

“FROM PARIS TO VLADIVOSTOK”

The Kremlin connections of
the French far-right



POLITICAL CAPITAL
POLICY RESEARCH & CONSULTING INSTITUTE

Marlene Laruelle
Lóránt Györi
Péter Krekó
Dóra Haller
Rudy Reichstadt

2015

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¹ *“We need a united Europe from Paris to Vladivostok. Or we will become a colony of the United States.”* Journalist Daria Aslamova’s paraphrase of Jean-Marie Le Pen’s response to an interview question in Komsomolskaia Pravda, January 15, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015. <http://m.kp.ru/daily/26329.4/3212604/>

Political Capital is a Budapest-based, independent political research and consultancy institute with a decade of experience, a strong international network and reputation. The basic values of the institute are parliamentary democracy and market economy. The institute's main fields of interest are political radicalism, extremism and its social background, conspiracy theories, prejudices, election research and Russian political influence within the EU. Political Capital has strong expertise in quantitative analyses.

On the authors:

Marlene Laruelle is Research Professor of International Affairs and Associate Director of the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University. She has recently edited *Eurasianism and the European Far Right. Reshaping the Russia-Europe Relations* (Lexington, 2015), and *Between Europe and Asia. The Origins, Theories and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism* (Pittsburgh University Press, 2015), co-edited with Mark Bassin and Sergey Glebov.

Péter Krekó, PhD. is the Director of the Political Capital Institute, and an assistant professor at the Eotvos Lorand University of Sciences.

Lóránt Győri is a sociologist and political analyst. Studied at the Eotvos Lorand University of Sciences in Budapest, earned his MA in 2008, currently finishing PhD at ELTE Faculty of Social Sciences, Doctoral School of Sociology. His areas of expertise cover far-right movements, new media and network research, sociology of science, discursive political science.

Dóra Haller is a freelance journalist and a digital communication consultant specialized in culture and society.

Rudy Reichstadt is a French recognized expert in the domain of conspiracy theories. Trained as a political scientist, he is a member of the "Observatoire des radicalités politiques" of The Jean-Jaurès Foundation.

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- **Jean-Yves Camus**, Associate Research Fellow at IRIS, director of the political radicalism observatory of the Foundation Jean Jaurès
- **Joël Gombin**, Political scientist, member of the political radicalism observatory of the Foundation Jean Jaurès
- **Olivier Schmitt**, post-doctoral research fellow at the Centre for International Studies (University of Montreal)
- **Marine Turchi**, investigative journalist at Mediapart who worked on the Russian loan scandal of the Front National

All errors and omissions are our own.

Marlene Laruelle

Lóránt Győri

Péter Krekó

Dóra Haller

Rudy Reichstadt

A note on methodology and terminology

The idea of the current research emerged during our earlier analysis on East European far-right parties' orientation towards Russia in 2009 and our study on the promotion of the Kremlin's interests through European far-right and far-left parties' pro-Russian policies in 2014.^{1 2} The findings of these papers led us to the hypothesis that certain far-right organizations within the EU have specific functions imposed by the Russian state and actors close to it. These functions include: (1) destabilization of the European Union (EU), its member states and transatlantic relations; (2) legitimization of the Russian regime and its policies; and (3) gathering information and spreading disinformation. In order to reveal these functions and to analyze the role of far-right parties and organizations within the EU, we launched a series of publications that focus on individual member states (Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Greece and France) and on EU institutions. The current piece, with the support of the Open Society Foundations, provides an in-depth analysis of the French far-right's pro-Kremlin's stance. Although the time scope of the study spans from the early 90's to current developments, its main focus is set on the time just prior to and during the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

During the study we refer many times to the terms "Russian influence" or "Russian state influence" or the "Kremlin's influence." These notions are connected with the term "Russian influence through power," by which we mean explicit and implicit actions by the Russian state and related actors or organizations, aimed at changing the behavior and/or agenda of certain political actors through political means and/or financial instruments. In this context, "political means" include ideological transfer, official meetings and diplomatic support, information warfare, etc., while "financial instruments" consist of specific forms of financing, for example donations or loans for a party, or financing individuals linked to the party and its broader infrastructure.

1 Péter Krekó and Krisztián Szabados, "Russia's Far-Right Friends. In-depth analysis.", Risk and Forecast, December 3, 2009, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends_349.html

2 "The Russian Connection", Political Capital, April 10, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf

We used the following research methods:

1. Desktop research to collect the necessary information, restore the order of developments and events and gather statements and quotes.
2. In-depth interviews with experts from academia, politics, and media, to gather non-public and background information, and deeper views on certain actors and events.
3. Methods of investigative journalism in order to gain confidential and background information from actors within or close to the far-right scene. In order to protect their identity, sources of such information remain anonymous in the study.
4. Analysis of French far-right media outlets and Facebook pages.

In the first part of our analysis, we look at French-Russian relations at the political, economic, and social levels. In the second, we analyze the Kremlin's ideological influence on the French political milieu through Front National's domestic and international pro-Russian networks. Finally, we present the Kremlin's influence on French public discourse, with special emphasis on the pro-Russian media and advocacy organizations.

Executive summary

- In 2009, Political Capital was among the first to call attention to East European far-right parties' orientation towards Russia. In April 2014, in an analysis generating lively international attention, we indicated that with the assistance of far-right parties' pro-Russian policies, "the promotion of Russian interests couched in national colors is proliferating throughout Europe." We also demonstrated that with the votes they cast in the European Parliament, some far-right and far-left parties pledge allegiance to Putin and his regime³. All this makes it patently clear that the Russian state's political influence across Europe has increased in recent years. The European extreme right, with its Eurosceptic and anti-liberal ideology, provided a fertile ground for the two-faced foreign policy of Russia – ideologically hostile, yet economically cooperative – towards Europe.
- France's mainstream political elite are in line with the European and NATO consensus, as well as policies reflected in the Minsk II agreement, regarding sanctions against Russia. Due to the Crimean crisis, the French government canceled delivery of two Mistral-class helicopter carriers—one being just short of handing over to Russia on 7th August, 2015—and refunded the advance payments, as well as Moscow's consequential losses on the project.⁴
- The far-right Front National party (FN) cultivates a dense relationship with the Kremlin, and with various Russian stakeholders on personal, organizational, and financial levels. The party's connections with Russia yield profits for both sides, a recent example of which is the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, where the FN not only endorses elections on separatist territories, but also acts as a "peace-broker." In return, President Putin openly praised Marine Le Pen for her electoral success and her commitment to „conservative values" and to national sovereignty instead of serving Brussels.⁵

3 Péter Krekó, Marie Macaulay, Csaba Molnár, Lóránt Györi, "Europe's New Pro-Putin Coalition: the Parties of 'No,'" *imrussia.org*, August 3, 2015, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://imrussia.org/en/analysis/world/2368-europes-new-pro-putin-coalition-the-parties-of-no>

4 "Mistral Dispute With Russia Settled, France Eyes Exports," *Defense News*, August 9, 2015, accessed September 21, 2015. <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/naval/ships/2015/08/09/mistral-dispute-russia-settled-france-eyes-exports/31278439/>

5 Transcript of the annual television show titled "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin", *kremlin.ru*, April 17, 2014, accessed November 11, 2015, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/20796/work>

- Marine Le Pen, the leader of the FN is considered to be among the few political friends of President Putin; however, it appears that the underlying strategic relevance of the FN for the Kremlin can be found more generally in France's geopolitical position since France is a major power, an essential part of the Euro-Atlantic community. On the other hand, the Front National, the strongest radical right party in the European Parliament, cultivates excellent ties with other pro-Russian parties in Western Europe, allowing it to act as an intermediary between those parties and Russia through the organization of different pro-Russian events and pan-European far-right party-families. The pro-Russian far-right caucus, spearheaded by the Front National, recently proved its weight and lobbying power in the European institutional environment with its creation of the pro-Kremlin Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF). Figures show that 91% of the members of the pro-Russian far-right parties, now part of the ENF, voted against anti-Kremlin resolutions, while the same figure is exactly 100% for Front National's MEPs in selected Russia-related decisions in the European Parliament prior to the establishment of the new caucus.
- The FN advances pro-Russian activities domestically through a wide French network of individuals and organizations and encompasses elements from both far-right scenes as well as Russian emigration circles. The party also relies on a well-structured pro-Russian domestic media, ranging from traditional media outlets to social media platforms.
- In turn, the FN's pro-Kremlin stance and its political activities are embedded into a Kremlin-friendly social milieu on a domestic and an international level. Moreover, this milieu provides excellent ground for the Kremlin's 'active measures' (*aktivnye meropriyatiya*), which date back to the power projection of the USSR, and usually involve the contacting of foreign political actors, the establishment and coordination of pro-Russian parties or other organizations, and the export of political know-how and expertise.⁶

⁶ 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>

- The Front National's latest scandal of being financed by a Russian-owned Czech bank very well fits this proactive political strategy of the Kremlin, but it may show only the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, different pro-Russian (or anti-Ukrainian) organizations and events involving FN and other far-right parties are constantly managed and often financed by Russian stakeholders tied to the Kremlin, even more so during this time of crisis in Ukraine. In this respect, the FN's international politics may have been directly influenced by Russian interests, regardless of whether the latter translated into financial, personal, or other forms of mutual "back-scratching".
- **Far-right organizations may fill three major functions: (1) destabilization** (at the Member State, EU, and transatlantic levels alike); **(2) external legitimization of the Russian regime** (e.g., through ideological support, statements and "observation" of elections); and **(3) provision of information and spread of disinformation** (i.e., transmission of the Russian point of view to EU Member States and collection of intelligence). The Front National is well suited to fill these functions. Its harsh anti-EU and anti-NATO-stance, loud Kremlin-supportive foreign policy campaign (including a strong support of Assad), and active participation in the Eastern Ukrainian political crisis on Russia's side provides important help to Russia to achieve its goals in Europe.

Political, economic and social environments

France's geopolitical position

France is firmly rooted in the Euro-Atlantic community, and though its attitude towards Russia in the Ukrainian crisis is the one adopted by the European Union, it does allow Russia some political relevance in its domestic politics—as a counterweight to the United States. This political accommodation can be traced back to President de Gaulle's political heritage. The Front National's importance in the eyes of the Kremlin can be understood partly by considering the fact that, among the West's top 3 nations in industrial and military power (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom), France alone has a major far-right, Eurosceptic, and pro-Russian party active in its political system. In another respect, the party can be very useful for reaching sizeable Western audiences with Russian influence, as it can be an important source of information from within Euro-Atlantic institutions. And because all have the same common xenophobic attitudes, it has successfully (as elaborated throughout this study) united many pro-Russian Western, and even Eastern European far-right parties. Far-right political actors may represent important geopolitical interests for the Kremlin, with the Eastern Partnership and Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) being at stake, Russia needs all the help it can get to disrupt these efforts considered by the Kremlin as hostile political initiatives. In Olivier Schmitt's words: "Russia views the expansion of the EU and NATO as a mortal danger; moreover, its political elite has a vision of Western European countries as deeply decadent and corrupt because they provide rights to homosexuals and accept Muslims on their soils."

French-Russian relations in a historical context

France and Russia have long-standing relations. The historical memory of Russian soldiers, and especially of Cossacks, in Paris streets after Napoleon's defeat in 1815 are part of French-Russian "folklore," yet this occurrence made no further impact on the French perception of Russia. In the 20th century, Russian culture was spread widely through France by the waves of "White" Russian émigrés fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution, and by a sizeable Armenian Diaspora, which played an important role in mediating between France and the Soviet Union. During the second half of the century, the bilateral relationship was relatively friendly.

The influence of the French Communist Party on domestic, cultural, and political life contributed to spreading a positive image of the Soviet Union. De Gaulle's reluctance to include France in the US-led vision of Europe and France's withdrawal from NATO command activities enabled a good diplomatic relationship with Moscow, symbolized by De Gaulle's visit to the Soviet Union in 1966. At that time, progress in the conquest of space put France at the forefront of space cooperation with the Soviet Union. Cultural exchanges remained relatively dense, with the promotion of Russian culture and language in France, and vice-versa in the Soviet Union.

French-Russian economic ties

In the 1990s and 2000s, relations remained warm. France, thanks to its nuclear energy production, is not dependent on Russian gas (see table 3), which meant that Paris never felt subject to any Russian interference. Bilateral trade relations are significant, though greatly below those between Russia and Germany or Italy (see tables 1 thru 3 below). France is well represented in the Russian economic landscape through the presence of big energy firms (e.g., Total is working with Novatek on Arctic deposits; GDF Suez and EDF are working on Nord Stream, and on South Stream before it stops), through several joint-ventures in the industrial and manufacturing sectors (such as that between Renault-Nissan and AvtoVAZ), through partnerships in the banking sector (e.g., between Société Générale and Rosbank), and through large investments in agribusiness (e.g., Danone). France has been leading in terms of cooperation with Russia in the space sector (the Russian missile Soyuz launched from the spaceport Kourou in French Guiana) and in the military-industrial complex (for instance, the joint venture between Sagem and Rostekhnologii). In 2010, the signing of contract for the sale of two Mistral-class amphibious assault ships to Russia was one of the first major arms deals between Russia and a NATO country, symbolizing the leading role of France and the French military sector in building bridges with Russia.

With the recent sanctions against Russia, France has been affected at two levels. First, the French government has had to take into consideration US and other NATO members' concerns and abandon the sale of the two Mistrals to Russia.

Paris not only loses a €1.2bn contract but also has to pay important penalty fees, to which will be added the detrimental reputation of a country canceling contracts.⁷ This decision could be explained by the continuous political and military tensions between Russia and the EU and NATO, as well as the failure for Russia to make and abide by a proper cease-fire agreement in Eastern Ukraine.⁸ Russia is also currently considering imposing sanctions against French telecommunications companies as a way to retaliate against the decision.⁹ The second level at which France has been affected by the sanctions has to do with French farmers who have been directly affected by Moscow's ban on European food products, which has contributed to both an overproduction and a collapse in the price of a variety of farm produce, notably in the apple, citrus, pork, and fish sectors.¹⁰ In voicing their discontent, and in order to protest the measures, farmers' unions have organized demonstrations and demanded that Brussels and Paris offer compensatory solutions.

7 President Hollande set two conditions for the sale in September 2014, when the deadline for the handover of the first ship expired. One was a cease-fire approved by international observers; another was to make sure that decisive steps were taken towards a political solution of the crisis.

8 "France reportedly facing 1.2 billion euro claim from Russia over Mistral warships," Euronews, May 15, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.euronews.com/2015/05/15/france-reportedly-facing-12-billion-euro-claim-from-russia-over-mistral-warships/>

9 <http://rt.com/news/237109-russia-sanctions-france-mistral/>

10 "Russia may sanction French companies over Mistral non-delivery – media," rt.com, March 3, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://fr.sputniknews.com/international/20140811/202102815.html>

Table 1. French imports from Russia¹¹

	2013
Imports from Russia (€)	10,262,688,080
Total imports (€)	512,774,671,000
Russian imports as a percentage of overall imports (%)	2.00%
The relevance of Russian imports (in order of importance)	10th
The most important products imported from Russia (based on BEC rating)	
Fuels and lubricants – processed– other (BEC 322)	48.45%
Fuels and lubricants – from materials (BEC 310)	39.31%
Industrial raw materials – processed (BEC 220)	7.60%

Table 2. French exports to Russia

	2013
Exports to Russia (€)	7,721,125,047
Total exports (€)	436,478,583,314
Exports to Russia in percentage of overall exports (%)	1.77%
The relevance of Russian exports (in order of importance)	10th
The most important products exported to Russia (based on BEC rating)	
Industrial raw materials – processed (BEC 220)	18.27%
Daily products (BEC 630)	17.90%
Capital goods (BEC 410)	15.05%
Parts and accessories of transport equipment (BEC 530)	12.79%
Other transport equipment - industrial (BEC 521)	10.28%

¹¹ Our own calculation is based on the Eurostat (EU trade since 1988 by BEC [DS-032655]) database.

Energy

Table 3. French and EU28 imports of petroleum oil¹² and natural gas¹³ from Russia in 2013¹⁴

	Value (€)	Share of imports from Russia in total extra-EU28 imports of petroleum/gas (%)	Share of imports from Russia in total imports of petroleum/gas (%)
France, petroleum	3,814,206,386	11.9%	11.1%
EU28, petroleum	99,160,929,595	32.8%	28.9%
France, gas	0	0.0%	0.0%
EU28, gas	17,472,466,881	46.0%	23.6%

A recent study led by the Institute of Energy Economics at the University of Cologne (EWI) analyzed the effects of a scenario of a possible embargo on Russian gas exports in November 2014 and its impact on the security of the gas supply in Europe.¹⁵

According to the study (see figure 1), France's gas supply would be secure during a 6-month disruption. A 9-month disruption would only have a mild effect on the French gas supply. Despite their high degree of supply diversification, an estimated 2.6 billion cubic metres (bcm) shortfall would occur in France, which represents 5 to 10 % of its annual demand.

As for general conclusions, the supply would be secure in almost all of the European countries during a 3-month embargo, except in Bulgaria, Poland, Turkey, and Finland. During a 6-month embargo, shortfalls would occur in many countries in Eastern Europe. France and Italy would be able to secure supplies.

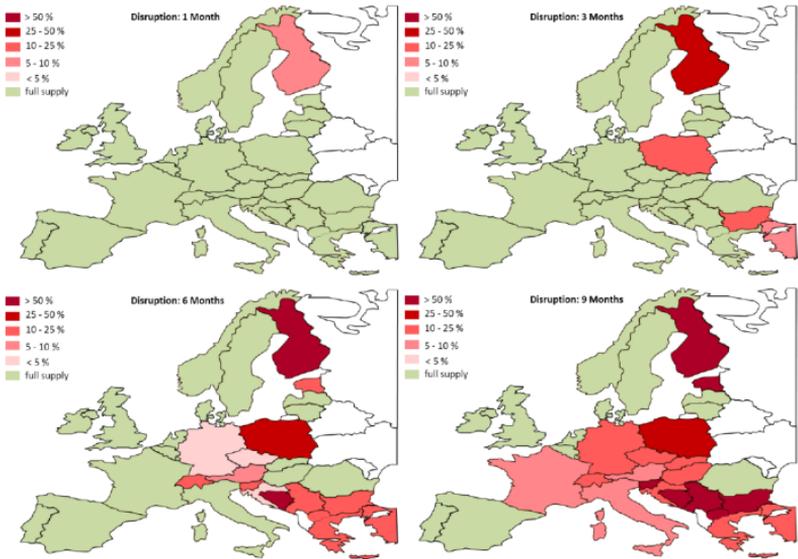
12 Petroleum oils and oils obtained from bituminous minerals, crude.

13 Natural gas in gaseous state.

14 Calculations based on Eurostat (EU trade since 1995 by HS6) database.

15 "An embargo of Russian Gas and Security of Supply in Europe", Institute of energy Economics at the University of Cologne, September 8, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.ewi.uni-koeln.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/Studien/Politik_und_Gesellschaft/2014/2014-09_An_Embargo_of_Russian_Gas_and_Security_of_Supply_in_Europe.pdf

Figure 1. Supply shortfalls in European countries relative to their annual demand



French-Russian diplomatic relations

France is traditionally considered a neutral country in relation to Russia, neither anti-Russian like some Nordic countries or the UK, nor pro-Russian like Hungary. Seen from France, Russia does not present a direct security threat and has no pipelines over which conflicts might occur. Paris usually delegates to Germany the leading role when dealing with issues related to the Eastern Partnership, as it wants to be recognized as having a key role in dealing with Mediterranean issues and the Muslim world more generally. Seen from Moscow, France is appreciated for its intermediate position. President Sarkozy's ability to secure agreements between Moscow and Tbilisi during the Russian-Georgian crisis of August 2008 was positively received by the Russian elites. On the Ukrainian crisis, however, France has had to follow the general European consensus on enforcing sanctions.

Russia and US in French politics

According to Joël Gombin, relations between France and Russia are still determined by the legacy of de Gaulle, whose diplomacy from 1944 and onwards sought to approach Russia in order to counterbalance the power of the United States. To this day, France's position towards Washington divides the French political elite. This division is what determines France's relationship with Russia, which acts as a counterweight to its relationship with the United States. As Gombin explains, this creates a paradoxical situation in French politics: pro-Russian politicians are either the "heirs of communism," for instance far-left party members like Jean-Luc Mélenchon; or right-wing politicians, such as Nicolas Sarkozy, François Fillon, Dominique de Villepin, or Thierry Mariani. François Fillon and Vladimir Putin are rumoured to be close. According to *L'Express*, it was Fillon whom Putin called the day after the defeat of the UMP in the presidential elections of 2012.¹⁶ It was Nicolas Sarkozy who signed the contract to sell the two Mistral warships to Russia in 2009. Thierry Mariani, member of the National Assembly of France, vice-President of the France-Russia friendship group, stated on his Twitter account on March, 1 2014: "How can one be for self-determination when it comes to Kosovo and against when it comes to the Crimean?" As for the French socialist party (PS) actually in power, they have always been rather suspicious of Putin's politics, even if some Socialist MPs are pro-Russian. Given the negotiating context with the two Mistrals, the PS and the Kremlin are even further apart.

Both far-left and far-right parties in France have developed a quite similar geopolitical analysis, where Europe is seen as a vassal of the United States, and NATO an agent of Anglo-Saxon capitalism. In their speeches, one recognizes the discourse of the Cold War (whilst they both deny using the same rhetoric), which they often mix with conspiracy theories. Jean-Yves Camus points out that, even if part of the far right is pro-European, it is still anti-EU and shares with the far left the vision of an "ideal, multipolar world". Both Jean-Yves Camus and Joël Gombin have confirmed this observation, noting that, while there is no actual collaboration (personal or action-wise) between the *Front de Gauche* and the *Front National*, there are similarities in ideological beliefs, such as the concept of Euroscepticism or the idea of being anti-American.¹⁷

16 "François Fillon et son ami Poutine", *L'Express*, January 29, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/francois-fillon-et-son-ami-poutine_1318016.html

17 However, sharing the same anti-imperialist ideas could lead to the seduction of some far-left party members by the National Front.

Gombin consequently explains that given such similarities between opposite sides of the political spectrum, Russia may exert influence on almost “every level” of French politics: within the mainstream parties and the extreme ones as well.

Russia’s perception among the French public

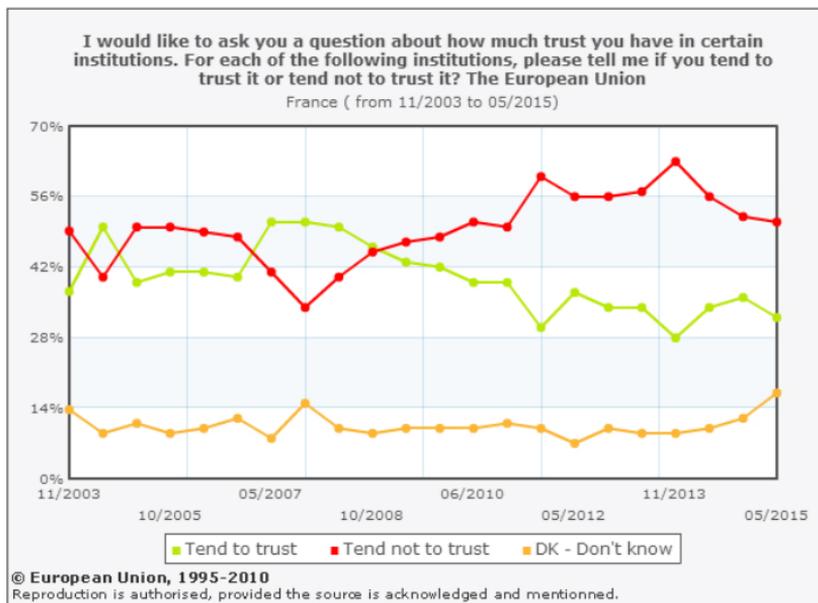
Historically, French public opinion has been dominantly distrustful of the United States, and very much polarized between a pro-American minority and an anti-American majority, often, but not systematically, overlapping with the right/left divide. The situation is evolving today among the new generations, and public perception of the United States is now mostly positive (about 60% of French people view the United States favorably), except during moments of tension over international issues such as the Iraq war. French public opinion is increasingly more concerned about Russia. In a 2013 BBC World Service poll, 25% of French people viewed Russia’s influence positively, with 63% expressing a negative view.¹⁸ However, this negative view of the Putin regime does not translate into cultural affairs.

French public opinion is also seeing a rise of Euroscepticism, expressions of which can be found both on the right and left side of the political spectrum, and which take the form of a profound mistrust of Brussels’ role. According to Eurobarometer surveys, since 2008 distrust of the European Union has greatly exceeded trust, although one can observe a short downward trend since November, 2013. We will see how the terror attacks in Paris have affected French attitudes about the European Union and its institutions in the long run.¹⁹

¹⁸ Document can be found here: http://www.globescan.com/images/images/pressreleases/bbc2013_country_ratings/2013_country_rating_poll_bbc_globescan.pdf

¹⁹ Standard Eurobarometer Surveys 19-83, 1983-2015, European Commission, accessed December 8, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/showchart_line.cfm?key-ID=2193&nationID=6,&startdate=2003.11&enddate=2015.05

Figure 2. Trust in the European Union in France 2003-2015



France's membership in the European Union seems a less divisive issue; opinions favoring it because of its benefits have almost always outnumbered those disliking it. So the French public does not question the basic *raison d'être* of the EU, but remains highly critical of its functioning.²⁰

²⁰ Standard Eurobarometer Surveys 19-82, 1983-2014, European Commission, accessed July 20, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/showchart_line.cfm?keyID=6&nation-ID=6&startdate=1983.04&enddate=2011.05

Kremlin's influence on today's French far-right

The far-right wing in France is largely dominated by the Front National (FN), which has been able to maintain a hegemonic status over other small far-right political groupuscules. It won 3.66%²¹, and 17.9%²² of the electorate in the 2012 French National Assembly and presidential elections, respectively, while reaching 24.86% in the 2014 European Parliament elections. The 2015 regional elections' results still show FN on the rise having added around 5% to its electorate base (in the first round) which might be connected to the Paris terror attacks and the rising anti-Muslim sentiments.²³ The FN works as an umbrella organization, covering many divergent organizations in a centralized structure, but it is not without its internal rivalries—in particular, around the dominant role the Le Pen family plays. Marine Le Pen, who succeeded her father in 2011, has developed a strategy for the party's "normalization." The aim is to "de-demonize" the FN and to erase its polemical aspects (anti-Semitism, negationism, and the infamous verbal outbursts of Jean-Marie Le Pen) in order to enable the party to enter the political arena and become a party of government, able to get seats in municipal councils, the European Parliament, and if possible the National Assembly. This strategy does not imply that the party is undergoing an internal de-ideologization: the information seeping out confirms, on the contrary, the FN's capacity to maintain a double discourse. Its radical groupuscules, those that are overtly fascist or neo-Nazi, are still present, but are kept mute. Success has been forthcoming, since the FN has become France's third-largest party after the two majority parties—the Socialist Party and Nicolas Sarkozy's UMP, recently renamed 'Les Républicains.'

21 Percentage of 2nd round vote.

22 Percentage of 1st round vote.

23 The party finally failed to gain control over any French regions, but the electoral results—especially in the first round—showed a historically high support for the Front National. The 6.6 million FN voters might signal a serious realignment of the French political landscape, already pushing the rightist Republicans led by former President Nicolas Sarkozy into turmoil, hesitation and abandoning the politics of „cordon sanitaire“. *French elections: Front National makes no gains in final round*, The Guardian, December 14, 2015, accessed December 15, 2015.

A vocal pro-Russian stance

Marine Le Pen is distinguished in the French landscape due to her very openly pro-Russian and pro-Putin stance. Back in 2011, she acknowledged admiring the Russian president and supporting Russia: "I can only be concerned when I see that our president (Nicolas Sarkozy), at the instigation of the Americans, is turning his back on Russia. Following the Americans, the French media demonize Russia."²⁴ Jean-Yves Camus also confirmed it is only Marine Le Pen and her party who openly take Russia's side on every level in French political life. The FN insists on several key positive components of the Russian regime: its authoritarianism (cult of the strong man), its anti-American jockeying (the fight against American unipolarism and NATO domination), its defense of Christian values, and its refusal of gay marriage, its criticism of the European Union, and its support for a "Europe of Nations."²⁵

According to the FN's ideology, we live in a world where nations are threatened by the dominance of an "Empire" (the United States or NATO), which seeks to undo the "natural links" between individuals who constitute a nation. Nations in this concept are seen as somewhat "timeless and organic communities" that need to defend themselves against the "Empire" – eventually with the help of Russia. Alain Soral,²⁶ the author of several controversial essays, and social affairs adviser for Marine Le Pen from 2007 to 2009, develops this idea in his essay "Understanding the Empire."²⁷ He explains that, in liberalism, individuals have no history, hence no future, therefore making them a danger to national communities. As for Jean-Marie Le Pen, an ideal Europe would consist of "powerful, independent and respected" nations and would include "nations of the northern continent from Brest to Vladivostok."²⁸

24 "Marine Le Pen dit "admirer" Vladimir Poutine", Le Point, October 13, 2011, accessed July 30, 2015. http://www.lepoint.fr/politique/election-presidentielle-2012/marine-le-pen-dit-admirer-vladimir-poutine-13-10-2011-1384085_324.php

25 The "Europe of Nations" is a far-right Eurosceptic geopolitical alternative to the EU, giving a role to Russia. It's geopolitical parallel is the Eurasian Economic Union founded on 29 May 2014 by Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia.

26 Alain Soral was a member of the Communist Party until 1993. Afterwards, he became a far-right ideologue, ranging from traditional anti-Semitism to new anti-Semitism. Sharing both nationalist and leftist values, he defines himself as national socialist. In an interview on May 18, 2011 concerning the 2002 presidential elections, he explained that "...the only one who has the political courage, who dares to critique the system is the one who has never been part of the political bourgeoisie (...) and while I'm still very tied to the Communist Party, I am also very disappointed in them, I thought for the first time that we must vote Le Pen, and it would truly be a revolutionary vote."

27 Alain Soral, *Comprendre l'Empire. Demain la gouvernance mondiale ou la révolte des Nations?* (Paris:Éditions Blanche, 2011)

28 This idea was first formulated in his program for the 2007 presidential elections.

With the 2014 crisis and Russia's banishment following the Ukrainian crisis, Marine Le Pen has turned out even greater praise: "Mr. Putin is a patriot. He is attached to the sovereignty of his people. He is aware that we defend common values. These are the values of European civilization."²⁹ She therefore calls for an "advanced strategic alliance" with Russia, which ought to be embodied on the European continent by a Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis.³⁰ On the Ukrainian crisis, the FN totally subscribes to the Russian reading of events and has given its very vocal support to Moscow's position.³¹ The party criticized the EuroMaidan revolution, considers that the European Union "threw oil on the fire" by proposing an economic partnership with a country in which half the population looks to the East, states its preference for a federalization of Ukraine that would give a broad autonomy to the Russian-speaking regions, and supports the solutions offered by Russia to solve the conflict, namely the federalization of Ukraine.³² The party's representatives have observed the Crimean referendum, and the following parliamentary and presidential elections in the separatist regions.

The Front National held a congress in Lyon on November 30, 2014, during which two representatives of the Russian government – Andrei Issaev, the Vice-president of the Duma, and Senator Andrei Klimov – were made honorary guests and were invited to participate. Andrei Issaev believed that their presence at the congress was due to the fact that the party was gaining more and more influence in France. During his speech, Andrei Issaev stated that, "An unconstitutional coup d'état had been committed in the heart of Europe [in Ukraine] with the coming to power of radical forces...the ideological heirs of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, the ally of Hitler."¹² Meanwhile at the tribune, Marine Le Pen pleaded for "Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals and not from Washington to Brussels."³³

29 "Marine Le Pen fait l'éloge de Vladimir Poutine «le patriote»", Le Figaro, May 18, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015. <http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2014/05/18/25002-20140518ARTFIG00118-marine-le-pen-fait-l-elogue-de-vladimir-poutine-le-patriote.php>

30 "Les réseaux russes de Marine Le Pen", Mediapart, February 19, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/190214/les-reseaux-russes-de-marine-le-pen>

31 "Le Pen soutient la Russie sur l'Ukraine", Le Figaro, April 12, 2014, accessed July 30, 2014, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2014/04/12/97001-20140412FILWWW00097-le-pen-soutient-la-russie-sur-l-ukraine.php>

32 "L'Europe responsable de la crise en Ukraine" La voix de la Russie, June 1, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015. http://french.ruvr.ru/news/2014_06_01/LEurope-est-responsable-de-la-crise-en-Ukraine-Marine-Le-Pen-4473/

33 "Au congrès du FN, la « camaraderie » russe est bruyamment mise en scène", mediapart.fr, November 20, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/291114/au-congres-du-fn-la-camaraderie-russe-est-bruyamment-mise-en-scene>

Experts interviewed for this research, however, downplayed FN's significance in the shaping of French public discourse on the Ukrainian crisis. Joël Gombin explained that there is no real debate in France concerning foreign affairs, as those issues are not debated in the Parliament and the media. He perceives the situation as a script, where the debate is always the same: Atlanticist versus pro-Russians. Ukraine may have had the sympathy of the general public at the beginning; however, as soon as the situation started deteriorating, the public took a step back, he said. Jean-Yves Camus criticized the majority of French political leaders for supporting Ukraine's adherence to the EU, especially those without proper knowledge of the ethnic and national complexity of the crisis, not to mention a clear vision of the EU's role in it.

In consequence, the pro-Russian standpoint of the Front National on the Ukrainian issue may seem very harsh and evidently important for the Kremlin's diplomacy, though its real impact on the French public opinion remains questionable.

Historical links through the "New Right"

The personal links between the FN and certain Russian figures are long-standing and can be explained by already existing personal contacts between certain figures of the Russian emigration in Paris and French political leaders. As early as 1990, probably via emigration networks, two ultra-nationalist figures, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, chairman of the so-called Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia, and Eduard Limonov, future leader of the National-Bolshevik Party, met with Jean-Marie Le Pen.³⁴ Intellectuals of the New Right and of the GRECE (Groupement de recherche sur la civilisation européenne) movement, who dominated circles close to the newspaper, *Le Figaro*, at the start of the 1980s, were at the forefront of their politics. The French New Right, and especially its main figure, Alain de Benoist, shifted the traditional far-right paradigm by moving from biological racism to cultural racism, in order to be in tune with the discreditation of race theories and the valorization of the right to cultural difference. The New Right actors were in contact with the esoteric and dissident Yuzhinsky Circle, which promoted esoteric Fascism and Nazism in the Moscow bohemian underground, and authors such as Julius Evola and René Guénon. Among the Yuzhinsky Circle activists, Alexander Dugin has been the most dynamic in structuring contacts in France.

34 Andreas Umland, "Zhirinovskiy in the First Russian Republic: A Chronology of Events 1991-1993," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 19, no. 2 (2006): 193-241.

He travelled to France several times between 1990 and 1993 and met with De Benoist, Christian Bouchet, Robert Steuckers, and Jean-François Thiriart.³⁵ Some of them, such as Christian Bouchet, facilitated the development of ties between representatives of the Russian far right and the FN.

New dynamics in the 2010s

In the 1990s and 2000s, links between the French and Russian extreme-right remained limited to the French and Russian “New Right.” However, at the turn of the decade 2000-2010 they suddenly took on a new scope. This occurred for two reasons:

First, the Russian authorities began deploying new strategies of influence abroad, and in particular in Europe. The aim has been to establish a “voice of Russia” that stands out distinctively on the international scene and that would confirm Russia’s regaining of its greatpower status. The disappointment of European public opinion toward the EU and the rise of populist parties across Europe were seen as allies of Russia’s strategy. The Russian Orthodox Church has been at the forefront, developing networks among conservative Catholic milieus.³⁶ The Russian ethno-nationalist political circles such as those around Dmitri Rogozin, circles that are anxious about the massive immigration in Russia, quickly sought inspiration from the FN’s discourse on the dangers of immigration and interpreted the 2005 riots in the Parisian *banlieues* as a revolt of “Arabs” against “Whites.”³⁷

Putin’s regime has also been pushing for contact with friendly foreign institutions that would monitor controversial pro-Russian elections in the post-Soviet space; this is a role that fell to the Belgium-based Eurasian Observatory for Democracy & Elections (EODE), founded in 2007. The Observatory constituted the core of the “European observers group” that validated the Crimean referendum of March 2014 and consisted of many FN-linked figures.³⁸

35 Anton Shekhovtsov, “Aleksandr Dugin and the West European New Right, 1989-1994,” in Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Eurasianism and the European Far Right. Reshaping the Russia-Europe Relationship* (Lanham: Lexington, 2015).

36 “Cyrille, le bras religieux du nationalisme de Poutine”, slate.fr, December 8, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.slate.fr/story/95027/cyrille-patriarche-poutine>

37 SEE Lukasz Jurczynszyn, “Russian Radical Nationalist Interpretation of the French Riots of November 2005,” in Marlene Laruelle, ed. *Russian Nationalism, Foreign Policy and Identity Debates in Putin’s Russia* (Stuttgart: Verlag Ibidem, 2012, 139-151).

38 Anton Shekhovtsov, “Far Right Election Observation Monitors in the Service of the Kremlin’s Foreign Policy,” in Laruelle, Ibid

This post-Crimea dynamic was extended to Philippe de Villiers, former candidate for the 2007 presidential election and leader of the defunct *Mouvement pour la France* (Movement for France), which “poached” on FN territory by adopting some of its themes, notably that of Islamophobia. Konstantin Malofeev, an Orthodox businessman head of Marshall Capital investment funds and of the Saint-Basile-le-Grand foundation—the most important Russian Orthodox charity organization, suspected to have funded the insurgency in Eastern Ukraine), along with Philippe de Villiers, publicly manifested their will to build historical recreational parks in both Moscow and Crimea, based on de Villiers’ success with the Vendée theme park, created to celebrate Royal France.³⁹

Second, high-ranking FN leaders have become increasingly active in their relations with Russia by taking several trips there. Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, Marine’s niece and France’s youngest MP, travelled there in December 2012; Bruno Gollnisch, executive vice-president of the FN and president of the *Alliance Européenne des Mouvements Nationaux* (AEMN – European Alliance of National Movements) did so as well in May 2013; and Marine Le Pen and FN vice president Louis Aliot both went in June 2013. Marine Le Pen was received at a high political level by the president of the Duma, Sergey Naryshkin, by Alexey Pushkov, who heads the Duma’s Committee of Foreign Affairs, and by the vice prime minister, Dmitri Rogozin. She returned to Russia on April 12, 2014, a few weeks before the European Parliament elections.⁴⁰ The fact that the Russian ambassador in France meets regularly with Marine Le Pen and other Front National leaders is also proof of a strong relation between the two nations. On June 12, 2014, Marine Le Pen and her niece Marion were invited to celebrate Russia’s National Day by the Russian ambassador in France, Alexander Orlov. This was the first time that Le Pen and Orlov were seen together publicly.⁴¹ “It’s true, I often go to the Russian Embassy,” admitted Marion Maréchal-Le Pen. “My aunt encourages me to do so.”

39 “*French politician defends plan for Crimean theme park*” Telegraph, August 16, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11038730/French-politician-defends-plan-for-Crimean-theme-park.html>

40 “*Marine Le Pen reçue à bras ouverts par la Douma*”, lemonde.fr, April 14, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/04/14/marine-le-pen-recue-a-bras-ouverts-par-la-douma_4400754_3210.html

41 “*Poutine et le FN : révélations sur les réseaux russes des Le Pen*”, tempsreel.nouvelobs.com, November 27, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/politique/20141024.OBS3131/poutine-et-le-fn-revelations-sur-les-reseaux-russes-des-le-pen.html>

Knowing how links were established at such a high level is complex, since the sources of such matters are seldom open about it. However, it is likely that Dmitri Rogozin's party, Rodina, plays a key intermediary role by "rehashing" old contacts between the Russian and French New Right at a more official level within the Russian administration.

French pro-Russian networks and key public figures

The president of the FN is in fact surrounded by several Russophile figures that have enhanced the party's orientation towards Russia. The most famous of them is Aymeric Chauprade, former international advisor to the FN, European deputy, close to the so-called "Orthodox oligarch" Konstantin Malofeev.⁴² Chauprade fosters a conspiracy line of thought and is known as a defender of the 9/11 conspiracy theory.⁴³ In June 2013, in a speech in the Duma, he called for the creation of an international forum for those who "love their identity" and reject "the alliance of Western globalization and anarchist nihilism" created by an "American financial oligarchy," and resisted by Russia "in the name of a world saying no to a new form of totalitarianism."⁴⁴ In July 2014, four days after the crash of Malaysian airliner MH-14 in Ukraine, he stated on his blog, Realpolitik.tv, that "the tragedy does not serve the interests of Russia and, instead, the destruction of the plane plays into the hands of the governments in Kiev and Washington and, of course, the Ukrainian-US camp."⁴⁵

The second pro-Russian figure is Xavier Moreau, a former student of Saint-Cyr, France's foremost military academy, and a former paratrooper, who directs a Moscow-based consulting company, Sokol, and seems to play a central role in forming contracts between French people who are close to the FN and the Russian business world.

42 In November, 2015, Chauprade quit the National Front over ideological divergences and his role in the jailbreak in the Dominican Republic of two Frenchmen accused of smuggling cocaine. The change, however, does not alter his past role played in fostering the relationship between the FN and the Kremlin. „Pro-Russia National Front MEP quits party," Euobserver, November 10, 2015, accessed November 11, 2015, <https://euobserver.com/tickers/131035>

43 "Le double discours d'Aymeric Chauprade sur le 11-Septembre", Conspiracy Watch, December 18, 2013, accessed July 30, 2015. http://www.conspiracywatch.info/Le-double-discours-d-Aymeric-Chauprade-sur-le-11-Septembre_a1153.html

44 The full text of the speech can be found on his website under the title of *Appel de Moscou*: Realpolitik.tv, <http://blog.realpolitik.tv/2013/06/lappel-de-moscou-daymeric-chauprade-le-13-juin-2013/>

45 "Déclaration de Hollande sur le Mistral: le piège américain se referme sur la France", Realpolitik.tv, July 22, 2014. Accessed on July 30, 2015. <http://www.realpolitik.tv/2014/07/declaration-de-hollande-sur-le-mistral-le-piege-americain-se-referme-sur-la-france/>

Third, Fabrice Sorlin, head of the France-Europe Russia Alliance (AAFER), leader of Dies Irae, a fundamentalist Catholic movement from Bordeaux.

Around this dominant trio of Chauprade, Moreau, and Sorlin, there are also other notable figures. Emmanuel Leroy, one of the FN's ideologues and a supporter of a pro-Russian axis, links with former GRECE milieus and participated in a racist gathering of the so-called "White Power" in Moscow in 2007, held in the presence of the Ku Klux Klan's former leader, David Duke. Frédéric Chatillon, whose private company provides the FN with diverse services, is the former leader of GUD, an extreme-right wing student organization with a reputation for violent and racist action. He was very active in the 1970s-80s and travels regularly to Moscow. Also to be noted is Odile Tequi, a militant of the Alliance Vita, an organization founded by the former minister Christine Boutin. Tequi plays a key role in the organization called "La Manif Pour Tous," (literally meaning "The Demonstration for All"), an anti-gay marriage movement. Polemical Franco-Swiss essayist Alain Soral, infamous for his anti-Semitic, anti-feminist, anti-communitarian, and anti-homosexuality texts, also enunciates passionately pro-Russian notions on his site *égalité et réconciliation* (Equality and reconciliation).

The FN also cultivates relations with Russian emigration milieus and institutions representing Russia in France. Thus, the FN's two MPs, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen and Gilbert Collard, are both members of a French-Russian friendship group. Marine Le Pen seems to have frequently met in private with the Russian ambassador to France, Alexander Orlov. Moreover, several FN officials have attended debates organized by Natalia Narochnitskaya, a high priestess of political Orthodoxy since the 1990s, and today president of the Paris-based Institute for Democracy and Cooperation. Lastly, contacts have been consolidated through the emigration milieus.

Businessman Alexandre Troubetzkoi (a grandchild of prince Nikolay Troubetzkoi), today director of the association "Dialogue Franco-Russe" (French-Russian Dialogue), is a close associate of Vladimir Yakunin, another "Orthodox businessman" with close ties to Putin and president of state-run Russian Railways. Troubetzkoi has met with Father Tikhon (Shevkunov), a prominent cleric who is also a best-selling author and editor of the conservative web-portal Pravoslavie.ru, and is rumoured to be Vladimir Putin's personal confessor. He has also met with Konstantin Malofeev, who for a time was a member of the Board of Svyazinvest, Russia's largest telecommunications holding.

Front National's international pro-Russian network of influence

Front National's Russian network and its functioning can be properly understood only with reference to all international networks of far-right parties in which it has been, and is currently, embedded. The party has been a leading force for organizing pro-Russian far-right parties across Europe. In 2009, FN along with Hungarian Jobbik founded the Alliance of European National Movements (AENM);⁴⁶ however, as part of "de-demonization" process, Le Pen decided to join the far-right European Alliance for Freedom (EAF) in 2013.⁴⁷ Before the 2014 European Parliament elections, the "Le Pen – Wilder alliance" was reported to have the support of the Front National, the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), the Flemish Vlaams Belang (VB), the Freedom Party of Austria (FPO), the Sweden Democrats (SD), the Slovak National Party and the Italian Lega Nord (LN). The Danish People's Party (DF), UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the Alternative for Germany refused to join the new alliance, while the more radical and anti-Semitic European nationalist parties such as National Democratic Party of Germany (NDP), the British National Party (BNP), Greek Golden Dawn (GD) and Hungarian Jobbik were not permitted to.

According to our earlier study⁴⁸, all but PVV, SD and DF could be considered as strongly "committed" towards the Kremlin; thus, the Front National proved to have considerable influence among pro-Russian parties and was able to form a pan-European alliance in Western and Eastern Europe alike.

46 "Far-right European parties forge alliance", eubusiness.com, October 25, 2009, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/politics-parties.13f>

47 "France's FN to team up with other far Right parties for European elections", October 23, 2013, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/10400740/Frances-FN-to-team-up-with-other-far-Right-parties-for-European-elections.html>

48 "The Russian Connection", Political Capital, April 10, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf

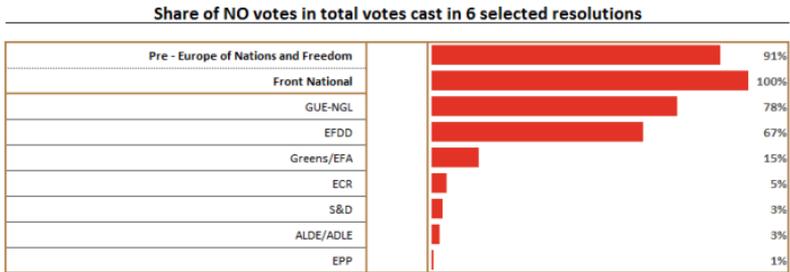
Ironically, EAF's post-election plan to form one large Eurosceptic (and pro-Russian) faction in the EP failed because of the EFDD faction led by Nigel Farage (UKIP), who considered the Front National to be too extreme for political cooperation at that given time.⁴⁹ Finally in June 2015, Marine Le Pen and her allies formed a new group within the European Parliament. The "Europe of Nations and Freedoms" (ENF) caucus consists of 37 members of 7 different nationalities. More than half of them are French and belong to Le Pen's party. Other members belong to various Eurosceptic far-right parties across Europe, including the Dutch PVV, the Belgian Vlaams Belang, the Austrian FPÖ, the Polish KNP, and the Italian Lega Nord.

The new formation gives the FN and affiliated parties special powers regarding funding (up to €20 million), speaking time, proposing more amendments at plenaries, additional seats in committees etc.⁵⁰ Figure 3 reveals that members of the new ENF caucus have exercised their legislative powers in favor of the Kremlin in voting down crucial Russia-related resolutions well before the forming of the new group in the European Parliament. In these cases, 91% of the future members of ENF proved to be pro-Kremlin, which percentage is the highest number among other rather pro-Russian factions of the far-left (GUE-NGL) and far-right (EFDD) as compared to mainstream political groups of the EP. Based on past voting behavior, Front National seems to lead not only the ENF, but its future lobbying in the Kremlin's interest, given the party's 100% pro-Russian voting record.

49 "Buoyant Le Pen seeks more allies for Eurosceptic group in Brussels", *theguardian.com*, May 28, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/28/marine-le-pen-eurosceptic-bloc-brussels>. Just short of two member states, the Front National along with PVV, LN, FPÖ and VB failed to form a new Eurosceptic group in the Parliament in 2014. Le Pen however pursued and created the Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom (MENF), an alliance with FPÖ and LN recognized and funded by the EP in 2015.

50 Péter Krekó, Marie Macaulay, Csaba Molnár, Lóránt Györi: "Europe's New Pro-Putin Coalition: the Parties of 'No,'" Institute of Modern Russia, August 3, 2015, accessed September 21, 2015, <http://imrussia.org/en/analysis/world/2368-europes-new-pro-putin-coalition-the-parties-of-no>

Figure 3. Share of “no” votes of caucuses and Front National in selected resolutions in the European Parliament



Selected Russia-related resolutions included:

- 1 - Strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia (11.06.2015), subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (motion for a resolution)⁵¹
- 2 - State of EU-Russia relations (10.06.2015), subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (motion for a resolution)⁵²
- 3 - Murder of the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov and the state of democracy in Russia (12.03.2015), subject (Paragraph 19, amendment 1), type of vote (joint motion for a resolution)⁵³
- 4 - Macro-financial assistance to Ukraine (25.03.2015), subject (vote: legislative resolution), type of vote (draft legislative resolution)⁵⁴
- 5 - EU-Ukraine association agreement, with the exception of the treatment of third country nationals legally employed as workers in the territory of the other party (16.09.2014), subject (approbation), type of vote (draft legislative resolution)⁵⁵
- 6 - Situation in Ukraine (17.07.2014), subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (joint motions for a resolution)⁵⁶

51 Votewatch.eu, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-strategic-military-situation-in-the-black-sea-basin-following-the-illegal-annexation-of-crimea-by-ru-15.html>

52 Votewatch.eu, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-state-of-eu-russia-relations-motion-for-resolution-vote-resolution.html>

53 Votewatch.eu, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-murder-of-the-russian-opposition-leader-boris-nemtsov-and-the-state-of-democracy-in-russia-joint-mot.html>

54 Votewatch.eu, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-macro-financial-assistance-to-ukraine-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-legislative-resolution-or-din.html>

55 Votewatch.eu, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-eu-ukraine-association-agreement-with-the-exception-of-the-treatment-of-third-country-nationals-lega.html>

56 Votewatch.eu, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-situation-in-ukraine-joint-motions-for-a-resolution-vote-resolution.html>

Aside from formal alliances, the party retains its core pro-Russian role behind the public political facade. Below is a detailed account of Le Pen's importance in legitimizing the Crimean annexation in March 2014. In Vienna in June 2014, Konstantin Malofeev and the Saint-Basile-le-Grand foundation hosted a secret conference for Christian, pro-family, and anti-LGBT traditionalists, titled the "Holly (or Grand) Alliance." The guest list included, among many others, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, Aymeric Chauprade and Alexander Dugin.⁵⁷ A few months later, Chauprade participated in a similar anti-gay event, organized partly by Malofeev, the World Congress of Families, and FPÖ leader, Heinz-Christian Strache. In March 2015, Jean-Luc Schaffhauser announced that an international forum for "peace and unity" was to be held in Donetsk on May 11 and 12, 2015, to focus on the two breakaway regions in Ukraine and their autonomy.⁵⁸

As shown by the foregoing, the FN's French-Russian network is completed by its international far-right party-family's informal and formal networks, and the FN is thereby enabled to act as an important intermediary among French domestic political actors and other Western far-right political actors. The FN thus plays an essential role in the Kremlin's political legitimization in the eyes of the European and Russian public, especially as accomplished by the successful political actions, conferences, forums, etc., mentioned above. The network around the Front National serves as a flexible international tool in the hands of the Kremlin. It constantly facilitates the flow of people, money, information, and other resources, adapting quickly to the war-torn international situation. It provides a well thought-out playground for Russian "active measures" to provide all kinds of support to "friendly" parties and organizations.

The FN's history of far-right affiliations shows that almost no far-right organization or person is unreachable in Europe by Le Pen with Russia behind her back. The party's importance stems from both France's prominent role in the Western world and its dense pro-Russian network of political actors.

57 "Gipfeltreffen mit Putins fünfter Kolonne", tagesanzeiger.ch, June 3, 2014, accessed July 30, 2014, <http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/ausland/europa/Gipfeltreffen-mit-Putins-fuenfter-Kolonne/story/30542701>

58 "Eurodéputé français annonce forum international à Donetsk mai 2015", eureporter.co, March 11, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.eureporter.co/fr/world/2015/03/11/french-mep-announces-international-forum-in-donetsk-in-may-2015/>. See also "European far right and pro-Russian politicians to visit Donbas," uaposition.com, May 10, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://uaposition.com/european-far-right-and-pro-russian-politicians-to-visit-donbas/>.

Russian financial influence on Front National

In November 2014, these intense FN-Russia relations bore their fruit, at least financially speaking. On November 22, the French online investigation website Médiapart revealed the FN obtained a loan of € 9 million from the First Czech Russian Bank (FCRB). Contacts were established by Jean-Luc Schaffhauser, a Dassault consultant and FN candidate who is close to Putin's advisor on cooperation with Russian organizations abroad, Alexander Babakov.⁵⁹ It was Babakov who directed Schaffhauser to this bank, which is controlled by Sroytransgaz, the Russian leader in gas pipeline construction.⁶⁰ Four days after the loan was negotiated, Médiapart revealed that the Front National aimed to borrow an additional € 31 million, for a total of € 40 million. Marine Le Pen denied borrowing an additional € 31 million and confirmed only the first loan. Further investigation on December 1 revealed that Jean-Marie Le Pen borrowed an additional € 2 million, through his association, Cotelec, from a Cypriot firm named Vernonsia Holdings, whose owner is Yuri Kudimov, a former KGB officer.⁶¹ Marine Le Pen explained that the FN party was forced to seek loans abroad as French banks refused to grant money to a far-right party. Jean-Yves Camus believes that this explanation is, in principle, plausible. Various financial experts have not deemed this operation illegal, and legal experts have not detected any wrongdoing as of yet.⁶²

In October 2014, when Médiapart asked Wallerand de Saint-Just, the FN's treasurer, whether there were plans to borrow money outside of France, he denied the existence of the loans for which the contract had already been signed in September 2014. Even investigative journalists seem baffled.

59 Dassault Group is a France-based group of involved in different industrial sectors, most notable for Dassault Aviation which manufactures military, regional, and business jets. According to Médiapart, Babakov organized a secret meeting between Le Pen and President Putin in February 2014.

60 "Le Front national décroche les millions russes." Médiapart. November 27, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015. <http://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/221114/marine-le-pen-decroche-les-millions-russes>

61 Cotelec is a "microparty" set up to provide finance for the National Front since 1991. It operates under the control of Jean-Marie Le Pen, and continues to channel cash - donations and loans - to the party. "Médiapart: Former Russian spy lent €2mn to Le Pen senior", euobserver.com, December 1, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/126731>.

62 This is not the first instance in France either; there was a precedent in the 80s, between the communist party and the "Banque Commerciale pour l'Europe du Nord," operating with Soviet resources, stated Camus in his interview.

According to Marine Turchi, a journalist from Médiapart who contributed to the investigations of the FN's loans, "the main question is why?" She is trying to understand what reasoning lay behind borrowing such large sums of money outside of France: is there any political compensation, any political interference? Why choose Russian funds in the first place? What is the deadline for repayment? Why has the MEP Jean-Luc Schaffhauser, an observer in the elections held in the Donbass region of Eastern Ukraine in early November, been paid € 140,000 for negotiating the loan? Why has there not been any transparency regarding the meetings that took place between Russian and FN representatives? To this day, Marine Turchi's questions remain unanswered. Médiapart continues to investigate the circumstances of these loans, which, even according to Russian media, would not have been possible without the Kremlin's agreement.⁶³

Marine Le Pen herself denies the theory that these loans will make the Front National dependent on Russia or that they will influence its international positions. She explains she finds "these insinuations are outrageous and offensive. Why would this loan determine our international position? It has been for a long time that we were on this (pro – Russian) political line. If a US bank wanted to redeem our credit, we would still stay on our political positions."⁶⁴ Even though some of Le Pen's defensive statements, for example, that the Front National was not able to obtain loans from the other banks it approached, seem reasonable, certain events lead one to believe other motivations lay behind the Russian loan. One of these has to do with the latest SMS-scandal, which revealed that the loan might have been a simple compensation from the Kremlin to the FN for having acknowledged the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

63 In an article, the French media RFI states that according to the Russian newspaper "Kommersant," it is clear that this operation would not have been possible without the approval of the Russian authorities. The newspaper *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* wrote, "Marine Le Pen is known for her sympathy for the Kremlin's policy, and she got even closer to Russia with the loans." *Novye Izvestia* published an article with the title "Russian mark in the French National Front, the Fifth Republic is looking for its fifth column." "La presse russe commente le prêt accordé au Front national", rfi.fr, November 24, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.rfi.fr/europe/20141124-presse-russe-commente-emprunt-accorde-front-national-marine-le-pen/>

64 "Marine Le Pen justifie le prêt russe du FN," lemonde.fr, November 29, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2014/11/23/marine-le-pen-justifie-le-prett-russe-du-fn_4528041_823448.html

At the end of March 2015, the hacker group *Anonymous International* published thousands of Russian internal governmental documents, among which were text messages thanking Marine Le Pen for siding with Russia on the annexation of Crimea.⁶⁵

Anton Shekhovtsov painted the scenario: Timur Prokopenko, deputy chief of the Domestic Politics Department of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, asked his “French connection,” Konstantin Rykov,⁶⁶ a media producer and tax resident of France, to persuade Marine Le Pen to become a European “observer” for the planned referendum.⁶⁷ Since Le Pen was preoccupied with her municipal elections campaign at the time, Aymeric Chauprade volunteered to observe on March 16, 2014, though the party later denied his official invitation and claimed he participated as a private person. After Le Pen had recognized the results of the referendum on March 17, Rykov texted the deputy chief: “We need to somehow demonstrate our respect for the French; this is important.” “Yes, super!” agreed Prokopenko.⁶⁸

On the April 18, the Cotelec association, as mentioned above, received € 2 million from Cypriot Vernonsia Holdings, due to the loan-agreement signed by Le Pen on April 4. The loans were mediated through Jean-Luc Schaffhauser, who received at least € 140,000 (other sources, such as Rue89Strasbourg.com, indicate that the sum was closer to € 450,000) for his services, as acknowledged by the party.⁶⁹ However, Schaffhauser doubted that the loan had affected party politics directly because financial negotiations with Russian stakeholders had begun only in April, after a failed attempt with a bank in Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates. When he was asked to explain the text messages, Schaffhauser replied that if there had been any negotiations in March 2014, “those should have been initiated by Aymeric Chauprade.”

65 “СМС переписка из Управления внутренней политики АП РФ. 2011-2014 гг.,” b0ltai.org, March 31, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://b0ltay.blogspot.hu/2015/03/2011-2014.html>

66 Rykov was an MP for United Russia party between 2007-2012 in the State Duma.

67 “Pro-Russian extremists observe the illegitimate Crimean “referendum,”” anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.hu, March 17, 2014, accessed July 20, 2015, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.hu/2014/03/pro-russian-extremists-observe.html>

68 “Russia and Front National: Following the Money,” anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.hu, May 2, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.de/2015/05/russia-and-front-national-following.html>

69 “Schaffhauser a reçu 100 000€ pour avoir été l’intermédiaire de l’emprunt russe du FN,” rue89strasbourg.com, November 26, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.rue89strasbourg.com/index.php/2014/11/26/vigie/schaffhauser-recu-100-000e-pour-avoir-ete-lintermediaire-de-lemprunt-russe-du-fn/>

Aymeric Chauprade and Marine Le Pen could not be reached by Médiapart to comment on these allegations.⁷⁰

The Crimean referendum revealed that the FN's international politics have indeed been directly influenced by Russian interests, regardless of whether the latter translated into financial, personal, or other forms of mutual back-scratching.⁷¹ It should be noted, however, that this kind of Russian political assertiveness fits perfectly the Kremlin's so called "active measures" agenda, which seeks to provide concrete assistance to foreign "friendly" organizations and parties. Similar intervention measures have been experienced in a variety of ways in Eastern Europe and the Baltics, including the possible infiltration of party ranks of a far-right party by Russian secret service "agent of influence" in Hungary, the founding of anti-shale-gas green parties in Romania and Bulgaria, and even the winning of elections by an electoral alliance representing the Russian minority's interests in Latvia.

70 "Crimée et finances du FN: les textos secrets du Kremlin," codex09.lautre.net (mediapart.fr), April 2, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015, http://www.codex09.lautre.net/wp-content/uploads/article_518769.pdf

71 But Mediapart assumed that the first loan of € 2 million in April 2014 could have been used by Cotelec to fund Front National's candidates in the European Parliament elections campaign.

Kremlin influence on the French media world

There exists today a highly structured pro-Russian network in France consisting of (1) traditional media enterprises close to the FN, (2) NGO-type organizations actively participating in promoting Russia's interests and perspectives, and (3) marginal media outlets often featuring conspiracy theories.

The FN's media world

There are multiple indirect relations between the Russian media and the FN-linked media⁷², although several projects have recently been aborted. Thus, at the end of 2012, La voix de la Russie opened a web TV channel, called ProRussia TV, which worked in cooperation with the TASS Russian News Agency. It was closed in April 2014, following the rearranging of the Russian media under the guidance of the Russia Today holding, and has been replaced by Sputnik news agency and radio platform operated by Russia Today as of November 22, 2014.⁷³ The same network operates TV Libertés, the FN's web television, which works with TASS Russian News Agency, the group EDH Communication, which has links with the Nazi supporter Mabilie, and Agence2presse, which includes several far-right figures, such as Yvan Blot, founder of the Club de l'Horloge (a "think tank" linked to the New Right in the 1980s), close to Catholic integrist groups, and who worked for La Voix de la Russie, Philippe Milliau, who is one of the main contributors to the Russian radio, and former member of both GRECE and Bloc Identitaire; and Gilles Arnaud, former regional advisor to the FN and also member of the Club de l'Horloge.⁷⁴

72 A pro-Russian broadcast on Ukraine for instance, on TV Libertés: <http://www.tvlibertes.com/panorama-la-face-cachee-de-la-guerre-en-ukraine-1ere-partie/>

73 <http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/>

74 "La télé identitaire, la drôle d'agence de presse et le « soft power » russe." Blog Le Monde, January 29, 2013, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://droites-extremes.blog.lemonde.fr/2013/01/29/la-tele-identitaire-la-drole-dagence-de-presse-et-le-soft-power-russe/>

Pro-Russian organizations

The Front National and its different networks are not the only ones to spread pro-Russian information. Several associations and institutions represent the Russian point of view and are often linked to the Russian diaspora based in France. Among the main ones, one can mention:

The “Dialogue Franco-Russe” Association, mentioned above, was established in 2004 as a Russian-French initiative to “develop the co-operation between the two countries.” The association enjoyed the patronage of former French President Jacques Chirac and President Vladimir Putin. In September 2014 the association arranged a trip to Russia for 12 French parliamentary delegates to demonstrate that Moscow is supported in the European Union.

The Council of Russian Compatriots (Conseil de coordination des compatriotes russes),⁷⁵ created in 2011 to play an intermediary role between the Russian authorities and what Russian policy defines as “compatriots” living abroad. The chairman of its board is Dimitri de Koc-hko, who is also president of the NGO France-Ural and journalist at *La Russie d’aujourd’hui* (the supplement in French of *Russia Beyond the Headlines*).⁷⁶

One of the most important organizations promoting Russia’s point of view in France is the **Institute of Democracy and Cooperation** (Institut de la Démocratie et de la Coopération), already mentioned above, a Paris based think-tank founded in 2008. Among the usual contributors of the institute, there are: Jacques Sapir, an economist who owes his reputation to the development of an exit strategy for France from the Eurozone, Thierry Mariani, vice-President of the France-Russia friendship group, Yves Pozzo di Borgo, a member of the Senate and the Centrist Union (UDI), and several French top executives, for instance, Christophe de Margerie, the former CEO of Total (before he died in a plane crash accident in Russia). The institute presents itself as an NGO; in reality, however, it emanates Russian soft-power and represents the Kremlin’s ideology, as it is opposed to economic liberalism and defends political conservatism. The Institute has organized several debates on current issues in France and Russia, such as “Kosovo, Crimea and the East-West confrontation in Ukraine,” on May 27, 2014, and “Sexual revolution and human rights,” on July 8, 2014.

⁷⁵ <http://www.conseil-russes-france.org/>

⁷⁶ “Plongée dans la galaxie des pro-russes français”, Atlantico, February 28, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015, <http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/plongee-dans-galaxie-pro-russes-francais-philippe-migault-et-alexandre-del-valle-et-olga-bronnikova-993540.html/page/0/1>

For the last few years, many small, pro-Russian Facebook and other Internet pages and associations have been publishing strong messages supporting Putin and the “greatness of Russia.” One is **Novopole** and another the **Collective France-Russie**, both French associations chaired by André Chanclu, a former member of GUD (Groupe Union Défense),⁷⁷ a French far-right student association founded in the late 1960s. In October 2014, Novopole organized a demonstration aimed at denouncing the “violations of human rights and crimes against humanity” in the Donbass region.⁷⁸

Putin’s French conspiracy acolytes

The Internet is a major venue for conspiracy theories supporting Russia. The protagonists form a mixed bag and share, according to Richard Hofstadter,⁷⁹ a single common feature: paranoid thinking. Many French conspiratorial movements take a pro-Russian perspective. They often represent the anti-liberal, pro-Russian far-right and far-left, which share the same distrust of the European Union and the Atlantic Alliance.

77 The Groupe Union Défense, GUD, is a far-right French student organization known for its violent activism. They were very active in the 1970s; however, their activity has greatly decreased since the 1980s. Regularly dissolved, it keeps surfacing under different names. The GUD took as its symbol the Celtic cross and the black rat, and participated in the 1969 founding of the Ordre Nouveau. In the mid-1980s, the GUD turned toward support of the Third Position movements and “national revolutionary” theories related to neo-fascism. The members tried to revive the movement in 2011 under the name of Youth Defence Union on the campus of the University of Paris II Panthéon Assas.

78 “NOVOPOLE Rassemblement le 11 Octobre Discours d’André CHANCLU Secrétaire Général”, Published on October 13, 2014, accessed July 30, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4u9UGOUWD80>

79 “Pourquoi il est urgent de lire «Le Style paranoïaque» de Richard Hofstadter”, Slate, July 28, 2015, accessed July 30, 2015. <http://www.slate.fr/tribune/64393/lire-le-style-paranoïaque-richard-hofstadter>

The composition of the **France-Donbass Committee** is a case in point and a good illustration of this diverse company.⁸⁰ The Committee was established in May 2014 under the leadership of a far-right activist, **André Chanclu**, and a communist, **Alain Benajam**, president of the Réseau-Voltaire France.^{81,82} The founders included the Collectif France-Russie, the **Valmy Committee**, former communist party member and activist Claude Beaulieu, publisher Alexandre Moumbaris, **Ginette Skandrani**, founder of The Voice of Libya (an “anti-Zionist” activist subscribing to Holocaust-denial theories), as well as a number of organizations of obscure origin, such as the “Rassemblement pour la Syrie” or the Anti-imperialist Committee.⁸³

Russia also gets the support of several marginal figures advancing conspiratorial narratives, such as **Jacques Cheminade**,⁸⁴ leader of the Solidarité & Progrès Party, and the sovereigntist **François Asselineau**, president of the Union Populaire Républicaine (UPR). Blogger **Olivier Berruyer** (les-crisis.fr), one of the founders of the Nouvelle Donne Party, regularly publishes pro-Kremlin texts.

80 On June 19, 2014, he organized a rally of around 100 people in front of the Ukrainian Embassy in Paris, on July 5 at the Place de la République, and on September 6 at Chatelet.

81 André Chanclu is a former member of far-right-wing movements like the “Groupe union défense” (GUD) and the “Groupe d’intervention nationaliste,” a secret neo-fascist movement organized in the 1970s at the initiative of the Ordre Nouveau. The Front National also emerged from the Ordre Nouveau. André Chanclu is also the leader of the Collectif France-Russie, a group established in the summer of 2008 immediately after the Russians/Georgian crisis, led jointly with Thierry Bouzard. Their objective is to counter “the vast disinformation campaign that followed the aggression of the Ossetian people.”

82 Alan Benajam, a close associate of Thierry Meyssan, is one of the leaders of the Réseau Voltaire. In 2005, the US State Department identified the website as a major source of anti-American information in the world.

83 Emerged from the “Committee for a Europe of sovereign peoples and nations” (established in 1992 related to and in defiance of the signing of the Maastricht Treaty). The Valmy Committee fights against German/American dominance and the creation of a Europe ruled by neoliberal globalization. The majority of its members are former communist activists, such as its president and senior organizer, Claude Beaulieu. However, in its ranks one also finds former Réseau Voltaire general secretary, Jean-Claude Ramos. In November 2011, Beaulieu participated in a trip to Syria, organized by Thierry Meyssan for “independent journalists” enjoying the hospitality of Syrian authorities. The group’s website samples information from a number of conspiratorial sites, such as the Réseau Voltaire, ReOpen911, Mondialisation.ca and Al-Manar. The Valmy Committee is one of the founders of the France-Donbass Committee. Since July 15, 2014, it has lowered its profile.

84 “*Jacques Cheminade est-il vraiment un candidat comme les autres?*” Rue89, March 17, 2012, accessed July 30, 2015. <http://rue89.nouvelobs.com/rue89-presidentielle/2012/03/17/jacques-cheminade-est-il-vraiment-un-candidat-comme-les-autres>

On his blog, he republished a piece by the historian, **Annie Lacroix-Riz**, member of the Pôle de Renaissance Communiste en France (PRCF), known for her controversial theory about an alleged “synarchist” conspiracy related to France’s 1940 defeat.⁸⁵ According to Lacroix-Riz, the American “liberation” of Europe amounted to nothing more than the extension of the American sphere of influence, a claim also supported by Natalia Narochnikskaya.⁸⁶ Another allegedly pro-Putin and pro-Russia conspiratorial site is **Le Grand Soir.info**, edited by **Victor Dedaj** and **Maxime Vivas**, both followers of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the presidential candidate of the Front de Gauche in the 2012 election.⁸⁷ The anti-Semitic and anti-American website **Égalité & Réconciliation** (E&R) also plays a central role in the dissemination of conspiracy theories. Based on the number of its visitors, it is one of the most popular sites in France (among the top 300),⁸⁸ and by far the most visited far-right political blog.⁸⁹ The site is particularly supportive of Putin, who is viewed as a symbol of resistance opposing the “American and Zionist Empire.”

Whether Russia invests money in these websites, associations, and other pro-Russian media remains unclear. According to Jean-Yves Camus, “it is only logical” that there is some kind of financial contribution to their activity; otherwise, he asks, what would the point of their existence be? Joël Gombin, however, believes that they are connected “only on an ideological level”. When asked to summarize his organization’s pro-Russian standpoint, John Laughland, a Director of Studies at the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation, emphasized that their goal is “a rapprochement of Russia to Europe,” served by the organization’s Russian and French affiliations. Their events have a Christian and conservative perspective and cover “all kinds of topics, not only Russia”, highlighted Laughland.

85 “*La Synarchie, ce complot permanent qui n’existait pas*”, Slate, October 30, 2012, accessed on July 30, 2015. <http://www.slate.fr/tribune/63537/synarchie-mythe-complot-permanent>

86 Cf. *Que reste-t-il de notre victoire? Russie-Occident, le malentendu, [What’s left of our victory? Russia and the West, the great misunderstanding]* Editions des Syrtes, 2008. Translated from Russian to French by Jacques Imbert, preface and postscript written by Francois-Xavier Coquin and Jacques Sapir, respectively.

87 “*Poutine, un coup de pied dans la russophobie occidentale*”, Le Grand Soir, October 3, 2011, accessed on July 30, 2015. <http://www.legrandsoir.info/poutine-un-coup-de-pied-dans-la-russophobie-occidentale.html>

88 www.alexa.com

89 Source: by E-Buzzing classification.