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

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Introduction: Russia’s “Political Warfare” via the Far-Right

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Russia has an established record of waging political warfare on its competitors on the world stage or practising “an ongoing subversion campaign in Europe and the United States, using tactics short of war.”¹ Effectively, such an approach equals “the employment of military, intelligence, diplomatic, financial, and other means – short of conventional war – to achieve national objectives.”² As was demonstrated by the likes of Anton Shekhovtsov, this approach also involves liaising with and supporting anti-systemic far-right parties intent on redrawing the political map of different Western countries.³ By 2024, it should not be a surprise that Russia encourages, funds, inspires, and rallies a string of radical and extremist actors who explicitly may not even be pro-Moscow, but act as political disruptors in their respective countries.⁴ At the same time, Russia itself is a non-democratic state that suppresses minorities, occupies territories, and has repeatedly failed to honour international agreements, including by challenging the sanctity of international borders. In other words, Russia is “[...an] increasingly right-wing, authoritarian, patrimonial and anti-Western” polity.⁵

Thus, in the eyes of the many far-right or REMVE (racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist) individuals present in the Western World, Moscow is morphing into a traditionalist, anti-modernity and anti-liberal role model.⁶ The extent to which this is an accurate portrayal of modern Russia, which features large Muslim minorities (some sources suggest that these constitute even up to 25 percent of the population),⁷ and given its divorce rate (top three in the world), that Russia could be seen as a stalwart of traditional or family values is debatable.⁸ Moreover, the Russian government has an ambivalent relationship with the

country's far-right milieu, which at times is given free rein to, for example, attack representatives of the Muslim minorities or activists, or journalists professing liberal views and critique of the Kremlin. However, this licence to act has often been curtailed at the whim of the far-right's Kremlin curators, who also have a track record of literally terminating their nebulous support for the country's nationalists and criminalising them en masse.⁹ Regardless of Russia's approach to its far-right/REMVE activists, the threat from Moscow has become a growing concern for Western policymakers since at least 2014 and Russia's annexation of Crimea, magnified by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022,¹⁰ but also, to some extent, the Russo-Georgian war of 2008.¹¹ This threat was clearly voiced in the infamous speech of President Vladimir Putin at the 2007 Munich Security Conference where, according to Daniel Fried and Kurt Volker, "the Russian leader firmly rejected the post-Cold War system he's still trying to torpedo."¹² Ironically, at no point did the Western far-right/REMVE feel any threat from or concern about Russia. It was thus happy to align itself with an anti-mainstream/disruptive force/country that caused so much controversy among the far-right's mainstream and pro-Atlanticist political opponents.¹³

Ironically, the Western far-right/REMVE's fascination with Moscow, despite the latter's falling short on some of the anti-Muslim or pro-family metrics and its repression of the Russian nationalist milieu, continues to persevere. It even withstood the test of the full-scale Ukrainian war when Moscow sent troops flying the Soviet banner into Ukraine and relied on its Asian or Caucasian units and recruits in the initial push onto Kyiv. In the eyes of Moscow's European backers, this amounted to the alleged traditionalist Moscow fighting "white" Europeans (Ukrainians) with its own Muslims.¹⁴ Shocking as it was, it hardly led to changes in opinions on the Western far-right/REMVE positive view of Russia or its foreign policy. It seems that the ties that bind these two parties of this arrangement – the Russian government and western far right/REMVE actors – are stronger than one might have thought.

This book aims to interrogate and highlight these ties by focusing on cases in which Russian influence in European countries is evident or at least strongly suspected. By demonstrating the practicalities of Russian support to a variety of far-right/REMVE actors present in ten European countries, the volume will dissect the forms and extent of influence, and the degree of support that Moscow offers to its fans, backers, and supporters abroad. The book will refer to the

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individuals, groups, movements, organisations, or parties discussed in its twenty case studies as far-right (and alternatively REMVE). The far-right, according to a classic definition of the phenomenon by Mudde,¹⁵ is a broad concept that encompasses both radical and extreme rights. The latter is more akin to the US concept of REMVE. In fact, the volume addresses entities or individuals who are nationalist, endorse nativist and anti-immigrant/anti-refugee policies, and aim to preserve an identity of a given racial, social, national, or regional group or entity by constructing illiberal and antidemocratic unequal societies. In this scenario, ethnicity, religion, tradition, nationality, culture, language, and gender become variables in the construction of such societies.¹⁶ Some wish to achieve this in a democratic manner by winning elections, while others endorse violence, and other sections yet of this milieu gravitate towards positions which are often called “anti-government” or “anti-institutional.”¹⁷ In short, the far-right landscape has become a complex and evolving phenomenon which suits Russia as it wages its “political warfare.” In this sense, it can now choose from a potentially very wide spectrum of potential political disruptors as its allies or outlets. This book zooms in on the result of Moscow’s choices while discussing the aforementioned twenty cases, which saw different degrees of Russian influence over and interference in the far-right/REMVE scenes of ten European countries.

Russia’s Relationship with the Far-Right in the West

The relationship between the European, and more broadly, the Western far-right, and Russia has been addressed by a few important works in the last ten years. Shekhovtsov’s contribution to the field has already been mentioned and is, moreover, one of the chapters in the current volume. A similar case concerns Nicolas Hénin and Przemyslaw Witkowski, both of whom penned monographs on their countries’ (far-right) relationships with Russia (France¹⁸ and Poland¹⁹ respectively). Other contributions meriting a mention include the work of the Counter Extremism Project, which discussed the cooperation between Russia and the West in this sphere in a broader, comparative setting.²⁰ Works by Clover, Horvath, and Teitelbaum, as well as those of Due Enstad,²¹ Fenghi,²² Garner,²³ or Laruelle,²⁴ which focus on aspects of the Russian far-right/REMVE milieu, provide a more contextualised understanding of the phenomenon. As these indicate, Russia has a long and rich track record of far-right politics and actions by REMVE militants, who are often used and abused by the Kremlin for domestic policy ends or, as was the case with the 2014 hybrid war against Ukraine – also

while effectively conducting Russia's foreign policy during its invasion of a neighbouring country.²⁵

Russia, which at times represses its nationalists, continues to be seen as a standard bearer for far-right forces hostile to the EU.²⁶ As Moscow counters the EU and the broader West in the name of fighting for a "multipolar world" (i.e. one with Russia at the top table), Polyakova demonstrates that the far-right is raging against the same "globalist" forces while wishing to preserve national sovereignty and cultural identity of a given country or region.²⁷ In turn, as Götz and Renaud Merlen put it, Russia then uses the Orthodox Church as an element in forging its separate and distinct identity, which impresses the identity-oriented anti-Western forces of the European far-right/REMVE.²⁸

Similarly, Antonis Klapsis argues that the far right in Europe sees Putin's Russia as a model of "neo-conservatism" and "semi-authoritarianism" that can counteract the undermining of nation-states spearheaded by the EU as well as NATO.²⁹ In other words, Europe's far-right/REMVE sees in Putin the model of a strong, conservative leader able to defend tradition and oppose a decadent West. According to Klapsis, the far right seeks a close relationship with Russia to achieve a gradual disassociation of their countries from a Euro-Atlantic sphere of influence and the institutions that represent it. From Moscow's point of view, these groups are an opportunity to expand its own geopolitical influence, for example, if far-right groups and parties become big enough to exert considerable pressure on EU governments to favour a relationship with Russia.³⁰ Highlighting Europe's far-right initiative in establishing relationships with Moscow, Anton Shekhovtsov demonstrates that efforts to build a (geo)political alliance with Putin are based on hopes that Russia could help Europe "reconstruct the mythologised and romanticised nation-state".³¹ The formation of coalitions and alliances with Europe's far-right is thus beneficial to Moscow as, according to Shekhovtsov, this constitutes a type of "active measure" to achieve major foreign policy objectives in case other softer measures do not work.³²

According to Paul Stronski and Annie Himes, such foreign policy objectives include sabotaging the unity of the West and its opposition to Moscow's illiberal vision while weakening democratic projects and values (especially when spreading in neighbouring countries) to prevent these from permeating Russia and undermining Putin's rule. Stronski and Himes argue that such aims require

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influence, which Russia has developed mainly through five tools: energy, information, culture, politics, and proxies.³³ (Dis)information tools have been especially relevant to Russia since COVID-19, in particular, to exert influence in Eastern Europe and delegitimise Western action towards the pandemic and overall credibility.³⁴ This Russian “infodemic” has continued until today through the spread and normalisation of conspiratorial narratives about the West, including in post-Soviet countries, where these efforts have been strengthened by promoting “Slavic brotherhood” narratives as well as shared Orthodox Christianity.³⁵

Overall, Russia wishes to appear as a viable and legitimate alternative to lead international relations (in opposition to Brussels) for like-minded or sympathetic groups and parties. To that end, Russia actively backs political leaders and candidates it views as vulnerable to influence in regions of interest, for example, by organising high-profile diplomatic meetings to demonstrate its leadership in neighbouring countries, or by aggressively controlling paramilitary groups in strategic regions, including in Ukraine.³⁶ On the other hand, Russia finances and connects far-right groups and parties in many European countries, which allows Putin to keep allies at the forefront of the European political arena while fostering political and social polarisation, as showcased by Beatrix Futak-Campbell. In her work, Futak-Campbell explains that divisions among Europe’s political actors are strategic and beneficial for Russia because these are as disruptive as they are distracting.³⁷

The literature above overlaps extensively in explaining the nature of the relationship between Russia and Europe’s far-right as an alliance of convenience aiming to undermine democratic systems and values, together with the institutions that represent them. To Russia, Europe’s far-right is a destabilising tool from which Putin can take advantage to gain legitimacy and geopolitical influence. To the far right, befriending Russia can empower alternative socio-political views within Europe, allowing nondemocratic and illiberal-leaning groups and parties to gain credibility and influence in the European political landscape. In the literature examined these insights emerge from studying direct forms of Russian influence. Complementing such an approach, this edited volume focuses instead on indirect forms of influence, including those based on circumstantial evidence which may be linked to Russia. These are important because they shape the threat landscape as much as direct attempts to manipulate

opinion and behaviour and, therefore, constitute a risk to consider in efforts to counteract Russia's strategies to debilitate liberal democracies.

Despite some of the existing literature offering regional examples to illustrate Russia's harmful influence, there are no systematic, comparative analyses that showcase how such an influence manifests across multiple countries. Moreover, when there are attempts to do so, such as Stronski and Himes (2019), Russia is presented as the dominant actor, removing local actors of agency (and accountability) in their efforts to establish closer ties with Putin. Filling this gap, the present volume looks at Russia's tactics to influence different regions across Europe, as well as analyse the steps undertaken by regional actors associated with the far right to build a useful relationship with Russia. In other words, it considers Russia's harmful influence upon the European threat landscape as a two-way street in which actors on both sides play an equally active role in shaping power relations. All for one common goal: destroy democratic debate at home and abroad.

Finally, while some of the literature provides recommendations on how to address Russia's harmful influence, including Gotz and Merlen (2019) and Stronski and Himes (2019), these seem only applicable as generic guidelines at the international level. It is thus unclear who exactly might be able to make use of those recommendations, in what capacity, and in what context, especially as it relates to the regional level. In contrast, our book offers both country-based tailored recommendations in addition to practical and rule-of-law-grounded advice to inform transnational counter-extremism and counter-terrorism efforts against Russia's activities with the far right. In doing so, this book represents both an analytical contribution to the study of this subject as well as a tool kit for practitioners.

Structure of the Book

The collection of studies that this book presents is organised by country-focused chapters, where each chapter considers two case studies within that country. Some case studies centre around a group, a movement, a party, or an individual, and they may span short or long periods of time, but all of them are evidence-based cases relevant to today's threat landscape and the current threat perception among counter-terrorism and prevention agencies. Following the same research

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questions, each chapter sheds light upon the types of (direct and indirect) Russian influence that can be observed in each region, including what means were used and by whom to allow for the development of such an influence to emerge. Towards developing a risk assessment for every country, each chapter will also investigate what type of impact the influence identified had or could have had, specifically highlighting what the risk of violence is and where it stems from.

In addition to providing a threat analysis, each chapter discusses any existing responses at the country level designed to tackle Russia's harmful influence. This might include very concrete measures taken by platforms, but also administrative measures voted by the governments, specific legislations, and even lesser responses such as political figures acknowledging the problem in public or in parliamentary debates. An assessment of whether any existing measures are sufficient will set the stage for recommendations. Accordingly, each chapter provides advice tailored to their regional focus and planned for policy makers and practitioners in the field of counter-terrorism and prevention to inform their practise. In addition to country chapters, the volume provides a concluding comparative chapter that helps understand the similarities and differences between all case studies. The purpose of this chapter is to determine whether patterns in Russia's influence on Europe's far-right exist and, if so, how we can better address them when constituting a problem both at the national and transnational levels. This comparative analysis also underlines the challenges in coordinating efforts against such patterns, providing recommendations on how to do so more effectively.

This edited volume has three main goals. Above all, it aims to provide original and evidence-based case studies that contribute to our understanding of Russia's influence on the European far right. In doing so, it (secondly) hopes to contribute to our understanding of the evolving far-right landscape, including by offering new conceptual insights around this form of (violent and nonviolent) extremism. Finally, it intends to increase policymakers' understanding of the ways in which Russia supports far-right movements, organised groups, parties, and individuals in Europe, with particular attention to the risk of violent extremism.

Themes Within, and Order of, this Book

The book's ten country chapters discuss Russian influence on the REMVE scenes in ten European countries. They are organised into five pairs of thematically linked countries, which help further elucidate the character of Russia's presence in this milieu. The first pair, including the Austro-German, introduces a situation in which Russia gains a considerable foothold amongst, or influence over, prominent members of a parliamentary and established political party, both sitting on the far-right of either Austrian (FPÖ) or German (AfD) politics. This, as will be shown, comes on top of activities with less 'mainstream' entities, such as the Suvorov Institute in Austria or even Russia's so-far troubled (lack of) relationship with the anti-institutional/anti-government German Reichsbürger.

The second pair, consisting of Serbia and Hungary, showcases a situation in which Russian influence in a given country far exceeds forays into the REMVE milieu and effectively influences the actions of governments. In Serbia, the country's defence and security sector openly cooperates with its Russian counterparts. This is done while suppressing the political activity of the Russian emigres residing in the country or during the demonstrations organised by the Serbian opposition when the country's prime minister thanked the Russian security services for the alleged tip-off on the upcoming protests.³⁸ Simultaneously, the government is playing a proverbial cat-and-mouse game with the REMVE political forces in the country, which are both seemingly critical of its alliance with Moscow but also stridently anti-Western and ideologically more in line with the preferences of Russia. Similarly, the Hungarian government also seems keen on assisting in both the growth and repression of a pro-Russian, but especially anti-Ukrainian, local REMVE scene. This allows for the adoption of a political attitude in which the current government in Budapest presents itself as a safer, less radical pair of hands to some of its internal and external critics. Consequently, Viktor Orbán's government is then keen on warning all who would listen of the political dangers should the REMVE actors gain more political prominence in the country. However, this does not stop the government or the far-right from overtures to Moscow.

The third pair, consisting of France and Italy, demonstrates how the online ecosystem of the REMVE milieu is keen on spreading ideas and talking points in favour of Moscow. Moreover, it also showcases how REMVE influencers (be it individuals or political parties) prioritise ideological viewpoints (such as anti-

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modernism, anti-feminism, or an anti-LGBTQ+ agenda), which are also close to Moscow's heart. These seemingly non-political points are then used to drive a wedge between the broader REMVE/far-right milieu proponents and voters and the rest of the electorate. This aforementioned ecosystem also produces and shares some of the most bizarre anti-government/anti-institutional conspiracies, of which one (as will be discussed in the French chapter), led to an attempted coup d'état.

The fourth pair, consisting of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, demonstrates how Russia's influence is spreading among individuals, voters, and organisations that are naturally and inherently positively predisposed to Moscow. They may not all politically come from the wider REMVE/far-right milieu, but while endorsing anti-government and anti-institutional positions (especially in relation to the EU, NATO, and the Russo-Ukrainian war) and professing social conservatism and an anti-immigrant agenda, all veer towards nationalist and pro-Russian positions. At the same time, both countries feature political or even paramilitary forces which have never hidden their fascination with or support for Russia.

Finally, the fifth pair, consisting of Sweden and Poland, presents cases of outright terrorist violence coming from the respective REMVE scenes, which can be tied to Russia. Such an approach allows Moscow a cover of plausible deniability as it was not its citizens nor its officials who prepared terrorist attacks in Sweden or Ukraine (by Polish REMVE individuals). These two chapters also discuss pro-Russian, or rabidly anti-Ukrainian, activities of individuals who are either Swedish (for Sweden Democrats) or Polish (Confederation). They started their political journeys on the fringes of their respective political systems, but years or decades later are enjoying the socio-political spotlight. At the same time, they have not, it seems, renowned nor changed their views.

In terms of individual chapters, the book begins with a chapter on Austria, which discusses two case studies. The first case study is that of an established, albeit situated on the radical right of the political spectrum, political party, Freedom Party of Austria, FPÖ or the Freedom Party of Austria, which tops the opinion polls in the country as of early 2024.³⁹ The second case focuses on the Suvorov Institute, an entity functioning on the fringes of political life in Austria. The first one zooms in on the scale and depth of FPÖ's dealings with Russia, especially during the period prior to 2019 when it co-led the Austrian government. Before

2019 the party moved beyond notional support for Russia, via e.g. signing of a ‘friendship agreement’ with United Russia – Russia’s governing party – towards participation in a government remembered for its pro-Russian policies. It seems that as much as FPÖ was responsible for driving the more mainstream parties in Austria towards pro-Russian positions, the Suvorov Institute played a role in mobilising the more radical political actors, such as the Identitarian Movement, for the benefit of Moscow. In this sense, the two entities, albeit disparate and not directly connected, actually led to a complementary existence.

The second chapter on Germany, mirrors the approach from the Austrian chapter as it also discusses an established, radical right, political party – the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and a more fringe entity, the Patriotic Union. The first case demonstrates an evolution of what initially started as a Eurosceptic political force and evolved into a political force publishing manifestos in Russian and calling for a détente in relations with Moscow as a pre-requisite for peace in Europe. The second case study provides fascinating detail on the little-known coup attempt from a group of Reichsbürger (a group of citizens of the Reich – an anti-state movement functioning in Germany which sees the Federal Republic as illegal) who attempted to win Moscow’s blessings for its planned violent revolutionary action.

The third of the national chapters focuses on Serbia and discusses the macro-influence of Russia on the Serbian government, led by the nationalist Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). Moreover, it showcases the role and the development of the even more radically nationalist and, at times, violent, People’s Patrol as a force in Serbian politics. The two, SNS and the People’s Patrol, are effectively competing for the same supporters, voters, donors, enablers, etc. and have both been developing their respective ties to the Russian government or the Russian far-right/REMVE milieu, which only appears independent of the Kremlin.⁴⁰ The chapter offers three ideas as to why this state of affairs persists and how beneficial this could be to the government in Belgrade and its counterpart in Moscow.

The fourth chapter addresses the situation in Hungary and the multifaceted and multipronged Russian efforts vis-à-vis the Hungarian far-right/REMVE scene. Interestingly, the Kremlin again seems to have prioritised targeting all subsections of this scene in Hungary – both via the more violent and extreme (via the Hungarian National Front) but also radical right (Jobbik and the case of the

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KGBéla – a Russian asset among its Members of the European Parliament, MEPs). Simultaneously, however, as the chapter demonstrates, Moscow could also count on more than a sympathetic ear from other sections of the country’s far-right, namely the Our Homeland political party – a splinter of the aforementioned Jobbik. The key here is not only an imagined sharing of conservative values between Moscow and Our Homeland as similar alliances or understandings exist between political forces in other European countries and the Russian government or the Russian governing party, United Russia. However, and this is unique among all countries covered by this volume, the Hungarian far-right forces also perceive Russia as an enabler of geopolitical changes in the neighbourhood, which, they hope, would lead to the restoration of pre-1920 Hungarian borders. As the longing for ‘Greater Hungary’ is one of the most potent animating factors for the Hungarian nationalists, Russia, which effectively attempts to forcibly redraw its borders with Ukraine, becomes an ally in an attempt to reset if not destroy the post–World War II order in Europe. This scenario would allegedly benefit Budapest as it borders Ukraine and, prior to 1920, saw today’s Ukrainian Zakarpattia/Transcarpathia regions within its borders. This would, in the minds of the Hungarian nationalists, allow for a claim to parts of Western Ukraine, should Ukraine lose the war against Russia. Consequently, the territorially-minded Hungarian far-right stands out among such political forces in Europe, which remain more intent on building transnational ideological alliances without getting into potentially toxic discussions on history and territory.

The fifth national chapter looks at the two cases from France, both of which are manifested mostly online. They bear some striking similarities as the main protagonists, Joël Sambuis and Remy Daillet, respectively, resided abroad while attempting to make the most of their online (in the former’s case) or both online and offline (in the latter’s case) activism. Sambuis, a French far-right activist since at least the 1980s, with prison sentences to his name, is sought by the French state in relation to an attempt on the life of the French president, Jacques Chirac, in 2002. Currently, he is a Russian citizen and enjoys Moscow’s protection while broadcasting his anti-Western, pro-multipolar world messages via multiple French websites and online channels while based in Russia. Daillet, on the other hand, a former foreign fighter in the Yugoslav wars on the Croat side, is a well-known and long-standing popular conspiracy theorist who, during the COVID-19 pandemic, decided to attempt a coup d’état in France. He rallied his followers

to the cause by hinting that he enjoyed Kremlin support, which would allow him to topple the “corrupt” French government. Both cases testify to the fact that Russia acts to support a wide variety of anti-systemic and not only far-right/REMVE political forces – Sambuis is a more traditional nationalist, whereas Daillet is more of an anti-government/anti-institutional extremist. Russia also fashions itself as an attractive alternative to such forces without explicitly and directly, as seems to have been the case with Daillet but also the aforementioned German Patriotic Union, endorsing these.

The sixth national chapter zooms in on the two cases from Italy. The first is seemingly more in line with cases of established radical-right political parties discussed in the German or Austrian chapter as it focuses on the League party. However, as the chapter dives into the details of the Russian influence it also uncovers layers of online political messaging and signalling which benefit Russia and appear at least partly inspired by similar talking points delivered by Moscow. The second case fully dwells on the online aspect of the Russian influence as it discusses the Kremlin’s influence on Italy’s far-right’s supporters. It uses an interesting case study of cyber-attacks, conducted by pro-Russian hacktivist collectives, on the websites of Italian institutions. These were allegedly attacked as a punishment for Italy’s support for Ukraine after the Russian full-scale aggression began in February 2022. The chapter then assesses the perception of these attacks by the aforementioned Italian activists and supporters of the far-right political party New Force.

Chapters seven and eight of this volume focus on the Czech and Slovak cases. Each of the four instances covered in these two chapters may not look similar at first glance, but this does not do justice to a single factor binding the REMVE scenes of the countries: the inherent and long-lasting pro-Russian sentiment of a variety of political forces and huge segments of the public. Consequently, the Slovak *Republika* radical-right party, the Slovak paramilitary Conscripts, or the Czech anti-government protestors from the streets of Prague all are fond of Moscow and see it as a viable and attractive geopolitical alternative to the European Union and NATO. At the same time, these are not pariahs as far as such sentiments are expressed in Czech and Slovak societies. These contain mainstream, and not always far-right political forces which often, at least proverbially, side with Moscow on emerging issues of the period. Regardless of the above, however, as is shown throughout these two chapters, the pro-Russian

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REMVE milieu comes in different shapes and forms and is actively involved in challenging the seeming status quo prevailing in the two countries. It is at its most effective once it combines its pro-Russian approaches with other causes dear to anti-systemic or anti-mainstream voters, namely COVID-19 lockdown measures or opposition to a given country's support for Ukraine in repelling Russian aggression.

The last pair of chapters (nine and ten) focus on rare events related to Russia's influence over the REMVE scenes in Europe, namely outright terrorist attacks as seen in Sweden and Poland. In Sweden, it is conducted by a group of right-wing extremists who trained in a camp run by a Russian far-right organisation which is designated by the US – the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM). This was the result of an understanding between RIM and a Nordic counterpart - the Nordic Resistance Movement – gone wrong. What was meant to be “just training” did not satisfy the trainees who, upon coming back from the camp, engaged in an ultimately unsuccessful campaign of terrorism in Sweden without the sanction of their leaders. The Polish case is different – it is one of the most remarkable testaments of a Russia-sponsored transnational connection of different REMVE actors across Europe: a German publicist/propagandist ordered an attack on a Hungarian centre in Ukraine and hired Polish far-right militants to do it for him. All of it happens so that Ukrainian-Hungarian relations could be further soured. Apart from the two violent cases, the chapters also focus on political actors who evolved from ideological positions and later entered parliament. First, the Sweden Democrats used to be known as a far-right, if not extreme-right political party, but now have a confidence and supply arrangement with the current Swedish centre-right government. In Poland, Grzegorz Braun evolved from a conspiratorial figure on the Polish far-right scene into one of the stalwarts of a political party that prior to the 2023 election in Poland seemed destined to break the duopoly between the Law and Justice and Civic Platform parties which have been alternating in government since 2005.

The volume finishes with a concluding chapter in which the findings of the previous ten are discussed in a comparative manner. Patterns of Russian behaviour vis-à-vis the European far-right/REMVE scenes are discussed to dissect the commonality of approaches by Moscow to utilise their adopted, real, or imagined ideological allies to proverbially rock the boat in the West. This is to ensure that in the future, policymakers have a viable compendium of what to

expect from the far-right/REMVE-Russia dealings, how these are built and developed, and how to best counteract such developments.

A Note on Concepts

Russian influence is not clear-cut. Above all, there can be either direct or indirect forms of influence. For example, an indirect form of influence could be an independent (unaffiliated) user endorsing and spreading pro-Russian narratives about the invasion of Ukraine. In such a case, while Russia might not be actively sponsoring or supporting this user to inflict change in the opinion or behaviour of others, harmful action can take place due to the mainstreaming of a discourse favourable to the Kremlin's agenda anyway. Conversely, a form of direct influence could be Russia providing financial assistance to a party candidate in a European country in order to assist it in being successful during elections. Both types of influence are equally valuable and thus present in this study.

As it will be shown, the case studies covered in this book demonstrate a wide variety of cases in which Russia either acted directly while dealing with the far right, went through middlemen (either Russian or of other nationalities), or were sought by a given individual, group, organisation, or party as a potential sponsor or supporter. Moscow also gave refuge to some of the individuals discussed in this book. At the same time, in some cases, Russia hardly had to perform any action before a given entity gravitated towards pro-Russian positions. In this sense, one should not assume that anyone who is friendly towards Moscow and, for example, praises the “multipolar world,” is automatically on the receiving end of Russian largesse. This volume discusses a string of cases which hardly needed any prodding from Moscow to sing Russia's praises. Additionally, it also presents individuals or groups which began their anti-systemic far-right journey while embracing anti-US, anti-Semitic, or anti-European conspiracies. These hardly featured any mentions of Russia, but some of their proponents gravitated towards Moscow through a peculiar learning process which saw them, for example, take an anti-migrant stance in general and then graduate towards anti-Ukrainian positions as Europe accepted refugees from Ukraine. Some Russian supporters are scornfully called Russia's “useful idiots” but as this volume will demonstrate, they often reach their ideological positions because of peculiar historical or ideological grudges, often imagined.⁴¹ The subsequent endorsement of such grudges has nothing to do with their proponents' mental or intellectual conditions,

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and it would be wrong to write these individuals off as mere fools or “useful idiots.” One must accept that some in the West consciously chose to reject the transatlantic alliance or European integration and, while doing so, aligned with external forces (Russia) seemingly sympathetic to their cause, regardless of the consequences of such a move. Due to the fact that a considerable section of such individuals comes from the far-right/REMVE milieu, it is only prescient to dissect such cooperation or understating between the two in detail.

- ¹ Freedom House, “Russia: Transnational Repression Origin Country Case Study,” Special Report 2021, n.d. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression/russia>.
- ² Seth G. Jones. “The Return of Political Warfare,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*, February 2018, 1–4. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/return-political-warfare>.
- ³ Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).
- ⁴ Elias Götz and Camille-Renaud Merlen. “Russia and the Question of World Order,” *European Politics and Society* 20, no. 2, 2019, 133–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2018.1545181>; and Mitchell A. Orenstein. *The Lands in Between: Russia vs. the West and the New Politics of Hybrid War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- ⁵ Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right: Tango Noir*, 20.
- ⁶ For more, see e.g. Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia’s New Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020) or Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, *War for Eternity: The Return of Traditionalism and the Rise of the Populist Right* (London: Penguin, 2020).
- ⁷ See: “Russia 2022 International Religious Freedom Report,” US Department of State, n.d. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/441219-RUSSIA-2022-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.
- ⁸ See: “Divorce Rates by Country 2024,” World Population Review, n.d. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/divorce-rates-by-country>.
- ⁹ For more on this issue, see: Robert Horvath, *Putin’s Fascists. Russkii Obraz and the Politics of Managed Nationalism in Russia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).
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