

Between Trump and Putin

The Right-Wing International, a Crisis of Democracy, and the Future of the European Union

“So. Washington is ours. Chişinău is ours. Sofia is ours. It remains but to drain the swamp in Russia itself.” Right-wing Russian ideologue Alexander Dugin posted this pronouncement as his Facebook status on November 13, 2016.¹ Each of the cities he named is the capital of a country—the U.S., Moldova, and Bulgaria, respectively—that had recently elected a leader espousing at least some views that are favorable to Moscow. And each had elections that took place amid concerns about Russian influence.

Knowing who Dugin is makes his post-U.S. electoral victory cheer more chilling. Dugin, who might be seen as a Russian counterpart to U.S. Alt Right leader Richard Spencer, made an early endorsement of then-candidate Trump in February, 2016 through Katehon, an illiberal “think tank” headed by Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, a man known for conceiving and financing conservative Christian initiatives.² Dugin is also on the U.S. individual sanctions list for his role in the Ukraine crisis—specifically for his leadership in the Eurasian Youth Union, which, as the Department of the Treasury reported, “actively recruited individuals with military and combat experience to fight on behalf of the self-proclaimed [Donetsk People’s Republic] and has stated that it has a covert presence in Ukraine.”³ Perhaps most notably, Dugin is also a chief proponent of neo-Eurasianism: an ideology encapsulating Russian “traditionalism” (including the rejection of feminism, “globalism,” and LGBTQ rights) and the belief that Russia has a Manifest Destiny of its own—a mystical calling not only to take dominion of Eurasian spaces from the Baltic to the Pacific, but also to revive the West’s Christian roots.

One of the more striking features of

the 2016 U.S. election was the convergence of the rhetoric and talking points of President Donald Trump and his supporters with those of the Kremlin. And in the tangled and ongoing investigation of Russian involvement with U.S. and European elections, these ideological connections and motivations have gone far less noticed.

While in Soviet times the Kremlin’s Marxist ideology attracted its share of Western sympathizers, post-Soviet Moscow has, if you will, dialectically emerged at the center of a “traditionalist international” around which many right-wing fellow travelers are rallying. There is an older history of American conservative attraction to Russian Christians and anti-Communists. Paleoconservative leader Pat Buchanan, a contemporary apologist for Russian President Vladimir Putin, noted as much in a post-Crimea paean to Putin, when he wrote that “The ex-Communist Whittaker Chambers who exposed Alger Hiss as a Soviet spy, was, at the time of his death in 1964, writing a book on ‘The Third Rome’—the conviction that, after the original Roman Empire, and ‘the Second Rome’ of Constantinople, Moscow inherited the mantle of Christian empire.”⁴

This fascination with Russian conservatives and Russia’s conservative potential was also shared by some of the direct ideological ancestors of today’s U.S. White nationalists, such as Francis Parker Yockey, a mid-century U.S. Far Right leader and avowed antisemite, who called for Western-Soviet cooperation in fighting Zionism. Since that time, post-Soviet Russia has become a right-wing state that has cultivated, through the efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church as well as right-wing intellectuals like Dugin, a loose right-wing international, as

I wrote in *The Public Eye* in 2016.⁵

Given this context, it’s unsurprising that the most toxic elements of the U.S. Right are drawn to Putinist Russia. In 2004, for example, White supremacist David Duke declared, “Russia has a greater sense of racial understanding among its population than does any other predominantly White nation.”⁶ Duke has since cultivated ties with Russia, among other things maintaining an apartment in Moscow that he has subleased to fellow White supremacist activist Preston Wiginton.⁷

Interest in Russia among the global Right has grown steadily in recent years, accelerating since the beginning of Putin’s third term in 2012. Since then, the Russian state has not only coordinated more closely with the Russian Orthodox Church, but has also come increasingly to portray itself, with a high degree of success, as the global standard bearer for “traditional values” conservatism.⁸ While Russia cultivates ties to Westerners on both the Far Left and the Far Right, Russia’s leading ideologues and soft power institutions—such as think-tanks, government-backed non-governmental organizations, and university centers—promote right-wing, neo-Eurasianist traditionalism. This ideology rejects modern liberalism as a “rootless,” culture-destroying globalism, and offers in its place a “multipolar” world order with strengthened national sovereignty, weakened supranational institutions (such as the European Union), and a rejection of universal human rights, with women’s rights, the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBTQ rights particularly threatened.

Russia’s embrace of this anti-feminist, anti-LGBTQ, anti-“globalist” “traditionalism” has coincided with a period in which the Russian state, concerned

about “color revolutions” and NATO expansion, has increasingly sought to weaken Western institutions. Putin’s agenda in this regard is not only to strengthen Russian power at the expense of the West, but also to undermine belief in the viability of liberal democracy itself. The means by which Russia pursues this agenda include cultivating ties with Western anti-democratic forces, inundating the West with propaganda, and employing other active measures, including hacking, in influence campaigns. What does Russia’s central role in rising global right-wing populism mean for the prospects of the EU, particularly in light of Brexit and Trump’s ascendancy to the U.S. presidency? The stakes are high this year. While the results of the Dutch and French elections have been encouraging for the future of the EU and NATO, an important German election is yet to come, and the threat of disinformation originating in both Russia under Putin and the United States under Trump remains serious.

EVALUATING DUGIN’S CLAIM: THE INTERNATIONAL APPEAL OF RUSSIAN ILLIBERALISM

Russian interference and influence in Europe, including the promotion of far-right “traditionalism,” should be of concern to defenders of human rights in light of the West’s current crisis of democracy.⁹ The future of the EU, after Brexit, is very uncertain. Should the EU be abandoned by another major player, the kind of illiberal, authoritarian, right-wing populism represented by Russia would continue to spread, to the detriment of democracy and human rights.¹⁰ That’s already happening in places such as Hungary, where Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, of the right-wing populist Fidesz Party, openly admires Putin and has recently moved to shut down Central European University. Indeed, European elites themselves have begun to express a need to protect their countries and values not only from Russia, but potentially also from the United States, in which a Russian influence campaign helped elect an illiberal president about whom Alexander Dugin and other Russian elites have often been enthusiastic.¹¹ In this regard, it is

salient that the U.S. right-wing *Breitbart News Network* is seeking to expand into European markets, bringing the same narratives of xenophobia and religious traditionalism that helped mobilize Trump’s supporters. While *Breitbart* has not yet opened new offices in Germany or France, these plans seem not to have been tabled.¹²

To be sure, the enthusiasm of the Russian political establishment for the Trump administration has faded as 2017 proceeds. In addition to disagreeing with Russia over Syria, the Trump administration has ham-handedly tried to distance itself from Russia after National Security Advisor Michael Flynn was forced to resign in February for failing to disclose that he discussed a possible lifting of Russian sanctions with Russian Ambassador to the U.S. Sergey Kislyak during the transition period. Russian politicians also became more cautious, even as they and Russian media rallied to the defense of Flynn. (In 2015 Flynn spoke at the 10th anniversary gala of the Russian propaganda network RT in Moscow, where he sat at Putin’s table. At a hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism on May 8, fired former Acting Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates confirmed that the Department of Justice believed Flynn to be compromised.)

But the shared illiberal agenda of Trump and Putin remains a threat to Europe. This April at a G7 meeting, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson—who in 2013 received the Russian Order of Friendship from Putin—unnerved many in Europe when he asked, “Why should U.S. taxpayers care about Ukraine?” Such a statement aids Putin’s goal of undermining democracy, even if Tillerson has also proven willing to give at least lip service to criticizing Russian aggression.¹³

And even apart from an immediate normalization of U.S.-Russian relations on Russian terms—something it seems the Trump team at least initially desired, and which would be geopolitically destabilizing as it would weaken NATO—the Trump administration is far more amenable to Dugin’s ideological goals than a Clinton administration

would have been. With this in mind, Dugin’s declarations—that Washington, Chişinău, and Sofia are Russia’s—seem like more than mere braggadocio, even if they are inflated. Will Dugin be declaring “Berlin is ours” this fall?

Dugin is not a latter-day Rasputin, the peasant healer who was widely believed to hold undue influence over the last Romanov royal family. But, despite some assertions to the contrary from those seeking to downplay Dugin’s significance, he is also far from a fringe figure. Nina Kouprianova—the estranged wife of Alt Right leader Richard Spencer who writes pro-Putin and anti-Ukrainian commentary under the name Nina Byzantina—has translated some of Dugin’s far-right political theory into English, bolstering Dugin’s influence among American White supremacists. While Kouprianova has downplayed the relationship between Dugin and Putin,¹⁴ the latter’s foreign policy is clearly informed by Dugin’s worldview in ways that are relevant to Russian influence in European and U.S. politics, as Eurasia expert Casey Michel explains:

If Dugin’s name is at all familiar, it’s likely due to his neo-fascist screeds, posited as geopolitical analysis, that have begun swirling international trends. As Spencer is to the alt-right, so, too, is Dugin to the modern incarnation of “Eurasianism,” a geopolitical theory positing Russia as the inheritor of “Eternal Rome” and one of the primary ideological bulwarks pushing the Kremlin to carve eastern Ukraine into the fanciful entity of “Novorossiya.” While much of Dugin’s influence on the Kremlin has been over-hyped, Dugin’s *Foundations of Geopolitics* remains assigned to every member of Russia’s General Staff Academy [the premier Russian institution for continuing training of high-ranking military officers]. And despite Kouprianova’s claims that “there is no evidence of communication between” Dugin and Putin, Charles Clover, in his masterful history of Eurasianism, noted that Putin and Dugin met a few months after the former ascended to the presidency. “Soon,” wrote Clover, “there were sponsors, contacts, and open doors” for Dugin.¹⁵

Dugin was also reportedly a part of the entourage that accompanied Putin on his visit to the Orthodox Christian holy site Mt. Athos in Greece in May 2016.¹⁶ But however personally close to Putin Dugin may be, what should concern us most here is the spread of a “traditionalist” ideology that, following in the footsteps of early 20th Century fascism, rejects liberal democracy and individual moral autonomy. Contemporary Eurasianism, like interwar Eurasianism and other Russian schools of thought related to the 19th Century ideologies of Slavophilism and Pan-Slavism, posits a special destiny for Russia in uniting the peoples of the large Eurasian landmass that runs roughly from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean, in addition to a messianic role in the revival of Western civilization’s Christian roots.¹⁷

In Putin’s third term in particular, Russia has positioned itself at the center of the right-wing international that propounds a “traditionalist” ideological tendency, and Dugin has emerged as one of the broader movement’s leading ideologues. As recent reports from NATO and Political Capital (a Hungarian think tank whose website describes it as “committed to the basic values of parliamentary democracy, human rights and a market economy”) have documented, Eurasianist ideology not only informs Russian foreign policy (such as Russia’s use of hybrid warfare, a military strategy that entails cyber and covert operations, including Russia’s use of troops without insignia in its invasion of Crimea and its officially-denied direct support for and presence in the rebel campaigns against the Ukrainian state), but also holds some attraction for Europeans disillusioned with austerity, immigration, and secularism.¹⁸

In light of the above, what are we to make of Dugin’s claim that Russia has won Washington, Chişinău, and Sofia? It is certainly overstated with respect to the latter. Bulgarian President Rumen Radev has called for the easing of EU sanctions against Russia, but also recently stated that he supports retaining Bulgaria’s membership in the EU and NATO, both of which Russia seeks to weaken.¹⁹ Sabra Ayres, a fellow with the International Women’s Media Foun-

dation who researches Russian soft power tactics in Bulgaria and other parts of Europe, said that her research has not turned up any evidence of a significant Russian effort to see Radev elected.²⁰

Pro-Russian Moldovan President Igor Dodon goes much further than Radev, however. Dodon openly declares that he aspires to be “a dictatorial leader, the same as Putin,” and claims to have received the blessing of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia. Dodon achieved a narrow electoral victory (initially contested with claims of voting irregularities) over Western leaning rival Maia Sandu. He’d campaigned on a platform of moving to scrap Moldova’s EU association agreement—over which Moscow actually sanctioned Moldova in July 2014, banning the import of Moldovan wine, fruit, and vegetables—and integrating Moldova into the Moscow-centered Eurasian Economic Union. Dodon’s campaign was rife with anti-immigrant and homophobic rhetoric and marked by widespread disinformation, much like Donald Trump’s.²¹

With respect to President Trump, the U.S. intelligence community released a report in January expressing high confidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign targeting the 2016 U.S. election that was intended to undermine U.S. confidence in the democratic process and to damage Hillary Clinton’s prospects. The CIA and FBI also have high confidence that in its effort, which involved hacking both Republican and Democratic targets but releasing damaging information only about Democrats, Russia “aspired to help President-elect Trump’s election chances.” Statements made at recent Senate hearings have confirmed these findings, and on May 8, before the Senate Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper actually stated that the Russians behind the influence campaign targeting the 2016 U.S. election “must be congratulating themselves for having exceeded their wildest expectations.”²² In addition, the U.S. intelligence community reported in January that the same techniques that were used in this campaign—a blend of “covert intelli-

gence operations—such as cyber activity—with overt efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or ‘trolls’—are likely to be applied “to future influence efforts worldwide, including against US allies and their election processes.”²³

In light of what is now known about the Russian role in the U.S. election, it is very plausible that Russia’s influence campaign played a key role in Trump’s Electoral College victory. The same type of Russian campaign appears to have swung Georgia’s 2012 presidential election, and there is no reason the same strategy cannot continue to effectively undermine other countries’ democratic processes unless vigilance is exercised and countermeasures are taken.²⁴

Russian leaders perceive such actions as defensive. They push conspiracist ideas about opposition to corruption and undemocratic policies in former Soviet republics such as Ukraine and Georgia being funded by liberal U.S. philanthropist George Soros, who has of late become a bugbear of Trump supporters and the U.S. Right as well. The Russian regime also rejects homegrown East European and post-Soviet efforts to protect universal human rights and work toward functional democracy as Western imports. While Russia’s reactions to perceived Western aggression have been disproportionate and unjustifiable, the West might have helped to stave off the current state of affairs if its leaders had taken Russia’s concerns about NATO expansion into consideration earlier.

RUSSIAN SOFT POWER AND INFORMATION WARFARE IN WESTERN EUROPE

Hacking is one of the most powerful tactics the Kremlin uses to influence other countries’ electoral processes, as the U.S. has been too slow to recognize. Germany and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have been recent targets of Russian hacking according to Germany’s intelligence services, and Germany has likewise expressed concerns about disinformation and possible hacking ahead of its parliamentary election slated for fall 2017.²⁵

Hacking, however, is by no means the only tactic Russia uses to gain influence

and sow disinformation in the West. In order to assess the outcomes of recent European elections and the prospects for upcoming European elections, we need to be aware of other methods of influence Russia employs. These include:

- infiltration by spies;
- hiring Western PR firms (in the past including Kissinger Associates and Ketchum) to help manipulate Western media and improve the Kremlin's reputation among Westerners;²⁶
- supporting Eurasianist and pro-Kremlin think tanks, such as the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute in Berlin (which is funded through a foundation headed by the Russian oligarchs Natalia Yakunina, the chairperson, and Vladimir Yakunin, the vice-chairman);²⁷
- establishing cultural centers at universities through the Russkiy Mir foundation, which promotes not only benign cultural exchange but also Eurasianist ideology and the Kremlin line on Ukraine;
- financing Far Right Western politicians and parties, such as Marine Le Pen's National Front in France;²⁸
- promoting social conservatism and pro-Moscow views through representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church; and
- taking advantage of the West's relative openness to flood the media with disinformation through "troll armies" and propaganda outlets such as RT, which had a \$380 million budget in 2011.²⁹

Russia has also played a role in facilitating relationships between right-wing European parties, for example with respect to the European Alliance for Freedom, a coalition that seeks to undermine the EU and liberal norms in the European Parliament.³⁰

Through all of these methods, Russia looks to capitalize on pre-existing weaknesses. Russia did not create discontent with the neoliberal European establishment, explains Italian legal expert Pasquale Annicchino, a research fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and senior research associate at the Cambridge Institute on Religion & International Studies; Euro-

skepticism is homegrown. One might add that the situation is exacerbated by a refugee crisis due overwhelmingly to failed U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Nevertheless, Annicchino stresses, Russia has proven capable of capitalizing effectively on the rising right-wing populist mood and exercises influence among politically extreme European groups.³¹

Annicchino has also done some of the most interesting research on how the Russian Orthodox Church has helped promote hardline conservatism in Europe by making common cause with traditionalists of other Christian confessions. Marcel Van Herpen, director of the Cicero Foundation and author of *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*, has shown that the Russian Foreign Ministry and Orthodox Church often coordinate with the goal of promoting a "traditional values" agenda and attacking universal human rights at the UN and in other international settings.³²

One case Annicchino has studied, the *Lautsi* controversy at the European Court of Human Rights, particularly illuminated this dynamic, when in 2011 the supranational court overturned a prior ruling that the compulsory display of crucifixes in Italian schools was a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. The legal expertise that secured the 2011 ruling—greeted by conservatives as a triumph over secularism—was largely derived from American evangelicals and delivered through *amicus curiae* briefs filed by the European Center on Law and Justice—an organization co-founded by U.S. Christian Right advocate Jay Alan Sekulow to serve as a sister organization to his American Center on Law and Justice.³³ Meanwhile, Annicchino writes, "the Russian Orthodox Church was at the forefront of the diplomatic battle," with major representatives, including Patriarch Kirill, writing to the Vatican and to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in support of the original Italian law requiring the display of crucifixes in public schools. In this manner, the Moscow Patriarchate courted favor with conservative European Christians.

To Annicchino, the entire case is em-

blematic of what is sometimes referred to as the "new ecumenism": the cooperation of distinct churches in pursuit of common goals.³⁴ Another example may be found in the close ties between the Russian Orthodox Church with traditionalist European Catholics cultivated in particular by the ROC's Chair of the Department of External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), who regularly meets with Catholic cardinals in Europe and has a particularly intimate relationship with the Institute for Ecumenical Studies at Switzerland's University of Fribourg, where he oversees exchange programs.³⁵

Meanwhile, Italy's Far Right Northern League has made no secret of looking to Russia not only as an economic partner, but also as a model for "the protection of the family."³⁶ It has created a cultural exchange program, the Lombardy-Russia Cultural Association, which receives funding from the Voice of Russia (since 2014 integrated into the publishing empire Sputnik, an increasingly important Russian propaganda outlet). The honorary president of the association is Alexey Komov, a right-wing advocate with substantial ties to both U.S. and Russian conservative coalitions, as the World Congress of Families' regional representative for Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States; the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society's representative to the United Nations; and a member of the Russian Orthodox Church's Patriarchal Commission on the Family and the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood.³⁷

The new ecumenism Annicchino describes also exemplifies what is sometimes called "bad ecumenism": that is, interfaith activity designed to achieve domination and undermine pluralism rather than promote the common good. Such bad ecumenism has played no small part in ushering in the rise of right-wing fellow travelers around Moscow.³⁸ The alliance of the Russian Orthodox Church with European and American Christian conservatives is just one example of the means by which Russia cultivates the Western Far Right, but it is an important one.³⁹

RUSSIA, RIGHT-WING POPULISM, AND THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN 2017

In engaging in the kinds of activities described above, the Russian Orthodox Church pursues not only its own ends, but helps to advance Russian influence in the West. With this context in mind, we can step back to consider what Russian influence may mean in the current European political landscape.

During the lead-up to the Dutch election on March 15, the prospects for Geert Wilders' Far Right Party for Freedom (PVV) concerned many. While Prime Minister Mark Rutte's Center Right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) won with 21.3 percent of the vote, the Labor Party (PvdA) suffered considerable losses, and the PVV came in second with 13.1 percent. While the Far Right populist bullet was dodged in the Netherlands, negotiations toward a governing coalition are ongoing, and the surge for Wilders' PVV is concerning.

But what of a Russian role? According to Van Herpen, with respect to the Dutch general election, there was no real need for Moscow to do more than continue to produce propaganda and disinformation.⁴⁰ Wilders cannot be openly pro-Russian due to anti-Russian sentiment in the Netherlands related to the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 by Russia-backed separatists in Donbas using the Russian Buk missile system, and the Kremlin also knows that it must not appear to be too cozy with Wilders if it wants to see his party succeed.⁴¹ As a Euroskeptic party, however, PVV's relative success is a threat to the EU. The Dutch vote against approval of the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement in April 2016 is also relevant context.

Meanwhile, the French election represented a high stakes test for the viability of the European Union and the post-war order. When I interviewed Van Herpen in January, the race was expected to come down to a contest between Marine Le Pen and François Fillon of the center-right Republicans. Moscow's affinity for Le Pen, leader of the far Right National Front, has been evident for some time, but Van Herpen noted that Russia could "wait and see" with respect to the French

general election, since both Le Pen and Fillon have pro-Russian views.⁴²

Of course, the contours of the French election changed in ways that confounded early forecasts. While Fillon's prospects receded, center-right En Marche! party candidate Emmanuel Macron surged in the polls, overcame an initial Russian propaganda campaign, and faced Le Pen in the May 7 runoff, coming away with a resounding victory (just over 66 percent of the vote), although unusually low turnout for France (74 percent) indicated widespread dissatisfaction with both candidates.

Well before the first round of the election on April 23, French officials began preparing for a Russian influence blitz on behalf of Le Pen.⁴³ Their foresight proved wise, as France was subjected to a fake news onslaught in which Russian propaganda outlets played a key role. After Macron's initial surge, Sputnik published a claim that Macron is a closeted gay man with "a very rich gay lobby" behind him, and his campaign has also been targeted by hackers suspected of being part of a Russian influence campaign.⁴⁴ Yet this failed to keep Macron out of the runoff, and an eleventh-hour assault of leaked documents and disinformation also failed to prevent Macron from winning in a landslide as projected by the polls.

A notable lesson from the election is that France seems comparatively well inoculated against the toxic effects of fake news, both institutionally and culturally. For example, France enforces a blackout on election coverage in the 44-hour period leading up to a presidential election, which in this case limited the impact of the last-minute document dump meant to harm Macron's candidacy. The French-language edition of *Sputnik* covered the leaks, but the French public collectively shrugged. Culturally, as Johan Hufnagel, managing editor of the left-wing newspaper *Libération*, recently stated, "We don't have a Fox News in France," adding that French voters "were mentally prepared after Trump and Brexit and the Russians."⁴⁵

Of course, Le Pen's nearly 34 percent of the French vote, an unprecedented result for the National Front, is nothing to sneeze at, and defenders of human rights must take it as a reminder

that the forces of nationalism and right-wing populism are still powerful. At the same time, in an attempt to make herself more appealing during the campaign for the runoff, Le Pen announced that she would temporarily step aside as leader of the National Front in order, ostensibly, to bring together the entire French people. She has since announced that she will "recreate her National Front into a broader 'patriotic' party that would seek power in parliamentary elections next month."⁴⁶ Perhaps this is why, despite Le Pen's espoused desire to withdraw France from the EU and her post-election claim to represent "patriots" over "globalisation supporters," U.S. White nationalist Richard Spencer took to Twitter to whine that whatever emerges from the National Front will be most likely "become a cucky, GOP-like party."⁴⁷ Spencer also tweeted that "we've seen the limits of the typical Euro-Right nationalist parties," suggesting "a global political party for White people" as one alternative going forward.⁴⁸

As encouraging as the French results are, there is still cause for concern. Just as defenders of Western institutions and norms may learn from what happened in France, so may purveyors of disinformation, including the Russian government. Russia will surely pull out all the stops to influence the German federal election scheduled for September 24, 2017. As Van Herpen argues, "Because Merkel is the last powerful defender of the EU and of sanctions against Russia, the Kremlin will do its utmost best to remove her by influencing the election process by disinformation and, eventually, hacking."⁴⁹ Van Herpen's book also notes the considerable affinity for Russia across the German political spectrum, including in Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) as well as among right-wing nationalist forces, such as Alternative for Germany (AfD).⁵⁰ Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder has a warm personal relationship with Putin, and Russian soft power has a significant presence in Germany, including through the Kremlin-backed think tank Dialogue of Civilizations in Berlin, one of the founders of which was Russian oligarch Vladimir Yakunin. Should the German political landscape shift enough to remove Chancellor Angela Merkel's

Christian Democratic Union (CDU) from the next governing coalition, this will likely result in a Germany more willing to support Russian interests at the expense of robust support for democratic norms and supranational institutions. In a very real sense, then, Angela Merkel may be said to be the current leader of the free world—the United States under Trump has certainly abdicated the right to make any such claim for the American president—and Merkel's removal from office would, at best, lead to increased destabilization and uncertainty for the EU's future.

THE TRUMP FACTOR: WHY THE 2016 U.S. ELECTION BODES ILL FOR EUROPE

At this point we may be disposed to ask the best known of the Russian “accursed questions”: what is to be done?⁵¹ Coming on the heels of the UK's Brexit vote, Trump's dubious, undemocratic, and quasi-covertly Russia-backed election to the U.S. presidency has certainly changed the picture relative to the European political landscape.⁵² America's European allies have reason to be uncertain about the new administration's willingness to honor Article 5 of NATO's charter, which provides for collective defense, with an attack against one ally considered an attack against all. In the aftermath of the U.S. election, Britain was reportedly so concerned about the possibility that Moscow holds compromising material on Trump that it “sought reassurance from the CIA that the identity of British agents in Russia will be protected when intelligence is shared.”⁵³ Israel's intelligence services reportedly expressed similar concerns that information shared with the United States might be passed to Moscow.⁵⁴ The departure of Flynn from the Trump administration and the open disagreement between the United States and Russia over Syria may have gone some way to assuage these concerns, but it is clear that serious questions remain about Russian influence on Trump himself.

Not too long ago, human rights advocates held out hope that the United States might be able to aid our European allies in pushing back against disinformation and influence campaigns from the Kremlin. On December 23, 2016, Congress passed the National Defense

Authorization Act, which provided for the creation of a Global Engagement Center “to lead, synchronize, and coordinate efforts of the Federal Government to recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining United States national security interests.”⁵⁵ Under Trump, we cannot expect much good to come from any efforts that might begin under the aegis of this Center; even if in light of recent developments Trump has become more cautious about his repeatedly stated goal of improving relations with Russia, he is unlikely to go out of his way to counter Russian propaganda. In addition, on May 9, 2017, Trump sent shockwaves through the U.S. by firing FBI Director James Comey in what appears to be an attempt to shut down the FBI's investigation into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia and possible criminal activities (although the nominal reason provided by the Trump administration has to do with Comey's handling of the Hillary Clinton email case).

Melissa Hooper, Director of Human Rights and Civil Society at the Washington- and New York-based nonprofit Human Rights First, had been among those hoping for a robust U.S. response to Russian influence after the 2016 election. Hooper previously worked with NGOs through the ABA Rule of Law Initiative as director for Russia and Azerbaijan. While based in Russia, Hooper became increasingly dismayed at the negative impact of the illiberal legislative efforts of Putin's third term, including the 2012 “foreign agents” law that requires independent groups that engage in any “political activity” to register as “foreign agents” if they receive any funding from sources outside Russia.⁵⁶ Having noticed Russia's influence on the spread of illiberalism in Europe—for example, in Hungary under Orbán—Hooper came to Human Rights First with concerns about the possibility of counteracting this trend.⁵⁷

With funding from the Jackson Foundation, she organized a series of informal policy discussions throughout 2016—at Columbia University, Stanford University, and Human Rights First's Washington, D.C., location—with experts from fields including advocacy, journalism,

scholarly research, and technology, to consider approaches to countering Russian disinformation, influence, and support for far-right extremism in Europe. I participated in the last of these discussions, in December 2016, and the mood in the wake of Trump's dubious win was far from cheery. Although proposed solutions involve both private and public actors and institutions, we participants were all clearly aware that the results of the U.S. election would make the task much more difficult. Nevertheless, there are steps that can be taken. As Hooper later explained to me:

We hope to act as a convener of civil society, so that with a unified voice we can help technology companies identify where they are contributing to threats rather than reducing them—in the areas of disinformation and publication of false stories, personal safety of rights workers, and the proliferation of hate speech targeting minority groups. And we hope we can then partner with companies to make sure their responses and proposed solutions are comprehensive, accessible, and effective.⁵⁸

For his part, Van Herpen supports debunking Russian disinformation and creating counter-narratives that can prove attractive. He points to the website StopFake.org, which was founded at Kyiv's Mohyla University and which is devoted to debunking Russian disinformation relative to the hybrid war in Ukraine. Van Herpen also believes that Western governments should impose stricter standards on Russian media produced for Western consumption and that Western states should invest in Russian-language media. With *Breitbart* planning to expand to Germany and France, Europe may soon be facing an onslaught of disinformation not only from Russia, but also from the United States.⁵⁹

“DRAINING THE SWAMP” OF WESTERN LIBERALISM: A RUSSIAN-AMERICAN ENTERPRISE?

In light of Trump's election and the potential expansion of *Breitbart* into European markets, Europe now faces a dual Russian-American onslaught of right-wing populist disinformation and fake news, sure to be backed up in cyberspace

by Russian and American trolls and bots. The U.S. election results confirm that the power of media manipulation and post-truth politics to erode liberal democratic norms must not be underestimated. And it is significant that far-right Russian and American ideologues have already been collaborating in media manipulation for some time.

The neo-Eurasianist ideologue quoted at the beginning of this article, Alexander Dugin, has become a beloved comrade of America's neonazis, White nationalists, and Christian nationalists. Dugin has, for example, given a lecture at Texas A&M University at the invitation of Preston Wiginton (delivered via Skype because sanctions prevented him from traveling to the U.S.).⁶⁰ Less well known, however, is that as a regular presence on the Russian outlet Tsargrad TV, Dugin has interviewed American conspiracist purveyor of fake news Alex Jones, of Infowars infamy. Tsargrad TV was founded by "God's oligarch" Konstantin Malofeev, and it employs former FOX News producer Jack Hanick, who, along with his family, recently converted to Russian Orthodoxy.⁶¹

In a segment from the program "Our Point of View" (*Nasha tochka zreniia*) uploaded to YouTube by the official Tsargrad TV account on December 20, 2016, Dugin tells Jones "there is a political elite that is organizing a color revolution against us." Referring to this elite as "the global dictatorship," Dugin adds "Clinton, Soros, the Obama Administration—that which is called the Deep State, will also organize a color revolution against Trump, not wanting to recognize the democratic victory of the American people." He added, "We need to think about how all of us together—Americans, Russians, Europeans—what we can do to oppose this elite."⁶² Jones agreed with Dugin's call to oppose "globalism," asserting it is a matter of "survival."⁶³

With this context in mind, we can return to Dugin's words quoted at the beginning of this article: "It remains but to drain the swamp in Russia itself." There's no need to guess Dugin's meaning, since he's told us himself—and in English, no less—on the site of Katehon, a Eurasianist "think tank" whose

supervisory board's president is none other than Konstantin Malofeev.⁶⁴ For Dugin, "draining the swamp" has much more to do with a desire to wage extremist culture wars than it does with rooting out political corruption (something that U.S. columnist Amanda Marcotte argues was also the implicit promise to Trump supporters all along).⁶⁵

On November 14, 2016, Katehon published Dugin's essay, "Donald Trump: The Swamp and the Fire," along with an illustration featuring European political leaders, including Angela Merkel and François Hollande, caricatured as swamp creatures. Dugin's essay opens with this pronouncement:

"The Swamp" is to become the new name for the globalist sect, the open society adepts, LGBT maniacs, Soros' army, the post-humanists, and so on. Draining the Swamp is not only categorically imperative for America. It is a global challenge for all of us. Today, every people is under the rule of its own Swamp. We, all together, should start the fight against the Russian Swamp, the French Swamp, the German Swamp, and so on. We need to purge our societies of the Swamp's influence.

Dugin goes on to claim that "anti-Americanism is over" thanks to the election of Trump, and to call for "a Nuremberg trial for liberalism, the last totalitarian political ideology of Modernity." Once representing the "apocalyptic monsters" of capitalism and Communism, Russia and America, in Dugin's view, now represent "two eschatological promises"—that is, in Dugin's understanding of "traditionalism," an illiberal Russia and America working to destroy liberalism would bring the world into better alignment with God's ostensible plans for humanity.⁶⁶

Like Dugin, Trump's chief strategist, Steve Bannon, is given to violent rhetoric. In a 2014 speech he gave via Skype for a conference held at the Vatican, Bannon bizarrely and inaccurately described World War II as a war of "the Judeo-Christian West versus atheists," which led to the relatively benign Pax Americana. Bannon added that, since the end of the Cold War, both sides face "a crisis both [sic] of our church, a crisis

of our faith, a crisis of the West, a crisis of capitalism." He predicted that "we're at the very beginning stages of a very brutal and bloody conflict" in which the "church militant" will have to play a role, lest modern "barbarity" "eradicate everything that we've been bequeathed over the last 2,000, 2,500 years."⁶⁷

Dugin and Bannon would undoubtedly disagree on certain matters regarding capitalism and Islam. Because Russia is home to large Muslim populations of different ethnic backgrounds, and the Russian state mobilizes Muslim leadership to pursue its traditional values agenda domestically—just as it does leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church and other faiths—Russia cannot overtly support wholesale Islamophobia, despite frequent ethnic Russian opposition to the construction of new mosques. Nevertheless, both Dugin and Bannon call for a violent international fight against secularism and liberalism. It also is not clear precisely how and in what manner President Trump may change U.S.-Russian relations, as he has received some pushback on his foreign policy agenda, and has upset the Russian political establishment with his actions in Syria. It is clear, however, that many Russian and American conservative leaders and ideologues continue to see potential for Russian-American global collaboration in the right-wing international in pursuit of Far Right ends. Let us hope that European governments and international institutions—and, more broadly, democratic norms and universal human rights—will ultimately prevail against the onslaught. ☹

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