

# “Natural allies”

The Kremlin connections  
of the Greek far-right

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**Paris Ayiomamitis**  
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**Political Capital** is a Budapest-based, independent political research and consultancy institute with a decade of experience, a strong international network and reputation. The basic values of the institute are parliamentary democracy and market economy. The institute's main fields of interest are political radicalism, extremism and its social background, conspiracy theories, prejudices, election research and Russian political influence within the EU. Political Capital has strong expertise in quantitative analyses.

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**POLITICAL CAPITAL**  
POLICY RESEARCH & CONSULTING INSTITUTE

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<sup>1</sup> “Interview with Nikos Michaloliakos in RF ‘Voice of Russia’”, Greek Voice of Russia, December 16, 2013, accessed September 16, 2015, [http://greek.ruvr.ru/2013\\_12\\_16/255918654/#.UrN2N1yFTtg.gmail](http://greek.ruvr.ru/2013_12_16/255918654/#.UrN2N1yFTtg.gmail)

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All errors and omissions are our own.

Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó, Angelos Chrysosgelos, Paris Ayiomamitis, Judit Takács

# A note on methodology and terminology

The idea of the current research emerged during writing our earlier analysis<sup>2</sup> on East European far-right parties' orientation towards Russia in 2009 and the study<sup>3</sup> on the promotion of Kremlin's interests through European far-right and far-left parties' pro-Russian policies in 2014. The findings of these papers led us to the hypothesis that certain far-right (and partly far-left) organizations within the EU have specific functions imposed by the Russian state and actors close to it. These functions include: (1) the destabilization of the EU, its member states and the transatlantic relations; (2) the legitimisation of the Russian regime and its policies; (3) gathering information and spreading disinformation. In order to reveal these functions and to analyse the role of far-right parties and organizations within the EU, we launched a series of publications that focus on individual member states (Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, France and Greece) and on EU institutions. The current piece, with the support of the Open Society Foundations, provides an in-depth analysis of the Greek far-right's pro-Kremlin's stance, with an outlook on the tendencies of the far-left as well. The time scope of the study reaches from the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974 until current developments, with a bigger emphasis on the latter. The focus, however, is on the time of Golden Dawn's electoral rise before and during the Ukraine-Russia conflict and the inauguration of a coalition government in Athens that espouses pro-Russian positions more openly than any previous Greek governments.

During the study we refer many times to the terms "Russian influence" or "Russian state influence" or "the Kremlin's influence." These notions are connected with the term "Russian influence through power," by which we mean explicit and implicit actions by the Russian state and related actors or organizations aiming at creating political changes in the behaviour and/or political agenda of certain political actors through political means and/or financial instruments. In this context, political means include ideological transfer, official meetings, diplomatic support, and information warfare, etc., while financial tools consist of specific forms of financing, for example donations or loans for a party, or financing individuals linked to the party and its broader infrastructure.

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2 Péter Krekó and Krisztián Szabados, „*Russia's Far-Right Friends. In-depth analysis.*” Risk and Forecast, December 3, 2009, accessed October 20, 2014, [http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends\\_349.html](http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends_349.html)

3 “*The Russian Connection,*” Political Capital, April 10, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, [http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc\\_flash\\_report\\_russian\\_connection.pdf](http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf)

We used the following research methods:

- 1) Desktop research to collect the necessary information, restore the order of developments and events and gather statements and quotes.
- 2) In-depth interviews with experts from academia, politics, and media to gather non-public and background information, and deeper view on certain actors and events.
- 3) Methods of investigative journalism in order to gain confidential and background information from actors within or close to the far-right scene (e.g., confidential talks). In order to protect their identity, sources of such information remain anonymous in the study.
- 4) Analysis of Greek far-right media outlets and Facebook pages.
- 5) Analysis of Russian online media in order to examine how Greek far-right actors are presented to the Russian public.

In the first part of the study the political, economic and social environments of the relations between Greece and Russia are presented. In the second part we analyse the Kremlin's influence on today's Greek far-right based on the so called 'patriotic subculture', the ideology of Golden Dawn, the party's foreign policy line, and its position on the Ukrainian-Russian geopolitical crisis. In the third part we present the Kremlin's use of propaganda to spread its influence through Greek far-right communication channels. The analysis includes both media personalities and different media outlets. In the last part of the study, Golden Dawn's assessment in Russian online media is analysed.

## Executive summary

- In 2009, Political Capital was among the first to call attention to East European far-right parties' orientation towards Russia. In April 2014, in an analysis generating lively international attention, we indicated that with the assistance of far-right parties' pro-Russian policies "the promotion of Russian interests couched in national colors is proliferating throughout Europe." We also demonstrated that with the votes they cast in the European Parliament, some far-right parties pledge allegiance to Putin and his regime. All this makes it patently clear that the Russian state's political influence across Europe has increased in recent years. The European extreme right, with its Eurosceptic and anti-liberal ideology, provided a fertile ground for the two-faced foreign policy of Russia – ideologically hostile, yet economically cooperative – towards Europe. Moreover, the current Ukrainian crisis clearly highlights the "vectors" and tools of Russian influence in Europe and, more specifically, in Greece.
- The economic crisis and the tension in Greece's relations with the Eurozone have upset the broad consensus in Greek politics and society about Greece's European orientation. In this political context, Western modernization can be perceived as alien by some parts of the Greek population, while Russia can be featured as the alternative vision for the country.
- According to a 2014 Pew Research Center poll, Russia's favorability decreased only by 1% to 62%, while the US' appeal dropped 5% to 34% as compared to 2013 in the Greek public.<sup>4</sup> Another Gallup poll in 2014 found that 35% of Greeks approved of Russian leadership in the world, and only 23% approved of the EU's leadership.<sup>5</sup> An October 2015 poll by Greek polling company Public Issue found that while Greeks overwhelmingly still see the EU as Greece's main ally (44%, as opposed to 12% for Russia), Russia is the second-most popular foreign power in Greece (after France), well above Germany and the US and marginally above the EU. If the EU remains popular but divisive (52% positive vs. 46% negative views), Russia's appeal

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<sup>4</sup> "Russia's Global Image Negative amid Crisis in Ukraine – Americans' and Europeans' Views Sour Dramatically," Pew Research Center, July 9, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2014/07/PG-2014-07-09-Russia-Favorability.pdf>; "Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance and Drones, but Limited Harm to America's Image," Pew Research Center, July 14, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/07/14/global-opposition-to-u-s-surveillance-and-drones-but-limited-harm-to-americas-image/>

<sup>5</sup> "More Greeks Approve of Russia's Leadership Than EU's," Gallup, 2014, accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181460/greeks-approve-russia-leadership.aspx>



is much more established (58% vs. 34%), even though this margin decreased markedly in the course of the first SYRIZA-ANEL government.

- Although no complete eastward geopolitical shift could be experienced by the SYRIZA-ANEL Greek government that took office in January 2015 and again in September 2015, there are still major future economic and energy issues to be decided upon in Greece, which can favor the Kremlin indeed. The country is potentially vulnerable to Russia in political and economic terms, and the latter may play an indirect role in Greece's long term debt management through current energy deals and major energy projects in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- The more difficult further loan negotiations will turn out to be, and the more difficult it will be for the government to implement austerity measures due to social and political rejection, the stronger political and economic pressure coming from Moscow is expected to become.
- Some pieces of evidence suggest the new/old Greek government is not only open towards the Kremlin on several key issues, such as separatism in Ukraine, but members of the government have ties to important Russian stakeholders. For example, Panagiotis Kammenos Greek Minister of National Defence (leader of ANEL) is close to the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, once affiliated with Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR); or Nikolaos Kotzias Minister for Foreign Affairs (close to SYRIZA leader Alexis Tsipras), who is close to Alexander Dugin, the main ideologue behind Eurasianism, and who used to have a strong impact on Russia's geopolitics. Figures even show that 85% of the members of SYRIZA voted against anti-Kremlin resolutions, which is higher than the party's own caucuses' (GUE/NGL) percentage of 78%, in selected Russia-related decisions in the European Parliament.
- Pro-Eurasianism is much more mainstream in Greece than in most EU countries not regardless of the shared cultural and religious heritage with Russia. More recently, the Greek public has been leaning increasingly towards Russia's world leadership as opposed to the EU or US after the years of economic crisis, clearly more so than in the past. This means that the SYRIZA-ANEL government's presumed affinity with the Kremlin might be backed by domestic public opinion gravely disappointed by the IMF/EU crisis management.

- Far-right parties have a well-founded ideological and personal relationship with the Russian regime: Golden Dawn's arrested leaders are openly endorsed by Alexander Dugin, the chief ideologist of Eurasianism. The far-right, populist party of the Independent Greeks (ANEL), who are in government, has an official memorandum of cooperation with Vladimir Putin's United Russia party. Both the extreme right Golden Dawn and the right-wing populist ANEL parties advocate a pro-Russian geopolitical shift for Greece. In the case of ANEL, the fact that one of Greece's most outspokenly pro-Russian politicians is also the Minister of Defense raises questions with regards to security cooperation between the two countries in the future, but Golden Dawn advocates for a radical change by moving Greece away from the US and its allies for good. The bottom line is that ANEL and Golden Dawn (as well as SYRIZA) unconditionally supported the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Golden Dawn's orientation can be detected in selected resolutions criticizing Russia in the European Parliament which were rejected in 100% of the cases by the party's MEPs.
- Golden Dawn's heavy-handed xenophobic, anti-Muslim policies, and its intolerant ideology fits the Kremlin's authoritative approach on many issues. The party is nonetheless drawn more by the Russian regime's statism and authoritarian nationalism, than by its Orthodoxy. The pro-Russian far-right is part of a broader far-right and far-left "patriotic subculture," apt to portray President Putin and Russia as a potential "savior" to Greece and the Greek economy.
- In turn, Alexander Dugin remains in public correspondence with Golden Dawn's leader, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, who is awaiting his trial for murder, extortion, and involvement in the disappearance of up to a hundred migrants. However, the extreme-right party is not presented by the Russian media to boost the Kremlin's political legitimacy. Instead, Russian domestic media close to the Kremlin is just a little more positive about the controversies surrounding the party, while Russian international media showcases Golden Dawn as an exemplar of fascism and racism caused by the austerity measures or power ambitions of the West. Even the 2015 report on neo-Nazism by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation casts it "as an organization propagating neo-Nazi ideas, racial, and national exclusiveness".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Neo-Nazism – A dangerous threat to human rights, democracy and the rule of law", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, April, 2015, accessed November 03, 2015, [http://www.bangladesh.mid.ru/press/Doklad\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.bangladesh.mid.ru/press/Doklad_Eng.pdf)

- The pro-Russian far-right fringe media with a steady foothold in the Greek public discourse blends geopolitics, conspiracy theories, and the supernatural in their reports on Greek and international politics, heavily tilted towards anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism (disguised as anti-Zionism) with superstitious elements.
- Discussions and rumors about Russia providing a bailout to Greece intensified at the time of the bailout agreements and political fights, which was part of the tactics of the Greek government to put a pressure on the EU. But generally, while Russia is interested in Greek-EU relations to deteriorate further (Russia is a more positive player in the eyes of the Greek public than the EU), the Kremlin cannot provide a significant financial help to Greece. At the same time, Greek governments so far have been aware of the fact that Russia does not want to substitute Western creditors and also that accepting such a loan would lead to a political marginalization on the EU level.
- However, the permanent domestic political and economic crisis along with the pro-Russian and Western-sceptic public opinion gives the Kremlin more opportunities to expand its influence.

# Political, economic and social environments

## Greece's geopolitical position

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has brought about tectonic geopolitical changes in Eastern Europe and the wider region. Russian intervention in the Ukraine allows for several important consequences to be drawn: the post-1991 European system of security cannot be considered stable; Putin's Russia will not integrate and cannot be integrated into Europe; a Cold War-like situation is in the formation, in which the US and the EU have started to use stronger measures against Russia.<sup>7</sup> For the stake of the Ukrainian crisis is not only what will happen to Ukraine, but it can potentially upset the order created after the collapse of the Soviet Union as well.<sup>8</sup> In this reconfiguration of the geopolitical playing field, the relationship of the Balkan States with Russia commands greater attention internationally as it is being re-evaluated once again by the great powers.

After the new government of far-left SYRIZA and right-wing populist ANEL was formed in Athens in January 2015, many feared<sup>9</sup> that a Kremlin "Trojan horse" was in place, considering that the parties voiced their pro-Russian position earlier and the new head of government, Alexis Tsipras, condemned sanctions against Russia, while supporting the annexation of Crimea and the separatist referendums in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> The Greek government also criticized the European Council's statement issued as a response to the Mariupol aggression of Russian-backed separatists. Despite all these, the Greek government has not enacted any major change in Greece's geopolitical orientation. PM Tsipras insisted that Greece would not seek economic aid from Russia and the country would stay in the European Union. Just days after the new government was sworn in, the new Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias agreed upon the extension of existing sanctions in a meeting with his EU colleagues

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7 Stephen J. Blank, "From Eurasia with Love", *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Summer 2014, Vol. 8 Issue 2, [http://www.au.af.mil/au/ssq/digital/pdf/summer\\_2014/blank.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/ssq/digital/pdf/summer_2014/blank.pdf)

8 Nicholas Rostow, "Consequences", *Naval War College Review*, Autumn 2014, Vol. 67, No. 4, <https://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/bb0fa3b2-0908-41d8-bfe8-ea962acaf2a6/Consequences.aspx>

9 "Greece's leftist government sparks fears of a Russian beachhead in Europe," Washington Post, January 29, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/greeces-leftist-government-sparks-fears-of-a-russian-beachhead-in-europe/2015/01/29/79cca26a-a7dd-11e4-a06b-9df2002b86a0\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/greeces-leftist-government-sparks-fears-of-a-russian-beachhead-in-europe/2015/01/29/79cca26a-a7dd-11e4-a06b-9df2002b86a0_story.html)

10 "Tsipras blasts EU's Ukraine policy in Moscow," enetenglish.gr, May 13, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.enetenglish.gr/?i=news.en.article&id=1920>

despite initial reservations.<sup>11</sup> Greece also went along with the EU's decision in March 2015 to leave sanctions in place if Russia did not fulfil the Minsk agreement after July.<sup>12</sup>

However, worries about the Greek government's approach towards the Kremlin should not be entirely dismissed given the alleged peculiar personal bonds that members of the coalition parties have with leading Russian politicians on the sanction list<sup>13</sup> and the continuing fragile political relations between the EU and Greece. It should also be taken into consideration that SYRIZA, in the European Parliament, kept its pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian positions on government as well when it comes to votes: for example, they voted against the Macro-financial assistance to Ukraine in March 2015 in the European Parliament.

If we look at more anti-Russian resolutions in the European Parliament, it becomes evident that SYRIZA exhibits a clear-cut pro-Kremlin stance, which exceeds the pro-Russian voting record of the GUE/NGL faction (of which SYRIZA is a member). SYRIZA MEPs voted in favour of Russia in 85% of these cases.

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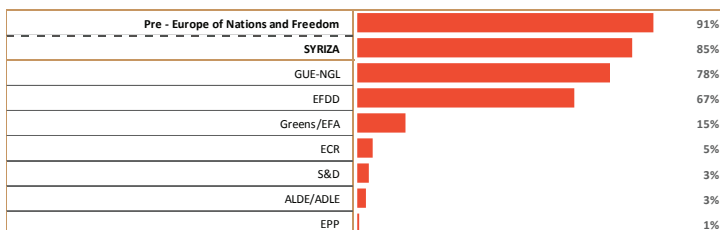
11 "EU wins Greek backing to extend Russia sanctions, delays decision on new steps," Reuters, January 29, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/29/us-ukraine-crisis-idUSKBN0L22B720150129>; "EU Foreign Ministers Extend Targeted Sanctions on Russia," The Wall Street Journal, January 29, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-foreign-minister-warns-of-new-spiral-of-violence-1422536212>

12 "EU agrees Russia sanctions to stay until Ukraine peace terms met," Reuters, March 19, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/19/us-ukraine-crisis-eu-idUSKBN0MF1FF20150319>

13 Anton Shekhovtsov, "Greek left-wing SYRIZA forms a coalition with the pro-Kremlin far right," [anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.hu](http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.hu), January 26, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.hu/2015/01/greek-left-wing-syriza-forms-coalition.html>

**Figure 1. Share of “no” votes of EP groups and SYRIZA MEPs in selected resolutions in the European Parliament**

**Share of NO votes in total votes cast in 6 selected resolutions**



Selected Russia-related resolutions included:

1 - Strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia (11.06.2015), subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (motion for a resolution)<sup>14</sup>

2 - State of EU-Russia relations (10.06.2015), subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (motion for a resolution)<sup>15</sup>

3 - Murder of the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov and the state of democracy in Russia (12.03.2015), subject (Paragraph 19, amendment 1), type of vote (joint motion for a resolution)<sup>16</sup>

4 - Macro-financial assistance to Ukraine (25.03.2015), subject (vote: legislative resolution), type of vote (draft legislative resolution)<sup>17</sup>

5 - EU-Ukraine association agreement, with the exception of the treatment of third country nationals legally employed as workers in the territory of the other party (16.09.2014), subject (approbation), type of vote (draft legislative resolution)<sup>18</sup>

14 [Votewatch.eu](http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-strategic-military-situation-in-the-black-sea-basin-following-the-illegal-annexation-of-crimea-by-ru-15.html), accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-strategic-military-situation-in-the-black-sea-basin-following-the-illegal-annexation-of-crimea-by-ru-15.html>

15 [Votewatch.eu](http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-state-of-eu-russia-relations-motion-for-resolution-vote-resolution.html), accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-state-of-eu-russia-relations-motion-for-resolution-vote-resolution.html>

16 [Votewatch.eu](http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-murder-of-the-russian-opposition-leader-boris-nemtsov-and-the-state-of-democracy-in-russia-joint-mot.html), accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-murder-of-the-russian-opposition-leader-boris-nemtsov-and-the-state-of-democracy-in-russia-joint-mot.html>

17 [Votewatch.eu](http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-macro-financial-assistance-to-ukraine-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-legislative-resolution-ordin.html), accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-macro-financial-assistance-to-ukraine-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-legislative-resolution-ordin.html>

18 [Votewatch.eu](http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-eu-ukraine-association-agreement-with-the-exception-of-the-treatment-of-third-country-nationals-lega.html), accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-eu-ukraine-association-agreement-with-the-exception-of-the-treatment-of-third-country-nationals-lega.html>

6 - Situation in Ukraine (17.07.2014), subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (joint motions for a resolution)<sup>19</sup>

The overtures of the Tsipras government towards Russia in the first half of 2015 should be seen more in the context of the then-ongoing re-negotiation of Greece's financial support by the Eurozone. After PM Alexis Tsipras met President Vladimir Putin in April 2015 in Moscow some newspapers reported that Russia might take a role in financing Greece in a form of advance payments of 3-5 billion Euros for the planned new gas pipeline that would go through the country.<sup>20</sup> But these predictions have not been confirmed and the Russians themselves denied these reports. Even an easing of the Russian embargo on Greek food and vegetables was not agreed upon despite media allegations. The Greek media were unanimous in reporting that apart from the very warm atmosphere during the meeting, there were hardly any concrete results. This meeting could be regarded to be an attempt to put some pressure by the SYRIZA/ANEL government on the Eurozone in the financial talks.<sup>21</sup> Of course, this event highlighted the Greek government's eagerness to opt for "geopolitical alternatives" outside the European Union.<sup>22</sup> As PM Tsipras put it earlier, Greece and Cyprus might form a "bridge of peace and cooperation between Europe and Russia."<sup>23</sup>

19 [Votewatch.eu](http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-situation-in-ukraine-joint-motions-for-a-resolution-vote-resolution.html), accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-situation-in-ukraine-joint-motions-for-a-resolution-vote-resolution.html>

20 Even [rt.com](http://rt.com) close to Kremlin anticipated before the meeting that "Greece could ask Moscow to bankroll a bailout, Gazprom could agree to a gas discount, or the two sides could talk about how to sidestep EU sanctions." *"Here is what you need to know about Putin's meeting with Tsipras,"* [rt.com](http://rt.com), April 7, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://rt.com/business/247449-tsipras-meeting-putin-moscow/>

21 In the final days before the agreement of the new bailout package in July 2015, Vladimir Putin and the Russian government made statements that Greece should sort its relationship with the EU out in the interest of global financial stability. Paradoxically, it wasn't the Eurozone crisis that ended up breaking the EU apart and extending Russia's influence, but it was the opposite that happened, i.e. the prospect of a geopolitically detached Greece under the influence of Putin probably factored in the considerations of the crisis' main players in Europe and outside (i.e. the US) to push for an agreement in the face of the Tsipras government's unpredictability.

22 *"Tsipras Tells Putin EU Sanctions on Russia Are Economic War,"* Bloomberg, April 8, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-04-08/putin-meets-tsipras-in-russia-as-eu-sanctions-in-focus>

23 *"Tsipras Says No To Possible Russian Aid; Says Greece Will Stay In Euro Zone During First Foreign Trip,"* International Business Times, February 2, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/tsipras-says-no-possible-russian-aid-says-greece-will-stay-euro-zone-during-first-1802256> Another source points out: "Economically speaking, Greece might not be globally significant. But at a time when the U.S. and Europe is fighting costly political battles in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, poking a country like Greece—which sits at the crossroads of these regions—could be far more expensive in the long run." *"Will debt negotiations force Greece into Russia's orbit?"* Fortune, March 9, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/03/09/greece-debt-crisis-russia/>

The agreement of Greece with its creditors on a third bailout package unleashed new dynamics in Greek politics that may affect future relations with Russia. Most importantly, it has drawn Alexis Tsipras and SYRIZA (but also ANEL as well) in the camp of the parties that see Greece's connection with Europe as paramount, thus strengthening this camp. But it created a split in SYRIZA and the emergence of a new, leftist anti-austerity party, the Popular Unity. The leader of the new anti-austerity party, Panagiotis Lafazanis, was the most forcefully pro-Russian minister in the first Tsipras government. He travelled with Tsipras to Moscow and was the one who pushed the idea that Russia could finance Greek debt until the very end. Popular Unity failed to enter the parliament in the September 2015 elections, thus leaving Golden Dawn and the orthodox Stalinist Communist Party (KKE) as the only parties in the Greek parliament that directly challenge Greece's connection to the EU. However, as the austerity of the third bailout signed by SYRIZA and ANEL begins to bite, one should expect that Popular Unity or at least some of its politicians to energize the leftist anti-austerity camp again.

One may expect then the remaining anti-austerity leftist parties and Golden Dawn to form a smaller, but more distinct and more aggressive, Eurosceptic and, perhaps, more forcefully pro-Putin pole in Greek politics. In the short term they should not be expected to have much power, as Tsipras maintains some of his popularity. But as the effects of the new austerity package start kicking in, these or other, new parties may start benefiting from it and becoming stronger and stronger in the longer term.

## **Greek-Russian relations in a historical context**

It can be said that Greek civilization and culture has formed the gate through which Russia entered the world. The two most distinctive elements of Russian culture today, namely its religion and its alphabet, are Greek creations. The Russians converted to Orthodox Christianity after falling under the religious influence of Byzantium (10<sup>th</sup> century AD). A little earlier (9<sup>th</sup> cent. AD), two Byzantine monks, Cyril and Methodius, developed a new alphabet for the Byzantine Empire's Slavic neighbours.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> However, in what would become a pattern for centuries to come, the two sides were not only intimately tied by common religious bonds, but also found themselves competing for the leadership of the Oriental Orthodox culture. Moscow assumed the name of the "Third Rome" (the second one being Constantinople, the successor capital of the Roman Empire) in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which not only showed Russia's lasting ambitions as a major power, but also pointed to the fact that these ambitions could be both a source of inspiration and of concern for Greeks.



After the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans, the relationship between the two sides became decidedly unbalanced, as it now involved an aspiring major power and a historic but suppressed culture looking for assistance from abroad. For most of the duration of the Ottoman occupation (15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century) and during the first 30 years of Greece's existence as an independent state (first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), Russia was seen, chiefly because of its religion, as the hope of Greeks for liberation and the re-establishment of an Orthodox Empire centred in Constantinople.<sup>25</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Greece saw the first incarnation of a divide that cuts through its society to this day, and it was the quite distinct social interests represented by the factions known then as the 'English' and the 'Russian' parties: while the former supported a more liberal democratic state and a free economy, the latter represented those who prioritized religion in the affairs of the state and longed for an authoritarian heavy hand to lead the country.<sup>26</sup> In the long term, the agenda of the English party won out and Greek elites have espoused since then (at least nominally) an agenda of Western-style modernization, and anchoring to the West and Europe. This divide between elites and people has remained as a distinctive feature of Greek political life.

As an independent statelet after 1830, Greece was a playing ground for the competition between Russia and England in the Mediterranean. Russian influence remained significant in the early post-independence era with a pro-Russian party competing for influence against pro-British and pro-French parties.<sup>27</sup>

Later however, Russia was also featured as a true enemy of Greece's nationalist aspirations. After the rise of Slavic nationalisms in the Balkans in the 1870s, Russia moved away from Greece and sponsored the na-

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25 The legacy of this period is quite mixed for the contemporary view of Russia in Greece. On the one hand, there is a memory of various insurrections in Greece encouraged by Russia whenever it wanted to pressure the Ottoman Empire in their geopolitical competition. All these insurrections were stoked by Russia, only for Greece to be left in the end without any support and to suffer terribly in the hands of the Turks. Today in Greece, *Orlofiika*, referring to an insurgency organized by Russian officer Orlov in 1770, which failed miserably, is synonymous with pathetic failure. On the other hand, Russia played probably the most important role that decidedly tilted the balance against the Ottoman Empire at a time when Greece was fighting for its independence in the 1820s. It was the triumphant victory of Russia in a war against the Ottoman Empire in 1829 that paved the way for the official recognition of the Greek state.

26 See John A. Petropoulos, *Politics and Statecraft in the Kingdom of Greece: 1833-1843* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) for an authoritative analysis of this period.

27 Russia's influence in independent Greece was at its apex during the rule of Governor Ioannis Kapodistrias (1827-1831), a Greek statesman who had served as the Tsar's diplomat.

tionalist agendas of new Slavic states (especially Bulgaria) as agents of its interests in the region. For most of the 50-year period before World War I, Greece (as a protégée of England) and Russia stood in opposing camps in the scramble for the remains of Ottoman Europe. The opposition between Greece and Russia was further compounded by the rise of communism in Russia after World War I, which neutralized religion as a link between the two countries.<sup>28</sup>

As a NATO member, Greece looked to the West for its orientation. The apex of anti-Slavic (and, by extension, anti-Russian) feelings in Greece came during the bloody Civil War (1946–49), the legacy of which reverberated until the late '80s and, in many ways, last until today.<sup>29</sup> The end of the war and the defeat of KKE (Greek Communist Party) meant that an adamantly pro-Western and anti-Communist regime was established in Greece. It was now conservatives who feared Russia, while leftists supported it.

After the end of the Cold War, Western modernization has often been perceived as alien by the Greek people, and Russia often featured as the alternative vision for modernization's opponents. These sentiments were demonstrated in the pro-Serbian stance of the Greek media during the coverage of the Yugoslav Civil War in the mid '90s, when Greek volunteers fought on the side of their Serb Orthodox "brothers."

According to Maria Psara, journalist at the Ethnos daily newspaper who has covered Golden Dawn extensively in recent years, *"A lot of Greeks went to fight as volunteers in the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s in the name of Orthodox kinship. Some of them were Golden Dawn members. But some of the volunteers told me that when they realised that it wasn't just about Orthodox kinship but about Nazism, they changed their minds."*

## **Greek-Russian economic ties**

Russia, as Greece's biggest trading partner, has two major leverages over the country: energy projects, and trade relations. In the years of the crisis, Russia's role became even more important, and discussions on deepening economic relations intensified. One high-profile initiative in 2013

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<sup>28</sup> Soviet Russia offered crucial assistance to Kemal's Turkey in its war against Greece in 1919–1922, as well as persecuted vibrant Greek communities in the Black Sea.

<sup>29</sup> The Greek Civil War was fought mainly in Macedonia, where Soviet-backed Communist rebels received assistance from Greece's northern neighbours, who also had Communist regimes at the time. As those Communist regimes (especially Bulgaria, but also Yugoslavia) had not abandoned their ambition to reclaim parts of Greek soil, the danger of Communism was reinforced by the older fear of Slavic aggression against Greece, thus exacerbating the negative view both of Greece's Balkan neighbours and their sponsor, Soviet Russia.

was the planned privatization of the national gas provider DEPA and the national energy network management company DESFA as part of the Greek government's commitment to its creditors to privatize public companies.<sup>30</sup> Russia, through Gazprom, arose as the most likely buyer of DEPA and DESFA, with interest from European companies remaining minimal throughout the tender. The government itself seemed to favour the Russian solution, and the domestic public opinion seemed to support it as well.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, Greece was confronted with the objections of the EU.<sup>32</sup> Greece also strongly supported the TAP pipeline project that would bring Azeri gas into Europe through Greek soil. Because of the EU's criteria set for the purchase, Gazprom withdrew its offer<sup>33</sup> of 1 billion euros for DEPA in June 2013, creating a severe budgetary gap and damaging the image of the government, while also deteriorating Russia's credibility.<sup>34</sup> Another case when Russia's popularity dropped in the eye of the Greek public was when it failed to support Cyprus after the country rejected the proposed Eurozone bailout plan in March 2013. The case of Cyprus showed that Russia had little interest in entering into strategic competition with the West beyond the area it has designated as its core interest: energy.<sup>35</sup> However, the termination of the South Stream project by President Vladimir Putin in December 2014 has put Greece in the focus of Russian energy plans

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30 "Greece to sell of stakeholdings in Hellenic Petroleum, DEPA and DESFA," Venture Capital Post, June 10, 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.vcpost.com/articles/9089/20130610/greece-sell-stakeholdings-hellenic-petroleum-depa-desfa.htm>

31 PM Samaras met Gazprom head Alexey Miller three times in the run-up to the privatization. See "Samaras and Miller discuss DEPA and natural gas," ΕΘΝΟΣ, March 12, 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.ethnos.gr/article.asp?catid=22767&subid=2&pubid=63796077> (in Greek).

32 The Commission worried that the purchase of DEPA and DESFA by Gazprom was going against competition law of the Union. There were also voices of concern that Greece (already dependent on Russian gas) would become wholly reliant on Russia strategically. See "Brussels blocks DEPA sale to Gazprom," Newsbomb, May 20, 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.newsbomb.gr/energeia-periballon/story/308939/oi-vryxelles-mplokaroy-n-tin-polisi-tis-depa-stin-gazprom#ixzz2Trt8FIQX> (in Greek).

33 "Russia's OAO Gazprom Says It Did Not Bid For Greece's DEPA Natural Gas Utility Because It Had 'Serious Problems' With Its Finances," International Business Times, June 11, 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/russias-oao-gazprom-says-it-did-not-bid-greeces-depa-natural-gas-utility-because-it-had-serious>

34 DESFA was eventually sold to Azeri company Socar, and shortly afterwards Baku announced its intention to allow its gas to be transported to Europe through TAP. Caitlin Del Sole, "Azerbaijan chooses TAP over Nabucco to provide gas pipeline to Europe," The European Institute, August 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.europeaninstitute.org/index.php/ei-blog/181-august-2013/1771-azerbaijan-chooses-tap-over-nabucco-to-provide-gas-pipeline-to-europe-88>

35 Ian Bremmer, "Why Russia refused to bail-out Cyprus," Financial Times, March 26 2013, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://blogs.ft.com/the-a-list/2013/03/26/why-russia-refused-to-bailout-cyprus/>

once again. The new alternative to South Stream, the Turkish Stream would reach the European market through Greece (Russia deliberately sidelined Bulgaria for the failure of the South Stream). Experts speculate that there might be a new energy cooperation emerging between Russia, Turkey, and Greece, which could offer Russia an economic mediator role between Ankara and Athens, as the relations between the two countries are still tense for various reasons.<sup>36</sup> Other countries, such as Hungary, seem to be supportive of the project too. Considering the Tsipras government's openness towards the Kremlin, the energy mega-projects (DEPA, DESFA, Turkish Stream) in the Eastern Mediterranean were expected to deepen the economic relations, especially in terms of the energy industry.

While discussions and rumours about Russia providing a bailout to Greece intensified in the time of the bailout agreements and political fights, these expectations finally proved to be false. Generally, we can say that while Russia is interested in the further deterioration of Greek-EU relations (Russia is a more positive player in the eyes of the Greek public than the EU), Russia cannot afford the provision of significant financial help to Greece- and, at the same time, Greek governments have been aware of the fact that Russia cannot and does not want to substitute Western creditors so far.

## Trade

Russia is the biggest trading partner of Greece,<sup>37</sup> primarily as a result of imports of petroleum and natural gas. The value of total trade between the two nations reached 9.3 billion Euros in 2013, surpassing trade flows between Greece and Germany. In turn, Greek exports mainly agricultural products to Russia, and the country welcomes more than 1 million Russian tourists every year. As we can see in the tables 1 and 2, summarizing trade between Greece and Russia below, Russia is almost ten times more important for Greece as an import partner than as an export partner, because only 1.5 percent of Greek export goes to Russia, while 15 percent of import comes from Russia.

Greek farmers and agricultural producers expected losses of around

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36 "Russia Is Not Bluffing With Turkish Stream Project," Oilprice, February 25, 2015, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Russia-Is-Not-Bluffing-With-Turkish-Stream-Project.html>

37 "Export - Import of goods," Enterprise Greece, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.investingreece.gov.gr/default.asp?pid=56>

178 million Euros in 2014, after Russia announced a ban on European Union food imports.<sup>38</sup> While this figure should not be considered severe in overall numbers, some sectors of agriculture, for example peach or strawberry production, can be contracted.<sup>39</sup> Tourism contributes more than 16% to Greek GDP, which is another key economic area affected not only by the shrinking numbers of Ukrainian and Russian visitors, but also by decreasing Russian investments in Greek tourism. Estimates put Russian tourism (real estate market, hotels, travel agencies) investment at around 3 billion Euros in the last decade, which is accompanied by more investments in energy-related construction, banks (e.g. Bank of Piraeus), food productions, etc.<sup>40</sup>

**Table 1. Greek imports from Russia<sup>41</sup>**

	2013
Imports from Russia (€)	6 513 391 551
Total imports (€)	46 698 987 308
Russian import in percentage of overall import (%)	13.95%
The relevance of Russian imports (in order of importance)	1.
The most important products imported from Russia (based on BEC rating <sup>1</sup> )	
Fuels and lubricants – from materials (BEC 310)	69.24%
Fuels and lubricants – processed– other (BEC 322)	26.23%
Industrial raw materials – processed (BEC 220)	3.12%

38 "Greek farmers hit hard by Russian sanctions against EU produce," Guardian, August 13, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/13/greece-farmers-russian-sanctions-rotten-fruit>

39 "Russian Sanctions Dim Greek Hopes for Exit From Recession," Bloomberg, August 11, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-08-11/greece-s-recession-exit-hopes-may-stumble-on-russia>

40 "Overview of the Greek-Russian investment relations," Serbianna, April 25, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://serbianna.com/analysis/archives/2631>

41 Our own calculation is based on Eurostat (EU trade since 1988 by BEC [DS-032655]) database. See description of the BEC rating process here: "Detailed structure and explanatory notes," United Nations, Statistics Division, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/cr/registry/regcst.asp?Cl=10>

**Table 2. Greek exports to Russia**

	2013
Exports to Russia (€)	406 029 940
Total exports (€)	27 555 886 120
Exports to Russia in percentage of overall exports (%)	1.47%
The relevance of Russian exports (in order of importance)	18.
The most important products exported to Russia (based on BEC rating)	
Food and beverages, raw materials, primary for household consumption (BEC 112)	30.39%
Semi-durable consumer goods (BEC 620)	24.11%
Industrial raw materials – processed (BEC 220)	18.39%
Food and beverages, primary for household consumption (BEC 112)	9.15%

## Greece's energy dependence

### Gas dependence

While Greece is less dependent on Russian crude oil (see table 3), which covers only around 30% of its needs, gas is more of a long term strategic issue. On the one hand, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), once completed in 2018, can deliver natural gas from Azerbaijan, therefore Europe and Greece will have an alternative source to Gazprom and its Turkish Stream. On the other hand, Greece is dependent on Russian gas because 83% of its gas import comes from Russia. In February 2014, the government of Antonis Samaras reached a deal with Russia on a 15% cut in the price of gas to boost economic production, however, demand for natural gas dropped by 35% in 2014 as a consequence of the contraction of the economy. Consequently, there is currently an urgent need to renegotiate the agreement under the take or pay obligation, which could leave the country to pay up to 100 million Euros to Gazprom.<sup>42</sup>

42 "Russia's Grip On Greece's Gas Has Created A Mess For The New Government In Athens," Business Insider, January 28, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/gazprom-gas-deal-with-greek-company-depa-complicating-russia-sanctions-negotiations-2015-1>

**Table 3. Greek and EU28 Imports of petroleum oil<sup>43</sup> and natural gas<sup>44</sup> from Russia in 2013<sup>45, 46</sup>**

	Value (€)	Share of imports from Russia in total extra-EU28 imports of petroleum/gas (%)	Share of imports from Russia in total imports of petroleum/gas(%)
Greece, petroleum	3 622 182 769	30.0%	30.0%
EU28, petroleum	99 160 929 595	33%	29%
Greece, gas	881 400 404	83%	83%
EU28, gas	17 472 466 881	46.%	24%

A recent study led by the Institute of Energy Economics at the University of Cologne (EWI) analysed the effects of a scenario of a possible embargo on Russian gas exports in November 2014 and its impact on the security of the gas supply in Europe.<sup>47</sup>

According to the study (see figure 2), Greece’s gas supply would be secure during a 3-month disruption. A 6-month disruption would have severe effects on Greek gas supply. The shortfall would be between 10 and 25 per cent of the annual demand.

As for general conclusions, the supply would be secure in almost all of European countries during a 3-month embargo, except for Bulgaria, Poland, Turkey and Finland. During a 6-month embargo, shortfalls would occur in many countries in Eastern Europe. France and Italy would be able to secure supplies.

43 Petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous minerals, crude.

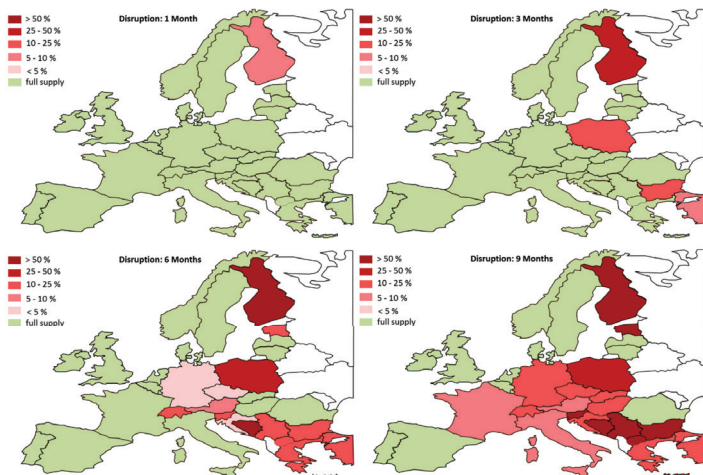
44 Natural gas in gaseous state

45 Calculations based on Eurostat (EU trade since 1995 by HS6) database.

46 Calculations based on Eurostat (EU trade since 1995 by HS6) database.

47 “An embargo of Russian Gas and Security of Supply in Europe,” Institute of energy Economics at the University of Cologne, September 8, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, [http://www.ewi.uni-koeln.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publikationen/Studien/Politik\\_und\\_Gesellschaft/2014/2014-09\\_An\\_Embargo\\_of\\_Russian\\_Gas\\_and\\_Security\\_of\\_Supply\\_in\\_Europe.pdf](http://www.ewi.uni-koeln.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/Studien/Politik_und_Gesellschaft/2014/2014-09_An_Embargo_of_Russian_Gas_and_Security_of_Supply_in_Europe.pdf)

**Figure 2. Supply shortfalls in European countries relative to their annual demand**



## **Greek-Russian diplomatic relations**

The country's overall Western orientation has been best encapsulated in the famous and unequivocal declaration, made by the most prominent Greek conservative statesman of the 20th century's, Constantine Karamanlis, when Greece joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1981: "Greece belongs in the West."<sup>48</sup> With the party scene dominated from the 1990s onwards by two pro-European and pro-Western parties (ND and PASOK) and increasing prosperity as Greece entered the Eurozone, the anti-European and anti-American messages from the far-left and far-right remained marginal in the early 2000s. In the mid-2000s, Greece's conservative Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis made an opening to Russia for the construction of a pipeline connecting Bulgaria's Black Sea coast to the Mediterranean, which would enable Russian exports to bypass the busy Bosphorus in Turkey. At the time, both Karamanlis and Putin affirmed "similar or identical" interests in connection

<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, mistrust of Europe can be traced back to the same era when the election campaign slogan that swept socialist Andreas Papandreou to power in 1981 was conducted on an anti-European and anti-NATO platform.



with many international matters, and Putin called Greece one of Russia's "closest partners". The economic crisis and the tension between Greece and the Eurozone changed the broad consensus in Greek politics and society about Greece's European orientation: Russia has a better reputation in Greece at the moment than the European Union does. Since 2012, the country's former ruling conservatives have towed the EU's line on the most pressing matters concerning Russia, namely in support of the Ukrainian government and the subsequent trade sanctions against Russia, *"They [Greece's New Democracy party] are also right-wing but they don't have much contact with Putin, and this is because they were steadfast in keeping Europe's line on the trade sanctions against Russia, which have also had a serious impact on the Greek economy,"* said Hasapopoulos, author of *Golden Dawn: The History, the People and the Truth*.

All this is important to remember because in 2015, for the first time, a government uniting the populist right and the radical left was formed in Athens. The SYRIZA-ANEL government of Alexis Tsipras crystallized the old, but never tangibly expressed, divide between modernizers and nationalists on the party scene, which has been present in Greek society for the past two centuries. While a SYRIZA-only government would probably have increased contacts between Athens and Moscow, a coalition of SYRIZA and ANEL created a coalition that is even closer to Moscow's interests in Greece. Although SYRIZA has not clearly indicated it wants to move away from Europe in the direction of Russia, the party has demonstrated a more lenient stance on issues regarding Russia compared to its EU counterparts nevertheless. In the European Parliament, for example, the MEPs of SYRIZA opposed the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine. In May 2014, during a tour of European capitals, Tsipras accused the Ukrainian government of harbouring neo-Nazi elements and was critical of the sanctions against Russia. SYRIZA has also praised the Russian-backed rebels in Eastern Ukraine, fighting against the pro-EU government of Ukraine. In its political resolution of the 1st Congress,<sup>49</sup> SYRIZA called for a "disengagement" from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, an end to Greece's closer ties with Israel, and the removal of Greek troops from overseas missions.<sup>50</sup> It also stressed the need for closer ties with Russia and China in the face of a "neoliberal" European Union and the "impe-

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49 *"The political resolution of the 1st congress of SYRIZA"*, SYRIZA, July 2013, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.syriza.gr/article/id/53894/The-political-resolution-of-the-1st-congress-of-SYRIZA.html#.VMV2ayuUc6m>

50 It's important to recognize SYRIZA's ideology in foreign policy. As a leftist party, it pursues anti-NATO and anti-EU foreign policy; the party also identifies itself as a pacifist party. In addition, being critical towards the United States, SYRIZA ascribes to a multi-polar view of world politics. Hence, it supports a more active role for China or Russia as balancing powers to the US. However, there is no particular ideological link with Russia or Eurasianism.

rialist" US. An even stronger indication that political change could be in the air was the fact that the first person Alexis Tsipras met with as prime minister was the Russian ambassador Andrey Maslov. However, in the year leading up to Greece's snap elections in January 2015, the party's leader watered down the rhetoric regarding the EU and NATO.

Former expectations of the Tsipras government significantly increasing Russian political and economic ties seemed to be exaggerated despite the turbulent times and bitter debates around the bailout package. However, the more difficult further loan negotiations will turn out to be, and the more difficult it will be for the government to implement austerity measures due to social and political rejection, the stronger political and economic pressure coming from Moscow is expected to become.<sup>51</sup>

The very choice of Nikolaos Kotzias (an intellectual who does not belong to the core of the SYRIZA party) as foreign minister likely symbolizes the populist and assertive character that underpinned the new government's foreign policy. He seemed to blur the lines between SYRIZA's Eurosceptic and anti-Western tendencies, the old-time links between the Soviet Union, the Greek Communists,<sup>52</sup> and ANEL's more ideological proximity towards Kremlin.<sup>53</sup> Kotzias is someone who advocated for the realignment of world politics around new, rising non-Western powers for years. As a faculty member of the University of Piraeus, Kotzias had invited Alexander Dugin to give a lecture; moreover, reports by the *Financial Times*<sup>54</sup> suggest that Kotzias had met Dugin numerous times in Moscow as well (albeit Kotzias himself has denied this).<sup>55</sup> While SYRIZA's ties with Moscow can be seen as part of a general policy set that seeks to create new opportunities and diversify Greek foreign policy, ANEL and especially its leader Kammenos seems to have an even closer cooperation with the Kremlin. The Athens-based Institute of Geopolitical Studies founded by Kammenos signed a "memorandum of understanding" with the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI) which was part of Russia's

51 See Chrysogelos, Angelos-Stylianou (2010): 'Undermining the West from Within: European Populists, the US and Russia', *European View* 9(2): 267-277

52 Kotzias, before the transition, welcomed for example the breakdown of independence movements in Poland.

53 His background is also quite multifaceted, as he started with the Greek Communist Party (KKE) before moving close to PASOK in the 1990s. For years he had been a close advisor of George Papandreu, a politician with very strong pro-American leaning.

54 "Alarm bells ring over Syriza's Russian links," *Financial Times*, January 28, 2015, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/a87747de-a713-11e4-b6bd-00144feab7de.html#axzz3ZBdnPIAt>

55 Having said this, Kotzias' first appearance on the European stage was much more conciliatory. While Greece counted among the countries that resisted intensification of sanctions against Russia, in a meeting of EU foreign ministers in January 2015, Kotzias' presence was deemed constructive and not going beyond accepted modes of EU policymaking.

Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) until 2009,<sup>56</sup> and right now it is led by a retired SVR lieutenant general, Leonid Reshetnikov, according to *Business Insider*.<sup>57</sup>

The tensions between the Troika and Russia, obviously created space for more Russian influence. “Russia could perhaps take advantage of a possible rift in Greece’s relations with the EU, stressed Dimitris Psarras journalist, specialized on Golden Dawn, noting that, if anything, “SYRIZA has challenged the very core of the European rationale”. On the other hand, he also added that “in the final analysis, SYRIZA remains a European party.” The strong ties of the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition with the Kremlin could be signs of a subtle pro-Russian change for Greece at the highest levels, at least in some aspects of foreign policy, and it can remain a feature of Greek foreign policy in the future as well.

## Russia’s perception among the Greek public

Although mainstream Greek media neither harbour a particularly positive image of the Kremlin, nor do they spread pro-Russian propaganda, a large part of the Greek public remains in favour of Russia and the Russian leadership, even after the Ukrainian crisis and the repeated failure of Russia to deliver substantive help for Greece, despite the siren songs from the Kremlin’s direction.

In the last years it seems that anti-Western sentiments (amplified by the Troika bailouts) seemed to rather improve Russia’s image compared to the EU and the US. While Russia’s overall favourable image decreased only by 1 point, from 63% to 62%, in 2014 compared to 2013 (see figure 3), the favourable image of the US among Greeks declined even more, from 39% to 34%, separate Pew Research Center polls have found.<sup>58</sup> The decline of pro-American sentiments was also confirmed by Gallup’s 2012 U.S.-Global Leadership Project, which showed Greek approval of

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<sup>56</sup> The institute is under Vladimir Putin’s Presidential Office now.

<sup>57</sup> “New Greek government has deep, long-standing ties with Russian ‘fascist’ Dugin,” *Business Insider*, January 30, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/new-greek-government-has-deep-long-standing-ties-with-russian-fascist-dugin-2015-1>

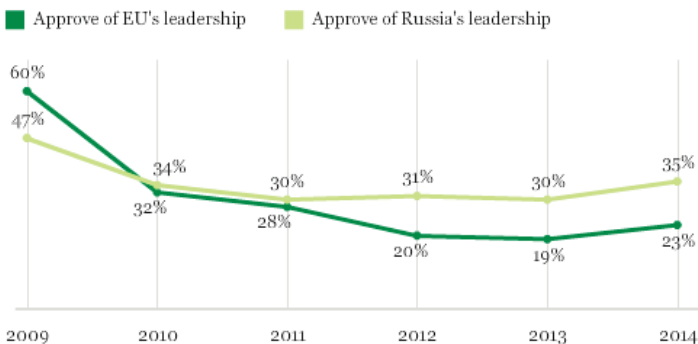
<sup>58</sup> “Russia’s Global Image Negative amid Crisis in Ukraine – Americans’ and Europeans’ Views Sour Dramatically,” Pew Research Center, July 9, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2014/07/PG-2014-07-09-Russia-Favorability.pdf>; “Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance and Drones, but Limited Harm to America’s Image,” Pew Research Center, July 14, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/07/14/global-opposition-to-u-s-surveillance-and-drones-but-limited-harm-to-americas-image/>

US leadership in the world to have dropped from 41% in 2009 to 24% in 2012.<sup>59</sup> Another poll, conducted by Gallup in 2014,<sup>60</sup> highlighted that the Greek public is more favourable towards Russia than the EU: 35% approved Russian leadership and only 23% approved the leadership of the EU. Looking at the trends, we can clearly see that this asymmetry is not caused by the improvement of Russia's image, but the deterioration of the reputation of the EU. This is one more indication that strengthening euro-rejection is opening the room for a stronger social-political influence of Europe.

**Figure 3. Greek approval of the leadership of Russia and the EU (2009-2014)**

*Greeks More Approving of Russia's Leadership Than EU's*

Among Greek adults



GALLUP

Source: Gallup survey, June 20-July 28, 2014

One of the main driving factors behind the higher approval rate of Russian leadership is the subpar Greek economic performance. The Gallup poll concluded: "Among Greeks who saw their economy as getting worse, twice as many residents approved of Russia's leadership (37%) as approved of the EU's leadership (18%). Russia's leadership also fared better than Germany's leadership (26%) by more than 10 percentage points." In the 10% optimistic

<sup>59</sup> "U.S. Global Leadership Report," Gallup, 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, [http://www.gallup.com/file/poll/161309/US\\_Global\\_Leadership\\_Report\\_03-13\\_mh2.pdf](http://www.gallup.com/file/poll/161309/US_Global_Leadership_Report_03-13_mh2.pdf)

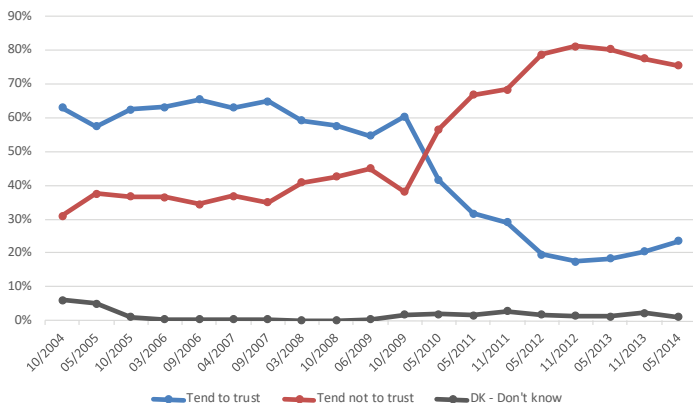
<sup>60</sup> "More Greeks Approve of Russia's Leadership Than EU's," Gallup, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181460/greeks-approve-russia-leadership.aspx>

group who saw their economy one that is improving, however, the EU's and Germany's leadership performance increased dramatically to 56% and 50% respectively, with Russia's leadership role remaining on a similar level, 32%. Thus, the favourable view of Russian leadership reflects the dire economic situation of Greece and the negative perception of the international actors associated with Greek economic hardship (the EU and the IMF).

According to the Eurobarometer survey (see figure 4), in June 2014 over two-thirds of Greece's population tended not to trust the European Union, while 24% said that they tend to trust the EU.<sup>61</sup> Lack of trust had a dramatic turnaround in 2010, when the Troika (a tripartite committee formed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) launched the bailout programme, and it has remained constant ever since.

**Figure 4. Greek public's trust in the European Union (2004-2014)**

**I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it? The European Union**  
Greece (from 10/2004 to 05/2014)



In terms of EU membership, the opinion of the Greek population is just as much divided: in May 2011, 50% of the respondents thought that all in all Greece has not benefited from EU membership, while 47% shared the

61 Eurobarometer - trust, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/cf/showtable.cfm?keyID=2193&nationID=22,&startdate=2004.10&enddate=2014.06](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/showtable.cfm?keyID=2193&nationID=22,&startdate=2004.10&enddate=2014.06).

opposite viewpoint,<sup>62</sup> which indicates that negative assessments of EU membership have, for the first time since 1983, surpassed positive ones.

An October 2015 poll by Greek polling company Public Issue found that while Greeks overwhelmingly still see the EU as Greece's main ally (44%, as opposed to 12% for Russia), Russia is the second-most popular foreign power in Greece (after France), well above Germany and the US and marginally above the EU. If the EU remains popular but divisive (52% positive vs. 46% negative views), Russia's appeal is much more established (58% vs. 34%). The fluctuations in the appeal of the EU are clearly related with the course of the negotiations between Tsipras and the EU in the first half of 2015. Ultimately, after the new bailout agreement was signed, the EU again became popular among a slight majority of Greeks. Russia's popularity on the other hand remains strong but quite smaller than what it was in the beginning of the SYRIZA-ANEL government (70%-20% balance of positive-negative opinions back then). This probably reflects some disappointment with the fact that Russia did not offer concrete assistance to Greece during Eurozone negotiations.

But still, SYRIZA-ANEL government's positive attitude towards Russia resonates well in the public opinion because Russia is a major power that creates an alternative to the Troika comprised of the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank.

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62 Eurobarometer – membership, 2011, accessed November 2, 2015, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/cf/showtable.cfm?keyID=6&nationID=22,&startdate=2004.10&enddate=2011.05](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/showtable.cfm?keyID=6&nationID=22,&startdate=2004.10&enddate=2011.05).

# Kremlin's influence on today's Greek far-right

## The patriotic subculture

The history of the far-right as a distinct political identity begins with the fall of the military dictatorship in 1974 and the rallying of all the forces that felt uneasy about the new democratic regime. These forces included those nostalgic for the post-Civil War “state of the right” in the 1950s and 1960s, but the tone in the Greek far-right movement was especially given by those associated with or nostalgic of the military dictatorship of 1967-1974.<sup>63</sup> As the post-Civil War political system and the military junta were associated with and highly depended on the United States (within the context of the Cold War, whereby communism was seen as the supreme domestic and international threat), the post-1974 far-right also maintained a strong pro-American position.

The post-Cold War far-right in Greece shed the old elements of its agenda associated with nostalgia for the dictatorship, but maintained nationalism and authoritarianism as key features. It also highlighted and sought to “incorporate” new pertinent issues, such as immigration, globalization, and national identity.<sup>64</sup> The more radical streams of the far-right—e.g., the proto-Nazi author and theoretician Konstantinos Plevris, the neo-Nazi group Golden Dawn of Nikos Michaloliakos, and the radical right party Greek Front of Makis Voridis, who sought inspiration in Jean-Marie Le Pen’s Front National, sought to embed Western authoritarian far-right traditions to a greater or lesser extent in imagery extracted from Greece’s ancient past. More conservative streams of the far-right maintained fundamental religiosity as their key characteristic, which had also been a feature of the post-Civil War state. Elements of this religious traditionalism were assembled around junta sympathizer journalist and TV station-owner Grigoris Michalopoulos, as well as various fundamentalist religious organizations. They were also harnessed by the maverick MP of the conservative New Democracy party Giorgos Karatzaferis, who

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63 This includes for example parties like the National Camp (present in the elections of 1977), the Party of the Progressives (1981), and the National Political Union (EPEN, 1980s). Of those, only the National Camp won parliamentary representation in 1977. The Progressives and EPEN won one seat each in European Parliament elections, the former in 1981 and the latter in 1984. See Ellinas, Antonis A. (2012): LAOS and the Greek Far-right since 1974, in Mammone, Andrea, Godin, Emmanuel and Jenkins, Brian (eds.), *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe: From Local to Transnational*, London: Routledge, pp. 124-140.

64 Ellinas, Antonis A. (2013): “The Rise of the Golden Dawn: The New Face of the Far-right in Greece,” *South European Society and Politics*, 18(4): 543-565.

owns his own TV station, and who later formed the Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS) party.<sup>65</sup> Despite their differences, most groups and personalities associated with the far-right during the 1990s also assumed a novel ideological trait, namely anti-Americanism, which by then had almost been explicitly associated with the Greek left. While the far-right remained internally fragmented and without electoral success,<sup>66</sup> it was joined in its critique of America and globalization by various intellectuals and activists of the left, who assumed patriotic and nationalist positions after the end of the Cold War. Taken together, the traditional far-right and leftists-turned-nationalists constituted a very active and vibrant “patriotic” subculture in Greek society that expressed unease with globalization, European integration and Greece’s place in the Western civilization.

## The Kremlin’s emergence

Whereas explicit pro-Russia positions were rare in the ‘90s, owing to Russia’s weakness, anti-Americanism and anti-globalization sentiments emanating from the heterogeneous patriotic subculture presaged future attitudes towards Russia in the new century. The newly independent Russia first surfaced as a point of reference in the 1990s during the wars in ex-Yugoslavia. Not unlike how Samuel Huntington had predicted in *The Clash of Civilizations*, the Greek public overwhelmingly identified with the Serbian side, primarily due to common religious ties. This was the time when arguments, such as the creation of an “Orthodox axis,” present in many societies from Greece to Russia as a bulwark against Western and Muslim influence in the Balkans, appeared among both the Greek far-right and the patriotic left, thus catalysing the emergence of the patriotic subculture. The US was seen as the main pillar of globalization, which, in turn, was seen by the far-right as the source of the cultural alienation and marginalization of Greeks. Anti-globalization and anti-Americanism became permanent features of the far-right by the end of the Yugoslav wars. However, the inroads of the far-right were very limited at that time, because anti-Americanism was primarily identified with a much more popular

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65 See Karambelias, Giorgos (2012): “The Sponsors of Golden Dawn,” *Ardin Magazine*, issue 90, accessed October 1, 2013, <http://www.ardin-rixi.gr/archives/8387> (in Greek: Καραμπελιάς Γιώργος: Οι σπόνσορες της Χρυσής Αυγής, σε: Αρδην, τεύχος 90).

66 The Greek Front and Golden Dawn, as well as political parties fielded in various national and European elections by Plevris and Michaloliakos, all failed to ever reach even 1% of the vote.



far-left.<sup>67</sup> The far-right was still associated with the “junta”, the unpopular post-Civil War political system, and the far-left spectrum in Greece traditionally regards the West, and especially the US, as the traitor of Greece because of its alleged support to this authoritarian regime. Meanwhile, political and intellectual elites (among which the main conservative party of New Democracy, which always maintained a populist right-wing) had successfully neutralized most of the far-right discontent,<sup>68</sup> but only until the financial crisis hit in 2008.

## The Party of Independent Greeks (ANEL)

The patriotic subculture and its far-right pillar had already a foothold in the Parliament in the 2000s, with the radical right-wing populist party LAOS (Popular Orthodox Rally). But in terms of party politics, the far-right emerged as a major power in 2012, when an anti-austerity party, called the Independent Greeks (ANEL), broke away from the main conservative party, New Democracy and the support for the extreme-right Golden Dawn started increasing exponentially. The leader of ANEL, Panos Kammenos, already had a reputation and a knack for conspiratorial politics, for example, he believes in chemtrails<sup>69</sup> and that Jews don't pay taxes.<sup>70</sup> Partially, as a consequence of the economic crisis, conspiracy theories blaming external forces are extremely popular in the Greek society.<sup>71</sup> Kammenos assumed a leading role in 2010 when New Democracy opposed the first bailout plan and austerity measures, and he became the first politician in the main political scene to promote arguments circu-

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67 For example, in the European elections of 1999 that took place a few months after the NATO Kosovo bombings, KKE fielded as candidates for the European Parliament the journalist Liana Kanelli and the intellectual Kostas Zouraris. Both were well known for their rabid opposition to the NATO presence in the Balkans (on the basis of which they decided to run with KKE) and ‘culturalist’ readings of world politics. Kanelli remained in KKE and has been serving as MP for the party for almost 15 years now, while Zouraris (who had a background in the left) only reappeared in politics when he was elected in 2015 with the Independent Greeks (ANEL) to Parliament.

68 Before the crisis, ND's protectionist outlook meant that it mostly presented Greece's anchoring to the EU as a strong guarantee against globalization's hardships. This further limited the space for growth of the far-right in Greece.

69 “Who is Panos Kammenos?,” thetoc, January 26, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.thetoc.gr/eng/politics/article/who-is-panos-kammenos>

70 “Politician Who Said Jews Don't Pay Tax Appointed as Greece's Defense Chief,” Haaretz, January 29, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/1.639763>

71 “Survey: Leading Conspiracy Theories in Greece,” Greek Reporter, July 18, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://greece.greekreporter.com/2014/07/18/survey-leading-conspiracy-theories-in-greece/>

lated in the far-right subculture about Russia and its potentially helpful role in the crisis. Kammenos, as early as during his tenure at New Democracy, claimed that Russia was a viable counterweight to Europe and that Greece should turn to the Kremlin for economic support.<sup>72</sup> He also claimed that Greece's untapped energy resources represent a true bonanza that would make bailouts obsolete. As the leader of ANEL and in opposition to pro-European parties, Kammenos significantly intensified his political links with the Kremlin. In March 2013, Kammenos announced that his party would sign a memorandum of cooperation with Vladimir Putin's party, and consequently Kammenos frequently made visits to Moscow to meet with officials there.<sup>73</sup> During the Ukraine crisis Kammenos consistently supported the Kremlin's position and criticized the ND-PASOK government for what he perceived as a too heavy anti-Russian stance: the politician released a statement "publicly support[ing]" Russia's annexation of Crimea shortly after the event in March 2014.<sup>74</sup> In the first half of January 2015, just before the elections, Kammenos went to Moscow and talked about the party's pro-Russian stance in an interview.<sup>75</sup>

After the formation of the Tsipras government with ANEL's support, Kammenos, as the country's new Defence Minister, on January 28, 2015 called for the "need for closer cooperation with Moscow." A month later Kammenos was invited to visit his Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu.<sup>76</sup> The meeting took place in April. The meeting was concluded in an atypically friendly tone from a NATO member. Kammenos, in his statement, underlined that the Greek people could always enjoy the help of Russia in difficult times, and the country will never forget the support Russia provided in the Cyprus case (e.g. veto on the resolution on Cyprus in the United Nations). The minister reiterated that "The new Greek government is seeking cooperation with Russia in all sectors. The recent

72 Pro-Russian and anti-European media outlets, even mainstream centre-left newspapers, accused then Prime Minister Papandreou of failing to make a serious request for economic support from Vladimir Putin during his visit to Moscow in early 2010.

73 "Καμμένος: Συνεργασία με το κόμμα Πούτιν με βάση την", tvxs.gr, March 9, 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://tvxs.gr/news/ελλάδα/συνεργασία-ανελ-με-κόμμα-πούτιν-με-κοινο-παρανομαστή-την-ορθοδοξία>

74 "Greece threatens EU veto over Russian sanctions," Independent, January 29, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/greece-threatens-eu-veto-over-russian-sanctions-10010138.html>

75 Anton Shekhovtsov: "Greek left-wing SYRIZA forms a coalition with the pro-Kremlin far right", anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.bg, January 26, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.bg/2015/01/greek-left-wing-syriza-forms-coalition.html>

76 "Defense minister Kammenos says he was invited to Moscow," thetoc.gr, February 3, 2015, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.thetoc.gr/eng/news/article/defense-minister-kammenos-says-he-was-invited-to-moscow>

agreements between Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Russian President Vladimir Putin open up new prospects".<sup>77</sup> The Greek Defence minister also claimed that his government is looking for ways to change the line of EU's policies regarding the sanctions against Russia, as they are in disagreement with the EU leadership about the necessity of sanctions. His Russian counterpart underlined the importance of "deep roots" of Greek and Russian cooperation in defence and military issues, and expressed his hopes that this good cooperation can be maintained.

Experts characterize the Independent Greeks and their ideology as pro-Russian by default. "It's in their party programme as is their support for the Eurasian dogma," said Vasiliki Georgiadou professor at the Pantheon University and expert on far-right politics, referring to the Eurasian Movement articulated by Alexander Dugin.<sup>78</sup> Distrust seems to manifest on the highest transatlantic levels. On the one hand Kammenos reassured NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg that "relations will continue as before," while on the other hand he insisted that Greece would maintain its strong ties with Russia:

*"Of course Greece has political relations with Russia. These relations are not hidden, these are open relations and we will continue to have those relations (...) Also we have (Russian) military equipment, we discussed that with the secretary general. We will continue to source spare parts so that we are able to keep this equipment, which will remain within NATO."*<sup>79</sup>

The strong relations of Kammenos raised widespread concerns in the EU and NATO about the loyalty and trustworthiness of Greece as an ally.

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<sup>77</sup> "Kammenos meets Russian counterpart during official visit to Moscow," enikos.gr, April 15, 2015, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://en.enikos.gr/politics/27277,Kammenos-meets-Russian-counterpart-during-official-visit-to-Moscow.html>

<sup>78</sup> "The fourth political theory," 4pt.su, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.4pt.su/en/topics/eurasianism>

<sup>79</sup> "Greece Defence Minister Reassures NATO Over Russia Ties," Defense News, February 4, 2015, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/europe/2015/02/04/greece-defence-minister-reassures-nato-russia-ties/22868847/>

## Golden Dawn

Golden Dawn (hereafter GD) was the other main actor of the far-right that benefited immensely from the financial crisis. The party's history goes back a long way, as it was first formed in the early-1980s as a group around a small magazine with the same name, only forming a political party in the 1990s. The party won entry to Greece's 300-seat parliament in July 2012 and was elected as Greece's third largest party on January 25, 2015 with 6.3% of the vote, giving them 17 seats. The party's rise to prominence has been striking, given that in May 2009 the party took part in the European elections, getting only 0.5 per cent of the vote. Golden Dawn, much like ANEL and the SYRIZA, rose to prominence on a wave of public discontent over tough fiscal austerity imposed on Greece by the EU and the IMF in the last five years in exchange for 240 billion euros in bailout loans. "They are tapping into the feeling that Greek pride has been trampled upon during the financial crisis," Maria Psara journalist at the Ethnos daily, who has covered Golden Dawn extensively for years, said.

Golden Dawn campaigned intensely against illegal immigration and the party proclaimed itself the champion of the people. As the country's crisis-struck government was unable to effectively deal with crime and urban insecurity, which rose in tandem with the financial crisis, GD took it upon itself to root out the perceived cause: illegal immigrants, especially Asian and Muslim, through violent and deadly attacks.

In September 2013, leftist activist and artist Pavlos Fyssas was murdered in Athens by a low-ranking Golden Dawn member. The investigation on his murder and the public outrage it caused brought about the prosecution of almost the entire Golden Dawn party apparatus under Greece's law for "criminal organizations." The leadership of the party, including almost all of its parliamentarians, were arrested and detained (or put under house arrest), pending trial for racketeering, assaults, etc. The trial began in late April 2015, but it did not destroy the party's reputation.

In a report<sup>80</sup> published in 2012, *The Guardian* correspondent Helena Smith wrote:

*"Golden Dawn party is increasingly assuming the role of law enforcement officers on the streets of the bankrupt country, with mounting evidence that Athenians are being openly directed by police to seek help from the neo-Nazi group, analysts, activists and lawyers say. In return, a growing number of*

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80 "Greek police send crime victims to neo-Nazi 'protectors,'" *Guardian*, September 28, 2012, accessed November 5, 2015, [http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/28/greek-police-victims-neo-nazi?CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/28/greek-police-victims-neo-nazi?CMP=tw_t_gu)

*Greek crime victims have come to see the party, whose symbol bears an uncanny resemblance to the swastika, as a 'protector.'"*

The party also offers some social services, such as free medical advice and food distributions, organized by the party's activists, to families in need who can prove they are Greek citizens. In addition, all their parliament members give 60 per cent of their salaries as MPs to welfare activities, according to report in the *Financial Times* in May 2014. The party's heavy-handed xenophobic, anti-Muslim policies and intolerant Christian ideology fits the Kremlin's authoritative approach on many issues.

## **The ideology of Golden Dawn: The "blonde race" in the North**

The ideology of the far-right party is built around racism and Nazism in a somewhat confusing and deceiving way when it comes to traditional values of the Greek society or Orthodox Christianity. This apparent confusion over how they identify themselves is thoroughly explored in the Greek media. Maria Psara said this far-right ideological confusion prompted her to write an article asking "Which God do Golden Dawn believe in?" She continued: "At the Hitirio theatre (which they stormed to protest against a theatrical play they deemed disrespectful to Christianity) they are Christians, during the winter equinox they are pagans, and at events about ancient Greece they profess their allegiance to the Olympian Gods. (...) Who do they believe in? Essentially they believe in Nazism and a soup of conspiracy theories." According to Vasiliki Georgiadou Political Science and History professor at the Panteion University and author of *The Far-right and the Consequence of Consensus*, "Golden Dawn are using religion as a tool...I don't believe they are serious about religion." Maria Psara added: "It's not the religious element that they like but the fact that they are the "blonde race," meaning they are white. They are exploiting Orthodoxy." Psara stressed the party's sheer racism in everyday life: "In all their attacks against immigrants on the street, they never target whites. They would never touch a Russian immigrant".

Analysts agreed that Golden Dawn are striving to blend the tenets of Nazism with their adulation for ancient Greece and, albeit to a lesser extent, with the heritage of the Orthodox Byzantine empire, which ruled from Constantinople (modern day Istanbul before it fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453). This is precisely where Russia, as the Orthodox champion, fits in the historical narrative. Some ultra-religious conservatives, partly overlap-

ping with GD's electorate, identify Russia with the so-called "blonde race" (ξανθό γένος) which, according to prophecies and superstitious folklore, will come and sweep away the enemies of the Orthodox Christians and reinstall the Greek Orthodox empire with its capital in Constantinople. "There is an undisputed cultural link with Russia through the common tradition it has with Greece, but this connection comes via the far-right," said Dimitris Psarras.<sup>81</sup> But it should be emphasized, according to Maria Psara, that Golden Dawn's exploitation of Greece's religious disposition towards Russia is not necessarily linked to religious folklore, but to racism and Nazism, which is the overriding principle governing the party. "They are charmed by power and that's why they admire Vladimir Putin so much, because he projects an image of strength and is hailed as the leader who restored Russia to its world power status and stood up to the West", the expert added.

## Golden Dawn's ties with the Kremlin

In the view of Maria Psara, there is a link between the Kremlin and Golden Dawn, and it manifests itself in both covert and an overt ways: "You can find obvious signs of these links on their websites and blogs and also in the not so public contacts between Golden Dawn officials and Russia." According to Dimitris Psarras, Russia's contacts with Golden Dawn stem from its desire as a "big power" to seek various (foreign) "policy supporters" in different European countries. Any doubts about the close links between far-right groups in both countries were soon dashed when far-right Russian sympathizers rallied to the defence of Golden Dawn members, who were jailed in 2013 and 2014, with banners and statements of support.

Relations between Golden Dawn and far-right parties in Russia go far back, long before Golden Dawn entered the Parliament in 2012. The neo-Nazi group had links to far-right parties in Russia in the '90s, especially with the leader of the ultra-right Liberal Democratic Party Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who has now become, according to the researcher on Russian far-right politics at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Sofia Tipaldou,

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81 Unconditionally positive views of Russia are much more popular among lay members of the Church or perhaps the lower-ranking clergy. The Church of Greece itself generally maintains cordial relations both with the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and the Patriarchate of Moscow, even though it prioritizes relations with the former. While many Greek bishops are outspoken in questions of foreign policy, there have been extremely few cases of expressed pro-Russian statements by high-ranking members of the Church of Greece.

“a puppet of Vladimir Putin in the Russian Duma.” Subsequently, Nikos Michaloliakos joined other similar European groups at a meeting in Moscow at the invitation of Zhirinovskiy,<sup>82</sup> bringing him a birthday present. As Hasapopoulos noted, “Michaloliakos went, even though he rarely travels outside Greece.”

These links remained strong and, ever since the crisis hit Ukraine, the Kremlin appears to be encouraging joint forums, hosting local and European far-right parties, according to Tipaldou. One of these forums, the International Russian Conservative Forum, was held in St Petersburg in March 2015 and attended by Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, one of the founders of the Rodina (Motherland) party, a “national-patriotic” coalition. It was also attended by Alexander Dugin along with other European far-right leaders, including GD. The forum was designed to “unite” and coordinate the policies of nationally-orientated forces all across Europe.<sup>83</sup>

One of many signs of the party’s close relations with Russia was the posting of a revealing audio recording of a private conversation between Takis Baltakos, an advisor to the then Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, and leading party member Ilias Kasidiaris on Russian YouTube in 2014. The alleged purpose of releasing this recording, which caused a huge public outcry in Greece, was to expose the link the prime minister’s top aide had with the far-right.<sup>84</sup> Another proof is on the Golden Dawn’s website a permanent feed of news from Russia. Moreover, according to a report published in the *Parapolitika* news site in July 2014,<sup>85</sup> shortly before senior party member Ilias Kasidiaris was jailed for his alleged role in the running of Golden Dawn as a criminal organisation, he was already planning to flee Greece and seek asylum in Russia. One analyst cited this as proof of the close links between Russia and Golden Dawn. “I can’t believe this was a coincidence,” said Maria Psara, who has covered Golden Dawn extensively for years. Another obvious link between the party and the Kremlin is Alexander Dugin, an important representative of the Eurasianist ideology. “There is direct communication between Dugin and Golden Dawn,” said Dimitris Psarras, pointing out that one of the leading mem-

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82 “Golden Dawn and Russian neo-Nazism,” *grreporter.info*, April 15, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, [http://www.grreporter.info/en/golden\\_dawn\\_and\\_russian\\_neonazism/11007](http://www.grreporter.info/en/golden_dawn_and_russian_neonazism/11007)

83 “Europe far-right parties meet in St Petersburg, Russia,” BBC, March 22, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32009360>

84 Media reports speculated at the time that Russian far-right groups had posted the video on Russian YouTube first, in an act of solidarity with Golden Dawn, as it could have easily been traced and removed from Greek YouTube by Greek authorities.

85 “Σχέδιο «απόδρασης» του Ηλία Κασιδιάρη στη Ρωσία,” *Parapolitika*, July 13, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.parapolitika.gr/article/96610/shedio-apodrasis-toy-ilia-kasidiari-sti-rosia>

bers that visited the Russian advisor was Eleni Zaroulia, the wife of party leader Nikos Michaloliakos. And at one of those meetings, Dugin reportedly declared that “Greeks and Russians are natural allies.” According to some Greek media reports, “Dugin remains in correspondence with Michaloliakos.” Another indication of the affinity of Dugin with Golden Dawn was his decision to post on his Facebook page the translation of an announcement by the party in support of Russia’s annexation of Crimea:

*“American-Zionist media and paid hacks in Greece and around the world claim that Russia annexed Crimea. This claim and the use of the term ‘annexation’ is completely wrong and misleading.” – reads the announcement of Golden Dawn.*<sup>86</sup>

However, Alexander Dugin’s role should not be exaggerated. He might have been one of many advisors to Putin with his own ideology, which doesn’t necessarily mean that Vladimir Putin endorsed his ideology, and right now he is rather sidelined in Russian politics. But the scope of these politics reaches well beyond Alexander Dugin. As a general strategy, the Kremlin tolerates far-right groups in Russia and even backs some of them, as part of its concept of “managed nationalism,” which, according to Tipaldou, “is basically a way to control all these [nationalist, far-right] movements.” Beyond doubt, the party doesn’t strive to hide its links with the Kremlin or Russian stakeholders, but rather boasts about them, for instance by posting photos on its official websites about the meetings of its officials in Russia. “It looks good for them to show that they have powerful friends in Russia - an alternative power to Europe,” Maria Psara said.

A covert way of influence would be the financing of Golden Dawn from Russia, however this has not been proved. There have been numerous media reports about Russian influence in Greece through far-right groups. A report in *The Week*<sup>87</sup> news magazine in November 2014 included Golden Dawn on a list of far-right groups in Europe that allegedly received loans from a Russian-owned bank. Additionally, two reports by *Unfollow* magazine<sup>88</sup> in 2014 claimed that Golden Dawn was funded by Russian business interests, as part of a wide-reaching plan by the Kremlin to bring Europe’s rising far-right under its influence, especially considering that many media reports suggested that Europe’s far-right populist

86 “Golden Dawn about Crimea,” last modified April 4, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/alexandr.dugin/posts/760335743976468>

87 “Russia funds French National Front: is Moscow sowing European unrest?,” *theweek.co.uk*, November 25, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.theweek.co.uk/europe/61498/russia-funds-french-national-front-is-moscow-sowing-european-unrest>

88 “Η χρηματοδότηση της Χρυσής Αυγής από ακροδεξιούς στη Ρωσία, έλληνες και ρώσους επιχειρηματίες,” *unfollow.com.gr*, June 30, 2014, accessed November 5, 2015, <http://www.unfollow.com.gr/print/14082-xrimatodotisi>



leaders have displayed an increasing zeal to back Russian positions in Brussels. According to the articles, there are multiple financial sources from Russia, ranging from the far-right and the mafia to oligarchs and “official” sources of finance of the Russian state. However, the articles do not provide sources to substantiate the magazine’s claims. All the analysts interviewed told Political Capital Institute that there have been unconfirmed rumours of Kremlin financing Golden Dawn, but these have never been substantiated and never confirmed.

## Golden Dawn and Russian geopolitics

Kremlin’s influence surely pays off in terms of the geopolitical views of Golden Dawn. The party’s leader Nikos Michaloliakos has reportedly urged for a Greek-Russian alliance and cooperation away from the “naval forces of the Atlantic.”<sup>89</sup> “They actually wanted to form a military doctrine with Russia,” Hasapopoulos claimed, “And they [the Kremlin] pay them back by issuing press releases that denounce the arrest and trial of Golden Dawn members as unconstitutional.” In an article published by a party-affiliated newspaper in 2012, leading member Ilias Kasidiaris called for Greece’s geo-strategic shift to Russia, echoing other party statements in the past, urging a reversal of Greece’s geopolitical orientation and for a re-evaluation of its alliances, as “they [those alliances] have offered Greece nothing.” Golden Dawn has stated on several occasions that the party wants Greece to move away from the US and its allies, and look to Russia for investment and energy. Opening up to Russia, the party insists, is in the best interest of the country, which has suffered losses due to “American Zionists.”

Golden Dawn’s pro-Russian stance has not been without its share of confusion, as demonstrated by the Ukraine crisis, when they found themselves torn between their “fellow fascists”—Ukrainian nationalists—and allegiance to Putin’s Russia. “They didn’t know what to make of the situation,” said Dimitris Psarras. In addition, as Maria Psara claimed, “They tried to avoid taking a clear cut stance in favour of Russia because they didn’t want to turn their backs on the Ukrainian nationalists.” The party opted

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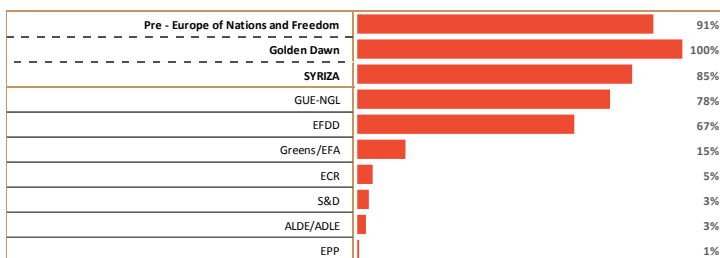
89 “*The Russian Connection*,” Political Capital, April 10, 2014, accessed November 5, 2014, [http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc\\_flash\\_report\\_russian\\_connection.pdf](http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf)

to side with Russia,<sup>90</sup> but analysts also said that Golden Dawn were perplexed by Russia's annexation of Crimea as it bore an eerie resemblance to the situation in Cyprus in 1974, when Turkey invaded and seized the territory.

However, this kind of confusion is hard to detect on the voting record (see figure 5) of the party which supports 100% an uncontested pro-Kremlin stance regarding selected anti-Russian resolutions in the European Parliament.

**Figure 5. Share of “no” votes of caucuses and Golden Dawn in selected resolutions in the European Parliament**

Share of NO votes in total votes cast in 6 selected resolutions



Selected Russia-related resolutions included:

1 - Strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia (11.06.2015), subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (motion for a resolution)<sup>91</sup>

2 - State of EU-Russia relations (10.06.2015), subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (motion for a resolution)<sup>92</sup>

3 - Murder of the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov and the state of democracy in Russia (12.03.2015), subject (Paragraph 19, amendment 1), type of vote (joint motion for a resolution)<sup>93</sup>

90 In a statement the party denounced Greece's "wretched leadership for not uttering a word about the deadly risk to Hellenism and Orthodoxy in Ukraine that is already manifested by the violent attacks against our compatriots."

91 Accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-strategic-military-situation-in-the-black-sea-basin-following-the-illegal-annexation-of-crimea-by-ru-15.html>

92 Accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-state-of-eu-russia-relations-motion-for-resolution-vote-resolution.html>

93 Accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-murder-of-the-russian-opposition-leader-boris-nemtsov-and-the-state-of-democracy-in-russia-joint-mot.html>

4 - Macro-financial assistance to Ukraine (25.03.2015), subject (vote: legislative resolution), type of vote (draft legislative resolution)<sup>94</sup>

5 - EU-Ukraine association agreement, with the exception of the treatment of third country nationals legally employed as workers in the territory of the other party (16.09.2014), subject (approbation), type of vote (draft legislative resolution)<sup>95</sup>

6 - Situation in Ukraine (17.07.2014), subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (joint motions for a resolution)<sup>96</sup>

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94 Accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-macro-financial-assistance-to-ukraine-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-legislative-resolution-ordin.html>

95 Accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-eu-ukraine-association-agreement-with-the-exception-of-the-treatment-of-third-country-nationals-lega.html>

96 Accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-situation-in-ukraine-joint-motions-for-a-resolution-vote-resolution.html>

# Kremlin's propaganda in Greek far-right communication: Mr. Liakopoulos and Daily Eleftheri Ora

Before the early 2000s, Russia was featured surprisingly little in the public debate and the collective imagery of a Christian Orthodox country like Greece. Pro-Russian "cultural" or "civilizational" readings of world politics thrived only in the fringes of political and academic debates. But the assertiveness of Vladimir Putin created a new appeal for Russia, especially among members of the patriotic subculture, but among the general public as well.

Few people have done as much to popularize the image of Vladimir Putin in the Greek public sphere as Demosthenes Liakopoulos, a book publisher from Thessaloniki. For more than ten years, Liakopoulos has been assiduously buying airtime on small TV channels of the Athens and Thessaloniki regions to disseminate telemarketing-style shows, in which he stars and promotes books written or published by himself.

Liakopoulos first established a foothold in Greek TV<sup>97</sup> through his association with the radical right populist party LAOS (Popular Orthodox Rally) of Giorgos Karatzaferis.<sup>98</sup>

In his broadcasts, Liakopoulos energetically blends geopolitics, conspiracy theories, and the supernatural: anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism (disguised as "anti-Zionism"), a superstitious (and rather distorted) reading of the Greek-Orthodox tradition, and the promotion of outlandish theories and stories about the impending Judgment Day, among others. A key element of Liakopoulos' broadcasts is his admiration (bordering on the personality cult) of Vladimir Putin. Given Vladimir Putin's defiant posture in world affairs, Liakopoulos presented Russia being ready to play a historical part as a supporter of Hellenism in an impending apocalyptic

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97 In the early-2000s Liakopoulos had a TV show (broadcast from Thessaloniki) in Karatzaferis' TV station; he also appeared next to Karatzaferis as one of his Thessaloniki collaborators in rallies organized in front of the statue of Alexander the Great. However, since then Liakopoulos cut ties with LAOS and has maintained a largely non-partisan profile (perhaps due to the idiosyncrasy of his ideas), eschewing references to domestic politics in his shows.

98 After leaving New Democracy in 2000, Karatzaferis created LAOS, whose message had most of the key elements of a typical far-right party (anti-immigration, nativism, law and order), while he also adopted anti-Americanism from the left. A keen populist rather than an ideologue, Karatzaferis espoused pro-Russian positions throughout the 2000s when this seemed to serve his strategy of delegitimizing Greek elites. LAOS became the first consistently successful far-right party in Greece, with representatives in the Parliament from 2007 to 2012.

struggle between good (Orthodoxy and Hellenism) and evil (the US, Israel and their paranormal allies). By now, Liakopoulos is a household name in Greece and his persistent promotion of his outlandish theories has made his vocabulary something of a standard in Greek popular culture. Despite his rather comical looks, his message is firmly situated in the patriotic subculture in Greece.

The cult of Putin and Russia as part of an elaborate mythology has been taken over even more forcefully in recent years by the Athens-based daily newspaper *Eleftheri Ora* (in Greek, The Hour of Freedom).<sup>99</sup> *Eleftheri Ora* has established something of a cult reputation for its outrageous front-page stories about conspiracies of the international Jewry and the world's financiers, the alleged Satanist undertones of US foreign policy, and so forth. Much like in Liakopoulos' "universe," Vladimir Putin, as a symbol of anti-Western assertiveness, and Russia feature prominently in *Eleftheri Ora*'s narrative of conspiratorial and supernatural geopolitics.

*Liakopoulos, Eleftheri Ora*, and other conspiratorial outlets of the patriotic subculture are usually dismissed as non-serious and irrelevant; however, as players these media outlets have shaped the Greek public discourse at a time of radical delegitimation not only of mainstream politics, but also of major established mass media sources. In fact, the image of Vladimir Putin and Russia as potential "saviors" in the early stages of the crisis (2009-2011), as well as the expression of such ideas by many politicians, can be traced back to the assiduous cultivation of Greek public opinion from such allegedly marginal actors.

According to the interviewees, Russia and Russian interests do not exert any influence on the Greek mainstream media, but there is a significant number of left-wing papers that have stood firmly against Greece's bail-out package agreement with the Troika, and have called for a solution to the crisis to come from outside Europe. According to Psarras, "This could possibly mean Russia," and he added that apart from the fringe media on the far-right, "who are all in favour of Russia," there are other populist fringe media outlets, such as Kontra TV or the Kouris media network.

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<sup>99</sup> Originally, the mouthpiece of Grigoris Michalopoulos, the newspaper is still published today by his children, after Michalopoulos was convicted and jailed for blackmail in the mid-2000s. Daily circulation is around 3000 copies, but given that the combined circulation of all political daily newspapers is 90000 copies, it's not insignificant either.

## Greek radicals in the Russian online media<sup>100</sup>

Despite some diplomatic connections described above, we cannot see a general friendly attitude towards Golden Dawn if we take a look at the Russian media. But pro-Kremlin sides definitely seem to be more empathic towards the party.

**Table 4. Selected Russian media sites featuring Greek extremism**

News site	Kommer-sant	Lenta	Komso-molskaia Pravda	RIA Novosti	Russia Today	Voice of Russia
Orienta-tion	Indepen-dent	Pro-Krem-lin	Pro-Krem-lin	Pro-Krem-lin	Pro-Krem-lin	Pro-Krem-lin
Reader-ship	2.338 million	10.179 million	7.566 million	11.311 million	n. a.	n. a.

Readership is defined by the number of clicks every day, based on the data of Web Index Report, 2014. See: [www.tns-global.ru/services](http://www.tns-global.ru/services).

In the media examined, Golden Dawn is mentioned primarily in connection to murder, terrorism, and the imprisonment of party members, as well as the November 2013 murder of two party delegates, the possible

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<sup>100</sup> In our examination of the Greek far-right's media presence in Russia we limited our scope from the 26 potential sources to 6, based on a combination of popularity and content. For the selection based on popularity, we used research data on Russian media from the global media research company, TNS. The relevance of the *Voice of Russia* aimed at a foreign audience is based on the fact that with its help the Kremlin tries to inform/influence the population of a given country, directly through their own language. Admittedly, *Russia Today* competes with *CNN*, *BBC* and *Al Jazeera* in an effort to present the Russian perspective in a global news competition. However, in some cases its coverage turned out to be rather biased; e.g., reporting on the Ukrainian crisis, *Russia Today* claimed that a number of Western journalists resigned in a public gesture. Subsequently, we subjected relevant articles published by the selected media to a two-round analysis. In the first round, based on leads we classified them by issue-categories, identifying the most common topics of far-right media representation. In the second round, we selected the patterns and analyzed articles assuring the most in-depth treatment of major topics. As a result, the analysis presents the Greek far-right along the typical issues of the Russian media, from the side of the pro-Kremlin and the opposition media alike. The period under review focused on developments prior to and following the eruption of the Ukrainian conflict, bringing articles published between October 2013 and November 2014 into our scope.

dissolution of the party and the role it plays in the European Union.<sup>101</sup>

Independent *Kommersant* presents Golden Dawn as a neo-fascist,<sup>102</sup> radical, and Eurosceptic party in contrast to other more moderate Eurosceptic parties.<sup>103</sup>

*"The radical Eurosceptics (Greek Golden Dawn, British National Party and Hungarian Jobbik) reject the integration process on principle and campaign for a withdrawal from the EU. Often they play on citizens' fear tied to internal and external threats, appeal to hatred and popular instincts with statements such as, 'We're going to show it to Brussels,' while they have yet to make a real impact on policy-decisions."*<sup>104</sup>

*Kommersant* has a clearly negative image of Golden Dawn, frequently mentioning party members' criminal record and linking the party to several crime cases and terror attacks.

Members of Golden Dawn were charged with the murder of popular anti-fascist singer, Pavlos Fyssas. While *Kommersant* reported the culpability of party members as a known fact, pro-Kremlin sites emphasized that the suspects had denied the charges brought against them. Two-thirds of the pieces published in *Lenta* described the likely innocence of the party leader.

*"(...) In addition, the neo-Nazis stated that the party had nothing to do with the murder and reject all charges to that effect."*<sup>105</sup> (Komsomolskaia Pravda)

*Lenta* writes the following about the imprisonment of Mihaloliakos: *"The leader of the Greek neo-Nazi party, Nikolaos Mihaloliakos, was arrested on charges of establishing a criminal organization. (...) In court, Mihaloliakos pleaded innocent and described the charges as politically motivated. (...) Mihaloliakos emphasized that Golden Dawn party is*

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101 The current analysis reviews the coverage of Golden Dawn in Russian online media. The period under review runs from October 2013 through November 2014. The analysis examines the Greek far-right along the typical issues of the Russian media, from the side of the pro-Kremlin and the opposition media alike in 38 and 25 articles respectively. In 2014, the largest number of articles appeared in *RIA Novosti* and *Kommersant*.

102 "Eurosceptics enter the European Parliament," *Kommersant*, May 26, 2014, accessed December 29, 2014, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2479739?isSearch=True>

103 "Eurosceptics focus on national issues, where the Russian Federation plays no major role," *Kommersant*, May 20, 2014, accessed December 29, 2014, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2474941?isSearch=True>

104 "Eurosceptics focus on national issues, where the Russian Federation plays no role," *Kommersant*, May 20, 2014, accessed December 29, 2014, <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2474941?isSearch=True>

105 "A Greek court imprisons the leader of far-right Golden Dawn," *kp.ru*, October 3, 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.kp.ru/online/news/1551061/>

*engaged exclusively in parliamentary politics.”<sup>106</sup>*

On the whole, pieces published on Greek far-right parties offer a good illustration of the media’s influence: while in the period under review the mainstream media reported almost exclusively on crimes committed by party members, the murder case, and the consequent imprisonment in connection to Golden Dawn, pro-Kremlin sites (leaving quotes by far-right politicians unchallenged) presented the facts in a more favourable light for Golden Dawn, hinting that the charges against the party and its leaders are more likely fabricated than true.

In the English-language, Kremlin-close international media, the Kremlin condemns far-right parties, including Golden Dawn, as the embodiment of racism, Nazism, and Fascism, and blames the EU, United States, and Ukraine for their emergence. Along this peculiar logic, the United States and the European Union contribute to the rise of extremist parties through their economic policies or “austerity terrorism”.

*“Thanks to an economically disastrous desperation to retain the flawed euro currency at all costs, the results could drive a wedge through Europe, as anti-EU candidates, including many extremists, scent victory. (...) Alongside Syriza’s de facto Communists, Golden Dawn’s neo-Nazis are also gaining ground.”<sup>107</sup>*

*“In Greece, austerity is being enforced by Golden Dawn, another group of unapologetic Hitler worshippers.”<sup>108</sup>*

In addition, with its policies the USA offers direct help to the far-right, for instance in Ukraine, to advance their own interests.

*“The fact that the US government is supporting the Right Sector and Svoboda in Ukraine as they praise Hitler and engage in a campaign of terrorism is shocking to many people in the United States. (...) All across the world, as the people fight against the cuts, and demand that their economic needs take priority over Wall Street profits, fascism emerges. Golden Dawn, the Neo-Nazi terror organization, has been unleashed on the people of Greece in response to their uprisings against austerity.”<sup>109</sup>*

106 “The Greek court denies pleas for the release of the leader of the neo-Nazi leader,” Lenta, October 3, 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://lenta.ru/news/2013/10/03/detention/>

107 “Europe going to extremes: Are Far-right set to change face of Brussels?,” rt.com, November 7, 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://rt.com/op-edge/eu-extreme-problems-nazis-348/>

108 “Austerity terrorism: From Kiev to NYC,” rt.com, September 4, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://rt.com/op-edge/austerity-measures-terrorism-trials-431/>

109 “Unspoken alliance between US govt & fascists,” rt.com, May 14, 2014, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://rt.com/op-edge/158904-us-fascists-right-sector-alliance/>



In other words, international Russian propaganda uses far-right parties to demonize enemies of the Kremlin and to illustrate their role played in the Ukrainian crisis. Golden Dawn is presented as a brutal neo-Nazi phenomenon, along with Ukrainian neo-Nazi parties, which are all manipulated as political tools by the EU, US, or Kiev.