014.

In Italy, the VoR was also involved in the cooperation with the far-right Lega Nord, albeit on a lesser scale than in the French case.

In February 2014, Max Ferrari, the LN’s member and contributor to the Italian service of the VoR, initiated the creation of the openly pro-Putin Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association (Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia, ACLR) directly associated with the LN.⁶⁰³ By slamming the “ongoing misinformation” about Russia in the mainstream media, Ferrari made it clear that the ACLR would try to “re-inform” the public through its website; in doing so, it would “take advantage of the collaboration with important Russian media, in particular with an official organ such as the Voice of Russia”.⁶⁰⁴

The scope of Ferrari’s previous contribution to the workings of the VoR is not entirely clear. For example, Ferrari published on his website, decorated with the Russian national emblem and flag, an article discussing Putin’s speech at the 2013 Valdai

⁵⁹⁸ Naryshkin served as the Chairman of the State Duma until 5 October 2016 when Putin appointed him as the Director of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service.

⁵⁹⁹ Although the Council of the European Union imposed, on 17 March 2014, a travel ban and asset freeze against Naryshkin as one of the Russian politicians responsible for actions which undermined or threatened the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, he was able to travel to Paris on the invitation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

⁶⁰⁰ François Clemenceau, “Ce lobby qui défend Poutine”, *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 7 September (2014), <http://www.lejdd.fr/International/Europe/Ce-lobby-qui-defend-Poutine-685316>.

⁶⁰¹ Vladimir Putin, “Ukaz o merakh po povysheniyu effektivnosti deyatel’nosti gosudarstvennykh SMI”, *Prezident Rossii*, 9 December (2013), <http://kremlin.ru/news/19805>.

⁶⁰² “Russia Today’s English newswire to be launched in April”, *The Voice of Russia*, 23 March (2014), http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/news/2014_03_23/Russia-Today-s-English-newswire-to-be-launched-in-April-1119/.

⁶⁰³ See Chapter 6 for more details about this Association.

⁶⁰⁴ “Nasce ‘Lombardia-Russia’”, *La Prealpina*, 20 February (2014).

meeting.⁶⁰⁵ Two days later, this article – under a slightly different title – appeared on the VoR’s website without any mention of Ferrari’s authorship and, thus, presented to the audience as the VoR’s own analysis.⁶⁰⁶

The ACLR lists the Italian service of the VoR as its “official partner”, while the website of the Italian VoR used to have a link to the ACLR’s website on its front page.⁶⁰⁷ Eliseo Bertolasi, an associate researcher of Tiberio Graziani’s Institute of Advanced Studies in Geopolitics and Auxiliary Sciences⁶⁰⁸ and correspondent of the Italian VoR (and later of Rossiya Segodnya), also contributed to the development of the ACLR.

In October 2014, on their way to Moscow, the joint delegation of the LN and the ACLR visited Russia-annexed Crimea and allegedly reached an “agreement on mutual exchange of information” with the “Ministry of Domestic Policy, Information and Communications of Crimea” and the Kryminform news agency.⁶⁰⁹ However, by the time of writing, this alleged cooperation has produced no results.

Structural relations also seem to be developing between the Slovak magazine *Land and Age* (Zem & Vek) and different Russian actors. *Land and Age* is a typical conspiracy theory magazine with a focus, as Matúš Ritomský argues, on three particular themes: politics, a search for social alternatives, and a return to nature.⁶¹⁰ The magazine is openly anti-Western and pro-Russian, as well as being particularly obsessed with “exposing” the “power of Jews and Americans”, the LGBT “conspiracy”, and Slovak mainstream media slammed as “mouthpieces of Zionism, Americanism, globalism, defamation of national values, primacy of the minority rights over the majority rights, [and] multiculturalism”.⁶¹¹

In May 2014, two editors of the magazine, Tibor Eliot Rostás and Dušan Budzák (he also directs Rádio Viva), met with Russia’s then Ambassador to Slovakia Pavel

⁶⁰⁵ Max Ferrari, “L’Europa di Putin: identità, tradizione, demografia. Il discorso di Valdai censurato dai giornali”, *Max Ferrari*, 22 September (2013), <https://web.archive.org/web/20131108234046/http://maxferrari.net/2013/09/22/leuropa-di-putin-identita-tradizione-demografia-il-discorso-di-valdai-censurato-dai-giornali>. Although Ferrari does not speak Russian, he has a Russian language version of his website: <http://maxferrarirussia.wordpress.com>. The Russian translation of the article was published there too.

⁶⁰⁶ “L’Europa di Putin: il discorso di Valdai ‘trasformato’ dai giornali”, *La Voce della Russia*, 24 September (2013), http://it.spitniknews.com/italian.ruvr.ru/radio_broadcast/6931403/121859556/.

⁶⁰⁷ See *La Voce della Russia*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140626014219/http://italian.ruvr.ru/>.

⁶⁰⁸ See Chapter 6 for more details about the Institute of Advanced Studies in Geopolitics and Auxiliary Sciences.

⁶⁰⁹ “Soglashenie o sotrudnichestve s Ministerstvom vnutrenney politiki, informatsii i svyazi Respubliki Krym i agentstvom novostey Krym Inform”, *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 11 November (2014), <http://ru.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/component/content/article/57-categoria-home-/257-2014-11-11-12-44-23>.

⁶¹⁰ Matúš Ritomský, “Zem a Vek nebezpečných konšpirácií”, *Priestori*, 25 September (2014), <http://www.priestori.sk/zem-a-vek-nebezpecnych-konspiracii-priestori/>.

⁶¹¹ Anton Smataník, “Slovenskí vojnoví Štváči”, *Zem & Vek*, July (2014), pp. 37-39 (37).

Kuznetsov, and later published an interview with him.⁶¹² In this interview, Kuznetsov, in particular, argued that the foreign policy of the Soviet Union had been based on the promotion of communist and socialist ideas internationally, and that the Soviet Union had paid money to the communist and socialist parties in the Warsaw Pact countries, as well as to the developing countries that had attempted to carry out socialist revolutions. With the demise of the Soviet system, Kuznetsov maintained, this practice was abandoned, but the Americans started employing the same methods which the US accused the Soviet Union of employing: instigating revolutions (“colour revolutions”), financing various NGOs, and promoting its own vision of democracy internationally.⁶¹³

In June 2015, an audio file was leaked that contained an unedited version of Kuznetsov’s interview for *Land and Age*.⁶¹⁴ It turned out that the magazine had not published certain parts of the conversation. Two major discussions were left out in the published version: (1) Kuznetsov’s extended discussion of Russian foreign policy, and (2) the editors’ attempts to establish closer relations with Russian institutions.

First, while talking about Russia allegedly abandoning the practice of “interfering in the internal affairs of other states”, Kuznetsov expressed his regret and voiced his hope that Russia would return to this practice. When asked by the editors whether Russia would potentially support a political force yet outside the Slovak political establishment that would proclaim Russian-Slovak “Slavonic brotherhood” as its official political platform, Kuznetsov said:

I am convinced that in Slovakia there is a good basis, and support among people for this kind of ideas, organisations, movements, which would contribute to the building of stronger relations between Russia and Slovakia. Naturally, we support and will support these movements [and] organisations that favour strengthening of cooperation and relationships with Russia. [...] This might have been our mistake that, in Russian foreign policy, we have abandoned what we used to call “interference” – interference in the internal affairs of other states; [we have abandoned] support – not political, but financial support – of parties in other countries. [...] But I think that, one way or another, we will eventually return to the necessity of, indeed, a more active support – not simply on the political level – of those political forces in certain countries which favour cooperation with Russia. [...] I think that, in the coming years, there will be an increasing support from the Russian side for the political forces in other countries, including Slovakia, which are loyal to Russia. And also support for the media.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹² Tibor Eliot Rostás, “Slovanská vzájomnosť je aj ruským záujmom”, *Zem & Vek*, June (2014), pp. 46-53.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

⁶¹⁴ See <http://www.ulozto.sk/xoqiiKVd/rosta-budzak-kuznecov-mp3>. The audio file was later uploaded on YouTube by a Slovak anti-corruption activist Juraj Smatana, see “Rostás (ZEM A VEK) žiada ruského veľvyslanca o podporu na médiu a politiku”, *YouTube*, 3 February (2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0t2yAax3_2s.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The editors of *Land and Age* also mentioned that they were thinking of expanding their media business and asked Kuznetsov whether they could receive any support for their endeavours from Russia. In reply, Kuznetsov said that he would be glad “to write to Moscow”, “to people who deal with these questions”, and recommend establishing contacts between *Land and Age* and “the relevant Russian structures”.⁶¹⁶

In September 2014, Kuznetsov was replaced by Aleksey Fedotov as Russia’s Ambassador to Slovakia, and the editors of *Land and Age* established contacts with him too. There is no evidence, however, that these contacts have led to any visibility of *Land and Age* or its authors in the Russian international or domestic media. Even when Rostás announced, in the beginning of 2015, that he and his associates would start collecting signatures for a petition demanding a referendum on Slovakia’s withdrawal from NATO⁶¹⁷ – an effort that the Russian authorities would naturally embrace – the Russian media hardly covered this initiative.

Nevertheless, the attempts of *Land and Age*, which changed its subtitle from “Information without censorship” to “Geopolitical and cultural monthly” in February 2015, to establish relations with the Russian structures continued. Russian Ambassador Fedotov introduced, in Bratislava, Rostás and Budzák to Armen Oganessian, the editor of the journal *International Affairs* (*Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn’*) that is officially associated with Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov heads the board of the journal, and Oganessian is an unsalaried advisor to the foreign minister. This meeting resulted in Rostás’s and Budzák’s visit to Moscow in June 2015 where, upon the initiative of the Russian Embassy in Slovakia, the editors of *Land and Age* presented their idea of creating a media holding at the roundtable held at the editorial office of *International Affairs*. Other participants included “representatives of non-governmental organisations and foundations, as well as representatives of the governmental structures”, while the roundtable was held “in partnership with the Union of Oil & Gas Producers of Russia”.⁶¹⁸

During his presentation at the roundtable, Budzák said that they were trying to expand their media business and launch a media house that would include not only the magazine, i.e. *Land and Age*, but also TV and radio stations, a daily newspaper, and online media. This media holding, as Budzák argued, would “work against the mainstream that was largely financed by the American side and in the interests of

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Grigorij Mesežnikov, “West Should Launch Counterattack in War with Russia”, *Charter97*, 20 July (2015), <https://charter97.org/en/news/2015/7/20/160609/>.

⁶¹⁸ Sergey Filatov, “‘My nakhodimsya v epokhe informatsionnoy voyny’, – govoryat gosti iz Slovakii”, *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn’*, 6 June (2015), <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/13270>.

NATO”.⁶¹⁹ In response to this presentation, Vasiliy Likhachev, an MP from the KPRF, assumed that their project would be carried out and inquired them about the time period they would require to endow it with “transregional and Europe-wide significance”. Likhachev expressed confidence that “Russian specialists [were] ready to take the most active part in processing and creating this kind of production”, because Russia needed allies in competing with Brussels “for the public opinion and the state of minds in Europe”.⁶²⁰

A report on the roundtable published by the Russian International Affairs Council, affiliated with Russia’s MFA and Ministry of Education and Science, noted that the participants also discussed prospects of “constructing” “a Russia-friendly area in Central and Eastern Europe”.⁶²¹

However, by the time of the writing, the idea of *Land and Age* to build a media holding has not been implemented, but the meetings and talks that Rostás and Budzák held with Russian representatives of different levels testify to the presence of mutual interest in developing structural relations between *Land and Age* and particular Russian groups.

The authors of “*I Am Eurasian*”,⁶²² an insightful investigation into the links between the Kremlin and the Hungarian far right, suggest that a different type of structural involvement of the Russian actors exists in the Hungarian media space. The authors analyse, in particular, the illegal far-right website *Bridgehead* (Hídfő) maintained by anonymous contributors and presumably coordinated by István Györkös, the founder of the extreme right paramilitary movement Hungarian National Front (Magyar Nemzeti Arcvonal, MNA).⁶²³

The emphatically pro-Russian and anti-Western *Bridgehead* provides “professional and regular content, exclusive information published on the portal, analyses revealing deeper-than-average familiarity with geopolitical, energy policy, economic and foreign affairs issues”.⁶²⁴ At the same time, the website that could be, until

⁶¹⁹ “Zem a Vek: Naše ambície nemajú hranice”, *Nie je to tak*, 23 June (2015), <http://www.niejetotak.sk/zem-a-vek-nase-ambicie-nemaju-hranice/>.

⁶²⁰ “Zhurnalisty iz Slovakii Dushan Budzak i Tibor Rostas – gosti zhurnalala ‘Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn’”, *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn’*, 16 June (2015), <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/13319>.

⁶²¹ “Roundtable on Constructing a Russia-Friendly Territory in CEE”, *Russian International Affairs Council*, 4 June (2015), http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=6072.

⁶²² Juhász *et al.*, “*I Am Eurasian*”.

⁶²³ In October 2016, Györkös fired at two police officers (killing one) when they arrived to his home to investigate whether he possessed illegal weapons in his house, see Justin Spike, “Suspected Neo-Nazi Shoots, Kills Police Officer near Győr”, *Budapest Beacon*, 26 October (2016), <http://budapestbeacon.com/news-in-brief/suspected-neo-nazi-shoots-kills-police-officer-near-gyor/41560>.

⁶²⁴ Juhász *et al.*, “*I Am Eurasian*”, p. 37.

spring 2015, accessed via the URL hidfo.net.ru,⁶²⁵ sometimes published articles that resembled “cables forwarded by foreign missions with underlined and highlighted text”.⁶²⁶ Moreover, as the authors of the investigation argue, “a number of articles run on Hídfő.net read as if they had not been written for Hungarian audience”, as they tended to explain particular Hungary-related phenomena that require no explanation.⁶²⁷ This and other evidence led the authors to the assumption that *Bridgehead* was not just another Hungarian ultranationalist website, but “a public messaging board and propaganda site maintained by Russian intelligence officers residing or operating in Hungary”.⁶²⁸

The case of *Bridgehead* using the Russian domain registration service also provides an example of a growing trend in the Western far-right milieu, namely the use of the Russian Internet services. Already in 2003, Slovak neo-Nazis hosted their web portal *Slovak NS Info* (NS Info Slovensko) on several Russian free hosting websites.⁶²⁹ At the time of the writing, mail servers of media sources such as *Holy Crown Radio* (Szent Korona Rádió) and *Deres.TV*, apparently affiliated with the Hungarian far-right Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom), are located in Russia and operated by the Moscow-based company LLC “TC TEL”.⁶³⁰ American right-wing extremist Dylann Storm Roof, suspected to have killed nine African Americans on 17 June 2015 in South Carolina (Charleston church shooting), chose a Russian company, REG.RU, to register and host his website lastrhodesian.com, where he published his racist manifesto.⁶³¹ The Austrian far-right *Free Austria* blog and the *People's Rule* (Volksherrschaft) website, associated with the extreme right party Working Group for Democratic Politics (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für demokratische Politik) are hosted by Russian companies too, and even have subtitles written in Russian language. Both were launched in the first half of 2014 and reveal straightforwardly pro-Russian stances.

The fact that some Western far-right organisations, groups and individuals host their websites on Russian servers does not directly fall into the category of the structural

⁶²⁵ As the URL suggests, the website was registered with RU-CENTER, the largest domain name registrar in Russia. The website itself, however, was hosted on the US servers. In April 2015, *Hídfő.net* moved to hidfo.ru also registered with RU-CENTER but hosted on a US server.

⁶²⁶ Juhász *et al.*, “*I Am Eurasian*”, p. 38.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁶²⁹ Martina Pisárová, “Website Urges Violence on”, *The Slovak Spectator*, 18 August (2003), <http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20020127/website-urges-violence-on.html>.

⁶³⁰ “Orosz szerveren üzemel a Deres.TV és a Szent Korona Rádió”, *Atlatszo.hu*, 5 July (2013), <http://atlatszo.hu/2013/07/05/orosz-szerveren-uzemel-a-deres-tv-es-a-szent-korona-radio/>; “Nemzeti radikális hírportálok: Oroszország magyar hangjai”, *Atlatszo.hu*, 26 August (2014), <http://atlatszo.hu/2014/08/26/nemzeti-radikalisk-hirportalok-oroszorszag-magyar-hangjai/>.

⁶³¹ Lenny Bernstein, Sari Horwitz, Peter Holley, “Dylann Roof’s Racist Manifesto: ‘I Have No Choice’”, *The Washington Post*, 20 June (2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/authorities-investigate-whether-racist-manifesto-was-written-by-sc-gunman/2015/06/20/f0bd3052-1762-11e5-9ddc-e3353542100c_story.html.

relations between the European far right and the Russian state. The growing trend of hosting their websites on Russian servers reflects the far-right groups' increasing distrust of the US-based hosting providers that, however, still remain the preferred option for European and even Russian far-right activists. Almost unrestricted freedom of speech in the US has made it difficult for the European authorities to investigate cases of neo-Nazi activism and Holocaust denial involving European far-right groups that hosted their websites in the US. However, after the Austrian police arrested Gottfried Küssel who had been involved in the workings of *Alpen-Donau.info*, a major neo-Nazi forum in Austria hosted in the US, the confidence in the US hosting services was shattered as the arrest only became possible because the Austrian authorities "had received help from US investigators to gain access to the website's servers".⁶³² The threat of similar cases, as well as the US PRISM surveillance scandal, suggested to some pro-Russian and anti-American far-right activists to opt for Russian hosting providers, as they seemed to be confident that the Russian authorities would not cooperate with European prosecution. Evidence suggests that Russian hosting providers do not necessarily come up to expectations. After the German officials arrested, in January 2016, two German nationals in connection with the investigation into *Altermedia Deutschland*, "a prominent nationwide right-wing extremist Internet news portal",⁶³³ they asked the Russian service provider Mir Telematiki Ltd., which hosted the website, to shut it down,⁶³⁴ and the Russians immediately complied with the request. Ironically, *Altermedia Deutschland* was previously hosted in the US and migrated to Russia because the Americans shut it down.

In some cases, the cooperation between the Western far-right media and Russia goes beyond the use of Russian web hosting services. This is the case of the Austrian, openly pro-Putin far-right printed magazine *Info-Direkt*. It was launched in March 2015 by the Linz-based Association for Freedom of Expression and Independent Journalism headed by Karl Winkler, who is also president of the far-right Community of Austrian Compatriots (Österreichische Landsmannschaft).⁶³⁵ The magazine's first website (www.info-direkt.at) was hosted in Austria, but it registered a new address (www.info-direkt.eu) in September 2015 that was hosted in Russia. In August-September 2015, almost all the major Russian media publicised a story originating in *Info-Direkt* that

⁶³² "Austria Arrests Former Neo-Nazi Leader Gottfried Kuessel over Website", *The Telegraph*, 13 April (2011), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/austria/8447175/Austria-arrests-former-neo-Nazi-leader-Gottfried-Kuessel-over-website.html>.

⁶³³ Innenministerium des Landes Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (Hrsg.), *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2009* (Schwerin: Abteilung Verfassungsschutz, 2009), p. 13.

⁶³⁴ Kathleen Schuster, "Suspected Neo-Nazi Website Operators Arrested in Germany", *Deutsche Welle*, 27 January (2016), <http://www.dw.com/en/suspected-neo-nazi-website-operators-arrested-in-germany/a-19006861>.

⁶³⁵ "Prorussischer Rechtsextremismus", *Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes*, August (2015), <http://www.doew.at/erkennen/rechtsextremismus/neues-von-ganz-rechts/archiv/august-2015/prorussischer-rechtsextremismus>.

alleged – with a dubious reference to an anonymous employee of the Austrian Defense Office – that the US was involved in the illegal smuggling of refugees from Asia and Africa to Europe.⁶³⁶ Moreover, the presentation of *Info-Direkt* took place in October 2015 during the soiree “In the service of peace” organised by the Russian-born Nathalie Holzmüller within the framework of her Vienna-based cultural project “The Faces of Russia”.⁶³⁷ Holzmüller is also known for organising annual “Russian Balls” in Vienna that are sponsored, in particular, by the Russian Embassy in Austria, the Russian federal government agency Rossotrudnichestvo,⁶³⁸ the Trade Agency of the Russian Federation in Austria and the FPÖ.⁶³⁹

5.5. Conclusion

Like in many other national and international media, stories about successes and failures of far-right parties in the national and European elections, as well as scandals involving far-right politicians, appeared in the Russian media on a regular basis as a conventional part of the coverage of the political developments in the world. However, since 2008-2010, Russian state-controlled or pro-Kremlin media have increasingly changed their approach to the coverage of fringe politics in general and the far right in particular.

Fringe Western politicians and activists – especially on the far right – who are inherently critical of the US, NATO, EU, Eurozone, liberal democracy, multiculturalism, human rights, etc. stopped being simple newsmakers for the Russian media, but started to appear as valuable commentators and opinion-makers. By 2008-2010 some of them, for example, Luc Michel, Tiberio Graziani, Mateusz Piskorski and some others had already proved themselves useful to the Russian foreign policy agenda as compliant “election observers”. Furthermore, already in 2008, after Russia’s facile victory over Georgia, the Russian media realised that they could place more confidence in commentators such as Lyndon Larouche or Heinz-Christian Strache than in any mainstream, albeit more reputable, politician. To undermine the liberal-democratic consensus in the West, Russian media have engaged with the forces that are trying to

⁶³⁶ “Insider: Die USA bezahlen die Schlepper nach Europa!”, *Info-Direkt*, 5 August (2015), <http://www.info-direkt.eu/insider-die-usa-bezahlen-die-schlepper-nach-europa/>. In the Russian media space, the story was publicised, in particular, by the country’s largest TV channel, Pervy kanal, see “Stary Svet ishchet vykhod iz migratsionnogo krizisa, kotory narastaet den’ oto dnya”, *Pervy kanal*, 3 September (2015), <http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/291480>.

⁶³⁷ See Chapter 6 for more information on Holzmüller, her projects and contacts with the FPÖ.

⁶³⁸ In an interview, Holzmüller mentioned the Russian Centre of Science and Culture instead of Rossotrudnichestvo, but all Russian Centres of Science and Culture across the world were restructured into different offices of Rossotrudnischestvo created in 2008.

⁶³⁹ Yuriy Kuzmin, “Nataliya Khol’tsmiyuller: kogda ya vizhu schastlivye litsa gostey bala, vse trudnosti zabyvayutsya”, *Boss*, No. 11 (2014), pp. 72-74.

undermine the West on their own accord. The pro-Russian sentiments of some of them constitute an added value.

From 2008 to the second part of 2013, the Russian media turned to politicians from the FN, DF, VB, SD and some other far-right parties to let them speak out their grievances about the “bureaucratic monster” of the EU, Eurozone, immigration, multiculturalism, gay marriages. The explicit message was clear: the West is in decline and failing; the implicit message was about the stability of allegedly conservative, traditionalist Russia in comparison to the disorderly liberal West.

Simultaneously, particular Russian media that received generous funding from the state due to their enhanced significance in promoting the Kremlin’s foreign policy, experimented with financing web-based TV channels in France run by far-right activists, first and foremost ProRussia.TV. This experiment has largely failed as the French far right proved unable to create a quality product.

The Ukrainian revolution that started at the end of 2013, the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the Russian invasion of the Donetsk Basin in 2014 have dramatically driven up the demand for far-right commentators and their conspiracy theories, anti-establishment ideas and anti-American vitriol. As a result, the number of interviews with far-right activists, as well as their shorter and longer comments considerably increased in domestic and international Russian media.

For the Russian audience, Western far-right commentators successfully play an allotted role of white European “experts” on the alleged normalcy of the Kremlin’s policies at home and in international relations. They do help create a comfortable feeling that Russia is not “a lonely state” and that it has allies in Europe and the West in general. That these allies are fringe politicians and publicists with unsavoury reputation and doubtful political prospects the major part of the Russian audience does not know. Russian media tend either to omit their far-right credentials or even exaggerate their significance to present them in a more reputable way.

On the international level, only RT can be considered a successful media project, and the presence of far-right “opinion-makers” contributes to its image of a provocative supplier of alternative news. In contrast, the VoR was a failed project, because even in those countries where radio still has a wide reach people prefer to listen to their national radio stations rather than the Russian one. The influence of the more recent Sputnik and RIA Novosti websites on Western societies is still to be evaluated.⁶⁴⁰

There is no evidence that the impact of the far-right commentators engaged by Russian international media with the aim of *forming* or *shaping* political opinions in the

⁶⁴⁰ On Sputnik see Ben Nimmo, “Sputnik: Propaganda in Orbit”, *CEPA Information Warfare Initiative*, No. 2 (2016), <http://infowar.cepa.org/Reports/Sputnik-propaganda-in-orbit>.

West has been in any way significant. On the other hand, convincing the international audience of the alleged legitimacy of Russian foreign policy may not be the main goal of the Russian international media. As argued earlier, the failure of Russian soft power in the West informed the Russian authorities of a new approach in their information warfare: Russian state-sponsored media now implicitly aim not so much at justifying the Kremlin's domestic and foreign policies, but rather at undermining the confidence of international audiences in the legitimacy of their own governments and, in more general terms, of the liberal-democratic consensus. Thus, the combination of Russian media resources and Western radical right-wing elements became yet another alternative institution challenging the social institution of mainstream international media.

If Chapters 4 and 5 explored the involvement of Western far-right activists and politicians in pro-Kremlin activities within institutionalised frameworks originally established by Russian actors, the next chapter explores a different phenomenon, namely the European far-right pro-Kremlin efforts that originally developed without any Russian framework but were supported by various Russian actors afterwards.

Chapter 6

Far-right Structures in Europe as Pro-Moscow Front Organisations

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 2 briefly mentioned that joint conferences of Russian and Western ultranationalists continued into Putin's second presidential term and beyond. These meetings were not limited to Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's World Congress of Patriotic Parties. Both old and new actors have been involved in hosting international far-right conferences since 2005.

As could be expected – given his extensive international cooperation in the 1990s – Aleksandr Dugin retained his position of the most active Russian advocate of the international far-right cooperation. In 2008, Dugin was appointed Professor at the Sociology Department of the Moscow State University, and, on the basis of this Department, Dugin established the Centre of Conservative Research, a think-tank promoting the New Right agenda. Among many other events, this think-tank co-organised the International Scientific Conference “Against Post-Modern World” that was held in in 2011 and attended, in particular, by Claudio Mutti and Christian Bouchet (then already a member of the FN since 2008). Presented as a “scientific conference”, the event had a clearly political agenda reflecting the New Right's approach to Integral Traditionalism that implies using Traditionalist vocabulary as a camouflage for far-right ideas.⁶⁴¹ The conference was sponsored by the Moscow-based Tempbank, whose CEO Mikhail Gagloev was then vice chair of Dugin's MED. It seems that Gagloev took such anti-liberal initiatives seriously. According to the US Department of the Treasury, his Tempbank “provided millions of dollars in cash and facilitated financial services to the Syrian regime. [...] Gagloev [had] personally travelled to Damascus to make deals with the Syrian regime on behalf of Tempbank”.⁶⁴² Gagloev also provided funding for the MED and ESM.⁶⁴³

Apart from Dugin, several other Russian right-wing extremists have been involved in the international cooperation with like-minded Western actors. For instance, Richard Arnold and Ekaterina Romanova detail, in a separate paper, particulars of the conference “The Future of the White World” held in Moscow in 2006 and organised by Pavel Tulaev's

⁶⁴¹ See also Anton Shekhovtsov, Andreas Umland, “Is Aleksandr Dugin a Traditionalist? ‘Neo-Eurasianism’ and Perennial Philosophy”, *The Russian Review*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (2009), pp. 662–678.

⁶⁴² In 2014, Tempbank and Gagloev were sanctioned by the US “for providing material support and services to the Government of Syria”, see “Treasury Sanctions Syrian Regime Officials and Supporters”, *US Department of the Treasury*, 8 May (2014), <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2391.aspx>.

⁶⁴³ Clover, *Black Wind*, pp. 275-276, 279.

Ateney journal. Several far-right authors and intellectuals attended this rather ambitious conference, including Guillaume Faye; Pierre Vial, the leader of the French identitarian neo-pagan Land and People (Terre et Peuple) group; Pierre Krebs, a German-French author and the head of the extreme right Thule-Seminar think-tank; David Duke, a former “Grand Wizard” of the Ku Klux Klan; Enrique Ravello, a former member of CEDADE and contemporary member of the Spanish branch of the Land and People; and a number of others.⁶⁴⁴ The conference “proposed a new ideology and structure of cooperation for racists, Euro-Russia” defined as “a union of the white peoples of the world and a sanctuary for the cultivation and protection of the white race”.⁶⁴⁵ Later that year, a similar gathering took place in Belgium under the title “Can Europe be without Russia?”. It was organised by Kris Roman, a former member of the extreme right Vlaams Blok and founder of the fringe Euro-Rus association that promotes the idea of a “white Europe” from Gibraltar to Vladivostok. The meeting was attended by Faye, Duke, Tulaev, Nick Griffin, and a few other, less known right-wing extremists.⁶⁴⁶

New Russian ultranationalist actors became involved in the international cooperation too. Czech researchers Miroslav Mareš and Martin Laryš write, in particular, that the Russian neo-Nazi group “Russian Image” established, in 2009-2011, contacts with the Greek neo-Nazi XA, Roberto Fiore, and Robin Tilbrook, leader of the far-right English Democrats.⁶⁴⁷

These meetings and conferences, while introducing some Western far-right activists to Russia or strengthening the Russian connections of others, were nevertheless marginal. However, concurrently to these fringe fora, a related and far more important phenomenon started to take shape since Putin’s second presidential term, namely organised pro-Russian efforts undertaken by various Western far-right organisations. These new initiatives are different from the activities described in Chapters 4 and 5. Electoral observation to the benefit of Moscow’s foreign policy and the cooperation with Russian media implied the existence of a Russian structure that initially determined the course of the corresponding activities even if they could later develop without that Russian structure. In contrast, the far-right pro-Kremlin efforts analysed in this chapter originally developed and assumed organisational forms without any initial Russian framework, but later were supported by various Russian actors directly or

⁶⁴⁴ “Historic Moscow Conference”, *DavidDuke.com*, 20 June (2006), <http://davidduke.com/historic-moscow-conference-press-release/>.

⁶⁴⁵ Richard Arnold, Ekaterina Romanova, “The ‘White World’s Future?’: An Analysis of the Russian Far Right”, *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2013), pp. 79-107 (97).

⁶⁴⁶ “‘Euro-Rus’, une association d’Indo-européens blancs pour la ‘Grande Europe’”, *RésistanceS*, 22 December (2006), <http://www.resistances.be/eurorus.html>.

⁶⁴⁷ Miroslav Mareš, Martin Laryš, “The Transnational Relations of the Contemporary Russian Extreme Right”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 7 (2015), pp. 1056-1078 (1065).

indirectly linked to the Kremlin, thus turning the far-right organisations involved in these activities into effectively pro-Moscow front organisations.

This chapter explores such activities drawing on the evidence from three particular cases. Namely, the chapter looks into the sources, nature and development of far-right pro-Russian efforts in Austria, Italy and France, as well as identifying their patterns and individuals and Russian structures that supported and furthered these efforts.

6.2. Austria

In certain cases, joint conferences of Western far-right activists and Russian mainstream actors preceded the entrance of the former into the Russian media, “electoral observation” missions, and other Russia-related activities. A few meetings held in Austria under the auspices of the FPÖ and Austrian Technologies GmbH in 2008-2010 developed from a series of relatively marginal events into active cooperation between the FPÖ and the Russian authorities as well as other actors.

Austrian Technologies is the name of a company that was founded in 2001 and was originally named Federal Institute for International Education and Technology Transfer (Bundesinstitut für internationalen Bildungs- und Technologietransfer, BIB). Despite the name suggesting its structural association with Austrian state institutions, the BIB was a private company that, nevertheless, received annual funding from various state departments, including the Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology.⁶⁴⁸ In 2005, the BIB was renamed into Austrian Technologies and presented itself as Federal Agency for Technology Transfer and Security Research (Bundesagentur für Technologietransfer und Sicherheitsforschung) again suggesting the structural link to the state institutions. Moreover, its website (www.austriantechnologies.gv.at) used, as the URL implies, a domain reserved by the Austrian governmental bodies (i.e. gv.at), while the website of the Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology officially provided a link to the Austrian Technologies website in its innovation and technology section.⁶⁴⁹

In the period between 2005 and 2009, the BIB/Austrian Technologies received €585,689 from the Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology.⁶⁵⁰ As the company acquired federal funds, it was supposed to be free of political influence, but its links to

⁶⁴⁸ “4655/AB XXII. GP”, *Österreichisches Parlament*, 10 November (2006), https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXII/AB/AB_04655/imfname_070540.pdf.

⁶⁴⁹ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20080530013741/http://www.bmvit.gv.at/service/links/innovation/index.html>.

⁶⁵⁰ “943/AB XXIV. GP”, *Österreichisches Parlament*, 10 April (2009), https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXIV/AB/AB_00943/fname_155513.pdf.

the FPÖ were evident. The BIB's vice president in 2003-2004 was Barbara Kappel, who was also president of the BIB/Austrian Technologies in 2004-2007. Kappel was considered a protégé of Thomas Prinzhorn, one of the richest Austrian industrialists and a prominent member of the FPÖ until 2006.⁶⁵¹ She was head of Prinzhorn's office when he was a member of the National Council in 1996-1999, as well as heading his office in the period 2000-2006 when Prinzhorn was Second and Third President of the National Council in 1999-2002 and 2002-2006 respectively.⁶⁵² In 2010, Kappel would become a member of the FPÖ's federal executive, coordinator of the party's economic and financial policy, as well as member of the Vienna Landtag (regional parliament).

In 2006, a new organisation appeared, namely Austrian Technologies GmbH, and Kappel became its Managing Director. It had no relation to either the Austrian state institutions such as the Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology, or even Austrian Technologies as a "federal agency".

The reasons for creating this organisation are not entirely clear, but the following developments may throw light on this question. In April 2005, Jörg Haider, the head of the FPÖ in 1986-2000 left the party and established the less radical, right-wing populist BZÖ. The FPÖ's member Hubert Gorbach who was Minister for Transport, Innovation and Technology (2003-2007) left the party together with Haider and joined the BZÖ too. Furthermore, Thomas Prinzhorn switched from the FPÖ to the BZÖ in 2006. The departure of these important figures from the FPÖ coincided with a marked decrease of funding for the "federal agency" Austrian Technologies from the Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology: the inflow of funding decreased from €295,000 in 2005 to €161,500 in 2006 and to €99,015 in 2007.⁶⁵³ This might be the reason why Kappel, who remained president of Austrian Technologies until 2007, decided to start a new company that would not be dependent on the Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology, but would be able to relate superficially to the "federal agency" and perform similar activities. As the website of Austrian Technologies GmbH stated, its focus was "on project design for international, high-performance projects, and on the worldwide transfer of know-how and Austrian technologies. We support our clients in their search for strategic partners and advantageous local conditions according to the motto 'We think global, act global and go global'".⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵¹ Katrin Burgstaller, Benedikt Narodoslawsky, "Unsere Politik ist nicht populistisch, sondern pragmatisch", *Der Standard*, 11 May (2011), <http://derstandard.at/1304551367527/derStandardat-Interview-Unsere-Politik-ist-nicht-populistisch-sondern-pragmatisch>.

⁶⁵² "Barbara Kappel", *European Parliament* – MEPS, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/125024/BARBARA_KAPPEL_cv.html.

⁶⁵³ "943/AB XXIV. GP".

⁶⁵⁴ "We Think Global, Act Global and Go Global, *Austrian Technologies*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160405183335/http://www.austriantechnologies.at>.

Despite its declared business-oriented focus, the public activities of Austrian Technologies GmbH were heavily politicised, while its association with the FPÖ was even more evident. In October 2008, the company co-organised a conference “Europe-Russia-Georgia: Peace Building I”.⁶⁵⁵ Other co-organisers included the FPÖ-affiliated institution “Freedom Academy”, which sponsored the event,⁶⁵⁶ and the Centre for Strategic Studies of Religion and Politics of the Modern World, a think-tank established by a Russian nationalist journalist and TV presenter Maksim Shevchenko. Kappel and the FPÖ’s leader Heinz-Christian Strache represented the Austrian side, while the Russian side was represented by Shevchenko, who at that time was also a member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, and two other members of the Civic Chamber: Russian Orthodox Bishop Theophan (Ivan Ashurkov) and Olga Kostina, a Russian public figure and wife of Konstantin Kostin, then deputy chief of the Domestic Politics Department of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation.⁶⁵⁷ Georgian businessman Levan Pirveli spoke on behalf of the political opposition to Georgia’s President Mikheil Saakashvili. The participants of the conference criticised the US, denounced Saakashvili blaming him for the conflict with Russia, and praised Moscow’s foreign policy. Strache argued that Europe needed to pursue its own geopolitical interests, to deepen and develop cooperation with Russia, since Russia was “a part of Europe”.⁶⁵⁸ For Strache, these statements became a point of entry into the Russian media.

Strache’s pro-Russian sentiment was apparent already in 2007. As a leader of a party represented in the Austrian parliament, Strache met with Putin on 23 May 2007 during the Russian president’s visit to Austria. It seems that Putin made an impression on Strache, and, the next day after his meeting with Putin, the FPÖ published a press release quoting Strache as saying that Europe was “unthinkable without Russia” and that it was essential “to further expand and deepen our friendship and cooperation with Russia in order to secure peace in Europe and strengthen democracy, economic and social security together with Russia”.⁶⁵⁹ In the same press release, Strache assumed

⁶⁵⁵ “Konferenz ‘Europe-Russia-Georgia: Peace Building I’”, *Austrian Technologies*, 20 October (2008),

<https://web.archive.org/web/20090607034041/http://www.austriantechnologies.at:80/unser-fokus/konferenzen-und-workshops/europe-russia-georgia-peace-building-i/>.

⁶⁵⁶ *Bericht des Rechnungshofes. Förderung der staatsbürgerlichen Bildungsarbeit in den Bildungseinrichtungen der politischen Parteien* (Vienna: Rechnungshof, 2014), p. 328.

⁶⁵⁷ The strong connection to the Civic Chamber led the Russian media to claim that the Civic Chamber was the Russian co-organiser of the conference; they do not mention Shevchenko’s Centre. In its turn, Austrian Technologies GmbH did not mention the Civic Chamber.

⁶⁵⁸ Yur’eva, “Diktator nedostoin diplomatii”, p. 2.

⁶⁵⁹ “Strache: Europa ist ohne Russland nicht denkbar”, *APA-OTS*, 24 May (2007), http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20070524_OT0059/strache-europa-ist-ohne-russland-nicht-denkbar.

Moscow's adverse position with regard to the construction of the US missile shield installations in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The involvement of the FPÖ in the political activities of Austrian Technologies GmbH seemed to have helped the party build closer links to Russian officials. In December 2008, the FPÖ delegation consisting of Strache, Kappel, Johann Gudenus, Johannes Hübner, Harald Vilimsky and Hilmar Kabas travelled to Moscow and met with then Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov to discuss with him "the development of friendly relations between Moscow and Vienna".⁶⁶⁰ During their visit to Moscow, the members of the FPÖ also met with the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and several MPs from the "United Russia" party.

In the beginning of 2009, Maksim Shevchenko invited Aleksandr Dugin to Vienna.⁶⁶¹ Shevchenko introduced Dugin to the leadership of the FPÖ, in particular to Strache and Kappel; moreover, Dugin became a guest at the Ball of the Viennese Union of the Incorporated (Ball des Wiener Korporationsrings), an annual ball organised by Viennese right-wing student fraternities, the so-called Burschenschaften.⁶⁶²

Shevchenko continued cooperating with Austrian Technologies GmbH, and, in May 2009, they held the second conference on the same topic as in the previous year, "Europe-Russia-Georgia: Peace Building II". The conference featured not only Strache, Kappel, Shevchenko and Pirveli, but also two Russian MPs from "United Russia", Grigoriy Ivliev and Viktor Zvangel'sky.⁶⁶³ Later that year, in November, Shevchenko – possibly upon Dugin's recommendation – brought two Dugin's associates, namely the economist Mikhail Khazin and Russian Islamist Geydar Dzhemal, to yet another conference co-organised with Austrian Technologies GmbH, "Conflict versus Dialogue: Are There Any Solutions to the Crises of the Modern World?".⁶⁶⁴ The conference, however, addressed only particular spheres of the "Modern World". Strache talked about "problematic events in the post-Soviet republics" referring to "colour revolutions" in Ukraine and Georgia. Khazin prophesised, as he had been doing for years, the inevitable

⁶⁶⁰ "Überaus herzlicher Gedankenaustausch von HC Strache und Moskauer Oberbürgermeister Luschkow", *APA-OTS*, 16 December (2008), http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20081216_OTS0054/ueberaus-herzlicher-gedankenaustausch-von-hc-strache-und-moskauer-oberbuergemeister-luschkow.

⁶⁶¹ Aleksandr Dugin, "V Evrope mnogo druzey Rossii", *Russia.ru*, 19 February (2009), <http://www.russia.ru/video/duginbal/>.

⁶⁶² "Eurasischer Rechtsextremismus in Wien", *Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes*, June (2014), <http://www.doew.at/erkennen/rechtsextremismus/neues-von-ganz-rechts/archiv/juni-2014/eurasischer-rechtsextremismus-in-wien>.

⁶⁶³ "Konferenz 'Europe-Russia-Georgia: Peace Building II'", *Austrian Technologies*, 25 May (2009), <https://web.archive.org/web/20100124144014/http://www.austriantechnologies.at/unser-fokus/konferenzen/europe-russia-georgia-peace-building-ii/>.

⁶⁶⁴ Manfred Andexinger, "Woche der Diplomatie", *Neue Freie Zeitung*, No. 47, 26 November (2009), pp. 14-15 (15).

economic downfall of the US, while Shevchenko praised the FPÖ as “one of the few European parties embodying freedom” and Strache – as “a politician of a new type”.⁶⁶⁵

The year 2010 was the last year when Austrian Technologies GmbH co-organised its Russia-related conferences, but they turned out to be of a higher profile than the previous ones. In January 2010, four organisations – Austrian Technologies GmbH, “Freedom Academy”, Maksim Shevchenko’s above-mentioned Centre, and the Russian federal government agency Rossotrudnichestvo – organised a conference titled “55 Years of the Austrian State Treaty – Reflections from the Austrian-Russian Perspective”.⁶⁶⁶ Apart from the usual participants (Kappel, Strache and Shevchenko), the conference was attended by two Austrian academics – Wilhelm Brauner and Lothar Höbelt – one way or another connected to the FPÖ, as well as a Russian MP from “United Russia” Irina Rodnina and a Russian academic Igor Maksimychev, a senior fellow of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

According to its official website, Rossotrudnichestvo “carries out projects aimed at strengthening international ties, close cooperation in the humanitarian sphere and formation of a positive image of Russia abroad”.⁶⁶⁷ It was created in 2008 and has become Russia’s major instrument of soft power in foreign countries. In 2013, Putin issued an edict raising the budget of Rossotrudnichestvo from 2 billion to 9.5 billion Russian roubles (i.e. approximately from €48 to €228 million at that time) by 2020.⁶⁶⁸ Orysia Lutsevych describes Rossotrudnichestvo as “an umbrella organization for a network of Russian compatriots” that “funds various ‘public diplomacy’ projects” and “operates an extensive network of 60 Russian Centres of Science and Culture and 25 representative offices in Russian embassies, and employs 600 people internationally”.⁶⁶⁹ Jānis Kažociņš, former head of Latvia’s state security service Constitution Protection Bureau, considers bodies such as Rossotrudnichestvo “government-organised non-governmental organisations which work outside the Russian Federation furthering Russian foreign policy objectives in all sorts of ways including through culture, through political pressure, [and] through diplomatic pressure”.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶⁵ Ivan Shataev, “Dialog protiv konflikta”, *Socialist*, 26 November (2009), <http://www.socialistinfo.ru/comments/387.html>.

⁶⁶⁶ “Konferenz: ‘55 Jahre Staatsvertrag – eine Betrachtung aus österreichisch-russischer Sicht’”, *Austrian Technologies*, 29 January (2010), http://www.austriantechnologies.at/vap/1262/Db/p16/i5/konferenz_55_jahre_staatsvertrag_eine_betrachtung_aus_oesterreichisch-russischer.html. The page is no longer available.

⁶⁶⁷ “About Rossotrudnichestvo”, *Rossotrudnichestvo*, <http://www.rs.gov.ru/en/about>.

⁶⁶⁸ Elena Chernenko, “‘Myagkuyu silu’ snabzhayut sredstvami”, *Kommersant. Daily*, No. 95, 5 June (2013), p. 1.

⁶⁶⁹ Orysia Lutsevych, *Agents of the Russian World: Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood* (London: Chatham House, 2016), p. 10.

⁶⁷⁰ Quoted in Juris Pakalniņš (dir.), *The Master Plan* (Riga: Mistrus Media, 2016).

In its article on the conference “55 Years of the Austrian State Treaty”, *Rosstrudnichestvo* reported:

Presentations [...] noted the tremendous role of the Soviet Union in preventing the division of Austria following the German model; highlighted the great significance of [Austria’s] politics of *neutrality* that [...] allowed the country to become a reliable link between the West and the East in the Cold War period.⁶⁷¹

Neither this kind of rhetoric nor the pro-Russian activities of the FPÖ were radically new for Austria. As Chapter 1 showed, the emphasis on the country’s neutralism from an ultranationalist perspective was the *raison d’être* of Adolf Slavik’s far-right nationalist National League that operated as a Soviet front organisation in 1950-1955 with the only aim: to promote Austria’s nationalist neutralism and rapprochement with Soviet Russia.

The last Russia-related conference co-organised by Austrian Technologies GmbH was devoted to “Coloured revolutions in the CIS countries and their current impact”.⁶⁷² On that occasion, the usual hosts such as Kappel, Strache and Shevchenko were joined by participants from the countries that experienced “colour revolutions”: Vladyslav Lukyanov, a Ukrainian MP from the Party of Regions; Bermet Akayeva, a former Kyrgyz MP and daughter of Kyrgyzstan’s former President Askar Akayev who fled to Russia after the “Tulip Revolution” in 2005; and two Georgian opposition politicians and businessmen – Levan Pirveli and Gogi Topadze. The Russian side at the conference was represented by Geydar Dzhemal and Sergey Markov, an MP and member of both the Supreme Council of “United Russia” and the Council on Foreign and Defence Policy of Russia.

A brief report on the conference was published in *Compatriot* (*Sootechestvennik*), a discontinued monthly Russian language newspaper published for *sootchestvenniki*, i.e. Russian expats in Austria. In his introduction, according to the report in *Compatriot*, Strache argued that the US and organisations such as United States Agency for International Development (also known as USAID) and NDI prepared and financed “colour revolutions”, as well as accusing non-commercial organisations of “advancing the US interests in different countries under the pretence of advancing democracy”. In his turn, Markov discussed “the political technologies and mechanics of ‘colour revolutions’”, suggesting that there were “attempts at preparing such a coup in Russia”.⁶⁷³ In other

⁶⁷¹ “Mezhdunarodnaya konferentsiya ‘55 let Gosudarstvennogo dogovora – razmyshleniya s rossiyskoy i avstriyskoy storony’”, *Rosstrudnichestvo*, 29 January (2010), <http://old.rs.gov.ru/node/8378>. My emphasis. The page is no longer available.

⁶⁷² “Konferenz mit Russland-Schwerpunkt: ‘Farbige Revolution in den GUS-Ländern und ihre aktuellen Auswirkungen’”, *Austrian Technologies*, 4 June (2010), http://www.austriantechnologies.at/vap/1262/Db/p16/i6/konferenz_mit_russland-schwerpunkt_farbige_revolution_in_den_gus-laendern_und_ih.html. The page is no longer available.

⁶⁷³ “Ob itogakh ‘tsvetnykh revolyutsiy’”, *Sootechestvennik*, No. 56 (2010), <http://www.sootechestvennik.com/index.php/news/1-info/407-colorrev>.

words, the last conference co-organised by Austrian Technologies GmbH impeccably followed the established pro-Kremlin ideological pattern that lay in the foundation of all the FPÖ's previous Russia-related conferences.

Since then, Austrian Technologies have not held any political conferences, but this did not mark the end of the FPÖ's pro-Russian activities. On the contrary, the party leadership became even more active in promoting Moscow's interests, keeping in mind its own far-right agenda.

One of many examples of such intersection is the trip of the FPÖ delegation to Russia's Chechen Republic for a meeting with its head, Ramzan Kadyrov, and other republican leaders in February 2012. The FPÖ was represented by Johann Gudenus and Johannes Hübner, and the latter explained that the aim of their trip was to

make sure that peace and order were reigning [in Chechnya], and that the true state of affairs did not correspond to the picture of the Chechen Republic presented by our media. It is also important for us to make sure that those who will return to the Republic will find normal conditions for living.⁶⁷⁴

The Austrian media criticised the FPÖ's meeting with Kadyrov, pointing out numerous human rights violations in Kadyrov's Chechnya.⁶⁷⁵ Kadyrov's name was particularly infamous in Austria. In Vienna, in 2009, four Chechens killed Kadyrov's former bodyguard Umar Israilov who had been granted asylum in Austria, as he had accused his former patron of creating illegal prisons and practicing torture and extrajudicial executions in Chechnya. Austrian prosecution incriminated Kadyrov with the killing of Israilov, but took no further action.⁶⁷⁶

Upon the FPÖ members' return from Chechnya, they declared that they were convinced that there was no persecution in Kadyrov's Chechnya and that Chechens seeking asylum in Austria could safely return to their homeland. Thus, the FPÖ's visit to Chechnya had a double agenda. Domestically, they played an anti-immigrant card claiming that most of the Chechens in Austria, rather than being genuine refugees, were "asylum scammers and economic migrants" who should be sent back to allegedly

⁶⁷⁴ "V Groznom obsudili obshchestvenno-politicheskuyu situatsiyu v respublike", *Grozny-inform*, 6 February (2012), <http://www.grozny-inform.ru/news/society/31804/>.

⁶⁷⁵ Eduard Steiner, "Gudenus: Geheime FPÖ-Mission nach Tschetschenien", *Die Presse*, 7 February (2012), http://diepresse.com/home/politik/innenpolitik/730447/Gudenus_Geheime-FPOMission-nach-Tschetschenien; "FPÖ-Delegation besucht tschetschenischen Präsidenten Kadyrow", *Der Standard*, 7 February (2012), <http://derstandard.at/1328507166001/Geheime-Mission-am-Kaukasus-FPOe-Delegation-besucht-tschetschenischen-Praesidenten-Kadyrow>; "'Frieden und Ruhe' in Grosny", *ORF*, 9 February (2012), <http://news.orf.at/stories/2103993/2103995/>.

⁶⁷⁶ Nikolay Sergeev, Sergey Mashkin, Seda Yegikyan, "Na Ramzana Kadyrova vozlagayut Venu", *Kommersant. Daily*, No. 76, 29 April (2010), p. 1.

peaceful Chechnya.⁶⁷⁷ Internationally, they sought to whitewash Kadyrov's regime, which was beneficial to him personally and the Russian authorities in general. It is unclear who exactly came up with the idea of the FPÖ's trip to Chechnya in the first place, but Gudenus claimed that the trip had taken place "through intermediary of Russian friends".⁶⁷⁸ Gudenus did not reveal the names of "Russian friends", but also present at the FPÖ's meeting with Kadyrov was Levan Pirveli, while Maksim Shevchenko later confirmed that the idea of the Austrians' trip had come from the Chechen authorities and that he had helped organise their trip.⁶⁷⁹ Shevchenko is known for having good relations with Kadyrov whom he would call "the foundation stone of stability and security of the Russian Federation".⁶⁸⁰

Among the FPÖ's leadership, Johann Gudenus is the most energetic advocate of the pro-Russian position of the party and has long-standing relations with Russia. Following the political footsteps of his now late father, FPÖ member John Gudenus, Johann Gudenus started his political career early, was a member of the FPÖ's youth movement, and, in 1996, became the youngest member of a Viennese district council in the Austrian capital.⁶⁸¹ His career in the FPÖ steadily progressed, and he became the party's deputy chairman in 2011.

Gudenus learned Russian language at school and travelled regularly to take part in summer schools at the Moscow State University from 1995 until 2003. By the end of this period, he spoke Russian fluently and acquired, in 2004, a Test of Russian as a Foreign Language certificate. In 2005, while studying at the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna for the degree of Master of Advanced International Studies, Gudenus lived in Russia for about a year studying at the Diplomatic Academy of Russia's MFA. His diploma thesis was devoted, in his own words, to "the political and diplomatic path of Russia in contemporary history, from 1995 to Khodorkovsky".⁶⁸²

In the beginning of the 2010s, Gudenus forged relations with Russian-born Nathalie Holzmüller who had lived in Austria since 1991 and launched, in 2007, the Viennese "Russian Ball", a dinner dance social event held annually since then and aiming at promoting Russian culture and Russian political interests in Austria. Over the years,

⁶⁷⁷ "FP-Gudenus/Hübner: FPÖ-Erfolg für Österreich – Präsident Kadyrow will Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge zurückholen!", *APA-OTS*, 8 February (2012), http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20120208_OTS0180/fp-gudenushuebner-fpoe-erfolg-fuer-oesterreich-praesident-kadyrow-will-wirtschaftsfluechtlinge-zurueckholen.

⁶⁷⁸ Steiner, "Gudenus: Geheime FPÖ-Mission".

⁶⁷⁹ Herwig G. Höller, "Moskaus blaue Freunde", *Die Zeit*, 29 September (2014), <http://www.zeit.de/2014/40/russland-oesterreich-kreml-fpoe/komplettansicht>.

⁶⁸⁰ "Osoboe mnenie", *Ekho Moskv*, 25 February (2016), <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/1718570-echo/>.

⁶⁸¹ Saskia Jungnikl, Benedikt Narodoslawsky, "Blitzblaues Blut", *Datum*, 1 March (2011), <http://www.datum.at/artikel/blitzblaues-blut/seite/alle/>.

⁶⁸² "Über mich", *Johann Gudenus*, <http://www.jgudenus.at/zur-person/>; Barabash, "My s Kadyrovym nashli obshchiy yazyk".

“Russian Balls” have become a meeting point of Russian and pro-Russian politicians, businessmen, diplomats, and cultural figures. Holzmüller also launched another project, “The Faces of Russia”, with the aim of “rallying people on the basis of interest in Russia, its history and culture”.⁶⁸³ Gudenus became a regular guest of “Russian Balls” and soirees held three times a year within the framework of “The Faces of Russia” project. Furthermore, according to Holzmüller herself, the FPÖ became one of the sponsors of the “Russian Balls”.⁶⁸⁴ The main page of the website of the “Russian Ball” features a report from the Russian ITAR-TASS news agency that singled out Gudenus as “the main sponsor” of one of the soirees held in 2012; the same report also noted that he had been “a regular guest and sponsor of the Russian balls and musical soirees”.⁶⁸⁵

The “Russian Ball” has increasingly become political in its self-representation; in one letter, Holzmüller refers to it as a “cultural and patriotic project”, and continues:

The project is helped by the Freedom Party of Austria [i.e. FPÖ] that is officially supporting President V.V. Putin’s politics. The Russian ball stirs wide interest in Austria whose government understands the absurdity of the sanctions [against Russia] that have caused extensive damage to the economy of the Austrian republic.⁶⁸⁶

Holzmüller also helped organise, in May 2014, a secret international meeting of European and Russian far-right activists and politicians in Vienna, which will be discussed later. The Austrian, openly pro-Putin far-right magazine *Info-Direkt* published an article about Holzmüller in its first edition where she was quoted as saying that “the media in Austria had not always reported the truth and therefore created a false [i.e. negative] impression of Russia”.⁶⁸⁷ The soiree held in October 2015 as part of the “The Faces of Russia” and titled, in a typical Soviet-style manner of “peace-making” active measures, “In the service of peace” included the presentation of *Info-Direkt*. At the same event, Holzmüller publicly read a letter from Sergey Aksyonov, EU-sanctioned “Prime Minister” of Russia-annexed Crimea, in which he expressed his gratitude for Holzmüller’s support.⁶⁸⁸ Back in March 2014, when the Russian authorities held the “referendum” in occupied Crimea, Johann Gudenus and Johannes Hübner travelled to Crimea to “observe” this illegitimate process.

⁶⁸³ Kuzmin, “Nataliya Khol’tsmiyuller”, p. 74.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Yuriy Kozlov, “Muzykal’noe suare ‘Iz Rossii – s lyubov’yu’ stalo prekrasnym rozhdestvenskim podarkom dlya avstriyskikh lyubiteley muzyki”, *ITAR-TASS*, 7 December (2012), republished on the website of the “Russian Ball”, see <http://www.russianball.info/rus/about.php>.

⁶⁸⁶ Holzmüller’s letter republished in Sergey Golovinov, “Vitse-gubernatora Kolkova obvinyayut vo lzhi?”, *Zebra-TV*, 27 January (2015), <http://zebra-tv.ru/novosti/chetvertaya-rubrika/vitse-gubernatora-kolkova-obvinyayut-vo-lzhi/>.

⁶⁸⁷ “Kultur im Dienste Russlands”, *Info-Direkt*, No. 1 (2015), pp. 42-43 (43).

⁶⁸⁸ I am grateful to Herwig Höller for sharing this information with me.

The FPÖ also established contacts with the straightforwardly pro-Kremlin Society of Austrian-Russian Friendship (Österreichisch-Russische Freundschaftsgesellschaft, ORFG). Three members of the party (Gudenus, Kappel and Peter Fichtenbauer) entered the extended board of the ORFG – in comparison, only one member of the SPÖ and one member of the Greens (Die Grünen) are on the extended board of the ORFG.⁶⁸⁹ No member of the ÖVP is on the extended board, but its contemporary president, Ludwig Scharinger, has been close to the ÖVP.

Speaking at a meeting held by the ORFG in March 2015, Strache enunciated a mixture of Kremlin's propaganda narratives and Austrian far-right neutralist arguments: intelligence agencies played a role in the Ukrainian revolution in 2014; foreign actors provided funding for NGOs in Ukraine; the change of the Ukrainian government was unconstitutional; sanctions against Russia are damaging to Austria which should remain a neutral country; hawks in the US government are thinking about the Third World War; NATO, rather than Russia, is the aggressor expanding to the Russian borders. The ORFG's President Ludwig Scharinger seemed to share Strache's views and declared: "we have to let the Americans know that they cannot divide us in Europe and that they should not constantly incite us against Russia".⁶⁹⁰

Despite all the pro-Moscow efforts of the FPÖ and its affiliated structures, as well as the party members' participation in Nathalie Holzmüller's "cultural" projects and their cooperation with the ORFG, there is no indication that the Kremlin has achieved any tangible results in terms of improving its image in Austria. Mainstream media in the country rarely cover the FPÖ's pro-Russian efforts, while the vigour of the ORFG and Holzmüller's projects is limited to preaching to the converted. Even within their own party, the leaders of the FPÖ find it difficult to spark the interest in their openly pro-Moscow positions. For example, at an FPÖ's semi-closed meeting in a Viennese café in August 2014, where Strache narrated to his fellow party members the Kremlin's version of the contemporary developments in Ukraine, as well as calling for building a new "Holy Alliance" between continental Europe and Russia, few seemed to be thrilled. They were instead more interested in the anti-American thrust of Strache's speech.⁶⁹¹

The pro-Russian activities of particular members and leaders of the FPÖ developed concurrently with their Russia-related business initiatives, some of which even preceded the FPÖ's pro-Moscow efforts.

⁶⁸⁹ "Erweiterter Vorstand der ORFG", *Österreichisch-Russische Freundschaftsgesellschaft*, <http://www.orfg.net/?page=7-erweiterter-vorstand-der-orfg>.

⁶⁹⁰ "Strache: 'Nicht Russland ist Aggressor der letzten Jahrzehnte'", *Die Presse*, 24 March (2015), http://diepresse.com/home/politik/innenpolitik/4692491/Strache_Nicht-Russland-ist-Aggressor-der-letzten-Jahrzehnte; "Zhurfiks s Khaynts-Kristianom Shtrakhe", *Österreichisch-Russische Freundschaftsgesellschaft*, 24 March (2015), <http://www.orfg.net/?news=show&id=48>.

⁶⁹¹ I am grateful to Bernhard Odehnal for sharing these observations with me.

As Austrian investigative journalist Herwig Höller wrote, Johann Gudenus was, between October 2006 and March 2010, managing director of Donovan Invest Trading GmbH, an Austrian company engaged in wholesale trade of raw cotton and yarn.⁶⁹² The company had a subsidiary in Moscow, Donovan Invest Trading Rus, while the Austrian company itself was owned, from 2007, by a Russian citizen. The balance sheet, which Donovan Invest Trading GmbH submitted to the Austrian relevant authorities to cover the period until the end of 2007, indicated that the company had a debt of approximately €300,000 – Gudenus never explained the nature of this debt. The company submitted no balance sheets afterwards. Gudenus left the position of managing director of Donovan Invest Trading GmbH in 2010, and it was liquidated a year later.

One of the objectives of the “federal agency” Austrian Technologies was promotion of Austrian businesses abroad, and, during the time when Barbara Kappel was the company’s president, Austrian Technologies tried to mediate between Austrian businesses and potential Russian customers. In Russia, the company was represented by Julia Vitoslavsky, a Russian citizen who had studied Economics in Vienna and later headed the “Information and Business Centre of the city of St. Petersburg” in Austria. Vitoslavsky, in particular, promoted various Austrian construction technologies in Russia,⁶⁹³ as well as cooperating with the Austrian state agencies in presenting 15 Austrian companies at a showcase event in St. Petersburg in June 2007.⁶⁹⁴

The FPÖ’s representatives frequently discussed economic issues at the meetings with their Russian contacts. As it was reported, already in 2008, during the FPÖ’s meeting with Moscow’s contemporary Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov, the latter had suggested meeting Strache again “to deepen the amicable relationship and discuss economic potentials”.⁶⁹⁵

In 2010, the FPÖ started the initiative of inviting children from Russian orphan homes to visit Austria, as well as regularly passing Christmas presents to orphan Russian children via contemporary Russian Ambassador Sergey Nechaev meeting him either at the Russian Centre of Science and Culture affiliated with the Austrian office of Rossotrudnichestvo or at the Russian Embassy in Vienna.⁶⁹⁶ Explaining these activities

⁶⁹² Höller, “Moskaus blaue Freunde”. See also Sofia Khomenko, “FPÖ: Aus Liebe zu Russland”, *Mokant*, 30 June (2015), <http://mokant.at/1506-fpoe-russland-ukraine-geld/>.

⁶⁹³ Ilya Vinogradov, “Avstriya stala blizhe”, *Kapital*, No. 6, 22 February (2006); Anastasiya Tyuleneva, “Chto v Rossii avstriyskogo”, *Stroitel*, No. 282, 12 March (2008), p. 3.

⁶⁹⁴ “Austria Showcase Russian Federation. St. Petersburg ‘Exportinitiative Umwelttechnologien’, 17.06. – 19.06.2007”, *Advantage Austria*, <http://www.advantageaustria.org/ru/oesterreich-in-russia/news/local/BusinessGuide08062007.pdf>.

⁶⁹⁵ “Überaus herzlicher Gedankenaustausch”.

⁶⁹⁶ “Vstrecha s rukovodstvom Avstriyskoy partii svobody v RTsNK v Vene”, *Rossotrudnichestvo*, 21 December (2011), <http://old.rs.gov.ru/node/29083>; “Avstriyskie pravye peredali rozhdestvenskie podarki rossiyskim sirotam”, *RIA Novosti*, 13 December (2014), <http://ria.ru/world/20141213/1038013138.html>.

to the media, Strache said that it was his “humanitarian duty to offer [their] help to the Russian friends”.⁶⁹⁷ However, these activities seemed to go beyond the “humanitarian duty”. During a meeting, in May 2011, of an FPÖ delegation with the then governor of the Moscow Region Boris Gromov, Strache said – in response to Gromov’s words of gratitude for the FPÖ’s humanitarian actions: “Children are goodwill ambassadors, and it is through the children we hope to develop further cultural and *economic* cooperation with the Moscow Region”.⁶⁹⁸ A Minister of Foreign Economic Relations of the Government of the Moscow Region was present at that meeting too. Apparently, the FPÖ used its humanitarian help to create a favourable impression on potential Russian business partners.

Furthermore, it was reported, that during the visit to Chechnya of Johann Gudenus and Johannes Hübner, the latter said that they “intended to study the investment potential of the Chechen Republic, so Austrian businessmen could invest in the regional economy”.⁶⁹⁹ When two members of the Legislative Assembly of the Chechen Republic, including a deputy chairman of the Chechen Committee for the budget, banks and taxes, visited Vienna shortly after the FPÖ’s trip to Chechnya, they met with the representatives of the party and again discussed “a possibility of investments in the economy of the Chechen Republic by Austrian businesses, as well as a possibility of sending the best pupils of the Chechen Republic to study in Vienna and other Austrian cities”.⁷⁰⁰

However, no details on the economic relations, if any, possibly deriving from the FPÖ’s meetings with Luzhkov, Gromov or Chechen politicians are available so far.

On 14-16 April 2016, two MPs from the FPÖ, namely Axel Kassegger and Barbara Rosenkranz, took part in a big conference titled “Second Yalta International Economic Forum” that took place in annexed Crimea. The organising committee was headed by Sergey Aksyonov, while the conference itself aimed at promoting the alleged investment potential of Crimea. According to the organisers, 1100 people participated in the conference; of them 70, described as “politicians, civic figures, and business leaders”, came from outside Russia.⁷⁰¹ The conference was important for Russia for two major reasons. First, the sanctions introduced by the West against Russia effectively barred foreign companies from investing in Crimea to pressure Russia into returning the

⁶⁹⁷ “Moskauer Kinder von FPÖ empfangen”, *APA-OTS*, 22 September (2010), http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20100922_OTS0051/moskauer-kinder-von-fpoe-empfangen-bild.

⁶⁹⁸ “Soobshchenie press-sluzhby gubernatora Moskovskoy oblasti”, *Moskovskaya oblast*, 11 May (2011), http://old.mosreg.ru/oficial_chronicle/60539.html. My emphasis.

⁶⁹⁹ “V Groznom obsudili obshchestvenno-politicheskuyu situatsiyu v respublike”.

⁷⁰⁰ “Chechenskie parlamentarii pobyvali v Avstrii”, *Parlament Chechenskoy Respubliki*, 18 May (2012), <http://old.parlamentchr.ru/content/view/1474/>.

⁷⁰¹ “Summing-up YIEF-2016 – Two Records, 70 Billion Roubles of Investment... and a Resounding NO to Sanctions”, *Yalta International Economic Forum*, 16 April (2016), <http://forumyalta.com/news/81/>.

annexed republic to Ukraine. Second, by inviting foreign participants to the conference, Russia aimed to show that the sanctions were not working and Russia was not internationally isolated.

The conference featured a separate discussion on how both Russian and non-Russian businesses could circumvent the sanctions, but this discussion was not made public. The organisers claimed that, during the conference, 12 contracts had been signed worth 20 billion Russian roubles (approximately €267,311,000 at that time),⁷⁰² but neither the details nor the names of the contractors were revealed. According to one of the press releases of the Second Yalta International Economic Forum, FPÖ's Kassagger "requested details of the plans to develop tourism in Crimea". He also expressed his hope that Austria and Russia would return to business as usual, "especially in the field of tourism", as he thought that it had a "huge potential for collaboration, particularly in the area of training tourism staff".⁷⁰³

Apart from the FPÖ's MPs, the far-right segment of the foreign participants was represented, among others, by Mitsuhiro Kimura; Hristo Marinov, the head of administrative apparatus of the Attack party; Stefano Valdegamberi who was elected to the Venetian regional council on the personal list of LN's Luca Zaia; Marcus Pretzell, an MEP from the far-right Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD), and Markus Frohnmaier, a co-founder of the AfD's youth wing Young Alternative for Germany (Junge Alternative für Deutschland, JAfD); Ewald Stadler's employee Robert Stelzl; and Mateusz Piskorski accompanied by Marina Klebanovich (ex-wife of Aleksey Kochetkov).

Despite all their pro-Russian efforts, however, the FPÖ for a long time did not succeed in establishing relations with the highest quarters of political power in Russia. While enjoying the multifaceted support from the FPÖ, the Russian authorities seem to have kept the Austrian right-wing radicals at arm's length, because the FPÖ is the major opposition to the mainstream Austrian parties, and the Russian ruling circles have been unwilling to compromise political and economic relations with them by openly supporting or, at least, rendering honours to their opposition. More specifically, Russian economic and business leaders continued to enjoy mutually beneficial and high-profile relations with the Austrian bank Raiffeisen Bank International, the subsidiary of which, namely ZAO Raiffeisenbank, is one of Russia's major banks. At the same time, the Raiffeisen Banking Group, "a powerful conglomerate of agricultural cooperatives, banks, and dairy

⁷⁰² Ibid.

⁷⁰³ "Time to Invest in Russia. On the Sidelines of the 2nd YIEF, a Meeting Was Held between Foreign Delegations and Leaders of Crimea", a press release of the Yalta International Economic Forum Foundation, p. 2.

producers”, has close ties to the ÖVP.⁷⁰⁴ On the other hand, the ÖVP’s prominent member Christoph Leitl, who is the President of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (Wirtschaftskammer Österreich) that represents and coordinates the activities of all Austrian businesses on the domestic and international levels, has business interests in Russia,⁷⁰⁵ while the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber itself is involved in the business relations with Russia that maintains a considerable economic presence in Austria.⁷⁰⁶ When Putin visited Vienna in June 2014, he was hosted by Austria’s contemporary President Heinz Fischer and Leitl, while Raiffeisen Bank International’s CEO Karl Sevelda was present at Putin’s address to the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber and held talks with the Russian businessmen accompanying Putin on his trip to Vienna. However, no FPÖ member was seen amid Putin’s Austrian hosts. With Leitl consistently opposing the EU’s sanctions against Russia⁷⁰⁷ and Sevelda’s pledge not to wrap up Raiffeisen’s business in Russia despite the sanctions⁷⁰⁸ – Sevelda made this pledge at a meeting with the ORFG – the FPÖ remained a useful, but not Moscow’s most important ally in Austria.

However, the situation changed in 2016. FPÖ member and Third President of the National Council Norbert Hofer won the first round of the presidential elections. For the first time in the Austrian post-war history, neither a representative of the SPÖ or ÖVP made it to the second round of the presidential election. After the annulled second round of the election, Hofer eventually lost the re-run to Alexander Van der Bellen, who was supported by Die Grünen, with 46.21% of the vote on 4 December 2016. But the failure of the SPÖ and ÖVP – parties that formed grand coalition governments for many years – as well as results of public opinion polls suggesting that the FPÖ will likely win the parliamentary elections in 2018 with over 30% of the vote,⁷⁰⁹ might have signalled to Moscow that political power of their mainstream partners in Austria was in decline and that the far right could become the Kremlin’s primary ally. The FPÖ would hardly be able

⁷⁰⁴ Oliver Treib, “Party Patronage in Austria: From Reward to Control”, in Petr Kopecký, Petr Mair, Maria Spirova (eds), *Party Patronage and Party Government in European Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 31-53 (35).

⁷⁰⁵ Ashwien Sankholkar, “Das Comeback des Herbert Stepic”, *Trend*, 3 April (2014), <http://www.trend.at/home/comeback-herbert-stepic-5586808>; Andrea Hodoschek, “Übergabe bei Leitls”, *Kurier*, 19 July (2015), <http://kurier.at/wirtschaft/uebergabe-bei-leitls/142.177.153>.

⁷⁰⁶ See more on Russia’s economic ties to Austria in Roman Kupchinsky, *Gazprom’s European Web* (Washington: Jamestown Foundation, 2009).

⁷⁰⁷ “Leitl kritisiert Sanktionen: ‘Wirtschaft nicht missbrauchen’”, *Der Standard*, 30 July (2014), <http://derstandard.at/2000003713801/Leitl-kritisiert-Sanktionen-Wirtschaft-nicht-missbrauchen>; “Leitl: ‘Sanktionen gegen Russland sind Unsinn und bewegen nichts’”, *Der Standard*, 29 December (2015), <http://derstandard.at/2000028245568/Leitl-Sanktionen-gegen-Russland-sind-Unsinn-und-bewegen-nichts>.

⁷⁰⁸ “Raiffeisen Remains Committed to ‘Attractive’ Russian Market”, *The Moscow Times*, 5 September (2014), <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/business/article/raiffeisen-remains-committed-to-attractive-russian-market/506541.html>.

⁷⁰⁹ “Hofer besser als Strache”, *OE24*, 9 December (2016), <http://www.oe24.at/oesterreich/politik/Hofer-besser-als-Strache/261658295>.

to form a federal government without a coalition partner, but there were strong supporters of a coalition government both inside the SPÖ and ÖVP. Although there was also strong opposition to such a coalition among Austrian social-democrats and conservatives, the chances were still high that, after the 2018 parliamentary elections, Austria would be ruled by a pro-Moscow, FPÖ-led coalition government.

These considerations might have underpinned the decision of the Presidium of the General Council of “United Russia” to conclude an agreement on collaboration and cooperation (*Zusammenwirken und Kooperation*) with the FPÖ. “United Russia” took this decision on 28 November, i.e. less than a week before the second re-run of the presidential election, and was possibly hoping to congratulate Hofer on the victory in December. Although Hofer lost, the FPÖ delegation went to Moscow two weeks after the re-run.⁷¹⁰ Featuring top leaders of the party such as Strache, Hofer, Vilimsky, Hübner and Gudenus, the delegation met, on 19 December, with Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Pyotr Tolstoy and Deputy Secretary of the General Council of “United Russia” Sergey Zheleznyak. Strache and Zheleznyak officially signed the agreement on cooperation between the two parties. In particular, they agreed to exchange information on topics such as “current issues on the situation in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Austria, bilateral and international relations”, and to exchange “experiences in the field of party building, organisational work, youth policy, economic development as well as other areas interesting for both sides”.⁷¹¹ Moreover, “United Russia” and the FPÖ agreed to

actively contribute to the development of mutually beneficial collaboration and cooperation between youth, women, education, aid and other social organizations in order to strengthen the friendship and education of young generations in the spirit of patriotism and the joy in work [*Arbeitsfreude*].⁷¹²

⁷¹⁰ According to Claus Pandi, editor of *Kronenzeitung*, also part of the FPÖ delegation was Stefan Magnet, who is presumably directly connected to the Austrian, openly pro-Putin far right printed magazine *Info-Direkt* discussed briefly in Chapter 5, see “Öllinger zu FPÖ-Moskau-Reise: Offenlegung aller Details des blauen Moskau-Deals gefordert”, *APA-OTS*, 19 December (2016), http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20161219_OTS0112/oellinger-zu-fpoe-moskau-reise-offenlegung-aller-details-des-blauen-moskau-deals-gefordert.

⁷¹¹ “FPÖ schließt Fünf-Jahres-Vertrag mit Kreml-Partei”, *Die Presse*, 19 December (2016), <http://diepresse.com/home/politik/innenpolitik/5136136/FPÖe-schliesst-FuenfJahresVertrag-mit-KremlPartei>.

⁷¹² *Ibid.* *Arbeitsfreude* is a controversial term in German language today. Originally, it was “the guiding spirit of the German Werkbund, a 1907 alliance of artisans, craftsmen, and industrialists who aimed at revitalizing German culture by combining industry with artistry” and wanted “to reject Victorian excess and revive the craftsmanship that had existed in medieval times”, see Richard Donkin, *The History of Work* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 192-193. However, the NSDAP hijacked the term *Arbeitsfreude* and used it for its own propaganda purposes.

The agreement also envisages that the two parties “will support the development of economic, trade and investment cooperation between the two countries”⁷¹³ – an arrangement that FPÖ members frequently discussed during their previous trips to Russia too.

During the signing ceremony, Strache stated: “We are very dissapointed that the EU and Russian government impose mutual sanctions. Our party is against the sanctions against Russia. I am sure that, eventually, the EU will adopt the same position and start developing cooperation with your country”.⁷¹⁴

At the time of writing, it is not yet clear what forms cooperation between “United Russia” and the FPÖ will take, but the signing of the above-mentioned agreement is so far the most important stage of the relations between the FPÖ and Russian actors.

6.3. Italy

The first organised pro-Russian initiatives in Italy emerged in 2004 and were related to Italian far-right activists who were in contact with Aleksandr Dugin. In 2004, the circle around the journal *Eurasia*, which was launched by Claudio Mutti and edited by Tiberio Graziani, established the group Eurasia Coordination Project (Coordinamento Progetto Eurasia, CPE) that would disseminate the neo-Eurasianist and New Right ideas of *Eurasia* on the socio-political level; Stefano Vernole became the leader of the CPE.

The CPE organised workshops, seminars, publish periodicals, and established relations with like-minded international groups. In March 2008, around 20 activists of the CPE, including Mutti and Vernole, protested against the US at the base of the Italian Air Force in Ghedi where the 704th Munitions Maintenance Squadron of the US Air Force is located. In addition to banners in Italian, the CPE activists held posters with slogans in Russian language: “Putin makes us free” and “Italy and Russia united against America”.⁷¹⁵

Diverse pro-Russian efforts won the CPE some attention from Russia’s official representatives in Italy. On 6 November 2010, *Eurasia* organised a conference “Economic and Cultural Relations between Italy and Russia” that hosted, among others, Aleksey Paramonov who was then Consul-General of the Russian Federation in Milan.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹³ “FPÖ schließt Fünf-Jahres-Vertrag mit Kreml-Partei”.

⁷¹⁴ “‘Yedinaya Rossiya’ podpisala soglashenie o sotrudnichestve s Avstriyskoy partiej svobody”, *Yedinaya Rossiya*, 19 December (2016), <https://er.ru/news/149954/>.

⁷¹⁵ Roberto Quadrelli, “Presidio C.P.E. davanti alla base di Ghedi”, *Facebook*, 30 March (2008), https://www.facebook.com/roberto.quadrelli.7/media_set?set=a.1355848147045.48614.1556721197.

⁷¹⁶ Luca Rossi, “I rapporti economici tra Italia e Russia: cronaca del seminario”, *Coordinamento Progetto Eurasia*, 23 November (2010), <http://www.cpeurasia.eu/1248/i-rapporti-economici-tra-italia-e-russia-cronaca-del-seminario>.

The CPE's contacts with Paramonov, however, did not result in any tangible cooperation with other Russian officials. The latter did not seem to see much political significance or potential of the CPE; its members could be useful as election observers or participants in anti-American conferences, but hardly anything else. Even Russian media did not seem to be interested in engaging with either Mutti or Vernole.

In 2010, Graziani and Daniele Scalea established the Institute of Advanced Studies in Geopolitics and Auxiliary Sciences (Istituto di Alti Studi in Geopolitica e Scienze Ausiliarie, IsAG) that was more successful, than the CPE, in establishing relations with Russian actors and institutions.

In 2011, the IsAG became an official partner of the World Public Forum "Dialogue of Civilisations" established by Vladimir Yakunin in 2002 when he was First Deputy of Minister of Railway Transport of the Russian Federation. Over the years, the "Dialogue of Civilisations" has become a significant international project aimed at advancing the ideas of a multipolar world – a Russian politically correct euphemism for anti-Americanism. Since 2012, representatives of the IsAG became regular contributors to the "Dialogue of Civilisations" project.

In December 2011, Graziani took part in a large, two-day conference titled "Innovations Forum Italy-Russia" organised by the Russian World Foundation (Fond "Russkiy Mir", FRM) and the Centre of the Russian Studies at the Sapienza University of Rome. The FRM was established by Putin in 2007 "to popularise Russian language" and "support programmes of studying Russian language abroad",⁷¹⁷ but its agenda has always been broader than this. Like Rossotrudnichestvo, the FRM is an instrument of Russia's soft power,⁷¹⁸ and aims "to promote values that challenge Western traditions",⁷¹⁹ especially in the countries that were Soviet republics before 1991. For example, the Estonian Security Police "has indicated that members of the 'former Soviet intelligence cadre are active within the Estonian chapter' of the FRM, which suggests that the foundation also works to advance Russia's foreign policy interests in the Baltics".⁷²⁰ The Centre of the Russian Studies at Sapienza was established by the FRM,⁷²¹ so it is possible to suggest that the conference "Innovations Forum Italy-Russia" was an initiative of the Foundation, rather than Sapienza.

⁷¹⁷ "Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 21.06.2007 No. 796 'O sozdanii fonda "Russkiy mir"', *Prezident Rossii*, 21 June (2007), <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/25689>.

⁷¹⁸ Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion*, pp. 87-88.

⁷¹⁹ Andrew Foxall, "The Kremlin's Sleight of Hand: Russia's Soft Power Offensive in the UK", Russia Studies Centre Policy Paper No. 3 (London: The Henry Jackson Society, 2015), p. 3, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/The-Kremlins-Sleight-of-Hand.pdf>.

⁷²⁰ Heather A. Conley, Theodore P. Gerber, Lucy Moore, Mihaela David, *Russian Soft Power in the 21st Century: An Examination of Russian Compatriot Policy in Estonia* (Washington: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2011), p. 15.

⁷²¹ "V Rimskom Universitete La Sap'yentsa otkrylsya Tsentr rossiyskikh issledovaniy Fonda 'Russkiy mir'", *Rossotrudnichestvo*, 12 December (2010), <http://old.rs.gov.ru/node/21725>.

The IsAG also became an official partner of several Russian organisations in 2012 signalling the increased cooperation with the Russian officials and other actors. In particular, the IsAG established partnership with the Russian Fund of High Tech Development; Diplomatic Academy of Russia's MFA; Russian State University of Trade and Economics; Institute of Democracy and Cooperation (IDC), a Paris-based Russian soft power operation headed by Natalya Narochnitskaya and John Laughland (see the next section); and *International Affairs*.

Although the IsAG cooperated with organisations from other countries, the Russian element of its international cooperation has been most prominent, while the scope of its pro-Kremlin activities in Italy has been much broader than those of the CPE. The IsAG is also more influential than the CPE, although, of course, its political influence remains largely limited to particular segments of the Italian academic and intellectual life, rather than political sphere. However, the IsAG is also involved, since 2013-2014, in coordinating the Master in Geopolitics and Global Security degree programme at Sapienza, and Graziani is a member of the scientific board of this programme.⁷²² It seems viable to suggest that, by taking part in educating Master students, the IsAG and its New Right, pro-Russian ideas may have deeper influence on the Italian political milieu in the mid- and long-term perspective.

So far, there has been no evidence that the pro-Moscow actions of the CPE or IsAG have exerted any major impact on the Italian politics. However, these efforts demonstrate the degree of penetration of the pro-Kremlin narratives into the Italian far-right milieu and the readiness of this milieu to promote these narratives and operate, effectively, as Russian front organisations in Italy.

The major pro-Kremlin far-right organisation in Italy today is the radical right-wing populist LN. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, the LN cooperated with Zhirinovskiy already in the 1990s and early 2000s. Already then, there was an ideological affinity between the LN and Russian ultranationalists, with anti-Americanism being the basis of this affinity. As Marco Tarchi argued, at that time, the LN's press "nurtured" its criticism of the US by strong attacks

against the so-called "Atlantic warriors", whose secret plotting aimed to weaken Russia, which the Europeans should look upon as a powerful and potential ally "without the deforming lens of the old anti-Soviet propaganda" in view of a continental defence "independent from Washington and separated from the NATO infrastructures".⁷²³

⁷²² See the website of the Master in in Geopolitics and Global Security degree programme: <http://www.mastergeopoliticaesicurezza.it>.

⁷²³ Marco Tarchi, "Recalcitrant Allies: The Conflicting Foreign Policy Agenda of the *Alleanza Nazionale* and the *Lega Nord*", in Christina Schori Liang (ed.), *Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 187-207 (194).

However, those were only Russian ultranationalists, rather than (self-nominated) representatives of Putin's regime, who were interested in developing contacts with the LN. The situation started to change when Putin's regime decided to take a "conservative" turn in 2011-2013, but in that period the LN was in decline, while Moscow lacked an operator who would establish contacts with the party.

Such an operator appeared in 2013. Aleksey Komov, the official representative of the World Congress of Families in Russia, travelled to Turin in December 2013 and took part, together with a Russian MP from "United Russia" Viktor Zubarev, in the LN's congress that elected Matteo Salvini as a new leader of the party. Komov and Zubarev were clearly treated as VIPs at the congress and were seated in the first row together with Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch right-wing populist PVV, and Ludovic de Danne, a prominent member of the FN's political bureau. The LN's congress enthusiastically applauded Komov's speech in which he referred to the Russian organisations he represented as the LN's "brothers in Russia" who supported "our common Christian European values".⁷²⁴

The participation of Komov in the LN's congress in Turin was hardly accidental: it was a deliberate attempt to establish contacts between the LN and Russian actors. Apart from being linked to the international "pro-family", homophobic association World Congress of Families, Komov is the head of the international department of the Patriarch's Commission on the Family Issues created by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2011.

Most importantly, Komov is closely associated with several projects of a Russian "Orthodox oligarch" Konstantin Malofeev. Given the latter's significance in establishing other contacts with European far-right and ultraconservative circles, it appears likely that, in comparison to Komov, Malofeev acts as an operator of the European/Russian contacts of a higher level. Therefore, his position in the Russian context requires a separate discussion to understand better the Italian and some other cases.

Malofeev has access to the ruling elites in Russia through several key figures. There are two main lines of these connection: (1) business relations around the Svyazinvest, which was Russia's largest state-controlled telecommunications company, and the telecommunications company Rostelecom to which Svyazinvest was joined in 2012-2013; (2) activities in the Russian Orthodox milieu.

The founder of the investment company Marshall Capital Partners, Malofeev was elected to the Board of Directors of Svyazinvest as the head of the strategic planning

⁷²⁴ Lega Nord Padania, "Congresso Federale Lega Nord 2013 – Ambasciatore Russo Nazioni Unite Alexey Komov", *YouTube*, 18 December (2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsgJtcNZZwQ>.

committee of the company in February 2009.⁷²⁵ During his tenure as a member of the Board, Malofeev invited several employees of Marshall Capital Partners into the management of Svyazinvest,⁷²⁶ while his investment company itself bought several Svyazneft's subsidiaries. As Svyazneft owned 51% of the shares of Rostelecom, Malofeev obtained 7% of the shares in Rostelecom.⁷²⁷

The CEO of Svyazinvest Yevgeniy Yurchenko seemed to be disaffected with what he saw as Malofeev's seizure of control over Svyazinvest,⁷²⁸ but Malofeev's actions were backed by a powerful ally, namely Igor Shchegolev, then Minister of Telecom and Mass Communications, who had direct access to Putin⁷²⁹ and had known Malofeev before his appointment to the Svyazinvest's Board. Shchegolev also chaired the Svyazinvest's Board of Directors in 2010-2011, and requested from Yurchenko to give a resignation notice.

Moreover, Russian economic investigative journalists suggested that Malofeev concluded the purchase of Rostelecom's shares in favour of a major *silovik*, namely then Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov who supervised telecommunications. Ivanov's son at that time was a deputy CEO of Gazprombank, and it was this bank that sold Rostelecom's shares to Marshall Capital Partners. Further evidence seems to corroborate this suggestion: as it emerged, at least some of Rostelecom's shares owned by Malofeev's Marshall Capital Partners were in fact operated by Gazprombank.⁷³⁰ In June 2015, Sergey Ivanov became a chair of Rostelecom's Board of Directors.

Yet another influential person with whom Malofeev enhanced relations through his work for Svyazinvest and Rostelecom is Count Alexander Trubetskoy, a French descendant of one of Russian noble families who immigrated to Europe after the Russian Revolution. On the invitation from Shchegolev and with the support of Sergey Ivanov, Trubetskoy became a chair of the Svyazinvest's Board of Directors in October 2011.⁷³¹ According to Trubetskoy, he formed relations with Malofeev and Shchegolev thanks to their conversations on the Christian Orthodox issues: "They [i.e. Malofeev and Shchegolev] are very close to Father Tikhon, and this played a certain role. Moreover,

⁷²⁵ "Sovet direktorov (s 10 fevralya 2009 goda)", *Svyazinvest*, 10 February (2009), <https://web.archive.org/web/20090221183128/http://svyazinvest.ru/manage>.

⁷²⁶ Rinat Sagdiev, Timofey Dzyadko, Irina Reznik, "Ne zamministra, a drug ministra", *Vedomosti*, No. 191, 11 October (2010), p. 16.

⁷²⁷ Igor Tsukanov, "Marshall pokupaet", *Vedomosti*, No. 171, 13 September (2010), p. 11.

⁷²⁸ Inna Erokhina, "Evgeniy Yurchenko nazval prichinu svoego uvol'neniya", *Kommersant. Daily*, No. 170, 15 September (2010), p. 13.

⁷²⁹ Andrei Soldatov, Irina Borogan, *The Red Web: The Struggle Between Russia's Digital Dictators and the New Online Revolutionaries* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), p. 196.

⁷³⁰ Oleg Sal'manov, "Kto spryatalsya v 'Rostelekome'", *Vedomosti*, No. 239, 17 December (2012), http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2012/12/17/kto_spryatalsya_v_rostelekome;

Roman Shleynov, "Vysokie otnosheniya", *Vedomosti*, 18 March (2013), http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2013/03/18/vysokie_otnosheniya.

⁷³¹ Roman Shleynov, "Knyaz'-svyaznoy", *Vedomosti*, No. 150, 15 August (2011), p. 1.

Konstantin Malofeev, as a businessman, shared some ideas with me regarding Svyazinvest, and I hope he can give me some advice in the future. But importantly, I know him as a true Russian Orthodox patriot”.⁷³²

Trubetskoy, who is executive president of the ADFR, is also part of Malofeev’s Orthodox circle of friends. “Father Tikhon” mentioned by Trubetskoy is Georgiy Shevkunov, a rabidly anti-Western ultranationalist and influential member of Russian Orthodox clergy, who is widely believed to be Putin’s personal confessor.⁷³³ Malofeev’s long-time friendship with Shevkunov, whom some sources consider Malofeev’s confessor too,⁷³⁴ provided him with access to the highest circles of the Russian Orthodox Church. Moreover, the supervisory board of the Saint Basil the Great Charitable Foundation, which Malofeev founded in 2007, includes, in particular, Shchegolev, Shevkunov, Count Zurab Chavchavadze,⁷³⁵ and ultranationalist filmmaker Sergey Mikhalkov.

In 2011, when Malofeev was still a member of the Boards of Directors of Svyazinvest and Rostelecom, and Shchegolev was still Minister of Telecom and Mass Communications, the Saint Basil the Great Charitable Foundation established – with support from Shchegolev’s Ministry – the Safe Internet League. Shchegolev headed the supervisory board of the League that also included, in particular, high-ranking officials from various power ministries and representatives of Russian Internet companies. In particular, the League was supported by the large international software security company Kaspersky Lab⁷³⁶ headed by Eugene Kaspersky, a graduate of the Fourth (Technical) Department of the Higher School of the KGB.⁷³⁷ Officially, the League aimed at countering the distribution of illegal contents in the Internet, and later it emerged that the League became the major Russian lobbyist of censorship in the Internet. At the end of 2011, the League drafted what became known as the Internet Restriction Law that the State Duma adopted in 2012 and that since then has been used by the Russian authorities to censor the Internet.⁷³⁸

⁷³² Ibid.

⁷³³ Timur Polliannikov, “The Logic of Authoritarianism”, *Russian Politics and Law*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2006), pp. 55–63 (61); John B. Dunlop, “Foreword”, in Marlène Laruelle (ed.), *Russian Nationalism and the National Reassertion of Russia* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. xvii–xix (xix).

⁷³⁴ Ivan Osipov, Roman Badanin, “Minoritariy ot Boga: put’ Konstantina Malofeeva ot bogatstva do obyska”, *Forbes*, 21 November (2012), <http://www.forbes.ru/sobytiya/lyudi/215436-minoritarii-ot-boga-put-konstantina-malofeeva-ot-bogatstva-do-obyska>.

⁷³⁵ Chavchavadze is also a member of the supervisory board of Malofeev’s Katehon think-tank.

⁷³⁶ “‘Laboratoriya Kasperskogo’ prisoedinyaetsya k rabote ‘Ligi bezopasnogo Interneta’”, *Kaspersky Lab*, 8 February (2011), <http://www.kaspersky.ru/news?id=207733419>.

⁷³⁷ Paul J. Springer, *Cyber Warfare: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2015), p. 164. In 1992, the Department was reorganised into the Institute of Cryptography, Telecommunications and Computer Science.

⁷³⁸ Rachel Nielsen, “Internet Restriction Law Comes On Line”, *The Moscow Times*, No. 5006, 2 November (2012), p. 47.

Komov, who participated in the LN's congress at the end of 2013, is associated with two projects of Malofeev: he is a foreign projects manager of the Saint Basil the Great Charitable Foundation and a member of the Board of the Safe Internet League. Apparently, Komov's visit to Italy was coordinated with Malofeev who seems to enjoy patronage of the influential figures such as Father Tikhon (Shevkunov), Igor Shchegolev who became an aide to President Putin in 2012, and, possibly, Sergey Ivanov, a powerful *silovik* in Putin's inner circle,⁷³⁹ who was Chief of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation from December 2011 until August 2016. However, there is no evidence that any of them was involved in establishing relations with the LN.

Shortly after Komov's visit to Italy, Max Ferrari, a member of the LN and contributor to the party's official newspaper *La Padania* and the Italian service of the Voice of Russia, came up with a proposal to establish the Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association (ACLR). As Giovanni Savino argues, Ferrari's initiative was "enthusiastically supported" by the LN,⁷⁴⁰ and the ACLR was founded in February 2014 with Aleksey Komov as its honorary president, Salvini's spokesman and vice chairman of the Lombardy Regional Communications Committee Gianluca Savoini – as president, and Ferrari – as general secretary.

According to Ferrari, the cultural objective of the ACLR "fully concurred with the worldview that Putin enunciated during the Valdai meeting": "Identity, Sovereignty, Tradition"⁷⁴¹ – it was a reference to Putin's Valdai speech, discussed in Chapter 3, in which he said that it was "impossible to move forward without spiritual, cultural and national self-determination".⁷⁴²

The website of the ACLR has published articles praising Putin as the great leader of Russia and presenting the Europeans with a choice between "Eurabia"⁷⁴³ as a project that would lead to "the denial of Europe", and Eurasia from Brittany to Vladivostok that would successfully compete with the US and China.⁷⁴⁴ Thus, it was not surprising that, apart from the interviews with Komov, the website also published several interviews with another associate of Malofeev, Aleksandr Dugin, who described Matteo Salvini as "the

⁷³⁹ Minchenko, "Politbyuro 2.0' nakanune perezagruzki elitnykh grupp".

⁷⁴⁰ Giovanni Savino, "From Evola to Dugin: The Neo-Eurasianist Connection in Italy", in Laruelle (ed.), *Eurasianism and the European Far Right*, pp. 97-124 (114).

⁷⁴¹ "Identity, Sovereignty, Tradition" is most likely a reference to a group in the European Parliament called "Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty" that consisted of 23 far right MEPs and existed from January until November 2007.

⁷⁴² Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club [2013]".

⁷⁴³ "Eurabia" is a concept popularised by Bat Ye'or (pen name of Gisèle Littman) that means "a gradual overtaking of Europe by Muslim populations", see Paul Jackson, "2083 – A European Declaration of Independence: A License to Kill", in Matthew Feldman, Paul Jackson (eds), *Doublespeak: The Rhetoric of the Far Right since 1945* (Stuttgart: *ibidem*-Verlag, 2014), pp. 81-100 (84).

⁷⁴⁴ Max Ferrari, "Eurasia o Eurabia: UE al bivio", *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 4 June (2014), <http://lombardiarussia.org/index.php/component/content/article/57-categoria-home/300-eurasia-o-eurabiaue-al-bivio>.

only politician who [could] represent the real interests of the Italians”.⁷⁴⁵ One of the interviews was conducted by Savoini⁷⁴⁶ during Dugin’s visit to Italy upon the invitation of the ACLR: on 4 July 2014, Dugin spoke at a special event, titled “The Eurasian Challenge of Russia”, co-organised by the ACLR and LN in Milano.⁷⁴⁷ Moreover, when the ACLR started establishing its branches across northern Italy, Dugin became an honorary president of the Piedmont-Russia Cultural Association (Associazione Culturale Piemonte-Russia).

The materials on the ACLR’s website largely followed the changes in the relations between Russia and the West. At the end of the revolution in Ukraine, the ACLR called for the division of Ukraine into “Ukrainian” and “Russian” parts; it then attempted to legitimise the “referendum” in Russia-occupied Crimea (the head of the LN’s foreign relations department Claudio D’Amico was one of the international observers at the “referendum”) and, later, to justify its annexation by Russia. After the Western countries introduced sanctions against Russia, the ACLR published numerous articles condemning the sanctions and calling to lift them.

The ACLR did not confine their activities to the pro-Russian online publications; rather, they seemed to focus largely on actions outside the Internet that included demonstrations, public discussions, and various presentations – sometimes in collaboration with the Russian Embassy in Rome and the Russian Consulate General in Milan.⁷⁴⁸ Moreover, possibly in its bid to cement their reputation of the devoted pro-Russian forces, the ACLR and LN cooperated with individual representatives of other Italian far-right and right-wing organisations. For example, in November 2014, the ACLR’s secretary and treasurer Luca Bertoni took part in the conference “Economic effects of the sanctions against Russia”⁷⁴⁹ together with CPE’s Stefano Vernole and Forza Italia’s Fabrizio Bertot who was also an observer at the Crimean “referendum”. In 2015, the ACLR and LN twice invited Eliseo Bertolasi, an expert from Graziani’s IsAG and correspondent of *Rossiya Segodnya*, to the conferences they co-organised: “The

⁷⁴⁵ Antonio Rapisarda, “L’ideologo di Putin lancia la Lega: ‘Ultima speranza per l’Italia’”, *Il Tempo*, 23 June (2015), <http://www.iltempo.it/politica/2015/06/23/l-ideologo-di-putin-lancia-la-lega-ultima-speranza-per-l-italia-1.1429396>.

⁷⁴⁶ Gianluca Savoini, “Intervista ad Aleksander Dugin”, *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 8 July (2014), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/component/content/article/57-categoria-home-329-intervista-ad-aleksander-dugin>.

⁷⁴⁷ “La sfida Euroasiatica della Russia”, *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 23 June (2014), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/stampa-eventi-cultura/eventi/319-la-sfida-euroasiatica-della-russia>.

⁷⁴⁸ Gianluca Savoini, “5 Febbraio 2014 – 5 Febbraio 2016: auguri a tutti noi”, *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 4 February (2016), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/component/content/article/57-categoria-home-585-5-febbraio-2014-5-febbraio-2016-auguri-a-tutti-noi>.

⁷⁴⁹ “Conferenza ‘Gli effetti economici delle sanzioni alla Russia’”, *Associazione Emilia Russia*, 17 November (2014), <http://www.emiliarussia.org/?p=26>.

Russian challenge to mondialism”⁷⁵⁰ and “Russia, the West, and the Ukrainian crisis” (Bertot was invited to this conference too).⁷⁵¹

Already in spring 2014, the Association built important relations with the organisation Russian Italian Youth (Rossiysko-Ital'yanskaya molodyozh, RIM), an organisation founded in 2011 to represent young Russians in Rome. It was founded by Irina Osipova, a Russian student and a daughter of Oleg Osipov, the head of the Rossotrudnichestvo office in Italy. Political views of Irina Osipova are not entirely clear, but her social networking profiles⁷⁵² feature photos that suggest friendly relations with a number of Italian far-right individuals and organisations such as convicted fascist bomb-thrower Maurizio Murelli and Italian fascist Andrea Palmeri who volunteered to fight against the Ukrainian government forces in Eastern Ukraine, as well as the leadership of the LN and the fascist movement CasaPound.

Owing to her family connection to Rossotrudnichestvo, Osipova has significantly contributed to the pro-Russian efforts of the ACLR and LN, as well as having helped them advance their relations with the representatives of the Russian state.⁷⁵³ On 11 July 2014, Osipova’s RIM co-organised and moderated the conference “What is Russia in 2014?” that hosted, in particular, Vitaliy Fadeev, the counsellor of the Russian Embassy in Italy, Luca Bertoni from the ACLR, and Alfonso Piscitelli, a regular contributor to the ACLR’s website. In an interview that followed this conference, Osipova told the VoR’s Italian service that “the Italian right-wing parties” favoured Russia and shared Putin’s “traditionally conservative positions”, and that Russia was seen in the West as “an example that inspire[d] those who [were] fed up with having to live in a regime of so-called democracy”.⁷⁵⁴ In September 2014, Osipova arranged a trip to Moscow for several members of the ACLR and other far-right movements, including the Forza Nuova and CasaPound.⁷⁵⁵ Osipova also invited Bertoni and Piscitelli to the conference “Rome – The Third Rome” that she organised, in November 2014, at the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Rome.⁷⁵⁶ On 28 November 2015, following Turkey shooting down a

⁷⁵⁰ “La sfida russa al mondialismo”, *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 6 January (2015), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/stampa-eventi-cultura/eventi/431-la-sfida-russa-al-mondialismo>.

⁷⁵¹ “Russia, Occidente e crisi Ucraina. La verità che i media occidentali non vi dicono”, *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 8 March (2015), www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/stampa-eventi-cultura/eventi/476-russia-occidente-e-crisi-ucraina-la-verita-che-i-media-occidentali-non-vi-dicono.

⁷⁵² See <http://vk.com/id188344> and <http://www.facebook.com/osipova>.

⁷⁵³ Giovanni Savino, “L’infatuazione putiniana della Lega, tra neofascisti italiani e Dugin”, *MicroMega*, 22 October (2014), <http://temi.repubblica.it/micromega-online/infatuazione-putiniana-della-lega-tra-neofascisti-italiani-e-dugin/>.

⁷⁵⁴ Marina Tantushyan, “Che cos’è la Russia nel 2014?”, *La Voce della Russia*, 14 July (2014), http://it.sputniknews.com/italian.ruvr.ru/2014_07_14/Che-cos-e-la-Russia-nel-2014-0439/.

⁷⁵⁵ Savino, “From Evola to Dugin”, p. 114.

⁷⁵⁶ “Konferentsiya Rim – Tretiy Rim v RTsNK”, *La Rappresentanza di RosSotrudnichestvo in Italia*, <http://ita.rs.gov.ru/it/node/3384>.

Russian jet that had apparently violated Turkish airspace during Russia's Syrian campaign,⁷⁵⁷ the ACLR and Osipova's RIM co-organised – together with the pro-Assad European Solidarity Front for Syria founded by Matteo Caponetti, the leader of the Evola-inspired, fascist Zenith Cultural Association (Associazione Culturale Zenit) – a manifestation in Rome “in support of Russia and against Turkey's terrorism and aggression”.⁷⁵⁸

The activities of the LN and ACLR in October 2014 were especially important for the development of their Russian connections that led to an increase of their pro-Russian efforts. That month, a delegation of the LN/ACLR visited Russia-annexed Crimea – their trip was coordinated with the Russian Embassy in Rome⁷⁵⁹ – and met with “Prime Minister” of Crimea Sergey Aksyonov. After Crimea, the LN/ACLR delegation went to Moscow where they met with a number of high-ranking Russian officials and politicians such as Chairman of the State Duma Sergey Naryshkin, his deputy and the head of the “United Russia” State Duma group Vladimir Vasilyev, the head of the Duma foreign affairs committee Aleksey Pushkov, and deputy Foreign Minister Aleksey Meshkov. The LN/ACLR delegation also visited a session of the State Duma; according to the official transcript of the session, Naryshkin personally welcomed the delegation:

Dear colleagues, [...] I would like to turn your attention to the presence of the leadership and regular members of the Lega Nord party on the guest balcony. This is one of Italy's political parties that is unalterably opposed to the anti-Russian sanctions introduced by the United States and the European Union – let us greet them! (Heavy applause.)

A sweatshirt, which the leader of the party Mr. Salvini is wearing, reads: “No to the anti-Russian sanctions!”. (Heavy applause.) Let us wish our colleagues best of luck! (Applause.)⁷⁶⁰

While in the State Duma, Salvini stated: “We take to heart all the developments in Crimea. Next week we will return to Brussels and we will be ready to start our fight for the recognition of the Crimean Republic and for the lifting of the anti-Russian sanctions”.⁷⁶¹

⁷⁵⁷ See “2015 Russian Sukhoi Su-24 Shootdown”, *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_Russian_Sukhoi_Su-24_shootdown.

⁷⁵⁸ “Manifestazione a favore della Russia, contro il terrorismo e l'aggressione Turca”, *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 25 November (2015), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/component/content/article/57-categoria-home-/578-manifestazione-a-favore-della-russia-contro-il-terrorismo-e-laggressione-turca>.

⁷⁵⁹ “Lega: non solo Mosca, a ottobre Salvini anche in Crimea”, *AGI*, 29 September (2014), http://archivio.agi.it/articolo/0bfa7ef9c5edcfe859c15a32acd39633_20140929_lega-non-solo-mosca-a-ottobre-salvini-anche-in-crimea/.

⁷⁶⁰ “Zasedanie No. 190”, *Gosudarstvennaya Duma*, 14 October (2014), <http://api.duma.gov.ru/api/transcriptFull/2014-10-14>.

⁷⁶¹ “Skazano!”, *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, No. 117, 15 October (2014), p. 3.

Salvini was able to meet and talk to Putin for 20 minutes during a break at the Asia-Europe summit in Milan on 17 October 2014.⁷⁶² Salvini described the conversation with Putin in an interview to the IsAG's Eliseo Bertolasi:

We talked about the absurd sanctions against Russia introduced by the cowardly EU that defends the interests not of its own citizens, but rather those of the economic oligarchs and lobbies of the representatives of the world power. We also discussed together important topics ranging from the protection of national autonomy to the fight against illegal immigration and defence of traditional values.⁷⁶³

The same day Salvini met with Putin in Milan, an Italian MP from the LN Paolo Grimoldi, who visited Moscow as part of the LN/ACLR delegation, declared the launch of the cross-party group "Friends of Putin" in the Italian parliament. As Grimoldi explained, this initiative was aimed at maintaining dialogue with Russia, which he called an "essential trade and economic partner" of Italy. The LN hoped that the "Friends of Putin" group would attract "several hundreds of supporters among the MPs and senators".⁷⁶⁴ When asked why the group had to be called "Friends of Putin" rather than "Friends of Russia", Salvini replied that, unlike Yeltsin, Putin represented Russia and defended the prosperity of the Russians, and that his party admired Putin and hoped that he would "become an example for all the European nations".⁷⁶⁵ On 3 December 2014, Grimoldi sent an official letter to the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Italian Parliament, inviting MPs to join the "Friends of Putin" group.⁷⁶⁶ The letter said that the aim of this group was to "contribute to pacifying diplomatic, political and economic relations" between Italy and Russia, because "the sanctions and the recent termination of the South Stream gas pipeline produced untold damage to our economy".⁷⁶⁷

The LN/ACLR trip to Moscow in October 2014 marked the beginning of a series of frequent visits of the LN leadership to Russia and their meetings with high-ranking officials and politicians from the "United Russia" party. On 22 October 2014, Claudio

⁷⁶² Savino, "From Evola to Dugin", pp. 113-114; Matteo Salvini, "20 minuti di incontro...", *Facebook*, 17 October (2014), <https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/photos/a.10151670912208155.1073741827.252306033154/10152465922593155/>.

⁷⁶³ Eliseo Bertolasi, "Interv'yu s Matteo Salvini i Gianluca Savoini iz partii 'Lega Nord' (Italiya) po vozvrashchenii iz Moskvyy", *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*, 8 November (2014), <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/12061>.

⁷⁶⁴ "Paolo Grimoldi sozdaet gruppu 'Druz'ya Putina' v parlamente Italii".

⁷⁶⁵ Irina Shcherbinina, Polina Solov'yova, "My voskhishchaemysya tem, chto delaet Putin", *Vzglyad*, 17 October (2014), <http://www.vz.ru/world/2014/10/17/711106.html>. One of the authors of the interview, Irina Shcherbinina, is a co-founder of the ACLR.

⁷⁶⁶ Michela Scacchioli, "Lettera della Lega Nord ai parlamentari: 'Iscriviti anche tu agli Amici di Putin'", *Repubblica*, 5 December (2014), http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2014/12/05/news/lega_nord_promuove_in_parlamento_l_associ_azione_amici_di_putin_-102198610/.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

D'Amico met with Andrey Klimov, a member of the supervisory board of Malofeev's Katehon think-tank and a senior member of "United Russia" who was responsible for the party's foreign relations in 2012-2016. During this meeting, D'Amico reiterated the LN's opposition to the sanctions against Russia, and suggested that the LN and "United Russia" signed an agreement on cross-party cooperation.⁷⁶⁸ Klimov and Salvini discussed this idea further during the latter's visit to Moscow in February 2015.⁷⁶⁹ The two of them continued discussing tentative official cooperation between the parties on 17 December 2015 when Salvini, Savoini and D'Amico arrived in Moscow for a two-day visit.⁷⁷⁰ It was not, however, until 6 March 2017, that Salvini and Zheleznyak signed a coordination and cooperation agreement between the LN and "United Russia", which was the same as the one signed between the FPÖ and "United Russia".⁷⁷¹

Although the agreement with "United Russia" was signed only in 2017, the LN and ACLR would continue its pro-Russian efforts in Italy, sometimes combining pro-Russian actions with its far-right and socially conservative agenda. On 18 October 2014, the LN, CasaPound and several other far-right organisations held an anti-immigration protest in Milan, and "the crowd displayed posters hailing Putin" as well as waving flags of the DNR.⁷⁷² On 7 November the same year, the ACLR organised an event "Family Tradition Identity: Russia's Challenge to Mondialism" in Varese that featured, in particular, Savoini and Komov.⁷⁷³ The ACLR continued discussing the "Ukrainian question" at the meeting titled "Beyond the Ukrainian crisis: For a New Dialogue between Europe and Russia" in April 2015 in Milan,⁷⁷⁴ and the same month co-organised a cultural event titled "Music of the World: Russia Special" in Varese.⁷⁷⁵ In June 2015, the ACLR held a public discussion "The Rebirth of Empire: Vladimir Putin's Russia" in Milan.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁶⁸ "Andrey Klimov vstretilsya s predstavitelem 'Ligi Severa'", *Yedinaya Rossiya*, 22 October (2014), <http://er.ru/news/123924/>.

⁷⁶⁹ "Klimov vstretilsya s federal'nym sekretaryom partii 'Liga Severa'", *Yedinaya Rossiya*, 17 February (2015), <https://er.ru/news/127882/>.

⁷⁷⁰ "Yedinaya Rossiya' i ital'yanskaya partiya 'Liga Severa' proveli konsul'tatsii v Moskve", *Yedinaya Rossiya*, 21 December (2015), <http://er.ru/news/138115/>.

⁷⁷¹ "Esclusiva: il testo integrale dell'accordo tra Russia Unita e Lega Nord", *Oltre la Linea*, 16 September (2017), <http://www.oltrelinea.news/2017/09/16/esclusiva-il-testo-integrale-dellaccordo-tra-russia-unita-e-lega-nord/>.

⁷⁷² Savino, "From Evola to Dugin", p. 113.

⁷⁷³ "Famiglia Tradizione Identita'. La sfida della Russia al mondialismo", *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 21 October (2014), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/stampa-eventi-cultura/eventi/383-famiglia-tradizione-identita-la-sfida-della-russia-al-mondialismo>.

⁷⁷⁴ "Oltre la crisi ucraina. Per un nuovo dialogo tra Europa e Russia", *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 12 April (2015), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/stampa-eventi-cultura/eventi/494-oltre-la-crisi-ucraina-per-un-nuovo-dialogo-tra-europa-e-russia>.

⁷⁷⁵ "Musiche dal Mondo – Speciale Russia", *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 4 July (2015), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/stampa-eventi-cultura/eventi/553-musiche-dal-mondo-speciale-russia>.

⁷⁷⁶ "Rinascita di un Impero – La Russia di Vladimir Putin", *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 3 July (2015), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/stampa-eventi-cultura/eventi/520-rinascita-di-un-impero-la-russia-di-vladimir-putin>.

Like their Austrian counterparts, concurrently with their pro-Moscow efforts the LN attempted to develop business relations with various Russian actors. On one particular occasion, the leaders of the LN were the only Italian politicians at the conference “Russia-Italy: maintaining trust and partnership” co-organised by the Italian-Russian Centre of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration and the State Duma Committee on Economic Policies, Innovative Development and Business. This conference was attended, apart from the LN’s leaders, by more than 100 academics and official trade representatives from both countries and aimed at “consolidating academic and business communities of Russia and Italy interested in developing Russia-Italian relations”.⁷⁷⁷

However, it seemed that the most active business-related contacts between the LN and various Russian actors developed in the context of Russia-annexed Crimea.

As mentioned earlier, the joint delegation of the LN and ACLR – in coordination with the Russian Embassy in Rome – made a trip to Crimea in October 2014. Apart from the political side of the meetings that the LN/ACLR delegation held in Crimea – discussing the “legitimacy” of the annexation of Crimea and criticising Western sanctions against Putin’s Russia – there was also an evidently economic component to them.

During his meeting with the LN/ACLR delegation, Crimean “Prime Minister” Sergey Aksyonov said that Crimean “authorities” intended to consider “cooperation projects in the areas of recreation, education, healthcare, agriculture and others”.⁷⁷⁸ In his turn, Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the “Crimean Federal District” Oleg Belaventsev stated that Crimea “was interested in building mutually beneficial Russian-Italian cooperation in economic, cultural and tourist spheres”.⁷⁷⁹ Consequently, the LN/ACLR delegation met with “first deputy Minister of Economic Cooperation” Konstantin Ipatov and “Minister of resorts and tourism” Elena Yurchenko who articulated their own vision of possible cooperation. Yurchenko claimed, after the meeting with the LN/ACLR, that they had reached an agreement on cooperation in the sphere of tourism.⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁷ “‘Rossiya-Italiya: sokhranit’ doverie i partnerstvo’ – nauchno-prakticheskaya konferentsiya 8 dekabrya 2014 goda”, *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Dumy po ekonomicheskoy politike, innovatsionnomu razvitiyu i predprinimatel’stvu*, 5 December (2014), <http://www.komitet2-7.km.duma.gov.ru/site.xp/052057124049050053050.html>; “‘Rossiya-Italiya: sokhranit’ doverie i partnerstvo’ – konferentsiya 8 dekabrya 2014 goda v Gosudarstvennoy Dume”, *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Dumy po ekonomicheskoy politike, innovatsionnomu razvitiyu i predprinimatel’stvu*, 11 December (2014), <http://www.komitet2-7.km.duma.gov.ru/site.xp/052057124049050054056.html>.

⁷⁷⁸ “Sergey Aksyonov prinyal uchastie vo vstreche s ital’yanskoy delegatsiyey”, *Pravitel’stvo Respubliki Krym*, 13 October (2014), <http://rk.gov.ru/rus/index.htm/news/287272.htm>.

⁷⁷⁹ “V Krym pribyla delegatsiya iz severnoy Italii”, *Gosudarstvenny Sovet Respubliki Krym*, 13 October (2014), http://crimea.gov.ru/ru/news/13_10_14.

⁷⁸⁰ “Krym budet razvivat’ sotrudnichestvo s Severnoy Italiej”, *Ministerstvo kurortov i turizma Respubliki Krym*, 13 October (2014), <http://mtur.rk.gov.ru/rus/index.htm/news/287308.htm>; “Sostoyalas’ vstrecha s delegatsiyey ital’yanskoy partii ‘Liga Severa’ i predstavatelyami Assotsiatsii

Following up on the LN/ACLR meetings in Crimea, the ACLR and Russia's now defunct Ministry of Crimean Affairs co-organised a conference "Russia and Crimea – two great opportunities for our companies" in Padua on 15 December 2014. Apart from the leadership of the LN and around 100 businessmen from various Italian regions, the conference featured several high-ranking figures including Deputy Minister of Crimean Affairs Elena Abramova; advisor on investment policies of the Ministry of Crimean Affairs Vadim Tretyakov; "Minister of Economic Development of Crimea" Nikolay Koryazhkin; Consul-General of the Russian Federation in Milan Aleksandr Nurizade; the representative of Confindustria⁷⁸¹ in Russia and Italy's Honorary Consul in Lipetsk Vittorio Torrembini; Mayor of Padua Massimo Bitonci; and regional Minister of Tourism and International Trade Marino Fiozzi – the latter two also represented the LN-affiliated far-right Venetian League (Liga Veneta).⁷⁸²

At this conference, Abramova declared that the Ministry of Crimean Affairs would "lend full support to those businessmen who would decide to use their capabilities and potential for doing business on the Crimean territory". In his turn, Koryazhkin was more specific saying that Crimea needed "technologies for storage and processing of fruit and vegetables, [and] winegrowing and wine production".⁷⁸³

The ACLR and the Ministry of Crimean Affairs held the second conference on the same topic in Milan on 20 March 2015. The second conference also hosted Abramova, Tretyakov and Koryazhkin, and aimed, as Savoini argued, at "presenting to the Italian business circles the vast potential of Crimea that [was] a special economic zone".⁷⁸⁴ Moreover, Savoini stated: "Business residents of Crimea, including foreign investors, will be exempt from taxes. I can assure you that, already at this initial stage, there are very many Italian companies intending to invest in Crimea".⁷⁸⁵ Among major economic sectors, in which Italian businesses were presumably prepared to invest, Savoini mentioned tourism and healthcare.

'Lombardiya-Rossiya"', *Ministerstvo ekonomicheskogo razvitiya Respubliki Krym*, 13 October (2014), <http://minek.rk.gov.ru/rus/index.htm/news/287300.htm>.

⁷⁸¹ Confindustria is the major association representing manufacturing and service companies in Italy, as well as a national chamber of commerce.

⁷⁸² "Russia e Crimea – due grandi opportunita' per le nostre imprese", *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 11 December (2014), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/stampa-eventi-cultura/eventi/414-russia-e-crimea-due-grandi-opportunita-per-le-nostre-imprese>; Alexander Prokhorov, "Crimea – grandi opportunita' per le imprese italiane in Russia", *La Voce della Russia*, 31 December (2014), http://it.sputniknews.com/italian.ruvr.ru/2014_12_31/281828809/.

⁷⁸³ "Nikolay Koryazhkin prinyal uchastie v biznes-missii v Italiyu", *Ministerstvo ekonomicheskogo razvitiya Respubliki Krym*, 17 December (2014), <http://minek.rk.gov.ru/rus/index.htm/news/291423.htm>.

⁷⁸⁴ Niva Mirakyan, "V Milane otkrylas' konferentsiya, posvyashchennaya Krymu", *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 20 March (2015), <http://rg.ru/2015/03/20/konf-site-anons.html>.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

However, further developments showed that the LN and ACLR were interested in other potential spheres of economic cooperation. In May 2015, the ACLR announced that it teamed up with the Russia-based company ItalAgro that specialised in sales and delivery of Italian equipment for agriculture and food production purposes to Russian customers, and opened an office of ItalAgro in Moscow to lobby for Italian companies.⁷⁸⁶ The same month, Irina Shcherbinina, one of the founding members of the ACLR, managed a joint ItalAgro/ACLR presentation of 15 Italian companies at the exposition “Crimea – The South of Russia” held in Russia-annexed Sevastopol. At the end of May 2015, the ACLR’s delegation also had a meeting with Crimea’s then “Minister of Agriculture” Vitaliy Polishchuk to discuss “possibilities that Crimea offered to Italian companies in the agricultural sector”.⁷⁸⁷

6.4. France

The first organised far-right pro-Kremlin activities in France were launched, like in Italy, by small organisations and marginal activists. However, these efforts emerged later than in Italy, and were originally undertaken in support of Russia’s war against Georgia in August 2008. That was, in particular, the main reason for André Chanclu, a former member of the violent extreme right Defence Union Group (Groupe Union Défense, GUD), to found a small organisation France-Russia Collective (Collectif France-Russie, CFR).⁷⁸⁸ The CFR claimed that they were not “subservient to any political movement or ideology” and that their only creed was “the defence of eternal Russia”.⁷⁸⁹ The group lavishly praised Putin for “strengthening the industrial complex, developing the economy while fighting the mafia oligarchs, reforming institutions, initiating major projects in the sectors of justice, defence and territorial administration”.⁷⁹⁰

In November 2009, the CFR, together with the activists of the Equality and Reconciliation (Égalité et Réconciliation) founded by Alain Soral, a former member of the French Communist Party (Parti communiste français) and FN, organised a

⁷⁸⁶ “Fiera agroalimentare della Russia del Sud – Crimea 2015”, *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 21 May (2015), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/component/content/article/57-categoria-home-/506-fiera-agroalimentare-della-russia-del-sud-crimea-2015>.

⁷⁸⁷ “Oltre le sanzioni. Fiera agroalimentare della Russia del Sud – Crimea 2015”, *Associazione Culturale Lombardia Russia*, 1 June (2015), <http://www.lombardiarussia.org/index.php/stampa-eventi-cultura/eventi/518-oltre-le-sanzioni-fiera-agroalimentare-della-russia-del-sud-crimea-2015>.

⁷⁸⁸ “My podderzhivaem vneshnyu politiku Rossii”, *Geopolitika*, 18 May (2009), <https://web.archive.org/web/20130129064601/http://www.geopolitika.ru/Articles/596/>.

⁷⁸⁹ Olivier Faye, Abel Mestre, Caroline Monnot, “L’extrême droite en mode Raspoutine; pas de liste GUD; des SMS racistes”, *Droite(s) extrême(s)*, 12 March (2010), <http://droites-extremes.blog.lemonde.fr/2010/03/12/pas-de-liste-gud-lextrême-droite-en-mode-raspoutine/>.

⁷⁹⁰ “Qui est Vladimir Poutine? 2ème partie”, *Collectif France-Russie*, 17 August (2009), <https://web.archive.org/web/20091128132353/http://www.collectiffrancerussie.com/2009/08/17/qui-est-vladimir-poutine-2eme-partie/>.

demonstration to greet Putin on his visit to France in the capacity of prime minister. The CFR and Equality and Reconciliation apparently coordinated this demonstration with the Russian Embassy in France.⁷⁹¹

In Russia itself, Chanclu's initial contacts were the neo-Eurasianists, in particular the MED and People's Rights (Prava narodov), a small neo-Eurasianist group established by Pavel Zarifullin who had left the MED/ESM after a conflict with Dugin. Chanclu's cooperation with the Russian neo-Eurasianists appeared to have had a significant ideological impact on him. This was particularly evident in his declaration of the creation of yet another organisation, Novopole,⁷⁹² which became involved in the activities promoting the pro-Russian and anti-American ideas and defending regimes such as that of Bashar al-Assad. Despite his efforts, however, Chanclu generally failed to develop his CFR or Novopole into an efficient organisation or establish relations with high-profile figures in Russia, and none of his pro-Moscow efforts gained any traction.

In 2009, Fabrice Sorlin, the leader of the Catholic ultranationalist organisation Dies Iræ and former candidate for the FN, formed yet another patently pro-Moscow organisation, the Europe-Russia Alliance (Alliance Europe-Russie) that was later renamed into the Association France-Europe-Russia Alliance (Association Alliance France-Europe Russie, AAFER). The AAFER organised several events, and managed to involve people such as the Russian Honorary Consul in the city of Biarritz Alexandre de Miller de La Cerda and Spanish Prince Sixtus Henry of Bourbon-Parma who was connected to the FN through his vice-presidency of the NGO "SOS Iraq's Children" presided by Jany Le Pen, wife of Jean-Marie Le Pen.⁷⁹³ Yet in the same manner as Chanclu's CFR, the AAFER failed to develop into an efficient organisation, but – compared to the failure of the CFR – the main reason for this was different. The AAFER's proximity to the FN implied that it would be the established political party FN, rather than a small group such as the AAFER, that would develop and expand the pro-Moscow activities of the politicians affiliated with the FN.

Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg suggest that it was the AAFER's Emmanuel Leroy, a former member of Alain de Benoist's GRECE and one of Dugin's French contacts, who contributed to the definite pro-Kremlin turn of the FN in 2010–2011.⁷⁹⁴ French journalist Gaïdz Minassian notes that Leroy, a member of the FN and

⁷⁹¹ Olivier Faye, Abel Mestre, Caroline Monnot, "Alain Soral et son association font les yeux doux à Poutine", *Droite(s) extrême(s)*, 26 November (2009), <http://droites-extremes.blog.lemonde.fr/2009/11/26/alain-soral-et-son-association-font-les-yeux-doux-a-poutine/>.

⁷⁹² André Chanclu, "Pourquoi Novopole?", *Novopole*, 20 January (2013), <https://web.archive.org/web/20130222040744/http://novopole.org/?p=18>.

⁷⁹³ Huguette Pérol, *Secrets de princes: un capétien au coeur de la France: Sixte-Henri de Bourbon-Parma* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 2009), p. 162.

⁷⁹⁴ Jean-Yves Camus, Nicolas Lebourg, *Les Droites extrêmes en Europe* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2015), p. 268. See more on Leroy in Pierre Vaux, "Marine Le Pen's Closest Advisor Comes out

advisor to Le Pen, “tried – without success – to establish high-level contacts between Le Pen and the Russian leadership, through his Russian wife [who was] close to the IDC and the Russian Embassy in Paris”.⁷⁹⁵

The Institute of Democracy and Cooperation (IDC) was created in 2008 with two headquarters – in New York and Paris – to promote the Kremlin’s perspective on a number of issues: “the relationship between state sovereignty and human rights”, “East-West relations and the place of Russia in Europe”, “the role of non-governmental organisations in political life”, “the interpretation of human rights and the way they are applied in different countries”, “the way in which historical memory is used in contemporary politics”.⁷⁹⁶ Russian academic Andrey Makarychev argued that the foundation of the IDC could be “interpreted as a direct response to the activities of European and American foundations and think tanks in Russia and, simultaneously, as an alternative to the Western interpretations of normativity in world politics”.⁷⁹⁷ Indeed, the launch of the IDC project owes to Putin’s comments that he made in Portugal in autumn 2007 when he spoke about the idea of establishing an institute that would “address the issues of electoral monitoring, situation with national minorities and migrants, freedom of speech”. As Putin argued, “the EU helps developing, through grants, Western institutions of this kind in Europe. I think it is time for Russia to do the same in the EU”.⁷⁹⁸

Natalya Narochnitskaya, a former Russian MP nominated by the Russian far-right “Motherland” party,⁷⁹⁹ became a director of the Paris chapter of the IDC, and was joined, as director of studies, by John Laughland, a British Eurosceptic journalist who had been described as a “right-wing anti-state libertarian and isolationist” and a “PR man to

of the Shadows in Donetsk”, *The Daily Beast*, 14 May (2015), <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/05/14/marine-le-pen-s-closest-advisor-comes-out-of-the-shadows-in-donetsk.html>.

⁷⁹⁵ Gaïdz Minassian, “Les réseaux français de Poutine: une intelligentsia hétéroclite”, *Le Monde*, 18 November (2014), http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/11/18/les-reseaux-francais-de-poutine-une-intelligentsia-heteroclite_4525583_3210.html. See also Marine Turchi, “Les réseaux russes de Marine Le Pen”, *Mediapart*, 19 February (2014), <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/190214/les-reseaux-russes-de-marine-le-pen>.

⁷⁹⁶ “The Institute of Democracy and Cooperation”, *Institute of Democracy and Cooperation*, <http://www.idc-europe.org/en/The-Institute-of-Democracy-and-Cooperation>.

⁷⁹⁷ Andrey S. Makarychev, “In Quest of Political Subjectivity: Russia’s ‘Normative Offensive’ and the Triple Politicisation of Norms”, in *What Prospects for Normative Foreign Policy in a Multipolar World?* European Security Forum Working Paper No. 29 (2008), pp. 12-17 (12).

⁷⁹⁸ Ekaterina Grigor'yeva, “Rossiya profinansiruet evropeyskuyu demokratiyu”, *Izvestiya*, No. 198, 29 October (2007), p. 2; Aleksandr Koptev, “Vy eshche ne lyubite Rossiyu? Togda – idyom k vam...”, *Argumenty i fakty*, No. 6, 6 February (2008), p. 4.

⁷⁹⁹ On Narochnitskaya and her ideology see Jardar Nuland Østbø, “Excluding the West: Natalia Narochnitskaia’s Romantic-Realistic Image of Europe”, in Helge Vidar Holm, Sissel Tone Ågot Lægred and Torgeir Skorgen (ed.), *The Borders of Europe: Hegemony, Aesthetics and Border Poetics* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2012), pp. 92-105.

Europe's nastiest regimes".⁸⁰⁰ While the IDC is also intended to promote Moscow's interests in the West, it is still different from Rossotrudnichestvo or the FRM. On the one hand, unlike these two, the IDC is not *officially* funded by the Russian state – in fact, the sources of the IDC's funding are unclear. On the other hand, the IDC has always been much more ideological than Rossotrudnichestvo or the FRM, and this resulted in a particular choice of Western organisations and individuals that the IDC cooperated over the years, ranging from Eurosceptic national-conservatives through right-wing populists to the far right – all both anti-American and sympathetic towards Russia.

There were also other figures close to the FN who, at the same time, have had relations with Russia: Frédéric Chatillon and Xavier Moreau. Chatillon, the former leader of the extreme right GUD, supporter of Assad's regime in Syria and the Lebanon-based Islamist Hezbollah movement,⁸⁰¹ often travelled to Russia on business and was one of the unofficial advisors to Marine Le Pen.⁸⁰² Former paratrooper officer Moreau, who holds dual French-Russian citizenship, owns the Moscow-based Sokol Holding that employs, as its website claims, former members of French Army elite troops and Russian security services,⁸⁰³ as well as providing consultancy and security to French companies.⁸⁰⁴ Moreau, for some time, regularly contributed to the Internet-based Realpolitik.TV channel founded by Aymeric Chauprade,⁸⁰⁵ while a prominent member of the FN Bruno Gollnisch described the relations between Moreau and the FN as "friendly". Moreover, Gollnisch seemed to acknowledge, without going into a detail, that Moreau had contributed to establishing the relations between the FN and Russian actors: "He's a businessman, an influential boy. He has friendships there [in Russia] and especially with Mr. Putin. I think he is still one of our contacts in Russia. He served as an intermediary in some circumstances".⁸⁰⁶

Marlène Laruelle notes that Chauprade, a prominent contemporary member of the FN who officially advised Marine Le Pen on international relations from autumn 2013 until spring 2015, worked with Moreau, as well as Sorlin and Leroy of the AAFER.⁸⁰⁷ Cécile Vaissié puts Chauprade into special focus arguing that it was him, rather than

⁸⁰⁰ David Aaronovitch, "PR Man to Europe's Nastiest Regimes", *The Guardian*, 30 November (2004), <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/nov/30/pressandpublishing.marketingandpr>.

⁸⁰¹ Caroline Monnot, Abel Mestre, "Le 'nouveau FN' de Marine Le Pen", *Le Monde*, 6 September (2011), http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/article/2011/09/06/le-nouveau-fn-de-marine-le-pen_1568382_1471069.html.

⁸⁰² Turchi, "Les réseaux russes de Marine Le Pen".

⁸⁰³ "Organization", *Sokol Group*, <http://www.sokol-corp.com/organization>.

⁸⁰⁴ See "Kamerton drugogo zvuchaniya", *Ekonomicheskie strategii*, No. 6 (2010), pp. 40-43.

⁸⁰⁵ Turchi, "Les réseaux russes de Marine Le Pen"; Minassian, "Les réseaux français de Poutine".

⁸⁰⁶ Turchi, "Les réseaux russes de Marine Le Pen".

⁸⁰⁷ Marlène Laruelle, "Russia's Radical Right and Its Western European Connections: Ideological Borrowings and Personal Interactions", in Mats Deland, Michael Minkenberg (eds), *In the Tracks of Breivik: Far Right Networks in Northern and Eastern Europe* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014), pp. 87-104 (102).

Chatillon, Sorlin or Leroy, who contributed most to the explicitly pro-Putin turn of the FN.⁸⁰⁸ It needs to be stressed, however, that – as Chapter 2 demonstrated – the FN was characterised by pro-Moscow positions in its foreign policy orientations since the 1990s. Moreover, already during the Cold War and immediately after the demise of the Soviet Union, a significant element of the French or Francophone far right revealed pro-Soviet/pro-Russian inclinations. Those were particularly associated with Jean Thiriart and the French/Belgian New Right, while the Thiriartian myth of a Europe “from Dublin to Vladivostok” – in its different variations – has become ingrained in many far-right discourses even outside the Francophone world.

Nevertheless, the pro-Moscow turn of the FN under Marine Le Pen in 2010-2011 gained prominence. Already in March 2010, when President Medvedev visited France, Le Pen “saluted to the arrival of Dmitry Medvedev to Paris and to Russia as a great nation [and] a friend of France”.⁸⁰⁹ This statement was hardly noticed then, and only after she became the FN’s president in January 2011, her consistent pro-Moscow position became conspicuous. At a press conference in April 2011, she said that she would favour partnership with Russia for “obvious civilisational [and] geostrategic reasons” and because of “interests in [France’s] energy independence”.⁸¹⁰ In an interview for *RT* the same month, she declared that she believed that France “should turn to Russia for economic and energy partnerships” and that she thought “very objectively” that “this ‘Cold War’ imposed by America on relations with Russia [was] a huge political error”.⁸¹¹

At the same time, Le Pen and her party started thinking of a trip to Russia with the objective of meeting “people in power”, as Ludovic de Danne, Le Pen’s advisor on European affairs, formulated. One senior official of the FN said that there were “proposals to meet, if not Putin, then his entourage or [representatives of] his party”, i.e. “United Russia”, although a meeting with Putin would be “much better”.⁸¹²

However, Le Pen did not travel to Russia either in 2011 or in 2012. In his book about Marine Le Pen, an established Russian journalist Vladimir Bol’shakov argued that the FN was planning her trip to Moscow in the beginning of 2012, but Le Pen cancelled the trip, because – as he suggested – the level of protocol was lower than she expected.⁸¹³ This can be explained by a reference to the electoral processes in Russia and France. On the one hand, the Russian political elites were busy throughout 2011

⁸⁰⁸ Cécile Vaissié, *Les réseaux du Kremlin en France* (Paris: Les Petits Matins, 2016), pp. 186-187.

⁸⁰⁹ Quoted in Faye, Mestre, Monnot, “L’extrême droite en mode Raspoutine”.

⁸¹⁰ Quoted in “Marine Le Pen veut aller en Russie”, *Le Figaro*, 2 May (2011), <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2011/05/02/97001-20110502FILWWW00503-marine-le-pen-veut-aller-en-russie.php>.

⁸¹¹ “I Want to Free France from EU Straitjacket – Far-right Party Leader”, *RT*, 27 April (2011), <https://www.rt.com/news/france-eu-immigrants-pen/>.

⁸¹² Quoted in “Marine Le Pen veut aller en Russie”.

⁸¹³ Vladimir Bol’shakov, *Zachem Rossii Marin Le Pen* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2012), p. 144.

preparing for the parliamentary elections in December 2011 and presidential elections in March 2012. On the other hand, France had presidential elections in late spring 2012, and the Russian political elites did not want to sour relations with the two most popular presidential candidates, i.e. François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, by doing another presidential candidate, namely Le Pen, high honour on the eve of the French presidential elections.

The lack of progress in the talks about Le Pen's visit to Russia in 2011 did not discourage the FN from pushing its pro-Russian foreign policy agenda. In an interview for a Russian newspaper, Le Pen declared that she, to a certain degree, admired Putin: "I think that Putin has a character and a vision of the future required for bringing to Russia the prosperity it deserves. And active cooperation between Russia and European countries can speed up this process".⁸¹⁴ In November 2011, Le Pen published her presidential programme, and, out of 11 foreign policy positions, Russia was mentioned in five of them; the first two positions offering the ultimate expression of the pan-European far-right narrative on Russia:

- (1) The advent of a Europe of Nations, a withdrawal from NATO integrated command and offering Russia a strategic alliance based on a close military and energy partnership, rejection of military interference, and support for international law.
- (2) A joint proposal to form a trilateral alliance Paris-Berlin-Moscow.⁸¹⁵

After he easily won the presidential election in March 2012, Putin visited France and held talks with President Hollande. This meeting revealed deep disagreement between French and Russian presidents over the situation in Syria. The French investigative journalist Vincent Jauvert identifies Hollande's criticism of Russian support for Assad as a turning point in the attitudes of Russia's political elites towards those in France:

After he just settled at the Élysée, François Hollande strongly criticised the Kremlin's position on Syria; ministerial visits have become seldom, the Franco-Russian dialogue has dried up. Therefore, the Kremlin needed a new footing in Paris. [Russia's] Ambassador Aleksandr Orlov and his adviser on French political parties, Leonid Kadyshev, proposed trying Marine Le Pen and her movement. The Kremlin gave its blessing!⁸¹⁶

⁸¹⁴ Elena Chernenko, "Frantsiya vvydet iz NATO", *Kommersant. Daily*, No. 192, 13 October (2011), p. 7.

⁸¹⁵ "Discours de Marine Le Pen prononcé le samedi 19 novembre 2011 à Paris à l'occasion de la présentation de son Projet Présidentiel", *Front National*, 19 November (2011), <http://www.frontnational.com/videos/presentation-du-projet-presidentiel-de-marine-le-pen/>.

⁸¹⁶ Jauvert, "Poutine et le FN".

It was the time when Orlov helped French far-right activist Gilles Arnaud to establish the Internet-based ProRussia.TV and secure Russian funding for the project. Simultaneously, Ambassador Orlov and minister-counsellor Kadyshev started, according to Jauvert, meeting regularly and discreetly with the leaders of the FN at the Russian Embassy in Paris and the Russian diplomatic residence.⁸¹⁷

The first major breakthrough in the FN's attempts to approach "people in power" in Russia took place in December 2012 when Marine Le Pen's niece Marion Maréchal-Le Pen went to Moscow and took part in the First International Parliamentary Forum "Contemporary Parliamentarianism and the Future of Democracy" held at the initiative of the State Duma and presided by Sergey Naryshkin.⁸¹⁸ The latter is a representative of the *siloviki* group within the Russian political elite. A graduate of the Higher School of the KGB, he headed the Presidential Administration in 2008-2011 (under Medvedev's presidency) and, since December 2011 until October 2016, was Chairman of the State Duma. Opening the forum, Naryshkin personally greeted Maréchal-Le Pen, although she was not supposed to deliver an address at the forum:

This forum hosts representatives of 23 countries of the world; they have very different political views and they are of different age, including the youngest member of the National Assembly of France Marion Maréchal-Le Pen who celebrates her birthday today. Allow me, on behalf of all the participants of the forum, to wish Madame Maréchal-Le Pen a happy birthday and every success and prosperity.⁸¹⁹

Upon her return to France, Maréchal-Le Pen gave an interview to ProRussia.TV in which she said: "Russia seeks a certain number of partners; they may have set their sights – as I hope anyway – on the Front National".⁸²⁰ She also suggested that meetings between the FN's representatives and Russian officials would continue.

On 13 June 2013, a delegation led by the AAFER's Sorlin and consisting of Chauprade, the president of the Catholic Movement of Families (Mouvement Catholique des Familles) François Legrier, the president of the association "Catholics in Campaign" (Catholiques en Campagne) Hugues Revel, and an activist of the "pro-life" Life Alliance

⁸¹⁷ Ibid.

⁸¹⁸ See Chapter 7 for more details.

⁸¹⁹ Sergey Naryshkin (ed.), *Sovremenny parlamentarizm i budushchee demokratii. Materialy pervogo Mezhdunarodnogo parlamentskogo foruma* (Moscow: Izdanie Gosudarstvennoy Dumy, 2013), p. 13.

⁸²⁰ Quoted in Marine Turchi, "Au Front national, le lobbying pro-russe s'accélère", *Mediapart*, 18 December (2014), <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/181214/au-front-national-le-lobbying-pro-russe-saccelerer>. Maréchal-Le Pen's interview for ProRussia.TV was also aired by the French service of the Voice of Russia as part of the structural cooperation between the two media companies, see "Journal hebdomadaire de La Voix de la Russie – 4 mars 2013", *La Voix de la Russie*, 4 March (2013), <https://fr.sputniknews.com/actualite/201303041022561808-journal-hebdomadaire-de-voix-de-la-russie-4-mars-2013/>. The video, however, is no longer available online, as it was hosted by the now terminated ProRussia.TV.

(Alliance Vita) Odile Téqui took part in the roundtable “Traditional Values – the Future of European Nations” in Moscow.⁸²¹ The roundtable was organised by Malofeev’s Saint Basil the Great Charitable Foundation under the auspices of the State Duma Committee on Women, Family and Youth Issues, and was essentially focused on the demonization of gay marriages seen as an existential threat to the “Christian civilisation”. The roundtable also featured managing director of the Saint Basil the Great Charitable Foundation Zurab Chavchavadze, as well as a number of Russian politicians, in particular, deputy head of the Central Office of the State Duma Yuriy Shuvalov and chair of the State Duma Committee on Women, Family and Youth Issues Yelena Mizulina. One of the results of the roundtable was a resolution signed by Mizulina and Aleksey Pushkov recommending the State Duma to amend the laws on adoption of orphan children in such a way that would ban adoption of orphans by same-sex foreign couples from those countries that recognised their union as marriage, as well as by single people or unmarried couples from those countries. The French far-right/ultraconservative delegation was invited to this roundtable to present “European support” for the amendments.

Also in June 2013, Marine Le Pen – accompanied by her partner and the FN’s vice president Louis Aliot and Ludovic de Danne – went to Moscow. During their visit, the delegation met with Sergey Naryshkin, Aleksey Pushkov, Dmitry Rogozin and Aleksey Zhuravlyov, an MP from the “United Russia” parliamentary group and the leader of “Motherland”, and some other politicians. During his meeting with Le Pen, Naryshkin stated:

You are well known in Russia and you are a respected political figure. [...] We see France as one of the key strategic partners of Russia in Europe and worldwide. We follow the decisions taken by the new [French] government, which are often taken in different ways by the society. We follow the developments with interest and we draw conclusions.⁸²²

Naryshkin’s statement could be interpreted as an acknowledgment of what Maréchal-Le Pen suggested after her own meeting with Naryshkin – that Moscow was looking for political partners in France and considered the FN as its potential ally. According to the reports, during the closed meeting of Le Pen and Naryshkin, they

⁸²¹ “Evropa zhdjot ot Rossii konsolidatsii zdrazykh sil i organizatsii soprotivleniya sodomizatsii mira”, *Sem’ya, lyubov’, otechestvo*, 13 June (2013), <https://web.archive.org/web/20150515024402/http://www.semlot.ru/regions/regions-news/301-evropa-zhdjot-ot-rossii-konsolidatsii-zdrazykh-sil-i-organizatsii-soprotivleniya-sodomizatsii-mira>.

⁸²² Quoted in Emmanuel Grynszpan, “Moscou déroule le tapis rouge devant Marine Le Pen”, *Le Figaro*, 21 June (2013), <http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/2013/06/20/01002-20130620ARTFIG00642-moscou-deroule-le-tapis-rouge-devant-marine-le-pen.php>.

discussed same-sex marriages and the Syrian issue;⁸²³ Le Pen insisted that the FN was the only political party in France that opposed foreign intervention in Syria. At that time, this position coincided with Moscow's position.⁸²⁴ After the meeting with Naryshkin, Le Pen declared:

I think we have common strategic interests, I think we also have common values, that we are European countries. [...] I have the feeling that the European Union is leading a Cold War against Russia. Russia is presented with a demonised face [...] a sort of dictatorship, a country totally closed. That is not, objectively, the reality. I feel more in tune with this model of economic patriotism than with the model of the European Union.⁸²⁵

The exchange of political niceties between Naryshkin and Le Pen, as well as Le Pen's Moscow meetings in June 2013 in general, laid the foundations of closer relations between the NF and Russian actors. In October 2013, Chauprade was invited to participate in the meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, and, from the second half of 2013, he became a regular commentator for the Russian media, which was also determined by the start of pro-European protests in Ukraine in late autumn 2013 and Russia's increased need for European support of its opposition to Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU.

From the beginning of 2014, two major processes connected to the financial relations between the FN and Russian officials – reported by French investigative journalists from *Mediapart* and, in particular, Marine Turchi – were running in the background of official meetings and pro-Moscow activities of the FN. First, Chauprade introduced Jean-Marie Le Pen to Malofeev in order to help the FN's founder get money for a political funding association Cotelec that was used to lend funds for electoral campaigns of FN members.⁸²⁶ In April 2014, Cotelec received €2 million from Vernonsia Holdings Ltd., a Cyprus-registered offshoot of the Investment Company of Vnesheconombank (or VEB Capital) that, in its turn, is a 100% subsidiary company of the Russian state corporation "Bank of Development and Foreign Economic Affairs" (or Vnesheconombank). At that time, General Director of VEB Capital was Yuriy Kudimov.

⁸²³ Ibid.; Isabelle Weber, "Gros succès pour la visite en Russie de Marine Le Pen", *Nations Presse*, 26 June (2013), <http://www.nationspresse.info/geopolitique/gros-succes-pour-la-visite-en-russie-de-marine-le-pen>.

⁸²⁴ Russia started its military intervention in the Syrian Civil War only in September 2015.

⁸²⁵ Quoted in "A Moscou, Marine Le Pen rend hommage à une Russie 'diabolisée'", *Libération*, 19 June (2013), http://www.liberation.fr/france/2013/06/19/a-moscou-marine-le-pen-rend-hommage-a-une-russie-diabolisee_912158; Marine Turchi, "Le Front national décroche les millions russes", *Mediapart*, 22 November (2014), <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/221114/le-front-national-decroche-les-millions-russes>.

⁸²⁶ Fabrice Arfi, Karl Laske, Marine Turchi, "La Russie au secours du FN: deux millions d'euros", *Mediapart*, 29 November (2014), <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/291114/la-russie-au-secours-du-fn-deux-millions-d-euros-aussi-pour-jean-marie-le-pen>.

Malofeev and Kudimov have known each other since at least 2010 when they both served on the Board of Directors of Rostelecom, so Malofeev's help in securing a loan from Vernonsia Holdings Ltd. for Cotelec seems consistent. According to Jean-Marie Le Pen, Chaurade himself borrowed €400,000 from Cotelec to fund his electoral campaign for the 2014 elections to the European Parliament, and *Mediapart* suggested that he received this loan "for the promise of Russian money to help fund Jean-Marie Le Pen's micro-party", i.e. Cotelec.⁸²⁷

Second, *Mediapart's* Marine Turchi presumes that Marine Le Pen made a secret trip to Moscow in February 2014 and met with Putin and Aleksandr Babakov.⁸²⁸ In 2006, the latter was briefly the leader of "Motherland" following Rogozin's resignation from the leadership of the party, but eventually joined "United Russia" and was elected to the State Duma in 2011. In June 2012, Putin appointed Babakov Special presidential representative for cooperation with organisations representing Russians living abroad. Babakov is also indirectly affiliated to Rossotrudnichestvo that, in particular, engages with the Russians living abroad. Moreover, both Babakov and Rogozin share a connection to Russia's defence industry: Rogozin is the top official responsible for the Russian military-industrial complex, while Babakov is the head of the State Duma commission in charge of the legal groundwork for the development of organisations of the military-industrial complex. According to Turchi, Babakov was essential in Le Pen's negotiations with the Russian officials about a €9 million loan to the FN that the party obtained from the First Czech-Russian Bank (FCRB) in September 2014.

More than 90% of the charter capital of the FCRB belongs to Stroytransgaz, a Russian engineering construction company in the field of oil and gas,⁸²⁹ while the majority of the shares of Stroytransgaz is owned by companies and holdings that belong to Gennadiy Timchenko,⁸³⁰ a major Russian businessman from Putin's inner circle.⁸³¹ It seems – and the assumption that Le Pen met with Putin personally reinforces this

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ Turchi, "Le Front national décroche les millions russes". See also Marine Turchi, Mathias Destal, "Le Pen-Putin Friendship Goes back a Long Way", *EUObserver*, 22 April (2017), <https://euobserver.com/elections/137629>.

⁸²⁹ Svetlana Petrova, "'Stroytransgaz' zanyalsya bankovskim biznesom", *Vedomosti*, 14 July (2003), <http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2003/07/14/strojtransgaz-zanyalsya-bankovskim-biznesom>.

⁸³⁰ Anastasiya Agamalova, "Holding Timchenko uvelichil dolyu v 'Stroytransgaze' do 94.55%", *Vedomosti*, 13 September (2013), <http://www.vedomosti.ru/business/articles/2013/09/13/holding-timchenko-uvelichil-dolyu-v-strojtransgaze-do-9455>.

⁸³¹ Christopher M. Matthews, Andrew Grossman, "U.S. Money-Laundering Probe Touches Putin's Inner Circle", *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 November (2014), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-money-laundering-probe-touches-putins-inner-circle-1415234261>. Stroytransgaz was expected to be involved in constructing the South Stream pipeline, but withdrew from the project before it was suspended because the US imposed sanctions on Timchenko and several of his companies, including Stroytransgaz, see "Announcement of Additional Treasury Sanctions on Russian Government Officials and Entities", *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, 28 April (2014), <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl2369.aspx>.

suggestion – that Putin was directly involved in making the final decision to provide a loan to the FN.

Another person identified by Turchi as one who had contributed to the negotiations about the Russian loan is the RBM's Jean-Luc Schaffhauser. In 1991, Schaffhauser was involved in a project aiming at reconciliation between the Vatican and the Russian Orthodox Church, and built contacts related to the Russian military-industrial complex in the mid-1990s. According to his own words, Schaffhauser became acquainted with Babakov in the mid-2000s through the Orthodox Church connections.⁸³² Moreover, Schaffhauser is the president of the European Academy, a Paris-based organisation that aims at fostering relations between European states and Russia. According to *Mediapart*, in 2014-2015, the European Academy received €250 thousand from two companies managed by Babakov's business partners.⁸³³ In June 2014, the European Academy co-opted Aleksandr Vorobyov and Mikhail Plisyuk, Babakov's employees and directors of the Moscow-based Institute of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, who started sending Schaffhauser recommendations for Russia- and Ukraine-related statements.⁸³⁴ It was also Plisyuk who arranged Schaffhauser's trip to the DNR to observe illegitimate "parliamentary elections".

The FN's economic strategist Bernard Monot said that Schaffhauser was essential in securing the deal with the Russian actors, and Schaffhauser himself confirmed that he had been paid €140,000 for his mediation.⁸³⁵ As the FN's treasurer Wallerand de Saint-Just explained, the party had turned to many French and European banks for a loan. Allegedly they all refused, so the FN asked for a loan from a Russian bank.⁸³⁶

The Russian-Ukrainian war deepened cooperation between various Russian actors and the FN. In March 2014, Chauprade travelled to Russia-occupied Crimea to observe the illegal "referendum". Marine Le Pen paid another visit to Moscow in April that year. As the EU imposed sanctions on several prominent Russian officials for the annexation of Crimea, she declared, during a meeting with Naryshkin, that she was "surprised a Cold War on Russia [had] been declared in the European Union"⁸³⁷ and that the sanctions were counterproductive. She also backed Russia's idea to federalise

⁸³² Agathe Duparc, Karl Laske, Marine Turchi, "Argent du FN: les hommes de la filière russe", *Mediapart*, 8 December (2014), <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/081214/argent-du-fn-les-hommes-de-la-filiere-russe>.

⁸³³ Agathe Duparc, "Le Front national a traité avec des banques mafieuses russes", *Mediapart*, 2 May (2017), <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/international/020517/le-front-national-traite-avec-des-banques-mafieuses-russes>.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁵ Duparc, Laske, Turchi, "Argent du FN".

⁸³⁶ Turchi, "Le Front national décroche les millions russes".

⁸³⁷ Alessandra Prentice, "France's Le Pen, in Moscow, Blames EU for New 'Cold War'", *Reuters*, 12 April (2014), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-le-pen-russia-idUSBREA3B09I20140412>.

Ukraine. Naryshkin thanked her for her “balanced position on the developments in Ukraine”.⁸³⁸

The “Ukrainian question” was the focus of the speech of Naryshkin’s deputy Andrey Isayev at the the FN’s 15th Congress that took place on 29-30 November 2014. Accompanied to the congress by Andrey Klimov, Isayev insisted that “the developments in Ukraine were instrumentalised to put pressure on Russia” and that the US forced the EU to introduce anti-Russian sanctions.⁸³⁹ The FN’s congress also hosted the FPÖ’s Heinz-Christian Strache, LN’s Matteo Salvini, PVV’s Geert Wilders, and Krasimir Karakachanov, the leader of the far-right Bulgarian National Movement (Balgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie).⁸⁴⁰ Isayev’s participation in the FN’s congress seemed to have strengthened Le Pen’s conviction that Russian ruling elites were willing to cooperate with the FN. After the congress, she sent a letter to Isayev, republished on the website of “Yedinaya Rossiya”, that, in particular, read: “Your participation as a political ally and friend in our struggle for the European of Nations and Freedoms has done us a high honour. [...] The strengthening of the voice of people in Europe portends a great future for our cooperation”.⁸⁴¹

At the end of May 2014, as revealed by Austrian investigative journalist Bernhard Odehnal, Malofeev convened – with the logistical help from Nathalie Holzmüller – a secret meeting in Vienna.⁸⁴² Among the participants of the meeting, several people were identified by Odehnal’s sources: the FN’s Marion Maréchal-Le Pen and Aymeric Chauprade; Aleksandr Dugin and nationalist painter Ilya Glazunov; Heinz-Christian Strache, Johann Gudenus and Johann Herzog from the FPÖ; Bulgarian far-right Attack’s leader Volen Siderov; Prince Sixtus Henry of Bourbon-Parma; and Serge de Pahlen, president of the Swiss financial company Edifin Services. The official topic was the “Congress of Vienna”, referring to a series of meetings of representatives of European states and Russia that were held in 1814-1815 and eventually established the “Holy Alliance”. Despite the official theme, however, the participants of the far-right meeting discussed how to “save Europe from liberalism and the ‘satanic’ gay lobby”.⁸⁴³

⁸³⁸ Chinkova, “Marin Le Pen”, p. 2.

⁸³⁹ “Evrope navyazany sanktsii protiv Rossii – Isayev”, *Yedinaya Rossiya*, 30 November (2014), <http://er.ru/news/125366/>.

⁸⁴⁰ Alexej Hock, “Russlands rechtes Netzwerk. Die Einflussnahme Russlands auf rechte Strukturen in der EU”, *Politik in Gesellschaft*, July (2015), p. 34, <https://linksunten.indymedia.org/en/system/files/data/2015/07/1617805416.pdf>.

⁸⁴¹ “Marin Le Pen: U sotrudnichestva ‘Yedinoy Rossii’ i ‘Natsional’nogo fronta’ velikoe budushchee”, *Yedinaya Rossiya*, 5 December (2014), <https://er.ru/news/125726/>.

⁸⁴² Bernhard Odehnal, “Gipfeltreffen mit Putins fünfter Kolonne”, *Tages-Anzeiger*, 3 June (2014), <http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/ausland/europa/Gipfeltreffen-mit-Putins-fuenfter-Kolonne/story/30542701>.

⁸⁴³ Ibid.

To a certain extent, this secret meeting was a prelude to a major conference called “Large Family and Future of Humanity” that was held in Moscow on 10-11 September 2014. This conference was originally planned as an annual meeting of the anti-LGBT “pro-family” organisation World Congress of Families (WCF) represented in Russia by Malofeev’s associate Aleksey Komov. But the main office of the WCF located in the US decided to refashion the event because the US imposed sanctions on several Russian officials who would take part in the meeting and the WCF did not want to risk its reputation at home.⁸⁴⁴ Officially, the conference in Moscow was organised by the Centre of National Glory of Russia and St. Andrew the First-Called Foundation – both organisations controlled by Vladimir Yakunin who at that time was still Russian Railways CEO – with the support of Malofeev’s Saint Basil the Great Charitable Foundation and the Patriarch’s Commission on the Family Issues headed by Komov. This high-profile event hosted around 1500 people from 45 countries. Oleg Morozov, then chief of the Domestic Politics Department of the Presidential Administration, communicated Putin’s address to the participants of the conference.⁸⁴⁵ Chauprade had the privilege to take part in the plenary session of the conference sitting at one table with Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus Vladimir (Kirill) Gundyayev, Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar, Supreme Mufti of Russia Talgat Tajuddin,⁸⁴⁶ Yakunin, Malofeev, Morozov, Mizulina and some other important figures.

In his speech, Chauprade talked about the fight against those who “lobbied the interests of people and organisations promoting the interests of non-traditionally oriented citizens.” He claimed that there was “an ideological struggle, a geopolitical struggle, [...] a struggle of the values of the so-called liberal philosophy, the philosophy of materialism, but in fact of the force of the dictatorship of the matter, dictatorship of materialism against the ideology of spirit”.⁸⁴⁷

Also present at the conference were Fabrice Sorlin and Johann Gudenus. The latter criticised the Western sanctions against Russia, lambasted US politics, and attacked “trends towards gender equality” in Europe.⁸⁴⁸ According to the communications leaked by the Anonymous International hacktivist group,⁸⁴⁹ Yakunin’s St. Andrew the

⁸⁴⁴ Miranda Blue, “‘Cancelled’ World Congress of Families Kremlin Conference Begins Today, Possibly with Special Guest Star Brian Brown”, *Right Wing Watch*, 10 September (2014), <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/cancelled-world-congress-families-kremlin-conference-begins-today-possibly-special-guest-sta>.

⁸⁴⁵ *Mezhdunarodny forum “Mnogodetnaya sem’ya i budushchee chelovechestva”* (N.a.: n.a., 2015), p. 4.

⁸⁴⁶ Tajuddin is also a member of the High Council of the MED led by Dugin.

⁸⁴⁷ “Vystuplenie deputata Evropeyskogo Parlamenta Emerika Shoprada”, in *Mezhdunarodny forum “Mnogodetnaya sem’ya i budushchee chelovechestva”*, p. 34.

⁸⁴⁸ “Vystuplenie chlena venskogo parlamenta, Avstriyskoy partii svobody Yohana Gudenus”, in *Mezhdunarodny forum “Mnogodetnaya sem’ya i budushchee chelovechestva”*, pp. 114-115.

⁸⁴⁹ “Cherny Internatsional: Malofeev i Dugin”.

First-Called Foundation covered Chauprade's and Sorlin's travelling expenses, while Chauprade, Gudenus and Sorlin were invited by Malofeev's Saint Basil the Great Charitable Foundation to a gala dinner closing the conference. Other notable invitees to the gala dinner included the leaders of the WCF, Dugin, Komov, Zurab Chavchavadze, Igor Shchegolev, and Georgiy Shevkunov (Father Tikhon).

In autumn 2014, Schaffhauser travelled to Eastern Ukraine to observe the illegitimate "elections" held by the DNR on 2 November 2014. In May 2015, he also was one of the initiators of the conference "Donbass: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow" held in Donetsk, the "capital" of the DNR. Officially, the conference discussed "peace settlement in and development of Donbass".⁸⁵⁰ But it was essentially an attempt at demonising the liberal West supporting Ukraine, as well as legitimising the unrecognised "state" of the DNR through participation in the conference of various foreign politicians, activists and journalists. The conference hosted over 20 foreign participants representing different political forces ranging from the far left to the far right of the political spectrum.⁸⁵¹ Apart from Schaffhauser, the far right was represented by Manuel Ochsenreiter, editor of the German magazine *At First!*, and Markus Frohnmaier of the JAFD. Schaffhauser participated in the plenary session sitting together with the leaders of the DNR and Aleksey Zhuravlyov of "United Russia" and "Motherland".

The conference was also attended by Alain Fragny, a former member of the French far-right Identitarian Bloc (Bloc Identitaire) in Cannes, and Emmanuel Leroy of the AAFER and FN.⁸⁵² Following the tradition of the Le Pen family who founded the implicitly pro-Hussein NGO "SOS Iraq's Children" in 1995, Fragny and Leroy established, in September 2014, a "humanitarian association" Children of Ukraine Emergency (Urgence Enfants d'Ukraine), with Fragny as president and Leroy as vice-president. The main objective of the association was "to provide help and moral and material aid to Ukrainians affected by the conflicts, especially children in difficult circumstances".⁸⁵³ Introducing their association, Leroy revealed the ideological side of the initiative going beyond helping Ukrainian children, linking it to his understanding of geopolitics: "We clearly understand the reasons why NATO wants to increase pressure on Russia through destabilisation or taking control of former states of the Soviet Union such as Georgia and Ukraine, and even through the war in Syria".⁸⁵⁴ During their visit to Donetsk in May,

⁸⁵⁰ "International Forum 'Donetsk: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow' to Be Held in DPR", *TASS*, 11 May (2015), <http://tass.ru/en/world/794049>.

⁸⁵¹ "V Donetske sostoyalsya mezhdunarodny forum", *Pravdorub*, 11 May (2015), <http://pravdoryb.info/v-donetske-sostoyalsya-mezhdunarodnyy-forum.html>.

⁸⁵² Vaux, "Marine Le Pen's Closest Advisor".

⁸⁵³ "Annonce No. 80", *Annexe au Journal officiel de la République française. Lois et décrets*, No. 41 (2014), http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/publications/assoc/pdf/2014/0041/JOAFE_PDF_Unitaire_20140041_00080.pdf.

⁸⁵⁴ Laurent Brayard, "Emmanuel Leroy – 'Nous savons que chacun des obus qui tombent peut enlever la vie des enfants du Donbass'", *DONi International Press Center*, 23 December (2015),

representatives of Children of Ukraine Emergency supposedly brought €3,000 to buy clothing and toys to children in an accident hospital,⁸⁵⁵ and then decided to change the name of their association into Donbass Children Emergency (Urgence Enfants du Donbass), because the word “Ukraine” was allegedly associated in the DNR with “death, tortures, [and] abominations”.⁸⁵⁶ In December 2015, the representatives of Urgence Enfants du Donbass went to Donetsk again, and donated, according to their own report, €8,000 for the renovation of a children’s home, purchase of toys and the treatment of four children injured in the Russian-Ukrainian war.⁸⁵⁷ The second visit of Urgence Enfants du Donbass was reported in French and English by the Russian website Sputnik,⁸⁵⁸ but the international media ignored these activities.

There is no publicly available evidence that FN’s leadership or members attempted to develop potential business relations with the Russian representatives. However, the case of Philippe de Villiers seems to point in this direction. De Villiers is the French businessman and politician. He is the founder of the historical theme park “Puy du Fou” in France and was a presidential nominee of the conservative and Eurosceptic Movement for France (Mouvement pour la France) for the 2007 presidential election. Chaurade was an international advisor to de Villiers before the former joined the FN.⁸⁵⁹ In April 2014, de Villiers visited Russia-annexed Crimea and had talks with “Prime Minister” Sergey Aksyonov. On 14 August the same year, de Villiers met with Putin in Yalta. The next day the media reported that de Villiers, Aksyonov and Malofeev signed an agreement stating that de Villiers would build an historical theme park in Crimea by the year 2019 for 4 billion Russian roubles (around €83 million at that time).⁸⁶⁰ By the time of the writing, however, no further developments in this direction have been reported. Due to the sanctions imposed on Russia and Crimea, de Villiers may have

<https://dnipress.com/fr/posts/emmanuel-leroy-nous-savons-que-chacun-des-obus-qui-tombent-peut-enlever-la-vie-des-enfants-du-donbass/>.

⁸⁵⁵ “Conférence de presse de l’association ‘Urgence enfants du Dombass’ à Paris”, *Synthèse nationale*, 14 December (2015), <http://synthesenationale.hautetfort.com/archive/2015/12/14/conference-de-presse-de-l-association-urgence-enfants-du-dom-5730714.html>.

⁸⁵⁶ Brayard, “Emmanuel Leroy”.

⁸⁵⁷ “Conférence de presse de l’association ‘Urgence enfants du Dombass’ à Paris”.

⁸⁵⁸ See “Une délégation française vire des fonds pour traiter les enfants du Donbass”, *Sputnik*, 4 December (2015), <https://fr.sputniknews.com/international/201512041020059327-france-fonds-traitement-enfants-donetsk/>; “French Charity Visits Donbass, Transfers Money to Help Wounded Children”, *Sputnik*, 4 December (2015), <http://sputniknews.com/europe/20151204/1031272273/donbass-children.html>.

⁸⁵⁹ Karl Laske, Marine Turchi, “Le troisième prêt russe des Le Pen”, *Mediapart*, 11 December (2014), <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/111214/le-troisieme-pret-russe-des-le-pen>.

⁸⁶⁰ “Frantsuzy postroyat v Krymu park razvlecheniy, posvyashchenny russkoy istorii, za 4 mlrd rubley”, *Kryminform*, 15 August (2014), <http://www.c-inform.info/news/id/10744>; Blandine Le Cain, “Un Puy du Fou russe va ouvrir en Crimée”, *Le Figaro*, 16 August (2014), <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2014/08/15/01003-20140815ARTFIG00097-un-puy-du-fou-russe-va-ouvrir-en-crimée.php>.

problems doing business in the annexed Ukrainian republic. It may also be the case that the publicised plan to build a theme park in Crimea were a stunt aimed at showing that some successful Western businessmen recognised Crimea as “an entity of the Russian Federation”.

Despite the seemingly good relations between the FN and Putin’s regime, their “love affair” seemed to stumble in 2016. The first allusions to an emerging rift surfaced in February 2016 when the FN’s treasurer Wallerand de Saint-Just claimed that the party experienced problems with applying for loans from French banks to run the 2017 parliamentary and presidential campaign, and that the party had applied for a €27 million loan from an unnamed Russian bank.⁸⁶¹ The latter statement suggested that the deal with the FCRB was somehow thrown into question. In March 2016, Russian media reported that the workings of the FCRB had been limited by banking regulators already in January that year,⁸⁶² and, later, the state-controlled Central Bank of Russia withdrew a banking license from the FCRB and, eventually, declared it bankrupt.⁸⁶³ Also in March that year, Jean-Luc Schaffhauser was trying – with the help of Babakov and Latvian consultant Vilis Dambiņš – to find another Russian bank from which the FN could borrow money, and Dambiņš suggested the Moscow-based bank “Strategiya”,⁸⁶⁴ which was previously involved in the “Russian Laundromat” scheme.⁸⁶⁵ The FN’s executive bureau officially decided to borrow €3 million from “Strategiya” in June 2016 to finance electoral campaigns,⁸⁶⁶ but a month later the Central Bank of Russia revoked a banking license from “Strategiya”,⁸⁶⁷ and there is no evidence that the FN managed to obtain a loan from it. After the failure of the deal with “Strategiya”, the FN was trying to obtain the same €3 million loan from the Russian bank NKB, but its banking license was also revoked in December 2016.⁸⁶⁸

The FN’s financial problems seemed to have less to do with the FCRB or the other Russian banks as such as with the internal political dynamics in France and their

⁸⁶¹ Charles Bremner, “Le Pen’s Party Asks Russia for €27m Loan”, *The Times*, 19 February (2016), <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article4693936.ece>.

⁸⁶² Darya Borysyak, Tatyana Voronova, “Rossiyskie problemy cheshskogo banka”, *Vedomosti*, No. 43, 14 March (2016), p. 14.

⁸⁶³ “Rossiyskiy bank-kreditor Marin Le Pen priznan bakrotom”, *Republic*, 20 September (2016), <https://republic.ru/posts/73717>.

⁸⁶⁴ Sanita Jemberga, “Latvian Financier Said to Act as a Go-between to Get Russian Loan for Le Pen”, *Re:Baltica*, 2 May (2017), <http://en.rebaltica.lv/2017/05/latvian-financier-said-to-act-as-a-go-between-to-get-russian-loan-for-le-pen/>. See also Duparc, “Le Front national a traité avec des banques mafieuses russes”.

⁸⁶⁵ “PAO ‘Aktzionerny Komercheskiy Bank “Strategiya””, *Banki.ru*, 29 February (2016), <http://www.banki.ru/banks/memory/bank/?id=9088422>.

⁸⁶⁶ Marine Le Pen, “Decision du Bureau Executif du Front National”, 15 June (2016), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7aNf14k01iZcm5YNmpXcm56M0E/view>.

⁸⁶⁷ “Bank of Russia Cancels Bank Strategia and ABB Licenses”, *Banki.ru*, 21 July (2016), <http://www.banki.ru/news/engnews/?id=9089141>.

⁸⁶⁸ “Bank of Russia Withdraws NCB License”, *Banki.ru*, 29 December (2016), <http://www.banki.ru/news/engnews/?id=9463868>.

interpretation by the Russian ruling elites. The year 2016 was the year when the French centre-right party Republicans (Les Républicains) held its primaries to select a candidate for the 2017 French presidential election. In these primaries, which took place in November 2016, François Fillon defeated Alain Juppé. Among many differences between these two candidates, Fillon was known for his Moscow-friendly positions, while Juppé was, on the contrary, quite sceptical about Russia's domestic and international activities.⁸⁶⁹

Various public opinion polls conducted in November-December 2016 showed that Fillon would have a slight advantage over Le Pen in the first round of the 2017 presidential election but would win by a landslide in the second round against Le Pen.⁸⁷⁰ Moscow seemed to consider Fillon and Le Pen as "pro-Russian" candidates, but since Fillon would – according to those public opinion polls – win, the Kremlin might have thought that continuous support for Le Pen in the run-up to the presidential elections could compromise apparently good relations with the elected president. Another possible indication that there was a certain rift between Moscow and the FN was that it was Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, rather than Marine Le Pen, who travelled to Moscow in November 2016, which might imply that, at that time, there had been no agreement between the FN and Russian officials on the visit of the presidential candidate Marine Le Pen to Russia.

The situation started to change in January-February 2017 with the dramatic decline of popularity of Fillon and the rise of the pro-EU and Russia-sceptic candidate Emmanuel Macron. Public opinion polls suggested that Macron and Le Pen would win the first round of the presidential election, hence Le Pen would be the only "Russia's candidate" in the second round. In the beginning of February, Russian state-controlled media outlets such as RT and Sputnik started publishing materials aimed at undermining the growing popularity of Macron. RT focused on Macron's highly-paid position at Rothschild & Cie Banque controlled by the Rothschild family,⁸⁷¹ thus playing the anti-globalist and anti-Semitic card.⁸⁷² Referring to Nicolas Dhuicq, a French MP representing The Republicans and a member of the board of the ADFR, Sputnik alleged that Macron was "an agent of

⁸⁶⁹ "A Republican Primary Upset Knocks Nicolas Sarkozy out of France's Presidential Race", *The Economist*, 20 November (2016), <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21710616-fran-ois-fillon-former-pm-takes-lead-over-favourite-alain-jupp-republican-primary>.

⁸⁷⁰ See, for example, "Présidentielle 2017: les rapports de force électoraux à cinq mois du scrutin", *IFOP*, 6 December (2016), http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/3576-1-study_file.pdf.

⁸⁷¹ See, for example, "'Il n'y a pas une culture française': Macron s'attire les foudres de la droite", *RT*, 6 February (2017), <https://francais.rt.com/france/33569-il-n-a-pas-culture-francaise-macron-attire-foudres-droite>; "Dupont-Aignan soupçonne Macron de conflits d'intérêts et veut qu'il clarifie 'ses financements'", *RT*, 11 February (2017), <https://francais.rt.com/france/33829-dupont-aignan-soupconne-macron-conflit-interets-clarifie-financements>.

⁸⁷² On the anti-Semitic myth of Jewish economic dominance related to the Rothschild banking dynasty see the chapter "The Economic Root" in William I. Brustein, *Roots of Hate: Anti-Semitism in Europe Before the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 177-264.

the big American banking system” and backed by a “very wealthy gay lobby”, as well as spreading rumours that Macron was secretly gay himself.⁸⁷³

Moscow’s aim might still be the reversion of Fillon’s decline, but since public opinion polls showed no hint at the recovery of Fillon’s popularity, the Kremlin seemed to have been compelled to provide political support for Le Pen. At the invitation of the State Duma foreign affairs committee, Le Pen travelled to Moscow and met, on 24 March 2017, with Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin and, later, with President Putin. During the meeting, Putin claimed that Russia did not “want to influence the events [i.e. the French electoral campaign] as they unfold[ed]”, but admitted that he saw the FN as a representative of a European political force that was “growing quickly”.⁸⁷⁴ In her turn, Le Pen asserted that she urged “the restoration of cultural, economic and strategic ties between Russia and France” and called for “a truly global strategy” in the fight against terrorism⁸⁷⁵ – a narrative promoted by official Moscow itself. FN’s officials, including Ludovic de Danne, denied that Le Pen discussed possibilities of obtaining Russian financial support during her visit to Moscow.⁸⁷⁶

6.5. Conclusion

Nine patterns have characterised the development of pro-Russian efforts of the far-right groups and political parties in Austria, Italy and France, which have increasingly started operating as pro-Kremlin front organisations in these countries.

First, the pro-Russian efforts in Italy and France drew upon the pre-existing pro-Russian sentiments within the far-right milieus of these countries. The Austrian case is different, because the FPÖ, which has largely monopolised the far-right political scene in Austria, was never characterised by these sentiments until its pro-Moscow turn in 2007-2008.

Second, pro-Russian activities in Italy and France were initially undertaken by marginal far-right groups that had limited or no political influence in their respective societies. This also applies to the Austrian case with one caveat: Austrian Technologies GmbH, which launched the initial pro-Russian actions, was a politically insignificant organisation too, but had strong links to the FPÖ. Barbara Kappel’s Austrian Technologies GmbH can be partially compared to the French Association France-

⁸⁷³ “Ex-French Economy Minister Macron Could Be ‘US Agent’ Lobbying Banks’ Interests”, *Sputnik*, 4 February (2017), <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/201702041050340451-macron-us-agent-dhuicq/>.

⁸⁷⁴ “Meeting with Marine Le Pen”, *President of Russia*, 24 March (2017), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54102>.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁶ Turchi, Destal, “Le Pen-Putin Friendship Goes back a Long Way”.

Europe-Russia Alliance run by Fabrice Sorlin and Emmanuel Leroy: Kappel, Sorlin and Leroy headed marginal organisations, but were connected to established political parties that picked up their pro-Moscow initiatives and brought them to a new, more significant level.

Third, the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 became a trigger for the launch of the first far-right pro-Russian activities in Austria and France. This war, interpreted from a Russian perspective as Georgia's aggression against South Ossetia, was in focus of Austrian Technologies GmbH and André Chanclu's France-Russia Collective. In contrast, the Russian-Georgian war garnered little attention in the Italian far-right circles.

Fourth, there are six types of structures and individuals – referred here as “operators” – who furthered, at various stages, cooperation between the far right in the above-mentioned countries, on the one side, and Russian actors linked to the Kremlin, on the other:

1. *“Russophile” activist operators.* Individuals such as Johann Gudenus, Max Ferrari, Fabrice Sorlin and Aymeric Chauprade played an important role in either initiating or consolidating the pro-Russian turns of their respective parties.

2. *Russian activist operators.* Individuals such as Aleksandr Dugin and Maksim Shevchenko contributed to the consolidation of the European far right's pro-Russian efforts. Their involvement seemed to be driven by their own political or ideological interests and resembled earlier attempts of Russian ultranationalists to build and develop relations with Western far-right activists and politicians – attempts that had earlier failed to produce any meaningful results.

3. *Russian soft power operators.* Rossotrudnichestvo, an institution aiming to influence public opinion outside Russia and cooperating with Russian-speaking diasporas, was an important actor that helped forge closer relations between Austrian and Italian far-right organisations, on the one hand, and Russian elites, on the other. The FRM seems to have played a certain role in forging such relations in the Italian case, but failed to advance them because Tiberio Graziani's Institute of Advanced Studies in Geopolitics and Auxiliary Sciences, with which it cooperated, was too marginal to be of interest to the Russian elites. Natalya Narochinskaya's Paris-based Institute of Democracy and Cooperation provided a useful Russian connection in the Italian and French cases, but only at the initial stages of the development of far-right pro-Russian efforts.

4. *Ultraconservative operators.* Aleksey Komov and, especially, Konstantin Malofeev were important in introducing Italian, French, and – to a lesser extent – Austrian far-right politicians into the Russian ultraconservative, religious and homophobic milieu that had access to Russian policy-makers through high-level contacts of Malofeev and Vladimir Yakunin.

5. *Diplomatic operators.* Russian embassies and consulates in the three countries helped formalise the relations between the far-right organisations and Russian officials.

6. *Russian power operators.* “United Russia” members encouraged pro-Russian efforts of the far-right organisations in the three countries. Especially important, in the Italian and French cases, were Chairman of the State Duma Sergey Naryshkin and the head of the Duma foreign affairs committee Aleksey Pushkov, who became key points of contact for the Northern League and National Front in their relations with the Russian ruling elites.

Fifth, pro-Russian efforts of the far-right organisations involved a repetition of narratives propagated by the Russian authorities: the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 is a fault of Georgia’s then President Mikheil Saakashvili; the South Stream pipeline is beneficial to the EU countries involved in the project; the Russian annexation of Crimea is legitimate; the territories in Eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian separatists and Russian troops are legitimate “People’s Republics”; Western sanctions against Russia in response to the annexation of Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine damage European economies; the US forced the EU to introduce anti-Russian sanctions; France should deliver Mistral helicopter carriers to Russia; homophobic laws adopted in Russia are justified.

Sixth, far-right politicians in Austria and France used the issue of helping children in Russia and occupied East Ukrainian territories as a means of creating a favourable impression on the Russian officials with whom they wanted to cooperate. This tradition in the far-right milieu goes back to the 1990s when the Le Pen family founded “SOS Iraq’s Children” to strengthen relations with Saddam Hussein.

Seventh, the FPÖ and LN have been interested in developing business relations with various Russian actors in addition to their political pro-Russian efforts. This may also be indirectly true in the French case: Philippe de Villiers, who wanted to build theme parks in Moscow and Russia-occupied Crimea, has cooperated with Aymeric Chauprade, but de Villiers is not officially affiliated with the FN.

Eighth, the pro-Russian efforts of the far right in the three cases ran concurrently with, or were complemented by, the participation of politicians such as Johannes Hübner, Johann Gudenus, Claudio D’Amico, Aymeric Chauprade, and Jean-Luc Schaffhauser in international observation of illegitimate “electoral procedures” in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

Ninth, only the French and Italian far-right leaders had the honour to talk to the most influential figure in Russia, although there is no conclusive evidence that Matteo Salvini’s 20-minute talk with Vladimir Putin in 2014 has resulted in any significant Russian support for the LN. At the same time, only the FPÖ and LN have been so far

successful in concluding agreements on collaboration with the “United Russia” party – a move that offers vast opportunities for further cooperation with official Moscow.

The final chapter looks at pro-Kremlin activities of European far-right politicians at conferences organised by Sergey Naryshkin, and during particular sessions of the European Parliament debating Russia-related resolutions.

Chapter 7

The Moscow-Strasbourg-Brussels Axis

7.1. Introduction

Since 2013, a number of Western far-right organisations, movements and individual activists have manifestly orientated themselves to Putin's Russia. This consistent support for Russian domestic and foreign policies suggests the existence of "a black international", i.e. transnational far-right movement controlled or, at least, coordinated by the Kremlin. As the previous chapters have shown, however, the Kremlin does not exert direct control of Russia's relations with Western far-right actors. Unlike the KGB's centralised collaboration with particular elements of the far-right scene in Western Europe during the Cold War, contemporary relations between various Western far-right and Russian actors have a decentralised character and are a result of a wide range of partly overlapping, partly convergent initiatives that have been coming from different sources, rather than only one, i.e. the Kremlin.

This situation reflects the structure of power relations in Putin's Russia in general. As Yevgeniy Minchenko, an expert on the Russian ruling elites, argues, "the rule in Russia is [not] a rigid vertical structure managed by one person. [...] The rule in Russia is a conglomerate of clans and groups that compete with each other for resources. And the role of Vladimir Putin in this system [is] the role of an arbiter and moderator".⁸⁷⁷

Rather than being a top-down demand from Putin, the cooperation and engagement with Western far-right politicians and activists is a bottom-up offer to the Kremlin made by those Russian actors who want to consolidate their own positions in a competitive market of many offers to Russia's highest quarters of power in the hope of receiving an advantage in the allocation of resources. This situation contrasts not only with the Soviet Union's KGB-coordinated collaboration with particular Western far-right organisations during the Cold War, but also with relations between Western and Russian ultranationalists, as the latter – by engaging in these relations – have pursued their own political goals without any prospect to be able to "sell" them to those in power, as discussed in Chapter 2. The only exception was Russian ultranationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy who in 2003 suggested that Moscow could "have [additional] leverage in world politics" through the European far-right parties that Zhirinovskiy cooperated with.⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷⁷ Yevgeniy Minchenko, "Bol'shoe pravitel'stvo Vladimira Putina i 'Politbyuro 2.0'", *Minchenko Consulting*, 21 August (2012), [http://stratagema.org/netcat_files/File/Политбюро_и_большое_правительство-2-2\(1\).pdf](http://stratagema.org/netcat_files/File/Политбюро_и_большое_правительство-2-2(1).pdf).

⁸⁷⁸ "V. Zhirinovskiy: Vsemirny Kongress patriotov".

At that time Putin's regime was not interested, while Zhirinovsky, in any circumstance, failed to build a pro-Russian far-right coalition.

Still, discussing contemporary relations between Western far right and Russian actors, who have presented this cooperation as being beneficial to the state, one can distinguish between two periods.

In 2005-2012, the peripheral, yet unambiguously pro-Kremlin, Russian actors increasingly cooperated with Western far-right politicians and activists in the areas of electoral monitoring and the media.

Starting from 2013, the prominence of these relations dramatically increased as signified by the rising status of the representatives of the Russian establishment engaged in these relations. This implied a growing perception of Western far-right organisations and individuals as political allies of Putin's Russia. This change was the result of two major, largely overlapping developments:

1. The ongoing process of the anti-Western and anti-American radicalisation of Putin's regime that started in 2004-2005 as a response to the "colour revolutions" in the post-Soviet space (seen by Moscow as a Western attempt to undermine Russia and its "sphere of influence"). This process was deepened by – among other factors – Moscow's negative reaction to the wave of protests, riots and regime changes in the Arab world in 2010-2012 (collectively known as the "Arab Spring"), as well as by the anti-Putin protests in Moscow and other Russian cities in 2011-2013.

2. The growing criticism of domestic and foreign policies of Putin's Russia coming from Western mainstream politicians and state officials was an additional factor. This criticism related, in particular, to (a) the failure of the Russian authorities to investigate the death of imprisoned corporate lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in a Moscow prison in 2009; (b) the Kremlin's crackdown on the anti-Putin protests and the polarising measures employed by the Kremlin to divide and undermine the opposition (most importantly, the criminal case against Pussy Riot, the "anti-LGBT propaganda law", the "foreign agents law"); and (c) Putin's unwavering support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad whose suppression of the anti-government protests resulted in the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011. As mainstream politicians and officials in Western countries gradually withdrew their political support for Putin's regime, the latter started looking for non-mainstream political allies in the West.

The meetings of the high-ranking members of the "United Russia" party, Russian diplomats and state officials such as Sergey Naryshkin or Aleksey Pushkov, as well as President Vladimir Putin himself, with the leaders of the European far-right parties implied a qualitatively new type of relations between Russian actors and Western far-right politicians. This turn was crowned by Putin's declaration, in April 2014, that the electoral victory of Viktor Orbán's Fidesz and electoral successes of Jobbik and the FN

pointed to a “rethinking of values in European countries” along the lines promoted by Moscow, i.e. “conservative values”.⁸⁷⁹

This new type of relations between the Russian actors and Western far-right politicians implied the deliberate integration of the activities of the latter into the broader framework of the Kremlin’s levers of influence in domestic and international environments. Apart from the pro-Russian efforts of the European far right discussed in the previous chapters, these activities also included “collective performances” of particular European ultranationalists in two important settings that this final chapter focuses on: (1) high profile discussion platforms initiated by the then Chairman of the Russian State Duma Sergey Naryshkin and held in Moscow in 2014-2015, and (2) certain sessions of the European Parliament debating Russia-related resolutions in the same period.

7.2. “Collective counselling” in Moscow

In 2009, Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who worked as a legal adviser for the London-based investment fund Hermitage Capital Management, died in custody awaiting trial on suspicion of aiding tax evasion. He had been arrested a year before his death after discovering and reporting to the authorities what he said was a state-sanctioned €130 million tax fraud by Russian tax officials, police officers, the judiciary, bankers and organised criminals. He was “said to have died of acute heart failure and toxic shock, caused by untreated pancreatitis”.⁸⁸⁰ Human rights monitors, including Russia’s Presidential Human Rights Council, announced that “Magnitsky had been beaten and intentionally deprived of medical help”.⁸⁸¹ The Russian authorities ordered an investigation, but it was eventually dropped. Nobody was punished for his death, and the Russian officials denied that Magnitsky had been beaten and/or tortured while in custody.

In June 2012, the US Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee adopted the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act that imposed visa bans and assets freezes on Russian officials suspected of involvement in Magnitsky’s detention, abuse and death.⁸⁸² In October the same year, the European Parliament adopted a resolution recommending

⁸⁷⁹ “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin”.

⁸⁸⁰ “Q&A: The Magnitsky Affair”, *BBC*, 11 July (2013), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20626960>.

⁸⁸¹ “Magnitsky Death Reminiscent of Worst Russian Abuses of the Past”, *Euronews*, 11 July (2013), <http://www.euronews.com/2013/07/11/magnitsky-death-reminiscent-of-worst-russian-abuses-of-the-past/>; “Q&A: The Magnitsky Affair”.

⁸⁸² “Text of the Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal and Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012”, *GovTrack*, 7 December (2012), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/112/hr6156/text/enr>.

to the European Council to impose and implement an EU-wide visa ban on, as well as freezing any financial assets of, Russian officials “responsible for the death of Sergei Magnitsky, for the subsequent judicial cover-up and for the ongoing and sustained harassment of his mother and widow”.⁸⁸³ These measures, as Nicholas Redman argued, “highlighted the vulnerability of Russia to pressure on its globalised elite. Putin responded in mid-2013 with initiatives to ‘nationalise’ all state officials: they were obliged to declare all of their family’s foreign property, which they could keep; and to bring all of their assets back to Russia”.⁸⁸⁴

Apparently also in response to the measures taken by the US and EU in relation to Magnitsky’s death, Sergey Naryshkin initiated the International Parliamentary Forum, the first meeting of which – titled “Contemporary Parliamentarianism and the Future of Democracy” – was held in the Imperial Hall of the Moscow State University on 10 December 2012. The forum hosted more than 200 participants: Russian high-ranking officials, ministers, leaders of all the establishment parties, diplomats, as well as a number of foreign parliamentarians and experts.⁸⁸⁵ Officially, the forum “discussed the issues of strengthening [...] institutions of representative democracy, their engagement with the civil society, improving law-making and law-enforcement practices, as well as problems of Eurasian integration and development of parliamentarianism in the CIS space”.⁸⁸⁶ In fact, however, the forum was used to promote the Kremlin’s view on the international relations and, in particular, to lambast the Magnitsky-related sanctions and the alleged “double standards” in the West’s approaches towards Russia. Naryshkin, Sergey Lavrov, KPRF leader Gennadiy Zyuganov and some other leading officials and politicians promised to act in response to the sanctions.

The FN’s Marion Maréchal-Le Pen attended the forum as a guest, but not in a speaking capacity. It was not until the Third International Parliamentary Forum – titled “New Dimensions of the Parliamentary Dialogue in the Contemporary Period” and held on 26 June 2014 – that European far-right politicians became regular speakers at this discussion platform initiated by Naryshkin. The third meeting seemed to be urgent: unlike the first and second forums, which were held in late autumn – early winter in the previous two years, the Russian officials decided to move the Third International Parliamentary Forum to June, apparently due to the introduction of Crimea-related sanctions against Russia and the PACE’s decision to suspend, from 10 April 2014, the voting rights of the

⁸⁸³ “Common Visa Restrictions for Russian Officials Involved in the Sergei Magnitsky Case”, *European Parliament*, 23 October (2012), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2012-0369&language=EN>.

⁸⁸⁴ Nicholas Redman, “Russia’s Breaking Point”, *Survival*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2014), pp. 235-244 (240).

⁸⁸⁵ Naryshkin (ed.), *Sovremenny parlamentarizm i budushchee demokratii*, p. 6.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Russian delegation and exclude it from the leading bodies.⁸⁸⁷ In this international environment, Moscow needed all the international support it could garner, and the composition of the plenary session of the third meeting reflected this need. It featured, among others, Moscow-friendly high-ranking officials from Algeria, Argentina, Bolivia, Indonesia, Moldova, and Serbia, as well as two former PACE presidents, namely Jean-Claude Mignon and René van der Linden who had been known for their pro-Russian positions.⁸⁸⁸ The radical element at the plenary session was represented by the ECAG's Mateusz Piskorski and Wolfgang Gehrcke, a German MP and one of the leaders of The Left, some members of which had been involved in pro-Kremlin "election observation" activities.

The anti-US sentiments, as well pro-Moscow narratives on the "Ukrainian question" and the Western sanctions dominated the Third International Parliamentary Forum. Piskorski talked of "the most violent geopolitical struggle waged for Ukraine against Russia and Eurasian integration, against the Eurasian integration bloc as an idea that [was] being turned into reality, but also against Europe and the European integration, and against the European Union".⁸⁸⁹ In another speech, Piskorski discussed the "geopolitical plans" of the unnamed ominous forces that wanted to configure "social historical conscience" and create "new artificial identities", but expressed his hope that Russia, together with anti-American forces in Europe, would be able to ruin these plans:

[...] At the recent elections to the European Parliament, we have observed that strong support goes to those political forces in the EU that do not share the views of the pro-American, Atlanticist mainstream.

I am glad that the events such as the one we have today, as well as the position of the Russian authorities, including the State Duma, facilitate a dialogue with – among others – the European forces that are currently in the opposition, but already understand perfectly what is going on on the global scale, that geopolitical game that I talked about. I hope [...] that we will be meeting more often in Moscow which is an island of freedom – freedom of speech, thought and exchange of ideas.⁸⁹⁰

The FPÖ's Johann Gudenus, who spoke at the forum two days after Putin's official visit to Vienna, praised Russia for maintaining freedom of speech, in contrast to "many countries of the EU".⁸⁹¹ Like Piskorski, Gudenus articulated an idea that the US had

⁸⁸⁷ "Citing Crimea, PACE Suspends Voting Rights of Russian Delegation and Excludes It from Leading Bodies", *Parliamentary Assembly*, 10 April (2014), <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=4982&cat=8>.

⁸⁸⁸ Mignon voted against the PACE's decision to suspend the voting rights of the Russian delegation; van der Linden adopted a clear pro-Moscow line in Russia's conflict with Estonia, see Vladimir Socor, "PACE Chairman Bending to the Kremlin Wind against Estonia", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 3 August (2007), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=32919](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=32919).

⁸⁸⁹ Naryshkin (ed.), *Novye izmereniya parlamentskogo dialoga*, p. 57.

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

employed the “divide and rule” tactic in Ukraine in order to weaken Russia and Europe and, thus, enforce its “geopolitical interests”. At the same time, Gudenus unequivocally positioned the FPÖ as defending the Russian interests:

Unfortunately, the European Union, many countries of the European Union are hostages of NATO and the Council of Europe that seem to have only one aim: to present Russia as “a bad guy”, to exclude Russia from the game. They appear to pursue this aim, but we, our party, in alliance with other democratic forces of Europe, strive to counter this.⁸⁹²

Gudenus argued that a “multipolar world” would be able to ensure “geopolitical balance and lasting peace”, and insisted that Europe and “Russia as part of Europe” needed to show to the US that Europe was not an American “zone of responsibility” and essentially drive the US out of Europe.⁸⁹³ Discussing these issues, Gudenus used the geopolitical narratives popular among the historical and contemporary pan-European fascists. For example, he claimed that the FPÖ was against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, i.e. a trade agreement between the EU and US, because the party supported the idea of trans-European and Eurasian space “*from the Atlantic to Vladivostok*”.⁸⁹⁴ In a piece that he contributed to the neo-Eurasianist pseudo-scientific *Journal of Eurasian Affairs*, Gudenus used a similar argument: “The powers-that-be in Europe must finally realise that the important axis required by Europe is not Brussels-Washington but *Paris-Berlin-Moscow*”.⁸⁹⁵ The phrase “Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis” has been popularised by the neo-Eurasianists since the 1990s.

The LN’s Claudio D’Amico, who also delivered his address at the Third International Parliamentary Forum, largely focused on the “legitimacy” of the “Crimean referendum” that he observed, and criticised – in concordance with Moscow’s line – international organisations such as the OSCE that had not recognised the “referendum” as they allegedly applied “double standards towards Russia”.⁸⁹⁶

In July-September 2014, in response to the escalation of Russia’s war in Ukraine and the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, Western societies – the EU, US, Norway, Switzerland, Canada, Australia and Japan – introduced tougher anti-Russian sanctions. Speaking at the OSCE Parliamentary Conference that took place in Switzerland in October 2014 and was titled “New Security Challenges: The Role of Parliaments”, Naryshkin fired a broadside at Western sanctions, the Ukrainian authorities and the US. He also touched upon the “faults” of European integration that manifested themselves,

⁸⁹² Ibid., pp. 135-136.

⁸⁹³ Ibid., p. 136.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 137. My emphasis.

⁸⁹⁵ Johann Gudenus, “The FPÖ Is against Centralism in the EU and Advocates a Europe of Fatherlands”, *Journal of Eurasian Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2015), pp. 30-31 (30). My emphasis.

⁸⁹⁶ Naryshkin (ed.), *Novye izmereniya parlamentskogo dialoga*, p. 161.

in his view, in “the aspiration of a range of European regions for independence”. Furthermore, he attacked “the shift towards a complete rejection of Europe’s self-dependence in foreign policy”, claiming that the US seemed to deny the EU political agency that would allow the Union to address “geopolitical issues” independently.⁸⁹⁷

Shortly upon his return to Moscow, Naryshkin convened an international round-table titled “Ways of overcoming a crisis of trust in Europe” on 25 November 2014. The far-right participants of the meeting were among the most pro-Kremlin speakers. The FPÖ’s leader Heinz-Christian Strache’s address echoed Gudenus’ statements at the Third International Parliamentary Forum and was almost entirely congruent with Naryshkin’s talk at the OSCE Parliamentary Conference in October that year:

In recent years, the European Union has not been adopting a position of its own. The European Union is now practically equal to NATO and has joined the sanctions regime against Russia automatically, following American interests. [...]

We are in favour of people in the continental part of Europe creating their own history, rather than following the interests of the Americans.⁸⁹⁸

The FN’s Aymeric Chauprade, who spoke right after Strache, repeated these arguments: “the coup on Maidan had been elaborated in Washington with the unfortunate assistance from the German government”; the US forced Europe to adopt anti-Russian sanctions; “the restoration of trust [...] should be carried out through a rejection of the American dictate”.⁸⁹⁹ The narrative of US control over Europe, popular among the far right since the 1950s, was particularly prominent in Chauprade’s speech:

Through the enlargement of the European Union by means of joining East European, Baltic states, the governments of which are [...] set against Russia, the US has tightened control over the European Union. Through economic leverage, by subjecting the elites of the European countries to the values of money, the US has managed to increase its influence in Europe.⁹⁰⁰

Gudenus, who also took part in the round-table, went along with what had been said previously: the US pursued their own interests in Europe and “ordered” the EU to impose anti-Russian sanctions detrimental to Austria and Europe in general.⁹⁰¹

⁸⁹⁷ “Vystuplenie Predsedatelya Gosudarstvennoy Dumy Federal’nogo Sobraniya Rossiyskoy Federatsii S.E. Naryshkina na Parlamentskoy konferentsii ‘Novye vyzovy bezopasnosti: rol’ parlamentov’ v ramkakh sessii 1: Voенno-politicheskie izmereniya – diskussiya po voprosam krizisa v Ukraine, Zheneva, 3 oktyabrya 2014 goda”, *Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, 4 October (2014), http://www.mid.ru/pravozasitnye-social-no-ekonomiceskie-gumanitarnye-voprosy-deatel-nosti-oon/-/asset_publisher/Z02tOD8Nkusz/content/id/668290.

⁸⁹⁸ Andrey Petrov (ed.), *Puti preodoleniya krizisa doveriya v Evrope. Materialy Mezhdunarodnogo “kruglogo stola”* (Moscow: Izdanie Gosudarstvennoy Dumy, 2015), pp. 15-16.

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

⁹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

⁹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

On 1 October 2015, the State Duma, together with Russia's MFA, held the Fourth International Parliamentary Forum again presided by Naryshkin. This time, none of the foreign far-right politicians participated in the plenary session of the forum, but other sections of the conference hosted D'Amico, Chauprade and Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, the FPÖ's Johannes Hübner, and Attack's Volen Siderov.

Speaking during the section on "strengthening the rule of international law and security", Siderov attacked national parliaments in the EU, as well as the European Parliament, dominated by "parties adhering to globalisation and supranational companies, and opposing conservative values and national economies".⁹⁰² In particular, he criticised the Bulgarian parliament for supporting the Bulgarian military involvement in the US-led invasion of Iraq, deployment of foreign military bases in Bulgaria, "suicidal sanctions against Russia", and abandoning the South Stream project. For Siderov, the situation in Europe looked critical and only "anti-globalist parties supporting conservative values and national sovereignty" could save it:

It is now an historical moment for Europe: if there is no large-scale ideological shift, no change of the politics of the continent, no rupture in the puppet-like dependence on the US, Europe will perish as a civilisation and parliamentarianism will be the last thing that the Europeans will be thinking about while fleeing from the Islamic invasion, and Russia will look like an island of refuge for the Christian world.⁹⁰³

In the course of the forum, Siderov also had a personal meeting with Naryshkin, during which the Bulgarian far-right politician repeated the main theses of his speech.

Other far-right politicians participated in the session on "the challenges of migration in the contemporary world", apparently in order to corroborate – from a right-wing perspective – Moscow's narratives about the EU's inability to tackle migration problems, the EU's general decadence, and the West's responsibility for the refugee crisis.

Maréchal-Le Pen attempted to persuade the audience that the migration problems were "the result of our historical mistakes including France's politics in Libya, Syria, [and] Iraq". At the same time, France could not deal with the migration problem, because the country "transferred much of its competence" to the EU.⁹⁰⁴

Chauprade saw the roots of "the migration crisis" in two factors: (1) the lack of control of migration from the EU guided by "the ideology that opposed national identity" and paved the way for "the migration flow to the countries of the EU"; (2) the violation of sovereignty of the states like Iraq and Libya by Western countries and, especially, the

⁹⁰² Andrey Petrov (ed.), *Rol' parlamentov v obespechenii mezhdunarodnoy bezopasnosti v sovremennykh usloviyakh. Materialy chetvertogo Mezhdunarodnogo parlamentskogo foruma* (Moscow: Izdanie Gosudarstvennoy Dumy, 2015), p. 69.

⁹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

US that resulted in the current crisis.⁹⁰⁵ If the EU wanted to solve the crisis, it should, in Chauprade's view, look to Russia for inspiration:

Russia consolidates in itself the notion of "nation-state". Defending the interests of peace, it strives to support the sovereignty of Iraq and Syria, and this is exactly the politics that should now be advocated, because it will help save the nation-states thus leading to stability and peace in the world. [...]

National parliaments should cling to the policy of realism that consists in supporting the actions of the Russian Federation, because these actions are pragmatic, absolutely realistic.⁹⁰⁶

In his turn, Hübner insisted that national parliaments in the EU had to serve the interests of the people who elected them, rather than the interests of the international organisations that urged the EU societies to be humanistic and accept refugees. In particular, he blamed the politics of the EU, especially the governments of Austria, Germany and Sweden, for "the huge wave of migration" to Europe, and criticised "the taboo" on discussing the migration problem.⁹⁰⁷

Considering the narratives that the politicians from the FPÖ, FN, LN, Attack and other far-right organisations articulated at the conferences convened by Sergey Naryshkin, they served the purpose of legitimising Russia's foreign policy and endorsing Moscow's views of the West in general and the US in particular against the background of growing international criticism of Russia. In this sense, the functions of these activities were similar to those of the far right's electoral observation and engagement with Russian media. However, the audiences in each case were different. Notably, none of the events discussed in this section was covered widely in Russian domestic or international media, let alone foreign media. Thus, apparently, the targeted audience of these events were their participants themselves, while the meetings could be described as "sessions of collective counselling". Representatives of the Russian political class could gladly listen to the praise of Moscow's policies from foreign politicians and convey to them other pro-Kremlin narratives that could be used in their home countries. Foreign politicians coming from diverse political and ideological backgrounds could consolidate their pro-Moscow, or at least Russia-friendly, views while listening to speeches of other foreign participants. Representatives of the unrecognised "states" (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria) could reassure themselves of the "legitimacy" of their pseudo-republics.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 117.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 117-118.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 127.

7.3. The parliamentary battlefield in Strasbourg and Brussels

In his study of the behaviour of the far right in the European Parliament during its seventh term (2009-2014), Marley Morris noted a fundamental conflict in their work as MEPs: “in most cases their ideology commits them to being fiercely critical of the EU”, but at the same time “they benefit from the EU – obtaining money, representation, legitimacy and contacts”.⁹⁰⁸ Morris argues that this conflict is manifested in several ways: they are marginalised within the European Parliament, they find it difficult to build alliances because of conflicting nationalisms and heterogeneous ideology, and they have little impact on the EU’s policies. Thus, they seem to have little choice but “to use the opportunities of giving speeches and asking questions at the plenary as a platform for promoting their (regularly Eurosceptic) worldviews, in the hope they will be picked up by the national and international media”,⁹⁰⁹ and, therefore, gain publicity.

The EU member states use several different voting systems to elect MEPs, but, according to the EU laws, they are all obliged to elect them on the basis of proportional representation using the list system or the single transferable vote.⁹¹⁰ In several EU member states, the European voting rules largely favour small, marginal or new parties. For example, France’s two-round system used for national parliamentary elections is unfavourable for the parties that do not obtain at least 12.5% of the vote in the first round. In the European parliamentary elections, however, French parties simply need to pass the 5% threshold per constituency to have its representatives be elected in the European Parliament. Since 1989 and, at least, until the time of writing – because of the differences between the voting systems used in the national and European elections – there have always been more FN’s MEPs than FN’s members of the National Assembly. Another example is the UK: its restrictive first-past-the-post system never allowed members of the BNP to be elected in the House of Commons, but after the 2009 European parliamentary elections, two members of the BNP were elected MEPs after the party had obtained 6.2% of the vote.

While the national parliaments seem to be more prominent, in terms of publicity in domestic contexts, than the European Parliament, the latter is still a significant platform that far-right MEPs use to promote their messages in the hope they reach national audiences and media. Therefore, “when it comes to making speeches and asking

⁹⁰⁸ Marley Morris, *Conflicted Politicians: The Populist Radical Right in the European Parliament* (London: Counterpoint, 2013), p. 5.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁹¹⁰ Kai-Friederike Oelbermann, Antonio Palomares, Friedrich Pukelsheim, “The 2009 European Parliament Elections: From Votes to Seats in 27 Ways”, *European Electoral Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2010), pp. 148-182.

questions” in the European Parliament, the far right even tend “to outdo other MEPs”.⁹¹¹ Discussions in the European Parliament concerning the issues of Russian domestic and international policies have not been an exception.

Over the years, the European Parliament has adopted a number of resolutions directly and indirectly related to Moscow’s political and geopolitical interests. Despite the non-legislative procedure of their adoption, these resolutions represent important lines of communicating messages from the European Parliament to the Russian authorities. As Stefano Braghiroli explains, unlike the European Commission or the Council of the EU, the European Parliament “is the only directly elected supranational institution of the EU”, and hence its positions generally reflect the views of the EU citizens, including those on EU-Russia relationships.⁹¹² Moreover, after the enactment of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament “has gained power exponentially vis-à-vis the other EU institutions, while showing greater activism within the sphere of external relations”, and has been “inclined to adopt value-oriented stances” enshrined in the resolutions.⁹¹³ Because of the European Parliament’s value-based approach to the Russia-related resolutions, they were mostly critical of developments in Russia, which elicited disgruntled response from Russian officials.

Nowhere has the pro-Russian “collective performance” of many European ultranationalists been demonstrated more clearly than during the debates over, as well as voting on, the Russia-related resolutions in the European Parliament in 2014-2016. The phenomenon of some far-right MEPs voting against critical Russia-related resolutions is not a new one, but it had been less homogeneous and consistent before 2014. One example is the approach towards Georgia after the war with Russia in August 2008. When the European Parliament adopted, during its sixth term, a resolution on the situation in Georgia that, in particular, “called on Russia to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of the internationally recognised borders of the Republic of Georgia”,⁹¹⁴ three MEPs from the far-right VB supported it, while Forza Nuova’s Roberto Fiore, Fiamma Tricolore’s Luca Romagnoli and the FN’s MEPs voted against it. When, during its seventh term, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on “providing macro-financial assistance to Georgia”,⁹¹⁵ which was not beneficial to

⁹¹¹ Morris, *Conflicted Politicians*, p. 7.

⁹¹² Stefano Braghiroli, “Voting on Russia in the European Parliament: The Role of National and Party Group Affiliations”, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2015), pp. 58-81 (60).

⁹¹³ Ibid.

⁹¹⁴ “European Parliament Resolution of 3 September 2008 on the Situation in Georgia”, *European Parliament*, 3 September (2008), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2008-0396&language=EN>.

⁹¹⁵ “European Parliament Legislative Resolution of 24 November 2009 on the Proposal for a Council Decision Providing Macro-financial Assistance to Georgia”, *European Parliament*, 24

Russia in geopolitical terms, all the LN's MEPs, who then belonged to the right-wing Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group, as well as the FN's Jean-Marie Le Pen and Bruno Gollnisch, the FPÖ's Andreas Mölzer and Franz Obermayr, and the PRM's Claudiu Ciprian Tănăsescu⁹¹⁶ supported the resolution. The nine far-right MEPs who voted against it were members of Attack, BNP, VB, and PVV.

Until 2014-2015, during the debates at the European Parliament, many far-right MEPs demonstrated a relatively balanced approach towards Russia-related issues, which was often marked by four argumentative patterns: (1) Russia is an important economic partner of the EU; (2) the EU cannot judge Russia because it lacks moral authority to do so; (3) democratic transition is still an ongoing process in Russia which is a result of the previous authoritarian rule; and (4) the EU should adopt a realistic, rather than confrontational, policy towards Russia.

One of the most typical combinations of these argumentative patterns can be found in the FPÖ's MEP Franz Obermayr's speech during the debate on a motion for the resolution "On the situation in Russia"⁹¹⁷ that, in particular, expressed the European Parliament's "profound disappointment with the conduct of the 4 December [2011] Duma elections, marred with frequent violations" and strongly condemned "mass arrests and beatings by the police during peaceful demonstrations in Moscow, St Petersburg and other Russian cities against Duma elections violations":

Democracy in Russia is undoubtedly still in its infancy and this was made clear once again during the last elections. It also goes without saying that 70 years of Soviet rule have left their mark. Russia is constantly being reprimanded by the EU, without the EU itself setting a good example. [...] Patriotic movements which try to go against the Brussels mainstream regularly become victims of hate campaigns in the political arena and the media. We should not therefore be pointing the finger at others. Because of our mutual interests in the field of energy, the EU should ensure that large companies like Gazprom comply with the competition rules on the energy market. On the other hand, we should not be disregarding Moscow's interests in the post-Soviet market.⁹¹⁸

Criticism of the developments in Russia – ranging from apologetic or indulgent to principled – was not uncommon among far-right MEPs during the debates in the European Parliament. The BZÖ's MEP Ewald Stadler was arguably the most apologetic

November (2009), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2009-0071&language=EN>.

⁹¹⁶ In 2010, Tănăsescu joined the Romanian centre-left Partidul Social Democrat (Social Democratic Party).

⁹¹⁷ "European Parliament Resolution on the Situation in Russia", *European Parliament*, 8 February (2012), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=B7-2012-0057&language=EN>.

⁹¹⁸ "Situation in Russia (Debate)", *European Parliament*, 1 February (2012), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20120201+ITEM-015+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

towards Russia, condoning the undemocratic practices of Putin's regime with reference to different speeds of democratic development in Russia and the West. While debating on the resolution "Political Use of Justice in Russia",⁹¹⁹ Stadler argued that "the Russian people [were] capable of themselves developing a state under the rule of law and at a speed and with the focuses that they themselves cho[se]".⁹²⁰ Implicit or explicit references to "speed" could be observed in other speeches too. For example, according to Jaroslav Paška of the ultranationalist Slovenská národná strana (Slovak National Party, SNS), Russia was "still getting used to democratic rule",⁹²¹ while the FPÖ's Andreas Mölzer insisted that Russia had "a great deal of catching up to do when it [came] to democracy and human rights".⁹²²

Some MEPs from far-right parties were more critical. During a debate on the detention of Greenpeace activists by the Russian authorities in 2013,⁹²³ the PVV's Daniël van der Stoep complained that, in the Netherlands, they faced "enough of the arrogance of the Russian state" noting that Russian diplomats refused to pay parking fines and could always rely on their international immunity if they mistreat their children.⁹²⁴ Nikolaos Salavrakos from the Greek far-right Popular Orthodox Rally (Laikós Orthódoxos Synagermós, LAOS), who supported the resolution "Political Use of Justice in Russia" in 2012, explained his decision by saying that "the human rights situation in Russia ha[d] deteriorated drastically over recent months and measures need[ed] to be taken to protect civil society and freedom of expression and assembly".⁹²⁵ However, harsh, principled criticism of Putin's Russia was, in general, scarce among the far-right MEPs.

Apart from the references to Russia "still getting used to democratic rule", another popular rhetorical "way out" of criticism of the developments in Russia was guided by a "whataboutist" tactic shifting the focus of the discussion from Russia to the EU. The FN's Bruno Gollnisch disputed the right of the European Parliament and, apparently, of the EU to "lecture Russia on human rights", because "Julian Assange, a dissident publicist

⁹¹⁹ "European Parliament Resolution of 13 September 2012 on the Political Use of Justice in Russia", *European Parliament*, 13 September (2012), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2012-0352&language=EN>.

⁹²⁰ "Debates", *European Parliament*, 13 September (2012), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=20120913&secondRef=ITEM-012&language=EN&ring=P7-RC-2012-0427#4-181-000>.

⁹²¹ "Rule of Law in Russia (Debate)", *European Parliament*, 15 February (2011), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20110215+ITEM-005+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹²² "Situation in Russia (Debate)".

⁹²³ On the detention of the Greenpeace activists by Russia see Alex G. Oude Elferink, "The Arctic Sunrise Incident: A Multi-faceted Law of the Sea Case with a Human Rights Dimension", *The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2014), pp. 244-289.

⁹²⁴ "Detention of Greenpeace Activists in Russia (Debate)", *European Parliament*, 23 October (2013), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20131023+ITEM-017+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹²⁵ "Debates".

and founder of the WikiLeaks site [had] been detained for weeks in the UK because of a totally outrageous and ridiculous extradition request from Sweden”.⁹²⁶ In his turn, Andreas Mølzer asserted that “the EU should refrain from trying to teach Russia lessons in democratic politics and should instead work on its own democratic deficit, putting an end to the leftist authoritarian pressure on Hungary”.⁹²⁷

Often, the focus of the debates on Russia-related resolutions shifted from Russia to individual member states, as far-right MEPs used the platform of the European Parliament to criticise the phenomena related to their own countries. According to Jobbik’s Krisztina Morvai, the EU could not call the relevant Russian state agencies “for an immediate, thorough investigation” into the murder of human rights activists, because the EU did not “have the confidence and moral authority to do this”. The EU, Morvai maintained, should better investigate “human rights violations in Hungary”.⁹²⁸ Discussing the same resolution on the murder of human rights activists in Russia, Morvai’s fellow party member Zoltán Balczó argued that the EU was right to speak out against human rights violations, but he questioned whether the EU had “the moral basis for doing this after it acquired [Czech President] Václav Klaus’s signature on the Treaty of Lisbon by letting the Beneš Decrees continue to apply”.⁹²⁹ Ewald Stadler’s counterargument to the claim that “indirect campaigning [had been] carried out on television in Russia by government reporting” during the 2012 presidential campaign was a request to explain “the Austrian Government’s coverage, where three quarters of all reports on [sic] the Austrian broadcaster ORF [had been] devoted to the government under [Austrian] Chancellor [Werner] Faymann”.⁹³⁰ During a debate on another Russia-related resolution, Attack’s Slavi Binev said that he “support[ed] the visa restrictions for all individuals implicated in the Sergei Magnitsky case”, but he could not support the resolution because

Everything that has been said on the Magnitsky case – abuse of power, lawsuits to remove political and economic rivals, arrests, torture, impunity of human rights abusers – applies to the current situation in Bulgaria. Despite numerous reports on

⁹²⁶ “Rule of Law in Russia (Debate)”. Assange was not detained in the UK, but applied for, and was eventually granted, political asylum at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

⁹²⁷ “Explanations of Vote”, *European Parliament*, 15 March (2012), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20120315+ITEM-012+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹²⁸ “Murder of Human Rights Activists in Russia”, *European Parliament*, 17 September (2009), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20090917+ITEM-009-01+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹²⁹ Ibid. The Decrees of the President of the Republic and the Constitutional Decrees of the President of the Republic, also known as the Beneš Decrees, were a series of laws passed by the government of Czechoslovakia after the Second World War that ordered the expulsion of the German and Hungarian minorities and confiscation of their property.

⁹³⁰ “Outcome of the Presidential Elections in Russia (Debate)”, *European Parliament*, 14 March (2012), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20120314+ITEM-013+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

my part, the European institutions remain silent, and no such measures or proposals have been made to the Council.⁹³¹

Some far-right MEPs also suggested that, instead of “lecturing” Russia, the EU could pursue a realistic policy towards Russia. This argument was perhaps best articulated by Jaroslav Paška:

It is good to have proper discussions with our Russian friends on all of the issues that concern us regarding the running of the country by the Russian authorities. However, this dialogue must be businesslike, in a spirit of partnership, and motivated by an effort to improve the functioning of the democratic system in Russia, rather than by the lecturing of a self-styled custodian of global democracy. Let us negotiate with Russia as with a friend, in a correct manner, openly and decently.⁹³²

Niki Tzavela, then a member of the LAOS, also thought that denouncing “everything that [was] happening in Russia” was “not productive or creative”. Tzavela believed that rapprochement between the EU and Russia could be achieved, first of all, through “multi-faceted cooperation in the trade, energy, culture and education sectors, before moving on to the human rights sector”.⁹³³ The LN’s Fiorello Provera, speaking on behalf of the EFD group, held that “a general feeling of aversion towards and mistrust of Russia” did not “represent a sound basis for the cooperation”, and that “support and trust [were] needed more than criticism”.⁹³⁴

However, for the FPÖ’s MEPs Mölzer and Obermayr, a realistic policy towards Russia, especially in terms of international relations, implied acknowledging a Russian sphere of influence, or, as Mölzer put it, showing “respect for Russia’s historical sensitivities with regard to geopolitical matters”.⁹³⁵ This narrative became especially prominent after Russia started exercising economic and political pressure on several non-EU East European countries and particularly Ukraine, in the run-up to the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit in the second half of 2013. During the debates on the resolution “on the pressure exerted by Russia on Eastern Partnership countries” that called on Russia to respect fully the sovereign right of those countries “to pursue their

⁹³¹ “Common Visa Restrictions for Russian Officials Involved in the Sergei Magnitsky Case (Short Presentation)”, *European Parliament*, 22 October (2012), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20121022+ITEM-024+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹³² “Rule of Law in Russia (Debate)”.

⁹³³ “Outcome of the Presidential Elections in Russia (Debate)”.

⁹³⁴ “EU-Russia Summit on 18 November 2009 in Stockholm (Debate)”, *European Parliament*, 11 November (2009), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20091111+ITEM-016+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹³⁵ Ibid.

own political choices”,⁹³⁶ Mölzer explicitly stated that the EU had to accept that those East European countries, which were not members of the EU and were previously Soviet republics, were “in the sphere of influence or interest of the Russians”.⁹³⁷

In the vote on the last Russia-related resolution adopted during the seventh term of the European Parliament and after the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the overwhelming majority of far-right MEPs refused to support a resolution, which condemned “in the strongest possible terms the escalating destabilisation and provocations in eastern and southern Ukraine”; rejected “any preparation for illegal ‘Crimea-like’ referendums”; and urged Russia “to immediately withdraw its presence in support of violent separatists and armed militias” and “to remove troops from the eastern border of Ukraine”.⁹³⁸ Out of 27 far-right MEPs who took part in the vote, only four supported the resolution: Sampo Terho of the PS, the PRM’s Vadim Tudor and Dan Dumitru Zamfirescu, and the DF’s Morten Messerschmidt;⁹³⁹ 3 MEPs abstained: Jaroslav Paška of the SNS, Nikolaos Salavrakos of the LAOS, and VB’s Frank Vanhecke.

The eighth election to the European Parliament held in May 2014 saw a rise of support for far-right parties such as the FPÖ, FN, DF, SD and PS which had “been able to capitalise upon popular discontent associated and a general feeling of disillusionment with democratic politics at the national level”.⁹⁴⁰ For the first time in their political histories, representatives of the far-right AfD, NPD, XA, Independent Greeks (Anexartitoi Ellines), National Alliance (Nacionālā apvienība, NA)⁹⁴¹ and Order and Justice (Tvarka ir teisingumas, TT) became MEPs. Electoral support declined for Jobbik, PVV, LN and VB, yet they remained represented in the European Parliament, while members of Attack, BZÖ, BNP, LAOS, SNS and PRM failed to get re-elected.

⁹³⁶ “European Parliament Resolution of 12 September 2013 on the Pressure Exerted by Russia on Eastern Partnership Countries (in the Context of the Upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius)”, *European Parliament*, 12 September (2013), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2013-0383&language=EN>.

⁹³⁷ “Pressure Exercised by Russia on Countries of the Eastern Partnership (in the Context of the Upcoming Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius)”, *European Parliament*, 12 September (2013), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20130912+ITEM-014-21+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹³⁸ “European Parliament Resolution of 17 April 2014 on Russian Pressure on Eastern Partnership Countries and in Particular Destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine”, *European Parliament*, 17 April (2014), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2014-0457&language=EN>.

⁹³⁹ A Hungarian MEP Csanád Szegedi, who was elected to the European Parliament as a member of the far right Jobbik party, supported the resolution, but he resigned from all the posts he held in Jobbik in 2012, shortly after revealing that he had Jewish roots.

⁹⁴⁰ Daphne Halikiopoulou, Sofia Vasilopoulou, “Support for the Far Right in the 2014 European Parliament Elections: A Comparative Perspective”, *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (2014), pp. 285-288 (285).

⁹⁴¹ The full name of this Latvian party is Nacionālā apvienība “Visu Latvijai!” – “Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK” (National Alliance “All For Latvia!” – “For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK”).

Because of the Russian-Ukrainian war and internal developments in Russia characterised by increasing pressure on opposition leaders (including the assassination of prominent member of the Russian opposition Boris Nemtsov in Moscow on 27 February 2015), the European Parliament discussed and adopted even more Russia-related resolutions compared to the previous term. Among those MEPs who generally declined to support the resolutions that criticised Russia, the following argumentative patterns were prevalent and were largely congruent with messages promoted by official Moscow, Russian pro-Kremlin expert circles and Russian state-funded media: (1) sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia for the annexation of Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine are harmful or useless; (2) Russia-related resolutions are driven by Cold War mentality on the part of the EU and/or anti-Russian sentiments; (3) only the US benefits from the confrontation between the EU and Russia; (4) rather than being at enmity with Russia, the EU should engage with this country and jointly respond to various international challenges. Whereas these patterns are, to a certain extent, similar to those characterising the far-right MEPs' arguments during the previous term of the European Parliament, references to the idea that democratic transition was still an ongoing process in Russia were almost absent in the eighth term.

The debates and results of the vote on two particular resolutions of the European Parliament (see Table 7.1) provide insights into the attitudes towards Russia presented by far-right MEPs and into the interplay of the above-mentioned argumentative patterns: "The state of EU-Russia relations"⁹⁴² (Vote 1) and "The strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia"⁹⁴³ (Vote 2).

The resolution "The state of EU-Russia relations" was very critical of Moscow's actions in the international and domestic domains. In particular, it stated that:

Russia's direct and indirect involvement in the armed conflict in Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea, together with its violation of the territorial integrity of Georgia, and economic coercion and political destabilisation of its European neighbours constitute a deliberate violation of democratic principles and fundamental values and of international law.⁹⁴⁴

Moreover, the resolution argued that Russia could no longer be "treated as, or considered, a 'strategic partner'" of the EU and that the EU had "to conduct a critical re-

⁹⁴² "European Parliament Resolution of 10 June 2015 on the State of EU-Russia Relations", *European Parliament*, 10 June (2015), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2015-0225&language=EN>.

⁹⁴³ "European Parliament Resolution of 11 June 2015 on the Strategic Military Situation in the Black Sea Basin Following the Illegal Annexation of Crimea by Russia", *European Parliament*, 11 June (2015), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P8-TA-2015-0232&language=EN>.

⁹⁴⁴ "European Parliament Resolution of 10 June 2015".

assessment of its relations with Russia”.⁹⁴⁵ The resolution was adopted by 494 votes in favour, 135 against and 69 abstentions. It was supported by five political groups in the European Parliament: European People’s Party (EPP), Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE/ADLE), The Greens – European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), and European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR); while the generally right-wing and Eurosceptic Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), the left-wing European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL), as well as the majority of independent MEPs, or Non-Inscrits (NI), rejected it.

In its turn, the resolution “The strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia”, in particular, supported “the non-recognition of Russia’s annexation of Crimea”, reiterated “its commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine”, noted “with concern that the illegal annexation of Crimea ha[d] precipitated a significant change in the strategic landscape of the Black Sea Basin and the adjacent area”, and warned “that the illegal annexation of Crimea offer[ed] Russia a ‘southern Kaliningrad’, another outpost directly bordering on NATO”.⁹⁴⁶ The resolution was adopted by 356 votes in favour, 183 against and 96 abstentions. It was supported by the EPP, ALDE/ADLE and ECR, while EFDD, Greens/EFA, GUE-NGL, as well as the overwhelming majority of NI, decided not to support it. The S&D group seemed to be divided, but the majority still voted in its favour.

Table 7.1. Far-right MEPs’ votes on the European Parliament resolutions “The state of EU-Russia relations” (Vote 1) and “The strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia” (Vote 2)

Country/MEP	Party	Group	Vote 1	Vote 2
Austria				
Barbara Kappel	FPÖ	NI	–	–
Georg Mayer	FPÖ	NI	–	–
Franz Obermayr	FPÖ	NI	–	–
Harald Vilimsky	FPÖ	NI	–	–
Belgium				
Gerolf Annemans	VB	NI	A	–
Denmark				
Jørn Dohrmann	DF	ECR	A	A

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁶ “European Parliament Resolution of 11 June 2015”.

Rikke Karlsson	DF ⁹⁴⁷	ECR	A	A
Morten Messerschmidt	DF	ECR	X	X
Anders Primdahl Vistisen	DF	ECR	A	X
Finland				
Jussi Halla-aho	PS	ECR	+	+
Pirkko Ruohonen-Lerner	PS	ECR	+	+
France				
Louis Aliot	FN	NI	-	-
Marie-Christine Arnautu	FN	NI	-	-
Nicolas Bay	FN	NI	-	-
Dominique Bilde	FN	NI	-	-
Marie-Christine Boutonnet	FN	NI	-	-
Steeve Briois	FN	NI	-	-
Aymeric Chauprade	FN ⁹⁴⁸	NI	-	-
Mireille d'Ornano	FN	NI	-	-
Édouard Ferrand	FN	NI	-	-
Sylvie Goddyn	FN	NI	-	-
Bruno Gollnisch	FN	NI	-	-
Jean-François Jalkh	FN	NI	-	-
Jean-Marie Le Pen	FN	NI	X	X
Marine Le Pen	FN	NI	-	-
Gilles Lebreton	FN	NI	-	-
Philippe Loiseau	FN	NI	-	-
Dominique Martin	FN	NI	-	-
Joëlle Mélin	FN	NI	-	-
Bernard Monot	FN	NI	-	-
Sophie Montel	FN	NI	-	-
Florian Philippot	FN	NI	-	-
Jean-Luc Schaffhauser	RBM	NI	-	-
Mylène Troszczynski	FN	NI	-	-

⁹⁴⁷ Rikke Karlsson left the DF on 16 October 2015.

⁹⁴⁸ Aymeric Chauprade left the FN on 9 November 2015.

Germany				
Hans-Olaf Henkel	AfD ⁹⁴⁹	ECR	+	A
Bernd Kölmel	AfD ⁹⁵⁰	ECR	A	A
Bernd Lucke	AfD ⁹⁵¹	ECR	A	A
Marcus Pretzell	AfD	ECR	-	-
Joachim Starbatty	AfD ⁹⁵²	ECR	A	A
Beatrix von Storch	AfD	ECR	-	-
Ulrike Trebesius	AfD ⁹⁵³	ECR	A	A
Udo Voigt	NPD	NI	-	-
Greece				
Georgios Epitideios	XA	NI	-	-
Lampros Fountoulis	XA	NI	X	X
Eleftherios Synadinos	XA	NI	-	X
Hungary				
Zoltán Balczó	Jobbik	NI	-	-
Béla Kovács	Jobbik	NI	-	-
Krisztina Morvai	Jobbik	NI	-	-
Italy				
Mara Bizzotto	LN	NI	-	-
Mario Borghezio	LN	NI	-	-
Gianluca Buonanno	LN	NI	-	-
Lorenzo Fontana	LN	NI	-	-
Matteo Salvini	LN	NI	-	X
Latvia				
Roberts Zīle	NA	ECR	+	+
Lithuania				
Rolandas Paksas	TT	EFDD	A	A

⁹⁴⁹ Hans-Olaf Henkel left the AfD on 7 July 2015.

⁹⁵⁰ Bernd Kölmel left the AfD on 7 July 2015.

⁹⁵¹ Bernd Lucke left the AfD on 7 July 2015.

⁹⁵² Joachim Starbatty left the AfD on 7 July 2015.

⁹⁵³ Ulrike Trebesius left the AfD on 7 July 2015.

Netherlands				
Marcel de Graaff	PVV	NI	X	–
Vicky Maeijer	PVV	NI	–	–
Olaf Stuger	PVV	NI	–	–
Sweden				
Peter Lundgren	SD	EFDD	A	A
Kristina Winberg	SD	EFDD	A	A

“+” – for the resolution, “–” against the resolution, “A” – abstained, “X” – absent or did not vote.

As seen from Table 7.1, far-right MEPs largely voted against the two above-mentioned resolutions, with the majority of the negative votes coming from the FPÖ, FN, XA, Jobbik, LN and PVV. The smallest group of far-right MEPs mostly representing the PS and NA supported the resolutions. Their vote can be explained both by the troubled historical (and, in Latvia’s case, contemporary) relations between their countries and Russia, as well as by the PS’s and NA’s MEPs affiliation with the ECR that largely supported both resolutions.

The TT’s Rolandas Paksas’s abstentions can also be partly explained by his group affiliation. Lithuania, too, has troubled historical and contemporary relations with Russia; yet the EFDD rejected the resolution and, by abstaining, Paksas rebelled against his group. Despite his abstention, it seemed during the debates that Paksas would have rather supported the resolution if not for the position of his group. For example, discussing the resolution “The state of EU-Russia relations”, he stated that the EU could not cooperate with Russia “at the expense of international principles and European values, norms and international obligations”. Paksas also argued that it was “necessary to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine” and that cooperation with Russia could only be renewed “upon full implementation of the Minsk agreements”.⁹⁵⁴

The SD’s MEPs Kristina Winberg and Peter Lundgren also abstained during both votes and rebelled against the EFDD’s decision. Their abstentions were, to a certain extent, determined by their nuanced approach towards Russian domestic and foreign policy. Previously, both of them supported the resolution titled “Murder of the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov and the state of democracy in Russia” that, in particular called “on the Russian authorities to stop all pressure, repressive acts and intimidation –

⁹⁵⁴ “State of EU-Russia Relations”, *European Parliament*, 10 June (2015), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20150610+ITEM-009-05+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

both political and judicial – against opposition leaders, civil society representatives and independent media”,⁹⁵⁵ despite the fact that they believed that the EU had “no right to call for any other countries to make any changes to their domestic policies whatsoever”: they supported the resolution to express their “condolences to the family, friends and supporters of Mr. Nemtsov”.⁹⁵⁶ Debating on the resolution “The state of EU-Russia relations”, Lundgren noted that the annexation of Crimea and the war against Ukraine created a situation where the EU had to take action and impose sanctions on Russia, and asserted that re-establishing cooperation with Russia would only be possible in case the Russian authorities complied “with their international and legal obligations”.⁹⁵⁷ While Lundgren’s position concerning the EU-Russia relations might be considered – his abstention notwithstanding – as critical of Russia’s actions, it was most likely the SD’s sceptical attitude towards NATO that informed Winberg and Lundgren to abstain during Vote 2. The resolution stressed “that modernising and enhancing the military capabilities of those Black Sea littoral states that [were] members of EU and NATO [was] of key importance to ensuring security and stability in the region”,⁹⁵⁸ and Winberg considered this as a step towards “the escalation of the conflict between Russia and the Western democracies” and the idea of moving NATO forces to the Black Sea Basin – as “an ill-advised and confrontational suggestion”.⁹⁵⁹

The VB’s Gerolf Annemans’s abstention during Vote 1 could be seen as a result of him being more distrustful towards the EU’s actions rather than those of Russia. While he seemed to agree that Russia’s actions in Crimea should be strongly condemned, he criticised the process of rapprochement between the EU and Ukraine, as well as claiming that the VB advocated re-establishing diplomatic relations with Russia and contested mutual economic sanctions and a trade boycott.⁹⁶⁰

The contradictory vote on both resolutions on the part of the AfD’s MEPs seemed to reflect an internal conflict within the party. The AfD was formed in 2013 and was

⁹⁵⁵ “European Parliament Resolution of 12 March 2015 on the Murder of the Russian Opposition Leader Boris Nemtsov and the State of Democracy in Russia”, *European Parliament*, 12 March (2015), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&language=EN&reference=P8-TA-2015-0074>.

⁹⁵⁶ “Murder of the Russian Opposition Leader Boris Nemtsov and the State of Democracy in Russia”, *European Parliament*, 12 March (2015), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20150312+ITEM-011-04+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹⁵⁷ “State of EU-Russia Relations (Debate)”, *European Parliament*, 9 June (2015), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20150609+ITEM-003+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹⁵⁸ “European Parliament Resolution of 11 June 2015”.

⁹⁵⁹ “Strategic Military Situation in the Black Sea Basin Following the Illegal Annexation of Crimea by Russia”, *European Parliament*, 11 June (2015), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20150611+ITEM-006-01+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹⁶⁰ “State of EU-Russia Relations”.

considered as a non-radical, Eurosceptic or even only softly Eurosceptic party.⁹⁶¹ However, a conflict between AfD's leading members Bernd Lucke and Frauke Petry, who represented the neo-liberal and national-conservative factions in the party correspondingly, eventually led to Petry taking control over the party in the beginning of July 2015 and radicalising the AfD in a more clearly right-wing direction. On 7 July 2015, Lucke and four other MEPs from his own faction left the party. Lucke referred to rising xenophobic, anti-Western and pro-Russian leanings in the party as the reason for his departure.⁹⁶² Out of seven original AfD's MEPs,⁹⁶³ only two remained in the party: Marcus Pretzell and Beatrix von Storch, who belonged to Petry's faction. In 2016, von Storch left the ECR and joined the EFDD, while Pretzell was expelled from the ECR and joined the more radical Europe of Nations and Freedom group in the European Parliament.

MEPs from Lucke's faction, while still members of the AfD in June 2015, largely abstained during the votes on both resolutions (Henkel supported Vote 1), while Pretzell and von Storch rejected them. However, these differences – most likely reflecting the disputes within the party – did not imply any radical contrast between the two groups' positions towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. In the final analysis, the two groups – with the exception of Henkel in relation to Vote 1 – rebelled against the ECR's decision to support both resolutions. Debates on other Russia-related resolutions also demonstrated certain affinities between the two factions' positions. For example, Lucke condemned “the illegal annexation of Crimea and any covert or overt support of violent attempts at secession”, but at the same time criticised the idea of ending strategic security partnership with Russia.⁹⁶⁴ Pretzell called Russia's annexation of Crimea an obvious breach of international law, yet contested the rapprochement between the EU and Ukraine, as well as criticising the EU's alleged meddling in Russia's internal

⁹⁶¹ See Kai Arzheimer, “The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?”, *West European Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2015), pp. 535-556; Robert Grimm, “The Rise of the German Eurosceptic Party Alternative für Deutschland, between Ordoliberal Critique and Popular Anxiety”, *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2015), pp. 264-278.

⁹⁶² Noah Barkin, “German AfD Founder Leaves Party Decrying Xenophobic Shift”, *Reuters*, 8 July (2015), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-politics-eurosceptics-idUSKCN0PI25720150708>.

⁹⁶³ For brief political portraits of these seven MEPs see chapter “Repräsentanz: Entstehungsgeschichte und Flügel der AfD” in David Bebnowski, *Die Alternative für Deutschland. Aufstieg und gesellschaftliche Repräsentanz einer rechten populistischen Partei* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2015), pp. 19-31.

⁹⁶⁴ “Situation in Ukraine and State of Play of EU-Russia Relations (Debate)”, *European Parliament*, 16 September (2014), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20140916+ITEM-004+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

affairs.⁹⁶⁵ Debating on Vote 1, Ulrike Trebesius and von Storch blamed *both* Russia and the EU for the cooling off in relations between them.⁹⁶⁶

The idea that the European Parliament's Russia-related resolutions were contributing to the escalation of the conflict between the EU and Russia underpinned the FPÖ's MEPs' negative vote on both resolutions. During the debates regarding Vote 1, they submitted written and almost identical explanations of their decisions to reject the resolution, with the underlying message that the report on the state of EU-Russia relations was unbalanced and biased, and that proposals featured in the resolution did not help improve relations between the EU and Russia. Barbara Kappel added to this main message that it was time that the EU started seeking a dialogue and came to a compromise with Russia.⁹⁶⁷ The FPÖ's MEPs presented a similar message during Vote 2: in their identical written statements, Harald Vilimsky and Georg Mayer argued that the Crimea-related resolution was "totally unbalanced and one-sided" and would only result in the "escalation of the conflict".⁹⁶⁸ Kappel built on this argument, adding that she was opposed to the NATO military build-up in the Black Sea. Scepticism about enhancing the role of NATO in the Black Sea Basin was present in Vilimsky's oral statement too.⁹⁶⁹

Opposition to the European Parliament's allegedly confrontational Russia-related resolutions, criticism of the sanctions against Russia, and conspiracy theories about the involvement of the US were used by the LN's MEPs to justify their rejection of both resolutions. For example, for Gianluca Buonanno, the resolution on the state of EU-Russia relations was "biased and full of anti-Russian prejudices", while the Crimea-related resolution was "excessively anti-Russian". For him, the EU policies towards Russia were inspired by the US and had to be reversed, as Russia was an important partner for Italian companies, and he would like to see Moscow more involved in European development policies.⁹⁷⁰

Jobbik's MEPs followed a similar argumentative line: Zoltán Balczó and Béla Kovács claimed that the sanctions were damaging to European economies and served as evidence that the EU pursued policies inspired by the US. Krisztina Morvai turned to

⁹⁶⁵ "Situation in Ukraine (Debate)", *European Parliament*, 14 January (2015), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20150114+ITEM-007+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>. Note, however, that despite his earlier belief that Russia's annexation of Crimea was against the international law, Pretzell took part in the Second Yalta International Economic Forum that was held in Crimea in April 2016, see Chapter 6.

⁹⁶⁶ "State of EU-Russia Relations".

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶⁸ "Strategic Military Situation in the Black Sea Basin Following the Illegal Annexation of Crimea by Russia".

⁹⁶⁹ "Strategic Military Situation in the Black Sea Basin Following the Illegal Annexation of Crimea by Russia (Debate)", *European Parliament*, 10 June (2015), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20150610+ITEM-013+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>.

⁹⁷⁰ "State of EU-Russia Relations"; "Strategic Military Situation in the Black Sea Basin Following the Illegal Annexation of Crimea by Russia".

“whataboutist” tactic questioning the validity of the Western criticism of Russia’s behaviour with references to allegedly equally ambiguous practices in the West. The NPD’s Udo Voigt largely adopted this “whataboutist” tactic too.

The analysis of the FN’s MEPs’ explanations of their negative votes on both resolutions suggests that they followed guidelines distributed among them – otherwise it seems impossible to understand why some explanations coming from different FN’s MEPs were identical, while some others were reworded but still contained identical phrases. Comparing written statements of different FN’s MEPs during the debates on Vote 1, it is possible to distinguish a set of theses most likely featured in these hypothetical guidelines: (1) anti-Russian sentiment, or so-called “Russophobia”, is the main motivation behind the resolution; (2) Georgia was responsible for the Russian-Georgian war in 2008; (3) the Crimean “referendum” in 2014 was legitimate; (4) Russia is a key partner of the EU; (5) the resolution only serves the US interests; and (6) one can witness “the advent of a multipolar world” in which neither France nor Europe “would be subject to any great foreign power”.⁹⁷¹ The FN’s MEPs’ statements during the debates on Vote 2 reiterated the third and fourth theses, as well as featuring a modified fifth argument: Europe should reject submission to the US and NATO.

The explanations provided by the XA’s MEPs for their negatives votes were arguably the most straightforward among the far-right MEPs. For the debates on Vote 1, Georgios Epitideios and Eleftherios Synadinos submitted two almost identical statements that argued: “The movement [i.e. XA] is geopolitically oriented towards Russia. Europe serves the interests of the system controlled by the US, especially regarding the issues related to the EU-Russia cooperation”.⁹⁷² Indeed, the XA’s thesis on the need of Greece’s “geostrategical turn” reads as follows:

It is required to immediately reverse our geopolitical orientation and re-examine our alliances that have contributed nothing to our national interests. We should turn, for investments and energy at first, to Russia. A trade and defence agreement with the Russians would rid our country from the deadly embrace of the USA and their allies.⁹⁷³

7.4. Conclusion

The “Arab Spring”, anti-Putin protests in 2011-2012, intensifying criticism of Russia’s domestic and international actions coming from mainstream Western politicians and officials, as well as the introduction of Magnitsky-related sanctions by the EU and

⁹⁷¹ “State of EU-Russia Relations”.

⁹⁷² Ibid.

⁹⁷³ “Πολιτικές Θέσεις”, *Χρυσή Αυγή*, <http://www.xryshaygh.com/kinima/thesis>.

US, amplified pre-existing anti-Western and, especially, anti-American sentiments of the Russian authorities, for whom external legitimization of Putin's regime became of even greater concern. The perceived gradual loss of established foreign allies made Moscow dependent on some remaining mainstream pro-Russian figures in the West, and, increasingly, led to rapprochement with anti-establishment actors, including far-right parties and organisations.

In order to consolidate the pro-Russian Western camp consisting of both mainstream and anti-establishment figures, Chairman of the Russian State Duma Sergey Naryshkin launched, in 2012, the International Parliamentary Forum that became a major platform for pro-Russian Westerners to exchange views and reassure themselves of their soundness. The far-right element of the International Parliamentary Forums built on the existing network of pro-Russian far-right politicians who had previously been engaged in electoral observation to the benefit of Russia's foreign policy, undermining Western political narratives in Russian media, and implementing pro-Russian projects in their home countries. However, the meetings within the framework of the International Parliamentary Forum featured only select representatives of the far-right pro-Russian camp, namely politicians from the FPÖ, FN, LN, Attack and ECAG. At the meetings in Moscow, they essentially reproduced the Kremlin's narratives that, at the same time, complied with their own ideas about Russia and the West: (1) the revolution in Ukraine was inspired by Washington to undermine Russia's sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space; (2) the Crimean "referendum" was legitimate; (3) the US and/or NATO forced the submissive EU to impose sanctions on Russia; (4) Europe should get rid of American influence; (5) Europe and Russia should build a common geopolitical structure on the Eurasian continent. Some far-right participants clearly positioned themselves as Russia's allies in Europe.

One could hear similar narratives in Strasbourg and Brussels during the debates on the European Parliament's Russia-related resolutions, especially since the beginning of the European Parliament's eighth term in July 2014. However, the far-right voices in the European Parliament were not always friendly or sympathetic towards Putin's Russia. Moscow's actions in the domestic and international spheres found little appreciation from MEPs representing the PS, NA, TT, DF, SD, and Bernd Lucke's faction of the AfD. Nevertheless, the majority of far-right MEPs did support Moscow's actions, and the staunchest far-right supporters of the Kremlin's policies could be found among the members of the FPÖ, FN, Jobbik, LN, PVV, NPD, VB, XA, and Frauke Petry's faction of the AfD. The critics of the European Parliament's Russia-related resolutions insisted that they were driven by anti-Russian and pro-American sentiments, and hindered cooperation between the EU and Russia considered as a key partner of Europe. Thus, it would be no exaggeration to say that, when MEPs from the FPÖ, FN, LN, PVV, VB, as

well as the AfD's Marcus Pretzell and individual right-wing MEPs from Poland, Romania and the UK formed the Europe of Nations and Freedom group on 15 June 2015, Moscow secured a predominantly loyal political structure at the heart of European democracy.

Conclusion

Almost one hundred years ago, particular ultranationalist circles in Germany envisaged an alliance with Soviet Russia that would help liberate their country from “predatory” English and French capitalists, and secure truly German rule over Germany. The Soviets, while formally promoting communism worldwide, were ready to collaborate with German fascists not only to break up Western isolation of Soviet Russia but also to inflict damage on the Entente capitalists that allegedly endeavoured to enslave the German and Soviet peoples.

Today, one can hear echoes of the interwar reciprocities between the Soviets and German ultranationalists in a post-Cold War international setting. The actors have changed, but some correlations remain similar. The “Entente” of today is the liberal-democratic West in general and the US and NATO in particular. Certain far-right forces in Europe, North America and elsewhere embrace Putin’s Russia as an ally in their struggle against Western liberal democracy and multiculturalism hoping that a (geo)political alliance with Moscow will help them reconstruct the mythologised and romanticised nation-state and “take our country back”. In their turn, Russian officials, leading politicians and loyalists are using the Western far right not only to consolidate the authoritarian kleptocratic regime at home and impose Moscow’s geopolitical objectives in the post-Soviet space, but also to counteract the growing isolation of Russia in the Europeanised world and, in particular cases, to disrupt the liberal-democratic consensus in Western societies and, thus, destabilise them.

In terms of ideology, contemporary far-right authors, movements and organisations, which consciously align themselves with Putin’s Russia, draw on a vast repository of historical right-wing extremist discourses. The major ideological inspiration for the rapprochement with Russia originating from the interwar period was National Bolshevism that combined commitments to class struggle, nationalisation of the means of production and ultranationalism. Minor inspirations from the same period included the Conservative Revolution and Strasserite left-wing Nazism. The Cold War era brought new incentives for cooperation with Russia, namely particular neutralist strands in post-war pan-European fascism that initially saw both the US and USSR as tantamount enemies of Europe, but increasingly shifted to a pro-Soviet position considering the US a much more sinister force eroding the ethnic, cultural and psychological fabric of European nations. The pro-Soviet far-right neutralists’ dream centred around a common geopolitical space imagined as “a European Imperium” that would unite Europe and Russia in a geopolitical symbiosis, or the “Euro-Soviet Empire” from Vladivostok to Dublin – an idea that could be traced back to the interwar National Bolshevik concept of the “Germanic-Slavonic bloc” from Vladivostok to Vlissingen.

Despite the readiness of some far-right activists and politicians to cooperate with the Soviet Union with the aim of creating an anti-American geopolitical bloc, Moscow seemed to be reluctant to fully engage in this sort of cooperation. Yet the Soviet security services readily exploited the Western far right in the field of subversive operations, or active measures, against the West.

The closed nature of the Soviet Union impeded Western far-right activists' communication with their potential political allies in the Soviet Union, but the latter's demise opened a wide window of opportunity for cooperation. In the 1990s, during the rule of Russia's President Boris Yeltsin, representatives of various Western far-right movements and organisations rushed to Russia to build contacts with people they thought were close to taking power in the country. However, they soon appeared to be disappointed because the only contacts they had managed to establish were those with Russian ultranationalist activists and politicians whose chances to come to power were slim. Russian ultranationalists were eager to develop relations with the Western far right too, albeit for a different reason: for them, international contacts offered a prospect of consolidating their positions among other Russian "patriots".

This situation changed little during Vladimir Putin's first presidential term. Despite the already growing authoritarianism of his kleptocratic regime and rapidly deteriorating state of human rights in Russia, Moscow aspired to maintain relations with mainstream Western politicians, who, in their turn, embraced and welcomed friendship with Putin's Russia. This situation started to change after a series of "colour revolutions" in the post-Soviet space in 2003-2005 which the Kremlin interpreted as a US-led Western attempt to undermine Russia's "legitimate" sphere of influence and to orchestrate a regime change in Russia itself. This interpretation resulted in Moscow's ever intensifying rethinking of its relationship with the US and EU. As Putin's regime felt threatened, pro-Western politicians and officials within the Russian ruling elite became gradually marginalised, while the representatives of the force institutions, or *siloviki*, with their Cold War mentality came to the fore of the debate on the relations between Russia and the West. Since then, Putin's Russia was no longer simply an authoritarian kleptocracy, because – due to Moscow's response to the "colour revolutions" and rethinking of its relations with the West – it now mainstreamed, legitimised and sanctioned radically conservative, anti-Western and, especially, anti-American discourses that, in the period between 1991 and 2004, existed largely on the peripheries of socio-political life.

These developments did not automatically result in the Kremlin's partnership with the Western far right. However, in 2005-2006, as a response to the work of independent electoral observation missions, whose critical assessment of fraudulent electoral practices contributed to the outbreaks of "colour revolutions" against stolen elections, there emerged a political project that enabled some minor Russian actors and European

far-right activists to join forces in a cause that directly benefited Putin's regime. This project involved politically biased observation of legitimate and illegitimate electoral processes in the post-Soviet space, or – in Moscow's understanding – Russia's sphere of influence. The Russian side of this project was represented by the formally independent, but intrinsically pro-Kremlin electoral monitoring organisation CIS-EMO. The other side was represented by the Belgian Eurasian Observatory for Democracy and Elections and the Polish European Centre for Geopolitical Analysis led and staffed by right-wing radicals. The three organisations invited far-right and far-left politicians and activists for international election observation missions, and, since 2005-2006, have been engaged in legitimising practices of electoral authoritarianism in the post-Soviet space while remaining loyal to general objectives of Russia's foreign and domestic policies. Since 2011, CIS-EMO gradually receded into the background; the organisation Civic Control managed by figures closely associated with the State Duma and the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation took over CIS-EMO's contacts with Western far-right politicians and activists involved in electoral observation.

Russia's five-day war with Georgia in August 2008 became yet another important milestone in the development of relations between Russian pro-Kremlin actors and Western far-right activists. Immediately after the war, the Kremlin understood that it might have won the war easily but had eventually failed to convince Western societies in the allegedly justified nature of Russia's aggression against Georgia. As Moscow was facing criticism from the West, the Russian state-controlled media changed the tactics. Previously, they relied solely on promoting the argument that Moscow's international and domestic activities were driven by good intentions, but since 2008-2009 the Russian media also started pushing the message that the West could not appreciate Russia's actions because Western liberal-democratic societies were decadent, plagued by same-sex marriages, moral crisis, failing multiculturalism and disrespect for the rights of the majority. To promote this message, Russian media, especially RT, have started engaging more intensely with far-right activists and politicians, as well as various conspiracy theorists and isolationists, who were willing to corroborate Moscow's message for ideological reasons. The narratives produced by the Russian state-controlled media with the help of Western far-right elements had two distinct audiences: a Western audience, whom the Russian media tried to convince that their ruling elites were failing them (in those areas where Putin's Russia succeeded); and a Russian audience, for whom the main message was that the presumed deficiencies of the EU and US demonstrated the failure of liberal democracy as such and the unacceptability of Western models of development for Russia.

The anti-Western turn of Putin's regime and aggressive foreign policy moves inspired hope among particular Western far-right movements and organisations that

have increasingly started operating, since 2006-2009, as pro-Kremlin front organisations promoting Moscow's geopolitical interests in their respective societies and internationally. Their cooperation with Russian stakeholders and institutions was facilitated by several types of operators. The first type of these operators is "Russophile" far-right politicians who made substantial contribution to pro-Kremlin turns of their parties. The second type is Russian ultranationalists who encouraged pro-Kremlin efforts of a number of radical right-wing parties in Europe. The third type is Russian soft power institutions such as Rossotrudnichestvo and Fond "Russkiy Mir" that generally aim to influence public opinion outside Russia. The fourth type is Russian ultraconservative activists, who – similar to the second type of operators – encouraged pro-Kremlin efforts of the European far right, but, unlike Russian ultranationalists, were actually able to help European far-right leaders reach politically significant Russian officials through their personal contacts. The fifth type is Russian diplomats who helped formalise relations between leaders of radical right-wing parties and representatives of Putin's regime. Finally, the sixth type is high-profile members of the "United Russia" party who became most important point of contact between certain far-right politicians and the Russian ruling elites.

In 2010-2014, several major developments gave further incentive to cooperation between Russian actors and Western far-right politicians. On the one hand, Moscow's reaction to the "Arab Spring" in 2010-2012 and the anti-Putin protests in 2011-2012 intensified the anti-Western and anti-American radicalisation of Putin's regime. On the other hand, many Western mainstream politicians and officials gradually withdrew their support for Putin's regime over its crackdown on the anti-Putin protests, show trials and dubious laws violating human rights, Moscow's backing of Bashar al-Assad's regime, and, most importantly, the annexation of Crimea and covert invasion of Eastern Ukraine.

To be sure, more than ever Putin's regime wanted to pursue relations with influential politicians in the West. But it seems that in 2012-2014 – against the background of the dramatic deterioration of relations with the West and, especially, after the EU, US and some other countries imposed sanctions against Russia – Putin and his inner circle convinced themselves that the West was waging a "war" on Russia and that it was hardly possible to return to the political honeymoon with the West that Putin's kleptocracy had enjoyed in 2000-2004. As a result, Putin's regime – drawing on a disparate range of its grievances, concerns and complaints over the perceived Western approaches towards Russia – formulated its long-term objective: to conclude with the West a "new Yalta agreement" that would fix a Russian geopolitical sphere of influence and legitimise the indefinite rule of the authoritarian kleptocratic regime in Russia. In order to achieve this objective, Moscow would ideally cooperate with Western mainstream politicians and officials who, for whatever reason, would be ready to agree

to the Kremlin's conditions, return to business as usual and build what Putin called "a harmonious economic community stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok".⁹⁷⁴ In Germany, the mainstream apologists of Putin's regime received the name *Putin-Versteher* (Putin understanders).

The problem for Moscow is that a "new Yalta agreement" is opposed by those Western politicians who understand the deeply illiberal and undemocratic nature of the Kremlin's proposal, and the threat that this "agreement" poses to the EU and the international order. Even more problematic for the Kremlin is that Western opposition to a "new Yalta agreement" is relatively united and, so far, has prevailed over the *Putin-Versteher*. Beyond all doubt, this unity is neither ideal nor seamless – the institutions, traditions, and practices of Western liberal democracies themselves render them vulnerable to Russia's active measures. But it is based on the workings of powerful alliances such as the EU, NATO and transatlantic partnerships that are difficult to undermine.

These circumstances triggered an upsurge of Moscow's cooperation with Western far-right forces, some of which had already proven their unwavering loyalty to Moscow by that time. Moreover, Russian ultranationalist, ultraconservative and other operators involved in building and developing contacts with the Western far right in favour of the Kremlin's foreign policy objectives, actively promoted this cooperation as it would help them consolidate their position inside Putin's regime.

Russian ultranationalist and ultraconservative operators of Western far-right contacts are open about their ideological aversion of the West and their sincere commitment to the destruction of the EU. One Dugin's associate makes this point clear:

Acknowledging the civilisational nature of the conflict between Russia and the West, we aim at destroying the West in its current form as a civilisation. Therefore, having recourse to the use of existing networks, we should give priority to those that are themselves directed at the destruction of modern European civilisational identity.

Groups that can act in this capacity include totalitarian sects, separatist movements, neo-Nazi and racist movements, anarchists and anti-globalists, radical ecologists, Eurosceptics, isolationists, illegal migrants, etc. This is exactly how the West operates, using [against Russia] liberal and human rights non-governmental organisations whose ideology is destructive and pernicious for the Russian civilisation.⁹⁷⁵

⁹⁷⁴ "From Lisbon to Vladivostok': Putin Envisions a Russia-EU Free Trade Zone", *Spiegel Online*, 25 November (2010), <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/from-lisbon-to-vladivostok-putin-envisions-a-russia-eu-free-trade-zone-a-731109.html>.

⁹⁷⁵ Aleksandr Bovdunov, "Tsvivilizatsionnye razborki", *Evrazia*, 13 January (2015), <http://evrazia.org/article/230>.

Naturally, this openness about the willingness to destroy the liberal-democratic West is intrinsic only to the most extreme Russian operators of Western far-right contacts. However, apart from its ostentatiously radical anti-Westernist message, the above-mentioned quote contains another important narrative that can also be found in the rhetoric of Russian high-ranking circles: Russia's actions, no matter how aggressive they are, are justified by what is perceived by Moscow as aggressive actions of the West. Or, as Ivan Krastev puts it, the Kremlin is engaged in "reverse engineering" Western foreign policy, i.e. "trying to reconstruct and imitate what they believe the West is doing",⁹⁷⁶ and the Kremlin believes that the West is waging a war on Russia.

This context is key to understanding the so-called "Gerasimov's Doctrine", an article on the recent past, present and expected future of warfare written by the Chief of the General Staff of Russia's Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov⁹⁷⁷ and most likely addressed to Russia's senior political leadership.⁹⁷⁸ Discussing the role of non-military methods in the resolution of interstate conflicts, Gerasimov argued that the primary phases of conflict development involved such non-military measures employed by an aggressor-nation as "the formation of coalitions and alliances" and "formation of the political opposition" in a victim-nation.⁹⁷⁹ As Keir Giles asserts, what Gerasimov described "was the Russian perception of how the US-led West intervenes in the internal affairs of states, exacerbating instability by engendering 'colour revolutions' in those that resist US hegemony, and financing and supplying weapons to rebel groups and mercenaries".⁹⁸⁰

Following the "reverse engineering" pattern mentioned above, for Moscow, "formation of coalitions and alliances" with the Western far right constitutes one of several types of active measures aimed at achieving the Kremlin's major foreign policy objectives, in case other, softer active measures do not work. In other words, Moscow's cooperation with the far right is dependent on the level and quality of contacts with the *Putin-Versteher* in Western national contexts, and Moscow always considers these two scenarios. The first scenario, or Plan A, is that if Putin's regime still has – or finds new – influential mainstream allies in a Western country, it will prefer to work with them to advance its interests. In the majority of cases Moscow will not directly support those far-

⁹⁷⁶ "Ivan Krastev: Russia Is 'Reverse Engineering' Western Foreign Policy", *Graduate Institute Geneva*, 18 November (2015), http://graduateinstitute.ch/home/relations-publiques/news-at-the-institute/news-archives.html/_/news/corporate/2015/ivan-krastev-russia-is-reverse-e.

⁹⁷⁷ Valery Gerasimov, "Tsennost' nauki – v predvidenii", *Voenno-promyshlennyi kur'er*, No. 8 (2013), pp. 1-3. For the English translation of this article see Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight", *Military Review*, January-February (2016), pp. 23-29.

⁹⁷⁸ Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right", *Military Review*, January-February (2016), pp. 30-38 (31).

⁹⁷⁹ Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight", p. 28.

⁹⁸⁰ Keir Giles, *Russia's "New" Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power* (London: Chatham House, 2016), p. 10.

right groups that are in opposition to the *Putin-Versteher* in fear of compromising relations with the latter. Indeed, why, for example, bid welcome to Jobbik when Putin's regime is already benefiting from the illiberal-democratic policies of Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to whom Jobbik is opposed? Nevertheless, even in cases such as this, Moscow will strive to maintain *medium-level* contacts with the anti-EU, anti-NATO, anti-American and generally anti-systemic forces through various operators. Thus, the second scenario, or Plan B, is that if the *Putin-Versteher* in a particular Western country become either too few or of little authority, then Moscow will activate and play the far-right card and directly support the anti-systemic forces to subvert the liberal-democratic order with the aim of undermining the unity of the Western opposition to Moscow's illiberal vision of a "new Yalta agreement". This is demonstrated, in particular, by the case of the FPÖ: official Moscow is on good terms with the Austrian mainstream political forces, but they became considered to be in decline in mid-term perspective; therefore, the Kremlin became interested in building stronger contacts with the FPÖ in the hope that this far-right party comes to power in Austria. However, a reversal of the second scenario is possible too, as the case of the FN showed: Moscow provided support to the FN in 2013-2015, but François Fillon, the candidate of the centre-right Republicans for the 2017 presidential election, was seen by the Kremlin as a mainstream *Putin-Versteher* and – according to public opinion polls conducted until the end of January 2017 – was more popular than the FN's presidential candidate Marine Le Pen; thus, the Kremlin limited (but did not not entirely end) its cooperation with the FN in order not to sour relations with Fillon. However, with the decline of Fillon's popularity in February 2017, the Kremlin, again, returned to the second scenario and supported Le Pen.

In the second scenario, the question of how far Moscow is prepared to go in using or exploiting the Western far right against the EU, NATO and the liberal-democratic consensus needs further exploration. May Russia go as far as building a modern version of the Schwarze Reichswehr that would imply cooperation with Western right-wing paramilitaries willing to wage a real war on the modern "Entente"? Could Moscow eventually fulfil a dream of Jean Thiriart and provide European national-revolutionaries with an "outside lung" which fascists can use to prepare for the destruction of the EU and liberation of Europe from "American influence"?

These questions may sound dramatic, but various reports indicate that they are legitimate. Russian neo-Eurasianists had developed relations with, and trained, pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine almost ten years before the latter facilitated the Russian invasion of the region in 2014.⁹⁸¹ The Slovak right-wing paramilitary movement

⁹⁸¹ Anton Shekhovtsov, "Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism and the Russian-Ukrainian War", in Mark Bassin, Gonzalo Pozo-Martin (eds), *The Politics of Eurasianism: Identity, Popular Culture and Russia's Foreign Policy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), pp. 185-204.

Slovak Conscripts (Slovenskí Branci), which is characterised by pro-Russian and anti-NATO views, was formed in 2012 by a Slovak national who had received training in Russia by former officers of the Spetsnaz, i.e. Russia's Special Purpose Military Units.⁹⁸² A pro-Russian and anti-NATO right-wing paramilitary group Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserve (Českoslovenští vojáci v záloze) exists in the Czech Republic too.⁹⁸³ According to the findings of a German investigative journalist, officers of Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate and Air Landing Troops may be involved in the training of German right-wingers on the basis of a Russian martial arts school connected to the Russian pro-Putin biker gang "Night Wolves".⁹⁸⁴ In 2014, British right-wing extremists were reported to have received training in Wales from representatives of the Russian neo-Nazi group White Rex.⁹⁸⁵ Hungarian investigative journalists András Dezső and Szabolcs Panyi argue that the extreme right paramilitary movement Hungarian National Front, whose leader István Gyórkös killed a police officer in October 2016, had Russian connections and that "Russian diplomats have participated in the airsoft drills" organised by the MNA.⁹⁸⁶

One suspects, like in the case of Russia's covert invasion of Ukraine, that some relevant information remains unrevealed. As Chapter 1 demonstrated, particular historical details of the covert Soviet cooperation with the European far right were discovered dozens of years later. There is little doubt that some information may never come to the surface at all. The situation today may be similar. This should encourage academics to do further research, analysis and clarification of the areas and aspects of cooperation between various Russian actors and Western far-right activists, movements and organisations discussed or not discussed in this thesis.

Future investigations, could focus on national case studies and address the issues such as, for example, Russian relations with US far-right figures who supported the election of Donald Trump as a new US president. One especially intriguing connection is the American far-right movement known as Alternative Right (or alt-right). A prominent representative of alt-right is Steve Bannon, a former executive chair of the influential far-

⁹⁸² Krekó, Győri, Milo, Marušiak, Széky, Lencsés, *Marching towards Eurasia*, p. 49.

⁹⁸³ Jan Wirnitzer, "V Česku roste proruská polovojenská milice. Chce si 'vzít vlast zpět'", *iDNES.cz*, 24 November (2015), http://zpravy.idnes.cz/profil-ceskoslovensti-vojaci-v-zaloze-obrtel-foo-/domaci.aspx?c=A151123_123952_domaci_jw.

⁹⁸⁴ Boris Reitschuster, *Putins verdeckter Krieg: Moskaus Allianz gegen Europa* (Berlin: Econ, 2016), pp. 256-264.

⁹⁸⁵ Scott Hesketh, Colin Cortbus, "Neo-Nazi Nuts Are Training Yobs to Embark on Race War", *The Daily Star*, 9 November (2014), <http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/409339/Neo-Nazi-activists-train-right-wing-Brits-race-war-secret-camps>; Gerry Gable, "Not Thugs but Terrorists in the Making", *Searchlight*, 10 November (2014), <https://web.archive.org/web/20150818045435/http://www.searchlightmagazine.com/blogs/searchlight-blog/not-thugs-but-terrorists-in-the-making>.

⁹⁸⁶ András Dezső, Szabolcs Panyi, "Russian Diplomats Exercised with Hungarian Cop Killer's Far-right Gang", *Index*, 28 October (2016), http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/28/russian_diplomats_exercised_with_hungarian_cop_killer_s_far-right_gang/.

right website *Breitbart News*, whom President Trump designated as his chief strategist and senior counsellor. Another notable representative of alt-right is Richard Spencer, president of the think-tank National Policy Institute, whom RT approached as a “political analyst” and expert on the Libyan and Syrian issues already in 2013. Spencer’s former wife Nina Kouprianova⁹⁸⁷ translated into English the writings of Aleksandr Dugin later published in Spencer’s publishing house Washington Summit Publishers.⁹⁸⁸

Further research could also consider the question about the significance of ideological aspects: in which cases is ideology the only motivation that drives certain far-right movements and parties to become pro-Kremlin front organisations in the West? And in which cases do personal biographies, business interests, financial reward or counterintelligence operations possibly play a more prominent role?⁹⁸⁹ One also needs to explore, in more detail, the patterns of communication between Western far right and the highest quarters of political power in Russia: who creates which channels of the communication? What operators are involved in each case? Who makes a decision to increase or decrease the intensity and significance of this or that communication? Another open question is the magnitude of the impact of the far-right parties’ engagement with various Russian actors on the socio-political situation in their Western societies. By exploring these issues researchers will contribute not only to the emergent field of studies of the relations between Russia and the Western far right, but will also make a contribution to the information and formation of current Western public affairs, and, eventually, to the strengthening of liberal democracy and consolidation of democratic international institutions.

⁹⁸⁷ They apparently separated in 2016. Nina Kouprianova also uses a pen name Nina Byzantina.

⁹⁸⁸ Aleksandr Dugin, *Martin Heidegger: The Philosophy of Another Beginning* (Arlington: Raddix/Washington Summit Publishers, 2014).

⁹⁸⁹ In May 2014, Hungary’s Constitution Protection Office accused Jobbik’s Béla Kovács of being a Russian spy, see Benjámín Novák, “Jobbik MEP Accused of Spying for Russia”, *Budapest Beacon*, 17 May (2014), <http://budapestbeacon.com/featured-articles/jobbik-mep-accused-of-spying-for-russia>; in May 2016, Polish prosecutors detained Mateusz Piskorski on suspicions of spying for Russia, see “Poland Detains Pro-Kremlin Party Leader for ‘Spying’”, *The Guardian*, 19 May (2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/19/poland-detains-pro-kremlin-party-leader-mateusz-piskorski-spying>. If Kovács’s and Piskorski’s activities are properly investigated, we may know more details about the cooperation with various Russian actors.

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