



THE KREMLIN'S INFLUENCE QUARTERLY

SERBIA

AUSTRIA MOLDOVA

FRANCE

UKRAINE

ESTONIA

MACEDONIA POLAND

COVID-19

ECONOMY

MEDIA

RELIGION

CIVIL SOCIETY

POLITICS

#2

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SUMMARY

The second issue of *The Kremlin's Influence Quarterly* continues investigating malign influence of Putin's Russia in the areas of economy, media, religion, civil society, politics and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following his essay on the Russian coronavirus-related aid to Italy published in the first issue of this journal, Dr. Anton Shekhovtsov looks at the developments around the Russian aid to Serbia. He argues that Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić used the pandemic to attack the EU in order to advance his own domestic agenda and praised China for being the only friend of Serbia as it agreed to deliver aid to fight COVID-19. Moscow joined Belgrade in its anti-EU and pro-Beijing propaganda, but failed to follow up quickly with its own medical, financial, and expert assistance to “the brotherly Serbian people,” and, consequently, was unsuccessful to benefit directly from the situation in the country.

In the second and final part of his essay on Austrian-Russian business relations, Dr. Martin Malek focuses on their political framework conditions, as well as side effects and consequences over the past two decades. The author writes that, due to the increasing dependence of Austria and the EU on energy source supplies from Russia, Austrian politicians and managers find it difficult to find critical words about Russia's domestic, foreign, security, and foreign trade policies. There is a belief among Viennese politicians and businessmen that Russia is “too important” as a power—and especially as a supplier of energy resources—so relations must not be “spoiled” under any circumstances.

Sergiu Tofilat and Victor Parlicov explore how Putin's Russia uses gas supplies to wield malign influence in Moldova. They argue that, by exercising its monopolistic position as a natural anti-dumping gas supplier to Moldova and by loyalizing corrupt political elites from Chișinău, Russian energy giant Gazprom serves as the main instrument of financing the Russian foreign policy agenda in Moldova. The authors assert that consolidation of Moldova's energy security by diversification of energy supply options and integration into European energy markets is not only vital for countering Russian malign influence in Moldova, but also key to solving the Transnistrian conflict, which affects regional security.

In her essay on the French editions of Russian international media, Anastasia Kirilenko discusses the question of how these media manage to impose themselves in the media landscape of France. She demonstrates that Russian media in France polarize the French society by advancing racist narratives, undermine trust towards the ruling elites by supporting anti-establishment movements, and discourage critics of the Kremlin's politics by filing lawsuits against them. Ironically, however, the journalistic community defends RT France and Sputnik in the name of the freedom of speech.

Georgy Chizhov exposes the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP) as one of the most effective instruments and mechanisms of Moscow's malign influence on Ukrainian society. He argues that the UOC MP is an organization dependent on the Russian Orthodox Church on all ideological and political matters, and supports in its followers the identity of “the united people” (with Russians), a negative attitude toward democratic values, and a cautious perception of their own Ukrainian state.

Alexandra Yatsyk's chapter focuses on the Russian government's agents of influence in Estonia after 2014. She identifies three clusters of agents of Russian

influence. The first group is represented by the Russian state institutions and Estonian entities supported by the Russian government. The second group consists of local activists who harshly criticize Estonia as allegedly systematically violating the very principles of liberal democracy. The third group incorporates those local agents who spread pro-Russian and anti-Estonian messages via mass media.

In her turn, Alisa Volkova analyzes a variety of methods used by Russian-affiliated forces to influence public opinion and politics in North Macedonia. The author asserts that Russia attempts – sometimes successfully – to penetrate the country's economy and politics spreading its malign way of doing business, but the volume of resources, people involved, and lack of significant economic interest show that this Balkan country does not seem to be a priority for Russia for maintaining its influence.

Melissa Hooper explores how Moscow can indirectly spread malign influence in Europe by looking at the developments in Poland. She argues that Russian influence schemes in Poland are generally weak and ineffective because of the long tradition of Polish skepticism towards Russia. However, the Law and Justice government has borrowed laws, methods, and messaging from the Kremlin. In particular, the government waged war on meritocracy in ministries, the military, and the judiciary; routed critics from institutions such as free media and civil society; fanned the flames of conspiracy theories; and increased polarization and tensions in the country.



HOW TO FAIL A MALIGN INFLUENCE OPERATION: THE CASE OF RUSSIAN AID TO SERBIA

Anton Shekhovtsov

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Belgrade, showing a mix of residential buildings and a prominent church with a tall, ornate spire. In the background, a modern cable-stayed bridge is visible against a hazy sky. The image is partially obscured by a green overlay on the left side.

COVID-19



ABOUT AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION

“The great international solidarity does not exist. European solidarity does not exist. That was a fairy tale on paper.”¹ These words were spoken by Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić as he was making—on 15 March 2020—an announcement about the introduction of a state of emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic. By the time of the announcement, Serbia had registered 48 active cases of the virus in the country.

These emotional words contrasted with the confidence that the Serbian authorities demonstrated at the end of February. On 25 February, Serbian Health Minister Zlatibor Lončar stated that there was “no reason for panic over coronavirus” adding that, while it was “realistic to expect this virus to appear in Serbia,” the country’s health system was ready and that all recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) had been implemented.² The next day, Vučić himself reiterated the same message saying that Serbia’s health system was “fully prepared” for the virus.³ At the same time, one expert from the government’s Crisis Center dismissed the seri-

ousness of COVID-19 calling it the “most laughable virus in the history of humanity.”⁴ And on 11 March, Vučić said that Serbia was “keeping things under control,” adding that “a meeting of top state officials and representatives of all relevant institutions” decided to ban indoor gatherings of more than 100 people, but saw “no reason to suspend classes in schools.”⁵ Just a few days later, Vučić’s rhetoric dramatically changed.

Vučić’s anti-EU messaging on 15 March seemed to have been driven by two main considerations. First, he needed to shift the blame for the outbreak of the pandemic from the authorities, who seemed to be content with the handling of the pandemic up until very recently, to an external scapegoat. Second, Vučić’s anti-EU messaging was praise towards Serbia’s authoritarian ally, China. The Serbian president used the same announcement of the state of emergency to inform the public of his plea for help from the country where COVID-19 had originated: “Today I sent a special paper, because we expect a lot and we have highest hopes in the only ones who can help us in this difficult situation, and that is the People’s Republic of China.”⁶

The state-controlled China Global Television Network (CGTN) widely circulated the video of Vučić insulting the EU and presenting China as Serbia’s last hope. The CGTN even subtitled the video for the English-speak-

1 CGTN, “Serbia’s State of Emergency: ‘China Is the Only Country that Can Help,’” YouTube video, March 16, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P42OrsA045M>.

2 “Serbia Ready for Possible Coronavirus Outbreak,” The Government of the Republic of Serbia (website), February 25, 2020, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/150594/serbia-ready-for-possible-coronavirus-outbreak.php>.

3 “Serbia Fully Prepared for Possible Emergence of Coronavirus,” The Government of the Republic of Serbia (website), February 26, 2020, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/150669/serbia-fully-prepared-for-possible-emergence-of-coronavirus.php>.

4 Ivan Vejvoda, “Coronavirus in Serbia – from Bad to Better to Much Worse,” European Forum Alpbach (website), July 13, 2020, <https://www.alpbach.org/en/efa-guest-commentary-coronavirus-in-serbia/>.

5 “Serbia Fighting Coronavirus in a Good Way,” The Government of the Republic of Serbia (website), March 11, 2020, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/151176/serbia-fighting-coronavirus-in-a-good-way.php>.

6 CGTN, “Serbia’s State of Emergency.”

ing audience and uploaded it to the CGTN's channel on YouTube, which had been, ironically, blocked in mainland China since 2009. The agenda behind the CGTN and similar channels of Chinese propaganda was clear: as China was suffering reputational losses in Europe and elsewhere for the failure to contain the spread of COVID-19, the country needed to show to the world that it was helping other nations in their struggle against the pandemic, especially in those places where it had—or hoped to have—significant investments. Serbia is currently “Europe’s fourth-biggest recipient of Chinese foreign direct investment,”⁷ and China “has gradually become one of the most important foreign policy partners of Serbia.”⁸

But Chinese propaganda was not only about words—it was about deeds too, as it did deliver aid. The first Chinese aid, namely one thousand rapid test kits, came already on 15 March—a donation from the Shenzhen Mammoth Public Welfare Foundation.⁹ Yet following Beijing’s official approval on 17 March to help Belgrade combat the pandemic,¹⁰ more aid started to arrive in Serbia later the same month. The first Chinese airplane carrying medical experts and equipment landed in Serbia on 21 March and was welcomed by Vučić and the Chinese Ambassador to Serbia, Chen Bo. As the Serbian government said, “medical packages sent from China ha[d] an inscription written in Chinese and in Cyrillic: ‘Steel friendship, we share good and bad,’ with a heart whose one side ha[d] the flag of Serbia and the other the flag of China.”¹¹

Perhaps coincidentally, a similar symbol was featured on the airplanes that brought Russian aid to Serbia on 4 April—Russian and Serbian flags in the form of two hearts with an inscription in Russian and Serbian: “From

Russia with love.”¹² Even if Moscow was not directly inspired by Beijing’s visual symbolism, it was obvious that Russia was following China in its attempts to exploit the pandemic for its own benefit. Unlike China, however, that seemed to be driven predominantly by economic interests; evidence suggests that Russia’s COVID-related operations in Serbia were underpinned by the Kremlin’s geopolitical interests and its political warfare against the West.

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Before discussing Russian information operations in Serbia, it is important to understand the context in which Moscow (and, earlier, Beijing) operated—a context that was alleged to by Vučić in his anti-EU messaging.

Vučić’s sweeping statement that “European solidarity” was “a fairy tale” was naturally an obvious insult to the EU. In the period between 2000 and 2018, the EU provided Serbia “with grants worth around €3.6 billion,” while Chinese grants to Serbia amounted to an estimated EUR 30 million (and “no Russian financial aid to Serbia was publicly registered” in the same period).¹³ Moreover, in the past 20 years, “the EU donated above 200 Million euros and loaned 250 million others to make the health system in Serbia stronger.”¹⁴ As Majda Ruge and Janka Oertel rightly note, “without the EU, Serbia’s health system would be much less capable of handling the coronavirus outbreak in the first place.”¹⁵

Clearly, neither China nor Russia can effectively compete with the EU in terms of the size of financial aid provided to Serbia. But where they can compete is the sphere of decision-making time, and both Beijing and Moscow are superior to Brussels as they are able to make decisions instantly—an ability intrinsic to authoritarian regimes that avoid and despise debate in the decision-making process.

7 Majda Ruge and Janka Oertel, “Serbia’s Coronavirus Diplomacy Unmasked,” European Council on Foreign Relations (website), March 26, 2020, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_serbias_coronavirus_diplomacy_unmasked.

8 Stefan Vladislavljev, “A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed – Belgrade Leans Closer to Beijing in the Fight Against the COVID-19 Epidemic,” Choice, March 19, 2020, <https://chinaobservers.eu/the-friend-in-need-is-a-friend-indeed-belgrade-leans-closer-to-beijing-in-the-fight-against-the-covid-19-epidemic/>.

9 Mu Xuequan, “China Sends First Batch of Medical Aid to Serbia to Help Fight COVID-19,” Xinhua, March 17, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/17/c_138884776.htm.

10 “Chinese Ambassador Tells Vucic: Aid to Battle Coronavirus Coming,” N1, March 17, 2020, <http://rs.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a578849/Chinese-ambassador-tells-Vucic-Aid-to-battle-coronavirus-coming.html>.

11 “Another 90 Tons of Medical Equipment Arrive at Belgrade Airport,” The Government of the Republic of Serbia (website), March 29, 2020, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/152805/another-90-tons-of-medical-equipment-arrive-at-belgrade-airport.php>.

12 This image was first used in the case of Russian malign influence operation in Italy in March 2020, see Anton Shekhovtsov, “Russian Malign Influence Operation in Coronavirus-hit Italy,” *The Kremlin’s Influence Quarterly*, no. 1 (2020): 8–16.

13 Majda Ruge and Nicu Popescu, “Serbia and Coronavirus Propaganda: High Time for a Transactional EU,” European Council on Foreign Relations (website), June 4, 2020, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_serbia_and_coronavirus_propaganda_high_time_for_a_transactional.

14 “EU Assistance to Health Sector in Serbia – a Fundamental Effort that Modernised the Whole Serbian Health System,” The Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia (website), March 23, 2020, <http://europa.rs/eu-assistance-to-health-sector-in-serbia-a-fundamental-effort-that-modernised-the-whole-serbian-health-system/?lang=en>.

15 Ruge and Oertel, “Serbia’s Coronavirus Diplomacy Unmasked.”

A day before Vučić complained about the alleged lack of European solidarity in the fight against the pandemic, the EU adopted the “Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/402” that temporarily restricted export of “personal protective equipment” to countries outside of the EU “in order to ensure adequacy of supply in the Union in order to meet the vital demand.”¹⁶ As the regulation entered into force, it made void national restrictions on export of protective medical equipment that had been placed by several EU member states, including the Czech Republic, France, and Germany.¹⁷ Those national restrictions were clearly harmful for the EU’s struggle against the pandemic, because production of personal protective equipment was, at that time, mostly concentrated in the Czech Republic, France, Germany, and Poland.

The entry of “Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/402” into force largely solved the problem of distribution and trade of protective and other medical equipment inside the EU, but left all the other countries out. However, as the EU grew more confident of its resources and capabilities, it started to exempt third countries from the export restrictions. On 19 March, the EU adopted the “Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/426” that excluded Andorra, the Faeroe Islands, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, the Vatican City, as well as some overseas territories, from the scope of application of “Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/402.”¹⁸ The same day, the EU’s High Representative Josep Borrell called Vučić to inform him that the EU was “looking at how to associate the Western Balkans to the initiatives” the EU was taking with regard to the pandemic and “how to best offer support in mitigating the socio-economic impact

16 “Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/402 of 14 March 2020 Making the Exportation of Certain Products Subject to the Production of an Export Authorisation,” Official Journal of the European Union, March 15, 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.LI.2020.077.01.0001.01.ENG>.

17 Amie Tsang, “E.U. Seeks Solidarity as Nations Restrict Medical Exports,” New York Times, March 7, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/07/business/eu-exports-medical-equipment.html>. It must be stressed that Germany had suspended those restrictions a few days before the adoption of “Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/402”; see Tonia Mastrobuoni, “Coronavirus, la Germania invierà un milione di mascherine all’Italia,” La Repubblica, March 13, 2020, https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2020/03/13/news/coronavirus_la_germania_invia_un_milione_di_mascherine_all_italia-251219227/.

18 “Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/426 of 19 March 2020 Amending Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/402 Making the Exportation of Certain Products Subject to the Production of an Export Authorisation,” Official Journal of the European Union, March 20, 2020, https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/march/tradoc_158671.pdf.

of the coronavirus” in the Western Balkans.¹⁹ Although the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) were excluded from the export restrictions by the adoption of “Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/568” only on 23 April,²⁰ the EU started providing aid to Serbia much earlier.

On 20 March, the EU decided to grant Serbia EUR 7.5 million to strengthen the country’s capacities and support its fight against the pandemic.²¹ Out of that amount, EUR 2 million would be used to cover the costs of transportation of medical supplies from China and India. Moreover, on 25 March, the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi instructed his office to release EUR 93.4 million from the funds of Instrument for Pre-Accession that is intended to help Serbia prepare for its future membership in the EU: EUR 15 million for immediate needs of the health sector and EUR 78.4 million for short- and medium-term needs (social and economic recovery).²²

This aid from the EU notwithstanding, there was—as the timeline discussed above suggests—a short period in March 2020 when the EU was absent from the unfolding epidemiological drama in Serbia. Beijing and Moscow, as well as Belgrade itself, seized this opportunity to criticize and attack Brussels and other European capitals for the “lack of European solidarity” while advancing their own interests in Serbia.

19 “Serbia: Phone Call between High Representative Borrell President Vučić,” European Commission (website), March 20, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/news/serbia-phone-call-between-high-representative-borrell-president-vucic_en.

20 “Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/568 of 23 April 2020 Making the Exportation of Certain Products Subject to the Production of an Export Authorisation,” Official Journal of the European Union, April 23, 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=uriserv:OJ.LI.2020.129.01.0007.01.ENG>. The regulation also exempted Gibraltar and territories of EU Member States excluded from the EU Customs Union.

21 “EU to Assist Serbia with €7.5m to Curb Coronavirus,” The Government of the Republic of Serbia (website), March 20, 2020, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/151944/eu-to-assist-serbia-with-75m-to-curb-coronavirus.php>.

22 “€94m Redeployed from IPA Funds for Serbia,” The Government of the Republic of Serbia (website), March 25, 2020, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/152322/94m-redeployed-from-ipa-funds-for-serbia.php>; “EU Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic in the Western Balkans,” European Commission (website), April, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/coronavirus_support_wb.pdf; “EU Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic,” European Commission (website), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-002307-ASW_EN.html.

FROM PRO-CHINESE AND ANTI-EU MESSAGING TO SILENCE

Moscow began its Serbian influence operation by echoing Chinese and Vučić's anti-EU messaging in the Russian state-controlled media. RT uncritically reported on Vučić's rant about European solidarity as "a fairy tale on paper,"²³ without providing the context and failing to acknowledge that the EU remained by far the biggest donor of nonrefundable assistance to Serbia, in particular to the country's health sector. For RT's senior writer Nebojša Malić, "the incompetence and hypocrisy of the European Union in dealing with the Covid-19 outbreak seem[ed] to have sobered up Serbia, a country that [had] previously slavishly committed itself to following orders from Brussels."²⁴ Another RT writer, Damian Wilson, contrasted the EU's "feebleness" with China's "soft-power offensive," against the background of "European nations outside the bloc, such as Serbia, hav[ing] been left to fend for themselves."²⁵ Arguing that the EU was "left looking poorly-prepared and slow to act" in the response to the pandemic,²⁶ Wilson cynically ignored a simple fact that when China started its charm offensive in March 2020, it had already managed to contain the spread of the virus in its own country, while the pandemic only started gaining momentum in Europe. Even when mentioning the EU's aid for Serbia, RT could not but question the *raison d'être* of Serbia's rapprochement with the EU: "Serbia has subordinated much of its domestic, foreign and economic policy to Brussels in an effort to eventually be considered for admission to the bloc, but the decades-long pro-EU narrative took a massive hit from the Covid-19 crisis."²⁷

Yet as the Kremlin propaganda was trying—following Serbian President Vučić—to denigrate Brussels and European capitals, the only positive message it pushed was praise of Beijing while keeping silent on Moscow.

23 "European Solidarity Doesn't Exist, Only China Can Help Us: Serbia Goes Full Emergency over Coronavirus," RT, March 16, 2020, <https://www.rt.com/news/483239-serbia-eu-china-coronavirus/>.

24 Nebojša Malić, "Goodbye, Globalism? Coronavirus Sobers up Serbia to EU Hypocrisy," RT, March 17, 2020, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/483335-coronavirus-pandemic-serbia-border/>.

25 Damian Wilson, "From Villain to Hero? After Its Badly Botched Response to the Covid-19 Outbreak, China Now Seeks to Be the World's Savior," RT, March 20, 2020, <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/483673-china-coronavirus-europe-doctors-aid/>.

26 Wilson, "From Villain to Hero?"

27 "Serbian PM: 'Fake News' that We Don't Appreciate EU Help, but Covid-19 Aid Came from China," RT, March 27, 2020, <https://www.rt.com/news/484322-serbia-coronavirus-eu-fake-news/>.

Ironically, against the background of the dominant anti-EU narrative being "feeble" and "slow" in its response to the spread of COVID-19 in Serbia, Russia—by its own standards—was even slower than the EU in providing any aid to Serbia. The latter did not seem to be of tactical importance to Russia, which predominantly focused on its influence operation in Italy in the course of March 2020.²⁸ Moreover, Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić, in a phone conversation with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on 16 March 2020, explicitly asked Russia "for assistance in the procurement of additional medical equipment, which would be necessary in case of a sudden increase in the number of patients."²⁹ Russian state-controlled media widely reported Serbia's plea for Russian help, as well as the words of Lavrov who promised that his country, "as always, would help Serbia," and wished "the brotherly Serbian people and its leadership to defeat this vicious virus as quickly as possible."³⁰

Between 16 March, when the phone conversation between Dačić and Lavrov took place, and the end of the month, the number of active cases of COVID-19 registered in Serbia went up from 56 to 835,³¹ but no aid from the Russian state was coming. As demonstrated above, at that time, the EU was already making important decisions on providing dozens of millions of euros to help Serbia fight the pandemic, but the Kremlin was still bashing the EU for being "slow," while, in its own turn, not sending any aid to "the brotherly Serbian people."

Leading Serbian independent newspapers wondered about the inaction of the Russian authorities. The left-leaning newspaper *Danas* wrote that there was "no point in expecting any significant help from Russia, because it had no considerable experience in fighting the virus, but also because of its weak economy."³² The liberal *Blic* noted that Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov offered Serbia words of support, but was disappointed by the lack of later developments:

28 See Shekhovtsov, "Russian Maligned Influence Operation in Coronavirus-hit Italy."

29 "Mutual Support, Assistance from Russia in Fight against Coronavirus," The Government of the Republic of Serbia (website), March 16, 2020, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/151491/mutual-support-assistance-from-russia-in-fight-against-coronavirus.php>.

30 "Vizit lavrova v Serbiyu otlozhili iz-za koronavirusa," RIA Novosti, March 16, 2020, <https://ria.ru/20200316/1568690255.html>; "Serbiya obratilas' k Rossii za pomoshch'yu v bor'be s koronavirusom," TASS, March 16, 2020, <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/7996439>.

31 "Serbia," Worldometer (website), <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/serbia/>.

32 Lidija Valtner, "Izostanak pomoći Moskve ne treba da čudi," *Danas*, March 20, 2020, <https://www.danas.rs/politika/izostanak-pomoci-moskve-ne-treba-da-cudi/>.

There is no doubt about the verbal support, but it was followed by silence from the Russian side. Meanwhile, the Chinese came to Serbia, flights with medical equipment were announced, money from the European Union, donations from Norway and aid from the United Arab Emirates. And then from those, who the majority of Serbian citizens consider their only true friends always and selflessly helping in time of need, although the evidence suggests the opposite, we get only a slap on the shoulder. Is it surprising or not?³³

Replying to the to the question about the absence of Russian aid, Suzana Vasiljević, an advisor to President Vučić, asserted that it could be explained by the problems that Russia experienced and the “paramount need to provide everything for its citizens.”³⁴ But as Russia provided aid to Italy—in the period between 23 and 25 March, fifteen Russian aircrafts delivered experts and equipment to Italy³⁵—Vasiljević’s argument was disputable. Serbian political scientist Igor Novaković, director of research at the International and Security Affairs Centre, agreed that Russia had its own problems but—with perhaps with an implicit reference to the Russian aid to Italy—made an insightful point: “So if they [Russia] decide to help, then they think it is beneficial to use this help for foreign policy objectives. They probably choose [a country] where [the help] can be most noticeable.”³⁶ Vasiljević’s point implies that, for Moscow, providing of aid to Rome was more politically urgent than providing aid to Belgrade. Italy, in contrast to Serbia, is a member of the EU and NATO, so the Kremlin’s influence operations in Italy could potentially have impact on decision-making inside these alliances, while little could be gained in Serbia where the socio-political climate is friendly for Russia anyway. A public opinion poll conducted in February-March 2020 demonstrated that 87 percent of Serbs viewed Russia favorably.³⁷ Moreover,

contrary to all the publicly available statistics, Serbs put Russia second on the list of the biggest foreign donors to the country: 27 percent of respondents think Russia is the biggest donor and 28 percent believe it is the EU; China comes third with 20 percent.³⁸

On 26 March, the Serbian government directly asked Russia to provide help to Serbia.³⁹ And eventually, Vučić had to call Russia’s President Vladimir Putin on 2 April, and the two finally “agreed on the provision of humanitarian aid to Serbia in order to fight the spread of the infection in the spirit of traditional friendly bilateral relations.”⁴⁰ As in the case of Italy, Putin assigned the task of delivering the aid to Serbia to Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu. On 3 April, Shoigu “ordered to create the aviation group for operational delivery of Russian military specialists to support the Republic of Serbia in the fight against coronavirus.”⁴¹ Russian airplanes started delivering aid the same day, and the first flight to the Batajnica Air Base was personally greeted by Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić, Defence Minister Aleksandar Vulin, and Russian Ambassador to Serbia Aleksandr Botsan-Kharchenko.⁴² Brnabić “expressed her gratitude to the Russian Federation for the assistance it provided to Serbia in the fight against coronavirus” noting that the Russian aid was “a partnership assistance that the Russian Federation sends to other countries too.”⁴³ By the morning of 4 April, eleven Russian airplanes had delivered, according to the Russian government sources, “87 servicemen of the Russian Ministry of Defence, including military physicians, specialist virologists of the NBC protection troops, special medical equipment, protective

33 Lana Gedošević, “A od Putina, tapšanje po ramenu: Srbiji su u pomoć pritekale Kina, EU i Norveška, ali na tom spisku Rusije nema,” Blic, March 28, 2020, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/a-od-putina-tapsanje-po-ramenu-srbiji-su-u-pomoc-pritekale-kina-eu-i-norveska-ali-na-qbv4ls7>.

34 Gedošević, “A od Putina, tapšanje po ramenu.”

35 See Shekhovtsov, “Russian Malign Influence Operation in Coronavirus-hit Italy.”

36 Gedošević, “A od Putina, tapšanje po ramenu.”

37 “Western Balkans Regional Poll. February 2, 2020 – March 6, 2020,” International Republican Institute (website), March 2020, https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/final_wb_poll_for_publishing_6.9.2020.pdf.

38 “Western Balkans Regional Poll.”

39 “Dačić: Srbija tražila pomoć Rusije,” Danas, March 28, 2020, <https://www.danas.rs/politika/dacic-srbija-trazila-pomoc-rusije/>.

40 “Telephone Conversation with President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic,” President of Russia (website), April 2, 2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63137>.

41 “Russian Defence Minister Gives Instructions on Creation of Air Group for the Prompt Delivery of Assistance to Serbia,” Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (website), http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12284998@egNews.

42 “Eleven Airplanes Delivered Medical Aid from the Russian Federation,” Ministry of Defence Republic of Serbia (website), April 4, 2020, <http://www.mod.gov.rs/eng/15843/jedanaest-avionadopremilo-medicinsku-pomoc-iz-ruske-federacije-15843>.

43 “Plane from Russia Arrives with Doctors, Medical Equipment,” The Government of the Republic of Serbia (website), April 3, 2020, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/eng/153281/plane-from-russia-arrives-with-doctors-medical-equipment.php>.

equipment and 16 pieces of military equipment.”⁴⁴

Curiously, the Russian international media such as RT or Sputnik—with very few exceptions⁴⁵—reported on the Russian aid to Serbia in a neutral way. That was in contrast to the reporting on the Russian aid to Italy, where facts about the aid were mixed with political messaging about the alleged failures of the EU and NATO to help Italy. As Moscow started delivering aid to Belgrade, narratives about the EU predominantly disappeared from RT’s and Sputnik’s coverage of the coronavirus-related developments in Serbia. It is unclear why this happened, but it is viable to suggest that Moscow realized that it could no longer afford pushing those narratives. If the EU was late with its assistance to Serbia, then Russia was behind not only China but even the EU it attacked, and Serbian society was aware of the situation, so praising Russia while criticizing the EU could potentially do more harm to public perceptions of Russia than good.

RUSSIAN AID TO SERBIA IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

As Serbia was waiting for Russian aid for “the brotherly Serbian people” in the second half of March, the Kremlin was engaged in an international campaign aimed at convincing the West to lift sanctions against Putin’s Russia that were imposed for its war against Ukraine and other aggressive actions. On 26 March, Russia submitted to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) an initiative to adopt its version of a Declaration of solidarity of the United Nations in the face of the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease 2019. Russia’s draft declaration suggested “recognizing the leading role of the WHO in combating the pandemic,” urged “states to cooperate with each other and with the WHO” and made some other sensible propositions related to the

44 “Russian Aerospace Forces Complete Transferring Russian Military Specialists, Necessary Equipment and Machinery to the Republic of Serbia,” Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (website), April 4, 2020, http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12285128@egNews.

45 For one prominent exception, see “Russian Aid to Help Serbia Avoid Italian Scenario Amid Pandemic – Lawmaker,” Sputnik, April 3, 2020, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/202004031078825909-russian-aid-to-help-serbia-avoid-italian-scenario-amid-pandemic---lawmaker/>.

pandemic.⁴⁶ However, the same draft also appealed to “abandon trade wars and unilateral sanctions adopted in circumvention of the UN Security Council”⁴⁷—an appeal which the EU, UK, US, Ukraine, and Georgia perceived as Moscow’s ill-concealed attempt to do away with the sanctions and, for this reason, eventually blocked what Russia’s Foreign Ministry called an “absolutely humanistic document.”⁴⁸ At the same time, the UNGA unanimously adopted a resolution on global solidarity to fight COVID-19 spearheaded by Ghana, Indonesia, Liechtenstein, Norway, Singapore, and Switzerland.

Russia’s version of the declaration was killed in the UN on 2 April, and it was exactly on that day that Putin agreed to deliver aid to Serbia in a phone conversation with Vučić.

One of the Russian officials who was especially vocal in condemning Western countries and its East European allies for blocking the Russian draft declaration was Leonid Slutsky, the chair of the Committee on International Affairs and president of the Russian Peace Foundation (RPF). In recent years, Slutsky, who became one of the first Russian officials sanctioned by the West for his involvement in the Russian war on Ukraine, has been engaged in various malign influence operations aimed at advancing Russia’s foreign policy interests ranging from organizing fake election observation missions to cooperating with anti-EU far-right forces inside the EU.⁴⁹ Following the refusal to include Russia’s proposal to ease sanctions in the final draft of the UNGA declaration, Slutsky described it as a manifestation of “political coronaegoism” on the part of the US and EU, adding that “hegemonistic ambitions upset common ef-

46 “Initiative to Adopt a UN General Assembly Declaration on Solidarity in Countering COVID-19,” Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations (website), March 27, 2020, https://russiaun.ru/en/news/covid19_270320.

47 “Initiative to Adopt a UN General Assembly Declaration on Solidarity in Countering COVID-19.”

48 “Comment by the Information and Press Department on the UN General Assembly Reviewing the Declaration of Solidarity on Combating the Coronavirus Pandemic,” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (website), April 4, 2020, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4094623.

49 See “Politically Biased Election Observation – a Threat to the Integrity of International Institutions,” European Platform for Democratic Elections (website), February 15, 2019, <https://www.epde.org/en/news/details/politically-biased-election-observation-a-threat-to-the-integrity-of-international-institutions-1774.html>; Shekhovtsov, “Russian Malign Influence Operation in Coronavirus-hit Italy.”

forts against the pandemic.”⁵⁰ Moreover, on 7 March, Slutsky published an appeal, which, again, criticized the refusal to support the Russian version of the UNGA resolution—“an inhumane attitude of some states,” as Slutsky put it.⁵¹ Slutsky’s appeal also called upon “all rational politicians in the leadership of the European Union, the USA, Great Britain, leading international and inter-parliamentary organizations to abandon the destructive sanctions policy.”⁵²

Slutsky’s appeal was distributed to Russian embassies across the world in order to garner support for Moscow’s attempts to push its revised version of the declaration on the pandemic through the UNGA—the revised version dropped the call to lift sanctions but still suggested to end “protectionist practices.”⁵³ Furthermore, the RPF’s website published, on 16 April, a news report saying, in particular, that the Foundation provided “humanitarian aid” to Italy, Iran, and Serbia.⁵⁴ It was unclear when exactly the RPF’s aid had been sent to those three countries, but the same news report featured letters of appreciation sent to Slutsky by ambassadors of Iran and Italy dated 24 March and 6 April respectively. However, there was no proof that the RPF had delivered any aid to Serbia by the time of the publication of the report.

The timing of the report was hardly coincidental: the UN was to consider Russian amendments to the UNGA declaration on the pandemic on 22 April, and Slutsky needed to demonstrate his active participation in the promotion of the Kremlin’s foreign policy interests on the international stage. This can explain why the RPF decided to refer, rather belatedly, to the aid it apparently delivered to Iran more than three weeks earlier, and to Italy more than a week before the publication of the news report. And the RPF evidently jumped ahead in the case of Serbia: during the meeting between Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić and Russian Ambassador Aleksandr Botsan-Kharchenko, the former mentioned that the RPF’s aid had arrived in Serbia in the period

50 “US, EU Refusal to Block Russia’s Anti-sanctions Resolution Is ‘Coronaegoism’ – Lawmaker,” TASS, April 3, 2020, <https://tass.com/politics/1139745>.

51 “Leonid Slutskiy Urged to Abandon the Sanctions Policy in the Light of the Coronavirus Epidemic,” The State Duma (website), April 7, 2020, <http://duma.gov.ru/en/news/48236/>.

52 “Leonid Slutskiy Urged to Abandon the Sanctions Policy.”

53 Edith M. Lederer, “Russia Tries Again to Win UN Approval for Virus Resolution,” ABC News, April 18, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/russia-win-approval-virus-resolution-70221150>.

54 “Rossiyskiy fond mira napravil gumanitarnuyu pomoshch’ grazhdanam Italii, Irana i Serbii,” Rossiyskiy Fond Mira (website), April 16, 2020, <http://www.peacefond.ru/news/?id=1518>.

between 20 and 26 of April.⁵⁵

The efforts of the Russian Foreign Ministry and Slutsky were doomed to failure. On 22 April, Western countries and their allies blocked Russian amendments to the UNGA declaration on the pandemic again.

CONCLUSION

When COVID-19 arrived in Europe from China, which failed to contain the virus and, as a consequence, triggered the pandemic, the EU was perplexed. The EU’s confusion as to how to deal with the pandemic was felt on many levels. Brussels was late with providing assistance to Italy, which initially was hit the hardest among all the EU member States, and it was late with providing aid to the Western Balkans including Serbia.

However, it is important to stress that by using the word “late” in this context, we implicitly refer to the fact that China’s aid had arrived to Italy, Serbia, and some other countries earlier than the aid from the EU. Apart from the EU’s confusion at the start of the pandemic, three major factors contributed to the EU being “late.” First, by that time, China had managed to stop the spread of COVID-19 inside the country and could grant medical equipment and protective gear to other countries. Second, as China had been investing heavily in European countries, it needed to restore its reputation damaged by the failure to contain the virus. Third, as an authoritarian state, China could coordinate the delivery of aid very quickly and without the red tape that is characteristic of rule-based democratic systems.

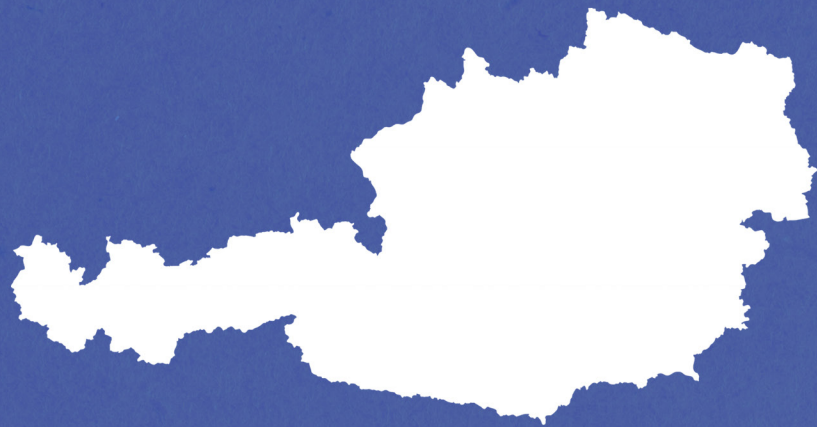
The EU did catch up, however, and eventually delivered more aid to Serbia than that from all the third-party countries combined. Nevertheless, there was a short period of time—around one week—between Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić’s plea for help from China and the EU’s promises to grant millions of euros to Serbia to help it fight the pandemic that was cynically exploited by Beijing and Moscow to attack Brussels and other European capitals while advancing their own objectives. For China, those objectives were predominantly economic—China is interested in investing in Serbia. Russia, rather, was driven by its political warfare with the West in general and the EU in particular.

However, by attacking the EU, the Kremlin was

55 “Exceptional Relations, Cooperation with Russia in Fight against Coronavirus,” The Government of the Republic of Serbia (website), April 27, 2020, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/155223/exceptional-relations-cooperation-with-russia-in-fight-against-coronavirus.php>.

mostly engaged in pro-Chinese propaganda, which could naturally be considered as indirectly pro-Kremlin, but was nevertheless primarily pro-Chinese. Russia offered Serbia words of overwhelming support but failed to quickly follow up with medical, financial, or expert assistance to “the brotherly Serbian people.” At that time, Belgrade was not important for Moscow’s geopolitical game—Russia used its resources instead to woo the EU and NATO member, Italy. Yet the absence of Russian aid undermined the Kremlin’s own narrative about the EU being “feeble” and “slow” in Serbia in comparison to China. And as Russia finally started sending aircrafts with humanitarian aid to Serbia after the EU had promised dozens of millions of euros to the country, the Kremlin media largely abandoned its anti-EU messaging in the context of the coronavirus-related developments in the Western Balkans.

This notwithstanding, the Russian parliament or, more specifically, its Committee on International Affairs chaired by Leonid Slutsky, tried to use Russian aid to Serbia as part of the Kremlin’s campaign to convince the international community to adopt a Russian version of the UNGA declaration on the COVID-19 pandemic that would potentially allow lifting Western sanctions imposed on Putin’s Russia for the annexation of Crimea and its war on Ukraine. However, Moscow’s trick did not work, and, in general, there is no evidence that Moscow has achieved any tangible result in its malign influence operations in Serbia.



THE (GEO-)POLITICAL ASPECTS OF AUSTRIAN-RUSSIAN BUSINESS RELATIONS

Part II

Martin Malek

An aerial photograph of Vienna, Austria, taken at sunset. The city's dense architecture, including the prominent spire of St. Stephen's Cathedral (Stephansdom) on the right, is visible against a warm, orange and yellow sky. The sun is a bright white circle on the horizon. The word 'ECONOMY' is overlaid in large, white, semi-transparent letters at the bottom of the image.

ECONOMY



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AUSTRIA'S ROLE IN THE NABUCCO AND SOUTH STREAM PIPELINE PROJECTS

The Nabucco pipeline was the EU's flagship project with regard to the energy resources of the Central Asia and Caucasus Region. It could have brought gas from the Georgian-Turkish and/or Iraqi-Turkish border, respectively, to the gas hub in Baumgarten without passing through Russia. OMV was the head company of this project; the other partners were the Bulgarian Energy Holding, Turkey's Botas, Germany's RWE, Hungary's FGSZ (a 100 percent subsidiary of the oil and gas group MOL), and Romania's Transgaz. As initially assumed, Nabucco would cost an estimated EUR 8 billion, a figure revised to EUR 12–15 billion. The 3,300-kilometer-long pipeline should have gone into operation in 2013 and reach a capacity of 31 billion cubic metres of gas (10 percent of EU-27 gas imports in 2005) by 2020. But especially since the fall of 2011, prospects for Nabucco appeared to be dwindling due to several reasons. Thus, the amount of non-Russian gas needed to fill Nabucco did not materialize; so several alternative projects, with a reduced Nabucco West pipeline among them, were under consideration.

Moscow did not want Nabucco to be built from the very beginning and did its best to derail it. An important initiative in this context was the South Stream pipeline, intended to transport gas from the Central Asian and Caucasus region. This pipeline, with a capacity of 63 billion cubic metres of gas per year, is proposed to run from southern Russia under the Black Sea to Bulgaria, then bi-

furcate to cross several other countries for Italy and Austria.

Russia's opposition to Nabucco was, of course, well known throughout the entire EU. Austrian Federal Chancellor Werner Faymann (Social Democratic Party) assured then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in November 2009 in Moscow that Nabucco is not directed against Russia.

Moscow wanted to involve Austria in South Stream at all costs, and Vienna did not take long to be persuaded. In April 2010, an Austrian-Russian intergovernmental agreement and a Gazprom-OMV cooperation agreement were signed to bring Austria into the project. Putin made it clear in Vienna it would be "realized no matter what."¹ At the occasion of Austria's accession to South Stream, Russian news agency RIA Novosti highlighted a "big victory for Russia and a major blow to Nabucco"²—which, again, left no doubt that South Stream was, above all, planned as a "Nabucco-stopper." On 21 February 2011, Gazprom's CEO Aleksey Miller announced in Moscow that his company and OMV had officially registered a joint venture to build and operate the Austrian section of South Stream. Its planned Austrian route practically duplicated Nabucco's (and therefore the EU's) envisaged route, from Hungary to the Nabucco terminal at Baumgarten.

The main supply planned for Nabucco was to be Shah Deniz natural gas field in the South Caspian Sea, off the coast of Azerbaijan. But after the Shah Deniz con-

1 "Putin Hails Russia's Gas Reserves as Austria Joins South Stream Project," Sputnik, April 24, 2010, <https://sptnkne.ws/3BcY>.

2 Andrei Fedyashin, "Vladimir Putin Goes to the Land of Strauss and Schnitzel," Sputnik, April 23, 2010, <https://sptnkne.ws/pack>.

sortium decided to use the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline over Nabucco for its exports, the Nabucco plan was finally aborted in June 2013.

South Stream was expected to cement Gazprom's influence over south eastern European gas deliveries. EU member-states Bulgaria and Greece are heavily dependent on Russian supplies. In 2014 the European Commission challenged South Stream on the basis of the EU's Third Energy Package (according to this legislation, adopted in 2009, a gas company cannot own a pipeline that supplies its gas) and threatened legal action against Bulgaria. This led to the cancellation of South Stream. The Commission accused South Stream of violating EU law regarding the access of competitors to the pipeline. After the cancellation, Gazprom quickly unveiled an alternative route. The new pipeline, called TurkStream, was designed to deliver 33.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas—half of which is intended for the Turkish market while the other half is slated for the Balkans and further to Central Europe. The new Russian pipeline through the Black Sea to Turkey was inaugurated on 8 January 2020 at a lavish ceremony in Istanbul. Austria's Baumgarten gas hub could be a key European transit point for Russian gas that flows through the TurkStream pipeline to Turkey (circumventing Ukraine) and on to the EU. Before TurkStream gas can end up in the continent, however, Gazprom will have to build a pipeline that connects this pipeline to the EU network.

ROSUKRENERGO, FIRTASH, MOGILEVICH, AND RAIFFEISEN

In 2004, the Centragas Holding AG, registered in Vienna and controlled by the pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarch Dmitry Firtash, teamed up with Gazprom to establish Swiss-registered RosUkrEnergo, or RUE, to exclusively import Central Asian gas to Ukraine. Firtash and Gazprom roughly split the ownership of RUE. Firtash's share was held in trust for some time by the Austrian Raiffeisen Investment AG, or RIAG (a subsidiary of Raiffeisen Zentralbank). Given that Gazprom was then and still is controlled by the Russian Government, observers speculated that Firtash had cultivated strong ties to Putin's inner circle in order to make RUE operational.

RUE then bought billions of dollars' worth of cheap natural gas mainly from Turkmenistan, mixed it with expensive gas from Russia and resold it at significantly marked-up prices inside Ukraine. Critics, however, pointed out there was no purely economic reason to use the

services of an intermediary in the gas trade between the former Soviet republics. It soon became clear that RUE was nothing more than a shell to siphon off profits. And the press started to speculate about ties of alleged gangster boss Semion Mogilevich to RUE. In April 2006, Raiffeisen International CEO Herbert Stepic "strictly" denied that "we came close to organized crime." According to him, there was no "proximity [of Raiffeisen] to Mr. Mogilevich." At this occasion, Stepic, however, declined to say for whom RIAG held its share in RUE. But he insisted that all relevant authorities in the Ukraine and Russia would know who was behind it.³

Raiffeisen had RUE checked by Kroll Inc., a renowned US consulting firm with close links to the intelligence community. The bank had been certified that the business relationship was unobjectionable. But finally, Raiffeisen severed all ties with RUE. As to the "relevant authorities" in Ukraine, Oleksandr Turchinov, head of the Security Service of Ukraine, or SBU, was convinced that RUE was indirectly controlled by Mogilevich. Ukraine's then Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko (a gas-business insider in her own rights) said after 2006 repeatedly that she had "documented proof that some powerful criminal structures are behind RUE company."⁴ In 2009, Ukraine and Russia agreed to stop using intermediaries, referring to RUE, which was liquidated between 2014 and 2016.

The contacts between Firtash and Mogilevich were discussed for a while in some Austrian and international media outlets. According to a cable from the US Embassy in Kyiv on 10 December 2008, Firtash admitted at a meeting with Ambassador Bill Taylor, which had taken place shortly before, that he had "ties" with Mogilevich, but they were "not close."⁵ Later Firtash denied having said this and assured that he had been "misunderstood." Be that as it may, in 2010, Ukraine elected pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich president. Firtash was one of the main Ukrainian oligarchs who had financed Yanukovich's campaign, which was also supported by the notorious US lobbyist and political consultant Paul Manafort.

In 2013, Firtash was charged by the US Justice Department with having overseen a criminal enterprise

3 Christine Zeiner, "Raiffeisen steigt aus russischer Gasfirma aus [Raiffeisen Withdraws from Russian Gas Company]," *Wiener Zeitung*, April 25, 2006, <https://www.wienerzeitung.at/archiv/117286-Raiffeisen-steigt-aus-russischer-Gasfirma-aus.html>.

4 Luke Harding, "WikiLeaks Cables Link Russian Mafia Boss to EU Gas Supplies," *Guardian* (US edition), December 1, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/01/wikileaks-cables-russian-mafia-gas>.

5 "Ukraine: Firtash Makes His Case to the USG," *WikiLeaks*, December 10, 2008, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08KYIV2414_a.html.

which paid millions in bribes to both state and central government agencies in India in order to obtain mining licenses. He was arrested by Austrian police in Vienna weeks after Yanukovich had fled Kyiv on 22 February 2014. Firtash's contacts in the Kremlin must have been excellent because the bail of EUR 125 million, which was due for his release, came from Russia: it was within a few days (!) paid by Russian billionaire Vasily Anisimov. Therefore, it was not really surprising that Firtash remained pro-Russian also in view of Putin's war against his homeland Ukraine.

Firtash is still in Vienna after six years and fighting against his extradition to the United States—with the assistance of a "cohort of attorneys, PR consultants and lobbyists on both sides of the Atlantic."⁶ The best-known jurist working for Firtash is Dieter Böhmdorfer (2000–2004 Austria's Minister of Justice, nominated by the Freedom Party, of which he was not a member).

FORMER AUSTRIAN TOP POLITICIANS AND MANAGERS AT THE SERVICE OF RUSSIA

On 14 February 2005 then German Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (Social Democratic Party) received Oleg Deripaska for a dinner with German and Russian entrepreneurs, although the German Foreign Intelligence Service (*Bundesnachrichtendienst*, or BND) had expressly warned against the Russian oligarch. An official of the German Federal Chancellery noted: "According to BND reports there are indications of [Deripaska's] links with organized crime that go beyond the 'normal level of dubious business methods' for top representatives of the Russian economy."⁷ In 2007 Deripaska, who at times was Russia's richest person and is noted for his close ties with Putin, acquired a large stake in Vienna-based Strabag, one of the largest construction companies in Europe. Its then boss Hans Peter Haselsteiner responded very emotionally to the question about Deripaska's—benevolently formulated—controversial reputation: Europeans and Americans have no reason whatsoever to point the finger [at Russia]: Russia has completely redistributed its national wealth in less than

twenty years, without bloodshed. America has needed three generations of lawlessness and a great civil war for this; Europe has needed two revolutions and two world wars." And addressed to the then US vice president (who wasn't actually up for discussion at all), Haselsteiner declared: "I'd rather do business with Oleg Deripaska than with Dick Cheney,"⁸ who, however, has not been known to have wanted to cooperate with Haselsteiner. Haselsteiner's position regarding Putin's Russia was also, and especially, fuelled by his desire to do profitable business there. Strabag then built the Olympic Village and the airport for the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, among many other things in Russia. According to figures from 1 January 2019, 25.9 percent of Strabag was owned by Cyprus-registered Rasperia Trading, which belongs to the Deripaska-controlled diversified industrial group Basic Element.

The Chairman of Strabag's Supervisory Board is Austria's former (2007–2008) Federal Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer (Social Democratic Party), who had no experience in the construction business prior to this appointment in 2010. Another interesting member of this Supervisory Board is (since June 2018; he will leave in 2020) the Russian national Oleg Kotkov, a Soviet and Russian military officer-turned-banker. He graduated from two Soviet Military Academies. From 2003 to 2007, he was Military Adviser at the Permanent Mission of Russia's Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, in Vienna. From 2016 to 2018, he was adviser to the Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Russian PJSC Asian-Pacific Bank.

Haselsteiner was a MP for the Liberal Forum from 1994 to 1998 and financed it afterwards, as well as the liberal party NEOS, which is represented in the National Council since 2013. The ideology of these parties was and is respectively very far away from Putin's or Deripaska's. Nevertheless, Haselsteiner declared to "admire" Putin, whom he has met several times. Haselsteiner's willingness to converge on opinions that he considered to be widespread in Russia was reflected, among other things, in his statement about a "Jewish network" among Russian oligarchs in which he "did not want to interfere."⁹ Such statements, which were largely ignored in Austria, can hardly be read otherwise than by the intention to

6 Stefan Melichar, Michael Nikbaksh, and Christoph Zotter, "All the President's Men," *Profil*, no. 43 (2019): 35.

7 "Schröder empfing 2005 dubiose Gäste aus Russland [Schröder Received Dubious Guests from Russia in 2005]," *Spiegel Online*, May 4, 2015, <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/vorab/schroeder-empfung-2005-dubiose-gaeste-aus-russland-a-967403.html>.

8 Renate Graber, "Die russische Wende [The Russian Turnaround]," *Der Standard*, June 4, 2007, <https://derstandard.at/2857801/Die-russische-Wende>.

9 Christa Zöchling, "Ein Freigeist als Milliardär [A Free-Spirited Billionaire]," *Profil*, no. 8, (2008): 27.

“fish for compliments” in Putin’s Russia. In Austria, at least publicly nobody noticed that Haselsteiner and then Freedom Party leader Heinz-Christian Strache, regardless of the enmity between them (Haselsteiner believes that for Strache he represents an “enemy image”¹⁰), share the same—largely favorable—opinion about Putin’s rule.

In interviews Haselsteiner considered it a serious mistake that the EU had “allowed” NATO’s “rapid eastward expansion.” Instead, an attempt should have been made to bring Russia into the EU. “Putin could have been won over. That would have made Europe great.” But all this, Haselsteiner believed, had been thwarted by “the Americans and NATO,” and “the Europeans” had followed suit “in their naivety.” For the United States, there were two very bad scenarios: “A united Europe including Russia” and a functioning euro.¹¹ Haselsteiner thus disclosed a complete ignorance of even the basic concepts of Russian foreign and integration policy, distorted the facts (for example, EU and NATO are completely different organizations, so one cannot prevent the enlargement of the other; and post-Soviet Russia has at no time shown any interest in joining the EU, which would be completely unrealistic anyway due to the size of the country), and propagated conspiracy theories. But at least, one learned from such interviews what Haselsteiner “geopolitically dreamed” of—namely a “united Europe together with Russia,” which is opposed to the US. And coincidence or not, this is also one of the most important goals of Putin’s foreign and military policy.

Only exceptionally did Haselsteiner express somewhat more sceptical views about Russia: “I very much regret that the Putin regime is moving further and further away from the rule of law [...] and leaves us no choice but to impose sanctions.” But “nevertheless Russia remains an important European nation and a promising market for the construction industry.” Haselsteiner continued that this is in his interest and has “nothing to do with Russian efforts to strengthen the [political] right in Europe, destabilize Europe and denigrate the EU.” This was, according to Haselsteiner, reprehensible despite the economic

interests.¹² And he, of course, maintained his cooperation with Deripaska.

Siegfried Wolf is one of the most internationally renowned Austrian managers. For him, Deripaska is an “upright, obliging and good entrepreneur.”¹³ At Deripaska’s request, Wolf became a member of Strabag’s Supervisory Board in 2007 and remained there until 2015. Also in 2007, Deripaska joined Magna International Inc. of the Austrian-Canadian industrialist Frank Stronach (who met Putin personally and gave him the highest praises), but already the following year—officially due to the financial crisis—he had to sell his share (20 percent of the stocks with 43 percent of the voting rights) to those banks that had previously helped him to handle the 1.5 billion dollar deal. In 2010 Wolf moved from Magna to the industrial conglomerate Russian Machines (which belongs to Basic Element): He became Chairman of the Board of Directors there (where he remained until 2018) and had to cooperate with Colonel General Valery Pechionkin, (in Soviet times he was a staff member of the Soviet Committee for State Security, or KGB, and from 1997 to 2000 Deputy Director of the Russian Federal Security Service, or FSB), who in 2018 became Basic Element’s CEO. Wolf is also chairman of the Supervisory Boards of GAZ, located in Nizhny Novgorod and part of Basic Element, and of Vienna-based Sberbank Europe AG, a European subsidiary of Sberbank.

In interviews Wolf always defends Putin against any criticism. Thus, Wolf said that human rights violations occur not only in Russia, but “also in other countries.” Russia, according to him, needs a “strong leadership.” And: “I can only report positively what I have experienced with Mr. Putin.” Wolf declared at the beginning of 2014 that in Russia “a more liberal society will emerge in the next few years” (in reality, exactly the opposite happened, M.M.). According to Wolf, Europe needs a “very, very close relationship with Russia.”¹⁴ Needless to say, he is massively opposed to EU sanctions against Russia.

Wolfgang Schuessel, from 1995 to 2007 was head of the People’s Party, during and after his tenure as Austrian Federal Chancellor (2000–2007), repeatedly

10 Renate Graber, “Da lachen ja die Hühner, Herr Hofer” [“That’s a Good Laugh, Mr. Hofer”] [interview with Hans Peter Haselsteiner]. *Der Standard*, June 29–30, 2019, 23.

11 “Haselsteiner: Russland in der EU ‘hätte Europa groß gemacht’ [Haselsteiner: Russia in the EU ‘would have made Europe great’] [interview],” *Die Presse*, September 20, 2017, <https://www.diepresse.com/5288922/haselsteiner-russland-in-der-eu-hatte-europa-gross-gemacht>.

12 “Haselsteiner will sich Auftragsvergabe bei Westbahn anschauen [Haselsteiner Wants to Take a Look at Contract Awards for Westbahn],” *Die Presse*, May 20, 2019, <https://www.diepresse.com/5631337/haselsteiner-will-sich-auftragsvergabe-bei-westbahn-anschauen>.

13 Jakob Zirm, “Siegfried Wolf wechselt von Magna zu Oleg Deripaska [Siegfried Wolf Moves from Magna to Oleg Deripaska],” *Die Presse*, September 14, 2010, 15.

14 Miriam Koch and Andreas Lampl, “Putin ist der richtige Mann” [Putin’s the man] [interview with Siegfried Wolf], *Format*, no. 5, (2014): 22–25.

praised Putin. In June 2019 Schuessel (who occasionally devoted his spare time to Russian icon painting) joined the eleven-member Board of Directors of Russian Lukoil, one of the largest publicly traded, vertically integrated oil and gas companies in the world. In 2018, Schuessel became one of nine members of the Board of Directors of the largest mobile operator in Russia and the other post-Soviet republics, Mobile TeleSystems, or MTS, with 110 million clients; it belongs to the Russian conglomerate AFK Sistema, headed by CPSU-member-turned-billionaire Vladimir Yevtushenkov. At the end of May 2019, however, it became known that Schuessel would lose this mandate: His name was missing from the list of candidates for reappointment. On it, however, there was another well-known person: Valentin Yumashev, who from 1997 to 1998 (under President Boris Yeltsin) was Head of the Presidential Executive Office.¹⁵ He and his wife were granted Austrian citizenship in 2009, which was what the Magna Group had stood up for.

The leader of the Social Democratic Party Christian Kern, during his short tenure as Austrian Federal Chancellor (2016–2017), made himself popular in the Kremlin by polemicizing against the EU’s Russia sanctions, for example, at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum in 2017. Kern has been CEO of the Austrian Federal Railroads from 2010 to 2016. In this position, he spoke out in favor of a broad-gauge (1,520 mm) railroad project to Vienna initiated by Russia. In July 2019 Kern joined the Board of Directors of the state company Russian Railroads, where he currently is the only foreigner. One of Austria’s best-known political journalists, Hans Rauscher, commented on this, referring to Putin’s military campaign against Ukraine: “This is not a good time for a former Austrian Chancellor and Social Democrat to become a lobbyist for Russian interests.”¹⁶ But such statements, of course, did not change anything about Kern’s financially rewarding commitment in Russia.

Austrian banks have always been strongly committed to Russia. As of 2014, Raiffeisen Bank International and Bank Austria¹⁷ alone had EUR 36 billion in loans in

Russia. Raiffeisen remained strongly represented on the Russian market even as many other Western banks have pulled back due to the impact of EU sanctions and assertiveness of Russian state-owned competitors. Deripaska’s companies had been Raiffeisen clients in Moscow for many years before he and the (1994–2012) Advocate General of the Austrian Raiffeisen Association (in German: *Generalanwalt des Österreichischen Raiffeisenverbandes*; an important position in the Austrian banking landscape) Christian Konrad met personally; Haselsteiner had introduced them to each other. In 2007 Konrad said: “I have no fear of contact with Russians: Raiffeisen is active in many business areas in Russia. [...] Deripaska has my respect. As far as I know so far, he is an incredibly direct and straightforward guy, acting in an understandable way with comprehensible reactions.”¹⁸

Stepic, who met Putin personally and was head of the Austrian-Russian Friendship Society from 2001 to 2003, resigned as head of Raiffeisen Bank International in 2013 and then acted as Senior Adviser to the Board of the bank. He continued to give interviews in which he (as before) made no secret of his political views mixed with conspiracy theories. For example, in June 2014 (i.e., shortly after the Russian annexation of Crimea and the start of the fighting in Donbass) said that he would “continue to defend Putin,” because “the media coverage of the conflict [in Ukraine] was totally one-sided, the formation of opinion is determined by New York and London.” The EU had wanted to conclude an Association Agreement with Ukraine “quickly,” “without talking to the Russians” (as when Russia “talks” to Ukraine before concluding any agreements, including with the EU). Stepic also justified the Russian military intervention against Ukraine with a US antimissile system in the Czech Republic and Poland (which, however, had less than nothing to do with the Russian war against Ukraine). Under “Yushchenko and Tymoshenko” a “pigsty” (*Saustall*) had ruled in Ukraine, but “successor Yanukovich had stabilized the country.” At least Stepic confessed that Yanukovich, at the same time, had “stolen everything so that nothing remained.” And for Stepic, the annexation of Crimea could be explained by the fact that “the West has annexed Ukraine” (!) “Russia’s goal was not to get NATO to its borders. This is the main concern.” And Putin is “light years ahead of the EU in implementing his plans—quite simply because he can decide for himself.” The EU, as Stepic supported

15 Yumashev’s daughter from his first marriage, Polina, in 2001 had married (and in 2018 divorced) Deripaska.

16 Hans Rauscher, “Neuer Job für Kern: Russian Connection. Es sind bereits etliche ehemalige Top-Politiker in Putins Reich engagiert [New Job for Kern: Russian Connection. Several Former Top Politicians are Already Employed in Putin’s empire],” *Der Standard*, May 1, 2019, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000102353840/neuer-job-fuer-kern-russian-connection>.

17 The headquarters of UniCredit Bank Austria AG (which is its full name) is located in Vienna, but it has not been “Austrian” for a long time, as it is almost entirely owned by the UniCredit Group based in Milan, Italy.

18 “Deripaska ist ein gerader Bursche [Deripaska is a straight guy] [interview with Christian Konrad],” *Der Standard*, June 4, 2007, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2859447/deripaska-ist-ein-gerader-bursche>.

Haselsteiner's views, should have "moved closer to Russia"—because "the US never liked the EU as a structure." One does not need to speculate about the main reason for such opinions, as Stepic spoke out: According to him, over the past two decades Russia had been the market where the most money could be made worldwide.¹⁹

AUSTRIA AND THE EU SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

The Austrian Economic Chamber constantly lamented the impact of the EU sanctions on the business of its members in Russia, although it was and is limited.²⁰ And the homepage of the Austrian Embassy in Moscow literally states: "Austrian-Russian trade has developed extremely dynamically in recent years."²¹ Therefore, EU sanctions do not stand in the way of this "dynamic."

The head of the Economic Chamber from 2000 to 2018, Christoph Leitl (People's Party), always gave Putin a very warm welcome in Vienna. Leitl, since 2009 a knight of the Russian Order of Friendship, from the very beginning opposed the EU sanctions against Russia (the Austrian public was not really interested in the fact that he was involved in two companies in Russia that produce insulation materials). And Christoph Matznetter, Deputy Head of the Economic Chamber (2005–2007 and since 2009), Deputy Head of the Austrian-Russian Friendship Society and long-standing Member of the National Council, has made it repeatedly clear that he, as well as a "broad majority" in his Social Democratic Party, wants to see the sanctions terminated²²—as wants the EU-skeptical Freedom Party both in the opposition and, between December 2017 and May 2019, in the government.²³ Notwithstanding this, Freedom Party-nominated Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl during her tenure always agreed to

the six-monthly extension of EU sanctions against Russia.

According to statistics from the National Bank (Austria's central bank), Russian direct investments in Austria have increased two and a half times since 2013 to around EUR 25 billion in 2018, which made Russia the second-largest investor in Austria. This gave some observers reason to suspect that the EU sanctions were being circumvented via Austria: "Given Russia's limited corporate footprint and the lack of tangible projects that would necessitate these investments, it appears Austria is used mostly as a hub or throughput for Russian investments across Europe and as a point of repatriation of capital from Russian subsidiaries in Europe."²⁴

In May 2019, Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen noted that Austria is participating in the sanctions against Russia as a loyal member of the EU—"regardless of what the Austrian position really is."²⁵ Translated into plain language, this means that "in reality," "Austria" is against the sanctions. And Leitl in his capacity (since 2017) as president of Eurochambres (the Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry, representing over 20 million companies) went on to demand an abolition of the EU sanctions. According to him, they "had no use whatsoever." Russia is "a partner with whom Europeans should engage in dialogue on economic, political, cultural and sporting issues."²⁶

19 Martina Salomon, "Stepic: 'Putin ist EU um Lichtjahre voraus' [Stepic: 'Putin is light years ahead of the EU'] [interview]," *Kurier*, December 6, 2014, <https://kurier.at/wirtschaft/stepic-putin-ist-eu-um-lichtjahre-voraus/70.074.860>.

20 Cf. Otmar Lahodynsky, "Schwein gehabt [Had Good Luck]," *Profil*, July 5, 2020, <https://www.profil.at/wirtschaft/russland-sanktionen-oesterreich-8217498>.

21 "Wirtschaftsbeziehungen zwischen Österreich und Russland [Economic relations between Austria and Russia]," <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/oeb-moskau/bilaterale-beziehungen/russische-foederation/wirtschaft/> (accessed 30 May 2020).

22 "The Winner is: Zar Wladimir [The Winner is: Czar Vladimir]," *Trend*, no. 46 (2016): 21.

23 Cf. "Strache fordert Ende von Russland-Sanktionen [Strache demands end to Russia sanctions]," *Die Presse*, June 2, 2018, <https://diepresse.com/home/ausland/aussenpolitik/5439865/Strache-fordert-Ende-von-Russland-Sanktionen>.

24 Heather A. Conley et al., *The Kremlin Playbook II. The Enablers*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 50, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/190327_Conley_KPII_interior_v3_WEB.pdf (accessed 30 May 2020).

25 Jutta Sommerbauer, "Van der Bellens und Österreichs 'wirkliche' Russland-Position [Van der Bellen and Austria's 'real' position on Russia]," *Die Presse*, May 15, 2019, 4.

26 Christoph B. Schiltz, "Europäische Wirtschaft ruft zur Abschaffung von Sanktionen auf [European economy calls for sanctions to be abolished]," *Die Welt*, December 9, 2019, <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article204148482/Europaeische-Wirtschaft-ruft-zur-Abschaffung-von-Sanktionen-auf.html>.

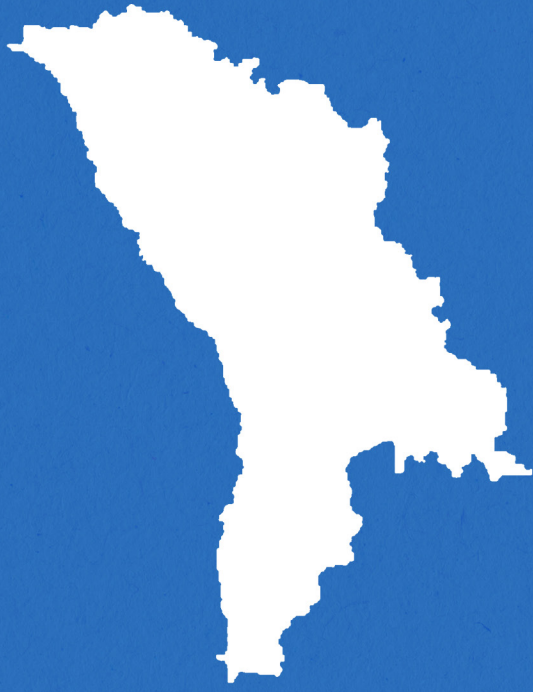
CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

Austrian politicians and managers find it difficult to say “no” to Russian officials and/or to find critical words about its domestic, foreign, security, and foreign trade policy. Austrian media outlets have paid some attention to increasing authoritarianism and the huge corruption under Putin, but Viennese politicians and businessmen rarely raise this issue. Instead, it is a widespread argument that Russia is “too important” as a power—and especially as a supplier of energy resources—so relations must not be “spoiled” under any circumstances.

There are no significant political forces in Austria which could be labelled as “anti-Russian” by Moscow-based politicians and/or media. Truly, nobody in Austria’s political elite wants to “argue” with Moscow. The governments in Vienna and Moscow like to emphasize that they are “very close” in most of the issues of international politics, that there are very few (if any) differences between them, that their relations are “trouble-free,” “cordial” etc. It is therefore not surprising that representatives of most parties and important interest groups (as the Economic Chamber) have been calling for the lifting of EU sanctions against Russia practically from the day they were imposed.

Natural gas and oil are nonrenewable resources which are imported into the EU and to Austria to a considerable extent from conflict regions and/or undemocratic states (such as Russia). There is no resistance whatsoever in Austria’s politics, media, and public against the fact that OMV portrays an increasing dependence of Austria and the EU on energy source supplies from Russia as a “guarantee of supply security.” Russia does not grant a “stable and secure gas supply” for Austria and the EU, but just the opposite: Moscow, especially since 1999 when Putin rose to power, has on several occasions demonstrated its capabilities and willingness to use gas and oil supply as a political leverage and a “geopolitical weapon” in order to subdue and/or punish “disloyal” states. It is irresponsible in the sense of a sustainable energy policy to make oneself dependent on the whims of the Kremlin.

If one wanted to give a very brief forecast on Austrian-Russian relations, it is totally obvious that there will be no change in the conditions described—regardless of the composition of the Austrian Government. The opposition hardly offers any alternatives with respect to the policy towards Russia, as all the major political forces in Austria have so-called Putin understanders (*Putin-Versteher*) among their ranks. And what all Austrian parties and special interest groups have in common is a total lack of understanding for the functional mechanisms of Russian domestic, security, foreign, and economic policy.



RUSSIAN GAS AND THE FI- NANCING OF SEPARATISM IN MOLDOVA

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ECONOMY

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last 200 years, the main part of the territory that today constitutes the Republic of Moldova switched sovereignties six times between the Russian Empire, the USSR, the Ottoman Empire and Romania, which explains why Russia treats it as a less loyal territory, compared to Ukraine or Belarus. With the last change in 1991, the Republic of Moldova proclaimed its independence and, on March 2, 1992, gained official recognition by the UN, in the borders of the former Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, including the Transnistrian region, inhabited by a more pro-Russian population as compared to the rest of the country. On the day of official recognition of the Republic of Moldova within UN, a military conflict sprang in the Transnistrian region, initially involving police forces and civilians and later the regular army. The Russian Army stationed in Transnistria (the former Soviet 14th Guards Army) supported the Transnistrian side, first unofficially then officially, which determined the outcome of the war. The war ended by a cease fire agreement signed between Presidents of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova—Boris Yeltsin and Mircea Snegur, reconfirming the direct involvement of Russia in the Transnistrian conflict.¹

Since 1991, the goal of Russian policy towards Moldova was to prevent Moldova from fleeing the Rus-

sian sphere of influence, and especially to maintain the Russian military base in Tiraspol and prevent Moldova's adherence to NATO. Transnistrian authorities served as proxies for Russia in pursuit of its foreign policy objectives, Russia's control over Transnistria being juridically recognized by the European Court for Human Rights.² However, maintaining the "statehood" of Transnistria required major financial support, and the energy sector played a crucial role in Russia's financing of separatism in the Republic of Moldova.

During Soviet times, the energy infrastructure was constructed in such a way that the energy system in the former Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic was dependent on critical infrastructure placed in the Transnistrian region:

the largest power plant—Moldovan State Regional Power Station (aka Kuchurgan Power Station, also known under the Russian acronym MGRES), with total installed capacity over 2.5 GWsix out of seven interconnection points between Moldova and Ukraine on high-voltage (330 kV) lines, four of these lines being tied up in a transformer substation on the territory of MGRESfour out of five entry points on gas transmission pipelines of regional importance, including all three entry points on the Trans-Balkan pipeline systemthe main gas compressor station on the Trans-Balkan pipeline system between

1 For more details on historical background and evolution of transnistrian war see Christopher Borgen, "Thawing a Frozen Conflict: Legal Aspects of the Separatist Crisis in Moldova: A Report from the Association of the Bar of the City of New York," Record of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, Vol. 61, 2006, pp. 13-24.

2 "Case Ilaşcu and others vs Moldova and Russia. (Application no. 48787/99)", European Court of Human Rights (website), July 8, 2004, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-61886>.

Ukraine and Bulgaria, located near Tiraspol (the administrative center of Transnistrian region)

Thus, by 1992, the energy security of the Republic of Moldova almost entirely depended on Russia and its proxy regime in the Transnistrian region. Less than 10 percent of the country's needs could be covered by electricity generation located outside the Transnistrian region. Import of electricity from Ukraine could not avoid high-voltage lines and transformation stations located in the breakaway region. Moreover, even the limited amount of generation controlled by constitutional authorities was mainly based on natural gas as fuel, while Gazprom was the only gas supplier and physical continuity of gas supply depended on infrastructural elements located in the Transnistrian region.

Since then, Russia has taken advantage of its energy leverage in relation to Moldova several times, generating crises, some of them politically reasoned. Thus, electricity supply to the main part of Moldova was limited or even halted in 1998,³ 2004,⁴ and 2005,⁵ while natural gas supply was interrupted in 2000.⁶

HOW GAZPROM TOOK CONTROL OF MOLDOVA'S GAS INFRASTRUCTURE

The gas price has long been used by Russia as a political tool in promoting its foreign policy in the countries largely dependent on Russian gas. The former Soviet countries are particularly vulnerable due to poverty, corruption, and weak regulation of the energy market. The Kremlin administration exploited these weaknesses to gain control of gas supply systems via Gazprom, as it happened in countries like Moldova (1995), Armenia (1997), and Belarus (2007), and only partly succeeded in other countries.⁷ The energy sector has always been a copious source of illegal enrichment for corrupt politicians. In the case of Moldova, during 1994–1998 the gas supply complex was twice exposed to hostile takeovers. Following a series of actions such as artificial debt

swelling and undervaluation of assets, undertaken in conspiracy with Moldovan government officials, Gazprom gained control over companies that owned critical gas transmission and distribution infrastructure.

The trans-Balkan pipeline that crosses Ukraine and Moldova (including the breakaway Transnistrian region) has been used by Gazprom to supply about 20–25 bcm of gas annually to Balkan countries. The gas transit was one of—if not the only—negotiating tools for Moldova in relation to Gazprom. However, the corruptibility and lack of vision of Moldovan political elites allowed the Russian holding to acquire, at derisory prices, the majority stake in Moldova's gas transmission system (1995) and distribution pipelines (1998) via debt-to-equity swaps. Prior to the acquisition, Gazprom had used its dominant position as a sole gas supplier to impose discriminatory conditions on the Moldovan side, thus artificially increasing the gas debt, as thoroughly analyzed in our 2007 research.⁸ Beginning in 1994, Gazprom increased the gas price for Moldova from USD 38.5 to USD 80 for one thousand cubic meters. During that period, Gazprom supplied gas on the European market at an average price of USD 72.8,⁹ although the share of transportation costs in the final price for EU countries was higher than for Moldova. At the same time, Gazprom supplied gas to the neighbouring Ukraine at a price of USD 50, which remained unchanged until 2005¹⁰ for political reasons, aimed at retaining Ukraine in Russia's sphere of influence. Besides the abusive price increase for Moldova, Gazprom requested advanced payments and imposed a fine of 0.35 percent per day on the amounts due (equivalent to 127.8 percent per annum in hard currency), which was seventeen times more than for other countries of the former USSR. Moldova's debt was further increased by the fact that the Transnistrian separatist region stopped paying for gas consumption after the 1992 Transnistrian conflict, when the separatists were backed by the Russian 14th Guards Army. Consequently, in 1994 alone, Moldova's gas debt increased from USD 22 million to USD 291 million, including USD 100 million in fines and USD 91 million of debt from the separatist region. Moldova was under threat to remain without gas supply due to the immense debt. In order to avoid this, in 1995 the government agreed to cede in favor of Gazprom a 50 percent+ 1

3 <https://www.mold-street.com/?go=news&n=8275>

4 <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/05/08/2004/5703b64e9a7947783a5a599c>

5 https://www.ng.ru/cis/2005-11-11/5_endoftheworld.html

6 <https://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2000/03/03/moldova-sdalas>

7 Gazprom profile by Steve Thomas, May 2006, PSIRU, Greenwich University, https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/Gazprom_profile_May.pdf.

8 IDIS Viitorul, "The gas industry in Moldova: The burden of ignorance and the cost of errors", 2007, <https://bit.ly/371L3L5>

9 М.М. Судо, Э.Р. Казанкова, "Энергетические ресурсы. Нефть и природный газ. Век уходящий", 1998

10 Slovoidilo.ua, "Как менялась цена российского газа для Украины на протяжении 24 лет?", 2016, <https://bit.ly/2S8lPiP>

share of the newly formed company Gazsnabtranzit, in whose capital the transportation pipelines were transmitted. The transaction was made both with deviations from the legal norm and to the detriment of the public interest, and as a result Moldova was prejudiced with over USD 416 million for the benefit of the Russian concern.¹¹

The government of Moldova admitted similar abuses in 1998 at the founding of JSC Moldovagaz, in which Gazprom received a 50 percent share.¹² The equity of the newly created enterprise was determined on the basis of the so-called preliminary estimate of both transmission and distribution pipelines. In 1999, the assets of the gas complex were to be revalued in order to rectify the ownership quotas in the share capital of Moldovagaz, with the corresponding correction of the gas debt. However, this provision has not been executed by the government. The share capital and the gas liabilities remained the same. These and other frauds were investigated in 2000–2001 by the Moldovan Court of Accounts (Supreme Audit Institution in Moldova) at the request of the Parliament. However, following Parliamentary elections on February 25, 2001, the pro-Russian Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) took over power,¹³ and already in March 2001 the team leader of auditing team, Mr. Tudor Șoitu, was ordered to finalize the investigation ahead of schedule.¹⁴ Despite the report containing pertinent proofs of frauds committed by high-level government officials and management of gas companies in favor of Gazprom, it has not been heard in the Parliament. Moreover, Mr. Șoitu was placed under accusation by the Prosecutor's office and fired from the Court of Accounts. The data and confirmative documents that constituted the base for the report were partially published later, within policy papers produced by IDIS "Viitorul" think tank in 2007,¹⁵ 2017¹⁶ and in Watchdog.md in 2019.¹⁷

GAS DEBT AND THE FINANCING OF SEPARATISM

The supply of Russian gas to both Moldova and the self-proclaimed Transnistria has been carried out under contracts signed by Gazprom with entities registered in Moldova and officially recognized (initially it was Gazsnabtranzit, afterwards—Moldovagaz). Under such a contractual scheme, the gas debt of the separatist region is accumulated by the Moldovan side.¹⁸ This was possible due to the fact that Transnistria's gas infrastructure was included in the capital of the Moldovan gas supplier under the pretext of paying the gas debt. Thus, Gazprom supplies gas to Moldovagaz, while the latter supplies gas to Moldovan consumers and to Tiraspol-Transgaz from Transnistria. De jure Tiraspol-Transgaz is a subsidiary of Moldovagaz, but de facto its assets were nationalized by the separatist authorities.¹⁹ Currently the outstanding amount owed by Moldovagaz to Gazprom at the end of 2019 totalled USD 7860.6 million²⁰ (including USD 1201.2 million to its subsidiary Factoring-Finans).²¹

Tiraspol-Transgaz resells the gas at subsidized tariffs to local Transnistrian households and enterprises, including to MGRES (Молдавская ГРЭС) power plant that supplies Moldova with electricity. The obtained revenue is accumulated on the so-called special gas account and is transferred directly to the separatist budget as loans from Tiraspol-Transgaz. Between 2007 and 2016, the separatist region received a USD 6 billion "gas subsidy," out of which USD 1.3 billion was converted into budgetary funds. In this way the self-proclaimed Transnistrian authorities covered 35.3 percent of the total budgetary expenditures for the respective ten-year period.²² The amount of "gas subsidy" generously provided by Gazprom is equivalent to 48 percent of the self-proclaimed Transnistria's GDP for that period. These findings point out that the unconstitutional regime in Tiraspol would not be sustainable without the permanent support of the Russian Federation. Given the subsidized tariffs, many people in Transnistria are unwilling to rejoin Moldova because they would have to pay more for gas consumption.²³

11 IDIS Viitorul (2007), *Supra* note 8 at page 10

12 IDIS Viitorul (2007), *Supra* note 8, §2.6

13 <http://www.e-democracy.md/elections/parliamentary/2001/>

14 https://www.watchdog.md/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Studiu-Moldovagaz-09-2019_compressed-1-1.pdf

15 IDIS Viitorul (2007), *Supra* note 8

16 IDIS Viitorul, "Energy and politics: the price for impunity in Moldova", Apr 2017, <https://bit.ly/2Nss3Yh>

17 Community Watchdog.MD, "Moldovagaz - 20 years of massive fraud under the protection of shareholders and state institutions", Sept 2019, <https://bit.ly/37M7z5P>

18 IDIS Viitorul (2017), *Supra* note 16 at chapter 3

19 Order no. 723 from Oct 13, 2005, of the self-proclaimed President of Transnistria, <https://bit.ly/2YgkDgO>

20 Gazprom financial report for Q4/2019 at page 83, <https://www.gazprom.ru/f/posts/77/885487/gazprom-ifs-2019-12m-ru.pdf>

21 Gazprom financial report for Q4/2005 at page 47, http://www.gazprom.ru/f/posts/91/747099/repiv_2005.doc

22 IDIS Viitorul (2017), *Supra* note 16 at page 15.

23 ECHR, case *Ilascu v. Moldova and Russia*, Annex: Witness Y, §261, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-61886>

The largest gas consumer in Transnistria is MGRES power plant (generation capacity of 2520 MW), controlled by Russian energy holding Inter RAO UES. MGRES generates electricity from gas provided by Tiraspol-Transgaz and supplies 80 percent of Moldova's electricity consumption. Using Moldova's dependence on Russian gas, including for electricity generation, the Russian Federation has imposed a contractual scheme whereby Moldovan consumers are forced to finance separatism in their own country by purchasing energy from MGRES located in Transnistria and accumulating gas debts.

Although Gazprom mentions in all its financial reports that Transnistria does not pay for gas consumption and it leads to the increase of Moldova's gas debt, gas supply to the region still continues.²⁴ From an economic point of view, the supply of gas without recovery of value is in fact a subsidy. In other words, Gazprom's activity in Moldova does not have an economic purpose, because it would never recover the gas debt from Moldovagaz, whose assets are below 20 percent of the total gas debt. In fact, Gazprom and senior Moldovan officials compel Moldovagaz to legalize the financing of the unconstitutional regime in Transnistria by supplying gas "on credit" and passing the debt to Moldovagaz. Moreover, according to contract provisions, Moldovagaz cannot interrupt the gas supply to the Transnistrian region without the written agreement of Gazprom.²⁵ It is probably the only case in history when legalization services of financing the separatism are not paid, but are provided in exchange for debt accumulation.

Even if Gazprom takes over all Moldovagaz assets to recover the debt, we estimate their value at almost USD 1.4 billion, which is under 20 percent of total gas debt.²⁶ Therefore Gazprom's activity in Moldova has nothing in common with genuine economic interests, but rather serves as a tool to promote the strategic agenda of the Kremlin administration in Moldova. This geopolitical agenda can be summarized as follows: strengthening Russian influence in Moldova by financing separatism and maintaining the role of mediator of the Transnistrian conflict in its own interest.

Russian "gas subsidy" converted into benefits for Russian businesses

24 Gazprom financial report for Q1/2020 at page 55, <https://www.gazprom.ru/f/posts/05/118974/gazprom-emitent-report-1q-2020.pdf>

25 Rise.md, (2016) „Confidential contract: Gazprom empire in Moldova”, Agreement no. 1 to the Contract of gas supply no. 1GM-07-11, §2.8, <https://www.rise.md/contract-confidential-imperiul-gazprom-in-moldova/>

26 IDIS Viitorul (2017), Supra note 16, chapter 4.

Since the 1990s, consumers in the Transnistrian region have benefited from heavily subsidized gas prices. The main beneficiaries were the large industrial enterprises—MGRES and the Moldovan metallurgical plant, also known under its Russian acronym MMZ. These companies consume a lot of energy and gas, and have been, or continue to be, controlled by Russian capital. Subsidized gas and energy tariffs provided them with significant competitive advantages compared to other companies in the region. At the same time, they exported the production at market prices, collecting strong currency. Respectively, the subsidies obtained by these factories through Russian gas were converted into real income.

The MGRES power plant is 100 percent owned by the Russian concern Inter RAO UES. As mentioned, the power plant is the main consumer of gas in the separatist region, using it as a basic source for electricity production.²⁷ MGRES benefited from a subsidized tariff that covered between 28 percent and 68 percent of the real cost of gas. Based on the financial reports of Inter RAO UES, during 2008–2015, the Russian investors obtained a profit of USD 291.8 million only through MGRES.²⁸

The separatist authorities have established subsidized tariffs for the MMZ metallurgical plant as well, through secret decisions. In the period 2005–2015 MMZ was part of the MetalloInvest holding controlled by the Russian oligarch Alisher Usmanov. The plant paid only 11.5 percent of the real gas price and was sometimes generally exempt from paying for gas. In the period 2007–2015, the plant reported sales of over USD 2.3 billion according to the data published by the so-called central bank of Transnistria. However, the real market prices for metallurgical production in Ukraine were 65–85 percent higher. We assume that this margin is explained by the fact that MMZ sold its production through traders affiliated to the Metalloinvest group, where the group accumulated most of its profits. Based on this assumption, we estimated that in the period 2007–2015, the profit related to MMZ production, accumulated by Metalloinvest traders, amounted to over USD 1.5 billion.

The so-called gas subsidy and respectively the subsidized electricity price in self-proclaimed Transnistria continue to be exploited by Russian cryptocurrency businesses as well. Igor Chaika, the son of the Russian ex-Prosecutor General, not only expressed openly his interest to invest in mining farms in Transnistria,²⁹ but also his

27 MGRES technical indicators for 2019, <https://bit.ly/2BtiV2t>

28 IDIS Viitorul (2017) Supra note 16, §2.4.1

29 Kommersant.ru, "Приднестровье примаивает инвесторов", Feb 2018, <https://bit.ly/2UYnoSO>

organization Delovaya Rossiya (Business Russia) helped the separatist government to develop the legislation on blockchain technology.³⁰ At least a part of the mining equipment was supplied through Moldovan customs. In December 2018 the separatist authorities announced their plans to increase the output capacity of MGRES power plant by 100 MW by supplying energy to the mining farms.³¹

CRYPTOCURRENCY AND RUSSIAN SUBVERSIVE OPERATIONS OVERSEAS

Cryptocurrency has been used by Russian hackers for various cyber attacks in recent years as a part of the “hybrid warfare,” following the rise of the political tension between Russia and Western countries after the annexation of Crimea. Cryptocurrency transactions are difficult to trace and this fact allowed the perpetrators to hide their identity and the source of funds, in order to circumvent the sanctions or the Know-Your-Client (KYC) procedures applied by commercial banks. The GRU-linked hackers used cryptocurrency to attack the German parliament in 2015,³² and the US Democratic National Committee (DNC) in 2016.³³ Cryptocurrency-funded cyber operations also targeted FIFA, WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency), and the Court of Arbitration for Sport in 2016.³⁴

Hard-to-trace cryptocurrency became a common tool in Russian subversive operations. In October 2017 Russian president Vladimir Putin even issued five presidential orders on the legal framework for digital currencies and mining.³⁵ Shortly after that, a spike in cryptocurrency mining activities has been observed in several pro-Russian breakaway regions. Besides Transnistria, the mining of virtual currency has also expanded to Don-

bass³⁶ and Abkhazia,³⁷ with the aim of creating a virtual trading platform in Crimea and providing services to the unrecognized pro-Russian territories.³⁸ Moreover, according to Ukraine’s Deputy Prosecutor General Anatoliy Matios, cryptocurrency mined in Ukraine has been used to buy military equipment, weapons, and ammunition for the separatist groups fighting in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.³⁹ Given that, the trace of the cryptocurrency mined in the pro-Russian breakaway regions becomes necessary to prevent and expose the subversive operations conducted by the Kremlin in its attempt to achieve political goals in other countries.

RUSSIAN GAS “SUBSIDY” STIMULATING CORRUPTION OF MOLDOVAN POLITICAL ELITES

Although Moldova was ruled by parties of different geopolitical orientations, since its incorporation in 1998, Moldovagaz remained a dangerous territory for control bodies. Throughout this period, Gazprom along with Moldovan decision-makers tolerated and even facilitated fraudulent schemes in the energy sector to the detriment of the national interests of Moldova.⁴⁰ At the same time, investigations of alleged fraud in the gas sector turned against their initiators and none of them finalized with proper prosecution of decision makers from Moldovagaz or Moldovan officials. Moreover, despite catastrophic dynamics in Moldovagaz’s financial situation, two of its top officials were decorated with the Glory of Work presidential award: Mr. Alexandr Gusev, President of the Administration Council (2012)⁴¹ and Mr. Iacov Cazacu, Vice President of the Administration Council (2017).⁴² This suggests that some of the illicit proceeds

36 BBC, ““Морячок” из ДНР купил биржу криптовалют и начал охоту на сокровища Винника”, Dec 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-46444479>

37 Abkhazia signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Russian Association of Crypto Industry and Blockchain (RACIB), Bitfeed.ru, “Абхазия разрабатывает нормативную базу для регулирования майнинга”, Dec 2018, <https://bit.ly/2UZ92RI>

38 Supra note 36

39 Politico.eu, “How Ukraine became the Wild East of cryptocurrencies”, Mar 2018, <https://politi.co/3fiZEPM>

40 Community Watchdog.MD, “Moldovagaz - 20 years of massive fraud under the protection of shareholders and state institutions”, Sept 2019, <https://bit.ly/37M7z5P>

41 <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=344965>

42 Presidential decree 362 from Sept 03, 2017, https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=100273&lang=ru

30 Novostipmr.com, “Начало большого пути. [...]”, Dec 2017, <https://bit.ly/3didSPC>

31 Anticoruptie.md, “The cryptorepublic”, Apr 2019, <https://bit.ly/2YhYjUc>

32 Netzpolitik, “Digital Attack on German Parliament”, Jun 2015, <https://bit.ly/3155DT7>

33 Mueller indictment from Jul 13, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2NPPpGf>

34 Indictment of the Western District of Pennsylvania, § 21 and 22, <https://bit.ly/30hnE1t>

35 Kremlin press release from Oct 21, 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/assignments/orders/55899>

from these schemes were used to bribe Moldovan politicians. Thus, each of the parties pursues its own interest: Moldovan political decision-makers aim for personal enrichment from corruption schemes, while Gazprom executes the Kremlin's agenda on financing separatism and increasing Moldova's dependence on the Russian Federation.

As mentioned above, the Court of Accounts' attempt to verify the activity of Moldovagaz in 2001 resulted in an open criminal investigation against the head of the audit team, Tudor Soitu.⁴³ However, the situation did not change even after the so-called pro-European coalition came to power in 2009. In 2012, the National Energy Regulation Authority (ANRE) issued four inspection reports on procurement irregularities at Moldovagaz's subsidiary. Frauds worth MDL 243 million (approximately USD 20 million at that time) were found in the purchase of goods at prices that exceeded 3–4 times the market price. This time the control ended with the assassination attempt on one of ANRE directors⁴⁴ just two weeks after the first inspection report was issued. Despite its odiousity—the explosion of a grenade under the car of a senior official, appointed by Parliament—this assassination attempt remains uninvestigated until present.

In 2014, following a conspiracy between Moldovan oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc and self-proclaimed Transnistrian President Yevgheny Shevchuk, the electricity produced by MGRES (owned by Russian Inter RAO UES) was supplied to Moldova through an intermediary company, Energokapital. The electricity was supplied at the same price as previously, while the internal gas tariffs for electricity generation in self-proclaimed Transnistria were decreased by 15 percent.⁴⁵ The illicit margin was syphoned off via Energokapital, whose beneficiaries are hidden behind a Scottish limited partnerships.⁴⁶ An investigation conducted by the Blacksea.eu revealed that Energokapital has a complex series of off-shore owners connected to the “theft” of a billion dollars from three Moldovan banks. Undoubtedly the energy supply scheme via Energokapital was coordinated at the highest levels in Gazprom and the Russian government, given the visit of the Deputy Prime Minister Andrian Candu to

Moscow in September 2014,⁴⁷ just two weeks before the incorporation of Energokapital.⁴⁸ Moreover, in 2016 civil society watchdogs publicly presented⁴⁹ copies of payment orders for transfer of dividends by Energokapital to its offshore mother company worth over USD 19 million⁵⁰ and solicited the Prosecutor's office to verify whether these were made in compliance with anti-money laundering legislation. Instead of investigating the facts, after just 2 weeks, the Prosecutor's office issued a press release claiming that “experts did not present any documents that would confirm the illegalities.”⁵¹

In March 2019 Moldova's Prime Minister Pavel Filip secretly sent a letter to his Ukrainian counterpart, in which he called for the removal of the Transnistrian metallurgical plant MMZ from the sanctions list and the termination of the antidumping investigation against MMZ.⁵² Why would the Moldovan prime minister lobby for the metallurgical plant located in the separatist region? The reason is obvious if we follow the money. MMZ is the main customer of the state-owned company Metalferos, which has a monopoly on the collection and export of scrap metal from Moldova.⁵³ In 2015–2019, the payments from MMZ to Metalferos amounted to at least USD 127 million, a part of which was embezzled to offshore companies directly controlled by Moldovan oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc,⁵⁴ the former leader of the Democratic Party to which Pavel Filip belongs. The Prosecutor's office started the investigations at Metalferos only after Plahotniuc left the country.⁵⁵ In exchange for insignificant personal benefits and acting to the detriment of national interests, Moldovan political elites ensured the temporary registration of MMZ in Moldova and allowed its exports to be made through Moldovan customs⁵⁶ and the state-

43 ECHR, case 18835/08 Tudor Soitu vs Moldova, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-191880>

44 ANRE press release, Apr 2012, <https://bit.ly/2YZpxOy>

45 Press release of self-proclaimed Transnistria Government, Jul 2016, <http://gov-pmr.org/item/7269>

46 Blacksea.eu, Bird, M. and Cotrut, A., “Moldovan energy intermediary company linked to “billion-dollar bank theft” scandal”, Mar 2016, <https://bit.ly/2NhyzAK>

47 Ministry of Economy press release, Sept 2014, <https://bit.ly/2V4iQtb>

48 Energokapital incorporation agreement, Oct 2014, <https://bit.ly/310nxlj>

49 <https://www.ipn.md/en/economie/77740>

50 <https://sergiutofilat.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/plati-energokapital.pdf>

51 <http://procuratura.md/md/newslst/1211/1/6723/>

52 Rise.md, “Rescuers of the Transnistrian metallurgic plant: Filip and Poroshenko have helped Transnistria earn millions”, May 2019, <https://bit.ly/39Whff7>

53 Newsmaker.md, “Люди бьются за металл. Кому выгодна продажа Metalferos и сколько денег там украли”, Jan 2020, <https://bit.ly/3fxcZE2>

54 Zdg.md, “Дело Metalferos: Эпизод с Владимиром Плахотнюком”, Aug 2020, <https://bit.ly/33sQZYv>

55 Tv8.md, “В ходе обысков на предприятии Metalferos задержано 7 человек”, Dec 2020, <https://bit.ly/2Prjgq4>

56 Commission Regulation (EC) No 112/2009 at (48) and (109), <https://bit.ly/39Y169i>

owned Railway company.

The large-scale corruption in the energy sector poses a real threat to economic and energy security, and even the territorial integrity of Moldova. Even today the Moldovan government continues to support the large energy-consuming enterprises in Transnistria, despite the fact that it leads to the increase of the gas debt. In March 2020 the Commission of Emergency Situations canceled the energy procurement tender and the state-owned trader Energocom signed a new agreement with MGRES power plant from Transnistria.⁵⁷

HOW TO TAKE A COUNTRY HOSTAGE FOR USD 1 BILLION IN 27 YEARS

As mentioned above, by the end of 2019 the total debt of Moldovagaz to Gazprom and its subsidiary Factoring Finans Ltd amounted to USD 8 billion, including about USD 7.5 billion related to gas supplied to the Transnistrian region. These figures are based on contract prices of gas, however the cost of natural gas supplied by Gazprom in the Transnistrian region via Moldovagaz is much lower than the invoiced amounts. According to Gazprom's officials, in 2016 the average cost for natural gas extraction was around USD 20 per one thousand cubic meters, including taxes.⁵⁸ Before switching to the "European price formula" in 2006, Gazprom supplied natural gas to Ukraine at USD 50 for the same amount,⁵⁹ which included the cost of transmission services to the border.

Between 2007 and 2016, the average gas consumption in the Transnistrian region was 1.8 billion cubic meters per year. Taking into consideration the cost of transit services on Ukrainian territory, one thousand cubic meters of natural gas delivered to the Ukrainian-Moldovan border (Transnistrian segment) cost Gazprom approximately USD 65 per one thousand cubic meters. Thus, the total costs incurred by Gazprom with financing the Transnistrian separatism over twenty-seven years are slightly more than USD 3 billion. In the mean time, at least around USD 2 billion have been recovered by just two Russian corporations (Metalloinvest and Inter RAO) by

benefiting from subsidized gas prices in the Transnistrian region. Thus, the bottomline costs for Russia with maintaining Transnistria as its main instrument of influence in Moldova was at most USD 1 billion—not too expensive for twenty-seven years of influence in a European country of 3 million people.

Thus, by exercising its monopolistic position as a natural anti-dumping gas supplier to Moldova and by loyalizing corrupt political elites from Chişinău, Gazprom served as the main instrument of financing the Russian foreign policy agenda in Moldova.

This malign influence can only be countered by consolidating Moldova's energy security and eliminating dependency on critical energy infrastructure controlled by Russia via its Transnistrian proxies. However, little has been done in this respect since 1991, despite the fact that the need for diversification has been acknowledged and even included in all energy strategies. Thus, the Energy Strategy until 2010 adopted in 2000⁶⁰ mentions diversification of energy supply sources and routes five times, while the Energy Strategy till 2020 adopted in 2007⁶¹ mentions it six times and the Energy strategy till 2030 adopted in 2013⁶² refers to it nine times. De facto, despite strong political and financial support provided by the European Union and other international development partners, no major progress has been achieved until the second half of 2019!

In terms of natural gas supply diversification, the largely publicized Iaşi-Ungheni interconnector started in 2014 still cannot be operated at its full capacity. Moreover, even after finalization of all works around this interconnection route, its capacity (1.5 bcm per annum) won't be sufficient to cover the winter peak consumption in Moldova even except Transnistrian region. Also, the southern part of Moldova would still remain fully dependent on the traditional natural gas supply route—the Trans-Balkan pipeline system—where the flow of gas could be disrupted by Transnistrian authorities. In the mean time, Gazprom has finalized the Turkish Stream project and is able to supply natural gas to Turkey and other Balkan countries bypassing the Ukrainian and Moldovan part of the Trans-Balkan pipeline. The breakthrough in terms of natural gas supply options for Moldova has been achieved only in the second half of 2019, and mainly due to external factors. Uncertainties around the gas transit contract through Ukraine after 2019 forced Gazprom to look for alterna-

57 TV8.md, "Контракт на поставку энергии с Молдавской ГРЭС продлен до 30 июня", March 2020, <https://ru.tv8.md/2020/03/31/kontrakt-na-postavku-energii-s-moldavskoj-gres-prodlen-do-30-ijunya/>
58 Vedomosti.ru (2016), "Газпром назвал текущую себестоимость добычи газа", <https://bit.ly/2BtkCgl>
59 Supra note 10

60 https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=73726&lang=ru
61 <http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=325108&lang=2>
62 <http://lex.justice.md/ru/346670/>

tive scenarios for supplying gas to the Balkans. The only feasible emergency alternative was to upgrade the Trans-Balkan pipeline system to be able to operate in reverse mode, which would enable Gazprom to supply gas to Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and Moldova via Turkey. Thus, in just about six months, this project of strategic importance was implemented. It is worth mentioning that civil society experts signalled the strategic importance of the reverse flow on the Trans-Balkan pipeline system and its priority compared to the Iași-Ungheni interconnector since at least 2014.⁶³

The implications of the Trans-Balkan reverse flow for Moldova cannot be overestimated as it also reverses the balance of power between Moldovan constitutional authorities and the Transnistrian proxies of Russia in the gas sector: presently, should Moldovagaz solicit Gazprom to supply natural gas to Moldova's southern border (instead of the eastern, as previously) the Russian supplier would have to comply with it. In this case, if Transnistrian authorities maintain the practice of nonpayment, the supply of natural gas to the secessionist region could be physically limited or even completely interrupted at Căușeni measurement station. The main risks associated with this scenario is on the electricity side: not only would it leave Moldova without its largest source of electricity, which is MGRES fueled by natural gas, but it is also highly likely that Transnistrian authorities would respond by shutting down high-voltage (330 kV) lines that would become critical for importing electricity from Ukraine thus leaving the entire country dependent on a single high-voltage line. Therefore, the next and the last logical step on the path of eliminating the risk of energy blackmail on behalf of Russian proxies in Transnistria is securing the electricity supply by interconnecting with the Romanian electricity transmission system in an asynchronous mode.

Similar to "diversification" efforts on the gas side, construction of electricity interconnections with Romania are being long delayed. Civil society experts have already lost track of all technical and feasibility studies commissioned in the last more than ten years around interconnection options. So far, despite about 250 million euros allocated for these purposes by international partners (World Bank, European Investment Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development), including a 40 million euro grant from the European Union, construction has not even been started. The only plausible explanation is that the entire process is being sabotaged by

Russian agents of influence among Moldovan decision makers.

In conclusion, consolidation of Moldova's energy security by diversification of energy supply options and integration into European energy markets is not only vital for countering Russian malign influence in Moldova, but also key to solving the Transnistrian conflict, which affects regional security.

63 <http://www.vedomosti.md/news/viktor-parlikov-gazoprovod-yassy-ungeny-sam-po-sebe-ne-imeet>



RT FRANCE AND SPUT- NIK'S ATTEMPTS TO EN- HANCE FRENCH SOCI- ETY'S DIVISIONS

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Broadcasting in France for only two and a half years, RT France has achieved impressive success in what concerns the outreach of its anti-government message—while (and maybe precisely because of that) they are substantially protected by the French journalistic community. How did a channel, which suppresses critics with lawsuits, and which is funded by a country that holds 149th place¹ for freedom of the press, manage to impose itself in the media landscape of France in the name of freedom of speech?

RT FRANCE AS FAVORITE MEDIA OF THE #JILETSJAUNES PROTESTERS

“Watch RT France or learn how to count,”—such signs were carried by so-called yellow vests—anti-government protesters in France. As Aavaz counted, RT France had 23 million views of its 588 reports on yellow vests from November 2018 to March 2019.² It was double the amount of views compared to those of five other French media outlets (combined) reporting on the issue. Added to that coverage are social media accounts retweeting content from Sputnik or RT France with a hashtag #jiletsjaunes. The accounts have been actively amplifying the protests, as it was first reported by the

*Times*³ and Bloomberg.⁴

Theoretically, since early December 2018, the General Secretariat for Defense and National Security has been in charge of the investigation into the alleged meddling of Russian social media accounts in the yellow vests protests in France.⁵ The official results of the probe are unknown and, given the time that has passed, unlikely to be made public. It would not be an exaggeration to say that such results are not a priority of the media and society. Thus, while speaking on French TV, the editor Edwy Plenel from the powerful investigative news outlet *Mediapart*, even mocked the mere idea that Russian trolls ever interfered in the movement. *Mediapart* has even quoted an unspecified intelligence source (his relation to the probe is not known) who “did not believe that Russians interfered in the Yellow vests movement.”⁶

An independent Russian investigative media outlet registered in Latvia, the *Insider* reported that two visible members of the yellow vests likely received visas to Russia upon a special invitation from the Russian MP Leonid

3 Rhys Bekely, “Russian Accounts Fuel French Outrage Online,” *The Times*, December 8, 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russian-accounts-fuel-protesters-outrage-online-xx2f2g8th>.

4 Carol Matlack, Robert Williams, “France to Probe Possible Russian Influence on Yellow Vest Riots,” *Bloomberg*, December 8, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-12-08/pro-russia-social-media-takes-aim-at-macron-as-yellow-vests-rage>.

5 “Gilets jaunes”: les autorités enquêtent sur de faux comptes Internet,” *Le Monde*, December 8, 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2018/12/08/gilets-jaunes-les-autorites-enquetent-sur-de-faux-comptes-internet_5394702_3224.html.

6 Matthieu Suc, “‘Gilets jaunes’: Macron affirme l’inverse de ce que disent ses services de renseignement,” *Mediapart*, March 8, 2019, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/080319/gilets-jaunes-macron-affirme-l-inverse-de-ce-que-disent-ses-services-de-renseignement>.

1 “Taking Control?,” Reporters without Borders (website), December 18, 2019, <https://rsf.org/en/reports/taking-control-report-rsf-internet-censorship-russia>.

2 “Yellow Vest Flooded by Fake News,” AVAAZ (website), March 12, 2019, <https://avaazimages.avaaz.org/Report%20Yellow%20Vests%20FINAL.pdf>.



Slutsky's Russian Peace Foundation.⁷ Those two individuals were never challenged on that by French media. As one of the French correspondents covering Russia put it on his social media account, the news is not really relevant because Russia did not create yellow vests. The risk: any particular attention to their travels would mean denying the internal problems of France.

On 11 November 2019, the Russian Foreign Ministry reported a meeting of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov with "members of the French civil society" in Paris.⁸ Among the representatives of civil society were Olivier Beruyer, the editor in chief of the conspiracy website *Le Crise*, and a populist blogger Thinker View (*Sky*). What do those "civil society representatives" expect from Lavrov? The far-right politician Marine Le Pen, main rival of Macron, and her father, officially received a loan of EUR 11 million from a Russian bank which later disappeared⁹ and from a Cyprus company with a Russian beneficiary

owner.¹⁰ Le Pen is supposed to reimburse one of the debts by 2028.¹¹ As Marine Le Pen explained, "no French bank wanted to give her money," and she turned to the Russians.¹²

Similar logic should apply to the French bloggers, activists, and others who met Lavrov and went on air on RT France. Many of them are unlikely to be given much time on mainstream French media because they support conspiracy theories or they are excessive—they denounce "dictatorship and global financial oligarchy in Europe,"¹³ "No freedom of speech in France,"¹⁴ etc.

At least someone will give them a larger platform. Yellow vests clearly do not care much about Russia, but they welcome their own visibility, regardless who provides it and with what goals.

7 "Khotim kak v Parizhe. Dokumenty podtverdili kontakty rossiyskikh vlastey s 'zhelytymi zhiletami' i nemetskimi natsionalistami," *The Insider*, November 18, 2019, <https://theins.ru/politika/188244>.

8 "In Paris, FM Sergey #Lavrov met with members of the French civil society," Russian Foreign Ministry's official Facebook account, November 11, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/MIDRussia/posts/2090333797732717>.

9 Marine Turci, "Emprunts russes du FN: la justice ordonne la communication des contrats à Mediapart," *Mediapart*, May 18, 2018, <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/marine-turchi/blog/180518/emprunts-russes-du-fn-la-justice-ordonne-la-communication-des-contrats-mediapart>.

10 Turci, "Emprunts russes du FN."

11 Marine Turci, "Prêt russe: le RN obtient un rééchelonnement du remboursement," *Mediapart*, June 8, 2020, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/080620/pre-russe-le-rn-obtient-un-reechelonnement-du-remboursement>.

12 Abel Mestre, "Marine Le Pen justifie le prêt russe du FN," *Le Monde*, November 23, 2014, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2014/11/23/marine-le-pen-justifie-le-pre-russe-du-fn_4528041_823448.html.

13 "Europe, dictature technocratique? Costa-Gavras [EN DIRECT]," *Thinkerview*, November 4, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNylkT2QW4U>.

14 Natacha Polony, "Journalistes et médias sous contrôles," *Les crises*, April 8, 2018 <https://www.les-crisis.fr/video-natacha-polony-journalistes-et-medias-sous-controles-par-thinkerview/>.

RT's devotion to the yellow vests' protests led to a comic situation. One yellow vests protester who was asked for a comment during the rally, on air of RT France, suggested that "we need Putin in France" who would speak and "enlighten" "our President [Macron], this clown"¹⁵ (surprisingly, the video disappeared from the channel's website but was copied by other accounts). This female activist named "Céline" explained she heard that Putin "made good promises to pensioners." This grotesque example explains the context in which the Kremlin's voice is operating. The French are poorly informed about Russia (Vladimir Putin did start the pension reform, but by raising the pension age he has not introduced policies that benefit older people.). RT France's coverage is welcomed by those who expect criticism of their own government. This task is carried out by RT France perfectly well.

HEAD HUNTING: FORMER FRENCH HIGH-RANK INTELLIGENCE OFFICER AND OTHER ANCHORS FOR RT FRANCE

The criticism should be in native French. Thus, the Iranian media in French¹⁶ is not popular—they did not manage to hire TV stars or simply native speakers. By contrast, RT France did the real head hunting and hired the true stars of French TV: Isabel de Muru from BFMTV, Frédéric Taddei from France 2 and Jean-Marc Sylvestre from TF1. Obviously, they came with their "address book" to attract credible speakers.

Finally, in February 2020, RT France recruited a former chief of intelligence at French security service DGSE (General Directorate of the External Security) Alain Juillet. He "has an exceptional background and a remarkable expertise. I am very happy to have a personality of this level among us. I'm sure it will provide our audiences with a deeper insight into the geopolitical processes at work around the world,"¹⁷ said Xenia Fedorova, editor in chief of RT France. Juillet now has his own program on RT France.

The outreach of RT France remains limited, but it

¹⁵ "Céline" adore Poutine, alors j'ai envie de lui dire..., L'instant détox, February 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUJLBMtUuJO>.

¹⁶ Frontpage, PressTV, <http://french.presstv.com/>.

¹⁷ "RT France recrute Alain Juillet, ancien patron du Renseignement à la DGSE," *France24*, February 2, 2020 <https://www.france24.com/fr/20200224-rt-france-recrute-alain-juillet-ancien-patron-du-renseignement-%C3%A0-la-dgse>.

grows fast. In 2019, RT France increased the number of Facebook followers by 17 percent, and YouTube subscribers by 60 percent. In July 2020, RT France had 677,000 subscribers on YouTube (there were 606,000 in early 2020) and 1,367,347 followers on Facebook (there were 1,195,806 in early 2020). This is more than what the mainstream networks BFMTV/TF1 have.¹⁸ BFMTV invests more efforts in traditional broadcasting than in social media. Nevertheless, this comparison is spectacular. The broadcasting of RT France was limited by only one provider and for several months it has also been rebroadcast by Canal+.

Sputnik French has 612,487 followers on Facebook. They were 487,013 in the beginning of 2020.

What are their hits (besides the yellow vests live coverage)?

So far, an absolute hit of RT France (more than 720,000 views on YouTube) is a program *Interdit d'interdire* (Forbidden to ban) exposing the narrative that there is an invisible tyranny in France: "They say that the word 'dictatorship' for the French situation is too strong. Of course, if you compare it with the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany, it will seem exaggerated. Still, there are dead people too, because of capital, because of capitalism. Everything we eat, we ingest that causes cancer, all the people who kill one other, who are taking antibiotics and antidepressants, they are living dead. The destruction is almost invisible, but it is still there. Tyranny is invisible, but it is there."¹⁹

Anti-US speech is one of the pillars of RT France's and Sputnik's reporting. The reason is easy to understand from their selection of speakers and the narrative they advance—it may be summarized as follows: Washington rules Brussels, Brussels dictates to Macron who is not a sovereign leader. Therefore, France adopted unfair sanctions against Russia because of the annexation of Crimea, although Crimea was always Russian and held a legitimate referendum on that. Macron cultivated warmer relations with Russia, but he is opposed by the "Deep State" and Brussels.

Ironically, RT France brought a lawsuit against the satirical cartoons newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* who dared to compare Frédéric Taddei's program *Forbidden to ban* to Nazi propaganda. So far, there is no one who would sue RT for serious comparisons of Europe or the US to

¹⁸ Marina Alcaraz, "RT France devant BFM TV ou TF1 sur YouTube," *Les Echos*, January 17, 2020, <https://www.lesechos.fr/tech-medias/medias/rt-france-devant-bfm-tv-ou-tf1-sur-youtube-1163991>.

¹⁹ "Disinfo: France Is a New Look on Tyranny," *EU vs Disinfo*, June 5, 2019, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/france-is-a-new-look-tyranny/>.



Nazis. For example, on a program about US policy in Venezuela, the US was compared to the “4th Reich”: “This is an absolute rule. US is a country that has a clear destiny, which, a bit like the 3rd Reich, believe they are better than all others. They may merit the nickname of the 4th Reich from this point of view.”²⁰

Soft anti-Americanism is present in mainstream French media too. French media do not really need Russia to advance it but only on RT France or Sputnik do guests clearly say what they think, in most cases without being rebuffed by the presenters or guests with a different opinion.

More recently, RT France’s segment on medical masks that were supposed to be shipped to France but were allegedly stolen by the Americans on the tarmac in China ended up on mainstream French media. Some journalists at least reached the RT’s source on their own, but most of them simply copy and pasted the RT France report as a credible source, like *Libération* did.²¹ French TV (France 3) called RT France just an “information channel” (without even saying on this occasion “a Russian

channel”).²²

The details of the story, in which Americans “stole the masks,” were never clarified. Some French politicians denied the report as fake news. The US Embassy issued a denial saying it was not the American state representatives.

This example may seem comic, but it shows reasons why RT France gains credibility. Key to its success is to criticize the French government, Brussels, and the US. And to forget about Russia, if possible.

Narratives such as, “Crimea is/was always Russian,” “there is no proof anywhere of Russian meddling in the elections,” “nobody knows what happened in Salisbury”²³ are routine on RT France and different opinions are not considered. But RT France actually tries to mention Russia as seldom as possible. Their main goal is to attack the French government. To quote RT’s journalists themselves: “we are French journalists with French press cards.”²⁴

22 “Coronavirus: une cargaison de masques venant de Chine destinés à la France détournée par des Américains,” *France3*, April 1, 2020, <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/provence-alpes-cote-d-azur/grosse-commande-masques-aurait-du-arriver-france-elle-ira-finalement-aux-etats-unis-annonce-renaud-muselier-1810096.html>.

23 The place of the Russian state-sponsored assassination attempt on Sergei Skripal, see “Skripal Suspects Confirmed as GRU Operatives: Prior European Operations Disclosed,” *Bellingcat* (website), September 20, 2018, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/09/20/skripal-suspects-confirmed-gru-operatives-prior-european-operations-disclosed/>.

24 “Disinfo: RT France Is a French Press Group,” *EU vs Disinfo*, March 2, 2020, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/rt-france-is-a-french-press-group/>.

20 “Disinfo: US Is Like 4th Reich,” *EU vs Disinfo*, May 6, 2019, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/us-may-be-called-the-4th-reich/>.

21 Dominique Albertini, “Une commande française de masques détournée vers les Etats-Unis sur un tarmac chinois,” *Libération*, April 1, 2020, https://www.liberation.fr/france/2020/04/01/une-commande-francaise-de-masques-detournee-vers-les-etats-unis-sur-un-tarmac-chinois_1783805.



ANTI-EU NARRATIVE

RT France and Sputnik routinely invite guests who are sure that the Eurozone will collapse, Italy will withdraw from it, and the UK had enough of Brussels' rule, which in turn, has been dictated by the US. The narratives are not necessarily coherent.

During the 2019 European elections, Sputnik attacked the main rival of Marine Le Pen (who is a Eurosceptic and has a deep relationship with Russia), Nathalie Loiseau, with different narratives: she is too pro-Muslim, she promoted homophobic cartoons in Poland, and she was in fact close to the far right when she was young. Sputnik did not really invent those "news" but tried to amplify everything it could. In some Sputnik's articles, the hope that the newly elected European Parliament would review the issue of sanctions was clearly articulated.

Coronavirus coverage has consisted of insisting that the EU will probably collapse—the former DGSE's chief of intelligence Alain Juillet reports, for example, that "in the spring 2020 Italy was painfully hit by the coronavirus epidemic. European countries are known for their lack of solidarity so they did not provide any help, but China and Russia are known to be altruistic and therefore provided help. Polls now show that Italians consider Chinese and Russians as their friends while they are opposed to

Europeans."²⁵

Worrying episodes concern the youngsters and what they should perceive as a rebellion in the current French context. This is a go-to for RT France. When young French YouTubers were invited to EU premises for an excursion, they accepted the invitation. But right after the visit, they went directly to RT France to denounce the EU. They said that they saw "Orwell" in the EU institutions²⁶; without going into details—the audience of RT France was supposed to be already convinced.

Especially in Western Europe, youngsters do not hesitate to denounce to journalists "obscure committees of the EU."²⁷ It may be the reason why they seem to be more sensitive to the Russian anti-EU narrative than the older generation.

25 Allain Juillet, "LA SOURCE – Après le Covid-19, un nouvel avenir pour l'Europe?", RT France, June 27, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7TfqNpXHvI&t=430>.

26 "L'impression d'être dans 1984': des youtubeurs parlent du 'voyage d'étude' organisé par l'UE," RT France, May 22, 2019, <https://francais.rt.com/france/62289-impression-detre-dans-1984-youtubeurs-parlent-voyage-etude-organise-commission-europeenne>.

27 "L'Europe vue par les jeunes: espoir à l'est, désillusion à l'ouest," L'express, May 23, 2014, https://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/actualite/l-europe-vue-par-les-jeunes-espoir-a-l-est-desillusion-a-l-ouest_1545876.html.

FIRST REPRIMAND FOR RT FRANCE: CHEMICAL WEAPONS REPORTING AND FAKE VOICE-OVERS

On 28 June 2018, RT France received its first reprimand from the French regulator CSA (Conseil de Surveillance Audiovisuel),²⁸ which, after RT France appealed, was maintained by the State Council²⁹ for its biased coverage of the chemical attack in Douma in April 2018. The regulator concluded that RT France did false voice-overs of two interviews with Syrian citizens, distorting their messages. Also, “because of a confusion between the presentation of the facts and their commentary and the choice of banners as ‘simulated attacks,’ the channel gave the impression that the fictitious nature of the chemical attacks occurring in the city of Douma on 7 April 2018 was an established fact, although it was an uncertain and controversial fact.”³⁰ The regulator “noticed that the whole 18 minutes of Douma’s incident coverage by RT France broke the Convention signed with the regulator. The convention obliges the channel to check the credibility of its information.”³¹

Since the reprimand in 2018, nothing has changed in RT France’s narrative that “White Helmets are terrorists” and chemical attacks in Syria were staged.³² RT France and Sputnik use words such as “likely” in its reports on chemical weapons to desperately insist that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is

not confident that the attacks took place and the videos from hospitals are staged. As for the false voice-overs in 2018, RT France claimed it was a “technical error.”

The most notorious reporting on the topic of chemical attacks in Syria from both Sputnik and RT France dates from March 29, 2019: “The intelligence services of France and Belgium are preparing a false-flag chemical attack in Syria’s Idlib province, in coordination with local terrorist cells and the pseudo-humanitarian White Helmets group. Once filmed, the footage will be doctored to ‘prove’ Moscow’s involvement in the attack.”³³

The French Foreign ministry then said: “This is not about information, but about coarse lies, which for this center [Russian Center for the Reconciliation of Conflicting Parties], organized by the Russian and Syrian authorities, is customary.”³⁴ Belgium’s Defence Ministry also denied the fake news.³⁵

The reprimand for RT France has not impressed the journalistic community in France. The French press in general assumes that “there is no fake news on RT France.” This is the case of the newspaper *Libération*’s popular fact check rubric, Check news *Libération*, even though it was published three weeks before the reprimand but after the controversial Syria report from 13 April 2018 was released.³⁶ A documentary by France 24 also claims the absence of fake news in the Russian media,³⁷ de facto contradicting or ignoring the CSA decision.

Sputnik’s activity has highly likely contributed to a terror attack on a mosque in France

On April 15, 2019, after the Notre Dame fire, RT.com informed us in English: “Notre Dame fire hits after several

28 “Manquements à l’honnêteté, à la rigueur de l’information et à la diversité des points de vue: la chaîne RT France mise en demeure,” CSA, June 28, 2018, <https://www.csa.fr/Reguler/Espace-juridique/Les-textes-reglementaires-du-CSA/Les-decisions-du-CSA/Manquements-a-l-honnetete-a-la-rigueur-de-l-information-et-a-la-diversite-des-points-de-voir-la-chaîne-RT-France-mise-en-demeure>.

29 Décision n° 422790, Conseil d’Etat (website), November 22, 2019, <https://www.conseil-etat.fr/fr/arianeweb/CE/decision/2019-11-22/422790>.

30 “Disinfo: Internal OPCW E-mail Proves that OPCW’s Douma Investigation Is Biased,” EU vs Disinfo (website), <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/internal-opcw-e-mail-proves-that-opcws-douma-investigation-is-biased/>.

31 “Manquements à l’honnêteté, à la rigueur de l’information et à la diversité des points de vue: la chaîne RT France mise en demeure,” CSA, June 28, 2018, <https://www.csa.fr/Reguler/Espace-juridique/Les-textes-reglementaires-du-CSA/Les-decisions-du-CSA/Manquements-a-l-honnetete-a-la-rigueur-de-l-information-et-a-la-diversite-des-points-de-voir-la-chaîne-RT-France-mise-en-demeure>.

32 Twenty-one search results on EU vs Disinfo for “chemical weapons” issue coverage by Sputnik and RT France in 2018-2020: “White helmets preparing new provocations to implicate Assad in chemical attacks,” “White helmets are a wing of terrorist organizations in Syria,” etc., see https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/?text=chemical+weapons&date=&disinfo_language%5B%5D=fr&per_page=

33 “Disinfo: France and Belgium to stage chemical attack in Syria,” EU vs Disinfo (website), March 29, 2019, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/france-belgium-to-stage-chemical-attack-in-syrias-idlib/>.

34 “MID Frantsii nazval zavavleniya o podgotovke provokatsii v Idlibe gruboy lozh’yu,” RIA Novosti, April 1, 2019, <https://ria.ru/20190401/1552289204.html>.

35 “La Belgique et la France en train de préparer une attaque chimique en Syrie? La Défense dénonce une fake news,” RTBF, March 30, 2019, https://www.rtbf.be/info/belgique/detail_la-belgique-et-la-france-en-train-de-preparer-une-attaque-chimique-en-syrie-la-defense-denonce-une-fake-news?id=10183839.

36 Vincent Coquaz, “RT et Sputnik ont-ils relayé des fake news pendant la campagne comme le dit En Marche?,” *Libération*, June 6, 2018, https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/2018/06/06/rt-et-sputnik-ont-ils-relaye-des-fake-news-pendant-la-campagne-comme-le-dit-en-marche_1656810.

37 Catherine Norris-Trent, Julie Dungalhoff, Anya Stroganova, “Élections européennes: quand la Russie s’en mêle,” *France 24*, May 17, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/fr/20190517-reporters-le-doc-trolls-russie-elections-europeennes-poutine>.



cases of vandalism against French Catholic churches.”³⁸ While Notre Dame is undoubtedly the most well-known landmark to be affected, the second largest church in Paris, Saint-Sulpice, briefly burst into flames on March 17.³⁹ The same month, the altar at Saint-Alain Cathedral in Lavaur was set on fire.⁴⁰ The on-air version of the same April’s report claimed that the French government underplays accidents against Christians (only anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish acts allegedly matter) and “the true scale is still unknown.”⁴¹

In the reality, at Saint-Sulpice church a homeless man set fire to the belongings of another homeless person and the door was burnt.⁴² In Lavaur, the church is only 300 meters away from the school. Teenagers who

allegedly burnt the altar cloth and committed other acts of vandalism were incriminated on the basis of video surveillance data. The presence of cakes in a confessional and the twisted arm of Christ in the form of a gesture from dab (a popular dance among teenagers) suggest that the authors were more likely to look for troubled teens than religious fanatics, summarized *La Depeche* (but not RT).⁴³

Sputnik France marked the spirits even better on this occasion. On 15 April 2019, on its account on Facebook, Sputnik published a controversial picture without any caption. The picture showed two people who appeared to not be of French origin and looked as if they were smiling in front of the burning Notre Dame cathedral.⁴⁴ As is clear from reposts, the picture of “Muslims laughing at Notre Dame fire” got at least several tens of thousands of shares⁴⁵ and at least the same amount of hate speech comments. Comments suggested that “Muslims, who love Satan, laugh at Notre Dame’s fire.” Others proposed to

38 “Notre Dame Fire Follows Months of Arson, Vandalism & Desecration of French Catholic Churches,” RT, April 15, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190415194954/https://www.rt.com/news/456629-french-catholic-churches-attacks/>.

39 “Historic Saint-Sulpice Church Burns in Paris (VIDEO),” RT, March 17, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190416093436/https://www.rt.com/news/454058-paris-st-sulpice-fire/>.

40 “Catholic Churches in France Vandalized, Set on Fire & Smeared with Excrement (PHOTOS, VIDEO),” RT, March 22, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190416093436/https://www.rt.com/news/454472-arson-vandal-french-catholic-church/>.

41 “Religious Violence Is Rising in France – the True Scale Is Still Unknown,” RT, April 14, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0jUJNvTfdw>.

42 Marie-Anne Gairaud, “Paris: l’incendie à l’église Saint-Sulpice n’était pas accidentel,” *Le Parisien*, March 18, 2019, <https://www.leparisien.fr/paris-75/paris-l-incendie-a-l-eglise-saint-sulpice-n-etait-pas-accidentel-18-03-2019-8034678.php>.

43 “Disinfo: Frequent Fires Occur in French Churches alongside Acts of Vandalism, the Authorities and Media Minimise Them,” *EU vs Disinfo*, April 15, 2019, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/frequent-fires-occure-in-french-churches-alongside-acts-of-vandalism-the-authorities-and-media-minimize-them/>.

44 Sputnik France’s Facebook account, April 15, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/sputnik.france/photos/a.151928934867194/2324497164277016/?type=3&theater>.

45 Rémi Banet, “Comment aurions-nous pu nous réjouir de l’incendie de Notre-Dame?: deux victimes de la haine en ligne racontent,” *AFP*, May 4, 2019, <https://factuel.afp.com/comment-aurions-nous-pu-nous-rejouir-de-l-incendie-de-notre-dame-deux-victimes-de-la-haine-en-ligne>.

“hang” them. The story became viral.

“Our photographer took that picture of the fire. These two people were caught by camera by a pure coincidence,”—explained Sputnik to a French journalist.⁴⁶

After several weeks of cyber harassment that also continued in real life when people started to recognize them on the street, the photographed men hired a lawyer to try to take down pictures.⁴⁷ They explained: two students studying architecture, they were one of the first at the location of the fire. They explained that they smiled because they saw a photographer close to them while one of them got the protective plastic on the face.

“Notre Dame, we visited it, we photographed it, we studied it, we modeled it in 3D, so how could we have been delighted by the fire? [...] As architecture students, seeing an architectural gem burn, it did something to us.” To prove his good faith, one of the students showed messages sent to a loved one via Snapchat during the Notre Dame fire: “I’m on my ass there. I saw the spire collapse,” he wrote in one of these messages.⁴⁸

The French journalist who reported on this “high quality journalism, unlike others do” (Sputnik defines itself likes this⁴⁹) which “accidentally published an accidental picture,” immediately got bullied on Twitter, her post was temporary suspended.

In October 2019, an 84-year-old man attacked a mosque in Bayonne, a city in the south-east of France, severely injuring two people, “to avenge the destruction of the [Notre Dame] cathedral in Paris,” the prosecutor said.⁵⁰ The former candidate of the National Front (now National Rally) in the departmental elections in 2015, admitted to having shot two people in front of the Bayonne mosque, after trying to burn the door of the building. He considers that Muslims are responsible for Notre Dame’s fire.

Of course, the direct contribution of Sputnik to this incident is hard to assess. Several members of National

Rally clearly suggested a possible “Islamic terror attack” on Notre Dame. However, Sputnik’s photo with “laughing Muslims” was one of the most shared fake news stories.⁵¹

The police investigation concluded: the fire probably started because of a short circuit in the temporary facilities that were installed for restoration work. The second hypothesis was “negligence” - for example, a lighted cigarette butt. But the police rejected the arson theory. The architecture students said they never felt racism in France before Sputnik’s “accidental” picture provoked such hatred.

WHY RT FRANCE AND SPUTNIK ARE PERCEIVED AS LEGITIMATE IN FRENCH JOURNALISM?

RT France started its broadcasting in late 2017 (while the website existed since 2015) in a very particular context.

There is plenty of evidence about Russian actors attempting to meddle in the French election in May 2017. The investigations by the *Insider*⁵² and *Mediapart*⁵³ based on the findings by *Bivol*, which discovered words in Cyrillic in the metadata of some hacked files,⁵⁴ revealed that the Russian military intelligence GRU unit #26165⁵⁵ was probably behind the hackers’ attacks on the e-mails of Emmanuel Macron’s team during the 2017 French presidential elections. Later, the same GRU unit #26165 was incriminated in the US by Robert Mueller’s probe for hacking emails of members of the Democratic National Congress.⁵⁶ In late 2019, *Le Monde* named two

51 Moullet, “Quelles théories sur les musulmans et Notre-Dame.”

52 “Roshka the Bear. How French President’s Mailbox Was Hacked by Russian Intelligence,” *The Insider*, October 28, 2017, <https://theins.ru/en/uncategorized/76960>.

53 Agathe Duparc, Anastasia Kirilenko, “Growing Evidence that Russia Is Linked to ‘Macron Leaks,’” *Mediapart*, June 2, 2017, https://www.mediapart.fr/en/journal/international/060617/growing-evidence-russia-linked-macron-leaks?_locale=en&onglet=full.

54 “Hello, Roshka Georgiy Petrovich,” *Bivol.bg*’s Twitter account, May 6, 2017, <https://twitter.com/BivolBg/status/860803144103723009>.

55 Roland Oliphant, “What Is Unit 26165, Russia’s Elite Military Hacking Centre?,” *The Telegraph*, October 4, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/10/04/unit26165-russias-elite-military-hacking-centre/>.

56 Leonid Bershidsky, “Russia Hacker Indictments Should Make the Kremlin Squirm,” *Bloomberg*, July 16, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-07-16/russia-hacker-indictments-should-make-the-kremlin-squirm>.

46 Alexis Orsini, “Incendie à Notre-Dame de Paris: Des photos montrent-elles vraiment deux hommes rire du drame?,” *20minutes.fr*, April 16, 2019, <https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/2498203-20190416-deux-disant-musulmans-rigolent-incendie-dame-retour-photo-virale>.

47 Banet, “Comment aurions-nous pu nous réjouir de l’incendie de Notre-Dame?”

48 Banet, “Comment aurions-nous pu nous réjouir de l’incendie de Notre-Dame?”

49 “Disinfo: Sputnik Delivers High Quality Journalism, unlike Other Media,” *EU vs Disinfo*, February 1, 2019, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/sputnik-is-a-high-quality-journalism-media-unlike-others/>.

50 Pauline Moullet, “Quelles théories sur les musulmans et Notre-Dame ont pu influencer le tireur de Bayonne?,” *Libération*, October 30, 2019, https://www.liberation.fr/france/2019/10/30/quelles-theories-sur-les-musulmans-et-notre-dame-ont-pu-influencer-le-tireur-de-bayonne_1760560.

GRU units: #26165 and #74455.⁵⁷ *Le Monde* referred to Google and Fire Eye's expert investigations (both expert teams studied concrete evidence, including how e-mails users were subjected to phishing and malware).

Wikileaks' account, as well as social media and Russian State TV spread "news" about "Macronleaks." Russian official state TV announced that an offshore account in the Bahamas belonging to Emmanuel Macron was found in those e-mails.⁵⁸ By coincidence, even before the release of "Macronleaks," during the decisive debates Macron's competitor Marine Le Pen accused Macron of having an offshore account in the Bahamas. The account turned out to be made up.⁵⁹

It is in this context that Macron promoted the so-called anti-fake-news law—to apply only during election periods, when prosecutors will be able to react quickly.⁶⁰

France still has not publicly attributed the cyberattacks to any particular perpetrator. A report written by the think-tanks linked to the French Foreign Ministry and the Ministry for the Armed Forces makes a clear distinction between the cyberattack and spreading manipulated information.⁶¹ According to the report, "Russian media, with Sputnik and RT at the head, played a non-negligible role in the diffusion of this information. – What can be safely assumed is that, whoever the perpetrator was, they were at least linked to Russian interests and received help from the American alt-right and French far-right."⁶²

This diplomatic statement also indicates an "American trace." Widely known is also the statement by Guillaume Poupard, the head of the French cyber security

57 Martin Untersinger, "Les preuves de l'ingérence russe dans la campagne de Macron en 2017," *Le Monde*, December 6, 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2019/12/06/macronleaks-des-hackeurs-d-etat-russes-ont-bien-vise-la-campagne-presidentielle-de-2017_6021987_4408996.html.

58 "Makrongeyt: khakery raskopali ofshornye scheta Makrona I veshchestvo na 'k'," *Rossiya-24*, May 6, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bi5U3b78ANU>.

59 Lizzie Dearden, "Emmanuel Macron Launches Legal Complaint over Offshore Account Allegations Spread by Marine Le Pen," *Independent*, May 4, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/french-presidential-election-latest-emmanuel-macron-legal-complaint-marine-le-pen-offshore-account-a7717461.html>.

60 Michael-Ross Fiorentino, "France Passes Controversial 'Fake News' Law," *Euronews*, November 22, 2018, <https://www.euronews.com/2018/11/22/france-passes-controversial-fake-news-law>.

61 Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, Alexandre Escorcica, Marine Guillaume, Janaina Herrera, "Information Manipulation. Challenge for Our Democracies," Policy Planning Staff (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs) and the Institute for Strategic Research (Ministry for the Armed Forces) (website), August, 2018, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/information_manipulation_rvb_cle838736.pdf.

62 "Disinfo: Russia Is Accused of Election Meddling in France without any Evidence," EU vs Disinfo (website), <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/russia-is-accused-of-election-meddling-in-france-without-any-proofs/>.

agency Anssi, who said, back in 2017, that he had no evidence that there was Russian involvement, amplified by media as a "denial of the Russian trace" by France.⁶³ Some media did "investigations" on American involvement in it,⁶⁴ on the basis that the e-mails were quoted by far-right American bloggers. In other words, public opinion would at least be confused.

In 2015, French law enforcers attributed cyberattacks against French TV channel TV5Monde to Russian hackers. In 2017, it was impossible to officially attribute this to them. The investigation was still "preliminary" in 2019 and has since been forgotten.

Straight after their release in 2017 and for several months thereafter, RT France (which at that time only had a website) and Sputnik promoted "Macronleaks."⁶⁵

But the most notorious report Sputnik published (without providing any evidence) was in 2017 about a "gay lobby" behind Emmanuel Macron, then candidate for the French presidency.⁶⁶ According to the same Sputnik report, "ex-French Economy Minister Macron could be 'US agent / lobbying banks' interests."⁶⁷ One gay magazine got inspired and placed a picture of Macron naked on its cover.

It was in this context that Macron called Sputnik and RT France "organs of propaganda." Macron said this openly during a press conference with Putin, while receiving the Russian president at the Versailles Palace on 29 May 2017: "I have always had an exemplary relationship with foreign journalists, under the condition they have to be journalists. When media outlets spread infamous untruths, they are no longer journalists. They are organs of influence. Russia Today and Sputnik were organs of influence during this campaign which repeatedly

63 "The Latest: France says no trace of Russian hacking Macron," *AP*, June 1, 2017, <https://apnews.com/fc570e4b400f4c7db3b0d739e9dc5d4d>.

64 Damien Leloup, Martin Untersinger, "'Macrongate': quand des néonazis américains cherchaient à faire basculer la présidentielle française," *Le Monde*, June 15, 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2019/06/15/macrongate-quand-des-neonazis-americains-cherchaient-a-faire-basculer-la-presidentielle-francaise_5476614_4408996.html.

65 "MacronLeaks: l'histoire de la drogue à l'Assemblée nationale refait surface," *Sputnik France*, July 31, 2017, <https://fr.sputniknews.com/france/201707311032476541-macronleaks-wikileaks-alain-tourret-droque/>.

66 "Ex-French Economy Minister Macron Could Be 'US Agent' Lobbying Banks' Interests," *Sputnik*, February 4, 2017, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/201702041050340451-macron-us-agent-dhuicq/>.

67 "Ex-French Economy Minister Macron Could Be 'US Agent'."

produced untruths about myself and my campaign.”⁶⁸

Sputnik reacted by saying this was defamation and Sputnik’s and RT’s editor in chief Margarita Simonyan promised to take legal action.⁶⁹ During Macron’s election, his spokesman at the time, Benjamin Griveaux, implicated the Kremlin, accusing it of having “chosen its candidates” and in particular Marine Le Pen. The promised legal action followed—at least against Griveaux.

DISCOURAGE THE CRITICS

On 13 June 2020, RT France lost a lawsuit against Macron’s former spokesman Benjamin Griveaux. On 7 January 2019, Griveaux said: “You have a media that do not do their journalistic work. [...] We’ve had a lot of fake news for a long time, conscientiously relayed by Russia Today. [...] Russia Today is not journalism, it is a propaganda tool that is funded by a foreign state, which is Russia. Me, I did not give them access to the press room of the Elysée. [...] For example, RT France disputes the fact that in Syria children were subjected to chemical attacks, it is the only channel to have challenged it. It has no place in the Elysée palace’s press room. It’s crystal clear.”⁷⁰

RT France felt offended and immediately sued Griveaux for defamation. The court rejected the complaint and transferred it to the administrative court only for a formal reason: Griveaux acted not as a private person but as a public official.

Meanwhile, by February 2020, even children in France’s kindergartens had learnt the name of “Benjamin Griveaux.” The Russian political refugee in France Piotr Pavlensky distributed a sex tape of Griveaux on the internet, ruining his career, pretending to act completely independently, because he lives in France now and can raise his voice about French politicians. French Police established that the editor in chief of RT France Xenia Fedorova attended the same Christmas party where the former Rus-

sian opposition activist Pavlensky was also present.⁷¹ But she explained that she stayed only for 15 minutes there and that her presence there was irrelevant.

One of Pavlensky’s lawyers are worth mentioning too. It is RT’s guest Juan Branco who gave an interview explaining the above mentioned “new look on tyranny” in France.⁷² Juan Branco openly claims his support for the Russian refugee in the sex tape case. The French prosecutor’s office even tried to discredit Branco for conflict of interests (Branco hosted the Christmas party attended by Pavlensky and RT France chief Xenia Fedorova, and the party resulted in violence) but failed.⁷³ As a lawyer for Pavlensky, Branco continues to attack Griveaux, for example, by asking for his “psychiatric expertise.”

Let’s stress it: there is no proof that somebody helped Pavlensky to bring down the RT France’s powerful critic. But the explanation given by Pavlensky himself is hard to believe too. While he speaks little French, Pavlensky claims to have read Griveaux’s extensive interview on “family values.” Griveaux indeed mentioned in one interview with a French magazine that he tries to be at home at least twice a week to help put children in bed. If we believe Pavlensky, he was shocked by this “hypocrisy” of Griveaux, whom he suspected to have dated a woman who was not his wife, several years ago. Pavlensky then decided to upload a sex tape onto his website. A case on “interference in private life” was opened against Pavlensky.

On air, RT France specified for those who have scandalous, unfounded doubts: they have nothing to do with the sex tape of Griveaux.⁷⁴ They only sued him in court.

To further complicate any criticism, RT France’s editor in chief Xenia Fedorova complained to the police pretending that she receives “threats of death.”

RT France announced at least another seven more lawsuits against French media. One of the most expensive French lawyers, Jérémy Assous, represents RT France.

68 “Emmanuel Macron: ‘Russia Today et Sputnik ont été des organes de propagande durant la campagne’”, *France24*, May 29, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IPnV2TYDCQ.

69 “Sputnik et RT déposeront plainte suite aux accusations portées contre eux par Macron”, *Sputnik France*, May 5, 2017, <https://fr.sputniknews.com/international/201705051031255120-sputnik-rt-plainte-macron-accusations/>.

70 Jamal Henni, “RT France perd ses procès contre Benjamin Griveaux et Charlie Hebdo”, *Capital*, June 13, 2020, <https://www.capital.fr/entreprises-marches/rt-france-perd-ses-proces-contre-benjamin-griveaux-et-charlie-hebdo-1372582>.

71 Vincent Monnier, Mathieu Delahousse, “Le passage éclair de la patronne de RT à la folle soirée de Juan Branco”, *L’Obs*, March 18, 2020, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/justice/20200318.OBS26213/info-obs-le-passage-eclair-de-la-patronne-de-rt-a-la-folle-soiree-de-juan-branco.html>.

72 “Disinfo: France Is a new look on tyranny.”

73 Claire Hache, Laurent Léger, “Branco redevient avocat de Pavlenski et demande une expertise psychiatrique de Griveaux”, *L’express*, March 5, 2020, https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/justice/branco-redevient-avocat-de-pavlenski-et-demande-une-expertise-psychiatrique-de-griveaux_2120123.html.

74 “La Russie impliquée dans l’affaire Griveaux? La réponse de Jérémy Assous”, *RT France*, February 16, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeThTPnc-Y>.



L'ÉLYSÉE CONFIRME L'ACCRÉDITATION DES MÉDIAS RT FRANCE ET SPUTNIK

He is also known to represent six plaintiffs against Professor of Russian studies Cécile Vaissié who wrote the book “Kremlin’s network in France” in 2016. One of the plaintiffs was the above-mentioned Olivier Beruyer who is behind the conspiracy theory website Les crises. Others, like Jorge Kuzmanovich, are frequent guests of RT France.

At the trial against Vaissié in 2019, lawyer Jérémy Assous tried to prove that there was indeed fascist rule in Ukraine and the plaintiffs—bloggers and activists—who suggest that there is fascist rule in Ukraine are not necessarily Russian agents and they also cannot be portrayed in a bad light as Vaissié did. Cécile Vaissié was acquitted on the majority of accusations but was convicted on one of them; both parties made an appeal.

The lawsuits, regardless how they end, are proactive: publishers and editors will be less eager to publish stories with criticism of any Russian influence in France and will stress that they report only “allegations on Russian influence.”

THE END OF THE STORY: “FOX NEWS VS OBAMA” EFFECT—SAME WITH “RT FRANCE VS MACRON”

Defending itself against RT France, the French government only loses and gets mocked by the press. The situation is like when US president Obama’s advisers said that Fox News is not really a news station and Obama himself compared it to “a talk radio,” different from a news outlet⁷⁵ (it happened, among other things, after a Fox News anchor alleged Michel Obama made a “terrorist fist jab”⁷⁶). Immediately, US journalists started to defend Fox News in the name of the freedom of speech.

In France, in November 2019, the spokeswoman for the French government Sibeth Ndiaye said that it is for the French journalistic community to assess the work of RT France and Sputnik: “On the media that you mentioned, I don’t know if we can consider them as such, it is a real

75 “Obama Suggests Fox News Is Like ‘Talk Radio,’” *The Hill*, October 22, 2009, <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/64271-obama-suggests-fox-news-is-talk-radio>.

76 Mark Sweney, “Fox News Anchor Taken off Air after Obama ‘Terrorist Fist Jab’ Gaffe,” *The Guardian*, June 13, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2008/jun/13/television.barackobama>.

ethical question that the profession in my opinion must ask. [...] I consider that they are not entirely free media as we know them in France.”⁷⁷

The journalistic community defends RT France and Sputnik. The National Union of Journalists stated in October 2019: “When he came to power, Emmanuel Macron’s cabinet made it known, with barely veiled words, that the President of the Republic wanted to choose his journalists. Since then, access to the Elysée has been an obstacle course for certain information professionals. Accreditation by the authorities and the majority party has, for example, been almost systematically refused, with a few exceptions, to journalists from RT France. [...] However, holders of the press card, RT France journalists exercise their profession in a media whose television channel holds a broadcasting license issued by the CSA.”⁷⁸ The reprimand from CSA was not addressed in the statement.

At a TV talk show, one French journalist covering Russia admitted that she and her colleagues wanted to somehow include Xenia Fedorova in their French-Russian circle, but their invitation was ignored. Sometimes the channel is even quoted by the French “compatriots” as a credible source. Nobody from the French journalistic community has even asked Sputnik to delete “the laughing Muslims” picture.

Those who do not agree that this is good journalism are sued in court and bullied in the name of freedom of speech.

77 Catherine Morozov, “Sibeth Ndiaye sur Sputnik et RT: ‘je ne sais pas si on peut les considérer en tant que médias,’” *Sputnik France*, November 4, 2019, <https://fr.sputniknews.com/france/201911041042371507-sibeth-ndiaye-sur-sputnik-et-rt-je-ne-sais-pas-si-on-peut-les-considerer-en-tant-que-medias/>.

78 “Refus d’accréditations répétés et ciblés à RT France: une inquiétante dérive du pouvoir,” *SNJ*, October 11, 2019, <http://www.snj.fr/article/refus-daccreditations-repetes-et-cibles-une-inquietante-derive-du-pouvoir-1807090900>.



UNDER THE CROSS:
THE ORTHODOX
CHURCH AS AN INSTRU-
MENT OF INFLUENCE

Georgy Chizhov



RELIGION



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THE CHURCH OF THE “UNITED PEOPLE”

In early 1985, 6,806 Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) parishes were registered. About 4,000 of them were on the territory of just one Soviet republic—Ukraine.¹ Accordingly, the Ukrainian Orthodox believers made up the lion’s share of ROC parishioners in the last years of the USSR.

Of course, the republics’ striving for more autonomy from the center during perestroika, and then for sovereignty, could not help but affect church structures. In the fall of 1990, the episcopal council of the ROC, in response to an appeal of the Local Council and Synod of the Ukrainian Exarchate granted independence and self-governance to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC, subsequently UOC MP, that is, of the Moscow Patriarchate). After the country’s essential acquisition of state independence, however, the Ukrainian bishops headed by the UOC Primate Metropolitan Filaret (Denisenko) appealed to the ROC leadership with a request to grant the Ukrainian Church full canonical independence (autocephaly).

The Ukrainian clergy’s request was refused, and by the time the Kharkiv Council of the UOC was convened in May 1992, the majority of the hierarchs had changed their position and voted for the removal of Filaret. Volodymyr (Sabodan), a Ukrainian by origin, was elected as Primate, who at that time held the chair of Metropolitan of

Rostov and Novocherkassk and the position of manager of the Moscow Patriarchy, although he did not belong to the UOC hierarchy and did not take part in the Council. Filaret, stripped of his ecclesiastical rank, soon initiated the creation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP).

“Essentially, this ‘council’ was created by the security agencies, both Russian and Ukrainian which at that time was still under the influence of the Russians,” said Filaret, recalling the events in Kharkiv almost two decades later. “This was in fact a secret power—the power of the state security agencies, and not our state.”²

But persuasive proof of the involvement of the Russian state in the Ukrainian “church revolution” was never cited. At that time, the Kremlin was preoccupied with completely different urgent problems, and the schism of Ukrainian Orthodoxy fit perfectly into the general picture of the mainly spontaneous dismantling of the USSR and the institutions that had held it together. Although in the early 1990s, the noncanonical “Filaret” UOC KP enjoyed an obvious sympathy on the part of the Ukrainian authorities, the majority of cathedrals, parishioners, and opportunities to influence officials at various levels remained the province of the UOC MP. Local leaders often were connected to the canonical church not only by faith but by familial or godfather ties (the institution of the godfather, which began in fact as a religious tradition, plays

1 Tetyana Evseyeva, “Arkhieyreyskiy Sobor UPTs v Kharkovi,” *Tsey den’ v istorii* [website], May 27, 2018, <https://www.jnsm.com.ua/h/0527T/>.

2 “Patriarkh UPTs KP Filaret: Kharkovskiy sobor 1992 goda organizovali spetssluzhby Religiozno-informatsionnaya sluzhba Ukrainy,” [Patriarch Filaret of the UOC KP: The Kharkiv Council of 1992 Was Organized by Intelligence Services] Religious News Service of Ukraine [website], December 23, 2011, https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/state/church_state_relations/46050.

a large role in the structure of Ukrainian society).

Not encountering any systematic resistance on the part of the government, the UOC MP extended its administrative support by organizing full-fledged cathedrals, chapels, and prayer rooms at state institutions.

The prevailing situation of the church, which was virtually led from a neighboring state, was perceived in principle by part of the Ukrainian elite as a potential threat. Viktor Yushchenko, while serving as president of the country, began a dialogue with the hierarchs of the two UOCs about “overcoming the schism in Ukrainian orthodoxy and the creation of a single local church,”³ and also began talks on this issue with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. And predictably, he countered the united position of the ROC and UOC MP and formulated this as “perplexity.” “The persistence of Viktor Yushchenko in the creation of a ‘united local church’ with the active participation of representatives of the government causes perplexity,” announced Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, representative of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.⁴ And the Episcopal Council of the UOC MP which took place in late January 2007 expressed perplexity regarding the proposal of the president of Ukraine to “sit at the negotiations table with fake pastors,”⁵ that is, with the UOC KP.

Meanwhile, at that time Moscow had not yet conducted any active influence operations through the church. It was enough that many priests and bishops of the UOC continued to persuade their parishioners that Ukrainians and Russians were one people and helped preserve people’s sense of a close connection and dependency on Russia. Patriarch Aleksiy II, Primate of the ROC, tried to refrain from direct participation of the church in politics. But the times changed, Ukraine made an attempt to leave the “embrace” of the Russian Federation for Europe, and Metropolitan Volodymyr, Primate of the UOC MP, once sent by Moscow to his Motherland, went further and further over to pro-Ukrainian and autocephalous positions. To keep Ukraine in geopolitical resistance with the West, the Kremlin had to effectively activate all the tools at its disposal.

3 “Viktor Yushchenko obsuzhdayet s Patriarkhom Filaretom ob’yedineniye Pravoslavnykh Tserkvey Ukrainy,” [Viktor Yushchenko Discusses with Patriarch Filaret the Unification of the Orthodox Churches of Ukraine], *Ekonomicheskkiye izvestiya*, January 12, 2007.

4 “V Moskovskom patriarkhate kritikyut vmeshatel’stvo Yushchenko v tserkovnyye dela,” [Moscow Patriarchate Criticizes Yushchenko’s Interference in Church Affairs] *Interfax-Religiya* [website], January 15, 2007, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=16072>.

5 “Arkhieriyi UPTs MP vystupili protiv sozdaniya yedinoi ukrainskoy pomestnoy Tserkvi,” [UOC MP Bishops Speak Against Creation of United Ukrainian Local Church] *Newsru.com*, January 25, 2007, <https://www.newsru.com/religy/25jan2007/upcmp.html>.

FIGHT FOR “OUR CONSTANTINOPLE”

The attack on the church “front” began almost immediately after the ascension to the Patriarchal throne in Moscow of Metropolitan Kirill (Gundyaev) in early 2009. “For the Russian Orthodox Church, Kyiv is our Constantinople with its St. Sophia; it is the spiritual center and the southern capital of Russian Orthodoxy,” the Patriarch announced at a meeting with Ukrainian Prime Minister Yuliya Timoshenko soon after his enthronement.⁶ Kirill’s visit to Ukraine (July 27-August 5, 2009) was considered by many experts to be openly political. In Kyiv, he was accompanied by protest actions and local clashes of pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian activists; his visit to the city of Rivne in the west of the country had to be cancelled at the recommendation of the authorities.

The Patriarch spoke a lot about the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, and on the final day of his visit announced that “he would be very happy” to receive Ukrainian citizenship if the Ukrainian authorities were prepared to offer it.⁷ After commentaries by Ukrainian officials that obtaining citizenship in the country was possible only by renouncing other citizenships, suggestions were made by the UOC MP that the Patriarch’s comments on this topic was a joke. Following the visit, the UOC MP published a colorful collection titled *Patriarch of Unity*.

A month and a half later, reflecting that “Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Moldova represent a unified civilization,” Kirill placed the reality of their sovereignty under doubt: “Recently, speaking on the topic of sovereignty, I constantly add the adjective ‘real,’ because there are many countries existing in the world that consider themselves sovereign, but which are not capable of acting in complete accordance with their national interests, including on the international arena.”⁸

In February 2010, on the day Ukrainian President

6 Vasily Anisimov, “Patriarch Kirill schitayet, shto religiozny faktor v otnosheniyakh Rossii i Ukrainy sleduyet usilit’,” [Patriarch Kirill Believes the Religious Factor in Russia’s Relations with Ukraine Should Be Strengthened] *Interfax-Religiya* [website], April 30, 2009.

7 “Patriarkh Kirill prosit pravil’no vosprinimat’ ego slova po povodu prinyatiya ukrainskogo grazhdanstva,” [Patriarch Kirill Urges His Comment on Taking Ukrainian Citizenship Should Be Taken Correctly] *Interfax-Religiya* [website], August 5, 2009, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/print.php?act=news&id=31452>.

8 “Yedinstvo pravoslavnykh stran obespechit im prochnye pozitsii v mire – patriarch Kirill,” [The Unity of Orthodox Countries Will Secure Them Solid Positions in the World – Kirill] *Interfax-Religiya* [website], September 25, 2009, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/print.php?act=news&id=32222>.

Viktor Yanukovich took office, Patriarch Kirill, together with Metropolitan Volodymyr, performed a prayer service before the inauguration ceremony at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra (Monastery), speaking to the new president. For the first time in history, the Moscow Patriarch took part in an event related to the inauguration of the president of a foreign state, which was also perceived by many as political interference. Throughout 2011, Kirill made four archpastoral visits to Ukrainian bishops.

In the fall of 2011, the state of health of UOC MP Primate Metropolitan Volodymyr took a sharp turn for the worse. He endured two difficult operations and in December 2011, gave consent to hold the convention of the Synod without his participation. Then, he began rapidly to lose the levers of governance of the Church. The pro-Moscow party was immediately designated in the person of Odessan Metropolitan Agafangel (Savvin), who declared himself the “first member of the Synod,” along with Donetsk Metropolitan Illarion and the abbot of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra, Metropolitan Pavel.

In January 2012, they convened the Synod already without the blessing of Volodymyr, essentially having created a mechanism for running the Church without its Primate and created a commission to change the Charter of the UOC (under the chairmanship of Illarion). The point of changing the Charter was understandable; to disavow the amendments incorporated into the Charter in 2007, which had reduced the dependency of the UOC on the ROC and therefore had provoked unhappiness in Moscow. Moreover, Archbishop Oleksandr (Drabinko), Volodymyr’s personal secretary and the virtual leader of the “autocephalous” movement in the UOC, was removed from a number of posts.

Unexpectedly for many people, His Beatitude Volodymyr overcame his illness and the attempted “coup.” At a meeting of the Synod in May 2012 under his leadership, all the dubious decisions made in the winter were cancelled. Several days later, however, according to a journalistic investigation by the TSN program,⁹ Yanukovich’s “family” demanded that Volodymyr renounce the post of Primate. The metropolitan stubbornly refused, and the pressure increased.

According to information from Ukrainian journalists, that same year in 2012, church patron Viktor Nusenik (a Russian-Ukrainian businessman from Donetsk, owner of coal mines, iron and steel mills, and Orthodox media

9 “Kolyshnya vlada namagalasya fizychno pozbutys’ mytropolyta Kiyvskoho i vsiyey Ukraini Volodymyra,” [The Former Government Tried to Physically Eliminate Metropolitan Volodymyr of Kyiv and All Ukraine], TSN, June 22, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oE5sGfZLSEE>.

in the two countries) proposed that the “rehabilitated” Drabinko should go to Moscow “for a promotion.”¹⁰ In June 2013, Oleksandr Drabinko was detained by law-enforcers; later he was accused by a witness in an apparently fabricated case involving the abduction of two nuns (who were almost immediately found and refused to give testimony). For several months, he was not allowed home, and not allowed to use the telephone. He was held in various Kyiv hotels, and then in a rest home outside of town. They gave him food and drink, and sometimes even took him to the cathedral to conduct a worship service. At some point he was forced to sign a statement that he had been taken into custody.

According to Drabinko himself, Interior Minister Vitaliy Zakharchenko told him: “You must leave Ukraine and depart on instructions from Patriarch Kirill.” Drabinko categorically refused. “I didn’t have the moral right to leave Metropolitan Volodymyr. His Beatitude was already in a very serious condition. My assistance was necessary. After all, I have been with him 16 years, as his personal secretary.”¹¹ Zakharchenko himself and the Prosecutor General Viktor Pshonka even came to visit Volodymyr in the hospital. Supposedly the Metropolitan was offered to abdicate in exchange for the release of his secretary, but His Beatitude did not budge.¹² But Drabinko regained his freedom only after the victory of the Revolution of Dignity.

The moment for the separation of the severely-ill metropolitan from his personal secretary was not chosen accidentally: only a few months remained before the scheduled date of the signing of the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement, and Moscow was mobilizing all its forces to disrupt the signing. Despite the fact that Metropolitan Volodymyr signed an appeal from the hospital together with the heads of other churches in support of Euro-integration, religious processions, and other actions by believers of the UOC MP rolled across Ukraine, aimed against closer ties with Europe.

“In the opinion of the organizers, the signing of the Ukraine–European Union Association will lead” to “thou-

10 Lana Samokhvalova, “Krest Blazhenneyshego Vladimira: Za shto uvolili Aleksandra Drabinko,” [The Cross of His Beatitude Volodymyr: Why Aleksandr Drabinko Was Dismissed] *Ukrinform*, May 26, 2015, https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-other_news/1848615-arest_blagennyshego_vladimira_za_chno_uvolili_aleksandra_drabinko_1748258.html.

11 Sonya Koshkina and Oleg Bazar, “Aleksandr Drabinko: UPTS prevratilas’ v nekiy ostrovok russkoy identichnosti v Ukraine,” [Oleksandr Drabinko: The UOC Has Turned into a Kind of Island of Russian Identity in Ukraine]. *Levy bereg*, January 7, 2017, https://lb.ua/news/2017/01/07/355419_aleksandr_drabinko_upts.html.

12 Sonya Koshkina, “Tserkovnaya revolyutsiya,” [Church Revolution] *Levy bereg*, February 28, 2014, https://lb.ua/society/2014/02/28/257677_tserkovnaya_revolyuetsiya.html.

sands of European gypsies and blacks living” in Ukraine, “millions of marches of Sodomites” passing, and schools being created for children “raised by homosexuals”—so the Ukrainian edition of the newspaper *Kommersant* described a religious procession in the center of Kyiv.¹³ “The values of the European Union contradict our Christian convictions. We detest the European Union to the depth of our souls!” Igor Druz, chairman of the pro-Russian organization People’s Council, announced during a religious procession.¹⁴

THE LARGEST “RUSSIAN PARTY”

We can confidently state that approximately from that moment (2012–2013), the ROC directly and through its local branch and dependent organization—the UOC MP—despite even disagreement with its primate of the time, began to openly oppose European values in Ukraine and essentially declared an ideological and political war against them. Of course, elements of this resistance had been observed even before this; however, before this, the Church had much less frequently gone beyond the bounds of the traditional sphere of its activity and had much more rarely directly interfered in politics.

Tactical goals were also identified by the ROC in Ukraine. First, defensive—to prevent by all means the growth of “autocephalous” sentiments among the clergy and the faithful. Second, offensive—to discredit Ukraine’s “pro-Western” path of development and its advocates in power, with the help of influential parishioners, to persuade society to return to close union with Russia and acceptance of the values prevailing there.

Such categories of Ukrainian citizens as the following became direct targets of pro-Russian influence:

- Priests of the UOC MP who need to be kept in obedience and confidence in the correctness of the “general line”
- Representatives of the national and regional elites—parishioners of the cathedrals of the Moscow Patriarchate
- The flock in the broad sense (simple believers), the most vulnerable to national democratic influence must be rigidly indoctrinated on the event of

impending historical events.

Ukrainian hackers from Cyber Alliance published the hacked correspondence of Kirill Frolov, deputy director of the Russian Institute of the CIS Countries, head of the Association of Orthodox Experts. This archive enables us to follow many mechanisms of influence by the ROC on Ukrainian politics. Here are also the personal recommendations for appointments of Ukrainian bishops, and transfer of money to parishes of the UOC MP to organize the “Orthodox movement,” and even a search for a spiritual advisor for Viktor Yanukovych. Frolov also writes of the organization of actions in Ukraine against autocephaly and the West. And adds: “The network of the UOC MP is ideal for mass propaganda against NATO.”¹⁵

Frolov’s messages note in particular Andrei Novikov, spiritual advisor to Grigory Pedchenko, chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (2010–2012) and secretary to the above-mentioned Metropolitan Agafangel, head of the Odessan Diocese. As can be seen from the correspondence, Novikov lobbied for the appointment of Pedchenko as Ukraine’s minister of defense.¹⁶ Should we be surprised that Gen. Pedchenko was an advocate of maximum close cooperation with Russia in the defense sphere, in particular joint military exercises. “We have considerably expanded the circle of our military cooperation. If in the past year there were 40 such activities, this year there will be 81. This is a powerful step forward. There, in Russia, there are a lot of trained officer cadres, specialists who have had practice, and for us this is very important.”¹⁷

In November 2013, a congress of Cossack clergy took place in Moscow, convened by Patriarch Kirill. In the opinion of socialist Nikolai Mitrokhin, a scholar of religion,

In fact what took place at it was coordination be-

15 “FrolovLeaks: воцерковлений експерт Кремля по впливу в Україні. Епізод,” [Frolov Leaks: Kremlin Church Expert on Influence of Ukraine] InformNapalm, December 6, 2016, <https://informnapalm.org/ua/frolovleaks/>; “FrolovLeaks: Церковні інтриги. Епізод III,” [Frolov Leaks: Church Intrigues. Episode III] InformNapalm, December 10, 2016, <https://informnapalm.org/ua/frolovleaks-epizod-iii/>.

16 “FrolovLeaks: Gebbel’s Patriarkha, verbuvannya ukrayins’kykh heneraliv i khreshchennya vohnem v Syrii. Epizod IV,” [Frolov Leaks: Goebbels Patriarch, Recruitment of Ukrainian Generals and Baptism by Fire in Syria. Episode IV] InformNapalm, December 17, 2016, <https://informnapalm.org/ua/frolovleaks-epizod-iv/>.

17 “Golova Genshabu rozkazav, shcho mav na uvazi Bozhen’ka, koli davav dvi nogi ta odin yazik,” [Chief of General Staff Says What God Intended When He Gave Two Feet, One Tongue] UNIAN, January 29, 2011, <https://www.unian.ua/politics/454098-golova-genshtabu-rozkazav-scho-mav-na-uvazi-bojenka-koli-davav-dvi-nogi-ta-odin-yazik.html>.

13 Artyom Skoropadsky, “V ukraine proydut millionnye marshi sodomitov,” [In Ukraine, Marches of Millions of Sodomites Will Pass] *Kommersant Ukraina*, no. 180, November 11, 2013.

14 Skoropadsky, “V ukraine proydut marshi.”

tween priests and the heads of Cossack units who had joined the delegation, right before the invasion of Ukraine. Kirill personally instructed that the Gifts of the Magi—relics kept on Mt. Athos—go first to Kyiv and then to Simferopol and Sevastopol, although these two cities had not been originally part of the program at all. A Russian delegation traveled with it to persuade the Crimean elite to transfer to Russia. This was more than a month before the invasion. Girkin¹⁸ accompanied this delegation as the chief security officer [...] this, according to many facts, became a point of departure for the formation two months later of his unit which seized Slavyansk and started the war in the Donbass [...] the patriarch tried to use various Ukrainian church figures for support and organization of the invasion. One of them, Archpriest Andrei Novikov of Odessa, a personal friend of the patriarch, constantly phoned him. He held the post of secretary of the Odessa Diocese, and sponsored and distributed cash to pro-Russian fighters in the city.¹⁹

According to testimony from believers, clergy at the cathedrals of the UOC MP have begun systematically making such statements as “there is no salvation in Europe,” and soon after the start of the Revolution of Dignity, they cursed the protesters outright. There is a “time of troubles” in the country “especially the Kyivan Maidan, where the power of hell is gathered to change our system, to bring rabble, hatred, and division among our peoples,” Odessa Metropolitan Agafangel, one of the first hierarchs of the UOC MP, said during a sermon.²⁰ And Andrei Tkachev, a popular Kyiv priest in the UOC MP, while preaching at a cathedral, literally cursed Maidan, calling down “illnesses, sorrows, and fear at home and in the streets” on its participants.²¹

Valery Otstavnykh, former deputy director of the Mission Department of the Tula Diocese of the ROC recounted:

18 Igor Girkin (“Strelkov”), officer in reserve of the RF intelligence services, who started the actual fighting in the Donbass in 2014, was one of those indicted in the case of the downing of the Malaysian Boeing MH17.

19 Dmitry Kartsev, “Vzglyadam patriarkha Kirilla otvechayet katolicheskaya model’ ustroystva tserkvi,” [Patriarch Kirill’s Views Correspond to the Catholic Model of Church Organization] Meduza, February 1, 2019, <https://meduza.io/feature/2019/02/01/vzglyadam-patriarkha-kirilla-otvechaet-katolicheskaya-model-ustroystva-tserkvi>.

20 “Odesskiy mitropolit Agafangel nazval evromaidan smutoj kuda soberayetsya sila ada,” [Odessa Metropolitan Agafangel Considers Euromaidan to be a Time of Troubles Where Power of Hell is Gathered] Religiya v Ukraini [website], December 12, 2013, https://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian_news/24271-odesskiy-mitropolit-agafangel-nazval-evromaidan-smutoj-kuda-sobiraetsya-sila-ada.html.

21 Georgy Chizhov et al., “Perelomnyye gody. Stranitsy ukrainskoy revolyutsii,” [Critical Years. Pages from the Ukrainian Revolution] (Kyiv: Laurus, 2018).

The ROC in conjunction with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate took part in attempts to suppress the events on Maidan. When the *titushki*²² were brought in from eastern Ukraine, they were housed at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra [...]. While the *titushki* were being fed and resting there, the doors of the lavra were closed, and worship services were suspended for technical reasons. Then the *titushki* were taken somewhere to the Maidan, to Mariinsky Park, where they beat the heads of advocates of reform and opponents of Yanukovich.²³

By 2014, in dozens of dioceses, the UOC MP formed a pro-Russian infrastructure consisting of non-governmental organizations and “Cossack associations,” trained speakers propagandizing the ideas of the “Blessed Trinity of Rus.” For example, in the Chernivtsi Diocese, a monastery received funds from Russia under the direction of Bishop Longin (Zhar), who called Ukraine an “anti-Christ state” and called for disruption of the mobilization. In Zakarpattya, Russians supported a separatist priest, Dmitry Sidor, leader of the so-called “Rusin Movement.” Odessa Metropolitan Agafangel had at his immediate disposal several “Cossack organizations.”²⁴

According to the official position of the UOC MP, the “Cossack” organizations exist only to guard cathedrals and priests and to maintain order at church events. In fact, as the experience of Donetsk and Lugansk regions has indicated, when necessary they easily transform into combat units. It cannot be ruled out that something of this nature was planned in Odessa as well. At any rate, in one of his messages, Kirill Frolov reports: “Metropolitan Agafangel called from a Czech number and said the following: ‘Let Putin know that I and the entire Odessa Diocese expect decisive measures regarding Odessa. The Diocese supports me and is ready for battle. I am prepared spiritually and ideologically to head the uprising.’”²⁵

Quite a few studies have been published on the direct and indirect participation of clergy from the ROC

22 A term used in Ukraine to describe people hired to break up mass actions and beat their participants.

23 Dmitry Volchek, “Operatsiya ‘Dary volkhvov’. Kak RPTs stala otdelom administratsii Putina,” [Operation Gifts of the Magi: How the ROC Became a Department of Putin’s Administration], Radio Svoboda, March 10, 2018, <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29086933.html>.

24 Mykhaylo Gonchar, Volodymyr Gorbach and Anatoliy Pinchuk, eds., *Rosiy’s’kyy sprut u dii. Keys “Ukraina,”* [Russian Octopus in Action. Ukraine Case] (Kyiv: Centre for Global Studies Strategy, 2020), <https://geostrategy.org.ua/analytika/doslidzhennya/rosiyskyy-sprut-u-diyi-keys-ukrayina/zavantazhyty-doslidzhennya-rosiyskyy-sprut-u-diyi-keys-ukrayina>.

25 “FrolovLeaks VIII: Pravoslavna elehiya,” [Frolov Leaks VIII: Orthodox Elegy] InformNapalm, February 16, 2017, <https://informnapalm.org/ua/frolovleaks-viii/>.

and UOC MP in the war in the Donbass on the side of the pro-Russian separatists.²⁶ Meanwhile, on the whole, the clergy and parishioners of the Church behaved entirely differently as the situation developed. Some headed off to defend Ukraine (and obtained the support of their clergy in this). Others continue to call for peace, trying to avoid the issue of guilty parties and initiators of war. Still others have taken a hard, anti-Ukrainian position: there are known cases of refusals to hold funerals for fallen Ukrainian soldiers at UOC MP cathedrals;²⁷ calls in homilies to refuse mobilization,²⁸ and so on.

At the height of events in 2014, Metropolitan Volodymyr, Primate of the UOC MP, passed away. Metropolitan Onufriy of Chernivtsi and Bukovina, who had a reputation as a man of prayer and a theologian, not inclined to become involved in politics, was elected the new Primate. However, Metropolitan Antony (Pakanich), an informal leader of the pro-Moscow “party” in the UOC became his manager (in fact the head of the Church’s “executive branch”). (Agafangel turned out to be too compromised and in part lost his positions while keeping the Odessa Diocese).

According to experts at the Ukrainian Strategy XXI Centre for Global Studies, Archpriest Nikolai (Balashov) is the actual leader of the UOC MP. He is the first deputy head of the Department of External Church Relations of the ROC and connected to Russia’s intelligence services.²⁹

26 See, for example, the book by Tatyana Derkach, *Moskovskiy patriarkhat v Ukraine: anatomiya predatel'stva*, [Moscow Patriarch in Ukraine: Anatomy of Betrayal] (Kyiv, 2018); the report “Kogda Bog stanovitsya oruzhiyem”, [When God Becomes a Weapon] by the Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, April 2015, https://www.irs.in.ua/files/publications/2015.04_Report_Religious_persecution_in_occupied_Donbas_rus.pdf; and journalistic investigation by Yury Butusov, “Pervy boy ATO 13 aprelya 14-go – boeviki Moskovskogo patriarkhata v otryade FSB Girkina otkryvayut ogon’”, [First Battle of the ATO on April 13, 2014 – Fighters of the Moscow Patriarchate in Unit of FSB Girkin Open Fire] *Censor.net*, July 17, 2016, https://censor.net.ua/resonance/397750/pervyyi_boyi_ato_13_aprelya_14go_boeviki_moskovskogo_patriarkhata_v_otryade_fsb_girkina_otkryvayut_ogon; and others.

27 Serhiy Radchenko, “Svyashchenyk ne skhotiv vidspyvati pomerloho voina”, [Priest Refuses to Perform Funeral for Dead Soldier] *Gazeta.ua*, February 5, 2019, https://gazeta.ua/articles/scandals-newspaper/_svyashchenik-ne-shotiv-vidspivati-pomerlogo-voyina/883771; “Skandal’ny svyashchennik UPTs MP oskorbil ATOshnikov”, [Scandalous Priest of UOC MP Offends ATO Soldiers] *Politeka*, September 1, 2017, <https://politeka.net/news/491019-skandalnij-svyashchenik-upts-mp-obrazil-atovtsiv-foto>.

28 “Episkop Longin (Zhar) pid chas propvidi zaklikav ukhlyatsiya vid mobilizatsii, a kerivnitstvo Ukraini nazvav ‘satanistami’”, [Bishop Longin (Zhar) Calls for Draft Dodging in a Sermon, and Calls Leadership of Ukraine ‘Satanists’] *Bukinfo*, September 16, 2014, <https://bukinfo.com.ua/show/news?id=50244>.

29 Gonchar, Gorbach, and Pinchuk, eds., “Rosiyk’kiy sprut u dii.”

Vadim Novinsky, a people’s deputy in Ukraine, controls the activity of the UOC MP “on the spot.” He is a Russian businessman who controlled iron and steel assets in Ukraine and later traded them for a 25 percent stake in the Metinvest holding owned by Rinat Akhmetov. Novinsky received Ukrainian citizenship by Decree of then-President Yanukovich, has been elected to the *Verkhovna Rada* or parliament three times, and has become a major donor to the UOC MP. Many experts believe that while Yanukovich was president, he secured Novinsky’s communication with the Church leadership.

“Novinsky was present at all my meetings with Yanukovich, where Yanukovich demanded that I force Metropolitan Volodymyr to retire. At these meetings, Yanukovich introduced Novinsky as a person authorized by him on the matter of the replacement of the primate of the UOC and in general the affairs of our church, as an ‘overseer,’” Metropolitan Oleksandr Drabinko later told journalists.³⁰

In December 2016, Ukrainian Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko appealed to the *Verkhovna Rada* to give consent to prosecuting Novinsky on criminal charges. He stated that it was Novinsky who had been responsible for the unlawful detention of Drabinko under guard in 2013, and it was he who gave the order by telephone to Valery Koryak, then head of the capital police about whether or not Drabinko could be delivered to His Beatitude Volodymyr or to a worship service. Parliament gave its consent, but charges were never brought against Novinsky.

Strategy XXI experts believe that Novinsky continues in fact to run the Church, but indirectly in Moscow’s interests. “Vadim Novinsky is the central—in order of degree of importance—secular figure in the current UOC,” Oleksandr Drabinko commented more diplomatically.³¹

“It is no accident that Russian politicians view the UOC as the largest ‘Russian party’ in Ukraine,” he added. “Novinsky is, so to say, the unofficial Russian ‘ambassador’ to Ukraine.”³²

30 Roman Romanyuk, “I smikh, i grikh. Chomu GPU zatsikavilasya Novynsk’skim,” [Whether to Laugh or Cry: Why the Prosecutor General is Interested in Novinsky] *Ukrainska Pravda*, September 13, 2016, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2016/09/13/7120463/>.

31 Sonya Koshkina and Oleg Bazar, “Aleksandr Drabinko: UPTs prevratilas’ v nekiy ostrovok russkoy identichnosti v Ukraine,” [Oleksandr Drabinko: The UOC Has Turned into a Kind of Island of Russian Identity in Ukraine] *Levy bereg*, January 7, 2017, https://lb.ua/news/2017/01/07/355419_aleksandr_drabinko_upts.html.

32 Koshkina and Bazar, “Aleksander Drabinko.”

In fact, Novinsky is far from the only major donor funding the UOC MP. Thus, the anti-autocephalous Union of Orthodox Journalists is funded by Viktor Vishnevitsky, founder of the coal company Coal Energy.³³

Today, we may distinguish the chief tools with which the Kremlin tries, through the ROC and UOC MP, to preserve and expand its influence over Ukrainian society:

- Support of the activity of pro-Russian political forces and individual politicians with use of the authority of clerics
- Dissemination of Orthodox fundamentalism (so-called spiritual tools)
- Creation of various types of Orthodox pro-Russian civic organizations—Orthodox societies, centers and unions of orthodox citizens, Orthodox lawyers, Orthodox women, unions of Orthodox citizens, support of canonical Orthodoxy, creation of “Cossack” organizations with a clear armed component
- Financial (as a rule, in the form of charity) support of local archpriests, abbots, and so on
- Infiltration of clergy clearly adhering to the “Moscow” line into law-enforcement agencies

YEARNING FOR AUTOCEPHALY

After the annexation of Crimea and the most acute phase of the war in the Donbass when many Orthodox in Ukraine grew disenchanted with the UOC MP, the question arose once again about the creation of an autocephalous (independent) Church which would be recognized by world Orthodoxy. At first, there was an attempt to revive the so-called Yushchenko Plan, which consisted of three steps. The first step was to unite the noncanonical jurisdictions of the UOC KP and UAOC (Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church); the second was for the unified church to obtain canonical status by joining the Ecumenical Patriarchate (EP); the third was to have the EP grant it autocephaly. In mid-2015, the UOC KP and UAOC nearly scheduled the date for the Unification Council, but in the end could not reach agreement. Public statements were made that Moscow had had a hand in the breakdown of the agreements, in fact with the help of Novinsky and his financial infusions again. To be sure, Metropolitan Makariy, Primate of the UAOC, maintained that he had not met with any pro-Russian oligarchs and had not taken any money from anyone to refuse the unification.³⁴

The search for a mechanism to obtain autocephaly continued. In the summer of 2016, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine appealed to the Ecumenical Patriarch Varfolomei with a request to publish a *tomos* (a decree of the primate of the church on an especially important issue) on the granting of autocephaly to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. President Petro Poroshenko and his Administration became actively involved in the issue, and the UOC KP, UAOC and a number of bishops of the UOC MP confirmed their interest in the creation of a local church. By mid-2018, the Ecumenical Patriarchate had made several public signals of its readiness to acknowledge Ukrainian autocephaly. It became obvious that Moscow was losing one of its battles with Ukraine.

The ROC and UOC MP launched a massive campaign against autocephaly. At first, a delegation of several archpriests of the UOC MP together with Vadim Novinsky headed to Fener (the district of Istanbul where the residence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is located). Then after the failure of its mission, the Holy Synod of the ROC took a decision to break communication totally with the

33 Vitaliy Klimchuk, “Oberezhno: ‘Spilka pravoslavnikh zhurnalistiv!’” [Caution: Union of Orthodox Journalists!] *Religiya v Ukraini*, January 12, 2016, https://www.religion.in.ua/zmi/ukrainian_zmi/31481-oberezhno-spilka-pravoslavnikh-zhurnalistiv.html.

34 “UAPTs gotova vesti peregovory s UPTs (MP) tol’ko s uchastiyem UPTs KP,” [UAOC Ready for Talks with UOC (MP) Only with Participant of UOC KP] *Religiya v Ukraini*, July 13, 2015, <https://www.religion.in.ua/news/vazhlivo/29725-uapc-gotova-vesti-peregovory-s-upc-mp-tolko-s-uchastiyem-upc-kp.html>.



Vadym Novynskyi in Pechers'kyi Caves Monastery, Kiev, Ukrain. Photo: lavra.ua

Ecumenical Patriarchate, and to cease mentioning Patriarch Bartholomew during worship services. The UOC MP Diocese received tens of thousands of form letter appeals to Bartholomew. "The Church leadership requests believers to fill out such forms where the believer, appealing to the patriarch, requests 'not to legalize the schism' and protests against the creation of a Unified Local Church on the basis of "schismatic grouplets." Thus, the Church leadership conducted deliberate subversive anti-Ukrainian work.

"Likely, this was fulfilling the whim of Moscow and its Muscovite satellites," said Yaroslav Mishchenko, a columnist for Ukrinform.³⁵

Nevertheless, on December 15, 2018, in the historic Kyiv Cathedral of St. Sophia, the unification council took place, which declared the creation of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). Prior to this, the UOC KP and UAOC were disbanded, and their clergy practically all joined the new church. Two bishops of the UOC MP took part in the council—Metropolitan Symeon of Vinnytsia

and Barskiy (Shostatskiy) and Metropolitan Oleksandr of Pereyaslav-Khmel'nitsky and Vishnev (Drabinko). Even a few days before the council, it was supposed that the number of bishops of the UOC MP who would transfer to the OCU would reach ten. It was reported that apparently serious pressure was put on those who "had second thoughts." In particular, media claimed that Metropolitan Agapit (Bevtsik) of Moglev-Podolsk and Shargorod was taken from his Kyiv hotel on the eve of the unification council and was brought to Novinsky and his guards at an unknown location.³⁶

The tomos was officially handed to Metropolitan Epifaniy (Dumenko) of Kyiv and all Ukraine, elected as Primate of the OCU at the unification council on January 6, 2019. Moscow was unreconcilable with Ukrainian autocephaly and continued to demand of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew that he retract the tomos, and demand of the local Orthodox Churches that they refuse recognition to the OCU.

"The Russian government in the person of the ROC

35 "Rukovoditeli UPTs MP tsentralizovanno sryvayut protsess predostavleniya tomosa," [The leadership of the UOC MP deliberately sabotage the process of receiving the tomos] Den', April 28, 2018, <https://day.kyiv.ua/ru/news/280418-rukovoditeli-upc-mp-centralizovanno-sryvayut-process-predostavleniya-tomosa>.

36 "Pokhishchennogo' SBU mitropolita UOC MP vyvez Novynskiy – SMI," [SUB Metropolitan of the UOC MP 'Kidnapped' by SBU was Taken by Novinsky] Delovaya stolitsa, December 15, 2018, <https://www.dsnews.ua/society/-pohishchennogo-sbu-mitropolita-upts-mp-vyvez-novynskiy---smi-15122018145900>.

has become involved in the process of persistent opposition to recognition of Ukrainian autocephaly,” believes Metropolitan Epifaniy.³⁷ Possibly, it was the uncompromising position of the ROC that significantly delayed the recognition of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by world Orthodoxy. Today, out of 15 existing Orthodox Churches only the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Helladic (Greek) Orthodox Church, and the Alexandriysky Patriarchate have entered into canonical communion with the OCU. After recognition of the OCU, the Helladic Church of the ROC announced the termination of Church communication with some of its hierarchs, and then suspended the work of the metochion of the Patriarchate of Alexandria at the Moscow Church of All Saints. Several Orthodox Churches took a negative position regarding the OCU; the rest, however, were cautious and put off the decision, not wishing to quarrel with the rich and influential Moscow Patriarchate.

If on the international level, the ROC tries to speak regarding the OCU from a position of strength, in Ukraine, on the contrary, the UOC MP is not averse to representing itself as a victim of oppression. On the whole and viewed from outside, the public and media activity of the UOC MP is oriented toward achieving the following goals:

- Create a notion of persecution of “canonical Orthodoxy” among public opinion in Ukraine
- Form a negative image of the OCU and its process of obtaining of autocephaly
- Incite a conflict between the ROC MP and OCU, preventing a positive attitude by Orthodoxy toward both jurisdictions simultaneously
- Portray Ukraine as an arena of acute religious struggle (or even religious warfare) in the world
- Cultivate images of “friends”—Russians and “ungrateful schismatics”—compatriot parishioners of the OCU

37 Svyatoslav Khomenko and Vitaliy Chervonenko, “Prestoyatel’ OCU Epifaniy: RPTs budyet vynuuzhdena priznat’ avtokefaliyu Ukrainskoy tserkvi,” [ROC Will Be Forced to Recognize Autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church] BBC, December 5, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-50664513>.

TIME FOR REVENGE?

After the change of government in Ukraine, the positions of the UOC MP grew markedly stronger. Unlike his predecessor Poroshenko, who declared the autocephalous church the cornerstone of Ukraine’s state independence, Volodymyr Zelensky preferred to avoid church issues, which are fraught with conflicts in society and growth of dissatisfaction with the government. Accordingly, the vigorous activity and propaganda of the UOC MP did not encounter any resistance on the part of the government. The transfer of parishes to the OCU from the UOC MP almost ceased.

The Church of the Moscow Patriarchate remains in first place in Ukraine in number of parishes (according to various statistics, from 10,000 to 12,000 versus approximately 7,000 in the OCU), and accordingly, in the number of parishioners. But public opinion is no longer on its side. According to the results of a national survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) in February 2020, 60.6 percent of Ukrainians have a positive attitude toward the OCU, and 5.4 percent have a negative one (the confessional affiliation of the respondents was not determined). The indicators for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church are somewhat more modest (it is still called the Uniate Church); the majority of the parishioners live in western Ukraine. Of those surveyed, 35.2 percent had a positive attitude toward it and 6.5 percent had a negative one. But with the UOC MP a negative balance of attitudes was recorded: 25.7 percent of those surveyed were positive and 28.0 percent were negative.³⁸

On the other hand, among top officials of Zelensky’s presidency, the authority of the UOC MP, as far as can be determined, is significantly higher. Some analysts believe that the main ally of the ROC in the Ukrainian leader’s entourage is Sergei Trofimov, first deputy of the Office of the President (OP). “Trofimov is an ardent parishioner of the Moscow Patriarchate, an affiliated person, so to say, who supports friendly relations and is in constant contact with Metropolitan Antony (Pakanich) of the Moscow Church. They say Trofimov consults with the Metropolitan even on political and personnel issues, including the appointment of key leaders in the regional administrations.

38 “Stavlennya do okremikh tserkov Ukraini i ochikuvannya vid diyal’nosti Pravoslavnoy tserkvi Ukraini: lyutyiy 2020 roku” [Attitudes Towards Individual Churches of Ukraine and Expectations of the Activities of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine: February 2020], Kyiv International Institute of Sociology [website], March 3, 2020, <https://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=921&page=1>.

And during visits of Trofimov to the regions, Metropolitan Antony organizes his meetings with local *vladykas* [bishops] of his church," writes the authoritative Ukrainian publication *Glavkom*.³⁹

Should we be surprised that among local officials, the percentage of adherents of the UOC MP is as high as before? But those officials who registered the transfers of religious parishes from the UOC to the OCU are now forced to answer questions from investigators and judges. The UOC MP initiated criminal proceedings in the UOC MP against the former heads of the Chernivtsi and Rivne regional state administrations.⁴⁰ In Vinnytsia Region, Igor Saletsky, head of the Department for Ethnic and Religious Affairs was forced to take part in almost forty judicial procedures related to the transfer of parishes to the OCU, and figured in four criminal cases instigated against him.⁴¹

ORTHODOX CORONAVIRUS

A quarantine in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic was imposed in Ukraine on March 12, 2020. Already by March 13, a meeting took place of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations with the participation of the leadership of the Ministry of Health. At the meeting, all the participants were in agreement with the restrictive measures recommended when performing religious rites. In practice, however, some leaders of the UOC MP began to demonstratively ignore the quarantine.

"Pray, fast, go to church, take communion and give communion to small children [...]. Everyone hasten to church [...] embrace one another [...]. We

39 Ruslan Polishchuk, "Mizhtserkovnu politiku pisatimut' stsenaristi '95 kvartalu'?" [Will Inter-Church Politics Be Written by the Screenwriters of Kwartal 95 Studio?"] *Glavkom*, February 21, 2020, <https://glavkom.ua/country/society/mizhcerkovnu-politiku-pisatimut-scenaristi-95-kvartalu-660913.html>.

40 "V UPTs (MP) initsiyuvaly kryminal'ni provadzhennya proty holiv Chernivets'koi ta Rivnenskoi obldierzhadministratsiy," [UOC (MP) Initiates Criminal Proceedings Against Heads of Chernivtsi and Rivne Regional State Administrations] *Religiya v Ukraini*, March 23, 2019, <https://www.religion.in.ua/news/vazhlivo/43519-v-upc-mp-iniciyuvalikryminalni-provadzhennya-proti-goliv-cherniveckoyi-ta-rivnenskoyi-obldierzhadministracij.html>.

41 Antonina Mnikh, "Igor Salets'kiy, nachal'nik upravlinnya u spravakh natsional'nostey ta religiy Vinnits'koi ODA: Politsiya vvažhae, shcho, zareestruvavshi perekhid ryadu religiyinikh gromad do PtsU, ya vchiniv smoupravstvo," [Igor Saletsky, Head of Department for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of Vinnytsia Regional State Administration: "The police believe that by registering the transfer of a number of religious communities to the OCU, I abused rights"] *Ukrinform*, November 14, 2019, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/2818472-igor-saleckij-nacalnik-upravlinna-uspravah-nacionalnostej-ta-religij-vinnickoi-oda.html>.

call on everyone to come to prayer," such was the video appeal to believers recorded by Metropolitan Pavel, abbot of the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra.⁴² Religious processions took place "for the sake of Orthodoxy and overcoming the coronavirus" in Vinnytsia, Rivne, and other cities. Crowded services were held. Clergy grounded their skepticism regarding the quarantine restrictions simply: truly believing Christians could not get infected in a church or during a religious procession. And the call of the OCU and other jurisdictions to their flocks to maintain the quarantine and visit worship services online was in fact explained as a lack of faith and an absence of grace.

Many religious scholars are inclined to explain such a position of the hierarchs of the UOC MP by Orthodox fundamentalism and their resistance to the Ukrainian government that has taken root over the past years of consistent promotion of Moscow's interests. "The rhetoric of persecution and martyrdom has become so customary for believers of the UOC MP that some skilled manipulators quickly transferred martyrdom from the state and 'dissenters' to martyrdom from the coronavirus," believes Archimandrite Kirill (Govorun), who holds a PhD in philosophy and is a candidate for theology.⁴³ "From the very beginning they [the UOC MP—Author] had a position of denial. Right up to the spreading of conspiracy theories, that the coronavirus is a plot by the West against Orthodoxy and spirituality," agrees Archimandrite Igor Kozlovsky, a religious scholar and historian.⁴⁴

Thus, the logic set by Moscow, of opposition to the West and the secular authorities of Ukraine, has led believers of the UOC into the trap of suicidal denial about the danger of infection.

As a result, the monasteries of the UOC MP have become real seedbeds of sickness. Almost all the monks and residents (about 200 people) at the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra have become infected, and several people subsequently died. The authorities were forced to close it under a strict quarantine with police checkpoints at the entrances. Trinity Monastery of St. Jonas and St. Pokrovsky Monastery in Kyiv were also closed for quarantine along with sev-

42 "Karantin: otmenyat li bogsluzheniya?" [Quarantine: Will Worship Services Be Cancelled?] *Lavra, Put' spaseniya*, March 13, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm95n_yvRvk.

43 Valeriya Kondratova, "Virus v UPTs MP. Fanatizm, den'gi i teorii zagivora," [Virus in the UOC MOP: Fanaticism, Cash and Conspiracy Theories] *Liga*, April 14, 2020, <https://www.liga.net/politics/articles/fanatizm-dengi-i-teorii-zagovora-pochemu-lavra-stala-epitsentrom-covid-19>.

44 Kondratova, "Virus v UPTs MP."

eral other residences. At Holy Dormition Pochayiv Lavra (Ternopil Region), the monks refused to take tests. “They fear examinations by doctors, since they believe that the medical technicians will give them injections and deliberately infect them,” a source from among the brothers told journalists.⁴⁵

After the removal of the quarantine in the majority of monasteries on June 1, an outbreak of coronavirus was recorded in the women’s Monastery of the Ascension of the Holy Flower in Kyiv. Nearly the entire editorial staff of *Otrok* (Lad), the UOC MP youth journal, were infected.

Rumors circulated about the hospitalization of Metropolitan Onufriy, Primate of the OUC MP; however, the Church denied such reports. In fact, the Primate did not appear in public either on Easter or during the feast days of St. George the Victorious and the Myrrh-bearing Women, although he did take part in the celebrations on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Victory, in fact calling it, in accordance with Russian propaganda slogans, “Victory in the Great Fatherland War.”

RISK FACTOR

On the whole, we can state that the Orthodox Church is one of the most effective instruments (and at the same time mechanisms) of Moscow’s influence on Ukrainian society. While suffering substantial “quantitative losses,” the UOC MP—an organization dependent on the ROC on all ideological and political matters—has preserved its very large number of parishioners, supporting in them the identity of “the united people” (with Russians), a negative attitude toward many democratic values, and a cautious perception of their own Ukrainian state. The influence of the ROC on world views extends even beyond the community of its followers, since this community is not closed and actively propagandizes the views prevailing in it in other social strata.

As a result, a rather high level of denial of the rights of minorities (and even elementary equality of women), by European standards, is recorded in Ukraine. The followers of the ROC are a breeding ground for conducting actions against the European and Euro-Atlantic choice of Ukraine—and the opposite—for a new rapprochement with Russia, despite

the annexation of Crimea and the hybrid war in the Donbass. In many ways, their votes ensure that a significant number of pro-Russian politicians get into parliament. As the events after the imposition of the quarantine illustrate, many believers of the UOC MP hold sufficiently archaic views of the world around them and are ready for unsafe behavior at the behest of their religious leaders.

Among local elites in the majority of Ukrainian regions, the influence of the ROC is even more visible than at the level of the broad popular masses, and this enables Moscow to build an information network to receive information and promote various decisions (or the opposite, to gently sabotage them). We must not overlook the factor of the Kremlin’s religious-political influence in the immediate entourage of the head of state, Volodymyr Zelensky, which must be viewed as a serious threat to Ukraine’s state security.

45 Dmitriy Gorevoy, “Oni boyatsya proverok vrachey,” [They Fear Doctors’ Examinations] *Nastoyashcheye vremya*, April 25, 2020, <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/church-coronavirus-ukraine/30576115.html>.



PORCUPINE AND BEAR: HOW ESTONIA THWARTS RUSSIAN INFILTRATION

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INTRODUCTION

On 18 April 2019, Estonia's President Kersti Kaljulaid met Russian President Vladimir Putin. She participated in the ceremony marking the opening of the renovated Embassy of Estonia in Moscow and it was her first visit to Russia since 2008. Even as she expressed satisfaction after the meeting, noting that it was a conversation "about difficult topics" and a "demonstration of mutual respect,"¹ each party gave no ground on the key issues defining the bilateral relations. Kaljulaid used this opportunity to yet again express Estonia's concerns regarding the fact that Russia still had not ratified the border treaty and mentioned the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, which is being built by Russia and which Estonia views as detrimental to European energy security. Putin, on the other hand, brought up issues on the rights of holders of so-called alien (or gray) passports, Russian-language education, and the "glorification of Nazism" in Estonia.²

There is nothing new in Russia's pronounced fixation on Estonia's domestic affairs and the Kremlin's deliberate disregard towards problems concerning Estonian sovereignty. For more than a decade now, Moscow has been consistently playing the card of victimization of Russians in the Baltics, disseminating the message via state-supported entities, the media, local sympathizers, and under the guise of educational programs. Russian speakers

constitute a quarter of the population in Estonia,³ including a sizable number of Soviet-era migrants who feel deprived in the newly independent country.⁴ The street riots of 2007, caused by relocating the monument of the Soviet soldier from the central square in Tallinn to the city outskirts, elicited resentment in the Russian-speaking minority. More than ten years later, the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia potentially remains uniquely vulnerable to the Kremlin's influence.⁵

Yet unlike other EU countries such as Austria, Italy, or Hungary where governments have tended to be more lenient and cooperative towards Russian authorities since Crimea's annexation in 2014, Estonia's pattern of coexistence with Russia can be described as cold politeness. After years of EU sanctions, Estonia's trade with Russia has contracted significantly. Imports from and exports to

1 Dario Cavegn, "At a Glance: Presidents Kaljulaid, Putin Discuss Estonian-Russian Relations," *ERR news*, April 19, 2019, <https://news.err.ee/931825/at-a-glance-presidents-kaljulaid-putin-discuss-estonian-russian-relations>.

2 Cavegn, "At a Glance."

3 "Population Figure and Composition", Estonian statistics, June 1, 2020, http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/1_Databas/Population/01Population_indicators_and_composition/04Population_figure_and_composition/04Population_figure_and_composition.asp.

4 Tuuli Anna Renvik, Asteria Brylka, Hanna Kontinen, Raivo Vetik, Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, "Perceived Status and National Belonging: The Case of Russian Speakers in Finland and Estonia," *International Review of Social Psychology*, 31 no. 1 (9), 1–10.

5 Jill Dougherty, Riina Kaljurand, "Estonia's Virtual 'Russian World': The Influence of Russia's Media on Estonian Russian Speakers," Tallinn: International Center for Defense and Security, October 2015, https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2014/Jill_Dougherty_Riina_Kaljurand_-_Estonia_s_Virtual_Russian_World_.pdf; P. Rethmann, "How Russians Have Helped Fuel the Rise of Germany's Far-Right," *The Conversation*, November 1, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/how-russians-have-helped-fuel-the-rise-of-germanys-far-right-105551>.

Russia in 2019 made up only 10 percent⁶ and 8.5 percent⁷ respectively in Estonia's overall international trade. Meanwhile in 1995–2017, Estonia's defense expenditures increased sevenfold.⁸ In one decade, from 2009 to 2019, Estonia also developed very effective counter-intelligence capabilities, as reflected in the conviction of twenty Russian spies,⁹ which is more than in any NATO or EU member-state during this period.¹⁰

Since 1998, the Estonian Internal Security Service (*Kaitsepolitseiamet*, KAPO), has been publishing a detailed annual report on national security, in particular focusing on Russia's interference in Estonian affairs and identifying the Kremlin's malign operations and its enablers.¹¹ Such a forthright tactic can be considered one of the elements in the "porcupine" strategy aimed at deterring the Russian "bear."¹² The Estonian government's vigilance compels Russia to pursue its agenda in a more subtle and nuanced manner.

This chapter focuses on the Russian government's agents of influence in Estonia after 2014. The cyberattacks and espionage activities attributed to Russia represent important aspects of the Kremlin's approach to Estonia, but they are beyond the scope of this research. For the purposes of this study, I used open sources, including information available on social media platforms.

RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN ESTONIA AFTER 2014: AGENTS, TOPICS, AND METHODS

In its attempt to make the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent war in the Donbass legitimate, Moscow intensified its outreach to the Estonian "compatriots" using propaganda and disinformation campaigns. Local participants in the riots related to the relocation of the Soviet-era Bronze soldier monument in 2007, pro-Russian civil activists, and members of the Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots in Estonia (CCRCE) represent the vanguard of Russia's malign influence. They spread pro-Kremlin messages on the discrimination of the Russian-speaking minority and glorify Soviet history in education, civil activism, politics, and the media.

Broadly speaking, I identify three clusters of agents of Russian influence. The first group is represented by the Russian state institutions and Estonian entities supported by the Russian government. They operate in the area of cultural and educational exchange programs, promoting Russia's positive image and recruiting political sympathizers in Estonia. The second group consists of local activists who harshly criticize Estonia as allegedly systematically violating the very principles of liberal democracy. The third group incorporates those local agents who spread pro-Russian and anti-Estonian messages via mass media. The offered taxonomy also implies that these categories are not mutually exclusive as these entities often carry out a range of activities, in addition to their core functions.

In brief, it is possible to identify the following patterns in their common *modus operandi*:

- disseminating propaganda and imitating discussions while excluding unwanted questions and opinions
- promoting a pro-Russian agenda at various international forums, such as the OSCE and UN
- legitimizing a pro-Russian agenda by creating a self-referential echo chamber with the participation of select domestic "experts," "civil activists," and "political scientists".

6 "Estonia Imports by Country," Trading Economics, May 16, 2020, <https://tradingeconomics.com/estonia/imports-by-country>

7 "Estonia Exports by Country."

8 "Estonia Military Expenditure."

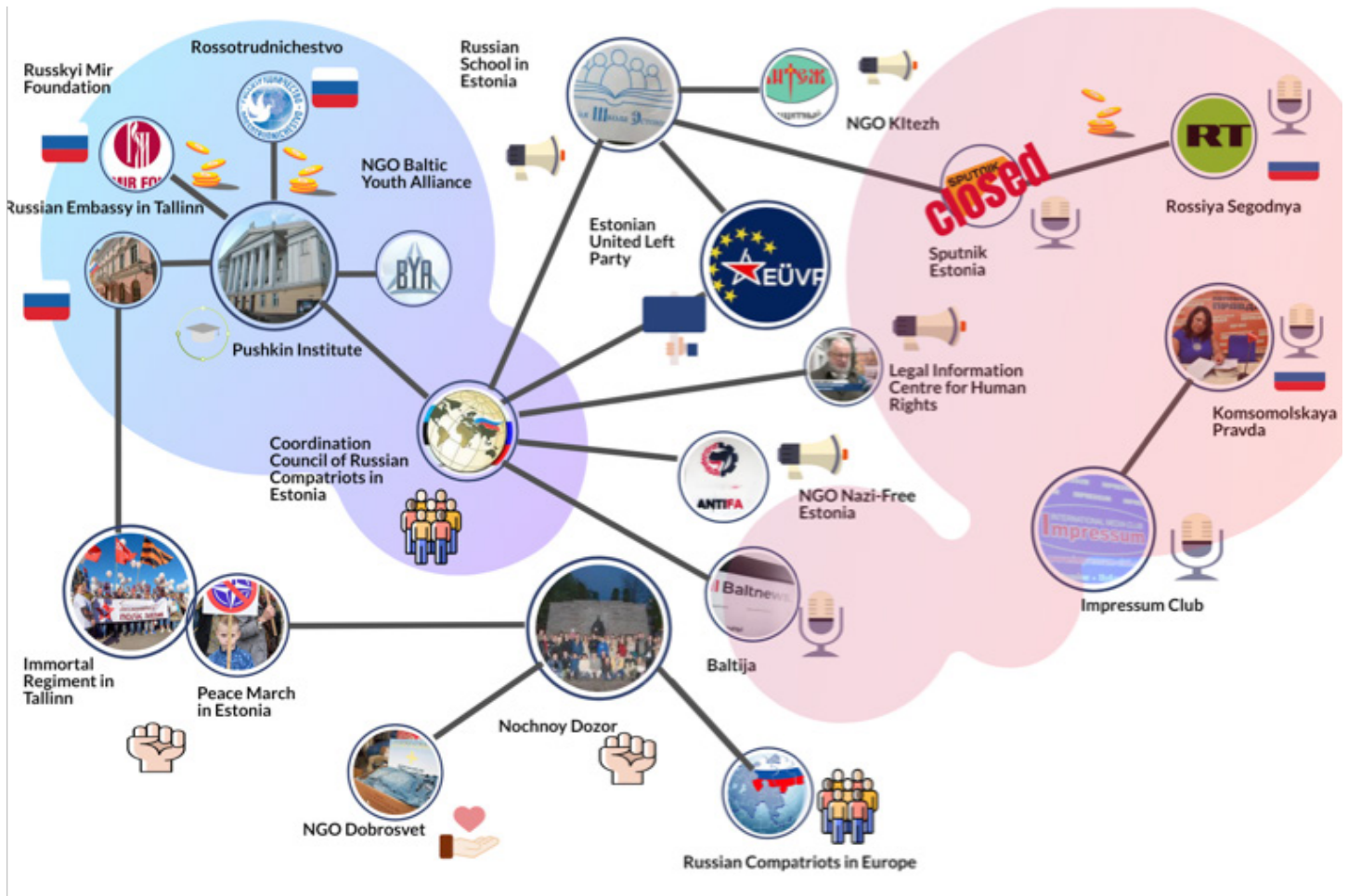
"KAPO Annual Review," *Keitsepolitseiamet*, 2019, <https://www.kapo.ee/en/content/annual-reviews.html>.

9 "KAPO Annual Review," 2019.

10 Ivo Juurvee and Lavly Perling, "Russia's Espionage in Estonia. A Quantitative Analysis of Convictions," International Centre for Defence and Security, Tallinn, 2019, 8, https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ICDS_Analysis_Russias_Espionage_in_Estonia_Juurvee_Perling_November_2019.pdf.

11 "KAPO Annual Review," 2019.

12 Frederick W. Kagan, "What is to be done," *Weekly Standard*, August 25, 2008, <https://www.aei.org/articles/what-is-to-be-done/>.



Pro-Kremlin agents in Estonia. Picture credit: Author

RUSSIAN STATE ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PUSHKIN INSTITUTE

Russian state institutions, including the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Estonia, *Rosstrudnichestvo* (Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation), and *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) Foundation specialize in projecting “soft” influence via educational exchange, cultural programs, conferences, and seminars while avoiding direct criticism of Estonian authorities on domestic social and economic issues.

In contrast to other countries, where *Rosstrudnichestvo* established centers of Russian culture (it maintained the network of seventy-three such centers in sixty-two countries around the world),¹³ which are widely known as focal points of Russian influence and—sometimes—re-

cruitment of agents,¹⁴ there is no such direct branch in Tallinn. The functions of such a center in Estonia is performed by the Estonian non-governmental organization (NGO) the Pushkin Institute, which hosts the Russian language center (Center) and is patronized by both *Rosstrudnichestvo* and *Russkiy Mir* Foundation. The Center is certified by the Russian authorities to conduct Russian language exams for obtaining Russian citizenship and to promote Russian language and culture in Estonia. The Center organizes a number of educational events and festivals with particular focus on Russian-speaking schoolchildren and teachers of Russian language.¹⁵

The Pushkin Institute and the Center carry out outreach to inform Estonia’s Russian-speaking youth about higher education opportunities at Russian universities. The scholarship programs offered by the Russian government

13 O Rosstrudnichestvo, Rosstrudnichestvo, July 17, 2020, <http://rs.gov.ru/ru/about>.

14 Tanja Traxler, “Grüne kritisieren Russlandzentren der Unis Innsbruck und Salzburg,” *Der Standard*, May 11, 2017, <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000057342067/gruene-kritisieren-russlandzentren-der-unis-innsbruck-und-salzburg>; Connor Simpson, “Head of D.C.’s Russian Cultural Center Accused of Recruiting American Spies,” *Atlantic*, October 23, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/10/head-dc-russian-cultural-center-accused-recruiting-spies/309616/>.

15 “Posledni meropriiatia”, Pushkini Institut, May 25, 2020, <https://pushkin.ee>.

are tuition-free and focus particularly on the holders of “gray passports,” as well as Estonian and Russian citizens permanently residing in Estonia.¹⁶

KAPO does not consider the activities of the Pushkin Institute and the Russian Language Center politically neutral.¹⁷ As indicated in its reports in 2017 and 2019, Moscow pays special attention to Estonia’s Russian-speaking youth as it tries to indoctrinate them through various cultural, educational, and sports programs both in Russia and abroad.¹⁸ Given Putin’s instructions to the government in March 2020 to promote Russian language abroad, further intensification of such efforts is very likely.¹⁹

Notable examples include the 2017 World Games of Young Compatriots in Kazan, the 2017 Third World Youth Forum of Russian Compatriots “Destiny of Russia: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow” held in Bulgaria’s capital Sofia, and the Sochi 2017 World Festival of Youth and Students. In recent years the Pushkin Institute co-organized, along with the Estonian pro-Russian NGO Baltic Youth Alliance (BYA), Russkiy Mir Foundation and the Russian Embassy in Estonia, a number of events that took place in Estonia, including youth camps My Baltics in 2017, Step to the Future and Start in 2018, Dream Factory in 2019 and 2020, and Baltfest in 2017–2020. Both the Russian Ambassador to Estonia, Aleksandr Petrov, and the Director of the Pushkin Institute, Andrey Krasnoglazov, participated in these events. In 2008, President Vladimir Putin awarded Krasnoglazov for his contributions in promoting the Russian language in Estonia.²⁰ He is also a member of the CCRCE. In 2019, Krasnoglazov was found guilty of document forgery,²¹ but he continues to run the Pushkin Institute.

Apart from working with Russian-speaking youth, the Pushkin Institute and the Center of Russian language convene events and conferences on Russian Orthodox culture and WWII. In January 2020, the Center hosted the presentation of a book written by Kirill, the Patriarch

of Moscow and all Russia, and Putin’s confidant. The book was published in Estonian, and as the Russkiy Mir Foundation explained in the accompanying press release, it “is a student book for all those who want to comprehend the basics of the Orthodox Christianity in their own language.”²²

The agenda of a conference organized jointly by the Tallinn Club of Navy Veterans and the Russian Embassy at the Pushkin Institute in November 2019 was replete with the pro-Kremlin WWII discourse. Entitled “The 75th anniversary of liberation of Estonia from fascism,” it presented Moscow’s revisionist narrative, which President Putin summarized in his op-ed in *The National Interest* in June 2020. It can be described as “uncovering” Russophobia and pro-Nazi sentiments, omitting or dismissing the Soviet occupation of Baltics, emphasizing the Soviet Union’s role as a liberator of Europe, and “revealing” anti-Soviet activities of other European countries via falsification of historical facts.²³

“ACTIVISTS”

Their principal activity consists of airing grievances of Estonia’s Russian-speaking minority, according to the Kremlin’s perspective, in the international arena while damaging Estonia’s reputation by spreading disinformation about the Estonian government’s purported disrespect for human rights and Western democratic values. This group includes representatives of the CCRCE; the NGOs Estonian Russian School, Legal Information Center for Human Rights (LICHR), and Nazi-Free Estonia; and former members of the *Nochnoy Dozor* (Night Watch) vigilante group that participated in the 2007 Bronze Soldier riots and the Estonian United Left Party (EULP). The CCRCE, Estonian Russian School, and the EULP unite most of the activists of this network. All of them regularly comment for Kremlin-funded media, including Sputnik Estonia, which was closed by the Estonian authorities in December 2019,²⁴ as well as Baltnews, Baltija, Regnum, and MK Estonia. Most of them also run pro-Kremlin fo-

16 “Obuchenie v rossiiskikh vuzakh”, Pushkini Institut, May 25, 2020, <https://pushkin.ee/ru/obuchenie-v-rossii/>.

17 “KAPO Annual Review,” Keitsepolitseiamet, 2017, https://www.kapo.ee/sites/default/files/public/content_page/Annual%20Review%202017.pdf; “KAPO Annual Review,” 2019.

18 “KAPO Annual Review,” 2019, 20-21.

19 “Putin poruchil razrabotat programmu po podderzhke russkogo iazyka,” RIA Novosti, March 2, 2020, <https://ria.ru/20200302/1566999876.html>.

20 “About Awarding the Pushkin Medal by Krasnoglazov A.V.,” Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library, February 28, 2008, <https://www.prlib.ru/en/node/430459>.

21 “Okruzhnoi sud smiagchil prigovor Andreiu Krasnoglazovu,” ERR.ee, June 10, 2019, <https://rus.err.ee/950962/okruzhnoj-sud-smiagchil-prigovor-andreju-krasnoglazovu>.

22 S.G. Myannik, “Knigu patriarkha Kirilla na estonskom iazyke predstavili v Talline,” Russkiy Mir, January 24, 2020, <https://ruskiymir.ru/news/267896/>.

23 Vladimir Putin, “Vladimir Putin: The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II,” *The National Interest*, June 18, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/ussian-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982>.

24 “Sputnik ends operations in Estonia,” ERR.ee, January 1, 2020, <https://news.err.ee/1019231/sputnik-ends-operations-in-estonia>.

rum and groups on social media platforms.²⁵

The NGO Estonian Russian School focuses on protecting Russian-language education in Estonia. This NGO was established in 2004 as a grassroots initiative of a small group of parents concerned about preserving Russian-language education at the Pushkin Gymnasium in Tartu. It expanded in 2010 as a result of a conference entitled “The Estonian Russian School,” which was organized by members of the councils of Russian language schools in Estonia, LICHR, and a number of Estonian NGOs.²⁶ Oleg Nazmutdinov, Alisa Blintsova, Dmitry Sukhoroslov, and Mstislav Rusakov form the core of the Estonian Russian School.²⁷ Until recently, Blintsova worked at Sputnik Estonia, where she hosted *The Tender Politics* show and had pro-Kremlin activists as guests.

Mstislav Rusakov also serves as the director of the self-styled “human rights advocacy group” Kitez h. This group says it provides legal support for Russian speakers in Estonia in discrimination cases.²⁸ However, upon closer examination, Kitez h’s annual reports reveal that its experience in this area is quite modest and the NGO’s main activity boils down to producing media hype. In 2020, Kitez h filed the legal case at the Tallinn city court against the closure of the Russian-language school in the small Estonian town Keila.²⁹ In 2015, it submitted the Alternative Report for the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination of United Nations.³⁰ In 2016, it obtained membership at the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN).³¹ This handed Kitez h an opportunity to legitimize its agenda during discussions at international forums and by doing so, inflict reputational damage on the Estonian government. Dmitry Sukhoroslov’s criticism of Estonia’s supposedly “discriminatory” language pol-

icy towards the Russian minority at the twelfth session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva and the Annual congress of the FUEN in Bratislava in 2019 illustrate this.³²

The LICHR’s director Aleksey Semenov can also be linked to this group. He was mentioned in KAPO’s 2014 report as an agent of Russian influence in Estonia. In 2017, however, the Tallinn municipal council included him in a list of candidates for an honorable distinction for his cooperation with the Tallinn City Council.³³ The LICHR indeed cooperated with Russia on a number of projects, and also consulted Yana Toom, MEP from the Estonian Centrist Party since 2014, who is known for her pro-Russian statements.³⁴

A part of local activists spreading pro-Kremlin messages comes from the Nochnoy Dozor vigilante group that participated in the Bronze soldier riots in 2007. Prominent members of this group include Dmitry Linter, Maxim Reva, Dimitry Klensky, and Sergey Chaulin. They tend to portray themselves as anti-fascist activists. Linter and Reva left Estonia for Russia but they are still actively spreading anti-Estonian messages via Russian media. Until recently, Linter worked for Russia’s military-historical society Symbolism and Patriotic Education and since 2019 has been serving as a vice head of the administration of the social movement Donetsk Republic.³⁵ Klensky’s articles are often featured by the Kremlin-supported media outlets Baltnews, Pravfond, and Dokole.

Sergey Chaulin, along with Aleksey Esakov and Allan Hantsom are the organizers of the “Immortal Regiment” parades and anti-NATO “Marches for Peace”

25 “There are still many Kremlin minded groups on Facebook,” PropaStop, February 5, 2010, <https://www.propastop.org/eng/2019/02/05/there-are-still-many-kremlin-minded-groups-on-facebook/>.

26 “Tallin: Konferentsiia ‘Russkaia shkola Estonii’ vyzvala nebyvalyi interes”, Baltija, August 28, 2010, <https://baltija.eu/news/read/9140>; “O nas”, Russkaia shkola Estonii, July 17, 2020, http://www.venekool.eu/?page_id=5.

27 “O nas”, Russkaia shkola Estonii.

28 “Mstislav Rusakov: ‘O sudebnom protsesse v zashchitu edinstvennoi russkoi shkoly v Keila’”, Pravfond, June 8, 2020, http://pravfond.ru/?mod_ule=articles&action=view&id=2785.

29 “Mstislav Rusakov: ‘O sudebnom protsesse v zashchitu edinstvennoi russkoi shkoly v Keila.’”

30 “Alternative Report for the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination of United Nations,” Kitez h, August 10, 2015, http://kitez h.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/State_report_Estonia_Kitez h_150810.pdf.

31 “Russian School in Estonia Admitted to European National Minorities Program,” ERR.ee, April 24, 2017, <https://news.err.ee/591732/russian-school-in-estonia-admitted-to-european-national-minorities-program>.

32 “‘Russkaia shkola Estonii’ vystupila na forume OON: nashim detiam grozit assimiatsiia,” Sputnik Estonia, December 2, 2019, <https://ee.sputniknews.ru/education/20191202/18627478/Russkaja-shkola-Estonia-vystupila-forume-UNO-nashim-detjam-grozit-assimilatsiia.html>; <https://ruskiymir.ru/news/258454/>.

33 Alexander Ikonnikov, “Kritiki Semenova ignoriruiut ego proshlye zaslugi pered gosudarstvom,” Sputnik Estonia, April 22, 2017, <https://ee.sputniknews.ru/politics/20170422/5476195/kritiki-semenova-ignorirujut-ego-proshlye-zaslugi-pered-gosudarstvom.html>.

34 “Iana Toom, “ne vizhu, kak protivniki smogut ostanovit ‘Severnyi potok-2’,” Sputnik, November 5, 2019, <https://ee.sputniknews.ru/politics/20191105/18370724/Yana-Toom-ne-vizhu-kak-protivniki-smogut-ostanovit-Severnyy-potok-2.html>; “Iana Toom, ‘v ES zakryvaiut glaza na assimiatsiiu natsmenshinstv v Baltii,’” Sputnik, October 10, 2019, <https://ee.sputniknews.ru/politics/20191010/18111898/toom-baltii-assimilatsiia-nacmenshinstv.html>.

35 Dmitry Durnev, “Drug Putina, ziat Pushilina. Kak Dmitrii Linter — chlen estonskoi ‘ronzovoi chetverki’ — voshel v rukovodstvo DNR,” Delfi, December 30, 2019, <https://rus.delfi.ee/daily/spektr/drug-putina-zyat-pushilina-kak-dmitrij-linter-chlen-estonskoj-bronzovoj-chetverki-voshel-v-rukovodstvo-dnr>.

in Tallinn.³⁶ The “Immortal Regiment” parade is also supported by the Russian Embassy in Estonia and pro-Russian organizations that encourage Estonia’s Russian-speaking youth to participate. This already resulted in the formation of the Victory’s Volunteers in 2019.³⁷

Chaulin³⁸ and Hantsom³⁹ were mentioned in KAPO’s reports as pro-Russian agents. In the 1990s, Hantsom was a member of the neo-fascist organization Russian National Unity, which is banned in Estonia. In the 2000s, he was convicted for hate crimes.⁴⁰ At present, Hantsom is the chief of the pro-Kremlin media outlet *Estlyandskie vedomosti* (rodina.ee), which billed itself as the “Russian language informational portal for those normal sexually straight Christians, who consider Estonia their motherland.”⁴¹

Esakov, Chaulin, and Hantsom are also board members of the Estonian NGO Russian Compatriots in Europe,⁴² which expressed in 2015 its support to a Polish pro-Kremlin far-right activist Mateusz Piskorski.⁴³ Along with the “Immortal Regiment” parades and “Marches for Peace”, Esakov and Hantsom run the NGO Dobrosvet, which sent eighteen trucks of humanitarian assistance to the separatist-controlled territories in the Donbass.⁴⁴ The Night Wolves, a club of bikers close to Putin, contributed to the NGO’s transport costs.⁴⁵ Chaulin and Hantsom

administer several groups on Facebook with about seven hundred members.⁴⁶

The key person who persistently accuses Estonian authorities of supporting the fascist ideology is a CCRCE member and a former director of the Community Hall in the town of Maardu, Andrey Zarenkov. He was a publisher of the *Baltic World* magazine, and he headed the leftist Constitutional Estonian Party (*Konstitutsioonierakond*) in 2006-2007. He was found guilty of corruption in 2014.⁴⁷ He is also a member of the Media Alliance of Russian Societies, a pro-Kremlin NGO registered in Brussels.⁴⁸ Zarenkov also runs the NGO Nazi-Free Estonia. In 2007, together with Vladimir Afanasjev, he organized the festival Vivat Russia. His *Baltic World* magazine ceased to exist in 2017, but later was reincarnated as *The Window to Europe* run by Zarenkov’s cousin Andrey Kondrashov.⁴⁹

In 2018, Rusakov along with Alisa Blintsova, Oleg Nazmutdinov, Dmitry Sukhoroslov, and civil rights activist Sergey Seredenko headed the anti-NATO EULP.⁵⁰ In Rusakov’s words, the EULP maintains anti-NATO and Russia-friendly positions, but it is not controlled by the Russian government.⁵¹ The EULP participated in the 2019 general election and managed to garner only 0.1 percent of the votes, which demonstrated its fringe status.⁵²

36 “V Tallinne vnov proidet ‘Marsh mira,’” *Sputnik*, August 18, 2017, <https://ee.sputniknews.ru/society/20170818/6842333/tallinn-vnov-proidjot-marsh-mir.html>.

37 Alisa Blintsova, “Nezhnaia politika. Chem zaimutsia v Estonii molodye ‘Volontery Pobedy,’” *Sputnik Estonia*, September 27, 2019, https://ee.sputniknews.ru/nezhnaja_politika/20190927/18003215/nezhnaja-politika-volontery-pobedy.html.

38 “KAPO Annual Review,” Keitsepolitseiamet, 2015, https://www.kapo.ee/sites/default/files/public/content_page/Annual%20Review%202015.pdf.

39 “KAPO Annual Review,” Keitsepolitseiamet, 2016, https://www.kapo.ee/sites/default/files/public/content_page/Annual%20Review%202016.pdf.

40 Julia Kalinina, “Znakomtes: Allan Khantsom — obolgannyi russkii patriot?,” *Baltnews*, September 23, 2016, <https://baltnews.ee/obc/20160923/1015202825.html>.

41 Kalinina, “Znakomtes: Allan Khantsom.”

42 “Glavnaia”, Russian Compatriots in Europe, July 17, 2020, <http://ruscompatriots.eu>.

43 “Tallinnski piket v podderzhku polskogo politzeka Mateusha Piskorskogo,” Russian Compatriots in Europe, July 17, 2020, <http://ruscompatriots.eu/12-2016-12-14-22-50-05>.

44 Oleg Leontiev, “Esakov: khotim sdelat «poslednii ryvok» iz Tallinna v Donbass,” *Sputnik Estonia*, June 28, 2018, https://m.ee.sputniknews.ru/ussian_news/20180628/11389432/Esakov-Dobrosvet-Donbass-Tallinn-Estonia.html

45 Oleg Leontiev, “Esakov: khotim sdelat ‘poslednii ryvok’ iz Tallinna v Donbass;” Oleg Leontiev, “Tallinnskie volontery ‘podnapriaglis’ i opravili eshche odnu furu v Donbass,” *Sputnik*, July 4, 2018, https://ee.sputniknews.ru/estonian_news/20180704/11486614/Tallinn-Dobrosvet-Donbass-gumanitarnaja-pomoshch.html.

46 “Kremlin minded groups on Facebook.”

47 Siim Lõvi, “NKO Altmedia Aleksandra Kornilova priznana vinovnoi v poddelke dokumentov,” ERR.ee, June 18, 2018, <https://rus.err.ee/840298/nko-altmedia-aleksandra-kornilova-priznana-vinovnoj-v-poddelke-dokumentov>; “V Estonii zaderzhan predsedatel pravleniia organizatsii ‘Estoniia bez natsizma,’” *Kommersant*, January 5, 2014, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2380364>.

48 “O nas”, International Association of Independent Internet Journalists and Bloggers (MARC), July 17, 2020, <https://marcnews.com>.

49 “Russia-related networks in Estonia Part 4,” PropaStop, July 6, 2018, <https://www.propastop.org/eng/2018/07/06/ussia-related-networks-in-estonia-part-4/>.

50 “Glavnaia”, Estonian United Left Party, July 17, 2020, <https://estleft.ee>.

51 Sofia Boborenko, “‘Podderzhivaiushchimi’ chlenami levyykh v Estonii mogut byt seropasporniki i grazhdane RF,” *Viru Prospect*, November 19, 2018, <https://prospekt.ee/ljudi-i-zizn/11838-podderzhivayuschimi-chlenami-levyyh-v-estonii-mogut-byt-seropasporniki-i-grazhdane-rf.html>.

52 “V tretem kvartale 2019 goda OLPE ostalas bez pozhertvovaniy,” *RusPostimees*, October 20, 2019, <https://rus.postimees.ee/6806130/v-tretem-kvartale-2019-goda-olpe-ostalas-bez-pozhertvovaniy>.

MEDIA HANDLERS

This group consists of journalists working for Russian state-funded media outlets. One of the key figures is Alexander Kornilov, a former chief of the Kremlin media outlet Baltnews, and a CCRCE member. In 2018, Kornilov was found guilty of document forgery.⁵³ He no longer runs Baltnews, which the Russian government's news agency *Rossiya Segodnya* recognized as its affiliate. Kornilov currently manages Baltija.eu, an Estonian NGO that partners with *Rosstrudnichestvo*, *Russkiy Mir* Foundation, and CCRCE and produces a pro-Kremlin news stream. Along with Zarenkov, he is a member of the pro-Kremlin International Association of Independent Journalists and Bloggers (the Media Alliance of Russian Societies—MARS).

The international Media Club—Impressum—was established in 2008 in Tallinn by Galina Sapozhnikova and Igor Teterin, two journalists working for Russian tabloid *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. Many speakers hosted by Impressum are frequently mentioned in the KAPO's reports.

Over the years, the list of guest speakers of Impressum have included (now late) Italian journalist and former politician Giulietto Chiesa, who frequently participated in the events supported by the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation and by Impressum, including presentations of his books *Zero* and *Latvian Candidate* in Tallinn in 2008 and 2011. He was a member of Kremlin-supported organizations *Mir bez Natsizma* (World Without Nazism) and the *Izorsk Club*. Due to his justification of Russia's military aggression against Georgia, Estonia banned his entry for a month in 2014. Chiesa was also known for supporting the annexation of Crimea and separatist activities in the Donbass.⁵⁴

Impressum also hosted Mateusz Piskorski, a founder of the far-right Polish party *Zmiana* (Change), who was arrested in Poland in 2016 and who spent three years in prison.⁵⁵ Other guests were Peter Schulze, Alexander Rahr, and Thomas Fasbender—all three actively cooper-

ate with the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, a think tank established in Berlin in 2016 by Putin's confidant and former CEO of the Russian Railways Vladimir Yakunin.⁵⁶ Rahr also holds a position as a senior adviser for Gazprom in Europe; he comments on Russian foreign and domestic policy, including his latest support for the constitutional referendum.⁵⁷ In August 2019, Rahr delivered a speech on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, repeating many elements of the Kremlin's perspective that justifies the collusion between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. Other explicitly pro-Kremlin figures hosted by Impressum since 2010 included Andranik Migranyan, Mikhail Delyagin, Fyodor Lukyanov, Vladimir Medinsky, Maksim Shevchenko, Sergey Mikheev, the scholar Valery Tishkov, and political analyst Vladimir Zharikhin—the latter two were banned from entering Estonia in 2014 for their pro-Russian positions, as were the writers Sergei Shargunov and Zakhar Prilepin. In 2019, the website of Impressum featured an op-ed by Prilepin, who fought on the side of the pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, on the 1934 Polish-German Pact, which he described as an anti-Soviet agreement.⁵⁸ This demonstrates very typically the Russian government's historical revisionism cloaked in a deliberately aggressive and incendiary style. Sapozhnikova successfully reproduced Impressum in Moldova's capital Chişinău under the name of Format A-3.

53 Siim Lõvi, "NKO Altmedia Aleksandra Kornilova priznana vinovnoi v poddelke dokumentov," ERR.ee, June 18, 2018, <https://rus.err.ee/840298/nko-altmedia-aleksandra-kornilova-priznana-vinovnoj-v-poddelke-dokumentov>.

54 Anton Shekhovtsov, "Foreign Observation of the Illegitimate 'General Elections' in the Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic in November 2018," European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE), 2018, 13.

55 Łukasz Woźnicki, "Po blisko trzech latach Mateusz Piskorski wychodzi z aresztu," *Wyborcza*, June 30, 2020, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,24787888,po-blisko-trzech-latach-mateusz-piskorski-wychodzi-z-aresztu.html>.

56 Nikita Jolkver, "What You Need to Know about a Putin Supporter's Think Tank in Berlin," *DW*, September 18, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/what-you-need-to-know-about-a-putin-supporters-think-tank-in-berlin/a-45548703>.

57 Vladimir Emelyanenko, "Konstitucionnoe sotvorchestvo," *Russkiy Mir*, June 23, 2020, <https://russkiymir.ru/publications/274034/>.

58 Zakhar Prilepin, "Zakhar Prilepin: Zapomnite deti, nichego my s nemtcami ne delilil," Impressum International Media Club, December 14, 2019, <http://www.impressum-club.eu/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01 articleid=2095&cntnt01 origid=53&cntnt01 returnid=163>.

THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY IN ESTONIA: POINTS OF INFILTRATION

What is the impact of the described activities on Estonia's Russian-speaking minority? How successful are these efforts in spreading pro-Kremlin messages?

KAPO claims that the impact has been negligible so far.⁵⁹ More than modest results of the EULP in the 2019 parliamentary elections support this assertion as does the increasing number of Russian-speaking residents of Estonia who obtain Estonian citizenship. As of 2020, 85 percent of Russian-speaking residents of Estonia held Estonian citizenship. Only 6 percent and 5 percent of Estonia's population hold Russian and unspecified citizenships (or "alien passports") respectively.⁶⁰

However, public opinion surveys conducted by the National Center of Defense and Security Awareness (NCDSA) in 2019⁶¹ and the Estonian Ministry of Defense in 2018,⁶² demonstrate certain axiological cleavages between Estonian and Russian communities on the issues of security, external threats, and geopolitical perspectives that could demonstrate possible ways of infiltration of Russia's malign influence into the Russian-speaking community in Estonia.

According to the results of the survey conducted in October 2018, Estonians tend to be at least four times more anxious about Russia's current policies as "attempts to regain influence" than Russian-speaking residents of Estonia: 49 percent of Estonians and 12 percent of Russian speakers responded "definitely so."⁶³ Similar divergence of views is observed with regard to the attitude towards Estonia's NATO membership: 57 percent of Estonian passport holders support it, whereas only 20 percent of Russian passport holders do while 60 percent of them are against.⁶⁴ Thus, 70 percent of Estonians think



Infographics credit: Author

that NATO membership represents the key security guarantee for Estonia. In contrast, 46 percent of Russians believe that cooperation and good relations with Russia are the best security guarantee for Estonia.⁶⁵

According to the same survey, 33 percent of ethnic Estonians and 30 percent of ethnic Russians believe that Estonia would be attacked ("probably yes"). The more confident, "yes sure" answer was chosen by 32 percent of Estonians and only 18 percent of Russian speakers. The willingness to defend Estonia was expressed by 79 percent of ethnic Estonians and 71 percent of ethnic Russians. In the 15–34 age cohort, 76 percent of ethnic Estonians were willing to defend the country from attack versus 67 percent of ethnic Russians. Interestingly, in the 35–49 group, more ethnic Russians (96 percent) were willing to defend Estonia than ethnic Estonians (88 percent).⁶⁶

The survey of 2,800 Russian speakers aged 16–20 living in Estonia conducted by NCDSA in 2019 partially confirms the KAPO's assessment that the impact of Russian influence could be effective via social media platforms. The survey design was focused on gauging this age cohort's vulnerability to the influence of hostile information and its resilience to it. The composition of the surveyed participants was as follows: 47 percent of respondents were residents of Tallinn, 37 percent lived

59 "KAPO Annual Review," 2019.

60 "Population Figure and Composition", Estonian statistics, June 16, 2020, http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/1_Databas/Population/01Population_indicators_and_composition/04Population_figure_and_composition/04Population_figure_and_composition.asp.

61 Dmitri Teperik and Grigori Senkiv, "Primary Worldview Characteristics of Russian-Speaking Young Adults in Estonia," National Centre of Defence and Security Awareness, Tallinn, April 2019, https://issuu.com/estonianguards/docs/ncdsa_research_2018_russian-speakin.

62 Juhan Kivirähk, "Avalik Arvamus ja Riigikaitse," Ministry of Defense, Tallinn, Autumn 2019, https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee//sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/avalik_arvamus_ja_riigikaitse_oktoober_2018.pdf.

63 Kivirähk, "Avalik Arvamus ja Riigikaitse," 24.

64 Kivirähk, "Avalik Arvamus ja Riigikaitse," 59.

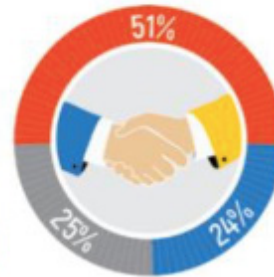
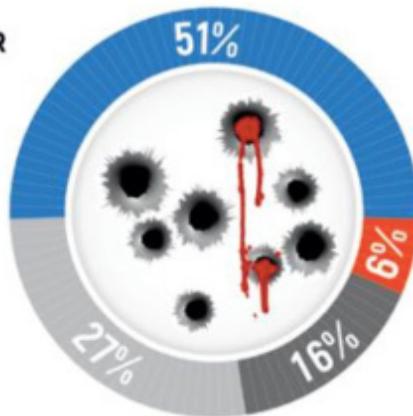
65 Kivirähk, "Avalik Arvamus ja Riigikaitse," 29.

66 Kivirähk, "Avalik Arvamus ja Riigikaitse," 33.

ESTONIA'S RUSSIAN-SPEAKING YOUNG ADULTS AND CURRENT CONFLICTS

WHO IS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WAR IN UKRAINE?

- UKRAINE ITSELF
- RUSSIA
- BOTH SIDES EQUALLY
- DIFFICULT TO SAY



SHOULD WE ACCEPT REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE IF THE WAR THERE ESCALATES?

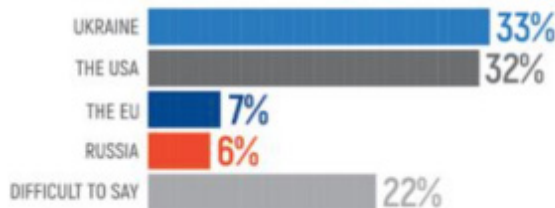
- NO
- YES
- NO OPINION



WHAT SHOULD BE DONE ABOUT SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA?

- EASE
- LEAVE AS THEY ARE
- TIGHTEN
- DIFFICULT TO SAY

WHO IS MOST TO BLAME FOR STARTING THE WAR?



RUSSIA COULD BE A REAL THREAT TO ESTONIAN SECURITY



Source: Teperik and Senkiv 2019, p. 19

in Narva, and 16 percent resided in other towns. In addition, 8.3 percent of survey participants were military conscripts,⁶⁷ 83 percent held Estonian citizenship, 10 percent were Russian citizens, and 7 percent had “alien” citizenship.⁶⁸ Among the respondents, 47 percent have associated citizenship either with practical issues or even just an identification document (passport), and 46 percent have granted it symbolic and patriotic values.⁶⁹

The survey results revealed that 66 percent thought that maintaining good neighborly relations and cooperation with Russia represents the key guarantee of Estonia’s security. This was followed by 47 percent, who considered the cooperation between the Baltic states to be the key safeguard of Estonia’s security and 43 percent believed it was the EU membership.⁷⁰ When asked about whether the EU was a positive factor for Estonia, 38 percent had difficulty answering this question while 25 percent perceived it equally positively and negatively.⁷¹ And yet 41 percent planned to go to other EU countries

for study and work while 34 percent wanted to stay and work and live in Estonia.⁷² Importantly, less than half (45 percent) of the respondents said that they would participate in armed resistance were Estonia to be attacked by an unspecified state.⁷³

According to the survey by the Estonian Ministry of Defense in 2018, attitudes towards security issues among Russian-speaking adults in Estonia are the result of the influence of Russian media on them. Respondents, who watch Estonian TV in Estonian at least once a week, hold a more positive view of Estonia’s NATO membership than those who watch Russian TV at least once a week. The most popular TV channels for the Russian-speaking community are *Pervõi Baltiiski Kanal—PBK* (14.3 percent), *RTR Planeta* (13.0 percent) and *NTV Mir* (8.7 percent)—all are funded by the Russian government.⁷⁴ The survey also showed that watching the Estonian Russian-language TV channel ETV+ has no impact on attitudes

67 Teperik and Senkiv, “Russian-Speaking Young Adults in Estonia,” 17.

68 Teperik and Senkiv, “Russian-Speaking Young Adults in Estonia,” 17.

69 Teperik and Senkiv, “Russian-Speaking Young Adults in Estonia,” 17.

70 Teperik and Senkiv, “Russian-Speaking Young Adults in Estonia,” 20.

71 Teperik and Senkiv, “Russian-Speaking Young Adults in Estonia,” 20.

72 Teperik and Senkiv, “Russian-Speaking Young Adults in Estonia,” 17.

73 Teperik and Senkiv, “Russian-Speaking Young Adults in Estonia,” 21.

74 Teleauditooriumi ülevaade jaanuarikuus 2019, Kantar Emor. TV Audience Measurement Survey, December 2, 2019; <https://www.kantaremor.ee/pressiteated/teleauditooriumi-ulevaade-jaanuarikuus-2019/>.

towards NATO.⁷⁵

ETV+ is not popular among young Russian speakers either: 61 percent do not watch ETV+ at all; 10 percent watch it regularly.⁷⁶ The Russian social platform VK is the most popular source of information and entertainment for young Russian speakers.⁷⁷

The perception of the conflict in eastern Ukraine reflects the high degree of vulnerability of this segment of Estonia's population to Russian government-sponsored disinformation. The survey results demonstrate that 84 percent of young Russian speakers in Estonia do not believe Russia could become a threat to Estonia, 61 percent support relaxation of sanctions against Russia and 51 percent say Ukraine is responsible for the war in the Donbass (only 6 percent blame Russia).⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

Strong political will, lack of economic dependence on Russia, and a high degree of transparency of Estonian authorities conspire to limit Russia's malign influence in Estonia. The EU's gravitation provides an effective antidote too since Estonia's Russian speakers and especially youth find the perspective of resettlement in Russia unattractive. Russian-speaking youth feel sentimental attachment towards the language and culture of their historical homeland, which explains why they do not feel threatened by Russia. However, this factor alone does not necessarily make them all a potential "fifth column." At the same time, the likelihood of recruitment to become prospective agents increases with participation in the educational exchange programs curated by Russian state institutions, especially if they take place in Russia.

The above-mentioned surveys revealed that Estonian Russians overwhelmingly prefer Russian information and entertainment sources, including the social media platform VK, which is closely monitored by Russia's Federal Security Service.⁷⁹ Another survey conducted by the Estonian Ministry of Defense in May 2018 demonstrated that there were significantly more pro-Kremlin posts on Facebook in comparison to VK: 67,000 posts versus

48,000 respectively.⁸⁰ This fact is definitely alarming with regard to possible ways that Russian malign influence can affect Estonian-Russians.

Parents contribute to the formation of geopolitical attitudes of Estonia's Russian-speaking youth and the older generation prefers to watch Russian TV channels (all three mentioned in the previous section are propagandistic) rather than Estonia's Russian-language TV programming, which should be overhauled to become more appealing to them.

The closure of Sputnik Estonia in December 2019 is likely to have a mitigating impact on Russia's malign influence in Estonia. However, the *Pervõi Baltiiski Kanal—PBK*, the main Kremlin media source in Estonia—continues to broadcast. Estonian national media, such as ERR news, can also inadvertently spread Russia's malign influence when it borrows content from the Facebook groups that carry pro-Kremlin messages.⁸¹ Estonian authorities should redouble efforts to counter Russian media influence on the Russian-speaking minority.

75 Kivirähk, "Avalik Arvamus ja Riigikaitse," 76.

76 Teperik and Senkiv, "Russian-Speaking Young Adults in Estonia," 19.

77 Teperik and Senkiv, "Russian-Speaking Young Adults in Estonia," 19.

78 Kivirähk, "Avalik Arvamus ja Riigikaitse," 23.

79 Oleg Kharseev, "'VKontakte' s gosudarstvom Sotcialnaia set raskryla pravila raboty s silovikami," *Kommersant*, October 8, 2018, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3764327>.

80 Dmitry Teperik, Grigori Senkiv, "Zamery Kremlevskoi propagandy v youtube," National Centre of Defence and Security Awareness, January 26, 2019, <https://kaitseen.ee/research/zamery-kremlyovskoj-propagandy-v-youtube>.

81 "ERR shares its news in pro-Kremlin groups," PropaStop, June 9, 2020, <https://www.propastop.org/eng/2020/06/09/err-shares-its-news-in-pro-kremlin-groups/>.



RUSSIAN NEGLIGENT INFLUENCE ON NORTH MACEDONIAN POLITICS

Alisa Volkova

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Skopje, North Macedonia, is shown in the lower half of the cover. The city features a mix of modern and classical architecture, with a prominent building with columns in the foreground. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky. The word "POLITICS" is overlaid in large, white, semi-transparent letters across the bottom of the image.

POLITICS



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North Macedonia, a Balkan country of around two million people and formerly part of Yugoslavia, has certain historical ties with Russia that developed over the last decades into a great variety of a malign Russian influence. Indeed, if one looks closely into the Macedonian political life since its independence, they will find all kinds of soft coercion instruments used by Russian politicians, diplomats, and businessmen in order to destabilize the society and keep North Macedonia away from the West, in particular from joining the EU and NATO. But despite all the efforts from the Russian side, in March 2020, North Macedonia finally became the thirtieth member of NATO. The country is also expected to join the EU in the near future.

In this article, we analyze a variety of methods used by Russian-affiliated forces to influence public opinion and politics in the country:

- Financing local news outlets and online groups to spread pro-Kremlin narratives and carry out disinformation campaigns in newspapers, Internet, and social media. During the campaigning period before the referendum on the name change from Macedonia to North Macedonia around forty new pages were popping up on Facebook to encourage people to boycott the referendum. According to Western diplomats, this campaign had Russian roots.¹
- Financing football and motorcycle clubs and nationalistic groups, as well as their participation in protests to support Kremlin's interests.

1 Marc Santora, Julian E. Barnes, "In the Balkans, Russia and the West Fight a Disinformation-Age Battle," *New York Times*, September 16, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/16/world/europe/macedonia-referendum-russia-nato.html>.

- Increasing cultural presence, for example pushing an idea of pan-Slavic identity and shared Orthodox Christian faith. Russia's Embassy stimulated the creation of around thirty Macedonia-Russia friendship associations, a Russian cultural centre in Skopje, and sponsored construction of Russian-style Orthodox churches.
- Establishing honorary consulates in Bitola and Ohrid, which can be seen as "intelligence bases" and influence centers.
- High-level political support for pro-Russian politicians. During the political crisis in 2015, Russia supported the former prime minister Nikola Gruevski over the opposition; Vladimir Putin then said that "Russia supports Macedonia's leaders and their efforts to normalize the political situation in the country."² The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs then issued a series of statements in support of Gruevski and his government and accused the EU and US for their role in orchestrating the oppositional protests in 2015–2016 using the methods of a "coloured revolutions." Another example is Putin's statement during the meeting with Gjorge Ivanov, the former president of Macedonia, that the Slavic alphabet and literature came to Russia from Macedonian soil.³
- Use of intelligence agents to recruit local former and current military officers and officers of the Interior Ministry to oppose the process of joining NATO.

2 Tomáš Vlček, Martin Jirušek, *Russian Oil Enterprises in Europe: Investments and Regional Influence* (Cham: Springer, 2019).

3 Aubrey Belford et al., "Leaked Documents Show Russian, Serbian Attempts to Meddle in Macedonia," *Investigative Reporting Lab Macedonia*, November 11, 2018, <https://irl.mk/leaked-documents-show-russian-serbian-attempts-to-meddle-in-macedonia/>.

According to the leaked documents,⁴ three agents from Russia's foreign intelligence service (SVR) were based in Skopje and overseen by the SVR's sister station in the Serbian capital, Belgrade. Besides that, the Russian Embassy in Macedonia also had four spies from Russia's military intelligence agency (GRU), with their activities coordinated from the GRU's base in Sofia, Bulgaria.

- Deepening energy dependency.
- Spreading corrupt ways of doing business and collaboration between business, politicians, and the church.

Looking at a bigger picture, Russia is using its usual instruments to penetrate the economy and politics in Macedonia spreading its malign way of doing business, but the volume of resources, people involved, and lack of significant economic interest show that this Balkan country does not seem to be a priority for Russia for maintaining its influence.

OVERVIEW OF MACEDONIA-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Macedonia was one of the first four countries that gained independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Russia was one of the first countries—and the first among major powers—that recognized Macedonia as an independent country while Western countries were hesitant and considering a complaint from Greece over the name. Greeks did not want to recognize a new country with the name identical to the name of their province—Macedonia—as it might cause a confusion and claims for the Greek province.

During the first years of independence economic ties between Macedonia and Russia have developed. Trade between the two countries grew significantly after the introduction of international economic sanctions to Yugoslavia in 1992. It is likely that during the sanctions period, Russia used Macedonia as a transfer for trade with Yugoslavia—it explains the rapid growth of trade volume. After lifting the sanctions, bilateral trade with Macedonia fell again—from USD 140 million in 1995 to USD 42 million in 1997.

Later, the trade volume was growing; one of the

reasons was an increase in oil prices in early 2000s as most of the Russian export to Macedonia was oil, gas, and metals. Though, it dropped significantly in 2012, when Macedonia changed its oil supplier. The main Macedonian export products to Russia are pharmaceuticals and agricultural products. After 2014, when Macedonia did not join the EU sanctions against Russia, it managed to increase its agricultural export to Russia thanks to the Russian counter-sanctions against the EU.

Between 2006 and 2016 Russia and North Macedonia had close political relations. Moscow supported the ruling right-wing coalition the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and its leader, then prime minister Nikola Gruevski. At that time Russian business, with its tradition of getting benefits from close ties with politicians, had grown in Macedonia, and there appeared plans to include Macedonia in the South Stream pipeline project and later in the Turkish Stream project. Russia was trying to draw Macedonia away from Western influence, interfering in its plans to join NATO and the EU.

But after a serious political crisis in 2015 and unsuccessful—for Nikola Gruevski—elections in 2016, new political relations between the two countries became lame. New Prime Minister Zoran Zaev turned to the West and accused Russia of interference in their internal affairs. After joining NATO in 2020, political relations between the two countries remain tense.

RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE AGAINST NORTH MACEDONIA JOINING NATO

In 2017, leaked documents from the Macedonian counterintelligence obtained by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and its partners in the region opened up a series of Russian activities in the country opposing the NATO expansion and preventing North Macedonia from joining the alliance and the EU. Coincidentally it started in 2008 when Macedonian efforts to join NATO were blocked by Greece, which vetoed its bid based on an ongoing dispute over the use of the country's name.

Since then Macedonia had been “undergoing strong subversive propaganda and intelligence activity implemented through the Embassy of the Russian Federation,” as it was stated by Vladimir Atanasovski, director of the Macedonian Administration for Security and

4 Luke Harding, Aubrey Belford, Saska Cvetkovska. “Russia Actively Stoking Discord in Macedonia since 2008, Intel Files Say,” *Guardian* (US edition). June 4, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/04/russia-actively-stoking-discord-in-macedonia-since-2008-intel-files-say-leak-kremlin-balkan-nato-west-influence>.

Counterintelligence.⁵

It was also discovered that Moscow was prepared to support the creation of a neutral military zone in the Balkans, the so-called Zone B4, which would have included Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. Russian ambassador to Macedonia Oleg Shcherbak proposed it to the country's top foreign ministry official, Nenad Kolev, at the meeting in April 2017 and justified it as an opportunity for these countries to save money, 2 percent of the budget that would otherwise have to be paid if they join NATO.

As an alternative to the EU, Russians offered Macedonia membership in the Eurasian Economic Union, which includes Russian Federation, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Kazakhstan. Shcherbak also urged Macedonian officials that the countries' economic and diplomatic ties could be adversely affected if officials did not start supporting Kremlin policies, according to the leaked document.⁶

Activities of the Russian intelligence were implemented through the Russian Embassy in Skopje by three agents of Russia's SVR, four agents of the GRU, local representatives of state news agency TASS and a representative of Rossotrudnichestvo, a Russian government aid agency.

It was reported in the documents that Russian agents tried to "recruit former and current members of Macedonia's army and interior ministry in order to create a critical mass of military trained persons, which at a certain political moment or situation are to be used for accomplishing Russian interests."⁷ The document did not mention whether these attempts had been successful. Russian agents also offered funds to Macedonian media outlets, including the ones of Albanian minority, in order to spread pro-Russian information and disinformation.

BIG FIGHT FOR THE NAME

The dispute between Greece and North Macedonia over the name "Macedonia" and its territory had been in place for centuries. After gaining independence, this argument led to a Greek veto on Macedonia joining NATO and the EU. Finally, in 2018 an agreement had been reached: Macedonia became North Macedonia

and Greece no longer opposed North Macedonia joining international institutions. But it was not only Greece that was concerned about the Macedonian name. Russia turned out to be extremely supportive of Macedonian nationalism and used its usual corruptive and disinformation tools to help them disrupt the referendum for the name change in 2018.

Journalists of the Investigative Reporting Lab Macedonia found out that the Russian billionaire living in Greece, Ivan Savvidi, transferred at least EUR 300,000 to individuals who opposed the renaming of Macedonia during the referendum campaign.⁸ According to their investigation, these payments were made to over a dozen Macedonian politicians from various parties, members of recently founded radical nationalist organizations, and soccer hooligans from the Vardar club who organized and participated in the riots to destabilize the society.

Ivan Savvidi has spent most of his life in Russia in Rostov-on-Don, built a diversified business empire, and from 2003 to 2011 was a member of the State Duma as a part of the United Russia faction. In 2012 he obtained Greek citizenship, moved to Greece, and started expanding his business there.

Leaked documents showed that Savvidi transferred the funds to Macedonia in a series of payments, including cash carried over the border by hand. The recipients included a group of football hooligans associated with the Komiti fan club of the Vardar football team. The Vardar football club is owned by a Russian millionaire and an honorary consul of Russia in Macedonia, Sergey Samsonenko, who previously lived in Rostov-on-Don like Savvidi. It is also well known for its ties to politics, especially the VMRO-DPMNE party, and it has been used in the past to stir up political violence.

It was later found that Vardar football fans took part in the violent protests in Skopje in June 2018, in which ten of them were arrested. One of the participating hooligans confirmed to reporters that their fan club had received cash from Savvidi. American intelligence officials also found proof that Russia has recruited local football fan clubs and motorcycle gangs to oppose the name change.⁹

Another driver of the protests against the name change that was also supported by Russia was a small right-wing political party "United Macedonia," which

5 Belford et al., "Leaked Documents."

6 Saska Cvetkovska et al., "Serbian-Russian spy games for 'Macedonian scenario,'" [in Macedonian], Investigative Reporting Lab Macedonia, March 31, 2020, <https://irl.mk/srpsko-ruski-shpionski-igriza-makedo/>.

7 Belford et al., "Leaked Documents."

8 Cvetkovska et al., "Russian Businessman Behind Unrest."

9 Marc Santora, Julian E. Barnes, "In the Balkans, Russia and the West Fight a Disinformation-Age Battle," *New York Times*, September 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/16/world/europe/macedonia-referendum-russia-nato.html>.

has changed its name from “Popular Movement for Macedonia” in early 2018 to be similar to “United Russia.” Alexander Dugin, a Russian far-right ideologist of Neo-Eurasianism, and his colleagues attended congresses and meetings of “United Macedonia” to, according to some news outlets, “teach how to gain power.”¹⁰ The party took a strong pro-Russian position against Macedonia joining the EU and NATO, and its leader, Janko Bachev, was on the frontlines of the protests against the name change, holding the Russian flag.¹¹

Besides stimulation of violent protests, Russian influence was also found in online activities around the referendum. The research institute Societas Civilis investigated Russian-backed online groups that spread false articles and Facebook posts. According to their research, false stories were created to raise social divisions and tension, bring down participation in the referendum, and amplify public anger. Around forty new pages were popping up each day on Facebook and Twitter to encourage people to boycott the referendum. They were also exploiting the ethnic issue with the question “Are you going to let Albanians change your name?” The way of presenting the information on these websites was similar to Russian interference footprints in elections in other countries.

Marko Troshanovski, a researcher at Societas Civilis, described one example of such false stories: “There is a famous Balkan singer, and they took an old picture of her beaten and bruised in a domestic violence incident, and tried to claim she was beaten by police at the protest.”¹² After the protests and a wave of fake news Zoran Zaev, then the prime minister of Macedonia, blamed Moscow of interference and expelled a Russian diplomat.

Analyzing Russian influence, Western officials identified that Moscow’s primary goal was to decrease turnout. And it was reached—the turnout at the referendum was 37 percent with 94 percent of votes in favour of the name change and joining NATO and the EU. But because the referendum was nonbinding, a low turnout did not stop the process—the decision was transferred back to the Parliament, where it gained two thirds of

MPs in favor of the deal. It allowed the country to overcome the Greek veto in NATO and join the alliance in March 2020.

EFFORTS TO CONTROL THE ENERGY SECTOR

Macedonia is highly dependent on fossil fuels—around 80 percent of the primary energy in the country comes from coal and oil. However, natural gas does not occupy a large share as the gasification system in the country is not well developed. All gas for Macedonia comes from Russia though pipelines controlled by Russia. Until January 2020 there was only one gas route—a TransBalkan pipeline. Using its monopoly position, Gazprom charges Macedonia one of the highest gas prices in Europe and tied it up with inflexible take-or-pay contracts.

In 2013, the Macedonian government signed an agreement with Russia on including Macedonia in the South Stream project, hoping that it will facilitate the gasification process inside the country.¹³ After Russian annexation of Crimea and following EU sanctions against Russian companies, the project was terminated and replaced by the Turkish Stream.

Meanwhile Gazprom maintained its interest in supplying more gas to North Macedonia. In 2015, Stroytransgaz, owned by Gennady Timchenko, a Russian oligarch sanctioned by the EU and US, began construction of a pipeline network in the country.¹⁴ The cost of the first section (around USD 75.7 million) were largely covered by Russia’s repayment to Macedonia of the debt it had inherited from the Soviet Union. In January 2020 part of the Turkish Stream pipeline opened its operations in the North Macedonia. The amount of gas imported to North Macedonia is expected to grow.

Russia also controls one of few power plants in North Macedonia. The gas-fired Combined Cycle Cogeneration power plant near Skopje TE-TO is largely owned by TKG-2 company, which is now controlled by Dmitry Pyatkin,¹⁵ a former colleague of Victor Vekselberg, a Russian oligarch close to Kremlin.

10 Ognen Chancharevic, “Russian advisor teaches ‘United Macedonia’ on how to take power,” [in Macedonian], VOA News, May 30, 2018, <https://mk.voanews.com/a/4416074.html>.

11 “Leader of the United Macedonia Bachev Holding Russian Flag Climbed to a Police Car at the Protest in front of the Parliament,” [in Macedonian], SDK, June 17, 2018, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/liderot-na-edinstvena-makedonija-bachev-rusko-zname-se-kachi-na-politsiska-kola-na-prototot-pred-sobranie/>.

12 Santora, Barnes, “In the Balkans.”

13 “Stavresky: Joining South Stream Will Accelerate Macedonia’s Gasification,” [in Macedonian], Government of North Macedonia (website), July 25, 2013, <https://vlada.mk/node/6956>.

14 “JSC Stroytransgaz Has Completed the Construction of a Gas Pipeline in Macedonia,” Stroytransgaz (website), August 1, 2016, <http://www.stroytransgaz.ru/en/pressroom/news/2016/08/6653/>.

15 “SOVLINK Increased Stake in TGC-2 to 59.80% from 32.80%,” AK&M, April 13, 2020, <http://www.akm.ru/eng/news/2020/april/13/ns6549135.htm>.

For oil, Macedonia is dependent on imports from Thessaloniki port in Greece, which goes to the OKTA refinery in Skopje. The refinery OKTA was purchased by the Greek company Hellenic Petroleum in 1999. Before 2012, Macedonia imported most of its crude oil from Russia, but then Hellenic Petroleum changed the supplier and oil imports from Russia dropped from USD 497 million in 2012 to almost zero. Lukoil and Gazprom attempted to purchase Hellenic Petroleum when the Greek government considered selling its shares but did not succeed in it.

One of the biggest companies in Macedonia is an oil and oil products distributor Makpetrol. In 2016, Alexander Kaplan and Alexander Smuzikov, who previously worked in and with TNK-BP, a venture between Russian oligarchs and British Petroleum that was sold in 2013 to Rosneft, tried to purchase Makpetrol for EUR 47 million.¹⁶ For that they founded Balkan Petroleum Holding Limited, a British-Cypriot company that can be traced to the British Virgin Islands. It was registered in the UK with a capital of just EUR 1000 and few months later placed a bid for Makpetrol. But the deal was suspended in July 2017 by the Macedonian Security and Exchange Commission, and in 2018 the court confirmed its invalidity. Shortly after that Balkan Petroleum Holding Limited was dissolved.¹⁷

According to the analysis of the Center for the Study of Democracy,¹⁸ if a Russia-linked company were to take over Makpetrol, Russia would have a virtual monopoly on the country's oil and gas market, which would significantly expand the Russian economic footprint multi-fold. The strategic goal of Russia to control the energy sector in North Macedonia was also confirmed in the leaked diplomatic documents. It was stated that "Russian foreign policy is in tight correlation with an energy strategy whose goal is to control strategic energy resources through partnership with the Balkan countries and to place Macedonia in a state of exclusive dependency on Russian policy."¹⁹

16 "Russian Investors Stalled in Bid for Macedonia's Makpetrol," Reuters, November 2, 2016, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/makpetrol-ma-investors/russian-investors-stalled-in-bid-for-macedonias-makpetrol-idUKL8N1D34T2>.

17 "Balkan Petroleum Holding Limited," Companies House (website), <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/10204965/filing-history>.

18 "Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint in Macedonia," Center for the Study of Democracy, January 13, 2018, <http://old.csd.bg/fileSrc.php?id=23329>.

19 Belford et al., "Leaked Documents."

A RUSSIAN OLIGARCH FROM ROSTOV-ON-DON IS THE RICHEST MACEDONIAN

When Russian businessmen go to other countries it is likely they go for the purpose of supporting certain political forces and promoting Moscow's interests by attracting local politicians with financial or other kinds of benefits. Rostov-on-Don's businessman Sergey Samsonenko, entering the North Macedonian business circles in 2006, was not an exception. He arrived in the country a few months after Nikola Gruevski became prime minister.

According to the Center for the Study of Democracy,²⁰ Samsonenko had close links with Gruevski's party VMRO-DPMNE, which then gained a majority in the Parliament. In particular, Aleksandar Pandov, a VMRO-DPMNE Member of Parliament from 1998 to 2002, worked as a manager in Samsonenko's BetCity gambling business until 2011. Another example of his open support of Gruevski was that Samsonenko took part in a pre-election music video published by VMRO-DPMNE in 2014.

Samsonenko's investments first were concentrated in sports and gambling. He bought the football and handball clubs Vardar; fans of this club were later used to heat up the protests. But his most profitable business—construction—jumped up due to his religious beliefs and good connections to the ruling party officials. Apparently the VMRO-DPMNE, a right-wing populist party, combined a new Macedonian nationalism with an Orthodox Christian identity, which was in line with Russian interests. According to the research of the Investigative Reporting Lab Macedonia,²¹ Samsonenko donated EUR 1.8 million to the Macedonian Orthodox Church for the construction of a Russian-style church in the Aerodrom municipality close to the center of Skopje. In October 2014, he established a company named Balkan Group Construction with capital of EUR 387 thousand, and after just five months the company transferred EUR 1.8 million as a donation.

Soon after this generous donation, the municipality (at that time governed by a VMRO-DPMNE mayor) granted a 35-year concession to Samsonenko's new

20 "Assessing Russia's Economic Footprint."

21 Maja Jovanovska, "Do You Want to Get State-Sponsored Deals? First Donate to the Macedonian Orthodox Church," [in Macedonian], Investigative Reporting Lab Macedonia, March 31, 2020., <https://irl.mk/sakate-da-vi-trgne-so-drzhavno-sponzorirani-zdelki-prvo-donirate-vo-mpts/>.

company to rebuild and then operate a public “Sports Center Jane Sandanski” through a procedure that was neither competitive nor transparent. In addition to the sports center, Samsonenko built a hotel there named “Russia.” The municipality facilitated the concession by changing zoning laws, in addition to waiving communal taxes associated with the construction of the sports center, the hotel, and the church.

Among the guests of the ceremony for the first stone in the construction of the sports center were ex-Prime Minister Gruevski, ex-head of the secret services Sašo Mijalkov, ex-mayor of the Aerodrom municipality Ivitsa Konevski, and other representatives of the then political elite. Thanks to those connections, Samsonenko managed to build a small construction and hospitality empire in Macedonia. In 2015, his company Sis Invest Group managed to buy a piece of land in the center of Skopje and started construction of the Marriott hotel and the Officers’ House only for EUR 660 thousand.²²

The company managing the sports hall was registered in Cyprus and owned ultimately by a Belize-based shell company used by Samsonenko for many of his other investments. It is worth mentioning that the same offshore addresses were used by many companies associated with Macedonian politicians close to Gruevski.²³

The church, for construction of which Samsonenko had donated EUR 1.8 million, should have been built by the end of 2015, but the construction went slowly. Instead, Samsonenko’s Balkan Group Construction managed to carry out a number of other construction projects in just two years: the “Sports Center Jane Sandanski,” the hotel “Russia,” the Academy for young talents of the Vardar football club, the Officers’ House at the Macedonia square, and a reconstruction of the Russian consulate in Bitola.

In 2016, shortly before the VMRO-DPMNE was voted out of power, construction of the church ceased and never started again. After the investigation of the corruption cases of the former VMRO-DPMNE leaders, including Nikola Gruevski, who escaped a two-year imprisonment by fleeing to Hungary, and Sašo Mijalkov, who received a three-year sentence in prison for election fraud, Samsonenko’s business lost its fortune.²⁴ His company Sis Invest Group, which owns land in the

center of Skopje, is under bankruptcy and will likely lose its property.²⁵

RUSSIAN-LOOKING “TROLL FACTORY” IN VELES

Another possible footprint of the Russian malign influence is a so-called troll factory in a small Macedonian town Veles, which became famous for the spread of fake news and conspiracy theory articles before the US elections in 2016. In 2017, Michael Carpenter, who specialized in Russia issues as a senior Defense Department official during the Obama administration said that “dozens, if not hundreds of troll networks supported by Russian operatives were likely operating, including in countries outside Russia such as Albania, Cyprus and Macedonia.”²⁶

In 2018, a joint investigation²⁷ by the OCCRP and partners in the regions showed that Veles’ political fake news industry was not a commercial initiative of local teenagers. The reporters found that it was launched by a well-known Macedonian media attorney and PR specialist Trajche Arsov. He worked with two high-profile American partners for at least six months during a period that overlapped with election day, ordered articles from American and UK authors, registered more than a hundred websites to spread conservative messages, including those containing false facts, through a number of teens in Veles.

The same investigation revealed that Anna Bogacheva, a well-known member of Russia’s “troll factory,” who was accused by the US of alleged interference in the election, visited Macedonia for “work purposes,” according to her responses to journalists, three months before the first US-focused web domain was registered by Veles’ “trolls.”

Although further evidence of the direct connection between Russia and the Macedonian “troll factory” was not found, Arsov’s online political activity was most probably inspired by Russian “troll factories.”

22 Maja Jovanovska, “Last Fight for the Site on the Square. [in Macedonian], Investigative Reporting Lab Macedonia, March 31, 2020, <https://irl.mk/poslednata-bitka-za-partsele-na-ploshtadot/>.

23 Ognian Shentov, ed., *The Russian economic grip on Central and Eastern Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

25 Jovanovska, “Last Fight for Site.”

26 Peter Stone and Greg Gordon, “Russia-Sponsored Troll Networks Targeting the U.S. May Number in the Hundreds. Impact 2020, October 19, 2017, <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article179799311.html#storylink=cpy>.

27 Saska Cvetkovska et al., “The Secret Players behind Macedonia’s Fake News Sites,” Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, July 18, 2018, <https://www.occrp.org/en/spooksandspin/the-secret-players-behind-macedonias-fake-news-sites>.

CONCLUSION

Russian presence in North Macedonia is rooted in the relations between the USSR and Yugoslavia and continues to be visible today. Being a part of the Balkan region, North Macedonia falls in the sphere of Russian interest as a region bordering the EU, which Moscow would like to keep under its control or at least influence.

Analyzing political, economic, and cultural footprints of Russia in North Macedonia, one can notice that Russia uses a variety of tools to influence affairs in North Macedonia, but its efforts have not been wholehearted. Thus, not all attempts to influence North Macedonian politics and economy brought intended results. On the one hand, Russia managed to establish close relations with the Macedonian political elite during Gruevski period, but, on the other hand, it did not succeed in resisting the opposition, which led to the radical change in the government and a loss of political ties with ruling politicians.

Russia put considerable effort into keeping North Macedonia out of NATO and succeeded in lowering the turnout at the referendum for the name change, but North Macedonia eventually joined NATO nevertheless. Russian business tries to penetrate and dominate the North Macedonian energy sector, but it still cannot gain the same success as, for example, in neighbouring Bulgaria.

A Russian journalist Konstantin Eggert describes the Kremlin's failure in North Macedonia as a logical result of their instruments: "Loutish behaviour, cynicism and relying on corrupted elites in the international politics does not bring long-term success."²⁸ Eggert believes that elites in the former Yugoslavian countries, with an exception of Serbia, are generally looking more towards the EU and NATO as a potential guarantee of peace in the region. Moscow does not seem a good alternative for such a goal. Moreover, the new generation that grew up after the Tito era also wants active integration with the EU and NATO.

Daniel Serwer, a professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, agrees that Russian politics has failed in North Macedonia, but the main objective of Moscow was "to cause as much trouble as they possibly can; they made

some trouble and they will continue to try and make trouble."²⁹ Moscow's lack of interest in North Macedonia can be explained by the fact that economic relations between the two countries are insignificant: Russia failed to dominate an oil sector in North Macedonia, the volume of gas that Macedonians buy from Russia is low, and its geographical location does not make it important for Russia's pipelines plans.

At the same time, during his decade in power, Nikola Gruevski did not manage to establish total control over all political institutions, even with Russian help. As a result, it was possible for the opposition, led by Zoran Zaev, to win the 2016 election and open up a corruption case against Gruevski. Having tight links with just one powerful politician turned out badly for Russia because it lost a significant part of its influence.

But some analysts consider that low turnout in the referendum in 2018 showed Russian intervention in Macedonian affairs was successful.³⁰ Moreover, with North Macedonia becoming a new member of NATO, it can be a threat to the international organization, because the country has one of the lowest levels of development of political culture³¹ and it can potentially be manipulated by external forces, including Russia.³²

Today, the main concern for North Macedonian society should be whether Russian practices such as corruption, close ties between politics and business, and the fake news industry will take root in the country and damage the system from inside even if it joins the EU. To prevent this, it is highly important to trace all corruption cases with no period of prescription, establish zero tolerance for corrupt politicians and purposeful spreading of fake news.

28 Konstantin Eggert, "Comment: Balkan Failure of Kremlin's Reenactors, [in Russian], DW, July 19, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/ru/комментарий-балканский-провал-кремлевских-реконструкторов/a-44752092-0>.

29 Margarita Assenova, "Disinfo Analysis: Moscow's Balkan Defeat," *Polygraph.info*, <https://www.polygraph.info/a/disinfo-analysis-macedonia-nato-russia/29770631.html>.

30 Simon Tisdall, "Result of Macedonia's Referendum Is Another Victory for Russia," *Guardian* (US edition), October 1, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/01/result-of-macedonia-referendum-is-another-victory-for-russia>.

31 "Democracy Index 2019," The Economist Intelligence Unit (website), <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>.

32 Ivana Stradner, Max Frost, "NATO Has a New Weak Link for Russia to Exploit," *Foreign Policy*, April 22, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/22/north-macedonia-nato-russia/>.



EMULATING KREMLIN STRATEGIES IN POLAND

Melissa Hooper

The background of the entire cover is a composite image. The top half is a solid red color. The bottom half is an aerial view of a city skyline, likely Warsaw, featuring several prominent skyscrapers. A large, semi-transparent white word "POLITICS" is overlaid across the bottom of the image, spanning across the red section and the city view. The word is in a bold, sans-serif font. The city view shows a mix of modern glass skyscrapers and older, more traditional buildings. The sky is a clear, light blue. The overall aesthetic is modern and professional.

POLITICS



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INTRODUCTION

Analysts and scholars in the West have tracked, categorized, and analyzed many vectors and strategies of Russian malign influence in Europe,¹ especially Central Europe, leading to a growing awareness of the Kremlin's attempts to undermine Western liberal democracy. However, as researchers have painstakingly documented Kremlin strategies of direct influence, the governments of Central Europe have become an interfering variable, adopting strategies that appear to come right out of President Vladimir Putin's playbook. Rather than the Kremlin wielding influence, these leaders have weakened their own institutional structures, driven internal division, and sowed distrust in their own systems.

For example, Hungary's ruling Fidesz party has concentrated media in the hands of oligarchs with connections to the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, similar to the method Putin used to cow independent media in Russia. Fidesz also translates Russian disinformation messages into Hungarian and disseminates them within Hungary—doing the Kremlin's bidding without the Kremlin even (apparently) asking. In Romania, attacks on court systems and anti-corruption institutions² drive

distrust and polarization, and in Bulgaria³ and Moldova⁴ endemic corruption foments skepticism of institutions even before Russian influence begins.

Even in Poland, a country notoriously skeptical of Russian policy, the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) government in power since 2015, has borrowed laws, methods, and messaging from their avowed enemy. While Poland is of course a target of Russian influence schemes, in part because of its critical attitude toward Russian policy and staunch defense of Ukraine, Russian influence schemes in the country are generally weak and ineffective. A small Russian-funded media ecosystem exists,⁵ but has not gained a notable following. A few influence organizations have been attempted and a few agents exposed: Kremlin operative Mateusz Piskorski who led the European Center for Geopolitical Analysis was arrested in 2016 and remains under investigation,⁶ and Russian agent Dmitry Karnaukhov, a professor of the Academy of Humanities who offered Moscow-financed grants and trips to those

1 Anton Shekhovtsov, "Conceptualizing Malign Influence of Putin's Russia in Europe," Free Russia Foundation, April 1, 2020, <https://www.4freerussia.org/conceptualizing-malign-influence-of-putin-s-russia-in-europe/>.

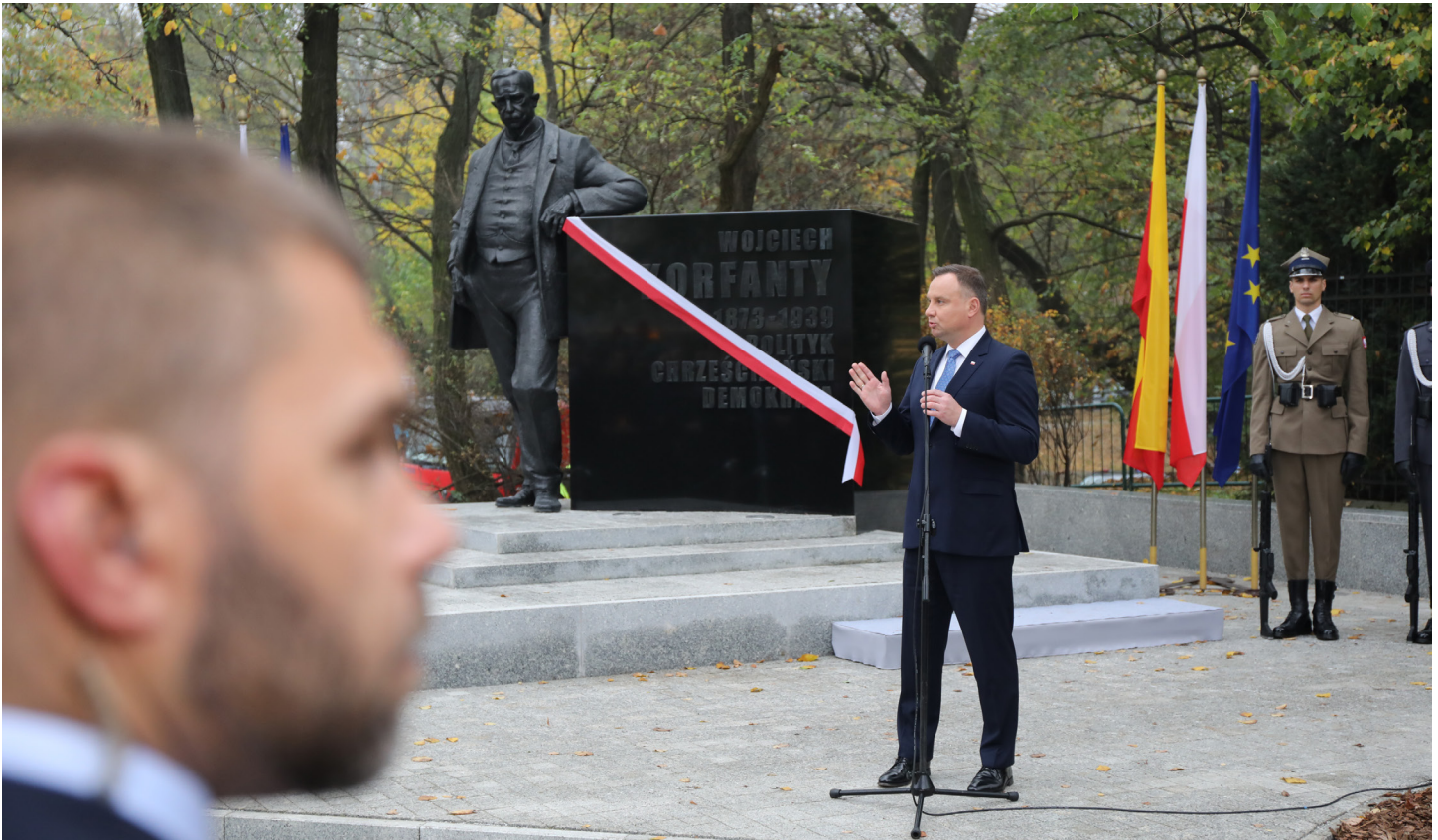
2 Dragoș Călin, "The appointment of top prosecutors in Romania: minimizing the role of the judiciary," European Law Blog, May 11, 2020, <https://europeanlawblog.eu/2020/05/11/the-appointment-of-top-prosecutors-in-romania-minimizing-the-role-of-the-judiciary/>.

3 Radosveta Vassileva, "Bulgaria: will Borissov's government survive this summer?" New Eastern Europe, July 13, 2020, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2020/07/13/bulgaria-will-borissovs-government-survive-this-summer/>.

4 Una Hajdari, "Moldova's Failed Revolution Is Not Over Yet," Foreign Policy, November 22, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/22/moldova-vladimir-plahotniuc-failed-revolution-not-over-yet/>.

5 Anton Shekhovtsov, et al., *The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe*, Political Capital Institute, (August 4, 2016), 51-53, https://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf.

6 "Poland detains pro-Kremlin party leader for 'spying,'" Guardian (US edition), May 19, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/19/poland-detains-pro-kremlin-party-leader-mateusz-piskorski-spying>.



President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda in Warsaw. Photo: Kancelaria Sejmu / Rafał Zambrzycki

with anti-Ukraine views, was arrested and deported in 2017.⁷ Russia funded the Change (Zmiana) party, as demonstrated by the recent Laundromat investigation, but the party achieved no success.⁸ One area where the Kremlin's influence has had any measurable effect is that a far-right political party with Russian ties entered the Polish parliament for the first time in fall 2019.⁹

Russian influence campaigns in Poland operate by exacerbating existing divisions, such as stirring up Islamophobia and anti-refugee sentiment in a country that has accepted Muslim refugees from Chechnya for years without incident, fomenting anti-Ukraine beliefs to drive a wedge between Ukraine and its closest anti-Russian ally, and exploiting polarization caused and exacerbated by the government-spun conspiracy theories

surrounding the Smolensk disaster.¹⁰

However, since PiS came to power, the Kremlin has likely been much more pleased with the situation in Poland. The government has focused intently on party loyalty; waged war on meritocracy in ministries, the military, and the judiciary; routed critics from institutions such as free media and civil society to promote a limited and government-approved worldview; organized disinformation and smear campaigns against "enemies of the state"; fanned the flames of conspiracy theories; criminally prosecuted individuals who disagree with the government (especially judges); and increased polarization and tensions in the country to what many consider their

7 Wojciech Jakóbk, "Russian 'Hybrid Warrior' Gets Help from Pro-Kremlin Media in Poland," Center for European Policy Analysis, accessed July 21, 2020, <http://infowar.cepa.org/Briefs/Pl/Russian-hybrid-warrior-gets-help-from-pro-Kremlin-media-in-Poland>.

8 The recent "Laundromat" scandal revealed that ECAG received EUR 27,685 from the UK company Crystalord Limited, which proved a direct financial link between Russian stakeholders or "dirty money," and the organization's activity between 2012 and 2014, "The Russian Laundromat Exposed," OCCRP, March 20, 2017, <https://www.occrp.org/en/laundromat/the-russian-laundromat-exposed/>.

9 Marcin Zaborowski, "The Kremlin's Influence Reaches Warsaw," Visegrad Insight, May 28, 2019, <https://visegradinsight.eu/the-kremlins-influence-reaches-warsaw/>.

10 Jacek Kucharczyk, "Instruments of Russian Influence in Poland," Association of Accredited Public Policy Advocates to the European Union, "Association of Accredited Public Policy Advocates to the European Union," June 14, 2019, <http://www.aalep.eu/instruments-russian-influence-poland>.

all-time highest level.¹¹

With all of this being done by the Polish government itself, the Kremlin has ample opportunity to exploit division, distrust, confusion, and polarization with its own propaganda. Yet, even if the Kremlin does not exploit this obvious opportunity, it threatens to damage Polish democracy and national security in just the ways Russia would hope. They promote greater disunity within the EU, make cooperation with allies more difficult, threaten Transatlantic efforts to combat corruption, undermine efforts to combat Russian influence and disinformation, and threaten support for Ukraine and the EU's Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia. None of these outcomes serve a democratic Poland or its allies.

Key ways in which Poland's government replicates Kremlin strategies indigenously include: (1) centralizing control and weakening the independence of Poland's democratic institutions; (2) heightening polarization through disinformation, conspiracy theories, and divisive messaging identifying the EU as a threat; (3) using traditional values messaging to sow division and engaging in corrupt collaborations with fringe religious actors to set policy; (4) implementing historical revisionism to undermine narratives of truth, accountability, unity, and reconciliation; and (5) allowing far-right, ultranationalist, and pro-Nazi groups the opportunity to organize freely and the freedom to spread racist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic ideas that foment disunity and instability; contributing to hateful rhetoric with government voices.

PARTY LOYALTY: CENTRALIZED CONTROL OVER COURTS, MEDIA, CIVIL SOCIETY

One of the major Russian-style strategies initiated by the PiS government has been a serious assault on an independent judiciary to rout out judges perceived to disagree with the government's worldview or that are likely to check its power—that is, act as an independent judiciary should. The transformation of the judiciary begun just days after PiS came to power included the use of illegal maneuvers to place loyal judges on the Constitutional Tribunal and repopulate the body that selects judges, attempted mass firings of judges deemed insufficiently loyal (stopped by the European Court of Justice), mass firings of prosecutors, the merging of the office of General Prosecutor and the office of Minister of Justice, a new politicized disciplinary body for judges, a new politicized appeal body that can re-decide court cases, and now a 2020 law that allows judges to be "disciplined" and lose their jobs if they speak out against the government or make a ruling that displeases PiS.¹² When the Constitutional Court ruled some of these acts unconstitutional, the government simply ignored the rulings, awarding itself the power to determine what the Constitution meant. These moves were characterized as Soviet-style by the Council of Europe's expert body the Venice Commission in its opinion recommending their reversal.¹³

One reason for the PiS attack on the judiciary might be the need to control decision-makers charged with reviewing corruption cases involving government officials, which seem to be increasing in recent years. Notably this is also one of the reasons behind the Kremlin's desire

11 The Christian Science monitor noted that polarization now is worse than during communism. Sara Miller Liana and Monika Rębała, "Opposite Poles: Why political middle ground is disappearing in Poland," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 5, 2016, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2016/0905/Opposite-Poles-Why-political-middle-ground-is-disappearing-in-Poland>. In 2018 Anne Applebaum wrote that Poland's political culture under the PiS was characterized by polarization, conspiracy theories, attacks on free press, and an obsession with loyalty. Moreover, Applebaum notes that the playbook being used by many authoritarians today, including in Poland, is Lenin's one-party polarization nativism as a mechanism for holding power, see Anne Applebaum, "A Warning From Europe: The Worst Is Yet to Come," *Atlantic*, October, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/poland-polarization/568324/>.

12 See Melissa Hooper, "Poland," in Alina Polyakova et al., *The Anatomy of Illiberal States: Assessing and Responding to Democratic Decline in Turkey and Central Europe*. (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2019), 16-20, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-anatomy-of-illiberal-states/>; Claudia Ciobanu, "Poland 2020: A Crunch Year for Populists' Grip on Power," *Reporting Democracy*, January 14, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/14/poland-2020-a-crunch-year-for-populists-grip-on-power/>; Claudia Ciobanu, "Polish Courts: Independent Judiciary Wins Battle, not War," *Reporting Democracy*, June 11, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/06/11/polish-courts-independent-judiciary-wins-battle-not-war/>.

13 European Commission for Democracy Through Law, Venice Commission, opinion no. 904, December 11, 2017, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2017\)031-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2017)031-e).

to control its judiciary completely in political cases.¹⁴ The lack of independence in Russia's judiciary is a well-known fact—with the words “telephone justice” used to describe what occurs in many cases: the judge queries the Kremlin or its local representative to decide how he or she should rule.¹⁵ At this point the Polish government appears to seek this level of judicial control.

PiS also purged non-loyalists from public media. A 2016 law terminated broadcasters' supervisory boards and empowered the Treasury Minister to fire broadcasting chiefs, formerly selected through a competitive process. More than 225 journalists and managers were fired or quit in protest. The Constitutional Tribunal's ruling that found the law unconstitutional was ignored. The main public television station, *Telewizja Polska*, was transformed into a government mouthpiece that slathers compliments on the government and calls critics corrupt traitors. Government-associated support for independent media was halted and has been shifted to pro-government outlets.¹⁶ When independent journalists do hold the government accountable, they are plagued with lawsuits for defamation, also a common Russian tactic.¹⁷

This decapitation of editors and administrators at key media outlets in favor of loyal overseers harkens back to Russia's war on independent media in 2013 and

2014.¹⁸ Another eerie similarity is the creation of a new media entity designed specifically to burnish the country's image abroad—an acknowledgement that the government's actions will be concerning to other democracies and in need of some spin. In Russia, this entity was named *Rossiya Segodnya*.¹⁹ In Poland it is the Polish National Foundation, an entity known for an expensive billboard campaign smearing Poland's judges.²⁰

Using public media co-opted by the government in its first months in office, PiS waged attacks on organizations that defend human rights and the rule of law, maligning these groups as assailing Polish civilization and identity. As in 2013 and 2014 when watchdog groups and critics of the Russian government were called traitors and fifth column and then raided, so in Poland in 2016 and 2017—and beyond.²¹ As independent groups face funding cuts, reduced staffing, and in some cases physical attacks, the Polish government created a Potemkin village of organizations that work to advance its social agenda, led by a new entity in the Prime Minister's office—the National Institute for Freedom—that controls EU funding and disseminates it to government loyalists only, many of which are government-organized non-governmental-organizations—GONGOs. Approved NGOs largely focus on the rights of Catholic families, priests, Christian refugees outside of Poland, and nationalist Poles.²² Similar to the raids conducted

14 Tom Balmforth, “Putin's Legal Vertical: Kremlin Seeks To Consolidate Court System,” RFE/RL, October 9, 2013, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-judicial-reform-arbitration-court/25131950.html>; Olga Romanova, “The Problem With the Russian Judiciary,” Carnegie Moscow Center, January 22, 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/75316>

15 Scott Boylan, “The Status of Judicial Reform in Russia,” *American University International Law Review*, 13, no. 5 (1998): 1327-1343, <https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1373&context=auilr&sei>.

16 In the recent presidential election, the OSCE criticized the lack of available impartial public media in the campaign. OSCE/ODIHR, “Polish Presidential Elections: Press Conference July 13, OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights,” Facebook, July 13, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=280075023312248&ref=watch_permalink.

17 See Hooper, “Poland,” in Polyakova et al., *The Anatomy of Illiberal States*. Annabelle Chapman, “Pluralism Under Attack: The Assault on Press Freedom in Poland,” Freedom House, June 2017, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FH_Poland_Media_Report_Final_2017.pdf; On Russia, see “Media Regulation in Russia: A Landscape Analysis of Laws and Trends,” Thomson Reuters Foundation, August 9, 2016, <https://www.trust.org/publications/i/?id=4798c68a-eed1-4660-b7c9-fc16a0032cc9>.

18 Timothy Heritage, “Putin dissolves state news agency, tightens grip on Russia media,” Reuters, December 9, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-media/putin-dissolves-state-news-agency-tightens-grip-on-russia-media-idUSBRE9B80120131209>; Alec Luhn, “Editor of independent Russian news site replaced with pro-Kremlin figure,” *Guardian* (US edition), March 12, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/12/editor-russian-news-site-replaced-lenta>; Anna Nemtsova, “The Kremlin Is Killing Echo of Moscow, Russia's Last Independent Radio Station,” *Daily Beast*, November 7, 2014, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-kremlin-is-killing-echo-of-moscow-russias-last-independent-radio-station>

19 Heritage, “Putin dissolves news agency.”

20 Maria Wilczek and Jan Cienski, “Polish public promotion scheme backfires,” *Politico*, September 18, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/polska-fundacja-narodowa-polish-public-promotion-scheme-backfires/>.

21 Glenn Kates, “‘Traitors’ Slur Goes Mainstream In Russia,” RFE/RL, March 26, 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-nationalism-traitors-crimea-media/25310606.html>; Maria Lipman, “Putin's enemy within: Demonising the ‘fifth column,’” European Council on Foreign Relations, March 26, 2015, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_putins_enemy_within_demonising_the_fifth_column311513; Rick Lyman and Joanna Berendt, “As Poland Lurches to Right, Many in Europe Look On in Alarm,” *New York Times*, December 14, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/15/world/europe/poland-law-and-justice-party-jaroslawn-kaczynski.html>.

22 Melissa Hooper, “Poland's New Front: A Government's War Against Civil Society,” *Human Rights First*, August 2017, <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/Poland-Report-August-2017.pdf>.

by the Russian government in 2013, in 2017 the Polish government began surprise “audits”—or raids—in which officials appeared unannounced and ordered production of reams of documents related to grants of EU and Norwegian funds. Some were ordered to pay grants back.²³ NGOs that supported migrants and women’s issues lost most of their funding since their issue of focus was not approved.

The government’s siege mentality when it comes to EU concerns has brought with it an ire toward NGOs that receive EU funding. Poland’s government now views EU funding on par with the “foreign funding” that President Putin cited as an attempt to threaten Russian security and overthrow his rule through “color revolutions.” Both countries have used George Soros as a convenient anti-Semitic scapegoat. In Poland, far-right groups associated with the government went so far as to declare that Soros-funded NGOs were responsible for opening Poland’s borders to refugees, promoting “gender ideology,” diluting Polish national identity, and attempting to overthrow the government, an apparent attempt to reference all the major topics of polarizing propaganda in Poland.²⁴

DRIVING POLARIZATION: DIVISIVE MESSAGING AND CONSPIRACY THEORIES

With the government’s takeover, Polish media has become just as polarized as Polish society. Contributing to distrust, the government uses public media to spread false information for political gains, smear critics, and drive extreme polarization—with devastating effects for Polish democracy.²⁵

While disinformation as a foreign policy strategy is still more often used by Russia, internally the Polish government seeds false information for political gain. In 2017, the Oxford Computational Propaganda Project reported on an army of trolls for hire used by political inter-

ests in Poland to smear opponents with disinformation.²⁶ Disinformation is also widely shared by the public: ahead of the 2019 European Parliament Elections, Polish Internet users shared more “junk news” than legitimate news on Twitter.²⁷ This situation occurs when distrust in media is the norm, a situation that PiS has worked hard to create. Recently, pro-PiS networks on social media have been employed to sway voters in interpreting the bizarre “informal cancellation” of the election in May 2020, and to bolster government claims that it is effectively combatting the coronavirus pandemic—while characterizing the EU as ineffective and passive.²⁸

Disinformation is wielded by the government to vilify critics, be they judges, political opponents, or civil society watchdogs. Borrowing directly from Putin’s playbook, a recently exposed campaign to discredit at least twenty judges was organized from within Poland’s own Ministry of Justice. One of the trolls admitted to posting inflammatory information on Twitter about judges that were critical of PiS policy.²⁹ She also mailed false inflammatory stories about one judge to 2500 journalists, and the judge’s home. An email exchange disclosed between her and a deputy minister of justice conjectured that the judge would “quiet down” with his criticism once he learned of the false information disseminated.³⁰

As in Russia, the touchstone for defining rule of law and human rights is increasingly not the country’s preexisting commitments under international agreements and instruments, including those of the EU, but the govern-

23 Hooper, “Poland’s New Front.”

24 Lyman and Berendt, “Poland Lurches to Right”; see Hooper, “Poland’s New Front.”

25 Jacek Kucharczyk, “Instruments of Russian Influence in Poland,” Association of Accredited Public Policy Advocates to the European Union, June 14, 2019, <http://www.aalep.eu/instruments-russian-influence-poland>.

26 Robert Gorwa, “Computational Propaganda in Poland: False Amplifiers and the Digital Public Sphere,” Samuel Woolley and Philip N. Howard, Eds., *The Computational Propaganda Project*, Working Paper 2017.2, <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/research/working-papers/computational-propaganda-in-poland-false-amplifiers-and-the-digital-public-sphere/>; see also Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard, “The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation,” *Computational Propaganda Research Project*, September 2019, <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/09/CyberTroop-Report19.pdf>.

27 Nahema Marchal et al., “Junk News During the EU Parliamentary Elections: Lessons from a Seven-Language Study of Twitter and Facebook,” *Oxford Internet Institute*, Data Memo 2019.3, <https://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2019/05/EU-Data-Memo.pdf>.

28 Anna Gielewska, Daniel Bush, and Maciej Kurzynski, “Poland Presidential Election 2020: The Pandemic Sows Chaos,” *Stanford University*, April 10, 2020, <https://fsi.stanford.edu/content/poland-election-chaos>.

29 Anne Applebaum, “The Disturbing Campaign Against Poland’s Judges,” *Atlantic*, January 28, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/disturbing-campaign-against-polish-judges/605623/> (An example: “Fuck off! You are bringing shame on honest judges and dishonor to Poland.” *Ibid.*).

30 Andrew Rettman, “Polish minister targeted judges in hate campaign,” *EUObserver*, August 20, 2019, <https://euobserver.com/justice/145685>.

ment's own interpretation of the "true" Constitution and interpretation of Polish values. To respond to the EU's increasing alarm at the attacks on the judiciary, free media, and civil society, Poland's government invokes arguments of sovereignty and the language of victimhood. Jarosław Kaczyński, the informal leader of PiS, has said he is ready to take on the EU and NATO member states to "make Poland a truly sovereign nation."³¹ PiS cries have become more shrill and at times have reached a fever pitch that mirrors the Kremlin's claims that Russia is eternally under attack—though the Kremlin's victimization is said to be at the hands of NATO while Poland's is at the hands of the EU. This messaging is also used to cloak foes of the government in suspicion, such as presidential candidate Rafał Trzaskowski who PiS discredited as backed by shadowy "foreign" forces.³²

PiS blasts the EU to amplify its nationalism and to draw political support, ignoring the fact that doing so damages its alliances, the trust of foreign governments, and the trust of its own people. As the EU attempts to check the government's assaults on democratic institutions, Polish officials have accused the EU of "colonialism,"³³ and characterized accountability mechanisms as a "crusade against Poland."³⁴ Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro argued that the EU was "occupying" Poland in a manner akin to the Nazis during World War II.³⁵ Ironically, with Polish popular support for the EU near 80 percent,³⁶ a Poxit is not realistic. Though it is notable that with the government's ongoing threat to defy orders of European courts regarding its attacks on the judiciary, Polish policy may in the future be-

31 Wojciech Moskwa, "Poland Ready to Fight Allies for Sovereignty, Kaczynski Says," Bloomberg, November 11, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-11-11/poland-ready-to-fight-its-allies-for-sovereignty-kaczynski-says>.

32 Jennifer Rankin and Shaun Walker, "Polish election: Andrzej Duda victory hands populists free rein," Guardian (US edition), July 13, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/13/polish-election-andrzej-duda-victory-hands-populists-free-rein>.

33 Ciobanu, "Polish Courts."

34 "Poland defends 'sovereignty' as EU probes controversial reforms," DW, January 19, 2016, <https://www.dw.com/en/poland-defends-sovereignty-as-eu-probes-controversial-reforms/a-18990294>; "The Latest: Polish premier calls EU sanctions 'scandalous,'" Associated Press, November 15, 2017, <https://apnews.com/dcf90e27b8cc41f782418f7574a0d343>.

35 Andrew Rettman, "Poland invokes Nazi crimes in EU rule-of-law dispute," EUObserver, January 11, 2016, <https://euobserver.com/justice/131768>.

36 66% of Poles believe that liberal democracy is the best form of government for them and 79% believe the EU does not pose a threat to their identity and values. "Voices of Central and Eastern Europe," GlobSec, June 2020, 13, 33, <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-read-version.pdf>.

come incompatible with EU policy—forcing the issue.³⁷

PiS has also viciously taken on the EU over migration. Like Hungary, Poland has completely declined to negotiate with the EU to accept migrants since the refugee crisis began. Former PM Beata Szydło stated that Poland would not be "blackmailed" by the "diktats" of larger EU countries to accept asylum-seekers, and linked acceptance of immigrants to terrorism and security threats.³⁸ Kaczyński cited refugees from the Middle East as a source of health risks and diseases dangerous to Poles.³⁹ By injecting xenophobic anti-refugee messages into discourse alongside anti-EU messages, the PiS party only exacerbates weaknesses and divisions that undermine democratic values and functioning.

PiS peddles outlandish theories about the 2010 Smolensk plane crash that killed Lech Kaczyński—former president of Poland and twin brother of PiS leader Jarosław. Though both Russian and Polish investigations concluded that human error of the pilot caused the crash, Kaczyński has chosen to sacrifice unity, trust, and truth to instead argue that Russians aimed to kill an effective Polish leader out of spite, and that his opposition was involved. Sadly, he has succeeded, having convinced 22 percent of the Polish population that the Smolensk crash was staged and that former Prime Minister Donald Tusk made a deal with Russia to kill President Lech Kaczyński.⁴⁰ He has also convinced 48 percent that Solidarity made a deal with the Communists in 1989 and that Poland is still ruled by those that were in power under the socialist regime.⁴¹

The conspiracy theories seared into Polish society by PiS have taken root, and with them an intense polarization, a distrust of government, and a skepticism

37 Recently PiS passed a new law, published during the night (as the party tends to do) on 12–13 December 2019. The law introduces sanctions for judges who follow a recent EU Court of Justice ruling that found members of several major judicial bodies in Poland were illegally appointed and should not be hearing cases. If this ruling is ignored by PiS and judges loyal to the party, we could see judicial chaos ensue in Poland. It is referred to above as the "muzzle law." Ciobanu, "Poland 2020."

38 Marcin Gocłowski, "Polish PM draws link between London attack and EU migrant policy," Reuters, March 23, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-poland/polish-pm-draws-link-between-london-attack-and-eu-migrant-policy-idUSKBN16U0TO>; Lizzie Dearden, "Poland's Prime Minister says country will accept no refugees as EU threatens legal action over quotas," Independent, May 17, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/poland-no-refugees-eu-legal-action-infringement-quotas-resettlement-beata-szydlo-commission-a7741236.html>.

39 Hooper, "Poland's New Front."

40 "Voices of Central and Eastern Europe," GlobSec, June 2020, 48–49, <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-read-version.pdf>.

41 "Voices Central Eastern Europe," GlobSec.

of democracy itself.⁴² The damage this does to Polish democratic functioning and to its own security creates fissures that can be exploited by foreign foes, and even independent of this exploitation the damage will have lasting effects.

TRADITIONAL VALUES MESSAGING AND POLICY

Perhaps the most striking example of Poland following in Russia's footsteps is in the use of traditional values rhetoric and policy. The government has increasingly positioned itself as a counter to EU policies and Western liberal values, again driving a sense of separation from the EU in ways that the Kremlin would appreciate. The Kremlin itself has sought to portray Russia as a global leader of the religious right, countering the alleged moral decline in Western values that allows for gay marriage and flexible gender roles. Traditional values messaging in Poland is used as in Russia to spread fear of a "foreign" threat to national cultural sensibilities and values. The threat identified is the same in Poland and in Russia: the EU and its "European values," or—as PiS MP and now Constitutional Tribunal Judge Krystyna Pawłowicz put it—"EU-leftist cultural aggression."⁴³

Beginning in early 2019, local parliaments and leaders in PiS strongholds began declaring their regions "LGBT-free."⁴⁴ These "zones" reflect not only the vague and unenforceable language but also the license to harm conveyed by Russia's anti-LGBT "propaganda" law passed in 2013, which criminalizes discussion of LGBT relationships in a positive light in front of children.⁴⁵ As with the Russian law, the Polish declarations communicate that LGBT people are not true citizens deserving of legal protections—against discrimination, refusals of service, or violence. As a result, violence

42 Michal Bilewicz et al., "Traumatic Rift: How Conspiracy Beliefs Undermine Cohesion After Societal Trauma?" *EurJPsychol* 15 no. 1, (February 2019): 82–93, accessed July 21, 2020, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6396693/>.

43 Notes from Poland, "PiS MP Krystyna Pawłowicz says that today's anniversary of Poland joining the EU is a 'sad day'. Poland has 'no common system of values' with the EU and needs to 'defend itself against EU-leftist cultural aggression' and the 'dictates of EU leftists with no electoral legitimacy,'" Facebook, May 1, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/notesfrompoland/posts/1026539657521244/>.

44 Claudia Ciobanu, "A Third of Poland Declared 'LGBT-Free Zone,'" *Reporting Democracy*, February 25, 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/02/25/a-third-of-poland-declared-lgbt-free-zone/>.

45 Miriam Elder, "Russia passes law banning gay 'propaganda,'" *Guardian* (US edition), June 11, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/11/russia-law-banning-gay-propaganda>.

against them increases. This is yet another way PiS increases polarization, internal violence, and instability, ignoring the long-term domestic security implications.

In 2020, as Poland struggled to combat an international pandemic that affected both health care and the economy, President Andrzej Duda ran his reelection campaign almost entirely on an anti-LGBT platform pledging to ban teaching on LGBT subject matter in schools and to forbid same-sex marriage and adoption.⁴⁶ In a campaign speech, he said promoting LGBT rights is a "foreign ideology" more destructive than communism.⁴⁷ Kaczyński questioned whether the opposing candidate, who supported LGBT rights and would consider compensation for Jews who had property taken during World War II, had a "Polish soul" or "Polish heart" because of these beliefs.⁴⁸ A PiS former minister went further in a July 9 tweet, calling the opposing party's platform "treasonous" and "apostasy."⁴⁹ After winning the election by a razor thin margin of 51 percent to 49 percent with a record-setting 68 percent of the population voting, Duda apologized to those he may have offended with his campaign.⁵⁰ But the damage is done and will continue. Very nearly half of the population disagrees with PiS, and is angry and scorned by the narrow loss. Will they remain civil when PiS continues to push through its nationalist and antidemocratic policies? One hopes, but the anger stirred up by PiS is certainly not just going to go away.

In each country, the power of the Church has been recognized by government leaders as a political tool. Each has created a symbiotic relationship whereby the Church is co-opted to support government policies, and in return the Church can call some of the political shots and obtain financial support when needed. The head

46 Carlie Porterfield, "Anti-LGBTQ Rhetoric Is Ramping Up in Eastern Europe, Human Rights Advocates Say," *Forbes*, June 10, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carlieporterfield/2020/06/10/anti-lgbtq-rhetoric-is-ramping-up-in-eastern-europe-human-rights-advocates-say/#358c366d231e>.

47 Marek Strzelecki, "Polish Leader Casts Gays as Enemy in Bid to Revive Campaign," *Bloomberg*, June 10, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-10/polish-leader-casts-gays-as-the-enemy-in-bid-to-revive-campaign?sref=q1G25G4a>.

48 Strzelecki, "Leader Casts Gays as Enemy."

49 Antoni Macierewicz, "Do zwolenników Platformy Obywatelskiej," [in Polish], Twitter, July 9, 2020, https://twitter.com/Macierewicz_A/status/1281185244817821696.

50 Loveday Morris et al., "Polish president Duda narrowly wins reelection, enabling the continuation of a far-right agenda," *Washington Post*, July 13, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/polish-president-duda-squeaks-a-second-term-electoral-commission-says/2020/07/13/838d4770-c486-11ea-a99f-3bbdff1af38_story.html.

of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill supports Putin's policies on same-sex marriage and domestic violence.⁵¹ The Polish Conference of Bishops has supported PiS legislation, such as the ban on abortion,⁵² and the Archbishop of Krakow stirred nationalism during the election by claiming a "rainbow plague" afflicted Poland.⁵³ In exchange for support, Russia's Patriarch Kirill has obtained funds for grand construction of church buildings—and a fancy watch.⁵⁴ The Catholic Church in Poland holds significant power when it comes to PiS policy.

Both governments have also sought to limit the rights of women in service of traditional values and traditional gender roles. Russia decriminalized domestic violence in 2017. Poland considered a similar measure that would have made a first incident of domestic violence not criminally punishable, but after public outcry reconsidered the measure.⁵⁵ In November 2016, PiS politicians moved to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), which calls for measures to strengthen prevention, response, and accountability for all forms of violence against women. Spurred on by right-wing partners, the government sought withdrawal on grounds that the Convention promotes "gender ideology."⁵⁶

In Russia, the Kremlin relies on oligarchs and their foundations such as those of Boris Yakunin and Konstantin Malofeev to legitimize policy and gain public

support. Malofeev has been a major funder of Kremlin traditional values initiatives and foreign policy, and is also able to help spread government messages through his television station Tsargrad TV (which he has called "God TV").⁵⁷

In Poland, the activists are not Orthodox, but the method is the same. The first ally of choice is Ordo Iuris, a far-right group that seeks to ban abortion, severely limit LGBT rights, decriminalize domestic violence, and reinforce gender stereotypes and traditional roles. Led by a former member of PiS, Ordo Iuris wields significant policy-making power in exchange for its support.⁵⁸ It was behind proposals in 2016 that de-funded domestic violence organizations, removed tolerance education from schools, and attempted to completely ban abortion. At their behest, PiS passed the abortion ban twice—in 2016 and in 2020 during the pandemic. However, after an enormous series of street protests in 2016, and an international outcry online in 2020, each time it was retracted.⁵⁹

Ordo Iuris, Malofeev, and Yakunin are not unknown to each other. All are members of the World Congress of Families—a global fringe organization labeled a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. It gathers American, Russian, Polish, Hungarian, and other far-right religious activists seeking to promulgate laws that restrict rights for women and LGBT persons under the theory that such laws pushed by the West promote "deviancy" and moral degradation.⁶⁰ In 2007, when the organization held its annual conference in Poland, PiS (during a previous stint in power) banned "of-

51 Caroline Schmitt, "Is the Russian Orthodox Church serving God or Putin?" DW, April 26, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/is-the-russian-orthodox-church-serving-god-or-putin/a-38603157>.

52 Dorothy Cummings McLean, "Polish bishops back campaign to ban abortion: 'no justification for killing children,'" LifeSite News, November 10, 2017, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/polish-bishops-back-campaign-to-ban-abortion-no-justification-for-killing-c>.

53 Nick Duffy, "Archbishop claims a 'rainbow plague' is affecting Poland," PinkNews, August 2, 2019, <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2019/08/02/archbishop-claims-rainbow-plague-afflicting-poland/>.

54 "Orthodox corruption?" Al Jazeera, February 7, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/2013/02/2013267215745877.html>; Andrew Osborn, "Russian Orthodox Church embroiled in corruption scandal," Telegraph, September 26, 2011, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/8790457/Russian-Orthodox-Church-embroiled-in-corruption-scandal.html>.

55 James Rothwell, "Poland drops plan to legalise 'one-off' cases of domestic violence," Telegraph, January 2, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/02/poland-drops-plan-legalise-one-off-cases-domestic-violence/>.

56 "The Breath of the Government on My Back: Attacks on Women's Rights in Poland," Human Rights Watch, February 6, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/02/06/breath-government-my-back/attacks-womens-rights-poland#_ftn111.

57 Melissa Hooper, "The non-governmental sector: Pro-Russia tools masquerading as independent voices," Foreign Policy Centre, March 21, 2017, <https://fpc.org.uk/non-governmental-sector-pro-russia-tools-masquerading-independent-voices/>.

58 Hooper, "Poland's New Front."

59 Alex Cocotas, "How Poland's far-right government is pushing abortion underground," Guardian (US edition), November 30, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/nov/30/how-polands-far-right-government-is-pushing-abortion-underground>; Selen Eşençay, "When COVID-19 Becomes a Political Ally: Poland's Law on Abortion," London School of Economics, June 24, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2020/06/24/when-covid-19-becomes-a-political-ally-polands-law-on-abortion/>.

60 Claire Provost and Nandini Archer, "Revealed: dozens of European politicians linked to US 'incubator for extremism,'" openDemocracy, March 27, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/revealed-dozens-of-european-politicians-linked-to-us-incubator-for-extremism>.

fending religious feelings.”⁶¹ The law parallels a Russian law passed at the behest of the Orthodox Church after Pussy Riot protested in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in 2012.⁶² The World Congress of Families is also active at the UN. Ordo Iuris was recently granted observer status at the Economic and Social Council. It is one of only three groups with such status from Poland, according to the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, one of the other two. The third is FEDERA, another traditional values organization.

The other PiS partner in support of religious nationalism is Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, a far-right priest known for his university and media empire. He has been called “the most important unelected person in Poland” around election time due to his media empire, and seems to be the PiS right-hand man. He and his Lux Veritatis Foundation have received USD 55 million from ten different government ministries for a bizarre list of unrelated projects: training judges, conducting cancer research, building a geothermal plant, constructing memorials, creating a new museum, organizing social campaigns, and providing a cellphone network.⁶³ In exchange for government largesse he uses his Radio Maryja network, television station TRWAM, and *Nasz Dziennik* newspaper as government mouthpieces.⁶⁴ His media has for years been identified as hate-propagating, Islamopho-

bic, and anti-Semitic,⁶⁵ but under PiS it specifically targets migrants, LGBT groups, and women, to support the government’s “traditional values” and “re-Christianization of Europe” frame. Government officials themselves now appear on the show, including Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and party leader Kaczyński.

In exchange for his support, Rydzyk can call the shots on government policies. For example, he was the backer of a law requiring most shops to close on Sunday in observance of the Sabbath, and for the removal of sex education from the school curriculum. He supported the abortion ban.⁶⁶ He has been credited with creating a “civil religion” in Poland, a religious belief system that ties in with the ruling political party.⁶⁷

HISTORICAL REVISIONISM: NATIONALISM, ANTI-SEMITISM, AND ANTI-UKRAINE

The revisionist politics of the Polish government play into Moscow’s hands.⁶⁸ Their reinvention of historical facts rejects multilateralism, focuses ire at the EU, and antagonizes important allies and neighbors Germany and Ukraine.⁶⁹

Russia is a leading provocateur of the Polish government with its rewriting of history related to the Katyn massacre, the start of World War II, and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Russian agitation has perhaps shown the Polish government the power of redefining history—and in doing so Poland has in many ways copied the state it seeks to counter.

In 2014, President Putin signed a law making it a criminal offense punishable by three years’ imprison-

61 Kodeks Karny [Criminal Code] art. 196, https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/7354/file/Poland_CC_1997_en.pdf; see also “Analysis of the Domestic Law Concerning Blasphemy, Religious Insult and Inciting Religious Hatred in Albania, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Turkey, United Kingdom on the Basis of Replies to a Questionnaire,” European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), (October 22, 2008), 72, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100625025832/http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2008/CDL-AD%282008%29026add2-bil.pdf>.

62 The Russian law was passed in 2013 as Article 148 of the Penal Code and criminalizes “public action that shows clear and obvious disrespect for society and intent to offend religious believers’ feelings.” “Amendments to Criminal Code and Certain legislative acts in the aim of protecting religious convictions and feelings,” Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia, June 30, 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/18422>.

63 Marc Santora and Joanna Berendt, “Mixing Politics and Piety, a Polish Priest Seeks to Shape Poland’s Future,” *New York Times*, September 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/21/world/europe/poland-elections-tadeusz-rydzyk.html>; Jo Harper, “Polish priest in hot water,” *Politico*, August 16, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/polish-priest-rydzyk-in-hot-water-over-green-energy/?fbclid=IwAR1YjI9K8LtcGyGn1dsMdzFgpbHtK4DxHfJW5OLj38TV0memALdQ-yDNI>.

64 Jonathan Day, “Poland’s Top Priest Embroiled in Corruption Allegations,” *Liberties*, September 19, 2019, <https://www.liberties.eu/en/news/poland-priest-corruption-allegations-power-plant/18052>

65 The U.S. State Department has called his radio station, Radio Maryja, “one of Europe’s most blatantly anti-Semitic media venues.” Poland’s New Front: A Government’s War on Civil Society, Human Rights First, August 2017: 14, <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/Poland-Report-August-2017.pdf>

66 Santora and Berendt, “Mixing Politics and Piety.”

67 Ireneusz Krzeminski, “Radio Maryja and Fr. Rydzyk as a Creator of the National-Catholic Ideology,” *ResearchGate*, 10.1057/978-1-137-43751-8_5, August 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309473027_Radio_Maryja_and_Fr_Rydzyk_as_a_Creator_of_the_National-Catholic_Ideology.

68 Daniel Bush and Maciej Kurzynski, “Poland: Presidential Election 2020 Scene-Setter,” *Stanford Internet Observatory*, January 28, 2020, <https://cyber.fsi.stanford.edu/io/news/poland-scene-setter>.

69 Mateusz Mazzini, “Poland’s Historical Revisionism Is Pushing It into Moscow’s Arms,” *Foreign Policy*, February 12, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/12/polands-historical-revisionism-is-pushing-it-into-moscows-arms-smolensk-kaczynski-pis-law-justice-holocaust-law/>.

ment “to spread intentionally false information about the Soviet Union’s activities during World War II.”⁷⁰

PiS deploys not only the same strategy as the Kremlin, but targets similar facts: complicity in World War II crimes against Jews. In 2018, PiS passed a law that criminalized statements that accuse Poland of being “responsible or complicit in” Nazi crimes. The government’s mythology dictates that no Polish nationals were complicit in crimes against Jews, contrary to existing evidence. The law, sometimes referred to as the Holocaust Law, defined offending speech as defamation, that is, as false. It targeted even heavily-supported scholarly research.⁷¹ The criminal penalty in Poland is three years. By criminalizing statements about Polish responsibility in its 2018 law, Poland mimicked both the substance and punishment applied in Russia.⁷² After international outcry, especially concerns expressed by the United States, the criminal defamation provisions of the Polish law were removed, though civil defamation remains, allowing damages suits for the same speech.

In 2018, PiS amended the powers of a body that has been called its “ministry of history” to focus work on a new target: Ukraine. The law awarded new powers to investigate “crimes of Ukrainian nationalists” committed between 1920 and 1950, apparently targeting the 1943 Volhynia massacre and other crimes by Ukrainians against Poles. Driving Polish-Ukrainian division in this way does not yield any benefit to Poland. The Ukrainian government no longer denies the Volhynia massacre (though it does not call the event a genocide, as does Poland), and recent years have seen joint commemorations between the two countries. The law itself is poorly-written: the term “Ukrainian nationalists” is not defined in Polish or international law. The effect is to drive rancor and division between Poland and one of its closest anti-Russian allies.

70 Uladzislaw Belavusau, “The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland,” *Security and Human Rights*, 29, no. 1-4 (December 2018): 36-54, https://brill.com/view/journals/shrs/29/1-4/article-p36_36.xml?language=en; Article 354.1 of the Russian Criminal Code, Статья 354.1 УК РФ. Реабилитация нацизма, <https://ppt.ru/kodeks/uk/st-354.1>.

71 Holocaust Scholar Jan Gross was charged under the law. In 2006, during a previous stint in power, PiS passed another law targeting scholars like Gross, which criminalized anyone who “publicly ‘accused’ Poland of participating in, organizing, or being responsible for Nazi or Communist crime,” wording even more similar to the Russian law. See Belavusau, “Memory Laws in Poland.”

72 Belavusau, “Memory Laws in Poland.”

AIRSPACE FOR THE FAR RIGHT

Russia supports far-right parties across Europe in order to destabilize NATO and EU allies. Its relationship with these parties is strategic—it aims to divide and weaken. In Poland, the government’s relationship with the far right is also based on a strategic need, in this case to win votes. PiS has been largely successful because it appealed to nationalists across the right—including the far right. Since taking power it has reached out to far-right voters and espoused far-right ideas,⁷³ inciting anti-migrant sentiment and anti-Semitism, questioning the true Polishness of any critics, and stirring fear of shadowy foreign ideas, money, and people. In search of votes, it allows the organizing of groups that foment the same divisions that are the focus of Kremlin-initiated operations. Indeed, some aspects of the far-right parties given room to operate in Poland—such as Kukiz’ 15 or Confederation (Konfederacja)—are Kremlin-connected.⁷⁴

PiS has repeatedly expressed support for far-right ideology. For example, it advocated with Facebook to allow the posting of little-known far-right symbols⁷⁵ and sought to prosecute an independent cameraman who, while undercover, captured a video of a neo-Nazi birthday party for Hitler.⁷⁶ As a result, far-right networks are spreading, creating content with greater frequency and more coordination.⁷⁷ Independence Day marches annually organized by the National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny) have seen attendance

73 Lidia Kelly and Justyna Pawlak, “Poland’s far right: opportunity and threat for ruling PiS,” *Reuters*, January 3, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-politics-farright/polands-far-right-opportunity-and-threat-for-ruling-pis-idUSKBN1ESOBK>.

74 Marcin Zaborowski, “The Kremlin’s Influence Reaches Warsaw,” *Visegrad Insight*, May 28, 2019, <https://visegradinsight.eu/the-kremlins-influence-reaches-warsaw/>; Péter Krekó et al., “The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin’s Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe,” *Political Capital Institute*, August 4, 2016, https://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf; Yaroslav Shimov and Aleksy Dzikawicki, “Email Hack Gives Glimpse Into Russia’s Influence Drive in Eastern Europe,” *RFE/RL*, March 11, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-e-mail-hack-belarusian-usorsky-piskorski-dugin/28363888.html>.

75 Marcin Goettig, “Polish minister accuses Facebook of censorship over right-wing symbol,” *Reuters*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-facebook/polish-minister-accuses-facebook-of-censorship-over-right-wing-symbol-idUSKBN13228Y>.

76 “Poland: Right-wing outlets accuse commercial TV channel of staging neo-Nazi event for undercover report,” *Mapping Media Freedom*, November 12, 2018, <https://mappingmediafreedom.usahadi.io/posts/22842>.

77 “Far Right Networks of Deception,” *Avaaz*, May 22, 2019, <https://avaazimages.avaaz.org/Avaaz%20Report%20Network%20Deception%2020190522.pdf>

surge into the tens of thousands of far-right activists unabashedly expressing hateful views.⁷⁸ Recent banners feature racist and fascist slogans such as “Pure Poland, white Poland!” and “Refugees get out!” The government has not condemned these messages, instead characterizing them as “stirring patriotism” and “a beautiful sight.”⁷⁹ Interior Minister Mariusz Blaszczak ordered no detentions or arrests of the protestors displaying white supremacist slogans, claiming he did not see any racist banners. The government has not condemned several other far-right rallies held since it came to power, nor has it condemned a significant increase in hate crimes.⁸⁰ Providing operating space and airspace for Nazis and ultranationalists and their hateful rhetoric increases susceptibility to Russian influence. Yet, PiS cannot help themselves in seeking political power however possible.

PiS has given enough air to the far right that in the 2019 parliamentary election, without access to support from any state media, in the face of direct attacks from the ruling party, far-right Confederation obtained 6.8 percent of the vote and gained 11 seats in parliament.⁸¹ This occurred despite the party’s overt pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian views. This apparent softening of a sliver of Polish society to pro-Russian ideology may in part be due to the government adopting similar messaging, making the ideology of the pro-Russian party seem not so foreign and abhorrent to Poles.

CONCLUSION

PiS has acted like an addict in Poland, seeking short-term highs using strategies it knows are harmful and volatile, while risking the long-term security and health of the nation. This health—in terms of democracy and citizen trust—is starting to deteriorate. According to a 2020 report, only 33 percent of Poles trust mainstream media—the lowest in Central and Eastern Europe.⁸² Public confidence in the judiciary has dropped.⁸³ Trust in politicians is at a twelve-year low.⁸⁴ Poles are sharply divided and hatred is on the rise, making it less likely that those who think differently will experience the sense of shared interests that enables democracy to function. The environment PiS has created, by attacking its own institutions, stirring animosity through disinformation and conspiracy theories, and promoting antagonism toward those that are not “real Poles” (a group which seems to include nearly half of actual Poles), does the Kremlin’s work. It weakens liberal democracy, fragments not only Poles but also the European community responding to Poland’s antidemocratic steps, and undermines international norms. PiS has not only created the Kremlin’s desired outcome, but in some instances borrowed Kremlin strategies, such as using traditional values to alienate citizens, or rewriting history to suit its politics. The transatlantic community can hope that Poland’s leaders will see the havoc wrought on Poland’s long-term interests and correct course, but with the push for votes and political power driving PiS, unfortunately that course correction is not likely to occur anytime soon.

78 Matthew Taylor, “‘White Europe’: 60,000 nationalists march on Poland’s Independence Day,” *Guardian* (US edition), November 12, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/12/white-europe-60000-nationalists-march-on-polands-independence-day>.

79 Taylor, “‘White Europe’: nationalists march.”

80 OSCE/ODIHR Hate Crime Reporting: Poland, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2018, <https://hatecrime.osce.org/poland>; Kelly and Pawlak, “Poland’s far-right”; Gavin Rae, “The neoliberal far right in Poland,” *Social Europe*, December 11, 2019, <https://www.socialeurope.eu/the-neoliberal-far-right-in-poland>.

81 Aleks Szczerbiak, “What are the prospects for Poland’s radical right Confederation,” *The Polish Politics Blog*, December 23, 2019, <https://polishpoliticsblog.wordpress.com/2019/12/23/what-are-the-prospects-for-polands-radical-right-confederation/>.

82 See “Voices Central Eastern Europe,” *GlobSec*, 38.

83 Rob Schmitz, “Poland’s Overhaul of its Courts Leads to Confrontation with European Union,” *NPR*, February 13, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/02/13/805722633/polands-overhaul-of-its-courts-leads-to-confrontation-with-european-union>; “GovData360,” *The World Bank*, 2019, https://govdata360.worldbank.org/countries/POL?indicator=28753&countries=HUN,HRV,LTU,LVA,RUS,KAZ,TUR,ROU,SVK,CZE,EST,BGR,GRL,TKM,MNE,AZE,BLR,GRC,PRT,SRB,MKD,BIH,SVN,ALB,GEO&viz=line_chart&years=2006,2018

84 “GovData360,” *The World Bank*.

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