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We know Russia funds Europe's far Right. But what does it get in return?

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Many influential European ultra-conservatives share an ideological alignment with Moscow - particularly on the rights of women and LGBTIQ people

That Russia serves as a reliable cash machine for Europe's far-Right political forces has long been an open secret.

Back in 2014, for example, [French media reported](#) that the country's far-Right National Front party had funded its election campaign with loans worth €11m from Russian banks. The party, which has since rebranded as presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National, has famously struggled to raise funds, with French banks declining to lend it money due to its racist and anti-Semitic past.

Two years later, [journalists in Italy](#) alleged that then-interior minister Matteo Salvini's far-Right Lega party had struck an oil deal with Russia, which would see profits diverted to Lega to finance its 2019 European Parliament election campaign. Buzzfeed later reported having [obtained an audio recording of a meeting](#) at which the deal was negotiated, which was attended by a close aide of Salvini's, though there is no evidence the deal was ever executed and Salvini has rejected the allegations as "fantasies". The case is being investigated by prosecutors in Milan.

Elsewhere, the enthusiasm for Russian money was such that it brought down Austria's ruling coalition. In a 2019 sting operation that came to be known as the 'Ibiza Affairs', Heinz-Christian Strache, Austria's then-deputy chancellor and the leader of the far-Right Freedom Party, was filmed [trying to accept a bribe from a fake Russian oligarch](#) while holidaying in Ibiza.

What did Russia get in return for this financial largess? Political support at key moments. In 2017, [French far-Right MEPs supported the annexation of Crimea](#), while, the following year, Salvini said the Italian government would veto [EU sanctions against Russia](#). Just last month, [NewsLines](#) magazine detailed the extensive links between the European far-Right and Moscow, with Kremlin operatives allegedly drafting pro-Russian talking points and amendments for their far-Right allies to propose in the European Parliament.

But this is not just about money. European conservatives – not only political parties, but also organisations opposing the rights of women and LGBTIQ people – share an ideological alignment with the ultra-conservative thinking prevalent in the Kremlin.

Take, for example, the Madrid-based online platform for conservative campaigners, CitizenGO. The platform, which is [known for](#) "coordinating large-scale e-petitions, including against transgender rights and abortion", was recently forced to [deny it has ever received funding from Russian oligarchs](#). Yet Wikileaks' Intolerance Network last year published a dataset that includes a 2013 [fundraising letter allegedly sent by CitizenGO](#) to pro-Putin oligarch Konstantin Malofeyev – who has

close links to CitizenGO board member Alexey Komov – and an apparent subsequent [funding agreement](#) between the two parties.

Russian funding is a reward for ideological alignment and an incentive to advance Russian interests

Elsewhere, Grégor Puppink of the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) was among a delegation from La Manif Pour Tous – a French campaign organisation opposing the rights of same-sex couples to marry and adopt children – to attend [a 2014 trip to Moscow](#). The trip reportedly included visits to both chambers of the Russian parliament, as well as various ministries, with the Moscow Patriarchate representative in the EU saying the delegation's overall aim was to “[find cooperation partners in Russia to defend traditional values](#)”. The ECLJ is the European arm of the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), headed by Donald Trump's impeachment attorney. Since 2007, the ACLJ has transferred more than \$3.3m to a Russian evangelical group, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, [whose head sits on Putin's Human Rights Council](#).

Attacking liberal democracy

In its ‘[Tip of the Iceberg](#)’ report, published last year, the European Parliament Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights detailed numerous cases of Russian financial dealings with far-Right parties and anti-gender civil society organizations across Europe. It found Russian actors accounted for \$188m of funding flowing to European anti-gender actors between 2009 and 2018, far surpassing the US Christian Right's spending in Europe over the same period.

Russian funding is not like other sources of funding – it is a reward for ideological alignment with Moscow and an incentive to advance Russian interests in the West.

These interests include undermining the international human rights system, which is protected by institutions such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Council of Europe and the European Union.

It is therefore no surprise that the same Putin allies in Europe who oppose ‘gender ideology’ – far-Right politicians and anti-gender activists – have attempted to systematically undermine the pillars of liberal democracy and the human rights system. CitizenGO has called for the [defunding of the WHO](#), the ECLJ has claimed that the [European Court of Human Rights is a tool of ‘Soros’](#) and Ordo Iuris has attempted to [sue a member of the European Parliament](#) who described attendees of a Polish independence march as “fascists, neo-Nazis and white race supremacists”.

Statements from Moscow suggest Russia's war with Ukraine is, at least in part, a war over rights. In early March, Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church, a close ally of Putin, claimed the invasion was necessary because of Ukraine's acceptance of Western liberal values, [including by holding gay pride parades](#). This narrative fits with well-established Russian support for Western ultra-conservative, anti-human rights networks, such as the [World Congress of Families \(WCF\)](#). The WCF unites the US Christian Right, Europe's far Right and anti-gender actors, as well as the oligarchs funding them and the Russian Orthodox Church, in a battle for conservative, pro-family values based on undoing decades of progress on rights and equality.

We should not forget that, across western Europe, Putin has paid and ideological allies working to undermine the foundations of liberal democracy and human rights from within. The work of these European far-Right politicians and anti-gender civil society actors in furthering Russian objectives – whether or not they are aware they are doing so – is why we should be worried by Moscow's financial influence. Once the war in Ukraine is over, these useful idiots of Russia will still be among

us.

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