



R E P O R T

TOY SOLDIERS:

NATO military and intelligence
officers in Russian active measures



INTRODUCTION

With the outbreak of the Russian War, the largest military aggression in Europe since World War II, the international community's attention was largely focused on the actions of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine. At the same time, the Kremlin has not abandoned, but has significantly increased the intensity of subversive operations and active measures of its intelligence agencies in the West, including the European Union. The aim of these operations is to destabilise the EU and NATO, undermine the internal unity of these organisations, radicalise certain social groups, and influence the politics of these countries, including through the support of political proxies. They also aim to obstruct various forms of assistance to Ukraine, among which military and technical assistance is particularly important.

To carry out such operations, Russian secret services use agents of influence who have a significant weight in their societies, are political, public, cultural, religious figures, well-known media personalities, experts, and scientists. The cooperation of such agents of influence with Russia is carefully concealed as revealing such cooperation will significantly undermine the trust of the audiences – both the general populace and politicians – upon whom Russia seeks to exert its influence. Moreover, exposure of such collaboration can disrupt operations and lead to undesirable consequences for

Russia and its agents, including official investigations, financial scrutiny, the proscription of cover organisations, and potentially even criminal prosecution.

This study explores the Russian Federation's connections with retired high-ranking military officers and heads of intelligence and security agencies in the EU, who actively engage in exerting influence advantageous to Russia. This group holds particular significance in the current landscape of a major conflict in Europe, given their inherently high level of trust within society and among political leaders. They are viewed as experts in security, defense, and international relations. Moreover, European nations display a demand for politicians with such backgrounds, enabling these individuals not only to indirectly shape government decision-making but also to directly participate in it as members of parliaments and government officials.

In establishing the links between these individuals and the Russian Federation, as well as other entities involved in activities beneficial to Russia, we employed the Methodology for risk-based assessment of Russian intelligence covert malign influence. This methodology was developed by the Center for Defense Reforms under the auspices of the NATO-Ukraine Platform for Early Detection and Countering Hybrid Threats.

“ The idea is that we must take over Europe! Conquer and annex!

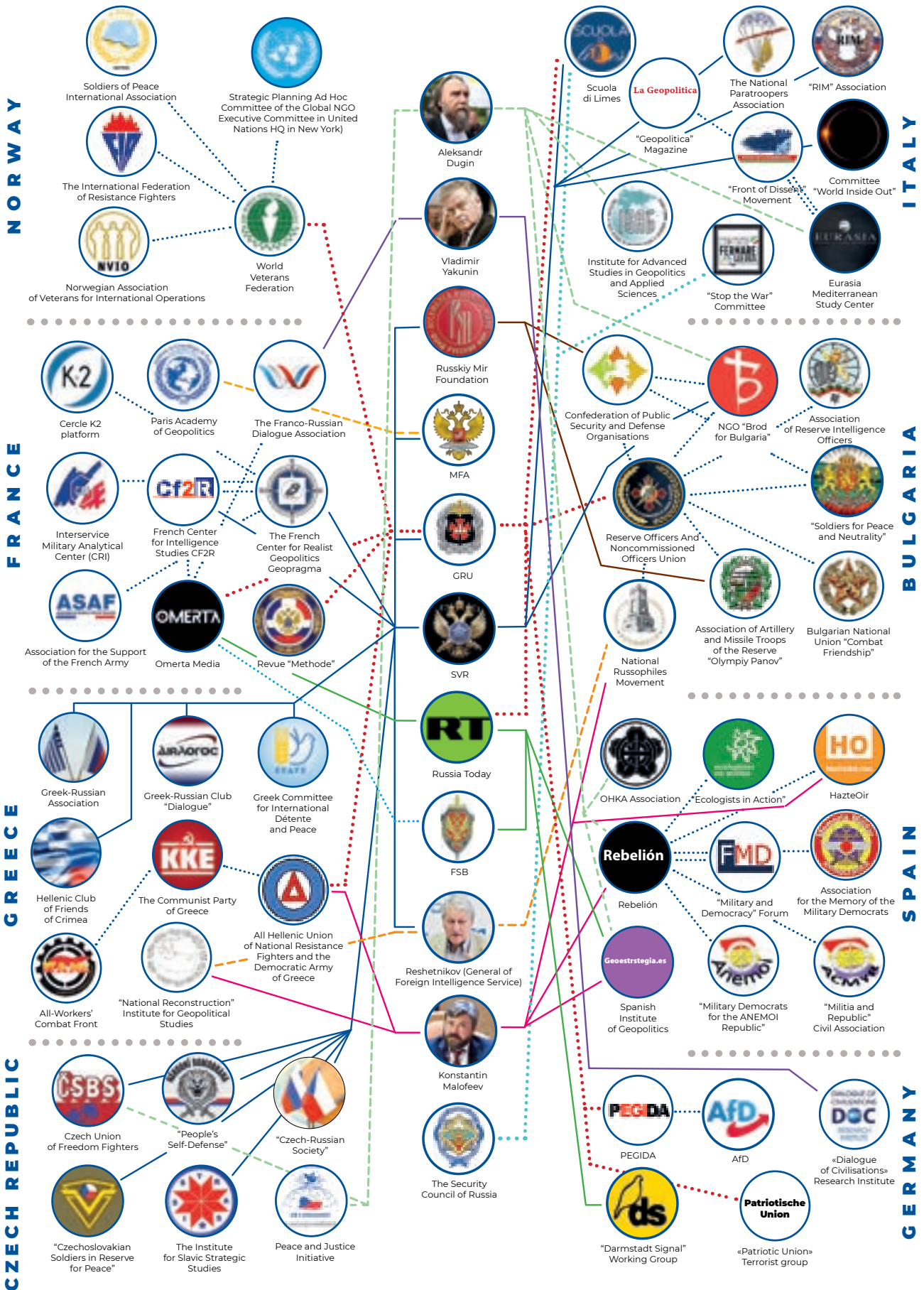
After all, we experienced such expansion into Europe during the Soviet period, when our communist parties (the Third International, the Comintern, the Cominform) achieved serious results in penetrating the parliaments of European countries. It served as a tool for our foreign policy.

To achieve this goal, we should employ soft power rather than brute force – to identify, cultivate, and support Eurasian “fifth columns”, to bring our people to power in Europe, to use, for example, Gazprom’s money, to buy up advertising agencies because they influence the media, and simply to act.”

Alexander Dugin

Strategic Advisor to the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation and ideologue of Russian imperialism

TOY SOLDIERS:
NATO MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS IN RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURES



FRANCE

In addition to its full-scale conventional armed aggression against Ukraine, the Russian Federation not only persists but is also intensifying its efforts to conduct unconventional hybrid aggression against Western countries. A recent instance of such actions was the Russian Federal Security Service's attempt to undermine the supply of arms to Ukraine in Germany, where it was exposed collaborating¹ with the *Alternative für Deutschland* party. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia confirmed instances² of Russian interference in the national parliamentary elections. At the same time, active measures to counter Sweden³ and Finland's⁴ accession to NATO have been documented.

In France, both preceding and following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia and its affiliated individuals and organisations have es-

tablished various platforms, including media and think tanks. Their activities aim to exert influence in alignment with the interests of the Russian government, particularly targeting France's withdrawal from NATO, justifying Russian aggression, and undermining the supply of Western weapons to Ukraine. The founders and active participants in such platforms include retired French officers and former employees of the national security and defense sector.

This collaboration is grounded in professional, political, and business ties with Russia, as well as certain characteristics inherent in the retired officer community in France, exploited by entities linked to Russia. **Patrick Chevallereau**, a researcher at the Royal United Service Institute and retired Vice Admiral⁵ of the French Navy, notes that these characteristics encompass⁶

In France, Russia and its affiliated individuals and organisations have established various platforms, including media and think tanks, whose activities aim to exert influence in alignment with the interests of the Russian government



Founder and president of Geopragma colonel Caroline Galactéros (*defense intelligence*)

the widespread desire among some French officers for a so-called “sovereign France”. This implies criticism of transatlantic associations and the perception of Russia as a “civilisational ally” facing the “threat of Islamists from the South”. This viewpoint was affirmed by a 2021 appeal to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg criticising the alliance, allegedly “threatening sovereign France”. The appeal, drafted⁷ by the *Cercle de réflexion inter-armées* (*Interservice Military Think Tank*), comprising over 60 French officers, was based on an adherence to Charles de Gaulle’s policy, known as “Gaullism”.

Retired officers not directly involved in the relevant platforms but with their own history of ties with Russia also participate in the socio-political life of France. They exert influence aligned with the interests of the Russian government, and as such, this report will also scrutinise their involvement.

THE FRENCH CENTER FOR REALIST GEOPOLITICS

The French Center for Realist Geopolitics, **Geopragma** (*Pôle français de géopolitique réaliste*, *Geopragma*), led by Reserve Colonel **Caroline Galactéros** and retired French Army General **Jean-Bernard Pina-tel⁸**, is active in France. Members of the Center’s board of directors have not only professional but also business ties with the Russian Federation, and other former employees of the French national security and defense sector also participate in the platform’s work. *Geopragma* engages in various activities, including publishing materials, hosting conferences, and producing video content aimed at justifying Russian aggression against Ukraine and blaming NATO for the war. Additionally, the center advocates for France’s withdrawal from the North Atlantic Alliance and the disruption of Western arms supplies to Ukraine.

Jean-Bernard Pinatel, the co-founder and vice-president⁹ of *Geopragma*, retired French army general, and former head of the Department of Information and Public Affairs of the French Ministry of Defense, is also the founder¹⁰ and president of the *LP Conseil* consulting company. One of its areas of operation¹¹ involves assisting businesses in Russia, including facilitating¹² the open-

ner roles in two companies, *Starinvestru and Goût*, *Sevastianov and Partners*, until 2023. Among other activities, *Goût* played a role in developing European relations for the Russian state-owned concern *Rosatcom*. **Hélène Perroud**, a former director¹⁶ of the French Institute in St. Petersburg (*L'institut français de Saint Pétersbourg*), is also on the Center's board of directors. She currently runs¹⁷ a consulting company that assists¹⁸ a consulting company that assist¹⁹ in developing businesses in Russia.



Retired French Army General Jean-Bernard Pinatel, co-founder and vice president of *Geopragma*, during his military service (center)

ing of an office in Moscow for the French pharmaceutical company *SANOFI*. *LP Conseil* has also assisted major corporations such as *Total*, *Michelin*, and *Auchan* in conducting business in Russia. The board of directors of *Geopragma* includes **Emmanuel Goût**, a French businessman who served as the deputy¹³ CEO of *Russia Today France*. Residing¹⁴ in Moscow since 2016, *Goût* has been involved¹⁵ in various ventures, including managing part-

The second co-founder and president of *Geopragma*, French Army Reserve Colonel **Caroline Galacteros**, has her own history of professional ties with Russia. Before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, *Galacteros* served as a guest lecturer¹⁹ at Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN) and participated in events organised by the *Russkiy Mir Foundation*. Notably, in 2017, she took part in a roundtable discussion²⁰ on migration issues. Both before and after the invasion, *Galacteros* has contributed to Russian state media, including *Sputnik*²¹ and *Russia Today*. In September 2023, a substantial interview with *Caroline Galacteros* was broadcast on *RT*. The *Geopragma Strategic Planning Committee* also includes **Alain Juillet**, former head of the Directorate General for External Security (*Direction générale de la Sécurité extérieure, DGSE*) and Honorary Pres-

Members of *Geopragma's* board of directors have not only professional but also business ties with the Russian Federation. Retired officers from the French national security and defense sector participate in the platform's work

ident of the Academy of Economic Intelligence (*l'Académie de l'intelligence économique*). Since 2020, Juillet has hosted his own program on Russia Today called *La Source*²², dedicated to security and geopolitics. Later in this report, we will

Geopragma engages in various activities, including publishing materials, hosting conferences, and producing video content aimed at justifying Russian aggression against Ukraine and blaming NATO for the war; it advocates for France's withdrawal from the North Atlantic Alliance and the disruption of Western arms supplies to Ukraine

closely examine Alain Juillet's public activities, influence, and alignment with the interests of the Russian government.

In addition to these individuals, who are members of *Geopragma's* governing bodies and departments, other former representatives of France's national security and defense sector are also involved in the center's work. Frequently, these officers hold anti-American beliefs and leverage *Geopragma* projects to discredit NATO and the United States in particular.

For instance, in 2021, a retired French brigadier general and former attaché²³ of the French Embassy in China, **Daniel Schaeffer**, participated²⁴ in the *Geopragma* Tuesdays program on the Far East. Brigadier General Schaeffer is a member of the French think tank **Asie21** and has his own history of

relations with Russia. In 2015, as an analyst of *Asie21*, Daniel Schaeffer took part in a conference²⁵ organized by the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, where he asserted the alleged "failure of American policy towards Ukraine". On the *Asie21* platform, Daniel Schaeffer exerts influence aimed at undermining cooperation between the United States and European NATO countries. Notably, in 2023, in collaboration with another retired French general, **Grégoire Diamantidis**, he published²⁶ an article stating that "NATO is not called upon to create a coalition against China in the Indo-Pacific, even in the event of Chinese aggression against Taiwan".

General **Grégoire Diamantidi**, in turn, serves as the secretary of another think tank that brings together more than 60 retired French officers, **the Cercle de réflexion interarmées** (*Interservice Military Analytical Center*, further referred to as *CRI*). The activities of the center in France, especially those aimed at criticising NATO, were covered by the journal of the Federation of French-Russian Institutes, *Methode*²⁷. Yelena Sydorova (Елена Сидорова), a Russian citizen, holds the position of editor-in-chief for this publication (further details on *Methode*, its activities, and French officers associated with it will be discussed below). As mentioned earlier, in 2021, *CRI* issued an appeal²⁸ to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, criticising the Alliance's NATO 2030 strategy. The appeal garnered support from several other French retired officers, as well as²⁹ the **French Center for Realist Geopolitics** (*Geopragma*).





Retired French Navy Vice Admiral Pascal Ausseur, current head of the French Fondation Méditerranéenne d'Études Stratégiques

Pascal Ausseur, a retired Vice-Admiral of the French Navy and current head of the French Mediterranean Foundation for Strategic Studies (*Fondation Méditerranéenne d'Études Stratégiques*), was also involved³⁰ in *Geopragma's* work. In his interview, the Vice Admiral exerted influence aimed at discrediting the United States and the West in general. He accused the United States of “brutal and ineffective interference” in international politics and highlighted the alleged “decline in the prestige of the West”.

In 2021, on the platform of the French Center for Realist Geopolitics, former French Ministry of Defense official **Alain Meininger** spoke³¹ about “ways to bring Europe and Russia closer together”. **Pierre Conesa**, a former member³² of the Strategic

Planning Committee of the French Ministry of Defense, is another member of the Board of Directors and a contributor to *Geopragma*. Conesa is a frequent contributor to Russia Today France³³, where he has criticised France’s migration policy, among other things. As part of the joint project of *Geopragma* and the *Terra Bellum* YouTube channel, he also exerted influence aimed at discrediting the United States of America, accusing³⁴ the US of “religious radicalism”.

Both before and after the full-scale invasion, Caroline Galacteros, Jean-Bernard Pinatel, Alain Juillier, and Pierre Conesa continued to participate in the work³⁵ of the Russian platform “Franco-Russian Dialogue”, co-chaired³⁶ by Vladimir Putin’s close friend, former head of

Russian Railways, Vladimir Yakunin. We will devote a separate section of this report to the activities of the Franco-Russian Dialogue and the participation of several other retired French officers in it.

In 2022, ASAF, together with the National Association of Retired Officers (*L'Association Nationale des Officiers de Carrière en Retraite*) sent an appeal to all French presidential candidates. The appeal states that “France, as a NATO member, may be drawn into an armed conflict against its will

INTERNAL CONNECTIONS OF GEOPRAGMA IN FRANCE

Given the professional and business ties with Russia of the French retired officers among *Geopragma's* founders and members, along with their involvement in exerting influence in the interests of the Russian government, the internal connections of such individuals within France are also noteworthy. This includes ties with former officers, military personnel, and other institutions and organisations.

For instance, Caroline Galacteros serves as the administrator³⁷ of the *Association de Soutien à l'Armée Française* (ASAF). This national association³⁸ brings together former combatants. ASAF collaborates with the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, boasting³⁹ over 3,000 members and including 100 other asso-

ciations representing more than 100,000 members. The ASAF's board of directors includes several retired high-ranking French officers. Its president, **Colonel Serge de Klebnikoff**, a retired French Armed Forces tank officer⁴⁰, has his own ties to Russia. As de Klebnikoff mentioned in an interview with Russia's Sputnik⁴¹, in 2019, he organised a trip for 75 French officers to attend the Immortal Regiment events in Moscow. Another participant in the Immortal Regiment events at that time was **Pierre Bayle**, a former employee⁴² of the French Institute of Higher Studies of National Defense (*l'Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale*) and the current Deputy Commissioner General⁴³ of the Organisation for Friendship and Assistance to Alumni of the Special Military School of Saint-Cyr. Saint-Cyr is one of the main military educational institutions in France (*Société amicale de secours des anciens élèves de l'École spéciale militaire de Saint-Cyr*).

Henri Pinard-Legry, Honorary President of the Association for the Support of the French Army (ASAF) and retired General, participated in the Franco-Russian Dialogue, which will be discussed in the relevant section.

On the ASAF platform, Caroline Galacteros also exerts influence in the interests of the Russian government, aiming to undermine France's membership in NATO and counter Western sanctions against Russia. For example, in February 2022, on the eve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the association's website published an interview⁴⁴ with the *Geopragma's* president about how “NATO is harming France” and how the policy of sanctions against





Retired General Henri-Pinard Legree, honorary president of the Association for the Support of the French Army (ASAF), at the Franco-Russian Dialogue event in April 2023

Russia has allegedly “shown its weakness”.

The activities of the association itself are also illustrative. In 2022, ASAF, together with the National Association of Retired Officers (*L'Association Nationale des Officiers de Carrière en Retraite*) and the aforementioned **Cercle de réflexion interarmées** (CRI), sent⁴⁵ a joint appeal to all French presidential candidates. The appeal states, among other things, that “France, as a NATO member, may be drawn into an armed conflict against its will”.

GEOPRAGMA OFFICERS, THE PARIS ACADEMY OF GEOPOLITICS, AND TIES WITH RUSSIA

The interaction between *Geopragma* and the **Académie de Géopolitique de Paris** (*Paris Academy of Geopolitics*), involving retired

French officers, is also noteworthy. The Academy, in turn, maintains ties with the Russian Federation. For instance, in October 2018, at the Russian Orthodox Spiritual and Cultural Center in Paris, the Academy, with its president, an Iran expert, and also the director⁴⁶ of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (*Institut international d'études stratégiques*) **Ali Rastbeen**, organised⁴⁷ an international colloquium on Russia's place in the modern world. The event was attended by **Artem Studennikov**, a representative of the Russian Embassy in France, and **Patricia Lalonde**, Vice President of *Geopragma* and former MEP. In 2013, the Paris Academy of Geopolitics, in collaboration with the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation (*IDC*), led by **Natalia Narochitskaya**, a member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation, hosted⁴⁸ an international conference on the “Geopolitics of the Caucasus”.



CENTER
FOR
DEFENSE
REFORMS

As mentioned earlier, both *Geopragma* members and other retired French officers participate in the activities of the Paris Academy of Geopolitics. For instance, in March 2023, Caroline Galacteros took part in a conference entitled “Global Consequences of the War in Ukraine”,



Ali Rastbeen, president of the Russian-affiliated Académie de Géopolitique de Paris

held at the Academy. The conference also featured⁴⁹ a retired Rear Admiral of the French Navy, an Honorary Member of the French Maritime Academy (*l'Académie de Marine*), and Chevalier of the National Order of Merit, **Jean Dufourcq**. During the event, the Rear Admiral emphasised the need for “Europeans to break free from the tight control of the American neoconservative clan” and called for “an immediate end to the fighting” in Ukraine. Another participant⁵⁰ of the Paris Academy of Sciences conference was a retired French general and former military attaché of the French Embassy in Germany, **Nicolas Richoux**, who referred to the war as “not global, but globalised”.

The Academy hosted another event titled “Russians outside Russia”, organised jointly⁵¹ with **Dmitri de Kochko**, co-founder of the Union of Russian Speakers of France and the *Forum des Russes de France*. Three representatives of *Geopragma* attended⁵² the event: the center’s president, **Caroline Galacteros**; former high-ranking official of the French Ministry of Defense, **Pierre Conesa**; and *Geopragma* board member **Christopher Coonen**. The event focused, among other things, on justifying Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, with one of the key positions⁵³ of the conference formulated as follows: “The world may have misunderstood Putin’s fundamental motives for defending Russia’s national interests and protecting its neighbourhood”.

ANALYTICAL CENTER CERCLE K2

From the perspective of *Geopragma*’s member officers potentially influencing other French organisations, it’s worth considering their involvement in the **Cercle K2** think tank. The center hosts many people from various areas of activities. Among its founders are⁵⁴ **Caroline Galacteros** and **Hervé Carresse**, another reserve colonel⁵⁵, former director of the Paris Fire Department, and Chevalier of the French Legion of Honour, who also has his own ties to Russia. For example, Hervé Carresse participated in the aforementioned *Franco-Russian Dialogue*⁵⁶, where he spread disinformation about the low morale and surrender of Ukrainian soldiers. He supported the strategic narrative of Russian propaganda about the damage caused by anti-Russian sanctions to



the French economy, and in his own public activities he also consistently exerts influence that is in line with the interests of the Russian Feder-



Jean Dufourcq, a retired French Navy Rear Admiral, honorary member of the French Académie de Marine, and holder of the National Order of Merit

ation. For example, on the YouTube channel of former Communist Party of France lawyer⁵⁷ **Régis de Castellana**, Carrezet said⁵⁸ that “Ukrainians are cannon fodder” and that the real decisions in the war are “made by the United States”.

Cercle K2 emphasises⁵⁹ that it is not responsible for the authors’ publications and that the platform does not have any specific features relevant to this study, but the few materials related to security issues are worth mentioning in this study. For example, one of the contributors to *Cercle K2* is **Alain Juillet**, a

member of *Geopragma’s* Strategic Development Committee and former director of the **French Directorate General for External Security** (DGSE). In his material on *Cercle K2*, Juillet exerts influence aimed at justifying Russian aggression, accusing⁶⁰ NATO of Russia’s war against Ukraine and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of “crossing red lines” by wanting to join the North Atlantic Alliance”.

Another publication by the *Cercle K2’s* current president⁶¹, also a retired French general and former aide to French President *François Marie Adrien Maurice Mitterrand*, **Jean-Pierre Meyer**, former head of operations at the Military Intelligence (*Direction du renseignement militaire*) and current president of the National Artillery Federation (*Fédération Nationale de l’Artillerie*), suggested⁶² that the United States may be involved in provoking Russian aggression. In a video on the Center’s YouTube channel on the essence and purpose of NATO, the organisation’s representative, **Samir Battiss**, summarises⁶³ that NATO allegedly “has no purpose”.

The *Cercle K2* founders⁶⁴ also include, among others, former RT⁶⁵ and Sputnik⁶⁶ speaker **Alain Rodier**, a former high-ranking French intelligence officer and deputy director of the **French Center for Intelligence Studies CF2R**, where he

The *Cercle K2* founders also include, among others, retired RT and Sputnik speaker Alain Rodier, a retired high-ranking French intelligence officer and deputy director of the French Center for Intelligence Studies CF2R, where he leads the research on terrorism and organised crime

leads the research on terrorism and organised crime. On the think tank platform, Alain Rodier has been influential in opposing Western anti-Russian sanctions; in particular, in his publication entitled “What can Putin do against ‘sanctions he has

ment, aiming, among other things, for France’s withdrawal from the North Atlantic Alliance, accusing NATO of Russian aggression, halting the supply of Western weapons to the Ukrainian army, and pushing Ukraine to negotiate with Russia. Omerta’s work regularly involves retired French officers and former national security and defense officials, some of whom have their own ties to Russia. For many years, they have been exerting influence that supports the efforts of Russian secret services in various areas.



Former Director of the Directorate-General for External Security (DGSE) Alain Juillet hosted his own programme on Russia Today called La Source

never experienced before’?”, he criticised⁶⁷ anti-Russian sanctions as allegedly they are “on the contrary, pushing Putin to war”.

OMERTA

Omerta Media⁶⁸ is another platform with ties to the Russian Federation, involving retired French officers and employees of the national security and defense sector. With the onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the European Union, including France, banned the broadcasting of two Russian state media outlets – Russia Today and Sputnik. However, in the same year, 2022, the aforementioned media platform *Omerta* was founded in Paris, which, according to *Le Monde*⁶⁹, became a new “mouthpiece of Moscow” in France. *Omerta* systematically exerts influence in the interests of the Russian govern-

The founder and president of *Omerta Media* is French businessman **Charles d’Anjou**, who has been living⁷⁰ in Russia since 2006. According to media reports⁷¹, he advised the security company of a retired Russian FSB colonel in Moscow. In 2022, Charles d’Anjou visited⁷² the occupied Donbas as a military correspondent for the French TV channel TF1. He shared the results of his trip at a meeting⁷³ in Moscow, where, among other participants, a representative of the Russian Union of Compatriots, **Vladislav Beresnev**, was present. According to *Intelligence Online*⁷⁴, the founder of *Omerta* has contacts with Russian Defense intelligence. In December 2022, Charles d’Anjou became a guest⁷⁵ on the Russian army’s official channel *Zvezda*, where he discussed his personal stay “in the zone of a special military operation”. Former Russia Today journalist⁷⁶ **Régis Le Sommier** became *Omerta*’s editor-in-chief.

In November 2022, Paris became the venue of the party to celebrate the launch of *Omerta*, attended by Charles d’Anjou and Régis Le Sommier. Another guest⁷⁷ at the event



Charles d'Anjou, founder and president of *Omerta* (left) and Régis Le Sommier, editor-in-chief and former Russia Today journalist (center), during their visit to the occupied Donbas, 2022

was **Bernard Squarcini**, the former head of the French Central Directorate of Domestic Intelligence (*Direction centrale du Renseignement intérieur, DCRI*), a retired French intelligence officer. Bernard Squarcini is involved in a number of scandals regarding so-called “influence peddling”. He is also known for his cooperation⁷⁸ with Russian oligarch and president of the Monaco football club **Dmitry Rybolovlev**. The US FBI (*Federal Bureau of Investigation*) has⁷⁹ several Squarcini’s contracts that were concluded “in the interests of Russia”. Squarcini is involved in *Omerta*’s work, particularly by exerting influence aimed at holding NATO responsible for Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. As Bernard Squarcini said in an interview⁸⁰

with the publication, “The war was the result of NATO tightening its noose around Russia”.

Alongside Bernard Squarcini, several retired French officers and former representatives of national security and defense structures contributed to the first issue of the *Omerta* print magazine. In particular, the aforementioned **Pierre Conesa**, a member of the *Geopragma* board of directors and a former high-ranking official of the French Ministry of Defense, and **Jean-Marc Marill**, a retired brigadier general⁸¹ and former employee of the African Division of the Directorate of Military Intelligence. Additionally, **Georges Kuzmanovic**, a retired French army officer and well-known French pol-

Omerta systematically exerts influence, aiming for France’s withdrawal from the North Atlantic Alliance, accusing NATO of Russian aggression, halting the supply of Western weapons to the Ukrainian army, and forcing Ukraine to negotiate



Bernard Squarcini, former head of the French Central Directorate of Internal Intelligence (DCRI), an Omerta ethers participant

itician, and Jacques Baud, a retired Swiss army officer living in France, also contributed to the issue. The issue⁸² was devoted to “the lost sovereignty of France”, “American interventionism”, and “Bandera’s trace in Ukraine”.

In March 2023, the aforementioned French army reserve officer **Georges Kuzmanovic** and the retired French general, former head⁸³ of France’s military missions to the UN and NATO, **Dominique Trinquant**, took part in a debate⁸⁴ on the *Omerta* platform on “Western responsibility for the escalation of the war in Ukraine”. Georges Kuzmanovic, who defended the posi-

tion of “Western guilt for the war in Ukraine” during the debate, has his own history of ties with Russia. For many years, he has been exerting influence in the interests of the Russian government. In the past, he was a member⁸⁵ of the French Left Party, whose branch he personally opened in Russia, and a security adviser⁸⁶ to the pro-Russian French presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon. In 2014, Georges Kuzmanovich, together with **Georgy Chepelev**, a member of the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots in France, initiated a “rally for peace in Ukraine” in Paris. The rally participants demanded⁸⁷ the recognition of the independence of the so-called ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR.’ Kuzmanovic also exerted influence aimed at legalising Russia’s occupation of Crimea, stating⁸⁸ that the annexation of the peninsula was allegedly “a forced act of the Russian Federation in response to the Nazi coup in Kyiv”. In 2017, Kuzmanovic took part in the launch⁸⁹ party of *Russia Today France*, and in the period from 2017–2019, he was the most frequently⁹⁰ featured politician on the air of this Russian media outlet.

General **Dominique Trinquant**, like several of the other officers mentioned above, also participated in the *Franco-Russian Dialogue*. In particular, in 2022, he spoke at a roundtable⁹¹ entitled “Does France really need NATO?”

French Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel **Christian Harbulot** also at-

Omerta has contacts with Russian Defense intelligence. Omerta’s editor-in-chief is former Russia Today journalist Régis Le Sommier



Swiss Army officer residing in France, Jacques Beau, featured on Omerta media

tended *Omerta*. He is the former leader of the French armed Maoist organization NAPAP (*Noyaux armés pour l'autonomie populaire*) and the left-wing *La Cause du peuple*. These days, he is the founder⁹² of the School of Economic Warfare (*l'École de guerre économique*). In his speech at *Omerta*, Christian Arbulo also exerted influence aimed at discrediting the United States of America. In his interview with *Régis Le Sommier*, he said⁹³, among other things, that “the United States is benefiting economically from the war”.

Another participant in *Omerta's* work was a former intelligence officer⁹⁴ of the French Navy, Éric Denécé. In his interview⁹⁵ with Charles d'Anjou, Denécé spoke about the “dominance of the United States of America”. Éric Denécé is the founder⁹⁶ of the aforementioned French Center for Intelligence Studies (CF2R). The Center, whose activities deserve special attention, is composed of French retired officers and intelligence officers.

THE FRENCH CENTER FOR INTELLIGENCE STUDIES

The French Center for Intelligence Studies (*Center Français de Recherche sur le Renseignement, hereinafter – CF2R*) comprises⁹⁷ several former high-ranking officers of the French Armed Forces and intelligence officers. The center itself maintains numerous ties with Russia and related organisations. For instance, **Eric Denes**, the director⁹⁸ of CF2R and the risk management consulting company CF2R Services is actively involved⁹⁹ in the *Franco-Russian Dialogue* and the *Omerta* platform¹⁰⁰. He also contributes¹⁰¹ to the Geopragma portal and was a commentator for the Russian state media Sputnik¹⁰² until 2022.

CF2R's leadership also features¹⁰³ **Alain Chouet**, former¹⁰⁴ Director of the Intelligence and Security Service (SRS) and former Head of the



Directorate General for External Security (DGSE), alongside **Michel Masson**, head¹⁰⁵ of the French Directorate of Military Intelligence (DRM). Another leader of the organisation is **Alain Juillier**, former director of the DGSE and a frequent participant in the Franco-Russian dialogue. Additional-



Éric Denécé, retired intelligence officer of the French Navy, CF2R director

ly, retired division general **Pascal Legai** and former director of the Directorate-General for External Security (DGSE), retired French Air Force general **François Mermet** contribute to the leadership.

One of *CF2R*'s advisory bodies includes¹⁰⁶ **Igor Prelin**, a colonel in the USSR KGB counterintelligence service, former instructor to Vladimir Putin, and press attaché to the last KGB chief, Vladimir Kryuchkov.

Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, *CF2R* has consistently exerted influence in line with the interests of the Russian government. Several experts¹⁰⁷ have even left the center because the organisation supports the Kremlin in its aggression against Ukraine. For example, materials on

the *CF2R* website exert influence aimed at justifying¹⁰⁸ Russian aggression. The materials accuse the United States of "tightening the screws in Donbas", which allegedly "left Russia with no choice but to go to war", and make accusations¹⁰⁹ of Washington "sabotaging the Minsk agreements".

In December 2023, *CF2R* published¹¹⁰ an article by the head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin, entitled "2024: The Year of Geopolitical Awakening".

Interestingly, *CF2R*'s analytical reports are utilised¹¹¹ by both government and commercial institutions in France. These include the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, the State Investment Bank¹¹², and a company¹¹³ part of the largest French stock index CAC 40, reflecting the movement of share prices of the 40 largest companies traded on the Euronext Paris stock exchange.

CF2R has ties to Russia and is involved in campaigns that serve the interests of the Russian government. Additionally, the center has links with other organisations that bring together retired French officers and former military personnel. For instance, *CF2R* is a member¹¹⁴ of **the Club Phoenix**, a platform for dialogue between representatives of the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, young researchers, and business representatives, created with the support of the Ministry's Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy (DGRIS). *CF2R* is also a member¹¹⁵ of the **Association of Former Intelligence Officers**

(AASSDN). In fact, one of *CF2R*'s leaders, retired General **François Mermet**, is the president¹¹⁶ of AASSDN, and **Alain Juillier**, a member of *CF2R*'s supervisory board, is the vice president¹¹⁷ of the association. *CF2R* is also a member¹¹⁸ of the aforementioned **ASAF**, the French Army Support Association.

The *CF2R* includes Colonel Igor Prelin, a former Vladimir Putin's instructor and press attaché of the last KGB chief

Methodes' editorial director¹²⁵ is **François Maurice**, a retired French Air Force officer¹²⁶. François Maurice is a 'DPR' supporter. After 2014, he published¹²⁷ in the newspaper of the Donetsk National Technical University. French officer Maurice is the incumbent president¹²⁸ of one of the branches of the *Union Nationale des Combattants*, a "Gaullist", and author of the book¹²⁹ "De Gaulle and Russia", as well as the article¹³⁰ "Waffen SS Division Galicia: On Ukraine's Return to the Dark Past". Maurice also criticises¹³¹ the "penetration of the NATO language into the French army".

REVUE "METHODE"

Another platform¹¹⁹ in France that involves retired French officers and merits attention in this study is the journal of the Association of Franco-Russian Institutes, "**Methodes**" (*hereinafter – Methode*). *Methodes*' editor-in-chief¹²⁰ is **Yelena Sydorova**, Director of the Franco-Russian Institute at the Platov South Russian State Polytechnic University (*Institut Franco-Russe de l'UPESR*, Russian acronym for the university – *NPI*). As an associate professor at YSPPU, she taught¹²¹ at Donetsk National Technical University after the start of Russian aggression in 2014. The work of *Methodes* is aimed at legitimising¹²² the official Russian position on the "civil war in Donbas", promoting¹²³ the military power of the Russian Federation, and endorsing the Sputnik V vaccine¹²⁴. The last printed issue of *Methodes* is dated 2021. Still, the French retired officers who are the authors of the magazine continue to exert influence in the interests of the Russian government after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The authors of *Methodes* include the retired French general, former commander of NATO forces in Kosovo **Jean-Claude Allard**¹³²; former captain of the French gendarmerie, alumnus¹³³ of the Special Military School of Saint-Cyr, and once presidential candidate **Alexandre Juving-Brune**¹³⁴; former officer¹³⁵ of the French National Gendarmerie, vice-president of the political party *Objectif France*, retired brigadier general¹³⁶ of the French Air Force Antoine Martinez, and former paratrooper **Xavier Moreau**¹³⁷.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, General **Jean-Claude Allard** was a guest¹³⁸ on Russia Today, where he called for "a rapprochement between NATO and Russia". In 2021, he signed the aforementioned statement by the *Cercle de réflexion interarmées*, criticising the NATO 2030 strategy. After February 2022, Jean-Claude Allard labelled¹³⁹ the Russian war against Ukraine a "NATO-Russia conflict". General Allard is an associate research fellow¹⁴⁰ at the prestigious Paris-based IRIS (*Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques*).



Bertrand Subele, Lieutenant General and Vice President of the political party Objectif France, is one of the authors of *Method*, pictured on the right

Another *Method* contributor, retired captain **Alexandre Juv-ing-Brun**, an alumnus¹⁴¹ of the Special Military School of Saint-Cyr, called¹⁴² on high-ranking French officers “not to get involved in a war with Russia” after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Earlier, in 2021, Juv-ing-Brun wrote¹⁴³ a letter of appeal to French President Emmanuel Macron on “the infiltration of Muslims into the French army”.

In 2022, **Alexandre Jouwing-Brun** participated in an event¹⁴⁴ organised by fundamentalist Catholics from the **Civitas** organisation founded by Belgian right-wing activist Alain Escada. The activities of both Civitas¹⁴⁵ and Alain Escada himself¹⁴⁶ were covered by the **Katehon** portal, funded¹⁴⁷ by Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev. During this event, Alexandre Jouwing-Brun promoted the so-called “new currency” he

had created, an alleged “alternative to the euro”. The retired gendarmarie captain¹⁴⁸ was later arrested on fraud charges.

Another *Method* author, retired French Air Force Brigadier General **Antoine Martinez**, is also involved in French political life. In 2015, he founded¹⁴⁹ the far-right political party *Volontaires pour la France*. The party is mainly composed¹⁵⁰ of former French military and police officers. As part of his own presidential campaign, Martinez promoted the idea¹⁵¹ of France’s withdrawal from NATO, publicly advocating for such a step. In 2022, he sought to justify Russia’s aggression against Ukraine by writing an article¹⁵² entitled “The Ukrainian Conflict: From Illusions to Reality”, in which he referred to Russia’s attack as “a logical continuation of the war prepared by the United States”.

A former French paratrooper officer, **Xavier Moreau**, has been living in Russia since 2000 and is a member¹⁵³ of the French NGO “East France – Solidarity Donbas” (*Vostok France – Solidarité Donbass*). According¹⁵⁴ to the Security Service of Ukraine, the organisation is controlled by Russian secret services.

Methodé’s editorial director is François Maurice, a retired French Air Force officer and a ‘DPR’ supporter. After 2014, he published in the Donetsk National Technical University newspaper. Maurice is the incumbent president of a branch of the National Union of Combatants, a “Gaullist”, and author of the book “De Gaulle and Russia

Moreau is known¹⁵⁵ for participating in the opening of the so-called “DPR consulate” in Paris and being an “observer” at the so-called “local elections” in the “DPR”. Xavier Moreau also has ties to Marine Le Pen’s *National Front*. In 2016, he visited the occupied Donbas together with **Emmanuel Leroy**, a politician close to Le Pen and a member¹⁵⁶ of the Russian Valdai club.

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Moreau continued to speak¹⁵⁷ on the French media. In his speeches, he describes Ukraine as a “fragile entity” allegedly “exploited by the West” and states¹⁵⁸ that Russia has “already won the war”.

Xavier Moreau is the founder¹⁵⁹ and editor of the **Stratpol** Center for Political and Strategic Analysis. One

of the guest editors¹⁶⁰ of this publication is Denis Pushilin, the leader of the DPR terrorist group. Other French retired officers are among *Stratpol’s* contributors, including **Pierre Conesa**, a member of the *Geopragma* board of directors¹⁶¹, who we have mentioned several times, and **Alain Corvez**, a retired colonel¹⁶², former adviser to the UN Force Commander in Lebanon, and adviser to the French Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior. In September 2022, Corvez became an “observer” at the so-called “referendum” on the accession of four Ukrainian regions to Russia.

Alain Corvez is under sanctions¹⁶³ in the EU, the UK, the US, Switzerland, Australia, Japan, and Ukraine, but this has not prevented him from continuing to promote the interests of the Russian government. In 2023, Corvez opposed¹⁶⁴ the supply of F16 fighter jets to Ukraine. In an interview with the French newspaper *Le Dialogue*¹⁶⁵ in October 2023, he claimed that people in Europe allegedly “increasingly want Russia to win”.

ASSOCIATION DIALOGUE FRANCO-RUSSE

The *Association Dialogue Franco-Russe* merits particular attention in this study. Established¹⁶⁶ in 2004 under the patronage of Russian President Vladimir Putin and his French counterpart Jacques René Chirac, the association is co-chaired by Russian oligarch and KGB general¹⁶⁷ **Vladimir Yakunin** (*KGB – Committee for State Security of the Soviet Union*). In 2022, following the onset of the Russian invasion of





Former French paratrooper officer Xavier Moreau unfurled the flag of the “DPR” terrorist group during the Yellow Vest protests in Paris

Ukraine, the association organised a series of conferences, roundtables, and panel discussions aimed at justifying Russian aggression. They accused NATO of initiating the war and used the threat of nuclear conflict to intimidate the West. Several retired high-ranking French officers and former intelligence officers attended these events.

For instance, on April 6, 2022, a panel discussion¹⁶⁸ titled “Russia-NATO: How to Avoid World War III” took place on the association’s platform. Retired French Brigadier General **François Chauvancy** participated in the discussion, which aimed to compel the West to negotiate with Russia, advocating to “hear Russia” and “restore dialogue between NATO and Russia”. On October 12, 2022, the association organised a roundtable¹⁶⁹ discussion on “Ukraine: NATO-Russia Relations after the War”. The conclusion of the event was to blame NATO for Russia’s war against Ukraine. Three retired officers attended the event – General **Vincent Desportes**, retired French Army

General **Dominique Delawarde**, and former officer of The French Army Special Operations Command (*Commandement des opérations spéciales*), Colonel **Jacques Hogard**.

Despite numerous publications and widespread publicity revealing that Vladimir Putin’s close associate, Russian oligarch Vladimir Yakunin, oversees the association’s activities, the platform continued to operate. In 2023, it intensified efforts to engage retired French officers in its events.

A notable aspect of the influence observed in the platform’s work in 2023 is the emergence of what is termed “fatigue from Ukraine” and the push to force Ukraine into negotiations with Russia. For example, on April 20, 2023, the *Franco-Russian Dialogue* platform announced¹⁷⁰ a panel discussion featuring three retired French generals – former lecturer at the *Ecole supérieure de guerre* **Alexandre Lalanne-Berduicq**, former French military attaché to Russia **Philippe Sidos**, and



Participants in the Franco-Russian Dialogue: General Vincent Desportes, retired French Army General Dominique Delawarde, and former French Army Special Operations Command officer Colonel Jacques Hogard

Henri Pinard-Legry, honorary president of the Association for the Support of the French Army (ASAF). The panel discussion was titled “Ukraine: Endless War”. However, General Philippe Sidos was unable to join¹⁷¹ the discussion.

French officers from the leadership of the *Geopragma Center* played an active role in the Franco-Russian Dialogue. In September 2023, Reserve Colonel and President of *Geopragma*, **Caroline Galacteros**, exerted influence during her speech¹⁷² at the association’s platform, pushing for Ukraine to enter into negotiations. She suggested that Zelenskyy would allegedly “negotiate when Ukraine is no longer there”. In October 2023,

Pierre Conesa, a member of the *Geopragma* board of directors and former official at the French Ministry of Defense, also sought to promote the idea of Ukraine negotiating. He insisted¹⁷³ that Putin was “talking to everyone”. In July of the same year, a retired general **Jean-Bernard Pignalat**, Vice President of *Geopragma* and Doctor of Political Science, gave an interview to the Association, advocating¹⁷⁴ for “not ignoring Russia’s security needs”.

In 2023, Eric Denes, the director of the *CF2R* center discussed above, also joined¹⁷⁵ the Franco-Russian Dialogue. The focus of his influence was similar: creating fatigue with Ukraine and compelling negotia-

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tions with Russia. During his speech at the event, retired officer Eric Denes asserted that “Ukraine cannot win, and Russia cannot lose in the war”.

In 2023, Zemmour’s *Reconquête* political party announced its participation in the European Parliament elections scheduled for June 2024. According to the French Institute for Public Opinion and Marketing Research in France and Abroad, this party stands a chance of winning EU seats

In an earlier instance in 2022, Rear Admiral **Jean Dufourcq**, a retired French Navy officer and honorary member of the French Naval Academy, decorated with the National Order of Merit, also participated in the *Franco-Russian Dialogue* roundtable. He was previously mentioned in the context of the events of the Paris Academy of Geopolitics affiliated with the Russian Federation. Another participant in this event was the retired French general, former head of France’s military missions to the UN and NATO, **Dominique Trincoan**. His involvement in *Omerta* was discussed above. The influence exerted by this roundtable¹⁷⁶ aimed at advocating for France’s withdrawal from the North Atlantic Alliance. The event itself had a distinctive title: “Does France really need NATO?”

CONCLUSIONS

Particular attention should be given to the threats associated with the involvement of retired officers from the

French Armed Forces in the country’s political landscape and Russia’s influence on these processes. For instance, during the 2022 presidential election, reserve colonel **Caroline Galacteros**, the president of the *Geopragma* think tank, assumed¹⁷⁷ the role of international affairs adviser to the far-right, pro-Russian candidate **Éric Zemmour**. Simultaneously, retired Major General **Bertrand de La Chesnais**, former Deputy Chief of Staff of the French Army, took on the role of the campaign manager for this candidate.

Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, **Éric Zemmour** adopted¹⁷⁸ an openly pro-Russian stance and criticised¹⁷⁹ France’s military support to Ukraine. The politician identifies as a “Gaullist”, using this perspective to shape his political vision, emphasising France’s need to withdraw¹⁸⁰ from NATO. In June 2023, **Omerta** published an extensive interview¹⁸¹ with **Éric Zemmour** titled “Zemmour has not yet said his last word”, presenting a segment of his political program dedicated to migration. In 2023, Zemmour’s *Reconquête* political party announced¹⁸² its participation in the European Parliament elections scheduled for June 2024. According to the French Institute for Public Opinion and Marketing Research in France and Abroad¹⁸³ (*Institut d’études opinion et marketing en France et à l’international – Ifop*), this party stands a chance of winning seats in the European Parliament.

The aforementioned retired Major General **Bertrand de La Chesnais**, as reported by *Le Parisien*¹⁸⁴, is closely associated with another French officer, retired French Army General **Pierre de Villiers**, the former Chief



of Staff of the French Armed Forces (2014–2017). General Pierre de Villiers is the brother of **Philippe de Villiers**, a prominent French pro-Russian politician, former Minister of Culture, and former presidential candidate who maintains close business ties with Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev. They signed a contract¹⁸⁵ to build a theme park in the annexed Crimea after its occupation.

Leading up to the 2022 presidential elections in France, there was active public discussion about the potential candidacy of General Pierre de Villiers for the head of state position. According to opinion polls conducted by *Valeurs Actuelles*¹⁸⁶, 20% of citizens would have voted for Pierre de Villiers. Philippe de Villiers actively supported¹⁸⁷ the idea of Pierre de Villiers' participation in the election.

According to *Francetv's* ratings, which did not include General de Villiers, Emmanuel Macron had¹⁸⁸ a pre-election rating of 26.3% on the eve of the vote, and Marine Le Pen had 23%.

In 2022, General Pierre de Villiers withdrew from the campaign. However, given the deteriorating international security situation, there is a growing demand in Western societies for the presence of former military officers in politics. The election¹⁸⁹ of General Petr Pavel as President of the Czech Republic attests to this. Therefore, the situation with Villiers' candidacy may change. The general himself did not rule out such a possibility, stating¹⁹⁰ back in 2020 that many French people wanted to see him in politics, and therefore he, "as a brave soldier, can be sacrificed".

TOY SOLDIERS:

NATO MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS IN RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURES



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SPAIN

It is well known that Russian secret services employ various tactics to exert influence, one of which involves supporting political parties across different ideologies, including both “left” and “right” factions. This strategy is evident in real-world politics; for instance, in Germany, Russia is reported by The Washington Post¹ to be collaborating with both the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* and the left-wing *Die Linke*. In France, the Russian Federation’s funding of the right-wing National Front (*Rassemblement National*) has been exposed², along with confirmed connections³ with Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s far-left *La France insoumise*. Similar activities are observed in several other nations. This strategy not only allows Russia to occupy various electoral niches and exacerbate societal polarisation but also to establish footholds of influence for a range of active measures.

In contemporary Spain, characterised by the traditionally tumultuous leftist regions of Catalonia and the Basque Country, ideological polarisation stands out as one of the most prominent in Europe. This was evident in protests⁴ of several hundred thousand people in November 2023 against the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party’s (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) intention to form a government alongside the right-wing “Together for Catalonia” (*Junts per Catalunya*) party, which advocates for regional independence. It’s worth noting for the purposes of this analysis that such polarisation is also evident among retired Spanish military personnel. This stems from the historical backdrop of the civil conflict of 1936–1939 between the “left-wing” Republicans, backed by the USSR⁵, and the nationalists led by Francisco Franco. A manifestation of this divide was the discord over the letter⁶, signed by 50 retired Francoist officers

Ideological diversity among the Spanish military is historically influenced by the confrontation of the years 1936-1939 between the “left-wing” Republicans, backed by the USSR, and the nationalists led by Franco



The founder of the Podemos party, a former member of the youth organization of the Communist Party of Spain, Pablo Iglesias

and published⁷ in November 2023 by the Spanish Military Association (*Asociación de Militares Españoles*), demanding the removal of the current Prime Minister **Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón**. It was sharply criticised by retired military officers on the “left” flank, who opposed the “Francoist legacy” in the army.

SPANISH OFFICERS IN THE RANKS OF THE LEFT-WING PODEMOS PARTY, TIES TO RUSSIA, AND ACTIVITIES ALIGNED WITH THE INTERESTS OF THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT

This ideological fracturing provides fertile ground for Russian secret services to directly influence select members of the Spanish military, influencing them directly and engaging in various specialised activities.

In Spain, retired officers are involved in activities aligned with the interests of the Russian government through political parties with ties to Russia, namely the left-wing⁸ Podemos (“We Can!”) and the far-right⁹ Vox (“Voice”). This study will also examine non-partisan retired Spanish officers with connections to Russia, their affiliated organisations, and their activities serving the interests of the Russian government.

One of the left-wing political forces involving retired Spanish officers is the **Podemos** party. Created in co-operation¹⁰ with representatives of the Trotskyist force “Left Anti-Capitalists” (*Izquierda Anticapitalista*), in 2016, as part of the broad coalition of leftist forces **Unidas Podemos**, it became¹¹ a partner of the “**United Left**” (*Izquierda Unida*), whose founder and key political force – the Communist Party of Spain (*Partido Comunista de España*) – is historically¹² associated with the USSR and modern Russia. Some of its members participated¹³ in armed aggression against Ukraine within the “DPR” and “LPR” terrorist groups.

Despite its electoral setbacks in the 2023 legislative elections, *Podemos* has achieved significant milestones since its inception. It has secured¹⁴ parliamentary seats multiple times, held positions¹⁵ within the Spanish government, and currently maintains representation¹⁶ in

The appeal to the EU to cease supplying military aid to Ukraine was signed by approximately 30 retired officers and former military personnel from various branches of the Spanish army, and the campaign was supported by Russia Today

the European Parliament. *Podemos* has received¹⁷ media support from Spanish-language Russian state media outlets such as **Russia Today** and **Sputnik**. The party's founder, **Pablo Iglesias**, a former member¹⁸ of the youth organisation of the Communist Party of Spain (*Unión de Juventudes Comunistas de España*), was¹⁹ a regular guest on Russian media platforms. The party has faced repeated accusations of being financed by the Russian Federation, particularly from Spanish government officials. In 2015, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, José Manuel García-Margallo, made a corresponding statement²⁰. During hearings of the National Security Committee of the Spanish Congress, a report was presented²¹ suggesting that *Podemos* may receive funding from the Russian government.

Since the onset of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, both the party itself and retired officers

from its ranks have systematically exerted influence in line with the interests of the Russian government. Their actions aim, among other things, to alleviate sanctions pressure on Russia and undermine the supply of military and technical assistance to Ukraine. For instance, in March 2022, during a meeting of the European Parliament, *Podemos* voted²² against expanding sanctions against Russia in response to a full-scale invasion. The party's official stance is to blame²³ NATO for starting the war. It has consistently opposed²⁴ granting Ukraine the EU candidate status and is against providing financial and military²⁵ assistance to Ukraine.

MANIFESTO TO THE EU DEMANDING A CESSATION OF ARMS SUPPLY TO UKRAINE

Regarding the personal involvement of retired Spanish officers who are members of *Podemos* and exerting influence that aligns with the interests of the Russian government, the manifesto²⁶ released by former members of the Spanish Armed Forces in June 2023 is noteworthy. The manifesto calls for the European Union to cease supplying military aid to Ukraine and to initiate what they term as "peace talks" with Russia.

The appeal was endorsed by approximately 30 retired officers and former military personnel from various branches of the Spanish army. Additionally, the campaign received support from the Spanish-language Russian state media outlet *Russia Today*²⁷.





Former Chief of the Defense Staff of the Spanish Armed Forces general José Julio Rodríguez Fernández

One of the prominent signatories of the manifesto was the former²⁸ Chief of the General Staff of the Spanish Defense Ministry (*Jefe del Estado Mayor de la Defensa*) and a member²⁹ of the Coordination Council and the National Public Council of Podemos, Air General **José Julio Rodríguez Fernández**. General Julio Rodríguez, who also served³⁰ as the head of the NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control program and the Director General³¹ of Armaments and Material of the Ministry of Defense of Spain, has consistently advocated for policies aimed at countering the supply of arms to Ukraine. For instance, in 2023, he expressed³² opposition to the transfer of Leopard heavy tanks to Ukraine via a post on his Twitter page, stating that such a decision would “lead to military escalation” and “prolong the war”. The retired Spanish army officer also maintains the belief³³ that the occupied Crimea cannot be returned “no matter what kind of military assistance is provided to Ukraine”.

Furthermore, General Rodríguez’s stance on the issue of Catalan independence is significant. Alongside advocating for the region to remain part of Spain, he supported³⁴ the holding of an unconstitutional referendum on Catalan separation. According to Spanish intelligence³⁵, Russian secret services were also interested in promoting the referendum within Spanish society.

General José Julio Rodríguez Fernández has been linked³⁶ by Spanish media to several left-wing associations of retired Spanish officers, including the “**Militaries Anti-Francoists**” (*Militares Anti-Franquistas*), the group “**Military Democrats for the ANEMOI Republic**” (*Colectivo de Militares Demócratas por la República “ANEMOI”*, hereafter referred to as ANEMOI), and the **Military and Democracy Forum** (*el Foro Milicia y Democracia*, hereafter – FMD), all of which will be further discussed in this report.



Spanish Navy retired officer Manuel Pardo de Donlebún Montesino co-organized the anti-NATO protest in Madrid in 2022, which received information support from the Russian channel Sputnik

In January 2022, on the eve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Military Anti-Francoists published³⁷ an official statement through its partner organisation, the **Association for the Memory of the Military Democrats** (*Asociación por la Memoria Militar Democrática*, hereafter – AMMD), accusing NATO, not Russia, of preparing for such an invasion. They demanded that Spain remain “neutral” in the conflict. It is noteworthy that after the onset of Russian aggression in 2014, the president of AMMD and a member of ANEMOI, Captain of the Spanish Navy in reserve Manuel Pardo de Donlebún Montesino, became an expert on the platform of the Span-

ish-language Russian media Sputnik³⁸, where among other things, he exerted influence aimed at discrediting NATO. In particular, he referred³⁹ to the alliance as “an instrument of US domination”. Retired Spanish Navy officer, Montesino is also the founder⁴⁰ of the organisation “**Veterans for Peace in Spain**” (*Veteranos por la Paz España*) and a member⁴¹ of the so-called International **Anti-imperialistic Front** (*Frente Antiimperialista Internacionalista*). During the NATO summit in Madrid in 2022, Montesino co-organized⁴² an anti-NATO protest in the capital, which received information support from Russia's Sputnik⁴³.

On the eve of Russia's invasion, on the Militares Antifranquistas' site a statement of the Asociación por la Memoria Militar Democrática was published, accusing NATO, not Russia, in preparing for an invasion, and demanding the “neutrality” from Spain

“Veterans for Peace in Spain” is part⁴⁴ of the international organisation *Veterans for Peace*, which is registered in the United States. Both Veterans for Peace in Spain and its American parent organisation have been influencing⁴⁵ opposition to the supply of Western weapons to Ukraine since Russia’s full-scale invasion.



In April 2023, Ecologists in Action participated in pacifist demonstrations in Spain, demanding to stop military and technical assistance to Ukraine and advocating for “peace talks” with Russia

The aforementioned ANEMOI group also officially opposes⁴⁶ the provision of Western military aid to Ukraine. Several representatives of ANEMOI and the Military and Democracy Forum have signed the aforementioned appeal to the EU, which will receive further focus later in this paper.

Another retired officer, a member of Podemos and signatory of the manifesto, is the former Chief⁴⁷ of the Spanish Air Combat Command (*General Jefe del Mando Aéreo de Combate*), retired Lieutenant General **César Miguel Simón López**. Lieutenant General López is the party’s representative⁴⁸ in the municipality of Guadalajara and a member⁴⁹ of the Military and Democracy Forum. He also serves as a military consultant⁵⁰ to the president of the **Airbus** aerospace company’s Spanish branch.

Other Spanish officers and retired military personnel, who supported the demand⁵¹ to the EU to halt arms supply, are not affiliated with political parties, but have established ties to Russia and are involved in campaigns that align with the interests of the Russian government. Therefore, they also deserve special attention.

For example, retired⁵² Spanish army lieutenant **Luis Gonzalo Segura** is a regular contributor⁵³ to the Spanish-language version of *Russia Today*. Through his work on the platform, Lieutenant Segura, among other things, exerts influence aimed⁵⁴ at discrediting Ukraine as an “undemocratic state” and discrediting⁵⁵ the North Atlantic Alliance.

In August 2023, Segura published a book⁵⁶ titled “The Ukrainian Trap” (*La trampa Ucraniana*), which criticises the “demonisation of Russia by the West” and accuses Western media of “disinformation and distortion of facts about the war”.

Another signatory of the demand⁵⁷ to the EU to stop supplying arms to Ukraine was retired Lieutenant Colonel⁵⁸ of the Spanish Air Force, **José Ignacio Domínguez**. Domínguez has also engaged with Spanish-language Russian state media, this time – with *Sputnik*⁵⁹. He serves as the regional coordinator⁶⁰ and lawyer for **Ecologists in Action** (*Ecologistas en Acción*), which has been systematically involved in influencing the interests of the Russian government. In April 2023, Ecologists in Action participated⁶¹ in pacifist demonstrations in Spain, demanding an end to military and technical assistance to Ukraine and



Retired Spanish Army Lieutenant Luis Gonzalo Segura backed the Manifesto to the EU, urging to halt arms shipments to Ukraine

advocating for “peace talks” with Russia, echoing⁶² similar arguments as those put forth by the Kremlin regarding the “threat of direct conflict between NATO and Russia”, along with employing classic leftist rhetoric about “reducing military spending” and the “urgency to bolster” social spending.

Participation of *Ecologists in Action* in campaigns⁶³ to shut down nuclear power plants in Spain and oppose the construction of the **MidCat** (*Midi-Catalonia*) gas pipeline also deserves attention. Analysts estimated⁶⁴, if completed, the MidCat project could reduce European reliance on Russian natural gas by 10 to 40%. Opposition to the pipeline’s construction in 2017 was cited⁶⁵ by subversion experts as one of the economic reasons why Russian intelligence services support Catalan separatists.

Among the signatories of the appeal to the EU is **Manuel Ruiz Robles**, a retired captain of the Spanish Navy and former member⁶⁶ of the left-wing anti-Franco **Democratic Military Union** (*Unión Militar Democrática*, hereafter – UMD). Robles is an official partner⁶⁷ of the aforementioned Military and Democracy Forum, a member⁶⁸ of the board of directors of the **Militia and Republic Civil Association** (*la Asociación Civil Milicia y República*, hereafter – AC MYR), and a member⁶⁹ of the organisation “**Friends of Combatants in Republican Spain**” (*Amigos de los Combatientes en la España Republicana*, hereafter – ACER). **ACER**, among its various activities, examines⁷⁰ the archives of the International Brigades in Moscow and collaborates with several other memorial organisations. Notably, it has a partner organisation in Russia that has received recognition for its



The ‘Militarys for the Future’ union held a rally, demanding changes to Spain’s legislation to permit active-duty military personnel to join political parties

efforts from the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation.

One more signatory of the manifesto is a retired officer⁷¹ of the Spanish Air Force **Floren Dimas**, who is a member of all three of the aforementioned officers’ associations, including ACER and ANEMOI. Dimas is also one of the contributors⁷² to the Military and Democracy Forum and the head⁷³ of the Militia and Republic Civil Association (AC MYR). In his public activities, Lieutenant⁷⁴ Dimas calls⁷⁵ “NATO expansion” as a reason for the war and opposes⁷⁶ Spain’s purchase of Patriot systems for further transfer to Ukraine.

Interestingly, all aforementioned retired Spanish officers who signed the manifesto to the EU, along with the Ecologists in Action, are contributors to the Spanish-language left-wing publisher **Rebellion**. The platform boasts approximately 4.5 million visits monthly and is considered one of the most influential left-wing re-

sources in Europe. While the owner of the publishing company remains unknown, one of *Rebellion’s* authors⁷⁷ is **Leonid Savin** (Леонид Савин), the editor-in-chief⁷⁸ of the think tank **Katehon**, which is funded⁷⁹ by Russian oligarch **Konstantin Malofeev**. The *Rebellion* site regularly reprints materials from *Katehon*⁸⁰ and another think tank associated with Malofeev⁸¹, **Geopolitica.ru**⁸². Additionally, **Maksym Goldrab** (Максим Гольдраб), leader of the **Union of Left Forces** party, banned in Ukraine and accused by the Security Service of Ukraine of collaborating with the Russian Federation, contributes to *Rebellion*. The Union of Left Forces party participated⁸³ in the so-called “elections” in the territories occupied by the Russian militia groups “DPR” and “LPR”. On the *Rebellion* portal, Goldrab addresses topics such as “Nazism in Ukraine”⁸⁴, “military corruption”⁸⁵, and “the destruction of freedom of speech”⁸⁶. Pablo Iglesias, the founder of the Podemos party, has also collaborated⁸⁷ as a contributor with the *Rebellion* platform.



It's important to note that the manifesto directly impacts the Spanish military, as it calls⁸⁸ for officers and representatives of the Spanish army to join the campaign.

PODEMOS' CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ASSOCIATIONS OF RETIRED MILITARY PERSONNEL

In regards to *Podemos's* potential influence on both active and retired Spanish military personnel, the party's ties⁸⁹ with the organisation "**Militaries for the Future**" (*Militares con Futuro*) deserve attention. One of the primary objectives of this organisation is to lobby for "amendments to Spanish legislation" to permit⁹⁰ military personnel to join political parties. Notably, *Podemos* actively sought to draw military personnel to this association, employing⁹¹ its own official media platform for this purpose.

"Militaries for the Future" has faced accusations⁹² from Spanish intelligence of engaging in "subversive activities" within the Spanish Armed Forces. During the migrant crisis in the Ceuta region (a Spanish exclave on the northern coast of Africa) in 2021, the organisation reportedly utilised the "**Citizens in Uniform**" (*Ciudadanos de Uniforme*) Telegram channel for anonymous military complaints, encouraging active military personnel to disregard⁹³ orders from their command and refrain from impeding attempts to

breach the border fence with Morocco.

"Citizens in Uniform" has been subject to coverage by Russian state media outlet *Sputnik* as part of efforts to discredit the Spanish Armed Forces and the NATO alliance. For instance, *Sputnik* published an article⁹⁴ about the alleged presence of "neo-Nazis" within NATO armies, citing a report by "Citizens in Uniform" submitted to the Spanish Ministry of Defense on the alleged "presence of such neo-Nazis in the Spanish Armed Forces".

It is noteworthy that representatives of the political alliance *Unidos Podemos*, comprising the *Podemos* party, have participated in events alongside "Militaries for the Future". For instance, on September 4, 2021, a rally⁹⁵ organised by the "**Union of Private Soldiers**" (*La Unión de Militares de Tropa*) was held in front of the Spanish Congress in Plaza de la Cortes, Madrid. Various associations of the Spanish military attended the event – the Professional **Military Association "Old Spanish Tercios"** (*La asociación "Tercios Viejos españoles" (TERVIES)*) that unites⁹⁶ military personnel from various branches of the army, the association "**Request for Justice and Honor**" (*Cuestión de Justicia y Honor*) that exposes internal violations within the Armed Forces, and representatives of the "Militaries for the Future". Members of the *Unidas Podemos* alliance also⁹⁷ were present at the rally, including **Enrique San-**

Militares con Futuro has faced accusations from Spanish intelligence of engaging in "subversive activities" within the Spanish Armed Forces

tiago, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain, who is considered⁹⁸ by Spanish media to be very close to the leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias.



A former Chief of Staff of the Spanish Army Ground Force, Army General Fulgencio Coll Bucher (on the left)

VOX RIGHTS, TIES TO RUSSIA AND INFLUENCE ON THE SPANISH MILITARY

From the perspective of ties with Russia exposed in this study, the Vox (*Voice*) political party deserves special attention among the “right-wing” political forces for its direct impact on the groups of active and former Spanish military personnel and the threats associated with such influence.

In 2019, Vox emerged⁹⁹ as a significant platform for engaging high-ranking retired officers of the Spanish Armed Forces in the country’s political landscape. Notably, several retired military figures accepted prominent roles within the party’s ranks. For instance, in various regional parliamentary elections, Vox fielded¹⁰⁰ candidates such as former Chief of Staff of the Ground

Forces (*Jefe de Estado Mayor del Ejército de Tierra*) Army General **Fulgencio Coll Bucher**¹⁰¹, awarded the highest royal award – the Cross of Isabella the Catholic; **Agustín Rosety Fernández de Castro**, a retired Brigadier General of the Spanish Navy with experience in special operations, who also held¹⁰² positions in the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Spain; **Antonio Budiño Carballo**, a retired Brigadier General, who previously¹⁰³ taught at the General Staff School of the Spanish Armed Forces; and **Alberto Asarta Cuevas**, a retired Major General of the Spanish Armed Forces and former commander¹⁰⁴ of the UN Interim Mission in Lebanon.

In 2023, the Vox candidate for the municipality of Orihuela was a retired lieutenant general of the Spanish Air Force, one¹⁰⁵ of the co-authors of the Spanish Air Force doctrine, **Manuel Mestre Barea**¹⁰⁶. In the Navarra region, the party was represented¹⁰⁷ by retired military officer **Emilio Jiménez**. Additionally, the list of candidates in the last elections included¹⁰⁸ retired non-commissioned officer **Manuel Ángel González**, as well as the former head¹⁰⁹ of the security service of the Cerro Muriano military base, retired officer **José Tuñón**.

According¹¹⁰ to Rafa Martínez, a professor of political science at the University of Barcelona, the majority of military personnel in the Spanish Armed Forces hold conservative views, with some sympathising with the former regime of dictator Francisco Franco. As a result, the conservative and far-right rhetoric of Vox resonates and garners support among both retired and active Spanish military personnel and officers.

During its formation, Vox faced scrutiny for its connections to Russia. Its leader, **Santiago Abascal**, publicly expressed¹¹¹ sympathy for the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Additionally, the party has consistently worked to undermine the European Union, aligning with Russian interests in terms of influence.



Close to Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, the president of the World Congress of Families, Alexei Komov, is a member of the executive board of CitizenGO

An investigation by Open Democracy¹¹² revealed that Vox was indirectly funded by the non-profit international association **HazteOir** (*Hazte Oir Víctimas de la ideología de género*), associated with Russian oligarch **Konstantin Malofeev**. In 2013, *HazteOir* founded an online platform to “protect traditional values” in Europe, called *CitizenGO*, with Alexei Komov, a Russian businessman close¹¹³ to Malofeev, on the board of directors¹¹⁴. According¹¹⁵ to Tagesspiegel, a German court confirmed the facts that Malofeev financed *CitizenGO*. Both *HazteOir* and *CitizenGO* played roles in promoting¹¹⁶ Vox in Spain. **Ignacio Arsuaga**, founder and president of *HazteOir* and *CitizenGO*, is a close associate¹¹⁷ of Vox party leader Santiago Abascal, although the organisations publicly severed¹¹⁸ ties in 2019.

It should also be noted that the activities of Vox’s leader and the party itself were occasionally covered¹¹⁹ by the *Katehon* think tank’s platform, funded by Konstantin Malofeev. For example, *Katehon* reprinted¹²⁰ Santiago Abascal’s critiques of so-called “international globalism”, which he claimed seeks to disintegrate nation-states.

CitizenGO has also supported¹²¹ other right-wing Eurosceptic parties with ties¹²² to Russia, such as Germany’s **AfD** (*Alternative für Deutschland*) and Italy’s **League of the North** (*Lega Nord*). Vox interacts¹²³ with these parties as well.

Open criticism of NATO and the EU in Spain poses a significant risk of marginalisation and electoral setbacks for any political party since such sentiments are not widely popular in Spanish society. Nevertheless, given Vox’s history of ties to Russia and its connections with Russian-linked political parties, one can observe the party’s consistent policy of discrediting the European Union. In fact, Vox has made criticising¹²⁴ the EU a fundamental aspect of its platform. Although the party does not openly advocate for Spain’s withdrawal from the European Union like the French “National Front” and the Italian “League of the North”, it emphasises the “need to restore the sovereignty of European countries”. It calls for a “revision of the EU Treaty”¹²⁵.

According to Xabier Deop, a professor of international public law and European Union law at the Catholic University of Avila, the program presented by Vox in the 2023 parliamentary elections is incompatible¹²⁶ with Spain’s membership in the European Union.

Moreover, given the significant public trust in the institutions of the Armed Forces, as seen from the study¹²⁷ conducted by the University of Murcia, the involvement of retired Spanish officers serves as an effective tool in legitimising the Eurosceptic agenda for a broader audience in the country.



July 1994, Alexander Dugin signs the “National Bolshevik Act” in Spain with the leader of the fascist MSR party Juan Antonio Llopart (*left*). Today, the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics is associated with Dugin

SPANISH INSTITUTE OF GEOPOLITICS, DUGIN, MALOFEEV AND RETIRED SPANISH OFFICERS

Within the scope of this study, particular attention is drawn to the **Spanish Institute of Geopolitics** (*Instituto Español de Geopolítica*, hereafter – IEG). The organisation operates its own online platform, **Geoestrategia.es**¹²⁸, catering to the

Spanish-speaking audience and specialising in the analysis of contemporary issues in security and defense, to which retired Spanish officers are active contributors. The Spanish Institute of Geopolitics maintains several connections with the Russian Federation and consistently wields influence that aligns with the interests of the Russian government. Moreover, its organisational structure exhibits signs of being a front cover for Russian secret services.

The director of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics, **Juan A. Aguilar**, is a political scientist and a reserve member of the Spanish army. He has authored¹²⁹ pieces on the portal *Geopolitica.ru*, which was co-founded by Alexander Dugin, a key ideologist and proponent of the “Russian world” concept, notorious for his appeals to the President of Russia on the invasion of Ukraine and the leader¹³⁰ of the International Eurasian Movement (IEM). *El Pais*¹³¹ reports that one of the sponsors of the portal is oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, who maintains close ties with Vladimir Putin. Notably, the editor-in-chief¹³² of the IEG platform is a Spanish political scientist affiliated¹³³ with the analytical center *Katehon* (which is also a part of Malofeev’s holding) **Enrique J. Refoyo**. Refoyo served as an observer¹³⁴ during the so-called Russian “referendum” in the occupied territory of the Kherson region in 2023. Moreover, one of the princi-

Particular attention should be paid to the Instituto Spanish Institute of Geopolitics, which exhibits signs of being a cover organization for Russian secret services, and to which retired Spanish officers are actively engaged

pal authors¹³⁵ of the IEG platform is Alexander Dugin, and the platform is actively promoting his vision of the “Russian world” and so-called “Eurasianism” concepts. Both Juan Aguilar and Enrique Refoyo are involved in translating Dugin’s books into Spanish, two of which – “Fundamentos de Geopolítica” and “Platonismo Político” – were presented¹³⁶ in Madrid in 2023.

Alexander Dugin is one of the key contributors to the IEG site; his vision of the “Russian world” and the concepts of so-called “Eurasianism” are being actively promoted on the platform

In April 2023, Juan Aguilar and other members of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics participated¹³⁷ in the “**World Conference on Multi-polarity**”, spearheaded by Dugin’s International Eurasian Movement and the **International Movement of Russophiles (IMR)**. The head of the IMR, **Nikolay Malinov**, faced accusations from the Bulgarian government of spying for the Russian Federation. A separate section of the study delves into the activities of retired Bulgarian officers associated with the *Russophiles* movement, which align with the interests of the Russian government. The conference drew notable attendees¹³⁸, including Russian Foreign Minister **Sergei Lavrov**, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson **Maria Zakharova**, the aforementioned oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, and numerous participants from over 60 countries. Throughout the conference, efforts were made to discredit the United States of America, with a key

focus on criticising “American colonial policy” and justifying Russian aggression against Ukraine under the guise of a “Russian struggle in Ukraine for a multipolar world”.

As previously mentioned, retired officers of the Spanish Armed Forces are actively engaged in activities of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics. Among the contributors¹³⁹ to the platform is a former Commander¹⁴⁰ of the Spanish Ground Forces and ex-Commander¹⁴¹ of the European Corps (*Eurocorp*), retired Lieutenant General **Pedro Pitarch**. Pitarch has published¹⁴² on Konstantin Malofeev’s *Geopolitica.ru*, where he addressed the complexities of elections in Catalonia, and participated regularly in Spanish-language broadcasts on Russian media outlet Russia Today¹⁴³, where he sought to discredit NATO. The IEG website promotes¹⁴⁴ the personal blog of Lieutenant General Pedro Pitarch.

At the onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in an interview with the Spanish edition of *El Confidencial*¹⁴⁵, Pedro Pitarch echoed the official position of the Russian government regarding the alleged “civil war in Ukraine”, asserting that the conflict purportedly “bears signs of a civil war”. In 2023, in his aforementioned personal blog, Lieutenant General Pitarch expressed support for the efforts of Russian secret services to undermine military and technical assistance to Ukraine¹⁴⁶, highlighting “the fatigue of the US and EU from the exorbitant costs of military assistance to Ukraine”. It’s noteworthy that the utilisation of socially sensitive rhetoric resonates within the Spanish military itself: in June¹⁴⁷ 2022, three military



associations – **ASFAS PRO** (*Professional Association of Sergeants of the Armed Forces*), **ATME** (*Association of Spanish Soldiers and Sailors*), and **UMT** (*Union of Military Personnel*) – organised a rally, demanding that the government in-

playing nuclear weapons in a conflict with Ukraine, particularly “if it faces the risk of defeat”. In February 2023, in his interview with Spanish RTVE¹⁵⁰, Pedro Pitarch suggested that Ukraine was embroiled in “essentially a war between NATO and Russia”, warning that a Russian defeat could result in the emergence of “Islamic republics” armed with nuclear capabilities.



Lieutenant General Pitarch also serves as a regular analyst¹⁵¹ for the **Association of Spanish Military (AME)**, an organisation that brings together the Spanish military and members of the Civil Guard. Through this platform, he seeks to undermine the supply of weapons to Ukraine and cultivate the fatigue from providing military assistance to the country. Thus, in October 2023, AME published¹⁵² Pitarch’s work titled “Growing Reluctance to Aid Ukraine with Weapons”.

One of the authors of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics, a former Commander of the Spanish Ground Forces and ex-Commander of the European Corps (Eurocorp), Lieutenant General Pedro Pitarch

crease military salaries (which was indeed planned by the Spanish government in 2023). Additionally, in 2023, in his own analytical article for ABC¹⁴⁸, General Pitarch warned of the alleged “threat of global war” due to the supply of tanks to Ukraine.

Lieutenant General Pitarch’s blog posts, among other content, are directed towards nuclear intimidation of the West, a tactic that aligns with one of the strategic influence operations of the Russian secret services. For instance, in one piece, the retired lieutenant general discusses the potential threat¹⁴⁹ of Russia em-

The Spanish Institute of Geopolitics also employs¹⁵³ a retired colonel of the Spanish Armed Forces with experience¹⁵⁴ participating in six UN and NATO multinational operations, **Enrique Vega Fernández**. Having studied¹⁵⁵ alongside Lt. Gen. Pitarch at the Academia General Militar, Zaragoza, Colonel Vega has worked in the General Directorate of Foreign Affairs of the Spanish Ministry of Defense and currently holds teaching positions¹⁵⁶ at the Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Melado and several other military training centers in Spain.

A former Commander of the Spanish Ground Forces, Pedro Pitarch, has been published on Konstantin Malofeev’s Geopolitica.ru and has regularly participated in broadcasts on Russia Today

Colonel Vega consistently advances the interests of the Russian government through his activities, which involve undermining Western military assistance to Ukraine and justifying Russia's aggression against the country.

In January 2023, as Western countries deliberated supplying Ukraine with Leopard tanks, on the **Military and Democracy Forum's (FMD)** website¹⁵⁷, which attracts former Spanish military personnel, Colonel Vega published an article named "Reflections on Leopard", where he alleged that Ukraine was engaged in "conflict between NATO and Russia", and criticised Spain for seemingly "bowing to the United States" in its decision to aid Ukraine militarily.

In February 2023, in his own post on FMD – a platform where he regularly contributes – Colonel Vega engaged in nuclear intimidation tactics against the West. In an article titled "Everything You Were Not Told About Sending Leopard Tanks to Ukraine", he suggested¹⁵⁸ that the Russian Federation could "offset the repercussions of supplying arms to Ukraine by resorting to tactical nuclear weapons".

Earlier, in October 2022, following the explosion on the Nord Stream gas pipeline, in his personal column¹⁵⁹, Colonel Vega dismissed Russia's possible involvement in the incident.

Apart from the FMD, Enrique Vega is also a member¹⁶⁰ of the **Association for the Memory of Democratic Military (AMMD)**, which brings together Spanish citizens "with past or present affiliations with the

Armed Forces and the Civil Guard". Following the onset of Russian aggression in 2014, the president of the association, **Manuel Pardo de Donlebun Montesino**, as mentioned previously, became a commentator for the Russian state media *Sputnik*¹⁶¹. Notably, the AMMD association itself blames¹⁶² NATO for Russia's war against Ukraine and advocates for Spain's "neutrality in the conflict".

Among other authors¹⁶³ associated with the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics, from the ranks of retired officers of the Armed Forces of Spain, particular attention should be given to retired Colonel of the Ground Forces¹⁶⁴ **José Antonio Crespo-Francés**. He holds a Doctorate in Arts and Humanities from the University of Navarra and has authored numerous works, often in collaboration with the Spanish Ministry of Defense, the **Spanish Commission of Military History** (*Comisión española de historia militar*), and some other reputable institutions.

Following the commencement of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on February 26, 2022, Colonel Crespo-Francés used the *La Paseata*¹⁶⁵ platform to advocate for the legalisation of Russian aggression and undermine Spain's aid to Ukraine. He argued that the conflict was occurring on "historical Russian territories" and asserted that Spain "has no relation to the war".

Colonel Crespo is also a contributor to the **Association of Spanish Military** (*Asociación de Militares Españoles* – AME), an organisation that consists of retired Spanish officers¹⁶⁶, among other members.

On the eighth of April 2022, on the association's website, José Antonio Crespo-Francés published an article¹⁶⁷ that criticised the speech of the President of Ukraine to the Spanish Congress, alleging that “the Azov battalion committed crimes at Donbas and in Mariupol”.



An IEG author, the president of the Spanish Association of Military Writers, a retired Spanish Brigadier General, Salvador Fontenla Ballesta. He was published on the Malofeev-funded platform Geopolitica.ru

Colonel Crespo-Francés is the author of a series of books, among which the attention should be given to the work “White Slaves: Islam and the Conquest of Europe”. Notably, one of the book presentations¹⁶⁸ that took place in May 2022 was hosted by the currently acting fascist party “Falange Española”.

The list of IGE authors¹⁶⁹ also contains a Spanish brigadier reserve general and former Chief of Staff of the Rapid Action Forces (*Estado Mayor de la Fuerza de Acción Rápida*) **Salvador Fontenla Ballesta**. Salvador Ballesta serves as the president¹⁷⁰ of the **Spanish Association of Military Writers** (*La Asociación Española de Militares Escritores*) and is a co-author¹⁷¹ of a guide to defense culture for students. Like some of his counterparts mentioned in this report, Brigadier General Ballesta has published¹⁷² on the *Katehon* platform, fund-

ed¹⁷³ by Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, where he denied the Russian threat to the Baltic States in 2017. Also, he has contributed to the aforementioned Geopolitica.ru platform¹⁷⁴.

Following the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in March 2022, Brigadier General Ballesta engaged in activities seemingly aimed at nuclear intimidation of the West. In an interview with the Spanish edition of *El Debate*¹⁷⁵, the retired brigadier general asserted that “Russia will not resort to nuclear weapons unless it faces direct threats”. Additionally, during the same interview, he advocated for a more neutral stance from Spain regarding the conflict and questioned¹⁷⁶ the potential repercussions of aligning with Russia.

In his public engagements, Salvador Ballesta also endeavours to discredit the North Atlantic Alliance. For instance, in 2021, he authored an article critiquing the Spanish and NATO mission in Afghanistan that was blocked¹⁷⁷ from publication by the Spanish Ministry of Defense. In another piece for *Periodista Digital*¹⁷⁸, Ballesta criticised NATO for its perceived lack of readiness to defend Ceuta and Melilla (Spanish territories in Africa bordering Morocco, which serve as the primary route for illegal migration to Spain). Additionally, in 2007, in his article¹⁷⁹ “The Military Potential of the European Union”, the general criticised NATO's “multinational composition”, contending that it negatively impacts the military capabilities of member countries and advocated for the enhancement of Spain's national armed forces.

RETIRED COLONEL PEDRO BAÑOS, TIES TO RUSSIA AND INFLUENCE IN THE INTERESTS OF THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT

In Spain, particular attention should be paid to the former head¹⁸⁰ of the Counterintelligence and Security Directorate of the European Corps (a tactical association of the armed forces of the EU member states – Eurocorp), former head¹⁸¹ of the Geopolitical Analysis Department of the General Secretariat of Defense Policy of the Spanish Ministry of Defense, and a former professor¹⁸² at the Higher School of the Spanish Armed Forces, retired Colonel **Pedro Baños**. Pedro Baños cherishes a personal story of his connections with Russia itself, as well as individuals and organisations linked to Russia. Both before and after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, he has exerted influence in line with the interests of the Russian government.

Pedro Baños contributes to Spanish-language Russian state-run platforms such as Russia Today and Sputnik, where he has consistently advocated for the interests of the Russian Federation. For instance, in 2015, following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Baños participated in a radio program¹⁸³ on *Sputnik*,

where he advocated forming an alliance between the EU and Russia. In an interview with *Russia Today*¹⁸⁴, Colonel Baños suggested the involvement of a Ukrainian fighter jet in the downing of Malaysian Boeing MH17 over Donbas, a narrative aligned with the official stance¹⁸⁵ of the Russian government.

In 2018, Pedro Baños was considered¹⁸⁶ for the position of head of the Department of National Security (*Departamento de Seguridad Nacional*) in the government of Pedro Sánchez. However, Baños did not receive this position because of the public outcry over his ties to Russia. *Russia Today*¹⁸⁷ and *Sputnik*¹⁸⁸ reported then on an alleged “planned attack” by Western intelligence against the Spanish officer.

Both before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Baños has worked to undermine the European Union's sanctions against Russia. In this context, he referred¹⁸⁹ to the EU sanctions in response to the occupation of Crimea as “an unnecessary mistake”. Furthermore, in 2023, during an interview with the Spanish channel Canal 26, he emphasised¹⁹⁰ that “Western sanctions against Russia have backfired”.

This study reveals the cooperation of Pedro Baños with individuals and organisations linked to the ideologist

Pedro Baños was considered for the position of head of the Department of National Security, but he did not get the appointment because of the public outcry over his ties to the Russian Federation. Russia Today and Sputnik then reported on an alleged “planned attack” against the officer



Former Chief of Eurocorp Counterintelligence Pedro Baños (on the right) and Russian Ambassador to Spain Yuri Korchagin, 2020

of “Russian World”, Alexander Dugin, repeatedly mentioned in this report. Thus, in 2019, Baños participated in a conference on metapolitics organised by the cultural association **OHKA** and the neo-fascist¹⁹¹ publishing house Fides. OHKA is a regular contributor¹⁹² to the *Geopolitica.ru* platform, which, according to the findings¹⁹³ of the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, is controlled by Alexander Dugin. During this conference, Baños presented his book **“Soros: Destroying Spain”**. Another participant¹⁹⁴ of the conference was the aforementioned observer of “local elections” in the so-called “DPR” and the editor-in-chief of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics (IGE), **Enrique Refoyo**.

In turn, in 2019, the *Geopolitica.ru* platform republished Pedro Baños’ program “Vision Geopolitic”, featuring **Juan Aguilar**, the currently acting director of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics, as a guest.

Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Reserve Colonel Pedro Baños has consistently exerted influence aimed at undermining the supply of military and technical assistance to Ukraine while justifying Russian aggression. Thus, at a literary conference in Pamplona, Spain, Pedro Baños criticised¹⁹⁵ the provision of arms to Ukraine as a “false path”. Later, in the interview with *Tiempo* during his visit to Buenos Aires in July 2023, where he was presenting his new book “The World’s Crossroads”, he blamed¹⁹⁶ NATO and the EU for Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.

CONCLUSIONS

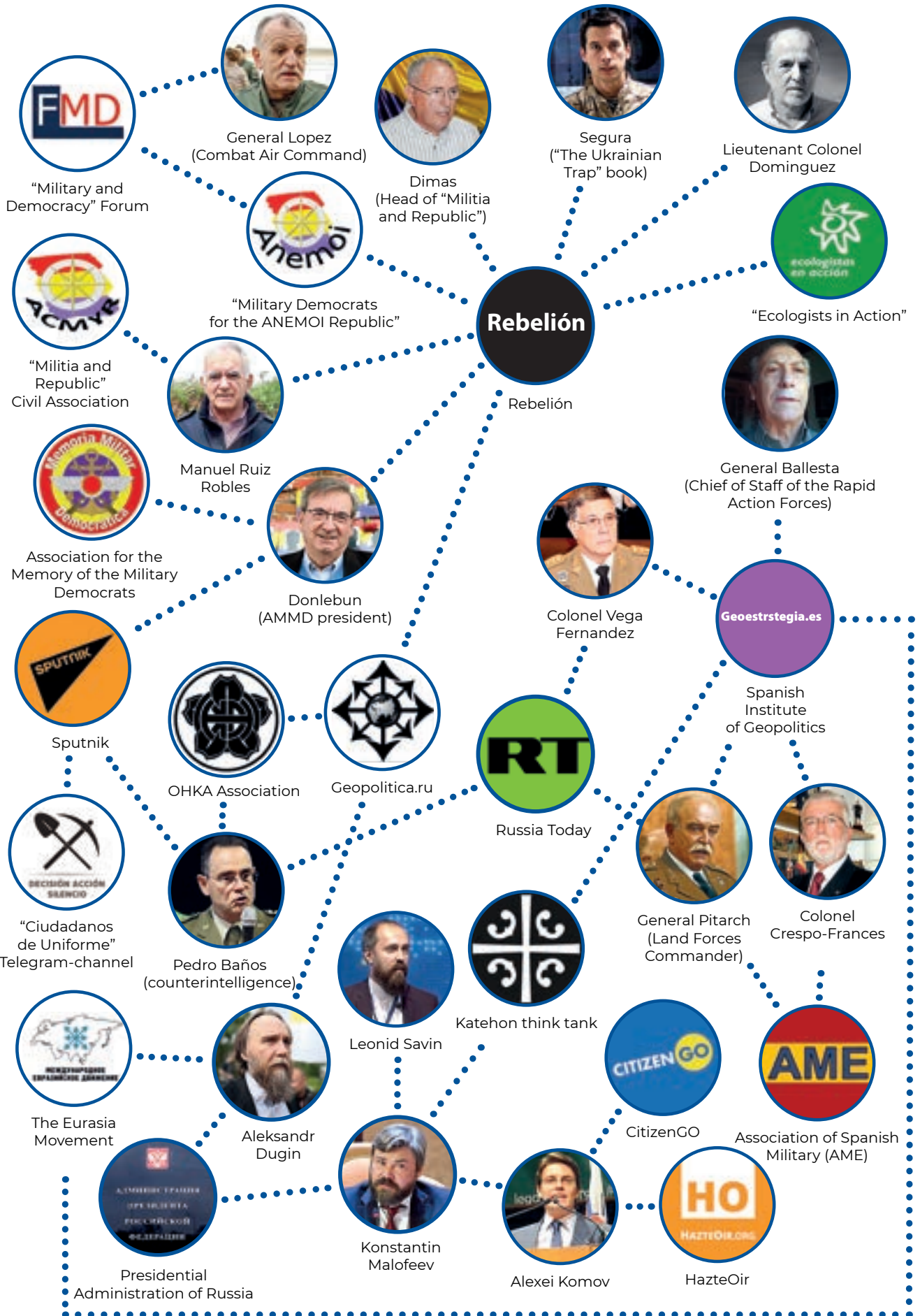
As mentioned before, according to the study¹⁹⁷ by the University of Murcia and the Valencia Anti-Fraud Agency published in December 2022, the Spanish Armed Forces enjoy the greatest support among the state institutions in Spanish society. Therefore, the involvement of re-

Spanish citizens are the most likely to support the idea of “peace talks” with the Russian Federation among other eight countries of Central and Western Europe, “even if such negotiations assume that Ukraine loses its own territories”, which indirectly indicates the effectiveness of the systemic influence being exerted

tired officers in exercising influence over unpopular social topics serves as an effective tool in the hands of Russian-affiliated actors.

The key areas in which the engagement of retired officers in Spain was identified are undermining the supply of military and technical assistance to Ukraine, weakening Western anti-Russian sanctions, and forcing Ukraine into so-called “peace talks” with Russia.

The latest *Euroskopia poll*¹⁹⁸ dated May 2023 shows that Spanish citizens are the most likely to support the idea of such “peace talks” with Russia among eight other countries of Central and Western Europe (Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Greece, Belgium), “even if such negotiations involve Ukraine losing its own territories”, which indirectly indicates the effectiveness of the systemic implementation of the relevant impact.



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After Bulgaria exited the socialist camp and conducted its first multi-party elections in 1990, the country successfully pursued Euro-Atlantic integration by joining the European Union and NATO. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Bulgaria, as reported by the German newspaper *Die Welt*¹, has emerged as the largest indirect arms supplier to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. However, a survey² conducted by the Institute for Global Analytics suggests that unlike in other European countries, Russian aggression has not resulted in an increased backing for NATO, or a heightened awareness of the alliance's security benefits within Bulgarian society. Only 53.4% of respondents believe that membership in the North Atlantic Alliance decreases the likelihood of a foreign attack, and a mere 44% of respondents are convinced that the country should defend its alliance partners in the event of a hostile attack. Both indicators rank among the lowest in Central and Eastern European countries. *Eurobarometer*³ data indicate

that support for providing armed assistance to Ukraine in Bulgarian society is the lowest in Europe as a whole, standing at 30% as of December 2023.

These figures, among other factors, are the outcome of the systemic influence exerted in Bulgarian society by various organisations and individuals with connections to the Russian Federation. According to the IGA History Undone⁴ study, this influence hinges on distorting cultural and value proximity, distorting the history of bilateral Soviet-Bulgarian and Russian-Bulgarian relations, and positioning Russia as a "major strategic partner". Currently, 25% of Bulgarian citizens regard⁵ Russia as such a strategic partner, while only 19.9% consider the United States of America in the same light.

A key promoter of such influence in Bulgaria is the community of retired officers and employees from the national defense sector, who traditionally play an active role in the country's

Since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Bulgaria has become the largest indirect supplier of arms to the Armed Forces of Ukraine





Zlatan Stoykov, Chairman of the RONU, former Chief of the General Staff of the Bulgarian Armed Forces, Reserved General in the Reserve. 2010, Kabul, Afghanistan

social and political life. Presently, the Armed Forces enjoy one of the highest levels of trust in Bulgarian society. As of 2020, this figure⁶ marked the highest in a decade, reaching 53%. This study has identified numerous connections between associations of retired officers and their individual representatives with contemporary Russia. These connections are institutionally grounded in the history of military-technical and military cooperation between the armies of the USSR and socialist Bulgaria, which joined the Warsaw Pact⁷ in 1955. Consequently, Bulgaria received significant quantities of Soviet weapons over the years. From a historical perspective, there is a promotion of the memory of Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottoman Empire as a result of the Russo-Turkish War of 1878 and

joint participation in military interventions by the Red Army, including the intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The disclosure of such ties with Russia and the involvement of retired Bulgarian officers and their organisations in campaigns aligned with the interests of the Russian government will be discussed below.

RESERVE OFFICERS AND NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS UNION (RONU)

Reserve Officers and Non-commissioned Officers Union (*Съюз на офицерите и сержантите от запаса и резерва*) stands as Bulgaria's largest military and patriotic organisation, encompassing⁸ 15 other associations

The RONU is the country's largest association of former military personnel. It includes 15 other organisations of Bulgarian officers and has a total membership of over 20,000 people

of Bulgarian officers, former personnel from national security and defense structures, and combatants. Its membership surpasses 20,000 individuals. The Reserve Officers and Non-commissioned Officers Union (hereinaf-



Reserve captain Lazar Murdzhev, longtime head of CSDPO and today a member of the association, is the founder of the Brod za Bulgaria NGO, which involves several retired Bulgarian officers

ter – **RONU**), as it is commonly known, holds official membership⁹ in the **International Confederation of Generals, Admirals, and Reserve Officers** (*Международная конфедерация генералов, адмиралов и офицеров резерва*), led¹⁰ by **Alexander Kanshin** (*Александр Каньшин*), a member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation. **Zlatan Stoykov** (*Златан Стойков*), the former¹¹ Chief of the General Staff of the Bulgarian Armed Forces and current head of RONU, serves as the Vice President¹² of the International Confederation of Generals, Admirals, and Reserve Officers.

Furthermore, RONU has established connections with another Russian organisation, the **Russian Union of Vet-**

erans (*Российский союз ветеранов*), with whom it signed¹³ a cooperation agreement back in 2014. The Russian Union of Veterans was led by former Chief of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces, Army General **Mikhail Moiseev** (*Михаил Моисеев*), until 2022. From 2023 onwards, it is headed by retired Colonel General¹⁴ of the Russian Armed Forces, **Vitaly Azarov** (*Виталий Азаров*).

CONFEDERATION OF CIVIL ORGANIZATIONS FOR SECURITY AND DEFENSE (CSDPO)

The second-largest organisation in Bulgaria, uniting retired officers and former employees of the national security sector and maintaining its own ties with Russia, is the **Confederation of Civil Organizations for Security and Defense** (*Конфедерация на обществените организации в сигурността и отбраната*). The Confederation, hereinafter referred to as CSDPO, consists¹⁵ of 29 Bulgarian organisations. Among its members¹⁶ are the **Association of Graduates of the Academy of the General Staff of the Russian Federation** (*Асоциация на завършилите академия на ГЩ на Руската Федерация*), represented by the alumnus of the Academy of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces, Major General (in reserve) **Dimitar Krastev** (*Димитар Крестев*), “**The Bulgarian Intelligence Bureau**”

The former Chief of the General Staff of the Bulgarian Armed Forces, General Zlatan Stoykov, is the Vice-President of the Russian International Confederation of Generals, Admirals and Reserve Officers

(Българско бюро за разузнаване), represented¹⁷ by reserve captain **Lazar Murdzhev** (Лазар Мурджев), the **Association of Alumni of the NATO Defense College in Rome** (Асоциация на завършилите Колежа по отбраната на НАТО в Рим), and several other associations.

Nikolay Malinov, in cooperation with the former director of RISS, Lieutenant General of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Leonid Reshetnikov and Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, was engaged in “creating conditions for Bulgaria’s turn from the West and reorientation towards Russia”

In 2018, **RONU** and **CSDPO** signed¹⁸ a cooperation agreement. Both individually and collaboratively, they engage with various entities associated with the Russian Federation across several domains, including the political sphere.

It is worth noting the connections of both organisations with the **Bulgarian Russophiles National Movement** (Национално движение “Русофили”) and the political party **“Russophiles for the Revival of the Fatherland”** (Русофили за възраждане на Отечеството). The leader of these organisations, **Nikolay Malinov** (Николай Малинов), faces formal charges by the Bulgarian prosecutor’s office for espionage in favour of the Russian Federation. The investigation alleges that Malinov collaborated with the former director of the **Russian Institute for Strategic Studies** (Российский институт стратегических

исследований, hereinafter – RISS), Lieutenant General of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation **Leonid Reshetnikov** (Леонид Решетников), and Russian oligarch **Konstantin Malofeev** (Константин Малюфеев), aiming to “create conditions for Bulgaria’s turn away from the West and reorientation towards Russia”.

Three members of the Reserve Officers and Non-commissioned Officers Union officially hold positions¹⁹ in the leadership of the *Russophiles*’ movement. These include its head, the aforementioned General **Zlatan Stoykov**, a retired **Bulgarian officer, head of the Association “Union of Disabled War Veterans and War Victims”** (Съюз на военнопострадалите и военнопострадалите) **Petar Velchev** (Петър Велчев), and retired Brigadier **Dimitar Shivikov** (Димитър Шивиков), former²⁰ Deputy Commander of the 68th Special Forces Brigade of the Bulgarian Army (“Специални сили”), RONU Honorary Member²¹.

Lazar Murdzhev, longtime head of CSDPO and its current association member²², is the founder²³ of the **NGO “Brod for Bulgaria”** (“Брод за България”). The organisation involves various retired Bulgarian officers and specialists, and it is also the publisher²⁴ of the **“Security”** journal (списание “Сигурност”). **Nikolay Malinov** is the author of the “Brod for Bulgaria”²⁵ platform and the “Security” journal²⁶. Interestingly, the former RISS director, **Leonid Reshetnikov**, is also an author²⁷ on “Brod for Bulgaria” platform.

In the following sections, we will explore the interactions of retired Bulgarian officers from RONU and CS-



Lazar Murdzhev is the founder and head of the scientific and expert club “Security”, which includes several employees of the communist Bulgarian State Security Committee

DPO, along with other individual officers, with the Russophiles National Movement, as well as the activities of the “Brod for Bulgaria” platform.

“SOLDIERS FOR PEACE” INITIATIVE

Since the commencement of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, both RONU and CSDPO, along with associated officers and individual members, have actively engaged in endeavours aligning with the interests of the Russian government. Notably, the **“Soldiers for Peace and National Sovereignty” movement** (*“Воини за Мир и Национален Суверенитет”*), established²⁸ in May 2023 under the Bulgarian initiative **“Soldiers for Peace”** (*“Воини за Мир”*), warrants special attention in Bulgaria. This movement has affiliations with both previously mentioned associations of retired Bulgarian officers (RONU and CSDPO). Its primary demand²⁹ centers around the proclaimed “neutrality of Bulgaria” during Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. The initiative, among other objectives, seeks to influence decisions to cease providing military and technical assistance to Ukraine. The official statement³⁰ on the movement’s formation criticises “the Bulgarian government’s involvement in NATO activities to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine” and contends that Bulgaria is purportedly “de facto at war with Russia”.

The primary target audience of the **“Soldiers for Peace and National Sovereignty”** initiative comprises active and retired Bulgarian military personnel and officers. The movement’s official statement³¹ outlines its goal as involving representatives from these communities in the “cause of peace”. Furthermore, “Soldiers for Peace and National Sovereignty” has initiated³² another national campaign, the **“National Movement for Peace and Sovereignty”** (*Национално движение за мир и суверенитет*), with the broader aim of achieving the so-called “neutrality of Bulgaria” and involving the entire Bulgarian society.

The co-founders and leaders of the **“Soldiers for Peace”** initiative are members of RONU and CSDPO with additional connections to the USSR and modern Russia. Both within the initiative and in their broader public activities, they exert influence aligning with the interests of the Russian government.

For instance, the head³³ of the “Soldiers for Peace” initiative is **Tsvetan Totomirov** (*Цветан Тотомиров*), the former Chief³⁴ of the General Staff of the Bulgarian Armed Forces, a graduate of the Military Academy of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces in Moscow, a participant³⁵ in the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, and retired Colonel General. Tsvetan Totomirov is an RONU member³⁶ and belongs³⁷ to the **Bulgarian National Union “Combatant Friendship”**



(Български общонароден съюз “Бойна група”) – a member³⁸ organisation of RONU. In April 2022, Colonel-General Totomirov, in his column, emphasised³⁹ that the decisions of the Ramstein International Conference to provide Ukraine with long-range artillery and other types of heavy weapons allegedly “prolonged the war”.



The head of the “Soldiers for Peace” initiative, General Tsvetan Totomirov (third from the left), former Chief of the General Staff of the Bulgarian Armed Forces, participated in the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968

The leadership of the “**Soldiers for Peace**” initiative includes⁴⁰ three other Bulgarian reserve officers: Major General **Stoimen Stoimenov** (Стоймен Стоименов), the aforementioned Captain **Lazar Murdzhev**, and Captain **Nako Stefanov** (Нако Стефанов).

Major General **Stoimen Stoimenov** is an alumnus⁴¹ of the USSR Lenin Military Political Academy (Moscow), a former⁴² employee of the Military Administrative Department of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and a former Deputy Chief of the Intelligence Department of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of

Bulgaria. He is also a member⁴³ of the Confederation of Civil Organizations for Security and Defense (CSDPO). Following the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Stoimen Stoimenov authored⁴⁴ the book “**Bulgaria Above All**” (България над всичко), in which he seeks to influence support for the strategic narrative of Russian propaganda regarding “fascism in Ukraine” and undermine Bulgaria’s membership in the North Atlantic Alliance. In his book, Stoimenov discusses the alleged “revival of fascism in Ukraine” and the so-called “price of Bulgaria’s membership in NATO and the EU”.

The second co-leader⁴⁵ of “**Soldiers for Peace**” is Lazar Murdzhev, the son of Dimitar Murdzhev (Димитър Мурджев), the head of the Fifth Directorate of the State Security of communist Bulgaria. Lazar Murdzhev was the personal bodyguard⁴⁶ of the former first secretary of the Central Committee of the BKP, Todor Zhivkov, and a reserve captain. Lazar Murdzhev is also the founder⁴⁷ and head of the **Scientific and Expert Club “Security”** (Научно-експертен клуб “Сигурност”), which includes several former employees of the State Security Committee of Communist Bulgaria (Комитет за държавна сигурност, hereinafter – DS). Notably⁴⁸, Major General **Todor Boyadzhiev** (Тодор Бояджиев) (now deceased), a graduate of the USSR KGB school and former deputy head of the First Main Directorate of the DS, and reserve Colonel **Boncho Asenov** (Бончо

Goran Simeonov, former head of the First Main Directorate of the State Security of Communist Bulgaria and head of the Association of Reserve Intelligence Officers, was a co-founder of “Soldiers for Peace”

Асенов), an officer of the Sixth Directorate of the DS, were part of this club. Additionally, Major General **Stoimen Stoimenov**, leader of “Soldiers for Peace”, and the leader of the National Russophiles Movement **Nikolay Malinov**, are also associated with the club.

Lazar Murdzhev, as mentioned earlier, is a member of the CSDPO. In January 2022, just before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, he criticised “hostile anti-Russian rhetoric” in an article⁴⁹ in



Brigadier General Dimitar Shivikov, a co-founder of the “Soldiers for Peace” initiative and the former Deputy Commander of the 68th Special Forces Brigade of the Bulgarian Army

“Security” journal, quoting Alexander Dugin’s statement that “only patriots would resist” sanctions against Russia. By April 2022, Lazar Murdzhev invited readers to consider the opinion⁵⁰ of Brazilian analyst **Pepe Escobar**, an alternative to the “European colonialists”, suggesting that “Ukraine has never been a state” and that “the liberation of all of Novorossiia would be fair”.

The third co-leader of “Soldiers for Peace” is **Nako Stefanov**, a reserve captain who is also a member⁵¹ of the CSDPO, the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Party of Communists, and the party⁵² “Russophiles for the Re-

vival of the Fatherland”, led by **Nikolai Malinov**. This is a reminder that Malinov has officially been accused by the Bulgarian prosecutor’s office of spying for Russia. In 2017, Nako Stefanov represented the BPC at a communist congress in Moscow, titled “October 100”, where he announced that the West was preparing⁵³ an “imperialist war against Russia”. In 2023, Nako Stefanov, along with representatives of the Russkiy Mir Foundation (Фонд “Русский мир”) and the “Russophiles”, participated⁵⁴ in the congress of the first *International Russophile Council*, held under the slogan “With Russia in heart!” Captain Stefanov is also a member⁵⁵ of the **Association of Artillery and Missile Troops of the Reserve “Olympiy Panov”** (Асоциацията на артилеристите и ракетчиците от запаса “Олимпий Панов”), an official collective RONU member.

The “Soldiers for Peace” initiative was co-founded by ten other high-ranking retired Bulgarian officers.

Among them is **Dimitar Shivikov**, the current head of the alumni association and a graduate⁵⁶ of Bulgaria’s most prestigious military educational institution, the Vasil Levski National Military University (Национален военен университет “Васил Левски”). He has already been mentioned as a co-leader of the National Russophiles Movement. Graduating with a degree in military intelligence, Shivikov is a retired brigadier general and an honorary member⁵⁷ of RONU. For many years, Brigadier General Shivikov has been involved in activities aligning with the interests of the Russian government. Notably, since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, he has systematically exerted influence to undermine the supply



Major General Rumén Ralchev, a long-time employee of the secret services of communist Bulgaria, the former personal bodyguard of the ex-president of communist Bulgaria, Todor Zhivkov

of Western weapons to Ukraine. For instance, according to *Epicentr*⁵⁸ in, one of his publications, Shivikov stated that supplying tanks to Ukraine would “only irritate Russia”, and he advised NATO experts to “learn to kiss Putin’s hands”. Dimitar Shivikov is actively involved in public life as part of the National Movement for Peace and Sovereignty rallies, which will be discussed further below.

Another co-founder of “Soldiers for Peace” is **Goran Simeonov** (Горан СИМЕОНОВ), a former head of the First Main Directorate of the State Security of Communist Bulgaria (Първо главно управление на ДС, далі – SS CB). He also leads⁵⁹ the **Association of Reserve Intelligence Officers** (Асоциацията на разузнавачите от запад), which brings together⁶⁰ former employees of the SS CB and is part⁶¹ of RONU. Goran Simeonov actively participates in public life. In an interview

with the Bulgarian *efir.info*⁶² website, he took efforts to undermine Western anti-Russian sanctions, claiming that such restrictions allegedly “hit Europe itself”. His influence also supports the Kremlin’s official position on the “proxy war of the West against Russia” which, according to his claims⁶³, is carried out now in Ukraine.

Other initiative’s co-founders include **Boiko Simitchiev** (Бойко Сумитчиев), an alumnus⁶⁴ of the Budyonny Military Academy of the Signal Corps in St. Petersburg, Bulgarian Brigadier General in reserve, and chairman⁶⁵ of the **Association of Communication and Information Specialists** (Асоциация “Комуникационни и информационни специалисти”), which is part of RONU. Reserve Major General **Rumen Ralchev** (Румен Ралчев) is a long-time member⁶⁶ of the secret services of communist Bulgaria, a former personal bodyguard of Todor

Zhivkov (the leader of the People's Republic of Bulgaria), **Petar Mladenov** (*Петър Младенов*). **Tsviatko Donchev** (*Цвятко Дончев*), a first-rank captain in reserve, is the chairman⁶⁷ of the **National Association of Reserve Forces Clubs “For the Honour of the Shoulder Straps”** (*Национално сдружение на клубовете на запасното войнство “За честта на пагона”*), which is also part⁶⁸ of RONU.

Other co-founders of “Soldiers for Peace” include former deputy⁶⁹ of the National Security Service, reserve colonel **Chavdar Petrov** (*Чавдар Петров*), who chairs⁷⁰ the National Association “Security” (*Национална Асоциация “Сигурност”*), a member⁷¹ of RONU, and an organisation⁷² of people who have worked in the security services of the Republic of Bulgaria. **Petar Pandurski** (*Петър Пандурски*) is a reserve colonel and deputy chairman⁷³ of the **Union of Bulgarian War Veterans** (*Съюз на ветераните от войните на България*). The Union of Bulgarian War Veterans is a large organisation that brings together Bulgarian combat veterans and collaborates⁷⁴ with RONU as part of its activities. The Union also collaborates with several other organisations linked to Russia, including the National Russophiles Movement. In May 2023, despite a ban from the capital's mayor's office, they jointly organised⁷⁵ the Immortal Regiment march in Sofia. In 2019, representatives of the Union, along with representatives of the Russian Embassy in **Bulgaria and the “Russian Club”** (*Русский клуб*) in Sofia, participated⁷⁶ in the opening of the exhibition “Crimea Today: A View from the Inside”, dedicated to the fifth anniversary of the so-called “reunification of the peninsula with Russia”.

The last on the list of founders of the initiative was the head⁷⁷ of the RONU regional branch, retired Colonel **Ilya Mandrov** (*Илия Мандров*).

TARGET AUDIENCE OF THE “SOLDIERS FOR PEACE” AND NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY INITIATIVE

As mentioned earlier, the **“Soldiers for Peace and National Sovereignty”** initiative specifically targets former Bulgarian national security and defense personnel and their families. In their declaration⁷⁸, they appeal to “reserve and active soldiers, war veterans, those disabled and wounded in action, generals, officers, lieutenant colonels, sergeants, and soldiers”, and “through them, their families” to support the initiative aimed at achieving the so-called “neutrality of Bulgaria”, particularly concerning the Russian war against Ukraine. Information support for *“Soldiers for Peace and Neutrality”* is provided through three key platforms: Lazar Murdzhov's **“Brod for Bulgaria”**, *Efir.info*⁷⁹, whose sole official partner is⁸⁰ the National Association *“Sigurnost”* (a member of the RONU), and the *Pogled*⁸¹ publication owned by Bulgarian PhD **Rumen Petkov** (*Румен Петков*). Petkov is a member of the supervisory board of the **“Referendum for Peace and Sovereignty”** (*Референдум за мир и суверенитет*) and a member⁸² of the **Coalition “Left!”** (*Коалиция “ЛЕВИЦА-ТА!”*). Another Bulgarian figure with the same full name, Rumen Petkov, a politician who visited⁸³ Moscow in 2017 for consultations with the United Russia party, is also on the board of the “Left!” Coalition.



“March for Peace” with demands to stop the supply of military and technical assistance to Ukraine, Bulgaria, 2023

As previously mentioned, the “*Soldiers for Peace and Neutrality*” initiated⁸⁴ a nationwide effort, “**The National Movement for Peace and Sovereignty**” (*Национално движение за мир и суверенитет*). Its primary activities include the so-called “**Marches for Peace**” (“*Марш за мир*”) – regularly held rallies in Bulgarian cities and the “**Referendum for Peace and Sovereignty**” (*Референдум за мир и суверенитет*) initiative. The aim of the initiative is to influence the entire Bulgarian society and the Bulgarian diaspora abroad. The directions of this influence align with the efforts of the Russian government, so we will delve into this campaign in more detail.

“MARCHES FOR PEACE” RALLIES

In 2023, a total of nine “Marches for Peace” rallies were held in Bulgaria, some of which occurred simultaneously in 40 cities⁸⁵ across the country, drawing tens of thousands of participants. The marches aimed to address various issues, including halting⁸⁶ the arms supply to Ukraine, opposing⁸⁷ the establishment of a North Atlantic Alliance military base in the country, and resisting Bulgaria’s entry⁸⁸ into the *Eurozone*. Retired Bulgarian officers, both affiliated with the “*Soldiers for Peace*” initiative and those unaffiliated, actively participated in these events.

Упродовж 2023 року в Болгарії було проведено дев’ять “Маршів за мир” – мітингів, деякі з яких проходили одночасно в 40 містах Болгарії, учасниками яких стали десятки тисяч людей

For instance, the “**Marches for Peace**” in Sofia on April 23, 2023, was participated by retired Brigadier General **Dimitar Shivikov**, former⁸⁹ Head of the Special Forces Division at the Ground Forces Training Headquarters (*Начальник на отдел “Специални сили” в Щаба по подготовка на суховооружения*). During his interview at the event, he stated⁹⁰ that in Ukraine, “the United States of

During the “**Marches for Peace**” on May 23, **Simeon Simeonov** (*Симеон Симеонов*), honorary chairman of the **Fatherland Union association** (*сдружение “Отечествен съюз”*), which has a partnership agreement with RONU, called⁹⁶ for support for the “Referendum for Peace and Sovereignty” initiative. Simeon Simeonov was awarded⁹⁷ the Order of Merit for the Fatherland, a state award of the Russian Federation.



Speech by Nako Stefanov, reserve captain and co-leader of “Soldiers for Peace”, during the March for Peace rally, May 2023, Sofia, Bulgaria

America is allegedly waging a war against Russia”, and warned against “Bulgaria’s interference in the conflict”. Another co-founder of “Soldiers for Peace”, Reserve Colonel **Chavdar Petrov**, urged⁹¹ NATO “not to interfere in the relations between Russia and Ukraine”. Reserve Captain **Nako Stefanov** expressed opposition⁹² to “Bulgaria’s involvement in the war” during the same rally.

The rallies also saw the participation of Colonel **Nikolay Tsanov** (*Николай Цанов*), a deputy head⁹³ of the Association of Reserve Intelligence Officers, which is part⁹⁴ of RONU but not affiliated with the “*Soldiers for Peace*” initiative. Colonel Tsanov in his interview⁹⁵ spoke against supplying arms to Ukraine, expressing concerns that “modern weapons provided to Ukraine” might “reach Bulgarian ports on the Black Sea coast”.

Another “**Marches for Peace**” on June 18 featured Brigadier General **Stefan Stefanov** (*Стефан Стефанов*), the head⁹⁸ of the RONU branch in Sofia, criticising military assistance to Ukraine and advocating⁹⁹ for redirecting funds to the social welfare sector.

As previously mentioned, the “**Marches for Peace**” also aim to influence opposition to the construction of a NATO military base in the country. The announcement¹⁰⁰ of the base deployment was made by the Bulgarian government as a response to the threats arising from Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. This opposition sentiment was voiced¹⁰¹ during the “**Marches for Peace**” conducted in Bulgaria on May 21, 2023. Alongside efforts to counter assistance to Ukraine, these events are utilised to undermine Bulgaria’s collaboration with NATO and resist further integration into the EU. For instance, during the “March for Peace” on March 12, 2023, calls¹⁰² were made advocating for Bulgaria’s withdrawal from NATO.

During a rally on October 22, 2023, participants of the “**Marches for Peace**” criticised¹⁰³ the Bulgarian government’s decision to cancel a national referendum on Bulgaria’s official course towards joining the eurozone.

As previously mentioned, the “**Marches for Peace**” systematically aim to influence Bulgaria’s cessation of armed assistance to Ukraine. For instance, Captain **Nako Stefanov** voiced¹⁰⁴ such demands during the march on July 9, 2023. Earlier, on June 19, 2023, a rally¹⁰⁵ was conducted as part of the “Marches for Peace”, calling for the resignation of Bulgaria’s Minister of Defense, Todor Tagarev (*Тодор Тагарев*), who had expressed readiness to escalate military aid to Ukraine.

A noteworthy element is the systematic coverage¹⁰⁶ of the “Marches for Peace” by the YouTube channel of *Efir-info*, including interviews with retired Bulgarian officers conducted during and after the rallies. In July 2023, **Leonid Reshetnikov**, a former director of RISS and a Lieutenant General of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, gave an interview¹⁰⁷ on the platform.

Co-organizers¹⁰⁸ of the Marches for Peace include “**Soldiers for Peace**”, the **National Russophiles Movement**, and the political party “**Russophiles for the Revival of the Fatherland**”.

These rallies also serve as a platform for collecting signatures to initiate the national “**Referendum for Peace and Sovereignty**”, a topic that will be discussed separately.

“REFERENDUM FOR PEACE AND SOVEREIGNTY”

“**Referendum for Peace and Sovereignty**” is a nationwide initiative striving to gather 400,000 signatures from Bulgarian citizens, both domestically and abroad. The goal is to initiate a nationwide referendum¹⁰⁹ address-

ing Bulgaria’s proclaimed “neutrality” concerning any armed conflicts beyond its borders. The initiative’s board comprises¹¹⁰ several retired Bulgarian officers, including three official representatives from the *Soldiers for Peace and Neutrality* initiative. These representatives are Major General **Stoimen Stoimenov** from the Bulgarian Armed Forces in reserve, retired Brigadier General **Dimitar Shivikov**, and Reserve Captain **Nako Stefanov**. Furthermore, the initiative’s leadership includes other retired Bulgarian officers, reserve officers, and individuals with connections to the USSR and contemporary Russia.

For instance, **Velizar Enchev** (*Велизар Енчев*), a former officer¹¹¹ of the First Main Directorate of the State Security of Communist Bulgaria (DS) and a one-time member of the Bulgarian Parliament, served as a foreign intelligence officer. In 1981, Velizar Enchev and his wife, who worked at the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research in Dubna (*Moscow region*), took a year’s¹¹² unpaid leave in the USSR. During this period, Enchev freelanced¹¹³ at the *Druzhba* journal in Moscow, focusing on culture and communist education.

Mincho Minchev (*Минчо Мънчев*), another member of the Referendum board, previously worked as an agent¹¹⁴ of the State Security Department, recruited in 1985 under the pseudonym “**Arabadzhiev**” (*Арабаджиев*) He co-founded¹¹⁵ the pro-Russian party “**Ataka**” (*партия “Атака”*) and currently serves as the director¹¹⁶ of the **Bulgarian Association “Eurasian Scientific Center”** (*Сдружение “Български евразийски научен център”*). In 2016, after the Crimea occupation, the Center, along with Crimean University and



Collecting signatures as part of the “Referendum for Peace and Sovereignty” initiative to initiate a nationwide referendum on Bulgaria’s so-called “neutrality” regarding any armed conflict

Kuban State University, organised a large-scale conference, “XXX Kharak Forum: Political Space and Social Time: Identity and Everyday Life in the Structure of the Life World”. In May 2016, the Bulgarian Eurasian Scientific Center, in collaboration with the Russian Embassy in Bulgaria and the Bulgaria-Russia Forum, co-organized¹¹⁷ the international conference “Historical Truth and Lies – 75 Years since the Beginning of the Great Patriotic War”.

Two additional members on the “Referendum for Peace and Sovereignty” Supervisory Board represent RONU: Reserve Colonel **Mikhail Kharlampiev** (Михаил Харалампиев), a professor¹¹⁸ in the Department of Chemical and Biological Weapons at the Vasil Levski National Military University, and **Todor Predov** (Тодор Прегов), a retired colonel and member of the Air

Defense Club of the RONU, serving as the head¹¹⁹ of the RONU regional branch in Veliko Tarnovo.

The Initiative’s Public Council includes several individuals with ties to Russia. Among them is **Plamen Paskov** (Пламен Пасков), owner of the Ediline veterinary clinic in Moscow, a Bulgarian political commentator, and contributor to the Russian website *Pravda.ru*¹²⁰. **Dr Orlin Stefanov** (Орлин Стефанов), a Union of Scientists in Bulgaria member, contributes¹²¹ to the *Russkiy Mir Foundation’s* channel. **Vasil Prodanov** (Васил Проганов), the Institute for Philosophical Studies Director, also serves as a guest¹²² lecturer at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). Professor **Petko Todorov** (Петко Тодоров), formerly¹²³ a board member of the 7 Days TV company owned¹²⁴

by former officers of the security structures of communist Bulgaria, chaired by **Georgi Agafonov** (*Георги́й Агафо́нов*), a former officer¹²⁵ of the 3rd Department of the State Security Service. Notable¹²⁶ participants include former DS officers **Borislav Todorov Jamdiev** (*Борислав*

when fulfilling obligations under the North Atlantic Treaty, allowing such presence in joint participation in an armed conflict. The likely purpose of this initiative is to counteract the Bulgarian government's plan to build a permanent NATO base in the country by 2025 and to close existing US military bases.

The likely purpose of this initiative is to counteract the Bulgarian government's initiative to build a permanent NATO base in the country by 2025, as well as to close existing US military bases

Тодоров Джамдиев) and **Nikolay Lyubomirov** (*Никола́й Любоми́ров*), along with **Velizar Enchev**, a former officer of the 1st Department of the DS. In 2017, Petko Todorov participated¹²⁷ in an event organised by MO'DIKO¹²⁸, a youth NGO initiated by the *Russian Club of Bulgaria*. The National Russophiles Movement and the youth wing of the *Ataka* party are partners¹²⁹ of the MO'DIKO initiative.

Under the **"Referendum for Peace and Sovereignty"**, Bulgarian society is being influenced in several areas, aligning with the interests of the Russian government. This influence primarily aims to counteract the provision of military and technical assistance to Ukraine. The initiative's website explains this as a response to "the threat of Bulgaria being drawn into a war" and criticises¹³⁰ the Bulgarian government's decision to supply arms to Ukraine.

Moreover, the initiative encourages¹³¹ Bulgarian citizens to support a ban on the presence of foreign troops on the country's territory, except

The *"Referendum for Peace and Sovereignty"* also urges¹³² citizens to support the demand for changes to national legislation on holding a referendum, proposing reducing the required number of signatures for a nationwide campaign from 400,000 to 100,000. This move would significantly simplify access to this instrument, including for entities associated with the Russian Federation. It is noteworthy that in Ukraine, too, such actors have systematically made efforts to initiate various kinds of referendums.

"BROD FOR BULGARIA", RISS AND THE NATIONAL RUSSOPHILES MOVEMENT

As mentioned earlier, the **Scientific and Expert Club "Security"** comprising several former officers of the state security structures of communist Bulgaria, was established by reserve captain **Lazar Murdzhev**. In 2015, this club served as the foundation¹³³ for the NGO *"Brod for Bulgaria"*. In the Bulgarian State Register¹³⁴ of Legal Entities, these two organisations are registered as one entity, referred to as the **Scientific and Expert Club "Security" – NGO "Brod for Bulgaria"** (*Научно експертен клуб Сигурност – НПО Брод за България*). Simultaneously, Brod for Bulgaria functions as the publisher

of the *Sigurnost* (further – *Security*) journal.

Two major associations of retired Bulgarian officers, RONU and SPS-DO, have direct connections with “*Brod for Bulgaria*”. For instance, SPSDO is a co-founder¹³⁵ of this platform, and RONU is a member¹³⁶ of

leadership of both¹⁴⁰ organisations include¹⁴¹ **Tikhomir Dimitrov Stoychev** (*Тухомир Димитров Стойчев*), a former employee of the Bulgarian Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The “*Brod for Bulgaria*” platform exerts multidirectional influence aligning with the interests of the Russian government, including its impact on political processes in Bulgaria. Let’s examine examples of such influence.

In 2016, “*Brod for Bulgaria*” served as a media partner¹⁴² in the publication of a sociological study commissioned by the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS), headed at that time by **Leonid Reshetnikov**. The study focused on the necessary characteristics of a potential presidential candidate from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) who had a chance of winning the election.

As reported by Bulgarian media, particularly the Bulgarian branch of *Radio Svoboda*¹⁴³, two weeks after the study’s publication, the then Commander of the Bulgarian Air Force, Major General **Rumen Radev** (*Румен Радев*), who “met all the criteria specified in the study”, resigned as head of the country’s Air Force and nominated his own candidacy for the presidency from the Bulgarian Socialist Party.

During the election campaign, Nikolay Malinov consistently supported Rumen Radev as Bulgaria’s presidential candidate. After nominating his candidacy, Rumen Radev, alongside the leader of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, Kornelia Ninova (*Корнелия Нинова*), participated¹⁴⁴ in the Congress of the National Russophiles Movement. There, he advocated for lifting sanctions against

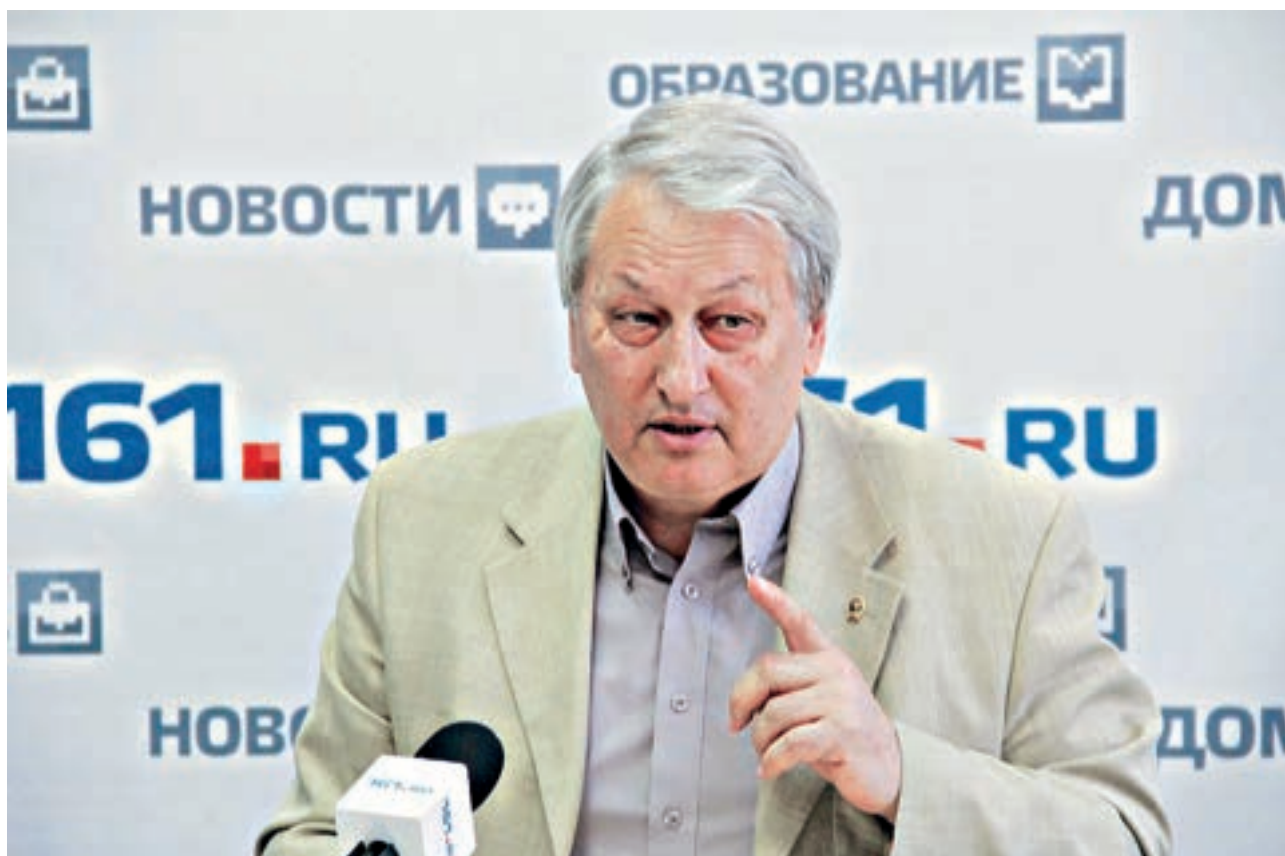


In 2016, “*Brod za Bulgaria*” acted as a media partner of a publication by RISS, then headed by the Lieutenant General of SVR Leonid Reshetnikov. The publication focused on the necessary characteristics of a potential presidential candidate in Bulgaria

the expert council of the journal “*Security*” In the December 2023 issue of the journal, RONU was represented by Lieutenant General of the Operational Reserve **Kiril Tsvetkov** (*Кирил Цветков*).

One of the authors¹³⁷ of “*Brod for Bulgaria*” is **Leonid Reshetnikov**, Lieutenant General of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service and former Director of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, mentioned multiple times in this report. **Nikolai Malinov**, the leader of the National Russophiles Movement, faced accusations of collaboration with Reshetnikov. Malinov himself is also an author¹³⁸ on the platform and a member of the *Scientific and Expert Club* “*Security*”¹³⁹.

“*Brod for Bulgaria*” has additional structural ties with the National Russophiles Movement. Specifically, the



Leonid Reshetnikov, the Lieutenant General of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, a former resident of Soviet intelligence in the Balkans, and former director of RISS

Russia and resuming trade relations with Russia.

In 2016, the **Reserve Officers and Non-commissioned Officers Union**, in its official statement, also endorsed¹⁴⁵ Rumen Radev's candidacy for Bulgaria's presidency.

It is worth mentioning that the research commissioned by RISS at that time was conducted by the sociological company G-Consulting, led by Bulgarian specialist **Zhivko Georgiev** (Живко Георгиев). In 2016, Zhivko Georgiev had official interactions with the Bulgarian Socialist Party, and by 2021, he became a member of Rumen Radev's strategic committee.

In 2017, a special report¹⁴⁶ by the US Department of State accused Leonid Reshetnikov of interfering in the 2016 Bulgarian presidential election. The report specifically mentioned Reshet-

nikov's efforts to disseminate "distorted opinion polls" through the Bulgarian Socialist Party.

After Radev's election victory, Reshetnikov confirmed¹⁴⁷ discussing Rumen Radev's candidacy with BSP leader Kornelia Ninova.

During the 2021 presidential election, RONU once again officially backed¹⁴⁸ Rumen Radev's candidacy. Members of Brod for Bulgaria, including reserve Colonel **Goran Simeonov**, also expressed their support.

Yet, "*Brod for Bulgaria*" maintains interactions with other political forces and organisations linked to Russia.

For instance, in November 2022, the organisation, in collaboration with the political party "*Just Bulgaria*" ("*Справедлива България*"), which includes¹⁴⁹ retired Brigadier General **Dimitar Shivikov**, initiated¹⁵⁰ a signa-

ture collection. This effort was made through an open appeal, including to the President of Bulgaria, urging to cease the delivery of military and technical assistance to Ukraine.

Even before the full-scale invasion, “Brod for Bulgaria”, alongside a representative of RISS, **Dr. Viktor Volodikhin** (Виктор Володихин), representatives of the Rossotrudnichestvo Foundation (“Россотрудничество”), and several other participants, took part¹⁵¹ in the congress of the *Russo-*

in opposing Bulgaria’s membership in NATO and undermining arms supply to Ukraine.

A month before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in January 2022, Reserve Captain **Lazar Murdzhev** had been issuing¹⁵³ warnings on the platform suggesting holding a national referendum to address the issue of “consolidating Western weaponry on Bulgarian territory for potential conflict with Russia”. As mentioned earlier in this report, Bulgaria became Ukraine’s largest indirect arms supplier in 2023.

As soon as June 2023, Reserve Colonel and Bulgarian professor **Gergin Gerginov** (Гергин Гергинов) published an article on the platform accusing¹⁵⁴ the West and the United States of America of instigating the conflict in Ukraine. He alleged that Ukraine was actively seeking to draw NATO into a war against Russia.

Similarly, retired General **Todor Boyadzhiev**, in his publication titled “Crimean Bridge” on “Brod for Bulgaria”, sought¹⁵⁵ to justify Russia’s aggression against Ukraine by framing the war as “Russia’s fight for independence” and laying blame on the West for its initiation.

Another instance involves Major General in the reserve and Doctor of Military Sciences **Stoimen Stoimenov**, who participated¹⁵⁶ in a campaign opposing the constitutional enshrinement of Bulgaria’s NATO membership, labelling the initiative as an “assault on direct democracy”.

Among the authors¹⁵⁷ associated with “Brod for Bulgaria” is **Dmitry Trenin**, a retired colonel¹⁵⁸ from the

In 2017, a special report by the US State Department accused Russian Foreign Intelligence Service General Leonid Reshetnikov of interfering with the 2016 presidential election in Bulgaria

philes’ movement. Nikolai Malinov was re-elected as a chairman there. The “Brod for Bulgaria” platform¹⁵² systematically covers the activities of the National Russophiles Movement.

INVOLVEMENT OF RETIRED BULGARIAN OFFICERS IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE “BROD FOR BULGARIA” PLATFORM

Several retired officers from the Bulgarian Armed Forces and reserve officers actively participate in the operations of the online platform “Brod for Bulgaria” and the print journal “Security”. The platform’s activities have once again aligned with the interests of the Russian government in several crucial areas, particularly



Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces (GRU), former director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, and current member of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). In October 2023, the portal republished¹⁵⁹ Trenin's article titled "The Ukrainian Conflict and

RONU-AFFILIATED ASSOCIATIONS OF OFFICERS AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN THE INTEREST OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



Dmitry Trenin, one of the authors of "Brod za Bulgaria", a retired Russian GRU Colonel, former director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, and current RIAC member

Nuclear Weapons", aimed at intimidating the West with nuclear capabilities and opposing Western military aid to Ukraine. Trenin suggests that the West has mistakenly ceased to fear Russia's potential use of nuclear weapons in response to arms supply to Ukraine.

Overall, the platform not only engages numerous representatives from Bulgarian civil society but also includes Russian experts like **Alexander Dugin** (Александр Дугин), an advocate of the "Russkiy Mir" concept and the leader¹⁶⁰ of the International Eurasian Movement. He is notorious for urging¹⁶¹ the Russian president to invade Ukraine and **Maria Zakharova** (Мария Захарова), a representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry. Given the platform's ties to Russia, its activities warrant scrutiny across various spheres of Bulgarian public life.

What also warrants attention in Bulgaria are certain associations of retired officers, as collective members of the Reserve Officers and Non-commissioned Officers Union (RONU), who operate within this sphere. As previously mentioned, **RONU** is a member of the **Russian International Confederation of Generals, Admirals, and Reserve Officers**.

For instance, the **Bulgarian National Union "Combat Friendship"**, which brings together Bulgarian veterans, is an **RONU** member¹⁶². At the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in March 2022, the union issued an official statement¹⁶³ addressed to the military and citizens of the Russian Federation, expressing support for Russia's efforts to "denazify and demilitarise" Ukraine.

By September 2022, the union had further voiced support for Russia's "Special Military Operation" through another official communication. It extended congratulations¹⁶⁴ to residents of the "DPR", "LPR", as well as occupied areas of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions for participating in the so-called "referendum" on "joining Russia".

In 2023, **Yavor Genov** (Явор Генов), a reserve colonel and head¹⁶⁵ of the "Combat Friendship Union", authored an article on the *Veteran's News* portal titled "Russia Can and

Should Return to the Balkans”. In his piece, Genov proposed that Russia’s primary ally in the region could be the “new people’s Bulgaria”, asserting that conditions were ripe for patriotic forces to triumph in elections.

According to Colonel Yavor Genov, Russia’s main partner could be a “new people’s Bulgaria”, where “conditions were ripe for patriotic forces to triumph in elections”

Another **RONU**-affiliated organisation¹⁶⁶, the **Association for the Land Forces of Bulgaria** (*Асоциация на Сухопътните Войски на България*), comprises representatives from relevant branches of the armed forces. Led by Lieutenant General of the Reserve **Kiril Tsvetkov**, one of the authors of “*Brod for Bulgaria*”, previously mentioned here, the association utilises its official Facebook page to discredit the EU and strain Bulgaria’s relations with member states, including North Macedonia, France, and Germany. For instance, the association’s publications criticise the “dominance of France and Germany in the European Union” in relation to negotiations over the name of North Macedonia, alleging¹⁶⁷ that the EU fails to recognise Bulgaria as a sovereign state.

In August 2023, Lieutenant General Tsvetkov, in his article on the Bulgarian portal “*Otbrana*”¹⁶⁸, criticised the decision to deploy the last combat-ready units of Bulgarian equipment to Ukraine.

Another association within¹⁶⁹ **RONU** that consistently wields influence in

support of the Russian government is the **Association of Reserve Intelligence Officers** (*Асоциацията на Разузнавачите от Запаса*). Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the association’s website, among other things, republished materials aimed at countering the supply of military and technical assistance to Ukraine. For example, in September 2023, there was an interview¹⁷⁰ with Reserve Colonel **Goran Simeonov**, previously mentioned in this report. Simeonov serves as the chairman of the association, a Bulgarian intelligence officer, and the former head¹⁷¹ of the Turkish branch of the National Intelligence Service. The interview discusses the “disarmament of the Bulgarian army through the supply of arms to Ukraine”. Additionally, another article¹⁷² posted on the association’s website criticised the “rampant Russophobia” in Bulgaria.

Some activities of the Reserve Officers and Non-commissioned Officers Union (**RONU**) itself should be explored closely. Along with participation in a number of the above-mentioned campaigns, it is worth mentioning a meeting¹⁷³ held in January 2018. The meeting was attended by officials from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). According to the official communiqué, the guests “expressed interest in the experience of military-patriotic organisations in Bulgaria”. The discussion was attended by the chairman of **RONU**, Reserve General **Zlatan Stoykov**, the chairman of the National Association “Security”, Reserve Colonel **Chavdar Petrov**, the chairman of the Union of Bulgarian War Veterans, as well as Reserve Captain **Marin Petkov** (*Марин Петков*) and the head





RONU representatives meeting with DPRK officials in Sofia. DPRK was represented by the defense attaché of the DPRK Embassy in Bulgaria and his assistant Li Guk

of the Bulgarian Anti-Fascist Union, **Simeon Ignatov** (*Симеон Игнатов*). DPRK was represented by **Kim Chol**, the military attaché of the DPRK Embassy in Bulgaria, and his assistant **Lee Guk**.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the report¹⁷⁴ “The Threat from Russia’s Unconventional Warfare Beyond Ukraine” by the UK’s Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies (RUSI), Russian intelligence services identify and exploit enemy vulnerabilities as part of their influence operations. A study by the European Commission’s *Eurobarometer* opinion poll project, published¹⁷⁵ in January 2023, reveals that the threat of war spreading from Ukraine to the EU ranks as the third most frequent concern among Europeans (81%). The study indicates that Russian-affiliated actors are leveraging this public sentiment in several EU member states, including Bulgaria. In Bulgaria, the issue of the country’s so-called “neutrality”

during Russia’s war against Ukraine is being manipulated to undermine military and technical assistance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Additionally, efforts are underway to deteriorate Bulgaria’s relations with the North Atlantic Alliance. A notable example is the “National Movement for Peace and Sovereignty” campaign, initiated by Bulgarian Armed Forces Reserve officers.

A study conducted by the Bulgarian Ministry of Defense demonstrates the effectiveness of this strategy. According to Todor Tagarev (*Тодор Тагарев*), the head of the Bulgarian defense ministry, in November 2023, there was a 35% decline in applications for admission to military academies and a 45% decrease in the number of cadets. The minister attributes these figures to the dissemination of disinformation within Bulgarian society regarding the alleged threat posed by Bulgaria’s involvement in the war due to its military assistance to Ukraine and membership in the North Atlantic Alliance.

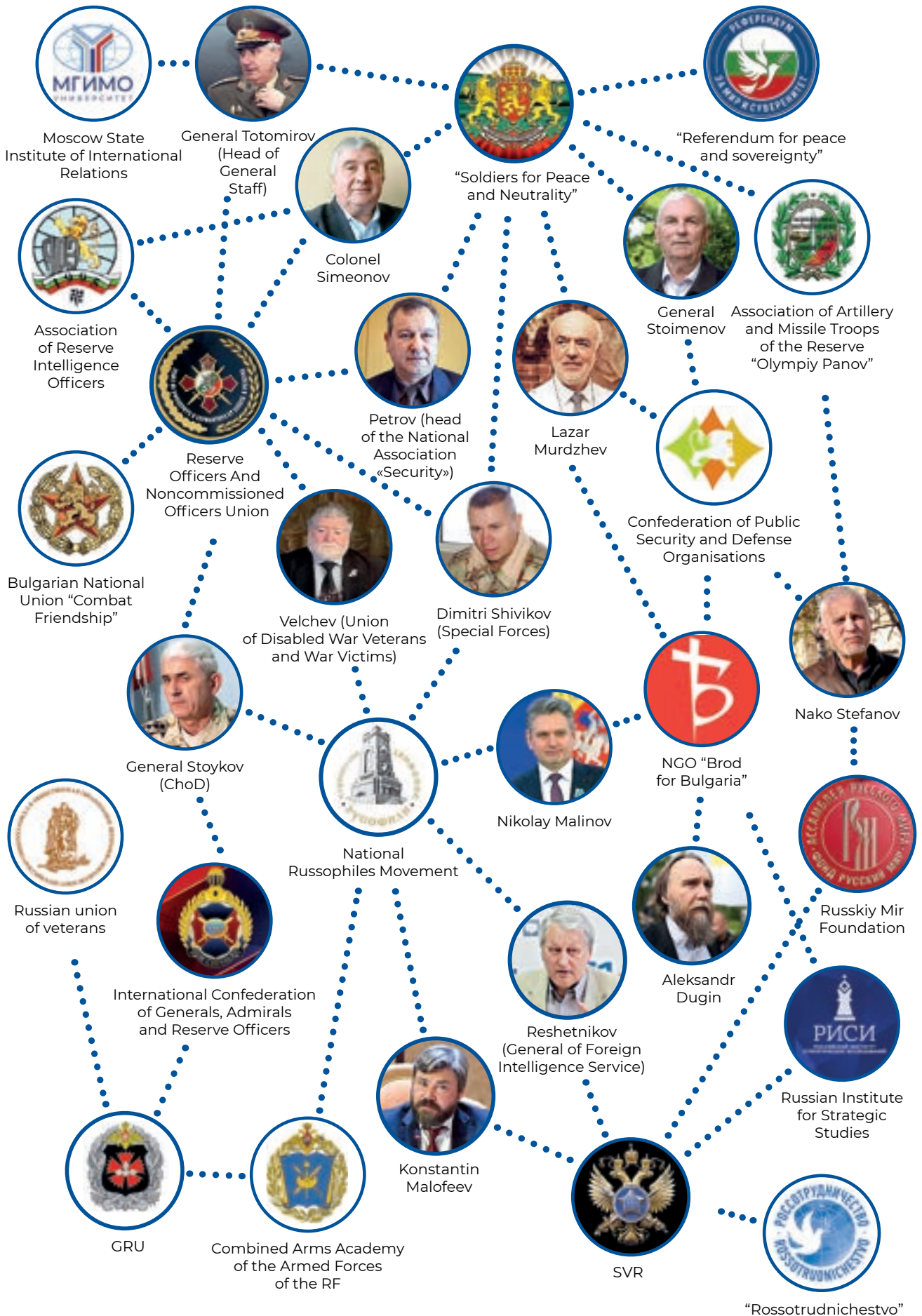
In 2023, the number of applications for admission to military academies in Bulgaria fell by 35% and the number of cadets by 45%. These figures are associated with the disinformation about the alleged threat of Bulgaria's involvement in the war due to its military assistance to Ukraine and NATO membership

Thus, the processes outlined in this report exemplify the systemic influence of the Russian Federation on a NATO member state, posing a threat to the stability, security, and defense potential of NATO in Eastern Europe. Moreover, the analysed impacts directly affect retired officers, reservists, and the Armed Forces of Bulgaria,

correlating with the combat capability of the member state. Furthermore, considering the lowest level of public support in Europe for providing military assistance to Ukraine (30%), further efforts to bolster such sentiments among Bulgarian citizens jeopardise the long-term political support for such assistance to Ukraine.

TOY SOLDIERS:

NATO MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS IN RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURES



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GERMANY

Germany has emerged as the second-largest contributor of lethal military aid to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, following the United States, in their defense against Russian aggression¹. However, Russia's interest in influencing Berlin extends beyond merely halting German support for Ukraine. It encompasses a myriad of factors and circumstances, from economic ties based on energy trade or pharmaceuticals to the sympathy of the German population for Russia due to the contradictory combination of guilt for the crimes of the Hitler Reich and historical revisionism. **Roderich Kiesewetter**, a retired Bundeswehr colonel and mem-

ber of the Bundestag, believes that the “*fundamental myth of the German-Russian brotherhood of arms*” was the joint fight against Napoleon². Additionally, Germany's pivotal role as a key EU and NATO country in Europe renders successful measures against Berlin a prerequisite for expanding Russian influence across the subcontinent. Equally important is the existence of a purely instrumental factor in the form of loyalty to Russia on the part of numerous organisations, such as football ultras, COVID dissidents, conspiracists, supporters of the Reichsbürger nationalist movement, and other associations of citizens of varying degrees of marginalisation. The institutional capacity of such entities is strengthened by affiliation with existing political projects located at opposite ends of the political spectrum. This is clearly evidenced by the legislative and extra-parliamentary activities of “Alternative for Germany” (*Alternative für Deutschland*), the Left Party (*Die Linke*), and others.

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Finally, an additional factor in the effectiveness of Russian influence in Germany is the institutional problems the internal security system is currently experiencing. These issues are caused, not least, by the personnel shortage experienced by the German secret services³. As of September 2022, about 1,000 jobs in the Federal Intelligence Service (BND) and 800 in the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) were vacant. Therefore, when selecting employees, they have to reconcile compliance with all the

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necessary standards of professionalism, official compliance, and political trustworthiness with the general need for staffing. This also applies to special checks of existing employees. As a result, individuals like **Ralph Werner Gelert**, who was accused of spying for Russia⁴ last year, find their way into the system. Another exam-

nalists suggest it could have included the coordinates of the IRIS-T air defense system deployment in Ukraine, GPS tracking of HIMARS MLRS movement, and data regarding the positions of artillery and air defense units of the Ukrainian Armed Forces⁷.

Carsten Linke was a coach of a children's football team in Weilheim in Oberbayern, Bavaria, and an employee at *Carl Zeiss* in Jena, a globally renowned manufacturer of optics and precision engineering with a substantial share of military products. His duties included selecting candidates for the BND⁸, and he was also a supporter of *Alternative for Germany*. Linke's involvement in various spheres of German society underscores the significant value of such individuals for the Kremlin, from leaking confidential information to infiltrating potential spies into secret services. This exacerbates the issue of Russian intelligence services' influence on their German counterparts, making it hard to determine the actual capabilities of Russian agents within the former law enforcement community.



Carsten Linke, former head of technical intelligence at the BND, who is accused of high treason and disclosing information to Russian secret services

ple is Colonel **Carsten Linke**, former head of technical intelligence at the BND, who is accused of high treason and disclosing information to Russian secret services⁵. This information is a state secret and relates, in particular, to the war in Ukraine. Contact between the defendant and the FSB took place through a liaison officer, Arthur Eller, a German of Russian origin who served in the German Armed Forces in the field of information security⁶ from 2009 to 2021.

The investigation has not revealed the specifics of the information Linke passed on to the Russians, but jour-

RETIRED BUNDESWEHR OFFICERS AMONG THE GERMAN (?) "REICHSBÜRGERS"

Meanwhile, these agents may be sufficiently organised to undertake more ambitious endeavours than mere espionage. In December of

Loyalty to Russia among numerous football ultras, COVID dissidents, conspiracy theorists, "Reichsbürgers", and the far right is an instrumental factor here





Investigation by German counterintelligence is ongoing regarding the involvement of former BfV director Hans-Georg Maassen in the Reichsbürger case

last year, 25 members of the *Patriotische Union terrorist group* were apprehended, with plans to alter the constitutional order in the country to reinstate monarchical rule⁹. Among the conspirators were several former members of the Bundeswehr Special Forces Command (KSK), including retired Lieutenant Colonel **Rüdiger von Pescatore** of the 251st Parachute Battalion, retired Colonel **Maximilian Eder**, and retired Colonel **Peter Wörner**. One of those detained had attempted to reach out to representatives of the Russian government to discuss plans to attack German authorities. Although Russia denied involvement, prior to his arrest, Eder had referred to Russian aggression against Ukraine as “freeing children from biolabs”¹⁰,

aligning with a Kremlin narrative and the conspiracy theory propagated by the *QAnon group*¹¹.

German counterintelligence is currently investigating the possible involvement of **Hans-Georg Maassen**, the former head of the BfV from 2012 to 2018, in the aforementioned *Reichsbürger case*, as some evidence suggests a connection¹². Simultaneously, Maassen has been instrumental in shaping the right-wing conservative movement *Values Union (Werteunion)* within the CDU/CSU bloc into a distinct political party¹³. This party will endeavour to secure seats in the state parliaments of Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia in the upcoming autumn. The potential success of this new polit-

In December 2023, authorities arrested 25 members of the Patriotische Union terrorist group, who were planning to alter the constitutional order in the country to restore monarchical rule



General Harald Kujat, former Chief of the General Staff of the Bundeswehr

ical force, which does not preclude collaboration with both¹⁴ the far left and the far right, is likely to contribute to the fragmentation of parties at the local level, with potential implications at the federal level. Germany's evolving political landscape presents challenges in predicting its impact on German support for Ukraine.

Several of Maassen's statements align more closely with the Kremlin's narrative than Ukrainian interests. For instance, in early January 2022, Maassen characterised the shipment of heavy-wheeled vehicles to Ukraine as "*Germany's involvement in the conflict with Russia*", suggesting it could make Germany "*a target for Russian attacks*"¹⁵. Furthermore, he has questioned Ukraine's status as a bastion of human rights, freedom, and peace in the West. Even prior to its formalisation, Russian media depicted the secession of the *Values Union* as a sign of dissatisfaction with the policies of the Bundestag¹⁶ current coalition.

THE INSTITUTE OF THE KGB OFFICER AND ACTIVITIES OF GENERAL KUJAT

Harald Kujat, a retired German Luftwaffe general and former Chief of the General Staff of the Bundeswehr from 2000 to 2002, has long advocated for a view of international relations favourable to Russia. Serving as Chairman of the NATO-Russia Council and Chairman of the NATO-Ukraine Chiefs of Defense from 2002 to 2005, Kujat's military and political credentials lend him authority, even in retirement, and underscore his significance in promoting Russian influence abroad. His status as "*Commander-in-Chief of NATO's Joint Forces in the event of hostilities*" elevates the importance of his comments and speeches as valuable sources of information for Russian media.

In 2016, Kuyat participated in the grand opening of the **Dialogue of**

Civilisations Research Institute (*Forschungsinstitut "Dialog der Zivilisationen"*) in Berlin, established by **Vladimir Yakunin**, a former KGB foreign intelligence officer and founder of the Foundation of the same name. The Institute's supervisory board includes, among others, Austrian politician and former Secretary

In 2016, Kujat participated in the grand opening of the Dialogue of Civilisations research institute in Berlin, founded by former KGB foreign intelligence officer Vladimir Yakunin.

Later he became the organisation's supervisory board member

General of the Council of Europe **Walter Schwimmer**, former Austrian Federal Chancellor **Alfred Gusenbauer**, former Czech President **Václav Klaus**, and Russian-Armenian oligarch **Ruben Vardanyan**, who later became a high-ranking official in the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic". Notable experts associated with the Institute include German political scientist **Peter Schulze**, who justified the annexation of Crimea under the pretext of protecting the Russian population from the consequences of the "coup d'état" in Kyiv¹⁷, and testified to the high compliance with democratic standards during the 2018 Moscow mayoral elections¹⁸. Schulze, together with Schwimmer and Yakunin, founded the Institute¹⁹. Other experts include propagandist **Alexander Rahr** and British Eurosceptic **John Laughland**, who referred to Russian aggression against Ukraine as "*the result of two decades of increasing hostility to Russia on the part of the*

collective West"²⁰. The French political scientist **Aymeric Chauprade**, a former member of the European Parliament from the National Front and an observer at the 2018²¹ regional elections in the Russian city of Omsk. He expressed doubts about the authenticity of photographic evidence of Russian war crimes in Bucha, suggesting that Russia is not interested in new sanctions and that Ukraine and the United States are not interested in a ceasefire²². Chauprade supervised the internship of Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov's daughter in the European Parliament in 2018²³.

Kujat positioned the emergence of the "*Dialogue of Civilisations*" as an attempt to enhance mutual understanding and find new ways to overcome conflicts worldwide²⁴. However, the *Institute for European Integrity*, an independent organisation that identifies civil society institutions with significant links to malign influence, labelled Yakunin's project as "the Kremlin's main propaganda factory in the West"²⁵. In March 2023, the *Dialogue of Civilisations* was officially dissolved, and its social media pages on platforms X and LinkedIn had ceased to be updated three years earlier.

However, in his capacity as an Institute expert, Kujat published articles and gave interviews to Western publications, aiming to portray Russia as a key element of the global security architecture. In February 2016, he said he believed that Russia's military intervention created an opportunity for a peaceful resolution of the war in Syria²⁶. In October of the same year, while commenting on Putin's visit to Berlin amid escalating tensions in Syria, Harald Kujat argued



that “Russia is striving to restore a multipolar world model amidst numerous local conflicts and the terrorism issue”. He emphasised that achieving a balance would be in the interest of all international relations’ parties²⁷. Kujat attributed the subsequent breakdown of peace talks to the US and its allies. He viewed the bombing of Aleppo by Russian aircraft as a necessary and inevitable measure, dismissing calls for tougher anti-Russian sanctions as mere populism²⁸.

Overall, Harald Kujat began advocating for constructive dialogue with Russia long before the establishment of the *Dialogue of Civilisations*, when the threat from Russia was not as apparent. In February 2004, for instance, as chairman of the NATO Military Committee, he wrote in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the Russian MoD’s official newspaper, about the complications and threats posed by terrorism. He praised the NATO-Russia Council as a platform for exchanging expertise and discussing technical information, capabilities, and resources²⁹.

In April 2008, he opposed Ukraine and Georgia’s accession to NATO, arguing that such a move would contradict the interests of these countries and NATO itself³⁰. Nonetheless, Kujat acknowledged Russia’s right to determine the Euro-Atlantic future of Ukraine as “a geopolitical power whose NATO accession would alter the security architecture in Europe”. He maintained a similar stance regarding the response to the Russian-backed conflict in Donbas. Kujat cautioned Germany and NATO against involvement in the conflict, considering the supply of weapons to Kyiv as “a

complication on the path to a political settlement”, and insisted on negotiations as the sole path to success, albeit only if “Putin and Obama met on equal footing”³¹.

Following Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine, Harald Kujat once again cautioned NATO against supplying Ukraine with heavy weaponry³². While in 2014, his stance stemmed from concerns about the “deplorable state of the Ukrainian army” and the need for extensive training efforts, in 2022, it was driven by fears of escalation and the potential use of nuclear weapons.

Commenting on developments in November-December 2023, Kujat’s perspectives reflect a blend of contradictory positions — those of a peacemaker, Euro-optimist, and Rusophile. Firstly, he contributed to formulating the “Swiss view” regarding the conclusion of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, advocating for Ukraine’s permanent neutral, non-aligned status. Under this proposal, third-party countries would guarantee Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, excluding Crimea and other temporarily occupied territories, which would be subject to separate negotiations³³. Secondly, Kujat characterised the war in Ukraine as “a warning sign with only one consequence: a decisive step toward Europe’s geopolitical reassertion — political, economic, technological, and military”³⁴. Thirdly, he viewed Russia’s strategic plan to “retake Odesa, liberate the / so-called/ L/DPR, and reunite with Transnistria” as quite realistic. He referred to the occupied regions of Ukraine merely as “territories that Ukrainians consider theirs”, aligning with the Russian narrative of historical justice restoration³⁵.



Bundeswehr Brigadier General Erich Vad (right) with Alice Schwarzer, editor-in-chief of the feminist magazine Emma, and the leader of the pro-Russian party Sarah Wagenknecht's Alliance, during a rally against arms supplies to Ukraine in Berlin, 2023

GENERAL VAD: TIES WITH RUSSIA AND ACTIVITIES TO UNDERMINE ARMS SUPPLIES TO UKRAINE

In contrast to Kujat's primarily expert activities, former Bundeswehr Brigadier General **Erich Vad's** focus is more practical. Although he has authored monographs and academic articles, Vad established and led the consulting firm *Erich Vad Consulting* after retiring from the military. While it remains unclear who his clients are and the extent of his business success, his website, which functions more like a personal blog, does not provide such information. Supposedly, it would have been made public had it been available.

Vad's military predictions have become the subject of jokes among German journalists, often described as unrealised prophecies, with comments such as *"in the theatre of war, in 99% of cases, the opposite of what he predicts happens"*³⁶. For instance, at the onset of the invasion, he forecasted a swift victory for Russia and

doubted the Ukrainian Armed Forces' ability to mount an effective defense³⁷. However, beyond his military career, he gained prominence in politics, serving as a military and political adviser to former German Chancellor Angela Merkel from 2006 to 2013. It is in this capacity that he is most frequently mentioned.

In his dual role of discrediting Ukraine and advancing Russian interests, Vad questions the Ukrainian Armed Forces' capability to effectively operate German-made equipment like the Leopard tank and Marder infantry fighting vehicle³⁸. He also advocates refraining from labelling Putin as a pathological despot³⁹. Such statements not only appeal to humanity but also aim to shift Russia's responsibility. Vad suggests that the conflict in Ukraine is part of a series of wars, including those in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan, all allegedly initiated by the West. Additionally, during a security policy seminar for the regional branch of the *Reservist Association of Deutsche Bundeswehr* in Franconia in 2019, Vad referred to Crimea as *"historically Russian territory conquered from the Turks"*⁴⁰.

Earlier this year, Vad stressed the importance of preventing Russia's disintegration, asserting that *Russia serves as a leading force in a multinational state to prevent disputes and wars*⁴¹. He expresses scepticism about Ukraine's integration into the EU and NATO due to concerns about corruption, oligarchic power, and violations of the rule of law.

On 25 February 2023, a mass rally took place in Berlin, opposing further arms supplies to Ukraine and advocating for the initiation of peace talks with Russia

Apart from his media statements, Vad actively participated in campaigns to prevent the supply of heavy weapons to Ukraine from Germany. For instance, in April 2022, he co-signed an article along with other German public figures appealing to the West for an end to the war in Ukraine through negotiations, titled *"Ceasefire Now!"*⁴². The timing of the appeal suggests a well-orchestrated plan in which Vad leveraged his experience as a former military adviser to Angela Merkel. He cited this experience when endorsing the position of **Alice Sophie Schwarzer**, editor-in-chief of the feminist magazine *"Emma"*, on the war in Ukraine as "appropriate"⁴³.

Initially, the magazine published an editorial advocating for a "compromise" (specifically, a "NATO-free Ukraine and a special status for Donbas") and urging *"negotiations with Putin, the president of the world's second most powerful nuclear power"*⁴⁴. Subsequently, allegedly agitated by Sergei Lavrov's statement regarding the real danger of nuclear

war, Alisa Schwarzer drafted a letter to Olaf Scholz urging against supplying weapons to Ukraine⁴⁵. In support of this appeal, various statements were made to challenge Ukraine's agency and diminish its legitimate struggle:

- **Antje Vollmer** (died in March 2023), a participant of the St. Petersburg Dialogue and former Vice-President of the Bundestag from the Union 90/Greens party, described EU sanctions as a "scorched earth policy" and characterised the war in Ukraine as "a classic proxy war between Russia and the West"⁴⁶;
- **Sahra Wagenknecht**, a member of the Bundestag from the Left Party, criticised the US for its policy of weakening Russia at the expense of *"arms supplies and Ukrainian deaths"*⁴⁷;
- **Erich Vad** warned of the threat of escalation and the risk of World War III⁴⁸.

Consequently, on February 25, 2023, a mass rally was held in Berlin, opposing further arms supplies to Ukraine and advocating for peace talks with Russia. The *"Uprising for Peace"* rally was organised by Alice Schwarzer and Sahra Wagenknecht, who launched a new online petition titled *"Peace Manifesto"*⁴⁹. As of February 1, 2024, over 908,000 people⁵⁰ had signed the appeal published on the *Change.org* platform. Using terms like *"peace"* and *"reaching compromises on both sides"* and manipulating public opinion in Germany, Alice Schwarzer and Sahra Wagenknecht effectively convey a sense of German solidarity with the Kremlin's typical narratives⁵¹.

Addressing the protesters from the stage, Vad spoke about a war of attrition where neither side would emerge victorious. He criticised Ukraine's decision to arm itself as pure militarism

and stressed that achieving peace *necessitates engagement with Russia*⁵².

The rally stirred controversy, leading Vad to moderate his stance relatively quickly. In March, in an interview with the Turkish newspaper “*Anadolu*”, he expressed support for providing weapons to Ukraine, advocating for a simultaneous ceasefire and a shift towards negotiations, which

fore fleeing to Moscow in 2020 when it was revealed that approximately \$2 billion had vanished from the company’s balance sheet. Under an assumed name, Maršálek obtained Russian citizenship and is reportedly under the FSB protection. He aided Russia in financing operations globally, and suspicions link him to Russian intelligence activities in the Novichok case and to supporting mercenaries from Yevgeny Prigozhin’s PMC “Wagner”⁵⁸.



Jan Marsalek, former Chief Operating Officer of the financial company Wirecard, is accused of working for Russian intelligence

he deemed necessary⁵³. Vad views a peaceful resolution of the conflict as a priority for Germany and as the only viable option for Ukraine⁵⁴. However, his characterisation of Ukraine’s future as a “frontline state” suggests that he does not envision negotiations progressing in a manner favourable to Kyiv’s interests⁵⁵.

Beyond his public engagements, Erich Vad is associated with one of the world’s most wanted criminals, **Jan Maršálek**⁵⁶. The former chief operating officer of the German payment company *Wirecard* served as a Russian agent⁵⁷ for a decade be-

Marsalek had ambitions to influence international relations, so he hosted extravagant receptions for influential Western politicians, officials, and intelligence officers. In 2014, Marsalek invited Eric Vada and several other security policy experts to Planegg Castle in the Munich suburbs for a roundtable discussion⁵⁹. In April 2017, a similar meeting was held in the form of a dinner at the upscale Käfer restaurant, with Marsalek footing the bill. Among the attendees were former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, former Bavarian Prime Minister Edmund Stoiber, former Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel, former Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, and Austrian Army Brigadier General and leading security expert Gustav Gusstenau⁶⁰. The latter’s connections to Marsalek and Russia – including joint projects with the embassy, membership in the Dialogue of Civilisations Institute, and the Austrian-Russian Friendship Society – put an end to his career at the Austrian Ministry of Defense⁶¹ in 2021.

Particularly notable are the connections between Brigadier General Erich Vad and one of the world’s most wanted criminals, Jan Maršálek, who is under FSB protection in Moscow



Both events were organised by the Felix Somary Foundation. Marsalek's name does not officially appear in the foundation's founding documents; it is run by Michael Dzeba⁶², a member of the Munich City Council from the CSU. This cover-up appears logical⁶³ since Wirecard's lobbyists were primarily former security officials and members of the CSU party, including former Minister of Defense Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg and former State Secretary and Intelligence Commissioner Klaus-Dieter Fritsche. Following Marsalek's exposure, the activities of the Felix Somary Foundation ceased, along with any further confirmed links to Vad⁶⁴.

HOW RUSSIAN STATE MEDIA USE GERMAN OFFICERS

With longstanding platforms for spreading influence in Germany being shut down (such as the Dialogue of Civilisations Institute and the Petersburg Dialogue Forum), and existing formats refusing to endorse Russia's political agenda in Europe (such as the Deutsch-Russischer Austausch), Russian media are facing the need to revise their content strategies. In the context of the declared conflict "with the whole West", obtaining complimentary comments from the "enemy camp" becomes especially crucial. Now, the services of full-time propagandists like **Alexander Rahr**⁶⁵ are no longer sufficient.

In this scenario, retired German military officers serve as the primary source of content for Russian talk shows like "60 Minutes" or news aggregators, offering their expert opinions on Russia's war against Ukraine. While they don't necessarily fabricate

material for their audience, editors publish or display representative excerpts from the experts' speeches. For instance, retired German lieutenant general **Roland Kather** predicted the "inevitable and rapid success of Russian troops"⁶⁶ and the "threat of tactical nuclear weapons"⁶⁷ prior to the invasion, and in early December, he spoke of the end of the West's "false optimism"⁶⁸.

Likewise, Russian media quoted retired Colonel **Wolfgang Richter** stating that "Kyiv is failing to achieve operational success"⁶⁹ and highlighting that "problems with mobilisation show that the image of Ukraine united by patriotism is unreliable"⁷⁰. Retired Brigadier General **Reiner Schwalb's** view that "Ukraine will not be able to win back all its territory from Russia"⁷¹ and retired Brigadier General **Egon Ramms'** assertion that "the Ukrainian Armed Forces are not able to break through the Russian defenses"⁷² were also cited. Additionally, retired Brigadier General **Helmut W. Ganser** emphasised that "the West has no clear plans and goals for Ukraine"⁷³, "the Ukrainian counter-offensive has exhausted itself"⁷⁴ and stressed that "nuclear escalation must be avoided at all costs". Retired Brigadier General Klaus Wittmann remarked, "Ukraine will not be able to cope because it is inferior in firepower"⁷⁵.

Russians capitalise on every opportunity to influence public opinion, aiming to discredit Ukraine, hinder or halt the supply of modern weapons to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and underscore Russia's business reliability. Although the involvement of German soldiers in assisting Kyiv lacks negative connotations, Russian media arbitrarily paint them in a nega-

tive light. This scheme was employed to disseminate the statement of German Air Force Commander **Ingo Gerhartz** about NATO's readiness to launch a nuclear strike on Ukraine⁷⁶ if necessary and the statement of Colonel **Andre Wüstner**, head of the Bundeswehr Union, regarding the cannibalisation⁷⁷ of the German army. In reality, Gerhartz did not specify Ukraine's territory, and Wüstner did

outlets like the "Sputnik" news agency, "RT channel", and "REN-TV International" satellite broadcasting, which target Russian-speaking Western audiences. For instance, through this method, Russians popularised the aforementioned statements by Richter⁷⁹ and Ganser⁸⁰, as well as Ramms's comments as of 25.02.2022 regarding the Bundeswehr's supposed *inability to defend the country*⁸¹. They used the same technique to disseminate the intercepted conversation among German generals, including Gerhartz⁸², discussing the potential use of Taurus missiles on the Kerch Bridge.

Vad stressed the importance of preventing Russia's disintegration, citing the need for it to remain "a leading force in a multinational state to prevent disputes and wars"

not advocate for a complete cessation of arms supplies to the Ukrainian army. Similarly, the words of the country's Army Chief, **Alfons Mais**, expressing optimism about forming the first combat-ready division by 2025, were misconstrued by the Russians as implying the Bundeswehr's inability to repel an attack due to weapons supply to Ukraine⁷⁸.

In the instances outlined in the preceding paragraphs, former German military personnel provided interviews or comments exclusively to German or Western media outlets. Russian media merely quoted them, sometimes distorting the original context or presenting the material under provocative or manipulative headlines that did not align with the content. Nonetheless, this was sufficient to convey the impression that German generals supported the Russian army and/or Kremlin policies. To amplify this impression, the relevant publications were disseminated to an international audience through

THE DARMSTÄDTER SIGNAL GROUP REPEATS RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT'S TALKING POINTS

The retired lieutenant colonel Hans-Jürgen Rose, notable for being the first Bundeswehr soldier to refuse to carry out an order in 2007 (to equip PA-200 Tornado fighters for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan) on the grounds of conscience⁸³, uses a starkly contrasting approach. From the Russian media's perspective, this act exemplified both the alleged criminal militarism of the United States and NATO and the embodiment of a true officer's spirit, making Rose a sought-after figure for commentary⁸⁴. For instance, in 2017, he gave an interview to "RIA Novosti" where he criticised the undemocratic nature of the Bundeswehr⁸⁵. In 2021, speaking to the propaganda outlet Russia Today, he characterised the operation in Afghanistan as "*beneficial only for American arms manufacturers and opium poppy traders.*"⁸⁶ Finally,



in January 2023, he remarked to RIA Novosti that the transfer of Leopard tanks to Ukraine would not significantly impact the course of the war and described it as *“an act of desperation aimed at maintaining the morale of the Ukrainian Armed Forces”*⁸⁷. Simultaneously, while discussing his stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the retired lieutenant colonel absolved Russia of

a non-aggressive army⁹⁰. However, despite its outspoken anti-military position, the organisation remains active and shows signs of being influenced by Russia. In this capacity, H.-J. Rose serves as the chairman of the supervisory board, with the working group directly comprising retired Major Florian D. Pfaff (spokesperson), Staff Sergeant Holger Hützel, Staff Sergeant Eric Giesel, and retired Lieutenant Colonel Helmuth Prieß (honorary chairman).



Lieutenant Colonel Hans-Jürgen Rose (left), chairman of the supervisory board of the Darmstädter Signal group, which brings together retired and active Bundeswehr officers

responsibility for the conflict, asserting that *“NATO is provoking Russia to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine in order to have a pretext to destroy Russian forces”*⁸⁸ and *“The West is undermining Ukraine’s economy and failing to provide it with ammunition”*⁸⁹.

Following his discharge from the German army in 2010, Rose continued his pacifist stance as a **Darmstädter Signal** working group member. Established in 1983 as Watchdog, the organisation brings together retired and active Bundeswehr officers who critically evaluate military policy and related issues, advocating for the “uniformed citizen model” and

On behalf of the group, on the official website, Pfaff published two position papers on Ukraine aligning with the Kremlin’s narrative:

- On January 31, 2022, the paper highlighted that *“Ukraine’s threats against the population of Russian origin and the announcement of a ban on the Russian language”* have exacerbated the conflict. It suggested that *“the separation of Crimea”* would not have occurred without Ukraine’s previous policies. The document proposed resolving the conflict by *“implementing the Minsk agreements and halting NATO expansion near Russia’s borders”*⁹¹.
- On March 1, 2022, the paper went beyond calls for peace, echoing messages commonly used by Russia. It mentioned that *“NATO’s eastward expansion from the Baltic to Romania was an illegal strengthening at the expense of Russia’s security interests”*, referenced the *“US-controlled coup in Ukraine”*, and suggested that *“President Putin could accept a neutral Ukraine without nuclear-capable cruise missiles”*⁹².

Pfaff and Rose were among the initial signatories of the “Immediate Political Détente” initiative in December

2016. The statement explicitly warned that *“the lack of cooperation with Russia threatens further confrontation and a new arms race, escalating the Ukrainian conflict”*⁹³.

Turning the spotlight back to the supervisory board of “Darmstädter Signal”, it is worth noting that it also includes civilians, such as Bundeswehr reserve major **Johannes M. Becker** and retired Swiss lieutenant colonel **Ralph Bosshard**.

In fact, Swiss citizen **Bosshard** is not the focus of this study, but from a methodological standpoint, his inclusion is noteworthy. Bosshard, a graduate of Moscow State University and the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, served in OSCE missions to Ukraine (2014–2017) and the South Caucasus (Nagorno-Karabakh, 2017–2020). He advocates for finding *modus vivendi*⁹⁴ with Russia, asserting that *“Russia is effectively at war with NATO”*⁹⁵ and disregarding the opinions of Ukraine and hardliners in the West.

Becker, a co-founder of the Center for Conflict Research at the University of Marburg, has displayed loyalty to Moscow since at least 2007. He hailed Russian President Putin’s strong speech at the Munich Security Conference that year as a fair critique of Washington, aligning Putin’s desire to move away from a unipolar world with the aspirations of the German political elite⁹⁶.

Johannes Becker was among the representatives of the German intelligentsia who penned an open letter to German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in the *“Berliner Zeitung”* on April 22, 2022. In it, they opposed

the supply of weapons to Ukraine⁹⁷. The letter’s main thrust is to pressure Ukraine into capitulating and accepting neutrality, recognising Crimea as Russian territory, and acknowledging the “independence” of Donbas. The letter closely mirrors the Schwarzer-Wagenknecht initiative, with all signatories also endorsing the “Manifesto of Peace”.

On the anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Becker granted an interview to *“Der Freitag”*. He asserted that there was *“no alternative to negotiations”*⁹⁸; in a speech at a rally a few days earlier, he challenged *“the aggressive policy of continued arms supply to Ukraine in a war that cannot be won and is irresponsibly fuelled by Foreign Minister Baerbock”*⁹⁹.

THE AFD GERMAN OFFICERS: “TRAINING OF UKRAINIAN MILITARY MUST STOP”

Germans’ unique affinity for Russia fosters a favourable view of rebuilding German-Russian relations. To achieve this objective, the Kremlin employs multi-channel communication with diverse political factions in Germany, ranging from traditional sympathisers on the left to certain segments of the Social Democrats, as well as their ideological adversaries on the right, represented by Alternative for Germany and the **Pegida** movement (which stands for *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes – Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West*).

The anti-Islamic political movement, established in Dresden (home to Germany’s largest share of AfD vot-

ers) in 2014, is known for the xenophobic rhetoric of its leaders and anti-immigrant unrest among its rank-and-file supporters, which have resulted in a number of criminal trials¹⁰⁰. While positioning itself as “*a movement addressing current political and social issues without ideology*”, one of the tenets of its “*Dresden Theses*” is “*the immediate normalisation of relations with the Russian Federation and the cessation of any warmongering*”¹⁰¹. “*Pegida*” rallies typically feature Russian symbols and portraits of Putin, and German experts have observed former members of the Stasi¹⁰² (the GDR’s secret police and punitive body) among its supporters.

On February 24, 2023, “*Pegida*” organised a demonstration in Dresden against the provision of weapons to Ukraine. Concurrently, participants in the “*Great Walk for Peace*” (“*Grosser Dresdner friedensspaziergang*”) took to the streets waving Russian flags. Their alignment with the aggressor was evident in a press release issued the previous day, urging the government to “*immediately engage in negotiations to halt the escalating conflict*”, afford Russia “*the opportunity to express its stance*”, and accurately assess Ukraine’s position “*following the Maidan coup and the brutal actions against the Russian population in the east of the country*”¹⁰³.

In October 2023, *Pegida*, along with the AfD and the anti-vaccination movement “*Querdenker*”, organised a similar rally in Berlin, advocating for “*government re-election, cessation of military aid to Kyiv, diplomatic resolution of the conflict in Ukraine, and the restoration of amicable relations with Russia*”¹⁰⁴.

As a purely political venture, *Pegida*’s evolution has been non-linear: it currently lacks the same level of support in Germany as it did during 2015–2018 or in the early stages of the Covid pandemic, but it has gained popularity abroad, notably in the Netherlands¹⁰⁵. The movement has established hubs in Austria, the United Kingdom, and all Scandinavian countries, each with a neutral or positive stance towards Russia¹⁰⁶. However, the prospects for its further evolution into an independent political entity remain uncertain – at least in Saxony, it has already been classified as an extremist movement. Consequently, it remains entirely reliant on its “*patron*”, which is the AfD.

In contrast to the street activism of the anti-Islamists, their counterparts from the parliamentary party **Alternative for Germany** possess the ability to influence the German government and politics directly. The presence of retired officers sympathetic to Russia among its ranks makes the party’s activities particularly intriguing to the Kremlin. Indeed, since its inception in 2013, the party’s leadership and ordinary members have openly endorsed the annexation of Crimea, visited the ORDLO (Separate Raions of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts) and the Crimea peninsula, and opposed anti-Russian sanctions. Since the onset of the full-scale invasion, they have embarked on a campaign to lobby for pro-Russian initiatives while discrediting Ukraine.

Maintaining constant communication with the Kremlin through an intermediary, Vladimir Sergienko, an assistant to one of the AfD members in the Bundestag, the party has re-

ceived funding, guidance, and direct instructions for its actions. In particular, it has endeavoured to block arms supplies to Ukraine through legal means, filing a lawsuit in July 2023 with the Federal Constitutional Court under the formal pretext of the lack of Bundestag's approval for



Russian political technologist Vladimir Sergienko, involved in the AfD's cooperation with Russian secret services to undermine military and technical assistance to Ukraine

such supplies, although not required by German law¹⁰⁷. The case is still under consideration, as evidenced by the absence of a court decision.

In early March 2023, a group of "Alternative" MPs with military backgrounds in the Bundeswehr appealed to the government, urging the cessation of training for the Ukrainian military and advocating for a peaceful resolution to the conflict¹⁰⁸. **Gerold Otten**, a retired Air Force colonel, signed the appeal, stating that Kyiv lacks the capability for success, so Germany should cease undermining its combat readiness by assisting it¹⁰⁹. The appeal also bore the signatures of **Rene Springer**, a lecturer at a naval school who had completed a lengthy tour of duty in Afghanistan, and **Dietmar Friedhoff**, a lieutenant colonel in the reserve who had visited annexed Crimea at the Kremlin's expense¹¹⁰.

Another notable signatory of the appeal was **Jan Ralf Nolte**, a senior boatswain (*Oberbootsmann*) and member of the Bundestag Defense Committee, known for his openly pro-Russian stance. He has expressed this stance in interviews and comments to the Russian "Izvestia", which were then republished in the West through "RT". In his speeches, Nolte consistently advocates positions favourable to Russia, criticising the idea of providing Ukraine with German weapons¹¹¹, asserting Russia's right to present its perspective to a Western audience¹¹², and insisting that the West's interest lies solely in prolonging the war in Ukraine to test its weapons in combat conditions¹¹³. Nolte's father-in-law is a Russian-German Orthodox priest, and the mother-in-law is ethnically Russian¹¹⁴. His wife, Katrin Nolte, hosts the streaming version of the right-wing conspiracy magazine "Compact", which is monitored by the BfV. In her shows, she frequently promotes information campaigns in support of Russia¹¹⁵.

"Alternative for Germany" has a chance of winning the parliamentary elections next year. Such an outcome by the far-right party would send an extremely surprising and troubling signal about German sentiment, as sociologists observe that the AfD attracts more voters than the NSDAP did in the 1930 Reichstag elections¹¹⁶. Furthermore, it will highly likely undermine¹¹⁷ Ukraine's position in its fight against Russia and embolden similar political forces across Europe.

However, the threat posed by *Alternative* is not limited to extreme populism or neo-Nazism. At the end of 2020, German counterintelligence

services identified a significant number of extremists within the Bundeswehr Special Forces (KSK) and the Military Counterintelligence Service (MAD)¹¹⁸. One of the radical movements associated with these security forces was the AfD youth wing.

In late 2020, German counterintelligence services identified a significant number of extremists within the Bundeswehr Special Forces (KSK) and the Military Intelligence Service (MAD)

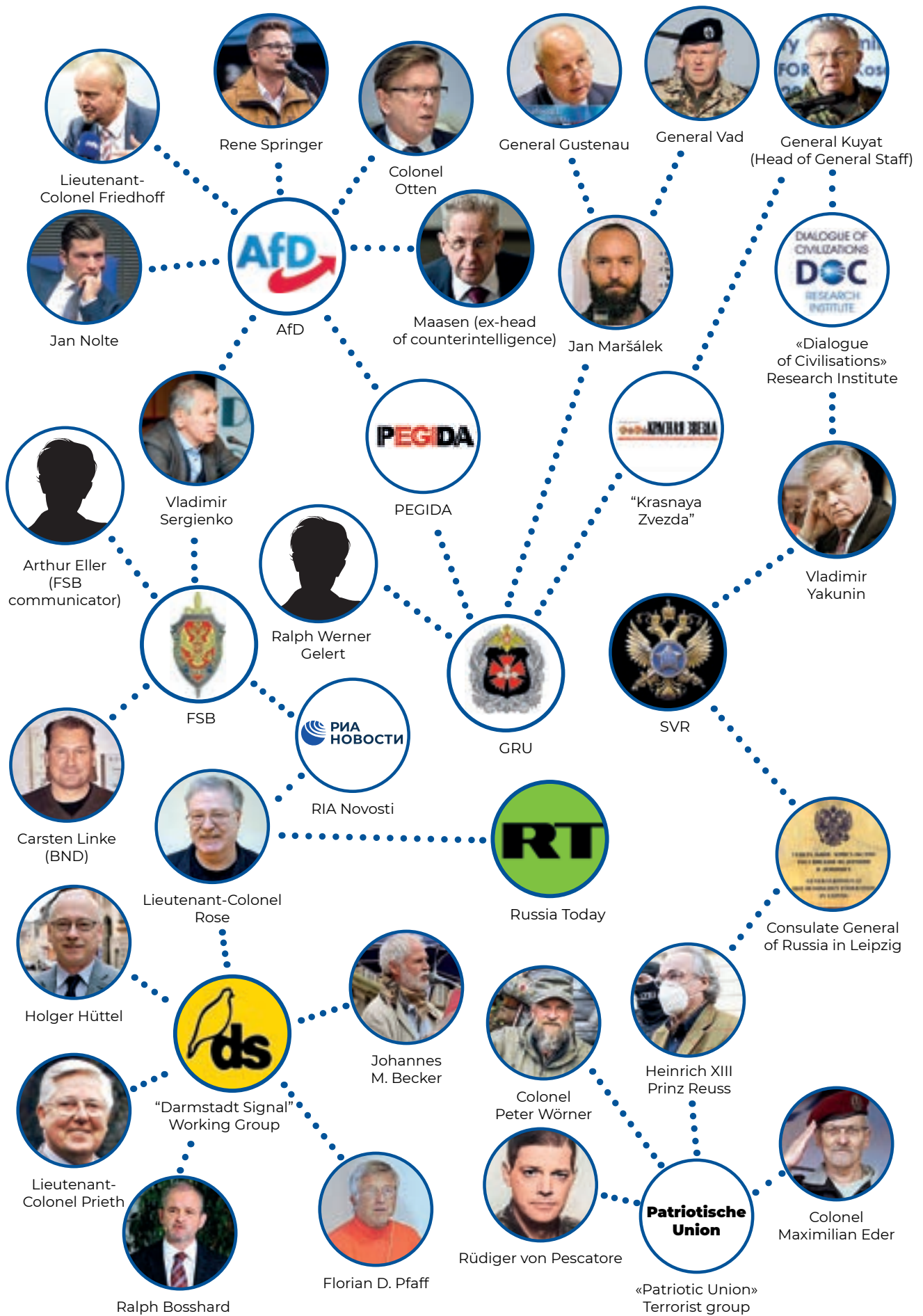
The potential emergence of a new right-wing party led by H.-G. Maassen and a separate left-wing political project by S. Wagenknecht (*the "Sarah Wagenknecht Union"*) may appear as spoilers aimed at diverting the AfD's electorate. However, despite the ideological rivalry between the parties, their leaders' views align when it comes to loyalty to Russia and criticism of European policies. The ongoing fierce confrontation and competition for the electorate do not preclude the possibility of forming a unified coalition under the new party configuration of the Bundestag, thereby amplifying their political influence. Such developments are in Russia's inter-

ests, prompting the Kremlin to have concrete plans to unify the German left and right into a single political conglomerate with a strong anti-war stance, effectively defended through the Bundestag. Apart from potentially bolstering its influence in the German parliament, Russia could harness anti-war sentiment in Europe and weaken support for Ukraine¹¹⁹.

A vote in the Bundestag in mid-January 2024 on a proposal for an appeal from parliamentarians to Chancellor Schulz demanding the immediate transfer of Taurus cruise missiles to Ukraine failed as it was initiated by the opposition. This outcome is not definitive, and the ruling coalition might put forward an alternative proposal. Nonetheless, the apparent opportunistic nature of the moment underscores that political considerations still take precedence over security concerns in Germany. The subject matter of the vote is also telling: despite the lack of consensus on cruise missiles, the supply of German weapons to the Ukrainian Armed Forces is steadily gaining traction in a manner beneficial to Ukraine. Thus, the efforts of the pro-Russian parliamentary lobby and retired officers to halt such supplies have proven unsuccessful. Their initiatives for a peaceful settlement increasingly exhibit signs of coercion and are also irrelevant.

TOY SOLDIERS:

NATO MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS IN RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURES



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GREECE

In the bilateral declaration on North Atlantic integration of Ukraine (Sept. 21, 2023), the Hellenic Republic agreed to provide political and financial support to Ukraine from NATO, as well as to further supply individual unilateral military, technical, and humanitarian aid to Ukraine¹. Earlier, Prime Minister of Greece Kyriakos Mitsotakis (Κυριάκος Μητσοτάκης) assured that Athens would support Ukraine in any case and referred to Ukraine as a “*source of inspiration for all democratic citizens of Europe*”².

Conventionally, Greece, accusing Russia of raising world prices and attempting to destabilise Europe, has transferred numerous arms of Soviet production from its own arsenals to Ukraine. However, military aid to Ukraine is not very popular among Greek citizens. In spring 2022, over 60% of Greeks opposed arms delivery and placed equal responsibility for the war on both Russia and Ukraine³. 61% of Greeks are convinced that their country maintains strong cul-

tural and historical ties with Russia, but only 33% of them believe it to be a strategic partner⁴.

The Kremlin is attempting to fully benefit from this ambiguity, appealing to both fundamental identities – ideological and religious. “The leftists” are nostalgic for the Soviet agenda, and “the rightists” are guided by the spiritual closeness of Orthodox people. The traditional Greek belligerence allows various political projects to gather veterans and former representatives of law enforcement agencies in their ranks. Deep national gratitude for Russian support during the liberation war against the Turks in 1821 has formed a peculiar Kremlin cult in their consciousness. Thus, in Spain, former military personnel and employees of the army and intelligence services, either individually or united in various associations, become the most active participants in events and campaigns that serve the broad political interests of the Russian state.

61% of Greeks are convinced that their country maintains strong cultural and historical ties with Russia, but only 33% of them believe it to be a strategic partner



PEEA-DSE (FIR member) rally in Athens, demanding the reparation repayment from Germany. According to CIA, FIR was a front-organization for the Soviet intelligence

“LEFTISTS” IN GREECE: FROM SOVIET SECRET SERVICES TO MODERN RUSSIA

In this context, the **World Veterans Federation (WVF)** and the **International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR)** deserve special attention. In 2018, the WVF signed a memorandum on partnership and cooperation with the propaganda media holding “Veteran’s News”, which was twice awarded by the Federation for “veterans’ movement information support⁵” in 2019⁶ and 2023⁷. Thus, Russia gained almost exclusive opportunities to influence the information component of the world’s largest

veterans’ association, and the Russian Union of Veterans was able to maintain close ties with similar organisations around the world.

On the anniversary of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, in a joint statement, the WVF and FIR effectively echoed the main ideas of Kremlin propaganda about NATO’s proxy war against Russia, the danger of providing Ukraine with Western weapons, and called for an immediate ceasefire, without mentioning respect for Ukraine’s⁸ sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The All **Hellenic Union of National Resistance Fighters and the Democratic Army of Greece (ΠΕΑΕΑ-ΔΣΕ, hereafter – PEEA-DSE)** is a member of

In a joint statement, the WVF and FIR effectively echoed the main ideas of Kremlin propaganda about NATO’s proxy war against Russia, the danger of providing Ukraine with Western weapons

both federations. Its Secretary General, **Mitsea Panagiota** (Μητσέα Παναγιώτα), is a member of the FIR Executive Committee, and First Vice President **Grigoris Touglidis** (Γρηγόρης Τουγλίδης) was the FIR vice president until 2019. In line with the Russian agenda regarding the veterans' movement, the assessments of World War II and contemporary conflicts, PEEA-DSE takes

σμου Φυλακισθέντων Εξορισθέντων Αντιστασιακών – ΣΦΕΑ, hereafter – SFEA), which is also a member of FIR. Its vice president and veteran **Spyros Halvatzis** (Χαλβατζής Σπύρος) expresses his outrage at the “rehabilitation of Nazi collaborators and executioners” in Ukraine¹³ and Kazakhstan¹⁴. Russian media frequently responds to his cues, amplifying them in their own publications to reinforce the “fascism in Ukraine” narrative.

PEEA-DSE takes pro-Kremlin stance – fascism is reviving in Europe, the war in Ukraine is of imperialist nature, Greece should leave NATO and the EU

pro-Kremlin positions: fascism is reviving in Europe, the war in Ukraine is of imperialist nature, Greece should leave NATO and the EU, etc⁹. These and similar ideas are expressed by the chairman of the executive committee of the Union, **Giorgos Katimerdzis** (Κατημερτζής Γιώργος), its vice president, **Yannis Zanganas** (Γιάννης Ζαγγανάς), and the president of the Central Administration, **Toula Mitsea** (Τούλα Μητσέα)¹⁰.

A burst of criticism from the Greek government for what it perceives as insufficient determination in repaying the reparations for the German occupation during WWII is an interesting example of PEEA-DSE activities aimed at neutralising Ukrainian initiatives to hold Russia accountable for the unprovoked war¹¹. Corresponding statements appeared a few days after the first speech of the Ukrainian agent at the UN International Court of Justice with claims to recover compensation from Russia¹¹.

In organised rallies and demonstrations, as well as in their statements, the associations of veterans often oppose NATO and Western militarism, forming a unified coalition with communists and affiliated structures. While PEEA-DSE and SFEA prefer political manifestations, **Communist Party of Greece** (CPG) functionaries attempt to act more precisely. The CPG tries to compensate for the lack of real support from the regular army and the somewhat mediocre character of their affiliation with them (claims about the massive participation of soldiers, navy personnel, and officers in communist rallies are impossible to verify objectively) by advocating for the rights of military servicemen¹⁵.

Regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Communist Party of Greece took a stance positioned above the “fight” while attempting to extract maximum political dividends from it. From March 2022, the communist party carried out a series of anti-war rallies in Athens, Thessaloniki, and other major cities of the country. During these rallies, it labelled the war as imperialistic, accusing both Russia and the West, represented by the EU and the USA, for its outbreak, and characterised Ukraine as a field of confrontation between these players¹⁶. In August 2023, the

Similar rhetoric is heard from the **Greek Association of Jailed and Expelled Resistance Fighters** (Συνδέ-



Secretary-General of CPG **Dimitris Koutsoumpas** (Δημήτρης Κουτσούμπας) referred to the national government's plans to sign an agreement on security guarantees for Ukraine as "an attempt to drag Greece into the war on the side of the Ukrainian reactionary government"¹⁷.

an expected result of the competition between monopoly groups (*US/NATO, EU, Russia*) for influence in the region absolves the Kremlin of responsibility for their unprovoked aggression and blurs Ukraine's status as a victim, artificially extending it to "the entire world working class"¹⁹.

In their events such as rallies and demonstrations, as well as in their statements, the associations of veterans often oppose NATO and Western militarism, forming a unified coalition with communists and affiliated structures

PAME's stance on the war in Ukraine is a symbiosis between the assessments of the Communist Party of Greece and the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). The latter has been labelling Ukraine a "totalitarian fascist state"²⁰ since 2014. Its attitude towards the Russian invasion is symmetrical: "The Russian attack must stop, NATO must be dissolved", "Ukraine is a puppet of the US and NATO"²¹.

By promoting the narrative of the need to close NATO military bases on Greek territory, end "*NATO interventions around the world*", oppose the transformation of Greece into a US puppet, to condemn "*nationalist and fascist forces in Ukraine*" and sanctions against Russia, which "*Greek farmers and workers pay for*", and by emphasising the fraternal kinship of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, some Greek communists are fully aligned with the Kremlin.

If PAME exploits the name "combat front" to emphasise belligerence in advocating for the rights of workers, then the **All Hellenic Association of Greek Militaries** (Πανελληνίου Σωματίου Ελλήνων Στρατιωτικών – ΠΑ.Σ.Ε.Σ, hereafter referred to as PASES) genuinely represents the interests of soldiers and officers, as stated in its statute²². Its ties with the communists, however, are purely nominal and have the character of sporadic information cooperation aimed at drawing attention to current issues of social or financial support for the army. Besides, the Association president, **Chariton Haritidis** (Χαρίτων Χαριτίδης), and vice president, Aristides Kasidopoulos (Αριστέιδης Κασιδόπουλος), often criticise the Armed Forces for refusing to address soldiers' complaints but refrain from discussing political issues²³.

Beyond its own statements, initiatives, and events, the Communist Party of Greece relies to the services of numerous affiliated structures. One of those is the "**All-Workers' Combat Front**" (Πανεργατικό Αγωνιστικό Μέτωπο Π.Α.ΜΕ, hereafter - PAME), a trade union without legal entity status, but with membership in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). PAME has its own opinions on the state of the opposition in Ukraine and the war unleashed by Russia¹⁸. The communist interpretation of the Russian army's invasion, as

Instead, the CPG Central Committee Department for the Armed and Security Forces often refers to PASES to emphasise its disagreement with the current state of affairs in the army due to the

excessive presence of foreign influence. The spokesperson for the Communists in this case is **Athanasios Paphilis** (Αθανάσιος Παφίλης), who is a member of the Central Committee, a Member of the Greek Parliament, and the Secretary General of the **World Peace Council (WPC)**. Affiliated with him is the **Greek Committee for International Détente**

The Greek Committee for International Détente and Peace (EEDYE) affiliated with the WPC, promotes an anti-European agenda and exerts influence aimed at preventing Ukraine's accession to NATO, discrediting both sides of this integration process

and Peace (Ελληνική Επιτροπή για τη Διεθνή Ύφεση και Ειρήνη – ΕΕΔΥΕ), which is also a member of WPC, promotes anti-European agenda and exerts influence directed on preventing Ukraine from joining NATO, by discrediting both sides of the process²⁴. The WPC Executive Secretary is another representative of Greece and ΕΕΔΥΕ – **Iraklis Tsavdaridis** (Ηρακλής Τσαβδαρίδης).

The World Peace Council was founded in 1949 as an “anti-imperialist democratic non-aligned movement” under the joint control of the International Department of the Soviet Union Communist Party Central Committee and the KGB (according to the US CIA). In this context, its activities were designed to fulfil two main functions: to influence public opinion and government policies in non-communist countries in favour of the Soviet agenda and to provide covert logistical support to Soviet-backed terrorist groups²⁵.

In 2014, the WPC issued an official statement on the tragedy in Odesa's Trade Union Headhunters, in which it reproduced the narrative of Russian propaganda: the Ukrainian government is illegitimate, as it “*came to power as a result of a coup d'état organised by the imperialism of the United States and the European Union*”; the puppet regime condones neo-Nazism, and the country is in a state of civil war²⁶.

There is no official reaction from the WPC to the Russian invasion of 2022. Instead, in an interview with the left-wing Turkish newspaper SoL, Tsavdaridis, in effect, blamed the war on the United States, the EU, and NATO. In his opinion, the Alliance has been “*steadily expanding since 1991 and using the war in Ukraine to further encircle the Russian Federation militarily*”, and therefore, will continue the war. He asserts that the United States and the European Union pose a threat to global security through their actions²⁷.

The convergence of perspectives regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine among Greek veterans' organisations, fighters' associations, (anti-) militarists, trade unions, and communist initiatives can be attributed to the Kremlin's established practice of leveraging anti-imperialist rhetoric to sway public opinion across Europe and globally. Furthermore, the substantial individual impact of retired officers who formerly held esteemed positions within the military or government agencies holds equal importance. Their direct affiliation with the military of a NATO member transforms their commentary on the Russian-Ukrainian war into a remarkable source of information and a potent tool for Russian influence.





Lieutenant
General Pavlos
Christou

THE GREEK-RUSSIAN ASSOCIATION AND THE HELLENIC CLUB OF FRIENDS OF CRIMEA, CHAIRED BY LIEUTENANT GENERAL CHRISTOU

The first person in this list worth mentioning is the retired Lieutenant General of the Greek Air Force, **Pavlos Christou**²⁸ (Παύλος Χρήστου). At various times, he served as a national representative to the OSCE, NATO, EU, UN, Eurocontrol, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and the European Defense Agency (EDA). Against this background, his status as

Secretary General of the Greek-Russian Association and President of the “Hellenic Club of Friends of Crimea” may seem like a “downgrade”. Russian propaganda, however, significantly promotes these kinds of associations among politicians, officials, cultural figures, and entrepreneurs in various European countries. Such associations exist in various forms in almost every EU member state, so being a leader of one at the top of the chain makes his influence of special importance. Considering that the initiative to establish the Club in 2019 was supported by the Greek national hero **Manolis Glezos** (Μανώλης Γλέζος – who, in 1940, along with his comrade, tore down the fascist flag from the Acropolis),

Lieutenant General Pavlos Christou is a Secretary General of the Greek-Russian Association and the President of the Greek Association “Friends of Crimea”

who referred to fighters for improving relations with Russia as “soldiers of peace”, the influence of such a structure should not be underestimated²⁹.

Christou systematically positioned himself as a friend of Russia even before the full-scale invasion. In 2018, at an event organised by the Russian Cultural and Scientific Center in Athens entitled “Russia as a Force for Peace”, he spoke about the realistic

since 2014, even though these occurred due to indiscriminate attacks by the Russian army and the use of civilians as human shields by the occupiers.

Generalising his personal sympathies to the sentiments of all his compatriots, Christou promotes a typically Kremlin-like mishmash of historical facts and manipulations. A striking example comes from his interview with a Russian media outlet: “*Russia has historically helped Europe for a long time, in all wars. We fought Nazism together. Russia and Greece had the largest casualties in World War II in terms of population. We are Orthodox. We are closely connected. In Crimea, Greeks fought on the side of Crimeans... People in Greece are for the Russian people, and... Russian citizens love Greece. Both Russia and Greece have large communities of compatriots*”³³.

In 2019, Christou visited occupied Crimea, and a year earlier, he advocated that all Russian trade with the United States and Europe should be conducted through the peninsula to lift anti-Russian sanctions

achievability of a strategic alliance with Russia³⁰. In 2019, he visited occupied Crimea, and a year earlier, he advocated that all Russian trade with the United States and Europe should be conducted through the peninsula to lift anti-Russian sanctions³¹.

Nevertheless, Christou’s media presence peaked in mid-May 2023 when he made a number of openly pro-Kremlin statements: he called on the West to stop supporting Ukraine, referred to Ukrainians and Russians as brotherly nations, and labelled the imposition of sanctions against Russia as a strategic mistake that did not align with Greek national interests. He accused both Russia and Ukraine of violating the rules and customs of war by “*moving combat operations to cities*”³². In this way, Christou appears to be manipulating views in the spirit of Russian propaganda, which consistently portrays Ukraine as the culprit of civilian casualties following the Russian invasion

At the same time, he attempts to whitewash the aggressor’s reputation as much as possible. In particular, he justifies his criticism of the shipment of Greek BMP-1s by citing the deterioration of Greece’s defense capabilities (while ignoring their replacement with newer and more technically advanced German Marder BMPs) and the stimulation of escalation³⁴. Supposedly, the introduction of new weapons into the Ukrainian Armed Forces will compel Russia to use weapons it has not yet employed because it “*did not want to destroy Ukraine*”.

As the vice president of the non-parliamentary party EMPROS (“Ahead!”), Christou led the national list of candidates for the coalition “Alliance of Changes” in the parliamentary elections in spring 2023. However, the coalition lost, but the changeability of political moods and partisan preferences can bring radical changes to parliamentary





Former Minister of National Defense of Greece Panos Kammenos and the current Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation Sergey Shoigu

landscapes in Europe (Slovakia and the Netherlands are clear examples). For these reasons, Pavlos Christou is a valuable resource for the Kremlin, whose further use in exerting influence aligned with the interests of the Russian Federation's government is a matter of time and a favourable occasion.

EX-MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE KAMMENOS: TIES TO RUSSIAN SECRET SERVICES AND RUSSIAN OLIGARCHS

Another major supporter of Russia's annexation of Crimea is **Panos Kammenos** (Πάνος Καμμένος), former Minister of National Defense in the Tsipras government (2015–2019), and leader

of the right-wing populist party "Independent Greeks". In an interview with Russian propagandists, he justified this international crime by claiming to save the Greek population of the [Crimean] peninsula from "attacks by the fascist government of Ukraine"³⁵. To justify his optimistic outlook on Russia, he employs the same arguments as Christou: strong ties between nations, Orthodox values, and a shared historical struggle against fascism.

In addition to numerous corruption scandals, one of the reasons for his resignation was the contradictions with the prime minister over the agreement on changing the name of North Macedonia³⁶. The resolution of the long-running dispute could ena-

Another major supporter of Russia's annexation of Crimea is the former Minister of National Defense in the Tsipras government (2015–2019) and leader of the right-wing party of populists, Panos Kammenos

ble Skopje to proceed with its European integration, which Moscow tried to hinder. While direct evidence is lacking, the assumption that Kammenos was involved in Russian attempts to sabotage the negotiation process is quite reasonable.

Given the suspicions of his involvement in the “Russia-gate”³⁷ – Russian interference in the US presidential election in

Since 2015, the “Hellas Net” television network, founded by Panos Kammenos’ friend and business partner Yannis Karagiorgis, a subsidiary of Malofeev’s “Tsargrad TV”, has been broadcasting in Greece

2016, American journalists considered Kammenos a “Putin ally”. Through his contacts with Russian oligarchs and Donald Trump’s adviser, George Papadopoulos, he could act as an intermediary. At the same time, his Russian ties to persons of interest are quite diversified: his proximity to Putin raises objective doubts, but he can surely be considered a confidant of the Kremlin’s “Orthodox oligarch” Malofeev and the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service³⁸.

Despite Konstantin Malofeev’s denials of his ties to Kammenos, the two had contacts before the annexation of Crimea and Russian aggression at Donbas³⁹. Additionally, their business interests overlap at least partially in the telecommunications sector. Since 2015, the “Hellas Net” television network, founded by Kammenos’ friend and business partner Yannis Karagiorgis and a subsidiary of Malofeev’s “Tsargrad TV” network, has been broadcasting in Greece^{40,41}.

The “Tsargrad TV” structural framework reveals Kammenos’ connections with other individuals who have served Putin’s regime to promote its influence in Europe. In particular, the former director of the American TV channel “Fox News”, John “Jack” Hanick, who from 2014 to 2017 held positions as a producer, chairman of the board, and advisor to the producer of Tsargrad. His arrest in 2022 in London and trial in New York (the first-ever criminal charge for violating US sanctions related to Russia’s undermining of democratic processes and institutions in Ukraine in 2014, in connection with Malofeev’s assistance in launching TV channels in Russia, Bulgaria, and Greece⁴²) prompted a sarcastic post from Kammenos on the social network X. However, this reaction only confirmed the suspicion of links between Kammenos, Hanick, and the Kremlin regime⁴³.

In January 2017, Leonid Reshetnikov, a retired lieutenant general of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, assumed the position of chairman of the supervisory board of the Russian TV network. Reshetnikov previously served as Russia’s diplomatic officer in Greece in the early 2000s and had led the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISS) since 2009. While formally performing the functions of a think tank under the Russian presidential administration, the Institute has been an important tool of the de facto intelligence apparatus of the Russian Federation.

In 2014, the **National Reconstruction Institute for Geopolitical Studies** (*Ινστιτούτο Γεωπολιτικών Μελετών “Εθνική Αναδημιουργία”*), affiliated with Kammenos, signed a memorandum of cooperation with RISS⁴⁴. Following this signing, Kammenos began advocat-

ing for lifting anti-Russian sanctions and restoring normal relations with Russia⁴⁵. In May 2016, he publicly announced his intention to conclude an agreement with Russia on the production of Kalashnikov assault rifles in Greece as soon as the European Union lifted the trade embargo with Russia⁴⁶. Kammenos was also the

tion is believed to be the dependence of his political position on the commitment of religious voters, who constitute the backbone of his electorate.

Nevertheless, as early as 2019, when presenting at the scientific conference “Geopolitical Developments in the Vital Area of the Eastern Mediterranean and Their Interaction with the International Environment”, Kammenos sharply criticised the Greek Church bishops for recognising the Orthodox Church of Ukraine⁵⁰. According to Kammenos, such a step would undermine the alliance with Russia and lead to the Turkish occupation of some Greek islands. The obvious lack of logic in these arguments emphasises their manipulative component. In this way, Russia was trying to reinforce the large-scale information campaign conducted at the time to prevent the formation of the local Ukrainian church, attempting to instill a rejection of the very idea of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church among the higher clergy of local churches.

The structural framework of “Tsargrad TV” stipulates Kammenos’ connections with the former director of the American TV channel “Fox News”, John “Jack” Hanick, who from 2014 to 2017 subsequently held positions as a producer, chairman of the board, and advisor to the producer of Tsargrad

only Western politician to attend the Fourth International Security Conference in Moscow in April 2016⁴⁷.

In February 2016, the Institute’s president, former Greek Deputy Interior Minister **Philip Tsalidis** (*Τσαλίδης Φίλιππος*), together with Kammenos, accused Turkey of involvement in financing ISIS⁴⁸. Given the deterioration in Russian-Turkish relations following the downing of a fighter jet a few months earlier, such a disinformation attack (since no one has confirmed the validity of these accusations) cannot be considered coincidental or impartial.

Greek experts indicate the similarity of Kammenos’ and Reshetnikov views on relations between the state and the church – both are aggressive propagandists of the Orthodox clergy⁴⁹. At the same time, the reason for the Greek ex-minister’s fanatical devo-

Another aspect of Kammenos’s connections with the Russian Federation, involved his attempts to secure the support of Russian oligarch MP Ivan Savvidi within the Greek government and parliament⁵¹. The fact that Kammenos attended the wedding of Savvidi’s son in Thessaloniki in June 2016 demonstrates the strength of their bond⁵². In 2017, Savvidi became the owner of the Greek free TV channel E (EpsilonTV, renamed to “Open TV” in 2018), and his initial appearance on the stage of this investment was accompanied by Minister Kammenos, which seemed as an outright provocation⁵³.

Overall, the former member of Tsipras’s government (as well as the prime minister himself) has repeat-





A Russian oligarch, a Member of the Hellenic Parliament, and the owner of the Greek football club “PAOK”, Ivan Savvidis

edly publicly thanked Savvidis for his investments in the Greek economy, which included port infrastructure, media, and manufacturing. At the same time, Kammenos actively supported the Russian businessman, lobbying for changes to legislation that would have allowed the SEKAP tobacco factory (bought by Savvidis in 2013 and sold in 2018) to avoid paying fines of 38 million euros for tobacco smuggling⁵⁴. In September 2018, Kammenos received a club shirt with the number “12” from the management of the Greek Football Club PAOK, also owned by Savvidis, despite the outrage of the team supporters, who expected respect for the sporting tradition of counting fans as the “twelfth player”⁵⁵. In return, Kammenos sent

a letter of consent, signed by himself, to vote in parliament for allocating a plot of state land for PAOK’s new stadium⁵⁶. Eventually, the team’s ultras became an additional factor of destabilisation during Greece’s negotiations with North Macedonia⁵⁷.

Nevertheless, since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Kammenos has not been very active. In April 2022, on a social network, he posted a photo of himself wearing a baseball cap with the inscription “USSR 1922–1991” and the comment “You lived together for many years, like family... Peace”⁵⁸. In June 2022, he called the EU’s embargo on Russian oil insane, arguing that it would harm everyone in the European Un-

In 2014, the Institute for Geopolitical Studies “National Reconstruction”, affiliated with Kammenos, signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, which is connected to the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation



The former First Deputy Minister of Defense of Greece Kostas Isichos (*in the middle*), who was acting as an “observer” in the so-called “elections” in the “Donetsk People’s Republic”. On the right – Member of the European Parliament from France Thierry Mariani, on the left – the leader of the Italian “Youth Party” Julian Rochedi

ion⁵⁹ instead of hitting Russia. A year later, he emphasised the importance of normal relations with Russia, citing the example of the fires in Greece, and claimed that extinguishing them would be impossible without Russian Be-200 Altair amphibious aircraft⁶⁰. Seizing the opportunity, the Russian media openly savoured his call to “bow the head and ask for help”⁶¹.

Judging by reports from Greek media and Kammenos’ own posts on social networks, he is currently preoccupied with complaints⁶² against the National Police regarding state protection and engaging in political squabbles⁶³ within SYRIZA. Considering the scandalous style of behaviour he has chosen, we can assume that he harbours ambitions to continue his political career. Therefore, any resonant topics, including Russia’s war against Ukraine and Greece’s position relevant to this context, will likely be exploited by him to bolster his political prospects.

Pavlos Christou and Panos Kammenos are the main actors exerting influence

in the interests of the Russian government in Greece, but there is a fundamental difference between them. Christou lacks political experience, so he relies primarily on his military career and rank, which explains the certain straightforwardness of his actions. Instead, Kammenos’s activity is characterised by an adventurous and inventive approach. Undoubtedly, the Kremlin will try to use both of them when the opportunity arises, but the figure of the former defense minister appears more dangerous. The threat will increase as Kammenos’ career develops.

“ROSSOTRUDNICHESTVO” IN GREECE: RETIRED OFFICERS AND ACADEMICS

The creation of the aforementioned “Hellenic Club of Friends of Crimea” was a continuation of the Kremlin’s course to legitimise the occupation of Crimea. In 2017, the first forum of the Association of Friends of Crimea, a “governmental NGO” created by Moscow, took



A Professor of Geopolitics at the Military Academy “Evelpidon”, Konstantinos Grivas (on the right), at the event “Russia as a force of peace” at the Russian Center of Science and Culture in Athens. The second from the left – General Pavlos Christou

place⁶⁴. The deputy of its chairman (Slovak dissident and Prime Minister of the Slovak government in 1991–1992, Jan Čarnogursky) is the former First Deputy Minister of Defense of Greece (2015), **Kostas Isichos** (Κώστας Ήσυχος).

After his resignation, he joined the creation of the left-wing radical party “People’s Unity” (Λαϊκή Ενότητα – LAE), which existed from 2015 to 2019. It was on behalf of this party that Isichos illegally visited the temporarily occupied Crimea in 2015 and 2016 and played the role of an independent observer in the illegitimate elections of the “head” and “deputies” of the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic” (DPR) in November 2018⁶⁵. Given that the international community does not recognise the elections organised by Russia in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and does not send its representatives to monitor them, Isichos had an obvious impact on the legitimisation of Russian proxies in Donbas and created a false impression that Western governments support state-building processes in these entities. Additionally, he was involved in the provocations in Odesa in May 2014, physically being in the city

and claiming that the Ukrainian authorities had lost control over it⁶⁶.

Through his speeches at meetings of the Joint Russian-Greek Commission on Economic, Industrial, and Technical Cooperation, as well as by participating in communication events organised under the auspices of “**Rosotrudnichestvo**” (“Россотрудничество”) by the **Greek-Russian Club “Dialogue”** (Γρεκο-ρωσсийский клуб “Диалог”) Isichos exerts a favourable influence for the Kremlin in discrediting the EU’s internal policies and approaches. He advocates for Russia as a peace-maker⁶⁷ while spreading disinformation about the European Union’s alleged deliberate “reproduction of neo-fascist formations”⁶⁸.

The professional activities of military analysts and scholars, conducted in favour of the Kremlin, dominate in terms of quality and format. **Konstantinos Grivas** (Κωνσταντίνος Γρίβας), a Professor of Geopolitics at the Military Academy “Evelpidon” (Hellenic Military Academy – Στρατιωτική Σχολή Ευελπίδων), utilises participation in Russian media as a means to exert influence beneficial to the Kremlin. The primary aim

of his speeches is to depict the supply of Greek weapons and military equipment to Ukraine as provoking threats to Greece itself⁶⁹. He criticises the Greek defense strategy, asserting that Russia “does not truly pose a military or geopolitical threat”, unlike Turkey⁷⁰.

In 2018, Grivas, along with Pavlos

At least one graduate of Evelpidon, a retired Greek army colonel, member of the Hellenic Institute for Strategic Studies (*ELISME*), and columnist for Western and Greek publications, **Panayiotis Nastos** (*Παναγιώτης Νάστος*), is utilised by the Russians to showcase the effectiveness of their own vision of the global agenda.

In 2021, they cited his article on the Syrian war as a potential stage for a new Russian-Turkish conflict⁷⁴, highlighting Russia’s unwillingness to step down. In 2023, Nastos continued to focus on the Greek-Turkish confrontation primarily. However, in July⁷⁵ and August⁷⁶, he published materials openly endorsing pro-Russian viewpoints. These included arguments about “*the inefficacy of Western weapons against a determined enemy’s improvisation*”, “*the failure of the Ukrainian offensive*”, “*hundreds of thousands of new casualties in the Ukrainian Army*”, and predictions of “*Ukraine’s imminent defeat*”. Similarly, at the beginning of 2024, he questioned statements from the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine regarding the downing of Russian hypersonic missiles by Patriot systems (presumably referring to the Kh-47 Kinzhal). He employed the term “Kyiv regime” without quotation marks, aligning with the Kremlin’s rhetoric⁷⁷. The outright loyalty evident in Nastos’ articles cannot solely be attributed to his connections with Russian politicians or institutions. Rather, his professional activities enable him to directly discredit Western support for Ukraine and question the effectiveness of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in utilising the provided weapons. Additionally, he contributes to developing potential conflicts in Greek-Turkish rela-

Since 2015, Greece has assumed an informal status as the ‘Trojan horse of Russia in the EU.’ This analogy gained traction due to the Kremlin-loyal policy of the ruling Coalition of the Radical Left and the activism of former military personnel and associated political forces

Christou, participated in the event titled “Russia as a Force for Peace”, during which he discussed the proliferation of Russophobia attitudes in the West, the resurgence of Nazism in Europe, and advocated for ceasing to view Russia as an enemy. He argued that Russia “*acts as a peaceful force, attributing its actions solely to an attempt to halt chaos instigated by the United States*”⁷¹.

In 2017, he referred to the Ukrainian authorities as “*descendants of the Waffen-SS, who are pretending to represent European liberal democracy*”⁷². Similarly, in June 2020, he enthusiastically praised Vladimir Putin’s pseudo-historical and revisionist article “75 Years of the Great Victory: Shared Responsibility to History and the Future”⁷³. As a military academy professor, he plays a significant role in promoting Russian influence within the defense sector.



tions, juxtaposing this with portraying a strong and friendly Russia as a counterbalance.

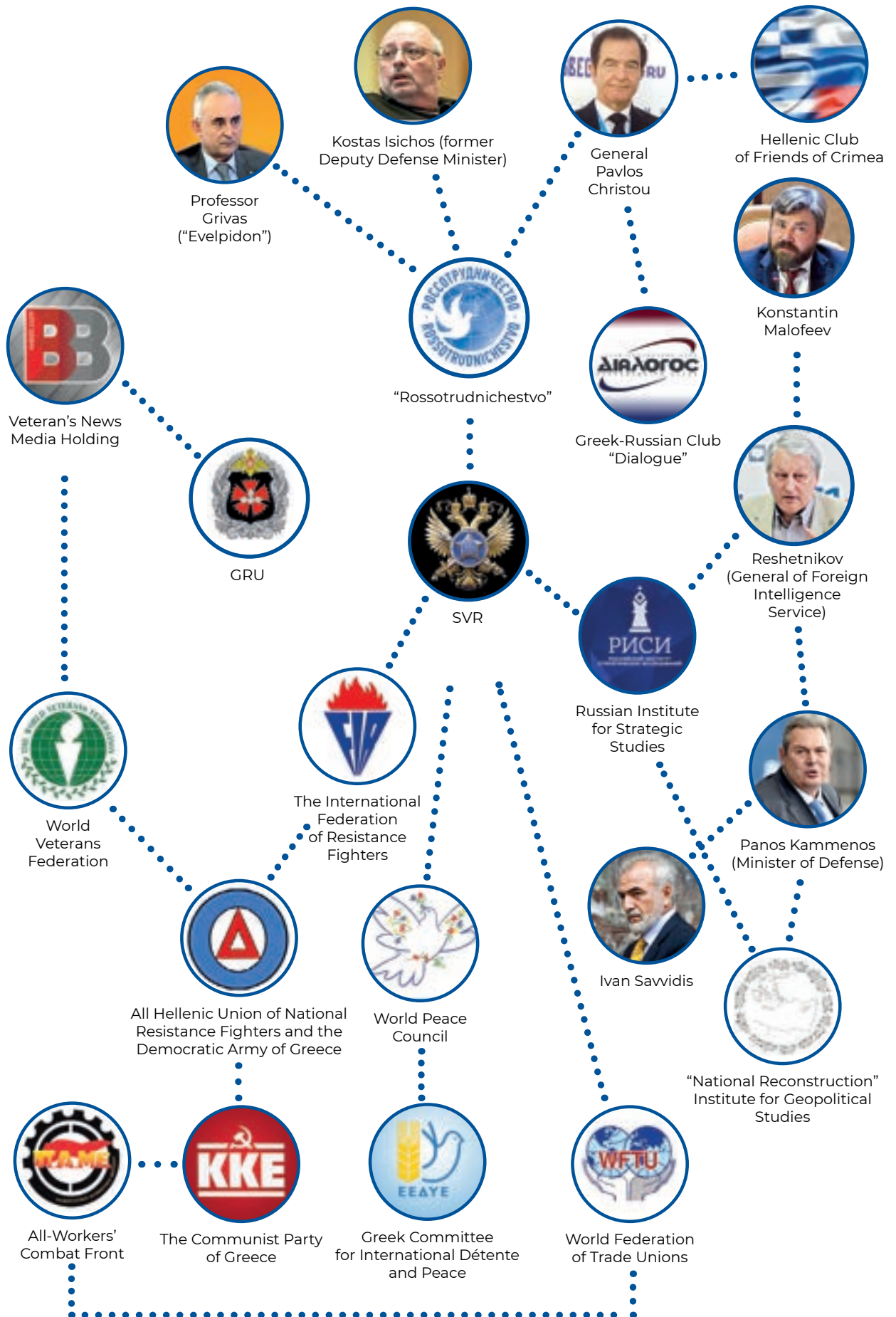
In a similar vein, Russian media resources exploit the expertise of **Stavros Atlamazoglou** (Σταύρου Ατλαμάζογλου), a veteran of the 575th Marine Battalion. In October 2023, in an article for the American publication “19Fortyfive”, he praised the Russian defense at the front⁷⁸. Additionally, he complimented Russian developments in the field of radio-electronic warfare and radio-electronic reconnaissance, as well as their application on the battlefield⁷⁹. In 2021, the Russians disseminated his article about the scenario of a NATO war against Russia, in which the Alliance can only rely on the speed of decision-making and its own manoeuvres⁸⁰.

Since at least 2015, Greece has been unofficially labelled as Russia’s Trojan horse in the EU. The validity of this comparison was confirmed by the Kremlin-loyal policy of the ruling Coalition of Radical Left and the activities of former military personnel and political forces associated with them.

Despite Greece being on the list of states that, according to the Russian authorities, “carry out unfriendly actions against Russian companies and citizens” since July 2022 due to its support for Ukraine, the Kremlin has not ceased its efforts to increase its influence in the country. Greek communists and their affiliated trade unions traditionally exploit the theme of class inequality, portraying Ukraine as a “puppet of the imperialists”. Hellenic veterans’ organisations and relevant international structures led by Greeks, under the guise of peace and non-alignment, propagate the Kremlin’s narrative about “Nazis” in Ukraine, discredit the EU and NATO, and in practice, support Russia’s historical falsifications and Putin’s fictional image of a peacemaker. In addition to organised influence, there is also personal influence, with agents advocating for the lifting of sanctions against Russia, the cessation of Western arms supplies to Ukraine, pressuring Ukraine to peace [surrender], or spreading the Kremlin’s version of events, in which Russia is portrayed as the victim, the West as the aggressor, and Ukraine as its accomplice.

TOY SOLDIERS:

NATO MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS IN RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURES



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THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was just as pleasantly surprising in terms of direction and pace as Italy's. Miloš Zeman, one of the most pro-Russian Western politicians¹ for almost two full terms in office, responded to the full-scale war with the historical parallel of *"a fight for Prague near Kyiv"*². In November 2023, he labelled his friendly relations with Putin as his biggest failure³.

The Czech Republic has provided refuge for over 400,000 Ukrainian refugees⁴. Prague has already delivered weapons worth almost €2.3 billion to Ukraine (and has contracts for nearly €3 billion more⁵), including more T-72 tanks than it has in its own army⁶. The Czech public initiative "Gift to Putin" (*"Dárek pro Putina"*) raised funds for 15 mobile complexes "Viktor", MLRS "Vampire", a T-72 tank "Tomáš", 10 tonnes of explosives for the Ministry of Internal Affairs special unit "KORD" and initiated a fundraiser for the American multi-purpose tactical helicopter UH-60 "Black Hawk"⁷.

In August 2023, President Petr Pavel officially permitted 14 Czechs to join the Armed Forces of Ukraine in fighting against Russia (though the actual number is close to 150)⁸. This authorisation from the country's top leadership not only exempts the soldiers from criminal liability upon their return home but also serves as an advocacy tool at the international level. In early 2024, Petr Pavel assured that support for Ukraine would continue, emphasising that the Czech Republic is *"protecting its own security"*⁹. However, he acknowledged that some Czech politicians and segments of society do not welcome such a stand.

The Russian media characterised Pavel's victory in the January 2023 presidential election as the beginning of a five-year period of *"militant Russophobia and unrestrained arming of Ukraine"*, portraying the Czech Republic's attempt to position itself at the forefront of EU and NATO processes¹⁰. Concurrently, they depicted Pavel as a lacklustre

In early 2024, Petr Pavel assured that support for Ukraine would continue, as the Czech Republic is *"protecting its own security"*



politician unlikely to make a mark on the international stage. Given these conflicting assessments, it is highly probable that Russia will seek to exploit any internal disagreements within the Czech Republic. In this context, retired General Pavel,

The pro-European president, General Petr Pavel, finds himself at odds with retired officers with diametrically opposed geopolitical orientations

who is pro-European, finds himself at odds with some former officers holding diametrically opposed geopolitical orientations.

MAJOR GENERAL HYNEK BLAŠKO ALLIES WITH THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

For instance, Major General **Hynek Blaško**, a member of the European Parliament from the Czech right-wing populist party Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), is staunchly against military aid to Ukraine. Blaško has a track record of defending Russian interests, including justifying Russia's actions in cases like the Skripal poisoning, the downing of flight MH17, and the activities of the Night Wolves. He regularly criticises NATO¹¹ and the European Union, and in May 2022, he addressed protesters in Prague, urging the government to “*stop sending weapons to Ukraine*”¹². Blaško has also accused NATO and the EU of provoking the conflict in Ukraine and accused Czech media of spreading false information about the war¹³.

Furthermore, Major General Blaško has consistently aligned himself with the Russian position in response to evolving circumstances. He has opposed anti-Russian sanctions¹⁴, resisted the establishment of a special tribunal to investigate Russian war crimes¹⁵, and voted against recognising Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism¹⁶. In June 2023, Blaško convened a meeting with Czech retired tourists in the European Parliament building, during which he reiterated ideas echoing Kremlin narratives against Czech EU membership and support for Ukraine. He said, “*The tragedy of the European Union will deepen as its states continue to engage in ‘Ukrainian affairs’*”¹⁷. According to the Czech media outlet Forum24, Blaško sponsored this trip using special funds from the European Parliament.

Major General Blaško has been involved in events at the *Olšanské hřbitovy* cemetery¹⁸ in Prague on at least two occasions alongside the nationalist Russian biker organisation *Night Wolves*. These events were dedicated to commemorating Soviet soldiers killed in World War II. In 2018, he held a flag bearing the signatures of anti-NATO soldiers¹⁹, and in May 2019, he distributed his own propaganda materials there²⁰.

A seat in the EU legislature being a promising political tool, Blaško sees running for the European Parliament again in 2024. He aims to lead the diverse *Alliance for the Independence of the Czech Republic coalition (Aliance za nezávislost ČR)*, which includes national conservatives, Eurosceptics, and ultranationalists united by the idea of the Czech Republic's withdrawal from the EU and NATO, as well as extremist, pro-Russian, and conspiratorial views²¹.





Czech General and MEP Hynek Blaško at the Olšanské cemetery in Prague with Russian “Night Wolves”

RETIRED OFFICERS AND EXTREMIST ACTIVITIES OF CZECH PARAMILITARY GROUPS

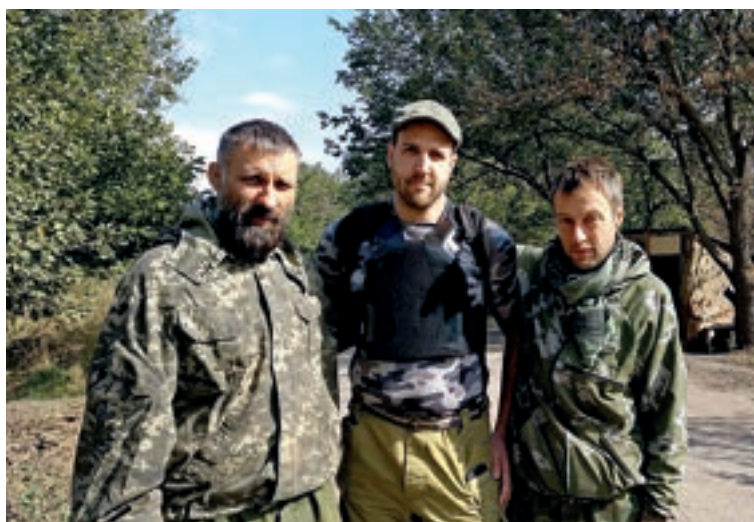
The activities of the paramilitary association “**Czechoslovakian Soldiers in Reserve for Peace**” (*Českoslovenští vojáci v záloze za mir*) are particularly noteworthy in promoting this vision. This group, led by Colonel **Ondřej Hrčiak** and Lieutenant Colonel of the Medical Forces **Marek Obrtel**, a former head of the 11th Field Hospital in Afghanistan, exhibits loyalty to Russia along with a willingness to use weapons²².

Despite presenting itself as an association of former military personnel, it operates as a xenophobic extremist group that is also anti-NATO. Distrustful of the EU and NATO, its members have been preparing for guerrilla warfare and terrorist attacks against their own liberal-minded population²³, anticipating an attack on the Czech Republic²⁴. Established

in 2015 for military reenactments and thematic seminars, the association openly declares its motto: “*Our enemies are not Russian soldiers, but our politicians!*” (*Naši nepřátelé nejsou ruští vojáci, ale naši politici*)²⁵. However, several members of the organisation were arrested in April 2021 for supporting the Russian Federation and having links to the “DPR” terrorist group²⁶.

Among those arrested was reserve Lieutenant Colonel **Ivan Kratochvíl**, who took over the group’s leadership in 2016 after Obrtel’s demarche (see details below). He personally visited the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine²⁷, where he had contact with Russian secret services²⁸. Prior to that, Kratochvíl had repeatedly demonstrated his allegiance to Russia and employed anti-American rhetoric. In 2016, in an interview with the Czech office of the Russian news agency *Sputnik*, he criticised the government’s consent to the use of Czech airspace by US *Global Hawk* reconnaissance drones²⁹, citing threats to

air traffic and human life. He also expressed suspicions that the United States was preparing for military operations in the Czech Republic. Kratochvíl also showed bias in his assessment of the Czechs' commitment to celebrating Czech Independence Day on 28 October, viewing it as evidence of the preparation of a "Czech Maidan" organised by "American imperialists"³⁰.



Militants of the Czechoslovakian Soldiers in Reserve for Peace, Pavel Botka (left) and Milos Uretsky (right), participants of the 'DNR' terrorist group

Another suspect in the prosecution was former professional military officer **Miloš Ouřecký**. With the assistance of Czech pro-Russian separatist militant **Jiří Urbánek**, Kratochvíl arranged for him to join the 1st Air Assault Brigade of the so-called 'DPR' to gain skills in handling explosives and weapons³¹. Later, this experience was to be shared among the association's members and sympathisers. **Pavel "Kavkaz" Botka**, another Czech mercenary fighting for

the 'DPR'³², was engaged in similar activities.

Nevertheless, the prosecutor's office returned the case to the police for further investigation, and all the defendants were released³³. Obviously, in the future, the *Czechoslovakian Soldiers in Reserve for Peace* will be the focus of attention of Czech law enforcement agencies, which may indirectly contribute to their growing popularity among radicals, militarists, and supporters of closer ties with Russia. Ties with the far-right *National Democracy* party (*Národní demokracie*), led by the anti-Semite **Adam Bartoš**, even open up certain political prospects for the Kratochvíl/Obrtel groups³⁴.

In 2014, the organisation's founder, Marek Obrtel, defiantly refused the awards received during his service in NATO missions in Kosovo, stating this in an open letter to the then Czech Minister of Defense³⁵. In 2016, Obrtel left the group and founded his own paramilitary organisation, the **People's Self-Defense** (*Národní domobrana*), which shares the ideas of the *Czechoslovakian Soldiers in the Reserve for Peace*. At the beginning of 2018, the "People's Self-Defense" had over 60 regional branches³⁶, but the real extent of the organisation's influence is difficult to assess given its marginal nature, even among the far right. The "People's Self-Defense" also positioned itself as a participant

Members of the pro-Russian paramilitary group «Českoslovenští vojáci v záloze za mir», under the guise of a former military personnel association, are preparing for guerrilla warfare and terrorist attacks against their own liberal-minded population



Lieutenant Colonel Marek Obrtel (*right*) with the militants of the “Národní domobrana”

in the 2021 march of the “Ostrava Immortal Regiment” (*Nesmrtelný Pluk Ostrava*), co-organised by the “Czech-Russian Society” (*Českoruský společnost*) in Ostrava and the Ostrav Russian House (*Ostravský Ruský Dům*), both elements of the “Rosotrudnichestvo” (*Россотрудничество*) network³⁷.

The peak of the “*People’s Self-Defense*” activity was in 2016-2021 during the migration crisis in Europe. “*People’s Self-Defense*” responded to it with staged videos of “patrols” in the Central Bohemian region and Northern Moravia with the “detention” of its own extras posing as illegal

refugees³⁸. Against the backdrop of Czech society’s complaints about the government’s lack of control over migration³⁹, counter-activity imitation allowed extreme radical movements to improve public perception⁴⁰.

However, the “*People’s Self-Defense*” includes individuals who legally own firearms and are interested in their practical use. They have visited the so-called ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’ to learn from the experience of warfare from the militants there. A former member of the organisation’s Board, **Nela Lisková**, organised the DPR People’s Consulate in the Czech Republic, which was closed by the Czech authorities in 2017

Representatives of the Národní domobrana visited the so-called ‘DPR’ and ‘LPR’ to learn from the experience of warfare from the militants there

because it was suspected of coordinating Czech structures to “invest” in the so-called DPR⁴¹. In 2023, Lisková publicly called for the “de-Ukrainisation and denasification of the Czech Republic”.

In addition to utilising various proxies such as paramilitary structures and political organisations, Russia relies on soft power to promote its policies through the Coordination Councils of Russian Compatriots (CORCs)

For these calls and other calls promoting hatred, she was sentenced to 8 months suspended with a two-year probationary period⁴².

Despite claims of the organisation’s apolitical and non-partisan nature, it has ties with Czech political parties⁴³. For example, Marek Obrtel unsuccessfully ran for the Senate in 2018 from the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD). During the 2022–2023 presidential campaign, he actively supported the representative of the same party, Jaroslav Bašta. Party leader Tomio Okamura and MP Jaroslav Foldyna have supported Obrtel since his days as a leader of the “Czechoslovakian Soldiers in the Peace”⁴⁴.

FORMER INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS “DEBUNK MYTHS ABOUT RUSSIA”

In addition to utilising various proxies such as paramilitary structures and political organisations, Russia relies on soft power to promote its policies through the *Coordination Councils of Russian Compatriots* (CORCs, Russian abbreviation –

KOPC) established in 97 countries⁴⁵. Through the activities of numerous individual centers, including Russian centers, cultural societies, and foundations, a network of institutions loyal to Russia is being established. In the Czech Republic, one of these entities is the **Institute for Slavic Strategic Studies** (*Institut slovanských strategických studií – ISSTRAS*), which, from 2014 to 2018, organised seminars, conferences, and demonstrations in support of Russia. A notable aspect of its activities is that these events took place in the Czech Parliament, directly in the Chamber of Deputies under the moderation of **Radmila Zemanová-Kopecká**⁴⁶, Deputy Chairman of the *Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots* in the Czech Republic. Currently, the Institute’s activities are mainly focused on social media.

Within the scope of this study, it is important to pay attention to retired security officials who spoke at the Institute’s events. In particular, at the 2016 seminar titled “*Myths about Russia*”, organised by ISSTRAS, a former military counterintelligence officer, Lieutenant Colonel **Martin Koller**, was in attendance. Having resided in Russia for an extended period, Koller is a member of the National Recovery Council (*Národní rada obnovy*), where he oversees the defense sector. He opposes the transfer of weapons to Ukraine⁴⁷, accusing it of using the population as human shields^{48,49}.

Andor Šándor⁵⁰, the former head of Czech military intelligence, also participated in the same event. As the author of articles and expert interviews, Šándor disseminates pro-Kremlin narratives about the forced annexation of Crimea⁵¹, the





Former Czech defense counter-intelligence officer, Lieutenant Colonel Martin Koller (center)

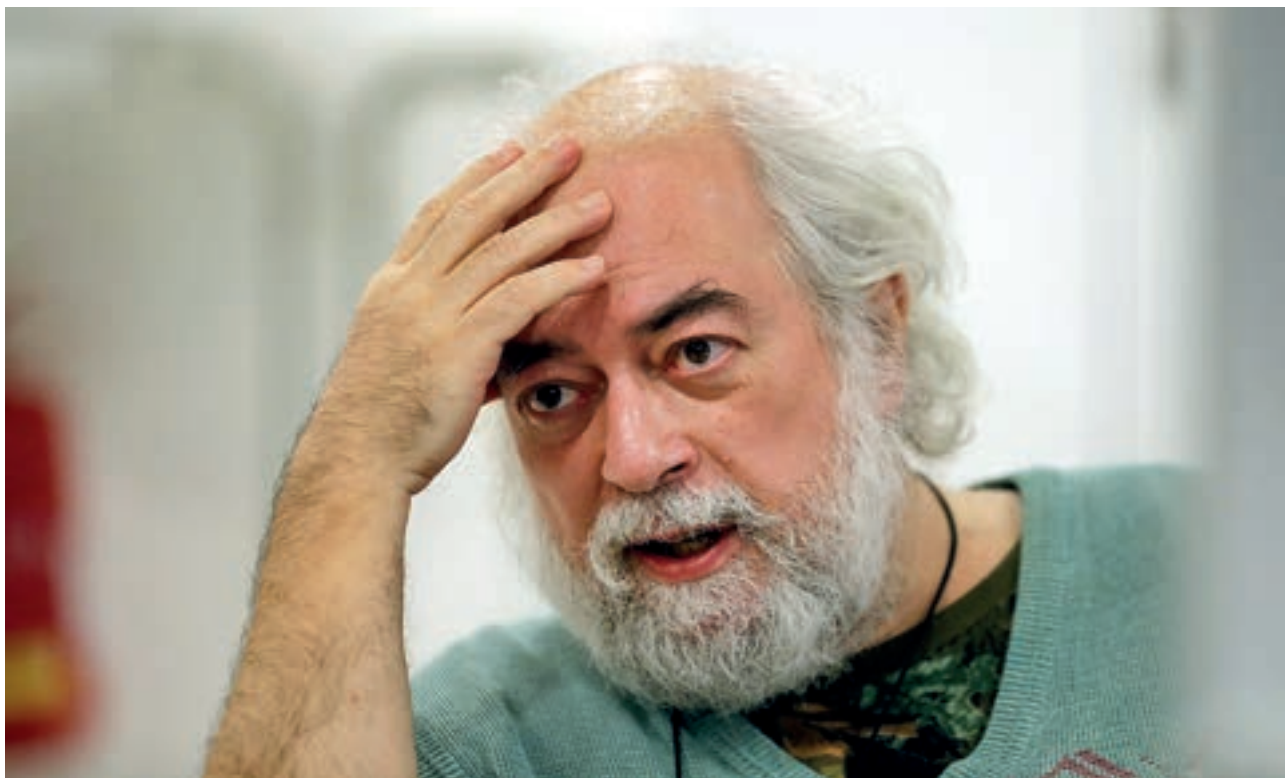
US responsibility for involving other countries, including the Czech Republic, in military conflicts, the disintegration of Ukraine due to war, and the irreparable losses that will lead to the country's ruination⁵². Concurrently, he portrays Russia as the sole force capable of uniting the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Šándor and Koller have recently focused considerable attention on energy security issues, suggesting that the Czech Republic may encounter challenges in the energy sector⁵³ due to reduced Russian gas imports. These concerns resonate publicly, as in recent years, the Czech Republic has actively sought alternative sources of electricity production to meet its own needs⁵⁴.

PRAK: TIES TO DUGIN, ANTI-UKRAINIAN, ANTI-CZECH, AND PRO-RUSSIAN ACTIVITIES

Another individual of interest is **Jan Schneider**, who has held positions in intelligence, police, and public services since 1990. He was an employee of the Security Information Service (*Bezpečnostní informační služba*) and served as the Director of the Secretariat of the Czech Republic Council on Intelligence Activities (*Rada pro zpravodajskou činnost*). This Council, an advisory body to the government, coordinates the cooperation of intelligence units from the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of

The former head of defense intelligence, Andor Šándor disseminates pro-Kremlin narratives about the forced annexation of Crimea, the US responsibility for involving other countries in military conflicts



Jan Schneider, a former Czech intelligence officer and leader of the NGO PRAK, participated in the forums of Alexander Dugin's International Eurasian Movement

the Interior, Security Information Service, and the National Security Directorate.

In 2021, Schneider criticised anti-Russian sanctions as counter-productive, describing them as a “*massage for Russia, which nourished its blood and gave it motivation*”. He denied any signs of Kremlin aggression preparation, asserting its focus was “*exclusively on business*”⁵⁵. In July 2023, he penned a controversial article in the *Argument* journal, aligning with the Kremlin’s anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western narrative. Schneider claimed Ukraine had abandoned Budapest Memorandum security guarantees by disregarding its neutral status and showing interest in nuclear weapons. He accused “*the United States of provoking civil unrest in Ukraine, leading to an unconstitutional coup and a return to negative Ukrainian traditions*”. Schneider also criticised the

West for constantly provoking Russia by “*breaking NATO’s promise of non-expansion to the East*”⁵⁶.

Since 2015, Schneider has led the NGO “*Against Repression and Criminalisation*” (PRAK). Its board includes⁵⁷ Czech politicians known for their pro-Russian stance, such as **Jindřich Rajchl**, head of the pro-Russian political party “*Law, Respect, Expertise*” (PRO), which frequently organises anti-Ukrainian, anti-Euro-Atlantic, and anti-government demonstrations in the Czech Republic. Another board member is **Josef Skála**, a former deputy chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), who justifies Soviet⁵⁸ and Russian⁵⁹ war crimes and disseminates information about US involvement in global conflicts⁶⁰.

PRAK has garnered a reputation for conspiracy and disinformation, a characterisation further solidified in

the context of Russian aggression. Notably, the organisation played a prominent role as one of the primary advocates for Martina Bednářová, a primary school teacher from Prague, during her trial for denying Russian war crimes in Ukraine. PRAK actively solicited donations on her behalf and portrayed her as a “victim of a

ism and Hybrid Threats of the Czech Ministry of the Interior (*Centrum proti terorismu a hybridním hrozbám*)⁶³ has highlighted the organisation’s online platforms as having characteristics indicative of disinformation influence. Furthermore, as of December 2019, it was documented that Novotný frequently visited Russia, and reports indicated him owning business there⁶⁴.

Schneider regularly attends forums of Alexander Dugin’s International Eurasian Movement and is involved in campaigns aimed at undermining Czech relations with the United States

worldwide conspiracy against truth and freedom“⁶¹ within the realm of conspiracy theories.

In 2015, Schneider conducted an interview with another PRAK member, **Stanislav Novotný**, wherein the Kremlin’s key hybrid messages were prominently featured: the assertion that the collapse of Ukraine is inevitable, the country is embroiled in a civil war, and the notion that European democratic values are merely a facade⁶². Novotný is known for founding the Department for Documentation and Investigation of Crimes StB (*Úřad pro dokumentaci a vyšetřování činnosti StB within the Ministry of Internal Affairs; StB – Státní bezpečnost*). The StB, operating as the State Security Service of Czechoslovakia during the Soviet era, functioned as a clandestine police force. Novotný also held the position of police chief in the Czech Republic from 1993 to 1994. In 2015, he assumed leadership of the Czech Association of Independent Media. Notably, the Center Against Terror-

His acknowledged anti-communist dissident past, along with his reputation for exposing the crimes of totalitarian regimes and studying church-state relations, media, and civil society development, have strengthened Novotný’s reputation as an expert whose opinion carries weight. Combining his professional experience with his commentary on domestic and foreign policy issues, he has had an impact on:

- Deteriorating relations between Prague and Washington and Brussels, referring to the Czech Republic as “*a colony of the West that has lost its freedom and economic independence in favour of the EU and US globalists*”⁶⁵.
- Justification of Russian aggression as a natural reaction to the West’s anti-Russian and anti-Belarusian policies and, based on this, the justification of the need to restore normal relations between the Czech Republic and Russia, as this is “*the aspiration of Czech society, especially the youth*”⁶⁶.
- Fabricated labelling of Ukraine as a “Nazi state”⁶⁷.
- The formation of a united Europe based on the diversity of cultures and the sovereignty of peoples without the creation of supranational bodies, but with the involvement of Russia as part of European culture⁶⁸.





Former police officer Zdeněk Ondráček (left) at a meeting with leaders of the terrorist group 'DNR' in occupied Donetsk

Returning to the personality of the PRAK leader, it is worth mentioning that Schneider regularly attends forums of Alexander Dugin's International Eurasian Movement (IEM). He participates in campaigns aimed at undermining Czech relations with the United States and Russia's avoidance of responsibility for crimes during the war in Ukraine. In particular, he spreads comments about Russia's genuine concern for Ukraine's future and shifts the responsibility for the blowing up of the Kakhovka HPP onto Kyiv. Schneider has also signed the **Peace and Justice Initiative** (*Mír a spravedlnost*), which advocates ending the war in Ukraine on Russian terms and stopping the supply of weapons to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. In addition, the text of the appeal resonates with the Kremlin's narrative about the harm of anti-Russian sanctions to "European households and companies, including Czech ones"⁶⁹.

The appeal was signed by Jiří Jaroš Nickelli⁷⁰, a former member of the historical and documentary commission

of the **Czech Union of Freedom Fighters** (ČSBS) and a descendant of a Russian legionnaire killed by the Nazis. He advocates the idea of a strong Russia as a guarantor of security in Europe⁷¹ and the neutrality of the Czech Republic⁷², which in fact means leaving NATO and the EU. He is also a member of one of the most esteemed and respectful Czech organisation the **Association of Czechoslovak Legionnaires** (*Československá obec legionářská*)⁷³.

The ČSBS association united participants in the national liberation movement of the Second World War, but for quite logical reasons (the departure of the original members due to ageing and death), membership in the 2000s was open to anyone who shared its values and agreed with the Charter⁷⁴. Probably the largest and oldest association of retired officers, it was often involved in corruption and financial scandals, which led to its dissolution in 2021. The association was part of the International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR).



Agent of the Czechoslovakian *Veřejná bezpečnost*, former colonel of the Border Guard Service Jaroslav Vodička (*right*) presents an award to the Honorary Consul of Russia at the Russian Embassy in the Czech Republic

JAROSLAV VODIČKA: FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIAN SECRET SERVICES TO RUSSIAN ONES

Its chairman, a former border guard colonel and agent of the Czechoslovak Police Force (*Veřejná bezpečnost*), **Jaroslav Vodička**, has his own ties to Russian intelligence services. Specifically, he engaged in negotiations regarding the commemoration of the end of World War II with several Russian diplomats who were declared *persona non grata* in 2021 as representatives of the Russian secret services. Notably among them are **Yevgeny Golikov**. The Atlas of Russian and Chinese Influence project by the Czech Center for European Values for Security Policy identified him as a civilian employee of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service⁷⁵. Other names on this list are Russian Federal Security Service officer **Andrey Konchakov**⁷⁶; and **Yevgeny Borisenko**, who is suspected by Czech intel-

ligence services of collaborating with the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces⁷⁷.

Vodička also participated in a joint event with the Night Wolves in 2018 in Dečín, organised by the Beskyd branch of the ČSBS with the support of the Czech Communist Party⁷⁸. Since the outset of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, he has actively supported the Kremlin's actions, sending a letter to the Russian ambassador assuring him of Russia's many friends in the Czech Republic⁷⁹. Vodička has been involved in actions aimed at undermining the state system and obstructing the normal functioning of democratic mechanisms in the Czech Republic. In 2016, during public events, he made xenophobic statements intended to stoke fears of refugees in Czech society, exacerbating the migration crisis⁸⁰. In 2018, he exerted influence favourable to the Kremlin, seeking to shape the perception of Crimea's recognition as Russian by European countries⁸¹.

In October 2023, he was one of the organisers of an event dedicated to the 105th anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic, where he articulated theses aimed at undermining confidence in the current government⁸².

In 2018, Jaroslav Vodička was awarded a recognition certificate from the Coordination Council of the Commonwealth of Independent States Veterans (Pensioners) International Union, an organisation within the CIS Executive Committee⁸³. This accolade was presented at the Russian Embassy, where **Emil Kulfánek**, a retired colonel of the Engineer Corps and deputy chairman of the ČSBS, received a special commendation from the Russian Ministry of Defense's representative office for his contributions to the organisation and execution of military memorial work in the Czech Republic. Kulfánek is a frequent attendee at events hosted by the *Izborsk Club*⁸⁴ think tank, founded by Alexander Dugin and classified as a tool for Kremlin propaganda⁸⁵.

Jaroslav Vodička has longstanding connections with communist movements in the Czech Republic. In 2018, alongside **Zdeněk Ondráček**, a former deputy from the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and a former police officer, he visited occupied Crimea⁸⁶. In January 2016 and May 2019, Ondráček met with leaders of the "DPR" group in occupied Donetsk⁸⁷. Despite being a private trip, Ondráček's car displayed the Czech flag, creating the impression of an official delegation⁸⁸.

Zdeněk Ondráček justifies Russian aggression against Ukraine. Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, he pub-

licly praised Putin's policies and supported the Kremlin's narrative by labelling Ukrainians as "*fascists*"⁸⁹. He also circulated a false video purportedly showing Ukrainians attacking civilians, painting them as having "*criminal tendencies*".

The Watchdog (*Hlídací Pes*) project of the Czech Institute for Independent Journalism deems Ondráček's activities harmful in line with the criteria of the Security Information Service, which delineate potential objectives of Russia's detrimental actions⁹⁰: *weakening the information capacity of the Czech Republic, bolstering the information resilience of Russian society, influencing the perception and mindset of the Czech audience, and undermining societal will to resist or confront, as well as instigating or exacerbating internal social and political tensions in the Czech Republic and disrupting NATO and EU's internal cohesion and capability*.

In 2019, ČSBS branches dissatisfied with their leadership's policies established the platform "Let's Restore the Respectability of ČSBS" (*Vratme vážnost ČSBS*). In December 2020, the Russian Embassy in the Czech Republic awarded regular members of this organisation with medals commemorating the 75th anniversary of liberation from fascism⁹¹. The platform persists in its endeavours in alignment with the interests of the Russian Federation, justifying Russian aggression and disseminating Kremlin narratives portraying Ukrainians as "*fascists*"⁹². The organisation's spokesperson, **Vladimír Pelc**, has been disseminating conflicting information about the war in Ukraine through the pages of the pro-Russian publication *Parlamentní Listy*⁹³.

Broadly, the network of retired officers in the Czech Republic, whose activities favour the Kremlin, should be considered within the framework of specific projects wherein Russia determines the direction of in-

to manipulate political processes in the Czech Republic by exploiting existing phobias and societal contradictions to bolster trust in extremist movements. PRAK is instrumental in propagating conspiracy theories about Ukraine's external governance and the prevalence of destructive American influence in Europe. Former Czech military personnel are actively opposing the supply of Western-made weapons and military equipment to Ukraine. Ex-intelligence officers are dedicated to discrediting integration processes in Europe and undermining the credibility of the US and NATO. Both groups advocate the notion that Russia is of paramount economic benefit to the Czech Republic and Europe and advocate for restoring cooperation with Russia, capitalising on the ideas of dialogue among Slavic peoples, victory in World War II, and a shared communist past.

The military is active in the context of resistance to the supply of Western-made military equipment to Ukraine, while ex-intelligence officers are focused on discrediting integration processes on the continent and compromising the United States and NATO

fluence based on Russian interests. For instance, the *Union of Freedom Fighters* and the *People's Self-Defense* were utilised as instruments

TOY SOLDIERS:

NATO MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS IN RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURES



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ITALY

On December 19, 2023, the Italian Council of Ministers adopted a resolution allowing the supply of funds, materials, and equipment to Ukraine to support its military efforts against Russia to continue until the end of 2024¹. On January 10, 2024, the lower house of the Italian parliament (Chamber of Deputies) also adopted a resolution to continue military support for Ukraine². Against the backdrop of the debate in the EU and the US over the allocation of aid to Ukraine, this friendly act is quite expressive. In general, the level of support demonstrated by Italy since the beginning of the Russian invasion was one of the biggest surprises. After all, during 2014–2022, pro-Russian statements by some Italian politicians clearly illustrated Rome’s traditional course of maintaining the desired level of cooperation with Moscow even after the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. As early as March 2022, the Italian daily *Il Foglio*

called the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies “*the largest Putin parliament in Europe*”³. Meanwhile, in July 2023, the Italian parliament voted in favor of a resolution recognizing the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people⁴.

Finally, in April 2022 Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the obvious contrast a “historic break”⁵. However, despite the public consensus on the responsibility of the Russian leadership for the war⁶, and the approval of sanctions against Russia and Russian oligarchs, only 16% of Italian citizens in 2022 considered it mandatory to punish the Kremlin for its aggression and restore Ukraine’s territorial integrity⁷. Party support is even more dispersed. The victory of the “Brothers of Italy” (*Fratelli d’Italia*), “League” (*Lega per Salvini Premier*), and “Forward, Italy!” (*Forza Italia*) in the September 2022 snap elections reset the Italian parliament, but pro-Russian elements are

About half of Italian society does not want to take sides in the Russian-Ukrainian war, making the confrontation between Ukraine and Russia in Italy particularly dynamic



Italian General Fabio Mini, the former commander of the NATO-led international force responsible for ensuring stability in Kosovo

still present in each of the parties that formed the coalition. The leader of the “League” openly referred to Crimea as Russian⁸, and “right-wing” radicals continue showing their loyalty to the Kremlin even after winning⁹. Additionally, about 23% of citizens see Russia as an ally¹⁰. A study by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, an independent nonprofit organization that protects human rights and analyzes extremism and disinformation around the world, showed that Italian social media users were most critical and skeptical of images from Bucha, doubting the involvement of Russian military personnel in the killing of civilians¹¹.

According to the Ipsos research center, about half of Italian society does not want to take sides in the Russian-Ukrainian war¹², making the confrontation between Ukraine and

Russia in Italy particularly dynamic. While Kyiv relies exclusively on public diplomacy, Moscow has traditionally been short on means to achieve their desired result. In the context of a new major war in Eastern Europe, it is quite expected that experts and politicians with military experience are at the forefront of informal competition for the sympathies of Italians.

GENERAL FABIO MINI AND THE FORMS OF RUSSIAN “SOFT POWER”

A prominent representative of such circles is retired Italian General **Fabio Mini**. The former commander of the NATO-led international force responsible for ensuring stability in Kosovo (*KFOR mission, 2002–2003*)¹³, expresses views totally aligned with Russia’s interests, aiming to:

- Justify the Russian army's military failures, by replacing them the interpretation of adherence to a certain plan¹⁴ and disciplined execution of orders¹⁵:
- Support the image of "invincible Russia". In an interview with TASS in May 2023, he stated that Russia had invested so many hu-



The owner of Eurasia magazine, Claudio Mutti, and Alexander Dugin, strategic advisor to the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation

man resources and weapons that it would be impossible to drive it out of the territories "claimed by Ukraine"¹⁶;

- Advocate for the resumption of economic cooperation with Russia. In the newspaper "Il Sussidiario", he argued for a return to "business as usual", especially in the energy sector, because "gasoline, diesel, gas and electricity" cost Europe "like gold"¹⁷;
- Justified Russian aggression by emphasizing the threat from Ukraine. Mini refers to the events of 2014 as "the liberation war of Donbas provinces against the Kyiv regime"¹⁸ and highlights provocations from NATO, which he claims has chosen a strategy of encircling Russia to "neutralize its influence in Central Europe"¹⁹.

The synchronization of Fabio Mini's views with the Russian agenda is also attributed to the presence of various forms of Russian soft power in Italy, Europe, and globally. Mini is a member of the "Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs"²⁰. According to American and European researchers, this platform serves as a cover for Russian (formerly Soviet) secret services²¹. It's no coincidence that the organization's vision for ending the war aligns with the paradigm of halting arms supplies to Ukraine, which would in their ideology prevent potentially provoking the risk of nuclear escalation²². In fact, in a special interview for the "Mezhdunarodnoye obozreniye" (*International Review*) show, aired on the propaganda channel Russia24 on December 2, 2022, Pugwash's Secretary General Paolo Cotta-Ramusino spoke entirely in-line with the Kremlin's "new geopolitical realities". He implied the necessity of forcing Ukraine to accept peace on Russia's terms "to avoid a global clash" and blamed the West for the outbreak of war", characterizing their behavior as unjustifiably "dangerous and aggressive towards Russia"²³.

"EURASIA" PUBLISHING, "GEOPOLITICA" AND ALEXANDER DUGIN

Since at least 2009 to 2015, Mini was a member of the scientific committee of "Eurasia", a journal founded in 2004 as a result of Italian neo-fascists' quest for their own political platform²⁴. Other members of this committee included the Russian World ideologists **Alexander Dugin** (Александр Дугин) and **Sergei Baburin** (Сергей Бабурин).

The “Eurasia” project, spearheaded by **Daniele Scalea**, has long aimed to consolidate supporters of the so-called “*fourth political theory*”, developed by Dugin and endorsed by the European New Rightists²⁵. The journal responded²⁶ to the Russian invasion with a mixture of conspiracy theories and Kremlin propaganda, discussing Ukraine’s alleged external governance, biolabs, and Russia’s conflict with NATO²⁷. To this

дународное евразийское движение), founded by Dugin. Initially rooted on the ideology of neo-Eurasianism, the organization gradually shifted towards principles of fascism and even Nazism concerning Ukraine and its people³⁰. Despite having established subsidiaries in numerous European countries, the primary adversaries³¹ of “Eurasians”, and particularly Russia, they are declared to be the “Anglo-Saxons”³². ISAG’s analysts regularly participate in events organized by the International Eurasian Movement, such as the IV “anti-fascist” congress in 2016³³, international conferences in Yalta in 2014³⁴ or 2018³⁵, as well as the Moscow Economic Forum (Московский экономический форум)³⁶ in 2018.

Tiberio Graziani is a member of the supreme council of the International Eurasian Movement organization, founded by Dugin

day it perpetuates the narrative of the Ukrainian war being solely an internal struggle between “nationalists and pro-Russian elements” within Ukrainian society²⁸.

Established as a joint project of **Claudio Mutti** (owner) and **Tiberio Graziani** (editor-in-chief), “Eurasia” underwent staff changes in 2011. Mutti assumed the role of editor, while Graziani and a portion of the “Eurasia” team transitioned to the “Geopolitica” journal. The journal was founded by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Geopolitics and Applied Sciences (*Istituto di Alti Studi in Geopolitica e Scienze Ausiliarie* – ISAG), jointly led by Graziani and the aforementioned Scalea. General Mini became a member of the scientific committee of “Geopolitica”, alongside Dugin.

ISAG is utilized by Russia to coordinate the left-wing parties of Italy²⁹. Tiberio Graziani is also a member of the supreme council of the International Eurasian Movement (Меж-

FRONTE DEL DISSENSO STANDS “FOR PEACE” AND FOR RUSSIA

Fabio Mini spoke at the **International Rome Peace Conference** on October 27–28, 2023, organized by the Italian movement “**Front of Dissent**” (“*Fronte del Dissento*”). This movement espouses anti-Western, pro-Russian positions and aligns itself with the so-called “covid dissidents”. Mini endorsed the final declaration, which accuses the United States and the West of instigating the war in Ukraine, portrays Russia as a victim of the Western aggression, and underscores NATO’s defeat in Ukraine as a prerequisite for global peace³⁷. The Russian media were covering the event as a gathering of anti-war, anti-fascist associations and leftist movements from more than 30 countries aiming to “halt the US and NATO aggression”³⁸.



In March 2023, the Front organized a rally in Milan against sending weapons to Ukraine³⁹, **Gaia Fuzai**, one of its coordinators, emphasized the “importance of lifting sanctions against Russia”, condemned the arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court for Russian



Fronte del Dissenso rally for Italy's withdrawal from NATO and for the lifting of sanctions against the Russian Federation, October 2022

President Vladimir Putin, and called for the restoration of relations and historical ties between Italy and Russia. Similar sentiments were echoed in the speeches of another founder of the Front, **Moreno Pasquinelli**, who is among the English-speaking authors on the Russian propaganda platform *Pravda.ru*⁴⁰. Since February 24, 2022 the Front of Dissent has organized the events under the hashtag *#StopKillingDonbass* in 12 Italian cities.

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE RUSSIAN REGIME INSIDE THE ITALIAN SCUOLA DI LIMES

General Mini also collaborates with several Italian publishers, including “Limes”, “la Repubblica”, “l'Espresso”, and “Il Fatto Quotidiano”. At the geopolitical journal “Limes”, he serves as a member of the scientific board. The journal has a dedicated coordinator for Russia within its organizational structure, **Mauro de Bonis**, who specializes in the study of post-Soviet countries⁴¹. The **Limes School** (*Scuola di Limes*) was established by the “Limes” journal as a non-academic educational institution on geopolitics and governance, catering to “executives and managers of public or private companies engaged in daily global interactions”. Among its lecturers⁴² are proponents of Putin's contemporary autocratic regime. Notably, **Sergei Karaganov** (Сергей Караганов), a Russian political scientist and economist, is renowned as one of the founders of the Foreign and Defense Policy Council (Совет внешней и оборонной политики – SVOP). He played a direct role in establishing both the Valdai Discussion Club and the journal “Russia in Global Politics” (Россия в глобальной политике). These platforms serve as crucial instruments for promoting Russian influence abroad, leveraging foreign experts' contributions, publishing their works and interviews, and

The leadership of the Scuola di Limes includes odious representatives of Putin's autocratic regime, namely Sergei Karaganov, a member of the scientific board of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, and GRU Colonel Dmitry Trenin

organizing representational events. Additionally, Karaganov serves as a member of the scientific board of the Security Council of the Russian Federation (*Совет безопасности РФ*) and potentially “may influence the opinion”⁴³ of its secretary, **Nikolai Patrushev** (*Николай Патрушев*). Another lecturer at the Limes School is **Dmitry**

military attaché at the Italian Embassy in Russia⁴⁷, is engaged in quite similar activities. However, unlike Fabio Mini, he is quite new to politics⁴⁸.

In his book “The upside-down world” (*Il Mondo al Contrario*), the general expresses sympathy for the Kremlin and influences opinions in line with the interests of the Russian Federation, discrediting the United States as a threatening state due to “the dragging of European countries into a confrontation with Russia”.⁴⁹ The book has gained significant popularity – according to *Il Dubbio* newspaper, the electronic version has been downloaded approximately 800 thousand times⁵⁰. However, certain instances of homophobia and sexism were observed in the book, sparking a scandal that ultimately led to Vannacci’s dismissal from his position as head of the Institute of Military Geography (*Istituto Geografico Militare*) in Florence⁵¹.

The striking resonance of these ideas with Russian “spiritual staples” was one of the reasons for the loyalty of Russian propaganda media to Vannacci⁵². At the same time, a rather ambiguous situation unfolded: following the publication and his dismissal in August 2023, the general was appointed Chief of Staff of the Operational Command of the Ground Forces (COMFOTER) by December of the same year⁵³. Following a public outcry, he garnered the patronage of Italian politicians known for their sympathies towards Russia – former mayor of Rome and former Minister of Agriculture in the Silvio Berlusconi’s government, Giovanni Alemanno, and League leader Matteo Salvini. This support was aimed at bolstering his potential candidacy in the upcoming elections to the European Parliament⁵⁴. In this context, it’s worth men-



Colonel of the GRU and a member of the Russian Council for International Affairs, Dmytro Trenin – one of the lecturers of the Scuola di Limes

Trenin (*Дмитрий Тренин*), a former GRU colonel and member of the Russian Council on International Affairs (*Российский совет по международным делам*). Before the full-scale invasion, he was the head of the Carnegie Moscow Center and a member of the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies. As a fierce supporter of realpolitik in international relations, Trenin controversially advocated for a preventive nuclear strike against the United States for intimidation purposes⁴⁴.

“THE UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD” OF GENERAL VANNACCI

General **Roberto Vannacci**, former commander of the Italian military contingent in Iraq⁴⁵ (2017), former commander of Task Force 45 during the war in Afghanistan⁴⁶ (2013) and former



General Roberto Vannacci (right), and the Italian ambassador to the Russian Federation, Pasquale Terracciano, receive a gift from Russian craftsmen, an icon depicting Saints Cyril and Methodius

tioning the election in 2019 of **Antonio Maria Rinaldi**, a reserve officer of the Financial Police⁵⁵ (*Guardia di Finanza*), who advocates for the lifting of anti-Russian sanctions citing “*the unjust loss of the Russian market for Italian companies*”⁵⁶. The retention of representation of Italian Eurosceptics in the EU structures aligns with the prevailing pan-European trend and serves the Kremlin’s interests in fragmenting the EU political system.

Amidst the patronage of politicians and the acknowledgment from readers, General Vannacci’s book was distributed by civil society organizations, including the Committee “**World Inside Out**” (“*Il Mondo al Contrario*”) founded in August 2023⁵⁷. Its head, retired Lieutenant Colonel **Fabio Filomeni**, is a writer himself. His book, called “Die for NATO?” (“*Morire per la NATO?*”), was presented in early 2023 at several platforms of Italian-Russian

cultural exchange. These included the *Cantiere Laboratorio* cultural association in Calabria⁵⁸, the framework of the Giulianova municipality programs⁵⁹, and the Russian Cultural Association “Emilia-Romagna” (*Associazione Culturale Russia Emilia-Romagna*) in Modena⁶⁰. It’s worth noting, representatives of *Cantiere Laboratorio* acted as observers at the pseudo-elections in the so-called “LPR” (“*Lugansk People’s Republic*”) in the fall of 2023⁶¹, and the Russian Cultural Association Emilia-Romagna is known for a recent attempt to justify the occupation of Ukrainian territories through an exhibition about Mariupol, which failed, due to strong socio-political backlash⁶². Furthermore, one of the presentations was organized⁶³ by the movement “Anti-War Coordination of Modena” (“*Coordinamento Modenese Contro la Guerra*”), which held actions “*in support of the children of Donbas*”⁶⁴ and against NATO’s support for Ukraine.



The march, organized by the Coordinamento Modenese Contro la Guerra in the city of Modena, against NATO and weapons supply to Ukraine, 2023

At the same time, Colonel Filomeni disseminates contradictory information about the war and the Revolution of Dignity. In his view, conflicts will persist as long as NATO exists, and benefiting from arms sales. However, he still refers to the war in Ukraine as a “civil war”⁶⁵. In 2022, in protest against the recognition of the Russian Federation as a state sponsor of terrorism, he returned to the US government a medal he was awarded for his services during his tenure with the NATO multinational contingent in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1997⁶⁶.

At the end of November 2023, Filomeni participated in the roundtable discussion titled “European security or insecurity? In search of lost stability”, organized by the Eurasia Mediterranean Study Center in co-

operation with the Polis Etica School of Civic and Political Education. The final report contained numerous provocative pro-Kremlin messages, including doubts about the expediency of supplying weapons to Ukraine, suspicions of their resale to terrorists worldwide, accusations of violating freedom of religion, and suggestions that energy issues cannot be resolved without Russia’s participation, etc.⁶⁷

Together with Filomeni, the aforementioned event was attended by retired Major General of the Engineer Forces (since 2010) Piero Laporta, an anti-Americanist and supporter of conspiracy theories about the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI under pressure from the US “deep state”. He responded to the outbreak of a full-scale war with a set of clichés about Putin’s abil-

Along with participating in events that benefit the Kremlin, the generals also speak with one voice at the expert level, insisting that the war against Russia lacks prospects



The “Stop the War” Committee collecting the signatures to initiate a referendum against sending weapons to Ukraine. The Committee comprises retired high-ranking Italian officers

ity to make Europe “doomed”, if NATO intervenes to protect its “scam in Kyiv”. Actually, Laporta precisely echoes the Kremlin’s theses about Ukraine’s external governance, the “massacre” in Donbas, and the “peacekeeping nature” of Russian intervention in Ukrainian affairs.

Alongside Filomeni, the aforementioned event was attended by retired (since 2010) Major General of the Engineer Forces **Piero Laporta**. He is known as an anti-Americanist⁶⁸ and supporter of conspiracy theories regarding the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI under pressure from the US “deep state”⁶⁹. Laporta also responded to the outbreak of a full-scale war with a set of clichés about Putin’s ability to render Europe “doomed”, if NATO intervenes to protect its “affair in Kyiv”⁷⁰. In essence, Laporta closely echoes the Kremlin’s narratives regarding Ukraine’s external governance, the situation in Donbas, and the purported “peacekeeping nature” of Russian intervention in Ukrainian affairs.

THE “STOP THE WAR” COMMITTEE, HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS AND MEASURES TO STOP AID TO UKRAINE

Retired officers also engage in coordinated activities, which are equally straightforward and aligned with Kremlin ideas. This takes the form of institutional resistance against Rome and the EU’s pro-Ukrainian policy in general. Thus, the **Committee “Stop the War”** (“*Fermare la guerra*”) includes notable figures such as the former Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force⁷¹, Lieutenant General⁷² **Leonardo Tricarico**; former commander of the Joint Operational Headquarters⁷³ (*Comando Operativo di Vertice Interforze – COVI*), the Folgore Airborne Brigade⁷⁴ (*Brigata Paracadutisti “Folgore”*), and President of the National Association of Paratroopers of Italy⁷⁵ (*Associazione Nazionale Paracadutisti d’Italia*), General Marco Bertolini; along with retired Air Force officer **Pasquale Tarantino**⁷⁶.



The President of the National Association of Paratroopers of Italy, a member of the “Stop the War” Committee, General Marco Bertolini

In 2023, under the guise of seeking a peaceful settlement, the Committee endeavored to undermine the supply of arms to Ukraine by submitting a petition to hold a referendum on the issue⁷⁷. During Pope Francis’ Angelus prayer, activists from the Committee brought a banner with the message “Stop the Slaughter” to St. Peter’s Square⁷⁸. Additionally, the Committee organized a direct protest calling for peace in the Middle East and Europe.

An analysis of the Committee’s policy papers suggests that it actively manipulates people by exploiting socially significant issues to create the false impression that Italians are striving

for change⁷⁹. Thus, the rise in utility prices is blamed on the restriction of Russian energy supplies, while unemployment and low incomes are attributed to globalization and integration processes in Europe, among other factors. Additionally, the Committee’s actions appeal to certain religious sentiments of Italians. They resonate with the Catholic Church’s calls for a diplomatic settlement of the conflict and Pope Francis’ peace initiatives, which put the victim on the same level as the aggressor⁸⁰.

In 2023, in a bid to broaden the Committee’s political influence, its founders, Giovanni Alemano and Massimo

General Bertolini called the Russian Federation’s access to the administrative borders of Donetsk and Luhansk regions as a prerequisite for peace negotiations

Arlechino, established the political party **Independence Movement** (*Movimento Indipendenza*). This party adopts an anti-American stance and opposes support for Ukraine⁸¹.

Beyond his involvement in the Committee, General Tricarico serves as the chairman of the **ICSA Foundation** (*La Fondazione Intelligence Culture and Strategic Analysis*), a think tank focusing on national security and defense issues. The foun-

In addition to participating in events whose content and requirements favor the Kremlin, generals also speak with one voice at the expert level, showing full support for the Russian strategic narrative. They insist that the war against Russia has no prospects due to the invincibility of the Russian army. For instance, in May 2022, Tricarico issued statements urging the EU to abandon the idea of defeating the Kremlin and instead persuade Ukraine to sign a peace agreement⁸⁵, arguing that the United States is the “only side interested in continuing the war”⁸⁶. Similarly, Marco Bertolini stated that it is virtually impossible to defeat Russia on the battlefield due to its formidable firepower⁸⁷. At the same time, he acknowledged that a scenario where Russia fully absorbs Donetsk and Luhansk regions up to the administrative borders could be a prerequisite for peace talks⁸⁸.

Additionally, in 2019, General Bertolini ran for the European Parliament from the “**Brothers of Italy**” (*Fratelli d'Italia*) party, which has had ties to Russia in the past⁸⁹. For example, **Irina Osipova** (*Ирина Осипова*), the head of the **NGO Association “RIM”** (*Russian-Italian Youth*), was an assistant to the head of the party of the current Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. RIM regularly holds public rallies in support of the so-called “LPR” and “DPR”⁹⁰ and opposes sanctions imposed on Russia⁹¹.

In general, the activities of the aforementioned generals were aimed at influencing specific policy changes on the part of the Italian government. In particular, they participated in numerous events such as meetings and demonstrations intended to halt the supply of weapons to Ukraine and weaken NATO’s capabilities. For in-

Irina Osipova, the former assistant to the current Italian Prime Minister, regularly holds public rallies in support of the so-called “LPR” and “DPR”

dition advocates for stopping NATO expansion in exchange for ending the war in Ukraine⁸². General Fabio Mini, mentioned earlier, participates in the Foundation’s scientific council. Meanwhile, General Marco Bertolini serves as a member of the editorial board of “*Analisi Difesa*”, a publication that regularly reviews military and political issues and provides military analysis⁸³.

Tarantino participated in an event dedicated to the Christmas ceasefire in November 2022⁸⁴. However, in reality, the event was organized primarily to hand over a petition to the Italian government, demanding that it addresses the European Council with a proposal for a ceasefire on the Ukrainian front for at least a month, starting on December 15, 2022. It is noteworthy that the proposed ceasefire at the front was intended to be accompanied by a halt in the supply of weapons to the “antagonists”.



stance, Marco Bertolini and Leonardo Tricarico took part in the Italian Independence Forum (*Forum dell'Indipendenza Italiana*) in July 2023. During this event, delegates, under the pretext of “restoring Italy’s independence”, voiced opposition to arms supplies to Ukraine and advocated against Italy’s membership in NATO, among other issues⁹².

Retired officers of the Italian army and intelligence services are actively pointing out the existence of an alternative to the current head of government and the political orientation towards Brussels, as such

It is noteworthy that the forum was moderated by individuals who either have ties to Russia or are closely aligned with the Kremlin. One of them, historian **Franco Cardini**, opposes the transfer of weapons to Ukraine and believes that such assistance constitutes an act of aggression against Russia by Italy⁹³. The other, Ambassador **Marco Carnelos**, is an expert at the Russian think tank **Valdai Discussion Club** (*Дискуссионный клуб “Валдай”*).

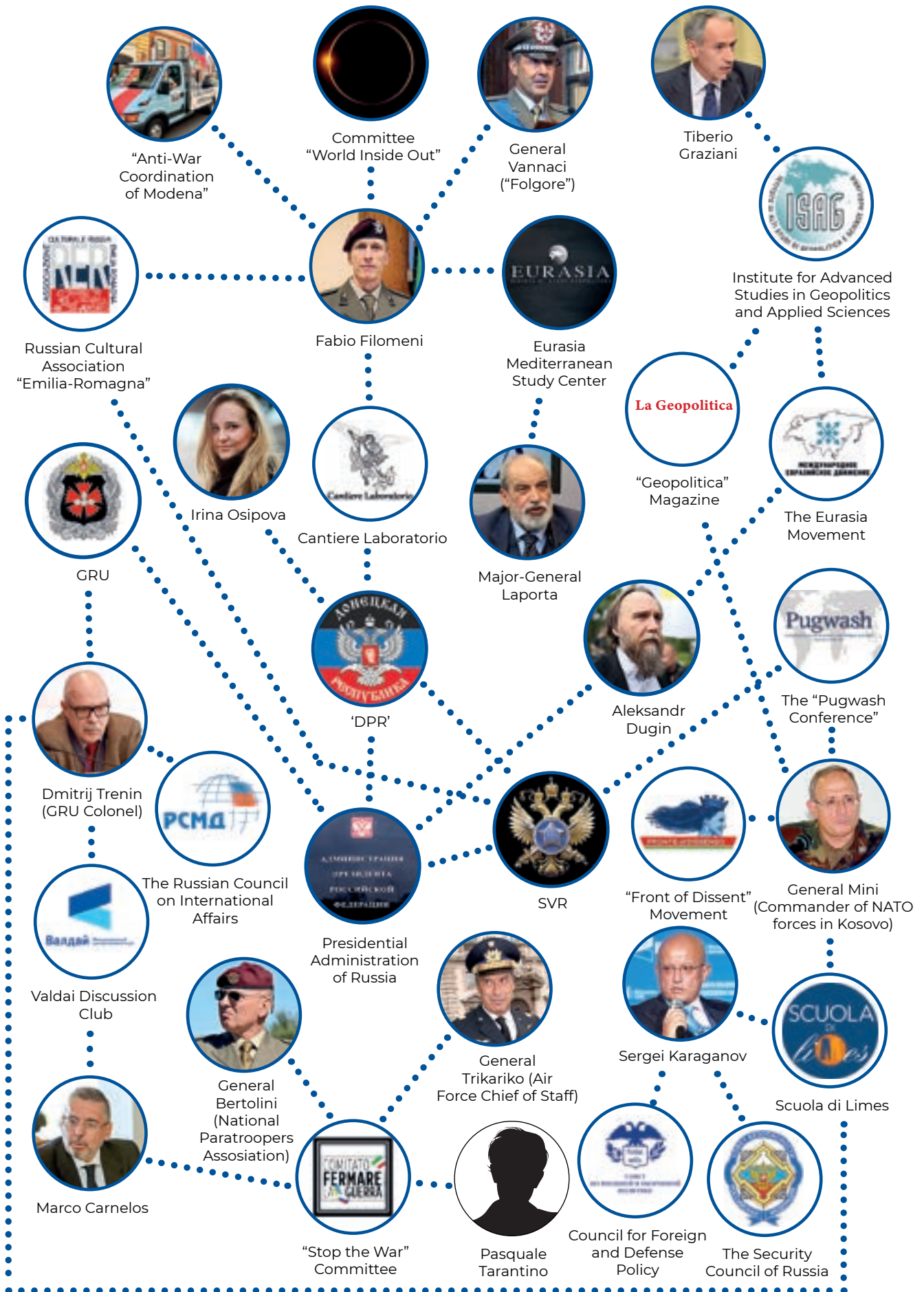
In early August of last year, in an interview with Fanpage, Italian Defense Minister Guido Crosetto stated that military assistance to Ukraine would

continue until it began to deplete Italian defense stocks⁹⁴. Despite its semantic vagueness, the wording suggests the potential boundaries of Italy’s current pro-Ukrainian stance. This position is likely to remain unchanged until the discourse advocating for unconditional respect for Ukraine’s sovereignty and the restoration of its territorial integrity is balanced by calls for peace in Europe, and until the course of normalizing relations with Russia garners a significant level of support.

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the corrupt influence of Russian financial flows on Italian politics has decreased by half. While its extent is not as vast as during the Silvio Berlusconi era, it has not completely vanished despite consolidated and widespread sanctions against the Russian state. Italian support for Ukraine, influenced by the overall political situation in the country, remains somewhat unstable. Primarily, due to Italy’s extremely limited capacity to overcome the financial crisis without assistance from the European Union. A firm pro-Ukrainian stance facilitates the Italian Prime Minister’s dialogue with EU institutions, but it also makes her a target for attacks from the opposition. Retired officers of the Italian army and intelligence services have been quite active in pointing out the existence of an alternative to the current head of government and promoting a shift in the public and state orientation away from Brussels.

TOY SOLDIERS:

NATO MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS IN RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURES



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NORWAY

Norway, as one of NATO's founding members that is sharing a border with Russia, occupies a strategic position in terms of the Alliance's security in Northern Europe. Since the onset of the full-scale Russian invasion, public and political support for providing Ukraine with armed, financial, and humanitarian assistance in Norway has remained one of the highest in Europe.

In 2023, Ukraine and Norway signed a political agreement on support for Ukraine amounting to 75 billion kroner (approximately 7 billion USD), spread over five years from 2023 to 2027¹. This agreement is rooted in the public demand among Norwegian citizens to support Ukraine. A **Proruss** poll showed that by the end of 2022, about 90% of Norwegians supported providing military assistance to Ukraine². For comparison, back in May of the same year, 58% of respondents supported such a policy, while 29% were against it³.

At the same time, according to a study by the social and market analysis agency **Opinion**, Norwegians are losing faith that Ukraine will win the war⁴. While at the end of May 2023, more than 50% of respondents believed that Ukraine would win the war, in November 2023, about 32% of respondents expressed confidence in this. At the same time, 45% of respondents were convinced that there would be no winners in the war.

Norway's strategic position in terms of North Atlantic Alliance security and the high level of public support for Ukraine make it important for the Russian government to influence its citizens in its own interests. In Norway, such influence primarily targets retired officers and veterans who have participated in combat operations, involving them in specific activities, which correspond with the interest of the Russian government in an effort to impact the Norwegian society as a whole⁵.

Norwegians are losing faith that Ukraine will win the war. In May 2023, more than 50% of respondents expressed confidence in that idea, while in November 2023, only about 32%



Dan-Viggo Bergtun, a former Norwegian military serviceman and participant in UN peacekeeping operations in Lebanon, the Secretary General of the World Veterans Federation

DAN-VIGGO BERGTUN – THE PRESIDENT OF THE WVF: ACTIVITIES AND CONNECTIONS WITH THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Dan-Viggo Bergtun, a former soldier and participant in UN peacekeeping operations in Lebanon⁶, deserves special attention in Norway. From 2015 to 2023, he served as President of the⁷ **World Veterans Federation (WVF)**, and in 2023, he became the Secretary General of this organization.

The WVF has a consultative advisory function to the United Nations. It is the world's largest international or-

ganization of combat veterans, bringing together former military personnel, war victims, resistance fighters, former prisoners of war, and former peacekeepers. The federation consists of 172 specialized organizations from 121 countries, including four representative organizations of the Nordic Veterans Council – Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Norway.

Dan-Viggo Bergtun's personal public activities as president of the WVF were aimed at achieving goals in the interests of the Russian government, particularly in legalizing the occupation of Crimea. For example, in April 2019, he paid an official visit to the occupied peninsula⁸, where he spoke at celebrations dedicated to the 75th

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anniversary of the liberation of Crimea and Sevastopol from the Nazi invaders. These events were organized by the **Russian Union of Veterans** (*Российский союз ветеранов, hereinafter referred to as RSV*), which actively supports aggression against Ukraine⁹. During his speech at the event, the WVF president expressed the federation's position on the need for a dip-

ские вести") in December 2017, the Norwegian expressed hope that Russian organizations would "assume more responsibility in the international arena"¹⁴. As an example of such cooperation, Bergtun cited the experience of WVF's cooperation with the **Russian "Battle Brotherhood"** (*"Боевое братство"*), an organization that brings together veterans of military conflicts and former employees of Russian secret services and security forces. In particular, the **"Battle Brotherhood"** engages former representatives of the Federal Security Service (*Федеральная служба безопасности – FSB*), the Foreign Intelligence Service (*Служба внешней разведки – SVR*), and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Министерство внутренних дел – MVD*). The organization is funded by the Russian government¹⁵. According to the Main Directorate of Intelligence of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, members of the "Battle Brotherhood" are involved in recruiting mercenaries for the war against Ukraine in Donbas and Syria¹⁶. Since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the organization has been engaged in providing "humanitarian aid" to the terrorist groups "DPR" (*"Donetsk People's Republic"*) and "LPR", (*"Lugansk People's Republic"*) among other activities. Today, it has official branches¹⁷ in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

In May 2017, during the V General Assembly of the International Advisory Committee of the Reserves and Reserve Officers' Organizations, Dan-Viggo Bergtun, on behalf of the WVF, awarded the "Veteran" medal for a significant contribution in supporting veterans¹⁸ to its president, **Alexander Kanshin** (*Александр Каньшин*), a member of the Public Chamber of the

During his tenure as the WVF President, Dan-Viggo Bergtun's activities corresponded to the interests of the Russian Federation's government, aimed at legitimizing the occupation of Crimea and bolstering the positions of Russian veterans organizations within the international veterans movement

lomatic and peaceful resolution to all conflicts¹⁰, including the "conflict in Ukraine". In October 2020, the WVF supported and was set to act as an information sponsor¹¹ for the online march of the "Immortal Regiment of Peacekeepers" (*Бессмертный полк миротворцев*) in Belarus¹². One of the organizers of the event was the **Russian Research and Practice Center "Peacemaker"** (*Научно-практический центр "Миротворец"*) as part of the project "Young Peacemaker" (*Юный миротворец*), funded by the Russian Presidential Grants Fund (*Фонд президентских грантов*)¹³.

Additionally, Dan-Viggo Bergtun influenced the strengthening of Russian veterans' organizations' positions within the international veterans' movement. For instance, in an interview with **Veteran News** (*"Ветеран-*





Dan-Viggo Bergtun at the meeting with representatives of the Russian Union of Veterans during his visit to the occupied Crimea in 2019

Russian Federation (*Общественная палата РФ*). Later, in 2019, Dan-Viggo Bergtun was presenting awards from the WVF at the aforementioned International Conference dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Republic of Crimea and the Sevastopol hero-city from the German fascist invaders. The award was given to Russian retired army general **Mikhail Moiseev** (*Михаил Моисеев*)¹⁹, who was Vladimir Putin's trusted person in the 2018 presidential elections and served as a former deputy of the State Duma in the Khabarovsk Krai (2011–2016), elected from the party "United Russia". At that time, Moiseev headed the **Russian Union of Veterans** and served as Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Labor, Social Policy, and Veterans' Affairs.

Mikhail Moiseev supported²⁰ the organization of a pseudo-referendum on Crimea's accession to Russia. Subsequently, as a member of the State

Duma, he awarded the "Spetsnaz of Russia" honors to former members of the special forces of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea²¹, including the "Vityaz" Special Forces Center (*Центр специального назначения "Витязь"*), "Berkut" riot police of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Crimea (*ОМОН "Беркут" МВС по Республике Крым – ОМОН*), and the Special Rapid Response Unit (*Специальный отряд быстрого реагирования – SOBR*) for their assistance in the operation that effectively led to the occupation of Crimea. Additionally, as the head of the Russian Union of Veterans, he arranged events for several consecutive years to commemorate the victory over the Nazi invaders in Crimea. He extended invitations to influential individuals and representatives of foreign veterans' organizations, contributing to the promotion of the idea of international recognition of Crimea as part of Russia.

The 2019 event also saw the attendance of notable figures, including: former Commander of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation and current Commander of the Northern Fleet of the Russian Federation, as well as the acting²² Commander of the Russian Navy, Admiral **Alexander Moiseev** (*Александр Моисеев*); the then-acting “vice-governor” of

activities against Western countries. For instance, it accused²⁴ the United Kingdom of waging “bacteriological warfare” in Korea, and opposed the rearmament of Germany. Other participants of the event included representatives from various veterans’ organizations: Stoyan Topalov (*Стоян Топалов*) from Bulgaria; Branka Kastelic from the Union of Associations of Fighters for the Values of the National Liberation Struggle of Slovenia (*Zveza združenj borcev za vrednote narodnoosvobodilnega boja Slovenije*); Franjo Habulin from the Association of Anti-Fascist Fighters and Anti-Fascists of Croatia (*Saveza antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Hrvatske*); Andreas Mohar from the Union of Carinthian Partisans (*Verband der Kärntner Partisanen*); and Sead Delić, Deputy Chairman of the Organization of Veterans of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Boračka udruženja Armije BiH*)²⁵.



Participants in the Russian aggression against Ukraine – members of the “Combat Brotherhood”, which is part of the WVF

occupied Sevastopol and former Deputy Plenipotentiary Representative of the Russian President in the North Caucasus Federal District, Rear Admiral **Andrei Shishkin** (*Андрей Шишкин*); and **Vilmos Hanti**, President of the **International Federation of Resistance Fighters** (*Fédération Internationale des Résistants – FIR*). According²³ to the US Central Intelligence Agency, the FIR was a cover organization for the Soviet Union’s secret services that supported the activities of communist regimes and conducted subversive

In March 2021, Dan-Viggo Bergtun delivered a greeting²⁶ on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of another significant Russian organization, the **International Confederation of Generals, Admirals, and Reserve Officers** (*Международная конфедерация генералов, адмиралов и офицеров резерва*). The confederation comprises associations of retired officers and veterans from various countries, including Austria, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Spain, and the Czech Republic. Its founder is the “**Megapir**” (“*Мегапир*”) association. Both organizations are led by the

“Combat brotherhood” was busy providing “humanitarian aid” to the DPR and LPR militia and has official representative offices at the occupied territories of Donetsk and Lugansk regions

mentioned **Alexander Kanshin**, who serves as the deputy chairman of the public council at the Russian Ministry of Defense, and is an academician of the Academy of Military Sciences, and the CEO of the “Sunday” (“Воскресенье”) foundation. He is also a business partner of **Oleg Dukhovnitsky** (Олег Духовницкий), a former Russian military intelligence officer²⁷ and former head of the Federal Agency “Rossvyaz” (“Россвязь”)²⁸.

After the full-scale invasion of Russia in Ukraine, Dan-Viggo Bergtun, on behalf of the WVF, called for the halt of the supply of Western weapons to Ukraine

An example of influence, exerted on both Norwegian society as a whole and retired officers and veterans in particular, can be seen in an article²⁹, authored by Dan-Viggo Bergtun and published in 2021 under the title “Are we infected with Russophobia in Norway?” (“Er vi i Norge smittet av russofobi?”). The article aims to rationalize Russian aggression by framing it as a response to an alleged “Ukraine and NATO attack on Russia”, while also fostering a positive attitude towards Russia by criticizing what is termed “Russophobia” in Norway and the broader Western context. It seeks to cultivate gratitude towards the Soviet Union for its role in liberating Norway from Nazi occupation in 1945. However, the article faced criticism³⁰ from Norwegian veterans’ associations, notably the **Norwegian Association of Veterans for International Operations** (*Norges Veteranforbund for Internasjonale Operasjoner – NVIO*), which, incidentally, is a member of the World Veterans Federation (WVF).

Following the commencement of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the former Norwegian serviceman also wielded influence aimed at countering the supply of military and technical assistance to Ukraine. In August 2023, acting on behalf of the WVF, Dane-Viggo Bergtun published an article on the NordnorskDebatt platform³¹, advocating for an end to the provision of Western weapons to the Ukrainian army. Specifically, the article criticized the decision of the British government to supply Ukraine with depleted uranium shells, citing potential “contamination of the war zone for decades”. Notably, the Russian government shared a similar stance at that time. Within the same discourse, the Norwegian exerted influence towards nuclear intimidation of the West, with the aim of pressuring Ukraine into negotiations with Russia.

DAN-VIGGO BERGTUN’S OTHER OCCUPATIONS: THE AD HOC COMMITTEE AT THE UN, AND THE SPIA

Of note, the aforementioned activities of Dane-Viggo Bergtun occurred during his tenure as a member³² of the Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Committee of the Global NGO Executive Committee at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Earlier, when Bergtun stood for membership in the organization³³ “to address veterans’ issues”, he did not garner the necessary support from veterans’ organizations in Norway, primarily due to his pro-Russian stance. Furthermore, Dan-Viggo Bergtun lacks support among organizations both within Norway and in Northern Europe. Notably, Dag-Magne Lunde, presi-



dent of the largest Norwegian veterans' organization NVIO, believes that Bergtun's election to a UN position with responsibility for veterans' affairs would clearly harm the veterans' movement in Norway³⁴.

Dan-Viggo Bergtun's activities are not confined to the World Veterans Federation. For instance, he also holds the



The publishing "Veteran's News", affiliated with GRU, is awarded a WVF medal for its information support of the veterans' movement

position of vice president³⁵ at the **Soldiers of Peace International Association (SPIA)**, which conducts activities that align with Kremlin interests and serve to justify Russian aggression. For example, in the initial days of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Association issued a statement calling³⁶ for a swift peaceful resolution of the "conflict". Notably, this statement refrained from assigning blame or assessing who the aggressor and victim are, effectively putting the Ukrainian and Russian peoples on an equal footing.

WORLD VETERANS FEDERATION DEEPENS ITS TIES WITH THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

According to **Dr. Maximilian Becker** of the Austrian Academy of Sciences³⁷, the **World Veterans Federation**

has always been an international and anti-communist organization, starting from its foundation in 1950 during the Korean War. The participation of veterans from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was hardly possible, primarily due to the invitation of refugees from Poland and Czechoslovakia to the organization. At present, however, the organization not only maintains a range of connections to the Russian Federation but also exerts influence aligned with the interests of the Russian government, as will be elaborated upon below.

Since 2012, the World Veterans Federation, represented by Dan-Viggo Bergtun, has participated in the sessions of the aforementioned **International Advisory Committee of Reserves and Reserve Officers' Organizations** (*Международный консультативный комитет организаций офицеров запаса и резерва, hereinafter referred to as MKK*) as an observer. The MKK was established in March 2011 in Moscow at the initiative of the **National Association of Unions of Reserve Officers of the Armed Forces "Megapir"** (*Национальная Ассоциация объединений офицеров запаса Вооружённых сил "Мегапир"*)³⁸. The declaration of foundation³⁹ was signed by a number of European organizations, including the Club of Generals of the Slovak Republic (*Klub Generálov Slovenskej Republiky*), the Union of Veterans' Organizations of Estonia (*Eesti Vabariigi Veteranide Organisatsioonide Liit*), the Republican Committee of the Organization of World War II Participants who fought on the side of the anti-Hitler coalition living in Lithuania (*Lietuvoje gyvenančių Antrojo pasaulinio karo dalyvių, kovojusių*

antihitlerinēs koalīcijas pusēje), and the Coordination Council of the Latvian Association of Anti-Hitler Coalition Fighters (*Latvijas antihitleriskās koalīcijas cīnītāju asociācija*).

During Dan-Viggo Bergtun's presidency, the World Veterans Federation openly began to cooperate with the Russian edition of **Veteran News** (*"Ветеранские вести"*)⁴⁰. The media holding company that owns the publisher is headed by **Vyacheslav Kalinin** (*Вячеслав Калинин*), a member of the Saratov Regional Council from the "A Just Russia – Patriots – For Truth" (*"Справедливая Россия – Патриоты – За Правду"*) faction. The deputy editor-in-chief of Veteran News, **Vladimir Korovnikov** (*Владимир Коровников*) also serves as an assistant to the chairman of the **International Council of Russian Compatriots** (*Международный*

The **Veteran News** publications provide comprehensive coverage of Dan-Viggo Bergtun and the activities⁴³ of the WVF. Their website features over 50 relevant posts, articles, and news pieces dedicated to these subjects.

In 2019, during the 29th General Assembly of the World Veterans Federation held at the United Nations in Paris, Veteran News was honored with the WVF gold medal⁴⁴ "for information support of the global veterans' movement". The award was personally presented by Dan-Viggo Bergtun to Vyacheslav Kalinin, the editor-in-chief of the publication.

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, one area of collaboration between the WVF and Veteran News involved joint efforts aimed at undermining the supply of Western weapons to the Ukrainian army and pressuring Ukraine into negotiations with Russia. Hence, in December 2022, Veteran News published an article⁴⁵ by Dan-Viggo Bergtun titled "Will more weapons bring peace to Ukraine?" In this piece, under the guise of advocating for peace, he urged for a cessation of arms supplies to Ukraine and advocated for the initiation of "UN-mediated negotiations".

As early as 2023, during the 30th General Assembly of the World Veterans Federation in Belgrade, Veteran News once again received the so-called "Gold Medal" from the WVF⁴⁶. The summary review, published on the Veteran News, mentions that Vyacheslav Kalinin, along with the chairman of the Military Trade Union of Serbia (*Војни синдикат Србије*), Antić Nović (*Новица Антић*), conducted a series of meetings⁴⁷ with foreign counterparts, resulting in agreements on collaboration with the publisher.

According to US CIA data, the *Fédération Internationale des Résistants* was a cover organization for the Russian secret services during the times of the USSR

совет российских соотечественников), one of the organizations that coordinates and promotes the interests of the Russian Federation abroad. In November 2022, Korovnikov was appointed as a Plenipotentiary Representative of the **Guild of Russian Lawyers** (*Гильдия российских адвокатов*) in the so-called "DPR" and "LPR", where he engages in "patriotic education"⁴¹ among young people and provides support to militants⁴² as part of the so-called "humanitarian mission" of Veteran News.





Deputy President of WVF, retired Major General of the Serbian Armed Forces, former head of the Military Academy of Serbia and Montenegro Vidosav Kovacevic

In the context of this study, it is worth mentioning a project of the aforementioned WVF partner, the Russian “Battle Brotherhood”, namely – the **“Battle Brotherhood Without Borders”** (“*Боевое братство без границ*”)⁴⁸. The organization aims to establish ties with veterans’ associations of the former Soviet Union, as well as with the WVF itself. The “Battle Brotherhood Without Borders” is registered in Belarus. It’s being led by retired Colonel **Viktor Sivokhin** (*Виктор Сивохин*), a combat veteran, who holds two Orders of the Red Star. He graduated from the Novosibirsk Higher Military and Political School (*Новосибирское высшее военно-политическое училище*) and the The V. I. Lenin Military-Political Academy (*Военно-политическая академия В. И. Ленина*).

Dan-Viggo Bergtun also has been in contact with the Russian “Battle Brotherhood”. For instance, as a representative of the WVF he participated in the “Battle Brotherhood’s”

IV Congress⁴⁹ in 2012. In 2016, an official statement⁵⁰ of the WVF, signed by Dan-Viggo Bergtun, criticized the decision of Latvian government to deny entry to the representative of the “Battle Brotherhood”, Russian Colonel **Gennady Shorokhov** (*Геннадий Шорохов*). The information coverage was provided on the “Battle Brotherhood” platform⁵¹.

In 2019, Colonel Shorokhov, the deputy head of the “Battle Brotherhood”, participated⁵² in the 29th General Assembly of the World Veterans Federation in Paris. Vyacheslav Kalinin, the aforementioned founder and editor of Veteran News, also attended the event⁵³. Mr. Kalinin holds a part-time position as the deputy head in the Moscow branch of the “Battle Brotherhood”. Representatives of the **Russian Union of Veterans**⁵⁴, also participated in the assembly. Among them was Colonel Dmitry Babiychuk, who, on behalf of the RSV, honored Dan-Viggo Bergtun with the “Warrior-Liberator” statuette.

The leadership of the WVF also includes several retired officers with connections to Russia. One notable figure is retired Major General of the Serbian Armed Forces, and former head of the Military Academy of Serbia and Montenegro (*Војне Академије Војске Србије и Црне Горе*), **Vidosav Kovacevic** (*Видосав Ковачевић*), who has been serving as the Deputy President of WVF⁵⁵ since March 2022. In May 2021, Vi-

In November 2022, the WVF and FIR issued a joint official statement calling for an end to the supply of Western weapons to Ukraine and opposing anti-Russian sanctions

dosav Kovacevic participated⁵⁶ in the Victory Day celebrations in Serbia, which were co-organized by the Russian government. As part of these events, a military parade was broadcast live from Moscow. During his speech, Major General Kovacevic, in his capacity as President of the Union of **Associations of Fighters of the National Liberation Wars of Serbia** (*Савез удружења бораца народноослободилачких ратова (СУБНОР) Србије, hereinafter – SUBNOR*), echoed the propaganda of the Russian government by accusing NATO of bombing Yugoslavia, and asserted that Serbian soldiers were engaged in a “liberation war” during the Alliance campaign⁵⁷.

As part of his public activities, Vidosav Kovacevic utilizes his influence to promote ideas that align with the objectives of Russian secret services. Specifically, he engages in blaming NATO for the aggression against Ukraine and glorifies the military power of the

Russian army. For example, in an interview with the Russian TASS⁵⁸ news agency in March 2022, the retired Serbian major general asserted that the North Atlantic Alliance purportedly “has no means to counter Russian hypersonic missiles”. Previously, Vidosav Kovacevic also claimed⁵⁹ that the war against Ukraine was ostensibly the result of “NATO’s policy and the rise of Nazism in Ukraine”.

As early as April 2023, Major General Kovacevic gave an interview⁶⁰ to the Russian online publisher, the **Federal News Agency** (*Федеральное агентство новостей*), where he also exerted influence aimed at justifying Russian aggression against Ukraine, labeling the war as a “necessary step” in response to NATO’s defense policy in Eastern Europe.

As mentioned earlier, Vidosav Kovacevic serves as the president of the **Union of Associations of Fighters of the National Liberation Wars of Serbia**. The Union originated from a socio-political organization with the same name from the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which united soldiers of the so-called National Liberation Army of the communist regime. It was the SUBNOR of Serbia that organized the 30th General Assembly of the World Veterans Federation⁶¹, which took place in March 2023 in Belgrade.

Despite the fact that the vast majority of representatives of the WVF governing bodies have not been observed engaging in activities conducted in the interests of the Russian Federation, they have not publicly protested against the openly pro-Russian stance of their leader and the federation’s involvement in it. It’s particularly surprising in re-

gards to the board members representing NATO member states. This includes the Vice President of the WVF and current US official⁶² **Saif Khan**, a former US Army soldier, Iraq War veteran, and attorney specializing in veterans' rights in America. Saif



The head of FIR and a representative of Magyar Association of Hungarian Resistance Fighters and Anti-fascists is Vilmos Hanti

Khan also serves as the Chairman of the Selective Service System⁶³ under the Administration of President Joseph Biden.

WVF AND FIR: TO JUSTIFY RUSSIA AND TO STOP AID TO UKRAINE

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the World Veterans Federation has been more actively engaged with the aforementioned **International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR)**.

In November 2022, the **WVF** and **FIR** published a joint statement aimed at undermining the supply of Western weapons to Ukraine and countering Western anti-Russian sanctions by pressuring Ukraine into negotiations. The corresponding official statement⁶⁴ calls for "dialogue and cooperation", which implies "halting arms

supplies and refraining from imposing further sanctions".

In October 2023, Dan-Viggo Bergtun participated⁶⁵ in a congress of anti-fascist associations organized by the FIR, where he advocated for negotiations and called on all WVF member organizations to demand a "non-military solution to the conflict".

Vilmos Hanti, the head of FIR⁶⁶ and a representative of the Hungarian Association of Anti-Fascists, also exerts influence in his public activities that align with the interests of the Russian government. For instance, on February 22, 2022, days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Hanti accused Ukraine of failing to implement the Minsk agreements⁶⁷, which, in his words, "has led to the current conflict". Russian President Vladimir Putin made a similar statement⁶⁸ on February 23, 2022.

Hanti also seeks to bolster the Russian government's narrative by supporting its claims of the West being responsible for the alleged "spread of fascism". As an example, he made a declaration regarding the perceived "rise of fascism" in the Baltic States, Poland, and Ukraine⁶⁹ during a parade commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Soviet victory in World War II held in Moscow in 2015.

The collaboration between the two organizations was noticeable even prior to February 24, 2022. One of its key objectives was to support the official stance of the Russian government regarding the purported resurgence of fascism in Europe, with a particular focus on Ukraine. In February 2020, WVF and FIR joined forces to participate in a conference⁷⁰ titled "**Fascism and anti-fascism in**

Europe today”, which was organized by the **Union of Anti-fascist Fighters and Anti-fascists of the Republic of Croatia** (*Savez antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Republike Hrvatske – SABA RH*). This event saw the participation of notable figures, such as the Vice President of the Croatian Parliament, Siniša Hajdaš Dončić, Croatian Secretary of State Juro Mar-

The conference’s final declaration emphasized the danger⁷¹ posed by “the rise of fascism and neo-Nazism” in Europe. Similar sentiments were expressed in 2021 by Dmitry Peskov (*Дмитрий Песков*), the press secretary for Vladimir Putin, and the other officials from the Russian government⁷².

Considering Bergtun’s and WVF’s influence on the UN, the discussed activities may lead to the formation of unfavorable opinions among the UN delegates

tinović, Russian Ambassador to Croatia Anvar Azimov (*Анвар АЗИМОВ*), and representatives from anti-fascist organizations across 15 European countries.

Other notable participants included Vilmos Hanti, the President of FIR, who also represented the Hungarian Anti-Fascists Association; Dan-Viggo Bergtun, the head of WVF; and **Oleg Kalinin** (*Олег Калинин*), the Vice President of the Russian Union of Veterans. The primary focus of Kalinin’s report was to label what he referred to as “Bandera nationalism” as “a contemporary manifestation of fascism”, and to characterize the 2014 Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine as “an unconstitutional armed overthrow, backed by Washington and Brussels”. Russian Ambassador to Croatia Anvar Azimov also addressed the conference, accusing the West of “distorting the history of World War II” and asserting that the United States and Ukraine purportedly “refused to support a UN resolution condemning Nazism and neo-Nazism”.

It’s important to highlight that the World Veterans Federation is expanding its connections with veterans and retired officers across the African continent as well. For instance, in March 2023, Derrick Oduro, a retired Major who previously served as the Deputy Minister of Defense of Ghana⁷³ and former member of the national parliament, was elected as the Treasurer General of the organization.

Also, in 2024, the World Veterans Federation conference is scheduled to be held in South Sudan, Africa⁷⁴, which has already sparked a heated public debate due to the need to allocate \$1.75 million for the event amidst the economic crisis and the threat of famine in the country.

It’s noteworthy that, according to CNN, a front organization linked to the Russian secret services, the so-called “Wagner” Private Military Company (*ЧВК “Вагнер”*), reportedly took part and offered armed support to the military junta during the military coup in South Sudan, aiding in the confrontation against the country’s army. In September 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin held a personal meeting with South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit, as reported by *Euronews*⁷⁵, allegedly “in search of new allies” for Russia.



CONCLUSIONS

There are few individuals and organizations in Norway that organize events favorable to Russia. Conversely, the country consistently demonstrates strong support for Ukraine, at least ideologically. The prevailing sentiment in society and the media is to ensure Ukraine's victory in the war.

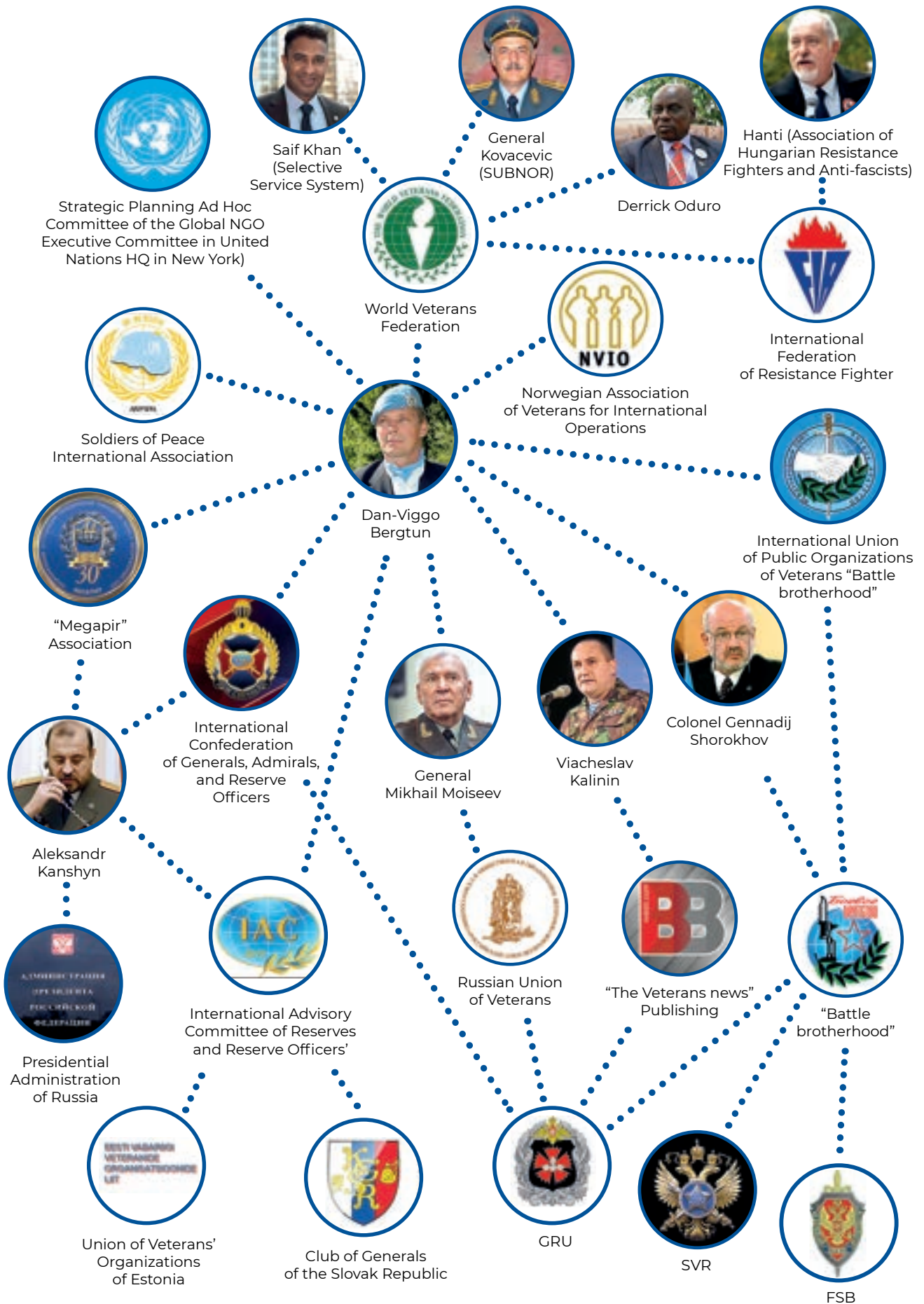
At the same time, certain former military figures in Norway wield influence that, combined with similar efforts in other European nations, possess a considerable potential to shift the attitudes of Western allies of Ukraine towards ones more favorable to Russia. Specifically, Dan-Viggo Bergtun, leveraging his official role within the World Veterans Federation and his personal networks, holds the capacity to exert influence at the United Nations. It's worth mentioning, that

despite internal opposition from certain members of the WVF, the organization is increasingly being shaped into an instrument by the Russian Federation to advance its own ideas and agenda, largely due to the efforts of Dan-Viggo Bergtun. At the same time, the presence of influential individuals in the governing bodies of the WVF, such as Saif Khan from the United States, provides Russia with an additional means to influence the agenda regarding Western countries' support for Ukraine.

Considering the influence wielded by Dan-Viggo Bergtun and the World Veterans Federation at the UN, the aforementioned activities could potentially shape a negative stance among UN delegates. This could subsequently impact voting on matters crucial for Ukraine.

TOY SOLDIERS:

NATO MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS IN RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURES



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