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### Who is behind Russian ideological onslaught in Europe?

#### *Investigative report done by a free-lance Russian journalist*

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The study looks at individuals and organizations that have played important roles in advancing Russian faux conservative, anti-European and anti-American agenda in four European countries: Ukraine (because it provides an example of how the ideological onslaught can transform into direct military aggression), Greece and Hungary (both among Russia's staunches allies in the European Union, whose support is crucial as the Kremlin struggles to get the EU to lift the sanctions imposed in retaliation for invading Ukraine), and France (because of the growing Russian influence).

In the case of **Ukraine**, the report explains the particularities of the countries and how Ukrainian and Russian identities blend. Because of that, Ukraine provides the most fertile ground for Russian agents of influence to sow ideas, notions and political memes, but it could also be argued that the idea of close relations with Russia has always been in high demand, no matter how badly Russia treated Ukraine.

The political division between those who favor closer ties with Russia and those who favor integration with the West goes now primarily along professional, educational, social class and age lines, while people's first language or ethnicity matter considerably less.

Some examples of how Russian agents have exerted their influence in the city of Kharkiv are provided, Ukraine's second largest city, which saw the same processes as Donbass and Crimea but that eventually remained under Ukrainian control. Some of these actors include:

- The Essence of Time: a network created by Sergey Kurginyan, a Moscow-based theatre director who mutated into a political thinker at the end of the 1980s when he campaigned against the dissolution of the USSR. Kurginyan widely uses the term USSR 2.0, which reflects what his intentions are.
- Viktor Nusenkis: native from Donetsk, he is the owner of a coal and metallurgy consortium with most of his assets located in the territory currently controlled by the rebels. He is also one of the main sponsors of the Russian Orthodox Church.
- Konstantin Malofeyev: a Russian investment banker and the owner of Marshall Capital Group who reinvented himself as a champion of Orthodox values and a defender of Russian interests around the world after being targeted by several criminal investigations over unpaid debts to a French investment fund and to the British arm of the Russian state-own bank VTB.
- Borotba: a left-wing organization whose name translates as “Struggle” from Ukrainian. It grew out of a loose association of anarchists, left-wing libertarians, Trotskyists and orthodox Soviet Communists, largely based in Kiev. Its Soviet faction took the upper hand, squeezing out the dissenters.
- Ukrainian Choice: Created in 2012 by former head of the presidential administration Viktor Medvedchuk, Ukrainian Choice was the most explicitly pro-Russian political party in Ukraine. The party has never achieved any electoral success, but its leader played an important role both before and after Euromaidan.
- Oplot (“stronghold” in Russian): a Kharkiv-based paramilitary organization formed in 2010 by former police and security officer Yevgeny Zhilin.
- Yugo-Vostok (Southeast): The name refers to the predominantly Russian-speaking southeastern Ukraine, which most rebels now call Novorossiia. Yugo-Vostok movement is a bit of a mystery, besides there is more than one of them.

**Greece** is, along with Cyprus, unique as an EU and NATO country that is pro-Russian across the political spectrum. This is explained by its history. Having never been a Warsaw Bloc country, it has a strong left-wing tradition, stemming from the post-WWII resistance that was brutally suppressed by British-backed forces. At the same, right-wing Greeks celebrate common Orthodox roots that unite Greece and Russia. Few politicians in Greece need much persuasion to cooperate with the Russian government. Most of Russian activities in Greece are largely simulative and linked to the simple desire to spend time in warm climes on beautiful islands.

Some of the actors promoting a Russian agenda in Greece are:

- Malofeyev’s Circle: The main story regarding Russian influence in Greece revolves around the same Konstantin Malofeyev who played a pivotal role in unleashing the Ukrainian conflict. He has been able to create a circle of influence among Greek politicians and has many friends in Syriza’s government.
- Ivan Savvidi: A tobacco magnate from Rostov, Savvidi formally heads the union of ethnic Greeks living in Russia. He is also regarded as an informal leader of Pontic (or Black Sea) Greeks (the ethnic Greeks who repatriated from the former USSR). The extent of his political clout in Greece is unclear, but he is definitely one of the major players in the Greek-Russian relations.
- Rusky Predprinimatel (Russian Entrepreneur) Foundation: The foundation is associated with Alexander Ruchyev, a Moscow-based entrepreneur who stole the

show on the Moscow development market in recent years by making lucrative deals with FSB (Russian security service) and the defense ministry. A self-proclaimed devout Orthodox Christian, he is an active participant of the Worldwide Russian National Assembly - an annual forum presided by Moscow Patriarch Kirill that draws members of the Russia Orthodox community from around the world.

- **Rhodes Forum:** The 13th Rhodes Forum was conducted in October 2013. It is co-chaired by Vladimir Yakunin (the former head of Russian Railways and Putin's close confidant). Yakunin's ambitions go far beyond Greece, but it is highly unclear whether his projects will continue to have the same weight now that he fell out with Putin. One of these projects is the Dialogue of Civilizations Forum - directly linked to Greece. Yakunin sees his forum as a gathering of respectable politicians and thinkers. Each year, he manages to attract some big names, but there it still feels often feels like a meeting of lunatics from the political fringe.

Related to Yakunin, the report explains about the St. Andrews Foundation, which goes beyond the Greek context but is worth describing. The Swiss-based foundation runs a smattering of mostly cultural activities around the world, ostensibly with the aim of liaising with Russophobes and Russophiles living in various countries, helping to restore and erect new Russian military monuments and churches and to promote family values. The latter issue is the realm of Yakunin's wife Natalya Yakunina, who also presides over family-related discussions at the Rhodes Forum. Despite Yakunin's fallout with Putin, the foundation continues to be active. Its most recent event - the conference titled "Yalta - Potsdam - Helsinki - Belgrade: In Search of Secure World Order" and organized on the fringes of the OSCE summit in Belgrade in November, was conducted under the auspices of Serbian president Tomislav Nikolic.

In Russia, the foundation operates under the name Centre of National Glory, which sponsors patriotic education as well as campaigns aimed at strengthening family values. The latter included consultation for young women aimed at preventing abortions. As all of Yakunin's projects, this one strives to avoid using toxic rhetoric and being associated with the political fringe. Yet, it often does.

The case of **Hungary** is quite different as there are almost no Russian actors involved and mostly local actors promote the pro-Russian agenda. Hungarian politicians were used by Russia for domestic propaganda purposes as in the case Jobbik MPs who observed sham referendum in Crimea and Donbass or Prime Minister Orban making strong anti-EU statements that get re-broadcast in the Russian television news. In Hungary, the stories of Russian influence revolve around two characters - Jobbik operative Béla Kovács and former Moscow embassy official Szilard Kiss, both currently under arrest.

- **Béla Kóvacs:** Much has been written in Hungary about the man who deemed "Jobbik's wallet" who was arrested on suspicion of spying for Russia. One of the big mysteries is what he was doing in Russia until he showed up in Hungary in the late 2000s and reshaped Jobbik leading it to electoral success. Kovács and Jobbik leader Gabor Vona travelled to Moscow on multiple occasions. Their Moscow circle includes leaders of Rodina party led by Alexei Zhuravlyov, MPs from Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's LDRP and members of NOD (National Liberation

Movement) - a new organization which serves as the backbone of Pro-Putin Anti-Maidan movement. The latter has recently organized a series of massive pro-government rallies in Moscow. Notably, many of Vona's interlocutors, such as Duma MPs Ivan Grachev and Vasily Tarasyuk (the latter also heads the Russian-Hungarian friendship society) are energy professionals and specialize in legislating energy issues. Gas pipelines and nuclear energy are the main aspect of relations between Russia and Hungary, with Jobbik traditionally backing Russian energy projects, such as South Stream. But in terms of ideologies and values, it feels like the Kremlin used Jobbik members to promote the shared ideology and political views in Russia itself more than to promote Russia in Hungary. Kóvacs has also been doing suspicious activities in the Zakarpattia region of Ukraine, which has a strong Hungarian community.

- Regnum: An unusual actor in the Russian-Hungarian relations is Dmitry Semushin, the shadowy stringer for the Russian Regnum agency, run by the former Kremlin spin-doctor Modest Kolerov. The latter is a major ideologist of the Russian world, which goes for spreading Kremlin's influence through Russian diasporas in various countries. For that reason, he was banned from entering Baltic countries. Regnum has an impressive network of correspondents all around the world and reports on a wide range of issues. It typically produces manipulative, opinionated pieces that many observers in the West regard as direct messages from the Kremlin.

The report mentions also the existence of Russian actors operating from Russia, and whose influence is extensive to more countries and not only Ukraine, Greece and Hungary. Some of these actors are:

- Rodina (Motherland): a party associated with vice-premier in charge of defense industry, Dmitry Rogozin. He is not formally a member, but he founded the party in 2003. At the time, it was positioning itself as an anti-Putin nationalist force. Its candidate Sergey Glazyev ran against Putin in the 2004 election, but only gained 4%. Today though, Rogozin is one of Putin's key allies, while Glaziev was Putin's envoy who tried to persuade Ukraine not to sign the association agreement with the EU.
- Neo-Nazi Circles.

In **France**, influential figures are now pro-Kremlin activists openly working to improve Russia's image in the country. One of these figures is Prince Alexander Trubetskoy, a Frenchman born into a white Russian family. He is one of the main activists in the pro-Kremlin faction of the white Russian emigration and Russian Orthodox Church in France. He has done a lot of work for the Russian Patriarchate in France, to the detriment of the Constantinople Patriarchate. Trubetskoy had liaisons with various Soviet government-owned companies and organizations since the early 1970s. In the 1990s, he also cooperated with Alexander Avdeyev, who later became the Russian ambassador to France. In 2004, Avdeyev invited Trubetskoy to set up a business association promoting French investment in Russia. The project wasn't particularly successful until Russian Railways chief Vladimir Yakunin got involved, helping to establish Kremlin contacts at the highest level.

In 2005, Trubetskoy also got acquainted with father Tikhon Shevkunov, who is believed to be Putin's spiritual guide. Mingling with Orthodox circles, he also befriended Konstantin Malofeyev (Shevkunov is on the board of Malofeyev's St Basil's foundation).

At the same time, the connection between between Malofeyev and Le Pen family (*Front National* party) has been well-investigated. Canal+ linked Malofeyev to the credit received by Le Pen's *Front National* from a barely known Russian bank.

Konstantin Rykov is a digital entrepreneur, who developed a whole culture in the Russian sector of the worldwide web in the early 2000s. Rykov is reputed with creating an army of internet trolls who have flooded social networks defending Kremlin's point of view and viciously attacking Putin's enemies. Rykov is himself an avid blogger churning out dozens of tweets and blog posts daily. He is also a major fan of Marine Le Pen. He even ran a French-themed Twitter account that was entirely dedicated to promoting her.

## Russian Influence in Europe: the reactionary values agenda

*EPF – Marina Davidashvili*

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The report focuses, from the perspective of restricting freedoms to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), the rights of LGBTI people and the right to self-determination, on **three questions** related to Russia:

- Who are the main actors promoting traditional values?
- Who are the main actors upholding liberal values?
- Who are the main actors exporting traditional values?

Some basic facts, in order to put in **context** the report, are:

- Abortion is legal since 1956; however, an important nuance is that it was legalized mainly because of soaring levels of maternal mortality and not because of women's rights struggles.
- Homosexuality was only decriminalized in 2003 (Yeltsin), it's still seen as something that should be expressed privately.
- The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has been growing in power and influence, and has developed a close relationship with the Kremlin.
- Civil Society (women's and LGBTI) Organizations are weak.
- Soviet heritage has always respected academia and medical evidence (important when it comes to fighting restrictions to abortion).

The report then presents the problem of the **laws restricting access to abortion**, and explains how this could be traced back to the speech of Patriarch Kirill at the III Christmas Parliamentary Gathering on January 2015, in which he presented his points of view on Russia's demographic problem, the suggestions to introduce ethical norms into the healthcare system, and the possibility of completely forbidding the advertising and promotion of abortion.

An intense debate on the subject exists since that date, and the report explains how the first draft law to withdraw funding for abortion from the obligatory medical insurance, which was promoted by the Samara Regional Duma, was rejected.

Just a month after this rejection, there was a second set of draft laws (in this case, three), this time promoted by Elena Mizulina, a prominent anti-abortion figure in Russia, along with other parliamentarians. This set of draft laws was more aggressive and introduced more restrictions. According to the report, the draft laws were almost approved and were supported by the ruling party, however, Saliya Murzabayeva, a prominent women's rights supporter at the Duma, intervened and clarified the consequences of the implementation of such laws to her colleagues, finally convincing the party leader, Vladimir Vasilyev to oppose the draft laws.

Valentina Matvienko, Speaker of the Council of the Federation, and Olga Golodets, Vice Premier, also spoke out against these draft laws, arguing that the health of a woman is above all. The Congress of Pediatricians, however, supported Kirill's idea of excluding abortions from the obligatory medical insurance. As well, the Government issued a negative opinion concerning the three draft laws promoted by Mizulina, mainly because if approved, negative consequences could appear, such as an increase on the number of abortions conducted outside of medical organizations.

According to the report, there is a presence of anti-choice figures within the scientific institutions, which have been very vocal against abortion, and have been providing "scientific" proofs to their arguments.

The conclusion presented by the report on this issue, when analyzing the official position, is that even though Mizulina's proposals were highly publicized and drew a lot of attention, these are not "passable" in the State Duma.

In addition, Russia has been able to establish links with international **anti-choice and anti-LGBT organizations**, such as the World Congress of Families (United States – religious right, aiming at promoting traditional family values and defending the traditional role of family in the society). The alliance with Allan Carlson, a prominent figure of the WCF appeared when Professor Antonov, along with Professor Viktor Medkov invited him to Moscow, where they discussed the demographic decay being caused (according to them) by the post-war feminist and sexual revolutions. That's in fact how WCF was created, and since 1997 there is East-West cooperation on this matter.

After that, Russia had no links, however, with WCF for many years, which was the case until the moment when the Russian Orthodox Church started gaining more and more influence (end of last decade), and wanted to develop international links. Some of the key figures are Alexey Komov (Russian representative of the WCF), Father Dimitry Smirnov (Komov's spiritual father, main anti-abortion figure within the Russian Orthodox Church, Head of the Patriarchal Commission for the Family, the protection of motherhood and childhood), and Archpriest Maxim Obukhov (along with Smirnov, representing the Russian Orthodox Church on these matters).

In 2011, the Moscow Demographic Congress was hosted and organized by WCF in Russia, and symbolically, on the day after it finished, Mizulina introduced the first package of abortion reforms to the Duma (these ones were approved). This package included softer measures than the ones presented later, abovementioned.

The Slavic Center for Law and Justice is another anti-choice organization existing in Russia (affiliate of similar American and European organizations). It's directed by Vladimir Ryakhovsky, who has served in influential posts within the Russian Government.

Smirnov and Obukhov, previously mentioned, founded the Russian Foundation for Support of Family and Demography, and along with Komov, they co-run the Russian platform of Citizen Go, with moderate success.

The Eurasian Women Forum (St. Petersburg, September 2015) also exemplifies these connections, although this time with the European far-right movements. In this case, representatives from France (Beatrice Bourges) and Italy (Giorgia Meloni), with a discourse against LGBT rights, feminism and arguing a crisis of spirituality in the West were invited.

There are two foundations, established by **Russian oligarchs Yakunin** (who is also now a senator) and **Malofeev** in charge of promoting traditional values (notably, against abortion): Istoki (Origins) Endowment Fund (Yakunin) and St. Basil the Great Charitable Foundation (Malofeev). Both these foundations have links with WCF.

On the subject of **Russia and anti-abortion movements in neighboring countries**, there are possible connections (unconfirmed). Slovak anti-abortion MEP Anna Zaborska was a speaker at the Moscow Demographic Summit of 2011, and may have been an influential voice to the draft law that followed this summit in Russia. In 2014 Georgia also approved the counseling and a 5-day waiting period, thanks to a commitment between the Georgian Parliament and the Georgian Orthodox Church. Lithuania has not yet implemented such measures, but the Ministry of Health is preparing a draft law on the waiting period. Similarly, in Latvia, the Parliament is discussing a draft law, which would increase the waiting period and would introduce mandatory counseling for women seeking abortion.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a calm situation for **LGBT groups** for about ten years. Starting in 2003, however, some draft laws have appeared, intending to penalize gay propaganda. Alexander Chuev (Just Russia Party) was the author of these drafts, which were not approved because of inconsistencies with the freedom of expression provisions of the Federal Constitution. Nonetheless, at a regional level, from 2006 onwards, 11 regions have adopted similar laws. A federal draft law was introduced in 2012 by the Legislative Assembly of Novosibirsk. As it is widely known, Putin is at the front of the anti-LGBT movement.

It is also important to state that there are some actors opposing the law, the most known is Nikolay Alexeev (human rights defender and LGBT activist). He's won a case against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights related to the prohibition of gay

parades. His main critic against the law is that it lacks a division between propaganda and education.

Following Russia, sets of similar laws were promoted in former Soviet countries (including some of the EU countries such as Latvia). Armenia, Lithuania, Moldova and Ukraine have dismissed some of the projects, for different reasons (EU pressure, aspiration to become part of the EU, and others). Belarus and Kyrgyzstan are still discussing related draft laws on the subject.

At the UN, Russia has had some successes in promoting traditional values, such as the adoption of a resolution by the Human Rights Council in 2011 entitled “Promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms through a better understanding of traditional values of humankind”, and a follow-up resolution in 2012 entitled “Promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms through a better understanding of traditional values of humankind: best practices”. Both resolutions faced large resistance and criticism from member states and civil society organizations, but nonetheless, approved. The criticism was mostly related to human rights issues, and because of that, Russia slightly changed the rhetoric, and promoted an agenda based on family and its protection. Thus, in 2014, the resolution entitled “Protection of the Family” was adopted, and later, a review resolution in 2015.

### Russia’s influence on promoting reactionary or socially regressive values in Central Europe (Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) *Political Capital Institute*

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A dangerous situation may have arisen on the European continent, where Russian ideological expansion, closely tied to foreign policy goals, endorsing regressive, illiberal and anti-Western principles, meets with a growing popularity of far-right parties, illiberal movements, and spreading political disillusionment with liberalism, human rights and democratic ideals.

Dissemination of anti-human rights and non-Western ideology abroad through soft power has two explicit channels: public diplomacy (changing the discourse about Russia) and protection of the Russian minority abroad (including access to appropriate cultural, ideological and patriotic information and education).

The media is essential in the diffusion of the illiberal ideology, and a new doctrine on information is currently being formulated in Russia, whose goal is the “promotion of spiritual and cultural values of the peoples of Russia in the world”.

The Ukrainian crisis has been a catalyst event regarding the Russian influence in Central Europe, increasing the Russian political-cultural activity in all five countries under review in the report (Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).

Political and ideological influence has been effective in substituting the declining of the economic power of Russia. Political and cultural influence is sometimes hard to



differentiate: many pro-Russian actors represent Russian geopolitical endeavors first and foremost, pushing the cultural agenda into a secondary role.

Despite the fact that reactionary values are only one – and small – part of the Kremlin's efforts to subvert liberal-democratic order and pro-Western orientation, **three major factors enhance the importance of the Russian reactionary values agenda worldwide:**

- It's a subtle form of influence if compared to direct or economic pursue of interests.
- Kremlin's cultural impact joins forces with other reactionary forces: Russian Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, evangelist movements in the United States, and many pro-life, pro-family and anti-abortion traditionalist NGOs (in addition to the network of far-right and even far-left movements with similar agendas).
- Russia is the only sovereign state with unmatched capabilities among developed countries taking direct part in those global traditionalist networks vying to reverse the development of worldwide human rights efforts.

The Kremlin is taking different approaches to spreading its influence in each country, depending on the cultural proximity and the public's perception of Moscow. The pro-Russian orientation of the elite and the public in general determines the room for manoeuver. The **ratio of Russian-speaking minorities** is low in all countries, but considerable in the Czech Republic and Austria, which is why strategies targeting the Russian diaspora are the most visible in these.

Cultural infiltration and the value export activity is much stronger via fringe organizations (radical parties, small NGOs, diaspora organizations, fringe media) than via the mainstream of the political spectrum, and since there is no dominantly pro-Russian public opinions, this value export activity finds indirect ways. The Russian regime takes advantage of different reactionary societal structures and infrastructure already available.

**Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary** are the countries where the public diplomacy already played a crucial role, and while socially regressive agenda is strong in **Poland**, in this country Russia plays a smaller role in the dissemination of this agenda.

The elites are the most infiltrated by pro-Russian ideological stances in **Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary**, and we can find strong influence in the media in the same countries. The public opinion is the most receptive to cultural and ideological influences in **Slovakia** ("pan-Slavic" sentiments are generally strong), but **Austria** also presents a considerable level of acceptance and receptiveness.

In **Slovakia**, the Roman Catholic Church and different paramilitary organizations seem to be the most important tools; while pro-Russian media in the **Czech Republic**; nationalist and pro-life movements in **Poland**; the governmental party Fidesz, the far-right Jobbik and traditionalist NGOs in **Hungary** are the most important sources of the ideological influence. In **Austria**, the societal structures are used mainly for political-economic ends, and there is a degree of ideological influence through non-traditional media, cultural associations, and political parties (FPÖ).

The organizational structures that help in the ideological export are diverse as well. The rather supportive cultural environment in **Slovakia** prompts scores of pro-Russian “grassroots” organizations, including ideologically very proactive official Russian intuitions as well. In **Hungary**, the openly pro-Russian rightist political elite enables the establishment of fringe pro-Russian ideological initiatives, which, on the one hand, have access to huge mainstream political-cultural networks, on the other hand are “invisible” in the general public. **Austria and Poland** are similar in that both countries’ pro-Russian structures are limited to a handful of organizations or persons. Still, pro-Russian stakeholders in Austria can reach up to the highest elite circles, while Polish pro-Russian organizations interconnectedness is a result of necessity, as it faces a fiercely anti-Kremlin elite and public. **The Czech Republic** seems to be somewhere in between. Cultural proximity enables several openly pro-Russian media with known journalists and owners to flourish but Czech public opinion and the country’s elite still remains pro-European.

Challenged by publics which are rather sensitive to direct Russian propaganda, as a reminiscent of Soviet legacy, Russia has embarked on a special media strategy in the CEE-region. Instead of directing the Kremlin’s messages directly through official channels, we can witness the creation or activation of scores of native-speaking pro-Russian news media/propaganda/intelligence sites since the onset of Crimean crisis.

What make the tiniest Russian cultural influence dangerous are the **traditionalist pan-European networks** Russia plays a vital part of. On the right side of the political spectrum, neo-Nazi movements and far-right parties have established a far-right cultural network infusing neo-Nazi ideology with the Eurasianism of Alexandr Dugin. Traditionalist pro-life, pro-family organizations encounter a similar international network of NGOs close to the Kremlin, for example CitizenGo or the World Congress of Families.

According to the main findings of the study, the analysis of the following channels requires **the most attention**:

- “Grassroots” organizations and strong political influence on the far-right in Slovakia.
- New media in the Czech Republic.
- Pro-Russian political organizations, ultra-conservative Christian organizations and broader nationalistic movements in Poland.
- Fringe media and the FPÖ in Austria.
- Right-wing political parties and their “pseudo-NGO-s” in Hungary.

**New approaches and techniques are needed.** At the moment, political will to push back the efforts of ideological export are lacking in the respective member states, in the European Union and from the United States as well. While the European Union has set the task to “counter Russian propaganda”, this taskforce is not expected to make any significant change.

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## Traditional and Family Values in the Orthodox Commonwealth

Florin Buhuceanu

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Several ideological concepts developed after the election of the Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) are interrelated with state politics directions exercised by the Putin Administration and have a direct impact upon the status of **LGBT rights and sexual and reproductive rights**. These concepts are:

- The traditional values of humankind, one of the most successful ideological products of export of the ROC and Russian Federation.
- The extension of the *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) in terms of strategic influence in the Orthodox Commonwealth and beyond.
- The 'spiritual security' of the nation appropriated by the Russian state and assimilated into its national security operational model.

A direct connection between state security, foreign affairs and preservation of the public role of the Orthodox Church can be identified back in January 2000. Putin Administration intentionally and explicitly has equated religious traditional narratives with the fundamentals of the state security. At that time, a number of threats that endanger national internal capabilities are identified: "a sharp drop in the birth rate and average life expectancy, the deformation of the demographic and social composition of society, a dwindling of the labor resources as the foundation for industrial development, a weakening of the fundamental cell of society, the family, and a lowering of the spiritual, moral and creative potential of the population". LGBT and sexual and reproductive rights are trapped into this context.

These ideological concepts are resembled and constantly reconfiguring the 'Russian doll' to allow Russia to serve as versatile and persuasive as possible its historical mission. In the words of the influential conservative leader and philanthropist Malofeev, this mission is to liberate the country and the world from "the new liberal anti-Christian totalitarianism of political correctness, gender ideology, mass-media censorship and neo-Marxist dogma".

The countries in which the study focuses are not located in the "near abroad" of Russia, they are not member states of the former Soviet Union, but form a target identified as being part of the Orthodox Commonwealth. In this sense, they are part of *Russkiy Mir* and became subjects of Putin's ideology. Traces of a common Balkan transgressive identity can be identified in all of them. They share a common perception of being a marginal part of the "West" (Europe), noticeable for the Western consciousness only during conflicts such as "Balkan war" or the danger of "Grexit". Unified geographically by a common Ottoman past and by a 'under siege' mentality, they activated a Grand National Narrative in which they defended not just themselves against the expansionist "Other one", but protected European society, and its culture and religion.

These countries faced waves of ethno-cultural and religious nationalism in the last century, placing the Orthodox Church in a privileged position. Their homogenous culture-nation based identity is treating with suspicion alterity in terms of religion and sexual orientation, and fuels negative prejudices leading to xenophobia, racism and homophobia. Orthodoxy is viewed as the backbone of regional, national and personal identity, while separation from church and state is a foreign concept, almost utopian

and denounced as “non-Orthodox”. Anti-Westernism was often linked in the whole region with a fateful return to the Orthodox roots.

The Orthodox Churches are treated as state institutions, having a clear tendency to prioritize national religious traditions over the human rights system understood and treated with suspicion as a Western instrument that is secularized and secularizing Eastern Europe and Western Balkans. The notion that LGBT, sexual and reproductive health rights are “new rights” attacking the civilization is an imbedded belief and Russia is viewed as an international actor fighting for Christian values.

Homosexuality and abortion are the triggers of international campaigning efforts coordinated by Russia, and what is surprising is that the argumentation used in favor of family and traditional values is borrowed from the human rights discourse. Freedom of religion and the rights of the majority are endangered; therefore state and Church should act and react to better protect human rights of the majority, natural family and public morals. Any legislation protecting LGBT rights and various other discriminated groups, including women and religious minorities, is considered to put in danger freedom of religion – that is practices as being on top of other fundamental human rights. Legislations inspired from the EU are dangerous.

Among the groups and institutions supporting these views and policies, some of them have capacity to internationalize it: the Department of Church and Society Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, Russkiy Mir Fund (created in 2007 by president Putin to promote internationally Russian culture), Rossotrudnichestvo (the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots living abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation), the advocacy organization Familypolicy.ru (an anti-gay and pro-life Russian organization with strong ties with the Moscow Patriarchy, an offspring of the World Congress of Families), or the St. Andrew the First-Called Foundation (oligarch Yakunin).

## The Russian Influence in Italy and Spain: The Agenda of Reactionary Values

*Francisco Malavassi*

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**Italy and Spain** are countries with a strong Catholic tradition, which makes them susceptible and more receptive than others in Western Europe to the kind of influence exerted by the Russian Federation in promoting reactionary values. However, while there are some similarities, both cases are very different mainly because of the focus of the influence.

In Italy, the main focus of the agents promoting these reactionary values is on **LGBT rights** (and including gender ideology, which seems to be a big topic in Italy at the moment) while on Spain the focus is on **abortion** (LGBT rights seem to be more accepted).

Italy and Russia have always enjoyed a peculiar relationship. Since the end of WWII, even though Italy had committed governments to the West, it always kept a channel of

communication with the USSR, politically and economically. These economic and political ties have remained after the disappearance of the USSR, now with Russia, and there are important connections in terms of business and political parties, which are not the object of study of the report, nevertheless are important to understand the whole picture.

Recent events complete the background to understand what's happening in Italy: the recent sentence by the European court of Human Rights stating that Italy violates human rights by failing to offer enough legal protection for same-sex couples, the discussion around the Scalfarotto law (which is related to the punishment of homophobia, and has created a major debate in the country), and as in many other cases, the Ukrainian crisis.

There is an existing network of organizations and agents promoting the Russian agenda all over the Italian territory, at the core of which we could find **Alexey Komov, the Lombardia-Russia Associazione Culturale and Gianluca Savoini**. Komov, a militant of Putin's party, is the Russian representative of the World Congress of Families (WCF), an American organization that supports Christian values internationally (defending what they call the "natural family", opposing gay marriage, abortion, non-traditional sexual education, among other topics). He also helps handle international relations for the Russian Orthodox Church. He acts through the advocacy group Family Policy, and has links with the Foundation of St. Basil the Great and the Patriarchal Commission for Family Affairs and Protection of the Motherhood and the Childhood.

Komov visits Italy with frequency in order to participate in forums and meetings both political and apolitical, but always with a regressive agenda in mind. Whenever he has had the opportunity, he has defended the actions taken by Putin in making Russia the bulwark of Christianity. He's one of the (many) Russian friends of the Lega Nord. It is precisely in the North of Italy where he has found an important ally in defending his agenda, which has allowed him to take his message all over Italy: Gianluca Savoini president of the Cultural Association Lombardy – Russia, and a member of the Lega Nord.

Komov has been appointed honorary president of the Association, which was created in 2014, and which is defined as a cultural non-party group but with an interest in specific ideas that are based in Putin's vision of the world. According to the association, the current world is in denial of its traditional past. Russia – they say – is the only light to look at, in that regard, with hope. Following this argument, its objectives are related to the promotion and diffusion of ideas defending Russia's position in the world. The communications and events published by the association clearly attack Western values and rights. The members of the organization have even been able to incorporate the situation in Ukraine to the agenda of traditional values.

The Association appears as organizer or co-organizer of events hosted by other organization all over Italy – organizations that in fact directly promote a reactionary agenda, and in many occasions Komov or Savoini attend these events. The most active of these other organizations are **Provita, Associazione Culturale La Torre or Giuristi per la Vita (Lawyers for Life)**.

When it comes to the role of **the media**, there is a strong presence of Russia Today or Sputnik (replacing La Voce della Russia); however, their agenda seems to be more related to political topics. There is also a popular website called “Lo Sai?”, which is apparently denouncing conspiracies but whose discourse is actually about the agenda of reactionary values, the hate towards the United States (and in a general sense, the Western values), and the supposed magnificence of Putin and Russia.

Other organizations that seem to be outside of the main network, but that promote reactionary values are La Manif pour Tous Italia (which in fact has made some efforts to become non-associated with Russia/Putin) or Luca Volontè’s organization Fondazione Novae Terrae. Volontè is also an important figure at a European level when it comes to the promotion of reactionary values and Russia’s interests.

The Spanish case seems to be less complicated than the Italian, with weaker and non-clear connections. Similarly to Italy, there seems to be a main network and Alexey Komov is also present, however, he’s not as prominent as in Italy. Komov has been invited in many occasions to Madrid in order to participate in different forums organized by **Hazte Oír**, **Citizen Go** or **Más Libres**, all three organizations composed practically by the same people. Luca Volontè has been invited too, to many forums, and along with Komov, and Ignacio Arsuaga, from Spain, the three of them seem to dominate the agenda of these events and to collaborate closely with each other. Some of the events in which they participate, have had presence from members of the Popular Party. Nonetheless, the Popular Party has been criticized by the people defending reactionary values because of the dismissal of the new abortion law.

Arsuaga is at the very center of the happenings in Spain. He’s the president and founder of Hazte Oír, an organization promoting “the political participation and the defense of life and human dignity, as well as the traditional family values”, according to their website. Their way of advocating for the topics of their interest is through online petitions. As such, there are petitions, for instance, against gender ideology, against abortion, or against the possibility of the induction of death. Most of the petitions surpass the expectations (20.000 signatures).

Arsuaga is very active in social networks and he’s definitely an opinion maker. In fact, he is the president of the WCF in Spain, which has allowed him to have a close relationship with Komov. He constantly praises Russia’s actions against abortion, as shown in different pieces of opinion. He has also said that he wishes for the Spanish government to put in place similar measures to protect the traditional family than the ones that have been put in place in Russia. And according to some of his declarations, the gay lobby’s objective is to destroy marriage.

The Spanish-based platform Citizen Go operates similarly to Hazte Oír, and its objective is to present itself as a global Christian cyber-lobby. It’s basically Hazte Oír for the whole world. Arsuaga and Volontè are among its board members. Más libres is another project sponsored by Hazte Oír, aiming at defending freedom of religion. All three organizations claim to be self-funded, but the information provided on this subject is not clear or complete.

Other organizations in Spain defending traditional values include **Professionals for Ethics** (which has honored Luca Volontè for his work) and **Foro Rusia** (a think-tank defending Russia’s actions).

There's a strong group of **pro-Russian media** and pseudo intellectuals, including as expected Russia Today and Sputnik. Conservative mainstream media such as ABC or La Razón constantly praise Putin's actions. There's an equivalent to Italy's "Lo Sai?" called "El Espía Digital", in this case formed by people that could be identified with far-right movements in Spain. Some of these people are regular collaborators to Russia Today. Other collaborators such as Juan Manuel del Prada are Eurosceptic and presenting the European Union as being created only to damage Spain. Finally, Intereconomía.TV is a TV channel linked to Julio Ariza, who has criticized the abortion laws and LGBT rights, and usually invites pro-Russian speakers to the different shows.

### Russia in Europe: Reactionary Values Agenda – The Case of Lithuania *The Open Society Fund Lithuania*

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Lithuania is a Baltic country that has long and complicated relationship history with Russia. In the 20th century, Lithuania spent almost fifty years under the occupation of soviet Russia. Counting together with more than one hundred years under the rule of tsarist Russia, in the last two centuries Lithuania spent more time being ruled by its eastern neighbor than as a free and independent state. The country was largely left out of the processes that shaped today's western democracies, and lengthy periods under authoritarian Russian influence left an imprint.

After the fall of the soviet regime, Lithuania became a part of Western geopolitical space, joining the European Union and NATO in 2004.

This blend of historical factors largely shaped cultural, social and political divides in today's Lithuanian society. One of the major divides is how people view and judge soviet times and how they view the country's relationships with Russia. A large part of the population feels sentimental and nostalgic of the soviet era. More than half would support pragmatic, neutral or "softer" country's approach to Russia and maintaining close political and economic ties. Others, including the ones whose relatives suffered under the occupation, want to erase any soviet heritage from independent Lithuania's narrative. They strongly support strict state's policy towards its eastern neighbor and all forms of independence from Russia, including energy sector.

This divide determines electoral choices and is used by the parties to appeal to their respective electorates. However, it is now also increasingly exploited by groups, organizations and individuals, supportive of Kremlin's home and foreign policies. In 2013 and 2014, analysts warned of intensified actions of groups that openly welcome Russia's ambitions of territorial and cultural expansion.

Another major divide is the attitudes towards the so-called "Western values", or cultural orientation, which, previously overshadowed by the issues of economic and political security, now is becoming increasingly significant. "Western values" are usually associated with liberal, individualistic or post-modern values.

These values as individual rights and freedoms are still rather foreign to Lithuanian culture. Therefore ratification of European and international human rights treaties are yet to translate to substantial changes for individual rights protection in Lithuania. Surveys show that, although politically and economically part of Western community, in terms of values and deeply held beliefs, Lithuania is still closer to other post-soviet and post-communist states, including Russia. Some traditional values such as respect for authority, institution of family with traditional gender roles, and national pride, appeal to considerable part of Lithuanian population. Equally, the majority of political parties follow a socially conservative agenda, even the ones that could be associated with center left, such as Lithuanian Social Democrat Party.

Putin's socially conservative agenda seems to be designed to have broad appeal to beliefs, that are still highly prevalent in Russian society and in some other parts of the world and Europe, including post-soviet and post-communist states. However, it is inherently different from Western countries' conservative agenda because of its authoritarian nature.

The "traditional values" narrative became a part of mainstream politics in Lithuania back in 2007-2008. It resulted in a policy document entitled "State Family Policy Framework" which defined family as married adults with or without children, whilst stating that the framework does not encompass "potential diversity of family concepts in private or cultural sphere", thus excluding all other forms of family from state's obligation to afford them legal protection. The framework was ruled unconstitutional and discriminative by the Constitutional Court in 2011 but the "traditional values" narrative remained strongly embedded in political and public discourse.

Since 2008, there have been numerous attempts in Lithuania to impose traditional values through laws and policies, aiming to preserve traditional family, restrict LGBT rights and women's rights. There has been a strong opposition to all attempts of strengthening the legal protection of children. Over the last several years, this reactionary trend has increased due to intensified activities of various socially conservative actors – politicians, religious organizations, groups, and communities. LGBT, women's rights and children's rights became entangled in various conspiracy theories and escalated to an enormous extent, even turning into protest movements and causing havoc in the country.

In 2013-2014, radical groups and individuals became ardent supporters of the Kremlin's actions against Ukraine. Messages on conspiracy theories around children protection issues turned into proclamations worshiping Putin, who is to save people from their "failed" and "fascist" governments, the "rotten" European Union and "imperialistic" U.S. This raised suspicions that some of these groups and individuals were used to advance Russia's agenda in Europe. In 2015, after receiving a report from the State Security Department, Lithuanian prosecution launched criminal investigations into the activities of 9 individuals and their potential ties with Russian authorities.

The report shows how Russia's influence in Lithuania has not decreased, but has intensified over the last several years and obtained new shapes, forms and channels of influence. There are clear indications that certain weak spots of the Lithuanian social and political environment are exploited such as low social trust and low trust in state



institutions, at the same time submissive relation towards authority, cultural proximity to Russia and other post-soviet/post-communist states, priority to economic security over liberties, radicalization of civil society, growth of Christian right movement which now shares the same moral agenda as Kremlin, radicals' access to the parliament used as a channel to infiltrate issues to political agenda. These factors enhance effects of multi-channelled Russia's influence, including its moral agenda, which is authoritarian and anti-liberties.

The exposure of Lithuania's cultural proximity to Russia and Putin becoming a traditional values' defender had a "mirror" effect on the Lithuanian political right. It is for the first time that value-orientations of Lithuanian political parties acquired such political significance. The last parliamentary term was marked by Liberal Movement party openly declaring pro-human rights values agenda, and there are strong indications that Conservatives are reconsidering their value-alliance with pro-Kremlin parties in light of new national security challenges. These developments can have a positive effect in terms of removing Kremlin-style reactionary initiatives from the parliament's agenda.

The Kremlin's information policy and intensified attacks on Lithuania's informational space also had a double-sided effect. On the one hand, it revealed that Lithuanian authorities are not in a position to give an efficient coordinated response on their own, due to limited capacities, and therefore a unified European/Western response to Kremlin's propaganda is needed. However, it also produced new waves of civic activism, working to expose pro-Kremlin networks in Lithuania, and, as a result, reducing the potential damage the network could do with spreading propaganda messages, and attracting and indoctrinating radicalized individuals and groups.

### **"Traditional Values" in the Russian Public Diplomacy toward Latvia** *Andis Kudors – The Centre for East European Policy Studies (CEEPS)*

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Considering Russia's ideological and normative "counterattack" on the Western world, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia are the frontline states, which are the first ones taking the information pressure. The Western countries have not much time for relaxation, because Russian propagandists, through the RT channel and Internet trolls' activities, are already trying to win the hearts and minds of the West Europeans. Latvia is vulnerable in this context, for the considerable number of Russian speakers provides Moscow with additional possibility to address a large part of Latvia's society.

One of the tools used by Russia to exert its influence is public diplomacy. Although Russian public diplomacy, considering the involved actors, meets the theory of new public diplomacy, however, in practice it is rather a one-way communication which often causes tension in target countries. Russian public diplomacy faces challenge in some of the former Soviet Republics, i.e., it has to compete with a much stronger center of gravitation of soft power – European Union. Although both sides speak about the necessity to avoid drawing new splitting lines in Europe, in particular situations, such as

in Ukraine before and after the EU Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius of late 2013, the official Russia drew the line through the territory of Ukraine.

Unfortunately, Russian foreign policy of Vladimir Putin's period toward the neighboring countries – former Soviet Republics – often is based on the idea that there can be only one winner in the game. The aforementioned helps to understand why Russia is so aggressive, while propagating its “traditional values” – since there will be only one winner, so it is nearly the life-or-death struggle.

In addition to this, Russian Orthodox Church is mentioned in the new Conception of Russian Foreign Policy adopted in early 2013, that continues the development of the theme of dialogue among civilizations, stating that Russia “facilitates dialogue and partnership between cultures, religions and civilizations, including within the UN system and other international and regional organizations; supports relevant initiatives of civil society and actively interacts with the Russian Orthodox Church and other main confessions of the country [..].” The ROC's Patriarch Kirill calls on Russia and Europe to cooperate, but only on the basis of Russian and Western European Christian roots. Kirill has stated the Moscow Patriarchate could help Europe return to its Christian roots and contribute to the peaceful coexistence of different religious confessions, claiming that Russia in this respect was a good example.

Having regained its state's independence in 1991, Latvia determinedly embarked on the path of democratization and made rapid steps, carrying out reforms of political system and economics. If initially Russia also took the similar direction, then during Boris Yeltsin's second presidency and all the more with Vladimir Putin's coming to power, Russia deviated from the reforms' route in several spheres. Russia's revanchist regional predominance tendencies have had their impact also on its bilateral relationship with Latvia. In economic sphere, there have been just fragmentary disagreements, but on the issues of values, discrepancies have only deepened.

The fact is significant that even during the periods of thaw in Latvia–Russia relationship, none of Russian Presidents or Prime Ministers wished to pay official visit to Latvia. Unlike their Russian colleagues, Latvian Presidents Guntis Ulmanis and Valdis Zatlers have visited officially the neighboring country. The two countries' differences in dimensions and influence on the course of international policy are not sufficient grounds for such situation. Although since ever early 1990s Russia has been criticizing Latvia for seeming violations of Russian speakers' human rights, nevertheless it also cannot be considered as the real cause of the relatively chilly relations.

The reasons should be rather looked for in differences between Latvian and Russian foreign policy basic vectors' directions. The defined in 1995 Latvian foreign policy priorities – accession to NATO and European Union – determined the character of the two countries' relationship in the following years. Russia has disapproved any former USSR member state's moving in the direction of Western integration, and Latvia is not an exception.

Disregarding the aforementioned, the intensity of economic relations between the two countries has grown since 2004.

In 2007, Latvia – Russia Border Treaty was signed, and Latvia abandoned its claim to the territory taken away from it during the Soviet period – Abrene or Pytalova. Russia changed its strategy and began to look for contacts not only in ethnic Russian political parties, but also in the ruling People's Party. However, the People's Party, due to cynicism of its leaders and mistakes made in domestic policy, was rapidly losing its popularity in the eyes of Latvian intellectuals.

Improvement in the two countries' mutual relationship took place in 2010 thanks to Latvian President Valdis Zatlers' visit to Moscow and St. Petersburg. Possibility of the visit had been partly ensured by Russia's wish to enhance its relations with the US and EU to gain their support for modernization process in Russia. But the visit would be impossible without Valdis Zatlers' efforts to achieve positive changes in Latvia – Russia relationship.

Differences in foreign policy and value orientation have had their impact also on Latvia – Russia bilateral relationship. Russia's foreign policy's influence on Latvia cannot be fully comprehended without taking into consideration the significant differences in the two countries' democratization achievements.

The activated in 2006 Russia's policy toward its compatriots residing abroad (hereinafter – compatriot policy) is an important part of Latvia – Russia relationship. Although the law on Russian compatriot policy was adopted even in 1999, nevertheless several initiatives which intensified implementation of the policy were commenced in 2006 – 2007. In 2006, the first three-year program of work with Russian compatriots residing abroad was adopted. In 2007, the foundation "Russkii Mir" was established to provide financial support for various Russian cultural projects in Latvia. Russian compatriot policy in Latvia has a distinctive feature – Moscow sees the Russians residing in Latvia simultaneously as the public diplomacy target audience and as Russian foreign policy tool.

The mentioned policy has several sub-directions: the issues of Russians' rights, popularizing the Russian language and culture, spreading a specific interpretation of history, popularizing the orthodoxy and providing support for the Russian language media in Latvia. In practice, implementation of Russian compatriot policy means financial and information backing the Russian NGOs, organizing seminars dealing with the issue of necessity to grant the Russian language the status of second state language, as well as organizing various undertakings and activities related to history. A part of Latvia's society lives mainly in Russian, not Latvian, information space, and the result is that they are the Russians residing in Latvia who are under stronger influence of Russian propaganda.

Russian funds have been used for organizing cultural events, conferences, publishing textbooks, producing films glorifying mainly the greatness of Russian nation and keeping silent about the Baltic countries occupation.

The "conservative turn" in Russia, carried out by Vladimir Putin, has automatically influenced the values spread by Russian compatriot policy. Having sensed those changes, the residing in Latvia Russian activists joined the new trend.

Whether it is explanation of Russian "traditional values", or criticizing the European Union for undermining the traditional family, the Russian media are the most efficient means of sending the message to Latvia. Major Russia's media are under direct or indirect control of Russia's political elite. The presence of Russian media should be viewed not only in the context of security policy, but also Russian compatriot policy.

Discussion of the issues of support for traditional family values in Latvia was not initiated just with the “conservative turn” in Russia at the beginning of V. Putin’s third presidency in 2012 and 2013. The support (sometimes however only on rhetoric’s level) for traditional family and conservative values in Latvian political discourse was voiced even in 1990s and in early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The difference from the previous period is that lately the aforementioned values have been backed by representatives of not only Latvian, but also so called Russian speakers’ parties.

On the topic of the positions on politics of Moscow Patriarchate’s central apparatus and Latvian Orthodox Church, these should be considered separately. Although Latvian Orthodox Church is subordinated to Moscow Patriarchate, nevertheless it does not always follow the Russian Orthodox Church leadership’s position on the issues of Russian compatriot policy and politics in general. The lead by Patriarch Kirill Russian Orthodox Church considers itself as an active Kremlin’s ally in Russian foreign policy, but the lead by Metropolitan Alexander Latvian Orthodox Church tries to concentrate rather on spiritual matters, maintaining reserved attitude in its statements on sensitive political issues in Latvia.

The ROC’s activities in Latvia, aimed at spreading traditional values and negative attitude toward granting special rights to sexual minorities, in this context, do not differ from the ROC’s activities elsewhere.

### Russian Subversion and Regressive Agenda in France

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In order to understand the existing links between the Russian agenda of reactionary values and the actors in France promoting this agenda, it is necessary to provide a background on the current **French political context**. Public opinion remains sober about Putin, but very critical of his military intervention in Donbass and Syria. Nonetheless, the growing wave of refugees arriving to Europe is changing the odds. The French are confused about this situation, and this confusion is not only worsened by the Russian intervention in Syria, but also by the recent terrorist attacks in Paris. Even the political class is confused: Hollande manifested in October 2015 (prior to the Paris attacks) that he would not act together with Russia in Syria, but after the attacks, Hollande promoted the creation of a wide coalition, which included Russia. Even though a strategic partnership with Russia is not likely to happen, tactical cooperation may continue, and this will bring the two countries closer to each other. Having this scenario, it is impossible to make short-term predictions on how the relationship between France and Russia will evolve.

The political context is now more complex than it has historically been in France, and the recent terrorist attacks illustrate how internally divided the French political class is, making it hard to reach a national consensus on important topics. The radicalization of the conservative right and part of the center-right may potentially be even more threatening to the democratic values in France than the extremist parties. The Front National has definitely restructured the French political system, even if the party may

not win a presidential election in the near future. The Fifth Republic polity, regulated by the competition between two leading parties, Left and Right, has disappeared, and the Front National is now a third voice in the political landscape.

In the current socialist government, political conservatism seems to be winning over social reforms. The French national interest may now be defined in terms of security, and not in terms of social progress against unemployment, which could be both beneficial or not to Hollande, depending on many factors.

Euroscepticism, coupled with traditional anti-Americanism, is now a majority view amongst the French political class.

And for the French it is still not clear what to do with Russia. Even if the EU has decided to maintain the sanctions to Russia until July 2016, the security problem and Hollande's recent visit to Moscow have reactivated the controversy. Opinion polls show that Putin is disliked, but French people support economic cooperation with Russia, out of concern for security. However, the Russian communication policy is probably successful in reaching out to the majority of French that do not want to open the country to refugees. More and more, and in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, the public opinion seems to be in favor of a coalition against ISIS which would include Russia, and also in favor of maintaining a good economic relationship with Russia.

In this context, some actors promoting traditional or reactionary values have appeared. Probably the most visible is *La Manif pour tous*, a movement for the defense of traditional family values, which was created against gay marriage in France. Even if they lost their battle, the movement was very successful in mobilizing thousands of people and now remains as a low-level but constant contestant of the government. The movement was created in 2012 as a reaction against the law initiated by the socialist government known as *le mariage pour tous*. Its members have different backgrounds; they mainly come from catholic associations and conservative or far-right parties (but with no official participation from the Catholic Church or political parties).

Many participants, in this movement, see positively Russia's publicized pro-family policies. They welcome the Russian law that prohibits propaganda for homosexuality and they consider Putin as an ally in the defense of traditional values. A few leaders of the French movement even tried to create an alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church and some Russian politicians in 2014. However, this has divided the movement and as a result, the direction of *La Manif pour tous* has officially stated that the group has no relations with the Russian regime.

The organization participated in an event that took place in March 2014, when a group of representatives of Catholic organizations travelled to Moscow, in a trip organized by Gregor Puppinck (Director of the European Centre for Law and Justice, one of the most important French actors in the promotion of a regressive agenda in Europe). Some of the organizations that participated in this event were *Famille Chrétienne* (Christian Family), the European Centre for Law and Justice (a Christian-inspired NGO with an office in Strasbourg, which "*advocates for the protection of religious freedoms and the dignity of the person with the European Court of Human Rights and the other mechanisms afforded by the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, the*

*Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and others*”, according their web site), Jérôme Lejeune Foundation and Alliance Vita (pro-life foundations). They met with patriarch Kirill, and with some members of the parliament.

According to the department of external relations of the Orthodox Patriarchate, everything was organized to help their French partners to find support in Russia, which suggests that the French were offered Russian money.

The reaction from some members of the Catholic Church and some Catholic associations was very critical; there was a general disapproval, and some feared the *putinisation* of the French movement. According to the critics, such as René Pujol, famous Catholic journalist, Russia is in no place to become the bulwark of Christianity, and Putin only wants to find allies in Europe. Representatives of *la Manif pour tous* were forced to answer, and stated that the movement is independent and did not initiate the Moscow encounter. However, even today, the movement continues to be ambiguous about Putin’s regime.

The **French Catholic Church** embraces traditionalism and, for a good part, *putinism*. Pro-Russian groups insist on presenting Vladimir Putin as a defender of traditional values, Christian morals, and family legislation. Even if France is a country of a strong Catholic tradition, Catholicism is in rapid decline. Now, Catholics have to fight to be heard in the public debate. While some Catholics have now accepted their status as a declining force (56% of the population is Catholic, but only 12% attend a service at least once a month), others tend to be more radical and want France to remain a country of a strong catholic tradition and influence. While this group is a minority within the Catholic Church, it is a very active minority, fighting against gay marriage and what they call the *islamization* of the French society.

Many of them have a positive opinion of the Russian regime and Putin, according to an analysis of the Catholic traditionalist web media, such as *Le Salon Beige*, *Riposte Catholique*, *Meta-Blog*, *Perepiscopus* and *Osservatore Vaticano*. In particular, *Le Salon Beige* has published many articles on Putin and Russia, describing the country as a perfect example of cooperation between church and government.

Nevertheless, an analysis of other Catholic media indicates that this point of view is not shared by all Catholics in France, and for many, Putin is a dictator doing whatever he wants. The Conference of Bishops of France has not expressed a strong opinion in one sense or the other, remaining cautious, except for the Bishop of Bayonne, Monseigneur Marc Aillet, who participated in the abovementioned trip to Moscow with some of the French Catholic associations, and who has praised Putin for his actions in returning pride to Russian citizens.

In the **French army**, a significant number of officers openly express support for Russian policies. They feel sympathy, and sometimes even admiration, for Putin. In public declarations, retired high-ranking officers often give positive comments about the Russian intervention in Syria, and show understanding for the Russian action in Ukraine. But no particular remarks on the topic of traditional values are made except for the fact that the same people from the army defending Putin, have expressed that Islam is the true enemy of France.

An analysis of the political parties shows how some of the members of the **traditional right** (*Les Républicains*, formerly UMP) are very vocal in defending Russia's actions, and they are influencing a lot of French people. There are lots of rivalries within the leadership of the party (Sarkozy, Fillon, Villepin, Mariani), although all of them promote anti-European, anti-American, *souverainiste* policies. And the Kremlin is taking advantage of these rivalries. The result of these and other factors is a radicalization of a sector of the traditional right, leaning more and more towards the far right. Some members of *Les Républicains* have advocated for the lifting of sanctions against Russia. However, these links to Russia tend to be more political and not directly related to an agenda of traditional values.

There are also small radical right-wing parties such as *Debout la France* or the *Parti Chrétien-Démocrate*, which are defending Russia's policies, as well as retired politicians, such as Philippe de Villiers. All of them share anti-American, Eurosceptic points of view. A number of extreme-right activists also sympathize and sometimes cooperate actively with Russia to promote the Putin regime in France. They are very few but active, in the complex galaxy of radical organizations, pro-Nazi movements and adepts of white supremacy. For these militants, Russia is a model. They admire the tough authority regime, anti-West positions, and the connivance between political power and the Orthodox Church. Some of them are Alain Soral (*Égalité et Réconciliation*) and André Chanclu (*Collectif France-Russie*).

Finally, the *Front National* is proud to claim close friendship with Putin. The party is now a very important political force in France, and it condemns the sanctions against Russia, supported the delivery of the two Mistral warships, and wants to solve the Ukrainian crisis according to the Russian interests, to enhance dialogue with Russia. The party opposes French intervention in Syria against Bashar-al-Assad and supports the Russian idea of a big coalition against ISIS. It considers it is in the French national interest to build a strong partnership with Moscow, to secure long-term contracts for energy, and to demonstrate the capacity to be independent from the United States. The party is openly pro-Russian, and some of its leaders have close links to Russian authorities. The results of an investigation, however, show that the majority of voters of the *Front National* don't have a positive opinion of Putin.

*Valeurs actuelles* is a weekly magazine, which exemplifies how the **reactionary press** portrays Putin as a partner and a model. Its editor-in-chief, Frédéric Pons, belongs to a group of **pro-Putin, anti-liberal editorialists**, whose rhetoric is very similar to the official messages the Kremlin promotes. For them, Putin is a good leader because he is the kind of president who fights for the independence of his country, and because he is a Christian believer. Pons supports Putin mainly because he cultivates a close relationship with the Orthodox Church, with patriarch Kirill, and with the Monks of Varlaam.

In France, Russia has also been able to use the **cultural and orthodox networks** to exert influence. The Russian Orthodox Church and the post-1917 Russian diaspora are powerful networks for Putin's regime in France. This diaspora adheres to the reactionary values promoted by the Kremlin. In the last ten years, Moscow was able to reconnect with the diaspora and enlist it in its service. They count on the support of

Russian media in French, financed by Moscow, to disseminate the Russian values in France. This diaspora has presence mainly in Paris and Nice.

They are conservative, orthodox patriots. They remain faithful to the memory of the Tsarist absolutist regime, and tend to idealize this period of Russian history, and be very critical of the USSR. After Putin came to power, they changed their points of view. They suddenly appeared to be very supportive of the new Russia, because they believed the country was on the process of “rebirth”. The Russian president succeeded in winning an important part of this white immigration.

This relationship has led to the emergence of cultural associations such as *Union des compatriotes russes de France* (Union of Russian compatriots of France), which is a tool to enroll everyone of Russian origin to serve as a channel of influence and communication. “Prince” Alexander Trubetzkoi and Dimitri de Kochko (journalist) are important figures within these cultural networks. De Kochko openly explains that he works to improve the image of Russia in France.

The Russian Orthodox Church has been trying to take control of the Orthodox institutions in France (which were affiliated to the Patriarchate of Constantinople). There have been many victories, but an important loss: the main Cathedral of Paris in rue Daru. This loss has led to a change in the strategy, and now the Moscow Patriarchate is building its own, huge cathedral in the center of Paris. To purchase the land and build, the Russian church was able to spend unlimited money, and benefit from the support of former Russian president Medvedev, who asked for the support of former French president Sarkozy to get all necessary clearances. An agreement was negotiated directly between the two presidents at the time.

**For additional information on the report please turn to Open Estonia Foundation:**

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