Péter Krekó- Lóránt Győri (Political Capital Institute)

Comrades for peace, equality and neutrality: pro-Russian far-left parties in Europe

While populist radical right parties in Europe and their connections to Russia are frequently discussed, much less attention is dedicated to the radical left side of the spectrum. This study tries to fill this gap by providing an overview of the political successes of radical left parties in Europe and their relations with Vladimir Putin's Russia.

The radical left in Europe: silently successful

"Serious researchers clearly see the impact of reforms in the Soviet Union on the formation of the so-called welfare state in Western Europe in the post-WWII period. European governments decided to introduce unprecedented measures of social protection under the influence of the example of the Soviet Union in an effort to cut the ground from under the feet of the left-wing political forces.". This paragraph from the recent article by Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov[1] clearly shows that the Kremlin not only wants to send messages to radical right forces in Europe, but aims to re-interpret history in a way that fits to the taste of the radical right as well.

The 2008 financial crisis and the austerity measures which dominated economic policies in its aftermath helped the resurgence of radical left forces (see table 1 below) on the continent to a similar extent to that of far-right parties, albeit for different reasons (the latter mainly managed to do so by exploiting xenophobic tendencies). The growth in support for radical left parties across Europe has been significant, as the membership of the European Parliament makes clear: whereas the radical left GUE-NGL group included only 4,6% of MEPs in 2009, in 2014 this ratio rose to 6,9% (see table 1). If we look at the results of national elections, we can observe the same results: far-left parties were able to increase their share of votes to 150% of their pre-crisis levels.[2]

Although meteoric rises such as those of Syriza (Greece) and Podemos (Spain), both of which gained popularity by exploiting austerity fatigue, are rare, the far left is definitely an important player on the European scene. Syriza is the main governmental force in Greece; its leader, Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, used to be the leader of the GUE-NGL group and its top candidate for European jobs. Die Linke is strong in Eastern Germany, and present in regional governments as well. Furthermore, in 2014, they were able to delegate their first regional Prime Minister as a consequence of a shockingly good result (28%) in the Thuringian elections. The communist party AKEL in Cyprus is a mainstream party that gained more than 30% of the vote in the last parliamentary elections; it used to be a governmental force as well. Sinn Fein is currently the third most popular party in Ireland and has been an important player on the political scene for decades.

[1] http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391
[2] http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2015/03/24/beyond-syriza-and-podemos-other-radical-left-parties-are-threatening-to-break-into-the-mainstream-of-european-politics/

Furthermore, the radical left in Europe is traditionally much more willing and able to cooperate across national borders on the basis of ideological similarities than is the far right. As a consequence, the radical left managed to maintain a parliamentary group (GUE/NGL) in the EP throughout the 2009-14 legislature, and also managed to establish a solid bloc in 2014, with MEPs drawn from 19 parties across 14 countries. By contrast, the far right's first attempt at founding a bloc in the EP, in 2007, lasted less than a year before collapsing in a welter of nationalist confrontation.[3]

The current far left in Europe is the product of two decades of careful evolution. After the collapse of the USSR, the mainstream of the European radical left, with some notable exceptions (such as the Czech, the Greek and the Cypriot Communists) made a strategic turn to the "new left". This meant abandoning the dogma of Marxism-Leninism (sometimes Stalinism), and adopting an ecological worldview and a neo-populist ideology that was able to mobilize the masses, building up a "grassroots" image. This strategy contributed to increasing electoral success, making the radical left a more attractive partner for players aiming to influence European politics.

Table 1. The performance of the most relevant radical left parties on the EP elections (2009/2014)[4]

Country	Party	2009 EP election results (No. of mandates)	2014 EP election results (No. of mandates)	Faction 2009/2014
Cyprus	AKEL	34.9% (2)	26.90% (2)	GUE/NGL
Czech Rep.	KSČM	14.18% (4)	10.98% (3)	GUE/NGL
Denmark	FmEU	7% (1)	8% (1)	GUE/NGL
United Kingdom	SF	0.65% (1)	0.66% (1)	GUE/NGL
Finland	Vas.	5.9% (0)	9.30% (1)	GUE/NGL
France	FDG	6% (4)	6.34% (3)	GUE/NGL
	UOM		0% (1)	GUE/NGL
Greece	KKE	8.35% (2)	6.07% (2)	GUE/NGL/NI
	SYRIZA	4.7% (1)	26.60% (6)	GUE/NGL
Holland	SP	7.1% (2)	9.60% (2)	GUE/NGL
	PvdD	3.46% (0)	4.21% (1)	GUE/NGL
Croatia	HL-SR	-	3.46% (0)	
Ireland	SP	2.76 (1)	1.8% (0)	GUE/NGL
	SF	11.24 (0)	19.50% (3)	GUE/NGL
	Independent		(1)	GUE/NGL
Luxemburg	Déi Lénk	3.41% (0)	5.76% (0)	
Latvia	SC (Saskaņa SDP)	19.57% (4/1)	13.04% (1)	GUE/NGL/ S&D

[3] http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7086986.stm
[4] http://www.electionresources.org/eu/index_en.html

Germany	Die Linke	7.5% (8)	7.40% (7)	GUE/NGL
	Tierschutzpartei	1.1% (0)	1.20% (1)	GUE/NGL
Italy	LAE	-	4.03% (3)	GUE/NGL
Portugal	B.E.	10.72% (3)	4.56% (1)	GUE/NGL
	PCP	10.64% (2)	12.67% (3)	GUE/NGL
Spain	IU/PCE (IP)	3.73% (4/1)	9.99% (6/5)	GUE/NGL
	Podemos		7.97% (5)	GUE/NGL
	Coalition Los		2.07% (1)	GUE/NGL
Sweden	V	5.66% (1)	6.30% (1)	GUE/NGL
% of mandates	GUE-NGL	4,6	6,9	
No. of mandates	GUE-NGL	35	52	35/52

Old and new comrade networks

The 1990s were marked by a weakening of the ties between Moscow and its former "comrades", but that trend began to be reversed in the 2000s as the Putin regime looked to re-establish some of the pre-existing connections with the “new”, politically emerging and competitive socialist left in Europe and beyond.

The utility of these networks to the Kremlin grew in tandem with the diminishing threat to Putin's rule posed by the domestic Communist opposition. Rather than being a potential irritant, in the early 2000s the global communist and former-communist network became a strategic asset. These comrades can be found almost everywhere in the world and their importance increases in times of crises. Russian influence via communist parties extends to Ukraine[5] and other former member states of the USSR and deep into the Middle East through the Arab socialist-communist parties in Iraq, Syria, and Iran.[6]

However, the new engagement was driven by pragmatism rather than ideology, and was paralleled by an enthusiastic push for far-right partners. Weiss and Pomerantzev neatly summarize this strategy: *“Unlike in the Cold War, when Soviets largely supported leftist groups, a fluid approach to ideology now allows the Kremlin to simultaneously back far-left and far-right movements, greens, anti-globalists and financial elites. The aim is to exacerbate divides and create an echo chamber of Kremlin support[7].*

Generally, Russian influence in European politics has been manifested in waves, connected to Russia's geopolitical conflicts. As the Political Capital Institute has described,[8] the pro-Russian attitude of European far-right parties became particularly manifest and visible after the Georgian and Ukrainian conflicts.[9] This appears to be the result of a coincidence of needs: 1) in times of diplomatic

[5] http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=24017&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=216&no_cache=1#.VuBAjJwrKM8

[6] http://www.solidnet.org/iran-tudeh-party-of-iran, http://www.solidnet.org/iraq-communist-party-of-kurdistan-iraq, http://www.solidnet.org/iraq-iraqi-communist-party, http://www.solidnet.org/syriasyrian-communist-party, http://www.solidnet.org/syria-syrian-communist-party-unified,

[7] http://www.interpretermag.com/the-menace-of-unreality-how-the-kremlin-weaponizes-information-culture-and-money/

[8] http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf

[9] http://imrussia.org/en/analysis/world/2368-europes-new-pro-putin-coalition-the-parties-of-no

isolation, Russian actors feel a stronger need to find allies and strengthen ties with players outside of the mainstream, 2) the geopolitical crises allow fringe European parties to articulate their alternative foreign policy agenda – with a strong Western-critical, pro-Russian narrative in the middle. Such crises give populist players a good opportunity to challenge the foreign policy of the mainstream.[10]

The annexation of Crimea also proved to be a turning point for radical left parties, leading to a striking display by some far-left groups of their allegiance to the Kremlin. Thus, the German Die Linke, the Polish Democratic Left Alliance, and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) all delegated "independent observers" to the (internationally unrecognised) referendum on Crimean independence, alongside their notional political opponents - observers from European far-right parties such as the Front National from France, Jobbik from Hungary, and FPÖ from Austria.[11] While their joint evaluation that the referendum was legitimate was striking enough, some went even further in providing help for the "comrades": for example, die Linke continued to legitimize the Kremlin-backed separatists by delivering "humanitarian help" to the "Donetsk People's Republic" (DNR) in February, 2015.[12]

As with far-right parties, the far-left ones are also ready to support Russia's foreign policy interests not only with words of support but also with votes in the European Parliament,[13] in the Council of Europe, and OSCE general assemblies. Syriza ,in government with its populist right coalition partner ANEL, does a lot to ally itself with Russia rhetorically and in policies on energy, foreign affairs and defence,[14] and Russia is considered to be the most important foreign policy partner for the Tsipras government – with Russia being more popular among the Greek population than the EU.

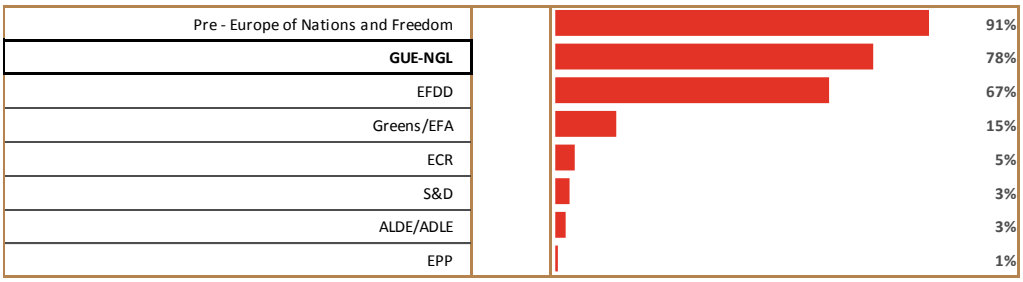
The two major pan-European organisations uniting Communist parties, the Party of the European Left and its representation in the European Parliament, the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), as well as the worldwide International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, express a definite pro-Russian sympathy. Whereas the rhetoric of individual far-left political parties on Russia and the Kremlin varies from party to party and from issue to issue, these umbrella organizations show a clear-cut pro-Russian political platform in their statements, resolutions and voting behaviour.

Historical ties play an important role in shaping alliances and networks. A post-Soviet institutional forum, a kind of "post-Communist International" for networking was established in 1998 by the Greek Communist Party as an annual conference of communist and workers' parties (IMCWP). The conference has been organized by a special working committee that includes the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. At a working committee meeting in Larnaka (Cyprus), in June 2014, the participants protested the Ukrainian government's terror and the proliferation of fascist forces, and also condemned the unilateral interference of the EU and the USA in the Ukrainian conflict – while making no mention of the role played by Russia in the conflict.[15] The joint statement of the 16th conference in Ecuador denounced the "imperialist intervention in Ukraine,"[16] while the 17th conference statement praised Assad as the force defending Syria from Western imperialism.

[10] http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_6377_europe_s_troublemakers.pdf
[11] http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.hu/2014/03/pro-russian-extremists-observe.html
[12] http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.hu/2015/02/german-die-linke-delegation-visits.html
[13] http://imrussia.org/en/analysis/world/2368-europes-new-pro-putin-coalition-the-parties-of-no
[14] http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/pc_boll_natural_allies.pdf
[15] http://www.akel.org.cy/en/?p=2223
[16] http://www.akel.org.cy/en/?p=2763#.VuFrnZwrKM8

Despite expressions of solidarity with Ukraine[17] and denouncing Russian military aggression, the GUE/NGL parliamentary group consistently pursued a pro-Kremlin line in the European Parliament throughout 2014-2015 voting against every important resolution aimed at keeping the Kremlin at bay and defusing the military situation. According to our own calculations, MEPs of the radical left group voted against resolutions going against Russia's geopolitical interests (e.g. Association agreement with, or financial assistance to, Ukraine) or criticizing Russia's military interventions in Ukraine, domestic human-rights abuses, or interference in political issues in Europe in 78 percent of the cases overall[18] (see Figure 1 below). This track record makes the GUE/NGL a reliable partner for Russia.

Figure 1. Share of "no" votes of EP groups in selected resolutions criticizing the Russian government in the European Parliament



Source: own calculations based on votewatch.eu[19]

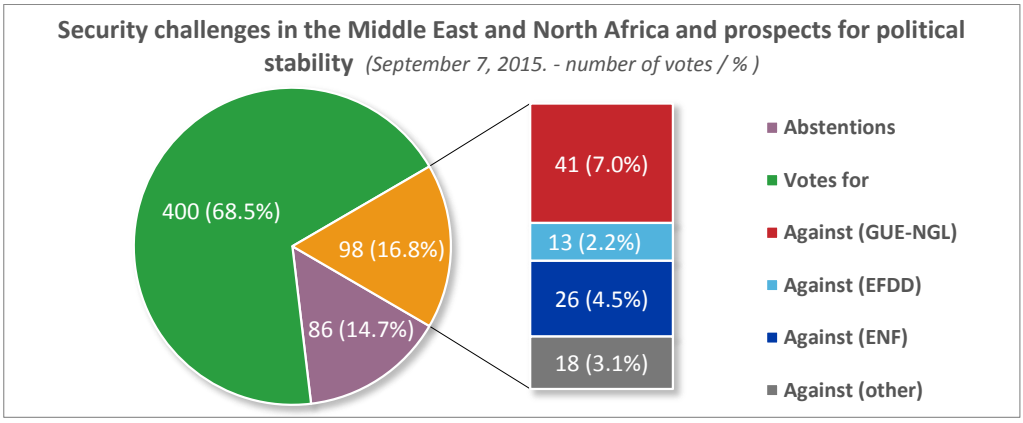
[17] The faction's March 11, 2014 motion, right before the Crimean annexation referendum, for a resolution to the European Parliament did condemn the use of Russian military force in Crimea, however it supported the false Russian claims about right-wing extremists and ultra-nationalists "seizing ministries, administrative buildings and police stations", and "holding several ministerial and other executive posts in the transitional interim government." http://www.guengl.eu/policy/resolutions/P20

[18] http://imrussia.org/en/analysis/world/2368-europes-new-pro-putin-coalition-the-parties-of-no

[19] 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), http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-strategic-military-situation-in-the-black-sea-basin-following-the-illegal-annexation-of-crimea-by-ru-15.html
2 - State of EU-Russia relations (10.06.2015), subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (motion for a resolution), http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-state-of-eu-russia-relations-motion-for-resolution-vote-resolution.html
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), http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-murder-of-the-russian-opposition-leader-boris-nemtsov-and-the-state-of-democracy-in-russia-joint-mot.html
4 - **Macro-financial assistance to Ukraine (25.03.2015)**, subject (vote: legislative resolution), type of vote (draft legislative resolution), http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-macro-financial-assistance-to-ukraine-draft-legislative-resolution-vote-legislative-resolution-ordin.html
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), , http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-eu-ukraine-association-agreement-with-the-exception-of-the-treatment-of-third-country-nationals-lega.html
6 - **Situation in Ukraine (17.07.2014)**, subject (vote: resolution), type of vote (joint motions for a resolution), http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-situation-in-ukraine-joint-motions-for-a-resolution-vote-resolution.html

Expressing support for Bashar el-Assad's regime is also part of the leftist foreign policy consensus. The radical left group in the EP unanimously rejected the Parliament's resolution calling for a military de-escalation in Syria, and holding President Assad accountable for crimes against humanity in September 2015[20] (see Figure 2 below). It was a clear demonstration of support for Russia's foreign policy goals, as the Russian military had been building up its capabilities in Syria since August, 2015 in support for Assad's regime.[21] Furthermore, it is difficult to explain on ideological grounds what makes the theoretically pacifist radical left parties support the regime of Assad, which helped to breed Sunni extremism[22], and massacred more than three hundred thousand people.

Figure 2. Group votes on the Syrian situation in the wake of the Russian intervention



Source: votewatch.eu[23]

Why Russia?

The far-right parties' pro-Russian stance is easy to explain on ideological grounds. Russia's authoritarian political system with a heavy-handed leader, its anti-human rights agenda, constant references to family values and Christianity, and to 'national interests' overriding market mechanisms and leading to state control over strategic sectors, offer a political and state model for several European far-right parties.

It is more difficult to understand why radical left parties with a secular, egalitarian and pacifist ideology admire a "post-communist neo-conservative"[24] system that is showing strong authoritarian and chauvinist tendencies, emphasizing the role of religion; reproduces and strengthens massive inequalities; promotes an aggressive nationalist-imperialist geopolitical agenda and repeatedly threatens the West with a nuclear attack. The core values of the Russian regime, often mentioned by Putin as the nation, the family and Christianity, are rarely the guiding values for left-wing parties.

[20] September 7, 2015 http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A8-2015-0193&language=EN
[21] http://www.businessinsider.com/putin-is-upping-military-intervention-in-syria-2015-9
[22] http://www.amazon.com/ISIS-Inside-Terror-Michael-Weiss/dp/1941393578
[23] http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-security-challenges-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-and-prospects-for-political-stability-motion-6.html#/##vote-tabs-list-2
[24] János Ladányi– Iván Szelényi: Post-communist neo-conservatism, Élet és Irodalom, year 56, issue 8, February 21, 2014, http://www.es.hu/ladanyi_janos8211;szelenyi_ivan;posztkommunista_neokonzervativizmus;2014-02-19.html

What, then, can explain the pro-Putinist tendencies of several far-left parties in Europe? The reasons are five-fold:

1.) The remnants of historic "comrade" networks between communist parties and the Soviet Union (strikingly visible in the case of the Greek Communists, Syriza, Greek AKEL and the Czech Communist Party).
2.) New international far-left organizational structures, such as the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties (IMCWP) bringing together European and Russian Communist parties.
3.) The "enemy's enemy is my friend" principle, making critics of globalization, the United States, and the liberal-capitalist West natural allies for radical, anti-establishment parties on the left.
4.) The Russian controlled economy, which promises to keep 'big capital' in check, is an attractive model for many anti-capitalists.
5.) The Kremlin's disinformation campaigns successfully frames public issues to the taste of the anti-establishment left ideology, arguing against the "fascist junta in Kyiv", promoting "peace", and "neutrality" in Ukraine and Syria, and calling for abandoning the unipolar global order.

Most of the leftist parties we observed rarely praise President Putin or his regime openly. They call for "neutrality", "peace", and "stopping Western aggression" instead. The majority of far-left parties showcases a double-edged strategy of rhetorical self-containment and the denial of pro-Putinism with an almost unconditional support of the Kremlin's core geopolitical goals and in some ideological issues. While the far-right parties' pro-Putinism is more spectacular, the far-left parties' pro-Russian strategy is less vocal, but equally consistent and persistent. [25]

Argumentation styles

The anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist principles of the left make Russia a natural ally in favouring a multi-polar world without the hegemony of the capitalist-imperialist United States and, to a certain extent, the EU. While radical left forces pursue a great variety of arguments, a number of typical far-left arguments and rhetorical styles are of particular use to Russia.

1) peace and neutrality

One typical argument is that the United States and the West are provoking conflicts in Eastern Europe or in the Middle East. Therefore, "pacifism" provides an ideological foundation for a permanent criticism of "Western aggression". Through this, the far-left, similarly to the far-right, helps the Putin regime in undermining the dominant narrative of the Euro-Atlantic Community on these conflicts, whilst providing legitimacy to Russian diplomatic moves. A number of parties, e.g. the German Die Linke, and back around 2012, the Greek Syriza, demanded their country leave NATO because of its "aggressive" stance, tendency towards "imperialist interference" in the affairs of sovereign states, and the dominance of the US in the military alliance. Calls for

[25] "Russian influence" or "Kremlin's influence" 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 aiming at creating political changes in the behavior and/or political agenda of certain political actors through political means and/or financial instruments. In this context, political means include secret service operations, official meetings, information warfare, etc., while financial tools consist of specific forms of financing, for example. Attila Juhász et. al., *"I am Eurasian", The Kremlin connections of the Hungarian far-right* (Political Capital Institute, Social Development Institute, 2015), 5. See: http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_SDI_Boll_study_IamEurasian.pdf

leaving NATO are justified by the argument that "neutrality" is needed to maintain peace. At the same time, leftist parties rarely talk about the role of European integration and even NATO in keeping relative peace in the post-WWII period in Europe. They also turn a blind eye to Russian moves directly aimed at undermining the peace in Ukraine (supporting separatists in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine with money, equipment, troops and weaponry) and in Iraq and Syria (boosting the refugee crisis by bombing civilians, including, according to independent sources, with banned cluster munitions). They support Syria without dedicating a word to the atrocities committed by the Syrian regime. In their eyes, the West is the aggressor, while Assad and Russia frequently appear as guarantors of peace.

2) autonomy and self-determination

The left is traditionally supportive of autonomy movements, and promotes referenda as a tool to express the will of the people. This general position was abused in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict to legitimize the so-called separatists and their "referendum" in Crimea and "elections" in Eastern Ukraine. As a statement by the Czech Communist party claimed: *"the Communist Party (…) fully respects the rights of the Ukrainian people to decide their future. (…) let the citizens decide themselves in a referendum and free elections, which should bring together Ukrainian citizens irrespective of their nationality or political or religious affiliations*. [26] Alexis Tsipras (then an opposition leader) also cheered the elections and the referendum in Eastern Ukraine[27]. What was missing is the mention of the fact that the freeness and fairness of these "elections" was not recognized by OSCE, because of the presence of tanks and armed men next to the ballot boxes.

3) "Anti-fascism"

Just as Putin's regime simultaneously warns of the rise of the far right and supports (and is supported by) far-right parties in Europe, the radical left's anti-fascism is often selective and one-sided. While radical left players usually share Putin's concerns over the hyperbolism of the "fascist junta in Kyiv" and criticize the EU for being ignorant, they do not see such problems on the side of the pro-Russian "rebels". Prominent members of the European left all echo this view. Tsipras, in March 2014, said that the European Union supports *"a government with far-right and fascist elements, which violates the Constitution of the country (…) And it goes into a malformed Cold War with Russia*. Pablo Iglesias, leader of Podemos, added[28]: "*the EU supported the illegal change of power in Ukraine and the coming of a neo-Nazi party to the Ukrainian government. Some European leaders, together with neo-Nazis, took part in public events in Ukraine, and this is too far from European values."* But at the same time, a Die Linke delegation went to Eastern Ukraine to have a friendly meeting with notoriously anti-Semitic leaders of the Donetsk Republic.[29]

4) *Relativisation and creating a (false) symmetry.*

For radical left politicians, who have more inhibitions about praising Putin and his regime directly, a typical and more subtle argumentation is to talk about aggressors on both sides. For example, without even mentioning the occupation of Crimea, a statement by the Communist

[26] **www.kscm.cz, 14 March 2014)** The Helsinki Accords, Helsinki Final Act, or Helsinki Declaration was the final act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe held in Finlandia Hall of Helsinki, Finland, during July and August 1, 1975. The Accords enumerated inter alia respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty, refraining from the threat or use of force, inviolability of frontiers and territorial integrity of states.
[27] http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/greek-election-wins-putin-a-friend-in-europe/514923.html
[28] www.english.pravda.ru, 19 November 2014
[29] http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.hu/2015/02/german-die-linke-delegation-visits.html

Party of Bohemia and Moravia called on "the parties" to respect the Helsinki Accords one day before the referendum, as if Ukraine were not occupied only by Russia – but by the EU and the US as well[30].

Comment [BN1]: Have you got a footnote for this?

5) Victimization

The radical left often portrays the Russian and Syrian regimes and Eastern Ukrainian rebels as victims of Western aggression. The ideological differences between the Russian regime and leftist parties seems to be bridged by special narratives provided by the Russian disinformation warfare waged in Europe. The far-left parties, for example, support Russia's Ukrainian intervention because they accept, and thus legitimize, the Russian narrative of a Western-backed Nazi coup on the Maidan – putting Russia on the side of the "oppressed" people. In Syria, they portray President Assad's Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party as fighting a "counter-revolution" against the "imperialist intervention" (!) and/or the Islamists controlled and financed by the West.[31] In this narrative, Russia is only helping to defend the legitimate government in Syria and its people from aggression safeguarding the future peaceful coexistence of religions and religious minorities. The IMCWP released a statement after the 17th congress in Istanbul in November, 2015, saying *"Syria has been attacked by an alliance led by the US imperialism and its collaborators, made up of the most reactionary regimes in the Middle East. (…) The imperialist siege has been broken after Russia intervened in the recent power vacuum. No one but the patriotic, anti-imperialist and progressive people of Syria made this change of circumstances possible."*[32]

Three shades of pro-Putinism

Radical left parties differ in the openness and level of support they give to Russia's geopolitical aims. In the classification below, we would introduce three different forms.

Rallying around the Russian flag (Direct, explicit support)

Some of the parties on the radical left scene in Europe are openly supporting the Kremlin, using its official line of propaganda or partaking in symbolic political actions aiming to legitimize Russia's foreign policy moves. This is a characteristic of only a handful of far-left parties. The French Left Party (PG) of Melenchon, the Greek Communist Party (KKE), and the German Die Linke are the most notable examples of such an approach. They are happy to vote in favour of Russia not only in the European Parliament, but in the Council of Europe as well.[33] The German Die Linke and the Greek Communist Party sent independent "observers" to monitor the referenda in Crimea and Donbass. In their statements, they stood firmly behind Russia's territorial annexation and also supported the Crimean referendum. The founder of the French Left Party, Jean-Luc Mélenchon said for example in

[30] **www.kscm.cz, 14 March 2014**

[31] https://toilerstruggle.wordpress.com/2013/09/06/with-whom-do-communists-stand-in-syria-what-is-the-solution-to-the-syria-question/

[32] http://www.solidnet.org/17-imcwp-resolutions/stand-against-reactionary-forces-and-imperialism-we-salute-the-patriotic-people-of-syria-en

[33] Die Linke delegate supported Russia even at the April 10, 2014 Council of Europe vote involving the suspension of the Russian delegation's voting right following the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. .http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=4982&cat=8

the European Parliament that *"The Crimean ports are vital for the security of Russia, (…) they are taking measures to protect themselves against an adventurer (…) on whom neo-Nazi influence is quite detestable. […] The Russian nation cannot allow North Americans and NATO moving closer to their doors."*[34] Secretary-General of the Greek Communist Party, Dimitris Koutsoumpas, cheered the annexation as well, claiming that that "*The people of Crimea, the Ukrainian people, and the Russian people have historical memories and positive experiences of the years of socialism, which has not been erased even if it's been over 20 years since the changes*[35]*".*

Similarly supportive statements were made in the case of the Russian intervention in Syria. In the words of Wolfgang Gehrcke, vice-Chairman of Die Linke faction,[36] "*a positive aspect is the stronger engagement of Russia in the Syrian question. (...) Without Assad and without Russia the termination of war and violence in Syria is not possible"*. The Joint statement of the Communist Parties of Greece and Turkey about Syria[37] also cheered the Russian intervention, blaming the casualties entirely on the West: "*The imperialist intervention of the USA, NATO, EU, Turkey, Israel and the Gulf monarchies in Syria that has been going on for 5 years and has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people".*

Hemispatial neglect (Indirect support)

Most radical left forces remain all but silent on the actions of Russia and Assad's regime in Syria, only criticizing the West. These forces seem to suffer from *'hemispatial neglect',* a syndrome that leads to a chronically and literally one-sided worldview, in which a person is completely unable to perceive what is happening on one side of the world. In this case, they are well aware of the sins of the West but blind to the problems on the Russian and Syrian side. This is manifested in a scapegoating rhetoric blaming only the Western powers (mainly the United States, NATO, and to a smaller extent, the EU) for the crises in Ukraine and Syria. Hypocritically calling for a peaceful solution and cooperation, this argument completely disregards and ignores Russia's role in provoking and escalating conflicts. The Cypriot Greek AKEL, the Spanish United Left and Podemos put the blame on the EU (USA) and the Kiev "fascists" it supports, without even mentioning Russia.

Similarly, the war in Syria is viewed as an "imperialistic" conflict caused by Western capitalist states, or NATO, aiming for the removal of the legitimate Assad government. In this context, far-left parties advocating a peaceful and democratic resolution usually forget the Russian intervention, which further escalated the military conflict and caused thousands of civilians to flee their homes and choose to migrate to Europe.

For example, George Loucaides, AKEL PM, proposed[38] that to defeat ISIS and end the Syrian civil war "*it is pivotal for the G20 and NATO countries to permanently discontinue any kind of financing, provision of equipment and trade with the Islamic State. You should also stop the undermining forces fighting the Islamic State on the ground, i.e. the Kurds and the Syrian army."*

A similarly one-sided worldview is connected to the strategy of only projecting the presence of "fascists" into Ukraine. Willy Meyer, an MEP from the Izquierda Unida[19]said for example:

[34] http://www.votewatch.eu/en/term8-security-challenges-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-and-prospects-for-political-stability-motion-6.html#/
[35] speech, Sport Stadium Athens, www.kke.gr, 16 March 2014
[36] http://www.linksfraktion.de/pressemitteilungen/beendigung-syrien-krieges-assad-moeglich/
[37] http://inter.kke.gr/en/articles/Joint-statement-of-the-Communist-Parties-of-Greece-and-Turkey/
[38] http://www.akel.org.cy/2016/02/17/syria/#.Vuk9dZwrKM9

destabilization of Ukraine is the result of a coup […] by armed paramilitary fascists. An organized destabilization by the U.S. government and the European Union, who have financed, supported, sustained, cheered the coup. (…) Yanukovych has no sympathy from me, no. But he was the Head of State voted by the Ukrainians.

Balancing (critique to both sides)

The decisive majority of the European far-left parties support the Kremlin in the conflicts with direct or indirect rhetoric. Only a few far-left parties express a "balanced" approach in line with their ideology of denouncing both Western and Russian imperialism and/or capitalism. Among those few parties are the Luxembourg-based Left Party and the Irish Socialist Party. These forces voice a general reservation towards any superpower, giving equal emphasis in their critique to the roles played by the West and Russia in the Ukrainian conflict. In fact, they describe each political actor's ambitions in terms of "imperialist" intervention –following the traditional political agenda of European far-left parties. This position is less pro-Kremlin than other radical left groups', but it is nevertheless misleading, because it denies that the role of Russia, with its direct military intervention, was incomparably greater than that of the West. But it is seemingly a "balanced" criticism. The statement made by Sinn Fein on Crimea is a nice example for this approach, strongly criticizing every party in, and outside, the conflict: *'"Sinn Féin condemns the political, military and economic interference in Ukraine and Crimea by the US, EU and Russia... There needs to be open dialogue and respect for human right. The make-up of the interim government in Ukraine is extremely worrying due to the inclusion of extreme right-wing neo-nazis in key ministerial positions. We reject the signing of the EU association agreement with this interim government"*[39].

Political and policy consequences

The main advantage to Russia of keeping this network of supporters in Europe is that they can help in the external legitimisation of the Russian regime, the destabilisation of the European Union and transatlantic relations, provide networks that can help to gain information, and influence at least a part of public opinion with the dissemination of the Kremlin's chosen narratives.

Why this is important for the international community and what should be done?

First of all, investigative journalists, policy leaders, and intelligence services must acknowledge that these "comrade networks" have both a diplomatic and a secret service dimension, which are alive and well. During Soviet times, the KGB played a key role in establishing these networks and exploiting them for active measures, and these players are still useful and active supporters of Russian geopolitical goals. As such, there is at least a need to asses in more detail the security implications of these connections. Mapping the personal and organisational connections in detail is crucial, as well as making them part of the diplomatic discourse. In the case of far-left parties, no proof of financial support on the scale given to far-right parties such as the French National Front has emerged so far,[40] but it would be logical to investigate further. Of course, the friendship of a superpower in itself can

39 www.facebook.com%2Fsinnfein%2Fposts%2F614970828572552&usg=AFQjCNFb5Fmoh1Gdt2QR05DO0BYyP_WY9A&sig2=8dCYEL4lkCMMORgZqCGPbg&bvm=bv.117868183,d.bGs

40 http://www.interpretermag.com/russia-and-front-national-following-the-money/

be a strong asset for marginal parties, which rarely enjoy the luxury of high level and strong diplomatic support.

Second, for politicians, it is crucially important to point to these pro-Russian connections of radical left parties where they are, and challenge the credibility and self-definition of these parties via political debates and campaigns. Supporting cynical aggressors in diplomatic conflicts while preaching about peace and equality is a contradiction that should be publicised and responded to.