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Mehra, Tanya, Thomas Renard and Merlina Herbach, ed(s). *Female Jihadis Facing Justice: Comparing Approaches in Europe*. The Hague: ICCT Press 2024.

Schmid, Alex (ed.) *Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness*, The Hague: ICCT, 2021.

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Poland: Ex Oriente Lux¹

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Poland is a challenging area for Russia to gain political influence. In Poland, founding an openly pro-Russian party is practically impossible due to historical reasons. First, a large part of Poland was occupied by Russia for 123 years. Then, during the interwar period, Poland remained a target of Soviet influence and sabotage operations.² For 45 years after World War II, Poland was forcibly incorporated into the Eastern Bloc and against the will of its citizens was ruled by the pro-Moscow communist party. In effect, after 1989, Poland chose a clearly pro-Western political course. Membership in the EU is supported by 74 percent of Poles,³ and 92 percent are in favour of NATO membership.⁴ Also, all the main political parties (both the right-wing populist United Right coalition, as well as the liberals, Christian democrats, and social democrats who will form a new government coalition after 2023) directly support Ukraine and the sanctions imposed on Russia. This situation is the reason why the leading partners for the Russian side have become the radicalised factions of the right and left, often extremists or supporters of niche ideologies.⁵ It was from these groups that came the protests against the presence of NATO troops in Poland,⁶ lack of support for the Ukraine war,⁷ as well as participants of conferences organised by Russia,⁸ political initiatives,⁹ and declarations of support for separatists in Donbas.¹⁰ Extreme groups are not only hungry for attention and political significance but also have an additional advantage for the Russian Federation. They are ideological laboratories where new ideas that favour Moscow can be generated.

Due to the apparent shift of the political scene towards the right, and the lack of definition of extremism in Polish law, there is no clear delineation between violent right-wing extremists (VRWE) and the political mainstream in Poland. This is also due to the weak involvement of state authorities in prosecuting hate crimes, as well as the fact that after 1989, all efforts to survey or outlaw extremist

organisations were compared to the oppressive activities of the secret police during the Polish People's Republic and were quickly dismissed as such.¹¹ Since Moscow is unable to create a pro-Russian party in Poland, it is enough for it to nurture an extremist idea and allow for its public and political solidification and growth. This way, after some time, more mainstream Polish publicists, academics, and politicians will take notice and hail it as a “refreshing impulse,” “return to the roots,” or a set of “true values.”¹²

That is why, when we take a closer political look at this pro-Russian milieu, it is clearly a combination of the most radical, anti-democratic wings of the right and left, which enter into various hybrid alliances and sprout from this mutually growing mycelium into dozens of micro-parties. These organisations are composed of a broad palette of former pro-Soviet communists, nationalists, religious zealots, national-Bolsheviks, monarchists, neo-Eurasianists, self-appointed officers of civil militias, anti-scientific conspiracy theorists, and antisemites.¹³ Two trends can be observed within this milieu: monarchist, nationalistic, ultra-religious, anti-Semitic politicians of the far-right Confederation party, and the national Bolshevik milieu. They stand out for several reasons. Among the first group, MP Grzegorz Braun stands out significantly in terms of propagating Russian narratives, intensive participation in the operation of pro-Russian political networks, and anti-Ukrainian excesses. Additionally, he regularly speaks to the Russian government media and met with a person expelled from Poland by the Polish counterintelligence as *persona non grata*.¹⁴ He will thus constitute the first case study of this chapter, analysing the Russian influence on the Polish far-right/REMVE milieu.

The second current mentioned – the Polish national Bolsheviks – seeks access to the Polish defence and security structures services, such as the army, police, national guard, and paramilitary groups. Its members willingly undergo military training. Additionally, their network of foreign collaborators includes Donbas separatists and terrorist organisations from the Middle East. At the same time, the leaders of this current/milieu are involved in Russian propaganda activities in Poland, Russia, occupied parts of Ukraine, Syria, Iran, and Lebanon. They also committed a terrorist attack, hence the choice to discuss in greater detail in this chapter is Falanga, the leading Polish national Bolshevik organisation.¹⁵

With the intensification of the armed conflict in Ukraine, Poland, the primary country on NATO's eastern flank and an essential ally of Kyiv, has become one of the critical fields of operation of the Russian services and their collaborators.

Already in 2014 and 2015, the increased activity of Russian agents of influence was noticeable.¹⁶ As time passed, their activity only increased. A multitude of small entities of the extreme right and extreme left became a key battleground for the Russian state and its security services. However, numerous, diverse sources allow us to trace Russian influence in Poland. The mechanism of Russia's politically harmful actions in the whole Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) is well described in the texts of Anton Shekhovtsov¹⁷ and Andreas Umland.¹⁸ The Polish context of this activity of the Russian Federation was discussed in more detail in the books by Grzegorz Rzeczkowski,¹⁹ Klementyna Suchanow,²⁰ Agnieszka Graff, Elżbieta Korolczuk,²¹ Tomasz Piątek,²² Mariusz Sepioło,²³ and the author of this chapter. Articles by Jakub Woroncow,²⁴ Julia Dauksza,²⁵ Anna Mierzyńska,²⁶ Daniel Flis,²⁷ and the author of this chapter²⁸ also made a significant contribution towards demonstrating the connections between Polish political actors and Moscow.

Case Study 1: Grzegorz Braun, Confederation MP

Leonid Swiridov, the Belarus-born representative of the Sputnik agency (a well-known disseminator of Russian disinformation), features in a peculiar photograph with the aforementioned Braun. The photo was most likely taken in Moscow in December 2018, years after Swiridov's expulsion from Poland at the request of the country's counter-intelligence agency.²⁹ This photo is a neat demonstration of how numerous conspiracy theories (anti-vaccination, anti-Semitic, anti-Masonic) and religious zealotry, professed by Braun in this case, can connect with alleged Russian influence and produce fascinating political returns, from Russia's point of view. These amounted to a monthslong anti-Ukrainian campaign which carried dangerous consequences for Poland's internal security, international standing, and stability.

Braun's party, Confederation, is an umbrella organisation, consisting of nationalists, ultra-conservatives, anti-vaxxers, and Catholic religious zealots. In the 2019 and 2023 parliamentary elections, Confederation won 6.81 percent³⁰ and 7.16 percent³¹ of the votes, respectively. Currently, it is being represented by eighteen out of 460 MPs who sit in the Polish Parliament and is the most significant party on the Polish far-right. Braun leads one of its co-elements, the Confederation of the Polish Crown, the most pro-Russian part of Confederation.

Braun's radicalisation, which led him to support Russia openly, began in 2010 with a plane crash in Smolensk. In the accident, the Polish President Lech Kaczyński and other members of the political elite died while on the way to commemorations of the Katyń massacre.³² Braun has become a proponent of a conspiracy theory about that crash. He believes that the passengers had been kidnapped and killed before the start. He posits that Presidents Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin put the plot in motion and the latter carried out the massacre.³³ During this period, Braun converted to Catholic traditionalism, began to attend masses in Latin, and in 2014 decided to run for president. His slogan was *Church – School – Shooting Range*. In his platform, he advocated for prison sentences for women who underwent abortion, and suggested having homosexuals whipped publicly.³⁴ Simultaneously, he came out as an ardent anti-vaxxer.³⁵ According to him, Poland should leave NATO and form alliances with Belarus, Iran, Turkey, and China.³⁶ He received 0.83 percent of the votes cast in the 2015 elections, but he declared these rigged and in a pre-6 January 2021 move, attempted to occupy the building of the National Electoral Commission.³⁷ Ultimately, only a few dozen supporters were with him in the building. The police intervened and forced the occupiers out, rendering Braun's coup entirely unsuccessful. After the elections, however, Braun was more politically successful while scoring 12 percent in the elections for the president (mayor) of Gdańsk, and then over 5 percent in Podkarpacie constituency for the European Parliament. Finally, 31,148 votes carried him to a parliamentary seat in 2019.³⁸

The process of winning political office saw Braun take an anti-Semitic turn. In his opinion, "international Zionist cadres" are "linked to American imperialism," and the goal of the Zionist movement is to maintain and strengthen the "world Jewish nation."³⁹ Israel is seen as a tool for achieving this goal. He sees Germany, allegedly clear of its guilt for the Holocaust, as the instigator of an anti-Polish campaign which is aimed at propagating the notion that Poland was responsible for the Jewish disaster. For Braun the goal of the campaign is to effectively establish a "Jewish archipelago-sovereignty" in the region from Stettin to Odessa, the so-called "Judeo-Polonia."⁴⁰ According to Braun, this process is to be supervised by the US Army. After the agreement between the governments of Poland and the US on enhanced defence cooperation was ratified in August 2020, he called this document Colonisation plus, and Occupation plus.⁴¹ He called for the US ambassador to be considered *persona non grata*⁴² and announced revelations that she was a Chinese agent.⁴³

If one were to judge these positions as extreme, then a look at his political collaborators provides any casual observer with ample evidence that these are, effectively, standard views in this milieu. Wiktor Węgrzyn, Braun's election agent, defended the Kremlin-supported motorcycle gang, the Night Wolves, who wished to tour Poland.⁴⁴ Rafał Mossakowski, Braun's political right-hand man with whom he led the occupation of the National Electoral Commission,⁴⁵ runs the Warsaw-based non-governmental organisation Education Centre Powiśle and the YouTube channel of the far-right magazine Magna Polonia. The latter is one of the main hubs in Poland for spreading conspiracy theories, fake news, and a far-right vision of the world. Mossakowski has also been organising regular anti-Ukrainian demonstrations since 2017.⁴⁶ Mossakowski organised many of his public events, including meetings with some of the most active supporters of the Kremlin among the Western far-right such as Nick Griffin of the British National Party and Roberto Fiore of New Force.⁴⁷ Holocher, the editor-in-chief of Magna Polonia, was also a member of Braun's staff and publishes Braun's texts in the magazine he runs. Holocher's statements today contain vicious anti-Ukrainian propaganda.⁴⁸ Braun's party expert on security and a member of the party's National Bureau is Sławomir Ozdyk,⁴⁹ a propagator of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory,⁵⁰ who regularly speaks to the Kremlin media⁵¹ and maintains a string of contacts in the transnational REMVE milieu.⁵² Among Braun's closest collaborators is Agnieszka Piwar from the Polish branch of Sputnik and the pro-Russian weekly magazine Myśl Polska. Andrzej Zapałowski is also an MP from the Confederation on behalf of Braun's Korona – one of the micro-parties which together make up Confederation. He takes an active part in the Russian disinformation apparatus. His statements have been published dozens of times by Sputnik,⁵³ the Ruposters and Pravda TV stations, and the Regnum and NewsBalt news agencies.⁵⁴ He believes that the Ukrainian lobby rules in Poland. He considers cooperation with Ukraine to be pointless because, in his opinion, it is a failed state and ruled there by the Banderite regime (after Stepan Bandera – the leader of Ukrainian nationalists) which is why Zapałowski demands the construction of a 3-meter fence with a length of 500km on the Polish-Ukrainian border.⁵⁵

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has not changed anything in the opinion or behaviour of Braun and his supporters. On the contrary, his anti-Ukrainian attitude has only strengthened and intensified. Opposition to condemning Russia, strengthening anti-Ukrainian attitudes, geopolitical conspiracy theories, fake news, and presence in the Russian media – this is what

Grzegorz Braun's last two years looked like. To a large extent, his public activity was channelled into activities directed against Ukrainian refugees and efforts to withdraw Polish support for its eastern neighbour. During the years 2022 and 2023, Braun:

- demanded that Ukrainian refugees should not be allowed to enter Poland;⁵⁶
- demanded that Polish money not be spent on helping the refugees;⁵⁷
- organised anti-Ukrainian conferences in Polish Parliament;⁵⁸
- was the only MP to vote against resolutions condemning the Russian genocide in Ukraine.⁵⁹ He, as one of the two MPs, also abstained from voting on a resolution “condemning the illegal referenda held by the Russian authorities in the occupied territories of Ukraine” and took steps to stop issuing visas to citizens of the Russian Federation;⁶⁰
- abstained while voting on Poland's consent to Sweden and Finland joining NATO;⁶¹
- opposed the recognition in the Parliament of Russia as a state sponsoring terrorism;⁶²
- falsely⁶³ accused Ukrainian migrants of murder committed in May 2022 in Warsaw;⁶⁴
- organised an all-Poland initiative Stop the Ukrainization of Poland with a conference in parliament and demonstrations all over Poland;⁶⁵
- demanded to close the Polish-Ukrainian border when the ban on men of military age leaving Ukraine is lifted;⁶⁶
- together with politicians from the Alternative for Germany and the Flemish Interest, called for the lifting of sanctions imposed on Russia, the abolition of subsidies for wind and solar energy, and the abolition of what they consider to be ideological taxation on fossil fuels;⁶⁷
- started to propagate the Polish version of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory. In his version of this narrative, Poles are to be replaced by Ukrainian refugees, and the whole displacement of these people to Poland is a planned operation to change the ethnic structure of Poland.⁶⁸

While Braun's anti-Ukrainian initiatives do not receive broader support in Poland, and the attendance at the events he organises is low (from ten to 300 people), they are widely noticed in the pro-Kremlin media and positioned as an important opposition to Poland's policy of supporting Ukraine.⁶⁹ Braun's publications are discussed by the News Front channel, one of the main transmitters of Russian

propaganda, which Western countries officially recognise as part of the assets of Putin's services.⁷⁰ Braun's statement and stills from the demonstration he organised were also included in the 60 Minutes programme, broadcast on the first program of Russian public television.⁷¹ When Braun and his supporters walked through the streets of Warsaw on 11 November as participants in the Independence March, the banner he was holding, Stop the Ukrainisation of Poland, was presented in the Russian media as the official slogan of this largest cyclical demonstration in Poland. The real slogan of this manifestation in 2022 was Strong Nation – Greater Poland.⁷²

Braun might seem like a fringe persona, but his outlets for dissemination and their outreach are growing. At the same time, the representation of his party in the Polish Parliament increased from one to four MPs, and the positive attitude towards assisting Ukraine is decreasing in Polish society.⁷³ As a result, Braun's pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian stance is beginning to gain more and more support. This may consequently threaten to weaken Polish support for Ukraine in its defensive war and strengthen Russian influence in Poland.

Case Study 2: Falanga

The clearest example of violent activities related to Russia in Poland is the case of the national Bolshevik group Falanga. Its leaders came from nationalist circles and underwent rapid radicalisation in the early 2000s and early 2010s, at the same time becoming followers of the concept of neo-Eurasianism created by Alexander Dugin. Their activities combined extensive propaganda (publishing Dugin's books, running a pro-Russian website and journalistic trips to Russia, Ukraine, Syria, and Lebanon) with paramilitary activity. They also developed numerous contacts with separatists from Donbas, terrorist groups from the Middle East, and ultimately, Falanga members carried out an act of political violence, if not outright terrorism, on the territory of Ukraine.

Falanga began as a splinter group from the nationalist youth organisation All Polish Youth (MW). After leaving MW they joined the neofascist group National Radical Camp (ONR).⁷⁴ ONR itself was an offspring of the Polish neo-fascist milieu and featured many of the Polish skinheads, especially from the south of the country, who adopted the name of the Polish pre-war fascists as their own.⁷⁵ The new entity did not shy away from violence, aggressive slogans, or

demonstrations. They attacked left-wing concerts and physically confronted political opponents, anarchists, gays, migrants, Roma, and socialists.⁷⁶

Bartosz Bekier led the ONR Masovia so-called brigade. He was instrumental in creating an event that is known as one of Europe's largest REMVE congregations – a rally/march held in Warsaw annually to commemorate Poland's Independence Day (thus, the name of the event is Marsz Niepodległości – Independence March).⁷⁷ Bekier, driven by this success, dreamed of taking over the entire organisation. He attempted an internal coup in early 2009 but eventually left the ONR with the whole Masovian brigade and created a new group, Falanga.⁷⁸ The organisation established branches around Poland relatively quickly and this gave Bekier the impression that he would quickly become an important player on the REMVE scene. The group soon evolved from classical fascism towards national Bolshevism, and from Polish-centric nationalism to Dugin's neo-Eurasianism. It preached anti-liberalism and anti-capitalism, and opposition to NATO and the US. Falanga also dabbled in attempts to create far-right and far-left alliances of the extremes which would include Maoists or even Stalinists.⁷⁹

Bekier had ambitions to be recognised as an intellectual. For several years at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, under the supervision of the Director of the Institute of Political Science of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Radosław Zenderowski, he prepared his doctorate. The topic of the doctorate was not politically neutral. It focused on the political thought of Hitler's collaborators from Slovakia – the Ludaks/Hlinkists.⁸⁰ The Falangites also run Xportal, Xradio, Xportal.tv, and ReVolta publishing house, where they publish books by Aleksander Dugin.⁸¹ In the Xportal itself, one can also find texts by many fascists and neo-fascists, including Dugin,⁸² Evola,⁸³ the leader of the Romanian Iron Guard Corneliu Codreanu Zelea⁸⁴ and the leader of the British Union of Fascists Oswald Mosley,⁸⁵ as well as numerous conversations with Dugin⁸⁶ and others, including with the leader of Donetsk separatists Denis Pushilin,⁸⁷ Roberto Fiore,⁸⁸ Nick Griffin,⁸⁹ or the leader of Hezbollah Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah.⁹⁰ A common thread throughout these articles, interviews, and conversations is the authors' or interviewees' sympathy for the Kremlin.

However, Falanga was not limited only to theoretical geopolitical considerations but also took advantage of trips to Russia's allied countries. In June 2013, Bekier and his colleagues took part in a trip of the European far-right to Syria and Lebanon, organised by pro-Russian Polish-Syrian politician Nabil al-Malazi. There, they visited, among others, the Lebanese base of Hezbollah, where the

leader of the Falange had the opportunity to shoot with a heavy machine gun, and the headquarters of the Syrian Social-Nationalist Party in Beirut.⁹¹ Additionally, Bekier visited prisons in Damascus, where he took photos of opponents of Syrian dictator Assad being tortured there, suggesting that “they will not suffer for too long.”⁹² Contacts with Russia’s Middle Eastern allies were so fruitful that the logos of the mentioned organisations appeared on Falanga banners, and activists of the Bekier group appeared with their flags at demonstrations and pickets. In addition to the Hezbollah and SPSN logos, these also feature the logo of the third group – also supported by Russia, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command.⁹³

Interest in war and terrorism is not only the theoretical consideration of the Falangists. The Bekier family has long military traditions. The great-grandfather, grandfather, and father of the future Falanga leader were soldiers. His father, Col Andrzej Bekier, was deputy military attaché of the Polish Embassy in Prague and a member of the UN Observer Mission during the war in Georgia.⁹⁴ He was also stationed in the US for several years, and Bartosz grew up there. Bekier affirms the military traditions of his family. In addition to wearing uniforms, Falange members were advised to join paramilitary formations and the army. The chief of the Lesser Poland region brigade, Michał Prokopowicz, was primarily responsible for military matters in the organisation. Prokopowicz junior has a long history of using violence. He regularly carried a baton and pepper spray with him. He regularly ripped off a sign from the Krakow office of transgender-MP Anna Grodzka. Among Falanga members, he is allegedly considered a mentally unstable person.⁹⁵ At the same time, he worked as a security guard, studied national security, and completed internships with the police.⁹⁶

In 2014, Falanga members infiltrated the Krakow Rifle Unit Number 2039 of the Social Educational Organisation Strzelec. Strzelec (literally translated “Shooter”) is a paramilitary and patriotic formation, a continuation of the Riflemen’s Association that existed in the interwar period. It aims to prepare young people for military service and the formations of civil defence, border guard, police, and fire brigade. Training includes shooting, parachute training, rappelling, field medicine, and martial arts. In Rifle Unit Number 2039, Falangists commanded platoons, were responsible for recruitment, and commanded the entire unit.⁹⁷ Additionally, several Falanga Members served in the regular Polish Army.⁹⁸

The paramilitary activity of this group, however, does not end with the exercises in Strzelec. In July 2015, Falanga members organised volunteer Anti-Bandera⁹⁹

patrols on the Polish-Ukrainian border.¹⁰⁰ Dressed in military uniforms and armed with rifles, they roamed the border mountains and pretended to defend Polish borders against the false flood of illegal immigrants from Ukraine. The video of this activity, recorded by the Falangists, has been broadcast on the Russian television network NTV.¹⁰¹ In the photos from the border, Falangists from Unit Number 2039 were recognised by the media.¹⁰² Despite this, in June 2016, their unit was invited to participate in NATO manoeuvres and codenamed Anaconda-16.¹⁰³

Meanwhile, Falanga's views on NATO are, to put it mildly, not favourable, as testified by their burning of the organisation's flag during a couple of their demonstrations.¹⁰⁴ Prokopowicz was also the author of part of the pro-Russian party Change (*Zmiana*) manifesto, which was devoted to defence issues.¹⁰⁵ He postulated Poland leaving NATO, and reorientation towards "other countries in the region" because "American imperialists" "risk the lives of millions of Poles and want to expand their sphere of influence in the East."¹⁰⁶ When Bekier went on a visit to Donetsk in 2014, he was accompanied by one of the members of Unit Number 2039,¹⁰⁷ and others took part in pickets in support of Russian separatists in Donbas in front of the Ukrainian embassy with flags of Donetsk separatists.¹⁰⁸

After numerous media reports, the commander-in-chief of *Strzelec* removed the Falangists from this paramilitary unit's ranks.¹⁰⁹ Falangists chose to bid farewell to their erstwhile patrons in a peculiar way: explosive material was found in the post-industrial vacant buildings where the members of *Strzelec* were to train. In addition to the cargo, in the place where the *Strzelec* exercise was to take place, inscriptions were left: the Falanga symbol, swastikas, SS symbols, and the inscriptions: "Slava Donbas."¹¹⁰ Despite the expulsion, however, Falanga members do not abandon their links with paramilitary organisations. They established cooperation with another paramilitary organisation (Józef Piłsudski's Rifle Association *Strzelec* in Rzeszów). They created their first branch¹¹¹ and initiated the Krakow section of the Polish hand-to-hand combat system Haller, a paramilitary organisation started by the pro-Russian milieu of the weekly *Myśl Polska*.¹¹²

Over time, the international inspirations of the leaders and the military preparation of the Falange members led them to outright political violence and terrorism. On the night of 3 February 2018, the building of the Society of Transcarpathian Hungarians – the Association of Hungarian Culture in Uzhhorod¹¹³ burned down. Uzhhorod is the administrative centre of Ukrainian

Zakarpattia Oblast. This region has been, since the Middle Ages, a part of the Hungarian kingdom and has a mixed Hungarian-Ukrainian population. One hundred and fifty thousand Hungarians live in the area. It has become a part of the USSR after WWII, and after its dissolution, part of Ukraine. The year 2018 saw a conflict between Budapest and Kyiv over the Ukrainian Education Act, which, according to Hungary, seriously violated the rights of national minorities regarding education in their native language. There were tensions and demonstrations in the region organised by the Ukrainian nationalists.¹¹⁴ In response, Hungarian authorities were pressing their Ukrainian counterparts to decisive response in relation to hate speech and actions for violence against the Ukrainian minority. All of this was happening against the backdrop of a vigorous Hungarian policy of “passportisation,” i.e. Budapest eagerly granted Hungarian passports to inhabitants of the region, which Kyiv also perceived as hostile.

In February 2018, Falanga activists Adrian Margielski and Tomasz Szymkowiak went to Transcarpathian Ruthenia as the region is also known. At night, they went to the building of the Hungarian centre. They painted a swastika and the number 88 on its wall which in the neo-Nazi code means the letters HH, i.e. “Hail Hitler.” They tried to set the building on fire using a clumsily prepared Molotov cocktail. They also took photos of the burning building. In Hungary, accusations were made against Bandera’s nationalists who allegedly attacked the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia. This description of the situation has been claimed by representatives of the Society of Transcarpathian Hungarians who, on 28 February, announced that Ukrainian nationalists were responsible for the attacks and demanded that an OSCE mission be sent to the region.¹¹⁵ Numerous recordings from CCTV cameras allowed the Polish Internal Security Agency (ABW) to catch the real perpetrators in less than a month. ABW detained five people, including Falanga members (Margielski, Szymkowiak, and Michał Prokopowicz).¹¹⁶

Margielski and Szymkowiak gave extensive testimony in exchange for lenient sentencing. Over time, Prokopowicz also began to testify.¹¹⁷ According to the latter, the entire action was suggested to him by a German journalist, assistant to an Alternative for Germany deputy, Manuel Ochsenreiter. For years, he has been running the German branch of Dugin’s *Katehon*, a think tank sponsored by the Russian millionaire Malofeev,¹¹⁸ and managing the neo-Eurasian German Centre for Eurasian Studies.¹¹⁹ He was a nationalist and editor-in-chief of the far-right magazine *Zuerst!* and a correspondent for the Russian television network

RT. Ochsenreiter also belonged to the delegation observing the referendum in Crimea and the elections in Donetsk and Luhansk.¹²⁰ Together with Mateusz Piskorski, a longtime stalwart of the pro-Russia scene in Poland, and a former parliamentarian with the far-left and populist *Samoobrona* (Self-Defence) party, they also ran the YouTube channel *Die Guten Menschen!* until 2021, the recordings of which were repeatedly shared by Dugin on his now-defunct Facebook fan page. Ochsenreiter, whom Prokopowicz met in Russia, allegedly suggested to him on Telegram to organise an attack on the Hungarian building in Uzhhorod. The entire action cost one and a half thousand euros. One thousand was to be taken by Prokopowicz and the rest was divided by the direct perpetrators.¹²¹ The aim was to inflame the conflict between Ukrainians and Hungarians and to discredit Ukrainian nationalists. Ochsenreiter was to cover the costs, and Prokopowicz was to find contractors and coordinate activities. If the campaign was successful, further activities were to be pursued.¹²² Ochsenreiter denied any connection to the incident.¹²³

However, the case files contain call screens confirming that the men were in contact. The testimony of the Falanga members also incriminated Ochsenreiter. After the scandal surrounding the attack carried out by Falanga broke out, and an investigation was launched in Germany, Ochsenreiter left the federal republic and went to Moscow. There, in 2021, at the age of 45, he died suddenly of a heart attack.¹²⁴ Prokopowicz was released from custody in 2019. He faced twelve years in prison. In March 2020, he was sentenced to three years in prison. The prosecutor's office considered his actions to be a terrorist crime, the purpose of which was to "publicly incite national hatred between Ukrainians and Hungarians" as well as to cause "disruption of the political system in Ukraine and deepen national divisions between Ukrainians and Hungarians."¹²⁵

Falanga did not neglect their political activities during this time. When, in 2016, the chairman of the pro-Russian party Change, the aforementioned Piskorski, was arrested, the leader of Falanga immediately became one of the contenders to take over his party. In one year alone, he was in Russia three times, meeting there with Dugin¹²⁶ and Sviridov.¹²⁷ He also gave the latter an interview for *Sputnik*.¹²⁸ Bekier also travels a lot around the world. Apart from private vacation trips, his political trips are mainly to places related to Russia and its allies. He visited Chechnya in 2018, where he participated in an MMA gala at the birthday invitation of the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, and spoke in the parliament in occupied Crimea.¹²⁹ He was also in Donbas,¹³⁰ Syria,¹³¹ Lebanon,¹³² Tehran,¹³³

and at far-right rallies in Moscow¹³⁴ and a journalists' trip in Kaliningrad.¹³⁵ In Donetsk, wearing a Polish Army uniform with Polish emblems, he spoke to participants of a pro-Russian rally on Lenin Square, claiming that the Polish nation supports separatists in Donbas.¹³⁶ In July 2019, Bekier went to Russia again for the Second International Forum, The Development of Parliamentarism. The host of the meeting was Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia.¹³⁷ Bekier himself describes it as a "convention of the anti-liberal international."¹³⁸ In his appeal to Putin and the Russian political class in the Duma, Bekier demanded that Poland leave NATO and the EU, demanded the conclusion of a Polish-Russian alliance, the forced federalisation of Lithuania and territorial autonomy for the Vilnius region, the partition of Ukraine, and the annexation of Lviv to Poland.¹³⁹

However, since the beginning of the Russian invasion in February 2022 and the death of Zhirinovskiy in April 2022, Bekier's public activities have significantly weaned. He publishes little, travels frequently around Europe for recreation, and seems to understand that this is not the time for activities sympathetic to Russia. It is possible that the fate of Piskorski and another of the Change leaders Janusz Niedzwiecki, who has been also arrested by Poland's counter-intelligence, ABW – the Internal Security Agency – and placed in custody, is also a reminder for Bekier.¹⁴⁰

In the context of Bartosz Bekier, we can talk about multi-threaded cooperation with Russian entities. Not only does he take part in official meetings at the invitation of the Russian side, such as the illiberal congress in the Duma (at the invitation of Zhirinovskiy's party), but he also meets with numerous people associated with the most pro-war part of the Russian establishment, such as Alexander Dugin and Ramzan Kadyrov. He also eagerly accepts invitations to Russia, where he takes part in meetings with officials and intellectuals. He visited areas of Ukraine occupied by Russia, such as Donetsk and Crimea. Additionally, Bekier cooperates closely with Russia's allied regimes, such as Syria and Iran. In the context of Russia, it is difficult to talk about any independence from the Kremlin figures such as Kadyrov or Dugin, as their connections with the secret services and ministries of power are broad and direct. At the same time, Bekier's public activity in Poland and his journalism leave no doubt about his praise for Russia and its foreign policy. At the same time, his Falanga group is responsible for the most infamous act of terror committed by Polish citizens in the last twenty years. There are also connections between the perpetrator of this attack,

Ochsenreiter, and Russia, as he immediately fled there and died after the attack came to light. Therefore, this case is a particularly bright example of multi-sectoral cooperation between a Polish politician and the Russian side, and the participation of entities associated with the Kremlin is very visible.

Conclusion

The Polish far-right remains divided on the Ukrainian issue. Neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups generally take a pro-Ukrainian stance. On the other hand, the far-right Confederation party and national-Bolshevik groups are largely pro-Russian. It should be noted here that the Confederation is a much larger formation and has a much greater political weight than neo-fascist groups. Grzegorz Braun himself is the most visible MP of the Confederation, active in anti-Ukrainian activities, and a frequent guest of the Russian media. His milieu is full of people manifesting their pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian views, and they are intensively networked with other European politicians from the pro-Russian camp. This group also includes members of the Polish terrorist organisation Falanga, which comprises the most active supporters of Dugin's ideas in Poland. They are networked and cooperate closely with pro-Russian extremists from Donbas, Syria, and Iran. Overall, this leaves a dismal picture of an active and well-networked pro-Russian camp in Poland, especially since the cases of Braun and Falanga are merely part of a much larger whole that deserves a separate, extensive report.

Recommendations

- Tightening cooperation with social media corporations in order to effectively remove disinformation, Russian propaganda, and hate speech directed against Ukrainians from their Polish-language media, in particular, fake news, the origin or propagation of which is related to the narratives spread by Russia, such as: it was NATO that attacked Russia, the West is ruled by Big Pharma/LGBTQ+/Jewish plutocrats/elite circle of paedophiles, Ukraine is ruled by neo-Nazis, and a great replacement/genocide of the white race/great reset is taking place in Europe.
- Effective enforcement of Polish law against people breaking it in the context of Russia, which is currently not fully used by law enforcement agencies, and, in particular, the initiation of more intensive prosecution of

crimes such as: praising genocide, praising a war of aggression, and inciting hatred on grounds of ethnic, racial, and religious affiliation.

- In cooperation with the services, researchers, and journalists specialising in the subject, creating a “map” of organisations active in spreading Russian narratives and placing them under counterintelligence surveillance.
- In cooperation with services, researchers, and journalists specialising in the topic, create a map of media active in spreading Russian narratives and placing them under counter-intelligence supervision, and, if legally possible, blocking their operations on Polish territory.
- Initiating large scale analysis and research of pro-Russian circles with a particular focus on groups which, because of their geopolitical views, professed ideology, or former alliances, constitute a direct base for establishing contacts with the Russian side. In the case of Poland, this means primarily: national Bolsheviks, religious integralists, anti-vaccination groups, national democrats, national communists, third-position organisations, border revisionist organisations (in the context of Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania), and anti-revisionist communists.
- Creation of an inter-ministerial team combining the ministries of justice, interior affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Digitalisation (responsible in Poland for combating disinformation) and special services, whose task will be to coordinate multi-sectoral activities aimed at tracking, investigating, and effectively responding to contacts of Polish political entities and individuals with the Russian side, with particular emphasis on government-related Russian media and NGOs.
- Taking action to combat Russian influence in coordination with Poland’s NATO and EU allies, in particular, establishing closer cooperation with special services and bodies operating at the EU and NATO levels, including the RAN, NGOs, and think tanks specialising in the topic.
- Due to the existence of clear personal and organisational ties, the establishment of cooperation with the German special services in the context of the cooperation of the Falanga and Grzegorz Braun with their German allies.

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