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FROM **RUSSIA**
WITH **HATE**



The activity of pro-Russian extremist groups
in Central-Eastern Europe

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This paper is the summary of the results of a year-long research project covering five countries and exploring the connections between a wide range of pro-Kremlin stakeholders and Central-Eastern European countries' political forces in general, and the violent, fringe extreme-right movements in particular. Political Capital has already published Europe-wide research¹² and country-specific case studies on the connections between (far-right) political players in Slovakia³ and Hungary,⁴ and published a report on the “export” of ultraconservative, illiberal values by pro-Kremlin players to Central-Eastern Europe.⁵ Important research on this topic has been done by others as well.⁶ This, however, is the first research project that focuses mainly on the *violent* ramifications of the strategy of the Russian state and its proxies to support fringe, extremist organisations in order to undermine bilateral ties with Ukraine and the United States, and destabilise the region. The five countries that we are focusing on are Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Most of our findings are indicative of the trends in the broader region.

1 Krisztián Szabados and Péter Krekó, “Russia’s Far-Right Friends” (Political Capital, 2009), http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends_349.html.

2 Political Capital, “The Russian Connection The Spread of pro-Russian Policies on the European Far Right,” 2014, http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf

3 Péter Krekó et al., “Marching towards Eurasia - The Kremlin Connections of the Slovak Far-Right” (Political Capital, 2015), http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_Study_Russian_Influence_Slovakia_ENG.pdf.

4 Attila Juhász et al., “I Am Eurasian! - the Kremlin Connections of the Hungarian Far-Right,” 2015, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf.

5 Péter Krekó et al., “The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin’s Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe” (Political Capital, 2016), http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf.

6 Anton Shekhovtsov: *Tango Noir: Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

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This summary is based on the country-specific case studies, all prepared with the involvement of local experts and investigative journalists in the respective countries. We are grateful to the authors and institutions listed below.

All errors and omissions are our own.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Secessionism and irredentism as a political strategy

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, we have seen far-right and extremist organisations, most of which had previously predominantly focused on ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities as their main enemies, redirect their attention to geopolitical issues. They are not only agitating against NATO and the EU, but also share a particular sympathy towards Vladimir Putin's Russia, which they regard as an ideological and political model, as well as a deep hatred of Ukraine.

Based on the numerous ideological and personal links between Russian businessmen, politicians, and diplomats and the organisations we uncovered in this research, we can claim that these links are not accidental. It rather seems to be part of a broader effort by the Kremlin to undermine the region's stability in general and bilateral links with Ukraine in particular via supporting the real "troublemakers" throughout the region: secessionist, revisionist, and ultranationalist organisations. The more disputes that exist between these countries, the more historic debates over the borders are resurrected, and the more fear and distrust is stirred up in the region, the better it is for the Kremlin. Vladimir Putin himself made strange statements that were rather revealing about Moscow's destabilising intentions: *"Someone wants to start revisiting the results of World War Two, well, let's try to debate that topic. But then we need to debate not only Kaliningrad but the whole thing, from the eastern part of Germany to Lviv, which was part of Poland, and so on and so forth. There's also Hungary and Romania. (...) Take up the flag and go for it."*

Bargaining with territorial disintegration and supporting secessionist movements is not something new in the Kremlin's playbook: Russia has been involved in similar activities all over the Western world, assisting actors ranging from the Italian Lega Nord to the Californian secession-

7 "Full Transcript of Bloomberg News' Interview With Vladimir Putin," *Bloomberg.com*, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-09-05/putin-discusses-trump-opeec-rosneft-brex-it-japan-transcript>.

ist movement.^{8,9} The Eastern European region, which had been a part of the Soviet Bloc before 1990, has a special importance in this regard, especially since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, which resulted in the allocation of more financial resources to and the organisation of more active measures by the Kremlin in the region.

The leaked emails of Moscow's chief strategist Vladislav Surkov, the mastermind behind the Crimean annexation,¹⁰ prove that a grand destabilisation strategy was laid down in 2014 aiming to achieve the autonomy of Transcarpathia and the federalisation of Ukraine through provoking conflicts between the Rusyn and Hungarian minorities and the Ukrainian far-right, and using secessionist-nationalist organisations in Ukraine, Hungary, and Romania as instruments. Furthermore, a pro-Kremlin activist from Belarus, Alexander Usovsky, organised rallies against Ukraine and for the secession of Ukrainian territories, paying local nationalist movements in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary with the financial support of Konstantin Malofeev, an orthodox oligarch close to the Kremlin who also supports pro-Russian "rebels" in Ukraine.¹¹ The recent "Laundromat" scandal revealed that Mateusz Piskorski, the leader of the Polish Zmiana party, a supporter of pro-Kremlin and Pro-Russian separatists, and an organiser of fake election observer missions who is currently under arrest for spying, received money from the Kremlin between 2012 and 2014.^{12,13}

(Some organisations and actions that the country case studies reveal are listed in Table 1).

8 Anton Shekhovtsov, "The Italian Far Right Lega Nord Builds Closer Ties with Moscow," 2017, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2017/03/the-italian-far-right-lega-nord-builds.html>.

9 Andrew E. Kramer, "California Secession Advocate Faces Scrutiny Over Where He's Based: Russia," *The New York Times*, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/21/us/yes-california-calexit-marinelli-russia.html>.

10 Mihály Kálmán, "Kiszivárgott Iratok: A Fidesz És a Jobbik Segítségével Akarta Megszállni Kárpátalját Putyin?," *Kettős Mércé*, 2016, http://kettosmerce.blog.hu/2016/10/26/a_fidesz_es_a_jobbik_segitssegevel_akarta_megszallni_karpataljat_putyin.

11 "Anti-Ukrainian Actions in the Czech Republic and Poland Sponsored by the Oligarch from Russia," *24-My.info*, 2017, <http://24-my.info/anti-ukrainian-actions-in-the-czech-republic-and-poland-sponsored-by-the-oligarch-from-russia/>.

12 OCCRP, "The Russian Laundromat Exposed," *OCCRP*, 2017, <https://www.occrp.org/en/laundromat/the-russian-laundromat-exposed/>.

13 Wojciech Cieśla, "Kto Prał W Polsce Brudne Pieniądze Z Rosji?," *Newsweek.pl*, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/polityka/sledztwo-newsweeka-kto-pral-w-polsce-brudne-pieniadze-z-rosji-film,407123.html>.

The grand strategy of Moscow combines support for political parties, NGO diplomacy, and intense disinformation efforts. The Kremlin's scheme is based on the Soviet heritage of *active measures* aiming to directly influence the political processes in other countries.¹⁴ This fits well into the views of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia Valery Gerasimov, who oversees the activities of Russian military intelligence on modern warfare, which he detailed one year before the annexation of Crimea: "*The information space opens wide asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy*".¹⁵

Table 1: Pro-Russian, anti-Ukrainian radical and extremist organisations and their destabilising actions

Country	Organisation(s)	Person(s)	Action
Czech Republic	National Democracy/ National Home Guard	Nela Lisková	Establishment of illegal Donetsk People's Republic's illegal "consulate" in 2016
Hungary	Jobbik	Béla Kovács	Spying for the Russian Federation against the EU (investigation began in 2014)
Hungary	Hidfo.ru portal/Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation	N/A	Accusing the Hungarian government of selling T-72 tanks to Ukraine. This fake story found its way to a Kremlin press release in 2014

14 Steve Abrams, "Beyond Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures in Putin's Russia," 2016, https://it-4sec.org/system/files/15.1.01_abrams.pdf.

15 Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review* 96, no. 1 (2016): 30.

Country	Organisation(s)	Person(s)	Action
Hungary	Hungarian National Front	N/A	Airsoft drill with GRU members
Slovakia	Slovak Revival Movement	Marek Rusyniak	Training by ex- Spetsnaz instructors; partnership with Narodnyi Sobor, Stig, Dobrovolec; recruitment of separatist fighters in 2014
Poland	Zmiana/ Congress of the New Right	N/A	Hate crime against World War Two statues in Western Ukraine in 2014
Austria	Identitarian movement	Martin Sellner	Organising anti-refugee protests, inspired by Alexander Dugin's ideology

This strategy aims at exploiting the weaknesses inherent to the Central-Eastern European region: the bitter memories of past territorial disputes, nationalist-secessionist tendencies, and the haunting spectres of chauvinist ideologies promising to make these nations great again. Literally, as polls indicate, not only xenophobic nationalism is widespread in the region,¹⁶ but revisionist, expansionist tendencies also enjoy considerable support (See Table 2). As Bugajski and Assenova wrote: *“Moscow (...) endeavours to benefit from political, ethnic, religious, and social turbulence in East Central Europe in order to keep governments off balance. Any democratic regression in ECE combined with the growth of nationalism and populism can favour Russia’s regional objectives by weakening democratic institutions, engendering EU divisions, and undermining NATO’s effectiveness.”*¹⁷

16 See Political Capital’s Demand for Right Wing Extremism Index, www.derexindex.eu

17 Janusz Bugajski and Assenova Margarita, *Eurasian Disunion: Russia’s Vulnerable Flanks*, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/product/eurasian-disunion-russias-vulnerable-flanks/>.

Pro-Russian extremist organisations often act as if they were deliberately implementing the above-mentioned strategy of Moscow. A prime example of this behaviour is the Sixty-Four County Youth Movement (HVIM) in Hungary. This organisation was engaged in extremist recruitment activity beyond Hungarian borders, released statements claiming that Transcarpathia is not part of Ukraine, organised protests in support of the “Donetsk People’s Republic”, and called for the boycott of chocolate products produced by Petro Poroshenko’s interests. Furthermore, Romanian authorities have accused them of plotting a terrorist attack in Romania. Additionally, there are extremist organisations whose blatantly obvious links to Russia are even better documented. The leader of MNA 1989, an extremist movement with extensive ties to Russian secret services, murdered a policeman in Hungary in October 2016. It turned out that Russian military intelligence (GRU) officers disguised as Russian diplomats have participated in joint airsoft drills with the members of this organisation. The former website of MNA has previously been referred to in a statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry as “proof” of a planted fake piece of news on Hungarian tanks being transferred to Ukraine. Budapest nowadays is becoming a centre of the pro-Russian extreme right: the centre of pro-Russian international extremist networks such as the Knights Templar International, and the host of meetings of and a safe haven for Swedish, French, and British extremists, while authorities are turning a blind eye to their activities. There are Slovak far-right paramilitary figures fighting in Eastern Ukraine or promoting the separatists’ case in Slovakia, including Martin Kepřta, a former member of the Slovak Conscripts (Slovenskí Branci-SB), whose organisation had earlier received training from ex-members of Spetsnaz, the Russian military intelligence’s special forces. Polish counter-intelligence is currently investigating Mateusz Piskorski, the leader of the Polish leftist party Change (Zmiana), as well as former activists of the far-right Polish Congress of the New Right (KNP) on charges of espionage on behalf of Russia. The latter had allegedly taken part in so-called “active measures” on the territory of Ukraine in 2014 to provoke an ethnic conflict against the Polish minority living in Western Ukraine.

In the Czech Republic, the “Donetsk People’s Republic” opened a “consulate” in September 2016 with the help of Czech far-right actors, including the National Home Guard, a paramilitary group (not recognised by the Czech authorities). The annual report of the Czech Security Information Service (BIS) also refers to widespread connections between extremist forces and Russia.

In Austria, it is not only the far-right FPÖ that serves the interest of the Kremlin, but we can also see increasingly extensive cooperation between Russia and the Identitarian Movement—the extremist youth movement following Alexander Dugin’s ideology – with increasing activity, a potential for violence, and a strong mobilizational capacity. These cases above all reveal that the threat Russia poses to the region is not only political or informational in nature, but a security threat as well.

Russia has had a vested interest in these organisations to destabilise the region since the annexation of Crimea. In addition, they aim to test and undermine trust in these states and their law enforcement bodies. They found natural allies in extremist movements in this effort, whose voices are amplified by a strong pro-Russian media network spreading fake news and conspiracy theories predominantly on social media, which aim to fuel and deepen ethnic, social, and national conflicts. Also, these media outlets spread calls for the secession of minorities living in Ukraine and joining the rebels in Eastern Ukraine. The refugee crisis, exacerbated by the Russian intervention in Syria, only helped these movements and the fake news media empire to flourish on the fertile ground of deepening fears, mistrust, and xenophobia. Such propaganda efforts exploit the widespread, albeit not dominant mistrust of the West in these countries, with the aim of turning the countries of the region against each other.¹⁸

18 Globsec Policy Institute, “Central Europe under the Fire of Propaganda: Public Opinion Poll Analysis in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia,” 2016, http://www.cepolicy.org/sites/cepolicy.org/files/attachments/glb_trends_en.pdf.

**Table 2. “Do parts of neighbouring countries belong to us?”
Percentage of the ones who agree (Pew, 2009)¹⁹**

Country	Agree, %
Bulgaria	66
Hungary	61
Russia	58
Poland	51
Czech Republic	40
Slovakia	29

The lack of responses

The Kremlin is highly effective in infiltrating fringe parties and para-military organisations in Central Europe, which are easy to purchase or control, as these extremist groups tend to be small and easily manipulated. While the destabilisation efforts in the region have been rather limited, this threat should be taken seriously.

The main problem is that this effort remains unchallenged in most of these countries. Naturally, the region is not homogeneous. Poland, the only state from the five under examination that has a direct border with Russia, is traditionally more vigilant towards influencing efforts and its leadership is conscious of “psychological warfare” conducted by the Kremlin. The Czech government also seems to have more willingness to explore these ties and counter them institutionally.

¹⁹ Pew Global Attitudes, “Two Decades After the Wall’s Fall,” 2009, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/pdf/267.pdf>.

In these countries, attempts at arresting individuals with links to Russian secret services and steps against espionage and the establishment of bodies to counter disinformation could be observed. The Slovak Ministry of Interior has recently announced that the Slovak police will employ twelve new experts to counter Russian disinformation and hybrid threats, which is probably also a reaction to the Slovak president Andrej Kiska's criticism directed at the Slovak state's unpreparedness to fend off such threats.²⁰

Hungary and Austria are rather reluctant to act and react. And, there still is widespread denial of Russian threat in the whole region. Nationalist leaders in the region tend to boast about their ability to defend their countries from external threats, but they remain silent when it comes to obvious, even violent cases of Russian attempts to undermine their sovereignty and humiliate their state institutions. Moreover, sometimes they even encourage them with their diplomatic silence and "pragmatic" economic and political ties to Russia.

What should be done?

In order to challenge this threat, we recommend the following steps:

1. Russian influence in the region should be treated as a security threat. Ministries of interior and counterintelligence agencies must have the staff, resources, and political support to reveal these malevolent links.
2. Politicians in Central-Eastern Europe should not ignore the elephant in the room anymore in bilateral discussions with Russia: obvious attempts by Russia to influence their political landscape should be mentioned – along with the Kremlin's attempts at instrumentalizing violent organisations. These issues should be discussed on the bilateral level.

²⁰ Márk Finta, "Szlovákia Az Orosz Propaganda Egyik Fontos Célországá," *Ujszo.com*, March 21, 2017, <http://uj szo.com/online/kozelet/2017/03/21/szlovakia-az-orosz-propaganda-egyik-fontos-celorszag-a>.

3. The financial links between extremist organizations and Russia should be officially investigated, recently leaked information should be scrutinised in the coming months (Surkov-files, Usovsky e-mails, “Laundromat” investigation, etc.).
4. A widespread lustration in law enforcement agencies is urgent. Law enforcement agencies and secret services (especially in post-communist countries) are still infiltrated by the Russian secret services, which deteriorates the chances for countering these threats.
5. The threat of Russian information warfare and political influence should be included in the countries’ public national security documents and assessments, which is the case in the Czech Republic, though no other country has so far done this in the region.
6. The pro-Kremlin attitudes find fertile ground in Euroscepticism and anti-Americanism. Political forces wanting to restrict Russian influence should also abandon anti-Western rhetoric.
7. More integrated secret services are needed. To overcome the reluctance of some member states, such as Hungary, to reveal the potential dangers of Russian influence and to acknowledge the pan-European nature of these threats, the European Union should push for more integrated intelligence services in the EU under the umbrella of the European Council or even the European Commission.
8. More transatlantic political investment by the United States is a must. We could see in the last few years that the “soft isolationist” stance of the previous administration encouraged the malevolent economic and political influence in the broader Central-Eastern European region. In order to counter this tendency, the United States should increase its commitment to the Central European region, the breeding ground for both World Wars in the 20th Century.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Contributors: *Petra Vejvodová, Jakub Janda, Veronika Vichová*

Political context

After the fall of Communism and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the Czech Republic became an integrated part of NATO and the EU by becoming the closest follower of Berlin's leadership in the community among the post-communist states of Central Europe. While relations between the two countries are traditionally important but reserved, the Crimean annexation polarised the landscape. This act was swiftly cast as Russian military aggression and illegal occupation by both the Czech parliament and the Czech government. President Milos Zeman, for one, practically welcomed this move with an openness that no other leader of an EU member dared to show.

The peculiarity of Russian influence in the Czech Republic stems from the fact that pro-Russian political actors represent only a small, albeit loud and visible fraction, with rather limited political power. The strongly pro-Russian political spectrum relies on politicians like President Zeman or Jan Mladek, a former minister for industry and trade (2014–2017); and fringe parties like the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy, or the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, or paramilitary groups like the National Home Guard. A significant pro-Russian “alternative media” landscape helps to amplify the voices of fringe organisations.

Pro-Russian sympathies are dominant on the Czech far-right and extremist scene: Tomio Okamura, the leader of Freedom and Direct Democracy, supports referendums in separatist areas in Eastern Ukraine; the National Democracy party praised Putin's effort to guarantee order and security in Ukraine, etc. The danger of these organisations is threefold. First of all, they represent a direct national security threat instrumentalized in Russia's hybrid war waged against Europe.

Second, Czech pro-Russian paramilitary organisations represent a regional threat as well, one that also extends to the Slovak pro-Russian extremist and paramilitary scene. Finally, despite the country's integration into Western structures, more than half of the Czech population is quite sceptical when it comes to the EU, so anti-establishment sentiment can be stoked more easily by advocates of the Kremlin, even on the fringes. The Czech Republic, on the other hand, is an exemplary case in Central-Eastern Europe when it comes to political responses. The Czech Ministry of Interior launched a Center against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats in January 2017 after the new Czech Security Strategy had warned of hybrid warfare in 2015.

United on the fringes

Parties and politicians inside and outside mainstream institutions obsessed with political Russophilia legitimise the Kremlin's geopolitical stances, while spreading anti-EU, anti-USA, and anti-NATO narratives. The Czech Republic is one of the few countries where extremists often echo the voices of a head of state: Czech president Miloš Zeman's pro-Russian stance dates back to before Crimea and after those events he continued to set the pro-Russian agenda, often broadcast by Russian state media and pro-Russian fringe media, by claiming that Crimea cannot be returned to Ukraine and that former Ukrainian PM Arseniy Yatsenyuk was a "Prime Minister of War."²¹

On the fringes, besides the Communist Party, there are far-right parties expressing an uninhibited support for Moscow, following a well-known pattern in Europe. This group includes the Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), the National Democracy (ND), and the Workers' Party of Social Justice (DSSS) party. Their pro-Moscow stance and criticism of the EU or the US comes with a package of disgust for migration, the rejection of multiculturalism, and the embracement of general xenophobia framed by global conspiracy theories.

21 "Zeman: Jaceňuk Je „premiér Války“, Nechce Mírové Řešení - E15.cz," Zprávy E15.cz, accessed April 4, 2017, <http://zpravky.e15.cz/zahranicni/politika/zeman-jacenuk-je-premier-valky-nechce-mirove-rensni-1149666..>

Tomio Okamura, the leader of the SPD, for example, not only denied any Russian aggression, but he even claimed that the “civil war” in Ukraine was provoked by the USA and the EU, while NATO is “arming against Russia.”²² One member of the ND, Ladislav Zemánek, participated in the separatist elections in Eastern Ukraine as an election observer.²³

When it comes to propagating Russian interests, fringe parties set aside their normal reservations against each other in parliament. The key pro-Russian NGO, the Slavic Strategic Studies, held seminars for MPs about “Current Fascism in Europe” and “Myths about Russia”, which were organised first by the far-left Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, then by the far-right party of Okamura in 2016. As Tomio Okamura summarised his “pacifist” position: “*The way to peace in the Europe goes through cooperation with Russia, not confrontation.*”²⁴

Extremist activity after the Crimean annexation

While Czech paramilitary movements are generally on the decline, new pro-Russian ones have sprung up after the Crimean crisis, which seems to be more than mere coincidence. The Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserve Against the Planned NATO Command (CSR), for example, was established in 2015, and refuses any future combat “in the ranks” of NATO against Russia or other Slavic nations, as stated in their memorandum.²⁵ The membership of this organisation mainly comprises well-trained former soldiers, and their drills are conducted with legal weapons. Another organisation, the paramilitary National Home Guard (NHG), was established by persons around the National Democracy party as a reaction to the migration crisis in 2015 to defend the Czech Republic from the influx of migrants.

22 Tomio Okamura, “Ukrajina: Kdo Je Tu Vlastně Zločincem?,” September 8, 2014, <http://www.tomio.cz/aktuality/ukrajina-kdo-je-tu-vlastne-zlocincem/>.

23 Vera Žilková, “Volby v Donbasu Sledovali Vedle Senátora Doubravy I Fašisté Z Maďarska,” iDNES.cz, 2014, http://zpravy.idnes.cz/na-separatisticke-volby-v-donbasu-dohlizeli-clenove-krajne-pravicovych-stran-1hj-zahranicni.aspx?c=A141103_130917_zahranicni_vez.

24 Okamura, “Sankce Vůči Rusku Byly Od Počátku Naprostá Hloupost,” accessed April 12, 2017, <http://spd.cz/tomio-okamura-sankce-vuci-rusku-byly-od-pocatku-naprosta-hloupost/>.

25 “Memorandum - Czechoslovak Soldiers in Ambush War against the Planned NATO Command,” accessed April 12, 2017, <http://csla.komuna.cz/memorandum-en-version/>.

One of its leaders, Nela Lisková, visited the Donetsk People's Republic in March 2016 as part of the NHG's delegation. This meeting was followed by the establishment of the Czech "consulate," which is in fact registered as a Czech NGO, of the Donetsk People's Republic headed by Lisková as "consul" in Ostrava, which has not been recognised by the Czech Foreign Ministry.²⁶

Despite the fact that these organisations' membership amounts to only a few hundred people, they can still have a strong destabilising effect not only due to their xenophobic actions against migrants, but also because they are members of the pro-Russian "power vertical" in the Czech Republic. The NHG is cooperating with the National Democracy party, while the CSR offered their services to Milos Zeman, who has thus far refused take them up on that offer.

Disinformation as a national security threat

Pro-Russian disinformation outlets, counting dozens of new media outlets and websites assist all the abovementioned pro-Russian organisations, including the most extreme ones, to disseminate their political messages. Their potential is shown by the fact that 25 per cent of the Czech public trusts the so-called "alternative media" more than the mainstream media.²⁷ The Czech counter-intelligence agency, BIS, claimed in their 2015 annual report that the outlets aimed at provoking inter-societal and inter-political tensions, while disrupting the unity of NATO and the EU in order to isolate Ukraine on the international stage.²⁸ All this prompted the Ministry of Interior to launch a Centre against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats to counter the non-linear warfare of the Kremlin.

26 "Donetsk Separatists Fly Flag At Czech Center That Prague Vows To Close," *RadioFreeEurope/Radioliberty*, 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-donetsk-czech-consulate-ostrava-liskova/27962142.html>.

27 "Disinformation Operations in the Czech Republic," *European Values Think-Tank*, September 13, 2016, <http://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/disinformation-operations-in-the-czech-republic/>.

28 Czech Counter-Intelligence Agency BIS, "Security Information Service (BIS)," 2015, <https://www.bis.cz/vyrocní-zpravaEN890a.html?ArticleID=1104>.

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Political context

In Slovakia's case, the Kremlin's influence is partly rooted in positive historical-national identity-building based on a shared Pan-Slavic ideology dating back to the 19th century. Anti-Western sentiments after the transition helped to revitalise these Panslavist tendencies by nationalist players. The 1990s' Meciar era's very strong pro-Russian foreign policy was put to a halt in 1998 and the country's integration into the Western structures of NATO and the EU ended in 2004. Still, Slovak mainstream politics has been pursuing a "friendly pragmatist" approach to Russia in accordance with the traditionally strong pro-Russian public sentiment. Prime Minister Robert Fico (SMER-SD), for example, became one of the most outspoken critics of European sanctions against Russia.²⁹ However, the war in Eastern Ukraine has somewhat altered the equation by turning Russia into a threat in the Slovak public's perception,³⁰ while the government firmly supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine.³¹ With the prime minister keeping his "dovish" policy without abandoning the European mainstream, the far-right People's Party–Our Slovakia (LSNS), has recently become the main driving force behind nationalist, pro-Russian political Panslavism. Even though the SNS used to be the most fervent supporter of Russia, it has toned down its pro-Russian attitude after having become a part of the third Fico Cabinet.³²

29 Krekó et al., "Marching towards Eurasia - The Kremlin Connections of the Slovak Far-Right."

30 Ibid.

31 The Slovak government also by providing reverse gas-flow, humanitarian aid, training of Ukrainian military expert to the Ukrainian Ministries of Defence and Health.

32 "Meet Slovakia's New Cabinet," *Spectator.sme.sk*, March 22, 2016, <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20121797/meet-slovakias-new-cabinet.html>.

On the contrary, the openly neo-Nazi ĽSNS's leader, Marian Kotleba, previously the most prominent leader of the extremist far-right, labelled the Maidan revolution an act of "terrorists" and the party launched its petition to secede Slovakia from the EU and NATO:

*"At present, NATO is trying to occupy the Ukraine and Russia. American soldiers are going closer and closer to the Russian borders. And our treacherous politicians help them with this."*³³

The ĽSNS pursues its pro-Russian, anti-establishment politics opposing the Euro-Atlantic community along several other "civic" actors and paramilitary organisations supported by strong pro-Russian online "alternative media."³⁴ The most alarming characteristic of the Kremlin's influence in Slovakia is its connection to the violent "grass-roots" radicalisation among far-right parties and paramilitary organisations. Kotleba himself not only has close relations with one of the decisive groups, the Action Group Resistance Kysuce (VK), but the MPs and membership of the ĽSNS is comprised of members accused of racially-motivated criminal offences and anti-Semitic hate speech.³⁵ Furthermore, as a distinctively dangerous element of the Slovakian extreme-right scene, some organisations have sent soldiers to Eastern Ukraine to fight alongside pro-Russian "rebels".³⁶ Moreover, ex-members of the Russian special forces, Spetsnaz, have provided trainings for some paramilitary far-right groups.

33 Naše Slovensko – noviny politickej strany Mariana Kotlebu, "V NATO Sme Bábkou Amerických Zločincov! NATO Vzniklo Preto, Aby Nás Zničilo Terroristov Ochraňujú, Nevinných Zabijajú," October 2016, <http://www.naseslovensko.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/nase-slovensko-oktober-2016.pdf>.

34 For example, the likes of the Slovak–Russian Society (Slovensko-ruská spoločnosť) and Pan-Slavic Union (Panslovanská únia), See: Péter Krekó et al., "The Weaponization of Culture: Kremlin's Traditional Agenda and the Export of Values to Central Europe" (Political Capital, 2016), http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_reactionary_values_CEE_20160727.pdf.

35 Moreover, the party has established "citizen soldiers" who patrol train lines against the "violent Roma," thus legitimizing the use of force against minorities.

36 "Slovak Extremists Groups Can Produce Rebels in Ukraine," *Spectator.sme.sk*, February 26, 2015, <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20056340/slovak-extremists-groups-can-produce-rebels-in-ukraine.html>.

Paramilitary radicalization with the helping hands from Russia

Although the two main Slovak paramilitary groups comprise only a maximum of few hundred people, the war in Ukraine and the migration crisis acted as catalytic events not only re-legitimising these extremist organisations' credo against religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities, but also revitalising feuds between Slovak and Hungarian, and Slovak and Ukrainian organisations, each harbouring historical, revisionist sentiments against each other. The Slovak Conscripts (Slovenskí branci – SB), established in 2012, is an officially unregistered sport/military organisation modelled after Russian patriotic clubs.³⁷ SB provides a comprehensive military training to the members by ex-Spetsnaz instructors, its leader and founder Peter Švrček received his training from the *Stiag* and the Russian Cossacks.^{38 39} A former member, Martin Kepřta, one of the few verified foreign fighters fighting alongside the separatists in Eastern Ukraine, stated:

*“Our aim is New Russia (Novorossiya) and recognition of Donetsk independent republic. I am a member of the official army.”*⁴⁰

The Action Group Resistance Kysuce (Akčná skupina Vzдор Kysuce), or VK, is one of the most dangerous paramilitary movements expressing adoration for Tiso and de facto approval of the Holocaust. Because of “tense relations” between Slovakia and Russia, VK openly called upon its members to undermine the po-

37 The organization is in direct contact with the pro-Putin “Night Wolves” biker gang for example.

38 The main ideology is the Pan-Slavic unity of Slavic nations from the Adriatic Sea to the Bering Strait against a “pro-terrorist, aggressive organization of NATO under imperial US influence.” “Spoved' Slovák, ktorý bojuje za proruských separatistov,” *Aktuality.sk*, February 23, 2015, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/271050/nevzali-ho-do-armady-siel-k-separatistom/>

39 Tomáš Bičkoš, “Slovenskí Branci – Poslanie, Činnosť a Zmysel Existencie,” *Mea Patria*, February 15, 2013, <http://meapatria.sk/zaujalo-nas/slovenski-branci-%e2%80%93-poslanie-cinnost-a-zmysel-existence/>.

40 *aktuality.sk*, “Spoved' Slovák, ktorý Bojuje Za Proruských Separatistov,” *Aktuality.sk*, February 23, 2015, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/271050/nevzali-ho-do-armady-siel-k-separatistom/>.

litical establishment using weapons if necessary in 2015.⁴¹ The destabilisation potential of the organisation is even greater under the leadership of Lukáš Kopáč, who wants to join forces with the SHO to possibly form another neo-Nazi party to run in the 2020 Slovak elections.

Infiltration into law enforcement bodies

Pro-Russian organisations pose a serious threat to Slovak national security and defence community since they tend to draw their membership from army personnel. The SB for example uses military-grade weaponry acquired from contacts or members in the Slovak military. VK went so far as to call on their members to infiltrate the army or the police.⁴² The Private Secondary Professional School for the Protection of Persons and Properties (*Súkromná stredná odborná škola ochrany osôb a majetku*) in Bratislava runs on an anti-Western and anti-NATO platform. It was founded by Štefan Kurilla, a certified Spetznaz instructor, and funded by Russian stakeholders. The school prepares students for careers in the police corps, the municipal police, customs service, the military police, etc., and thus has an established relationship with Slovak security institutions. The school's former head, Jozef Gandžala, is a member of another prolific NGO, the Association of the Slovak Soldiers (ASV), which accused the Ministry of Defence of "treason" for sending Slovak troops to Latvia in 2017 as part of the V4 countries' commitment after the Warsaw Summit.⁴³ ASV's chairman, Jozef Žarnovičan, threatened: *"There will come the time, and it is not so far, when Slovakia will have the national government resistant toward the transnational fascist corporatist and globalist pressures (...) with a strong national defense army ready to protect its own citizens."*⁴⁴

41 Dušan Mikušovič, "Preniknite Do Armády a Polície, Vyzývajú Verných Radikáli Zo Vzduchu," *Denník N*, June 4, 2015, <https://dennikn.sk/151609/preniknite-armady-policie-vyzvyvaju-verných-radikalí-zo-vzduchu/>.

42 Ibid.

43 Hlavné správy - Konzervatívny denník, "Predseda ASV Žarnovičan Podozrieva Skupinku Okolo Gajdoša a Naďa Zo Spáchania Vlastizrady. Žiada O Prešetrenie," *Hlavné Správy*, February 3, 2017, <http://www.hlavnespravysk/predseda-asv-zarnovican-ziada-o-presetrenie-z-protistatnej-cinnosti-sk-upiny-padlo-aj-meno-gajdos-a-nada/893524>.

44 "Výpoveď Asociácie slovenských vojakov - ZEM & VEK," Web Page, *Zem a Vek - Časopis*, (2017), <http://www.zemavek.sk/articles/view/vypoved-asociacie-slovenskych-vojakov>.

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Political context

Despite the shared, difficult history, including but not limited to the Cold War period when Moscow crushed the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Hungaro-Russian relations were rather practical and balanced after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Pragmatism, based on Hungary's dependence on Russian energy, has always been a decisive factor in defining incumbent Hungarian governments' Moscow strategy. Still, because of a lack of shared language, culture, and religion, Russophile grassroots movements are almost non-existent within Hungary. However, since the eruption of the Ukrainian crisis, we have seen some organisations popping up miraculously and, we can assume, not spontaneously. Hungarian society, despite nationalist political efforts to turn the country Eastwards, is generally oriented more towards the West than towards Russia.⁴⁵ Hungary's vulnerability against Russia stems from the pro-Russian geopolitical turn of the ruling rightist Fidesz party and the far-right Jobbik–Movement for a Better Hungary—which have added a new layer to the “pragmatic” pro-Russian policies that also characterised previous socialist governments. Jobbik is part of the network of far-right and right-wing populist parties in Europe that support the Kremlin's geopolitical goals by echoing the official Russian standpoints and its attempts to destabilise the EU and NATO. However, as Jobbik shifts more towards the centre of the political spectrum and aims to open up to the West, some extremist, sometimes paramilitary organisations (with ties to Jobbik), are becoming more important in channelling Russian influence to Hungary. These organisations, as a consequence of their use of hate speech, revisionist goals, recruitment activities beyond the borders of Hungary, and openly expressed hatred of the Ukrainian state pose a direct national security threat.⁴⁶

45 “Magyarország a Legvédtelenebb Az Orosz Befolyással Szemben,” Portfolio, 2016, http://www.portfolio.hu/users/elofizetes_info.php?t=cikk&i=241345.

46 Juhász et al., “‘I Am Eurasian’ - the Kremlin Connections of the Hungarian Far-Right.”

Jobbik and its satellite organisations' rally around the Russian flag

Despite Jobbik's tries to distance itself from paramilitary organisations, the revisionist Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (HVIM), the neo-Nazi Army of Outlaws (Betyársereg), the Hungarian Self-Defence Movement (MÖM), and the Wolves (Farkasok) all belong to the party's hinterland through personal and financial connections.⁴⁷ In 2009, Jobbik president Gábor Vona entered into a strategic alliance lasting to this day with the leaders of extremist organisations, which lent political legitimacy to even the most violent elements of the extremist scene.⁴⁸

These organisations traditionally focused on minorities (mainly of Jewish and Roma origins) as archenemies, but since the Ukrainian crisis, we have seen their focus gradually shifting to geopolitical matters, allowing their positive attitudes towards Russia to become increasingly obvious. They promise to protect the Hungarian minority living in Transcarpathia, whilst supporting the separatists' cause for independence and embracing the Kremlin's ultraconservative value-set based on Christianity, tradition, and family. Russian geopolitical efforts and targeted propaganda fuels Hungarian nationalist narratives: according to some revisionist hopes, the annexation of Crimea can help Hungary reclaim its lost territories, such as Transcarpathia and Transylvania. This fits into Russia's geopolitical efforts to make the borders more debatable in the region,⁴⁹ ⁵⁰ and to create and re-open territorial disputes that might even help the creation of frozen conflicts in the future.

47 Lóránt Győri and Attila Juhász, "A Jobbiknál Jól Megfér a Cukiság És a Szélsőségek," *24.hu*, December 15, 2016, <http://24.hu/belfold/2016/12/15/a-jobbiknal-jol-megfer-a-cukisag-es-a-szelsosegek/>.

48 "Gyilkolna a HVIM Alelnöke," *ATV.hu*, 2012, http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20120815_akasztana_es_gyilkolna_a_jobbik_szovetseges_szervezet_alelnoke.

49 "A Székelyföldi Autonómia Orosz Érdek, Állítja Egy Offshore Elemzőcég," *Világtérkép/Átlátszó*, 2014, <http://vilagterkep.atlatszo.hu/2014/08/26/a-szekelyfoldi-autonomia-orosz-erdek-allitja-egy-offshore-elemzocseg/>.

50 "Tyirityán: Nem Tartjuk Orbánt Közellenségnek," *24.hu*, November 23, 2016, <http://24.hu/kozelet/2016/11/23/tyirityan-nem-tartjuk-orbant-kozellensegnek/>.

As we know from the leaked emails of former Putin chief strategist Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin directly aimed to encourage political revisionism in Hungary during the Crimean crisis,⁵¹ especially with regards to Transcarpathia. According to the hacked e-mails of Alexander Usovsky, a pro-Kremlin activist, Jobbik and one paramilitary organisation could have even received financial support for organising protests in late summer of 2014.⁵² In fact, Jobbik and HVIM did organise a protest in front of the Ukrainian Embassy in Budapest to demand autonomy for Transcarpathia and the federalisation of Ukraine in August 2014.⁵³

As a typical example of how this strategy works in practice (with limited success), HVIM posted a declaration in 2014 and organised protests calling for a “patriotic stand in support for Russia” in which they stated that “*Transcarpathia is not Ukraine, and Transylvania is not Romania.*”⁵⁴ Another attempt of the same organisations was to boycott the chocolates and sweets produced by Petro Poroshenko’s interest.⁵⁵

Active measures: the Hungarian National Front and the case of Béla Kovács

There are even more obvious cases of trying to influence political processes via active measures than those already mentioned. One of the most dangerous Hungarian hate groups, the Hungarian National Front (MNA), was recently dissolved after their leader shot and killed a police officer as his house was being searched for weapons on October 26, 2016.⁵⁶

51 Kálmán, “Kiszivárgott Iratok.”

52 “Kremlin Is behind Anti-Ukrainian Protests in Poland: Analysis of the Hacked Correspondence - InformNapalm.org (English),” *InformNapalm.org (English)*, March 7, 2017, <https://informnapalm.org/en/kremlin-behind-anti-ukrainian-protests-poland-analysis-hacked-correspondence/>.

53 “Ez a háború nem a magyarság háborúja,” Text, *Jobbik.hu*, (August 9, 2014), <https://jobbik.hu/hireink/ez-haboru-nem-magyarsag-haboruja>.

54 “Vér Nélkül Nem Lehet: Magyar Nemzeti Radikálisok Erdélyben II.,” 2014, <https://atlatzso.hu/2014/05/28/ver-nelkul-nem-lehet-magyar-nemzeti-radikaliskok-erdelyben-ii/>.

55 “Bojkott Indult a Kárpátaljai Magyarokért,” *Alfahír*, April 22, 2015, http://alfahir.hu/bojkott-indult_a_karpataljai_magyarokert.

56 “Lecsapott a TEK a Nemzeti Arcvonalra,” *24.hu*, November 15, 2016, <http://24.hu/belfold/2016/11/15/oriasrazzia-lefejeztek-a-nemzeti-arcvonalat/>.

This organisation was revealed to have had good relationships with Russian diplomats and security services. Investigative journalists revealed that members of the foreign military intelligence agency (GRU) disguised as Russian diplomats had been able to participate in airsoft drills together with members of the MNA for years in Hungary without being disturbed.⁵⁷ While we cannot assume that the murder itself was part of following the Kremlin's orders, the mere fact that these connections exist is telling about how far the Russian state can reach to find possible allies for creating instability.

Even though it is well known that the organisation's website *Hídő. ru* is being operated with the assistance of Russian secret services and is involved in active measures,⁵⁸ the subsequent official investigation by the police and parliamentary commissions are not following this line of inquiry.⁵⁹ Similarly, there has been no real progress in the ongoing investigation against Béla Kovács, the former head of Jobbik's foreign policy cabinet, whom authorities currently accuse of espionage against the EU on behalf of Russia.^{60,61} Kovács has yet to be arrested, so he is free to continue his diplomatic activity in Brussels or tamper with possible evidence. This reveals a concerning situation where Hungarian authorities, afraid of losing the "friendship" of Russia, are reluctant to step up against increasingly obvious cases of Russian influence, and in this way encourage the Kremlin to continue its activities.

57 Panyi Szabolcs, "New York Times: Orosz Fedett Hírszerzők Évi Ötször Utaztak Le Bónybe," December 25, 2016, http://index.hu/belfold/2016/12/25/new_york_times_orosz_fedett_hirszerzok_evi_otszor_is_gyakorlatoztak_gyorkosekkel/.

58 "Könyvedén Szórákodik Velünk Az Orosz Titkosszolgálat," August 19, 2014, http://index.hu/belfold/2014/08/19/from_russia_with_love/.

59 Panyi Szabolcs, "Sziijártóék Nem Lépnek a Bónyi Rendőrgyilkos Orosz Kapcsolatai Miatt," November 10, 2016, http://index.hu/belfold/2016/11/10/szijjartok_nem_lepnek_a_bonyi_rendorgyilkosag_orosz_titkosszolgalmati_szala_miatt/.

60 He has been accused by the Constitution Protection Office (AH) in the midst of the campaign for the 2014 general election, however it hasn't been uncovered thus far who Kovács Béla's Russian contact was.

61 Zoltán Ember, "Kovács Béla Él És Virul Strasbourgban," *24.hu*, June 15, 2016, <http://24.hu/belfold/2016/06/15/kovacs-bela-el-es-virul-strasbourgban/>.

European and regional security threat

Hungary is more and more becoming the centre of extremist, “alt-right” European organisations and a centre for Russian propaganda activities.

Russian institutional influence manifests itself, among others, in the relations between Hungarian far-right movements and several pro-Russian separatist organisations in Europe that are aiming to undermine the territorial integrity of the region. The Romanian branch of HVIM met with the separatist Moldovan National Democrat Movement (MND) to exchange experiences: “*They are curious how we built this organisation, they want to learn from us (...) the EU brought nothing good (...) hats off to Putin, we can count on the Russians,*” said Zoltán Szócs about the meeting, who Romanian prosecutors have accused of making preparations for a HVIM-related terrorism attempt.⁶² Interestingly, the abovementioned Surkov strategy would have put the focus on Hungary and Romania in fuelling secessionist sentiments to help to destabilise Ukraine.

Zsolt Dér, one of the leaders of the Wolves, a member of the Army of Outlaws, and a veteran of the Yugoslav Wars, only postponed joining the fight on behalf of the Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine because at the time he was serving as an assistant to the Deputy Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly Tamás Sneider (a former neo-Nazi), who is delegated by Jobbik.⁶³

62 “Vér Nélkül Nem Lehet.”

63 “Dér Zsolt És Az Igazság – Válaszok a Bulvár Média Hazugságaira,” *Szent Korona Rádió*, March 31, 2016, <http://szenkoronaradio.com/blog/2016/03/31/der-zsolt-es-az-igazsag-valaszok-a-bulvar-media-hazugsagaira/>.

HVIM founder and Jobbik Vice President László Toroczkai is in contact with the Putinist James Dowson, the leader of the British Knights Templar International (KTI), owner of fake news sites, and someone who is considered to be a fundraiser for the “border-patrol activity” of the pro-Russian Bulgarian paramilitary organisation Sipka.^{64,65} Additionally, the British ex-far-right leader Nick Griffin is moving to Budapest to find a safe haven of illiberalism. The danger of destabilisation is so real that HVIM was threatened along with Jobbik by the Ukrainian paramilitary organisation Karpatska Sic in 2015, who claimed the two would be annihilated.⁶⁶

64 Gergely Miklós Nagy, “Fehér Embernek Fillérékért! - Oroszbarát Brit Újfasiszták Toroczkai És a Jobbik Közeliében,” *Magyar Narancs*, 2016, <http://m.magynarancs.hu/kismagyarország/feher-embernek-fillerekert-101832>.

65 The Sipka’s activity materialised in the physical abuse of refugees.

66 “Fegyveres Ukrán Szervezet Fenyegette Meg a Jobbikot És a HVIM-Et,” *Alfahír*, April 24, 2015, <http://alfahir.hu/fegyveres-ukran-szervezet-fenyegette-meg-a-jobbikot-es-a-hvim-et>.

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Political context

Russian political leverage in Poland is rather limited due to historical and recent events. Territorial aggressions, Russification attempts, and the Soviet occupation of the past make the Kremlin's position, Panslavic sentiment or admiration for the great Eastern Christian power difficult to support. Instead, the main goal of Warsaw after the transition was to seek both the integration of Poland into the Euro-Atlantic community and democratic independence for post-Soviet states. The illegal occupation of Crimea and the following Russia-Ukraine war in Eastern Ukraine once again put the Kremlin in the role of military aggressor in the eyes of the Polish government, the political establishment, and society at large. It is not surprising then that the July 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw resulted in the strengthening of the Eastern flank of the alliance by deploying one battalion to Poland. Thus, the Kremlin had to resort to mainly indirectly targeting Polish nationalist-fringe movements with soft power through fringe media, while also relying on a very small circle of politicians, parties, and NGOs primarily around the Zmiana party led by Mateusz Piskorski for some direct political influence. As a result, the Russian modus operandi in Poland is not really trying to outright challenge the Polish pro-Western geopolitical stances, but rather to stoke cross-border tensions with Ukraine, Germany, or general anti-establishment sentiments aimed at domestic or regional destabilisation.

Election business and spying

Once a politician of the far-right Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland (SRP), Mateusz Piskorski became an MP of the Sejm for a brief period of a time in 2005, where he successfully launched his foreign-policy carrier. In 2007, he established the pro-Russian and pro-Eurasian European Center of Geopolitical Analysis think tank (ECAG), which became an intermediary for organising the participation of "election observers" in elections in collaboration with the Commonwealth of the Independent States - Election Monitoring Organization (CIS-EMO) for the Kremlin.

Each mission had an EUR 100-200 thousand budget. As one former politician explained:

“I met Piskorski (...) He opened his calendar which was filled to the brim: The Caucasus, the former Soviet Union, Africa. He proposed: ‘You can go with us if you want. If only you pouched a few people, preferably former MPs, councillors’. I passed, but many of my colleagues liked this political tourism.”^{67 68}

Well after the Crimean crisis in 2015, Piskorski formed the leftist party Zmiana (Change) out of former SRP members, people from the fringe Communist Youth of Poland, and the far-right Falanga to create a thus far unprecedented representation of Russian interests in Polish political life. Zmiana rallied for rapprochement between Warsaw and the Kremlin and denied Russian military intervention in Eastern Ukraine blaming Kiev for the “collapse”. The politician was put under arrest in 2016 on spying charges followed by raids of the houses of two former activists of the Congress of the New Right (KNP) who are suspected of cross-border sabotage. The accused may have participated in a Russian “active measure” on the territory of Western Ukraine in 2014, trying to damage Bandera statues to incite inter-ethnic tensions between the Polish minority and the Ukrainian majority.⁶⁹ As it turns out, Piskorski knows well the Hungarian MEP of Jobbik, Béla Kovács, a figure who has similarly been accused by Hungarian authorities of spying for the Kremlin, since they both participated in the illegal Crimean referendum as “independent observers.”⁷⁰

67 Piskorski persuaded, among others, Andrzej Lepper, and two LPR politicians—Sylwester Chruszcz and Daniel Pawłowicz—to participate in such missions. Moreover, he pouched some of his foreign contacts: a Belgian professor-communist, a French scientist and researcher, a German councillor, and a British nationalist.

68 “Eurozjaci W Warszawie,” *Newsweek.pl*, January 15, 2013, <http://www.newsweek.pl/swiat/eurozjaci-w-warszawie,100369,1,1.html>.

69 “Putyin Ötödik Hadoszlopa: Újabb Kémek Után Kutat a Lengyel Elhárítás,” *PCblog/Átlátszó*, 2016, <http://pcblog.atlatszo.hu/2016/06/15/putyin-otodik-hadoszlopa-ujabb-kemek-utan-kutat-a-lengyel-elharitas/>.

70 Anton Shekhovtsov, “Pro-Russian Extremists Observe the Illegitimate Crimean ‘referendum,’” 2014, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2014/03/pro-russian-extremists-observe.html>.

Soft power of historical grievances

The Kremlin attempts to exploit the current nationalist renaissance in Poland by spreading historical anti-Ukrainian or anti-West narratives popular in rightist, extremist movements through fringe media or politicians. For example, the National Rebirth of Poland (NOP) or the National Radical Camp (ONR) cannot be accused with any Russian sympathy, though their ultraconservative set of values bound to anti-Ukraine or anti-EU stances play indirectly into the Kremlin's hand. One such key point is the Volhynia tragedy during World War Two, where members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) massacred Poles; so Marian Kowalski, the leader of the ONR stated:

“Supporting Bandera’s Ukraine? It is nonsense. (...) I think that at the moment when the Bandera-course began to be cherished, Poland should have withdrawn from making any friendly gestures towards this country.”⁷¹

Others took a clearly active role: David Hudziec, an activist of the Camp of Great Poland, moved to Donbass to work for the Novorossia News Agency and he labels Ukraine the “real” enemy of Poland. One of the pro-Russian pages in Poland, Xportal’s editor-in-chief is Bartosz Bekier, who called NATO a “terrorist” organisation despite him being the head of the far-right Falanga movement, whose members participated in the official “Anakonda-16” exercise of the alliance. Janusz Korwin-Mikke, founder and former leader of the far-right KNP, even went so far as to acknowledge that the separatists in Donbass are “Russian patriots,” while protesting against the EU with a Nazi salute.⁷²

⁷¹ Interview with Marian Kowalski for this analysis.

⁷² Maïa de La Baume, “MEPs Suspended for Making Nazi Gestures,” *POLITICO*, October 27, 2015, <http://www.politico.eu/article/european-parliament-meps-suspended-for-making-nazi-gestures/>.

AUSTRIA

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Political context

Austria, due to its traditional, post-World War Two “neutral” stance, has a special relationship with Russia, one that also manifests itself in the post-Crimean period. Austria was the first EU member state that welcomed Vladimir Putin for an official visit after the Crimea annexation on June 24, 2014. While Austria acknowledged that the annexation defied international law and supports the EU sanctions in principle, the country has been at the forefront of those trying to weaken the sanction regime from the beginning. Russia traditionally has connections to the Austrian business and political community (including the centre-left SPÖ and centre-right ÖVP), though these influences rather remain economically focused, pragmatic, and non-ideological in their nature.

Austria is a special case when it comes to the relations between the political far-right and Russia. The most popular opposition party, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), is the only political actor that has an official cooperation and coordination agreement in a vast array of topics with the governing United Russia Party.⁷³ The candidate of this party, Norbert Hofer garnered nearly 47 per cent of the votes in the run-off presidential elections in December 2016. The reason for this support from the Kremlin? after this success might be that Russia hopes the FPÖ can become one of the governing parties in the future (Austria has had coalition governments without exception since 1983)⁷⁴ and in light of the fact that they are leading the polls and have been in government already this is a possibility that cannot be excluded.

73 Anton Shekhovtsov, “The Italian Far Right Lega Nord Builds Closer Ties with Moscow,” 2017, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2017/03/the-italian-far-right-lega-nord-builds.html>.

74 “Russian Model Helps Extreme Right to Become Mainstream,” *Raamop Rusland*, 2017, <https://www.raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/europa/476-russian-model-helps-extreme-right-to-become-mainstream>.

Links with Russia: mainstream and extreme

Given the Austrian population's general anti-Russian attitude and the historical animosity of the far-right towards Russia based on anti-Slavic Nazism, FPÖ's position towards Russia might seem surprising. This policy is a result of a deliberate pro-Russian turn of the party leadership dating back to around 2007, which strongly intensified since the Crimean crisis in 2014. The rationale for the relations between the FPÖ and the Kremlin is the fiercely anti-EU party's future prospect to get into power as well as mutual political legitimization: FPÖ can claim to have Moscow's clout behind its back, while FPÖ officials have affirmed "referenda" and "elections" both in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine, and municipal elections in St. Petersburg in 2014.

The Russian connections in the FPÖ are built on the highest levels. Heinz-Christian Strache, the party chairman, his deputy Johann Gudenus, and its foreign-policy speaker Johannes Hübner are regular guests in Moscow. Personal networks, shared values, diplomatic gains, and business ties all play a role in this love affair. The pro-Russian stance of the Austrian far-right could be explained by some personal and economic reasons at its very beginning, though the relationship later grew into a sort of political alliance, facilitated by the Orthodox oligarch, Konstantin Malofeev, who is investing a lot into fringe networks in Ukraine and Europe, and thus may be called "the man who finances what Moscow can't."⁷⁵ The cooperation is ideologically based on ultraconservative values emplaced against the decadent, morally corrupt West, occasionally referred to as "Gayropa." Gudenus presided over a company with ties to Russia and visited Putin allies in Chechnya and Belarus, in addition having been an election monitor at the Crimean referendum in 2014. Moreover, the FPÖ not only legitimises the domestic or foreign policies of the Russian Federation, but also propagates the Kremlin's ultra-conservative and moral high ground against the West.

75 Justin Salhani, "The Russian Billionaire Carrying out Putin's Will across Europe," *ThinkProgress*, January 4, 2017, <https://thinkprogress.org/putins-man-in-europe-a4fe6bb48d76#.mwc728ky8>.

The Russian connections in Austria, however, go well beyond political parties. Russian influence in Austria is clearly noticeable among far right-youth movements. The ideology of Alexander Dugin is gaining influence within the Identitarian Movement, an extremist youth organization whose Austrian branch was founded in 2012 against a supposed “Islamization” of Europe. The group has been gaining momentum and media attention (somewhat disproportionate to its actual political relevance) since the refugee crisis began.

Generally, we can witness a vast network of “NGOs,” “alternative media” and think tanks established all over Austria and Germany agitating for pro-Russian positions. One example is the Suworow Institute in Vienna, serving as a “bridge” organisation between far-right groups and Christian-fundamentalist circles. Another one is the Center for Continental Cooperation, which seems to be (partly) funded by Russian government entities. Both institutions have close ties to the Identitarian Movement in Austria. The “activation” of individuals, NGOs, pro-Russian media, and extremist organisations in Austria before and after the Crimean crisis indirectly points to the use of the so-called “active measures” by which the Kremlin proactively reaches out and taps into far-right European parties’ resources to influence European domestic politics, while weakening European mainstream institutions.

The city of balls

Russian influence in Austria will most likely increase over the coming years, especially since all polls show the FPÖ as a forerunner in the general elections, which will take place in 2018 at the latest. Moreover, the widespread anti-American attitudes in Austria,^{76,77} together with anti-liberal and authoritarian traditions arguably provide a fertile ground for the current pro-Russian agitation by the Freedom Party and other actors.

76 According to the 2016 Gallup U.S. Global Leadership report, the perceived negative role of US’s global leadership was the ninth highest in Austria among 132 countries in which the poll was conducted.

77 “The 2016 U.S.-Global Leadership Report,” *Gallup.com*, 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/services/191807/us-global-leadership-report-2016.aspx>.

Austria, as a country bridging Western and Eastern Europe, is not just the centre of several European institutions and a hub of Russian spies, with an estimated 2-3000 agents and informants of Russia active in Vienna,⁷⁸ but a regular meeting place for Russian and European politicians as well.

So far, Austrian authorities have not seemed to show an interest in the topic: we cannot find any traces of mentions of Russian influence in official public reports of the security services.

The regular pro-Russian events in Austria (the alternative “Vienna Ball” in 2014, and the far-right meeting “Defenders of Europe” in Linz in October 2016) exhibited a vast network of pro-Russian actors from different backgrounds coming together to network and cooperate openly. The blooming relationship between the Kremlin and far-right actors has made Vienna a safe haven for extending the Kremlin’s pro-Russian extremist network throughout Europe. This way the FPÖ and the Identitarian Movement have become an interlocutor between Eastern and Western pro-Russian far-right actors.

78 Sigrun Rottmann, “Vienna Is Still a Favourite Playground for Spies,” *BBC News*, July 8, 2010, sec. Europe, <http://www.bbc.com/news/10553310>.

ANNEX 1 - ANTI-WEST NARRATIVES IN THE COUNTRIES UNDER REVIEW

Austria

Heinz-Christian Strache - Freedom Party (FPÖ)

“We do not want any wildfire or a third world war at all, which would be possible in my opinion if one looks at how oil is being poured on fire deliberately (...) We have let the Americans know they cannot divide us in Europe, and they should not incite us against Russia constantly.”

The Czech Republic

Marek Obrtel - Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserve (CSR) (paramilitary group)

“I cannot identify myself with American policy. (...) Its consequences are burned-down countries and millions of dead people all around the world.”

Tomio Okamura - Freedom and Direct Democracy (party)

“Russia was punished for the crimes of Ukrainian fascists from Kiev...it was another dangerous stupidity of Brussels.”

Natalija Vitrenkova - Institute of Slavic Strategic Studies (NGO)

“Ukraine is a new neo-Nazi state. No wonder that Crimea wanted disassociate.”

Hungary

Article - Army of Outlaws (BS) (paramilitary group)

“Recently a refugee centre was attacked in Prague, even in Russia the aggression of these human animals has to be stopped by force. This is only the beginning. European nationalists are preparing for a fight; the resistance has begun. Soon the iron will of survival will spring up to protect the motherland and guarantee the protection of the family fire.”

Szabó Zsolt - Army of Outlaws (BS)

“Russia is back as the largest player of world politics. President Vladimir Putin clarified the situation on Monday and said the unipolar world order is over. The Russian anti-terror operation has officially started in Syria! (...) When we say Russia’s return is a positive development it does not mean that we expect Putin to bring us the paradise on Earth. Only order.”

Vona Gábor - Jobbik (party)

“(...) there is a fear in me that this is some kind of foreplay to a Russian-US war. (...) I feel like whatever is happening in Transylvania is not primarily about the Hungarians and Romanians, (...) but about a power struggle between Russia and the US.”

Slovakia

Party petition - People’s Party Our Slovakia (LSNS)

“At present, NATO is trying to occupy the Ukraine and Russia. American soldiers are going closer and closer to the Russian borders. And our treacherous politicians help them with this.”

Thomas Bičkoš - Slovak Conscripts (SB) (paramilitary group)

“Membership in pro-terrorist aggressive organisation NATO, under imperial US influence, or membership in the over-bureaucratic European Union which is gradually changing to the Pan-European super-state does not absolutely give a guarantee or assurance of liberty and preserve the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic.”

Martin Koprta - Slovak Conscripts (SB) (paramilitary group)

“Our aim is a New Russia (Novorossiya) and recognition of a Donetsk independent republic. I am a member of the official army. It means that if the peace will continue I will remain in the barracks waiting when my homeland again will call me to service.”

Communique - Action Group Resistance Kysuce (VK) (paramilitary group)

“Brother Slovaks, sympathizers, and supporters of Action Group Resistance Kysuce! Taking into account the tense relations with Russia and the catastrophic situation in the Slovak security and defence forces we call on all brave, mentally and physically healthy nationalists that they, within their capabilities, would try to infiltrate into the army or police.”

Jozef Žarnovičan - Association of the Slovak Soldiers (ASV)

“The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is increasingly becoming an aggression tool of American and European elites in the fight for redistribution of resources, not for defence of democracy, which is already an essentially dead ideology.”

Jozef Žarnovičan - Association of the Slovak Soldiers (ASV)

“There will come the time, and it is not so far, when Slovakia will have the national government resistant toward the transnational fascist corporatist and globalist pressures, will have the clearly defined treaty of alliance with the strong and reliable states, with a strong national defence army ready to protect its own citizens.”

Poland

Mateusz Piskorksi - Zmiana (party)

“[Ukraine] is a collapsed state. Once the West, including Poland, backed Bandera’s supporters in Ukraine, the country was thrown into chaos” (...)
“The people of Crimea have had a pro-Russian view for a long time. And they are afraid of Banderists. We should be afraid too”

David Hudziac - Camp of Great Poland

“When the conflict in Ukraine broke out, I didn’t want to be passive. In Poland, everyone suddenly stood against Russia, supporting Ukrainians thoughtlessly. They forget that the Bandera movement, which has caused so much harm to the Poles, is recovering there. For Banderists, it is Poland that is their biggest enemy!”

Janusz Korwin Mikke - KORWiN (party)

“The separatists in Donbass are Russian patriots. His excellence Petro Poroshenko, president of Ukraine, must destroy them, in the same way that Germans had to smother the Warsaw Uprising. (...)I will probably surprise you, but if I were Putin myself, after shooting down that plane, I would sent 50,000 soldiers immediately, take over the land, execute the perpetrators, and hold a fair referendum.”

ANNEX 2 – PRO-RUSSIAN PARAMILITARY ORGANISATIONS IN THE CEE

Czech Republic

Czechoslovak Soldiers in Reserve (CSR)			Founded: 2015
Personnel	Ideology	Violent threat	Connections to Russia
c. 500/6000**	Nationalism Pan-Slavism Anti-NATO Anti-Ukraine	Military training Legal weapons	Rhetorical

National Home Guard (NHG)			Founded: 2015
Personnel	Ideology	Violent threat	Connections to Russia
c. 50/2500	Nationalism Pan-Slavism Anti-NATO Anti-migration Anti-Ukraine	Military training Crisis training	Donetsk People's Republic Donetsk People's Republic's consulate in Ostrava

Hungary

Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement HVIM			Founded: 2001
Personnel	Ideology	Violent threat	Connections to Russia
c. 100-200	Nationalism Revisionism Anti-Semitism Anti-migration Anti-Ukraine	Military trainings Pro-Russian terrorism case Violence against migrants	Transnistria

Army of Outlaws (BS)			Founded: 2008
Personnel	Ideology	Violent threat	Connections to Russia
c. 400	Neo-Nazi Anti-Semitism Anti-Roma Anti-migration	Military training Protection racket Hate crimes against Roma	Russian fight clubs

Wolves			Founded: 2011
Personnel	Ideology	Violent threat	Connections to Russia
N/A	Nationalism Anti-Semitism Anti-Roma Anti-migration	Military training Airsoft drills	Separatists

New Hungarian Guard (ÚMG)			Founded: 2009
Personnel	Ideology	Violent threat	Connections to Russia
c. 200	Nationalism Anti-Semitism Anti-Roma Anti-migration	Military training	Rhetorical

Hungarian Self Defence Movement (MÖM)			Founded: 2014
Personnel	Ideology	Violent threat	Connections to Russia
N/A	Nationalism Anti-Semitism Anti-Roma Anti-migration	Military training Anti-Roma marches	Rhetorical

Hungarian National Front (MNA)			Founded: 1989/defunct
Personnel	Ideology	Violent threat	Connections to Russia
-	Nationalism Anti-Semitism Anti-Roma Pro-Putin	Military training	GRU

Slovakia

Slovak Conscripts (SB)			Founded: 2012
Personnel	Ideology	Violent threat	Connections to Russia
ca. 150	Pan-Slavism Anti-NATO Anti-Ukraine	Russian combat, survival, tactical training, Systema (Система), Live firing	Separatist fighter – M. Kepřta Association Stiaĝ Spetsnaz and OMON instructors Russian patriotic clubs Night Wolves

Action Group Resistance Kysuce (VK)			Founded: 2011
Personnel	Ideology	Violent threat	Connections to Russia
ca. 200	Neo-Nazi Pan-Slavism Anti-Semitism Anti-NATO Anti-Ukraine	Military training Infiltrates armed forces Arson attack on Roma family	Rhetorical

*There are pro-Russian paramilitary organizations only in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. There are no pro-Russian paramilitary organisations in Austria, while some Polish paramilitary movements are only infiltrated by pro-Russian politicians.

** Estimated number of personnel by experts/self-proclaimed number of personnel.

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, we have seen far-right and extremist organisations, most of which had previously focused predominantly on ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities as their main enemies, redirect their attention to geopolitical issues. They are not only agitating against NATO and the EU, but also share a particular sympathy towards Vladimir Putin's Russia, which they regard as an ideological and political model, as well as a deep hatred of Ukraine. This is not accidental, but rather a broader effort by the Kremlin to undermine the region's stability in general and bilateral links with Ukraine in particular via supporting the real "troublemakers" throughout the region: secessionist, revisionist and ultranationalist organisations. The more disputes that exist between these countries, the more historic debates over the borders are resurrected, and the more fear and distrust is stirred up in the region, the better it is for the Kremlin. This strategy aims at exploiting the weaknesses inherent to the Central-Eastern European region: the bitter memories of past territorial disputes, nationalist-secessionist tendencies, and the haunting spectres of chauvinist ideologies promising to make these nations great again. We would like to thank all the national contributors for their great work on the country case-studies: Fabian Schmid, Bernhard Weidinger Dr., Petra Vejvodová PhD., Jakub Janda, Veronika Víchová, Michal Kacewicz, Łukasz Wenerski, Grigorij Mesežnikov PhD., Radovan Bránik, Daniel Milo JUDr., Attila Juhász, András Dezső, Szabolcs Panyi.



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