



## INFORMATION WARFARE

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## Russia's 'Activity' toward the West—Confrontation by Choice

By Jolanta Darczewska and Piotr Żochowski, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, Poland

### Abstract

During the Cold War, the KGB's disinformation operations and their psychological and disruptive influence earned the catchall name of active measures. Today too, similar actions are being treated as a strategic asset in operations carried out by the Russian special services to influence the external environment. These actions, as tried and tested systemic mechanisms for confrontation with the West, support the implementation of the Russian Federation's foreign policy.

### Outline of the Problem

The international military and political pressure which Russia has exerted on its near and far surroundings, and its willingness to escalate tensions, have in recent years become one of the central issues of the discourse on global security. Many analyses have been carried out on this topic, and many articles have been written. However, reflection on the Russian threat remains fragmentary, as not all of its aspects and manifestations have been covered. Most observers have focused on activities in the infosphere (i.e. the media and cyberspace). Meanwhile, informational pressure has become a fundamental instrument of Russian influence, although it is far from being the only one. Pretexts for overt and covert media operations have included deliberately provoked incidents in the field of intelligence, on state borders, through migration flows, at events organised on Russia's own territory and the territories of foreign states (e.g., conferences, festivals, peace camps), violations of the airspace of NATO states and neighbouring countries, interference in parliamentary and presidential elections, financial and political support for radical environments and centrifugal trends within the EU, interfering with decision-making processes, discrediting political leaders who have opposed the Kremlin, and many more besides.

In this article, we will take a more holistic approach to examining the Russian threat by placing it within the wider framework of 'active measures'. This term well captures its complex nature. In fact, it synthesises different techniques—military, intelligence, economic, social, diplomatic, financial, media, online—all of which are subordinate to the implementation of the Russian Federation's strategic foreign policy objectives. This article also emphasises the key role of the Russian special services in preparing and constructing the executive support structures for these operations of influence, as well as the close ties between these operations and acts of provocation & wrecking, international organised crime and other manifestations of sabotage. These are carried out in physical, psychological-informational and communication spaces. The activities referred to as active meas-

ures were the subject of in-depth studies in the West during the Cold War: in addition to the sizeable load of knowledge to be found in these studies, they bring a broader political, social, and historical context to the current situation.

### 'Active Measures'—the Domain of the RF's Special Services

At the heart of the confrontational Cold War doctrine lay operations of influence, implemented in a systematic and coordinated fashion by the KGB, which received the collective name of 'active measures'. This term is not used in modern Russian political language, although due to the nature of the observed actions and their effects, as well as the continuity of the strategic culture (including the attachment of the Russian special services to these traditions), it should be accepted that they are part of the arsenal of measures Russia uses to influence its external environment. The dictionary of concepts employed in this operational work, published by the KGB in 1972, defined this type of activity as "covert, offensive projects involving disinformation, destabilisation and espionage deriving from the current political priorities [of the state], the aim of which is to influence a broad sphere of political and social activities in other countries." Also, Vasily Mitrokhin defines the essence of active measures in his 'KGB Lexicon' as "espionage-operational activities aimed at exerting influence on the foreign policy and internal political situation of the countries that are the object of these actions."

In official Russian strategic documents, the term 'active measures' has been replaced with synonyms such as 'support measures' and 'special means of influence'. These appeared in the Military Doctrine of 2000; in later texts they have been replaced by the terms 'non-military means', 'indirect action, i.e. wrecking, sabotage, the organisation of irregular armed formations', 'informational action', 'informational-psychological action' and 'informational-technological action'. In the latest version of the Military Doctrine from December 2014, the term 'information technology' has been introduced. This concept has also been transferred to the new edition

of the Information Security Doctrine from December 2016, where it appears in different contexts: as Russia's 'shield' defending the sovereignty of the Russian Federation, and as a 'sword', the West's informational weapon against Russia.

The doctrinal rationale for such actions is the so-called fourth threat: Russian strategists have extended the Western triad of threats in cyberspace (cyberwar, cyberterrorism and cybercrime) to include interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, above all Russia. This has a practical dimension: this artificially created image of the enemy helps to build potential for confrontation, mobilisation, legitimising the activities of the Russian government, and masking the offensive goals of its policy. 'The West's informational fight against Russia' places the latter in the role of the 'defender' both of its own citizens and of 'states which do not consent to the hegemony of the United States and a unipolar world'—that is, a defensive role, and not that of an aggressor who initiates conflict.

After Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the methods known as 'active measures' were once again made systemic in nature. As before, they are carried out on two levels, covert and overt (in the forms presented as Russian soft power). Revealing the fact that these actions were inspired by Russia, and sometimes emphasising it, serves the self-promotion, reconfirming the audience's belief in the omnipresence and omnipotence of the Russian special services. This kind of self-promotion strengthens the services' position within the so-called force sector. It is also in line with older traditions; during the Cold War these active measures were also presented as a 'war between intelligence services'.

### Active Measures as a Form of Proxy War

In identifying areas at risk from the activities of the Russian special services, it would be helpful to identify the strategic offensive objectives of the Russian Federation's foreign policy. For Europe, these are:

- the maintenance (and possible expansion) of the sphere of Russian political and economic influence by influencing the political and business elites of European countries, who would then take decisions in accordance with Russia's interests;
- in the regional dimension, maintaining control over Belarus, regaining control over Ukraine, and working to destabilise the Baltic States as an element weakening the eastern flank of NATO;
- breaking up the European Union by stoking the disputes between the member states within its composition, and limiting US influence in Europe, by means including interfering with cooperation within

NATO, and as a result, revising the current shape of European security;

- sabotaging (by bringing the partners into conflict) plans to build individual political, military and economic alliances designed to block the aims of Russian policy from being accomplished;
- stoking anti-American sentiments among the authorities, elites and societies of Europe, the continuous building of a pro-Russian lobby, and maintaining the conviction that it is necessary to accept the 'reasonable' rationales and demands of Russia, which is intended to undermine any determination to oppose its actions.

The Russian projects subordinated to these purposes are treated as the arsenal of the 'proxy war.' These include:

- influencing informational space (the creation of web portals lending credibility to Russia's position, reaching out to influential media, spreading disinformation and informational chaos);
- the use of the psychological military factor, demonstrations of force (military manoeuvres near the borders of NATO member states, demonstrating Russia's military superiority over NATO forces in the region, lowering public morale in NATO member states, and disparaging projects aimed at improving defence capabilities);
- intelligence activity aimed at diagnosing the situation in countries that are the targets of aggression and their counter-intelligence capacity, attempts to disrupt them, and the penetration of institutions and structures responsible for the preparation of defence;
- supporting groups favourable to Russia (the promotion of Russian arguments justifying Moscow's policy, instilling the belief that opposition to Russia is doomed to failure, stoking and instrumentalising internal disputes, highlighting the adverse effects of sanctions and trade restrictions on the one hand, and the benefits of cooperation with Russia on the other);
- reaching out to groups critically disposed towards cooperation with the US and NATO, and strengthening their arguments;
- inspiring and supporting radical, populist, Eurosceptic and separatist political parties and movements in Europe;
- the long-term construction of social, political and intellectual resources which knowingly or unknowingly support the implementation of Russia's political objectives (local authorities, business circles, academic cooperation, youth exchange programmes, artistic circles, sports fans);
- supporting Russian criminal circles (smuggling, trading weapons) and using them to infiltrate the EU and NATO;

- special local operations (such as cyberattacks, acts of sabotage to create panic among the local population, disruption of critical infrastructure, creating migration crises, provoking and stoking Russophobic sentiments, discrediting and compromising politicians in order to stoke internal political conflicts). The Russian special services are carrying out such actions in most European countries, using Russian and foreign political parties, non-governmental organisations and church groups, and capital linked to the Kremlin, among other instruments; which tools are used depends on the current climate in political and economic relations with the country concerned, as well as on its internal political, social and cultural circumstances. Different measures are applied to Germany, where there is a significant potential for destabilisation associated with the large Russian-speaking diaspora; likewise, yet other measures are used in France, where Russia acts through strong pro-Russian circles. The special services' arsenal includes the important tool of mechanisms for corruption, or the open employment of former politicians by groups and companies pursuing Russian economic objectives. Russia also acts outside the territory of the 'target states'. Signs of this include attempts to influence governments and public opinion in other countries; the aim is always to discredit the country under attack and hinder any initiatives which are contrary to Russia's interests.

One kind of such activity carried out by the special services is the attempts to locally destabilise specific situations in order to exert political pressure. An example of this was the creation (from September 2015 to February 2016) of local channels of migration from Russia to northern Norway and north-east Finland (most likely involving local Russian structures of force and organised crime), forcing the authorities in both countries to cooperate in the field of security. In Germany one attempt at an orchestrated provocation was the so-called 'Lisa affair' in January 2016, using fake reports about an abducted girl; statements critical of the German government by the leadership of the Russian foreign ministry were accompanied by anti-immigrant demonstrations in which members of the Russian diaspora participated.

### **The Conceptual and Organisational Basis for Strategic Confrontation**

Active measures were the subject of in-depth studies in the West during the Cold War. A cursory review of them leads to the conclusion that the contemporary repertoire is largely a continuation of the same ideas, although Russia has given up trying to change the world according to ideological preferences, which underpinned the

conceptual Cold-War basis of its active measures in that period. The doctrinal model justifying Russia's present activity is similarly inflexible: it is based on a contrast between the worlds of Russia and the West, the basis for which is the civilisational distinctiveness of the 'Russian world', duly expanded to cover the 'Eurasian world.' The strategic narration based on this so-called geopolitical scientific conception, and the criteria of 'truth' deriving from it, is simplified, adapted to the specific nature of the target audience, and displays a diverse range of thematic and ideological concepts. Moreover, this is a narrative free of the embarrassing burden of a system of values (which even today Russia has failed to create), and which in practice boils down to undermining the values of others. Geopolitics also determines the tone of the narrative, which is dominated by the rhetoric of confrontation. The United States and NATO have become a kind of 'absolute enemy,' which questions the role of Russia as a world power, abuses its trust and constantly humiliates it, shaping the global situation by means of 'colour revolutions'. The rivalry with the United States and NATO has become the most universal 'argument' of Russia's domestic (the creation of an illusion of danger and of pervasive anti-Russian hysteria, or Russophobia) and foreign policy. Calling foreign values (such as the sovereign right of Georgia and Ukraine to determine their own paths of development and choice of alliances) into question presents this as an act of defence of Russia's sovereignty, and as a mirror response to the cynical games of the West.

As regards the organisational principles, the innovations mainly derive from the use of new information and communication technologies, which have expanded the possibilities for exerting influence. The communication barriers of the past have been abolished by the internet, which guarantees access to information in real time, enabling the special services to rapidly penetrate the target of their actions by informational means. The development of the so-called new media (traditional online media and social media) allows for the rapid dissemination of crafted content (its dissemination around the world, reproduction, the removal of objectionable content, forcing the desired interpretation), ensuring the sender's anonymity and access to the audience without any intermediaries. The global communications network has added new tools to the toolbox, which means that today's problems with Russia's aggressive foreign policy are just an enhanced version of the old ones.

Citing research carried out during the Cold War, and considering the new elements mentioned above, the modern arsenal of active measures can be presented as follows:

Type	Organisational forms/techniques
BLACK (coordinated by the special services)	Acquiring agents of influence and instrumentalising the implementation of Russia's objectives by people unaware of this fact Fabricating evidence (fakes) Provocations, such as the destruction of monuments and memorials Subversion and covert, restricted use of armed violence Arranging demonstrations Bribery, corruption, blackmail and slander of politicians Cyberattacks, cyberprotests and propaganda 2.0
GREY (coordinated by the Kremlin)	Inspiring social groups, including extreme political parties and organisations Activities through controlled international organisations Instrumentalising Russian foundations and associations, such as <i>Russkiy Mir</i> and the Russian Historical Society Establishing pro-Russian portals and supporting them financially 'Troll factories', organising pro-Kremlin networks Social networking attacks, individual trolling
WHITE (coordinated by the Kremlin)	Informational activities carried out through state-owned news and multimedia agencies (RT, Radio Sputnik, RIA Novosti) Projects implemented through branches of <i>Rossdruzhestvo</i> & <i>RONIK</i> (Russian institutes of science and culture) at embassies of the Russian Federation, other organs of executive and legislative powers (such as the Commission for the Defence of the Sovereignty of the Russian Federation, which is part of the Federation Council) Organising scientific and cultural events (conferences, exhibitions, memorial rallies, scholarships and language courses)

Based on Dennis Kux, 'Soviet Active Measures and Disinformation: Overview and Assessment', Parameters: the Journal of the US Army War College, winter 1985. After Steve Abrams (Абрамс Стюв), *Большее, чем пропаганда: активные советские мероприятия в путинской России* [More than propaganda: Soviet active measures in Putin's Russia?]; <<http://connections-qj.org/ru/article/bolshe-chem-propaganda-aktivnyie-sovetskie-meropriyatiya-v-putinskoy-rossii>> [accessed 29 August 2017].

### Conclusion: the Complex Nature of the Russian Threat

Russia's actions are part of the reality of contemporary security, which is characterised by the growing importance of non-military threats (located at the threshold

of conventional warfare), as well as by general volatility and unpredictability. In NATO's strategy, they have acquired the name of 'hybrid threats', and are located in the field of defence; this does not facilitate the understanding of their complex nature or the development of methods to counter them. The actions of the Russian special services as described are far from the strictly military dimension. Because of their behind-the-scenes nature they must be treated as a kind of international criminal activity, and should rather be located in the field of security and public order.

The historical term 'active measures' well captures the trans-sectoral nature of the Russian threat. The majority of techniques for confrontation between the Russian Federation and the outside world are indirect in nature, and thus difficult to grasp. Their aims are the realisation of their own strategic interests, the strengthening of Russia's international position, and the 'disarming' of the enemy, that is, achieving a situation in which internal actors in those countries end up pursuing the foreign policy goals of Russia. By exploiting the difficulties in identifying these threats, Russia can destabilise the situation in the countries under attack, exert a devastating effect on their administrative and decision-making structures, and undermine their social & economic bases and their cultural foundations (their ideologies, value systems, political culture and the rule of law). This threat is at the same time external and internal, national and transnational, which cannot be countered in a symmetrical way. This kind of sabotage is being carried out by state and non-state actors in both overt and covert ways, using legal and illegal methods. This represents a continuous process, which is based on the state's integrated activity on several fronts, is carried on via different channels (diplomatic, political, economic, military, social, media), and is subject to the systemic, permanent, long-term and offensive strategy of support for the foreign policy of the Russian Federation.

The narrative strategy imposed by Russia blurs the boundaries between war and peace, between the offensive and the defensive. A key ingredient of this strategy is shaping Russia's image as the victim of the West's cynical game, and enforcing the belief that this is a war between two sides. Meanwhile, the situation is actually inherently asymmetric: the aggressor is undertaking unilateral actions, while the party being attacked can only judge the scale of the devastation after the fact.

Because the long-term goals of Russian foreign policy include the revision of the current system of international security, we should expect that the intensity and range of Moscow's active measures against NATO and the EU will not be reduced in the medium term. This is demonstrated by the systematic expansion of the con-

ceptual and executive support structures, as well as the inclusion of military measures and forces in the arsenal of influences. This means that the crisis-creating role of the Russian threat will grow, and any effective defence against it will require the increased attention of those bodies responsible for security and defence, as

well as more intensive research into systemic organisational projects, their conceptual bases, new techniques for exerting influence, corrupt funding mechanisms, and the development of procedures which will enable the rapid and effective neutralisation of this threat.

*About the Authors:*

*Jolanta Darczewska*, Ph.D., is the Head of the Department for Internal Security in Eastern Europe and *Piotr Żochowski* is a Senior Fellow in the Department for Internal Security in Eastern Europe at the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw, Poland.

## ANALYSIS

### Russia's Intervention in the U.S.

By Robert W. Orttung, George Washington University

#### Abstract

At a time when American society is going through a period of wrenching change and is deeply divided across a number of cleavages, the country is unusually vulnerable to external influence. Although weaker than the U.S. in conventional terms of military and economic power, Russia has sought to take advantage of domestic divisions in the U.S. to sow chaos and reap the benefits of a weakened Western alliance. Each week brings new revelations about what techniques Russia has employed against the U.S. and contacts between Trump campaign affiliates and a foreign power, but it remains unclear to what extent Russian actions had an impact on the thinking or behavior of American citizens.

#### The Context

American society is experiencing dramatic upheaval across a variety of dimensions. The overall population is increasingly diverse in terms of race, religion, sexual identification, and a host of other markers. Traditions are giving way to new norms, such as the rapid transition to the acceptance of same sex marriage by many Americans. Today, fewer Americans attend church than did so in the recent past, making America less distinct from other developed countries. Women now make up a majority of college students and are slowly making gains in the workplace, changing the nature of the way people work, even as automation and technology are changing the kinds of jobs available. Sexual assault is now a frequent topic of conversation, bringing to light behaviors that had recently been hidden. Rural areas are resentful of "coastal elitists" and Republicans are taking aim at universities, which they see as spreading liberal ideas and generally having a negative impact on society. Democratic activists are pushing progressive change to build on the trends washing across the coun-

try and the gains of the Obama administration, while traditionalists are mobilizing to return the country to what they claim are its roots—an era when these social forces were less visible.

Such divisions and polarization are apparent in the country's increasingly toxic political life, in which neither party seems to have a stable and coherent majority to implement a program of reform to address America's inability to set up an economy that delivers benefits to all of its workers, provides comprehensive health care, or ensures a sense of security and justice to its citizens. While conspiracy theories are nothing new in American public life, they have taken on a new urgency. Donald Trump was particularly effective in using them during his campaign in charging that the "system is rigged."

Russia has nothing to do with the origins of this purely domestic turmoil. Most Americans rarely think of Russia, a country that is far away and with which the U.S. has few economic ties. However, Russia now looms large in the daily headlines and political calculations of both parties. President Trump, who lost the popular vote

to Hillary Clinton by more than 3 million votes and whose current approval rating are at the lowest point for any President on record, repeatedly claims that the Russians did not intervene in the election, fearing the evidence of such foul play would undermine the legitimacy of his rule. After meeting with Putin in November, for example, Trump declared “He said he absolutely did not meddle in our election,” implying that the rest of us should take Putin’s word for it.

In contrast, the U.S. intelligence community on January 6, 2017, issued a consensus report claiming that Russia had intervened in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The report did not contain a smoking gun and focused mostly on an analysis of RT, including a lengthy appendix based on events in 2012 (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2017, p. 4). Facebook, in a separate report describing new efforts to “manipulate civic discourse and deceive people,” did not say who was carrying out such actions, but did note that “our data does not contradict the attribution provided by the U.S. Director of National Intelligence in the report dated January 6, 2017.” (Weedon, Nuland, & Stamos, 2017) Like the intelligence community, however, Facebook did not make its data public. Despite Trump’s groundless assertions to the contrary, there is a wide consensus that Russia intervened in some way. But, as Hillary points out in her book *What Happened*, “by the time Vladimir Putin came along, our democracy was already far sicker than we realized (Clinton, 2017, p. 326).”

### What did Russia do?

As articles elsewhere in this issue have noted, Russia uses a full spectrum of techniques to pursue their interests against the U.S. that include military, economic, political, and informational resources. Russia’s state-sponsored hackers’ ability to break into the Democratic National Committee and Hillary’s campaign manager John Podesta’s e-mail accounts and then publicize embarrassing revelations about the inner workings of the party and the campaign had a damaging impact on the course of the campaign, particularly in the absence of similar revelations from the Republican side.

While such hacking is clearly illegal, Russia also engages in a variety of techniques that are in the open. One is the international broadcasting of RT (formerly Russia Today) and the news agency Sputnik. While the U.S. Justice Department recently made the network register as a “foreign agent” and it lost its journalistic accreditation to the U.S. Congress, RT is still widely available to American viewers online and its advertising posters are prominently displayed at Washington DC bus stops.

RT and Sputnik identify the most divisive aspects of American culture and broadcast information designed

to deepen these chasms. While there is not a mass audience for this kind of material, it does reach a small audience of activists who spread it on-line through social media, though the reach and impact of such messaging is a matter of dispute. The Russians also set up a variety of fake websites and troll farms in an effort to boost the prominence of their material. In a few cases, such sites were able to get actual Americans to take to the streets in protest, but such successes appear to be few in number and it is likely that the protesters would have taken to the streets regardless of whether the Russians had provided them with specific instructions. In other words, the Russians do not set the agenda in the U.S., but simply takes advantage of what is already there.

Beyond RT and Sputnik, a more controversial effort was the purchasing of ads and promoting of tweets on Facebook, Twitter, Google and other sites to boost the visibility of Russian material. The evidence in this area is mounting, according to Adam B. Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Permanent Select Committee. As Congressional investigations have revealed, Facebook has been collecting vast amounts of information from its users and can sell advertisers access to narrowly defined audiences. While there is debate over the level of sophistication of these Russian efforts, it is clear that regulators need to figure out how to ensure that social media is not abused during elections and that election ads on platforms like Facebook need to be regulated in the same way that they are regulated in the traditional media to ensure that foreign powers do not have the ability to shape domestic decision making.

### What Did the Trump Campaign Do?

Recent U.S. presidents have all started their terms with efforts to improve the Russian–American relationship—George W. Bush famously announced that he had looked Putin in the eye and had seen his soul, which apparently was inclined toward cooperation. Obama announced a “reset” at the beginning of his term. Shortly thereafter, in each case, relations soured. Trump took this approach to a whole new level during the campaign, announcing his admiration of Putin’s authoritarian leadership style and listing a series of intractable problems—Syria, Ukraine, North Korea—that could be solved through better relations between the erstwhile Cold War adversaries. During the campaign, Trump called on Russia to release more information about his political opponents at home and praised Wikileaks for embarrassing the Democrats.

The Trump campaign had plenty of direct ties to Russia. Campaign Manager Paul Manafort helped Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich win election and had dealings with oligarch Oleg Deripaska. Spe-

cial Prosecutor Robert Muller has now indicted him on a variety of serious charges related to his activities before he began working for Trump. Trump's first national security advisor, Michael Flynn, had worked for RT and joined Putin and others for a celebratory dinner in Moscow. On December 1 he plead guilty to lying to the FBI about conversations with the Russian ambassador, a felony. Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from the investigations of the Trump campaign ties to Russia when it became clear that he had not been truthful about his own contacts with the Russians. This recusal and Trump's decision to fire FBI Director, James Comey, led to the appointment of Muller as a special prosecutor. Although Muller has only filed charges against a handful of individuals so far, there is a widespread expectation in Washington that his investigation is only getting started and that eventually he will reveal more inappropriate behavior. Attention has focused on Trump's son, Donald Jr., whose e-mails showed that he sought dirt about Hillary from the Russians. Other incidents remain unexplained, such as why the Trump team tried to change the Republican party platform in ways favorable to Russia during the party convention in the summer of 2016.

### What Was the Impact of Russian Intervention on U.S. Politics?

The biggest question of all in this heady brew of allegation and counter-allegation is whether Russia's actions had an impact on the 2016 U.S. presidential election and/or other aspects of American democracy. Or, is Putin merely benefitting from all the publicity around the claims that Russian hackers and information warriors had a big impact through their manipulation of social media? If there was an impact, did nefarious Kremlin operatives get American voters to vote for Trump when they might not have done so otherwise? Did they demobilize voters who might have supported a more conventional candidate than Trump, by instilling a sense of disgust in American politics? Did they change the narrative of the U.S. national conversation? Or, were they merely shouting into the void with no discernable impact?

Those who claim no or minimal impact argue that the Wikileaks revelations were not enough to throw the election, that Russia is simply amplifying themes that are widely discussed in the mainstream American media, that the audience for its publications and advertisements

are relatively small compared to overall media consumption by American voters, and that much of the Russian output is crude and amateurish. While Russia might not have actually changed anything on the ground in the U.S., it is certainly benefitting from the constant attention that American politicians and media give to its efforts. Russia and Putin have few admirers among the American public beyond fringe white nationalists and cravers of a strong leader, but Russia now appears to be a powerful force in the world due to the attention its information warfare has generated. This image of a commanding twenty first century power may boost Russian prestige in places like Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, where it remains in competition with the U.S.

On the other hand, there is growing evidence that small interventions on social media can have a big impact. A recent Harvard study showed that the far Right white nationalist website Breitbart gained an outsized influence on U.S. politics during the campaign, by focusing on a couple of key issues, like immigration and Hillary's e-mails, and getting the mainstream media to discuss these topics (Benkler, Faris, Roberts, & Zuckerman, 2017; Faris et al., 2017). Another influential study in *Science* reports the results of an experiment in which stories planted in relatively obscure websites have a measurable impact on Twitter discussions (Gentzkow, 2017; King, Schneer, & White, 2017). Building on the findings of this study, it is possible that Russia's various interventions were able to affect the election just enough to shift it in favor of Trump.

Additionally, Trump's focus on conspiracy theories during the campaign and in his tweets as president creates an atmosphere in the U.S. that is much more receptive to the kind of messaging coming from Russian sources, clearly aimed at dividing the American population into warring factions, rather than bringing people together in support of common objectives.

Trump is a purely American creation. Russia used its resources to intervene in the campaign. Whether the current incumbent came to power with Russian assistance and whether members of his campaign colluded with the Kremlin to win election will be questions long debated. On-going investigations by the special prosecutor, Congressional committees, and the independent media will likely provide more evidence in the coming months.

#### *About the Author*

Robert W. Orttung is the director of research for the George Washington University Sustainability Collaborative and an associate research professor at GW's Elliott School of International Affairs. He is the author of *Putin's Olympics* (with Sufian Zhemukhov), and editor of *Sustaining Russia's Arctic Cities* and (with Henry Hale) *Beyond the Euromaidan*.

*See overleaf for References.*

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## ANALYSIS

### Russia's Multifaceted Influences in France

By Marlene Laruelle, George Washington University

#### Abstract

Russia's relationship with France should be seen as a two-way street since both sides have interests in the other. Russia operates in France through numerous cultural, political, economic, and media layers with some success. Russia's main influence comes from the French firms working in Russia and some conservative factions among Les Républicains.

#### The Franco-Russian Bilateral Relationship

France occupies a special position in Russia's perception of Europe, for several reasons. First, there have long been ties between the two countries: Paris welcomed Russian exiles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as several hundred thousand émigrés who fled the October Revolution. Second, Russia values France's Gaullist hesitancy toward transatlantic institutions in favor of a more continental Europe. Thirdly, and most pragmatically, deep economic ties shaped bilateral relations, with the majority of big French firms having some involvement in the Russian market. These factors combine to explain not only Moscow's persistent efforts to get Paris on its side on the international scene, but also to be recognized on the French political and cultural landscape as a great power that "matters." Russian influences in France are multifaceted, yet they should not be analyzed as a unidirectional power that Russia holds over France, but as two-way interactions, in the sense that many actors in France are also interested in building links with Russia.

In this short article, I look at the different "layers" of Russia's networks of influence in France.

#### Cultural Layers

The presence of Russian émigré communities in France—primarily in the Paris region and in Southern France—plays a critical role in giving substance to the relationship and in bridging the gap between the two countries' agendas and approaches. Many émigré associations have rallied behind Putin's Russia and support Moscow's effort to reach out to French constituencies, even if some segments of this émigré social fabric continue to refuse to reconcile with the Kremlin, seeing it as too favorable to the Soviet past and as not rehabilitating enough of the "White" past to be forgiven. Today, the most networked figures with connections both in France and Russia are often of émigré descent; they play a key role in mediating Russia's positions. One prominent example is Alexandre Troubetzkoi, director of the most influential French-Russian association, the Dialogue franco-russe. Several

other aristocratic families have likewise rallied in support of Putin's Russia, such as the Cheremetieffs, Tolstoys, Obolenskys, Jevakhoffs, etc. They are influential in the French Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots, the main institutional umbrella for the Russian diaspora in France; launched in 2011, it now brings together about 300 associations.

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) constitutes an important element of this Russian landscape in France. This component, too, is quite divided: several important Orthodox parishes still reject the reconciliation act of 2007 between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) or belong to the Constantinople Patriarchate, and therefore remain independent from Moscow. The ROC's sudden drive to retake possession of French Orthodox parishes—both for symbolic but also for financial and real estate-related purposes—has resulted in several long-lasting judicial sagas, with some successes (the Nice Orthodox Cathedral, for instance) and some failures (one example being the Biarritz church). Overall, 2016 was a successful year for the Patriarchate and the Kremlin, with the inauguration of the new Orthodox Cathedral and cultural center in Paris, the largest in Europe, the very existence of which is proof of Russia's choosing Paris as the place from where to display its reasserted power in the heart of Europe.

Russia has also invested in the think tank world by launching the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation (IDC), led by Natalya Narochnitskaya and probably initiated by Dmitri Rogozin. Since 2005, the IDC has given a platform to high-level Russian figures, as well as creating a forum for French politicians and intellectual circles to engage in public discussions that defend the Russian position on international affairs from Kosovo to Crimea, from Syria to Iran, and that back Russia's "conservative values" stance.

Russia devotes particular energy to conquering the French cultural and intellectual landscape. Russia was the guest of honor at the French Book Fair of 2010 and will be again in 2018. Several famous publishing houses—such as L'Age d'homme (based in Lausanne, Switzerland), Syrthes and Cerf éditions—are also playing a critical role in promoting Russia to a French audience. The Société Musicale Russe/Conservatoire Rachmaninoff, led by Pierre Cheremetieff, has a similar function in the music and dance domain. Last but not least, it is worth mentioning the jet-set paradiplomacy that constitutes an important means of advancing Russia's branding and is very active, among other locations, on the Riviera: several big names in the French cinema world (of whom Gerard Depardieu is the most famous and caricatured figure, but whose number also includes

Alain Delon, Vincent Cassel, Monica Belucci, etc.) and the sport realm promote Russia as a fancy place for world jet-setters to make contacts and mingle.

### Political Layers

Russia can also rely on several sets of connections in the political world. Of these, Moscow's ties to the far right have been the most documented. The National Front (NF) has been connected to Russia for decades, but it was with Marine Le Pen's accession to the leadership in 2011 that the NF emerged as a strong pro-Russian voice on the French political landscape. Yet these links should not be overestimated: the Kremlin has always preferred to engage with the mainstream right, since it is more able to access power, and collaborates with the NF in part due to its lack of other friends, especially since the 2014 crisis with Ukraine. The NF has received some financial support from Kremlin-affiliated banking structures but the bonds are mostly ideological, as the two share the same critical stance toward the United States, NATO, and the European project, and call for the revival of so-called "conservative values" that oppose both the decadent liberal West and Islam.

Russia has also gained support among the far left parties, and given the historical strength of the Communist Party in French public life, it is quite easy to shore up this support. Today, a pro-Russian leftist stance—insisting on an anti-NATO, anti-US, anti-EU, and anti-establishment narrative, but silent on the "conservative values" issue—is embodied by figures such as Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the Front de Gauche (now Les Insoumis), and former member of the Socialist Party Jean-Pierre Chevènement, who served as economic ambassador to Russia during the Hollande presidency (2012-2017) and is now President Macron's special representative to Russia.

Seen from Moscow, however, it is links with the mainstream right, Les Républicains, which have the most potential value. The party includes a distinct pro-Russian group that includes former President Nicolas Sarkozy, his former prime minister and unsuccessful 2017 presidential candidate François Fillon, and their foreign policy advisory circles. The kingpin of the Républicains' Russophile faction is former MP Thierry Mariani, vice-president of the French–Russian Parliamentary Friendship Group, who is a key player linking Russian and French businesses (He is also engaged in forging links with the post-Soviet space more broadly, with a particular focus on Central Asia.). In addition, Mariani is a member of the parliamentary collective Droite Populaire, which calls for the classical right to go more on the offensive regarding issues of national identity and immigration in order to capture the National Front's electorate.

Within the party, pro-Russian positions emerged particularly vividly during the Ukrainian crisis. The first delegation to visit Crimea in the summer of 2015, over the opposition of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, consisted mainly of *Républicain* MPs, but also included a few Socialist MPs. The trip to Crimea was reprised in the summer of 2016 by another delegation—of the eleven participants, ten were members of *Les Républicains* and one was a former member of the Socialist Party. Many of these deputies, from both the National Assembly and the Senate, were also active in the June 2016 parliamentary initiative that called for lifting European sanctions against Russia.

A new political—and cultural—realm that Russia has very recently succeeded in conquering is that of the Catholic Right. The phenomenon of the Catholic Right as a political agent is quite recent in France—it was marginalized for decades and only became a genuine political actor in 2014 with the *Manif pour Tous*, the popular movement against gay marriage. This ideological bond with Russia has been fed by the Syrian crisis and Russia's self-proclaimed role as defender of Eastern Christians, a sensitive topic for the Catholic segment of the French audience, relayed by influential figures in the Lebanese and Armenian diasporas. The SOS Eastern Christians association, close to the far right but also well connected to *Les Républicains*, now stands as the most active pro-Russian actor in that field, alongside the ultra-Catholic movement *Dies Irae*.

To this should be added the segment of the French military that, having been raised with a Gaullist vision of the world, shares a relatively favorable perception of Russia's stance on international affairs—its sovereigntist perspective, lack of confidence in multilateral actions, and willingness to get involved in war theaters if such intervention is deemed necessary resonate well with the French military tradition. Officially, the military is neutral and not involved in politics; however, generals are allowed to express some personal viewpoints, especially once they have retired while continuing to have certain official or consulting functions. Several of them (including General Jean-Bernard Pinatel, General Christophe Gomar, General Didier Tauzin, General Michel Debray, and General Claude Gaucherand) have expressed pro-Russian sentiments.

### Economic Layers

All the big French firms—those listed in the CAC-40, the benchmark French stock market index—have business interests in Russia. They are involved in the defense industry (Thales, Dassault, Alstom), the energy sector (Total, Areva, Gaz de France), the food and luxury industry (Danone, Leroy-Merlin, Auchan, Yves Rocher,

Bonduelle), the transport industry (Vinci, Renault), and the banking system (Société Générale). Total is working with Novatek on Arctic deposits; GDF Suez and EDF are working on Nord Stream, and cooperated on South Stream before the project was abandoned. Several joint ventures have taken shape in the industrial and manufacturing sectors, such as that between Renault-Nissan and AvtoVAZ. Partnerships in the banking sector include the one between Société Générale and Rosbank. Large investments in agribusiness (e.g. Danone) are also a sign of active bilateral economic relations. France is a global leader in cooperation with Russia in the space sector (the Russian missile Soyuz launched from the Kourou spaceport in French Guiana) and in the military-industrial complex (for instance, the joint venture between Sagem and Rostekhnologii). Many of the CEOs of these big industrial groups have close connections to the Kremlin's inner circle and have served as intermediaries channeling Russian interests and worldviews to reach the highest decision-making circles. These CEOs are also the ones who fund the main associations linking France and Russia: the *Dialogue franco-russe*, the more official French-Russian Chamber of Commerce, and the less public and more rightist Club Pushkin.

### Media Influences

Russia's presence on the French media landscape is also well developed. It can be divided into three tendencies.

The first is partnering with respectable newspapers. For instance, one of the main French newspapers, *Le Figaro*, published the monthly *La Russie d'Aujourd'hui* (the French version of *Russia Beyond The Headlines*—it is now discontinued) in partnership with the Russian government newspaper *Rossiiskaia gazeta*. A new Russian supplement is also distributed by the weekly *Valeurs actuelles*, a rising star of the ultra-conservative and economically liberal French media world. In the more intellectual realm, *Conflicts*, a geopolitical quarterly, is openly pro-Russian.

The second trend is the development and anchoring of Russia Today and Sputnik, whose French versions launched in 2014 and early 2015, respectively. Unable to penetrate the mainstream television world, RT has specialized in alternative niches, mostly sharing its content via social networks. It has become, for instance, one of the French-language leaders on the Periscope video-uploading platform, where it has more than 85,000 followers. On Twitter, RT boasts about 78,000 followers and Sputnik 46,000. Yet even if they have succeeded in mastering search engines' algorithms, allowing them to appear high on Internet searches, the influence of Russia Today and Sputnik remains minimal. Since 2015, there has been discussion of launching a French news chan-

nel modeled after CNN, BBC, France 24, CCTV or Al-Jazeera—it should be launched at the end of December 2017.

Thirdly, there are myriad mini-media—mostly web platforms, though they may seek to become Internet TV channels—that are managed by Russians directly or by pro-Russian French figures close to the far right. These media are of poor quality; they belong to the far right conspiracy web of websites and groupuscules. Even if they do occasionally create some “noise,” their readership is minimal and limited to segments of the population already convinced by alternative narratives. Moreover, their lifespan is quite short: several, including ProRussia TV, are already defunct.

### Conclusion

Russia’s networks in France are based on several “layers” of influence. Chief among these is business: the main French firms involved in Russia are able to lobby the

political leadership for their interests—and those of Russia. The second layer of influence comes from Les Républicains. It is critical to note that the party’s pro-Russian factions are also the ones that put forward a xenophobic, anti-Islamic narrative and believe the party should “poach” the National Front’s electorate. Russia’s self-positioning as the defender of Christian values, the traditional family, and Eastern Christianity constitutes a powerful magnet for them. All those sensitive to the Gaullist legacy and to the notion of national sovereignty—a group that encompasses both the leftist and the rightist political traditions—are attracted by Russia’s current positioning on the international scene. Yet the specificity of Russia’s actions in France is to be found in the fields of history, culture and intellectual life, where several Russian actors with different agendas are making a genuine effort to inscribe Russia on the French cultural landscape, with a relatively high degree of success.

#### *About the Author*

Marlene Laruelle is Research Professor of International Affairs; Director, Central Asia Program; and Associate Director, Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at the George Washington University Elliott School of International Affairs.

## ANALYSIS

# Much Ado about Nothing: The Effects of Russian Disinformation on the German Bundestag Elections

By Gemma Pörzgen, Freelance Journalist

### Abstract

There was extensive hysteria in the German media about “fake news” and an expected Russian disinformation campaign before the German elections. But nothing happened and the attempts of Russian foreign media outlets were not influential in spreading any relevant fake stories among the German public.

### A Great Fear of Intervention

Following the dirty election campaign in the US and the inauguration of Donald Trump as president, the German government and political elites became nervous. “Fake News” became a fashionable term for the danger of disinformation and was highlighted by nearly every media outlet. The fear was great that there could be political interference from abroad into the election campaign for the German Bundestag on 24 September 2017. The debate about Russian interference into the US elections played a big role in a lot of German articles.

German chancellor Angela Merkel had asked the security services already in spring 2016 to provide more information about whether Moscow was trying to interfere into German politics and media. The reason was the so-called “Lisa case” in January 2016 which had become a German–Russian political scandal. Russian state media had spread the news that a young girl named Lisa, who held both German and Russian passports, had been raped by refugees. This story had no basis in fact, which the German police proved immediately, but Russia’s state media were so successful in telling this story

and achieving high ratings in Russia with it, that they that continued to repeat the so-called rape story.

These TV reports had an impact on the Russian-speaking community in Germany, whose members often watch Russian TV channels. Their biggest group are the 2.7 million Russlanddeutsche, a German minority group from Russia. Lisa belonged to this group, whose members were totally marginalized politically since their arrival to Germany during Soviet times. They traditionally voted for the German conservative party CDU until Merkel came to power.

Many were surprised when the “Lisa case” led Russian speakers to organize demonstrations in several German cities. Seven hundred protesters marched in Berlin in front of the chancellor’s office. At the same time, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov gave a press conference, speaking about “our girl Lisa” and blaming German police for not doing enough to protect her. It became a huge scandal and the German government was convinced that these media reports and Lavrov’s statements were orchestrated to increase the political power of the “Russians” in Germany. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier blamed Moscow for “political propaganda.”

Since then there has not been a full-scale investigation looking into the details of these events. Therefore, it is still unclear whether the Lisa episode was an orchestrated action by Moscow or more of a media event with huge political consequences.

### Russian Efforts

Since the “Lisa case,” it is common mainstream opinion in Germany that this was a first attempt by Moscow to intervene into German politics. This experience has led to a feeling of general mistrust towards Moscow among German elites, which has worsened Russian–German relations even more. The bilateral relationship had cooled down already after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine, but, before this downturn, there had been close relations between both countries and societies.

It is clear that Moscow has established several instruments to try to influence German politics and to unsettle the German public.

Beginning in 2013 the Kremlin started a Russian media offensive as part of a new soft power strategy. The results were also seen in Germany, because several state-owned media outlets started to work on the German market, mostly in Berlin. But they did not turn out to be very successful or influential. It was obvious that they were poorly managed and not well coordinated, sometimes even working in competition against each other. Many of their activities were cut during the last year due to financial problems.

In contrast to the English-language TV channel RT, the German version never became as influential. RT Deutsch is only available on the Internet and has never reached more than a niche audience of people with similar thinking and interests. The German website had a daily video news show when it started in November 2014, but this show shrank to a weekly program, because there was not sufficient money. When RT Deutsch launched operations, the already existing platform Sputnik News, then still labeled the “Voice of Russia,” did not even report on the new outlet’s start and they were never interlinked.

The quality of the RT Deutsch program has been poor from the beginning and the producers were not able to attract any prominent German journalists to appear on their shows, in contrast to RT’s experience in the US.

After the start of RT Deutsch in Germany, there were so many critical reports about this propaganda outlet in the German media, that they were not able to find many serious people willing to sit for an interview in the first years. RT Deutsch has been more successful through social media, reaching out to certain circles promoting a range of conspiracy theories, the far right and far left, but it is still difficult to say if this has a serious effect. They have 39,000 followers on Twitter (up from 13,700 in June 2016) and 328,043 friends on Facebook (up from 197,600 in June 2016), which shows that they grow, but not to extensive figures.

The second Russian Website Sputnik News Deutschland is more professionally made, but less successful in the social media sphere. The radio program of the former channel Voice of Russia can only be heard on the Internet and on certain regional private channels, and its reach is low.

The PR-supplement added to various newspapers *Russia Beyond the Headlines* stopped appearing in German papers in December 2016. It had been a supplement to the national newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* for several years until March 2014 and then to the economic newspaper *Handelsblatt*, lobbying to end sanctions and reaching out to German business people. There remains only a website left which attracts few members of the German public.

### Coverage in the German Media

German media reports often neglect to describe the small reach of the Russian propaganda outlets, which gives a distorted picture of the strength of RT and Sputnik in Germany. But one should not be naïve about the content of these outlets and their attempt to create a certain picture which is far from professional journalism.

RT Deutsch, in particular, is mainly focused on painting a dark picture of German society and pol-

itics. Also it is clear that certain parties like die Linke or the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) are overrepresented in their program. For a long time, most serious politicians did not give interviews to RT Deutsch, which was a good way to marginalize this kind of program. However, the situation changed during the election campaign. Even Foreign Minister Siegmund Gabriel gave a long exclusive interview in September to RT Deutsch which helped them to reach a wider audience outside their usual niche.

The Press and Information Service of the German government observes the activities of these foreign media outlets among its surveys of everything which is written about Germany abroad. Asked if the German government had seen any disturbing activities during the election campaign, spokeswoman Ulrike Demmer could not identify any particular news case of Russian propaganda, but she noted the tendentious reporting by the state-owned Russian media. The only examples of real cases mentioned by Demmer so far are the Lisa case in January 2016 and a second event in June 2017 related to the German Bundeswehr in Lithuania.

In that incident, the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* had blown out of proportion a story about an anonymous e-mail to the president of the parliament of Lithuania, Viktor Pranckietis. It accused German soldiers of rape, which turned out to be a lie as proven by the investigations of the Lithuanian police within several hours. The origin of the e-mail remained unclear, but was used to blame Moscow without any proof in many German media which repeated the allegations in the unproven sensational report of *Spiegel-Online*.

The media expert Uwe Krüger criticized the trend of many journalists to report on developments without proving them. "Serious media blame alternative media to spread conspiracy theories and to simplify complex issues," he said. "But when it comes to Russia even serious media do not follow the facts, but tend to a certain conspiracy reporting." Since Trump won the US election one can observe in German media a tendency of sensationalism, blowing up the danger of the Russian threat through Moscow's propaganda. In February 2017 the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* published a whole series of articles, in which the authors wrote that there would be a real danger for the election with the sensational headline "War Without Blood", without giving any proofs for this thesis.

Experts on Russia, like Stefan Meister of the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) warned that the influence of Moscow's propaganda in Germany should not be overexaggerated. He criticized some media for such exaggeration. He had his own

experience with a player from the US, which showed a certain interest in interfering into Russian–German relations. The US based think tank Atlantic Council published a report in November 2016 with the title "The Kremlin's Trojan Horses" with the analysis of several authors about Russian networks in France, Germany and Great Britain. Without Meister's knowledge, the organization published a graphic in his article showing the so-called "Trojan horses" in Germany, i.e., political players that the Atlantic Council accused of doing Moscow's bidding: the governing party SPD, the German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations, and the right-wing party AfD were mentioned together, which was followed by a critical debate. Meister distanced himself from this graphic and the Atlantic Council had to erase the graphic from the online version of the report.

This attempt to strengthen a new Cold War atmosphere towards Russia was followed by several other activities of the Atlantic Council in Europe. They organized several conferences in different European countries, for example in Berlin in June 2015, on "Russian propaganda." Also the US embassy invited German journalists working on Eastern Europe to discuss Russian politics and invited US politicians to lobby for further sanctions on Russia. In Germany, the influential group of Transatlanticists in politics and media are especially open to these arguments, because they do not know Russia from their own experience and tend to look on foreign policy issues mostly through American frames. Many German experts on Russia are critical about this simplified picture. The head of the former Moscow office of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, Jens Siegert, which is close to the Green Party, warned that there was already a hysterical fear of Russia and argued that the next chancellor would not be chosen in Russia. From his own experience working in Russia for more than 20 years, he wrote that foreign influence on other countries would always be very small.

On the other hand, it is known that there have been several hacker attacks on the German Bundestag which led to a debate about the involvement of foreign secret services. The clues all led to a hacker group called "APT28", which is seen as being part of Russian secret service operations on the Internet. Therefore many politicians and security experts in Berlin warned that the stolen material could be used in the German elections as the Clinton e-mails were used during the US election campaign. On the other hand, there have been several critical reports about the Deutsche Bundestag not working seriously enough on closing their existing security breaches, which makes it easy for any hacker to gain access to their communications.

## No Interference

The German elections took place on 24 September and there was no Russian interference. No stolen material from the several hacker attacks appeared during the election campaign to influence results.

“Russian interference was much less than expected but yet obvious throughout the German election campaign,” says Meister. “Russian foreign media have criticized Angela Merkel’s refugee policy, promoted conspiracy theories, and fake news and provided populists with a platform to attack mainstream politicians.”

But the strong showing for the new right-wing party AfD entering the Bundestag and becoming the third largest fraction are not the result of Russian propaganda attempts and interference, but an answer to domestic German politics. After the rule of a grand coalition and with only a weak opposition in the parliament and a highly disputed refugee policy followed by the Merkel government, Germans have many reasons to vote against the traditional parties.

This seems also to be the case with the Russlanddeutsche, who became more politically involved in Germany since the Ukrainian crisis and the Lisa case and are now more visible on the German political landscape. University of Osnabrück scholar Jannis Panagiotidis, the most

knowledgeable expert on this minority group, reports that the preliminary election results show that the AfD won support from the Russlanddeutsche.

But this is not proof for the new thesis put forward by certain scholars and journalists which argues that the Kremlin simply chose a subtler approach this time, by directly targeting the Russian-speaking diaspora in Germany rather than the electorate as a whole. This interpretation does not take sufficiently into account the differences in the Russian-speaking community and over-exaggerates again the influence from Moscow.

It is impossible to know precisely how many AfD votes came from the Russlanddeutsche or other Russian-speaking communities. Moreover, nobody can prove if their vote was influenced by Russian propaganda or by their own beliefs. Many Russlanddeutsche are known for being German patriots, very conservative and religious and sharing values which they found more represented in the AfD today than in the ruling CDU under Merkel, which has adopted many liberal values in recent years, which the Russian-speakers do not share. Many of them no longer feel at home politically in the CDU, which has nothing to do with Russian propaganda, but with the drastic changes within the conservative party spectrum in Germany.

*An earlier version of this article was published in German in “Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte”, 21–22/2017, <[www.bpb.de/apuz](http://www.bpb.de/apuz)>*

### *About the Author*

Gemma Pörzgen is a freelance journalist specializing in Eastern Europe. She works for online media and German national radio Deutschlandfunk Kultur. She grew up in Moscow and Bonn, studied political science, Slavic literature and Eastern European history. She was a news editor at daily newspaper Frankfurter Rundschau and foreign correspondent in South Eastern Europe and Israel/Palestine. More information: <[www.gemma-poerzgen.de](http://www.gemma-poerzgen.de)>

**ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST**

Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder, Aglaya Snetkov

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Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder, Aglaya Snetkov

Layout: Cengiz Kibaroglu, Matthias Neumann, Michael Clemens

ISSN 1863-0421 © 2017 by Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Bremen and Center for Security Studies, Zürich

Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen • Country Analytical Digests • Klagenfurter Str. 8 • 28359 Bremen • Germany

Phone: +49 421-218-69600 • Telefax: +49 421-218-69607 • e-mail: [laender-analysen@uni-bremen.de](mailto:laender-analysen@uni-bremen.de) • Internet: <[www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/rad.html](http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/publications/rad.html)>