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The Relations Between The European Far-Right and The Russian Federation

A Social Constructivist Perspective

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Abstract

This project explores the relation between the European far-right and the Russian Federation with a focus on the values and ideas that Vladislav Surkov's sovereign democracy proposes. The study uses Alexander Wendt's Social Constructivism as a theoretical reference point for the understanding of the role that sovereign democracy plays in the developing of relations between the Kremlin and Europe's far-right around notions such as anti-globalism, the cult of the strong leader, traditional Christian-European values and centralization of political power. The study concludes the fact that by courting the European far-right in a rhetoric that highlights the ideas proposed in sovereign democracy, the Russian Federation is perceived as a symbol of anti-globalism and an alternative to the current political establishment in the European Union and the Transatlantic partnership, which on the one hand provides the Kremlin with influence over the political process in Europe, while on the other hand it just provides support for its domestic political governing style.

keywords: European far-right, sovereign democracy, anti-globalism, the Russian Federation, EU.

1.Introduction

In the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation had plunged into a period of instability as it had undergone a financial and economic crisis, social unrest and political uncertainty. The current President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin has called the dissolution of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical disaster of the twentieth century"[1] and while this remark appears as very powerful, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that for the Russian Federation at least, the end of the Cold War has not been followed by a period of prosperity and development shortly after.

The instability of the last decade of the twentieth century appears to have marked Russia and as this project will show further, the reference to the period following the end of the Cold War has been a key element that further on in the twenty-first century defined the perspective that the Kremlin has displayed towards the practice of governing.

The "Colour Revolutions" that took place in the former Soviet satellite states of Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in mid-2000s have highlighted for the Russian Federation the possible threat of, on the one hand massive shifts in the domestic political landscape and consequently, on the other, a potential destabilization of the largest country on the planet.

It is in this context that the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation Vladislav Surkov in 2008 has published the article entitled "Russian Political Culture: A View From Utopia" in which he argues for what is called 'sovereign democracy', a model of democracy which in Surkov's views is specific to the Russian political culture and its historical background.

The sovereign democracy model is set to explain why notions such as a strong center of political power, idealization of the leader (or the cult of the strong leader), anti-globalism and traditional Christian-European values should be at the center of the development of the democracy in Russia. The arguments are brought about the historical foundation of the Russian Federation particularly on the necessity of stability which in Surkov's perspective can only be guaranteed by a strong center of authority, hence the assertion on the centralization of political power, through the firm rule of the leader, of an "effective manager", for the preservation of the Russian traditional values in the era of globalization.

This project is set out to develop a better understanding of the relations between the Russian Federation on one hand and the European Union's far-right political parties around the ideas that sovereign democracy upholds, namely anti-globalism, state centralism and sovereignty, the cult of the strong leader and traditional European-Christian values.

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[1] Osborn, Andrew. "Putin: Collapse of the Soviet Union was 'catastrophe of the century'", *Independent*, April 25, 2005,
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-collapse-of-the-soviet-union-was-catastrophe-of-the-century-521064.html.

The increase in popularity of the European far-right parties in the years following the financial and economic crisis of 2008 reveals the importance of the relation that these parties develop with the Russian Federation particularly from the European Union's and NATO's perspective, but also from the point of view of individual member states. The Euroscepticism among these parties and the criticism of the Transatlantic partnership underline the fact that the European far-right can pose a serious threat to the current political establishment in Brussels and it is this line of thought that the relations that these parties establish with the Kremlin become relevant for EU and NATO. For this reason, this project attempts at providing an understanding of the implications of the courtship that the Russian Federation has displayed towards the European far-right around notions like anti-globalism, state sovereignty, the ideal of the strong leader and traditional Christian-European values, in order to understand the role of sovereign democracy in the developing of relations between the Kremlin and Europe's far-right.

The focus in International Relations on Russia in the recent years has been primarily on its use of hard power, namely the intervention in the Syrian Civil War, the annexation of Crimea or the involvement in the Ukrainian crisis. However, the use of soft power by the Kremlin is relevant for a better understanding of this actor's behaviour in the international system and this study is delimited in that it does not focus primarily on the material component of the Russian foreign relations, but rather on the relations developed with the European far-right around the values and ideas of sovereign democracy.

In this sense, for the purpose of developing this project, Alexander Wendt's Social Constructivism will serve the purpose of the theoretical reference, as this theory emphasizes the importance of ideas and identity in the establishing and developing of relations in the international system. The role of the meaning that actors have towards one another is central to the Social Constructivist theory as it is argued that it serves as the basis for the actions that actors take towards one another and this is particularly what this project is set out to investigate: what role does sovereign democracy play in the relations between the European far-right and the Russian Federation?

In order to address this problem this project will first identify what values and ideas Surkov's sovereign democracy proposes and the argumentation around them. Further on, the project will seek to understand how these values and ideas are reflected in the instances of interaction between and in the rhetoric employed by the European far-right and the Kremlin, following which, the analysis will look at how Russia is perceived by the European far-right through the prism of these values proposed by sovereign democracy as an alternative to the current political establishment in the European Union and the Transatlantic partnership.

The project presents a constructionist from an ontological standpoint, while the epistemological tradition in which the project is conducted is interpretivism. From a methodological perspective, the project is a deductive qualitative study and the main source of data is secondary data such as reports, media articles, secondary literature, and also primary data consisting of official statements or manifestos of the European far-right political parties.

In the following section of the project the methodological parameters of the project will be developed, starting with a brief description of the structure and the component sections.

2.Methodological approach

a. Structure

In this section it will be presented the main structural components of the project with a brief introduction to each of the parts which will further be developed.

The introductory part provides the reader with the overall coordinates of the research project. In this regard, the problem concerning Russia's ideological component in foreign affairs with a particular focus on the relations with EU's far-right is presented, along with the research question. The doctrine of sovereign democracy is presented at this stage in short, while further on, a separate chapter will provide a more detailed perspective on the issue. At the same time, the introduction will describe the delimitations of the project through which it provides an explanation for how the problem formulation was developed. Another important element in this section is to justify the relevance of investigating Russia's relations with EU's far-right and to underline the motivation behind it.

The next section of the project consists of the methodological approach. The importance of establishing from the very beginning the methodological features of the project is crucial in that it helps the reader to better understand the prospects of the study. The methodological section of the project presents the main features of the research that include the structure, the ontological and epistemological considerations, research design and how the research is to be conducted, along with the choice of theory and empirical data.

In this regard, the project will first be situated in the terms of ontological and epistemological traditions of research. Both considerations concerning ontology and epistemology are fundamental features to any academic research and by indicating the philosophical traditions in which the research has been conducted the reader can better follow the development of the project itself. From an ontological standpoint, the research is developed with a constructionist approach as the object of study is the relations between Russia and EU's far right and the relevance of a political doctrine - which is by definition not occurring naturally but rather socially constructed. With regards to epistemology, the study will adopt an interpretivist approach as this perspective, as argued by Christopher Lamontin International Relations seeks is to understand identities, ideas, norms and culture in international politics.[2] The ontological and epistemological stances of the project will be further developed in this chapter.

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[2] Christopher Lamont, *Research Methods in International Relations,* London,Sage, 2015, p.18.

From a methodological standpoint, the project will be a qualitative research as it will seek to gain in-depth knowledge about the relations between Russia and EU's far-right. In the same line of thought, the design of the project will be case study. Further on in this chapter it is elaborated the choice of documentary analysis as a primary tool for interpreting data and a series of sources are being presented.

The methodological section also explains the choice of theory which is Social Constructivism developed by Alexander Wendt's 1992 article "Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics".

The following section presents the Social Constructivist theory employed for this project. Social Constructivism comes as a critique to the very foundation of the theoretical approach to International Relations established after the First World War. While the traditional approaches to International Relations such as Realism, Neorealism or Liberalism have been founded on the perception that the international system is based on the principle of balance of power - that is in an anarchic system, in which self-help behaviour is not only recommended but also vital for the conservation of the state -, Social Constructivism argues that it is in fact the balance of *threats*[3] that define the interaction between actors - in which case the perception of one another is crucial - and that prior to the interaction there is no perception - and therefore the system is socially constructed. The emphasis of the Social Constructivist theory falls onto the key relevance of ideas and identities in the development of interactions within the international system and also on the fact that the behaviour of the actors is driven neither by human nature - as the classical Realists would argue -, nor by the structure of the international system - as the Neorealists would. For Constructivism, the behaviour of the actors is socially constructed and as mentioned above, based on the ideas that the actors develop and on the perceptions of each other. In relation to this study, Social Constructivism aims at explaining the interaction between Russia and EU's far right with a focus on the promotion of concepts and ideas of political organization, such as nationalism, sovereignty or centralization of political power. In this regard, as Constructivists argue, the dynamic of the anarchic international system cannot be predicted outside the definition of identities and interests that the actors involved in interaction have. The Social Constructivist theory will be presented in greater detail in chapter three.

The next section will present the doctrine of sovereign democracy and its main arguments. The concept of sovereign democracy has been promoted in Russia after the Colour Revolutions that took place in the former satellite soviet states Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Ukraine. The features of this political approach have been presented by the former Deputy Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration, Vladislav Surkov. While the democratic movements took place in the above mentioned former communist states, the threat of spill-over into Russia posed a major challenge to the country's political leadership. Sovereign democracy comes to emphasise the historical particularities of the development of Russia as a strongly centralised nation-state. These specific characteristics of centralisation is argued to lead not only

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[3] Stephen Walt in Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it", *International Organization,* Spring 1992, 46, no.2, p.396.

to development but also to provide socio-political stability and cohesion. Sovereign democracy is argued as a political ideology that is based on "the historical foundation of national statehood - the new democratic order has its origin in European civilization - but in a specific Russian version of civilization".[4]

In this sense, the doctrine of sovereign democracy claims that there is a particular Russian evolution in relation to the democratic process which is specific to Russia although the process itself of democratization has been inspired historically from Europe. The key features of this distinction lie in the fact that for Russia as a society, in order to preserve its territorial and spiritual wholeness, it is essential to maintain a powerful center of sovereignty while the opposite would simply generate chaos, discredit institutions and the structures of democratic authority.[5] The key elements of sovereign democracy are presented it in more detail further on in chapter four in order to identify the ideas that are being uphold serve as the basis for defining the meaning between the increasingly influential far-right in the European Union and the Kremlin - and in the same line of thought, by regarding this dynamic with the use of a Social Constructivist theoretical background, to better understand how political identities and ideas influence interactions within the international system.

In the analysis section the study will focus on the interpretation of the data gathered which will be used to better understand the relations between Russia and the European Union's far right, with a focus on the ideological similarities between the doctrine of sovereign democracy and the manifestos of the far-right parties in EU and the possible implications for the evolution of relations between the Kremlin and the EU and NATO. At the same time, the analysis section also discusses the reasons for which Russia has adopted a nationalist-oriented political doctrine and address the research question of what role the doctrine of sovereign democracy has in the relations between Russia and EU's far-right parties. The analysis focuses both on the relations between the Russian government(or representatives) with each individual far-right party in the EU and on the relations between Russia and multiple parties. Consequently, one individual object of focus is, as an example, the cooperation agreement signed in December 2016 between the far-right Freedom Party of Austria and the ruling party Russia United. Or as a focus on multiple EU far-right parties interaction with Russia, such as the participation of representatives of far-right parties from Italy, Austria and Hungary in the referendum organized by the local government in Crimea in March 2014.

In the conclusion section, the research project presents the results of the study while at the same time evaluating the quality of the conclusion reached and the data used for analysis. Given the fact that the far-right parties have been in decline in the post-WWII period, and some of them only newly formed(such as the case of Germany's AfD) it can be argued that the relations with Russia has provided the European far-right with an opportunity for (re)confirmation and this idea is directly linked to Wendt's conception of socially constructed

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[4] Vladislav Surkov, "Russian Political Culture: The View from Utopia", *Russian Politics & Law,* 2008, 46:5, p.10-26.
[5] Ibid., p.12.

international system: that the meanings in terms of which action is organized arise out of interaction. In the conclusion section the research will also show why Russia has employed a nationalist, state-centralized model of political organization described by the doctrine of sovereign democracy: while such a political structure generates domestic stability in the light of the Colour Revolutions and it justifies a strong, state-centralized administration, in the relation with the EU, the promotion of values that the European far-right identifies with at the same time weakens EU in general and in relation to Russia in particular.

b. Ontological considerations

The following section of the research will reflect upon the key aspects of an academic inquiry which are related to the choice of ontological stances, epistemological considerations and the use of methodology and specific methods employed for collecting and analysing data. It is relevant to underline the importance of elucidating the aspects concerning the use of research methods and considerations on methodology and philosophy of science, as these issues are directly linked to the understanding of the underlying logic of the project.

Before we go any further with the explanation of these issues, it is important to clarify a few overall considerations regarding the methodology used in the study of International Relation(IR). As Christopher Lamont argues, the use of methodology in IR is strongly related to the available opportunities that exist as most of the methods employed are inspired from the broader category of social sciences in general and from political science in particular.[6]
This comes natural, given the fact that the study of International Relations as a discipline has emerged recently - in terms of historical time of course -, in the post-WWI period as an attempt to investigate solutions for the avoidance of war in general. Prior to the development of IR as a distinct discipline of study, the inquiries in what we now call International Relations have been developed in various fields of social sciences such as law, economics, political science or sociology.[7] It is in the light of this emergence of International Relations as a distinct discipline from the fields of social science that Lamont argues that the methodology used in the study of International Relations is inspired from the broader category of social sciences.

Another aspect that is important to be clarified from the very beginning is the distinction between methodology and methods. For the purpose of avoiding confusion it is important to draw the distinction between methodology and methods and how they relate to each other. While methodology is sometimes regarded as an academic 'fancy' term for various methods employed in research, the meaning of methodology goes far beyond the use of certain methods. As Moses and Knutsen argue, methodology refers to the broader question of how one approaches a subject, whereas research methods refer to very specific tools or techniques of manipulating data (both collecting and analysing).[8] In the case of this project in particular, the

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[6] Lamont, *Research Methods in International Relations*, p.13.
[7] Ibid.,p.13.
[8] Jonathon W. Moses and Torbjørn L. Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p.4.

choice of a qualitative approach in studying the relation between the Russian Federation and the European far-right is a distinct aspect of the project as it seeks to achieve a deeper understanding of this phenomena, whereas the choice of document analysis as a primary technique for handling data represents the method employed and it constitutes a separate aspect of the project. In consequence, this study will consider this distinction and use the terminology as such.

Further on, this study will present its stances with regards to the philosophy of science and how does this aspect of the research relates to the question of what role the doctrine of sovereign democracy plays in the relations between Russia and the European far-right.

Citing the political scientist Colin Hay, Harrison and Callan state that the question of ontology logically precedes epistemology which in turn logically precedes methodology.[9] This perspective is plausible and the problem of ontology, epistemology and methodology are strongly connected and interdependent. In this regard for the purpose of addressing the issue of the role played by sovereign democracy in the relations between the Kremlin and the European far-right the project will proceed with clarifying the ontological stance of this research first after which it will present the epistemological considerations and the methodology.

The issue of ontology is of course a very broad problem to investigate and one might think why are these concerns relevant to the study of International Relations and in particular to answering the research question. As Harrison and Callan put it, the question of what we want to know is directly influenced by our position on what there is to know.[10] Ontology presents itself as a highly abstract branch of philosophical inquiry, but broadly speaking, it refers to 'what is' or 'what exists'. More specifically, in the case of this research, the question of social ontology is related to the nature of social entities. There are two main traditions in the philosophy of science with regards to ontology. The first one is objectivism and according to Alan Bryman, "it asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors".[11]

Given the fact that this study seeks to understand what role does a man-made ideological political perspective have in the making of actor's foreign relations the objectivist ontological stance does not present itself as fit for the purpose of the research. This brings us to the other main ontological stance in social science research - constructionism. While objectivism states that social phenomena have an independent existence in relation to social actors, constructionism argues that social phenomena are not only being produced by social actors(interaction) but that they are in constant revision.[12]

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[9] Colin Hay(2002) in Lisa Harrison and Theresa Callan, *Key Research Concepts in Politics and International Relations*, London, Sage, 2013, p. 85.

[10] Harrison and Callan, *Key Research Concepts in Politics and International Relations*, p.80.

[11] Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 4th edition, 2012, p.33.

[12] Ibid., p.33.

c. Epistemological considerations

The inquiry into the field of ontology('what is the world made of') is directly linked to the question of knowledge and how one can gain access to knowledge. Epistemology is what deals with this fundamental question. As mentioned above, the connection between the epistemological stances and ontological ones is deeply rooted as the problem of what knowledge is, cannot be disentangled from the question of what there is to know. And in this perspective, in social science research, epistemology highlights two main traditions. Hollis and Smith describe these two traditions in terms like 'outside' and 'inside' perspectives and traces the emergence of the positivist(or the 'outside') perspective back to the very beginnings of modern science in early 16th century.[13]

The positivist approach(often named empiricist) is modeled on the perspectives and methods of natural science and it is most often associated with the search for causes and explanations. Although the choice of epistemological stance is not positivist, it is relevant to present its main features in order to better understand the background of why positivism does not fit for this project.

As Martin and Hollis note, to define positivism in terms of causation and explanation is rather insufficient as it lacks clarification with regards to what 'cause' is and about the nature of causality.[14] However, this idea of causality is drawn from the approach to research in natural sciences and the main point that is being made is that the social world is governed by laws of nature which apply whenever similar events occur in similar conditions. In the study of IR, positivism states that the discipline should be studied as a social science, in a systemic, replicable, and evidence based manner.[15] Some of the most prominent works of positivist research in the field of IR are by Hans Morgenthau - who claims that International Politics governed by objective laws - and Kenneth Waltz and his super-structured system of international relations both arguing that international politics can be studied as an objective reality that is a world 'out there' and distinct from the researcher.[16]

The emergence of the positivist stance in the research of IR is identified with the emergence of this discipline of study itself. The utopian ideas of the Idealist conception of the international system have been strongly rejected by realists such as E.H. Carr or H. Morgenthau in the very developing stages of IR as a distinct discipline of study and the perceptions about how the world should be have been traded for inquiring the international system as it is.[17] In this regard, as argued by Martin and Hollis, the growth of the discipline has been influenced by

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[13] Martin Hollis & Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations,* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, p.1
[14] Ibid., p.3
[15] Lamont, *Research Methods in International Relations,* p. 19.
[16] For further details on this, Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, and Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.
[17] E.H.Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* offers a very concise critique of the Idealist perspective on world politics.

ideas of science.[18] The positivist approach to researching IR has been also labeled as nomothetic as one of its purposes (reflected also in the methodology employed) is to generate laws about the international system and can be traced back to Francis Bacon and the first stages of scientific induction.[19]

However, given the fact that this project seeks to understand a socially constructed phenomena, the evolution of relations between the European far-right and the Russian Federation, particularly through the prism of the role played by sovereign democracy and the values it upholds, rather than a naturally occurring phenomena, a positivist approach - and consequently an approach similar to the study of natural sciences - doesn not fit the purpose of this project. In this sense, an interpretivist epistemological stance is more appropriate.

This antagonism between positivism and interpretivism goes back to the very beginnings of the philosophical inquiries in ontology and our relation with the 'real world'. While David Hume, laying the foundations of positivism argued that the mind is an empty vessel which acquires knowledge through senses(experience), interpretivists rejected this idea by stating that humans are not *tabula rasa* but rather equipped with basic preconditioning concepts which are being used to harness the flux of senses and perceptions.[20] One might enquire what connection can be found between such a high level of abstractization and social research. Well this idea underlies the very perception of what social world is: while positivists argue that there is a world independent of the researcher, existing on its own, interpretivists argue that there is a plurality of social worlds "that are created through human interaction in society, through history, with ideas, using language."[21] In this line of thought, given the fact that the purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how the relations between Russian Federation and the European far-right are constructed and particularly how the values expressed in sovereign democracy play a role in the developing of these relations, interpretivism represents the more suitable choice.

If the main claim of the positivist approach to the study of social science is that the social world can be studied just as the natural world, interpretivism argues that these two are in fact distinct and that history, society, ideas and language influence the patterns we use to explain and understand social phenomena.[22]

In IR, interpretivism, as argued by Christopher Lamont, seeks is to understand identities, ideas, norms and culture in international politics.[23] For the purpose of addressing the research question of this project, in this sense, even more an interpretivist epistemological stance is more suitable. Martin and Hollis further explain the connection between context, actors' understanding of context and action in the positivist-interpretivist dichotomy: "one task of IR is to find a meaning in actions and events, which may elude all the actors involved. It is

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[18] Martin and Hollis, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*, p.45.
[19] Moses and Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research,* p.10.
[20] Ibid., p.171.
[21] Ibid., p.192.
[22] Ibid., p.165.
[23]Lamont, *Research Methods in International Relations,* p. 37.

not the same sort of task as that of the natural scientist in search of hidden causes because the context of action cannot be divorced from the actors' understanding of the context."[24]

c. Methodology and methods

Now that the ontology and epistemology coordinates of this project have been illustrated, we can move further to the more specific aspects of methodology and research design. As mentioned above, the ontological and epistemological stances precede the methodological aspects of the research project and in consequence, they also affect the choice of methodology that is being employed. Interpretivist approach to research is quite often associated with a qualitative methodological approach as it deals primarily with understanding social phenomena, not necessarily explaining them.[25] As the purpose of this project is to understand the role that the values promoted in sovereign democracy play in the relations between the Kremlin and Europe's far-right, a qualitative approach is preferable.

Qualitative research is generally described as using non-numeric data and as a guiding rule it usually emphasises the relevance of words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data.[26]

The relation between theory and the data used will be deductive. Social Constructivism will serve as a theoretical basis for understanding the relations between Russia and the far-right parties in EU. This is related to what Andrew Bennett calls the 'logic of confirmation'.[27] In terms of research design, the research will be conducted as a case study.

Given that the main features of the ontological and epistemological stances of the project have been displayed, along with the methodological approach, the choice of methods will be further presented.

A literature review has been conducted in order to identify the already existing scholarly works on the topic of Russian foreign policy. This aspect of the research is extremely relevant as it displays the relation of the project with the academic literature, it provides as an informational basis about the topic and it can also lead to identifying gaps that may exist in the research that has already been produced. As the chapter consisting of the literature review in this project shows, the main criticism to the existing literature is the fact that the Russian Federation is portrayed as a "threat" or as an "enemy" and not simply as an actor in the international system. As a consequence, this apparent bias sets limits to the existing literature. The role of the literature review is, however, not simply to list a summary of existing research. As Lamont puts it, a good literature review needs to be both analytical and organizational.[28] As

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[24] Martin and Hollis,*Explaining and Understanding International Relations,* p.70.

[25] Harrison and Callan, *Key Research Concepts in Politics and International Relations*, p.116.

[26] Bryman, *Research Methods*, p.380.

[27] Andrew Bennett in Detlef Sprinz et al, *Models, Numbers, and Cases Methods for Studying International Relations*, Ann Arbor, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 2004, p.29.

[28]Lamont, *Research Methods in International Relations,* p. 65.

the literature review chapter shows, the studies produced on the relations between the European far-right and the Russian Federation have been critically approached and also organized based on the institutions that produced them.

With regards to the data collection, the project is set to handle written documents. The source of data in this sense will be both primary and secondary.

Lamont defines primary source documents as "the original documents, authored by individuals who had direct access to the information that they are describing, or directly experienced a particular event".[29] In terms of primary sources of data, the study will use official documents released by the Russian government(such as official press releases, etc), EU's far-right political parties manifestos or documents provided by international institutions.

As Harrison and Callan argue, the use of documentary analysis technique can be very useful if the researcher lacks the time and resources to create new data and if access is limited.[30] This factor can be regarded both as a strength of using this type of data but also as a weakness: the availability of data has increased in the age of information through research portals, online libraries, instant access to editorials websites and archives as well as academic journals, however, at the same time this method of collecting data can be time-consuming and troublesome.

Empirical data will consist of a variety of sources and mainly written documents. Before going any further, it needs to be mentioned that the use of data is delimited in terms of timeframe. While Russia's relations with Europe has a long history, the focus of this research is on the recent period. The research question is concerned with the role of a recent political doctrine in the relations between Russia and the European far-right. In this regard, the timeframe that this research is collecting data from is 2008-onwards since the doctrine of sovereign democracy was first officially presented by Vladislav Surkov.

One of the categories of data will be media reports that cover the relations between the Russian government and representatives of far-right parties in the European Union. The focus will be on Austria's Freedom Party(FPÖ), Bulgaria's ATAKA, France's National Front(FN), Germany's AfD, Hungary's Jobbik, Italy's Northern League(LN) and UK's British National Party and UKIP as these parties - as shown further in the analysis - have developed extensive relations with the Russian Federation and they represent relevant political forces in the European Union and their respective member countries.

The data to be extracted is consisted of reports of interactions and formal/informal connections between Russian officials and representatives of the EU far-right political spectrum. The most important aspect when using media sources is the impartiality of the report provided. It is difficult to assess the quality of the data in this sense, however a useful criteria for distinguishing between partisan and nonpartisan reports is the reputation of the media trust itself. For this purpose, I will focus on using sources that have an established tradition of impartiality such as the Washington Post, Le Figaro, The Telegraph or New York Times. At the same time, through triangulation of sources the reports will be verified and filtered for acquiring a higher quality data for this project.

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[29] Ibid., p.80.

[30] Harrison and Callan, *Key Research Concepts in Politics and International Relations*, p.116.

One of the main advantages of using this category of sources is availability. The access to a large variety of media reports, including archives has been made available in the age of information through a simple task in search engines. Also, the media reports can be regarded as being available in the sense that they have most of the time a rather accessible language which makes this type of sources easy to use in this regard. However, the availability of data when it comes to media reports represents at the same time a source of weakness. Using this category of data requires a wider investigation and the use of a rather large number of sources in order to extract the data necessary to address the research question. This category of data can be accessible, but definitely time-consuming too.

Another source of empirical data can be obtained by searching relevant scholarly journals(peer-reviewed journals) that have been published on the topic of Russian foreign policy with a focus on the relations with EU's far right parties. The search has been done with the help of databases with access provided by the university library such as Historical Abstract, Jstore, ProQuest or Web of Science and by using keywords and phrases such as 'russian foreign policy', 'russia's foreign affairs', 'EU's far right', 'nationalism' and 'sovereign democracy'. Once established, the results will be filtered on the basis of relevance for the research question in particular and for Russia's relations with EU's far right in general. Similarly to the use of media reports, in the case of peer-reviewed literature, the reliability of the sources is crucial and in this regard the data have be obtained from articles and books published by reputable institutions and have been filter based on the relevance aand the quality of the studies.. However, the reputation of the institution does not guarantee the quality of the studies and it definitely does not necessarily mean that other institutions cannot provide valuable reports. For instance, one of the organizations that have produced several good quality studies on the topic of the relations between the Russian Federation and the European far-right is the Budapest-based research institute Political Capital which does not have the renown of the top research institutes in international affairs. As scholarly basis for the project have been identified studies by Alina Polyakova, Marlene Laruelle, Antonis Klapsis and Anto Shekhovstov.

Research centers in the field of International Relations also served as a basis for obtaining relevant material used for the purpose of addressing the question of Russia-EU's far-right relations. Another source of data are studies from think-tanks in the field of International Relations such as Political Capital and Atlantic Council.

The articles resulted in this search have then been revised on the basis of relevance to Russia's relations EU's far-right and in relation to the research question. This set of documents will serve as secondary data for the research project and it will be used after critically analysed.

In the case of scholarly journals, one the advantage of using such a category of data is the depth that it provides to addressing Russia's relations with the European far-right. Scholarly articles in comparison to media articles have this advantage because they are aimed not only at providing knowledge on the topic, but also to investigate it in more detail in order to identify causal mechanisms in the phenomena investigated. For this reason, scholarly literature can be a useful source of data, however it presents weaknesses too. One of them is the fact that working with this category of data can prove very slow for that the scientific language and concepts that it employs are more intellectually demanding. At the same time, the length of scholarly articles,

although may vary from few pages to few tens of pages, are significantly larger than media reports for instance. In this regard, working with scholarly literature can be a very fertile choice but at the same time it requires more effort and time.

Data has also been procured from official documentation such as political manifestos published by EU's far-right parties in which the analysis will seek to identify the core values and features in relations to the doctrine of sovereign democracy, which include preference for a more state-centered pole of power, idealization of the political leader as a firm ruler and 'effective manager' and anti-globalism. Another source of data has been obtained from press releases or political speeches.

The use of primary data poses a great advantage in comparison to secondary literature in that, by definition, it provides with an unaltered set of information. However, in the same line of thought, the process of decrypting the primary data can prove daunting and the identification of useful information for addressing the research question can sometimes simply be missed.

3. Theoretical perspective - Alexander Wendt's Social Constructivism

The emergence of the Social Constructivist theoretical approach to the study of International Relations comes in the midst of the debate between the major theories that dominated the discipline after its foundation in the early 20th century, realism and liberalism or their later variations, neoliberalism and neorealism.

If at an early stage in the development of International Relations as a distinct discipline of study the central questions that determined the views that theoreticians adopted have been around notions such as the human nature, Wendt argues that the debate over the late 20th century inquiry in the study of International Relations orbits around concepts like structure or process and institutions rather than the causality of human nature on state action.[31] In fact, the whole argumentation that Wendt presents in "Anarchy is What States Make of It" revolves around the relation between anarchy as a feature of the international system and the self-help behavior of states as a consequence of anarchy as a defining element of the international system.

Wendt goes to argue that both major theoretical perspectives in IR at the end of the Cold War, neoliberalism and neorealism "share a commitment to rationalism" which in Wendt's view this "offers a fundamentally behavioral conception of both process and institutions: they change behavior but not identities and interests."[32] This brings us to one of the core elements that this theory focuses on and which underlines its usefulness for the research of the relations between the Russian Federation and the European far-right: the relevance of identity and interests in shaping state action.

The fact that Neorealism argues that the structure of the international system generates a direct effect on the behavior of the states[33], that is anarchy leads to self-help state action is what puzzles Alexander Wendt and this is due to the fact that in these terms, state action is driven simply by the logic of self-help through "simple learning and behavioral adaptation" whereas the relevance of complex learning in redefining identity and interests is no longer possible.[34] Wendt goes to explain that the power politics and self-help do not necessarily follow the logic expressed by Neorealists and that anarchy does not have causal effects on state action and it is rather the process than the structure that lead the international system to a self-help phase.[35]

As mentioned above, Social Constructivism comes as a critique to the existing major theoretical approaches to the study of International Relations. The main point of focus in

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[31] Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It", p.391.
[32] Ibid., pp. 391-392
[33] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Boston, Addison Wesley, 1979.
[34] Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It", p.392.
[35] Ibid., p. 394.

Wendt's critique refers to self-help and power politics as "necessary features of world politics"[36] under anarchy, an idea that Waltz argued in *Theory of International Politics.* Instead Wendt goes to argue that self-help is rather an institution - that is a stable set of identities and interests - than a consequence that the anarchic structure of the international system has on state action.[37]

Neorealism, also known as Structural Realism and given its latter name, emphasises on the role that the international system's structure have on the behavior of states. However, as Wendt argues, the definition of the structure of the international system that Waltz presents in *Theory of International Politics* in terms of ordering principles, principles of differentiation and the distribution of capabilities does not predict much about the behavior of states.[38] In fact, Wendt, citing one of Waltz' revisionists, Stephen Walt, that it is the balance of threats rather than the balance of power that influences the action of states. This means, in Wendt's perspective of world politics that in the absence of the structure of identities and interests, Waltz' definition of the structure of the international system "cannot predict the dynamics of anarchy".[39] It is again the particular element of Constructivism that stands out in relation to the rationalist theories of IR: the importance of state identity and interest.

This perspective on the international system is in stark contrast with the previous tradition in studying International Relations. As John Mearsheimer argues, "realists believe that state behavior is largely shaped by the material structure of the international system" and that in fact the "distribution of material capabilities among states is the key factor for understanding world politics."[40]

One of the main principles of Social Constructivism relates to the fact that action is determined on the basis of the meaning that the other has to one's self and in this sense Wendt provides an illustrative example in the attempt to underline the limitations of anarchy in explaining state behavior: United States military power has a completely different meaning, therefore a different significance which translates into action for Canada or for Cuba, just as British missiles had a different significance for the Soviet Union than for the US. This is to emphasise the fact that although anarchy and distribution of power do play a role in shaping state action, it is the "intersubjective understandings and expectations on the *distribution of knowledge*" that define the self and the other and hence affect the state behavior.[41]

The role of identity and interests plays therefore a key role in the Constructivist theoretical approach to IR. In Wendt's perception, identity is seen as roles that the states acquire which are seen as relatively stable understandings and expectations about self and which in turn form the basis for interests.

The relation between identity and interest is well explained in Ted Hopf's *Social Construction of International Relations* where he argues that "interests should be derivable from identity in

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[36] Ibid., p.395.

[37] Ibid., p.399.

[38] Ibid., p.396.

[39] Ibid., p.396.

[40] John Mearsheimer, "A realist reply", *International Security*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, summer 1995, 20, no.1, p.91.

[41] Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It", p.397.

the sense that an individual's identity implies his interests."[42]

This perception of identity-interests relation and the importance of roles is highlighted by Wendt in an illustration that dates back to the period when the article has been written: in the absence of roles, argues Wendt, defining interests becomes more difficult and that was the case of the United States and post-Cold War Russia. In Wendt's perspective, "without the Cold War's mutual attributions of threat and hostility to define their identities, these states seem unsure of what their "interests" should be."[43] This idea is also underlined in Jackson and Sørensen who argue that the "international system is not something 'out there' like the solar system" as it has no existence outside of "intersubjective awareness among people" as the system is seen to be the result of human interaction, not in materialistic terms as Neorealism would claim.[44]

Since self-help is perceived as an institution of anarchy rather than a consequence of the structure of the international system, Wendt argues that Waltz' definition of the international system structure in three elements(ordering principle, principles of differentiation and distribution of capabilities) lacks a fourth dimension and that is the intersubjectively constituted structure of identities and interests in the system.[45]

This new element that Wendt proposes for understanding the structure of the international system draws implications that refer to the timing of the interaction between actors. He goes to argue that the interaction is a defining moment in establishing identity and interests. In fact, Wendt argues that in the absence of interaction the conceptions of self and other cannot be determined just as if "in the virtue of anarchy we assume that the state of nature necessarily face a stag hunt or a security dilemma."[46]

The meaning that states have of one another is described above as having a key role in the shaping of interests and identities and therefore in the action of actors in the international system. This perception varies greatly in relation to Waltz' view that it is in fact the anarchic structure of the international system that reflects the causal element driving state action. And in this regard the question arises: how does the meaning that states have of one another come about? Wendt's explanation of this is to underline the second principle of Social Constructivism and that is meaning being a result of interaction and that anarchy plays only a permissive role instead of being the primary cause that generate state action.[47]

The illustration presented by Wendt in order to better understand this principle is regarding two actors, ego and alter which had not had any history of interaction prior to the moment described. Realists would argue that each of the actors should consider worst-case scenarios - an idea that relates to what Neorealism described as a consequence of anarchic structure of the international system. However, Wendt argues that ego's gesture/action represents the basis on which it is to respond to alter, but for alter ego's gesture needs to be inferred in order to understand ego's intentions and this deduction depends, as Wendt argues on the meaning that

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[42] Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics,* Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2002, p.16.
[43] Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It", p.399.
[44] Robert Jackson, Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 209.
[45] Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It", p. 401.
[46] Ibid., p.401.
[47] Ibid., p.403.

alter would have by performing such a gesture itself. This illustration underlines that social threats are constructed, not emerging naturally.[48]

Furthermore, Social Constructivism argues that the relation between predation on one hand - that is a predisposition for various reasons that certain states have towards the practice of aggression - and a self-help international system is described in terms of causality, but as a consequence of "what states *do*" in anarchy, even if the source of predation is completely exogenous to the system.[49] For Neorealism, the self-help characteristic of state behavior is a given feature that the system has due to the emphasis that neorealists put on the causal relation between structure and state behavior. It is precisely this aspect that Social Constructivism challenges, the very fact that the structure of the international system, although anarchic does not necessarily imply a self-help type of behavior, as self-help is rather simply one of the options that the states can adopt themselves through the type of interaction that they employ towards one another based on the reciprocal meanings that they have according to their identity and interests. This distinction between what Neorealism argues as a given feature of the international system - self-help behavior as a consequence of the anarchic structure - and the Social Constructivist claim that the state action is rather driven by the identity that states have which generate their interests and further on the meanings of one another through interaction is underlined by Wendt by referencing to the concept of reification which is defined by citing Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann as "the apprehension of the products of human activity *as if* they were something else than human products - such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer and his products is lost to consciousness. The reified world is . . . experienced by man as a strange facticity, an *opus alienum* over which he has no control rather than as the *opus proprium* of his own productive activity."[50] In a nutshell this is what Social Constructivism is all about and the whole reasoning behind Wendt's formula of *anarchy is what states make of it*, the idea that actors within the international system are authors of their own actions based on their identity and their interests which naturally change and evolve as the process of interaction is being developed and new dynamics take place and become more relevant to the actors' interests, reshaping them in this sense.

Wendt then goes to analyse three instances where the self-help international system can be avoided through institutional transformation of identity and interests.

The first case is that of the institution of sovereignty. In Wendt's perspective, sovereignty is defined as the result of intersubjective understandings of one another, as an institution, as "there is no sovereignty without the other" but rather an "ongoing accomplishment of practice, not a once-and-for-all creation of norms that somehow exist apart from practice."[51] In this case it is central to Wendt's argumentation on the concept of

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[48] Ibid., pp.404-405.
[49] Ibid., p.409.
[50] Ibid., p.410.
[51] Ibid., p.412.

sovereignty the practice, the process of interaction between actors that draw on the principles that consist the institution of sovereignty.

The second case analysed by Wendt is that of cooperation among egoist states and the transformation of interests. Again, in the case of cooperation the focus of the Social Constructivist analysis is on how "expectations produced by behavior affect identities and interests". According to Wendt, the key element in the achievement of cooperation is the fact that the creation of norms and institutions is not simply the imposition of external constraints on the states' action but rather as having the role of incentivising the states to acquire new identities through the internalization of new understandings of self and other.[52] The distinction between Wendt's perspective on the achievement of cooperation within the international system comes as a direct opposition to the main theoretical approaches to International Relations: neoliberalism and neorealism. The cooperation in the perspective of these traditional theoretical perspectives is that it can be achieved in the context of an anarchic international system between egoist actors while the identity of the actors appears to have little relevance. As Brown and Ainley argue, "norms promoting cooperation will have no purchase on what is essentially a process of ends-means calculation.'[53]

In this sense, the Social Constructivist theory comes to emphasise a different aspect of reaching cooperation between states, in that the norms developed do in fact play a major role in establishing relations between actors.

The third instance in which Wendt explains the institutional transformation of identity and interests is the case of shifting from a competitive security system to a cooperative one. In this case, Wendt argues on the case of the end of the Cold War and the ideological changes that occurred within the Soviet Union in its last years. First of all Wendt argues that the step necessary for the transformation of identity and interests is the "breakdown of consensus about identity commitments."[54]

It is interesting to mention here that the relevance of norms in influencing action has been perceived differently by Ted Hopf as he considers that it is rather the habit - that is the "unthinking, unintentional, automatic" - rather than the norm that lead to the "reproduction of self and other through a collection of discursive practices that relies neither on the need for the denial and suppression of the other nor on the conscious selection of behavior based on a particular norm."[55] In this line of thought the shift from previous identity commitments that Wendt argues for can be considered unlikely to happen due to the hesitancy of states to give up on previous habits.

In the second stage of competitive-cooperative transformation Wendt argues for a "denaturalization" which in fact aims at "identifying new possible selves and aspirations."[56]

For the third step Wendt talks about the technique which he calls "altercasting'. The problem of redefining one's identity and interests needs to be accompanied by a mirror change in the

[52] Ibid., p.417.
[53] Chris Brown and Kirsten Ainley, *Understanding International Relations,* London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.69.
[54] Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It", p.420.
[55] Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics*, p.11.
[56] Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It", p.420.

perspective of the other actors as one's identity and interests have been influenced as mentioned above by the interaction between actors. In this sense, the change of identity and interests of others becomes as important as the change of the self. And altercasting is what Wendt describes as "technique of interactor control in which ego uses tactics of self-presentation and stage management in an attempt to frame alter's definitions of social situations in ways that create the role which ego desires alter to play. In effect, in altercasting ego tries to induce alter to take on a new identity . . . as if it already had that identity."[57]

The last step in achieving a transformative process from a competitive system to a cooperative one is the presence of "reward" on the part of alter which in turn motivates ego to employ further on similar practices which eventually institutionalize positive perceptions of self and other in terms of security.[58]

One of the points of critique to Social Constructivism is highlighted by Jackson and Sørensen and it relates to the element of uncertainty which according to them is disregarded by Social Constructivism. And the main idea in relation to the uncertainty of the anarchic international structure is that Wendt is criticised for he "downplays the fact that states have difficulties in obtaining trustworthy information about the motives and intentions of other states".[59]

In this line of thought, Social Constructivism works as a theory in a rather "ideal-type" of international system, a system in which actors do not practice unjust policies towards one another and apart from being honest in their actions, they also explain to the deepest meaning their intentions and interests. The role of ideas in shaping state identity and interests is justifiably supported by Social Constructivism, however, the transparency and fluidity of the interactions between actors in this regard can be regarded as uncertain in the international system. As Paul Kowert argues, a "further problem is that Wendt associates social constructivism with the most internalized, most ideational forms of international structure."[60]

Another element that can be criticised in Wendt's theoretical perspective on the study of International Relations is related to the process of transforming a competitive system to a cooperative one. As noted above, Wendt identifies several steps as necessary in achieving this transformative process one of them being the "rewarding" of ego by alter which in response leads to motivating ego and eventually consolidating institutions. In this sense, one of the risks that can jeopardize this process is the element of deception which can increase the issue of uncertainty.[61]

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[57] Ibid., p.421.

[58] Ibid., p.422.

[59] Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations Theory,* p.173.

[60] Paul Kowert, "The Peril and Promise of Constructivist Theory", *Ritsumeikan Journal of International Studies*, 13, no. 3 March 2001, p. 161.

[61] Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations Theory,* p.173.

4. Vladislav Surkov's Sovereign Democracy

In an interview with the American magazine The Atlantic in 2014, Vladislav Surkov explained that "[his] portfolio at the Kremlin and in government has included ideology, media, political parties, religion, modernization, innovation, foreign relations, and ..." after a pause went on to add "modern art".[62] This evasive appearance that Surkov displays here is reflected in many instances which grants him a mysterious air among the high officials in the Kremlin.

Vladislav Surkov served has had various functions in the Russian government, having served as a deputy head of the presidential administration, deputy prime-minister and assistant to the president on foreign affairs. When he was asked on his opinion on the travel ban contained in the set of sanctions that the the EU and the US have applied as a result of the Russian annexation of Crimea, he replied: "I see the decision by the administration in Washington as an acknowledgment of my service to Russia. It's a big honor for me. I don't have accounts abroad. The only things that interest me in the U.S. are Tupac Shakur, Allen Ginsberg, and Jackson Pollock. I don't need a visa to access their work. I lose nothing."[63]
However, the personality of Vladislav Surkov is not of main interest to this study, but rather his role in establishing key elements of the Russian system of governing during the mandates of Vladimir Putin.

In an article entitled "Russian Political Culture: A view from Utopia" dated back to the end of President Putin's second term in office, Vladislav Surkov described in 2008 why the political culture of Russia ultimately requires the country to follow a distinct model of democracy in relation to the democratic practice of the West.

As mentioned earlier, it can be difficult to argue that the Russian Federation has explicitly adopted a political ideology in the post-Cold War period and whether or not terminology such as 'putinism' or 'sovereign democracy' can be regarded in this line of thought, as clearly defined ideologies is a topic that is open to debate. Surkov has even acknowledged in his "View from Utopia" that "[his] discourse will be unscientific" and in places, even, anti scientific in character".[64] It is therefore not the way the Russian government and political elite are self-perceived as having an ideology that is of interest to this study. Instead, what is relevant is to understand the very key elements that can be identified as the

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[62] Peter Pomerantsev, "The Hidden Author of Putinism", *The Atlantic,* November 7, 2014,
https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/11/hidden-author-putinism-russia-vladislav-surkov/382489/.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Surkov, "Russian Political Culture: The View from Utopia", p.10.

values which define the current Russian political practice in relation to the European far-right and which are described in Surkov's ideas on sovereign democracy.

Sovereign democracy comes at a time - year of 2008 - when the Russian political elite has arguably been threatened by the wave of pro-democracy social movements that have developed in Russia's neighbouring countries and former satellite states in the Cold-War period. These pro-democratization movements known as 'the Colour Revolutions' have taken place in Georgia in 2003 - the Rose Revolution -, in Ukraine in 2004 - the Orange Revolution - and in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 - the Tulip Revolution. In this regard the concept of sovereign democracy comes at a time of political instability in the region which can be argued that implied consequences for the Russian political leadership as well. As Surkov put's it, ""For twenty years we have witnessed and taken part in a troubled and impressive transformation of the Russian world."[65]

The concept of sovereign democracy comes in this regard as a reaction towards attempts or any possible attempts at influencing the development of the Russian Federation by the West towards a western-style of democracy. As Francis Fukuyama explains, cited by Dmitri Orlov, when referring to the concept of sovereign democracy, that the "positive meaning contained in it is that Russia will seek its own path to democratic change."[66]

Vladislav Surkov expressed the same opinion as Fukuyama, in that he argued that the "new building of Russian democracy is constructed on the historical foundation of national statehood." and even expressed the idea that the Russian path towards democracy is "predetermined by the fundamental categories and matrix structures of our history, national self-consciousness, and culture."[67]

It is important therefore to acknowledge the fact that Surkov perceives the development of the Russian democratic practice as being based on the ideas and values that consist the national statehood. And although, as he argues, "democratic order has its origins in the European civilization" it is the specific of the Russian civilization that should determine the path that Russia should take towards democratization.[68]

Another element that defines the context in which the doctrine of sovereign democracy has been developed is the instability and chaos that characterized the Russian society and political establishment shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[69] Also it is important to note here that prior to the democratization that resulted after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has never experienced any form of democratic government.

It is in this context that the doctrine of sovereign democracy is proposed by Vladislav Surkov in Russia, as an affront to the attempts allegedly by the West to drive regime change in former-Soviet satellite states and after a period of significant social and political instability.

As a note of critique to the text presented by Surkov, "Russian Political Culture", it is worth mentioning an argument. Despite the fact that the article underlines some of the key

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[65] Ibid., p.10.
[66] Dmitri Orlov, "The New Russian Age and Sovereign Democracy", *Russian Politics and Law,* 2008, 46 no.5, p. 72.
[67] Surkov, "Russian Political Culture", p. 11.
[68] Ibid., p.11.
[69] Peter Pomerantsev, "The Hidden Author of Putinism".

elements that describe the Russian political practice particularly after President Putin's third term - values that as will be further shown have become extensively appealing to the European far-right in recent years - in many cases it makes use of non-specific language and formulas and ideas such as: "democracy - like everywhere in some regards, unique in others, just like any other democracy in the world." or "political culture is one of the manifestations of culture".[70]

One of the main claims that the doctrine of sovereign democracy proposes is the stability that it provides through the centralization of political power. This is of course the referred to as the case of the Russian nation, both historically and in the present context.
As Surkov puts it, "through the centuries a strong central state gathered, consolidated, and developed an enormous country, stretching broadly over space and time. It conducted all significant reforms."[71]

It is therefore the centralization of power in fact the reason why the Russian people through its political leadership have managed to produce a stabilized society in which it was created the possibility for economic growth to take place and for the securitization of the society. Furthermore, Surkov goes to explain that in the absence of a centralized pole of governance, leads to the "disturbance of this balance or incautious and untimely decentralization [which] will always weaken Russian democracy, generating chaos and degrading social institutions and the structures of democratic authority."[72]

The centralization of political power is illustrated by Surkov through the citation of the results of a poll that was conducted in May 2008 by the Public Opinion Foundation according to which the center of the political power has been regarded by the respondents as the most trustworthy among different levels of government in Russia. In this sense, the President of the Russian Federation received the trust of 55 percent of the respondents, while merely 20 percent have confidence in the leaders of the oblast, krai or republic and merely 8 percent trust the local political leader - such as mayors. In this line of thought, as Surkov puts it, "the higher and more remote an authority, the more it is trusted."[73]

The idea that a central pole of political power is entrusted by the people along with the idea that the centralization brings stability in the country is underlined also by what Pomerantsev identified as a "mantra of the era" in Russia: the formula of "effective manager" when referring to the political leader which "means that The president is the president of "stability," the antithesis to the era of "confusion and twilight" in the 1990s."[74]

This brings us to the second most relevant element of sovereign democracy and the current political practice in the Russian Federation: the perception of the leader. This element which as shown further on in this project is one of the features of Russian politics that have been underlined on many occasions by the European far-right as a model to be followed referred to what Surkov identifies as an inherent feature of the Russian political culture: the

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[70] Surkov, " Russian Political Culture", p. 11.
[71] Ibid., p.12.
[72] Ibid., p.13.
[73] Ibid., p.14.
[74] Pomerantsev, "The Hidden Author of Putinism".

idealization of leaders. As Surkov argues, in the Russian political culture, "the individual personality is an institution—by no means the sole institution but a very important one."[75]
And among the possible explanations for this characteristic of the political culture in Russia, Surkov argues that "a high and remote authority is easily mythologized, idealized, personified, and incorporated into a monocentric model of political space."[76]

The criticism that has been oriented towards the Russian political practice in the post-Cold War period is seen as a threat to the sovereignty of the state. Citing Iver Newmann, Surkov argues that "[w]hatever social practices may have acquired importance at one time or or another (religious, bodily, intellectual, social, military, political, economic, or any other kind [I would add—democratic—V.S.]), Russia is invariably regarded [by the West] as an anomaly. [...] Inasmuch as exclusion is an essential component of integration, . . . the temptation arises to emphasize the differentness of Russia for the sake of integration of the European identity."[77]

In this line of thought, Surkov argues that the "idea that the current unprecedented pressure on Russia is due to the defects of our democracy is nonsense, stupidity. It makes much more sense to discern behind these complaints another motive and goal—to wrest control over Russia's natural resources by weakening its state institutions, defense capability, and independence."[78] It is highly important to note here the positioning that Surkov underlines on Russia's part when it comes to the relation with the West and the Western-style democracy: the inference in Russia's path towards democracy is regarded not simply as a "stupidity" but rather as a menace that is aimed at undermining the sovereignty of the Russian Federation.

In Surkov's perspective, the sovereign democracy model is suitable for the Russian political culture for several reasons and among them are the fact that - as noted above -, "it justifies centralization, concentration of the nation's material, intellectual, and power resources for the purposes of self-preservation and successful development of each citizen in Russia and of Russia in the world."[79] Furthermore, the firm rule displayed by the Russian political leadership during the administration of President Putin is seen as a necessary manner of conducting politics as the "loosening of the political structure will enable it to develop not in leaps and bounds, as in the past, but by means—if I may put it this way—of topological changes, that is, without breaks and losses that would damage the wholeness of Russia as a nation."[80] The notion of 'effective manager' is once again described here as the means of achieving stability and development, an element of Russian politics that - as argued further - is one of the most attractive features that the European far-right appreciates in the practice of the Kremlin.

Another reason why Surkov considers sovereign democracy to be a model that best suits the Russian political culture is related to the perspective that has been displayed in the post-Soviet Russia with regards to the global order. As the analysis of this project shows further on, the European far-right not only shares the perspective described in sovereign democracy,

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[75] Surkov, "Russian Political Culture", p. 13.
[76] Ibid., p.15.
[77] Ibid., p.19.
[78] Ibid., p.19.
[79] Ibid., p.21.
[80] Ibid., p.21.

but also regards the Russian Federation as a source of support for promoting such an approach to world affairs. Most concisely, this view is described by Surkov when he argues that "" there are radical dreamers who say that nations themselves will no longer exist. There will be total globalization. Perhaps they are right, but personally I am not interested in a future from which everything Russian has disappeared. A future without Russia is not worth talking about. As a compromise, let us dream of a global federation based on treaties among free nations."[81]

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[81] Ibid.,p.22.

5. Literature Review

The literature that has been produced on the topic that this project is focused on has been limited due to some factors. First of all it is relevant to understand the context of the relations between the Russian Federation and the European far-right. Of course, the project focuses on the relations between Russia and Europe's far-right in the post-Cold War period which spans over the course of roughly two and a half decades which can arguably perceived as a rather short period in terms of historical standards. However the relation between the European far-right and the Russian Federation has been developed on an even shorter period of time from two perspectives: the emergence - or in some cases as the National Front re-emergence - of the far-right in Europe and the degradation of relations between the European political establishment and Russia following the crisis in Georgia, Syria and Ukraine.

The amount and depth of research that has been conducted on the subject of the relations between Russia and the European far-right is therefore directly affected by these dynamics. In this sense, parties such as Hungary's Jobbik and Bulgaria's Ataka founded in mid-2000s or the German AfD founded in 2013 have had a short period of time relative to the other established European parties to become relevant political powers at the national level and to develop relations with the Russian Federation. It is interesting to note however that in spite of these limitations, the literature covering the relations between the Russian Federation and Europe's far-right does present extensive pieces of research, albeit few.

One of the most active centers of research that have been identified to have produced studies on the relations between Russia and Europe's far-right is the Budapest-based research institute Political Capital.

The studies that have been developed by Political Capital on this study's topic have been fairly numerous given the amount of research that has been produced overall. The focus of the studies that Political Capital has been both on the individual relations between various European far-right parties and the Russian Federation and also on joint projects that aimed at investigating the relations between the Kremlin and Europe's far-right in a broader perspective. For instance, a very comprehensive study that covers the specific contacts between Moscow and Hungary's far-right is the 2015 study "I am Eurasian"[82] which has been co-authored by multiple analysts at the Budapest research institute, namely Attila Juhász, Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó and András Dezső. Although this particular study does offer an extensive account on how the contacts between the Russian Federation officials or representatives and Hungary's far-right counterparts have been conducted in recent years, it offers little interpretation and contextualization of these interactions. Nonetheless, for the investigation of the relations between Hungary's far-right and the Kremlin, this study offers a valuable report.

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[82] Attila Juhász, Lóránt Győri, Péter Krekó and András Dezső, "I am Eurasian. Kremlin's Connections to the Hungarian far-right", Political Capital, March 2015.

In a similar fashion, a more recent study produced by the research institute Political Capital is focused on the relations between the Austrian far-right and its relations with the Russian Federation. "[T]he result of a collaborative project between Political Capital Institute, DÖW and investigative journalist Fabian Schmid"[83], the study entitled "Russian Connections of the Austrian Far-Right". This study is also focused on establishing the contacts between the Kremlin's officials and the Austrian far-right and it is - similarly to the previously mentioned study - focused on the "Russian influence through power"[84] in the relation to Austria's far-right.

Another comprehensive study published by the Political Capital Institute is the one edited by French historian Marlene Laruelle entitled "From Paris To Vladivostok"[85] and which investigates the contacts established between Moscow and the French far-right. Naturally, the study edited by Laruelle has a more historical structure and it presents on one side the relation between France and the Russian Federation with regards to the diplomatic or economic ties, but it also focuses on issues such as the geopolitical implications of France in relation to Russia and the perception of Russia by the French people. When it comes to what the other studies by the Political Capital Institute entitled "Russian influence through power", Laruelle's study analyzes too the impact of the Kremlin on the French far-right, but again from a historical perspective, as well as in the years following the revitalization of the French National Front after the accession to the far-right party's leadership of Marine Le Pen.

Marlene Laruelle has edited another volume entitled "Eurasianism and the European Far Right". This vast study which comprises of several articles developed by researchers in th efield such as Anton Shekhovtsov, Jean-Yves Camus or Nicolas Lebourg focuses mostly on the world-views of Alexander Dughin and its implications in the relations between the Kremlin and the European far-right. This volume represents an excellent source of knowledge concerning the philosophical basis on which the current political practice in Russia is presumably fundamented on.

Anton Shekhovtsov has also been one of the researchers that have inquired into the topic of the Russian relations with the European far-right. He has written a volume entitled "Russia and the Western Far Right - Tango Noir" and also has published multiple articles such as "Conventional bedfellows: The Russian Propaganda Machine and the Western Far Right", "Moscow and the Far Right in France and Austria" or "Russian Model Helps Extreme Right to Become Mainstream" in which he analyses the evolution of relations between the Kremlin and the European far-right.

Another source of research projects developed on the topic of the relations between Moscow and Europe's far-right is the Atlantic Council - an American think-tank. Most notably, researcher Alina Polyakova has edited two very comprehensive studies entitled "The Kremlin's Trojan Horses" which deal with, in one of them, the Russian influence in Greece, Italy, and Spain and another one with the Russian influence in France, Germany, and the United

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[83] Bernhard Weidinger, Fabian Schmid and Péter Krekó, "Russian Connections of the Austrian Far-Right", Political Capital, April 2017.

[84] Ibid, p. 7.

[85] Marlene Laruelle et al,, "From Paris to Vladivostok. The Kremlin connections of the French far-right", Political Capital, December 2015.

Kingdom. Each of these cases are developed individually in that the Russian Federation's relations with France for instance is treated separately and by a different author, in this case being the above mentioned French historian Marlene Laruelle.

These two studies offer very interesting insights concerning the relations between Russia and Europe's far-right which as shown further on in the analysis section have been of great help for the purpose of understanding various elements of the different relations of the Russian Federation with the European far-right.

Alina Polyakova has produced another good study on the topic and also published by the Atlantic Council, an article entitled "Putinism and the European Far Right" which focuses primarily on the Euroscepticism displayed by the European far-right which in her opinion represents a direct link to Russian government and its anti-Westernism. Also, another article published by Polyakova in the World Affairs magazine in the issue September/October 2014 entitled "Strange Bedfellows: Putin and Europe's Far Right" it argues for a similar hypothesis.

The Wilfried Martens Center for European Studies has also published an excellent study developed by Antonis Klapsis entitled "An Unholy Alliance. The European Far-Right and Putin's Russia" - referencing the Holy Alliance of 1815 - and it analyses the relations between the Russian Federation and the European far-right both from an ideological perspective and from a strategic point of view.

The European Council on Foreign Relations has also published studies on the topic of this project, one of them being written by Mark Galeotti, entitled "Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages its Political War in Europe" which focuses on the "active measures"[86] that the Russian Federation is employing as soft power in the relations with its European counterparts. Gustav Gressel from the same institution has written a study entitled "Fellow Travellers: Russia, Anti-Westernism, and Europe's Political Parties" which is aimed at understanding the relations between the Russian Federation and European political parties while trying to demonstrate that the far-right European parties are more inclined towards cooperation with the Kremlin.

Most of these studies have proposed interesting ideas about the relations between Moscow and Europe's political leadership, particularly the far-right. It is very important to note, however, that the rhetoric adopted in the development of these studies has presented explicit bias towards the current European political establishment and against the Russian Federation. This is not of me to say that the Russian Federation should instead be promoted in the scholarly literature on the topic of Kremlin's relations with Europe's far-right. From an academic inquiry point of view, the bias should by no means be present or at least be highly avoided. For Polyakova and Shekhovtsov for instance, the Russian Federation is always regarded a threat and while that may be a valid assumption, it is important to maintain a neutral positioning towards the issue studied so as it does not lead astray the researcher and more importantly the reader. Nonetheless, regarded in this light and being aware of the limitations of these studies, the contributions made to the research topic are of great value.

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[86] Mark Galeotti, "Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages its Political War in Europe", European Council on Foreign Relations, August 2017, p. 5.

6. Analysis section

a. Background

The relations between the Russian government and the European far-right have developed in recent years both in terms of the frequency of the contacts established between the two parties and the complexity of the levels of interactions. The reference here to a unitary configuration of the far-right political actors within the European Union is not accidental for as this analysis will show further, in the years following the financial crisis there have been tendencies to integrate the far-right in a politically traditional manner - such as the formation of a distinct group within the European Parliament - and through various cultural and academic events and conferences with a less formal association focus that will be further detailed in this project.

As Alexander Wendt's Social Constructivism argues, the role of identity is crucial to the development of the relationship between actors in the international system and the relation between the European far-right and Russia highlights this fact whether the focus is on the political identity or the cultural and religious aspects.

Although Russia has not officially claimed any ideological stance in the post-Cold War era such as the case of the Bush administration's neoconservative doctrine of spreading a liberal-type of democracy in the international system, the historical tradition of Moscow being the "third-Rome" has re-emerged under the administration of Vladimir Putin in that the conservative values of christianity and family based on male-female couples that are argued to have laid the foundation of the European culture are promoted in contrast to Western Europe's "decaying" society. At the same time, this analysis will look at the advocacy for notions such as nationalism, state sovereignty, the cult of the strong leader and anti-globalism - notions that have been proposed by Surkov's doctrine of sovereign democracy - which represent another segment of rapprochement between the Russia and the European far-right and that in fact, based on this appeal by the Russian government to the traditional cultural and religious heritage and a nation-state oriented political approach, the far-right identifies in Russia a model to be followed.

The relations between Russia and Europe in the post-Cold War period have been challenging to say the least. In the period following the financial and economic crisis started in

2008 which generated a mistrust in the capitalist model of economic practice, it can be argued that the Kremlin identified an opportunity to develop its influence in Europe.[87]

The global tendency towards democratization has increased in the last few decades. According to a study by Freedom House in 2015 the number of democracies worldwide has increased from 40 percent in the 1980s to 60 percent in mid 2010s, however, the increase of democratic regimes has been followed by an increase of populism and extremism in the post 2008 financial crisis.[88]

The development of an ideological relationship between Europe's far-right and the Kremlin is directly linked to the very meaning of the integration process which is the European Union. The Schengen zone of free travel which is considered to be one of the major achievements in terms of European integration along with the common monetary policy or the Eurozone, comes under threat by the new wave of nationalism, a nationalism that is in line with the Russian perspective detailed in the doctrine of sovereign democracy and which is aimed at reversing the process of what the far-right calls 'the Islamisation' of Europe.

In this sense, the EU is argued to have become a threat to national sovereignty, a key element of the doctrine of sovereign democracy, and in most cases, migration and non-European Muslim migrants in particular are being perceived as the reason for the endanger of national values.[89]

Similarly, as the former Foreign Minister of Poland, Radoslaw Sikorski argued, what the West sees as an opportunity for prosperous coexistence is seen in Russia as a threat to its geopolitical agenda and regime survival.[90]

In this sense, the European far-right's approach is similar to Russia's position and opinion on the EU as according to a survey from 2015, 60 percent of Russians have an unfavorable view of the EU while 80 percent of the Russians have a similar stance towards NATO.[91]

In the following part we will look at the relations between the Russian Federation and the major far-right parties in the European Union, namely Austria's Freedom Party, Bulgaria's ATAKA, France's National Front, Germany's Alternative for Deutschland, Hungary's Jobbik, Italy's Northern League and UK's British National Front and UKIP.

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[87] Polyakova, Alina et.al. *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses - Russian Influence in France, Germany and the United Kingdom,* Washington D.C., Atlantic Council, 2016, p.5.

[88] Puddington, Arch. *Discarding Democracy: Return to the Iron Fist,* Washington D.C., Freedom House, 2015, p.4.

[89] Polyakova, Alina, *Putinism and the European Far Right,* Washington D.C., Atlantic Council, 2015, p.3.

[90] Sikorski, Radosław in Polyakova et al, *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses,* p. 2.

[91] Jacob Poushter, Katie Simmons, and Bruce Stokes, *Russian Public Opinion: Putin Praised, West Panned*, Pew Research Center, 2015

b. Austria's Freedom Party

In the case of Austria's FPÖ(Freedom Party of Austria), the contacts between the far-right party and Russia have been among most prominent in the European political elite. Similarly to most of the European far-right parties analysed, the Freedom Party of Austria has perceived Russia in relation to concepts like state-sovereignty and nationalism, anti-globalism and concerning the cult of the strong leader - or as explained earlier in the formula of "effective manager".

The perception of the current political establishment in the European Union and the Transatlantic partnership is regarded by the Freedom Party of Austria - as in the case of the following mentioned European far-right parties - as a threat to Austria's sovereignty. Although it is worth mentioning that the fact that Austria is not a member of NATO presents a particularity in the rhetoric of the far-right party FPÖ.

In this sense, the Russian Federation comes as an alternative to support Austria's claim for independency from the current Euro-Atlantic political configuration. The Freedom Party of Austria's Chairman and member of the Austrian Parliament, Heinz-Christian Strache has argued that "instead of playing the stooge of the US in the encirclement of Russia, Brussels must finally be able to build positive relations with Moscow and show understanding of Russian interests."[92] In a similar fashion, the prominent Freedom Party of Austria politician Johann Gudenus argued that Europe needs to develop a partnership with Russia more than it needs to do so with the United States. This rationale is argued on a basis similar to the perception of other European far-right parties in that Russia, after its recovery in the post-Cold War period can pose as a strong competitor to the US which has created a "massive geopolitical upheaval."[93]

This positioning of Austria's Freedom party towards Russia underlines the idea that Social Constructivism argues for in that the meaning that actors have towards one another is a key element in the developing of relations in the international system.

The anti-European and anti-American position, that the Freedom Party of Austria has, comes as a result of the ideological perspective of the Austrian far-right party and the implications that the membership in the European Union has, along with the NATO influence in Europe. In a way that resembles the rhetoric of the National Front or the Northern League as shown further, the concepts of sovereignty and nationalism fundament this ideological basis that forms the anti-European attitude. For instance, with reference to one of the main elements of discord in European politics in recent years, immigration, as the Freedom Party's manifesto argues, in a nationalist rhetoric, FPÖ believes that "Austria is not an country of immigration. This is why we pursue a family policy centred around births. Legal and legitimate immigrants who are already integrated, who can speak the German language, who fully acknowledge our

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[92] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance*, p. 30.
[93] Ibid., p.30.

values and laws and have set down cultural roots should be given the right to stay and obtain citizenship."[94]

The fact that the state-sovereignty and nationalism are key elements that lead to the Austrian far-right parties positions highlights the importance that the doctrine of sovereign democracy has in Russia's attempt to court the Freedom Party of Austria.

Another element that the doctrine of sovereign democracy upholds which the Freedom Party of Austria finds appealing is the idea related to the cult of the leader. As we noted further in the case of the National Front or Jobbik, the Freedom Party of Austria leaders regard the firm rule of Putin as a model to follow as "[the Russian President Vladimir] Putin symbolizes the strength of a leader who still has everything under control."[95]

In the case of the Ukrainian crisis, the Freedom Party of Austria has supported Russia's actions in its various stages of development. The annexation of Crimea was regarded by the Austrian far-right as a legitimate action to be taken by the Russian part and as the leaders of the British National Front, Jobbik or the French National Front, the Freedom Party of Austria has delegated Johann Gudenus to be an observer in the referendum organized by the Crimean government.[96] According to the FPÖ's politician , "[the referendum] was in perfect order... Everything was quiet, disciplined and exemplary".[97] Furthermore, on the referendum day Gudenus has stated that "[he] did not see anything that would suggest pressure, propaganda or military intervention."[98]

The pro-Russian stance that the Freedom Party of Austria has expressed in the Ukrainian crisis has been naturally developed in a campaign to put an end to the sanctions imposed on Russia as a consequence of the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine. The leader of the FPÖ called for an "end to the pointless and harmful sanctions against Russia … which harm, first and foremost, the Austrian and European economy."[99]

The relations between the Freedom Party of Austria and the Russian Federation have reached a higher level when the Austrian far-right party has formalized relations with Kremlin's main party, United Russia. The agreement - similar to the accord between the United Russia and Italy's Northern League - has been signed in Moscow by the Freedom Party of Austria's leader Heinz-Christian Strache and Sergei Zheleznyak, deputy to the United Russia's general secretary.[100] Although the accord is non-binding from a legal standpoint, the symbolic value of

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[94] "Party Programme of the Freedom Party of Austria - Austria First", , FPÖ, June 18, 2011, https://www.fpoe.at/fileadmin/user_upload/www.fpoe.at/dokumente/2015/2011_graz_parteiprogramm_en glisch_web.pdf.
[95] "'Putin's friends' in Austria's right-wing FPÖ achieve strong election result", *DW,* October 15, 2017, http://www.dw.com/en/putins-friends-in-austrias-right-wing-fp%C3%B6-achieve-strong-election-result/a-4 0960928.
[96] "Referendum day in Crimea's Simferopol", *DW*, March 16, 2014, http://www.dw.com/en/referendum-day-in-crimeas-simferopol/a-17500378.
[97] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance*, p. 40.
[98] "'Putin's friends' in Austria's right-wing FPÖ achieve strong election result".
[99] Győri, Lóránt. "Russian Connections of the Austrian Far-Right", *Political Capital*, April 2017, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_AT_20170428.pdf, p. 60.
[100] Mills, Anthony. "Austria's far-right seals pact with Russia", *Euobserver*, December 20, 2016, https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/136356.

it is nevertheless significant as it made official the tendency of cooperation between the Austrian far-right party and Russia. Also it is relevant to mention that the agreement signed between United Russia and the Freedom party of Austria has been initiated by the Russian party according to FPÖ's leader.[101]

c. Bulgaria's ATAKA

In the case of Bulgaria, the far-right party ATAKA has expressed in numerous occasions the desire for a rapprochement with the Kremlin. In 2014, the Bulgarian far-right party has even launched its campaign for the European Parliament in Moscow.
The ceremony during which the campaign was launched were described as highly formal in that the Higher Commission of the Russian Duma awarded the ATAKA leader with the Russian Federation distinction "Fatherland Star" for the contributions that Volen Siderov has made for the improvement of relations between Bulgaria and Russia.[102]

Similarly to Austria's Freedom Party, the notions of nationalism and state sovereignty are central in the case of the Bulgarian far-right. The rhetoric that the ATAKA party employs underlines the importance of the concept of sovereignty to the Bulgarian party. While the relation between Bulgaria and the EU presents different historic and political features than the case of France or Italy for instance, in that Bulgaria has only joined the EU in 2007 and NATO in 2004, the criticism of ATAKA towards both the EU and the Transatlantic partnership is no less firm than the rhetoric used by the French far-right. Volen Siderov, ATAKA's leader has condemned on many occassions the pro-NATO and pro-EU policy of the current Bulgarian government for "turning Sofia into a puppet in the hands of the US".[103]
Similarly to the Austrian far-right, it is important to note here that, as Social Constructivist argues, the role of the meaning that Russia has for ATAKA in comparison to that of the US plays an important role in the position that the Bulgarian far-right party adopts towards these two actors.

The reasoning behind the criticism is linked to one of the major ideas proposed by Surkov's doctrine, the issue of sovereignty. In Bulgaria's case, just as in the case of the other NATO member states in Europe, the degree of sovereignty is argued to have been decreased in favor of the hegemonic US which in ATAKA's perception is detrimental to the interests of Bulgaria. However, the perception of the concept of sovereignty in the case of ATAKA can also be interpreted as simply a shift in geopolitical preference from NATO towards the Russian Federation and not necessarily as a call for regaining sovereignty for Bulgaria's through the disconnection from international agreements such as the Transatlantic partnership and the European Union membership. In this sense, on the occasion of celebrating the "Liberation

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[101] Győri, Lóránt. "Russian Connections of the Austrian Far-Right", p. 31.
[102] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance*, p. 29.
[103] *Ibid,* p.20

Day", ATAKA visited the European Parliament and European Commission representations in Sofia and advertised that it was in fact the Tsarist Russia that played a decisive role in the establishment of the Bulgarian autonomy from the Ottoman empire in 1878, and not the "non-existent EU".[104] This affinity that ATAKA displayed with regards to Russia, of being liberated by "Russia, not the EU homosexuals" is regarded by the prominent Bulgarian political scientist Dimitar Bechev as a part of the broader discourse of "unity with Russia, of being part of Russia."[105]

The relations between the Bulgarian nationalist ATAKA and the Russian Federation need to be regarded in the broader perception that the Bulgarian population has towards Russia. Prior to the European Union's 2007 enlargement which included Bulgaria and Romania, the Russian Ambassador to the EU called Bulgaria "Russia's would-be Trojan horse in the EU.[106] This scenario is regarded in the light of the cultural and historical closeness between Bulgaria and Russia and the possible consequences for the future of the EU-Bulgaria relations. However, the main segment of Bulgarian population is declared pro a European Union membership and while this is relieving from the perspective of the EU, the fact that almost a quarter of the Bulgarian population is pro a Russian-led Eurasian membership increases the doubts about the possible developments in the EU-Bulgaria-Russia relations.[107]
Another element of uncertainty in the Bulgarian politics is the fact that ATAKA has managed to impose itself as a relevant political actor and even to emphasise its importance in the stability of the Bulgarian coalition based government.
It is in this context that the relation between the Bulgarian far-right ATAKA and the Kremlin develop.

When it comes to the crisis in Ukraine, the far-right ATAKA argued shortly after the annexation of Crimea by Russia that the Bulgarian government should recognize the referendum results.[108]
This positioning on the side of the Russian Federation has been advanced further by ATAKA in that in the year following the referendum in Crimea, the Bulgarian far-right party has attempted to obtain parliamentary recognition of the referendum.[109]
This approach towards the Russian annexation of Crimea comes as little surprise as two former

[104] *Ibid,* p.34.
[105] Bechev, Dimitar, Dessislava Hristova, Kurzidlowski, Alex Sakalis, "Bulgaria: leaving no man's land behind for the EU open door", *Open Democracy,* April 11, 2014,
https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/dimitar-bechev-alex-sakalis-dessislava-hristova-kurzydlowski/bulgaria-leaving-no-.
[106] Poręba, Tomasz. "Russian Influence In Bulgaria - a Threat to Europe?", *New Direction*, February 26, 2016, http://europeanreform.org/index.php/site/article/russian-influence-in-bulgaria-a-threat-to-europe
[107] "22% of Bulgarians want to join Russia's 'Eurasian Union'", *Euractive,* May 15, 2014,
https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/22-of-bulgarians-want-to-join-russia-s-eurasian-union/.
[108] "Bulgaria Should Recognize Referendum Results in Crimea, Nationalistic Ataka Party Says", *Radio Bulgaria*, March 17, 2014,
http://bnr.bg/en/post/100357217/bulgaria-should-recognize-referendum-results-in-crimea-nationalistic-ataka-party-says.
[109] "Bulgaria's Ataka Party to Seek Parliamentary Recognition of Crimea Referendum", *Novinite*, February 14, 2015,
http://www.novinite.com/articles/166531/Bulgaria%E2%80%99s+Ataka+Party+to+Seek+Parliamentary+Recognition+of+Crimea+Referendum

members of the ATAKA party, Simeon Kostadinov and Pavel Chernev have traveled to Crimea in March 2014 at the invitation of the local government for the role of "observers" in the referendum.[110]

The recognition of the Crimean referendum is not the only aspect in which ATAKA has expressed a pro-Russian stance. In the aftermath of the Russian annexation of Crimea, ATAKA was against the imposition of sanctions on Russia by the EU asking the Bulgarian government to veto such a proposal.[111] The party went even so far as to threaten to withdraw the support of the coalition government led by Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski in the case of the Bulgarian government would support the implementation of sanctions against Moscow, a withdrawal of support that would lead to the collapse of the government.[112] Even more, ATAKA supported a resolution in the Bulgarian National Assembly to condemn further economic sanctions against Russia.[113]

As Social constructivism argues, through its second principle that the meaning the actors have towards one another is resulted through interaction, the positioning of ATAKA in a pro-Russian stance influences the meaning that the Bulgarian far-right party have for the Kremlin.

This situation highlights how by approaching the European far-right with ideological affinity around notions such as nationalism and state sovereignty, Russia could influence the domestic politics of the European member states to adopt pro-Russian policies.

d. France's National Front

In the case of France, among the major far-right parties that have known a revitalisation in recent years in Europe has been the National Front(FN). The fact that the leader of the FN has been voted to run in the second round of the presidential elections in France in 2017 underlines the relevance of the party not only in the French political landscape but also at the European Union's level and at the international level. The election of Emmanuel Macron - a supporter of the EU project[114] - for the Presidency of France represents the most beneficial outcome of the elections from the perspective of the European integration process in general. However, with regards to the research question that this project poses, in the light of Russia's

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[110] "Bulgarian Nationalists to Be Among Observers of Crimea Referendum", *Novinite*, March 12, 2014, http://www.novinite.com/articles/158860/Bulgarian+Nationalists+to+Be+Among+Observers+of+Crimea+Referendum.

[111] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance*, p. 43.

[112] "Nationalists vow to topple Bulgarian cabinet over Russia", *Euractive*, April 2, 2014, https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/nationalists-vow-to-topple-bulgarian-cabinet-over-russia/.

[113] Simmons, Jo. "The Curious Tale of Bulgaria's Extremist Flip-Flopping Party", *The Hufftington Post,* June 3, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jo-simmons/volen-siderov-ataka_b_5432359.html.

[114] Bouillard, Christoph, "Emmanuel Macron : le président pro-européen dont le public l'était nettement moins que lui", *Atlantico,* May 8, 2017, http://www.atlantico.fr/decryptage/emmanuel-macron-president-pro-europeen-dont-public-etait-nettement-moins-que-lui-3041880.html.

relation with the European far-right, the election of Emmanuel Macron as the French President constitutes an even great victory for the European Union. In polls prior to the start of French presidential election campaign, the victory of Macron has by no means been considered plausible and regarded from a European integration perspective, both alternative candidates that appeared most likely to materialize into a French presidential election have raised doubts about the relationship of France with the Russian Federation. At the end of 2016, the candidates that have been believed to be elected for the second tour have been the leader of Les Republicains, Francois Fillon and the leader of the Front National, Marine Le Pen.[115]

In this perspective, given that Les Republicains and mainly the FN have been supporters of a more pro-Russian stance of both France and Europe[116], the election of Macron has benefited both the EU integration process and the political camp in France and EU that calls for a more categorical approach towards Russia. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, the success that the FN has known in recent years poses the party at the center of the relation between France, the EU and Russia. This increase in popularity of the far-right party FN is seen by some analysts as an illustration of a crisis that is undergoing in the French society with a direct effect on the political scene.[117]

It is in this context that the Russian-FN relations have developed in the period following the accession of Marine Le Pen to the top position in the French far-right party.

As the analysis will further detail, the relations between the FN and Russia have been based both on ideological similarities, but also on concrete interests that the two actors share.

One of the most important aspects that drives the relation between the FN and Russia constitutes the stances that these two actors share towards both the EU and the Transatlantic axis.

In the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a unipolar world order has been the result of what the Russian President Vladimir Putin identified as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century".[118] The newly established world order has been many times under criticism by the Russian Federation for it is argued that a unipolar world order is meant to generate instability.[119] In this line of thought, the FN's stance towards this issues has been strikingly similar. In fact, the FN's leader Marine Le Pen has argued earlier this year that "we are in a world that is multipolar, a world in which each country has its voice and a world that is balanced."[120] This perspective on the global order that Le Pen displays identifies with one of

[115] Martin, Clarisse. "Présidentielle 2017 : Fillon et Le Pen au second tour, selon un sondage", *RTL*, December 17, 2016,
http://www.rtl.fr/actu/politique/presidentielle-2017-francois-fillon-et-marine-le-pen-donnes-au-second-tour-selon-un-sondage-7786164996.

[116] Marlene Laruelle in Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses,* 3rd edition, p. 7.

[117] *Ibid.*, p.7.

[118] Osborn, Andrew. "Putin: Collapse of the Soviet Union was 'catastrophe of the century'", *Independent*, April 25, 2005,
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-collapse-of-the-soviet-union-was-catastrophe-of-the-century-521064.html.

[119] "Putin: Attempts to Create a Unipolar World Failed, Global Balance is Restoring", *Sputnik*, December 4, 2016, https://sputniknews.com/politics/201612041048146161-putin-unipolar-world/.

[120] Walt, Viviene. "Why France's Marine Le Pen Is Doubling Down on Russia Support", *Time*, January 9, 2017, http://time.com/4627780/russia-national-front-marine-le-pen-putin/.

the major principles that the doctrine of sovereign democracy upholds in Surkov's text: "a global federation based on treaties among free nations".[121]

Furthermore, in the French Presidential elections programme, Le Pen argued for this idea every since from the begining in that - if elected - she would return to France its national sovereignty towards a Europe of independent nations.[122]

This view that the FN has on the current global order is reflected by the party's stance towards the EU's current configuration and towards the Transatlantic partnership. However, it is worth mentioning that although France is deeply committed to the Euro-Atlantic community, the bilateral relations with Russia are arguably still influenced by the strategy adopted by De Gaulle after the Second World War, whose diplomatic efforts of rapprochement with the Soviet Union were perceived as an attempt to counterbalance the power of the United States.[123]

The Constructivist idea with regards to the balance of threats as an alternative approach to the balance of power - hence the emphasis on the relevance of the perception that the actors have towards each other in the international system - is being illustrated by the approach that the FN has towards Russia in relation to France's membership in NATO. During a lecture in 2013, the FN leader Marine Le Pen has argued that the North Atlantic alliance has become irrelevant as "[she] do not understand against which enemy is NATO protecting [its allies]".[124] In this sense, it appears that the FN does not regard the Russian Federation as a threat to its interests, therefore the very continuation of NATO is being queried. However, the broader French political elite approach towards Russia - as noted above - is rather welcoming and this phenomena is not a characteristic featured exclusively by the French far-right. Even the former French President Holland has argued that Russia "is not an adversary, not a threat" and that "NATO has no role at all to be saying what Europe's relations with Russia should be."[125]

When it comes to the integration project in Europe, it is interesting to notice that the FN's rhetoric towards the EU has shifted in recent years as prior to the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, in the 1980s the National Front has been a supporter of the integration process. However, since Marine Le Pen's accession to the FN's top leadership position, the criticism towards the current EU establishment has increased. The re-evaluation of principles and values within the FN - materialized in the open conflict that Marine Le Pen has led against her father Jean-Marie Le Pen - has been regarded by some analysts as an illustration of how the far right has reinvented itself across Europe.[126]

Le Pen's opposition towards the EU's current configuration has been extremely vocal as the FN leader called the EU an "anti-democratic monster".[127] The FN leadership has even gone so far to call, through the voice of Marion Maréchal Le Pen, Marine Le Pen's niece and

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[121] Surkov, Vladislav. "Russian Political Culture: The View from Utopia", *Russian Politics and Law*, 46, no.5, 2008, p.22.

[122] "144 Engagements", Front National, 2017, http://www.frontnational.com/pdf/144-engagements.pdf.

[123] Marlene Laruelle in Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses,* 3rd edition, p. 8.

[124] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance - The European Far Right and Putin's Russia*, Brussels, Wilfried Martens Center for European Studies, 2015, p. 29.

[125] "Hollande: Russia Is A Partner, Not A Threat", *Radio Free Europe*, July 8, 2016, https://www.rferl.org/a/hollande-russia-is-a-partner-not-a-threat/27847690.html.

[126] Polyakova, Alina, *Putinism and the European Far Right,* p.5.

[127] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

member of the French Parliament, the EU to be "the poodle of the United States."[128] This perspective on the current world order is shared also by one of the top members of the European Parliament, FN's Aymeric Chauprade who argued that the shift in policy towards Russia is a necessary action for "the hope of the world against new totalitarianism", meaning "the American and European financial oligarchy."[129]

Such a vehement positioning by the FN against the current international structures that France is part of is an illustration of a deeper perception about the European integration project and the role and the future of the Transatlantic partnership. Alain de Benoist, a French philosopher and supporter of the French "new right" argued that from a geopolitical perspective, "Russia is now obviously the principal alternative to American hegemony."[130] Although these dynamics are interesting in themselves for the purpose of academic enquiry and as a topic, with regards to the research question for the current project it is important to underline the ideological basis for which a shift towards Russia is prefered by the French far-right. And this brings us to the principles and ideas highlighted in the doctrine of sovereign democracy.

In the party's 2017 presidential manifesto the issue of sovereignty has been placed on the first line of order as the main goal of Le Pen's policies was to regain the liberty of the French people through the restoration of its sovereignty.[131]

The FN's perspective on the international system and its positions towards the EU and NATO are in line with Russia's stances towards the same organizations and in principle with the perceptions of a functional, stable world order. The principles that drive these positions are similar among Kremlin and the FN: one of the main idea that is proposed by the doctrine of sovereign democracy is the relevance of the nation-state in the international system. In this sense, the anti-hegemonic, anti-EU stance that the FN adopts is an expression of their view on the concept of sovereignty and its high importance. In an interview for the Austrian press cited by Le Figaro, the FN leader Marine Le Pen declared about the Russian President Vladimir Putin that "he is a patriot as he is committed to his people's sovereignty and that he is aware that both the FN and Russia support common values - that is the values of the European civilization."[132] In this regard, the notion of sovereignty appears to be a key element that connects the French far-right to Russia. Also, this case strengthens the Social Constructivist argument that the role of ideas and values in the establishing of relations in the international system is relevant.

The perception of Russia as a friendly actor in the international system by the FN has been manifested in very concrete actions, not simply at the rhetoric level.

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[128] Higgins, Andrew. "Far-Right Fever for a Europe Tied to Russia", *The New York Times*, May 20, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/21/world/europe/europes-far-right-looks-to-russia-as-a-guiding-force.html.
[129] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance*, p. 29.
[130] Higgins, Andrew. "Far-Right Fever for a Europe Tied to Russia".
[131] "144 Engagements".
[132] "Marine Le Pen fait l'éloge de Vladimir Poutine «le patriote»", *Le Figaro,* May 18, 2014, http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2014/05/18/25002-20140518ARTFIG00118-marine-le-pen-fait-l-eloge-de-vladimir-poutine-le-patriote.php.

The contacts between the top leadership of the FN and Russia have been unaffected by the broader stance that the France and the West in general adopted as a result of Russia's actions in Ukraine and in Syria.

After 2012, a series of FN's leaders traveled to Moscow such as Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, FN's MP in late 2012 during a forum organized by the Russian Duma, Bruno Gollnisch, the executive vice-president of the FN in May 2013, Marine Le Pen and FN's vice-president Louis Aliot in 2013. A year later, in April 2014 Marine Le Pen travelled again to Moscow on which occasion the reception of the FN's leader has been more formal in that the President of the Duma, Sergei Naryshkin welcomed Le Pen in Russia.[133]

The closeness between the FN and Russia has been regarded also from the perspective of alleged financial links between Kremlin and the French far-right party. Given the history of anti-semitism and white supremacy that the FN has had in its former years, the access to financial services has been rather limited and in the light of the rejections received from European banks, the FN contracted a loan of €9 million in 2014 from the First Czech-Russian Bank in Moscow.[134] However, it is imperative to mention that in spite the allegations, evidence for the connection between the financial institution above mentioned and the Russian government has not been established. Nonetheless, this action is regarded as having a great significance as it can be interpreted, if a connection exists between the source of the financial service and the Kremlin, as an attempt by Russia to buy influence in European politics.[135]

In the wake of the Ukrainian crisis in March 2014, some of the FN's leaders travelled to Crimea with the role of international observers in the referendum that was organized by the local government. Aymeric Chauprade, FN's member of the European Parliament stated that the referendum was not only valid but it had a double legitimacy: on the one hand it was historically legitimate as it was an expression of the free will of the Russians of the region and on the other hand it was politically legitimate as its result reflected a democratic choice.[136]

Furthermore, the FN leader Marine Le Pen has argued that the reason for which the Ukrainian crisis has escalated is due to the European Union's actions and stated that she "is surprised a Cold War on Russia has been declared in the European Union."[137] To this perspective adheres also the former leader of the FN, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who shortly after the annexation of Crimea by the Russian government, argued that "Crimea has always belonged to Russia."[138] In another interview for Spiegel, cited by the French franchise of the Russian media

[133] Marlene Laruelle in Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses,* 3rd edition, p.10.

[134] Martin, Anne-Claude. "National Front's Russian loans cause uproar in European Parliament", *Euractive,* December 5, 2014, https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/national-front-s-russian-loans-cause-uproar-in-european-parliament/.

[135] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance*, p. 34.

[136] *Ibid,* p.44.

[137] Prentice, Alessandra. "France's Le Pen, in Moscow, blames EU for new 'Cold War'", *Reuters,* April 12, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-le-pen-russia/frances-le-pen-in-moscow-blames-eu-for-new-cold-war-idUSBREA3B09I20140412.

[138] Licourt, Julien. "L'indéfectible soutien du FN à la Russie de Poutine", *Le Figaro*, March 19, 2014, http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/decryptages/2014/03/19/25003-20140319ARTFIG00183-l-indefectible-soutien-du-fn-a-la-russie-de-poutine.php.

trust Sputnik, Marine Le Pen has been extremely critical of the situation created in Ukraine which in her perspective has been amplified by the EU, accusing Europe "to have thrown oil on the fire.[139]

Some analysts argue that the loan that the FN contracted in Moscow represents a reward for backing Russia's annexation of Crimea[140] however, as mentioned above, in the absence of specific evidence on this case it is difficult to establish unequivocally the connection.

One of the ideas proposed by the doctrine of sovereign democracy that is reflected in FN's relation with Russia, particularly with regards to the Ukrainian affair is related to the way the FN leader, Marine Le Pen views the Russian President Vladimir Putin and his actions such as the annexation of Crimea. In an interview with the German editorial Spiegel, cited by Reuters, Le Pen she respects Putin just as she respects the German Chancellor Angela Merkel for "Putin puts the interests of Russia and the Russian people first."[141] This type of authoritarian leadership, of "doing what is good for Russia and the Russians" is linked to the concept highlighted in the doctrine of sovereign democracy with respects to the idealization of leaders.

The case of the French Mistral project - which involved the delivery of several of these class multipurpose ships to Russia - has been regarded as an opportunity for the FN to align itself with Kremlin. As a result of the Russian actions in Ukraine, among the sanctions imposed on Moscow by the West was also the suspension of this project. The FN's reaction was simply to argue that once again the sovereignty of France was disrespected as the move was seen as a result of the pressure imposed on France by the United States and the EU.[142]

The identification of similar ideological components on the part of the FN and the Russian Federation underlines the fact that the French far-right finds common ground with the Kremlin in the promotion of christian values, appreciation of authoritarianism - or the cult of the strong man, what Surkov described as the idealization of leaders -, the opposition against a US/NATO led unipolar domination and a strong criticism of a liberal, functionalist configuration of European states in the detriment of the support for a "Europe of nations".[143]

Although it is argued that positioning towards Russia does not determine voting patterns as the electorate is driven by domestic, socio-economic issues[144], the fact that the FN leader has been able to run in the second round of French presidential elections, despite the fact that the

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[139] "L'Europe responsable de la crise en Ukraine (Marine Le Pen)", *Sputnik*, June 1, 2014, https://fr.sputniknews.com/actualite/201406011022854181-leurope-est-responsable-de-la-crise-en-ukraine-marine-le-pen/.

[140] Chazan, David. "Russia 'bought' Marine Le Pen's support over Crimea", *The Telegraph*, April 4, 2015, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11515835/Russia-bought-Marine-Le-Pens-support-over-Crimea.html

[141] Martin, Michelle. "France's Le Pen says she admires Putin as much as Merkel", *Reuters*, June 1, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-lepen/frances-le-pen-says-she-admires-putin-as-much-as-merkel-magazine-idUSKBN0EC1ES20140601.

[142] Ouchikh, Karim. "Suspension de la livraison du Mistral à la Russie : Hollande ridiculise la France et porte atteinte aux intérêts vitaux de notre pays", *Le Front National*, September 4, 2014, http://www.frontnational.com/2014/09/suspension-de-la-livraison-du-mistal-a-la-russie-hollande-ridiculise-la-france-et-porte-atteintes-aux-interets-vitaux-de-notre-pays/.

[143] Marlene Laruelle in Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses,* 3rd edition, p.9.

[144] *Ibid,* p.10.

FN has not come to power, suggests nonetheless a shift in the political landscape in France towards the far-right, as explained above, benefits Russia.

e. Germany's AfD

The interaction between the German recently established far-right and the Kremlin is directly affected by the relations between post-Cold War Germany and The Russian Federation. Some analysts argue that the relations between Germany after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia has been special in that two elements - feelings of historical guild and at the same time gratitude - form the basis of the interaction between Germans and Russians. Stefan Meister, a German political scientist and Head of the Robert Bosch Center for Central and Eastern Europe argues that "the fact that Russia suffered the most victims during WWII, Germany has a moral obligation [...] to ensure peaceful relations with its big neighbor."[145] At the same time Meister argues that the feeling of gratitude comes as a result of the fact that peaceful German unification was allowed.[146]

Another element that distinguishes the framework in which the relations between the German far-right and the Russian Federation are being developed is the Russian speaking German population which amounts to a significant approximately 2 million German voters.[147]

It is in this broader context that the relation between the Kremlin and German far-right have developed in the post-Cold War period.

The rhetoric of the German AfD, one of the very recently founded far-right parties in Germany that have managed to persuade a large population of German voters is similar to the broader European far-right. Russia's anti-liberal or anti-American stance is not dismissed by the German far-right but this is in fact an element of the relations between the Kremlin and Germany's far-right that make the former an attractive partner for the latter. In this sense, it is argued that the AfD, being critical towards the EU and NATO, similarly to other European far-right parties, appear to be a natural partner for the Russian Federation.[148]

In fact, the AfD's manifesto argues that "[for AfD] the relationship with Russia is of prime importance, because European security cannot be attained without Russia's involvement."[149]

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[145] Meister, Stefan in Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses,* 3rd edition, p. 12.
[146] *Ibidem*, p. 12.
[147] Shalal, Andrea. "Russian-Germans in focus amid fears of Moscow propaganda", *Reuters*, August 16, 2017,
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-election-russian-germans/russian-germans-in-focus-amid-fears-of-moscow-propaganda-idUSKCN1AW1NA.
[148] Amann, Melanie, Pavel Lokshin. "German Populists Forge Ties with Russia", *Spiegel Online*, April 27, 2016,
http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-populists-forge-deeper-ties-with-russia-a-1089562.html.
[149] "Manifesto for Germany", AfD,
https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/04/2017-04-12_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch_web.pdf, p.30.

Regarding the perspective on sovereignty, in an interview for the Russian broadcaster RT, the former leader of the AfD, Frauke Petry argued that the current German Chancellor Angela Merkel "has given up the sovereignty of the country."[150] The emphasis on values such as state-sovereignty comes in line with the broader European far-right rhetoric and in relation to the Kremlin it underlines once again that the interactions between Russia and the far-right parties in Europe are promoted around such notions. Given the complexity of the situation that the migration crisis in Europe, the pressure on the German Chancellor Angela Merkel has raised difficulties in maintaining both a liberal refugee policy and a tough stance on Russia.[151] In this sense, a more weakened position towards the Kremlin appears as an opportunity for the AfD and consequently for Russia, however, in some cases AfD politicians such as Alexander Gauland have had a pro-Russian stance ever since the very foundation of the far-right party in 2013.[152]

As mentioned above, one key element of the relations between the AfD and the Kremlin is the particularity of Germany incorporating in the post-Cold War era a large Russian-speaking German population. At the state elections in 2015, the German far-right has campaigned with a specific target on this "German-Russian" population in Germany, by handing out campaign flyers in Russian.[153] It is worth mentioning however that according to a poll organized in October 2016 - most of the respondents to the poll, 95 percent of which were born outside of Germany - advertised that they entrust the German media more than the Russian counterparts.[154] Nonetheless, the fact that the AfD has considered the "German-Russian" population as a focus of their regional campaign indicates the fact that AfD's approach towards the Eastern Europe and in particular towards Russia highlights potential for development from the German far-right's perspective.

The perspective that the AfD has on the international order and on the European Union in particular is similar to the one displayed by the National Front in France and by what Surkov argued in sovereign democracy through the formula of "global federation based on treaties among free nations". In the German far-right party's manifesto, AfD argues that "[they] are in favour of returning the European Union to an economic union based on shared interests, and consisting of sovereign, but loosely connected nation states."[155]

In relation to the Ukrainian crisis, most probably one of the elements of discord between the Euro-Atlantic political establishment and Russia, the German far-right has in many occasions expressed a pro-Russian rhetoric. Again, in order to fairly assess the stance that the AfD has taken with regards to the Russian actions in Ukraine it is necessary to mention that in the German political elite there are top representatives that in spite the fact that they do not belong to the German far-right political spectrum, adopt a similar stance of reconciliation

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[150] "Chancellor Merkel has given up German sovereignty - right-wing party leader", *RT*, June 20, 2016, https://www.rt.com/shows/sophieco/347415-brexit-germany-rightwing-party/.

[151] Meister, Stefan in Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses,* 3rd edition, p. 12.

[152] Amann, Melanie, Pavel Lokshin. "German Populists Forge Ties with Russia".

[153] Oltermann, Philip. "How Germany's Russian minority could boost far right", *The Guardian*, September 22, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/22/how-germanys-russian-minority-could-boost-far-right.

[154] *Ibid.*

[155] "Manifesto for Germany", p.16.

towards Russia in the case of the Ukraine and also consider Ukraine to be the result of rather the European Union instead of the Russian Federation. In an interview granted to the German Welt am Sonntag cited by RT, the former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder has argued that given the fact that the EU ignored the deep cultural divisions within the Ukraine particularly with regards to the European Union, the Ukrainian crisis is a situation for which the EU should be blamed.[156] It is important to mention here that the ties of Germany's former Chancellor Schroeder to Russia have been extensive every since he 2005 when he stopped holding the top-executive position in the German government and that he has been criticised many times by the current German political leadership for the constant support that former Chancellor Schroeder expressed towards the Kremlin.[157]

However, the AfD's position towards the Ukrainian crisis and the sanctions that the Euro-Atlantic community has imposed on Russia has been consistently of reconciliation with the Russian Federation. In a foreign policy resolution during the campaign for the regional elections in the autumn of 2015, the AfD called for the annulment of the sanctions imposed on Russia.[158] Furthermore, the former AfD leader Frauke Petry, in the interview granted to the Russian broadcaster RT argued that not only the AfD is pro-abolition of sanctions against the Russian federation but it also claimed to have been the first party in Germany to have asked for this to happen.[159] Marcus Pretzell, an AfD politician and member of the European Parliament has also sent the clear message that the Russian Federation is not internationally isolated and that the sanctions against the Kremlin should be lifted.[160]

It is interesting to notice the consistency of the positions that the German far-right politicians have towards the Russian sanctions and in this line of thought, the courting of the German far-right around notions like sovereignty and anti-liberalism comes natural from the Russian political elite.

Furthermore the activity between the youth wing of the AfD, namely the JA(Junge Alternative) and the Young Guard, the youth wing of the main party in Russia, United Russia has also underlined the potential for closer relations between the two parties in relation to common perspectives on nationalism and state sovereignty. After a meeting with Young Guard's leader Robert Schelgel, the JA's co-head Markus Frohnmaier stated that "Euro critical and sovereigntist movements are gaining in strength across the entire European continent" and that it is "self-evident that these activities be pooled into a new youth network."[161] This formalisation of interactions between the youth wing's of the German far-right and the Russian Federation particularly with a focus on anti-establishment, anti-EU, nationalist and

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[156] "EU policy to blame for Ukraine crisis - Ex-Chancellor Schroeder", *RT*, May 12, 2014, https://www.rt.com/news/158432-schroeder-russia-sanctions-eu/.

[157] Paterson, Tony. "Merkel fury after Gerhard Schroeder backs Putin on Ukraine", *The Telegraph*, March 14, 2014, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10697986/Merkel-fury-after-Gerhard-Schroeder-backs-Putin-on-Ukraine.html.

[158] Meister, Stefan in Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses,* 3rd edition, p. 16.

[159] "Chancellor Merkel has given up German sovereignty - right-wing party leader".

[160] Amann, Melanie, Pavel Lokshin. "German Populists Forge Ties with Russia".

[161] *Ibid.*

pro-sovereignty values highlights the relevance of the Russian rhetoric around these values in establishing contacts with groups within Europe.

As Stefan Meister argues, the Kremlin's goals are to undermine and question the current approach of the German leadership towards Russia with regards to the crisis in Ukraine and the consequent sanctions, ot sow disunity in the Euro-Atlantic partnership by fueling anti-establishment sentiments with the alternative on a nationalist, sovereign approach to German politics. This strategy is therefore seen as aimed at polarizing the German stance on Russia and at weakening the overall EU policy towards Moscow.[162]

f. Hungary's Jobbik

The far-right in Hungary has attempted to improve its relations with the Kremlin under the same principles as the far-right political parties in other European states. The reluctance towards the EU and towards NATO is not a concealed feature of the broader political landscape in Hungary as even the current leader of the government, a member of the Fidesz party which is not considered to be on the far-right of the political spectrum, Viktor Orban, has many times criticised the EU and the American hegemony. Even in a speech in the European Parliament, Orban argued that Hungary is not happy with the way EU works and that it needs to be reformed.[163]

The Hungarian far-right however, does not regard the European Union with such "positive" views. In an interview conducted by the Komsolskaia Pravda, a Kremlin-linked news agency, in 2014, the member of the European Parliament and the far-right Hungarian party Jobbik, Béla Kovács argued that although his party came second in the European Union Parliamentary elections, the possibility of Jobbik winning the next elections should be regarded through the prism of the question whether or not the EU will hold further elections as in his opinion, the EU will cease to exist shortly and further parliamentary elections will not be organized. In this perspective, Kovács argued, that if Europe "does not turn to the East, we won't have any place to go. That's right, dear mother Russia, you will have to come to the rescue of Europe again. And not for the first time."[164]

This perception of Russia as 'Europe's saviour' by the Hungarian far-right emphasises the Constructivist idea of the relevance of the meaning the actors have towards one another in the establishing of relations.

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[162] Meister, Stefan in Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses,* 3rd edition, p. 17.

[163] Gutteridge, Nick. "Stony-faced MEPs look on aghast as Hungary PM gives them both barrels", *Express*, April 26, 2017, https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/796883/European-Union-Hungary-PM-Viktor-Orban-criticises-EU-speech-Brussels-parliament.

[164] Juhász, Attila. *"I am Eurasian" - The Kremlin connections of the Hungarian far-right*, Budapest, Political Capital, 2015, p.50.

The criticism towards the EU has been even stronger coming from Jobbik's leader, Gábor Vona. In an interview granted for the Russian-based online magazine "Geopolitics" - interview published entirely on Jobbik's official website -, the leader of the Hungarian far-right party argued that the European Union and its member states have not only reached a point of decay and a complete loss of values and national identity, but the very intentions with which Hungary in particular was admitted in the EU was not to develop the country but rather to "colonize, exploit cheap labor and acquire markets".[165] This strong anti-European sentiment goes hand in hand with the perspective that Surkov described in "A View from Utopia" as it underlines the very meaning that the far-right Jobbik gives to the relation between Hungary and the EU - that Hungary is a vassal in relation to Brussels and that by being a member of the European Union, the state is stripped of its sovereignty. Furthermore in its party manifesto, Jobbik argued that "[they] cannot accept such a membership in a union that brings about a fatal mutilation of [their] national sovereignty!"[166] Furthermore, the issue concerning the sovereignty of Hungary in relation to the European Union is regarded by the Jobbik party as having only one of the sides to be related to economic issues. The more relevant aspect of the relation with Brussels is that of the values. And Vona argued that the traditional culture is only existent nowadays in the East.[167] The rhetoric that the Hungarian far-right party's leadership adopts in relation to the European Union-Russia alternative calls to mind Ted Hopf's idea that it is the habit, meaning "the automatic, unintentional" that bring about the ideas about self and other.

The frustration concerning the sovereignty of Hungary in relation to the EU is being doubled by the perspective that the Hungarian far-right party has when it comes to the Transatlantic partnership. In Jobbik's perspective, the European Union, as noted in the case of other above-mentioned far-right parties, is being regarded as a servant of the interests of United States. It is in this light that the Hungarian far-right party argues for a rapprochement with the Russian Federation for the counterbalancing of what is called the Americanization of Europe.[168]

Referring to the case of the project South Stream and its unsuccessful development, a member of the Hungarian Parliament from Jobbik, Márton Gyöngyösi emphasised the fact that the Kremlin was right in condemning the European states for blocking the project. The alignment with the Russian rhetoric on Jobbik's part in this case underlines the Hungarian far-right party's affinity towards Russia, however the core element here is the fact that Gyöngyösi agreed also to the fact that the European states have not acted in a sovereign manner but rather under instructions received from Washington and Brussels.[169]

Another aspect that links the Hungarian far-right and the Kremlin is the sympathy that Jobbik has towards Russian power. The firm, authoritarian-like rule of Vladimir Putin and the the political elite in Russia appeals to the Hungarian far-right precisely because of the relation between a strong grip on power and the promotion of conservatism as the Russian president is

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[165] "Gábor Vona: Euro-Atlanticism must be replaced by Eurasianism", *Jobbik*, May 10, 2013, http://www.jobbik.com/g%C3%A1bor_vona_euro-atlanticism_must_be_replaced_eurasianism..

[166] "Manifesto", Jobbik, October 24, 2003, http://www.jobbik.com/manifesto_0.

[167] "Gábor Vona: Euro-Atlanticism must be replaced by Eurasianism"..

[168] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance*, p. 27.

[169] "Hungary is a victim of Euro-Atlantism", *Jobbik*, http://www.jobbik.com/hungary_victim_euro-atlantism

regarded to be a "great national leaders that preserves traditional values, bans gay marches and refuses to kowtow before the USA."[170] This perspective can alsobe identified in Surkov's sovereign democracy.

Jobbik's stance towards the EU and NATO is arguably a source of development in its relations with Russia. The leader of the party argued that "Hungary is a gateway and a bridge for Moscow to the West, and for us Russia is a large potential market and may act as a counterbalance against a lopsided Euro-Atlanticism. (…) For Hungary Euro-Atlanticism has caused an economic, political and cultural crisis, and therefore we have to reassess our international position. To my understanding, Eurasianism means that Hungary can serve as a catalyst between Europe and Asia. Eurasianism has the advantages of preserving the autonomy of various regions, and of being built on some sort of continental cooperation, in opposition to exploitation by the EU."[171]

The Russian Federation seen as a political and ideological alternative to the West is therefore a characteristic that appears to be present in the Hungarian far-right similarly to other European far-right parties and the debate is carried around notions that the doctrine of sovereign democracy upholds: state sovereignty, idealization of leaders, centralized political power and anti-globalism. These features of political practice emerge as appealing both to Jobbik and the other European far-right parties mentioned in this project.

In the case of Ukraine, the stance that Jobbik took towards the crisis is similar to the European far-right. The outburst of the crisis was perceived as an opportunity by Jobbik to emphasise once again the empathy with the Kremlin and in an opportunistic manner to campaign for some of its most articulated interests: the Hungarian minorities in areas that belong to the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. Márton Gyöngyösi, Jobbik's MP argued that Hungary should on one hand look upon Russia as an example of enforcing one's interests. In this case once again it can be noticed the appeal that Jobbik displays for the cult of the strong leadership. On the other hand, Márton Gyöngyösi argued that Hungary should try to establish connections with Russia in order to promote policies that benefit the Hungarian minorities.[172]

In the case of Hungary's Jobbik, there is one distinctive element when it comes to Russia's relations with the party. The above mentioned member of the European Parliament on behalf of the Hungarian far-right party Jobbik, Béla Kovács has been accused by the Hungarian government to have engaged in espionage activities for the Russian Federation and in May 2014 the Hungarian government asked the European Parliament to revoke Kovács' immunity in order for him to be investigated for the accusations of spying for Russia.[173] Although Kovács was accused of espionage and of channeling Russian funds towards the support of Jobbik in 2014, the Hungarian far-right member of the European Parliament was formally charged in the Hungarian judiciary system only in December 2017.[174]

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[170] Juhász, Attila. *"I am Eurasian",* p. 50

[171] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance*, p. 26.

[172] *Ibid*, p. 42.

[173] Krekó, Péter, Mitchell Orenstein. "A Russian Spy in Brussels?", *Foreign Affairs*, May 29, 2014, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/hungary/2014-05-29/russian-spy-brussels.

[174] "Hungarian MEP charged with spying on EU for Russia", *BBC News*, December 6, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42257996.

Despite the fact that at the moment the investigation into the case of Kovács are still in the process of elucidating whether or not the accusations of espionage are grounded, the connections of Kovács and in particular his rhetoric towards Russia clearly illustrates a particular affinity that Jobbik as a party has towards the Kremlin.

Also, the fact that Kovács acted as an observer during the referendum that was organized by the local Crimean government, although does not prove anything regarding the allegations about him acting on behalf of the Russian government in espionage activities, it underlines once more the closeness between the Kremlin and the Hungarian far-right. It is interesting to notice in this case that the Hungarian far-right party does not seem to take a defensive attitude in relation to the situation created around one of its top officials. In fact, Zoltán Lazar, a top Jobbik politician argued that "Jobbik stands for anti-globalization, they are Eurosceptic, anti-liberal and believe in Eastern Opening. In that context, Russia doesn't appear to be all that threatening. In other words, if someone spies for them on the EU all we say is hip-hip hurray."[175]

g. Italy's Northern League

In the case of the Italian far-right, the role of the notions that the doctrine of sovereign democracy promotes have played a key role as well in establishing contacts and improving relations between Russia and parties such as the Northern League(LN) or Brothers of Italy.

The relations between the Italian far-right and Russia around norms and ideas such as state-sovereignty, nationalism, authoritarian rule or conservative values need to be regarded first of all in the broader context of the Italian public opinion about Russia and particularly about the current Russian leadership. The result of an poll run in August 2017, as much as a third of the Italian population expressed appreciation for Vladimir Putin which is a high score in itself, but given the fact that the other prominent world leaders such as the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Macron or the Chinese leader Xi Jinping are perceived with less appreciation than the Russian leader underlines the fact that overall, Italians are inclined towards the Russian leadership.[176]

In an interview in 2013, for the Italian franchise of the Russian media Sputnik, the leader of the Northern League(LN) Matteo Salvini argued that in fact Italians "know little about Russia, although in [his] opinion Russia represents the future. In the coming years Russia shall become a unique partner for the League and Northern Italy."[177]

Similarly to the other European far-right parties, the opposition towards the current European and Transatlantic establishment drives the Northern League. In an interview for the Foreign Associated Press in Rome cited by Reuters, the leader of the far-right Italian party LN,

[175] Juhász, Attila. *"I am Eurasian",* p. 22.

[176] Foggiano, Alessandro. "Sondaggi politici SWG: Chi Sono i Leader Mondiali Piu Amati Dagli Italiani", *Termometro Politico,* August 2, 2017.

[177] Santi, Tatiana. "Matteo Salvini e la sua Lega di battaglia", *Sputnik News*, December 20, 2013, https://it.sputniknews.com/italian.ruvr.ru/2013_12_20/Matteo-Salvini-e-la-sua-Lega-di-battaglia/.

Matteo Salvini argued that euro is a "criminal currency" and that the European Union is hopeless in that it cannot be reformed as it is "run by a group of people who hate the Italian people and economy in particular."[178]

The ideological basis that drives the reluctance towards the European Union by the Northern League is related to issue of Italian sovereignty.

It is argued that in the Italian anti-establishment movements, the Russian leader Vladimir Putin became "a powerful symbol of sovereigntism in its battle with globalism" as he is seen by the rising extremist forces in Italy as an adversary and alternative to the EU and the globalist elites and in consequence a potential partner in Italy's attempt to regain its sovereignty.[179]

In relation to NATO and the rhetoric concerning the alliance, Matteo Salvini, the leader of the Northern League has argued in 2016 that in spite the fact that he was raised in a culture that perceived Russia as a threat, in the post-Cold War period Russia no longer poses a danger and in this regard NATO works against the interest of Italy.[180]

This instance underlines clearly the Constructivist argument concerning the high relevance of meaning that actors have towards one another in the realisation of interaction in the international system.

Russia has been regarded by the Lorenzo Fontana, the LN's member of the European Parliament as a major economic partner not only for Italy but for the whole of Europe and as a model example when it comes to national identity and family values.[181] Further more, during a conference organized in 2014 by another prominent leader of the LN and Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament, Fiorello Provera, with the official support of the Permanent Mission of Russia to the EU, the LN has been argued to be a good partner for RUssia in the European Parliament. During the same conference, Sergey Markov, a Russian conservative political scientist argued that the Kremlin should develop relations with the far-right.[182]

The Ukrainian crisis highlighted the close relations between the LN and Moscow. In the case of the referendum organized by the Crimean government, two important LN leaders traveled to Sevastopol with the role of observers in the referendum. Claudio D'Amico, a former member of the Italian Parliament and Lorenzo Fontana, a member of the European

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[178] Mackenzie, James. "Italy's Northern League calls for EU to be 'demolished'", *Reuters*, December 10, 2014,
https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-italy-politics-salvini/italys-northern-league-calls-for-eu-to-be-demolished-idUKKBN0JO25A20141210.

[179] Luigi Sergio Germani and Jacopo Iacoboni in Polyakova, Alina et. al. *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses 2.0 - Russian Influence in Greece, Italy, and Spain*, Washington D.C., Atlantic Council, 2017, p.11.

[180] "Di Maio negli Usa: "Principali alleati, Russia interlocutore storico. Il M5s vuole replicare la riforma fiscale Trump"", *Il Fatto Quotidiane*, November 14, 2017,
https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2017/11/14/di-maio-in-viaggio-negli-usa-loro-principali-alleati-russia-interlocutore-storico-e-sulla-nato-restiamo-ma-perplessi/3977679/.

[181] "The Russian connection - The spread of pro-Russian policies on the European far right", *Political Capital,* March 14, 2014 http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00007035/.

[182] Hawley, Charles. "Europe's Far Right Flirts with Moscow", *Spiegel Online,* April 14, 2014,
http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/european-far-right-developing-closer-ties-with-moscow-a-963878.html.

Parliament and responsible for LN's relations with other European far-right parties attended the referendum which they considered to be legitimate.[183]

The relations between the Northern League and the Kremlin have reached a higher level of collaboration as in March 2017 the leader of the LN Matteo Salvini traveled to Moscow in order to sign a cooperation agreement between United Russia, the main party in the Russian Federation and the Northern League. The agreement is not legally binding the parties, however the relevance of this accord is extremely significant for the evolution of the relations between the Italian far-right and Russia and for the broader far-right political axis in Europe in general, even if it is regarded through its symbolic and cooperative value.

In a nutshell, the agreement describes the necessity for further interaction between the Northern League and Russia and collaboration on exchange of information on current issues, bilateral and international relations, exchange of delegations for expert meetings and cooperation in general.[184] In relation to the doctrine of sovereign democracy, the signing of the cooperation agreement between the Northern League and United Russia is based on the main principle that consists the far-right ideology - state sovereignty.[185]

h. UK's Independence Party and British National Party

The relations between the British far-right and Russia evolve under the same notions as the other above mentioned European far-right parties such as the issue of sovereignty, nationalism, the preservation of traditional cultural features for the purpose of maintaining a sense of national identity. In this sense, the British National Party(BNP) expressed clearly that "the BNP loves Europe but hates the EU."[186] Similarly, the position towards the Transatlantic partnership is another element of discord between BNP and the current political establishment in the UK and in Europe in general. In this regard, BNP pledged for a withdraw not only from the European Union but also from NATO and in turn it argues that the UK should instead 'engage constructively with Russia as a natural ally and trading partner'.[187] The appreciation of the Russian Federation as an alternative to the Euro-Atlantic cooperation is being taken a step further from a simple shift in preference by the BNP. In a speech in 2015, the former leader of BNP, Nick Griffin argued that "Every European nation has had its time leading Europe and

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[183] Luigi Sergio Germani and Jacopo Iacoboni in Polyakova, Alina et. al. *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses 2.0,* p. 14.

[184] "Esclusiva: il testo integrale dell'accordo tra Russia Unita e Lega Nord", *Oltre La Linea*, September 16, 2017.

[185] Barlozzari, Elena, Matteo Carnieletto. "Ecco l'accordo tra Lega Nord e Russia Unita", *Il Giornale,* July 13, 2017, http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/ecco-laccordo-lega-nord-e-russia-unita-1419611.html.

[186] "Democracy, Culture and Identity: British National Party General Elections Manifesto 2010", BNP, May 6, 2010,
http://www.general-election-2010.co.uk/2010-general-election-manifestos/BNP-Manifesto-2010.pdf.

[187] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance*, p. 30.

indeed the world. The Greeks. The Romans. The Spanish. The French. The Germans. The British. Every great people - except the Russians. And now it becomes historically Russia's turn."[188]

In the case of the UK, the decision of the British people in the referendum organized in the summer 2016 to leave the European Union is a distinct element in the relations between the Russian Federation and the European far-right. If the leave of the Union is regarded as a key aspect of the European far-right parties' rhetoric which orient towards Russia to follow as a model of maintaining a strong sense of sovereignty, in the case of the UK the reality of the Brexit is a proof that such scenarios are not simply theoretical but truly possible. The Brexit is an illustration of the fact that influencing a shift from the liberal-institutionalist approach towards European affairs is an objective that the Kremlin can pursue. As Neil Barnett argues, the electorate's decision to leave the European Union in June 2016 suited the Kremlin, because it weakened the EU overall and made exits by other states more likely. A fragmented Europe makes it far easier for Russia to dominate individual states and to weaken the Europe-US relationship.[189]

With regards to UKIP, one of the main voices of the Brexit campaign, it is difficult to establish whether or not it should be considered a far-right and also given the reluctance of British people in general to associate themselves with the 'far-right'[190], the establishment of the positioning UKIP has on the political spectrum becomes even more challenging. However, if the fact that UKIP is a far-right party or not is a troublesome assessment to make, the fact that there are some features in its ideology that are correlated with the far-right and some of its political representatives are identified with the far-right raises some suspicion in this regard, to say the least.[191]

In light of these considerations - with an emphasis on acknowledging the fact that UKIP can pose difficulties in being placed with precision on the political spectrum -, the relation of the party with the Russian Federation particularly around norms and ideas such as sovereignty, the idealisation of political leaders or nationalism appears to be prominently in line with the broader European far-right approach towards Kremlin.

The leaders of UKIP have often expressed high regardeds towards the Russian leader Vladimir Putin. For instance, when the former UKIP president and leading figure in the Brexit movement in England and within the European Parliament, Nigel Farage was asked who was the world leader that he appreciated the most his reply was "Vladimir Putin".[192] However, it is

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[188] Weaver, Courtney. "To Russia with love, from Europe's far-right fringe", *Financial Times,* March 22, 2015, https://www.ft.com/content/556ed172-d0b9-11e4-982a-00144feab7de.

[189] Barnett, Neil in Polyakova et al., *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses,* 3rd edition, p.18.

[190] "After failing to take over UKIP, the farright is at bay", *The Economist*, October 5, 2017, https://www.economist.com/news/britain/21730020-britains-first-past-post-electoral-system-stifles-radical-parties-all-colours-after.

[191] Walker, Peter. "Ukip's new leader could be anti-Islam activist with links to far right", *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/sep/29/ukips-new-leader-anne-marie-waters-could-be-anti-islam-activist-with-links-to-far-right.

[192] "Nigel Farage: I admire Vladimir Putin", *The Guardian*, March 31, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/mar/31/farage-i-admire-putin.

important mentioning the fact that despite admiring the Russian leader it does not mean that Farage has not approved of Kremlin's actions in Syria or Ukraine.

This type of dual approach towards Kremlin is distinct related to the approach that European far-right parties have expressed in relation to Russia. The appreciation of the Russian leader and at the same time the disapproval of Russia's action has been expressed also by the leader that succeeded Farage at the presidency of UKIP, Paul Nutall who argued that "while Putin is a nasty man, he is generally getting it right" when referring to the Kremlin's strategy in the Syrian civil war and the Middle East in general.[193]

The relation of Nigel Farage with Russia has been active to the extent that the Kremlin funded television broadcaster RT - or under its former name known as Russia Today - has even offered Farage his own television show.[194]

Furthermore, given the frequent appearance on the RT programs, the leader of UKIP has been advertised as having been known far longer to the Russia Today audience than most of the British electorate as a special "endlessly quotable" British guest.[195] On a less positive note, in the FBI's investigation on the possible collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russian government, the former UKIP leader has been called as a person of interest and despite the fact that until unquestionable evidence is provided for why Farage "may have information about the facts that are under investigation"[196], the very fact that the UKIP former leader has been associated with the Kremlin at such a high level highlights once again his affinity towards Moscow.

In the case of the Ukrainian crisis, UKIP has played this type of duality when addressing Russia's policy towards Ukraine and its actions in Crimea. Although UKIP has not taken Russia's side similarly to the European far-right parties, the British independence party used the opportunity to once again criticize the European Union. In a debate with at the time Nick Clegg, Nigel Farage, shortly before the Crimean referendum took place argued that because of the "false series of hope" that were given to the people in western Ukraine the political crisis erupted and generated Russia's reaction for which reason "the European Union does have blood on its hands in Ukraine."[197]

[193] Mairs, Nicholas. "Paul Nuttall: Vladimir Putin 'generally getting it right'", *Politics Home,* November 20, 2016,
https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/political-parties/uk-independence-party/news/80954/paul-nuttall-vladimir-putin-%E2%80%98generally.
[194] Foster, Patrick. "Kremlin-backed broadcaster RT offers Nigel Farage his own show", *The Telegraph*, September 7, 2016,
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/07/kremlin-backed-broadcaster-rt-offers-nigel-farage-his-own-show/.
[195] Klapsis, Antonis. *An Unholy Alliance*, p.35.
[196] Kirchgaessner, Stephanie, Nick Hopkins, Luke Harding. "Nigel Farage is 'person of interest' in FBI investigation into Trump and Russia", *The Guardian*, June 2, 2017,
https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jun/01/nigel-farage-is-person-of-interest-in-fbi-investigation-into-trump-and-russia.
[197] Osborn, Andrew, William James. "UK's anti-EU leader accused of being apologist for Russia before vote", *Reuters*, March 27 2014,
https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-britain-politics/uks-anti-eu-leader-accused-of-being-apologist-for-russia-before-vote-idUSBREA2Q16A20140327.

Aside from the alleged closeness between UKIP, its former leaders on one side and the Russian government on the other or the possible reasons for which UKIP has had its position on the Ukrainian crisis, the concepts around which the party orbits when it comes to its most prominent objective, the return of the UK to its former approach to international affairs and consequently the withdrawal from the European Union is a call for the regain of sovereignty. This idea brings together UKIP and the Kremlin from an ideological standpoint.

And although it can be debated whether or not UKIP should be regarded as a far-right party, the relevance here of the party is due to the rhetoric that almost identifies with the European far-right in relation to issues of sovereignty, the culture of strong leader or nationalism and due to its highly important role that the UKIP played in achieving what most European far-right parties regard as a top objective: the withdrawal from the European Union and its eventual dissolution.

8. Conclusion

This project was set to explore the relations between the Russian Federation and the European far-right with a focus on the importance of the values that Surkov's sovereign democracy upholds in establishing and developing these relations. Some analysts argue that Surkov's sovereign democracy has ended up "devouring its puppet master"[198] and although sovereign democracy has not been confirmed and adopted by the Kremlin as an official ideology with regards to the democratic development of the Russian Federation, values and ideas such as state-centrism, nationalism, the cult of the "efficient manager" as a leader and anti-globalism have been present in the rhetoric that defined the interactions between the European far-right and the Kremlin.

The Russian Federation, as argued in the analysis chapter of this project, can be regarded as a geopolitical alternative to the current political establishment in the West, the European Union and the Transatlantic partnership. However, apart from these possible reasons for engaging in positive, constructive interaction between the European far-right and the Russian Federation, the relevance of what Social Constructivism argues as important features that determine the dynamics in the international system such as identity, the meaning that actors have towards one another and the instances of interactions out of which these meanings arise should not be neglected for a better and more comprehensive understanding of the relations between the European far-right and the Kremlin.

These particular values and ideas highlighted by Surkov's sovereign democracy, namely the appeal for a strong centralized state, traditional European and national values, anti-globalism and the cult of the powerful leader have been an important element in the rhetoric employed by the European far-right in the relation with Russia. As mentioned on several occasions in the analysis section, the instances of display by Moscow of these values have been perceived by the European far-right as potential style to be replicated.

The inconvenient series of events following the financial crisis of 2008 in the European Union has fueled anti-establishment sentiments across the continent and raised doubts about the feasibility of the liberal approach to European and international affairs in that Europe has been challenged with crisis of different nature every since: the debt crisis, low unemployment and a slowly recovering economy, the refugee crisis and increased terrorist threats, to name a few.
In this context, the vehement Euroscepticism displayed by the European far-right has not only lead to a chance in the political landscape in Europe but it also has serious implications at the international level and as this project has highlighted, in the relation with the Russian Federation.

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[198] Vladimir Frlolov, "Rise and Fall of Surkov's Sovereign Democracy", *The Moscow Times*, May 12, 2013, https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/rise-and-fall-of-surkovs-sovereign-democracy-23891.

The issue of state sovereignty which is central both to the European far-right and to the Kremlin has played a key role in the establishment and development of contacts between the two parties. As this project has shown, the strong criticism for what most European far-right parties have called as a loss of state sovereignty is central to the rhetoric that has been employed not only towards its own electorate, but also in the dialogue with the Kremlin. In this sense, the Russian Federation has been regarded by these parties as a beacon of hope in the attempts to restore the sovereignty of the European Union's member states and as a potential partner that would provide concrete support for achieving this objective.

Similarly, in the anti-globalism and anti European Union and Transatlantic rhetoric, the identification of both the European far-right and the Russian Federation with these ideas has created the foundation for strengthening of relations between the Kremlin and Europe's far-right. As the anti-globalist rhetoric is directly linked to the issue of state sovereignty, the association between the Kremlin and the European far right appears more logical. In this perspective, the fact that the Russian Federation is perceived - and in some cases as noted in the analysis - explicitly mentioned as a symbol of the opposition to globalism is an element of identity that increases the possibility for the development of positive relations betwen the Kremlin and Europe's far-right.

The conservative perspective on society and ideas about family which Russia upholds has also resulted in shaping Moscow as an attractive partner for the European far-right parties in the detriment of the generally liberal European stance on these issues. As noted in the analysis section and very openly formulated by the Hungarian far-right leader, Gabor Vona, these traditional Christian-European values that the European far-right parties are attached to, in the Europe's far-right perspective, can only be identified nowadays in the East of the continent. This is yet another element that sovereign democracy proposed which the European far-right also identifies with and the association of the Russian Federation with the promotion of traditional values provides a further positive incentive for the shaping in the European far-right's perspective of the meaning that the Kremlin has and ultimately its identity.

The display of strength and powerful leadership primarily by the Russian President Vladimir Putin has been regarded as shown in the analysis as an appealing feature of governing for the European far-right. It can be argued that the Kremlin's strong grip on governing has been openly criticised by the European Union and as a consequence the European far-right, by aligning with the Russian Federation on this issue is naturally opposing the European Union. However, the European far-right, as mentioned in specific instances in the analyses has not only defended the Russian President Vladimir Putin but on many occasions the Kremlin leader has even been praised by top representatives of the far-right parties in Europe. The perception of the Russian leadership and its President as powerful even by means that are questionable from the point of view of the European democratic tradition appears to have been twisted among the European far-right in a way that sets the governing exercise in the Russian Federation out of context as the focus on the less democratic practices has been rather reduced in the detriment of the emphasis on aspects such as the strength and power that the Russian leader displays. This perception that the European far-right has on the style of governing of the Russian Federation as a powerful, unwavering approach to politics is related to the other values

and ideas that the Kremlin and the far-right parties in Europe identify with in that the restoration of sovereignty, the opposition to 'globalist forces', the conservation of traditional Christian-European values require such a firm style of leadership.

As a consequence of the interaction between the European far-right and the Russian Federation around these notions, the Kremlin and the far-right in Europe can become a more homogenous opposition group to both NATO and the European Union that can lead to the weakening of the current institutional structures and the political establishment in the Europe. The signing of the cooperation agreements between the two European far-right parties, Italy's Northern League and Austria's Freedom party are concrete steps taken in this direction.

In this sense, the seeking of partnership and the promotion of the values and ideas that bind the two parties, on the one hand it helps achieve the purpose of sowing disagreement across the European continent and also it provides confidence and justification for upholding these ideas for both parties as they have come under criticism by the current European-North Atlantic political establishment.

For Russia, by courting the European far-right around notions like state-sovereignty, antiglobalism and the cult of the strong leader, the advantages of such a policy can be identified in several aspects. As shown in the analysis section what many analysts argue is the fact that by creating contacts and developing relations with the European far-right, the Kremlin can influence the policies that the current political establishment in the West adopts concerning Russia. Furthermore, the Russian development of relations with the European far-right can be understood also in terms the undermining of the European Union and Trans-Atlantic partnership. Similarly the attempt to develop influence in the European political landscape by the Kremlin can be regarded as an action aimed at providing a defence or justification for its domestic practice of governing through a strongly centralized state, traditional values and the cult of a strong leader.

For the European far-right, on the other hand, the establishment and strengthening of relations with the Russian Federation can also benefit the parties in that it weakens the European Union and the NATO and their ability of adopting a firm stance towards Russia. However, one of the main element in the relations between the Kremlin and Europe's far-right is the fact that the parties in Europe that seek the developing of relations with Russia can benefit also from acquire international recognition by one of the world's largest superpowers. This idea can be considered plausible given the fact that most of the European far-right parties have either been established in fairly recent years such as the case of AfD in 2013 or have known a revitalisation and an increase in popularity only recently. In this sense, the establishing of contacts with the Russian Federation can appear as significant progress.

The positioning of the European far-right parties towards Russia and the European Union/NATO in the context of the Ukrainian crisis illustrates the relevance of the strengthening of relations between the Kremlin and Europe's far-right and the implications for the approach that the European Union and NATO adopts towards the Kremlin. The recognition of the Russian annexation of Crimea - and as noted in the analysis section the pressure exerted on the European political leadership to recognize Kremlin's action - can be perceived as a specific example of policy that the European far-right can help influence in the benefit of the Russian

Federation. Furthermore, the issue concerning the sanctions that the West has adopted towards the Kremlin is another element of concrete benefit in the case of which the Russian Federation can utilize by courting the European far-right around values expressed in sovereign democracy.

While the reasoning of behind the rapprochement between Russia and Europe's far-right can be identified in various perspectives, the role that the values promoted through sovereign democracy relates to the Social Constructivist perception of establishing relations in the international system. The role of ideas about global order, state-sovereignty, the cult of the strong leader and traditional Christian-European values is to form the basis of interactions between the two parties and in consequence it influences the meanings that the Kremlin and the European far-right have towards each other which further on affects the actions taken by these actors with implications for the broader political establishment in Europe.

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