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Conclusion: Patterns of Russian Influence

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Writing in 2018, Anton Shekhovtsov outlined the history of post-1945 Soviet and then Russian engagement with the far-right in Europe. Throughout most of that period this “tango noir,” as he referred to it, had hardly been a systematic process and was mostly limited to individual neo-Nazis or fascists in Western Europe who were run by Moscow’s security services.¹ This changed after 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Interestingly, the first Russians to forge connections with far-right actors in the West were not emissaries of the Kremlin, but the nationalist opposition to the administration of President Boris Yeltsin,² such as Alexander Dugin, the Svengali-like philosopher who later allegedly gained a lot of policy traction with decision makers in the Kremlin, who travelled to different European capitals and also received prominent far-right guests in Moscow. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the infamous leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia, even attempted to form an entity amounting to a far-right international movement.³ After the ascension of Vladimir Putin as Russian President, the new authorities in the Kremlin did not immediately endorse such contacts and refrained from implementing a wide-ranging outreach to the far-right/REMVE milieu in the West.⁴ As is documented by Witold Jurasz, the regime looked for an ideological narrative it could adopt and then re-package as the national or state’s ideology.⁵ Only during Putin’s second term as president (2004-2008) and after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004), when Moscow became increasingly defensive and anti-Western on the world stage and more repressive internally, did the Kremlin eventually opt for political conservatism domestically. This provided an opening for an active outreach to far-right politicians in the West which officially commenced after 2012,⁶ and the civic unrest which met the announcement Putin would attempt to run for a third presidential term.⁷ In such

conditions, the Kremlin closed ranks and sought non-liberal allies both in Russia, as seen with its often bizarre “alliance” with local far-right/REMVE milieu, and abroad.⁸ This outreach set the scene for the events and cases discussed in this volume.

The European or Western far-right/REMVE did not necessarily seek Russia’s support. The readiness to accept Russian influence or outright infiltration has rarely been grounded in genuine or ingrained pro-Russianness of a given actor or entity. The impulse behind this readiness, however, comes from the inherent anti-establishment, anti-mainstream, and anti-Western values of different far-right/REMVE actors. In these conditions, the Kremlin barely has to work to convince such potential allies of its genuinely good intentions.

The imagined community of values between Europe’s traditionalists, “patriots” or “conservatives” and Moscow, which is discussed in the introduction to this volume, helps facilitate different relationships and pushes them to another level.⁹ Thus, no longer is this just a game of a given Russian security service running or assisting individual assets in the far-right milieu – business cultural, and student ties also come in handy during the process as these allow for winning over a given individual or an entity to Kremlin’s position. In this regard, the development of ties between Russia and the West in the 1990s and 2000s normalised all types of relations, including among extremes. Finally, Russians living in the West, or those who often travel between Russia and the West, also play prominent roles in developing Moscow’s influence in the far-right/REMVE circles. Before 1989/1991 this was hardly possible as the Soviet Union was a closed society, and Russian diasporas in the West were much less numerically significant (few Russian businessmen or students were based there, for example).

All in all, however, the aforementioned factors were superseded by the Russian “political warfare” strategy described in the book’s introduction. In short, as Russia sees itself unjustly and unfairly treated by real or imaginary Western powers, it attempts to respond to this treatment by effectively waging war on the West without declaring it. The anti-establishment, anti-mainstream, disruptive far-right/REMVE milieu neatly fits into this approach as it is equally anti-Western as Moscow, albeit seemingly for different reasons. At the same time, this union becomes more attractive and obvious if both Russia and the European far-right/REMVE find reasons that bind them. As geopolitics can be tricky and not all Western far-right politicians or activists are keen on Russian territorial expansion or broadening of its sphere of influence Westwards, nor are they big

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fans of Russia's socio-economic or political order, the convergence between the two sides takes place elsewhere. Shared anti-Americanism, anti-Atlanticism, and support for the alleged traditional or family values provides both with a springboard for success and allows Moscow to expand the battlefield of its "political warfare." All of the aforementioned issues led to be the development of a multi-faceted Russian influence on the Western far-right REMVE/milieu.

This volume's ten chapters provide insights into the practicalities of this influence. These describe different individuals, based in different countries, working for very different entities, of varying biographies and social backgrounds. Other cases highlighted entities of varying sizes and influence – be it political parties, cultural institutes, networks, paramilitary organisations, or groups of violent activists. Seemingly, very little binds these diverse actors, but clear patterns of how Russia attempts to influence the far-right/REMVE emerge and are visible across many cases. As will be shown below, this influence is often strategic and direct in nature with Moscow actively, via its officials and state bodies, attempting to curry favour with a given far-right/REMVE entity or individual and aiming to convince them to align with Russia's viewpoints on a given issue(s).

Primarily, this influence is often supported by direct transfers of resources or know-how, or contacts to Russia's Western far-right/REMVE ally. Secondly, however, it often resembles an approach akin to that of soft power practiced by different states with less radical or beyond the pale organisations or individuals abroad. In the latter, hardly any favour or money changes hands, in the former Russia has a string of options ranging from direct bank transfers to far less direct forms of influence such as feeding specific disinformation lines to a given "partner" in Europe. In effect, Russian influence is sometimes diluted and thus hard to pin down and demonstrate directly as it is meant to be low key, passive, or indirect. It is, of course, possible to identify proverbial "smoking guns" in the relationship between the far-right/REMVE in Europe and Russia – such cases are discussed for example in the chapters on Slovakia, Sweden, Poland, and Hungary (for violent or espionage related events) or those on Germany, Austria or Italy (for more grandiose, party and business-related connections). At the same time, however, this book, through its discussion of a broad range of cases, demonstrates the complexity of the issue which needs to be discussed beyond the optics of direct connections (as is demonstrated especially in the chapters on Italy, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, and France).

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commonality, i.e. approaches and solutions which could be replicated across different European countries.

The central message of these recommendations is the need to own up to the damage Russia has been able to inflict upon Western polities via different means. These need to be enumerated and described in detail so that a meaningful process of change could be then ignited. A few chapters include ideas on the establishment of parliamentary or extra-parliamentary investigative committees to dissect connections between authorities, government parties, and other institutions in Russia. Their development, however, would be hampered by the fact that, as this book demonstrated, in certain cases, those who fear exposure via such committees or commissions are often either in or around power in a string of European states. Of course, the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine allows for a political climate in which Moscow's former allies or benefactors would be forced to distance themselves from Putin's regime, but this is often only temporary or cursory in nature. Nonetheless, any platform or avenue which highlights findings on Russia's infiltration of a given Western country, should be taken into consideration, and used to its utmost capacity in an attempt to block further Russian activities.

Such platforms also allow for a more selective "naming and shaming" of given cliques or groups. A lot of ire is concentrated on politicians who, for example, benefited from Moscow's largesse. Equally critical voices could be raised in relation to the media in general and journalists in particular as these shape opinion in different countries. On many occasions, especially among the less professional so-called "media influencers" or "alternative media," these played malign roles in an unquestioning transmission of pro-Russian or anti-Western talking points.

Many chapters also include calls to beef up (counter-)intelligence funding so that the security services have more resources to monitor Russian activities. Given the reality of the aforementioned aggression, such calls should not fall on deaf ears, nor should they be seen as extravagant. Of course, how this money is spent will depend on a given country as some seem better prepared to counter Russian disinformation or "hybrid" operations, whereas others still lag behind in this field. One difficulty, however, while contemplating such an increase in funding is the issue of its immediate efficacy. Many of the cases described in this book touch upon situations in which a given Western individual, group, party etc. did nothing outwardly illegal. At the end of the day, going to Moscow for a "conference" or a "study trip" is not criminal. Neither is signing an association agreement with a

Another issue which warrants discussion is Russia's attempts to exacerbate violent far-right extremism in Europe. It is true that the radical right parties and figures, that is, the democratic but nativist and anti-systemic and non-violent, became the focus of Russia's attention. Moscow rightly assumed that working with or via political parties which in the wake of the 2008 financial and 2015 migrant crises who were gaining popularity would bring more benefit than outright support for the non-democratic and violent extreme-right. This book showcases the examples of the former in Austria, Germany, and Italy. At the same time, however, as Moscow wishes to maintain a broad portfolio of disruptors who would be ready to do its bidding in Europe, it has not shied away from considering or giving support to more extreme elements of the far-right/REMVE milieu. A clear-cut case is Serbia where seemingly non-governmental Russian emissaries liaise with the militant and vigilante People's Patrols. Another example comes from Hungary where the Russian security services liaised with some of the country's most rabid extremists. Moreover, other "independent" Russian entities have a track record of training members of extreme-right Western European organisations (as the chapter on Sweden demonstrates). Moscow is also happy to tolerate conspiracies which effectively lead to attempted terrorist attacks conducted by its clients, such was the case with the multi-layered Polish-German and anti-Ukrainian plot, which ended with an attempted terrorist attack (see: Polish chapter of this volume). Russia's real and imagined might and martial posturing also positively predispose some of the most extreme far-right conspirators towards it. This is most evident in the French and German chapters where violent coup-plotting extremists either seek Russian help or use their alleged connections to Russia to drive recruitment. The Russian macho-militarism also fascinates some Czech or Slovak radicals/extremists and even some of the Austrian identitarians. The following sections enumerate and briefly discuss ten patterns of Russian influence vis-à-vis Europe's far-right/REMVE.

Influence via Official Contacts

Influence via official contacts is the most explicit way of influencing far-right/REMVE actor(s) by Moscow. In short, it entails pairing a political party (most usually) or any other entity from the West with its Russian counterpart and signing an agreement or memorandum of cooperation between the two. Such a move provides the Kremlin with a veneer of deniability as it can maintain the

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pairing is a decision of an entity seemingly independent of Russia. The pairing is accompanied or effectively conducted through public ceremonies, which usually take place in Moscow, such as photoshoots and the establishment of joint expert groups on different issues. Effectively, these may not amount to much in practical terms but tie down or compromise a given Western politician or activist as Russia's ally. At the same time, these could also effectively pave the way for the blossoming of business ties between the two entities or Russian loans and other perks to Western far-right/REMVE officials. These perks range from invitations to meetings or "congresses" in the likes of Moscow or St. Petersburg, to meetings with high-level Russian officials, tours of the country, and presence in Russia state-owned media which also beam its news to international audiences in languages including English. Such developments are covered in chapters on Germany, Austria, and Italy but its traces, on a smaller scale and related to less high-profile European far-right individuals, are also found in the chapters on Poland or Sweden.

Influence through Foreign Governments

Influence through official contacts can reach another level when a pro-Russian party gets into government. This is mostly the case with Serbia, which is run by a government dominated by SNS, a post-nationalist party, itself a splinter group from the country's traditional far-right political force, the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) which up to this day is led by Vojislav Šešelj. The SNS seems to balance between engagement with the EU and Russia, and, as Predrag Petrović outlines in his chapter, attempts to play one against the other while maintaining an iron grip on Serbia's politics. In this sense, the Belgrade government both represses and encourages the political forces to its right, including the plethora of parliamentary or extra-parliamentary entities, so that it can then turn around to both Brussels and Moscow and pitch itself as a steady pair of hands to either of the benefactors. Thus, to an extent, all these forces seem to be playing a role in a theatre of "political technology", as devised by president Vučić and his government. Notably, the term "political technology" is associated with Russia and especially Vladislav Surkov who is infamous for his usage of "pseudo-experts, technical parties, fake civic organizations and youth movement [...] and covert media techniques" to animate the Russian political system and provide it with a veneer of genuine competition.¹⁰

At the same time as Belgrade balances Brussels and Moscow, its security structures, energy companies, state, and private media, generally all either cooperate with their Russian counterparts or craft narratives beneficial to the Kremlin. This acts as another form of insulation for the Serbian government through which it earns Moscow's appreciation. Consequently, it allows for some breathing space in its relations in the EU, especially in relation to the Kosovo issue. In this arrangement, Russia is by no means a passive actor, as it constantly monitors Belgrade's behaviour and effectively threatens to shift its support away from the SNS towards more extreme sections of Serbian nationalism. Moscow signals this possibility while allowing for growing links between Russian far-right, which as has been demonstrated throughout this volume is effectively curated by the Kremlin, and their Serbian counterparts who are not completely under Belgrade's control.

Edit Zgut-Przybylska's chapter on Hungary dissects a similar dynamic in Hungary. Victor Orbán's government also seems to be locked in a love-hate relationship with political forces to its right, previously Jobbik (now referred to as *Mi Hazánk*), which are more radical and effectively, more pro-Russian than Orbán's governing Fidesz party. This allows the government to present a more moderate face to Brussels but also to use the local far-right to test the political waters while, for example, making anti-Ukrainian statements and attempt to curry favour with Moscow. Simultaneously, the government represses acts of far-right militancy but seems to have been caught off guard when some of the militants developed relations with Russian security services. It is becoming clear that for Russia the Hungarian far-right or REMVE militants are useful not as disruptors of Hungary, but more as local proponents of seemingly unconceivable geopolitical changes, such as the redrawing of borders in Europe. This longing for restoration of Greater Hungary turns the Hungarian far-right into plausibly obvious allies of Moscow which itself is intent on striking a blow to geopolitical arrangements which emerged post-1989 in Europe.

Influence via Infiltration

This attempt to influence local far-right/REMVE scenes is modelled on the Soviet/Russian approach to the European far-right/REMVE prior to 2012. In short, it relies on Russian intelligence organisations running single members of the milieu who were found interesting as sources of information or agents of

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influence. Not all of this volume's chapters discuss such cases but one can imagine that this pattern has been represented in many of the Western far-right/REMVE milieus throughout the last decades. Nonetheless, chapters by Zgut-Przybylska and Milo, on Hungary and Slovakia, do provide the readers with examples of Russian espionage operations related to the far-right/REMVE milieu. In the first case, the individual concerned, Béla Kovács, rose to become an MEP in Brussels/Strasbourg. The Slovak case is less high profile but nonetheless testifies to the Russian interest in nationalist or more extreme circles of a given country. Such actions, if they attract too much attention, can go wrong from Russia's point of view. However, they can also provide Russia with genuine knowledge of the ins and outs of the political systems of a given country and, if Moscow's agent is well-positioned and networked, allow it to work towards bringing a given political entity towards more pro-Russian positions, as was the case with the Hungarian party Jobbik.

Influence via Ideological Commonality

As the introduction and especially the chapters on Italy, Germany, Austria, and Slovakia demonstrated, the European far-right/REMVE milieu to a large extent regards Russia as a role model as far as the socio-political organisation of the state is concerned. In this reading of the situation states need strong, nationalistic, conservative, pro-family, traditionalist, anti-modern leaders who proverbially look after their people and oppose the imaginary diktat of the liberal elites. As Russia allegedly delivers this, then it should be of little surprise that some far-right/REMVE leaders effectively became smitten with the country while describing it in almost religious terms while contrasting it with their seemingly declining homelands. Such a perception of Russia is fuelled by its vastness, alleged mysticism, and rawness – all allegedly no longer available in the West. The fact that Russia is repressing its own local right-wing scene, or that the regime is turning into a kleptocracy, does not seem to bother far-right Europeans. In this sense, its otherness, vastness, and removal from Europe or the West works in its favour as it is perceived to be true to its roots and helping to cement a heterogeneity of the world – a cause to celebrate for all far-right/REMVE individuals.¹¹

Influence via “Imagined” Russia

As much as Russia looks like a role model of an idealised organisation of the state for far-right/REMVE actors, Moscow is also able to gain seemingly surprising allies outside the radically nationalist milieu who also imagine Russia in a very specific way. In the process, it becomes evident they share a lot with their far-right/REMVE counterparts but also possess a unique perception of the country. These allies are equally anti-immigrant, anti-NATO, anti-EU, anti-liberal and anti-LGBTQ+ as their far-right/REMVE counterparts but would balk at being labelled nationalist or fascist. This is mostly evident in the Czech and Slovak chapter of the volume which describe cases in which different political milieus, akin to the far-right/REMVE, also imagine Russia in a specific way. They idealise the past when the Central-Eastern European countries were joined in a geopolitical bloc with the Soviet Union. This allowed for the construction of an imagined pan-Slavic community under the Soviet, effectively Russian, leadership which opposed capitalism and imperialism. In the eyes of some of the Czech and Slovak militants, this should be continued after 1989 with the Russian Federation as the natural successor to the Soviet Union in this arrangement. These militants, as was shown especially by Milo in the Slovak chapter, do not necessarily see themselves as far-right/REMVE and often perceive themselves more in the anti-imperialist tradition of the far-left. Their ideological stances, however, have a lot in common with those of the milieu that Russia has been engaging with and infiltrating post-2012.

The Russian readiness to engage such militants or activists testifies to Moscow’s ability to tailor its attempts at influencing the country’s political disruptors depending on the local conditions. If it means rekindling the old flame of the Soviet friendship, then the Kremlin will not look unfavourably towards such ideas. This does not mean, however, that all such initiatives end with success. The travails of some of the Czech militants who joined the Russian side in its war against Ukraine as early as 2014 provide a fascinating case study in this respect.¹² These individuals from the Czech pan-Slavic milieu allegedly went there to train in preparation for violent actions at home but found themselves not particularly welcomed by the Russians or Donetsk or Luhansk “People’s Republics,” and then shunned once their ill-coordinated training plan came to light.

Influence via Ideological Pioneers

The far-right/REMVE fascination with Russia partly developed through its engagements not with the Russian government, which started around 2012, but with seemingly independent far-right/REMVE Russian figures. They were the pioneers in winning accolades of their Western colleagues who were later provided with a toolkit, be it financial, cultural, or personal, to direct their fascination towards the Kremlin. None played (or plays) this role better than Alexander Dugin, and he is often made into a Svengali-like figure who whispers into the ear of Vladimir Putin,¹³ and some regard him almost as a towering intellectual.¹⁴ In fact, he is a child of the Soviet establishment who rebelled against it, was a far-right outcast in the early years of the Russian Federation, later found himself employed in the Russian academia, also by its military institutions, and effectively became more influential as a philosopher and a thinker abroad than at home.¹⁵ After 1989 he build up a sizeable following in the West and cast himself as the all-knowing, prophet-like, keeper of wisdom unavailable to mortals who were blinded by their belief in Fukuyama's "end of history." He appealed to both the far-right and the far-left and could attempt to claim independence from the Kremlin, which strengthened his anti-systemic credentials to different European radicals.

This volume amply demonstrates Dugin's outreach and standing he enjoyed among the far-right/REMVE in the West. It is not so much that they cooperated with him, but referenced his ideas and related their geopolitical analyses to his. A great example is the Falanga milieu in Poland discussed by Witkowski. Interestingly enough, Dugin seemingly fell out of favour with the Kremlin in 2014, when his anti-Ukrainian radicalism was too much even for Russian standards, a mere two years after Moscow's decision to engage far-right/REMVE milieu in the West.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the legacy of his presence on the far-right lecture circuit in Europe prior to 2012, and that of his publications, still lingers in the milieu and allows Russia (which has seemingly washed its hands off him) to still refer to him as an alleged reference point or even a role model while communicating with some of the anti-Western radicals of Europe. Consequently, Moscow is able to build up its influence in these circles.

Influence via the Media

Russia invests in its media conglomerate so that it can extend beyond the country's borders. After 2012, and prior to the commencement of the full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022, state-controlled media like Russia Today and Sputnik freely beamed Russian propaganda across different European countries.¹⁷ For reasons outlined in this volume, these channels attract viewers or listeners who rejected the mainstream or traditional media, regarded as compromised or non-objective. The value of such channels to far-right or anti-government individuals in Europe was exacerbated by the fact that Russia's messaging came in different shapes and forms. This included not only the two aforementioned channels, which had their "national" services, but also local news, websites and finally multilingual channels on social media which effectively acted as disinformation or "re-information" media. Russia co-sponsored these or lent elements of its state media infrastructure to boost their coverage or increase their professionalism and outreach. Such "media" were then tasked with promoting certain speakers or talking heads – local pro-Russian far-right/REMVE individuals featured prominently in these. This arrangement created a dynamic of dependency between the two as only these "media" were keen on giving unrestricted access to such political leaders or operators. The latter were grateful for such opportunities and have a track record of pandering to the most anti-systemic views to satisfy the disinformation or "reinformation" urges of listeners and viewers of such "media" outlets.

Influence via Far-Right/REMVE Militants

Russia's image, and that of President Putin as the world's last standing strongman seemed to have played a role in situations in which Moscow was not actively attempting to influence the local far-right/REMVE milieu but was instead courted by courtiers of that scene who expected Russia to offer assistance to their political projects. Such was the case with the seemingly outlandish coup plots in France, as detailed by Nicolas Hénin, and Germany, as outlined by Anton Shekhovtsov. These plotters sat at the intersection of the far-right and the anti-government (AGE)/anti-systemic milieus, which might have complicated their potential for outreach and forging of relations with Moscow.¹⁸ As was discussed, Moscow has an impressive track record of liaising with the far-right, a process which intensified after 2012, but seems to be yet finding its feet while dealing with the

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post-COVID-19 militants of the AGE type. This might be the reason why it largely spurned the overtures of the German plotters and hardly even registered the fanciful French attempt.

Russia might not have been interested in liaising with the German or the French far-right coup plotters but is not averse to infiltrating the far-right paramilitary organisations of Europe. Moreover, it also is open to discussions, often via seemingly independent proxies, with the most extreme and violent elements of a given country's far-right/REMVE scenes. This has been the case with Sweden where it deputised the Russian Imperial Movement to liaise with the Nordic Resistance Movement or its German proxies to enlist the co-operation of individual members of the Polish Falanga for nefarious purposes in Ukraine. Such moves provide the Kremlin with a wider portfolio of entities it can potentially call upon from a given far-right/REMVE milieu. Such moves, however, come at a price when the foreign partner decides to conduct violent or even terrorist operations of their own volition. This was the situation in Sweden where the militants of the Nordic Resistance Movement, who trained in Russia in facilities run by the Russian Imperial Movement, effectively went rogue and organised a string of bombings without the knowledge or approval of their Swedish or Russian patrons. Probably for this reason, as Russia wishes to avoid diplomatic fallout from such incidents, the practice of providing Russian territory to scores of far-right/REMVE militants for "training" is less widespread than one might suspect.¹⁹ Nonetheless, such a channel has been, and could potentially be used, by Moscow to again influence developments in a given Western country.

Influence via the Paramilitaries

Moscow also seems to have developed a soft spot for the not only more radical but also action oriented members of different far-right/REMVE scenes. This is clearly visible in its attempts to infiltrate the far-right paramilitary milieu of Hungary, as documented by Zgut-Przybylska, or its indirect drawing on members of this milieu in Poland to stage a terrorist attack in Ukraine, as outlined by Witkowski in his chapter. The Hungarian paramilitaries might have been interesting to Moscow due to their long-standing and high-level political and social connections, and in the Polish case as they could have been more easily manipulated to act against the hated "Banderites" (a slur term for Ukrainians favoured by the Kremlin).²⁰ At the same time, Moscow's connection was also

evident in the development of Slovak Conscripts (SB), as described by Milo in his chapter on Slovakia. This was a seemingly non-far right organisation, but if one was to scrutinise its anti-immigrant and anti-EU/NATO but pro-Russian messaging, then it would not be far-fetched to assume its members would have felt at ease amongst some of the REMVE individuals described in the volume's other chapters. Russia, a disruptor, a seemingly "active" force in international politics, looked like an obvious choice for a youngster, and SB founder, who attempted to find a practical but also a political inspiration for his actions.²¹

Influence via Exiles

As was demonstrated in the volume, with France as the most obvious case, Russia hosts individual figures of the European far-right/REMVE and refuses to send them back to their countries of origin. These individuals act as "refugees" who are running away from partisan authorities back at home as these are intent on allegedly imprisoning them because of their views. Russia refuses to extradite these and some, like the Frenchman Joël Sambuis, are beaming anti-Western and pro-Russian messages into the online sphere. Their standing and reach may not be as wide as they had been before their escape to Russia, but their functioning in Moscow attests to the latter's image of a protector and provider for like-minded anti-systemic forces of the world. This is exacerbated by the presence in Russia of figures such as Rinaldo Nazzaro, the former leader of The Base – a group designated as a terrorist organisation in the likes of Canada or the UK.²² These individuals could potentially be useful to the Kremlin if it ever decided to proverbially activate them as agents of its influence in different far-right/REMVE milieus of the West.

Conclusion

As the types and scale of Russian infiltration of the European far-right/REMVE milieu are multifaceted, albeit far from comprehensive in certain cases, a discussion on relevant countermeasures is often challenging. There is no one quick fix nor one-size-fits-all type of a scenario which could be implemented immediately. The book's national chapters all include sections devoted to recommendations and ways forward, and these present a case for a thorough and ambitious policy response. Moreover, they also indicate areas of transnational

seemingly comparable Russian organisation. In this sense, more resources and consequently, more monitoring of such activities will not produce, or will not automatically produce, criminal cases or prosecutions. It will, however, strengthen the understanding of how Russia operates via its favourite disruptors of the last decade – far right/REMVE activists and politicians – and should thus be supported.

Seemingly, this is a straightforward case as one would have to describe and then sell, from a public relations point of view, the stories of Russian dealings with the local far-right. Unfortunately, in today's political climate, the proverbial "far-right" is often considered part of the political mainstream, and it remains highly sensitive to any accusation connecting it with foreign influence. In this sense, provision of smoking guns as described in previous chapters – the Ibiza video (attack), the Uzhorod attack (Poland) or the Garbar recording (Slovakia) which embarrassed elements of a given country's far-right – help pave the way for a more robust and direct communications policy on the scale of Russian attempts to work with or through the local extreme elements.

A lot of the suggested countermeasures centred on the issue of disinformation through which Russia concretises its foreign policy narratives, and where it socialises its fans, supporters, admirers etc. into these. Suggestions to block foreign sponsored disinformation through the banning and blocking of websites and profiles spreading serious, foreign-funded disinformation or engaging in Foreign Information Manipulation and Influence (FIMI) stood out. The creation of rapid response strategic communications teams also stood out, which would be activated during given social, political, economic or health crises in a given country. Their task would be to proverbially "flood the airwaves" with truthful narratives to oppose Russian disinformation which thrives on crises and division.

Finally, some diverging recommendations come from countries in which the Russia-far-right axis is also joined, more or less willingly, by the local governments, which themselves either pander to the far-right sentiments or are politically radical. These governments should be deprived of EU funds, which is a process more straightforward in the case of EU candidates and not EU Member States. At the same time, European institutions, and other allied governments, such as the U.S. or Canada, if providing funding to any policy initiatives in such countries, should target actors operating locally and independent of these governments.

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The broad scope of the recommendations included in this volume not only testifies to Russia's multifaceted attempt to work with or via the European far-right/REMVE, but also to a broader socio-political malaise now plaguing the West. It is now evident that cosyng up to Moscow and aligning with itself on a broad range of issues, from foreign policy stances to social issues such as one's views on LGBTQ+ community, has now been normalised and mainstreamed. Thus, naming and shaming, strengthening one's security structures, or better countering disinformation may not suffice to stop Russia's influence operations with Europe's disruptors. In this sense, not only does the West need to “disrupt the disruptors” but also accordingly address the problem at its source in Russia. This, however, could be the topic of the next volume on the Russia-far-right/REMVE axis in Europe.

¹ See Chapter 3 of this book by Anton Shekhovstov.

² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴ For a reconstruction of how Russia attempted to work with and through the Western far-right/REMVE, and for appreciation that Moscow first zoomed in on the process of creating “the Russian world” as an antecedent to all this, see: Michel Eltchaninoff, *Inside the Mind of Vladimir Putin*, London: Hurst, 2018, pp. 157-71.

⁵ Witold Jurasz, *Demony Rosji* [Demons of Russia], Warszawa: Czerwone i Czarne, 2022, kindle edition, loc. 485.

⁶ Shekhovtsov, pp. 85-7.

⁷ See: Masha Gessen, *The Future Is History. How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia*, New York: Riverhead Books, 2017, pp. 360-465 for an account of these protests.

⁸ See: Robert Horvath, *Putin’s Fascists. Russkii Obraz and the Politics of Managed Nationalism in Russia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

⁹ See, e.g. Jean Thiriart, *Europe. An Empire of 400 Million*, London: Arktos, 2021.

¹⁰ See: Sanshiro Hosaka, “Welcome to Surkov’s Theater: Russian Political Technology in the Donbas War,” *Nationalities Papers*, Volume 47, Special Issue 5: Special Issue on the Donbas Conflict, September 2019, pp. 750 – 773.

¹¹ See: Kacper Rekawek, *Career Break or a New Career? Extremist Foreign Fighters in Ukraine*, April 2020, Berlin: Counter Extremism Project, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Report_Career%20Break%20or%20a%20New%20Career_Extremist%20Foreign%20Fighters%20in%20Ukraine_April%202020.pdf.

¹² Kacper Rekawek, *Foreign Fighters in Ukraine. The Brown-Red Cocktail*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2023, pp. 176-82.

¹³ For a more realistic presentation of Dugin, his philosophy and his actual influence on the Russian domestic or foreign policy, see: Andreas Umland, “Post-Soviet ‘Uncivil Society’ and the Rise of Aleksandr Dugin: A Case Study of the Extraparliamentary Radical Right in Contemporary Russia,” Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Cambridge for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, January 2007, <https://deliverypdf.ssrn.com/delivery.php?ID=757114096124124125090095003015089023030092050084043069014030069120089117098113070110018011103047026000040101126113083005127121045037034011050080082083067096090081007063022004068112064000006110023119082064119020066010106112126030067084069027124120006086&EXT=pdf&INDEX=TRUE>.

¹⁴ See: Tei Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *War for Eternity: The Return of Traditionalism and the Rise of the Populist Right* (London: Penguin, 2020).

¹⁵ For Dugin’s early years see: Gessen.

¹⁶ Dugin openly incited to violence or mass murder of Ukrainians in an interview. See: Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow. The Rise of Russia’s New Nationalism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016, p. 327.

¹⁷ As was demonstrated by RFE/RL, the ban on these two media, introduced in early 2022, is far from perfect two years later as their services are accessible to viewers from Brussels. See: Gjeraqina Tuhina, “Two Years Into EU Ban, Russia’s RT And Sputnik Are Still Accessible Across The EU,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 3 February 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-rt-sputnik-eu-access-bans-propaganda-ukraine-war/32803929.html>.

CONCLUSION

¹⁸ On AGE – anti-government extremism see e.g.: Bàrbara Molas, “A Comparative Assessment of Anti-Government Attacks in Germany, the US, and Brazil,” *ICCT Policy Brief*, September 2023, <https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-09/Molas%20-%20The%20Insurrection%20Wave%20final%20to%20publish.pdf>.

¹⁹ Kristie Pladson, “German neo-Nazis trained in Russia: report,” *DW*, 6 May 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-neo-nazis-trained-at-russian-camps-report/a-53692907>.

²⁰ Alexander J. Motyl, “The Language of Russia’s War on Ukraine,” *Foreign Policy*, 13 March 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/13/putin-ukraine-russia-war-language-shibboleth-palyanitsya/>.

²¹ For more on this concept see: Rekawek 2020.

²² BBC News, “Neo-Nazi Rinaldo Nazzaro running US militant group The Base from Russia,” 24 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-51236915>.