EU Eastern Partnership, Hybrid Warfare and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Christian Kaunert *

eucrim
European Law Forum: Prevention • Investigation • Prosecution

Article

ABSTRACT

This article aims to conceptualise and map Europe's Eastern Partnership that is under attack from the outside – notably by Russia. It analyses the impacts of Russia's hybrid warfare on the European Union. Russia's relationship with the West is characterised by the collective trauma and stigma associated with the disintegration of the USSR, which inspired Putin's geopolitical vision. However, in recent years, Putin's Russia has sought to re-establish itself on the world stage by projecting power, harking back to the height of Soviet influence in the 1970s and 1980s. In this endeavour, Russia has used both private military companies and far-right terrorist groups in its hybrid war strategy against the European Union. This article analyses this development, suggesting that Russia is aiming to establish itself as an expansionist power in Europe with little regard for international law and norms.

AUTHOR

Christian Kaunert

CITATION SUGGESTION

C. Kaunert, "EU Eastern Partnership, Hybrid Warfare and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine", 2022, Vol. 17(2), eucrim, pp158–164. DOI: https://doi.org/10.30709/eucrim-2022-011

Published in
2022, Vol. 17(2) eucrim pp 158 – 164
ISSN: 1862-6947
https://eucrim.eu

I. Introduction

In the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the USSR, there were hopes for a bright future for a new Europe. This provided a political opportunity that led to the accession of several Eastern European countries to the European Union between 2004 and 2007, particularly triggered by the desire to become key champions of stability and prosperity in the region.

Since 2003, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has sought to create a "ring of friends", i.e. an area of political stability, security and economic prosperity, comprising the countries situated to the east (i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and to the south of the EU (i.e. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, and Tunisia) (Commission of the European Communities 2003: 4). Thus, one of the aims of the ENP has been to foster security cooperation. More than two decades after the launch of the ENP, results have been mixed. Cooperation, notably in the field of security, has not progressed as much as envisaged in the ENP official documents (Kaunert and Léonard, 2011). Moreover, the international environment, notably in the EU's neighbourhood, has changed significantly since the ENP was launched. Political developments, such as the Arab uprisings in the south, and the war in Ukraine in the east, have led some observers to argue that the EU is now surrounded by a "ring of fire", rather than a "ring of friends" (Economist, 2014). As a result, security concerns have been prioritised on the EU's agenda. Although the initial plan was objectively designed in the context of a discourse of stability and prosperity, it soon was reviewed and replaced by a strategy defined by resilience. Launched in June 2016, the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) called for the need for "a strong European Union like never before" and opened the security debate about "the European project" which, in the words of *Federica Mogherini* (former High Representative and Vice-President of the EU Commission), had "brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy" and was now "being questioned" (EEAS, 2016).

II. European Security and the War in Ukraine

The impact of the conflict in Ukraine on the EU's Eastern Partnership has been considerable, in particular because it significantly impacted the EU's relationship with Russia. *Zwolski* (Zwolski, 2017) outlined the two competing positions derived from this debate: firstly, Europe "threatened by expansionist Russia" which is linked to more assertive EU responses to this threat. *Sakwa* (Sakwa, 2015) links this with the idea of Europe in the wider sense, and the EU subsumed in a wider Atlantic community. Secondly, the EU could become more "inclusive towards Russia", which *Sakwa* links to the idea of a greater Europe, including Russia, but also Turkey and Ukraine as concentric circles (Sakwa, 2015). *Zwolski* underlines the implications of these two competing visions: on the one hand, Russia has become expansionist despite efforts by the EU and NATO to develop closer ties. This implies the EU standing up to Russia's bullying neighbouring countries, outlined by the 2015 House of Lords review on the future of EU-Russia relations (House of Lords, 2015). On the other hand, Russia is portrayed as a victim of European and Euro-Atlantic expansionism (Mearsheimer and Walt, 2007; Kissinger, 2014; Milne, 2014). According to this line of reasoning, the EU must become more receptive to Russia's legitimate security concerns (Sakwa, 2015). *Sakwa* even blames Europe for systematically ignoring Russia's attempts to create new, more inclusive institutional co-operative frameworks and submits that Europe is "dead".

Indeed, the relations between Russia and the EU have been distinctly shaped by Russia's conception of the West and by Russia's own identity-building practices. The discourse about "us" and the "them" was conducted in an environment where historical traumas play a central role and where ideological, societal, and spatial divisions are echoes of Russia's securitised civilisational dialogue (Kazharski, 2020, p. 2). In recent history,

Russia experienced two major collective traumas that forever transformed how it related to Europe: the first was the collapse of the USSR and the second was the West's insistence that it had defeated the USSR, relegating the recently formed Russia to a minor partner. The great aspirations of the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, endorsing the end of the Cold War and the division within Europe, were perceived by Russia as illusive and feeble, when the West refused to give Russia the place it deserved (Sakwa, 2015). Russia's grievances towards Europe deepened when Gorbachev's "Common European Home" aspirations (Gorbachev, 1989) started to transform into an elusive idea as, according to *Sakwa*, the European Union transformed its peace project into an expansionist and political one (Sakwa, 2015, p. 2). The same was defended by *Zielonka*, who argued that "two Europes" came together in the aftermath of the Cold War (Zielonka, 2006) instead of a "Europe whole and free" (OSCE, 1990) ready to start from zero.

Since the disintegration of the USSR, Russia has struggled to find its path, its identity and especially its geopolitical space as an entity with a "distinct civilisation" strongly anchored on a civilisational ideology that was at odds with the situation after the Cold War (Tsygankov, 2016, p. 3). Additionally, the uncomfortable fact that Europe did not disentangle its Atlanticists knots, not only deepened Russia's scepticism of the West, as it also nurtured a sense of humiliation, a key factor in the emergence of Russia' identity today. It is precisely here where the emotional dimension plays a pivotal role. It is important to understand how narratives of shame, fear and grievance influence how Russia perceives Europe and how Europe portrays Russia. On the one hand, Europe traditionally sees Russia as fundamentally expansionist and interventionist (Baranovsky, 1997), seeking to expand its sphere of influence and power towards its neighbours. On the other hand, hit by international sanctions, Russia has been portraying itself as a victim of international injustice, whose dignity and interest have been widely ignored. Not surprisingly, the optimism born of Perestroika was therefore soon diluted and was tangibly undermined by the crisis in Crimea and the subsequent war in Ukraine: Europe regarded the crisis as an annexation, whereas Russia saw it as a unification. This marks a decisive turning point where Russia assumes its own autobiography as one defined by and entrenched in a "wider" continental Europe (Sakwa, 2012). The speech in which *Putin* declared the reintegration of Crimea to the Russian Federation revived the narratives of a symbolic past founded on the reminiscence of a shared identity shattered after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This needed to be recovered in the name of a new greater project, alluding to a greater past whose ambitions were built upon strengthened domestic political and economic interests, and amalgamating political legitimacy with national and regional objectives (Putin, 2014).

The next sections analyse the way in which Russia has related to the EU since the annexation of Crimea, the wars in Donetsk and Luhansk, and, subsequently, the full invasion of Ukraine in 2022, demonstrating Russia's increasing turn towards an expansionist power, which, increasingly, threatens the European security order.

III. Russia's Hybrid Warfare and its Private Military Companies

This section outlines the way in which Russia has used hybrid warfare and private military companies to challenge the European security order. This challenge has provided us with reasonable grounds to perceive Russia as an expansionist power. Over the last eight years, Putin's Russia has sought to re-establish itself on the world stage by projecting its influence across the Middle East and Africa, harking back to the height of Soviet power in the 1970s and 1980s. The Kremlin sees this as Russia's right in the world. This has been notably attempted through the use of *hybrid warfare*. The phenomenon of hybrid warfare has been debated since it entered into the security and military lexicon. In general, states and non-state actors have employed both conventional and irregular methods to achieve their goals throughout history. According to *Hoffman* (2007, p. 8), hybrid warfare comprises different types of warfare, which can all be executed by both state and

non-state actors. These types of warfare include conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts, and criminal disorder. By conducting this variety of acts of warfare, *Hoffman* (ibid, p. 8) asserts that the main goal of hybrid warfare is to obtain "synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict". In addition, he notes that in hybrid war, all the forces, whether regular or irregular, become blurred into the same force in the same battlespace (ibid, p. 8). *Pindjak* (2014, p.18) contends that hybrid warfare involves multi-layered endeavours that aim to destabilise a functioning state and polarise its society. Thus, by combining kinetic operations with subversive efforts, the adversary goal is to have an impact on decision-makers. Usually, the aggressor using hybrid warfare conducts clandestine actions that leave no credible smoking gun in order to avoid attribution or retribution (Pindjak, p. 18). In that sense, *Deep* argues that hybrid warfare has the "potential to transform the strategic calculations of potential belligerents due to the rise of non-state actors, information technology, and the proliferation of advanced weapons systems" (Deep, 2020).

With this in mind, Putin's Russia started to employ what have been termed Private Military Companies (PMC's) or perhaps more accurately semi-state security forces to assist in the re-establishment of Russia's international standing (Marten, 2019). However, Russia's deployment of such companies represents a very serious threat to international security as they have re-interpreted the mercenary in their own way and in a departure from the traditional "soldier of fortune" seen in the mid to late 20th century. Russia can and has been using the legal ambiguity surrounding such companies in terms of International Law to expand its influence in Ukraine, Africa and Syria. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the encroachment of so-called Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine highlight their increased use by Moscow to further its regional goals in a more aggressive interpretation of the "near and abroad" policy or in Soviet parlance "Spheres of Influence". This has been made possible by the ambiguous legal status of private military companies internationally. The most prominent Russian mercenary group is the Wagner group which first appeared in Crimea in 2014 and has since been in the vanguard of Russian foreign policy in Africa, the Middle East and in the contested areas of Eastern Ukraine.

Where does the Russian military doctrine and strategy stem from? It was derived from the Soviet armed forces, which, based on a Marxist perspective, viewed war "as a socio-political phenomenon . . . [where] armed forces are used as chief and decisive means for the achievement of political aims" (Glantz, 1995, p. xiii). After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks established a militia-type volunteer army, which, for instance, fought against the Basmachi insurgents in Central Asia (Statiev, 2010, p. 25). Subsequently, Leon Trotsky transformed the Red Army into a regular army with hundreds of thousands of soldiers. After the end of World War II, the Soviet leadership used militias extensively to suppress nationalist insurgents in Western Ukraine (ibid, 97-123). Militias were subsequently used as a tool of Soviet counter-insurgency operations to tap into local knowledge and intelligence. Thus, militias played an important role of the regular army, and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union closely supervised them (ibid, 26). The collapse of the Soviet Union facilitated nationalism in the former Soviet territory. Ethnic conflicts prompted Moscow to intervene in former Soviet republics, whereby Russia had inherited most of the Soviet military capabilities, yet its army was trained to fight a conventional war against NATO. One example for Russia's new foreign policy approach in the post-Soviet area is the case of the insurgents from the Russian-speaking region of Transnistria, who fought a short war against the former Soviet republic of Moldova in 1992. While the Moldova-based Soviet/Russian 14th Army was officially neutral, it covertly supported pro-Russian Transnistrian militias. Another example is the war in Georgia. In 2008, Russian forces supported local militias of the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Several thousand South Ossetians and volunteers from North Caucasus, as well as up to 10,000 Abkhazians, participated in the war (Holcomb, 2017, p. 216).

The primary objection to mercenaries is that they are warriors without a state, fighting for money rather than national ideology. The post-war surge in mercenary activity prompted Geneva Protocols I and II in 1977 that

banned mercenaries. Geneva Protocol I also includes the most widely accepted definition of a mercenary in international law in its Art. 47(2) which reads as follows:

> A mercenary is any person who:
>
> (a) is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict;
>
> (b) does, in fact, take a direct part in the hostilities;
>
> (c) is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the armed forces of that Party;
>
> (d) is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a Party to the conflict;
>
> (e) is not a member of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict; and
>
> (f) has not been sent by a State which is not a Party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces.

However, it is widely regarded that Art. 47(2) is not only unworkable legislation but also so ambiguous that any capable lawyer would be able to argue their client out of it (Geoffrey, 1980, p. 375). Due to Art. 47, Russian military companies, like their western counterparts, operate globally with relative ease. This exploitation of inadequate laws and loopholes within international legislation is referred to as “lawfare” (Chifu & Frunzeti, 2020, p. 47). While Russian law prohibits mercenary activity (Art. 13(5) of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and Art. 208 of the Russian Penal Code), there has been an upsurge in Russian mercenary activity in the last eight years. Papers relating to the Wagner and the Slavonic corps have pointed out that the Kremlin uses the question of legality as leverage against the Russia military companies in order to control them and to ensure that they act in Russia’s interest (Chifu & Frunzeti, 2020). However, this view does not adequately take into consideration that the Kremlin interprets and applies Russian law ad hoc as required. This is especially the case when it comes to matters of state security and foreign intelligence operations. Russian law has been continually distorted to suit the ends of the oligarchs and of Vladimir Putin. This corresponds to what has happened in Russia since the end of communism, in what *Klebnikov* (Klebnikov, 2001) termed the era of “gangster capitalism”. Russia has a propensity to act in the grey zone between peace and war, where it can deny any involvement and quite often gets away with actions that violate the social norms of the international community, if not international law itself (Peterson, et al, 2019, p. 30). *Chifu* and *Frunzeti* point out that these so-called Russian PMC’s are the perfect tool for conducting lawfare by allowing the Kremlin to operate on the edge of the law or in territories where the law has no application (Chifu & Frunzeti, 2020, p. 47).

The registration of the various PMC’s outside of Russia is not simply an effort to circumvent Art. 13 of the Russian Constitution, which prohibits mercenary activities and enshrines the monopoly on violence with the armed forces of the Russian Federation. It is a very simple template to protect Moscow whenever such companies are deployed. In a word: deniability. The question of the legality of Russian military companies is merely a façade that shields Moscow and its intentions. The proximity of oligarchs such as Wagner’s owner Yevgeni Prigozhin to Vladimir Putin indicates collusion at the highest level. Prigozhin is an unusual individual to head up a military company, as he has no military background and made his money in a chain of restaurants in St. Petersburg after a stint in jail for petty crime (Harding, 2020, p.160-161). *Marten* (Marten, 2019, p. 196-197) considers him a middleman when it comes to Wagner, making money out of contracting Wagner

operations. Prigozhin is meanwhile worthan estimated 200 million dollars after securing lucrative catering contracts for the Russian military in the region. Prigozhin denies any links to Wagner and the Kremlin also denies the existence of the Wagner Group; after all, being a mercenary is illegal in Russia. Prigozhin is no stranger to deniable operations as he is also suspected of funding a troll farm in St. Petersburg that was involved in the online manipulation of the US election in 2016 (Chifu & Frunzeti, 2020, p. 47; Belton, 2020, p. 483). This places Prigozhin firmly in the grey zone of hybrid warfare along with Wagner. As Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov noted "De jure we do not have such legal entities" (Harding, 2020, p. 153). However, Putin has noted that individuals do not represent the Russian Federation that "it is a matter of private individuals not the state" (Belton, 2020, p. 483). *Belton* notes that in this instance Putin was being facetious, and that the term private individual was a typical KGB tactic that allowed for plausible deniability for any Kremlin involvement. She adds that by this time, all of Russia's so-called private businessmen had become agents of the State (ibid., p. 483). This is a sentiment shared by *Browder* (Browder, 2015) who highlighted this same issue in his acclaimed book Red Notice.

In the same way as we have viewed groups like Wagner or 'RUS-CORP' to be PMC's, attributing the title company to them, we have perhaps also overestimated the role of oligarchs in this landscape. Far from being independent from the Russian State, they are inextricably linked to it and to Vladimir Putin. They merely do the Kremlin's bidding and benefit financially by acting as caretakers for Moscow's deniable operations, as in the of case Prigozhin and Wagner. The oligarchs owe their loyalty to Putin and the Russian State, essentially making them an extension of the Russian intelligence apparatus and in that regard insulated and protected. The motion to legalise PMC's in Russia in 2018 was vetoed, as it would have put at risk the 'Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation', mainly known as GRU, and its deniable operations, and it was not in the best interests of the Russian Federation to allow the legalisation of such companies. Maintaining the status quo is in the interest of the Russian secret services structures with which the PMCs are linked and through which they are controlled because legalisation of their activities could limit this influence and control (Dyner, 2018, p. 2). Doing so would have destroyed the veneer of plausible deniability that protects the GRU and its private army. It is no coincidence that the Wagner group trains on GRU bases and deploys globally with the assistance of the regular Russian military.

Even if international law could be applied, in particular with a view to establishing culpability, it would be necessary to establish beyond any doubt who owns the companies and where they are registered. With the exception of the RSB-group and the Moran Group, it is unclear where Wagner is registered. Whether inside Russia or externally, it will be inherently difficult to challenge these groups and, their use in Eastern Ukraine and in particular the Donbas, very worrying. In every respect, the Kremlin has established a very dangerous foreign policy tool with the PMCs. Moscow has completely applied the deniability rationale, including the denial of the death of Russian contractors in Syria in 2018 at Deir ez-Zor. This deadly incident involving United States Special Forces led to the death of up to 200 to 300 Russian contractors of the Wagner Group. The death of Russian nationals in a foreign country should have elicited a strong response from the Kremlin, yet it did not (Neff, 2018). This shows the ruthlessness with which Moscow is willing to pursue its foreign policy goals up to the point of abandoning its operatives if necessary. While Africa represents a significant part of Wagner's operations, it also represents a learning curve. Moscow deployed Wagner on the continent, using it as a proving ground for how best to employ them, with little or no consequence should the operations there fail. As we have seen, this approach has been very successful and the scope of operations has become broad. Groups like Wagner are very well suited to making a significant contribution at low financial cost in a 'power as prestige' way (Østensen, & Bukkvoll, 2022, p.144).

IV. Far-Right Terror, Russia and the EU's Eastern Partnership

This section outlines the way in which Russia has used hybrid warfare and far right terror groups to challenge the European security order. This challenge has provided us with further grounds to perceive Russia as an expansionist power. While Russia did not create all of the far-right activity in Eastern Europe, it has utilised pre-exisiting far-right networks and has further expanded far-right activity in the region. Eastern Europe and EaP countries have been viewed as places with populist far-right movements (Buštíková, 2018). Far-right elements in Ukraine gained notoriety during the Euromaidan revolution of 2013-2014, which led to the removal of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych and a turn towards the West (Freedom House, 2018). They have been closely linked to the fighting that erupted in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, with the emergence of the volunteer battalions. Following the Euromaidan revolution, Russia intervened in Ukraine, which led to the former's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. With Russia's intervention and Ukraine's military being woefully ill-prepared, Kyiv turned to volunteer battalions, with thousands of individuals, many with little training, answering this call (Aliyev, 2016; Karagiannis, 2016). The Azov Regiment, Right Sector, and Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists were or are overtly far-right, while others are or were not so, including the Georgian National Legion. The first of these has become particularly notorious, with far-right terrorist Brenton Tarrant bearing one of its symbols. It is known for forging links with other Western far-right organisations. Furthermore, there have been moves to designate it a foreign terrorist organisation in the US, and there are concerns about its continuing role (Umland, 2019; Lister, 2020). However, Kyiv soon recognised the problems and negative attention caused by the foreign fighters, including their use for Russian propaganda purposes. It therefore disbanded and integrated these groups into the military by 2016, although some rogue elements persisted into 2019. Thus, some far-right volunteers were present in Ukraine in the early stages of the conflict in 2014 and others have continued to be (Aliyev, 2020).

An influential far-right group with important activity in Ukraine is the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM). Despite being entirely Russian, it has become an important player in the far right environment of Ukraine. RIM is a pro-Russian entity aimed at defending Russian culture against the West, founded in St. Petersburg in 2002. They are a tsarist, ultranationalist and Christian-orthodox group grounded on the defence of Russian ethnic identity and white supremacy. The group is presently the first white nationalist organisation to be designated a terrorist group by the US State Department (Pompeo, 2020) although it continues to operate its two paramilitary training camps in St. Petersburg and its training programme called "Partizan". According to the leader and founder, Stanislav Anatolyevich Vorobyev, the group accuses western culture of the "destruction of the family and healthy moral values" through "abortion, propaganda of debauchery and acceptance of sexual perversions." (Shekhovtsov, 2015a). Among its primary goals are the repossession of the "lost territories" of the old Russian Empire and the reinstatement of the monarchy (Shekhovtsov, 2015b). Starting as a small group in St. Petersburg, whose objective was to promote a healthy lifestyle and military ideals based on the values of the Russian Orthodox Church, and to study the history of Russian military glory" (Yudina and Verkhovsky, 2019), in 2007, the RIM has grown into a paramilitary organisation creating a small tactical army, the Rezerv ("Reserve"). Between 2007 and 2014, the RIM engaged in political activism and became involved in Russian politics, working closely with far-right organisations. But it was not until Crimea's Annexation that the RIM came into the spotlight. The day after the invasion, Vorobyev flew to Crimea with a small crew to help pro-separatist forces in Ukraine. According to the leader of the RIM, this was a unique opportunity to protect ethnic Russians and to destroy "the stability of anti-Russian regimes on all the territory inhabited by the Russian ethnos." (Horvath, 2015). They soon started to provide military training in their Reserv training camp to Russian citizens wishing to enlist in the conflict as pro-Russian separatists, and three months after the annexation, created an exclusive training facility for foreign fighters, the Imperial Legion Military-Patriotic

Club (Yudina and Verkhovsky, 2019). However, in March 2015, the RIM emerged as a transnational ideological group. It joined Rodina, a Russian far-right party and together embarked on a new enterprise, "The Last Crusade" – an international extreme right network called the "World National-Conservative Movement" (WNCM) (Oliphant 2020). In the same year, the group gathered in the International Russian Conservative Forum (Shekhovtsov, 2015c), with several European political parties, such as the Greek Golden Dawn, the German National Democratic Party, and the Italian Forza Nuova, and some special guests, including Nick Griffin, former leader of the British National Party, Udo Voigt (NDP) and Roberto Fiore (Fuorza Nuova). Later in the same year, the RIM strengthened its ties to the Swedish neo-Nazi group Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) that was operating across several Scandinavian countries. Over the subsequent years, the RIM clearly expanded and grew its network; in 2017, it started talks with US supremacists groups, in particular with the leaders of the Charlottesville's assembly (Omelicheva, 2020). Seeking to expand its network throughout Europe even further, in 2019, the RIM attended several meetings in Poland, Bulgaria, Austria, Spain, and Germany.

Over the past five years, the two training camps have become a hotspot for training right-wing extremists, wishing to learn how to perpetrate attacks. Until 2018, one of its training facilities, Partizan, was registered online as a surveillance and security company. According to the group's site on the Russian social network Vkontakte, they provide online courses on weapons handling, personal fighting and military topography. More recently, it came to light that members of the Young Nationalists, the youth wing of Germany's oldest right-wing extremist party, the NPD, and Der III. Weg (The Third Way), one of the most radical German far-right parties, received military field training from the RIM (Welle, 2020). Syrian mercenaries and members of far-right associations have allegedly also received training in their facilities. Approximately 18,000 users identified themselves as Partizan community members on the VKontakte social network (IGTDS, 2020); some from Sweden, others Finland, and about three dozen from the Baltic States (IGTDS, 2020). While the RIM portrays an official façade of being against Putin's regime, in truth the RIM is quite close to the government. There are several suggestions indicating that the Kremlin not only has closely monitored the group's operations in Crimea and in Syria but has also ignored the fact that they use official military weaponry. Partizan is largely accepted by the authorities and operates liberally across Russia (Shekhovtsov, 2015a; Carpenter, 2018). Moreover, the RIM is to some extent represented in the Duma by Alexei Zhuravlev, leader of the Rodina party, who has also supported Russian separatists in Ukraine. Finally, whilst the RIM does not represent the Kremlin, the truth is that it has been covertly protecting the group since its designation as a terrorist association.

V. Conclusion

El Economista wrote in 2017:

> "The reason Putin supports the far-right in Europe is because he knows that this weakens us (…) it divides us and divides Europe. (…) he knows the extreme right makes us weak, he knows the far-right divides us. And a divided Europe means that Putin is the boss."

Contrary to what happened during the Cold War, Russia is not seeking to spread the communist message across the continent or pursue military control of Europe. The objective is now to reshuffle and reshape the continent's liberal security order. Putin appears as the definition and personification of a moral and identitarian Russia that is quite attractive to far-right nationalists in Europe, and a person several far-right politicians would wish to emulate. In the Eastern neighbourhood, activities of far-right groups are rapidly growing. Far-right groups have been striving on ethnic-nationalist discourses. They have close links not only to Russia, but also with the bourgeoning far right in Europe. Furthermore, over the last decade, the Russian intelligence community has reinterpreted and developed the concept of mercenary in a way unlike anything

we have seen in the past. While the use of soldiers of fortune was popular during the Cold War, the Kremlin has turned them into a 21st-century tool of hybrid warfare. Russia has created a completely deniable military entity that can use any means necessary to achieve the end goal. A military force comprised of professionals that are not bound by the articles of war or international norms is truly dangerous. Russia has shown through military actions
in Ukraine and Crimea, and wider political influence operations, its willingness to openly flout international rules
and norms to achieve its strategic goals (Peterson et al, 2019).

Bibliography

Aliyev, H., 2016. Strong militias, weak states and armed violence: Towards a theory of 'state-parallel' paramilitaries. *Security Dialogue*, 47 (6), 498–516.

Aliyev, H., 2020. Is Ukraine a Hub for International White Supremacist Fighters? | Russia Matters.

Baranovsky, V., 1997. *Russia and Europe: The Emerging Security Agenda | SIPRI*. Oxford University Press.

Buštíková, L., 2018. *The Radical Right in Eastern Europe*.

Carpenter, M., 2018. Russia Is Co-opting Angry Young Men [online]. *The Atlantic*. Available from: https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/08/russia-is-co-opting-angry-young-men/568741/ [Accessed 15 Mar 2021].

Chifu, I & Frunzeti, T. (2020) From Mercenary Companies to Private Defence. The Case of Russian Private Military Companies (National Defence University, Washington D.C. 2020)

Commision of the European Communities, 2003. Communication from the EU Commission to the Council of the EU Parliament: Wider Europe — Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours.

Council of the European Union, 2009. Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit.

Council of the European Union, 2015. Outcome report of the meeting with Eurojust Contact Points and Liaison Magistrates | Eurojust | European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation.

Deep, A. 'Hybrid War: Old Concept, New Techniques', Small Wars Journal, 2015. Available at: https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/hybrid-war-old-concept-new- techniques (Accessed: 1 October 2020).

Dyner, A.M. (2018) The Role of Private Military Contractors in Russian Foreign Policy (Polish Institute of International affairs, No. 64 (1135), 4 May 2018, 2.

EEAS, 2016. *A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy*.

El Economista, 2017. Putin apoya a la extrema derecha para dividir Europa, dice Timmermans - EcoDiario.es [online]. Available from: https://ecodiario.eleconomista.es/global/noticias/8260811/03/17/Putin-apoya-a-la-extrema-derecha-para-dividir-Europa-dice-Timmermans.html [Accessed 19 Mar 2021].

Glantz, D.M. (1995) The Evolution of Soviet Operational Art, 1927–1991: The Documentary Basis. Routledge, London.

Gorbachev, M., 1989. "Europe as a Common Home".

Harding, L. (2020) Shadow State: murder Mayhem and Russia's Remaking of the West (Guardian Faber, London, 2020)

Holcomb, F. (2017) "The Kremlin's Irregular Army: Ukrainian Separatist Order of Battle," Russia and Ukraine Security Report 3, (September 2017), 9, Institute for the Study of War. https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/HUDOC_38263_08_Annexes_ENG.pdf

Hoffman, F.G. (2007) Conflict in the 21st Century: The rise of Hybrid Wars. (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies)

Horvath, R., 2015. The Euromaidan and the crisis of Russian nationalism. *Nationalities Papers*, 43 (6), 819–839.

House of Lords, 2015. The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine, (HL Paper 115), 123.

IGTDS, 2020. Combat training for European neo-Nazis in Russia [online]. *IGTDS*. Available from: https://igtds.org/blog/2020/06/09/combat-training-for-european-neo-nazis-in-russia/ [Accessed 20 Mar 2021].

International Committee of the Red Cross, "Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I) of 8 June 1977," Geneva, Switzerland, May 2010, available at www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0321.pdf

Karagiannis, E., 2016. Ukrainian volunteer fighters in the eastern front: ideas, political-social norms and emotions as mobilization mechanisms. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16 (1), 139–153.

Kaunert, C. and Léonard, S., 2011. EU counterterrorism and the European neighbourhood policy: an appraisal of the southern dimension. *Terrorism and political violence*, 23 (2), 286–309.

Kazharski, A., 2020. Civilizations as Ontological Security? Stories of the Russian Trauma. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 67 (1), 24–36.

Kissinger, H.A., 2014. Henry Kissinger: To settle the Ukraine crisis, start at the end. *Washington Post*, 5 Mar.

Klebnikov, P. (2001) Godfather of the Kremlin: The Decline of Russia in the Age of Gangster Capitalism (Mariner Books, Boston, 2001),

Lister, T., 2020. The Nexus Between Far-Right Extremists in the United States and Ukraine. *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*.

Marten, K. (2019) Russia's use of Semi-State Security Forces: The Case of the Wagner Group (Post Soviet Affairs, 35.3)

Mearsheimer, J.J. and Walt, S.M., 2007. *The Israel lobby and US foreign policy*. Macmillan.

Milne, S., 2014. The clash in Crimea is the fruit of western expansion | Seumas Milne. *the Guardian*, 5 Mar.

Oliphant, R., 2020. Far-Right Russian group claims Donald Trump labelled them terrorists to win election. *The Telegraph*, 12 Apr.

Omelicheva, M., 2020. Designating the Russian Imperial Movement a Terrorist Organization: a Drop in the Bucket of Needed U.S. Counter-Extremism Responses - PONARS Eurasia [online]. *https://www.ponarseurasia.org/*. Available from: https://www.ponarseurasia.org/designating-the-russian-imperial-movement-a-terrorist-organization-a-drop-in-the-bucket-of-needed-u-s-counter-extremism-responses/ [Accessed 20 Mar 2021].

OSCE, 1990. Charter of Paris for a New Europe [online]. Available from: https://www.osce.org/mc/39516 [Accessed 12 Nov 2020].

Østensen, A.G. & Bukkvoll, T. (2022) Private Military Companies- Russian Great Power Politics on the Cheap?, Small Wars and Insurgencies, 33: 1-2.

Pindjak, P. (2014) 'Deterring Hybrid Warfare: A Chance for NATO to and the EU to work together', NATO Review, 2014.

Pompeo, M., 2020. United States Designates Russian Imperial Movement and Leaders as Global Terrorists [online]. *United States Department of State*. Available from: https://2017-2021.state.gov/united-states-designates-russian-imperial-movement-and-leaders-as-global-terrorists/ [Accessed 20 Mar 2021].

Putin, V., 2014. Address by President of the Russian Federation • President of Russia [online]. Available from: http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603 [Accessed 4 Aug 2020].

Sakwa, R., 2011. Russia's Identity: Between the 'Domestic' and the 'International'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63 (6), 957–975.

Sakwa, R., 2012. The problem of 'the international' in Russian identity formation. *International Politics*, 49.

Sakwa, R., 2015. The death of Europe? Continental fates after Ukraine. *International Affairs*, 91 (3), 553–579.

Sakwa, R., 2017. *Russia against the rest: The post-cold war crisis of world order*. Cambridge University Press.

Shekhovtsov, A., 2015a. Anton Shekhovtsov's blog: Russian politicians building an international extreme right alliance. *Anton Shekhovtsov's blog*.

Shekhovtsov, A., 2015b. Anton Shekhovtsov's blog: Russian fascist militants give money to Swedish counterparts. *Anton Shekhovtsov's blog*.

Shekhovtsov, A., 2015c. Anton Shekhovtsov's blog: What does the fascist conference in St. Petersburg tell us about contemporary Russia? *Anton Shekhovtsov's blog*.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) | EU Neighbours [online], 2021. Available from: https://www.eun-eighbours.eu/en/policy/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp [Accessed 6 Aug 2021].

Tsygankov, A., 2016. Crafting the state-civilization Vladimir Putin's turn to distinct values. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 63 (3), 146–158.

Umland, A., 2019. Irregular Militias and Radical Nationalism in Post-Euromaydan Ukraine: The Prehistory and Emergence of the "Azov" Battalion in 2014. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 31 (1), 105–131.

Welle, D., 2020. *German neo-Nazis trained at Russian camps: report | DW | 05.06.2020*.

Yudina, N. and Verkhovsky, A., 2019. Russian Nationalist Veterans of the Donbas War. *Nationalities Papers*, 47 (5), 734–749.

Zielonka, J., 2006. *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*.

Zwolski, K., 2017. Wider Europe, Greater Europe? David Mitrany on European Security Order. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55 (3), 645–661.

* Author statement

Parts of this article build on joint work with Dr Joana de Deus Pereira (University of South Wales) on the EU Eastern Partnership, Ontological Security and EU- Russian warfare.

About eucrim

eucrim is the leading journal serving as a European forum for insight and debate on criminal and "criministrative" law. For over 20 years, it has brought together practitioners, academics, and policymakers to exchange ideas and shape the future of European justice. From its inception, eucrim has placed focus on the protection of the EU's financial interests – a key driver of European integration in "criministrative" justice policy.
Editorially reviewed articles published in English, French, or German, are complemented by timely news and analysis of legal and policy developments across Europe.
All content is freely accessible at https://eucrim.eu, with four online and print issues published annually.

Stay informed by emailing to eucrim-subscribe@csl.mpg.de to receive alerts for new releases.
The project is co-financed by the Union Anti-Fraud Programme (UAFP), managed by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF).

Co-funded by
the European Union