

A close-up photograph of a computer keyboard. The keys are dark grey with white symbols. A prominent key in the lower center features the Russian flag's horizontal stripes of white, blue, and red. Other visible keys include the equals/underscore key, the right square bracket/asterisk key, the semicolon/underscore key, the up arrow key, and the right arrow key.

THE RUSSIAN CONNECTION

The spread of pro-Russian policies on the European far right

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In 2009¹ Political Capital was among the first to point out² Russia's growing interest in East European far-right parties. At the end of 2013 a number of analysts³ noticed a similar development. This time around, Russia is involving itself with far-right parties of Western Europe. Currently, Russian influence in the affairs of the far right is a phenomenon seen all over Europe as a key risk for Euro-Atlantic integration at both the national and the Union level; especially in view of the upcoming 2014 European Parliamentary elections. Spearheaded by the French National Front; post-elections, far-right parties might form a pro-Russian block in the European Parliament. Or even if they were unable to do so, the representation of such forces in the European Parliament is expected to rise. All this is happening in concurrence with a political and economic crisis that has put the European Union in a vulnerable state.

The 'Eurasian doctrine'

There is an increasingly evident ideological link between some of the European far-right parties and the current Russian leadership. This may be interpreted within the framework of Russia's geopolitical strategy. Since the start of the Putin-era, by leaving behind the social and economic failures of the preceding period and the attending embarrassments of the international bargains; has enabled Russia to set its sights on the restoration of the country's status as a world power. This is tied to Russia's imperial ambitions and its unique modernization path being backed by energy-industry resources⁴. Diplomatic arm-twisting has only been partly symbolic. For it has also contributed to the consolidation of political power at home through specific economic achievements; primarily in the energy-market. These developments have become particularly important when the negative effects of the global financial/economic crisis deeply impacted the Russian economy; under heavy strain to this day.

Russia's foreign-policy activism has been given a new impetus in Vladimir Putin's third presidential term. Prior to taking this path, Putin presented his foreign-policy aspirations in what he termed, '**Eurasian Union**', in a 2011 article published by the daily, Izvestia⁵. Subsequently, the president's ideas were elaborated by the journalist and political strategist, Modest Kolerov⁶, the head of a presidential institution responsible for foreign relations.

1 Russia's Far-Right Friends: http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends_349.html

2 The Moscow connection: what does Jobbik have to do with Putin's Prussia? http://hirszerzo.hu/hirek/2009/12/1/132169_a_moszkvai_kapcsolat_mi_koze_a_jobbiknak_pu

3 including Marcel H. Van Herpen and Paul A. Goble, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/putinism-as-a-model-for-western-europe-s-extreme-right-by-marcel-h-van-herpen>, http://www.iwp.edu/news_publications/detail/kremlin-expands-and-exploits-its-ties-with-extreme-right-in-europe-says-prof-paul-goble

4 Angela E. Stent: Restoration and Revolution in Putin's Foreign Policy, EUROPE-ASIA STUDIES Vol. 60, No. 6, August 2008

5 <http://www.russianmission.eu/en/news/article-prime-minister-vladimir-putin-new-integration-project-eurasia-future-making-izvestia-3->

6 Kolerov has been 'persona non grata' in Latvia since 2012 for threatening the country's "territorial integrity and economic security", and earlier he was also banned from Lithuania, Estonia and Georgia. <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1998818>.

The doctrine promised post-Soviet states national development and 'genuine sovereignty', without the European Union's 'gratuitous restrictions'

These points are well complemented by Putin's reformulated ideology built on authoritarianism, law-and-order policies, nationalism and statism, and the proclamation of a kind of – using a term coined by János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi⁷ – '**post-communist neo-conservatism**' against Western values perceived to be on the decline.

In this context, Russia's EU-skepticism along with the downright anti-EU attitude of the far-right forces of Europe who oppose their own establishment, are ideologically compatible with the 'Great Russia' concept and are given as all but natural allies of Putin's Russia.

East European far-right - a background

In 2009, we demonstrated the connection between some far-right formations and Russia through the examples of several post-communist countries, including Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia and Slovakia. The special status of Bulgaria, Slovakia and Serbia (cultural/historical reasons tied to statehood and a Pan-Slavic ideology) has made the public and the political elite in these countries more receptive to Russia.

In Bulgaria the nationalist, anti-EU and statist party, Attack (ATAKA), formed in 2005, is the strongest proponent of pro-Russian relations. By 2013 support for the party dropped to 7.3% and, according to Gallup international's January 2014 survey, if the trend continues, the party's 2 EU parliamentary seats gained in 2009 may be lost.⁸ The party's president, Volen Siderov, expressed his pro-Russian stance only indirectly when he supported the construction of a direct gas-pipeline linking Bulgaria and Russia, and when, instead of Turkey, he argued for Russia's accession to the EU. In addition, and similar to Hungary's Jobbik, in its platform Attack emphasizes the importance of turning to markets outside the Union, i.e., in Russia, Libya and Iraq.

In Slovakia, following the departure of the Slovak National Party (SNS) from Parliament, the leader of the People Party - Our Slovakia (ĽSNS), Marian Kotleba, emerged as a new force on the Slovak far right. With his anti-ethnic and anti-Roma rhetoric, he became governor of the Banská Bystrica Region after winning 55% in a runoff election. Despite his short political career and before gaining any nationwide influence, as early as January 2014, Kotleba hurriedly expressed his support for the since ousted pro-Russian president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich. In an open letter⁹, the politician stated that those protesting in Ukraine promote the interests of the West ("looking for closer ties to Russia") thereby threatening the "independence" of Ukraine. However, it is interesting to note that Kotleba's former organization, Slovenska Pospolitost, in which he practically began his political career, has supported the insurgents' struggle for national autonomy¹⁰.

7 Ladányi János–Szelényi Iván: Post-communist neo-conservatism, *Élet és Irodalom*, year 56, issue 8, February 21, 2014. http://www.es.hu/ladanyi_janos8211;szelenyi_ivan;posztkommunista_neokonzervativizmus;2014-02-19.html

8 http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=157612

9 <http://www.vucbb.sk/portal/sites/default/files/bbsk/clanky/2014/otvoreny-list-predsedu-bbsk-mariana-kotlebu-prezidentovi-ukrajiny-viktorovi-fedorovicovi-janukovicovi/otvoreny-list.pdf>

10 Slovenska Pospolitost had strong ties with ĽSNS and Kotleba, however, these ties seem to have been eroding recently. The split of opinions in the case of Ukraine is just an illustration of this trend.

In Hungary, Jobbik's 2010 election program already described the establishment and maintenance of good relations with "an increasingly influential Russia" as vitally important. In May 2013, in a lecture at Moscow's Lomonosov University Gábor Vona characterized Russia as the guardian of European heritage as opposed to a "treacherous" European Union. Béla Kovács, the president of Jobbik's Foreign Affairs Cabinet, the party's EP-representative, and the co-chair of the Russia-EU Inter-Parliamentary Working Group, at the group's 2013 meeting in Kaliningrad asked a Russian Upper-House senator: "What is the future possibility of an EU member state initiating accession talks with the Euro-Asian Union?"

In other words, in these countries the main features of the relationship(s) between the far-right and Russia have been apparent for quite some time. These include the policy of 'Eastern opening' that emphasizes economic interests, a peculiar ideological bonding, and pushing Russia's agenda on international forums (remember the attacks of the far-right aimed at the pro-US Saakashvili during the Russian-Georgian conflict)¹¹.

Facing East all across Europe

The present 2014 Ukraine on the verge of civil war and the Syrian geopolitical gambit are representative of the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008. In these conflicts, some parties on the European far-right support pro-Russian Ukrainian Viktor Yanukovych and Syrian Bassar al-Assad. Aside from Russia's global and regional interests, the shared interests in respect to energy-industry, issues of primary importance to Russia are also striking.

In most post-communist East European countries, Russia with its Soviet past, has been regarded as the external enemy number one for a long time. However, in recent years this enemy-concept seems to have changed. A rather dramatic case would be the East European far-right parties whose pro-Russian stance became stronger even as, under Putin's watch, the promotion of nostalgia for Russia's imperial past went hand-in-hand with the positive 'reinterpretation' of the country's communist past.

According to the explanation widely shared by the media, Russia provides material support for some European far-right parties. However, no evidence has surfaced to prove the account conclusive. Simultaneously, the ideological and political affinity of **far-right parties to Russia is apparent for the following reasons:**

- Russia's authoritarian political system, its heavy-handed leader, its great-power rhetoric, the suppression of basic freedoms, state control over strategic sectors, the constant reference to 'national interests' overriding market mechanisms and a controlled economy keeping 'big-capital' in check offer a **state-organization model** for some European far-right parties.
- Paradoxically, even though **some extreme-right parties who proclaim national self-reliance, isolation, and wish to demonstrate their criticism of the European Union. They meanwhile advocate for the break-up of the Euro-Atlantic community by moving closer to Russia.**

¹¹ http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends_349.html

- Russia's new geopolitical strategy coincides with the European far-right's anti-establishment platform and policy interests. Moreover, **through what Putin terms as the 'active means' (aktivnye meropriyatiya) of his 'Eurasian Doctrine', Russia provides political support to 'friendly' parties and organizations.** In Sinikukka Saari's summary report, he mentions three major components.
 1. Proactive political initiative-taking; this involves the contacting of foreign political actors, the establishment and coordination of pro-Russian parties, and the export of political know-how and expertise.
 2. "NGO-diplomacy"; which essentially means the establishment of non-governmental organizations such as youth, minority, separatist civil organizations, and think tanks for the promotion of Russian interests.
 3. The support for friendly media enterprises. The 'media' component is aimed at influencing domestic and foreign public opinion through existing media channels or media yet to be established. For instance, pseudo-civic organizations have cropped up in Estonia, Trans-Istria and Southern Ossetia. The Russians have provided financial and political support to Moldavian and Georgian separatists. In Latvia, a formerly insignificant Harmony Center party won the elections with strong Russian backing (Saari, 2011:3-5)¹².

In other words, the gains from the trade-off for far right parties are not necessarily financial, as commonly assumed, but more valuable professional, organizational and media assistance; i.e., access to networks and political know-how. The effective use of such political know-how by Russia represents a risk for an emerging European pro-Russian party-network. Russia is clearly present on all fronts. Russia is simultaneously trying to assert its interests in the political mainstream and extremist parties alike, as well as venturing into a number of alternative scenarios. Tell-tale signs in Italy, Greece, and Hungary show parallels between one another's far-right parties and Russian support. Meanwhile Russia continues to maintain its regular inter-governmental contacts.

Russian influence may not only be effective due to its direct relations with specific parties, but also because these parties as of late, thanks to their resurgence, have become influential in their respective party families within the EU. In short, **there is reason to believe that Russian diplomacy seeks to build party families in Europe.** This is suggested by Russia's policy for encouraging far-right parties to hold conferences with Russian assistance and to form alliances.

- In November 2013 the head of the British National Party (BNP) Nick Griffin, the head of New Force, Roberto Fiore and the spokesperson for Greek Golden Dawn, Ilias P. Kasidiaris were on a visit to Moscow and held a joint news conference. The 'guest list' is given special significance by the constellation of their party alliances. The New Force has close ties to Golden Dawn through the European National Front (FNE), established in 2004 by far-right parties and presided over by Fiore. On the other hand, BNP is part of the Jobbik-led Alliance of European National Movements (AENM), where the French National Front was a former member.

¹² Sinikukka Saari: Putin's Eurasian Union Initiative: Are the premises of Russia's post-Soviet policy changing?, Ulbrief NO9, 1 Nov. 2011 <http://www.ui.se/upl/files/65793.pdf>

- Aside from its founder, Umberto Bossi, the Northern League's December 15, 2013 party election congress the Turin was attended by Geert Wilders, president of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV), Heinz Christian-Strache, the leader of Austrian FPÖ, the representatives of French National Front, Flemish Interest (VB), Swedish Democrats (SD), as well as Viktor Zubarev, the representative from United Russia¹³. Political consultations with the Russian representative precede the 2010 creation of, the then new, European Parliamentary election alliance. This alliance was named the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF) with the mission to consolidate and prepare these parties for the European elections.
- Jobbik and Golden Dawn are both invited to the Russian National Forum organized by the Intelligent Design Bureau (close connections to Putin) to be held on October 4 and 5, 2014 in St. Petersburg. The significance of the forum is suggested by the large number of invited guests (1500) to a conference with the following agenda: the joint development of a new national doctrine for Russia and Europe, and the creation of a permanent coordination committee for the implementation of national policies adopted by the conference¹⁴.

European network of pro-Russian parties

In respect to the links of European far-right parties to Russia, one can distinguish between 'committed', 'open'/'neutral' and 'hostile'.

- **Most major European far-right parties typically fall in the 'committed' category, openly professing their sympathy for Russia.** Within the group, in order to differentiate the means by which far-right parties actively support Russia one must make a distinction between two, often overlapping forms of commitment. Some parties who promote stronger economic ties with the East, may show sympathy based simply on considerations in relation to foreign and economic policy and realpolitik, without regard to Putin's economic and social regime as a model. **In the 'open' group one finds parties that while in most cases display a negative or neutral attitude toward Russia, in some important issues support the Russian position** even in the absence of genuine motivation. The most prominent player in this 'double game' is PVV led by Geert Wilders who clearly and regularly condemns Russia at home, while abroad he has started to develop political networks with the Russians.
- **When it comes to the category of 'hostile' parties, it is clear that they come primarily from countries in conflict with Russia.** These include Romania, which has a permanent conflict with Russia over Moldova where Romanians are the majority population, or Latvia where the National Alliance "All for Latvia!" shows hostility towards Russia and Latvia's Russian minority population.

¹³ Zubarev stated clearly that the „political and ideological platform” of the congress and Putin's philosophy show a large degree of convergence, which he is going to report to United Russia. In January 2014, Northern League EU MP, Lorenzo Fontana traveled to Russia to prepare a high level meeting with Putin later in 2014. Responding to questions, Fontana admitted that the meeting scheduled between Putin and the head of LN, Matteo Salvini will involve the coordination of “mutual interests” pointing beyond Europe. - <http://www.affaritaliani.it/affari-europei/intervista-internazionale-euroscettica-incontro-salvini-putin.html>

¹⁴ <http://bit.ly/1iJcJS>

The relationship of far-right parties in some European countries with Russia¹⁵

Country	Committed	Open/Neutral	Hostile
Austria	FPÖ		
Belgium	VB		
Bulgaria	ATAKA		
Croatia		HSP (neutral)	
Czech Republic	DS		
Denmark		DF (open)	
Estonia		EIP (neutral)	
Finland			PS
France	FN		
Germany	NPD		
Greece	XA		
Holland		PVV (open)	
Hungary	Jobbik		
Italy	LN, FN		
Latvia			VL-TB/LNNK
Lithuania	TT		
Poland	SRP	LPR (open)	
Romania			PRM
Slovakia	SNS, ĽSNS		
Sweden		SD (open)	
United Kingdom	BNP		
Total	15	6	3

The pro-Russian standpoint of some far-right parties is clearly demonstrated by their public statements. In Italy, talking about values the **Northern League's** EP-representative, Lorenzo Fontana describes Russia¹⁶, which he also sees as a major economic partner for Italy and all of Europe, as a model example when it comes to national identity and the protection of the family. The leader of extra-parliamentary **New Force**, Roberto Fiore perceives **Putin's Russia as a "model civilization"** defending the identity of Christian Europe against banks and migrants.

In Greece, in a 2013 interview¹⁷ given to The Voice of Russia, Golden Dawn chairman, **Nikolaos Michaloliakos, argued that there is a "natural alliance" between Greece, a "sea power" and Russia, a "land power"**. In 2014 the party's spokesperson, **Ilias P. Kasidiaris**, said that in the event Golden Dawn wins the next election, Greece may immediately enter into an alliance with Russia.

In the 2011 French presidential race, French National Front leader, Marine Le Pen tied the rise of European nations to a strategic alliance built on military and energy partnership with Russia, recommended that Germany develop a trilateral alliance system along the Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis and called for the creation of a Pan-European Union with the participation of Russia.

¹⁵ Political Capital's own categorisation, based on public statements of party officials, and documents on the websites of these parties

¹⁶ http://italian.ruvr.ru/2013_12_20/Matteo-Salvini-e-la-sua-Lega-di-battaglia/

¹⁷ http://greek.ruvr.ru/2013_12_16/255918654/#.UrN2N1yFTtg.gmail

In Great Britain, as chairman of the British National Party, Nick Griffin was present as a foreign election observer at the 2011 general Duma election in Russia and the 2012 general parliamentary election in Ukraine, after which he came to the conclusion that “Russian elections are much fairer than Britain’s”.

Statement made by	Statement
Hungary Gábor Vona, Jobbik party chairman (www.iarex.ru, January 22, 2014)	For me Euro-Asianism means that Hungary may become a bridge between Europe and Asia. [...] The advantage of Euro-Asianism comes from the fact that, in contrast to EU-integration, it preserves the independence of regions engaged in continental cooperation.
Italy Matteo Salvini, Northern League Federal Secretary (La Voce Della Russia, December 20, 2013)	People in Italy still know little about Russia, although in my opinion Russia represents the future. In the coming years Russia shall become a unique partner for the League and Northern Italy.
Greece Nikolaos Michaloliakos, Golden Dawn party chairman (Voice of Russia, December 16, 2013)	Greece and Russia are natural allies. In return for its security, Greece must provide Russia access to the warm seas.
France Marine Le Pen, National Front party leader (French presidential candidate speech, Paris, November 19, 2011)	Respecting neutral status, international law and national taxation, we propose the creation of a sovereign Pan-European Union with the participation of Russia and Switzerland..., the United States and Turkey would not be part of that entity.
Great Britain Nick Griffin, British National Party chairman (www.bnp.org.uk, December 9, 2011)	Russian elections are much fairer than Britain’s.

Most major parties belonging to the European Alliance for Freedom, an election alliance, and other prominent right-wing parties, such as Jobbik and Golden Dawn, are all committed to Russia. **Representatives of the far right are expected to do well in the upcoming EP elections.¹⁸ The most important player is Front National that can delegate alone 18 MEPs to the European Parliament according to latest predictions. If a new caucus of far-right parties will be formed, it can be lead by one of the most enthusiastic supporters of Russia, Marie Le Pen. But even if far-right parties faced difficulties in forming their own group, pro-Russian far-right forces might have a larger presence in the European Parliament than ever before.¹⁹ Russia has a vested interest in the subsequent ability to influence relevant decisions at the EU level in order to hold on to its position in the European energy market because it is concerned with the radical changes in the global energy market²⁰.**

18 <http://blog.electio2014.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/PollWatch2014-tables-5-March-2014-forecast.pdf>

19 Far-right parties may have difficulties in meeting both of the two criteria required to form a group in the European Parliament. Extreme right parties are expected to have 25 MEPs but they might fail to have the required numbers of MEPs from 7 different countries, given for example that they would exclude the representatives of the most extreme parties such as Jobbik and Golden Dawn.

20 e.g., increasing significance of renewable energy, American shale gas and liquefied gas

Support for pro-Russian parties

	2009 EP election results % of votes (No. of seats)	Most recent parliamentary election results % of votes (No. of mandates, election year)	EP2014 Prediction % of votes (No. of seats, prediction by Pollwatch 2014)
FPÖ (Austria)	12.71% (2)	20.5% (40, 2013)	21% (4)
VB (Belgium)	9.9% (2)	7.8% (12, 2010)	5.2% (1)
ATAKA (Bulgaria)	11.96% (2)	7.3% (23, 2013)	-
DS (Czech Republic)	1.1% (0)	0.86% (0, 2013)	-
FN (France)	6.3% (3)	13.6% (2, 2012)	21.5% (18)
NPD (Germany)	-	1.3% (0, 2013)	1.3% (1)
XA (Greece)	-	6.9% (18, 2012)	10.7% (2)
Jobbik (Hungary)	14.8% (3)	20.5% (23, 2014)	19% (4)
FN (Italy)	0.47% (0)	0.26% (0, 2013)	-
LN (Italy)	10.2% (9)	4.1% (18, 2013)	4.2% (4)
TT (Lithuania)	12.2% (2)	7.7% (11, 2012)	20% (3)
SRP (Poland)	1.5% (0)	0% (0, 2011)	-
ĽSNS (Slovakia)	-	1.8% (0, 2012)	3.6% (0)
SNS (Slovakia)	5.6% (1)	4.6% (0, 2012)	5.3% (1)
BNP (United Kingdom)	6.2% (2)	1.9% (0, 2010)	-
Total No. of seats	26		38