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**Martens Centre**  
for European Studies

# An Unholy Alliance

The European Far Right and Putin's Russia

**Antonis Klapsis**



## Credits

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The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies is the political foundation and think tank of the European People's Party (EPP), dedicated to the promotion of Christian Democrat, conservative and like-minded political values.

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# Martens Centre profile

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The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, established in 2007, is the political foundation and think tank of the European People's Party (EPP). The Martens Centre embodies a pan-European mindset, promoting Christian Democrat, conservative and like-minded political values. It serves as a framework for national political foundations linked to member parties of the EPP. It currently has 29 member foundations in 22 EU and non-EU countries. The Martens Centre takes part in the preparation of EPP programmes and policy documents. It organises seminars and training on EU policies and on the process of European integration.

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## About Antonis Klapsis

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**Antonis Klapsis**, Ph.D., is an Adjunct Lecturer of History at the Hellenic Open University and at the Open University of Cyprus, and the Head of International Cooperation and Research Programmes at the Konstantinos Karamanlis Institute for Democracy. He is the author of four books and co-author of another, and has published numerous papers in distinguished peer-reviewed international academic journals. From June to November 2014 he was a Visiting Fellow at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.







To my brother, Vassilis.

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The paper examines the connections between Russia and far-right political parties in Europe. It argues that these close relationships are based both on ideology and strategy. The European far right sees in Russian President Vladimir Putin the model of a strong, conservative leader who defends traditional values and opposes the decadent West. Since most far-right parties are at the same time against European integration and anti-American, they also see a close relationship with Russia as a necessary foothold in order to achieve the gradual disassociation of their countries from Euro-Atlantic institutions. The Kremlin, for its part, views these parties as possibly being useful for the achievement of its own objectives. Thus, it is interested in gathering them under its wing.

In this context, in recent years far-right parties all over Europe have established cordial relations with Moscow. Far-right leaders pay regular visits to Russia, have meetings with Russian officials and often appear on state-owned Russian media. The fact that they are discussants with the Kremlin boosts their credibility at home and improves their image. At the same time, they are often invited to monitor electoral procedures in disputed territories, thus offering some sort of credibility and international recognition for the results of ballots. The secessionist referendum which was held in Crimea in March 2014 is the latest example of this trend. More generally, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has offered a great opportunity for the expression of the pro-Russian sentiments of most European far-right parties. These organisations see Putin's policy as tangible proof of his resolve to impose his will on his opponents and to mark the re-emergence of Russian power at the international level. From the Kremlin's point of view, these parties can also help Moscow to expand its geopolitical influence. Even if Putin does not manage to see parties with pro-Russian leanings forming governments, he can still hope that their growing influence will exert considerable pressure on EU governments, especially as far as relations with Russia are concerned.





Over the last few years, far-right parties have gained significant ground in many European countries. This trend has become even more apparent since the beginning of the global financial crisis, which started in the US in 2007–8 and very soon affected the whole world. This is not to say that it is the crisis alone that has boosted far-right political parties.<sup>1</sup> But what is absolutely certain is that these parties have been able to increase their influence on public opinion and secure considerable support from electorates all over Europe.<sup>2</sup> As a result, in some cases they have been able to gain third place in national elections and second or even first place in European Parliament (EP) elections. Some of the most characteristic examples are the National Front (Front National, FN) in France; the UK Independence Party (UKIP); Jobbik, the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom, 'Jobbik'); and Greece's the Popular Association – Golden Dawn (Λαϊκός Σύνδεσμος – Χρυσή Αυγή, 'Golden Dawn'). Thus, it is not at all surprising that the phenomenon has attracted the attention of numerous scholars, analysts and journalists from various academic and national backgrounds.

Many things have been written about the rise of far-right parties in Europe and about the causes as well as the potential consequences of this development. Despite their diversity, a mixture of anti-liberalism, social conservatism, profound Euroscepticism, xenophobia and ultranationalism—not necessarily in exactly the same proportions—is more or less the cornerstone of their ideological beliefs. In some cases these features are coupled with secessionist tendencies or dreams of territorial expansion at the expense of neighbouring countries. However, there seems to be yet another important common characteristic which is not always identified at first sight: their pro-Russian leanings and close connections with Moscow. Analysing this very interesting and potentially decisive aspect of the policies of European far-right parties is the main purpose of this paper.

One thing has to be clarified from the beginning. This study mainly focuses on the most significant (in terms of electoral success and/or influence) European far-right parties, regardless of whether they are classified as populist, radical, extremist or even almost openly neo-Nazi. What the study examines are not the differences among them, but rather their astonishingly similar stance towards Putin's Russia. The FN, Job-

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<sup>1</sup> A. Klapsis, 'Economic Crisis and Political Extremism in Europe: From the 1930s to the Present', *European View*, 13/2 (2014), 192–5.

<sup>2</sup> C. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); D. Art, *Inside the Radical Right: The Development of Anti-Immigrant Parties in Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); R. Wodak, M. KhosraviNik and B. Mral (eds.), *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse* (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).



bik, UKIP, Golden Dawn, the Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ), Attack (Ataka) from Bulgaria and the North League (Lega Nord, LN) from Italy are the most prominent examples. However, they are not the only ones that are taken into account, as there are frequent references to others, such as the British National Party (BNP), the Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang, VB) from Belgium, New Force (Forza Nuova) from Italy, the National Democratic Party (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, NPD) from Germany, and the People's Party – Our Slovakia (Ľudová Strana Naše Slovensko, L'SNS). As is obvious, this constellation of far-right parties covers a wide geographical spectrum, thus giving the phenomenon a pan-European dimension.

A few words need to be said here about the sources used in this study. Since the development of close ties between European far-right parties and Moscow is a rather recent trend that is still evolving, academic literature on the subject is not as solid or extensive as one might expect. The issue is covered much more widely by journalism, for exactly the same reason. Much useful information can be drawn from the parties' official programmes, as well as from statements made by far-right party leaders, members of national parliaments, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and other high-ranking or distinguished party members. This third category of sources has been the one most extensively used: the websites and the publications of the far-right parties concerned.

A final remark has to be made concerning the period covered by this study. This paper is mainly concerned with developments that took place in 2013 and 2014.<sup>3</sup> This choice does not at all imply that there were no connections between European far-right parties and the Kremlin before 2013. On the contrary, in most cases the foundations of these connections were laid well before 2013. The above-mentioned period was chosen for two main reasons. First, it was a period full of events that had a profound effect on the way relations between European far-right parties and Russia evolved: the Russo-Ukrainian conflict and Moscow's decision to annex Crimea were the most significant. Second, the 2014 elections for the EP took place in the middle of this period. These elections were very important in increasing the electoral power of many far-right parties all over Europe and subsequently for the expression of their pro-Russian leanings in the EP itself.

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<sup>3</sup> Since the research for this study was concluded early in December 2014, the reader should take into account that events that happened after the first week of this month are not analysed here.



The paper is divided into five sections. The first describes how the European far right perceives Putin's Russia as a model of conservative and semi-authoritarian governance. It is this perception that lays the foundations for an ideological connection between Moscow and far-right parties all over Europe. The second pinpoints how, in their quest to dismantle the EU and NATO, European far-right parties see Russia as a geopolitical alternative. The third examines the close contacts that have been developed between European far-right parties and the Kremlin, which take the form of visits to Russia, frequent appearances in the Russian media, electoral monitoring, funding and so on. The fourth focuses on the European far right's clearly pro-Russian stance as regards the recent Russo-Ukrainian conflict and Crimea's secession from Ukraine. The fifth and final section analyses how Moscow is able to use pro-Russian far-right parties all over Europe as Trojan horses for the purpose of exerting pressure on their national governments and on the EU as a whole on issues of great interest and importance for the Kremlin.

Having said all that, the core question of this study emerges once again: are connections between European far-right parties and Moscow so deep that they explain these parties' pro-Russian leanings? The main argument of this paper is that in reality a sort of unofficial alliance has been established between the Kremlin and far-right parties from various European countries. This study explores the factors that have fuelled the formation of this seemingly unholy alliance.<sup>4</sup> The framework of analysis is two-fold. On the one hand, it is argued that the rapprochement between European far-right parties and Moscow is based on political calculations from both sides. In other words, there is a common target—it makes no difference if their motives might not be exactly the same—that brings them closer to each other: the dissolution (or at least the weakening) of the EU and NATO. On the other hand, it is underlined that apart from this political target, there is also an ideological connection between Putin's Russia and European far-right parties. The latter see the former as a sort of model for a neo-conservative and semi-authoritarian regime which fits their beliefs. In this context, politics and ideology are examined as two interrelated aspects of the same phenomenon, with each fuelling the other.

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*The main argument of this paper is that in reality a sort of unofficial alliance has been established between the Kremlin and far-right parties from various European countries.*

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<sup>4</sup> It seems to be unholy in the sense that it brings together two sides (Putin's Russia and European far-right parties) which appear to have completely different ideological bases.







Today we need new strategies to preserve our identity in a rapidly changing world, a world that has become more open, transparent and interdependent... For us, questions about who we are and who we want to be are increasingly prominent in our society... It is evident that it is impossible to move forward without spiritual, cultural and national self-determination... We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the basis of Western civilisation. They are denying moral principles and all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual.<sup>5</sup>

These statements were made by Putin during a speech he gave in September 2013. They can be considered the epitome of his neo-conservative ideology. A return to 'traditional values' is coupled with references to national integrity. Multiculturalism is rejected and otherness is perceived more or less as a threat to a long-established way of living. Globalisation is seen as a force that undermines the authority of nation-states and their cultural inheritance. The West is depicted as decadent and forgetful of its own Christian origins. The Euro-Atlantic community is not the answer to these problems but rather the very source of them. The need for action in order to save a world shaken by unprecedented and extremely rapid developments is now thought to be greater than ever. As a result, the need for a strong leader appears to be self-evident: a leader like Putin, who can decisively implement these policies.

Few (if any) European far-right parties would disagree with this manifesto. As will be shown, Putin's ideology is absolutely familiar to them, as it expresses the hard core of their fundamental beliefs. In this context, Putin's Russia emerges as the only power that is ready to defend everything they stand for. It is anti-Western and anti-liberal, it is conservative as far as societal issues are concerned, it is nationalist, and it is governed by a strong leader who does not hesitate to use authoritarian measures in order to achieve his goals.<sup>6</sup> What more is there to ask for if you are a European far-right leader and you believe that your country should exit the EU and NATO, that parliamentary democracy is not necessarily the best option, and that human rights (for example, freedom of speech or the free expression of one's sexual orientation) should at times be curbed? This common approach on a number of issues lays the ideological basis for the establishment of closer relations between Russia and far-right political parties all over Europe.

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<sup>5</sup> M. Laruelle, 'Conservatism as the Kremlin's New Toolkit: An Ideology at the Lowest Cost', *Russian Analytical Digest*, 138 (2013), 2.

<sup>6</sup> A. Barbashin and H. Thoburn, 'Putin's Brain: Alexander Dugin and the Philosophy behind Putin's Invasion of Crimea', *Foreign Affairs*, 31 March 2014.



A core element of Putin's political ideology is the belief that the West (including both Europe and the US) is in decay and that, as a result, its downfall is more or less inevitable. Most European far-right leaders obviously share the same opinion: the West is sick because it has chosen to disassociate itself from its spiritual and cultural heritage. In contrast, Russia is thought to be the power which is struggling to reverse the course of moral decadence. If for mainstream European politicians Putin's neo-conservative and even anti-democratic policies are appalling, for far-right parties they are admirable and constitute a sort of example that should be followed. Putin is praised by the president of the FN, Marine Le Pen, as a true patriot and a defender of European values and 'the Christian heritage of the European civilisation'.<sup>7</sup> Jobbik's leader, Gábor Vona, did not hide his feelings when he declared that Europe was a sinking ship that had lost its values and that Europeans should get back to their roots and 'rearrange [their] relationship with other traditional cultures that only exist in the East now'—a statement that obviously refers to Russia.<sup>8</sup> During a lecture he gave in May 2013 at Lomonosov University in Moscow, Vona referred to the US as the 'deformed offspring

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of Europe' and to the EU as the traitor of the European continent. He told his audience that Russia represents Europe much better than either the US or the EU 'as it preserves its traditions and does not follow the culture of money and the masses'.<sup>9</sup> The LN's MEP, Lorenzo Fontana, has described Putin's Rus-

sia as an example as far as the protection of national identity and family values is concerned. The leader of the neo-fascist New Force, Roberto Fiore, has gone a step further: according to him, Russia is a 'model civilisation' which defends Christian Europe against the threats from international bankers and migrants.<sup>10</sup>

For far-right parties originating from Orthodox countries, such as Bulgaria and Greece, religion plays an even more important role in their views on Russia, it being the largest Orthodox nation in the world. Putin likes to present his country as the international protector of Orthodoxy. This is not a new strategy, but one that goes back centuries to the time of the Russian tsars and that has traditionally been shared by the Pa-

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<sup>7</sup> A. Polyakova, 'Strange Bedfellows: Putin and Europe's Far Right', *World Affairs Journal*, September/October 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Jobbik, 'Gábor Vona: Euro-Atlanticism Must be Replaced by Eurasianism', 5 October 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Jobbik, 'Gábor Vona had a Lecture at Lomonosov University', 24 May 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, *The Russian Connection: The Spread of Pro-Russian Policies on the European Far Right* (Budapest, 14 March 2014), 7.



triarchate of Moscow. This concept is seen positively by parties such as Attack and Golden Dawn. Golden Dawn officials have repeatedly referred to the religious bonds that unite the Greeks and the Russians and make Russia a natural ally.<sup>11</sup> Attack's leader, Volen Siderov, has suggested that there is open war against Christianity and Christian values in general, and more specifically against Orthodoxy. According to Siderov, Orthodoxy has been declared the greatest enemy of the Western world,<sup>12</sup> and he obviously includes Russia as a target of this alleged attack.

Putin's social conservatism also appeals to far-right parties all over Europe. The impact of his homophobic campaign is probably the most obvious example of this trend. Putin has repeatedly referred to the need to counter 'homosexual propaganda', which threatens to undermine the foundations of a society based on heterosexual families. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights, including gay marriage,<sup>13</sup> have practically no place in this context. Western liberalism, which grants equal rights to all citizens irrespective of their sexual, religious or other preferences, is thought to be degenerate and is perceived as a social and national threat. In June 2013, Russia adopted a law banning the distribution of 'propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships' among minors.<sup>14</sup> It is no surprise that prominent far-right politicians across Europe were enthusiastic about this development and that some (such as Julien Rochedy, the leader of the National Front Youth, i.e. the youth organisation of Le Pen's FN) asked for the adoption of similar laws in their countries.<sup>15</sup> More recently, continuing what the party's leadership describes as the fight 'for preserving traditional Bulgarian values', Attack submitted to the Bulgarian National Assembly a legislative proposal which aimed to prohibit homosexuals from showing their sexual preferences in public.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *Ruvr.ru*, 'Συνέντευξη του Νίκου Μιχαλολιάκου στο ΡΣ "Η Φωνή της Ρωσίας"' [Interview with Nikos Michaloliakos at the Radio Station The Voice of Russia], 16 December 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Ataka, 'Volen Siderov: Media Monopoly of the God Fighters in Europe Must Be Broken Up', 16 May 2014.

<sup>13</sup> According to the BNP, gay marriage is nothing more than 'a battering ram to destroy traditional values, to attack our Christian heritage and to break up the family' (BNP, 'BNP Policies – Putting Britons First', 20 October 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Article 19, *Russia: Federal Laws Introducing Ban of Propaganda of Non-Traditional Sexual Relationships* (London: Article 19, 2013); C. Wilkinson, 'Putting Traditional Values into Practice: Russia's Anti-Gay Laws,' *Russian Analytical Digest*, 138 (2013), 5–7.

<sup>15</sup> For Rochedy's views on the subject, see *Politicsinside.fr*, 'Le Patron des Jeunes du Front National en Faveur d'Une Loi "Anti-Propagande Gay" en France Comme en Russie', 9 January 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Ataka, 'Ataka Wants 5-Year Prison Sentence for Gay Parade Participants', 7 February 2014; Ataka, 'Slavi Binev Voted in Favour of Report Defending Sexual Minorities Rights', 8 February 2014.



Like Putin, European far-right politicians oppose globalism as a force that undermines nation-states' authority. They are also apprehensive of multiculturalism, which they see as a threat to national/traditional culture. Multiculturalism in the West has failed because it is 'an artificial, transplanted model', Putin has argued.<sup>17</sup> Practically all European far-right politicians would agree with this statement. For them, multiculturalism goes hand in hand with the unwanted migration flows to Europe from Asia and Africa. As a result, it is another symptom of Western degeneration. In some cases, far-right parties' rejection of multiculturalism is just an expression of open or hidden racism and xenophobia, including the anti-Roma attitudes of parties such as Jobbik and the L'SNS. 'We know of no great civilisation that was created or sustained by a multicultural population':<sup>18</sup> this phrase from the 2010 election programme of the BNP could be adopted as a motto by far-right parties all over Europe without any difficulty.

Coupled with Putin's social conservative profile is the perception many European far-right politicians have of him as an effective leader who, within a matter of a few years, has managed to reform Russia from a collapsing country and a political puppet in the hands of the West to a significant global player. In the same way that Putin rejected and overthrew the decadent political establishment of Boris Yeltsin's era, the European far right rejects and wants to overthrow the political system of Western Europe. The palingenetic character of Putin's administration appears to be self-evident. Putin is also given the credit for rebuilding Russian power in the post-Soviet, post-Cold War era. It is in this context that the leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, stated that the politician he most admires 'as an operator' (but 'not as a human being') is Putin.<sup>19</sup> The Russian president's economic policy is also praised by European far-right parties, especially his decision to implement a strategy for state control of the strategic sectors of the Russian economy. Most far-right politicians all over Europe also use anti-capitalist rhetoric, rejecting the consumerist nature of Western capitalism.

European far-right politicians are equally attracted by Putin's strong leadership. Putin rules his country with an iron hand, a method that coincides with the ideal of autocratic leadership that many of them have in mind. Repression of his political opponents is not infrequent. Freedom of speech is not at all guaranteed. Putin has imposed extremely tight controls on the media. In practice, almost all of the Russian media

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<sup>17</sup> *The Voice of Russia* (website), 'Rule of Law, Morality and a Return to Multi-Polarity – Putin at Valdai', 22 September 2013.

<sup>18</sup> BNP, *Democracy, Culture and Identity: British National Party General Elections Manifesto 2010* (Welshpool: British National Party, 2010), 23.

<sup>19</sup> P. Wintour and R. Mason, 'Nigel Farage's Relationship with Russian Media Comes under Scrutiny', *The Guardian*, 31 March 2014.



promote only official government views with no reference to opposing opinions. Journalists who dare to criticise his choices are very likely to be subjected to pressures of various kinds, including the risk of being attacked or even murdered.<sup>20</sup> This kind of authoritarianism is not perceived by European far-right politicians as a threat. Rather, they see it as an example to be followed when it comes to finding a solution to what they describe as the failure of liberal, Western-type democracy: public submission is the keyword here. Putin's law and order policy is also an ideological magnet for far-right parties outside Russia. His tough line—as seen in the imprisonment for hooliganism of members of the feminist punk-rock band Pussy Riot—is embraced with open arms in many far-right circles outside Russia. The same applies to Putin's repressive measures against foreign non-governmental organisations operating on Russian soil, which have been accused of being spies and sponsors of foreign interests that undermine Russian sovereignty.<sup>21</sup>

What far-right politicians in Europe find even more fascinating is the image of Putin as a patriotic (or even nationalistic) leader. His constant efforts to rebuild Russian national pride are only one side of the coin. The other is his resolve—even if he has to resort to the use of force—to protect alleged Russian national interests beyond Russia's international borders. The invasion of Georgia, the support provided by the Russian government to the secessionist movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the more recent Russo-Ukrainian conflict and the Russian annexation of Crimea are the most striking examples. Le Pen summed up the general far-right feeling in Europe when, on the occasion of the Russian intervention in Crimea, she praised Putin for doing only 'what is good for Russia and the Russians'.<sup>22</sup> The expansionist character of these movements adds to the excitement felt by certain European far-right parties such as Jobbik, which see in them a window of opportunity for putting their own expansionist projects into action.

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In terms of the ideological bonds between European far-right parties and Russia, Alexander Dugin is a key person. His concepts of Eurasianism, national bolshevism and conservative revolution appear to be

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<sup>20</sup> T. Heritage, 'Putin Dissolves State News Agency, Tightens Grip on Russia Media', *Reuters*, 9 December 2013; *BBC News Europe*, 'Russia Profile', 28 November 2014.

<sup>21</sup> R. Orttung, 'Kremlin Nationalism versus Russia's NGOs', *Russian Analytical Digest*, 138 (2013), 8–11.

<sup>22</sup> Polyakova, 'Strange Bedfellows'.



very appealing to a great number of far-right politicians across Europe. His nationalist, socially traditional, totalitarian, anti-liberal and generally anti-Western ideology adds to his international success among far-right circles. What is equally important is that Dugin's works seem to provide the basis for Putin's geopolitical analysis and thus affect the Russian president's strategy.<sup>23</sup> For parties like Golden Dawn, Dugin is considered to be a sort of ideological guru, whose analysis epitomises the reasoning behind the present and future steps of Russian foreign policy. Judging from what Dugin stands for, Moscow appears to be on a collision course with the US and the EU,<sup>24</sup> a development welcomed with open arms by anti-American and Eurosceptic far-right parties.

All in all, far-right parties across Europe are attracted by Putin's ultra-conservative and semi-authoritarian form of governance. They see it as a model that, if given the chance, they might be willing to follow. This common approach on a number of issues forms the basis of the ideological connection between European far-right parties and the Kremlin. Anti-liberalism and anti-Western feelings are of key importance in this respect. Consequently, this ideological connection paves the way for the establishment of closer relations between the two. As is usually the case, it is much easier to come closer to someone with whom you have much in common.

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<sup>23</sup> Barbashin and Thoburn, 'Putin's Brain'.

<sup>24</sup> Golden Dawn, 'ΑΠΟΚΛΕΙΣΤΙΚΟ: Βαρουσήμαντη Συνέντευξη με τον Στενό Συνεργάτη του Πούτιν, Αλεξάντερ Ντούγκιν' [Exclusive News: Important Interview with Putin's Close Adviser, Alexander Dugin], 30 May 2014.









The ideological connection is not the only thing that draws European far-right parties closer to Russia. Ideological similarities alone would not have been enough to establish a strong political relationship between the European far right and the Kremlin. There is also a decisive geopolitical factor that is directly related to the way both stand vis-à-vis the EU and NATO. Many European far-right politicians see in Russia an example of how a country can be truly sovereign and independent, ignoring Western liberalism and confronting the West. In addition, since most of them are also against European integration and anti-American, they see a relationship with Russia as a necessary foothold on the path to achieving the gradual disassociation of their countries from Euro-Atlantic institutions. In other words, Russia is thought to be the alternative not only to Western democracy, but also to both the EU and NATO.

European far-right parties are, in general, utterly Eurosceptic. They disapprove of the concept of European integration as it entails the transfer of sovereign rights from national governments to the EU. Being a supranational entity, the EU is perceived as a direct threat to nation-states. Thus, far-right leaders all over Europe have repeatedly expressed their opposition to the participation of their respective countries in the EU. Many would rather see the EU dissolved. They also dislike the euro because it strips member states of their absolute control over monetary affairs. It is in this context that they see Putin as an ardent supporter of national sovereignty and a challenger of the idea of 'Europe' in a way that is compatible with their own nationalist convictions.<sup>25</sup> Consequently they look up to Russia as the power which could, on the one hand, facilitate the dissolution of the EU and, on the other, offer the necessary geopolitical support for European countries in the desired post-EU era.

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*Many European far-right politicians see in Russia an example of how a country can be truly sovereign and independent, ignoring Western liberalism and confronting the West.*

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The European far right is equally anti-American. In most cases European far-right parties are not fond of their countries' participation in NATO and would prefer to adopt what they usually describe as an 'independent foreign policy'. For them NATO is nothing more than the instrument used by Washington to promote US strategic interests in Europe and elsewhere at the expense of the rest of the alliance's members. The establishment of closer relations between European countries and Russia fits perfectly into this analysis, according to which Moscow could counterbalance US influence over Europe. As a result, Putin emerges

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<sup>25</sup> Polyakova, 'Strange Bedfellows'.



as the natural ally of those self-proclaimed ‘patriotic’ (as opposed to the ‘decadent cosmopolitan’) political powers that wish to see Russia strengthen its influence throughout the European continent. The fact that in the last few years the Kremlin has openly challenged the US influence, at least in the Russian periphery (e.g. in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine), has reinforced the tendency of far-right parties to attach themselves to Moscow.

One of the most characteristic examples of a far-right party that is utterly anti-EU and anti-American/anti-NATO is Jobbik. Its leader has gone as far as to accuse the EU ‘of threatening the freedom of Hungary and colonising the [Hungarian] nation.’<sup>26</sup> According to Vona, Hungary was not admitted to the EU so that it could develop economically or in other areas: what the EU really wanted from Hungary was to exploit its cheap labour and penetrate its markets.<sup>27</sup> In an interview he gave to *The Voice of Russia*, Vona stated: ‘Being principled, conservative and radically patriotic basically means saying a definite “no” to the modern world that surrounds us in the Euro-Atlantic region today.’<sup>28</sup> Leaving no doubts about Jobbik’s feelings and intentions, in February 2014 the party’s Member of Parliament (MP), Tamás Gaudi Nagy, removed the flag of the EU (which he later referred to as a symbol of enslavement and colonisation) from the hall of the Hungarian Parliament and, in a clearly theatrical move, threw it out of one of the building’s windows.<sup>29</sup> Jobbik also highlights the need to orient Hungarian external trade eastwards (including, of course, towards Russia) in order to decrease Hungary’s dependence on the West.<sup>30</sup> In this context, Jobbik is in favour of Hungary leaving the EU and instead joining Russia’s alternative Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).<sup>31</sup> According to the same analysis, since Europe has become the ‘servant’ of the US, Moscow’s role should be that of

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<sup>26</sup> Jobbik, ‘Vona Urges Fight Against EU which Colonizes and Enslaves Hungarians’, 29 March 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Jobbik, ‘Gábor Vona’.

<sup>28</sup> *The Voice of Russia* (website), ‘“Europe and the West have Disowned Their Most Essential Values” – Vona’, 4 September 2013.

<sup>29</sup> *YouTube.com*, ‘LiveLeak – Hungarian Jobbik Member of Parliament Throws Away EU Flag’, 18 February 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Jobbik, ‘Eco-Social National Economics’.

<sup>31</sup> D. Sharkov, ‘Far-Right MEP Accused of Acting as Russian Spy’, *Newsweek*, 26 September 2014. The EEU was established on 29 May 2014 by a treaty signed by Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. On 9 October 2014 a treaty to enlarge the Eurasian Economic Union was signed with Armenia. The mission of the EEU is mainly the economic cooperation of its members through the creation of a single market. However, its political importance cannot be neglected. Moscow’s dominant role is more than apparent. The whole scheme reflects Putin’s dream to restore Russian influence over most of the former Soviet Union territories. Ideologically it is inspired by the theories of the far-right Russian professor, Alexander Dugin. According to Dugin, the formation of a Russian-driven Eurasian state will gradually lead to a minimisation of US influence in Europe and eventually to the inclusion of most EU countries within the Russian sphere of influence; Barbashin & Thoburn, ‘Putin’s Brain’.



counterbalancing the Americanisation of Europe.<sup>32</sup> Vona has referred to Russia as the Eurasian power that could 'spearhead a real political, economic and cultural resistance against the Euro-Atlantic block.'<sup>33</sup> 'Euro-Atlanticism must be replaced by Eurasianism', he has publicly declared.<sup>34</sup> In this context, he later added that Hungary could be Moscow's bridge and gateway to the West.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore no coincidence that Jobbik's MP, Márton Gyöngyösi, has stated that Hungary should welcome Russia gaining ground against the West, as a new balance of power will probably be advantageous for Hungarian national interests.<sup>36</sup>

Another far-right party from Central Europe that shares similar ideas is the L'SNS. Although not as strong as other far-right parties across Europe, the L'SNS made a huge impression in November 2013 when its leader, Marian Kotleba, surprisingly won the gubernatorial election in the Banská Bystrica region. As in the case of Jobbik, the L'SNS is equally anti-European and anti-American. It is strongly in favour of Slovakia leaving both the EU and NATO.<sup>37</sup> In order to make a theatrical statement about his anti-EU policy, in March 2014 Kotleba removed the 'occupation flag' of the EU from the building of Banská Bystrica's regional administration: 'Those occupying blue rags should not have to remind us that we have completely lost our national independence', he proclaimed.<sup>38</sup> In September 2014 it was NATO's turn. From the window of his office Kotleba hung a banner containing the slogans 'Yankees go home!' and 'Stop NATO'.<sup>39</sup> In this context, the L'SNS's pro-Russian orientation comes as no surprise.<sup>40</sup>

Another fierce opponent of Euro-Atlantic institutions that has strong pro-Russian leanings is Golden Dawn. The almost openly neo-Nazi party has gained remarkable public support since 2012. It has always

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<sup>32</sup> Jobbik, 'Gábor Vona had a Lecture at Lomonosov University', 24 May 2013.

<sup>33</sup> *The Voice of Russia* (website), "'Europe and the West'".

<sup>34</sup> Jobbik, 'Gábor Vona'.

<sup>35</sup> *larex.ru*, 'ЛИДЕР ПАРТИИ "ЙОББИК - ЗА ЛУЧШУЮ ВЕНГРИЮ" ГАБОР ВОНА О ЕВРОАТЛАНТИЗМЕ, РОССИИ, ГРУЗИИ, СИРИИ, РУСИНАХ, ТРАНСИЛЬВАНИИ И СЕРБИИ' [The Leader of Jobbik – For a Better Hungary, Gábor Vona, Talks about Euro-Atlanticism, Russia, Georgia, Syria, the Ruthenians, Transylvania and Serbia], 22 January 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Jobbik, 'Gyöngyösi: Crimea Means a Chance for Hungarians as Well', 17 March 2014.

<sup>37</sup> T. Nociar, *Right-Wing Extremism in Slovakia* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2012), 64; L'SNS, [No Title]; L'SNS, 'O L'Udovej Strane Naše Slovensko' [About the People's Party – Our Slovakia].

<sup>38</sup> M. Terenzani-Stanková, 'Kotleba's Monthly Defunded', *The Slovak Spectator*, 21 April 2014; *Správy Pravda*, 'V Bratislave Znelo Stop Fašizmu, Kotleba Nazval Vlajku EÚ Okupačnou Handrou' [Heard in Bratislava: 'Stop Fascism'. Kotleba Called the EU Flag 'Occupying Rags']], 16 March 2013.

<sup>39</sup> *The Economist*, 'The Slovak National Uprising: A Celebration Hijacked by Politics', 4 September 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Political Capital, *The Russian Connection*, 7.



had close connections with Russian extreme-right parties and groups, and in recent years it is thought to have received under-the-table funding from Moscow.<sup>41</sup> Being anti-European and anti-American, Golden Dawn sees Russia as Greece's 'natural ally'. According to the party's leader, Nikos Michaloliakos, Athens and Moscow share great common interests in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. As a result, Greece should disassociate itself from the West (i.e. the EU, NATO and the US) and offer Russia an exit 'to the warm seas' in return for a Russian guarantee of Greek national security.<sup>42</sup> Golden Dawn's official programme clearly states that a turn to Russia in the fields of investment and energy is absolutely essential, since a trade and defence agreement with the Russians would disentangle Greece 'from the fatal embrace of the US and its allies.'<sup>43</sup> One of Golden Dawn's most prominent MPs and a spokesperson for the party, Ilias Kassidiaris, has gone as far as to ask for Russian troops to come to Greece in order to guard the Burgas–Alexandroupolis Russian oil pipeline should it be constructed.<sup>44</sup> Not surprisingly, Golden Dawn warmly welcomed the creation of the EEU in May 2014, expressing the hope that it will become a successful rival to both the EU and the US.<sup>45</sup> Three months later the party enthusiastically hailed the decision of Russia,

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*Attack's leader, Siderov, has made it clear that Bulgaria's attachment to NATO harms Bulgarian national interests and that he would rather have a closer relationship with Russia.*

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Brazil, India, China and South Africa to establish an alternative to the International Monetary Fund, viewing this as a decisive step towards overthrowing the existing 'international Zionist banking system'.<sup>46</sup>

More or less the same arguments are used by Attack, an utterly Eurosceptic party which sees the EU as a threat to traditional values. Thus, Attack does not at all exclude the possibility of Bulgaria exiting the EU, since the latter is nothing more than a puppet in US hands. According to the party's programme, one of its main aims is for Bulgaria to withdraw from NATO and to have a fully neutral policy that precludes any military alliance. Attack's leader, Siderov, has made it clear that Bulgaria's attachment to NATO harms Bulgarian national interests and that he would rather have a closer relationship with Russia. He has also

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<sup>41</sup> M. A. Orenstein, 'Putin's Western Allies', *Foreign Affairs*, 25 March 2014.

<sup>42</sup> *Ruvr.ru*, 'Συνέντευξη του Νίκου Μιχαλολιάκου' [Interview with Nikos Michaloliakos].

<sup>43</sup> Golden Dawn, 'Πολιτικές Θέσεις για την Χρυσή Αυγή του Ελληνισμού' [Political Positions for the Golden Dawn of the Greek Nation].

<sup>44</sup> Hellenic Parliament, *Πρακτικά της Βουλής των Ελλήνων* [Minutes of the Hellenic Parliament], 26 September 2012, 1806.

<sup>45</sup> Golden Dawn, 'Σφοδρό Χτύπημα στην Εξωτερική Πολιτική των ΗΠΑ: Ιδρύεται Σήμερα η Ευρωασιατική Οικονομική Ένωση στο Καζακστάν' [A Hard Hit for US Foreign Policy: The Eurasian Economic Union is Founded Today in Kazakhstan], 29 May 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Golden Dawn, 'Η Ρωσία και οι Εταίροι της Δημιουργούν Νέο Διεθνές Νομισματικό Ταμείο' [Russia and its Partners Create a New IMF], 13 July 2014.



publicly announced that, should he ever come to power, he will withdraw Bulgaria from NATO and ensure that relations between Sofia and Moscow are fostered.<sup>47</sup>

The FN is an example of a far-right political party from Western Europe that has close connections with Russia. Le Pen advocates the creation of a strategic alliance with Russia based on a comprehensive military and energy partnership.<sup>48</sup> A first step in this direction would be the establishment of a trilateral alliance between Paris, Berlin and Moscow. Eventually, the scheme would result in the formation of a pan-European union including Russia, thus forcing the EU and NATO aside.<sup>49</sup> 'I do not understand against which enemy NATO protects us', she stated in June 2013 during a lecture she gave at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations.<sup>50</sup> Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, one of the FN's MPs and a niece of the party's leader, took the same line when she declared that the EU is 'the poodle of the United States.'<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the FN's MEP, Aymeric Chauprade, refers to Putin's Russia as 'the hope of the world against new totalitarianism,' meaning 'the American and European financial oligarchy'.<sup>52</sup>

UKIP is equally—if not even more—Eurosceptic. It wants the UK to leave the EU immediately and to maintain only trading ties with it.<sup>53</sup> The party's leader, Farage, is a critic of US foreign policy and does not hide his admiration for Putin.<sup>54</sup> His pro-Russian leanings have become more apparent as a result of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. An even more ardent supporter of closer cooperation between London and Moscow is the BNP. Apart from resolutely opposing the euro and categorically rejecting the prospect of the UK becoming a member of the eurozone,<sup>55</sup> the BNP considers the EU to be an organisation dedicated to usurping British sovereignty and destroying British nationhood and national identity.<sup>56</sup> In view of this analysis,

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<sup>47</sup> Ataka, '20 Principles of ATAKA Political Party'; Ataka, 'ATAKA Launched its Election Campaign in Moscow', 25 April 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Political Capital, *The Russian Connection*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Le Figaro*, 'L'Indéfectible Soutien du FN à la Russie de Poutine', 19 March 2014.

<sup>50</sup> FN, 'Marine Le Pen au MGIMO (Moscou)', 16 June 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Polyakova, 'Strange Bedfellows'.

<sup>52</sup> A. Higgins, 'Far-right Fever for a Europe Tied to Russia', *The New York Times*, 20 May 2014; V. Kara-Murza, 'European Nationalist Right Votes for Putin', *World Affairs Journal*, 28 May 2014.

<sup>53</sup> UKIP, 'What We Stand For'.

<sup>54</sup> Charlemagne, 'Russia's Friends in Black', *The Economist*, 19 April 2014.

<sup>55</sup> BNP, 'Foreign Affairs'.

<sup>56</sup> BNP, *Democracy, Culture and Identity*, 5.



Russia emerges as the only possible alternative. According to the BNP, the UK should withdraw from NATO and the EU and should instead 'engage constructively with Russia as a natural ally and trading partner'.<sup>57</sup>

The FPÖ's anti-American and pro-Russian sentiments were officially declared by its chairman, Heinz-Christian Strache, when he stated that 'instead of playing the stooge of the US in the encirclement of Russia, Brussels must finally be able to build positive relations with Moscow and show understanding of Russian interests'.<sup>58</sup> In an interview he gave in April 2014, the prominent FPÖ politician Johann Gudenus, who is well known for his pro-Russian leanings, appeared to have no doubt that Europe needs Russia more than it needs the US. Moscow's recovery after the collapse of the Soviet Union means that Washington now has strong competition, which in turn has created a massive geopolitical upheaval. For Gudenus, the prospect of a strong Russia on the world stage is more than welcome as it will give Europe more independence vis-à-vis the US and will bring Europe back into balance. This is why Washington wants to prevent Europe and Russia from moving closer together at any cost. He concluded:

For the US hegemonic aspirations, fear of Russia is perhaps the most important asset. We must regard Brussels and the EU as agents of such policy and as against the interests of European citizens... When Russia and Europe fight, Washington laughs. But I firmly believe that common sense will prevail. Soon no one in Europe will be patronised by the US.<sup>59</sup>

The list of pro-Russian far-right parties which are united by Euroscepticism includes other Western European parties, the most important being the LN in Italy, the VB in Belgium and the German NPD. These parties reject a federal EU and look to Russia as a geopolitical alternative to it. The LN has declared that it sees Russia as a major economic partner for Italy,<sup>60</sup> while one of the party's MPs went as far as fostering the creation of a 'Friends of Putin' group in the Italian Parliament.<sup>61</sup> The VB appears willing to act as Moscow's

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<sup>57</sup> BNP, 'BNP Policies – Defence', 23 October 2014.

<sup>58</sup> C. Hawley, "'A Partner for Russia": Europe's Far Right Flirts with Moscow', *Spiegel Online*, 14 April 2014.

<sup>59</sup> M. Ochsenreiter, "'A Strong Russia is Good for Europe'", 18 April 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Political Capital, *The Russian Connection*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Vz.ru*, 'Путин встретился с лидером итальянской партии "Лига Севера"' [Putin Met with the Leader of the Italian Party North League], 17 October 2014.



advocate in the EP,<sup>62</sup> while the NPD argues that Germany should withdraw from NATO and the eurozone and seek to establish a new strategic partnership with Russia.<sup>63</sup>

To sum up, practically all European far-right parties examined in this paper see Russia as a geopolitical alternative to both the EU and NATO. As they do not hide their Eurosceptic and anti-American feelings, their pro-Russian leanings come naturally. For them, deeper European integration and US intervention in European defence issues through NATO are not at all welcome since they run contrary to the nationalist approach to state sovereignty. From this point of view, the restoration of Russian power is not perceived as a threat but rather as a desirable development which would drastically change the balance of power in Europe and possibly facilitate the dissolution of the EU and the dismantling of NATO.

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<sup>62</sup> Hawley, "A Partner for Russia".

<sup>63</sup> NPD, 'Solidarisch mit Le Pen: Keine Nato, Kein Euro!'.







The flirting between Moscow and European far-right parties goes well beyond public statements made by the leaders or members of the latter. It also includes the establishment of close contact, as well as other forms of direct or indirect communication. Of paramount importance here is the contact that far-right politicians all over Europe have with Russian officials. These exchanges give far-right parties (especially those that are small or from small countries) some much-needed international recognition. The fact that they are discussing with the Kremlin boosts their credibility at home and improves their image. Instead of appearing as outcasts from the political and diplomatic establishment, they can now claim to be taken seriously by one of the most important countries in the world. To put it bluntly, this is something that can easily be sold in the internal political market and consequently brings European far-right parties more votes in local, national and European elections.

Jobbik is again one of the most characteristic examples. It is openly Russophile and Putin seems to have taken the party under his wing.<sup>64</sup> During his visit to Moscow in May 2013, Vona had meetings with several leading Russian officials. In this view, the visit was ‘a major breakthrough as it became clear that Russian leaders consider Jobbik as a partner.’<sup>65</sup> Moreover, he publicly admits to maintaining good relations with several Russian diplomats in Budapest and does not hesitate to publicly express his happiness that the Russian embassy is always represented at Jobbik’s yearly conferences.<sup>66</sup> However, these connections might just be the tip of a much more sinister iceberg, as there are persistent charges that the Kremlin even goes as far as funding Jobbik.<sup>67</sup> To make matters worse, in September 2014 Béla Kovács, a Jobbik MEP and a vocal advocate of pro-Russian politics, was accused by the Hungarian authorities of being a Russian spy and of channelling Russian funds to support Jobbik.<sup>68</sup>

Attack is also known for its strong connections with Russia. The party has been reported to have close ties with the Russian embassy in Sofia,<sup>69</sup> and there are also rumours that Moscow secretly funds the party.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Orenstein, ‘Putin’s Western Allies’.

<sup>65</sup> Jobbik, ‘Gábor Vona had a Lecture’.

<sup>66</sup> Jobbik, ‘Gábor Vona’.

<sup>67</sup> P. Hockenos, ‘Did Putin Win the EU Elections?’, *The German Times*, 30 May 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Sharkov, ‘Far-Right MEP’; M. A. Orenstein and P. Krekó, ‘A Russian Spy in Brussels? The Case of “KGBéla” – and What it Means for Europe’, *Foreign Affairs*, 29 May 2014.

<sup>69</sup> *Novinite.com*, ‘WikiLeaks: Bulgaria’s Ataka Party Becoming Increasingly Anti-American’, 17 May 2011.

<sup>70</sup> Orenstein, ‘Putin’s Western Allies’.



What is even more notable is that Siderov chose to launch his party's campaign for the 2014 EP elections in Moscow during a ceremony at which he was presented by the Higher Commission of the Russian Duma with the 'Fatherland Star' medal for his contribution for the development of relations between Bulgaria and Russia.<sup>71</sup> Some weeks earlier, Attack members, led by Siderov, had taken advantage of Bulgaria's National Liberation Day to once again express their anti-EU and pro-Russian leanings. They visited the EP and European Commission representations in Sofia and put up posters which reminded passers-by that it was Russia and not the then non-existent EU that had played a decisive role in the establishment of Bulgarian autonomy from the Ottoman Empire in 1878.<sup>72</sup>

Of even greater importance are the contacts between the FN and the Kremlin, given the special political and diplomatic weight of France in international affairs and the party's significant power in French politics. In June 2013, Marine Le Pen visited Moscow at the invitation of the Chairman of the State Duma, Sergey Naryshkin. During this visit, Le Pen met with the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, Dmitry Rogozin, with whom she discussed issues of common interest, including the turbulent situation in Syria, the prospects for EU enlargement and the marriage of homosexual couples.<sup>73</sup> In April 2014, just a few weeks before the elections for the EP, Le Pen visited Moscow for the second time in less than a year. She once again met with Naryshkin and also made public statements saying that EU policy towards Russia in view of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict was not in line either with traditionally friendly Franco-Russian relations or with the economic interests of France or any other EU country.<sup>74</sup> Just a few months later Le Pen admitted that the FN had obtained a loan of nine million euros from the Moscow-based First Czech Russian Bank, whose owner is known to have very close ties with the Kremlin. The FN explained that the Russian bank was not their first choice but that other European banks had refused to offer the party the much-needed loan.<sup>75</sup> However, even if this is true, it does not change the situation. The revelation was of great significance, as it was the first official confirmation that a European far-right party had accepted Russian money. This move on the part of Moscow could easily be interpreted as an attempt to buy influence in European politics, based on the assumption that someone who borrows money is usually inclined to be somewhat obligated to their creditor.

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<sup>71</sup> Ataka, 'ATAKA Launched its Election Campaign in Moscow', 25 April 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Ataka, 'Thousands Participated in ATAKA Procession on the Occasion of Bulgaria's National Liberation Day', 3 March 2014.

<sup>73</sup> E. Grynszpan, 'Moscou Déroule le Tapis Rouge devant Marine Le Pen', *Le Figaro*, 21 June 2013; Orenstein, 'Putin's Western Allies'.

<sup>74</sup> A. Prentice, 'France's Le Pen, in Moscow, Blames EU for New "Cold War"', *Reuters*, 12 April 2014.

<sup>75</sup> *Le Monde*, 'Le Front National a Emprunté de l'Argent à une Banque Russe', 23 November 2014; I. Manraud, 'Deux Hauts Responsables Russes en "Guest Stars" au Congrès du FN', *Le Monde*, 29 November 2014.



Another way that far-right parties maintain contact is by making friendly gestures to members of the Russian armed forces who visit European countries. For example, in September 2014, Golden Dawn's MP, Konstantinos Barbaroussis, boarded the Russian cruiser *Moskva*, which at the time was visiting the Greek island of Lefkas in the Ionian Sea. During the discussion he had with the captain of the ship, Barbaroussis did not pass up the chance to emphasise that Golden Dawn supports close cooperation between Greece and Russia (including cooperation in military affairs), as well as the creation of an 'Orthodox axis', which apart from these two countries would also include Serbia.<sup>76</sup> In June 2014, Le Pen's political adviser, Karim Ouchikh, rushed to welcome the four hundred members of the Russian Navy who had arrived at the French port of Saint-Nazaire to be trained in the operation of the two Mistral-class amphibious assault ships that Russia had ordered from a French shipbuilder in 2011.<sup>77</sup>

Also quite important in maintaining close ties between the Kremlin and European far-right parties is the role of Russia Today, a state-funded television network based in Moscow.<sup>78</sup> Apart from Russian, Russia Today operates in English, German, Spanish and Arabic. The main—yet officially unspoken—aim of this television network is to act as an instrument for globally promoting the official views of the Kremlin. Thus, the willingness of Russia Today to give publicity to leaders and prominent members of European far-right parties should be taken to imply that they are welcome in Moscow. UKIP's Farage, for example, might not like all of Putin's politics, but their common dislike of the EU has definitely helped to make Farage a very desirable guest for Russian state-run broadcasters such as Russia Today. During his frequent interviews he rarely criticises any aspect of Putin's policy. It is obviously no coincidence that Russia Today describes Farage as a special and 'endlessly quotable' British guest.<sup>79</sup> 'He has been known far longer to the Russia Today audience than most of the British electorate', Russia Today claims.<sup>80</sup> In one of these interviews Farage openly suggested that Europe is not governed by democratically elected governments but

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*Just a few months later Le Pen admitted that the FN had obtained a loan of nine million euros from the Moscow-based First Czech Russian Bank, whose owner is known to have very close ties with the Kremlin.*

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<sup>76</sup> Golden Dawn, 'Συνάντηση Αντιπροσωπείας Χρυσής Αυγής με Ρώσους Αξιωματούχους στην Λευκάδα – Φωτορεπορτάζ, Βίντεο' [Golden Dawn Representatives Meet with Russian Officials at Lefkas – Photos, Video], 30 September 2014.

<sup>77</sup> FN, 'Bienvenue aux Marins Russes!', 30 June 2014.

<sup>78</sup> *BBC News Europe*, 'Russia Profile'.

<sup>79</sup> Wintour and Mason, 'Nigel Farage's Relationship'; M. Rifkind, 'Nigel Farage is a Buffoon for Admiring Vladimir Putin', *The Telegraph*, 1 April 2014.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*



instead by the worst people the continent has seen since 1945. In contrast, the leader of UKIP has never made any criticism of the quality of democracy in Russia.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, Russia provides the ground for interaction between members of far-right parties from various EU countries. One of the driving forces behind this is the Russian National Forum, a group with close connections to Putin, which brings together hundreds of ultra-conservative and far-right groups from Russia and abroad for the purpose of formulating a framework for close cooperation between 'nationalist forces'.<sup>82</sup> Apart from the work done by the Russian National Forum, interaction is also achieved through the participation of members of far-right parties in conferences organised in Russia on ideological and political issues which bind these parties both to one another and to the Kremlin. The protection of traditional values and the family against 'homosexual propaganda' is first among these issues. For example, in November 2013, the leader of the BNP, Nick Griffin, and New Force leader Fiore, along with Golden Dawn's MP, Artemis Mathaiopoulos, participated in an international conference held in Moscow on the 'pressure' that is placed on traditional values by LGBT-friendly legislation in Europe.<sup>83</sup> In September 2014, an international forum on 'The Multi-Child Family and the Future of Humanity' was held at the Kremlin state palace as part of the Russian national programme The Sanctity of Motherhood.<sup>84</sup> At this forum, the FPÖ's Gudenus and Chauprade of the FN spoke out against the 'homosexual lobby' that wishes to impose laws in favour of LGBT rights, including the adoption of children by homosexual couples.<sup>85</sup>

Probably more important from a political point of view was the conference organised in August 2014 in Yalta under the title Russia, Ukraine, New Russia: Global Problems and Challenges. It is clear that the venue was deliberately chosen to underline Moscow's determination to keep Crimea firmly under Russian control. Moreover, the participants included members of numerous far-right parties, including the BNP, Jobbik and the VB. The participation of the senior adviser to Putin, Sergei Glazyev, as well as of Maxim

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> *Realpatriot.ru*, 'Russian National Forum'.

<sup>83</sup> *Tribuna.ru*, 'ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЕ ПРАВЫЕ ОБСУЖДАЛИ МОСКВЕ, КАК ЗАЩИТИТЬ ТРАДИЦИОННЫЕ ЦЕННОСТИ' [The European Right in Moscow to Discuss How to Protect Traditional Values], 27 November 2014.

<sup>84</sup> *Orthodox Ethos*, 'On September 10, 2014, an International Forum on "The Multi-child Family and the Future of Humanity" began at the State Kremlin Palace', 18 September 2014.

<sup>85</sup> *Der Standard*, 'Gudenus Kritisiert in Moskau EU, NATO und "Homosexuellenlobby"', 12 September 2014.



Shevchenko, a member of Putin's human rights council, was a clear sign that the conference had the green light from the Kremlin.<sup>86</sup>

Last but not least, the Kremlin uses the European far right to legitimise elections and referenda in regions of the former Soviet Union with pro-Russian separatist movements, such as Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and, more recently, Crimea. The Eurasian Observatory for Democracy and Elections—which purports to be independent but actually has close ties with the Kremlin—often invites members of far-right parties from Europe to monitor electoral procedures in disputed territories. This is done in an attempt to bring a measure of credibility and international recognition to the result of the ballots. Not surprisingly, far-right observers always come to the conclusion that electoral procedures have been in accordance with internationally acceptable democratic standards. International observers from European far-right parties are also invited to parliamentary elections held in Russia. In 2011, BNP leader Griffin was invited to fulfil such a role. According to Griffin, not only was the electoral procedure absolutely flawless, but the Russian elections appeared to be much fairer than British ones. He described the Russian elections as 'robust, transparent and properly democratic', and came to the conclusion that 'Putin's Russia is more democratic than Cameron's UK Banana Republic'.<sup>87</sup>

From the analysis in this section, it is clear that European far-right politicians do not forego any opportunity to make their relations with Russia as cordial as possible. Meetings with high-ranking Russian officials, frequent appearances on Russian media known for their connections with the Russian government, and participation in semi-official Kremlin-backed congresses are among the most common ways of maintaining close relations with Moscow. These contacts are fuelled by the common approach that European far-right parties and Putin's Russia share on a number of issues, including societal, political and diplomatic ones. As is obvious, these contacts not only serve as the basis for the unofficial alliance between European far-right parties and Moscow, but also help to further strengthen it.

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<sup>86</sup> H. Coynash, 'Russian Fascist Ideologue Dugin: Why Stop with Donetsk and Luhansk?', 1 September 2014.

<sup>87</sup> BNP, 'Russian Elections "Much Fairer than Britain's" – Initial Verdict from Nick Griffin', 9 December 2011.





The conflict between Russia and Ukraine offered a great opportunity for the expression of pro-Russian sentiments by most European far-right parties. This trend was further boosted by the developments in Crimea. Of particular importance here was the (not internationally recognised) referendum held there on 16 March 2014, whose result was overwhelmingly in favour of Crimea joining the Russian Federation. In both cases European far-right parties saw Putin's policy as tangible proof of his resolve to impose his will on his opponents and of the re-emergence of Russian power at the international level. They perceived the EU and US reaction against Moscow as aggressive and fiercely opposed it. At the same time they foresaw the possibility of a Western defeat which would create serious problems for the cohesion of the EU and facilitate the collapse of US power in Europe. As far as Crimea was concerned, the prospect of the peninsula's secession from Ukraine was welcomed wholeheartedly by those far-right European parties with expansionist or secessionist tendencies.

### **The international illegality of the secessionist referendum in Crimea**

On 27 March 2014 the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 68/262 concerning the 'Territorial integrity of Ukraine'. The resolution affirmed the General Assembly's commitment to the 'sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders'. It called upon all states 'to desist and refrain from actions aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine, including any attempts to modify Ukraine's borders through the threat or use of force or other unlawful means'. More specifically, it underscored that 'the referendum held in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol on 16 March 2014, having no validity, cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or of the city of Sevastopol'. For this reason it called upon all states, international organisations and specialised agencies 'not to recognize any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol on the basis of the above-mentioned referendum and to refrain from any action or dealing that might be interpreted as recognizing any such altered status.'<sup>88</sup> One hundred UN member states voted in favour of the resolution, whilst only 11 (including Russia) voted against. There were 58 abstentions, while 24 states chose not to vote and were absent when the vote took place. The Russian veto had blocked all previous attempts made by the Security Council to adopt a similar resolution which would declare the Crimean referendum as lacking any legal basis and thus being contrary to international law.

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<sup>88</sup> UN General Assembly, *Resolution 68/262, 'Territorial integrity of Ukraine'*, 27 March 2014.



The leader of the L'SNS, Kotleba, provided a sort of summary of the way most European far-right parties perceived the Russo-Ukrainian crisis which followed the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine. In an expression of his pro-Russian feelings, in January 2014 Kotleba sent an open letter to the pro-Russian President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, urging him not to give in to the Euromaidan protesters. According to Kotleba the anti-governmental clashes in Ukraine were provoked by the EU (because it needed new markets) and the NATO 'terrorist organisation' (because it wanted to move closer to the Russian borders). Making reference to his experience in Slovakia, Kotleba also urged Yanukovych not to open Ukraine up to the EU as this would not bring anything good for the Ukrainian people: 'At the end of the process, nothing other than the total enslavement of the Ukrainian people and the transfer of Ukrainian land into the hands of foreign investors will have been achieved, as is taking place in Slovakia,' Kotleba concluded.<sup>89</sup>

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine had another side effect. It proved that European far-right parties valued their pro-Russian leanings above their ideological affiliations with like-minded Ukrainian parties. Before the Euromaidan protests which triggered the Russo-Ukrainian crisis, parties such as the FN, Jobbik and the BNP had established close contacts with their Ukrainian ideological counterpart, Freedom (Svoboda).<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, when the crisis broke out, they decided to align with Russia instead. New Force's attitude was even more characteristic. Just a few months before the crisis, the leaders of New Force and Freedom had agreed to 'fight against the liberal forces of multiculturalism and the destruction of the national traditions of European civilisation',<sup>91</sup> and New Force's officials had referred to the need to safeguard Ukrainian national identity.<sup>92</sup> However, while at the start of the crisis New Force supported Freedom because of its nationalist background, its rhetoric gradually changed, and it went on to adopt clearly pro-Russian arguments (e.g. that Euromaidan and consequently the Russo-Ukrainian conflict were the result of US interference in Ukraine).<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *Hlavné Správy*, 'Kotleba varuje Janukovyča pred teroristickou organizáciou NATO a snahami EÚ rozbit' Ukrajin' [Kotleba Warns Yanukovych Against the Efforts of the Terrorist Organisation NATO and of the EU to Break Ukraine], 31 January 2014.

<sup>90</sup> BNP, 'Alliance of European National Movements Expands to 9 Parties'.

<sup>91</sup> Svoboda, 'Делегація "Свободи" відвідала Рим на запрошення італійської партії "Форца нова"' [The Delegation from Freedom Visited Rome at the Invitation of the Italian Party New Force], 25 April 2013.

<sup>92</sup> Svoboda, 'Andriy Mokhnyk Met with Representatives of the "Forza Nuova" Party', 14 October 2013.

<sup>93</sup> *Lombardiarussia.org*, 'Crimea: Il Referendum è Valido', 1 July 2014.





The secessionist referendum held in Crimea in March 2014 made the alliance between the Kremlin and far-right parties from all over Europe more evident than ever before. As it had done in similar cases in the past (e.g. in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Moscow invited international observers in an effort to boost the legitimacy of the election results. It was no surprise that most of these observers turned out to be members of European far-right parties, including the FPÖ, the VB, the National-European Community Party (Parti Communautaire National-Européen, from Belgium), Attack, the FN, Jobbik, the LN, Tricolour Flame (Fiamma Tricolore, from Italy) and the Platform for Catalonia (Platforma per Catalunya, from Spain). As expected, all of them declared that the ballot, which was denounced by almost all Western countries as illegitimate, had been exemplary.<sup>94</sup>

Crimea's secession was seen as a window of opportunity for those European far-right parties which are secessionist, such as the LN. The party's leader, Matteo Salvini, publicly recognised the validity of the Crimean referendum and appeared to be concerned about 'the continuous provocations' of the Ukrainian government in Kyiv against Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationals.<sup>95</sup> Aside from his pro-Russian sentiments, Salvini's words could barely hide his hope that one or more similar secessionist referenda might one day take place in Northern Italy. To put it simply: if Crimea can succeed in parting from Ukraine, why can Padania not one day in the not-so-distant future gain its independence from Italy?

For similar reasons, the Crimean secessionist referendum seemed to open up a window of opportunity for far-right parties in favour of reshaping international borders in Europe in a way that would facilitate the territorial expansion of their countries at the expense of their neighbours. Jobbik is the most characteristic example, since its political goals explicitly include 'the reincorporation into the [Hungarian] national body of both Western and Carpathian-basin Hungarians'.<sup>96</sup> Along with other far-right political parties from Europe, Jobbik sent observers to Crimea in order to validate the secessionist referendum. According to Jobbik, the Crimean referendum was not only legitimate and valid, but was also a 'triumph of a community's self-determination'.<sup>97</sup> Party officials also pointed out that the developments in Crimea might give Hungarian minorities living in Ukraine the chance to seek and eventually gain regional autonomy. Thus, according to

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<sup>94</sup> S. Walker and A. Luhn, 'Crimea Goes to the Polls with Landslide Expected for Union with Russia', *The Guardian*, 16 March 2014; A. Shek-hovtsov, 'Pro-Russian Extremists Observe the Illegitimate Crimean "Referendum"', 17 March 2014; Higgins, 'Far-right Fever'.

<sup>95</sup> *Lombardiarussia.org*, 'Crimea'.

<sup>96</sup> Jobbik, 'Foreign Affairs Policy'.

<sup>97</sup> Jobbik, 'Jobbik: Crimea Referendum is Exemplary', 18 March 2014.



Jobbik, Hungary should, on the one hand, look upon Russia as an example of enforcing one's own interests and, on the other, try to establish an alliance with Moscow in order to facilitate the implementation of a more proactive Hungarian minority policy.<sup>98</sup>

As a result of the Crimean affair, Jobbik found the opportunity to refer publicly to its territorial claims over Ukraine. In this case, the point of interest was Transcarpathia, which until the end of the First World War was part of Austria–Hungary. In April 2014, Jobbik MP Nagy gave a speech to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg during which he referred to the 'hidden powers' that want to colonise Ukraine and launch an attack on Russia. Wearing a T-shirt with the slogan 'Crimea legally belongs to Russia! Transcarpathia legally belongs to Hungary!', Nagy described Ukraine as an 'artificial state' that has taken away territories, such as Transcarpathia, that historically belong to neighbouring countries.<sup>99</sup> The sanctions against Russia as a result of the Crimean referendum cannot be valid, he concluded, as this

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referendum was nothing more than the free expression of the local people's right to self-determination. At the same time, he explicitly asked for the return of Transcarpathia to Hungary 'because it belongs to Hungary according to international law'.<sup>100</sup> This expansionist policy is also reflected in Jobbik's economic programme, according to which the party

thinks in terms of economic policy 'for the Carpathian basin as a whole' and considers Hungarian populated territories beyond the borders as part of a 'unified Hungarian economic zone'.<sup>101</sup>

However, it was not only secessionists and territorial revisionists who saw Russian policy in Ukraine, including Crimea, in a favourable light. Almost all other European far-right parties did the same. Attack wholeheartedly supported Russia in its conflict with Ukraine and over the Crimea issue. Siderov publicly accused the US government of supporting the overthrow of Yanukovych, adding that by interfering in Ukraine, Washington had proved that its real aim was nothing less than securing US hegemony in the region. Si-

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<sup>98</sup> Jobbik, 'Gyöngyösi: Crimea'.

<sup>99</sup> *Youtube.com*, 'Gaudi az ET-ben: Kárpátalja Visszajár Magyarországnak' [Gaudi in the EP: Transcarpathia to be Returned to Hungary], 10 April 2014.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Jobbik, 'Eco-Social National Economics'.



derov bitterly condemned the pro-NATO and pro-EU policy of the Bulgarian government as being against the national interests of Bulgaria and of turning Sofia into a puppet in the hands of the US.<sup>102</sup> By repeatedly referring to the need for a more independent Bulgarian foreign policy, Siderov actually meant that Sofia should support all Russian activities in Ukraine (including Crimea).

Attack was one of the European far-right parties that sent election observers to validate the secessionist referendum in Crimea. Four Attack MPs were present at Sevastopol during the referendum, and they stated that there were no incidents of disruption and that the citizens had had the opportunity to express their free will and to determine their future.<sup>103</sup> Attack recognised the result of the referendum and was against the imposition of sanctions on Russia by the EU, asking the Bulgarian government to veto such a proposal.<sup>104</sup> From Siderov's point of view, the US and EU reactions to Russia's conflict with Ukraine were nothing more than a campaign against the largest Orthodox country in the world. Aside from the religious aspect, Attack's leader also asserts that the West obviously feels threatened by the fact that Russia is gradually regaining its strength and becoming an important player in the international arena.<sup>105</sup>

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Similarly, Golden Dawn's leader, Michaloliakos, suggested that the Ukrainian crisis was created by US interference in order to halt Russia's geopolitical expansion and the implementation of Dugin's Eurasian doctrine. For Michaloliakos, Putin's hard line towards Ukraine was absolutely justified, as was his aim to get a firm hold on Crimea, which would give Russia an important strategic advantage, that is, securing access to 'warm seas'.<sup>106</sup> For Golden Dawn, the US and the EU were the aggressors in Ukraine, not Russia. Indeed, Russia was the victim of an attempt to make Ukraine a NATO military base and a foothold for the territorial dismemberment of Russia.<sup>107</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that although it did not send electoral observers to

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<sup>102</sup> Ataka, 'Siderov: ATAKA will Recognize Crimea's Referendum', 18 March 2014.

<sup>103</sup> Ataka, 'Crimea Referendum was Held Peacefully without Provocations According to ATAKA Observers', 18 March 2014.

<sup>104</sup> Ataka, 'ATAKA is Against Imposing Sanctions on Russia by the EU', 17 March 2014; Ataka, 'Volen Siderov: Bulgaria Has to Veto Possible EU Sanctions Against Russia', 20 March 2014; Ataka, 'ATAKA: No to Sanctions Against Russia, Yes to Crimea Referendum', 24 March 2014.

<sup>105</sup> Ataka, 'Volen Siderov: Media Monopoly'.

<sup>106</sup> N. G. Michaloliakos, 'Η Κριμαία, ο Μόσκοβος και η Ελλάδα [Crimea, Moscow and Greece]', 15 March 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Golden Dawn, 'Ο Φαρισαϊσμός των Αμερικανοσυνιστών για την Κριμαία' [The Pharisaism of the American-Zionists about Crimea], 18 March 2014.



Crimea, Golden Dawn referred to the pro-Russian referendum held in Crimea as valid and as expressing the true will of the people of the region.<sup>108</sup>

Le Pen was also supportive of Putin as far as the Crimean issue was concerned. At the height of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, she paid an official visit to Moscow, during which she accused the EU of starting a ‘new Cold War’ against Russia.<sup>109</sup> The FN was among the far-right parties to send election observers to the Crimean referendum. Chauprade, one of the FN’s observers, declared that the referendum was not only valid but that it had a ‘double legitimacy’: on the one hand, it was historically legitimate as it was an expression of the free will of the Russians of the region, and on the other, it was politically legitimate as its result reflected a democratic choice.<sup>110</sup> Le Pen’s spokesperson, Ludovic De Danne, called the Euromaidan revolution in Kyiv ‘illegitimate’. He recognised the results of the referendum in Crimea as expressing the pro-Russian sentiments of the vast majority of the local population, explaining that Crimea had historically been part of Mother Russia. At the same time, he pointed out that the sanctions against Moscow were unjustified and that ‘all these unbalanced politics and policies from the so-called West are very dangerous.’<sup>111</sup> On 30 October 2014, during his visit to Moscow, the former leader and founder of the FN, Jean-Marie Le Pen, did not hesitate to underline that Crimea had always been a part of Russia and that the only thing that Putin did was to give the Russian residents of Crimea the right to rejoin their motherland.<sup>112</sup>

The Western European far-right parties with a pro-Russian attitude towards the Crimean affair include the FPÖ. Gudenus was among the observers of the Crimean referendum. In one of his public statements, he supported the idea of the secession of Crimea, explaining that people should be given the right to decide on their own future and that the international community should respect their decision.<sup>113</sup> ‘The vote was not under the “impending Russian gun barrels” as the Western media claimed’, Gudenus said in one of his inter-

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<sup>108</sup> Golden Dawn, ‘Καταδίκασε την Ρωσία για την Κριμαία ο Σαμαράς – “Τρέμει” ο Πούτιν...!’ [Samaras Condemned Russian Attitude in Crimea—Putin ‘Is Shivering...’], *Euobserver.com*, 18 March 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Prentice, ‘France’s Le Pen, in Moscow’; Hockenos, ‘Did Putin?’.

<sup>110</sup> F. Morice, ‘French Far-right Politician Endorses Crimea Vote’, *Euobserver.com*, 21 March 2014.

<sup>111</sup> *Russia Today* (website), ‘Crimean “Referendum at Gunpoint” is a Myth – Intl Observers’, 17 March 2014; E. Sukhoi, ‘Crimea is Historically Part of Russia, Referendum was Legitimate – Marine Le Pen’s Spokesman’, 20 March 2014; Higgins, ‘Far-right Fever’.

<sup>112</sup> *Right-world.net*, ‘Жан-Мари Ле Пен приехал в Москву к другу Глазунову... и не только’ [Jean-Marie Le Pen Arrived in Moscow to Meet his Friend Glazunov... And not Only], 30 October 2014.

<sup>113</sup> *Russia Today* (website), ‘Crimean “Referendum at Gunpoint”’.



views.<sup>114</sup> On the contrary, according to him the referendum was reminiscent of a normal Sunday election in any European country. 'Everything was in perfect order... Everything was quiet, disciplined and exemplary', he concluded in a way that could not have been more pro-Russian.<sup>115</sup>

As one would expect from previous experience, British far-right politicians did not hide their pro-Russian leanings during the Russo-Ukrainian conflict or as far as the Crimea affair was concerned. In March 2014, during a television debate with the British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg, Farage accused the EU of being 'imperialist' and 'expansionist' and of having 'blood on its hands' for destabilising Ukraine by encouraging the Ukrainians to overthrow Yanukovich. Moreover, Farage did not hesitate to openly defend the Kremlin's reaction: 'If you poke the Russian bear with a stick, he will respond', he said.<sup>116</sup> Farage once again made his opinion perfectly clear in September 2014, this time during a EP session:

This EU empire, ever seeking to expand, stated its territorial claim on the Ukraine some years ago. Just to make that worse, of course, some NATO members said they too would like the Ukraine to join NATO. We directly encouraged the uprising in the Ukraine that led to the toppling of the president, Yanukovich, and that led of course in turn to Vladimir Putin reacting.<sup>117</sup>

The BNP was equally supportive of the Russian arguments as far as the Crimean referendum was concerned. In the party's view, the people of Crimea had done nothing more than exercise their right to a democratic vote 'to re-join the nation (Russia) from which they have been parted (in historical terms) for a short time only.'<sup>118</sup> What the BNP added to the pan-European far-right debate was an indirect anti-Islamic touch, shared by many of its ideological counterparts across the continent: 'In what way is the Crimean situation different in principle to that of the Kosovans, who were given every support, even to military backing, by the West (including Britain) when they declared unilateral independence from Serbia? ... Could it be that the Kosovans are Muslim, whilst the Russian people of the Crimean peninsula are Christian?'<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ochsenreiter, "A Strong Russia".

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> *BBC.com*, 'Farage: EU Does Have "Blood on its Hands" over Ukraine', 27 March 2014.

<sup>117</sup> *UKIPMEPS.org*, 'Nigel Farage: Stop Playing Wargames in Ukraine', 16 September 2014.

<sup>118</sup> BNP, 'The People of Crimea, the British Government, and Russia: A Distorted View of Events', 31 March 2014.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.



In a nutshell, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict and the secessionist referendum in Crimea were turning points in the expression of the pro-Russian feelings of the European far right. The latter wholeheartedly supported the views of the Kremlin and fiercely opposed the reaction of the EU and NATO. It is no coincidence that the vast majority of observers in the Crimean referendum belonged to far-right parties all over Europe. For some of them the result of the referendum and Russia's annexation of Crimea were seen as opportunities to raise either their secessionist demands in their home countries or their expansionist aspirations in connection with neighbouring countries. However, for all of them, Putin's hard line was simply further proof of his resolve to openly confront the West.









If for European far-right politicians Putin's Russia is seen as a strategic ally in their quest to dismantle the EU and weaken NATO, the Kremlin obviously considers European far-right parties as useful for exactly the same reason. These parties can help Moscow to expand its geopolitical influence in Central, South-eastern and Western Europe. Even if Putin does not manage to see parties with pro-Russian leanings forming governments, he can still hope that their growing influence will exert considerable pressure on EU governments, especially as far as relations with Russia are concerned. Some of these parties have already been promoting Russian economic and strategic interests in the critical field of energy, repeatedly highlighting Russia's advantage as a provider. Jobbik and Golden Dawn, to name just two of the most striking examples, openly supported the construction of the (eventually ill-fated) Russian-backed South Stream pipeline, which was meant to transport natural gas from Russia to Western Europe. In contrast, they fiercely opposed the EU- and US-backed Nabucco pipeline. According to Jobbik MP Gyöngyösi, Putin was right when he said that the countries blocking the South Stream were not acting in a sovereign manner but were acting under instructions from Washington and Brussels.<sup>120</sup>

Support from far-right parties proved to be insufficient to ensure the adoption of the Russian pipeline scheme. It was, however, a clear indication of how these parties could be promoters of Russian interests. That they met with limited success in this particular case does not mean that they might not prove more successful in the future. From this point of view, Moscow has much to gain by using European far-right parties for its own interests, not only in the economic sphere, but also at the political and diplomatic levels. To put it simply, pro-Russian far-right parties can act as Trojan horses for the Kremlin in its attempts to undermine the internal cohesion of the EU and NATO.

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Russia's strategic goal of splitting or at least weakening the West is obviously facilitated by the growing electoral strength of far-right parties across Europe. By encouraging and supporting parties that want to demolish the EU and see their countries withdraw from NATO, the Kremlin is actually promoting this aim—if not directly, certainly indirectly. There is no doubt that close ties between Moscow and European far-right

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<sup>120</sup> Jobbik, 'Hungary is a Victim of Euro-Atlanticism', 12 April 2014; Jobbik, 'Jobbik Continues to Support the Implementation of South Stream', 11 May 2014; G. Linardis, 'Οι Επιπτώσεις από την Αναστολή Κατασκευής του Αγωγού South Stream' [The Consequences of the Suspension of the South Stream Pipeline], 5 December 2014.



parties will give Putin more leverage against the EU and NATO.<sup>121</sup> This is part of Russia's strategy, and it is based on the coincidence of interests between the Kremlin and most European far-right parties: regardless of their different reasons, both the former and the latter would like to see the dissolution of the EU and NATO.

This prospect was made clear even before the 2014 EP elections. Filip Dewinter, a senior member of the VB, put it quite bluntly in April 2014 when he publicly stated: 'I think we can be a good partner for Russia in the European Parliament. And Russia sees us as a potential partner.'<sup>122</sup> The fact that this statement was made on the sidelines of a conference organised at the EP by Fiorello Provera, a prominent member of the LN and Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament, with official support from the Permanent Mission of Russia to the EU, only added to the excitement it caused. Not surprisingly, Sergey Markov, a conservative Russian political scientist known for his close ties with the Kremlin, who was also participating in the conference, welcomed Dewinter's statement. He commented that Russia needs 'to move forward to further develop this cooperation' with the European far right.<sup>123</sup>

The Russo-Ukrainian conflict and the Crimean issue provided the opportunity for—so far not decisive but nevertheless present and possibly important—intervention by far-right parties in support of Moscow. The EU decision to impose economic sanctions on Russia fuelled pro-Russian statements and activities from those far-right parties represented in the EP. The FN was again one of the most ardent supporters of the Russian position. Marine Le Pen made it clear that her party was against the policy of sanctions, explaining that the EU would actually suffer more than Russia by imposing sanctions on Moscow.<sup>124</sup> Almost simultaneously, the leader of the FPÖ, Strache, travelled all the way to Geneva to have a meeting with Russia's UN Ambassador, Alexei Borodavkin, during which the former was eager to condemn Western sanctions against Moscow.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Polyakova, 'Strange Bedfellows'.

<sup>122</sup> Hawley, "A Partner for Russia".

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. See also Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union, 'Conference on Russia–EU Relations at the European Parliament', 10 April 2014.

<sup>124</sup> *1tv.ru*, 'Лидер Национального фронта Франции Марин Ле Пен дала интервью Первому каналу' [French National Front Leader Marine Le Pen Gave an Interview to Channel One], 13 April 2014.

<sup>125</sup> Hawley, "A Partner for Russia".



European far-right parties' support for the Kremlin was not only rhetorical or merely theoretical. On the contrary, it took a much more practical shape, both at the national and European level. Almost all far-right parties were openly against the policy of sanctions. In most cases their pro-Russian leanings were unsuccessfully hidden behind a veil of economic reasoning. The main argument was that sanctions against Russia would cause severe damage to the national economies of EU members. This argument was further intensified when, in response to the imposition of the sanctions, Moscow decided to boycott agricultural and food products of EU origin. Whenever they had the chance, leading far-right politicians spoke out against the policy of sanctions, repeatedly asking their governments to refrain from implementing them.<sup>126</sup>

Attack's reaction to the possibility of EU sanctions against Russia was perhaps the most notable, as it threatened the stability of the Bulgarian government. Apart from being apologists for Putin's actions, after Russia's annexation of Crimea, Attack warned that it would withdraw its support for Bulgaria's coalition government under Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski if the latter, in accordance with EU decisions, supported the implementation of sanctions against Moscow.<sup>127</sup>

Attack's votes were crucial since without them Oresharski's government would lose the parliamentary majority, be unable to secure a vote of confidence and thus collapse. This incident proved beyond any doubt that under certain conditions pro-Russian far-right parties could play a destabilising role in the internal political affairs of their respective countries, using as much of their political leverage as possible to impose the adoption of pro-Russian policies.

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Another characteristic example of a pro-Russian stance on the part of a European far-right party was that of the LN. During his visit to Moscow in mid-October 2014, Salvini, the party's leader, promised the Chairman of the State Duma, Naryshkin, that the LN would continue to fight in the EP for international

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<sup>126</sup> For some examples see, among others, Ochsenreiter, "A Strong Russia"; Jobbik, 'The EU-provoked Russian Boycott Causes Severe Economic Damage', 11 August 2014; Jobbik, 'Jobbik: NATO Membership is Rather a Security Risk for Hungary', 7 September 2014; E. Karakostas, 'Ο Σαμαράς Σφραγίζει την Καταστροφή της Ελλάδος – Τάχθηκε υπέρ των Νέων Κυρώσεων στη Ρωσία' [Samaras Seals the Destruction of Greece: He Positioned Himself in Favour of the New Sanctions Against Russia], 31 August 2014; Golden Dawn, 'Λάμπρος Φουντούλης: "Αν η Ε.Ε. Θέλει Εχθρότητα με τη Ρωσία, θα μας Βρει Απέναντί της" ΒΙΝΤΕΟ' [Lampros Fountoulis: 'If the EU Wants to Go Against Russia, it will Find us on the Opposing Side', Video], 28 October 2014.

<sup>127</sup> Polyakova, 'Strange Bedfellows'.



recognition of Crimea's 'reunification' with Russia. After the meeting with Naryshkin, Salvini publicly stated that EU sanctions against Russia risked costing Italy five billion euros annually and that his party would press for their abolition.<sup>128</sup> This statement came only two months after Salvini had accused the EU and the Italian government of being foolish to impose economic sanctions on Russia, and the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi of destroying the Italian economy only to please US President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.<sup>129</sup> What is even more striking is that during a press conference held by the Russian news agency TASS, Salvini went as far as to declare that Russia was ready to join the EU and become a full member, explaining that in this way the EU would be 'a space of peace and freedom from the Atlantic to the Pacific.'<sup>130</sup> In a clearly theatrical move, the LN's MEP, Gianluca Buonanno, even appeared in the EP wearing a T-shirt with the slogan 'No sanctions against Russia'.<sup>131</sup>

The case of the FN was even more interesting. As a result of the EU sanctions against Russia, in September 2014 the French government was obliged to postpone the delivery of two Mistral-class amphibious assault ships to Moscow. The FN bitterly opposed this decision and openly asked François Hollande's government to honour the Franco-Russian agreement on the construction of the ships, signed in 2011. Le Pen's party accused the French government of having yielded to foreign pressures (most importantly US, British and German).<sup>132</sup> The FN's reaction in the Mistral case showed that even on very sensitive issues, such as military affairs, the party's close connections with Russia play a significant role in shaping its policy.

The apogee of the expression of pro-Russian leanings by the European far right was probably the vote in the EP concerning the ratification of the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement. The Agreement, which for obvious reasons Moscow strongly opposed, was ratified on 16 September 2014 by a vast majority, with

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<sup>128</sup> *Ria.ru*, 'Лига Севера намерена начать битву за признание присоединения Крыма' [The North League is Going to Start the Battle for the Recognition of Crimea], 14 October 2014; *Itar-tass.com*, 'Итальянская партия "Лига Севера" будет добиваться отмены санкций ЕС против РФ' [The Italian Party North League Will Seek the Abolition of EU Sanctions Against Russia], 14 October 2014; *Rg.ru*, 'Россия - не угроза. Сергей Нарышкин встретился с делегацией "Лиги Севера"' [Russia: Not a Threat. Sergey Naryshkin Met with a Delegation from the North League], 15 October 2014.

<sup>129</sup> *Italian.ruvr.ru*, 'Matteo Salvini (Lega Nord): Via le Sanzioni contro la Russia, Distruggono la Nostra Economia', 15 August 2014.

<sup>130</sup> *Newsru.ua*, 'Лидер итальянских сепаратистов убеждён, что Россия готова ко вступлению в ЕС' [The Leader of the Italian Separatists is Convinced that Russia is Ready to Join the EU], 15 October 2014.

<sup>131</sup> C. Morris, 'Ukraine Vote Sends EU into Uncharted Territory', *BBC.com*, 16 September 2014.

<sup>132</sup> FN, 'Suspension de la Livraison du Mistral à la Russie: Hollande Ridiculise la France et Porte Atteinte aux Intérêts Vitaux de Notre Pays', 4 September 2014.



535 MEPs voting in favour of it and only 127 voting against, while 35 abstained. Not surprisingly, most of the negative votes were from MEPs belonging to far-right parties. As if they had all agreed on the line they would follow, the FPÖ, the VB, the FN, the NPD, Golden Dawn, Jobbik, the LN, the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid, from the Netherlands) and UKIP all voted against the Agreement.<sup>133</sup> Even though they have not formed a political group in the EP and thus are not as coherent as other political families, practically all the far-right parties represented in the EP aligned with Moscow on this issue of critical importance for the Kremlin.

To sum up, the electoral success of far-right parties in many EU countries, including in the 2014 elections for the EP, has made the potential role of these parties even more important. They are able to pressure their national governments to adopt a stance that is friendlier to Moscow on a number of issues. Although they still lack the numbers and cohesion to fundamentally change EU policies through the decisions of the EP, they are in a position to bring forth the Eurosceptic message in Brussels and Strasbourg with ever-increasing power. Most importantly, as far as EU relations with Russia are concerned, they can provide an ‘echo chamber’ for Russia in the EP, thus making it even harder for the EU member states to come up with a firm and united response to Moscow’s challenge in Ukraine and possibly elsewhere in the future.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *Votewatch.eu*, ‘EU–Ukraine Association Agreement, with the Exception of the Treatment of Third Country Nationals Legally Employed as Workers in the Territory of the Other Part’, 16 September 2014.

<sup>134</sup> Higgins, ‘Far-right Fever’.





Relations between European far-right political parties and Russia have become warmer and warmer in the last few years. And since it takes two to tango, these relations would never have taken the form they have today if both sides had not been eager to come closer and closer together. On the one hand, far-right leaders all over Europe have been looking at Putin's Russia with great admiration, respect and interest. On the other, Moscow has repeatedly welcomed them warmly and has taken them under its wing. Ideological affiliations and—most importantly—common interests have been the basis of this seemingly unholy alliance.

European far-right politicians see Putin's Russia as a semi-authoritarian and neo-conservative model of governance that they would most probably like to see in their own countries. This model fits their beliefs and is perceived as a dynamic response to the 'malice' of liberalism, openness and tolerance from which Western democracies suffer. Thus, they are naturally attracted by Putin's 'decisive' government. As for the Russian president, his moves are also partly ideologically driven since he genuinely seems to believe that liberal democracy is doomed and that leaders who are willing to follow his example should be somehow encouraged. In any case, it is always easier to develop relations with people who have a mindset similar to your own.

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*Apart from the ideological connection, European far-right politicians clearly see Russia as an ally in their desire to dismantle the EU and to diminish NATO's (and consequently the US's) role in European security issues.*

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Apart from the ideological connection, European far-right politicians clearly see Russia as an ally in their desire to dismantle the EU and to diminish NATO's (and consequently the US's) role in European security issues. Moscow is thus held up as a geopolitical alternative to both the EU and NATO. According to this analysis, Russia is not a threat but rather an asset to peace and stability in Europe. For the Kremlin, the growing success of far-right parties (with the backing of Russia, where necessary<sup>135</sup>) is clearly an advantage, since it is thought that this will destabilise EU governments and the EU itself.<sup>136</sup> Putin's ambition to make Russia the dominant power in Eurasia and create a sort of a regional Russian hegemony<sup>137</sup> has

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<sup>135</sup> A.-S. Chryssogelos, *Old Ghosts in New Sheets: European Populist Parties and Foreign Policy* (Brussels: Centre for European Studies, 2011), 17–21.

<sup>136</sup> Orenstein, 'Putin's Western Allies'.

<sup>137</sup> L. Aron, 'The Putin Doctrine: Russia's Quest to Rebuild the Soviet State', *Foreign Affairs*, 8 March 2013.



played an important role in his attempt to establish closer ties with EU far-right political parties that can facilitate the achievement of his goals. With this strategy Russia seeks to create problems for NATO, as the pro-Russian far-right political parties are equally Eurosceptic and anti-NATO.

It is in this context that close contacts between European far-right parties and Moscow make sense. Meetings between officials from the two sides are only the tip of the iceberg. European far-right politicians have become favoured guests of the state-owned Russian media. They are constantly invited to participate in conferences that take place in Russia and have at least the unofficial backing of the Kremlin. At the same time, members of far-right parties from all over Europe are also invited to monitor electoral procedures and secessionist referenda in territories where the status quo has been disputed in some way. Moreover, the revelation that the FN has secured a huge loan from a Russian bank has provided new evidence that Moscow might be willing to assist European far-right parties in ways that go beyond merely providing moral or

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*Moscow is not only trying to take advantage of the fact that far-right parties with anti-EU and anti-NATO feelings tend to see Russia as a strategic ally, but that it might try to create the opportunity itself by offering under-the-table support to these parties.*

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political support. It is also an indication that Moscow is not only trying to take advantage of the fact that far-right parties with anti-EU and anti-NATO feelings tend to see Russia as a strategic ally, but that it might try to create the opportunity itself by offering under-the-table support to these parties.

Before the revelation of the FN scandal, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict had already revealed the existence of an unofficial alliance between European far-right parties and the Kremlin. Far-right parties all over Europe openly and wholeheartedly supported Russia not only in its dispute with Ukraine, but also in its diplomatic confrontation with the West (the EU and NATO). They also supported the annexation of Crimea by Russia despite the fact that this annexation was against international law. Even though this support was not enough to change the position of any EU country vis-à-vis the Ukrainian and Crimean issues, it proved that far-right parties are willing to raise their pro-Russian voices, not only at the national level but also in the EP. Thus, they made it clear that they can potentially be useful to Moscow as a means of exerting pressure on EU governments and on the EU and NATO from within.

What lies ahead? Is this alliance going to expand, or does it simply reflect a momentary coincidence of interests? The chances are that at least in the near future European far-right parties will continue to maintain





close contacts with Russia. For its part, Moscow will not cease to see them as potentially useful allies for destabilising the West. The alliance might not be official, but since it is clearly based on common interests and is supported by coinciding ideological backgrounds, it will probably continue to exist. In order to be countered, these ties between European far-right parties and Russia need to be relentlessly exposed.





### Stress the importance of political debate.

Pro-EU political parties and politicians should refer more consistently to the threat posed by the establishment of close contacts between the European far right and Moscow. Connections between far-right parties and Russia have very frequently been pinpointed by print and electronic media. However, it is important that this becomes a major issue of political debate at both the national and the European level.

### Inform civil society as part of a general communication strategy.

This political focus on the close relations between European far-right parties and the Kremlin could become part of a general strategy to confront the far right all over Europe. European citizens need to be more systematically informed about this aspect of the far right's international activities since it clearly affects these parties' positions on a number of important issues, such as the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. What needs to be underlined above all is the fact that the unofficial alliance between the European far right and Putin's Russia might pose a real threat to peace and political stability in Europe as a whole. Non-governmental organisations and think tanks can play a critical role in this respect.

### Expose financial contacts more clearly.

Investigations concerning the external funding of far-right parties should be launched to establish whether they receive money from Russian sources, especially ones related directly or indirectly to the Kremlin. If it can be proved that Russian money is being given under the table to these parties, then not only ethical but also serious legal questions will be raised. In any case, the provision of Russian funding will be a clear sign that these parties are under the direct influence of Moscow. Similarly, more emphasis should be given to the fact that—with or without Russian funding—far-right parties such as the ones examined in this paper systematically promote Russian interests at both the national and the European level.

### Confront Russian representatives with inconsistencies.

Last but not least, Russian representatives should be confronted more often about the inconsistency of supporting far-right parties all over Europe and then wanting to appear anti-Nazi. This doublethink is one of their weakest points, especially if it is contrasted with the fact that Moscow's major argument for illegally interfering in Ukraine was that by doing so it prevented 'Nazis' from coming to power in Ukraine.





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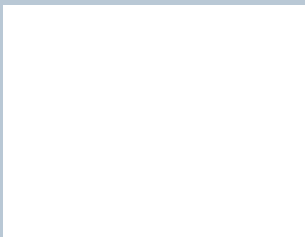
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European far-right parties have developed close relationships with Russia, based both on ideology and strategy. These parties see in President Vladimir Putin the model of a strong, conservative leader who defends traditional values and opposes the decadent West. Since most far-right parties are at the same time anti-American and against European integration, they also see a close relationship with Russia as a necessary foothold in order to achieve the gradual disassociation of their countries from Euro-Atlantic institutions. The Kremlin views these parties as possibly being useful to expand Russia's geopolitical influence. This unholy alliance should be emphasised and condemned more often in Europe.



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