



# Contemporary Security Policy

ISSN: 1352-3260 (Print) 1743-8764 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fcsp20>

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To cite this article: Michal Onderco (2019) Partisan views of Russia: Analyzing European party electoral manifestos since 1991, Contemporary Security Policy, 40:4, 526-547, DOI: [10.1080/13523260.2019.1661607](https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019.1661607)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019.1661607>



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Published online: 12 Sep 2019.



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## Partisan views of Russia: Analyzing European party electoral manifestos since 1991

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### ABSTRACT

The connection between Russia and European political parties has been in the scholarly and popular spotlight recently. While scholars focus on the connection between the far right (and populist) parties and Russia, they have all but ignored the rapidly increasing literature on the role of political parties in foreign policy. This article provides an attempt to bridge these literatures. After analyzing a corpus of party manifestos, the results suggest that there is temporal variation in how European parties have seen Russia since the end of the Cold War. European parties tended to be mostly positive in their views of Russia prior to 2015. Geography and ideology were much less important as a factor in explaining party positions. While some ideological groups share attitudes across different borders, the overall influence of ideology on attitudes toward Russia is minimal.

**KEYWORDS** Party politics; Russia; foreign policy; Europe; ideology; Crimea

The connection between Russia and European far right and populist political parties has been in the scholarly and popular spotlight in recent years. This has been motivated by three factors: Firstly, there is abundant evidence of intellectual fascination on the part of many of the Europe's current "troublemakers" with Putin's Russia (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016; Krekó & Szabados, 2009; Political Capital Institute, 2014; Polyakova, 2014; Stéphane & Schmitt, 2015). Secondly, many of these extremist parties pursue goals similar to those pushed by Putin's Russia, such as limiting cooperation with Europe, promoting stronger roles for the national states, and placing limits on the rights of minorities (whether ethnic, religious, or sexual) (Gressel, 2017; Klapsis, 2017; Political Capital Institute, 2014; Roháč, Zgut, & Györi, 2017). Thirdly, many of these parties enjoy active connections with Russia, whether by participating

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019.1661607>.

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in various networks or by cooperating with various Russian agents (Hénin, 2016; Krekó et al., 2015; Polyakova, 2014; Schmitt, 2017, 2018).

While most of the scholarly attention has focused on the connection between the far right (and populist) parties and Russia, scholars have noted too that the appeal to anti-imperialism and the fight against the American hegemony has also provided a connection between the far left and Russia (Braghioli & Makarychev, 2016; Stéphane & Schmitt, 2015). Curiously, little conceptual link has been done between the scholarship studying extreme parties' connections with (and interest in) Russia on one hand, and the increasing academic interest in the study of the role of political parties in foreign policy on the other hand. The scholarship on the role of parties in foreign policy has focused on the role of ideology, and has seen a true explosion of the scholarship in recent years (Blarel & van Willigen, 2017; Fonck, Haesebrouck, & Reykers, 2019; Herbel, 2017; Kaarbo & Kenealy, 2017; Mello, 2012, 2014; Raunio & Wagner, 2017; Wagner, Herranz-Surrallés, Kaarbo, & Ostermann, 2018). However, understanding European parties' past and present view on Russia is crucial for sketching prospects for future cooperation (or confrontation) with Russia. If European parties held deep-seated antagonism toward Russia, the potential for overcoming existing antagonism and for future cooperation would be extremely limited.

The present article seeks to make three contributions to the existing scholarship on parties and foreign policy. Firstly, the article bridges scholarship on party politics of foreign policy and the scholarship on attitudes toward Russia by studying the variation in partisan attitudes toward Russia. Secondly, it brings a new source of data to the table: an analysis of a corpus of party manifestos developed within the Comparative Manifesto Project (Merz, Regel, & Lewandowski, 2016; Volkens et al., 2018). Thirdly, the article systematically studies variation along ideological, geographical, and temporal lines.

The results provide four key takeaways. Firstly, European parties have paid very little attention to Russia in their party manifestos. Secondly, prior to Russia's invasion of Crimea, European parties frequently held positive views of Russia (or were ambivalent toward the country), and did not see the country as a threat. Save for a few exceptions, they did not hold deep-seated hostility toward Russia. Their current critical attitude is rather a reaction to Russia's actions in Ukraine. Thirdly, geography—the proximity to Russia—has not structured attitudes toward the country. Fourthly, except for some small patterns, it is difficult to point to ideology as an influential factor in the attitudes toward Russia.

The remainder of the article continues as follows. The second section provides a theoretical argument about the variation in partisan views on Russia. The third section outlines the methodology of the present study, while the fourth section presents the results and analyzes them. In the concluding section, I offer possible avenues for future research on this issue.

## Toward a theory of party variation on Russia

Explaining party positions toward Russia requires us to consider three different angles. Firstly, it is the growing body of scholarship on partisan politics of foreign and security policy. This scholarship has experienced an expansion in the recent years, and has focused mainly on the approval of military missions abroad. This focus on party politics stems from the long-standing focus of the comparative foreign policy analysis field on the *innenpolitik* aspects of foreign policy-making, and has focused in particular on the impact of partisan ideology on foreign policy preferences. However, studying party politics of relations with another country, especially one so close as Russia is to Europe, requires consideration of the structural conditions which shape how countries are exposed to. Geography captures many of these considerations. Last but not least, the foreign policy toward the third countries is at least partially a function of their actions. While there are many ways to capture the other actors' actions, longitudinal analysis can be used to capture developments in the other actors' policy. Therefore, in this article, I will focus on three aspects to explain the variations in parties' views of Russia: partisan ideology, geography, and across time.

### *Partisan ideology*

Recent studies have explored the partisan politics behind the variation in participation in (and approval of) military interventions (Fonck et al., 2019; Mello, 2014; Raunio & Wagner, 2017; Wagner, Herranz-Surralles, Kaarbo, & Ostermann, 2017). As Wagner et al. (2017) explain, in the post-Cold War period, the use of military has become associated less with conflict, and more with spread of human rights and “wars of choice.” This is in contrast to the Cold War, when the left was historically associated with opposition to militarism.

This opposition to militarism has also often led to calls for peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union and the fight against “aggressive” foreign policy, which has often meant being soft and accommodating toward Soviet Union. Scholars have argued that the contemporary far left, although much less powerful compared to her predecessors, continues to hold these attitudes (Gressel, 2017; Krekó & Györi, 2016). This makes attitudes toward Russia different from attitudes toward the United States. There is a partisan aspect to the anti-Americanism and attitudes toward the United States, especially through attitudes toward militarism and capitalism (Beyer & Liebe, 2014; Everts & Isernia, 2015; Katzenstein & Keohane, 2007). However, especially after the end of the Cold War, there is no reason to expect much variation among the parties in their attitudes toward Russia on the basis of partizanship in the traditional left-right sense.

However, the emphases that individual parties put on different agendas may shape their attitudes toward Russia. For example, as Braghiroli (2015) demonstrates, the liberal parties in the European Parliament, which focus on human rights, tend to be more critical of Russia's human rights record. Given Russia's recent attempts to promote itself as a standard-bearer for the cooperation of sovereign countries, traditional morality, and identitarianism, we could expect that the fringe parties that argue that the West is in decay and that the supranational integration has reached too far would be more positively attuned to Russia over time (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016; Gressel, 2017; Klapsis, 2017). While far-right parties are frequently associated with such belief, appeals to morality and limits to European integration are not limited to far-right parties (Stéphane & Schmitt, 2015). This belief is associated in general with Eurosceptic views, and similar beliefs form part of what Marks, Hooghe, Nelson, and Edwards (2006) call "traditional-authoritarian-nationalist" (TAN) parties (as opposed to the "green-alternative-libertarian" (GAL) parties). Therefore, one could expect that the more parties espouse the TAN ideology, the more likely they are going to be positive about Russia, since they (in principle) espouse the same values. This means that European parties associated with the traditional values would be more pro-Russian. At the same time, we could also expect that the more nationalistic parties are, the more appeal Russia's nationalist message will have, and therefore we might expect parties scoring high on nationalism to hold positive views of Russia (Gressel, 2017; Stéphane & Schmitt, 2015).

### ***Geographical proximity***

Europe's relations with Russia have historically been shaped along geographical lines. Eastern Europe was for four decades subjected to direct Russian interference, whereas in Western Europe, the Cold War was perceived through both the prism of ideological struggle and the fear of military intervention. These experiences shaped how actors saw the Soviet Union and later Russia (Applebaum, 2012; Judt, 2005).

This finding is consistent with the findings from the study of international conflict. Scholars have long recognized geography as a relevant factor to explain the cooperation and conflict between countries (Diehl, 1991; Oneal, Oneal, Maoz, & Russett, 1996). It is logical that the closer countries are, the more opportunities they have for conflict. However, the flipside of the geography argument demonstrates that geographically close countries which trade extensively are more likely to have cooperative relations (Robst, Polachek, & Chang, 2007). This relationship is, however, frequently moderated by both the nature of the goods that countries trade, and how widely the benefits of the trade are shared (Copeland, 2014; Goenner, 2010; Press-Bar-nathan, 2006).

At the end of the Cold War, driven by the desire to free themselves from the Soviet (and later Russian) influence, Eastern European countries pursued a policy of political integration with the West, especially the EU and NATO. This desire was partially a response to the potential threat from Russia (Grayson, 1999; Marten, 2018). Over time, Eastern European countries have come to be seen as strongly pro-American. Scholars of democracy promotion have noted that the desire to spread democratic norms further into the East has been strongly held by Central and Eastern European governments after their entry to the European Union and NATO (Balogh, 2012; Berti, Mikulova, & Popescu, 2016; Dangerfield, 2009). Given Russia's view that these activities constitute interference in her sphere of influence, it is not inconceivable that the Eastern European countries might hold more negative views of Russia.

Geographical proximity, augmented by the historical experience, might have made Eastern European parties reasonably more negatively predisposed toward Russia compared to parties in other parts of Europe. This expectation would fit with arguments recently made by Sauer (2017) who argued that NATO was pushed toward a stronger confrontation with Russia by its Eastern European members. On the other hand, because of the relative geographical distance, parties in Western European countries (as well as countries in the Southern Europe) might have a lower threat perception stemming from Russia. Put bluntly, threat perception of Russia is different in Tallinn than in Lisbon.

Therefore, I expect that if geography played a role, the parties in Eastern Europe would be more negative toward Russia compared to parties in other parts of Europe.

### ***Developments over time***

While the whole period under study takes place in the post-Cold War period when the competition between the West and East had already become a matter of the past, it is expected that time plays a role. Controlling for a time (or a time period) allows us to capture variations in Russian policy and actions toward its neighbours—whether the near ones, or the more distant ones (such as the EU).

As scholars of Russian foreign policy have extensively noted, Russian relations with, and attitudes toward the West have changed significantly since 1990s (Haukkala, 2015; Hopf, 2016, 2018; McFaul, 2018). While there has been earnest, extensive cooperation between the East and the West in economic as well as security issues (for example the cooperation on removing nuclear weapons from Ukraine, see Bernauer, Brem, & Suter, 1999). During the Yeltsin years and throughout early 2000s, Russia behaved more-or-less as a benign actor and even showed interest in integration in the Western international architecture. However, especially after the conflict in Georgia, a

development of an increasingly negative attitude could be expected. Even if some parties in Europe saw Russia as merely reacting to Georgia's provocations (Braghiroli & Makarychev, 2016; Klapsis, 2017), Russia's willingness to violate the sovereignty of another country could be expected to cause unease among European parties.

The relationship soured over time and culminated in the Ukraine crisis and Russian occupation of Crimea (Hopf, 2016). The party positions also could be expected to be more negative after Russia's invasion of Crimea and the intervention in Ukraine, making it predictable that the parties became more negative vis-à-vis Russia over time.

## Methodology

### *Positions on Russia*

One of the reasons why the scholars studying the connections between European parties and Russia and the scholars studying partisan politics of foreign policy have not intersected is the type of data these scholars use. Scholars looking at European parties and Russia tend to work with more qualitative research, with the exception of Gressel (2017), who conducted an expert survey of foreign policy preferences of 252 parties represented in national parliaments and the European Parliament. While expert surveys provide both reliable and valid ways of assessing partisan views of foreign policy (Benoit & Laver, 2007; Hooghe et al., 2010; Steenbergen & Marks, 2007), the downside of Gressel's study is that it provides only a snapshot view.

In contrast, large quantitative databases have been popular among the scholars of parties in foreign policy. One of the major sources of the quantitative scholarship on parties and foreign policy is the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) data. CMP has been considered the most popular source of data to estimate party positions on a wide array of topics (Gemenis, 2013). The main advantage of party manifestos is that they stated preferences of political parties, which the parties use to attract voters (Pennings, 2017). Given that they do not rely on expert knowledge, they provide a reliable assessment of partisan positions over time.

Although the CMP does code positive and negative references to Russia, there is *not a single mention* of Russia coded for *any* of the countries outside the former Soviet bloc and Greece since 1920. Even for the former Soviet bloc and Greece, there are less than 50 positions on Russia coded for all parties since the end of the Cold War (Volkens et al., 2018). Yet this is at odds with what we know about the Cold War, when views of Soviet Union were an important aspect of domestic political battle (Everts, 1985; Müller & Risse-Kappen, 1987), but also with the recent work on the partisan connections with Russia cited earlier.

To overcome this shortcoming, and to measure partisan views of Russia in this article, I use the data from a CMP offshoot, the Manifesto Corpus (Merz et al., 2016; Volkens et al., 2018). Manifesto Corpus offers full texts of 676 party manifestos from the countries currently in the EU.<sup>1</sup> As Merz et al. (2016) state, the text recoding is one of the most appropriate ways to treat the Corpus data. This approach has also been taken before, for example in Horn, Kevins, Jensen, and Kersbergen (2017), who recoded the CMP's welfare codes.

Manifestos have been scraped for all references to Russia. It is important to note that the manifestos were scraped using the web interface and not the R package provided by the CMP. The chief reason for this is that in the R package, not all manifestos are “properly” split into quasi-sentences, and some manifestos are even inserted as one quasi-sentence (whereas in the case of most parties, manifestos are sliced into hundreds of quasi-sentences). I thus decided that instead of slicing manifestos into quasi-sentences, it would be more reliable and valid to work with the data available from the web interface. Therefore, I searched the interface for mentions of the root related to Russia (e.g., “rus\*” for Slovakia, “rusl\* OR russis\*” in the Netherlands, etc) by country. In countries with more than one official language, I used combinations in all official languages.

From the resulting data, I removed unrelated quasi-sentences which were selected due to some linguistic similarity (eg, in Bulgarian, numerous quasi-sentences containing the word “rus\*” [Рус in Bulgarian] referred to the city of Ruse [Русе]), or which contained only the word “Russia” (likely a section header or similar). The quasi-sentences which remained in the dataset were all hand-coded into eleven categories:

- (1) Russia as a part of BRICS
- (2) Energy dependence
- (3) Human Rights in Russia
- (4) Security
- (5) Special Relationship
- (6) Spread international norms & institutions
- (7) Trade
- (8) Destabilization threat
- (9) Democracy promotion
- (10) Ukraine war
- (11) Disarmament

Furthermore, the first seven categories were coded in terms of whether the reference was positive or negative. For example, it was coded differently whether Russia, as a part of BRICS, was seen as an opportunity, or whether it was seen as a threat. Appendix A contains further information about coding frame and guidance given to coders. Coders were recruited from



among students and recent graduates with political science background; and who were either native speakers, or fluent speakers of the source language (acquired e.g., through long-term residence in a country). The data was then aggregated at the party-election level, and party-election is also the unit of analysis in the remainder of the article.

The ways in which CMP measures partisan positions are intrinsically connected to the *issue salience* within party manifestos (Budge, 1994; Mikhaylov, 2009; Oppermann & Viehrig, 2009). By implication, however, this means that scores capturing partisan positions change if the document's size changes, even if the position itself did not change. As Mikhaylov (2009, p. 27) explains, the standard solution to this problem was to use a distance function (Krippendorff, 2012). Whereas in the CMP methodology, the category scores are calculated as a ratio of category codes compared to the total number of codes per document, distance scores take a difference in opposing codes (e.g., left and right) and divide them by their sum. In that way, we can achieve a more reliable measure of a *policy position*, independent from the document size (Kim & Fording, 1998; Laver & Garry, 2000; Mikhaylov, 2009). In this article, I work with policy positions, and use the distance function for categories where both positive and negative codes were awarded. To arrive at the final score, I divide the difference of positive and negative codes by their sum. The score ranges from  $-1$  to  $+1$ , where  $-1$  indicates that all mentions were negative, and  $+1$  indicates that all mentions were positive.

In total, 911 quasi-sentences mentioning Russia were found in the total of 260 manifestos. Most manifestos containing references to Russia had fewer than five references, a result that testifies to the relatively low interest in Russia among the European parties. There are two outliers: one Lithuanian and one Polish party. Lithuania's *Homeland Union—Lithuanian Christian Democrats* had 135 codes allocated in 2008, and 92 in 2012; whereas Poland's *Law and Justice* had 51 codes allocated in 2011. Both parties were included in the analysis. The five countries with the highest mention of Russia in partisan manifestos are Lithuania (309 [but see above], 23.8 on average per manifesto), Estonia (154, 8.5 on average), Germany (148, 5.5 on average), The Netherlands (88, 2.69 on average), and Poland (88, 11 on average). On the other end of the spectrum, there was only one mention of Russia in manifestos from Denmark, Portugal, and Romania, and three in manifestos from Italy.

### **Party ideology**

I hypothesized that party ideology influences how parties see Russia. I use three different ways of measuring ideology. Firstly, I use the broad classification of parties based on the CMP data, which codes partisan ideology as

ecological, socialist, social democratic, liberal, Christian democratic, conservative, nationalist, agrarian, and regional.

Secondly, I calculate a party-level nationalism score to estimate how “nationalistic” each party is. To do this, I use the data on nationalism from the CMP data, and I calculate the score as a difference between positive and negative scores on the CMP item “National Way of Life.” This item is defined in the positive category as “Favourable mentions of the manifesto country’s nation, history, and general appeals” (variable p601), and in the negative category as “Unfavourable mentions of the manifesto country’s nation and history” (variable p602; both the definitions are taken from the CMP codebook version 2018a; see Volkens et al., 2018). This capturing of nationalism has been used in the past in the literature (Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Lowe, Benoit, Mikhaylov, & Laver, 2011).

Thirdly, I look at the ideological divide along the GAL/TAN axis. The data on GAL/TAN ideology were taken from the Chapel Hill Electoral Survey (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017). The GAL/TAN ideology is scored on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 denotes the libertarian (post-materialist) end, and 10 denotes the traditional (authoritarian) end.

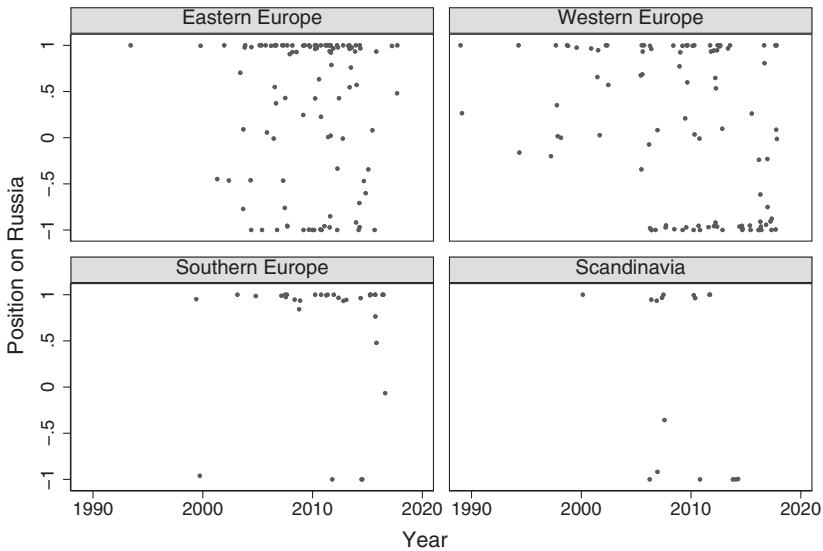
### **Geographical regions**

As argued above, it is expected that the geography plays a role in dividing the partisan views of Russia, and that Eastern European countries would have a more negative view compared to parties from other parts of Europe. To analyze this expectation, I group the countries into four broad regions: Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Southern Europe, and Scandinavia. Countries are classified in these categories as follows:

- *Eastern Europe*: all post-1995 newly-acceded countries, except Malta and Cyprus;
- *Western Europe*: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, United Kingdom;
- *Southern Europe*: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain, Portugal;
- *Scandinavia*: Denmark, Finland, Sweden.

### **Results**

Based on the three theoretical expectations, I look at the variation in partisan views of Russia along the three categories outlined above: geography, across time, and ideology. I start with geography and time. Figure 1 provides average party positions on Russia in all four regions over time. Each dot represents a party-election, and we can easily observe both temporal variation and the regional differences.<sup>2</sup> To start with Eastern Europe,



**Figure 1.** Positions on Russia across geographical regions over time.

Note: Individual points slightly jittered to improve readability.

there is substantive variation across time among parties and countries. While in the period between 1990 and 2000, there is data for one party in each period available, data is available for substantially more parties in the subsequent periods. In the 2000–2014 period, Eastern European parties have been rather positive toward Russia, contrary to the expectations presented in the theoretical section. After 2015, there is a growing number of countries with a negative outlook, but a divide persists and over half of parties maintain a positive view (on average, however, the parties moved toward a negative view post-2015). Therefore, it is not possible to conclude that Eastern European parties have been more negative toward Russia compared to parties in other parts of Europe, especially compared to Western Europe.<sup>3</sup>

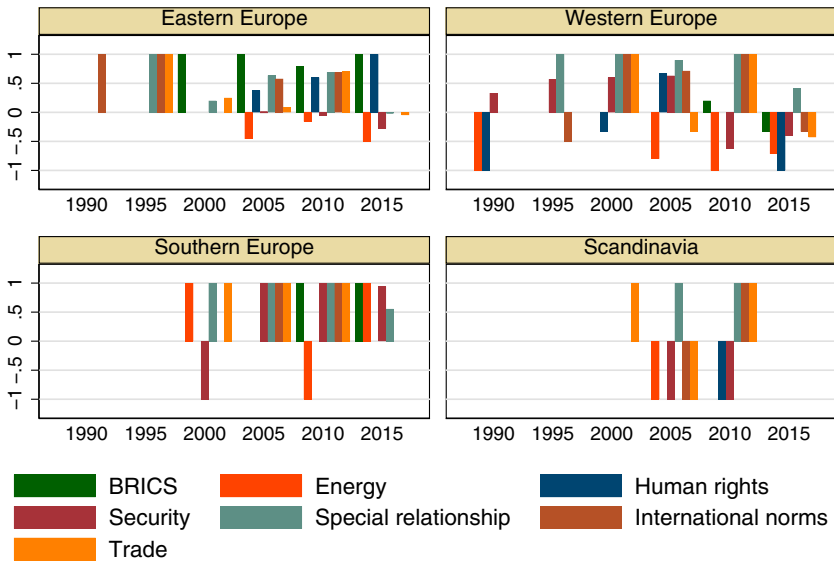
This overall pattern toward a positive view should not obscure finding that even within the Eastern European region, there is significant variation both within and between countries. To illustrate this divide we may look at elections in Slovakia and Poland at the beginning of the present decade. While in Slovakia's 2012 elections, all parties that mentioned Russia held a positive view of it, in Poland's 2011 elections, parties were divided. *Palikot* and *Law and Justice* held a negative position while *Civic Platform* and *Democratic Left Alliance* held a positive position. In Slovakia, for example, Russia has traditionally been seen as country with shared cultural values, and as a bulwark against the American imperialism (Malová, 2017). This finding corresponds with that of Chrysosgelos (2015), who theorizes that the partisan views of

Russia in the European parliament are a function of attitudes toward the United States.

In Western Europe, parties were positive on average, until 2015. To be sure, there has consistently been a group of parties critical of Russia, however, these critical parties tended to be the ones for whom Russia was not particularly salient, and these parties tended to have very few (one or two) references per manifesto. The majority of the parties saw Russia either ambivalently or positively, a finding also confirmed in the work of Gressel (2017). This has changed since 2015, and Western European parties have come to see Russia rather negatively. While prior to 2015, parties tended to have more diverse views of Russia, after the invasion of Ukraine, Western European parties had a uniformly negative view of Russia. Exceptions to these rules have been the *Indominable France* and *Democratic Movement* in France, the *Free Democratic Party* and *Alternative for Germany* in Germany, the *Socialist Party* and *Forum for Democracy* in The Netherlands, and the *UK Independence Party*. These findings correspond with the prior scholarship, which has found that fringe and hard Eurosceptic parties have tended to be more positive toward Russia (Braghiroli, 2015), but also that in the post-Crimea era, the parties with positive view of Russia tend to be on the far left and far right (Schmitt, 2017; Stéphane & Schmitt, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, in both Scandinavia and Southern Europe, parties have been on average positive about Russia. Curiously, in the whole of Southern Europe, four Spanish parties were the only ones who ever held a negative position on Russia (*United Left* in 2000; *Forum Asturias* in 2011, and *Citizens and People's Party* in 2015 elections). This finding underscores the argument that the European weariness as regards Russia is a response to Russia's own actions.<sup>5</sup>

To further unpack the variation, we analyze the patterns of issues addressed by parties over time. Looking at Figure 2, we see important differences in what topics are being addressed by parties across regions and over time.<sup>6</sup> In Eastern Europe, we observe variation over time, but the figure, which shows the average positions, obscures the important variation within the region. For example while overall parties within the region have traditionally held a negative view of Russia when it comes to security (with some, such as Poland's *Law and Justice*, or Lithuania's *Homeland Union* holding the most negative attitudes within the whole sample), there are also parties that hold rather positive views of Russia when it comes to security issues (such as the *Slovak National Party*, *Estonian People's Union*, or *Lithuanian Social Democratic Party*). Energy dependence is a similar case—on average, parties in Eastern and Western Europe mention Russia in negative terms when it comes to energy security, but there are exceptions. The most obvious one is Slovakia, where except for the liberal *Freedom and Solidarity* in 2010, parties consistently saw energy dependence on Russia as an opportunity



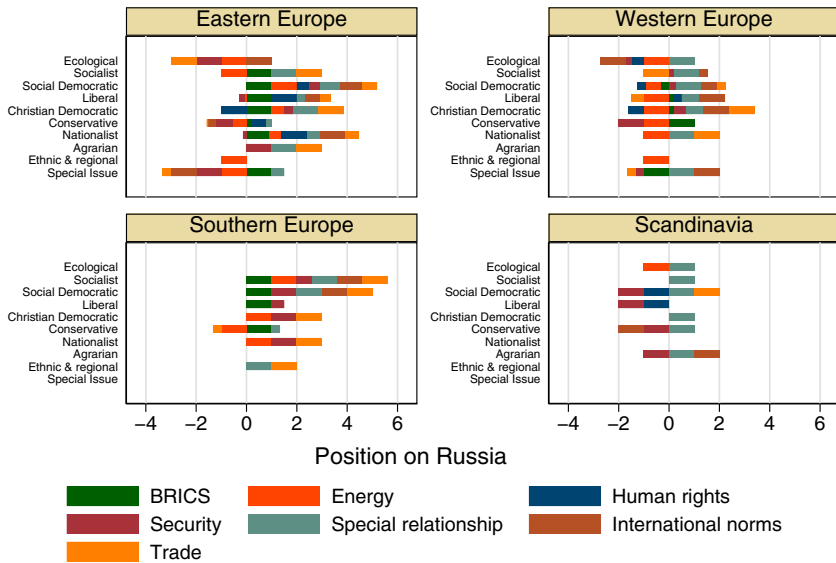
**Figure 2.** Issues addressed in relation to Russia over time.

(even *Freedom and Solidarity* switched to a positive view in 2012). This is rather surprising, considering that Slovakia was the hardest hit country after Russia stopped gas deliveries to Ukraine in 2009 (Christian Science Monitor, 2014). Energy security is also seen as an opportunity with a positive connotation in southern Europe.

The “special relationship” is a divisive issue among the Eastern European parties which share a lot of historical past with Russia. In Southern Europe, however, “special relationship” is seen in more positive light, frequently referring to historical ties between Orthodox religious communities (Klapisis, 2017). This is especially true because the positive view of Russia in this region is strongly influenced by the Greek parties (especially *Golden Dawn*) which held a very positive view of Russia in the post-crisis period.

Taken together, we see that the data did not bear out the expectation that Eastern European parties would be more negative toward Russia. If anything, on average it was the Western European parties which tended to be more negative, but looking at averages obscures variation within regions, which has been noted by scholars such as Gressel (2017).

Moving to the party ideology, we can start by looking at this slightly changed version of Figure 2: Figure 3 namely shows the same data but through the prism of party ideology. We see again that in general, all party families—with a few exceptions—tended to see Russia positively on average. These exceptions include ecological parties in eastern and western Europe, conservative parties outside southern Europe, and special issue parties in eastern Europe. Yet when it comes to the issues, there is an



**Figure 3.** Party ideology and positions on Russia.

important variation by party family as well as regionally. As mentioned previously, prior research has theorized that party ideology, rather than national allegiance, drives attitudes toward Russia in the European Parliament (Braghioli, 2015). However, we find little confirmation for this when looking at the parties across all EU countries. To be sure, there are some similarities across regions within the same party family: For example, Christian democrats in both eastern and western Europe tend to be critical of human rights in Russia; and conservatives outside southern Europe have a negative view of Russia's role in European security. But parties belonging to the same party family may behave in a contradictory fashion depending on the region: For instance, while eastern European socialists view trade positively in the context of relations with Russia, the western European socialists see it negatively.

This finding contradicts the finding of Braghioli (2015), but it may be explained by the differences between the European Parliament and national parliaments; and the fact that within European Parliament groups, the group position is often driven by a few particularly strong parties. Energy provides a similar example: While in eastern Europe some party families see energy dependence as an opportunity (particularly social democrats, Christian democrats, and nationalists), in western Europe the energy dependence is seen universally as a negative feature across all parties. In short, we observe that party ideology interacts with region, and that there is no clear pattern across parties and attitudes.

The look at the relationship between the two political ideologies and party positions on Russia confirms this observation. We do not find any systematic relationship between party ideology and the attitudes toward Russia, as reported in the statistical analysis reported in Table 1 above. While this does not mean that there might not be relations *on the level of individual parties*, there is no systematic relationship between these ideologies and the position on Russia. For example, among the parties which score very high on the GAL/TAN, we find parties hold both negative views of Russia (for example, *Law and Justice* in Poland, or *Reformed Political Party* in The Netherlands) and also positive views of Russia (*Golden Dawn* in Greece, for instance). Indeed, many of the parties with high GAL/TAN scores tend to be the ones that are often singled out as potential troublemakers or cases of particularly positive views of Russia among European parties (see, for example, Orenstein & Kelemen, 2017).

The link between nationalism and positive attitudes toward Russia, which is often raised in relation to the far right (Braghiroli, 2015; Polyakova, 2014; Schmitt, 2017), is not straightforward either. There is no systematic relationship between nationalism as an ideology measured across parties and positions toward Russia, which is reported in Table 1. The reader should keep in mind that the average score on nationalism for the parties included in the sample is 2.15, but the score is as high as 7.5 for nationalist parties in the sample (nationalist and agrarian parties are, however, similarly nationalistic). However, the standard deviation (indicating the spread of data) is high for the nationalism score among nationalist parties ( $SD = 5.30$ ). The “above-average nationalist” nationalist parties have uniformly positive views of Russia, unless they come from Baltics, which is not surprising given the public opinion about Russia among the non-Russian population in the Baltic countries. However, parties that have a high nationalism score in general (but are not classified as nationalist) tend to have much more varied view of Russia: for example, in the Dutch elections in 2017, both the liberal *People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy* (VVD) and the nationalist *Forum for Democracy* (FvD) had an above-average nationalism score (7.75 vs 9.02), but VVD was critical of Russia, whereas FvD had a positive attitude.

**Table 1.** Ideology and attitudes toward Russia.

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>GAL/TAN</b>	0.03	
	0.03	
<b>Nationalism</b>		0.01
		0.02
<b>Intercept</b>	-0.27	-0.17
	0.25	0.18
<b>N</b>	185	253

Notes: Ordinary least square regression, standard errors (clustered at the level of parties) reported in the second row<sup>7</sup>; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Expanding from Braghiroli (2015), we could explain the VVD's critical stance by the party's view of Russia primarily through the prism of human rights. It is likely that nationalism plays a relevant role for the party's position on Russia only if it is a defining feature for the party.

In sum, we see a very mixed effect of party ideology. Some party families tend to have similar views of Russia across regions, for example Christian democrats in Eastern and Western Europe share views of human rights in Russia. However, we find that overall, the relationship between ideology and attitudes toward Russia is weak, and we observe that parties often hold positions that are a result of a unique conflation of factors.

The results also partially confirm findings from the scholarship on parties and military missions; it concurs, for instance, with Wagner's et al. (2018) finding that the GAL/TAN dimension does not structure parties' foreign policy outlook. However, neither do we find that the left-right dimension, which they (and numerous others, such as Hofmann, 2013 or Rathbun, 2004) see as structuring the conflict over military missions, structures the conflict related to Russia. This may be due to a number of reasons, one of which I propose is the low salience of Russia for most European parties over time—after all, European parties have had very few references to Russia in their party manifestos.

## Conclusion

This article has mapped partisan views of Russia over a longer period of time, based on the revealed positions presented in parties' electoral manifestos. In the context of the current tensions between the European countries and Russia, we should be interested in how European parties see the country. If they hold any deep-seated hostility toward Russia, the potential for cooperation would be very limited.

In this article, I shed light on the partisan perspectives on Russia by analyzing all references to Russia in the corpus of party manifestos of European parties (Merz et al., 2016). The corpus was combed for all references to Russia, and these were then coded into eleven categories.

Three important results emerge from the present analysis: Firstly, until recently, European parties have paid relatively little attention to Russia. In analyzing the manifestos of all European parties since the end of the Cold War, we found only slightly over 900 references to the country from 28 countries over a period of almost 30 years (which is approximately one reference per country per year). Secondly, prior to Russia's invasion of Crimea, European parties saw Russia positively overall; we found no evidence of any widespread (or deep-seated) hostility. Thirdly, ideology is scarcely a factor structuring partisan views of Russia except for faint traces (such as Christian democrats in both Eastern and Western Europe tending to be critical of human rights in Russia).



Curiously enough, eastern European parties are not anti-Russian—in fact, western European parties were, on average, more negative. With the exception of southern Europe, the overall situation shifted after 2015 when parties came to see Russia more negatively. It is important to keep in mind that sometimes even the same parties (and partisan families) see Russia in a conflicting way—both in a positive way and in a negative way on different subjects.

The results also show that nationalism as an ideology, which is frequently seen as a binding agent among pro-Russian parties in Europe, is *not* what drives pro-Russian attitudes among European parties. In fact, only the parties for which nationalism is the defining feature, and which are extraordinarily “nationalist” in their outlook, tend to have positive views of Russia.

The results contribute to a richer understanding of European parties’ attitudes toward Russia. Far from being easily dichotomized as pro- or anti-Russian, European parties have over time held a rather ambivalent, but on average positive, position vis-à-vis Russia (while remaining rather negligent). At the same time, the results give further credence to the argument that for the majority of the post-Cold War period, Europeans “have forgotten” about Russia.

The results from western Europe show that it is particularly the newly emerging populist and Eurosceptic parties (mixed with the Dutch Socialists and German liberals) whose electorate might find the pro-Russian statements appealing. After the invasion of Ukraine, mainstream parties—even those who were in the past rather positive about Russia—have turned critical of Russia, likely in line with their voters’ preferences. In Scandinavia and southern Europe, the references to Russia were the least numerous; Russia remained a relevant subject only in eastern European and western European party programs (and even then, only to a limited degree). This is in line with the fact that Russia has also disappeared from the security policy and defence planning in these countries.

Finally, the results demonstrate that the new-found interest in Russia and the recent appeal to it is indeed new. Positions on Russia have not been politicized before, and therefore the attitudes toward it seem to be a newly relevant factor in the emergence of populist parties in Europe. If political parties start politicizing relations with Russia to a greater degree in their national electoral programs, this could be a new (and potentially interesting) development.

## Notes

1. In this article, I work with the corpus version 2018a (also labeled as 2018-1), current as of the end of July 2018. Current EU members have been included for the whole period under study. The full list of all parties included in the study can be found in Appendix C. While not all parties in all EU member states are covered for the whole period of time, the data provides a reasonable coverage of parties in most European countries. The CMP project continuously develops the website where manifestos can be searched.

2. We may also notice that there is a clustering of parties around the two extremes (−1 and 1, meaning all mentions were positive or all mentions were negative). Intuitively, these may come from the low number of observations—if a party makes only one or two comments about Russia in its manifesto, it might well be that these will be both positive (or negative). While it is true that the more references to Russia there are, the less extreme the position of the party is, it is also true that not all extreme scores can be attributed to the low number of observations.
3. This finding was also confirmed in an OLS regression where individual regions were used as dependent variable. The only region which had a statistically significant impact was Southern Europe (results can be found in Appendix B online). A one-way between-subjects ANOVA to compare the effect of region on overall attitudes towards Russia confirmed these results. While there was a significant effect of region on attitudes at the  $p < 0.05$  level for the four regions [ $F(3, 249) = 5.09, p = 0.002$ ], the difference between Eastern Europe and other regions was not statistically significant at the  $p = 0.05$  level.
4. German FDP is an exception to this. Some scholars of Russian foreign policy, such as Stent (2019) argue that it is precisely the desire to “see the EU go” which binds Russian foreign policy and the hard Eurosceptics.
5. This finding was also confirmed by an OLS regression where time periods were inserted as individual predictors. The results suggest that all other periods were statistically significantly more positive toward Russia compared to the post-2015 period. Results are reported in Appendix B, available online.
6. I do not report results related to democratization, destabilization, disarmament and Ukraine, because these are mentioned very little (between 11 and 28 parties in the whole sample)
7. The analysis included also region and period dummies, which are not reported here for brevity. Full table can be found in Appendix B online. Model 1 corresponds to Model D in the Appendix B, Model 2 corresponds to Model E in the same appendix.

## Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this article was presented at the Hertie School of Governance in January 2017. I am thankful to the Hylke Dijkstra, the CSP editor, for his exceptional advice throughout and the two excellent reviewers for careful reading of my manuscript and constructive feedback. I am also thankful to Alexandru Filip, Monika Sus, and Wolfgang Wagner for their extremely helpful comments and suggestions. Mary Graham edited the language with much care. The author is thankful to all coders for help with coding. All appendices mentioned in the article are available at <http://www.mwpweb.eu/MichalOnderco/> under “Publications”.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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