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## RUSSIA: Support for Europe’s Far Right Show Deep Ideological Influence Mission

**Summary:** Russia’s support and heavy investments to influence European far-right groups illustrates a repeating pattern that Moscow employs on nationalist parties in France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy. Through cultivating alliances with these parties, Russia can further its strategic goals of balancing power with Europe and eroding Western institutions.

**Overview of Russia’s Tactical Actions in Western Europe:** Russia pours immense money and resources into right-wing parties in Western Europe, signaling how it regards the importance of influencing Europe’s internal politics. Russia conducted operations to infiltrate parties across Europe, each to accomplish a tactical objective that plays into Russia’s overall foreign policy strategy in Europe.



Russia’s actions across France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy strongly indicate a coordinated campaign designed to infiltrate, destabilize, and break apart Europe’s global institutions. More broadly, Russia most likely seeks to improve its regional power in Europe by gaining sympathy and controlling groups of populations within Europe. By controlling the people, Russia can

effectively control and influence the territory, as it did during the annexation of Crimea. The figure above demonstrates how Russia and nationalist parties engage in a cycle which encourages and entrenches cooperation, and how nationalist parties and Russia help solidify the idea that Western institutions are failing. While Russia foments this anti-West sentiment, it draws attention away from its aggressive agenda at home or in its near abroad.

**France:** Russia invested heavily into supporting the far-right National Front party and specifically Marine Le Pen's campaign for election and likely received favorability on policy in return. At the beginning of Le Pen's election campaign in 2014, a Russian member of parliament brokered a \$12 million loan between a Russian bank and Le Pen's campaign. The loan coincided with the Russian annexation of Crimea, which Le Pen quickly supported against the consensus of most French officials. Messages between two Kremlin officials indicate many in the Russian government attribute her support of the annexation to Russia's donation.

Le Pen maintains a deep support for pro-Russian policies, which likely stems from her shared values with Russia and the Russian financing of her election campaign. Le Pen's platform of withdrawing from the EU, lifting sanctions on Russia, and endorsing the annexation of Crimea closely align with Moscow's interests. These values align with the values of Le Pen's party, which include withdrawing from global partnerships in favor of nationalism. Furthermore, most banks in Europe will not loan Le Pen's party money due to the party's former connection to fascism, making Russian loans even more desirable. Le Pen ties for front-runner in polls for the next general election with current President Emmanuel Macron, showing how Russia's investment is paying off.

**Germany:** Russia is cultivating a wide group of allies in Germany primarily through the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) likely as a means to undermine Germany's position as a leader within the EU. A BBC investigation in April showed Russia's effort to infiltrate AfD and specifically gain "control" of MP Markus Frohnmaier. Despite his denial of a connection to Russia, he openly supports numerous pro-Russian policies, including Russian control of Crimea. Russia also campaigned for AfD in Germany's most recent election, and experts connect several anonymous foreign donations to AfD back to Russia.

In return for Russian support, AfD also backs many anti-institutional values Russia asserts across Europe. AfD remains strongly anti-immigrant and anti-EU, and its leader argued against the deportation of a group of Russian spies in April. Russia almost certainly maintains a positive feedback loop with AfD, though AfD voters and officials may not fully grasp Russia's influence in their party. AfD's support for pro-Russian policy also resonates with many of its supporters, particularly in Eastern Germany, formally apart of the Soviet bloc. In return, Russia continues to support AfD thus helping them earn re-election. This loop of cooperation in return for support on policy proved an effective strategy for the AfD as it remains the largest opposition party in Germany.

**Great Britain:** Russia donates millions to right-wing parties in Britain likely in an attempt to influence Brexit results. In 2018, the Conservative Party received over \$1 million from Russian oligarchs and explicitly refused to return the donation after it became public. The Conservatives have accepted over \$3 million from high profile Russians since 2010 despite the party's promise to decline Russian money. On top of these collective donations, former oligarch Alexander Temerko donated over \$1 million to the Conservative Party and maintains a very close friendship with Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Additionally, Nigel Farage, leader of the Brexit party and a

key voice of the anti-EU movement in Britain received, then failed to disclose a \$500,000 donation from pro-Russian donors with ties to Moscow. Finally, a report in 2017 revealed that many large banks in London processed nearly \$740 million from a money-laundering operation run by criminals with links to Kremlin. However, the UK failed to open a criminal investigation, likely due to illicit Russian funding supporting influential businessmen and politicians with ties to large banks.

Russia receives a high return on its investment in British politics. Farage's Brexit party continues to grow in popularity, while Conservatives continue to demonstrate indecision on Brexit and even Johnson's willingness to shut down the government amid the Brexit debate. Though Russian influence likely does not permeate the entire Conservative Party, its continued acceptance of Russian money indicates its willingness to align itself with policies that directly benefit Russia.

**Italy:** Moscow attempted to orchestrate a secret deal to fund Italy's populist Lega party, likely in return for Lega support of Russia's agenda in Europe. A secret recording released on 10 July revealed a proposed oil deal during a covert meeting in Moscow that would provide Lega with tens of millions of dollars. Italy outlaws international political donations, so the participants sought to conceal the transfer by using oil companies as a front. Lega leader Matteo Salvini did not attend the meeting and denies accepting donations, although Salvini travelled to Moscow at the same time of the meeting. Although it is unclear if Lega received any money, the recording raises concerns of other possible covert financial dealings between the Kremlin and Lega.

Lega cultivates strong political ties with the Kremlin and aligns closely with Russia's conservative values. Lega views Russia as an ally in preserving traditional values and endorses sanctions relief and Russia's return to the G8. Gianluca Savoini, a close aide of Salvini, operates a Russian cultural group with pro-Kremlin ideals. Salvini and Savoini frequently travel to Russia on both official and unofficial trips and outspokenly advocate for lifting Russian sanctions placed after the annexation of Crimea. In 2018, United Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin's party, signed a cooperation deal with Lega, with Lega vowing to work with United Russia to promote further cooperation and business ties.

**Outlook and Implications:** Russia's donation and influence campaign in Europe will likely continue due to key upcoming European elections and the failure of most European countries to act towards their actions. All four countries will hold elections within the next four years, which all present a key opportunity for right-wing parties to gain further traction in their respective governments. Russia will almost certainly continue their influence campaigns due to the success of gaining the support of officials such as Le Pen in France and Frohnmaier in Germany. Fundamentally, many of Russia's conservative values align with the domestic priorities of many far-right nationalist parties in Europe. Using this value-alignment to influence foreign citizens, Russia seeks to disrupt many western institutions such as NATO, the EU, and strong US-European alliances because weak and isolated European countries allow Russia to control the balance of power in Europe more easily. Furthermore, inaction from Europe regarding Russia will almost certainly incentivize Russia to continue their efforts. As Russia's tactics gain more publicity, they may evolve more sophisticated and surreptitious methods of influence.

Russia's continued activities will likely cause an increase in nationalist sentiment in Europe, decreased trust in European governments and institutions, and increased support for pro-Russian policies in Europe. The misinformation created by Russia's involvement in Europe most likely

causes mistrust for Europe's institutions and support for returning to conservative values. This mistrust not only destabilizes Europe's government thus making it easier for Russia to shift Europe's balance of power in their favor, but it also plays into the narrative of most nationalist parties that the current moderate institutions cannot govern effectively. Nationalists will in turn likely take advantage of Russia's support and use the increased funding to strengthen affiliates to build up other nationalist political groups.

[Zach Coffee, Gianna Geiger, Grace Knopp, Nick Hughes, Elizabeth MacManus]

## **EUROPE-IRAN: Serious Action Against Iran Unlikely Despite Joint Statement**

**Summary:** While tensions between Iran and Great Britain, France, and Germany will probably continue to grow following a joint statement against Iran, domestic political concerns make major action unlikely.

**Development:** On 23 September, Great Britain, France, and Germany released a joint statement blaming Iran for the 14 September drone attacks on Saudi Arabian oil facilities, following a meeting of the United Nations. Houthi rebels in Yemen claimed ownership of the attack. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, French President Emmanuel Macron, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel included in their statement their reaffirmed support for the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. The leaders also urged Iran to “refrain from choosing provocation and escalation,” while Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denied the allegations of Iranian involvement. As these European leaders address the drone attacks, they each also face domestic concerns, with Brexit, domestic tension in France, and Merkel’s announcement that she will not run for re-election in 2021.

**Analysis:** The joint statement will likely only serve to increase tensions between Iran and Great Britain, France, and Germany, and will not likely spur major action. Due to domestic priorities in Great Britain, France, and Germany, the leaders will likely have a difficult time building political momentum to shift focus from domestic challenges to international issues. Johnson, Macron, and Merkel will likely focus instead on a commitment to strengthening the 2015 deal through diplomatic means. As Iranian officials have rejected accusations of involvement following the joint statement, a lack of serious action among the European countries will probably not stymie the growth of tension between countries. Since Houthi rebels in Yemen have claimed responsibility, Iranian officials most likely see the continued blame placed on Iran as an attack, contributing to increased tensions.

[Alli McIntyre]

## **GEORGIA: Russia Announces Funding for Separatist Army**

**Summary:** Russian President Vladimir Putin has approved a government proposal which will send funds to modernize the army of Abkhazia. This likely suggests Russia plans to support further separatist movements in the region.

**Development:** On 23 September, Putin approved a proposal to send funds to modernize the army of Abkhazia, a move that the government of Georgia condemned due to historical grievances. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia fought and gained independence from Georgia. Few countries recognize Abkhazia's sovereignty, as most consider it a breakaway region of Georgia. Russia formally recognized Abkhazia's independence in 2008, after Russia defeated Georgia in a war to support the independence South Ossetia, another Georgian territory. Putin has employed similar strategy in relations with Ukraine and other countries in the region.

**Analysis:** Russia's effort to modernize the army of Abkhazia likely indicates plans of future aggression against Georgia and other former Soviet states. Doing so publicly seems to suggest that Russia has little fear of retaliation by the international community. Russia will likely continue to fund separatist armies in the region to destabilize former Soviet countries further and establish puppet regimes or even annex more territory as it did in Crimea. Should Russia continue to support separatist armies in the region, the territorial integrity of post-Soviet states may be in jeopardy.

[Elizabeth MacManus]

## INDONESIA: Revised Legal Code May Harm Tourism

**Summary:** Jakarta's pending penal code outlawing same sex relationships and extra-marital sex may lead to a drastic decrease in tourism for Indonesia.

**Development:** On 20 September, Indonesian President Joko Widodo postponed a revised penal code criminalizing extra-marital and same sex relationships. The revised penal code applies to foreign visitors as well as Indonesian citizens and punishes such crimes with prison time and fines. Human Rights Watch and The Institute for Criminal Justice Reform warn that the revisions will invite persecution for gay Indonesians. On 19 September, the Australian government warned its citizens of the potential risks they face by traveling to the Indonesian archipelago in light of the new penal code. Indonesia currently holds far more moderate laws regarding human sexuality than its Southeast Asian Muslim neighbors, Malaysia and Brunei.

**Analysis:** Jakarta's penal code revisions may decrease tourism to Indonesia if formally introduced into the legal system. The legal revisions suggest a shift in Indonesia towards a more traditionalist form of Islamic familial piety and that Indonesia seeks to join Malaysia and Brunei in taking a more hardline stance in the judicial system regarding social freedoms. As other Western nations will likely also warn its citizens of travel to Indonesia, Indonesia will likely lose its status in the eyes of tourists as the most moderate Islamic nation of the three and will probably experience a decrease in foreign tourism. Widodo's postponing the passing of the revisions probably indicates apprehension that the laws will lead to a decline in the economy and status in the international community. Human rights advocacy organizations' responses and those of the Indonesian Islamic community will also probably factor into Widodo's decision making.

[Max Olson]



## SERBIA-CHINA: Chinese Initiative Will Likely Promote Further Influence

**Summary:** Serbia and China launched another security initiative that will place Serbian and Chinese policemen in patrols in three cities around Serbia, indicating a continuation of a growing trend of Serbian-Chinese cooperation.

**Development:** On 18 September, Serbia and China launched a new security initiative that places Chinese police officers with local Serbian patrols. The Chinese officers have no power to make arrests but will serve as a link between tourists and Serbian police. Novi Sad, Smederevo, and Belgrade will host these joint patrols, which officials say will help the growing number of Chinese tourists and workers in Serbia feel more secure. This initiative follows the Chinese and Serbian interior ministers' May signing of a memorandum that allows joint police exercises and cooperation in combating cybercrime. Serbia also receives a large amount of financing from China to support China's Belt and Road initiative. Serbia has used this funding for infrastructure improvements and other projects that the European Union refuses to fund in Serbia.

**Analysis:** The new addition of joint police patrols demonstrates a growing pattern of Chinese presence in Serbia and may prompt further Serbian-Chinese cooperation. China likely sees Serbia as a key point to enter Europe, and Serbia's central location in the Balkans will help China broaden its reach into the region. China may also seek to exert more influence by providing Serbia with unmanageable debt as a result from its increasing number of financing deals. As Serbia incurs greater debt, it would likely become more reliant on Chinese loans and support. Serbia, in turn, likely views China as a key partner as its economic investment as it cannot receive funding from the European Union for needed improvement projects. Serbia will likely continue to seek closer ties with China to continue building economic partnerships and to continue securing financing to boost its infrastructure and security projects. Chinese expansion into Serbia will likely directly compete with Russian interests in Serbia, because Russia views Serbia as a key regional ally. In response, Russia will likely increase its economic cooperation with Serbia and continue its campaign to stress cultural ties between the two nations.

[Gianna Geiger]

**This is a global intelligence briefing prepared by the students of the Global Security and Intelligence Studies program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona. The views expressed in this briefing are those of the students, not the university.**

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