



**A Guide
to the Russian
Tool Box
of Election
Meddling:
a Platform to
Analyse the
Long Term
Comprehensive
Kremlin
Strategy of
Malign
Influence**

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Introduction

Meddling into the domestic political processes of foreign states by Vladimir Putin's Russia has become the new reality of the modern world for quite some time now. As demonstrated by research within The Alliance for Securing Democracy, a project at the German Marshall Fund, Russia has interfered in the political processes of at least 27 countries of Europe and North America since 2004. The interference allegedly includes multiple methods, varying between cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns¹.

Naturally, the meddling has drawn the attention of Western analysts, as well as politicians, security services and the media. Along with case studies of Russia's meddling, conducted by think tanks and even the U.S. Senate², analysis of arguably successful examples of confronting such Kremlin's actions is becoming available³.

However, with new details coming into focus, occasionally the scale of Russian meddling and the tools used still makes an impression even on the experts⁴. It is also true that both political scientists and official institutions of the West

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- 1 Oren Dorell, "Alleged Russian political meddling documented in 27 countries since 2004", USA Today, September 7, 2017, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/09/07/alleged-russian-political-meddling-documented-27-countries-since-2004/619056001/>
 - 2 Putin's asymmetric assault on democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for U.S. national security, Minority staff report for the 105th Congress, U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FinalRR.pdf>
 - 3 Erik Brattberg, Tim Maurer, "Russian Election Interference: Europe's Counter to Fake News and Cyber Attacks", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 23, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/23/russian-election-interference-europe-s-counter-to-fake-news-and-cyber-attacks-pub-76435>, H.A.Conley, J.B.Jeangene Vilmer, "Successfully Countering Russian Electoral Interference", Center for strategic and international studies, June 21, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/successfully-countering-russian-electoral-interference>
 - 4 Bradley Barth, "Experts surprised by extent of Russian election meddling, demand voting security for 2018", SC Media, June 07, 2017, <https://www.scmagazine.com/experts-surprised-by-extent-of-russian-election-meddling-demand-voting-security-for-2018/article/666771/>

still disagree on the level of significance and actual forms of Russia's meddling⁵, and the end goals of these malign operations.

For example, though the Director of the U.S. National Intelligence Dan Coats publicly warned in May 2017 that Moscow "was using sophisticated cyber-techniques to influence the outcome of the election, just as it had done in the 2016 US Presidential vote", the message received a sceptical welcome⁶. The official statement that Russia did not interfere in the UK election came later⁷.

After a year, a special investigation revealed that the Kremlin could have directly helped the opposition leader, Jeremy Corbyn, during the general election in 2017⁸. The politician, who is still openly demonstrating that he is "blind to the truth about Russia"⁹, and his Labour Party, performed much better than expected before the beginning of the electoral campaign.¹⁰ Yet, rather than another case of the Kremlin's meddling and a need of further investigation into this possible episode of malign activities, discussions after the investigation which disclosed Russia's assistance to Corbyn's campaign focused on reliability of the research data and its conclusions¹¹.

Despite a rather clear statement in the declassified assessment by the U.S. intelligence community that Russia's regular efforts to undermine the country's democratic fundamentals and the goal to help Donald Trump to be elected (and to denigrate Hillary Clinton) were complementary¹², there are still ongoing discussions on which of these goals was central.

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- 5 Steven Yoder, "Russian Disinformation: Everywhere? Nowhere? Neither?", Coda Media, August 24, 2017, <https://codastory.com/disinformation-crisis/information-war/is-russian-disinformation-everywhere-or-nowhere?platform=hootsuite>
- 6 Andrew Foxall, "Why Russia (probably) isn't hacking the general election", CapX, 5 June 2017, <https://capx.co/why-russia-probably-isnt-hacking-the-general-election/>
- 7 Paul D. Shinkman, "British Say Election Was Free of Russian Meddling", U.S. News, 16 June, 2017, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-06-16/british-say-election-was-free-of-russian-meddling#close-modal>
- 8 "Exposed: Russian Twitter bots tried to swing general election for Jeremy Corbyn", The Times, 29 April, 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/exposed-russian-twitter-bots-tried-to-swing-general-election-for-jeremy-corbyn-zffv8652x>
- 9 "Why Jeremy Corbyn is still blind to the truth about Russia", The Financial Times, March 16, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/2812d81a-2870-11e8-b27e-cc62a39d57a0>
- 10 Jim Pickard, "Labour election triumph silences Jeremy Corbyn's critics", The Financial Times, June 9, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/dc3a43ca-4d22-11e7-a3f4-c742b9791d43>
- 11 Chris Stokel-Walker, "There are some major issues with claims Russian bots swayed the election in Jeremy Corbyn's favour", Wired, 1 May, 2018, <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/jeremy-corbyn-russia-twitter-research>
- 12 "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections", Intelligence community assesment (ICA), 6 January, 2017, https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf



The same applies to Russia's support to Corbyn. Even those who do not rule out the probability of this support, e.g. Senior Research Fellow Ewan Lawson of RUSI think tank in London, argue that, for the Kremlin, it is not about having a particular outcome; it is more about undermining confidence in Western democracy and the electoral system¹³.

It must also be acknowledged that Russian election meddling is frequently simplified and reduced to cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns, big or small. In other words, the information warfare element of the overall meddling mosaic, and, in particular, the role of the internet for spreading the Kremlin's influence, is mostly in focus. Meanwhile, revealed examples of meddling from several countries show that the malign activities are much more comprehensive and utilize many tools, while the whole process is far more multi-level and diversified than mere tactics of information warfare.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the former NATO Secretary General, and Michael Chertoff, the former United States Secretary of Homeland Security, are confident that the West is still unprepared to stop Russia's election meddling. It

13 Shoshana Kedem, "2017 UK general election: Did Russian Twitter bots boost Jeremy Corbyn?", *Verdict*, 4 May, 2018, <https://www.verdict.co.uk/did-russian-bots-sway-the-2017-uk-election/>

urged them to establish the Transatlantic Commission on Election Integrity. Rasmussen and Chertoff see a lack of understanding about the comprehensive nature of the challenge as one of the reasons of the West's unpreparedness: "Worryingly, Western governments are still fighting the last war: They're stuck in the blunt 2016 lexis of "fake news," while current trends indicate that Russia and similar adversaries are sharpening their toolkit".¹⁴

Yet, other experts (including this paper's author) believe that the Kremlin hardly invents something new; it is still applying KGB methods, but with some new tools.

"It's the same playbook they used in the Cold War era," says Clint Watts, a researcher at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, U.S. In the 2016 election, a kind of a symbol for Russian meddling, he says, Russia "just used a digital battlefield instead of an analog one. They didn't do anything in terms of strategic doctrine that was different. It was just much easier to execute in cyberspace and social media than they could have ever done in the 1980s."¹⁵

"There is nothing new about a Russian government seeking to exert influence in Western countries. For many decades, the Soviet Union supported Western communist parties and ran disinformation campaigns [...] They have returned to their old tactics — but with some new twists. We already know that social media makes it much easier for the Russian state to spread disinformation. Less attention has been paid to the Russian private businessmen who make it much easier for the Russian state to win friends and buy influence than their Soviet counterparts did", - Anne Applebaum, a well-known journalist and expert on Russia, agrees that there aren't many innovations in what Russia is doing.¹⁶

"Service A's (this was the name of the KGB office responsible for implementation of 'active measures' – M. L.) active measures to influence U.S. politics and undermine the role of the United States in the world persisted until the final years of the Soviet regime. As late as 1991, KGB-inspired disinformation and forgeries continued to circulate. Throughout this time, the chief aim of

14 Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Michael Chertoff, "The West Still Isn't Prepared to Stop Russia Meddling in Our Elections", Politico, 5 June, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/06/05/russia-election-meddling-prepared-218594>

15 Garret M. Graph, "A Guide to Russia's High Tech Tool Box for Subverting U.S. Democracy", Wired, 13 August, 2017, <https://www.wired.com/story/a-guide-to-russias-high-tech-tool-box-for-subverting-us-democracy/>

16 Anne Applebaum, "The critical questions on Russia", The Washington Post, 26 March, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/the-critical-questions-on-russia/2017/03/26/0be96e7c-10ae-11e7-9b0d-d27c98455440_story.html?utm_term=.2ed78db98f03

the KGB and GRU was to “undermine the US-led liberal democratic order,” the same goal that is now being attributed to the Russian intelligence services,” – Mark Kramer of Harvard University, senior fellow and program director of the project on Cold War studies at the Davis Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies, emphasizes Russia’s same goals as well as the same measures since times of the Soviet Union. By the way, he reminds us that information is available on repeated attempts of meddling by the Kremlin in U.S. elections during the Cold War.¹⁷

On the other hand, we should admit that Russian meddling is neither always unified nor consistent in its model of application. Some experts even identify differences between the Russian ways of gaining political influence in America and Europe, and in particular, Eastern Europe¹⁸.

Still, even if these models differ, it does not rule out opportunities for certain generalizations. The authors of the study *Does Russia interfere in Czech, Austrian and Hungarian elections?*, presented in cooperation by Hungary’s Policy Research and Consulting Institute *Political Capital*, the Czech think tank *European Values* and Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW) at the end of 2017, outline the following tools applied by Russia for election meddling:

We should admit that this scheme is probably one of the most comprehensive in grasping the generalized strategy of Russia’s meddling in the political processes of the West; yet, the analysis of experiences of different countries suggests that it does not reveal this phenomenon in its full complexity, neither in terms of actors involved, nor mechanisms applied or goals pursued.

Therefore, the task of this paper is a ‘stock-taking’ or an ‘audit’ of Russia’s meddling in Western elections, referenda or even politics in general. Along with creating a list, as exhaustive as possible, of tools and techniques of malign activities, used by the Kremlin in different places and in multiple cases, it is also an attempt to analyse possible implications of the phenomenon of Russian meddling in political processes of the West in recent times.

17 Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Roots of Meddling in U.S. Politics”, PONARS Eurasia, January, 2017, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/soviet-roots-meddling-us-politics>

18 Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó, Jakub Janda, Bernhard Weidinger, “Does Russia interfere in Czech, Austrian and Hungarian elections?”, Political Capital, European Values Think-tank in cooperation with DöW, 2017, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/pcadmin/source/documents/western_experiences_eastern_vulnerabilities_20171012.pdf



Funding: open and secret, direct and indirect

As a rule, direct Russian meddling in elections and politics of foreign countries in general is believed to be a rather new phenomenon. A research of the Atlantic Council *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses* links it to Putin's come-back to the presidential office in 2012, triggering the spread of 'active measures'.¹⁹

It was also only after the annexation of Crimea when concerns emerged over The Kremlin's attempts to fund favourable political parties and individual politicians.²⁰

However, Russian meddling in politics and funding, direct or indirect, of pro-Russian political forces and their electoral campaigns, began much earlier. In particular, the research of the above-mentioned project at the German Marshall Fund, The Alliance for Securing Democracy, mentions support to the later-impeached Rolandas Paksas during the 2003 presidential elections in Lithuania as the first case of meddling.

In general, the case of Paksas' impeachment could be one of the strongest examples of the potential complexity of Russia's influence operations, their ability of bringing together interests of private individuals and those of Putin's regime

19 Alina Polyakova, Marlene Laruelle, Stefan Meister, and Neil Barnett, "The Kremlin's Trojan Horses", Atlantic Council: Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center, November 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/Kremlin-trojan-horses>

20 Mitchell A. Orenstein, "Putin's Western Allies", Foreign Affairs, 25 March, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-25/putins-western-allies>

for pursuing the Kremlin's goals, and the variety of tools they use, ranging from the Kremlin-friendly businesses to interests of the mafia²¹ or arms trafficking²².

It is worth focusing on the funding component of Paksas' election as the president of Lithuania. Yuri Borisov became the key donor of Paksas' electoral campaign. Having connections with the Russian defence industry, Borisov lived and did business in Lithuania; his company Aviabaltika was facing accusations of illegal arms trade with Sudan. Borisov formally donated more than 1 million litas (about 400 thousand USD) to Paksas' electoral campaign²³; research documents indicate, though, that the actual amount of support could have been over 1 million USD²⁴.

It is not only the differences in amount that matter, or the fact that the official funding can serve as a cover for a much higher unofficial one. As important, is that this case of support could illustrate a certain model of illegal 'business', since Borisov saw it as an investment to bring several-fold return through services of Paksas as president.

This example reveals one of the reasons why, rather than directly from the budget of Russian intelligence, funding almost always comes from private money of individuals tied to Putin's regime in a certain way. It can be affirmed that it is not only about having a cover or an attempt to conceal Russia's malign operations. The point is, that individuals that participate in these financing schemes also possess private interests that they actively pursue. These private interests are in harmony with the broader interests of the Kremlin.

"[These roots] don't start with the election; they start with money, and namely Russian oligarch money," – explains Seva Gunitsky, the Russian-born politics professor at the University of Toronto, this time about Russia's meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election²⁵. In his words, it is important to understand

21 "Lithuanian leader in 'mafia' row", BBC News, 27 November, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3244478.stm>

22 Steven Lee Myers, "Lithuania Ousts President Over Dealings With Businessman", The New York Times, 6 April, 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/06/international/asia/lithuania-ousts-president-over-dealings-with-businessman.html>

23 Oren Dorell, "Alleged Russian political meddling documented in 27 countries since 2004", USA Today, September 7, 2017, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/09/07/alleged-russian-political-meddling-documented-27-countries-since-2004/619056001/>

24 Contract between R. Paksas and Y. Borisov, 21 February, 2004, <http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3227236-2004-02-21-Contract-Between-R-Paksas-and-Y.html>

25 Sean Illing, "Set aside Putin and follow the money": a Russia expert's theory of the Trump scandal", Vox, 3 January, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/2017/7/18/15983910/donald-trump-russia-putin-fbi-collusion-fusion-gps>

that Putin's regime is not as monolithic as the West often imagines, with a variety of internal interests. Trump-connected interests of Russian oligarchs or even shadow world actors are decades old, while Putin himself might not even have known about Trump several years ago.

If we grasp this aspect of the funding model of Russian influence, we will have to admit that it is not only election meddling that poses a threat; the problem is about the penetration of Russia-connected businesses into the West where they move on to promote their interests in a similarly non-transparent way. This influence does not begin or end with a certain election, regardless of its outcome.

Cynically enough, even Putin's foreign policy advisor Sergey Karaganov admits this way of promoting Russian influence by open statements that the Kremlin "buys the elite of foreign countries with money that was then stolen, likely together"²⁶.

It is thus safe to say that, along with being the most well-known and doubtless case, financing the leader of the French far-right Marine Le Pen by providing a million in loans through a Russia-linked Czech bank²⁷ is also the simplest funding scheme, unlikely to be used by the Kremlin in the future.

This is why it is not only direct Russian money participation in Western politics that should be avoided. Both the above-mentioned investigation by the U.S. Senate²⁸ and the above-mentioned study of the Atlantic Council *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses*²⁹ outline a potential threat of insufficient supervision of the involvement in UK politics of money from European companies allegedly tied in with Russia.

Currently, there are two known cases on either side of Atlantic of how Russia, at least in theory, can use decisions of national businesses on supporting allegedly political-related things, for promoting its influence.

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- 26 Christian Neef, "We Are Smarter, Stronger and More Determined", Spiegel, 13 July, 2016, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-with-putin-foreign-policy-advisor-sergey-karaganov-a-1102629.html>
 - 27 Gabriel Gatehouse, "Marine Le Pen: Who's funding France's far right?", BBC News, 3 April, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39478066>
 - 28 Patrick Wintour, "Russian bid to influence Brexit vote detailed in new US Senate report", The Guardian, 10 January, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/10/russian-influence-brexit-vote-detailed-us-senate-report>
 - 29 Alina Polyakova, Marlene Laruelle, Stefan Meister, and Neil Barnett, "The Kremlin's Trojan Horses", Atlantic Council: Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center, November 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/Kremlin-trojan-horses>

The first is the case of U.S. company Columbus Nova, linked admittedly to the Russian oligarch Viktor Vekselberg, and its payments to Trump's lawyer Michael Cohen³⁰. The second is about Russian-proposed goldmining deals to Arron Banks, the major funder of Brexit³¹; Banks has considerable ties with Russia through his wife³².

By the way, one of the Russian think tanks suggested a slightly different gold trade scheme as a secret channel of funding the German far-right party Alternative for Germany from Moscow sources³³. Trading with gold, oil and diamonds is also known as a mechanism for secret funding operations of the USSR KGB in the West³⁴.

Though none of these recent examples have been proven yet, as a component of Russian plans to secretly finance its interference in Western politics, one should remember the Kremlin's sophisticated efforts to conceal its influence, making it very challenging to prove. Therefore, disclosed possibilities and existing loopholes for Russia to implement its influence should be analysed along with proven cases for getting a proper picture of the Kremlin's influence promotion.

For example, despite the UK prime minister Theresa May's tough position on Russia, her Conservative Party has recently demonstrated that it sees nothing wrong with acquiring funds from oligarchs of Russian origin that have moved to the UK. Since 2010, the conservatives have reportedly received more than 3 million pounds from rich Russian-origin donors, including 826 thousand pounds during the premiership of May³⁵. The Tories do not agree to give back the donation even after the attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal.

30 Reuters in Washington, "Russian oligarch met Cohen at Trump Tower before inauguration – reports", The Guardian, 25 May, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/may/25/russian-oligarch-michael-cohen-trump-inauguration-sources>

31 Carole Cadwalladr, Peter Jukes, "Arron Banks 'met Russian officials multiple times before Brexit vote'", The Guardian, 9 June, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/jun/09/arron-banks-russia-brexit-meeting>

32 Neil Barnett, "Who Funded Brexit?", The American Interest, 26 July, 2016, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/07/26/who-funded-brexit/>

33 Tony Paterson, "Putin's far-right ambition: Think-tank reveals how Russian President is wooing – and funding – populist parties across Europe to gain influence in the EU", The Independent, 25 November, 2014, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-s-far-right-ambition-think-tank-reveals-how-russian-president-is-wooing-and-funding-populist-9883052.html>

34 "Moscow's Gold: Soviet Financing of Global Subversion", National Observer, 1999, http://www.nationalobserver.net/1999_autumn_campbell.htm

35 Gordon Rayner, "Tories will not return £820,000 in Russia-linked donations, Philip Hammond says", The Telegraph, 11 March, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/03/11/tories-will-not-return-820000-russia-linked-donations-philip/>

The wife of Vladimir Chernukhin, a former member of Putin's government, donated more than a quarter of a million pounds to the conservatives in 2017. Chernukhin himself was not a businessperson in Russia, at least officially; he worked at the state bank Vneshekonombank, eventually ran it for a couple of years, and also held the position of deputy finance minister. It makes origins of his wealth questionable in terms of transparency, to put it softly. Chernukhin's wife donated huge amounts to the Tories simply for the reason of spending time at private dinners and tennis games with the most influential politicians³⁶.

It is very possible that the Chernukhin family are trying to expand their own influence in the UK or even to seek some specific goals. However, as the example of the impeached president of Lithuania Paksas and other above-mentioned examples show, the Kremlin is good at eventually using personal interests and influence abroad of people linked to Putin's regime for its own gain. Before it is realized, and ways for promotion of this influence stopped, any concerns about the Kremlin's meddling in elections will remain fruitless. It is because direct or indirect funding of elections constitutes only a small component of Russian comprehensive meddling in the politics of the West.

A probability that Putin's regime finances European and North American politicians via Kremlin-linked Western lobbying institutions, thus turning these politicians into its lobbyists and direct or indirect agents, deserves special focus. An Investigation into Russia's likely tampering of the U.S. presidential election enabled officials to identify this model in action, though in favour of pro-Russian president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich, rather than Russia.³⁷ Prosecutors claim that Paul Manafort has paid more than 2 million USD to former high-level influential politicians, including the ex-chancellor, for undercover pro-Yanukovich lobbying.

The fact that Manafort became a manager enables us to argue that the Kremlin definitely can utilize such schemes, too. It is because Manafort has also cooperated with Oleg Deripaska, an oligarch close to Putin³⁸; in addition, Konstantin

36 Andrew Learmonth, "SNP MP Alan Brown told to sit down after asking about controversial Tory party fundraisers", *The National*, 21 February, 2018, <http://www.thenational.scot/news/16037774>.

SNP_MP_told_to_sit_down_after_asking_about_controversial_Tory_party_fundraisers/

37 Shawn Donnan, "Manafort allegedly paid €2m to European politicians", *The Financial Times*, February 23, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/879b2960-18d3-11e8-9376-4a6390addb44>

38 Mike Eckel, Christopher Miller, "The Metals Magnate And Manafort: A Kremlin Confidant Is Drawn Into The Trump Investigation", *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 22 September, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/manafort-deripaska-kilimnik-russia-trump-investigation/28751541.html>

Kilimnik, who is believed to be the U.S. lobbyist's right-hand man in Ukraine and has suspected ties with Russian intelligence³⁹, has also been charged with obstruction of justice by special counsel Robert Mueller who is investigating Russian meddling in the U.S. election. It is also known that, in episodes unrelated to charges of bribing European politicians, Manafort tried to influence high-ranking U.S. politicians in favour of Deripaska before working for Trump.⁴⁰

Also, for example, the former chancellor of Austria Alfred Gusenbauer, who reportedly was among key actors of the Manafort-funded lobby group⁴¹, has also been used for promoting Russian influence. Gusenbauer is a known member of the *Dialogue of Civilizations* Rhodes forum established by Vladimir Yakunin, the former chief of Russian Railways, to promote Russian interest⁴², and the member of the board of Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute founded in Berlin as an intended tool for enabling this promotion.⁴³

Placed on the list of U.S. sanctions, Yakunin has somehow avoided sanctions both in Canada⁴⁴ and in the EU⁴⁵, a fact that illustrates the possible degree of success of lobbying by Russia and its agents.

Meanwhile, political analyst Stanislav Belkovsky, who is well aware of the Russian modus operandi, explains "there are a number of schemes that can be used to avoid U.S. accounting rules on lobbying and PR." He must have meant ways to avoid being registered as a 'foreign agent' even when working for Russia⁴⁶.

Coming back to Manafort and Russia's possible influence upon him, experts

39 "Manafort aide Konstantin Kilimnik charged in Russia probe", BBC News, 8 June, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44419760>

40 Jonas Bernstein, "Oligarch Tied to Manafort Has Past Links to Senior US Politicians", Voice of America, 22 March, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/oligarch-oleg-deripaska-tied-to-paul-manafort-has-past-links-to-senior-us-politicians/3777379.html>

41 "European politicians got millions to lobby for pro-Russian government in Ukraine", Deutsche Welle, 24 February, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/european-politicians-got-millions-to-lobby-for-pro-russian-government-in-ukraine/a-42721849>

42 Leonid Ragozin, "The Putin adoration society", Politico, 16 October, 2015, <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-putin-adoration-society/>

43 Dialogue of Civilizations governance board, <https://doc-research.org/about-us/governacy/>

44 "Bombardier lobbies Canada against Russia sanctions", Daily Sabah, 16 March, 2017, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/2017/03/16/bombardier-lobbies-canada-against-russia-sanctions>

45 "Yakunin and Russian Railways not included on EU list of sanctions due to Latvia's objections", The Baltic Course, 15 September, 2014, <http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/transport/?doc=96338>

46 Sue Curry Jansen, "How Western PR Firms Quietly Push Putin's Agenda", Fast Company, 7 January, 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/40437170/russia-quiet-public-relations-war>

PRE-ELECTORAL PROCESS

Attack a
non-preferred
candidate



Sensitive files
can be hacked
and published



Disinformation
operations can
be employed



Candidates can become targets
of online activity measures,
blackmail or intimidation

Support a
preferred
candidate



Candidate can be supported
through his team receiving
financial benefits



Candidate can receive
intelligence support on its
opponents from abroad



Candidate can be getting in-
kind support by being invited
to Russia or Russian-occupied
territories in Ukraine



Candidate may be directly
provided with campaign
financing or media support

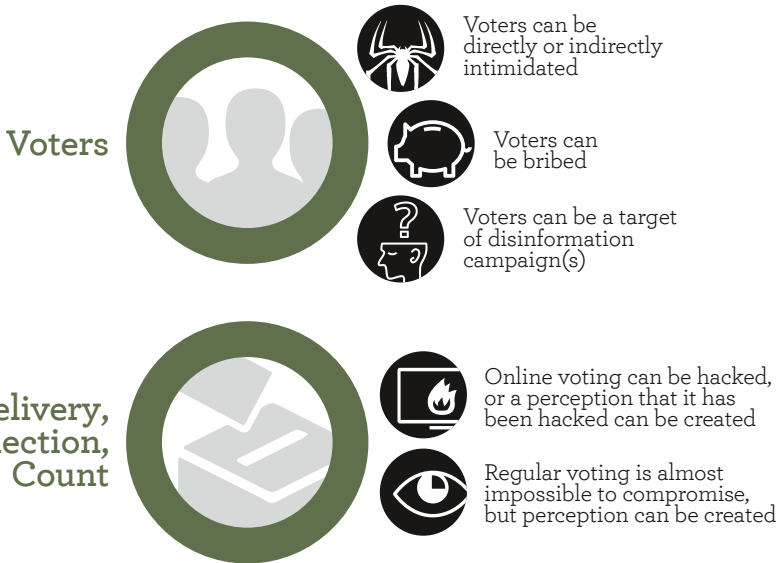
The scheme from the study "Does Russia interfere in Czech, Austrian and Hungarian elections?" by the Political Capital, the European Values Think-tank in cooperation with the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, 2017. http://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/western_experiences_eastern_vulnerabilities_20171012.pdf

also note that the now publicly revealed 'black ops' used by this lobbyist in Ukraine between 2011 and 2013⁴⁷ were partially repeated to help Trump's election. Putin's 'troll farm' and other Kremlin-related actors directly contributed to the implementation, putting Manafort in the middle of the probe into Russia's influence in the U.S. presidential elections.

Information about Semion Mogilevich, believed by many to be one of Russia's mafia bosses, who allegedly organized funding for the electoral campaign of

47 Luke Harding, "Former Trump aide approved 'black ops' to help Ukraine president", The Guardian, 5 April, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/apr/05/ex-trump-aide-paul-manafort-approved-black-ops-to-help-ukraine-president>

ELECTIONS



The scheme from the study «Does Russia interfere in Czech, Austrian and Hungarian elections?» by Political Capital, the European Values Think-tank in cooperation with the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance, 2017. http://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/western_experiences_eastern_vulnerabilities_20171012.pdf

Viktor Orban, the Hungarian prime minister is openly positive about Putin's regime, is also worth mentioning and analysing⁴⁸.

Anastasia Kirilenko, a well-known investigative journalist and researcher of the Russian regime's mafia ties, shared the following written testimony of Dietmar Clodo, a German businessman known to the police, that she had received from another famous investigative journalist, German Jürgen Roth: "In the 1990s I lived in Budapest, where I was doing consulting and owned a private security company SAS. There I met a well-known businessman Semion Mogilevich. We established a trusting relationship, partially because we were both religious Jews. In the mid-1990s, actually between 1993 and 1996, he asked me to hand over cash to various people. One of them was Sándor Pintér

48 Anastasia Kirilenko, "A suitcase full of cash from the Solntsevo mafia: Does Putin have a compromat on the Hungarian Leader?", Free Russia Foundation, <http://www.4freerussia.org/a-suitcase-full-of-cash-from-the-solntsevo-mafia-does-putin-have-a-compromat-on-the-hungarian-leader/>

(long-term minister of the interior of Orbán's Hungary – M.L.). At that time I only knew that he was a senior police officer and that he was working for Mr. Mogilevich. <> In the spring of 1994, on the eve of the parliamentary elections, Mogilevich's interpreter brought me a suitcase containing almost one million Deutsche Marks. This money was supposed to be handed to a young man. However, the young man refused to enter my home. I told him: "Listen, I have the suitcase with the damn money, and I am not going to step out onto the street with this cash. If you refuse to enter, I'll give the suitcase with the million back to Mr. Mogilevich. I don't care." He went up to my place with another elderly looking gentleman, and I handed over the suitcase with the cash. I didn't care who he was. Only after the parliamentary elections did I realize that the young man was Viktor Orbán from the Fidesz. <>. I declare, under penalty of perjury, that I am telling the truth. Regensburg 06/15/2016"

It is hard to say whether Mogilevich filmed the transfer of money purposefully to later share this compromising material with Putin's security services, causing a dramatic shift in Orbán's attitude towards Russia and Putin. This is the conclusion Kirilenko arrived at. Even if this conclusion is wrong, this information deserves attention for analysing attempts of Putin's regime to meddle in Western elections, moreover that other examples are going to be provided in this paper to illustrate the role of the mafia in this process.

How can we sum up all this information about the Kremlin's funding of sympathetic politicians, parties and their electoral campaigns, and likely direct bribing of Western influencers? It looks like fighting Russian money's participation in Western politics may well border on fighting windmills, if there is no serious and comprehensive international policy against dirty money in general, against the penetration of non-transparent Russian business into the West, and against aides of such businesses in the West.

Even during the Cold War and the Iron Curtain, Russian intelligence successfully managed to fund political actors of choice and special operations⁴⁹. It is therefore hard to expect that now, with no iron curtain anymore and a much broader diversity of potential Russian funding sources, tougher conditions for financing electoral campaigns or political financing in general could be helpful. It is of course necessary to patch the holes of funding regulations; however, the fight should be much more complex.

49 "Moscow's Gold: Soviet Financing of Global Subversion", National Observer, 1999, http://www.nationalobserver.net/1999_autumn_campbell.htm



Russia-friendly parties: assisting the network of natural supporters

This support is not even concealed. As a rule, it is openly declared, though actual cooperation tools are yet to be fully revealed. Despite rumours that the Kremlin's support is not restricted to non-financial forms, 'follow the money' principle is not helpful, in this case, to discover the nature of Moscow ties. Because, so far, only the fact of the loan to Le Pen causes no doubt. In addition, we should agree with Anton Shekhovtsov, a researcher of Europe's far right and their ties with Russia, who says that "the Kremlin does not need to buy this support, since it is already there".⁵⁰

On the other hand, the same could be said about the Soviet Union's support to communist parties around the globe: The Kremlin did not need to buy it. Yet, it was provided to make pro-Moscow forces stronger. In a similar fashion, Putin's regime is now interested in reinforcing or, whenever possible, bringing the far right to power in Western countries.

Regardless of the question as to whether the Kremlin's support was essential in these cases, participation of e.g. Italy's League or Austria's Freedom Party in governments of these countries should also be considered from the perspective of Moscow's meddling in elections and politics in general of Western countries.

Furthermore there have been elements of direct meddling noticed on Twitter.⁵¹

50 Dmitry Okrest, "Nationalists in Europe back Putin", 18 August, 2016, <https://birdinflight.com/ru/mir/20160818-nationalists-in-europe-back-putin.html>

51 David Alandete, Daniel Verdu, "How Russian networks worked to boost the far right in Italy", El Pais, 1 March, 2018, https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/03/01/inenglish/1519922107_909331.html

The current Austrian Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache also reportedly admitted in 2015 that he had received information on migration flows from Russian intelligence⁵². The topic of migrants was one central to the parliamentary election campaign in Austria in 2017. The elections brought the far-right Freedom Party into the government, with Strache taking the Vice-Chancellor office.

The potential direct influence of the Russian security services to the far right is yet to be explored by this paper. However, what kind of support can it be, apart from a financial one, still on the level of rumours, and the direct influence of Russian security?

This support has apparently been analytically assessed and defined as early as in 2011, as the analysis of Russia's increasing external activeness reveals. It is true that, in her paper of that time, the Finnish international relations expert Sinikukka Saari limited her research mostly to Russia's efforts in neighbouring states; yet, in her study *Putin's Eurasian Union Initiative: Are the premises of Russia's post-Soviet policy changing?*⁵³, she revealed the general strategy still in action, includes vis-à-vis ideological sister parties in the West. By the way, as early as then did she connect this strategy to the well-known KGB's tradition of 'active measures', substantial for the analysis of Russian meddling in Western politics, rather than the so-called 'soft power', mostly discussed by Russia experts.

"Russia's existing neighbourhood policy developed into its current form as a response to the 'Colour Revolutions' in former Soviet countries. The Orange revolution in Ukraine was interpreted widely in Russia as humiliating evidence of Russia's weakening influence in the post-Soviet space. The conclusion drawn was that Russia should increase its efforts to create its own NGO networks and to provide financial assistance, know-how and education in 'political technologies'; all in order to regain its dominant position in the region", - argued Saari.

She outlined three key tools deployed to influence the foreign public in the 'near abroad':

- **Pro-active political involvement**, i.e. creating links to a variety of political actors, assisting, reorganization and coordination of pro-Russian parties, export of political technologies and consultation around elections;

52 Markus Sulzbacher, "Die Nachrichtendienste unter Kontrolle der FPÖ", Der Standard, 3 January, 2018, <https://derstandard.at/2000071369657/Die-Geheimdienste-unter-Kontrolle-der-FPOe>

53 Sinikukka Saari, "Putin's Eurasian Union Initiative: Are the premises of Russia's post-Soviet policy changing?", Swedish Institute of International affairs, 1 November, 2011, <https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/publications/ui-publications/putins-eurasian-union-initiative-are-the-premises-of-russias-post-soviet-policy-changing-min.pdf>

- **‘NGO diplomacy’**, i.e. creating and assisting pro-Russian youth groups, minority and separatist civil organizations and think tanks;
- **Creation and management of a favourable media environment**, i.e. the establishment of Russian media ventures, launching media campaigns in the Russian media, or influencing the local national media.

This strategy might have been updated and adopted for Western political markets. However, the available cases of Russia’s support to favourable forces in countries of Europe suggest a conclusion that this strategy is employed exactly.

Drafted by the Kremlin-linked Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI) and intercepted by Bulgarian intelligence, the 30-page election strategy plan for Bulgaria’s Socialist Party seeking a victory for its candidate Rumen Radev at the country’s presidential election in November 2016 comes as one of the brightest examples⁵⁴. The plan includes a spectrum of measures ranging from ‘fake news’ to rigged polls. It looks like the plan was not only adopted⁵⁵, but it also worked, since Radev was actually elected.

As now known, the institute run by a former Russian intelligence agent Leonid Reshetnikov also created a plan for meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election⁵⁶. RISI also cooperated with both a right wing Independent Greek party, and the current prime-minister Alexis Tsipras and his left-wing Syriza party in the run-up to the January 2015 Greek election⁵⁷. Both of these parties now constitute the Greek government.

To be honest, such plans and even ‘black ops’ prepared by Russian-related agents for victories of Kremlin-preferred candidates in countries of Europe are no longer an innovation. Strekoza (Dragonfly) was the name of a plan found in 2003 in Lithuania with Borisov, Paksas’ sponsor; its goal was to destabilize the situation in the country and act for victory of Paksas’ party at the

54 Joe Parkinson, Georgi Kantchev, “Document: Russia Uses Rigged Polls, Fake News to Sway Foreign Elections”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 23 March, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-does-russia-meddle-in-elections-look-at-bulgaria-1490282352>

55 Illian Vassilev, “Russia’s elections manual for BSP and the role played by Bulgarian sociological agencies”, *Bulgaria Analytica*, 31 March, 2017, <http://bulgariaanalytica.org/en/2017/03/31/>

56 Ned Parker, Jonathan Landay, John Walcott, “Putin-linked think tank drew up plan to sway 2016 US election – documents”, *Reuters*, 19 April, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-russia-election-exclusive/putin-linked-think-tank-drew-up-plan-to-sway-2016-us-election-documents-idUSKBN17L2N3>

57 Paul A. Goble, “Kremlin think tank confirms close links with Kremlin and with new Greek premier”, *Euromaidan Press*, 1 February, 2015, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/02/01/Kremlin-think-tank-confirms-close-links-with-Kremlin-and-with-new-Greek-premier/>

parliamentary election⁵⁸. As previously mentioned, Manafort also drafted the 2011-2013 'black ops' plan with an aim to support Russia-leaning president of Ukraine Yanukovich. By the way, it included establishing a think tank, a task mentioned, among others, in the strategy unveiled by Saari.

It is anybody's guess as to whether such 'intellectual assistance' is being transferred to other sister parties of the Russian regime and other preferred actors in Europe. Noticeably, in the case of support to Italy's League, NGO Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association was established; Shekhovtsov emphasizes its influence upon League-Russia cooperation⁵⁹, while Applebaum suspects that it was via this association how Russian influence in Italy was bought⁶⁰.

Shekhovtsov indicates that, among others, election monitoring organization CIS-EMO and other bodies, and personally actors like Aleksandr Dugin, Sergey Glazyev and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, are involved in the creation and coordination of a network of pro-Russian parties.⁶¹

The congress of the European far right in Vienna in late May 2014 is one of the most illustrative examples of this coordination and support, ideological and intellectual. Konstantin Malofeyev, a Russian oligarch famous for this kind of activity, served as a financial supporter of the event, while Dugin became its key ideologist and even called for an establishment of a 'holy alliance'⁶². Supported by Rodina (Homeland), a party close to the Russian power elite, a congress of European far right took place in 2015 in Saint Petersburg⁶³; it also hosted a forum of separatist movements from around the world.⁶⁴

58 New Europe Brussels team, "Strekoza plan unveils election questions", New Europe, 15 November 2003, <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/strekoza-plan-unveils-election-questions/>

59 Anton Shekhovtsov, "The Italian far right Lega Nord builds closer ties with Moscow", Anton Shekhovtsov's blog, 6 March, 2017, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.com/2017/03/the-italian-far-right-lega-nord-builds.html>

60 Anne Applebaum, "This is how Putin buys influence in the West", The Washington Post, 15 June, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/this-is-how-putin-buys-influence-in-the-west/2018/06/15/45ccbb2a-70b2-11e8-bf86-a2351b5ece99_story.html?utm_term=.60ef46caafb0

61 Anton Shekhovtsov, "The far-right front of Russian active measures in Europe", Euromaidan Press, 16 August, 2016, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2016/08/16/the-far-right-front-of-russian-active-measures-in-europe/>

62 Robert Zubrin, "The Wrong Right", National Review, 24 June, 2014, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2014/06/wrong-right-robert-zubrin/>

63 "Europe far-right parties meet in St Petersburg, Russia", BBC News, 22 March, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32009360>

64 Patrick Reeve, "Texas, California Separatists Attend Kremlin-Funded Conference", ABC News, 27 September, 2016, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/texas-california-separatists-attend-pro-Kremlin-conference/story?id=42395066>

Together with Malofeyev, Glazyev and Reshetnikov, Dugin established a website, addressing Europe's far right community in multiple languages, and the think tank Katheon. A well-known researcher of Russian influence Christo Grozev claims that this kind of ideological support is not even authentic, since founders of such institutions don't always believe in what they declare: "They have performed market research and identified a niche, for which they are producing and selling. It is highly possible they mock intellectual poverty of their clients in private", - explains Grozev⁶⁵.

A particularly detailed study by the Hungarian Policy Research and Consulting Institute *Political Capital* of Russian influence in Austria reveals how support to current incumbent actors of the Austrian Freedom Party had intertwined in an overarching network, ranging from workshops, training sessions and meetings with high-ranking politicians in Moscow, to very broad activities of the Suvorov Institute in Vienna or even building business ties between Russia-friendly Austrian actors and individuals or institutions in Moscow⁶⁶.

As the strategy revealed by Saari foresees, all these political actors, of course enjoy full 'information support' of Russia⁶⁷. This support goes far beyond Sputnik and other Russian disinformation channels, something disclosed, along with these studies, by the unveiled Le Pen's personal connection with Russia's ex-MP Konstantin Rykov⁶⁸, frequently referred to even as a pioneer of Russian social media manipulation techniques or, more modestly, an important component of the Russian disinformation machinery⁶⁹.

The fact that there are at least three cases, in which support beneficiaries are under suspicion of direct collaboration with Russian intelligence, constitutes an important aspect for an analysis of Russia's attempts to support European marginal groups. In Poland, Mateusz Piskorski, a member of the

65 Christo Grozev, "Would you like fries with that conspiracy?", Christo's blog, 2 January, 2017, <https://cgrozev.wordpress.com/2017/01/02/would-you-like-fries-with-that-conspiracy/>

66 Dr. Bernhard Weidinger, Fabian Schmid. Dr. Péter Krekó, "Russian Connections of the Austrian Far-Right", *Political Capital*, April, 2017, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_AT_20170428.pdf

67 Anton Shekhovtsov, "Conventional bedfellows: The Russian propaganda machine and the western far right", *Eurozine*, 27 October, 2017, <https://www.eurozine.com/conventional-bedfellows-the-russian-propaganda-machine-and-the-western-far-right/>

68 Nicholas Vinocur, "Marine Le Pen's internet army", *Politico*, 12 February, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/marine-le-pens-internet-army-far-right-trolls-social-media/>

69 Molly Schwartz, "The man who taught the Kremlin how to win the internet", *Public Radio International*, 31 May, 2018, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-05-07/man-who-taught-Kremlin-how-win-internet>

above-mentioned Russia-backed network of European marginals, was detained in May 2016 on charges of espionage for Russia, and maybe China⁷⁰. Again In 2016, an investigation into the murder of a police officer by Istvan Gyorkos, the leader of a far-right Hungarian National Front, un-curtained this organization's long-standing links to Russian military intelligence GRU⁷¹. MEP Bela Kovacs of Hungary's far-right Jobbik party was charged with spying for Russia as long ago as 2014⁷².

By the way, an analysis of the life story of Kovacs's wife also enables us to suspect the KGB's famous 'honey trap' tactic, whereas charm and temptation by KGB women-officers were used to recruit Western politicians. However, it is not only the history of the KGB and the case of Kovacs's wife, but also other coincidences of these times, that suggests analysing women's roles in promotion of Russian influence in Russia-friendly marginal groups in the West. Suspicions regarding the wife of Brexit funder Banks have already been mentioned; the wife of Richard Spencer, the leader of the U.S. far right, and active promoter of his ideology is a Russian Nina Kouprianova, an active follower of Dugin⁷³.

To summarize, one can claim that the Kremlin's support to its favourable groups is hardly limited to a particular election campaign. On the contrary, if support is successful in the long run and internal issues of the West are properly exploited, direct election meddling can become redundant or limited. With or without it, every so often the Kremlin is effective in achieving its goals.

In addition, the intellectual, informational and ideological assistance apparently can be as valuable as the financial one in some cases. This is why fighting 'fake news' and following the Kremlin's dirty money cannot solve the problem of Russian meddling in Western politics on its own.

On the other hand, the process of meddling has much broader goals than merely helping a certain Kremlin's sister party at one or another election. One should remember that one of Russia's key long-term goals is to not only weaken, but

70 "Poland detains pro-The Kremlin party leader for 'spying'", The Guardian, 19 May, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/19/poland-detains-pro-Kremlin-party-leader-mateusz-piskorski-spying>

71 Edit Zgut, "Hungary's pro-Kremlin far right is a regional security threat", Euobserver, 23 December, 2016, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/136354>

72 Daniel Nolan, Csaba T. Tóth, "The Far-Right European Lawmaker and the Three-Decade 'KGB Honey Trap'", VICE News, 26 September, 2014, <https://news.vice.com/article/the-far-right-european-lawmaker-and-the-three-decade-kgb-honey-trap>

73 Casey Michel, "Meet the Moscow Mouthpiece Married to a Racist Alt-Right Boss", The Daily Beast, 20 December, 2016, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/meet-the-moscow-mouthpiece-married-to-a-racist-alt-right-boss>

destroy the EU from inside, while, after the 2014 European Parliament election, 20 per cent of members of this EU institution that is gaining an increasingly important role were openly Eurosceptic⁷⁴. The EP voting in June 2018 on a resolution urging Moscow to release Ukrainian political prisoners, imprisoned in Russia and Crimea, showed that this pro-Russian EP alliance is holding its position.⁷⁵

Reinforcing this kind of Kremlin-friendly forces across the EU can sometimes be a more important goal for Putin's regime than a symbolic success in some particular country's election. It does not mean, however, that we will see a vast orchestrated meddling campaign by the Kremlin during the 2019 EP election. As such a major bulk of the work can have been done before the election.

The experience of the referendum in the Netherlands on an Association Agreement with Ukraine, where marginal forces played a leading part and Russian meddling was also obvious, can serve as an example of how these groups can be utilized for undermining a pan-European agenda⁷⁶.

The examples provided are already enough to see that a toolbox of support for Kremlin-friendly parties is rich in measures, ranging between those widely believed to be just 'soft power' and real security service operations. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the whole toolbox is justly associated with the KGB tradition of 'active measures', making it crucial to rely on counterintelligence and, in general, Western security services to resist the meddling. Investigating into and revelation of Russia's transnational influence networks is another important form of resistance.

74 Jeremy Bender, "Putin Is Infiltrating European Politics With Shocking Effectiveness", Business Insider, 9 December, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/putin-is-infiltrating-europe-2014-12>

75 "Full list of Members of the European Parliament who voted against the resolution on political prisoners in Russia", Tango Noir, 16 November, 2018, <http://www.tango-noir.com/2018/06/16/full-list-of-members-of-the-european-parliament-who-voted-against-the-resolution-on-political-prisoners-in-russia/>

76 Anne Applebaum, "How Much Trouble Is Russia Causing in Europe?", Slate, 8 April, 2016, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2016/04/the_dutch_referendum_on_ukraine_shows_how_russia_is_influencing_europeans.html?via=gdpr-consent



Ties with traditional Western parties and politicians

Publicity and awareness-raising to the Western public about the Kremlin's influence networks, ways of seeking influence and strategies used are particularly important for one more reason: The Kremlin's efforts are certainly not limited to assisting marginal groups.

The impeachment process against a former Deputy Speaker of Parliament Mindaugas Bastys from the ruling Social-Democrat Party of Lithuania in 2018 revealed how this influence can be intertwined into a network of interests of the Russian nuclear power giant Rosatom and personal ties with former officers of the Russian security services⁷⁷ and other Moscow's influence agents or even mafia bosses⁷⁸.

As early as in summer 2015, after the French delegation's visit to the Russia-annexed Crimea, vocal discussions started about the Kremlin's influence upon a considerable wing of the French right⁷⁹. To understand the anatomy of this support, along with other explanations, one has to look at the role of Dialogue Franco-Russe, an association founded as long ago as 2004⁸⁰.

Dialogue Franco-Russe is a lobbyist organization promoting a strategic

77 "Lithuanian MP faces impeachment for ties to Russian spy", The News, 23 March, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/194039-Lithuanian-MP-faces-impeachment-for-ties-to-Russian-spy>

78 "VSD demaskuoja Seimo vicepirmininką M.Bastį: ryšiai su Rusijos verslininkais, įtariamais agentais ir mafijos autoritetais", 15min, 9 March, 2017, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/vsd-demaskuoja-seimo-vicepirmininka-m-basti-ryšiai-su-rusijos-verslininkais-itariamais-agentais-ir-mafijos-autoritetais-56-766490>

79 Benjamin Haddad, "How Putin Won French Conservatives", The Daily Beast, 18 August, 2015, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-putin-won-french-conservatives?ref=scroll>

80 Claire Bigg, "Crimea Visit Spotlights Kremlin Sympathies Beyond French Fringes", Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 29 July, 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/crimea-visit-spotlights-Kremlin-sympathies-beyond-french-fringes/27159124.html>

partnership between Russia and France. Thierry Mariani, an ex-chief of Russian Railways and member of the National Assembly of France, is the leader of the association; previously believed to have had personal ties with Putin, he is now on the U.S. sanctions list. Along with ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy and a long-standing supposed favourite of the previous French presidential election Francois Fillon, he is a member of the Republican Party.

According to the French secret service, the organization is “infected” with the Russian foreign intelligence service, claims *The New York Times*⁸¹. However, influential politicians of France’s traditional parties do not shy away from ties with it. Both the organization itself⁸² and its individual members were actively engaged in the 2017 French presidential election campaign.

A board member of the Dialogue Franco-Russe and a Republican MP Nicolas Dhuicq has even actively contributed to Russia’s disinformation campaign to spread rumours that the presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron is homosexual and allegedly supported only by ‘gay lobbyists’ and American bankers. This was what Dhuicq shared in his interview with the Russian disinformation channel Sputnik⁸³. This disinformation circulated around Russia’s conventional ‘fake news’ communication channels⁸⁴ in an attempt to harm Macron and help Le Pen and Fillon alike⁸⁵. It was probably Fillon rather than Le Pen who mostly deserved the label of key Russia-backed candidate at the previous French presidential election. He even enjoyed support by the rigged polls technique⁸⁶, disclosed as a part of a Russian meddling toolbox by Bulgarian intelligence in the case of the intercepted Moscow-drafted assistance plan for Radev.

Fillon’s ties with the Kremlin are so close that he has even had an opportunity to profit from them. In 2015, Fillon reportedly arranged a meeting with

81 Cécile Vaissié, “Can the Kremlin Influence the French Election”, *The New York Times*, 14 April, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/14/opinion/can-the-Kremlin-influence-the-french-election.html>

82 “Russia Tries to Influence Le Pen to Repeal Sanctions”, *Bellingcat*, 29 April, 2017, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2017/04/29/russia-tries-influence-le-pen-repeal-sanctions/>

83 Shira Rubin, Tanya Bekker, “Russia’s Fake News Crusade Is Still Pushing For Le Pen”, *Vocativ*, 24 April, 2017, <http://www.vocativ.com/423581/russia-fake-news-le-pen/index.html>

84 “War without blood”, *Zeit*, February, 2017, <https://www.zeit.de/digital/internet/2017-02/bundestag-elections-fake-news-manipulation-russia-hacker-cyberwar/seite-5>

85 “France election: Macron laughs off gay affair rumours”, *BBC News*, 7 February, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38892409>

86 “French polling watchdog warns over Russian news agency’s election report”, *The Guardian*, 2 April, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/02/french-polling-watchdog-warns-over-russian-news-agency-election-report>

Putin in Saint Petersburg for a Lebanese businessman Fouad Makhzoumi for 50 thousand USD.⁸⁷

In the UK, along with the already mentioned Russia's support to the 2017 parliamentary campaign of Corbyn-led Labour, the individual role of this politician during the Brexit campaign deserves special attention. Corbyn and his office, that had to be among key proponents of the Remain vote, have apparently sabotaged⁸⁸ the pro-EU campaign, deliberately and for unclear reasons. This behaviour of Corbyn unexpectedly coincided with increasingly visible Russian efforts to contribute to Brexit⁸⁹.

By the way, Seumas Milne, known for a long time for his exceptional benevolence to Putin's regime, was apparently the author of the idea to sabotage Labour's EU Remain campaign⁹⁰. In 2015, Milne was even assigned an important moderator role at the so-called 'Valdai Forum', a networking event for Russian influencers in the West.⁹¹

Incidentally, a scandal from as early as 2008 demonstrates the fact that the Kremlin and its aides have been seeking to promote their influence in UK traditional parties for a long time. Unveiled Deripaska's ties with Labourite, the then UK representative in the European Commission Peter Mandelson, and the Conservative Party's treasurer George Osborne, were the focus of the scandal⁹².

Not only is Lord Mandelson remaining an influential politician; he has also become Russia's official lobbyist, quite likely opposing the Government's

87 Anne-Sylvaine Chassany, Max Seddon, "Francois Fillon faces more pressure over Vladimir Putin links", *The Financial Times*, March 21, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/98a34480-0e62-11e7-b030-768954394623>

88 Laura Kuenssberg, "Corbyn office 'sabotaged' EU Remain campaign – sources", *BBC News*, 26 June, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-36633238>

89 David Gilbert, "Everything you need to know about the bombshell report linking Russia to Brexit", *VICE News*, 11 June, 2018, https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/zm8gz9/trump-russia-aaron-banks-brexit-farage

90 David Parikarakos, "Corbyn's new Stalinist voice", *Politico*, 25 October, 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/stalinist-voice-of-labour-seumas-milne-jeremy-corbyn-putin/>

91 Simon Walters, Will Stewart, "Red handed! Photograph shows Jeremy Corbyn's pro-Kremlin spin chief held in Putin's iron grip at propaganda summit", *Daily Mail*, 1 November, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3298550/Red-handed-Photograph-shows-Jeremy-Corbyn-s-pro-Kremlin-spin-chief-held-Putin-s-iron-grip-propaganda-summit.html>

92 "Three Men, One Yacht, And A Big Scandal", *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 23 October, 2008, https://www.rferl.org/a/Three_Men_One_Yacht_And_A_Big_Scandal/1332191.html

attempts to isolate Putin's regime.⁹³ It was only the U.S. sanctions that made Mandelson stop representing the oligarch's interests officially; however, his list of Russian clients still appears to be long.

Deripaska's attempts to influence U.S. Republican politicians has already been mentioned. However, the investigation into Russia's likely influence in the 2016 U.S. presidential election is increasingly focusing on a network that Russia is establishing in the National Rifle Association, the Republicans' major supporter, as well as in the party itself.⁹⁴ The investigation is looking into a possible contribution of Aleksandr Torshin, a Russian politician suspected by Spanish prosecutors of links with the Russian mafia⁹⁵, to Russian meddling in the U.S. presidential election through his NRA contacts.⁹⁶

It is also worth noting, the probe of Russian meddling in the U.S. presidential election has already revealed that the Kremlin goes beyond supporting just one of the candidates; it is searching for and builds contacts with sympathetic policy-makers well in advance. It is clear by now that, for example, it was not only Trump who received support from Russia in one form or another during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. At a certain point, Russia also backed Bernie Sanders, a participant of the Democratic primaries, and Jill Stein, a Green Party candidate.⁹⁷

Though prosecutor Mueller's indictment of 13 Russians charged of meddling in the U.S. election states that Russia assisted both above-mentioned U.S. politicians in an attempt to harm Clinton, the goals vis-à-vis Stein can well be of a more long-term nature. This politician has been enjoying support since 2012; as Michael McFaul, former U.S. ambassador to Moscow, admits, supporting

93 Andrew Foxall, "Putin and the Prince of Darkness: Revealed: the web of links between Peter Mandelson's shadowy global consultancy firm and the billionaire power brokers of Putin's Russia", Henry Jackson Society, 26 July, 2014, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2014/07/26/putin-and-the-prince-of-darkness-revealed-the-web-of-links-between-peter-mandelsons-shadowy-global-consultancy-firm-and-the-billionaire-power-brokers-of-putins-russia/>

94 Alex Altman, Elizabeth Dias, "Moscow Cozies Up to the Right", Time, 10 March, 2017, <http://time.com/4696424/moscow-right-Kremlin-republicans/>

95 Anna Nemtsova, "What's the Truth About the NRA's Man in Moscow?", The Daily Beast, 23 February, 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/whats-the-truth-about-the-nras-man-in-moscow>

96 Michael Isikoff, "Trump's Son Should Be Concerned": FBI Obtained Wiretaps of Putin Ally Who Met with Trump Jr.", Huffington Post, 25 May, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/fbi-wiretaps-putin-ally-trump-jr_us_5b08bf56e4b0568a880b7859

97 Michael Collins, "Indictment: Russians also tried to help Bernie Sanders, Jill Stein presidential campaigns", USA Today, 17 February, 2018, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/02/17/indictment-russians-also-tried-help-bernie-sanders-jill-stein-presidential-campaigns/348051002/>

her is in line with Russia's strategy to back fringe social movements with the aim of exacerbating social tensions in Western countries⁹⁸.

In the meantime, Torshin and his teammate Maria Butina⁹⁹, who has turned out to be building networks in the U.S. with the Kremlin's blessing, seem to have been preparing for the U.S. presidential election ahead of the game. In April 2015, Butina and Torshin travelled to the State of Tennessee to take part in a fundraising event for the presidential campaign of Scott Walker, the Governor of Wisconsin. It was only later that their focus shifted to Trump.¹⁰⁰

Based on a survey of social media space by the UK-based firm, Bakamo, in the run-up to the French presidential election, it is possible to conclude that the Russian disinformation machinery has, in one way or another, supported other Eurosceptic candidates, along with Le Pen and Fillon.¹⁰¹

These examples suggest a conclusion that in terms of neither methods, nor goals, that can be multi-faceted, Russia's support to marginal forces cannot be seen in isolation from the contacts that it is building with traditional Western parties and politicians. Even during one election or referendum, support can be rendered to different groups; actions by both marginal and traditional actors can meet the Kremlin's interests even in the framework of the same campaign.

Therefore, long-term Kremlin support to traditional Western parties is worth as much attention and research and is as dangerous as its assistance to marginal groups.

98 Robert Windrem, "Senate Russia investigators are interested in Jill Stein", NBC News, 20 December, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/why-are-senate-russia-investigators-interested-jill-stein-n831261>

99 Scott Stedman, "Kremlin discussed support for Maria Butina as she visited NRA headquarters in 2014", Medium, 6 April, 2018, <https://medium.com/@ScottMStedman/Kremlin-discussed-support-for-maria-butina-as-she-visited-nra-headquarters-in-2014-eb18a21a04ec>

100 Alex Altman, Elizabeth Dias, "Moscow Cozies Up to the Right", Time, 10 March, 2017, <http://time.com/4696424/moscow-right-Kremlin-republicans/>

101 Andrew Rettman, "Russia and the French presidential election: The Kremlin interference", VOXeurop, 21 April, 2017, <https://voxeurop.eu/en/2017/russia-and-french-presidential-election-5120971>



Malign information gathering beyond cyber-attacks

Having become a kind of Kremlin's business card for its malign activities, cyber-attacks have been the main focus of discussions regarding Russian meddling in elections and analysis of ways of protection against the meddling.

The argument, based on the information available is that, databases of political parties and campaigns, social media platforms and mainstream media, and personal accounts of candidates and their families, should be considered as vulnerable targets for such attacks¹⁰².

It needs to be remembered that cyber-attacks, regardless of their scale and nature, constitute just one method of malign information gathering (spying). As can be seen from the Netherlands example, along with numerous attempts to hack into emails of Government officials¹⁰³ for obtaining sensitive information, the security services of this country were concerned about 'field' spying pursuing the same goal of affecting the decision-making¹⁰⁴.

Hacking into parliament's computers and information theft were also focused on during the 2017 parliamentary election in Germany.¹⁰⁵ However, it was in

102 Erik Brattberg, Tim Maurer, "Russian Election Interference: Europe's Counter to Fake News and Cyber Attacks", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 23, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/23/russian-election-interference-europe-s-counter-to-fake-news-and-cyber-attacks-pub-76435>

103 Thessa Lageman, "Russian hackers use Dutch polls as practice", Deutsche Welle, 10 March, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/russian-hackers-use-dutch-polls-as-practice/a-37850898>

104 Peter Cluskey, "Dutch minister says Russia is manipulating public opinion", The Irish Times, 15 November, 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/dutch-minister-says-russia-is-manipulating-public-opinion-1.3293248>

105 "War without blood", Zeit, February, 2017, <https://www.zeit.de/digital/internet/2017-02/bundestag-elections-fake-news-manipulation-russia-hacker-cyberwar/seite-3>

2016 when Hans-Georg Maaßen, the President of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, warned about some other methods of the Kremlin's malign activities, in his comment on the attempts of Edward Snowden, former U.S. National Security Agency officer, to discredit Germany in favour of Russia. These methods include ordinary parliament spying, attempted recruiting of MPs' assistants, and efforts of infiltration into other political institutions¹⁰⁶.

The probe into Russian meddling in the American presidential elections has also revealed that Moscow's tactics and methods of recruitment have hardly changed since the Cold War¹⁰⁷. These insights indicate that cyber spying has by no means encouraged Russia to drop their regular means of information gathering; they are still used for meddling in elections and Western politics in general.

By the way, the very case of Snowden, who is doubtlessly exploited by the Russian intelligence services¹⁰⁸, demonstrates that, even nowadays, key information can be obtained through channels different from cyber-attacks.

Russia is in a constant process of collecting information about politicians, ready to use it to destroy anyone out of favour. This was the point of Christopher Bryant, a former UK Minister for Europe, in his reaction to information that Russia allegedly could possess a blackmailing dossier against Trump, in the run-up to the 2017 national election.

The politician said that he had been a victim of such tactics himself and was "absolutely certain" that high-profile government figures "will have been investigated by individuals linked to Russia or employed directly by Moscow" in search of compromising material (*kompromat*).

"British companies are being hired to do the work of Russia's FSB security service. They are collecting sensitive financial and personal information about London-based enemies of the regime as well as spilling the beans on national security and UK foreign policy," said Bill Browder, a former major investor in

106 "German spies imply Snowden leaked files for Russia", The Local, 15 April, 2016, <https://www.thelocal.de/20160415/possible-that-snowden-linked-to-russia-german-spies>

107 Zachary Cohen, "FBI documents detail how the Russians try to recruit spies", CNN, 15 April, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/15/politics/russia-spy-recruitment-tactics-fbi-carter-page/index.html>

108 John Schindler, "Edward Snowden is a Russian Agent", XX Committee, 11 June, 2016, <https://20committee.com/2016/06/11/edward-snowden-is-a-russian-agent/>

Russia and currently one of the most dedicated fighters against Putin's regime, in his comment on Russian spies' methods of operations.¹⁰⁹

The famous unconfirmed Steele Dossier¹¹⁰ is insufficient to conclude as to whether Russia has kompromat against Trump. However, in the light of the traditional 'active measures', it is highly likely that the Kremlin makes efforts to collect such information both about candidates that Moscow opposes and those whom it prefers to help.

All this information about activities and aims of Russian spies is neither new nor surprising; nevertheless, with focus increasingly shifting to cyber-attacks, the trend is to overlook it. Meanwhile, the Kremlin is making use of its broad armoury of 'active measures' to ruin careers of politicians whom it dislikes. There is no reason to believe that it would stop using some of its components even now, in times of cyber-attacks. It is even more groundless to assume that, if there are no Kremlin cyber-attacks detected during one or another election campaign, or with no information available about a theft of essential information, the election can be deemed free of Russian meddling.

On the contrary, Putin's regime seems to be creative in combining traditional spying methods and cyber-attacks. From now on, social media seems to be a helpful tool in doing this. In the case of France, Russian agents pretended to be Macron's friends on Facebook to infiltrate the social networks of the presidential hopeful and obtain personal information of interest¹¹¹. Convincing Macron's friends to activate malicious software with the prospect of using it for spying is believed to be the end goal of the operation¹¹².

The famous email-hacking operation against Macron's campaign has seemingly been conducted in a similar way. At first, phony internet addresses were

109 Mark Townsend, David Smith, "Senior British politicians 'targeted by Kremlin' for smear campaigns", *The Guardian*, 14 January, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/14/russia-blackmail-chris-bryant-donald-trump-boris-johnson-liam-fox>

110 The Steele Dossier - Trump Intelligence Allegations, https://archive.org/stream/TheSteelDossierTrumpIntelligenceAllegations/The%20Steele%20Dossier%20-%20Trump-Intelligence-Allegations_djvu.txt

111 Joseph Menn, "Exclusive: Russia used Facebook to try to spy on Macron campaign - sources", *Reuters*, 27 July, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cyber-france-facebook-spies-exclusive/exclusive-russia-used-facebook-to-try-to-spy-on-macron-campaign-sources-idUSKBN1AC0EI>

112 Damien Sharkov, "Russian spies used Facebook to trick Macron allies: Report", *Newsweek*, 27 July, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/russian-spies-used-facebook-trick-macron-allies-report-642648>

created to imitate addresses of *En Marche!*, Macron's movement. They were used to send malware emails that enabled hacking into the campaign's emailing.¹¹³

The information that Russia, in its attempt to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, could have used personal data of Facebook users, obtained by Cambridge Analytica¹¹⁴, shows one more method of information gathering and managing; it is possible that Russian intelligence is using it for political objectives, as well.

However, the use of 'big data' is hardly news in the world of intelligence. To put it in the plain words of John Sawers, the former head of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), "now, the most important person in any intelligence service is the data analyst, because it's the data analyst who will tell you where the threats are coming from and where the opportunities are emerging that you as an intelligence agency can exploit"¹¹⁵.

This is why the revealed Russian attempts to use 'big data' for political campaigns and election meddling should be assessed against the general context of the Kremlin's spying operations and protection against them. Moreover that the ways of gathering 'big data' and opportunities to obtain them are nowadays much wider than the only now clarified case of Cambridge Analytica and Facebook.

To sum up, one can argue that the information Russia is trying to gain for its election meddling efforts is not at all an exceptional component of its spying activities. Though currently so actively discussed in the context of elections, the cyber-attacks are also used for other Russian information-gathering activities. There is no reasonable ground to distinguish between election-targeted cyber-attacks and other information-gathering attacks. On the contrary, all new emerging spying methods should be analysed in the general context of malign information gathering by the Kremlin.

It should be remembered that 'traditional' methods of spying and collecting

113 Alex Hern, "Macron hackers linked to Russian-affiliated group behind US attack", 8 May, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/08/macron-hackers-linked-to-russian-affiliated-group-behind-us-attack>

114 Ryan Browne, "Cambridge Analytica whistleblower says Facebook users' data could be stored in Russia", CNBC News, 9 April, 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/09/cambridge-analytica-whistleblower-facebook-data-could-be-stored-in-russia.html>

115 Christina Pazzanese, "Goodbye James Bond, hello big data", The Harvard Gazette, 28 February, 2018, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/02/former-mi6-head-recounts-how-intelligence-gathering-has-changed/>

compromising material is keeping their role in political influence operations; these methods can be as dangerous as cyber-attacks.



Disinformation: much more than RT, Sputnik and 'fake news', on or off social media

'Fake news' and social media, as a tool to spread it, has been a well-known non-military weapon of achieving political goals of Putin's regime for quite a while.¹¹⁶

There are already some studies available arguing that fake news might have determined Trump's victory in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections¹¹⁷. It might be premature to draw comprehensive conclusions from this data only; the effectiveness of this weapon though, can be illustrated by analysis of the case of 'fake news' about the alleged health issues of Clinton.¹¹⁸

It is also known that individuals affiliated with the Internet Research Agency, Russia, have been formally charged with meddling in the U.S. election.¹¹⁹ There

116 EU East StratCom Task Force, "Means, Goals and Consequences of the Pro-Kremlin Disinformation Campaign", ISPI, 19 January, 2017, https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/commentary_stratfor_19_01.2017_0.pdf

117 Richard Gunther, Erik C. Nisbet, Paul Beck, "Trump may owe his 2016 victory to 'fake news,' new study suggests", *The Conversation*, 15 February, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/trump-may-owe-his-2016-victory-to-fake-news-new-study-suggests-91538>

118 Gregory F. Treverton, Andrew Thvedt, Alicia R. Chen, Kathy Lee, and Madeline McCue, "Addressing Hybrid Threats", Swedish Defence University, 2018, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Treverton-AddressingHybridThreats.pdf>

119 U.S. Department of Justice, "Grand Jury Indicts Thirteen Russian Individuals and Three Russian Companies for Scheme to Interfere in the United States Political System", 16 February, 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/grand-jury-indicts-thirteen-russian-individuals-and-three-russian-companies-scheme-interfere>

are suspicions about the impact of fake news on social media upon referenda in the U.K., Scotland and Catalonia.

On the other hand, it may be affirmed that this phenomenon is quite well analysed, and the West is taking increasingly active measures to defend itself from this threat. For example, France introduced Cross Check, a special fact-checking platform, during the electoral campaign, and some voices even announce its victory over the flow of ‘fake news’¹²⁰. In Germany, statements have been made that fake news had no effect on the country’s electoral campaign.¹²¹

However, viewing Russia’s election meddling as a self-sufficient phenomenon in isolation from the Kremlin’s long-term and comprehensive malign activities is very likely to lead to the wrong conclusions about the meddling itself.

For instance, it is known that the ‘fake news’ intended to promote anti-immigration moods in Germany were very common *before* the German electoral campaign¹²². With the impact of these news items unmeasured, the question remains as to whether they had not shaped opinion of some voters prior to the campaign. Sweden is facing a similar situation, as NATO membership and the regional security issues are high on the agenda in the run-up to the national elections in autumn 2018. This much at least is clear that the country’s security services are concerned over possible Russian interference in the context of discussing these topics¹²³.

Yet, a study by the Swedish Institute of International Affairs demonstrated, as early as January 2017, that Russia was conducting a coordinated disinformation campaign on the above-mentioned issues¹²⁴. The assumption was that the campaign was linked to the next national election. It poses the question as to whether the upcoming election campaign can be deemed free of Moscow’s

120 Chris O’Brien, “How France scored a big win against fake news during its recent elections”, VentureBeat, May 19, 2017

<https://venturebeat.com/2017/05/19/how-france-scored-a-big-win-against-fake-news-during-its-recent-elections/>

121 Andrea Shalal, Eric Auchard, “German election campaign largely unaffected by fake news or bots”, Reuters, 22 September, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-election-fake/german-election-campaign-largely-unaffected-by-fake-news-or-bots-idUSKCN1BX258>

122 Tim Fume, “Germany’s anti-immigrant fake news”, VICE News, 2 February, 2017, https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/mb98pb/germany-fake-news-election-migrants

123 Johan Ahlander, “Sweden braced for possible Russian election meddling: security service”, Reuters, 22 February, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sweden-security/sweden-braced-for-possible-russian-election-meddling-security-service-idUSKCN1G626P>

124 “Report: Russia spread fake news and disinformation in Sweden”, Sveriges Radio, 9 January, 2017, <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2054&artikel=6604516>

meddling even if no Russian 'fake news' attacks were documented during the campaign itself.

These cases constitute more illustrations of the fact that it is substantially impossible to analyse the Kremlin's election meddling in isolation from the overall and comprehensive malign activities of Putin's regime against the West. It necessitates long-term and comprehensive efforts to resist this influence rather than focusing on elections exclusively.

It is also known that the Kremlin's current disinformation strategy is not so different from operations described in USSR KGB textbooks.¹²⁵ Just like the USSR-made disinformation, the current processes are much more multi-tier than the mere spread of fake news in the media.

The first thing to note is that, along with social media, Russia is also using the so-called 'alternative media' for distributing its 'fake news'. These trends are particularly present in the U.S.¹²⁶ and the Czech Republic¹²⁷.

"Some of the disinformation comes directly from Russia and some is created locally along the general lines defined by the Russian propaganda machine, so the message content is coordinated," says Tomas Prouza, the former Czech state secretary.¹²⁸

A survey from 2016 by the think tank European Values showed that a quarter of Czech voters read 'alternative media' and trust it. A survey in 2017 by Ipsos found that 35 per cent of those who regularly read alternative news sites do not care whether the pages are funded by or related to Russia.¹²⁹

Similar processes are also taking place in other countries, making us agree, at least partially, with Leonid Bershidsky, Bloomberg commentator, that "Russian

125 Michael Martin, "Old KGB spy manual reveals origin of fake-news strategy", Metro, 27 December, 2017, <https://www.metro.us/news/the-big-stories/old-kgb-spy-manual-reveals-origin-fake-news-strategy>

126 Jacob Wohl, "Why Do Alternative Media Personalities Carry Water for Russia?", The Washington Reporter, <https://thewashingtonreporter.com/jacob-wohl-why-do-alternative-media-personalities-carry-water-for-russia/>

127 Henri Mikael Koponen, Helsingin Sanomat, "In the Czech Republic, 'alternative' news sees good business", International Press Institute, 24 January, 2018, <https://ipi.media/in-czech-republic-alternative-news-sees-good-business/>

128 Philip Heijmans, "Czechs prepare to fight disinformation onslaught as elections loom", Deutsche Welle, 17 June, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/Czechs-prepare-to-fight-disinformation-onslaught-as-elections-loom/a-39281431>

129 Emily Schultheis, "The Czech Republic's Fake News Problem", The Atlantic, 21 October, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/fake-news-in-the-czech-republic/543591/>

state news organizations infiltrated alternative media of the West while nobody was paying attention”¹³⁰. Now, it also helps to meddle in elections and general politics in the West.

Yet, it is not only the media that is used for disinformation and affecting people’s minds. As previously mentioned, Western lobby and public relations groups can also serve as channels for funding meddling in elections and politics of the West in general.

Sue Curry Jansen, a Professor of Media and Communication at Muhlenberg College, notes the need to pay attention to the influence of these groups upon public opinion.

“The Russian attempt to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election, using what intelligence agencies call “active measures,” has dominated headlines. There is, however, a second front in Russia’s effort to shape the hearts and minds of U.S. citizens, and it’s received almost no attention in mainstream media outlets since the election. As someone who studies the growth of global public relations, I’ve researched the roles PR firms play in shaping public perceptions of international affairs. For years, Russia has been involved in public relations campaigns that have been developed and deployed by prominent, U.S.-based, global PR firms—campaigns intended to influence U.S. public opinion and policy in ways that advance Russia’s strategic interests”, - claims Curry Jansen.¹³¹

There are more weapons that Russia is using to affect the minds of the Western public. The Dutch referendum on the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement could be an example.

Along with plenty of ‘fake news’, a tactic of ‘false threat’ was adopted during the referendum. In the beginning, Kremlin-affiliated disinformation units announced terror threats against the Netherlands on Youtube, allegedly coming from the Ukrainian volunteer Azov Battalion, if the country’s citizens do not vote for approving the Association Agreement with Ukraine¹³². This could still be considered a kind of ‘fake news’. However, following the refutation of

130 Leonid Bershidsky, “How Russian Propaganda Really Works in the West”, Bloomberg, 28 November, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2016-11-28/how-russian-propaganda-really-works-in-the-west>

131 Sue Curry Jansen, “How Western PR Firms Quietly Push Putin’s Agenda”, Fast Company, 7 January, 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/40437170/russia-quiet-public-relations-war>

132 “Behind the Dutch Terror Threat Video: The St. Petersburg “Troll Factory” Connection”, Bellingcat, 3 April, 2016, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2016/04/03/azov-video/>

the message, the referendum-initiating Dutch citizens moved on to publicly declare that they had received threats from Ukrainians¹³³.

A special 'Ukrainian team' was mobilized for campaigning against the Association Agreement with Ukraine; the team participated in meetings, made statements in the media and made every effort to create a negative image of Ukraine. The fact that "Ukrainians speak against the Agreement" had to grant legitimacy to these activities. It came to knowledge later that the group's most active members were immigrants from Russia or Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine¹³⁴.

Initiated or funded by Russian disinformation disseminators in order to catch public attention abroad, spectacular performances during public events and rallies are becoming the new normal. The Czech Republic saw imitative decapitations, as rally participants wore traditional Arab clothes and held toy guns. Russian campaigners are suspected of being behind the performances of the local far right¹³⁵.

Even in the context of alleged meddling in the U.S. presidential election, mentions are made that Russians had organized political rallies, pretending to be Americans. During one of these stage performances, Russians paid an unidentified person to build a cage aboard a flatbed truck and another to wear a costume "portraying Clinton in a prison uniform"¹³⁶.

Because of putting words into the mouths of foreign politicians as well as ordinary people is Russia's ability to spread its disinformation so noteworthy. Stop the War Coalition, an organization acting in the U.K., published an article on 21 July 2014 about the Malaysian airliner, downed over Ukraine days before. Along with 'struggling for peace', the organization actively participates in the

133 Robert van der Noordaa, "Kremlin Disinformation and the Dutch Referendum", StopFake, 14 December, 2016, <https://www.stopfake.org/en/Kremlin-disinformation-and-the-dutch-referendum/>

134 Andrew Higgins, "Fake News, Fake Ukrainians: How a Group of Russians Tilted a Dutch Vote", The New York Times, 16 February, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/16/world/europe/russia-ukraine-fake-news-dutch-vote.html>

135 Philip Heijmans, "Czechs prepare to fight disinformation onslaught as elections loom", Deutsche Welle, 17 June, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/Czechs-prepare-to-fight-disinformation-onslaught-as-elections-loom/a-39281431>

136 Warren Strobel, Dustin Volz, Jonathan Landay, "U.S. charges Russians with 2016 U.S. election tampering to boost Trump", Reuters, 16 February, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-russia-indictment/u-s-charges-russians-with-2016-u-s-election-tampering-to-boost-trump-idUSKCN1G022U>

country's politics and electoral campaigns¹³⁷. The article on behalf of the organization, then headed by the Labour leader Corbyn and his advisor Andrew Murray, compared the plane crash to the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne, which caused the outbreak of World War I.

Probably not many people paid attention to these allusions when the article was publicised. However, it is now known that the aircraft was shot down by a Russian army-owned Buk missile, while comparing this crime to events that triggered World War I was strictly in line with Russian disinformation instructions. It has come to light following the publication of emails from Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin's 'black PR' spin doctor¹³⁸.

Already mentioned above, rigged polls constitute another revealed form of Russian disinformation. As said previously, Bulgarian intelligence found out about this tactic offered by the Kremlin to its sympathetic politicians in the country, through interception of the Moscow-drafted election campaign plan. France saw the same tactic in action later.

To sum up: Russia-led disinformation campaigns of meddling in elections and broader political processes of Western countries should be viewed as a much more comprehensive and multi-faceted phenomenon than a mere spread of 'fake news' on social media. Whereas 'fake news' is concerned, it is wrong to monitor it only in the context of elections and use this kind of monitoring for concluding as for the absence or presence of Russian interference in an electoral campaign.

137 Jon Rogers, "Pray DUP away! Furious protests on London streets in anti Tory-unionists demonstration", Express, 10 June, 2017, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/815455/General-Election-2017-DUP-Tory-Conservative-coalition-protest-downing-street-latest-update>

138 Tim Shipman, "Corbyn group Stop the War Coalition 'peddled Kremlin line' over flight MH17", The Times, 27 May, 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/corbyn-group-peddled-Kremlin-line-over-mh17-t9htxjfh>



Russia's election meddling as emerging comprehensive transnational practice

Going beyond one-country's effort is one of the important new aspects revealed about Russia's meddling in Western elections. On the contrary, it involves an increasing number of transnational actors.

For example, studies of the online disinformation campaign targeting the Catalonia referendum found that a considerable bulk of the campaign effort was performed via accounts in Venezuela¹³⁹.

Latvian foreign affairs minister Edgars Rinkevics said that citizens from Russia and the former Soviet states, including people subject to U.S. sanctions, had put money into Latvian banks, and some of it may have been used for political manipulation in foreign countries. "There is also the connection to ... hybrid warfare that money being transferred or kept in (the) Latvian financial system can be used to undermine ... the political systems of other countries,"

139 Itxu Diaz, "Venezuela and Russia Teamed Up to Push Pro-Catalan Fake News", The Daily Beast, 28 November, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/why-is-venezuela-waging-cyber-war-in-europe>

Rinkevics said at the end of May 2018 in his comment on information received by his country from Western partners.¹⁴⁰

Increasingly bold statements are made even in the British parliament about ties between the New Zealand-born Chandler brothers, ruling their business empires from Singapore and Dubai, and Russian businesses, and maybe even Russia's security services or the Chechen mafia¹⁴¹. They stepped into the spotlight by having established Legatum think tank, an important player in the Brexit story¹⁴² that was even accused in June 2018 of breaking the rules of conduct applicable to such institutions.¹⁴³

Julian Assange and his Wikileaks have contributed to Russia's meddling in the U.S. election¹⁴⁴; Russia-protected NSA traitor Snowden joined him in Catalonia¹⁴⁵.

In total, it shows that effective opposition to this meddling would take a co-ordinated international effort.

140 John O'Donnell, Gederts Gelzis, "Latvia probes whether Russian money flows used to meddle in Europe", Reuters, 29 May, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-latvia-banks-politics-exclusive/exclusive-latvia-probes-whether-russian-money-flows-used-to-meddle-in-europe-idUSKCN1IU2BM>

141 Glenn Owen, "Legatum founder is 'suspected spy': Devastating claim made by MPs about Brexit think-tank man after shock dossier reports 'Kremlin links'", Daily Mail, 6 May, 2018, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5695573/Legatum-founder-suspected-spy.html>

142 Peter Geoghegan, "The Brexit web with Legatum at the centre", The New European, 5 December, 2017, <https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/the-brexit-web-with-legatum-at-the-centre-1-5302732>

143 Gabriela Galindo, "UK's Legatum Institute accused of 'breaching charity rules' in Brexit report", Politico, 6 January, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/legatum-institute-accused-of-breaching-charity-rules-brexit-report/>

144 "WikiLeaks played key role in Hillary Clinton's defeat in US presidential election, says study", First Post, 13 July, 2017, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/wikileaks-played-key-role-in-hillary-clintons-defeat-in-us-presidential-election-says-study-3808269.html>

145 Chris Zappone, "On Catalan independence, Julian Assange, Edward Snowden emerge as surprise backers", The Sydney Morning Herald, 26 September, 2017, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/on-catalan-independence-julian-assange-edward-snowden-emerge-as-surprise-backers-20170926-gyoqxs.html>



Mafia joining forces with the regime

In a study *Crimintern: How the the Kremlin uses Russia's criminal networks in Europe* presented in April 2017, an outstanding expert of Russia and organized crime Mark Galeotti affirms: "Russian-based organised crime groups in Europe have been used for a variety of purposes, including as sources of 'black cash', to launch cyber-attacks, to wield political influence, to traffic people and goods, and even to carry out targeted assassinations on behalf of the Kremlin".¹⁴⁶

Another expert on Russian organized crime, Walter Kego from The Institute for Security and Development Policy in Stockholm, echoed this sentiment. He added that, along with its power in the criminal world, the Russian mafia has a big influence in politics. "There is no question that they are used by high ranking officials in the Kremlin to do certain things, although not all the time," said the expert.¹⁴⁷

Studies of well-known cases of Russia's election tampering also refer to the mafia quite frequently.

Suspected and confirmed by an eyewitness' written statement, possible funding of the openly Moscow-sympathetic Hungarian Prime Minister Orban's electoral campaign with money provided by Mogilevich has already been mentioned. For a long time and repeatedly¹⁴⁸ did experts discuss ties of people within

146 Mark Galeotti, "Crimintern: How the Kremlin uses Russia's criminal networks in Europe", European Council on Foreign Relations, 18 April, 2017, http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/crimintern_how_the_Kremlin_uses_russias_criminal_networks_in_europe

147 Irina Filatova, "Russian mafia groups reportedly operate in Europe on behalf of the Kremlin", Deutsche Welle, 27 April, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/russian-mafia-groups-reportedly-operate-in-europe-on-behalf-of-the-Kremlin/a-38617828>

148 Anastasia Kirilenko, "Gangster Party candidate: Trump's ties to Russian organized crime", The Insider, 7 April, 2018, <https://theins.ru/uncategorized/98190?lang=en>

the entourage of the U.S. president Trump himself with the Russian mafia¹⁴⁹, including Mogilevich again.

However, the indictment against Manafort by the special counsel Mueller seems to reveal this person's very clear tie to the Ukrainian MP Ivan Fursin. Many believe the latter to be a close partner of Mogilevich. Martin Sheil, a retired criminal investigator for the U.S. Internal Revenue (Taxes – M.L.) Service, says the indictment, with its connections to Fursin, helps illuminate the murky world Manafort operated in before taking the reins of Trump's presidential bid. "This indictment strongly indicates the existence of a previously unknown relationship between an alleged Russian organized crime leader and Mr. Manafort," Sheil told *The Daily Beast*¹⁵⁰.

A possible trace of the mafia also transpires in the investigation of Russia's meddling in the Catalan referendum. Spanish officials argue that the Russian mafia assigned some of its laundered money to a now-collapsed nationalist Catalan party, whose radical wing was among the initiators of the Catalan independence referendum. Officials assume the mafia's key objective was to take over the police in the region; they also claim that the criminals' interests could have coincided with those of the Kremlin, as Russians allegedly see an independent Catalonia as a possible base from which to penetrate other parts of Europe¹⁵¹.

As for the mafia's interference in politics, one should remember the data publicized in summer 2010 after being gathered by Austrian law enforcement, something more substantial than experts' conclusions, about funding earmarked by the Georgian mafia in Europe and their attempts to topple the-then country's president Mikheil Saakashvili.

Though this is the Georgian rather than the Russian mafia that is directly quoted this time, it is known that not only does the Russian mafia operate on a transnational scale but also it is transnational itself. It is even more so

149 James S. Henry, "The Curious World of Donald Trump's Private Russian Connections", *The American Interest*, 19 December, 2016, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/12/19/the-curious-world-of-donald-trumps-private-russian-connections/>

150 Betsy Woodruff, "Mueller Reveals New Manafort Link to Organized Crime", *The Daily Beast*, 11 February, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/mueller-reveals-new-manafort-link-to-organized-crime>

151 Martin Arostegui, "Officials: Russia Seeking to Exploit Catalonia Secessionist Movement", *Voice of America*, 24 November, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/officials-say-russia-exploiting-catalonia-secessionist-movement/4135842.html>

in relation to mafia groupings from former USSR republics¹⁵². This particular case exemplifies a direct link of the Georgian mafia's interests to those of the Kremlin and obvious traces of Moscow's participation in the operation, as documented by the Austrian law enforcement. Moscow was the primary destination of mafia money, only later to be forwarded to Georgia. In addition, Igor Giorgadze, fugitive and former Minister of State Security of Georgia, repeatedly blamed for the assassination attempts of the-then president Eduard Shevardnadze and pro-Russian coups in the nineties¹⁵³, now under the protection of Russia, was the operation broker in Moscow¹⁵⁴.

These four examples of Putin's regime-linked mafia meddling in elections in different countries lead to a conclusion that interests of criminal groups can well be coordinated and used for implementation of the Kremlin's strategy of election tampering.

152 Euan Grant, "The Russian Mafia and organised crime: how can this global force be tamed?", Open Democracy, 12 October, 2012, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/euan-grant/russian-mafia-and-organised-crime-how-can-this-global-force-be-tamed>

153 "World: Europe 'Russia behind Georgia plot'", BBC News, 24 May, 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/351760.stm>

154 Alexander Melikishvili, "Is Part of the Georgian Opposition Financed by Georgian Organized Crime?", The Jamestown Foundation, 30 June, 2010, <https://jamestown.org/program/is-part-of-the-georgian-opposition-financed-by-georgian-organized-crime/>



Conclusions and recommendations:

For Putin's regime, meddling in elections is only part of a bigger campaign in the Kremlin's war against the West, carried out non-stop for a long time and using a variety of methods in its malign activities. It is therefore impossible to analyse this meddling in separation from a general strategy of Putin's regime or to undertake measures of protection only against election meddling without an effort, comprehensive enough, to fight back against the Russian threat as such.

In its complex attack, the Kremlin brings together a network of groups and actors, a coalition whose members often pursue their personal goals and may as often act individually as they do collectively. It is the coordination and thorough analysis of possibilities to exploit each particular group for specific aims that enable Putin's regime to successfully utilize the whole configuration for its own benefit. Therefore, the West should clearly identify the Kremlin's likely aides including political and PR consultants, lobbyists etc. as well as direct assistants of the Russian mafia, opaque businesses or the government itself in their efforts of money-laundering and financial penetration of the West. Mechanisms must be identified to resist their infiltration in Western societies without violating the norms of democracy and our values. Publicity is one of the tools possible, by making the Kremlin's malicious operations and their local aides visible and raising public awareness about the emerging threats.

The West has been wrong in recent years to focus mostly on Russia's support to marginal groups. Along with investing efforts in influencing extremists, both left and right, the Kremlin is searching for ways to spread its influence in traditional parties too. It looks like even the groups in the West that are openly hostile to Putin's regime are not fully immune to attempts to spread this influence. This process of influence and its dangerous implications must be acknowledged.

Consolidation of Russia's non-transparent business in the West is one of the key

problems that enables the Kremlin to be so successful in destroying Western democracy from inside. Russia is as successful in exploiting opaque Western businesses. It is thus a priority task to introduce higher transparency standards in the business environment.

Along with the 'active measures', well-known to Western intelligence, Russian election meddling practice is closely connected to the direct operations of the Russian security services, financial and other crimes, and even involvement of the mafia. It stresses a need to strengthen not only the West's protective capacity, but also counterintelligence and law enforcement that should both be more active in resisting illegal activities of the Kremlin and its aides, identifying fast-changing threats and undertaking countermeasures.

Both the public and the policy-makers in the West still have an insufficient understanding about the actual behaviour of Russia, and the shortage of analytic capacity to monitor and analyse it. It is therefore necessary to reinforce independent think tanks, as well as the government's and secret services' in-house analysis of these issues. Quality media, in particular investigative journalism, are of as high importance. Strengthening it, without breaching the freedom of expression or interfering in content, should become a task of governments and the Western community as a whole, rather than private individuals and businesses only. Proper analysis of malign activities and the ability to present them to society constitute an important success prerequisite in this struggle.

Undermining liberal democracy, based on values, genuine market economy and human rights, is the key goal that the Kremlin and its helpers share. This goal matters as much for the Kremlin itself in its geopolitical ambitions as it does for Kremlin-backed non-transparent businesses, the mafia and political groups that resist the liberal democracy because of their beliefs. In resisting this aggression, reinforcing Western democracy itself is one of the primary tasks, something that lies within the responsibility of Western states.

It is more than clear now that Russian malign activities are not restricted to any regions nor by any barriers, making it necessary for the West to come up with a joint response. Only if coordinated on an international scale, can resistance activities bear fruit.

Defensive measures are not sufficient to win in this war. Along with methods of self-protection, the West should start thinking about counter-moves.

As this paper focuses only on election meddling as a measure of political warfare, note should be taken that Russia does not differentiate between peace and war. The available examples of attacks against electoral systems, that can

and should be given the same status as Russia's attacks against states' critical infrastructure, along with an attempted coup in Macedonia, have demonstrated that Russia is not going to restrict itself to political measures of warfare only in pursuance of its goals. The strategy of the Western response should therefore include a coordinated response against the whole set of threats rather than only challenges of the political war led by Russia.

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