

## Putinism and the European Far Right

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Under Russian president Vladimir Putin's watch, the Russian government has developed a toolkit of political, economic, informational, and military mechanisms aimed at progressing its foreign policy interests. This toolkit has been refined since Putin took office in 2000 and deployed with increasing sophistication in Russia's immediate neighborhood since 2008. Since the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013, Ukraine has witnessed the application of all the levers of influence and destabilization at the Kremlin's disposal: the manipulation of Ukraine's national politics, the exertion of economic pressure through energy dependence, and the launching of an information war aimed at discrediting the Maidan as a democratic movement. With the illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the war in the Donbas, the Kremlin resorted to its tool of last resort: direct military intervention.

While the extent of Russian military involvement in Crimea and the Donbas came as a surprise to many observers, it was not completely unpredictable given previous Russian involvement in Georgia and Moldova. With the ousting of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, a Putin ally who had reneged on his promise to sign an EU association agreement, Putin stood to lose control over a strategically important country in Russia's neighborhood. Thus, when all preferred tools of influence had failed—the installation of a Russia-friendly government and the exertion of economic pressure through control of energy inflows and prices—more direct measures had to be taken to prevent Ukraine from leaving the Russian sphere of influence. According to Putin's foreign policy doctrine, an unstable or failed state is better than a hostile state aligned with the West.

However, the Kremlin's destabilization efforts have aimed at countries far beyond its bordering states, reaching far into Eastern and Western Europe. Military intervention, the tool of last resort that the Russian Federation was able to deploy in Ukraine is not an option for NATO and EU member-states, at least not without harsh consequences that even Putin would be unwilling to accept.

In Europe, the Kremlin's destabilization efforts have been subtler. This paper focuses on one aspect of such efforts: the establishment of a relationship of mutual understanding and ideological congruence between Europe's far-right parties and the Putin doctrine, or Putinism. Investing both financial and ideological resources in parties on the extremes of the political spectrum (both right and left) is a frequently used strategy in the Kremlin's toolkit of influence. Such parties and movements, while usually on the fringe of mainstream politics, can serve to fracture political coalitions, even with low levels of electoral or public support. However, two aspects of the relationship between the Kremlin and far-right parties in Europe are unique and particularly dangerous to the future of the EU: (1) the breadth and depth of ideational overlap

between Putinism as an ideology and far-right discourses, with Euroskepticism and anti-Westernism as the master frame; and (2) the growing popularity of far-right parties across Europe since 2008, which has propelled many such parties from the fringes and into the mainstream of national politics.

The main argument in this paper is that Euroskepticism—the rejection of EU institutions and integration, and the loss of national sovereignty and cultural “dilution” that these integration processes represent—feeds into Putin’s anti-Westernism as the master frame driving the far-right–Putinist agenda. Social conservatism, while conceptually unique, is a supporting frame that buttresses both Euroskeptic and anti-Western discourses.

The combination of ideological congruence and electoral popularity means that pro-Russian political parties have gained increasingly more sway in EU and national politics. And this increasing influence has come at an auspicious time. Continued economic stagnation, an unabating refugee crisis, and recent terrorist attacks in Paris have shaken the EU dream of an ever closer union to the core. Some EU member-states, such as Sweden, France, and Germany, have already reinstated border controls to track and register migrants. In the aftermath of the Paris attacks, more countries are likely to follow. The Schengen zone of free travel—one of the most radical and comprehensive efforts to create a united Europe that has ever been seen, besides the Eurozone—is at risk. In this context, far-right parties, which have called for stricter immigration controls, warned against the so-called “Islamization” of Europe, and expressed admiration for Putin’s style of authoritarian nationalism, stand to gain even more. If or when these parties come to power, Putin’s allies will no longer be the “crazies” on the right, but the governing bodies of the EU.

### **The Rise of Pro-Russian Far-Right Parties in Europe**

Apart from the Greens, the far right is the only new party family to emerge in Western Europe since the 1980s (see Table 1 for a list of contemporary far-right parties included in this analysis). The first among these parties, the French National Front (FN), gained momentum when the party received 9.5 percent of the vote in the 1986 French parliamentary elections and scored a stunning success when reaching the second round of the 2002 presidential elections, with almost 17 percent of the national vote. In the meantime, other far-right parties in Western Europe, such as the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Belgian Vlaams Belang (VB), the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), the Italian National Alliance (AN), and Lega Nord, have all succeeded in gaining parliamentary representation and increasing popular support. The FPÖ received 21.4 percent of the popular vote in the 2013 Austrian parliamentary elections, and the FN conquered a dozen cities in the 2014 French municipal elections, establishing itself as France’s “third political force.”

Academic research on the electoral successes of far-right parties attributes variation in electoral outcomes to voters’ characteristics, socioeconomic changes, immigration, and differences in political institutions, such as thresholds for entering parliament and representative versus majoritarian systems. But these conventional theories have failed to explain the persistence and expansion of far-right parties across Europe in recent years and the adoption of far-right

discourses by center-right parties, such as Fidesz in Hungary and the Republicans in France.<sup>1</sup>

Early studies aiming to explain electoral support for the far right failed to take into account the discursive adaptability of such parties. The most electorally successful far-right parties have moved away from openly racist and xenophobic rhetoric and have pitched themselves to voters as protectors of a civic liberal tradition, which they have nevertheless successfully reframed along national lines. In these party narratives, the EU has become a threat to national sovereignty, and non-European Muslim immigrants are seen as the reason for the loss of national values and the threat to liberal democratic ideals. Far-right parties have paradoxically become defenders of European values against the encroachment of both non-European foreigners and the EU elite in Brussels. Cultural issues, rather than purely economic ones, have become the key to catapulting the far right into the political limelight.

France’s National Front is at the forefront of this far-right mainstreaming. The battle between Marine Le Pen and her father over the control of the party he founded illustrates how the far right has reinvented itself across Europe. In April 2015, Ms. Le Pen publicly distanced herself from her father after he called Nazi gas chambers a “detail of history.”<sup>2</sup> By May, Mr. Le Pen had been suspended from the party, a decision that he unsuccessfully appealed. In August, he was expelled, ostensibly for making the same kinds of comments that had won him votes in the past. Holocaust denial and open racism is out; a defense of a uniquely European culture—a Europe for Europeans, but without the meddling EU—is in.

**Table 1.** Electoral Support for Far-Right Parties in Recent National and EU Elections

| Country        | Party Name                                   | % vote in EU parliamentary election (2014) | Seats in EU Parliament | % vote in national parliamentary election | Seats in national parliament | Date of last national parliamentary election |
|----------------|--|--|------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|
| Austria        | Freedom Party (FPÖ)                          | 19.72                                      | 4                      | 20.51                                     | 40                           | 29-Sep-13                                    |
| Belgium        | Flemish Interest (VB)                        | 4.26                                       | 1                      | 3.67                                      | 3                            | 25-May-14                                    |
| Bulgaria       | Ataka (PPA)                                  | 2.96                                       | 0                      | 7.3                                       | 23                           | 12-May-13                                    |
| Czech Republic | Worker's Party of Social Justice (DSSS)      | 0.52                                       | 0                      | 0.86                                      | 0                            | 25-Oct-13                                    |
| Denmark        | People's Party                               | 26.6                                       | 4                      | 21.1                                      | 37                           | 18-Jun-15                                    |
| France         | National Front (FN)                          | 24.85                                      | 24                     | 0.35                                      | 2                            | 10-Jun-12                                    |
| Germany        | National Democratic Party (NDP)              | 1.03                                       | 1                      | 1.5                                       | 0                            | 22-Sep-13                                    |
| Greece         | Golden Dawn (XA)                             | 9.4  | 3                      | 6.3                                       | 17                           | 25-Jan-15                                    |
| Hungary        | Jobbik                                       | 14.67                                      | 3                      | 20.54                                     | 23                           | 6-Apr-14                                     |
| Italy          | Northern League (NL)                         | 6.15                                       | 5                      | 4.14                                      | 27                           | 24-Feb-13                                    |
| Lithuania      | Order and Justice (TT)                       | 14.25                                      | 2                      | 7.31                                      | 6                            | 28-Oct-12                                    |
| Netherlands    | Party for Freedom (PVV)                      | 13.3                                       | 4                      | 10.1                                      | 15                           | 12-Sep-12                                    |
| Poland         | Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland (SRP) | 0.04                                       | 0                      | 0.32                                      | 0                            | 25-Oct-15                                    |
| Slovakia       | Slovak National Party (SNS)                  | 3.61                                       | 0                      | 4.55                                      | 0                            | 10-Mar-12                                    |
| UK             | British National Party (BNP)                 | 1.09                                       | 0                      | 0   | 0                            | 7-May-15                                     |
| UK             | Independence Party (UKIP)                    | 26.6                                       | 24                     | 0.2                                       | 1                            | 7-May-15                                     |

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Haddad, “How Putin Won French Conservatives,” *The Daily Beast*, August 18, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/08/18/the-inevitable-putin-le-pen-alliance-is-so-on.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Myriam Francois-Cerrah, “Jean-Marie Le Pen May Have Been Banished, but His Ideas Endure,” *New Statesman*, August 22, 2015, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/08/jean-marie-le-pen-may-have-been-banished-his-ideas-endure>.

## Putinism and Far-Right Ideologies

This paper examines the manifestations of Putinism in Russia's foreign policy since Putin came to power in 2000. Here, Putinism is defined as the combination of post-totalitarian authoritarianism,<sup>3</sup> nationalism, and anti-Westernism.<sup>4</sup>

The ideologies of far-right parties differ between countries—Hungary's Jobbik, for example, has purposely distanced itself from France's National Front, calling the FN a party of “faithless liberalism.”<sup>5</sup> For her part, Marine Le Pen as leader of the FN excluded Jobbik from the EU parliamentary faction on the grounds that it is too extremist. On social values, the far right is also a mixed bag, with parties like the Dutch PVV supporting LGBT rights, while Austria's FPÖ defines a family as “a partnership between a man and woman with common children.” The point here is not to analyze differences between far-right parties in Europe, of which there are plenty, but rather to emphasize the commonality of the far right's agenda and its mutually beneficial relationship with Putinism.

## Framing Processes

The congruence of popular opinion, far-right party discourses, and Putinism is similar to the notion of “framing,” which social movement scholars have used to describe the making of meaning in the process of movement formation, from initial organization to political mobilization and finally to frame alignment. Social movement scholars use the concept of “collective action frames” to describe the meaning-making process carried out by political elites, activists, and the general public that successful social movements employ. In frame theory, “social movements are not viewed merely as carriers of extant ideas and meanings that grow automatically out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies.”<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, movement actors shape and generalize grievances by drawing on collective identities to produce movement solidarity around a set of ideas—in the case of the far-right, the Euroskepticism that coalesces with the Kremlin's anti-Western bend.

Social movement scholars who examine cognitive frames are concerned with the micro-processes of “meaning work,” or how social movement organizations construct and shape group grievances into broader political claims. In this view, “collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization.”<sup>7</sup> Social movement frames define “us” and “them,” articulate injustices, attribute blame, organize consensus, and motivate action.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lev Gudkov, “The Nature of ‘Putinism,’” *Russian Politics and Law* 49, no. 2 (2011): 7–33.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Putinism: Russian and Its Future with the West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary, “Jobbik and France's National Front: The Difference Could Not Be Larger,” [http://www.jobbik.com/jobbik\\_and\\_frances\\_national\\_front\\_the\\_difference\\_could\\_not\\_be\\_larger](http://www.jobbik.com/jobbik_and_frances_national_front_the_difference_could_not_be_larger).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Benford and David Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26, no. 1 (2000): 611–39.

<sup>7</sup> David Snow and Robert Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,” *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988): 197–218.

<sup>8</sup> Gamson, William. 1975. *The Strategy of Social Protest*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey. Ibid.

Political leaders have an important role in shaping and aligning framing processes. Successful movement entrepreneurs,<sup>9</sup> a group to which far-right party leaders certainly belong, are particularly adept at recognizing political opportunities and tapping into popular frames, such as disillusionment with the EU and anti-immigrant sentiments. But even if the political opportunity is there, collective mobilization may not occur without individuals or organizations capable of convincingly aggrandizing popular grievances. In the case of the far right, the political opportunity is there thanks to the economic crisis, the refugee crisis, and the possibility of EU integration, as is political entrepreneurship.

The key to mobilization is that social movement frames have to resonate with popular cognitive frames.<sup>10</sup> Resonance depends on how credible the frame is and on the extent of its relevance to the target population. Credibility can be undermined if, for example, movement discourse does not match movement activity. Frame salience is increased when the social movement can appeal to a core belief, reflect everyday experience, or tap into a cultural myth, which is exactly what the far right and the Putin regime have been particularly adept at.

### **Euroskepticism and Anti-Westernism**

Euroskepticism has been a galvanizing issue for far-right parties and nicely aligns with Putin's anti-Western rhetoric. Far-right parties across Europe have increasingly used anti-EU rhetoric since the signing of the Maastricht Treaty.<sup>11</sup> Euroskepticism has become so ubiquitous and taken for granted among far-right parties in Western and Eastern Europe that it has been largely forgotten that this has not always been the case. In the 1980s, for example, far-right parties such as the FN supported EU integration.

Recent academic research supports the notion that far-right parties are winning votes because of their new anti-EU turn. Studies show that Euroskeptic attitudes, rather than anti-immigrant attitudes and ethnic nationalism, are driving support for far-right parties.<sup>12</sup> Europeans' public approval of the EU has declined dramatically since the financial crisis (and will likely go down even more in the aftermath of the ongoing refugee crisis). Between 2012 and 2013 alone, median support for the EU fell from 60 to 45 percent.<sup>13</sup> Marine Le Pen has derided the EU as an "anti-democratic monster" while in the same breath exalting Putin for doing "what is good for Russia and the Russians."

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<sup>9</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Cedric de Leon, Manali Desai, and Cihan Tuğal, "Political Articulation: Parties and the Constitution of Cleavages in the United States, India, and Turkey," *Sociological Theory* 27, no. 3 (2009): 193–219.

<sup>11</sup> Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007);

<sup>12</sup> Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Daphe Halikiopoulou, Kyriaki Nanou, and Sofia Vasilopoulou, "The Paradox of Nationalism: The Common Denominator of Radical Right and Radical Left Euroscepticism," *European Journal of Political Research* 51, no. 4 (2012): 504–39; Han Werts, Peer Scheepers, and Marcel Lubbers, "Euroscepticism and Radical Right-Wing Voting in Europe, 2002–2008: Social Cleavages, Socio-Political Attitudes and Contextual Characteristics Determining Voting for the Radical Right," *European Union Politics* 14, no. 2 (2013): 183–205

<sup>13</sup> Pew Research Center, "The New Sick Man of Europe: The European Union" (2013), <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/05/13/the-new-sick-man-of-europe-the-european-union/>.

Thus, for far-right parties, adopting a Euroskeptic discourse that allows such parties to blame Brussels for economic stagnation and lack of border controls is a smart political strategy.

The far right's electoral strategy also complements Russians' negative opinion of the EU, as well as the Russian government's anti-Western rhetoric. According to a June 2015 Pew survey, 60 percent of Russians have an unfavorable view of the EU, and 80 percent have an unfavorable view of NATO.<sup>14</sup> One-third of Russians also blame Western sanctions linked to Ukraine for the worsening economic situation. In Russians' distaste for the West, Putin comes out on top: according to the most recent polling by the Levada Center, Putin enjoys a popularity rating of 88 percent.<sup>15</sup> While some have questioned the validity of the Levada surveys, most observers of Russian society would agree that Putin does enjoy majority support at home. Much of this support has been built on the regime's ability to position itself as a challenge to Western hegemony and European liberalism.

In Russian domestic policy, anti-Westernism has manifested itself in the banning of "undesirable" organizations in Russia. In 2012, the Russian Federation passed the so-called "foreign agent" law, which requires all nongovernmental organizations working in Russia to register as foreign agents if they receive foreign funding. In 2015, as a follow-up to the foreign agent law, Putin signed the "undesirable organizations law," which authorized Russian prosecutors to declare foreign organizations undesirable for Russian society and to shut them down. Most, if not all, international organizations, such as the National Endowment for Democracy, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, and others, were branded as undesirable and forced to close down their offices.<sup>16</sup> These laws aim at repressing civil society but also send a clear message that Western values, as represented by international organizations engaged in democracy promotion, have no place in Russia.

In its foreign policy, particularly in Ukraine and more recently in Syria, Russia under Putin has aimed to position itself as a mediator of peace, a protector of vulnerable peoples, and the arbiter of stability in contrast to Western interventionism. In Ukraine, the now well-known Russian media narrative framed the Euromaidan Revolution as a fascist coup supported by Europe and the United States. Russia's "annexation" of Crimea, an act that Russian officials first denied and Putin later boasted about in a government-produced documentary (*Crimea: The Way Back Home*), won Putin an increase in popularity, because, according to the official narrative, Russia (and Putin specifically) stepped in to "save" Crimea from Western-supported fascists.

Since 2012, anti-Western rhetoric has become more prominent in Russian officials' public statements as Russia seeks to assert itself as the leader of the "anti-Western" world.<sup>17</sup> Putin's hard anti-Western turn in 2012 followed on the heels of the 2011 Bolotnaya protests. The

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<sup>14</sup> Jacob Poushter, Katie Simmons, and Bruce Stokes, "Russian Public Opinion: Putin Praised, West Panned," Pew Research Center (2015), <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/2-russian-public-opinion-putin-praised-west-panned/>.

<sup>15</sup> Levada Center, "Approval of Putin" (2005), <http://www.levada.ru/eng/>.

<sup>16</sup> "Soros Fund and World Ukrainian Congress Enter NGO 'Stop-List,'" *RIA Novosti*, July 7, 2015, <http://ria.ru/society/20150707/1118850670.html> (in Russian).

<sup>17</sup> Masha Gessen, "Russia Is Remaking Itself as the Leader of the Anti-Western World." *Washington Post*, March 30, 2014.

demonstrations, held in response to election fraud, brought, by some estimates, over 100,000 Russians out to demand free elections and an end to corruption. The protests were contained using mass arrests, but Putin, still prime minister at the time, seems to have learned a lesson. When he entered his third term in 2012, Putin reversed Dmitriy Medvedev's mild reforms, such as the election of regional governors, set about repressing the independent news media, arrested opposition leaders, and condoned murders such as that of Boris Nemtsov.

Putin's repression of the domestic opposition paralleled the Russian state media's refocused attention on Cold War themes: Russia's greatness in defeating the Nazis in World War II was paired with an anti-liberalism that focused on the United States, with Europe a close second. But, as Stoner and McFaul note, while "the Kremlin propaganda machine portrayed the United States as an imperial, predatory state, which constantly undermined international stability and violated the sovereignty of other states," this stance was different from that employed during the Cold War. "Putin's regime added a new dimension to the ideological struggle—conservative Russia versus the liberal West. Russian state-controlled media asserted that Putin had nurtured the rebirth of a conservative, Orthodox Christian society."<sup>18</sup>

### **Social Conservatism: Putin and the Far-Right as Protectors of Traditional Values**

Europe's far-right parties and the Putin doctrine frame their respective nations and people as being in the middle of a culture war between Western liberal plurality and traditional Christian values. In 2013, the Center for Strategic Communications—a Russian based think-tank—published a report entitled "Putin: The New World Leader of Conservatism."<sup>19</sup> Putin, according to this report, stands for traditional values in a world fraught with instability: law and order, family, and the Christian heritage. The FN's Marine Le Pen has praised Putin for standing up for Christian civilization and traditional values, hailing him as a "natural ally to Europe."<sup>20</sup>

At the center of the far right and Putin's traditionalism are LGBT rights. In Russia, an anti-gay propaganda law passed in June 2013 that allows the government to infringe on LGBT individuals' rights by banning peaceful demonstrations or imposing hefty fines on same-sex couples who are affectionate in public. The law was widely criticized by Western media, but domestically, anti-LGBT discourse and laws find support among the population. According to Pew polls, Russia is one of the most homophobic societies, with 74 percent of Russians saying that homosexuality should not be accepted in society.<sup>21</sup> This puts Russia closer to Middle Eastern countries like Lebanon (where 80 percent of the population disapproves of homosexuality) and predominantly Muslim countries like Pakistan (87 percent) and Malaysia (86 percent) than to other European countries, which are overwhelmingly accepting of homosexuality. And it is precisely this tolerance for homosexual relationships that drives a wedge between Russia and Europe and unites Europe's far right with Putin's Russia.

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<sup>18</sup> Kathryn Stoner and Michael McFaul, "Who Lost Russia (This Time)? Vladimir Putin," *Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2015): 167–87.

<sup>19</sup> "Expert: Vladimir Putin Becomes a Leader of World Conservatism," *RBK*, December 10, 2013, <http://www.rbc.ru/politics/10/12/2013/893963.shtml> (in Russian).

<sup>20</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, "Europe's Far Right Still Loves Putin," *Washington Post*, February 18, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/02/18/europes-far-right-still-loves-putin/>.

<sup>21</sup> Pew Research Center, "The Global Divide on Homosexuality" (2013), <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/06/04/the-global-divide-on-homosexuality/>.

In the Putinist doctrine, Europe's tolerance and acceptance of LGBT rights is a symbol of the West's cultural degradation. The Russian state media often uses European and U.S. expansion of legal rights to same-sex couples to paint a picture of a civilization in crisis, a Sodom and Gomorrah on the verge of collapse. In 2014, Vitaly Milonov, a conservative St. Petersburg politician who sponsored the local legislation that laid the groundwork for the federal anti-gay propaganda law, urged Russian media to boycott the European song contest Eurovision, because one of the contestants (and eventual winner) was a drag queen. He called the contest a "Sodom show," and when gay marriage was legalized in the United States in 2015, Milonov threatened to block citizens from Facebook because of its influence in promoting gay rights.<sup>22</sup>

In the renewed culture war between Western social liberalism and traditional conservatism, Europe's far-right parties have stood with Putin. In 2013, representatives of Europe's far-right parties, including BNP and Golden Dawn, traveled to Moscow to take part in a conference organized by a group called the Russian National Forum (see Appendix for a chronology of the far-right's Russian connections). Together, Russian nationalists and the European far-right members discussed the challenges posed by pro-LGBT legislation in Europe to traditional values.<sup>23</sup> UKIP, the more mainstream of the two British far-right parties, stated its opposition to same-sex marriage. As has Austria's FPÖ. In 2012, taking notes from Russia's anti-gay laws, Jobbik also proposed an amendment to ban "gay propaganda."

Social conservative values are used both by the far right and within the Putin doctrine to delineate who belongs in their national vision versus who does not, and to take up the anti-Western position. They succeed by tying moral values into a broader master frame that captures the public zeitgeist that the EU and the West are in cultural decline, that the European dream is an illusion, and that a strong anti-Western leader is needed to protect traditional values and institute stability.

### **Conclusion: The Future of the Far-Right–Putin Relationship**

While the focus of this paper is on the ideological congruence between far-right parties and Putinism, multiple reports have exposed how the Kremlin directly finances the European far right. The most famous case was the revelation in 2014 that the FN had received 40 million euros from a Russian-controlled bank. Evidence also points to the Kremlin's financing of Jobbik since 2008.<sup>24</sup> One of Jobbik's MPs, Bela Kovacs, is likely to be put on trial by the European Parliament on charges of spying for Russia. The Austrian FPÖ and the Bulgarian Ataka parties have also faced allegations of accepting Russian financing.<sup>25</sup> The Kremlin's investment in these groups is paying off at a premium.

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<sup>22</sup> "Milonov Demanded that the Roskomnadzor Close Facebook," *Russian News Service*, June 27, 2015, <http://rusnovosti.ru/posts/378115> (in Russian).

<sup>23</sup> Antonis Klapsis, "An Unholy Alliance: The European Far Right and Putin's Russia" (Wilfried Martens Center for European Studies, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Attila Juhász, Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó, and András Dezső, "I Am Eurasian": The Kremlin Connections of the Hungarian Far-Right" (Social Development Institute, March 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Rettman, "Reports Multiply of Kremlin Links to Anti-EU Parties," *EU Observer*, November 26, 2014, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/126676>.



Far-right parties consistently support the Kremlin's interests in the European Parliament, where they have done particularly well, and far-right political leaders praise Putin's aggressive foreign policy in public. For example, members of far-right parties have acted as election observers in the occupied territories of Ukraine: in March 2014, members of the FPÖ, the VB, Ataka, the FN, Jobbik, and the LN endorsed the validity of the Crimean referendum, which, like Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, has not been recognized by any international body or nation. UKIP's Farage has spoken out in interviews and in statements to the European Parliament accusing the EU of encroaching on Russia's interests and inciting the Maidan Revolution. On economic and political issues, the far right has also taken the Kremlin's side. As Klapsis notes, "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." And the European far right is here to stay.

Today, the EU is in crisis mode. The ongoing refugee crisis is feeding the far right's long-standing demands for stricter border controls. Some countries, like Hungary, Bulgaria, and Slovenia, are set to build fences on their borders. Germany has instituted temporary border controls, as has Sweden. The terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, shook Europeans to the core, especially as rumors swirled that some of the attackers had snuck in with the millions of refugees streaming into Europe. The tragic events in Paris, in which 129 people were killed in a coordinated effort by ISIS, may prompt more Europeans to look to strong-willed leaders who will take an aggressive stance against immigration and challenge the EU's open border policy. Such disgruntled publics will have no further to look than their homegrown far-right parties.

As the European far right makes gains, as it is likely to do, Putin will wield a more powerful lever for influencing European policy. Centrist European politicians may eventually be forced to concede ground to anti-European, and now pro-Russian, sentiments if they want to win reelection. Fearing the power of voters aligned with UKIP, FN, and other parties, European leaders may become reluctant to take a strong stance against Russia. An EU so crippled by inward-looking national politics that it cannot be a counterweight to Russian aggression is exactly what the Kremlin wants. If anti-EU, pro-Russian voices gain a foothold in national governments, a Europe united on foreign policy becomes difficult to imagine.

But while it may be clear how aligning with Europe's far-right parties serves the Kremlin, it is less clear what (aside from financing) the far right gets from supporting Putin. The answer to this may rest more with ideology than with financing. The European right sees the Russian leader as a staunch defender of national sovereignty and conservative values who has challenged U.S. influence and the idea of "Europe" in a way that mirrors their own convictions. They also see Russia's posturing to reassert its geopolitical interests—something the EU prevents members from doing unilaterally—as successful. Putin's self-proclaimed role as the leader of the new conservative world undoubtedly strikes a chord with parties that see themselves as carrying the mantle of true European conservatism.

A Europe with far-right parties in power will bring new allies to Putin's anti-Western and anti-American campaign. European countries with a far-right party at the helm will also likely benefit economically from good relations with Russia. In addition to direct party financing, Russia still provides a third of the EU's natural gas imports, and Russia has been known to be generous to its

allies on gas pricing. Before long, the United States may find in Europe not a strategic ally, but a pro-Russian political force.

#### **Appendix: Recent Chronology of Kremlin Relations with European Far-Right Parties**

- *May 26, 2015*: French National Front leader Marine Le Pen visits Moscow and meets with Speaker Sergei Naryshkin<sup>26</sup>
- *March 22, 2015*: European far-right groups back Putin at a St. Petersburg forum attended by 150 members of Russian nationalist and right-wing European parties<sup>27</sup>
- *February 16, 2015*: Hungarian President Victor Orban, head of the far-right Fidesz Party, agrees to work with Moscow to build a new nuclear power plant<sup>28</sup>
- *November 27, 2014*: €9 million of a total loan of €40m is loaned by the First Czech-Russian Bank to Marine Le Pen's Front National to use in upcoming regional and presidential elections<sup>29</sup>
- *November 25, 2014*: Austrian FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache posts pictures of himself and other FPÖ leaders at a high-level conference in Moscow<sup>30</sup>
- *November 2, 2014*: Members of the European far right act as international "observers" in the November 2014 general elections in Ukraine's self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics<sup>31</sup>
- *May 19, 2014*: Jobbik MEP Bela Kovacs is officially accused of spying for Russia in return for money<sup>32</sup>
- *May 2014*: Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev organizes a meeting in Vienna with delegates from the FPÖ, France's National Front, and Bulgaria's Ataka<sup>33</sup>
- *April 10, 2014*: Latvian MEP Tatjana Zdanoka is accused of "being an agent of influence for Russia"

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<sup>26</sup> "French National Front Leader Marine Le Pen Visits Moscow," *Yahoo News*, May 26, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/french-national-front-leader-marine-le-pen-visits-164635054.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Marina Koreneva, "European Far-Right Groups Back Putin at Russia Forum," *Yahoo*, March 22, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/european-far-meets-russia-pro-kremlin-forum-171138383.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Faiola, "From Russia with Love: An Energy Deal With Hungary," *Washington Post*, February 16, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/from-russia-with-love-an-energy-deal-for-hungary/2015/02/16/05216670-b134-11e4-bf39-5560f3918d4b\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/from-russia-with-love-an-energy-deal-for-hungary/2015/02/16/05216670-b134-11e4-bf39-5560f3918d4b_story.html).

<sup>29</sup> "France: €40m of Russian Cash Will Allow Marine Le Pen's Front National to Take Advantage of Rivals' Woes in Upcoming Regional and Presidential Elections," *Voting News*, November 28, 2014, <http://thevotingnews.com/e40m-of-russian-cash-will-allow-marine-le-pens-front-national-to-take-advantage-of-rivals-woes-in-upcoming-regional-and-presidential-elections-the-independent/>.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Rettman, "Reports Multiply of Kremlin Links to Anti-EU Parties," *EU Observer*, November 26, 2014, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/126676>.

<sup>31</sup> Allison Quinn, "The Faces Behind Ukraine's Rebel Election Observer Mission," *Moscow Times*, November 6, 2014, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/article.php?id=510773>; Anton Shekhovtsov, "Fake Monitors 'Observe' Fake Elections in the Donbass," *Anton Shekhovtsov's Blog*, November 1, 2014, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2014/11/fake-monitors-observe-fake-elections-in.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Zoltán Kovács, "Parliamentary Committee on National Security Accuses Jobbik MEP Bela Kovacs of Spying for Russia," *Budapest Beacon*, May 19, 2014, <http://budapestbeacon.com/politics/parliamentary-committee-on-national-security-accuses-jobbik-mep-bela-kovacs-of-spying-for-russia/8141>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid; Ilya Arkhipov, Henry Meyer, and Irina Reznik, "Putin's 'Soros' Dreams of Empire as Allies Wage Ukraine Revolt," *Bloomberg*, June 15, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-06-15/putin-s-soros-dreams-of-empire-as-allies-wage-ukraine-revolt>.

- *March 16, 2014*: In the Crimea referendum, Aymeric Chauprade, the National Front's top European Parliament candidate for the Paris region and a foreign policy advisor to Marine Le Pen; and officials from FPÖ; representatives of "a Flemish nationalist group in Belgium"; and Bela Kovacs, the Jobbik politician accused of spying for Russia, serve as election monitors<sup>34</sup>
- *May 2013*: Kremlin-connected right-wing Russian nationalists at the prestigious Moscow State University invite Jobbik Party president Gabor Vona to speak at an event
- *October 2012*: Ataka's leader, 2012: Ataka's leader, Volen Siderov, travels to Moscow (reportedly at his own expense) to celebrate Putin's sixtieth birthday and threatens to leave Ataka if it supported further sanctions against Russia<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew Higgins, "Far-Right Fever for a Europe Tied to a Russia," *New York Times*, May 20, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/21/world/europe/europes-far-right-looks-to-russia-as-a-guiding-force.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Alina Polyakova, "Strange Bedfellows: Putin and Europe's Far-Right," *World Affairs Journal* September/October (2014), <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/strange-bedfellows-putin-and-europe%E2%80%99s-far-right>.