

“I AM EURASIAN”

The Kremlin connections of the Hungarian far-right



POLITICAL CAPITAL
POLICY RESEARCH & CONSULTING INSTITUTE

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Political Capital is a Hungary-based independent political research and consultancy institute with one decade of experience. We have always stood for the basic values of democracy, human rights and market economy. The institute's main fields of interest are right-wing extremism and its social impacts, conspiracy theories, prejudices and election research. For some time, Political Capital has been focusing on the Russian propaganda spread within the EU and the Kremlin's influence on European parties and organizations.

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All errors and omissions are our own.

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A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY

The idea of the current research emerged during our preceding analysis¹ on East European far-right parties' orientation towards Russia in 2009 and the study² on the promotion of Kremlin's interests through European far-right and far-left parties' pro-Russian policies in 2014. The findings of these papers led us to the hypothesis that certain far-right (and partly far-left) organizations within the EU have specific functions imposed by the Russian state and actors close to it. These functions include: (1) destabilization of the EU, its member states and the transatlantic relations; (2) legitimization of the Russian regime and its policies; (3) gathering information and spreading disinformation. In order to reveal these functions and to analyze the role of far-right parties and organizations within the EU, we launch a series of publications that focus on individual member states (Hungary, Slovakia, Greece and France) and EU institutions. The first element of the series, with the financial support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, provides an in-depth analysis of the Hungarian far-right's pro-Kremlin's stance. The time scope of the study reaches from Jobbik's foundation in 2003 until current developments. The focus, however, is on the time before and during the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

During the study we refer many times to the terms "Russian influence" or "Russian state influence" or "Kremlin's influence." These notions are connected with the term "Russian influence through power," by which we mean explicit and implicit actions by the Russian state and related actors or organizations aiming at creating political changes in the behavior and/or political agenda of certain political actors through political means and/or financial instruments. In this context, political means include secret service operations, official meetings, information warfare, etc., while financial tools consist of specific forms of financing, for example.

The main goals of the research are the following:

1. Identify the relevant connections between Hungarian far-right and far-left stakeholders and Kremlin stakeholders.
2. Collect and analyze the most important pro-Russian declarations and actions of the relevant radical political players in Hungary.
3. Create a list of the meetings and links between radical players and Kremlin stakeholders and analyze their relations.
4. Reveal personal, organizational, media and other linkages between the far-right and Kremlin stakeholders.

We used the following research methods:

1. Desktop research to collect the necessary information, restore the order of developments and events, gather statements and quotes.

¹ Péter Krekó and Krisztián Szabados: „*Russia's Far-Right Friends. In-depth analysis.*” Risk and Forecast, December 3, 2009, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/in-depth-analysis/russia-s-far-right-friends_349.html

² “*The Russian Connection*”, Political Capital, April 10, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf

2. In-depth interviews with experts from academia, politics and media to gather non-public and background information and deeper view on certain actors and events.
3. Methods of investigative journalism in order to gain confidential and background information from actors within or close to the far-right scene (e.g., confidential talks). In order to protect their identity, sources of such information remain anonymous in the study.
4. Analysis of Hungarian far-right media outlets and Facebook pages.
5. Analysis of Russian online media in order to examine how Hungarian far-right actors are presented to the Russian public. Based on a combination of popularity and content, we limited the scope of research from the 26 potential sources to 6. For the selection based on popularity, we used research data on Russian media from the global media research company, TNS. In assessing the various media, we took into account three major content criteria: the number and content of far-right articles published in the medium, the medium's political orientation and the composition of the medium's readership. Based on the selection criteria, three pro-government media targeting domestic audience and one independent medium, as well as two international media proved to be suitable for our research. Subsequently, we subjected relevant articles published by the selected media to a two-round analysis. In the first round, based on leads we classified them by issue-categories, identifying the most common topics of far-right media representation. In the second round, we selected the patterns and analyzed articles giving the most in-depth treatment of major topics. The analysis included articles published between October 2013 and October 2014.

In the first part of the study political, economic and social environments of the relations between Hungary and Russia are presented. In the second sequence we analyze the Kremlin's influence on today's Hungarian far-right based on the examples of Béla Kovács case, uncertainty about Jobbik's financing, the party's foreign policy line and its position on the Ukrainian-Russian crisis. In the third part we present the Kremlin's influence on and its propaganda in Hungarian far-right communication channels. The analysis includes both news portals and Facebook pages. In the fourth sequence we briefly present the Russian propaganda in the mainstream media. And in the last part of the study, Jobbik's assessment in Russian online media is analyzed.

Disclaimer

Since this study does not intend to give more space to or propagate extreme and/or illegal views and sites, the authors have decided upon a certain referencing principle regarding far-right sites and materials used in the analysis. Links are only provided to expert analyses, databases and mainstream press articles. Contents on the official website of Jobbik are also referred to by links since the party is represented in the Hungarian Parliament. All other far-right, extreme or illegal contents and sites mentioned or quoted in the study are referred to by the name and date of the source in the text. The exact references with screenshots for the latter sources are stored in a separate document at author institutes, Social Development Institute Kft. and Political Capital Kft., and may be requested for academic use.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In 2009, Political Capital was among the first to call attention to East European far-right parties' orientation towards Russia. Subsequently, in an analysis generating lively international attention, in April 2014 we indicated that with the assistance of far-right parties' pro-Russian policies "the promotion of Russian interests couched in national colors is proliferating throughout Europe," and we also demonstrated that with their votes cast in the European Parliament, far-right and far-left parties pledge allegiance to Putin and his regime. All this makes it patently clear that **Russian state's political influence across Europe has increased in recent years**. Moreover, the current Ukrainian crisis clearly highlights the "vectors" and tools of Russian influence in Europe, as well as in Hungary.
- The fact that in ideological terms the European far-right can be pitted against the European Union has offered fertile ground for Russia's two-track policy in respect to Europe (hostile ideologically, cooperative in business). **In this context, far-right organizations may fill three major functions: (1) destabilization** (at the member state, community and transatlantic levels alike); **(2) provision of external legitimization of the Russian regime** (e.g., through ideological support and observation of elections); **(3) provision of information and spread of disinformation** (i.e., transmit Russian propaganda to EU member states and gather intelligence).
- **While the Orbán-cabinet pursues a pendulum politics, it is of utmost importance for the Kremlin to exert influence on the Hungarian far-right and especially on Jobbik, which has become the country's largest opposition force. In addition, the Kremlin has a vested interest in pushing the political spectrum in a more Kremlin-friendly direction and exacerbating public discontent with the West.** Through this, the Russian regime aims at indirectly putting pressure on the Hungarian government and destabilizing the European Union and the region.
- In Hungary, some Hungarian National Socialist organizations maintained contact with Russia already in the 1990s. In ideological terms, opposition to the EU, the West and the US were the major catalysts even then, although **these attitudes have not and still do not characterize the majority of the far-right voter base that has expanded significantly in recent years. According to a Medián survey conducted at the end of 2014, 48% of Jobbik voters would side with the United States in a new Cold War, and only 27% would support Russia. In other words, Jobbik's policy serving Russian interests is not motivated by demand from its support base, and the party's towing the Russian line must be explained by other factors.** In respect to the French National Front, it was revealed recently that the party receives Russian funds. Jobbik's murky financial background prior to 2010, the surprising pro-Russia turnaround of media close to Jobbik around 2008 and the funds provided to the party by a suspected spy, Béla Kovács, raise the same suspicion regarding this party as well. Confirmation of that suspicion is yet to come.

- The Russian leadership and the media close to Kremlin use Jobbik and its leaders specifically to promote the Kremlin's current policy objectives and support its anti-EU campaign. E.g., similarly to Béla Kovács, who served as an observer during the referendum on Crimea's status and was accused of espionage against EU institutions, Márton Gyöngyösi and Adrienn Szaniszló were among those European far-right politicians who helped legitimize elections in Donetsk and Luhansk counties in Eastern Ukraine through their participation as observers. While Jobbik politicians emphasize Hungary's neutrality when it comes to the Ukraine-Russia conflict, their position regarding the conflict is fully identical to the one-sided Russian propaganda. In order to help spread pro-Russian views, the party launched a series of public discussions of national scope. Also, Jobbik consecutively tries to put pressure on the Hungarian government in order not to fulfill its EU and NATO duties, which in this case involves stepping up against Russia. The referendum initiative on Hungary's neutrality in the Ukraine-Russia conflict launched by Jobbik in February 2015 in part serves the same interest. When it comes to energy policy, the party regularly backs decisions both in the European and in the Hungarian parliaments that are in line with the Kremlin's interests. These efforts clearly aim at maintaining and increasing Hungary's energy dependence on Russia, thus contradicting Hungarian national interests.
- Similarly to a number of other European far-right parties, Jobbik legitimizes the Russian regime by sharing a set of conservative ideological values with Russia's current official state ideology. According to this ideological framework and Jobbik's messages, the EU is seen as a declining institution and a puppet of the US, while the Eurasian Union envisioned by Russia seems to be a realistic alternative. This view is reflected in the title of our study, which is a quote by Gábor Vona that appeared in an interview on June 27, 2014 in a Russian online newspaper *vzgliad.ru.*, an independent business media outlet in its own definition.
- In respect to public information, with the intensification of the Ukrainian conflict Russian propaganda efforts became explicit and unequivocal in the far-right media. In the mid 2000s, the most prominent far-right news portal, *Kuruc.info* had a distinctly anti-Russian slant, although today, after a sharp turn, it is seen as an almost unconditional supporter of Putin's policies. Moreover, Hungarian-language Kremlin propaganda websites are proliferating on the Internet, thanks to the so-called "active measures"³ successfully applied by Russian secret services.
- Russian influence also visibly extends to paramilitary organizations to the right of Jobbik. Moreover, according to the general tendency, the more an organization and its infrastructure are beyond mainstream politics, the easier it is for the Russian state to exert its influence. In the hands of a Russia bent on destabilizing the region, these organizations and their organs may become dangerous instruments and may present political and national security risks (e.g., by propagating revisionist efforts in Trans-Carpathia and Transylvania), even though the support for such efforts is marginal.
- Apparently, marginal far-right media may also play a role in sparking international conflicts. For instance, in the so-called "tank scandal" *Hidfo.net.ru*, which is considered as a "message board" for Russian secret services, used its local agents to make pictures and file a report about rail transport routes known only to the military. The report was picked up by the Russian foreign department and used to warn the Hungarian government, indicating that these media outlets may wield significant influence.

³ Through the "active instruments: of Putin's Eurasian Doctrine (*aktivnye meropriyatiya*), political support is provided to "friendly" parties and organizations. This has three major components: (1) proactive political measures, (2) "NGO-diplomacy" and (3) funding friendly media operations (Saari, 2011).

- Aside from the far-right media, Russian influence is evident in some mainstream media organizations as well. Among the staff of some news organizations, one also finds journalists who regularly attend various political events in Moscow, aside from openly expressing pro-Kremlin positions.
- There is growing evidence that the Russian regime's efforts at exerting political influence are not limited to extremist circles. The Russian leadership has the general objective (mainly ineffective up to now) of stirring up anti-Western sentiments in a wide spectrum of the population. In the meantime, whether intentionally or by accident, the Hungarian government is more likely to promote rather than hinder Russian propaganda efforts through its policy measures and political discourse. Jobbik's role has been evident in this context as well; the far-right party regularly tries to steer the government in the direction of pro-Russian policies, especially when it comes to the Ukrainian crisis. Moreover, as the largest opposition party, Jobbik poses a political risk to the current ruling party.

POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

Hungary's geopolitical position

The Ukrainian-Russian conflict is causing fundamental changes in countries of the region, including Hungary. Russian incursion on Ukraine has a number of consequences: the European security system in place since 1991 is no longer seen as stable, Putin's Russia has not been and cannot be integrated into Europe, and conditions resembling the Cold War are emerging, where the United States and the European Union take an increasingly firm position against Russia, and the logic "with me or against me" based on bipolarity gains popularity.⁴ In the current conflict, it is not only the future of Ukraine that is at stake, but the crisis could also upset European stability, which emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and create a global precedent for new attempts at empire building (for instance, for China in the South-East Asian region).⁵

The competition for so-called *entredoux* states between the United States and the European Union (Eastern Partnership Program) on the one hand, and Russia (Eurasian Union) on the other, is becoming a zero-sum game, for all intents and purposes.⁶ For instance, an earlier balancing strategy pursued by Ukraine, Belorussia and Moldova is no longer viable, and they will be forced to make structural choices.⁷ The same logic holds for Central and Eastern European EU and NATO member states, not to mention that the indecision characterizing the European Union appears to be more and more untenable. As a result, in a shifting geopolitical playing field the relationship maintained by Eastern European countries with Russia is gaining new relevance and receives increasing international attention.

In the international context, among the Eastern European states it is Poland and Romania that carry the most weight, while Hungary, following a pro-Russian foreign policy since 2010 and pursuing a pendulum politics regarding the Ukrainian crisis, has attracted the attention of the Euro-Atlantic security alliance as a potential risk factor. This is all the more the case since Hungary's unique geopolitical position and foreign policy turnaround are closely related to its domestic policy developments; namely, after gaining a two-thirds majority in 2010, the second Orbán-cabinet embarked on constructing an illiberal system. This has led to political isolation in the West and, due to a self-styled Eastern Opening foreign policy doctrine and the simultaneous eruption of the Ukrainian crisis, the country appears to drift inevitably to the East.

Hungarian-Russian relations in a historical context

Due to historical reasons, generally Russia's image is not favorable in the Hungarian public and political elite. Russia's role in smashing Hungarian freedom fights (1849, 1956), installing communist dictatorships in the 20th century (Hungarian Soviet Republic, Rákosi and Kádár regimes), and maintaining decades of Russian military occupation have obviously not helped to strengthen friendly views on Russia.

After regime change, for the most part it was the political left – within that the MSZP as the successor to the former Communist Party, along with the marginal far-left Workers Party – that maintained some contacts with Russia, while Russia had no established channels with the Hungarian right.

⁴ Blank, 2014: 44-45.

⁵ Rostow, 2014; Blank, 2014.

⁶ Cadier, 2014: 64.

⁷ Cadier, 2014: 65.

In fact, in most cases parties on the right watched with suspicion and criticized the left for its Russian diplomatic contacts. Typically, before 2009⁸ Fidesz, in opposition at the time, and Viktor Orbán himself strongly criticized the Gyurcsány-government for the South Stream gas pipeline agreement signed by Hungary and Russia in 2008 and for the potentially growing influence of Russia due to the Paks extension project. However, once in power, Orbán has become one of the main supporters of these projects. In other words, until quite recently PM Orbán, today considered as “Putin's man,” and the political identity of the Hungarian right was characterized by the rejection of close connections to the topical Russian regime. Accordingly, the first Orbán-government between 1998 and 2002 was keen on keeping Russia at arm's length. Even though connections to Russia endured in the left-wing camp and consequently Russian politicians often placed more confidence in left-wing political actors, nevertheless the left then in power considered Euro-Atlantic integration as key goal.

From a historic point of view, by looking at the far-right one cannot find any apparent signs of intense Russian contacts. Compared to the mainstream right, however, one sees a difference, namely that Turanism (i.e., the idea of kinship with Eastern people) has always played an important role for adherents of far-right ideology. Moreover, for national socialist organizations (Hungarian Welfare Association and Hungarian National Front that reject the parliamentary system) emerging after the regime change, Russian national socialist organizations have served as a model since the mid-1990s. It must also be noted that ultra-right media organizations, describing themselves as the spiritual leaders of the Hungarian far-right, were the first to introduce Alexander Dugin and his ideology to Hungary.⁹ In short, the pro-Russian stance of the Hungarian far-right is based in part on contacts established between Russian and Hungarian paramilitary forces following the regime change, the spiritual tradition of Turanism and the ultra-right ideology's uncritical attitude towards Russia. Jobbik, established in 2003, and to a lesser extent some members of circles close to Fidesz, returning to power in 2010, continue to rely on these sources.

Hungarian-Russian economic ties

Since a political rapprochement with Russia has not been a top political priority since 1990, every political side tries to justify their opening to Russia by referring to economic interests and portraying it as an attempt to “recapture eastern markets” lost following the regime change. In public discourse, Jobbik politicians use the above line of argument as well.

However, the possibility of recapturing eastern markets may be challenged on several grounds. For one, along with the regime change, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) collapsed and so did the access to markets of former Eastern Bloc countries. Hopes of resurrecting the same access to markets today were nothing but an illusion. Second, all objectives aimed at developing closer economic ties are diametrically opposed to the other objective of reducing Hungary's energy dependence on Russia (the primary arena of economic ties), which is also frequently stated by Hungarian politicians. Third, all the gestures made by the government in the past few years to the East notwithstanding, the Hungarian economy continues to depend on the performance of Western countries (primarily Germany), while the country's economic and trade relations with Eastern states have made little progress, despite all recent efforts.

⁸ „A hátunk közepére kívánjuk most Putyint”, index.hu, February 17, 2015, accessed February 19, 2015, http://index.hu/belfold/2015/02/17/orban_putyin_latogatas/

⁹ „Nem ma kezdték – a rendszerváltás utáni magyar szélsőjobb orosz kapcsolatai”, PC Blog, November 24, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://pcblogger.atlatszo.hu/2014/11/24/nem-ma-kezdték-a-rendszerváltás-utáni-magyar-szélsőjobb-orosz-kapcsolatai/>

In the area of trade relations,¹⁰ Russia plays an important role in respect to imports. The fact that Russia is Hungary's third largest import partner is due exclusively to its energy dependence. Fuels and lubricants account for 90% of Russian imports. Only 2.5% of Hungarian exports are destined for Russia, making it only the 13th largest trading partner for Hungary. The first nine places are all occupied by EU member states, where Germany leads the field by a wide margin, absorbing one quarter of all Hungarian exports.

Imports (2014)

Imports from Russia (€)	5,444,704,181
Total imports (€)	78,975,459,768
Russian import (%)	6.89%
The relevance of Russian imports (in order of importance)	3rd
The most important products imported from Russia (based on BEC rating ¹¹)	
Fuels and lubricants – primary (BEC 310)	82.6%
Industrial supplies – processed (BEC 220)	8.7%
Fuels and lubricants – processed – other (BEC 322)	6.9%

Exports (2014)

Exports to Russia (€)	2,076,275,081
Total exports (€)	83,397,752,856
Exports to Russia (%)	2.49%
The relevance of Russian exports (in order of importance)	13th
The most important products exported to Russia (based on BEC rating)	
Consumer goods – Non-durable (BEC 630)	24.3%
Capital goods (BEC 410)	19.8%
Industrial supplies – processed (BEC 220)	17.8%

Hungarian-Russian diplomatic relations

In the 20 years following the regime change, Hungarian-Russian diplomatic relations were limited to economic and commercial ties. Change came first with the efforts of PM Ferenc Gyurcsány, who was on good terms with Vladimir Putin, to bring the South Stream gas pipeline to Hungary. After 2010 the second Orbán-cabinet deepened even more the political ties between Hungary and Russia. A new element was introduced, which involved the expansion of relations on ideological dimensions and the positive references to Eastern models. Soon after taking office, PM Orbán announced the policy of Global Opening, soon to be replaced by Eastern Opening, which was the country's new foreign policy and primarily foreign trade concept. According to the original idea, typically promoted with economic slogans, the policy set criteria for Hungary's reaction to global economic and political changes, the global economic crisis and the simultaneous crisis within the EU.

¹⁰ Our own calculation is based on Eurostat (EU trade since 1988 by BEC [DS-032655]) database.

¹¹ See description of the rating process here: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/cr/registry/regcst.asp?Cl=10>, accessed December 12, 2014.

For foreign trade, it was the East, and specifically countries that avoided a recession and actually managed to expand in the midst of a global crisis, that appeared to be the logical choice. (However, problems of such development models have become apparent since then; Russia, Turkey and China are facing serious economic challenges.)

Accordingly, after 2010 the process of building stronger diplomatic ties was underway with a series of high-level visits to China, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia and Russia. Started in 2013, the establishment of a network of trade missions aimed at facilitating the expansion of the Hungarian Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) sector was an important step. Criteria for adequate trading skills, data bases and training programs to be provided to Hungarian SMEs were also defined. The development of joint economic committee meetings annually or biennially at the state-secretarial or (in the case of key partners) at the ministerial level is also a central component of the new concept. In the case of China and Russia, preparations on the Hungarian side were led by a high commissioner. Step by step, the Foreign Ministry staff has been restructured in line with the new requirements, starting at the time of Tibor Navracsics' brief tenure after the 2014 elections and continued by his successor, Péter Szijjártó. Restructuring was carried out with eye on a value-free and interest-based foreign policy announced by PM Viktor Orbán at the yearly Ambassador's meeting in August 2014. The special attention devoted to eastern orientation is indicated by the fact that China and Russia received their own department while, with the exception of neighboring countries and the West Balkans, all other European states are managed from a single department. EU affairs, on the other hand, have been assigned to the Prime Minister's Office.

However, despite all the diplomatic efforts, business figures remain disappointing. From the business point of view, the policy of Eastern Opening is a failure¹²; having lost its original meaning, it is increasingly becoming an instrument of an ideological fight for freedom, waged by the Hungarian government against the West, and a tool for developing closer political ties to Eastern "illiberal democracies." All this is forcefully reflected in the Prime Minister's speeches and in government communication, emphasizing the crisis of Western civilization, its economic decline, and the imperious power of Brussels and, since 2014, the United States of America. Consequently, at the beginning of 2015 the foreign policy of the Hungarian government seemed to have fallen into a trap. Statements made by government officials reveal the intention of correcting the foreign-policy path, since pendulum politics seems to have reached its limits. Following the government's various "freedom fights" in recent years, the government's scope of action and its ability to maneuver on the international stage have come to an end. The US entry ban on Hungarian officials in late 2014, the visit of German Chancellor Merkel and Russian President Putin to Budapest in early and mid-February 2015, as well as PM Orbán's visit to Warsaw just a few days after Mr Putin's visit to Budapest clearly showed that Hungarian foreign policy has to be revised. Without any doubt, the government had to somewhat adjust its political standpoint, which might improve the image of Hungary's foreign policy. However, this process, full of contradictions, might be late in many respects.

Hungary's energy dependence

Hungary's long-term energy dependence on Russia – with all the attending financial and political risks – is tied to the nuclear industry and gas supplies. In respect to the former, an agreement signed by Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin on January 14, 2014 – and reaffirmed on February 17, 2015 – is of special importance.

¹² István Madár, „Ezért lett bukás a keleti nyitás”, Portfolio.hu, Marc 23, 2015, accessed Marc 23, 2015, http://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/ezert_lett_bukas_a_keleti_nyitas.211635.html

While details of the agreement remain secret, it is clear that it involves the construction of two new reactor blocks in Paks by Rosatom, a project to be financed by the Russian party's loan to the tune of EUR 10 billion. From the standpoint of Hungary's economic and political interests, the benefits of the Orbán-Putin agreement, concluded in total secrecy and without tendering, would be difficult to justify to this day. As explained by the government, aside from creating new jobs, the completed project would reduce the country's energy dependence by doubling the present 2 GW capacity of the power plant, accounting for 40% of Hungary's current electric power generation.¹³ However, the anticipated final cost of the investment project is not known, and there is no explanation for the rush of decisions. Furthermore, energy dependence is unlikely to decrease: the new blocks could go online in 2030, and with this the government will have tied the country's electric power-generating capacity to Russia through 2085, with the added risk that the entire project may be based on outdated technology by that time. In respect to financing, the EUR 10 billion is but a low estimate for the investment, i.e., a budget overrun resulting in additional dependence on Russia is essentially a foregone conclusion. Moreover, most of the loan is to be repaid in the second half of a 21-year repayment schedule, putting a disproportionate burden on future generations and governments.¹⁴ Under an absurd scenario, the entire loan would have to be repaid before the completion of the two blocks because, based on current information, the power plant will be owned by the Hungarian state, while operational guarantees to be borne by the Russian party are not known to this day. Furthermore, the lack of approval by the European Commission might postpone the nuclear plant's extension project by years, which reveals the risks arising from the agreement. Namely, the delay might worsen Hungary's position towards Russia significantly, since according to the deal, risks like this have to be borne by Hungary alone.

According to energy policy expert András György Deák, maintaining low gas prices is of vital importance for a government that won the election again in 2014 if it wants to hold on to its voter base. At the same time, the expert emphasized that energy companies' gas businesses acquired by the state are already deep in the red, which means that the financing of cheap gas may carry significant budgetary risks down the line and without Kremlin's help. As a result, the Hungarian government may have become politically dependent on the Kremlin. This suspicion was confirmed when unexpectedly Hungary stopped gas supplies to Ukraine, following a meeting in Budapest between Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, and Gazprom CEO, Alexei Miller.¹⁵ As a result, the Orbán-cabinet not only left Ukraine and the EU in a difficult position, just as the Russian-Ukrainian-EU gas talks were underway in Berlin, but also compromised Hungary in the midst of international diplomatic efforts aimed at easing tensions in Eastern Ukraine.

All the above was probably among the reasons why Vladimir Putin described Hungary as "one of the most important political and trade/economic partners" of Russia.¹⁶ Simultaneously, the perception of the Hungarian government has become extremely favorable in the Russian media.

¹³ "Orosz-magyar nukleáris megállapodást írtak alá", Miniszterelnökség, January 14, 2014, accessed October 10, 2014, <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/hirek/orosz-magyar-nuklearis-energiai-megallapodast-irtak-ala>, "Nő Magyarország energetikai függetlensége", Fidesz.hu, January 14, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.fidesz.hu/hirek/2014-01-14/no-magyarorszag-energetikai-fuggetlensege/>

¹⁴ In the first seven years 25%, in the second seven years 35% and in the third seven-year cycle 40% of the loan must be repaid, while the interest rate continues to increase from 3.95 to 4.95%.

¹⁵ "Háborognak az ukránok a magyar gázszállítás leállítása miatt", Napi Gazdaság, September 26, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.napigazdasag.hu/cikk/23966/>

¹⁶ "Szijjártó Moszkvában: Hangnemet váltott a magyar kormány", Origo, November 19, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.origo.hu/nagyvilag/20141119-szijjarto-moszkvaban-zold-utat-kapott-a-deli-aramlat.html>

The online news service, euractiv.com, published in 12 languages, compares Viktor Orbán's pro-European statements with his pro-Russian actions, noting that in Brussels and Washington “alarm bells” have gone off over Hungary's foreign policy orientation towards Russia.¹⁷ At the same time, maintaining Hungary's position as a “buffer zone” is in the vital political interest of Russia. In the words of András Rácz: “Russia's strategic interest is to see Hungary's continued membership in the European Union and NATO, which lends it special value, an influencing potential.”

As President Putin’s visit to Hungary on February 17, 2015 made it patently clear, Hungary is of importance for Russia mainly due to political and energy policy reasons. Apparently, Russian economy hit hard by sanctions and low oil prices is currently not able to help the Hungarian economy. Hungary-Russia relations that have been criticized the most due to the Eastern Opening policy and the deal about the extension of Paks Nuclear Plant in particular increase Hungary’s energy dependence on Russia even more.

Gas dependence

According to Eurostat data, the European Union’s dependence on Russian oil and natural gas is far from negligible. In 2014, 26% of the EU’s total oil requirements came from Russia, while in respect to natural gas that rate was 22%.¹⁸ In respect to Hungary, Russian imports play an even more prominent role: 89% of its oil and 57% of its gas requirements came from Russian sources in 2014.

Oil imports¹⁹ from Russia in 2014²⁰

	In value (€)	The share of Russian imports in total oil imports from outside the EU (%)	The share of Russian imports in total oil imports (%)
Hungary	2,834,753,694	89%	89%
EU28	80,456,884,803	30%	26%

Gas imports²¹ from Russia in 2014²²

	In value (€)	The share of Russian imports in total gas imports from outside the EU (%)	The share of Russian imports in total gas imports (%)
Hungary	1,657,863,775	91%	57%
EU28	12,552,953,228	44%	22%

¹⁷ “Hungary's Orbán: We'll choose our own path with Russia”, EurActiv, November 20, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/hungarys-orban-well-choose-our-own-path-russia-310185>

¹⁸ Own calculations based on Eurostat (EU trade since 1995 by HS6) database.

¹⁹ Unrefined oil made from crude oil and bituminous minerals.

²⁰ Own calculations based on Eurostat (EU trade since 1995 by HS6) database.

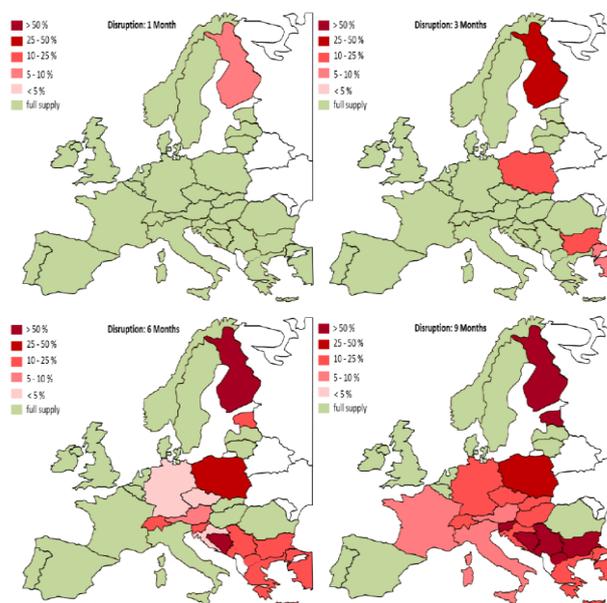
²¹ Gaseous natural gas.

²² Own calculations based on Eurostat (EU trade since 1995 by HS6) database.

A 2014 study by the Institute of Energy Economics at the University of Cologne²³ looked at the effects of a potential Russian gas embargo on supplies in Europe, if it were announced in November 2014. As part of the analysis, European pipeline, storage and liquid-gas facilities were modeled in a computer simulation. Researchers studied a variety of scenarios for the duration of an embargo, based on the price and availability of liquefied gas. In the event of a three-month suspension of deliveries, the majority of European countries would have sufficient gas supplies. The exceptions would be Bulgaria, Poland, Turkey and Finland. However, a suspension of the delivery of Russian gas for at least six months would lead to gas shortages in many Eastern European countries. However, in Hungary the supply of gas would be guaranteed even with a six-month interruption of deliveries. Services would be severely disrupted only if pipelines were shut down over a period of nine months. In that case, shortages would amount to 10-25% of the annual gas requirement.

Gas shortages in European countries

(annual gas requirements in %, based on gas embargo scenarios. Source: Institute of Energy Economics at the University of Cologne)



Nuclear energy dependence

A report conducted by the Atlantic Council²⁴ concludes that in addition to fossil fuels, Russia holds another ace — nuclear fuel — in a number of Eastern European countries. Five countries, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary, depend almost entirely on a Russian state-owned company for nuclear fuel used in their plants. Analysts conclude that in these five countries nuclear plants running on Russian fuel account for 42% of electric power generation.

²³ "An embargo of Russian Gas and Security of Supply in Europe", Institute of Energy Economics at the University of Cologne, September 8, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.ewi.uni-koeln.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Publikationen/Studien/Politik_und_Gesellschaft/2014/2014-09_An_Embargo_of_Russian_Gas_and_Security_of_Supply_in_Europe.pdf

²⁴ "Europe's Dependence on Russian Energy: Deeper Than You Think", Atlantic Council, April 27, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/eastern-europe-s-russian-energy-dependence-deeper-than-you-think>

In Hungary, the four blocks in Paks accounted for 50.71% of total power generation in 2013.²⁵ According to World Nuclear Association data, in 2014 the country's uranium requirements amounted to 357 t, provided entirely by Russia.²⁶

Nuclear-plant blocks in Hungary²⁷

Block	Net capacity [MW(e)]	Status	Type (builder)
PAKS-1	470	In operation	PWR (Russia)
PAKS-2	473	In operation	PWR (Russia)
PAKS-3	473	In operation	PWR (Russia)
PAKS-4	473	In operation	PWR (Russia)
PAKS-5	1170	Planned start of construction: 2018	WER-1200 (Russia)
PAKS-6	1170	Planned start of construction: 2020	WER-1200 (Russia)

Russia's perception among the Hungarian public

The Hungarian population is much less sympathetic to Russia and Russians in general than to the United States or Americans in general. Following regime change, in 1992, on a 100-point scale the sympathy index for the US stood at 73%, and it was only 36% for Russia. Fifteen years later, in 2007, the US index dropped to 60%, while that of Russia rose to 41% (Medián, 2007). In 2014 the United States received 65 points, while Russia received only 44 points. Although Russia's perception has slightly changed for the better since the regime change, while the perception of the US has deteriorated, the US is still far more popular. Among those following political events the majority believe that the Hungarian side is to blame for the deterioration in Hungarian-American relations (Medián, 2014, 444.hu). According to 63% of respondents the relationship between Hungary and the USA declined, while 31% said it remained unchanged. 4% was unable to respond, while 2% believed the relationship between the two countries had actually improved. In respect to the Hungarian-Russian relationship, 49% of all respondents believed there has been no change, 36% believed it has improved and 10% believed the relationship has deteriorated. Should Hungary choose sides, 53% of the respondents favored that the country maintains closer ties with the US, 25% would prefer closer ties with Russia and 22% could not decide.

Party preference indeed has a significant role in forming opinions. Among those with a clear party preference, Fidesz supporters are the most tolerant of Russia: 39% would like to see Hungary develop closer ties with Russia, while 40% with the United States. Interestingly, supporters of Jobbik are less tolerant of Russia: 48% of them are more sympathetic to the United States, and only 27% have a preference for Russia. In the opposition camp without Jobbik, the USA leads by a rate of 72 to 18, and among those without a party preference by a rate of 54 to 16.

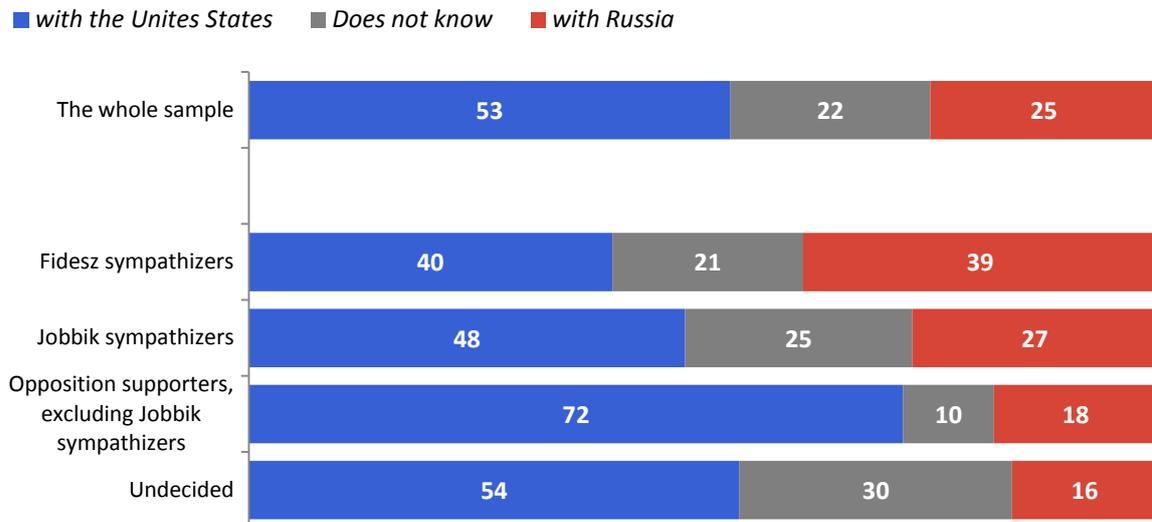
²⁵ "Power Reactor Information on Hungary", International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.iaea.org/PRIS/CountryStatistics/CountryDetails.aspx?current=HU>

²⁶ "World Nuclear Power Reactors & Uranium Requirements", World Nuclear Association, December 1, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/Facts-and-Figures/World-Nuclear-Power-Reactors-and-Uranium-Requirements/>

²⁷ *Nuclear Power Reactors in the World 2014 Edition*, IAEA, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www-pub.iaea.org/books/IAEABooks/10756/Nuclear-Power-Reactors-in-the-World-2014-Edition>

Should Hungary choose with which country it maintains closer ties, what would you prefer?

(%; source: 444.hu²⁸)



Other surveys show a similar result. Ipsos' survey that was conducted in early December 2014 included the following question: "Hungary shouldn't distance itself from Europe and develop closer ties to Russia. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?" 57% agreed and 28% disagreed, while 15% of the respondents were unable to answer the question.

However, further research somewhat modifies the image of a Hungarian public with a fundamental Western orientation. In early April 2014, a leading market research organization in the UK, Ipsos MORI, looked at public opinion concerning the crisis in Ukraine in eleven countries, including Hungary. The complexity and sensitivity of the situation in Ukraine is indicated by the fact that close to one third of the respondents were unable to say what measures their governments should take. This was a common feature in all the countries participating in the survey. However, data showed that in general, Hungarian respondents were the least supportive of any measures against Russia. While only one third of them (34%) agreed with the statement that Russia should not be allowed to enter East-Ukrainian territories, in other countries, on average every other respondent held this opinion.

Nevertheless, the Hungarian population cannot be considered pro-Russian; the positions taken in response to the questions ranged along a wide scale. However, the population's above-average pro-Russian attitude (in accordance with the data above showing that supporters of Fidesz are the most friendly toward Russia) might indicate that the government's and Jobbik's communication concerning Russia may be effective in some segments of the population. Although Hungary has a significant stake in the conflict due to its geopolitical position and significant Hungarian diaspora living in Trans-Carpathia, every other Hungarian believes that the government should refrain from any form of interference and leave the resolution of the problem to others (Ipsos MORI, 2014).

²⁸ "A magyarok többsége Amerikát választaná és nem Oroszországot", 444.hu, January 7, 2015, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://444.hu/2015/01/07/a-magyarok-tobbsege-amerikat-valasztana-es-nem-oroszorszagot/>

According to comparable results of various surveys, the extension of nuclear energy capacities, and in particular through Russian investment, is not popular in Hungary, and the majority would support to decrease the energy dependence. At the request of Greenpeace, in the end of May 2014 Ipsos conducted a survey in the Visegrad Four countries with a focus on energy dependence (Greenpeace, 2014). The survey also tried to find out respondents' attitudes concerning their country's dependence on Russian energy imports. An overwhelming majority, 79% of Hungarian respondents believed it was a rather serious problem. The rate was even higher in Poland (88%), while fewer Slovaks (70%) and Czechs (65%) believed that dependence was "definitely" or a "rather" serious problem.

It is important to note that both the general public and even the majority of the supporters of the most pro-Russian far-right party are characterized by Western orientation, which means that Jobbik's policies supporting Russian interests are unrelated to domestic policy issues. Instead of satisfying some internal demand, Jobbik's commitment to Russian interests must be attributed to some other factors.

KREMLIN'S INFLUENCE ON TODAY'S HUNGARIAN FAR-RIGHT

The public revelation of the Béla Kovács case

The leading force on the Hungarian far-right, the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), gradually became a supporter of Russia in little more than 10 years, even though the mission statement of Jobbik, that became a party in 2003, consistently emphasizes the party's anti-communists stance.²⁹ Even though Jobbik would never tolerate former members of the state-party (MSZMP) or communist-era secret services among its leaders³⁰, the party became an apologist for Russia that is currently led by a former KGB officer.

In the spring of 2014, the Constitutional Protection Office filed charges at the Chief Prosecutor's Office against Jobbik MEP Béla Kovács, who had a key role in developing Jobbik's Russian connections, alleging that for years he spied on European Union institutions.³¹ The authorities claim they have recorded visual and audio evidence to prove charges, that the politician had systematically worked for the Russian secret service and held secret meetings with Russian agents.³² The case has also affected the most recent European parliamentary election campaign, where the governing Fidesz and the left opposition attacked Jobbik with the Kovács case. While the far-right party promised to hold an internal investigation, nothing has happened to date. As secretary of the Jobbik's Foreign Affairs Cabinet and vice chairman of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee Márton Gyöngyösi put it in a recent interview: *"What should have we done? How could any party and especially such a young party get any information on the activities of the world's most powerful secret services? Counterespionage is not our core business. All we could have done is look into the eyes of Béla Kovács and ask him whether this is true."*³³

According to the Hungarian media, Béla Kovács was born in Budapest in 1960 and moved to the Soviet Union in his early 20s. In 1986 he earned a diploma in international economics at the Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) in Moscow and, after a short stay in Hungary, in 1988 he returned to the Soviet Union with his Russian wife. He returned from there in 2003 as a successful businessman, although no one knows what he actually did between 1988 and 2003. He claims to have worked for various companies. He joined Jobbik in 2005, and from that time on he has worked on developing the party's international relations. In 2008 he arranged the first trip to Moscow for the party president, Gábor Vona, and paved the way for Jobbik's rapprochement with Russia. Hungarian authorities and a number of European secret services took notice of Kovács in 2009. At the initiative of the politician, the Alliance of European National Movements (AENM), an umbrella organization of nationalist parties in Europe, was established in Budapest that year, with the openly stated (albeit eventually failed) purpose of fielding an independent faction in the European Parliament.

²⁹ Even though today's Russia is not a communist country, the contradiction between Jobbik's pro-Russian and anti-communist stance on the one hand is due to continuous association of Russia with communism among Hungarians, who often link Russia with Hungary's communist past. On the other hand, the current Russian regime plays with and builds upon the nostalgia for the Soviet Union.

³⁰ However, one can find some former members of Jobbik who used to be members of MSZMP. Between 2010 and 2014 there were even two such members of the party's parliamentary group (Miklós Korondi and László Nyikos).

³¹ The provision based on which the case constitutes spying against EU institutions was entered into the Hungarian Criminal Code in January of 2014

³² *"Németh: Egyértelmű, kik állnak Kovács Béla mögött"*, M1 Híradó, May 20, 2013, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.hirado.hu/2014/05/19/nemeth-egyertelmu-kik-allnak-kovacs-bela-mogott/>

³³ *"Keleten senki nem bízik Orbánban"*, 444.hu, March 30, 2015, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://444.hu/2015/03/30/jobbik-kulpol-gyongyosi/>

Kovács – who started his career in the EP in 2010 as a Jobbik representative – became the treasurer and later president of AENM. The Alliance received significant financial support from the EP: € 186,292 in 2012 and € 350,294 in 2013.³⁴

When in the spring of 2014, in the last stretch of the European parliamentary election campaign, the government media reported that he was accused by the Chief Prosecutor's Office for espionage, Kovács insisted that neither he nor his Russian wife, Svetlana Istosina, have ever maintained any ties with secret services.³⁵ However, five months later the online news service, Index ran an investigative piece³⁶ questioning the politician's claims. According to the article, Béla Kovács, born in 1960, was raised by foster parents. His father was Russian and his birth certificate was manipulated using KGB methods, deleting information on the father. As it turned out, in the 1970s and 1980s his Russian wife extensively traveled around the world, which she could have never been able to afford as a simple Soviet citizen. The Index article also revealed that Istosina had already been living with Kovács when she married an Austrian criminal. Simultaneously, she is also married to a Japanese man to this day who, incidentally, works in the nuclear industry. Taking Austrian and Japanese surnames, these marriages of convenience were probably needed to acquire foreign travel documents, visit target countries without drawing suspicion and presumably serve as a 'messenger' of a sort.

Barely one month after the publication of the exposé, Béla Kovács delivered a speech at the opening ceremony of the Second World Forum of MGIMO alumni in Moscow. The politician was applauded when he said that in Hungary he is considered to be a Russian spy, that he was not worried and would continue his work as before.³⁷

The politician has yet to challenge the claims made in the investigative piece, and in the meantime Jobbik continues to stand by Béla Kovács. While the party's vice president, Előd Novák, promised a thorough and quick investigation during the EP campaign referred to above, a few days later the party leadership backtracked, and has yet to issue any relevant information on the progress of its internal investigation of the Kovács case. Although Kovács is still protected by immunity, based on evidence submitted by the Hungarian Prosecutor's Office to the EP, the EP's legal committee sees sufficient cause for the EP's competent body to review the case.³⁸

The fact that Jobbik did not let go of Béla Kovács may have two explanations. One is that based on the results of the EP and the October municipal elections, as well as public opinion surveys, the party came to the conclusion that the scandal has not significantly eroded its support base. The other, and perhaps more plausible, explanation is that by now the Russian influence on Jobbik has reached a level where the party is no longer in a position to displace Béla Kovács. This, in turn, raises the suspicion that the Kremlin is blackmailing the Jobbik party.

³⁴ „Grants from the European Parliament to political parties at European level per party and per year”, European Parliament, November 2014, accessed December 12, 2014,

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/grants/Grant_amounts_parties_11_2014.pdf?hc_location=ufi

³⁵ „Kovács Béla (Jobbik): 'Nem voltam kém soha'”, vs.hu, May 15, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014,

<http://vs.hu/kozelet/osszes/kovacs-bela-jobbik-nem-voltam-kem-soha-0515>

³⁶ “A glorious match made in Russia,” Index.hu, September 28, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014,

http://index.hu/belfold/2014/09/28/a_glorious_match_made_in_russia/

³⁷ “Kovács Béla: 'Nem könnyű Oroszország barátjának lenni'”, ATV.hu, October 13, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014,

<http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20141013-kovacs-bela-nem-konnyu-oroszorszag-baratjanak-lenni>

³⁸ “Felfüggeszhetik Kovács Béla EP-beli mentelmi jogát”, Mandiner, January 7, 2015, accessed January 8, 2015,

http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20150107_felfuggeszhetik_kovacs_bela_ep_beli_mentelmi_jogat

Whichever explanation proves to be right, the comments made about the spy case by a Jobbik politician, Zoltán Lázár, are highly revealing of the traditionally anti-communist far-right's current relationship with Russia: „(...) *Let's look at his wife. She may have a Japanese husband. So what? That's a problem for Béla and not for Hungary. She may have worked for the KGB. So...? How does that endanger Hungary? (...) We stand for anti-globalization, we are Eurosceptic, anti-liberal and we 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.*”³⁹

The suspicion of active influencing

It is suspected that Béla Kovács has acted as a so-called “influence agent” for the Russian secret service. “For the most part, the Russian secret service did not instruct him to acquire secret European Union documents; his ‘expertise’ lies in disruption[, and namely in] agitating against the alliance in the heart of the European Union, and unifying Eurosceptics and anti-EU extremists, organizing them into a faction,” the Hungarian daily, *Népszabadság* wrote about the activities of the politician, quoting Hungarian secret service sources.⁴⁰ If this proved to be the case, the activities of the Jobbik politician would perfectly fit the series of so-called “active measures”; these measures, according to security sources, have been pursued intensely by Russian intelligence for years in Hungary, and these are the measures that apparently shifted into higher gear in the 2014 Ukrainian-Russian conflict.

Active measures have been used by the Soviet secret service since the 1950s, and later the KGB operated an “active measures” special department. In the intelligence community, the term refers to an operation that aims to influence a foreign country in the interest of the host country. While the methods may vary a great deal, they have one common feature, of completely differing from the ideas the common people might have about espionage. As we have already demonstrated in one of our earlier studies called “*The Russian Connection*,”⁴¹ a commonly used method is that an “influence agent” establishes, funds or supports by any means an organization that can be used to influence the internal and even external affairs of the target country. Measures may also involve cases where a member or agent of the secret service bribes journalists and other opinion-makers directly or through intermediaries with the same goal in mind, engages in disinformation or disruption, tries to blackmail, compromise or, in extreme cases, kill someone. The department engaged in active measures continues to operate under the legal successor organization, Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), using the same name and format inherited from the KGB era. The special importance of active measures in intelligence is indicated by the fact the two services operating within KGB's First General Directorate, Service ‘A’ employed some 300 officers working exclusively on active measures. The service was organized along functional and geographic criteria, and included half a dozen departments. KGB-residenturas operating in specific countries gave active measures top priority. Active measures were managed by a special staff that each December, as part of drawing up an annual plan, submitted active measures to Moscow headquarters proposed for the following year.

³⁹ Zoltán Lázár's Facebook post, September 23, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/drlazarzoltan/photos/a.732707570121816.1073741829.728155333910373/747069718685601/?type=1>

⁴⁰ “Kovács Béla nem kém, hanem megbízott bomlasztó volt”, *Népszabadság*, May 23, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://nol.hu/belfold/kovacs-bela-a-bomlaszto-1463621>

⁴¹ “Az orosz kapcsolat”, *Political Capital*, April 10, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/pc_elemzes_20140410_az_orosz_kapcsolat.pdf

Active measures served global objectives, were not limited to specific countries, and the area of operation and the target area did not necessarily overlap. At KGB-residenturas, those responsible for active measures, operated under the supervision of political intelligence. A number of former KGB secret agents emphasize that Western intelligence services never gave the attention to Soviet/Russian active measures they deserve, which is explained by conceptual differences between Western and Eastern counterintelligence doctrines.

The role played by Béla Kovács in the financing of Jobbik

Considering allegations of spying against Béla Kovács, his wife's past ties to the KGB, the couple's activities in Hungary and the politician's career path in Jobbik, there is strong reason to believe that the two had lead roles in implementing active measures. Béla Kovács and his wife joined Jobbik in 2005. Barely 2 years since its establishment, the party was short on funds and, according to the recollections of party politicians, in many cases paying utility and phone bills presented serious problems. According to sources coming from Jobbik's inner circle, Béla Kovács was taken on board thanks to his foreign contacts and deep pockets. The party colleague who introduced him to Jobbik received an American luxury car as a gift, and there was a period when the largest private donation received by Jobbik came from Kovács.⁴² Several million forints may look like pittance in the financing of a political party, but not in the case of Jobbik, which in the middle of the 2000s did not receive significant state funds, and thus every penny was appreciated.

According to a piece published by the Internet portal Origo.hu,⁴³ financial assistance played an important role in Béla Kovács' meteoric rise within the party. "I saw these bright-eyed, determined young men and I started to believe in them immediately" – with these words Béla Kovács remembered 2005, according to the article, when he knocked on Jobbik's door with the help of a former army mate. However, Jobbik's leadership had a completely different memory of the incident. "Along with Dávid Kovács [then president of Jobbik] we thought he was completely crazy. He talked about all kinds of Russian connections, which we did not like at all, and believed that he was just bluffing, and laughed at him behind his back," said Ervin Nagy, Jobbik's former vice president, adding that, as far as he remembers, Kovács showed up at the party before 2005.

At the time, Jobbik's far from crystallized foreign policy concept was strongly anti-Russian and Kovács, "who didn't have the demeanor of a politician and had a slight speech impairment," was politely dismissed with his heretical worldview. "In those days, a large number of crazies congregated around Jobbik, and it was difficult to identify the ones that were actually all right. Now I have to admit I misjudged him and, as it turned out, he really had some contacts," said Ervin Nagy. Eventually, Kovács resurfaced around the end of 2006, coinciding with Gábor Vona's return as president after an 18-month absence. According to Nagy, Vona also met Kovács around 2005, and following his return he offered Kovács to run the party's foreign affairs cabinet. "Following our defeat in the 2006 municipal election, we were tired and disappointed, and Gábor believed that a shake-up of policy cabinets would give Jobbik a new lease on life," said one of Jobbik's former leaders, explaining how Béla Kovács, who supported the party's municipal campaign with millions, according to many sources, managed to return to the party's inner circle.

⁴² "Kágébéla lehet a Jobbik veszte", Index.hu, May 15, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://index.hu/belfold/2014/05/15/kagebela_lehet_a_jobbik_veszte/

⁴³ "Élvezte a titokzatosságot a Jobbik utazó fantomja", Origo, May 23, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20140522-kovacs-bela-palyafutasa-a-jobbikban.html>

According to a 2009 Audit Office report,⁴⁴ in violation of statutory obligations, Jobbik failed to submit a comprehensive and fair statement on its finances for any year between 2005 and 2008. Therefore, in January 2010 the prosecutor's office launched an investigation into Jobbik's finances. The probe concluded that in some cases the party committed accounting and certification errors (also mentioned in the Audit Office report). However, according to the Audit Office, this has not rendered the party's financial position or the fundamental components of its operation inscrutable or untraceable. Accordingly, the charge of violating accounting standards did not stand and the Audit Office report made no statement to that effect either. At the same time – as indicated by Transparency International in a study⁴⁵ – Jobbik has yet to explain how it financed its 2009 and 2010 campaigns that presumably required significantly more funds than officially reported by the party.

Between 2004 and 2008, when Jobbik had no seats in the Parliament, the party didn't receive any public funds and its annual revenues ranged between HUF 655,000 and HUF 3 million. Revenues presumably came from private individuals and Béla Kovács was their largest private donor. In other words, if the claims of Jobbik politicians on their official sponsors are correct, Kovács was Jobbik's largest supporter at the time and, for all practical purposes, he financed the party single-handedly. As former MP and former member of the parliament's national security committee József Gulyás stated in a background discussion, national security agencies have not properly investigated into these claims (nor into the Kremlin's influence on the Hungarian far-right, in general) either during the time of MSZP-SZDSZ governments before 2010, or since then.

Jobbik's annual revenues (in HUF thousands). Source: Jobbik⁴⁶

2004 _____	2,636
2005 _____	1,999
2006 _____	3,217
2007 _____	655
2008 _____	2,094

Béla Kovács and Jobbik's foreign policy

When it was proposed that Béla Kovács could replace a representative recalled from the European Parliament in 2010, the politician and his wife left no stone unturned to be delegated by the party to the EP. "He came to my house with his wife. Since all I knew about the woman was that she was an Austrian citizen, I introduced her to my father in German. I was surprised when it turned out that she didn't really speak the language, and I didn't really understand the whole thing. Then his wife gave me a pair of gold cufflinks. It was obvious why they paid a visit and why they made me such a present. They wanted me to help Kovács in his bid for the EP position," remembered one of the former leaders of Jobbik that episode in 2010 in an interview conducted for this research.

⁴⁴ "Jelentés a központi költségvetési támogatásban nem részesülő pártok 2005-2008. évi gazdálkodása törvényességének ellenőrzéséről", Állami Számvevőszék, November 2009, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.asz.hu/jelentes/0937/jelentes-a-kozponti-koltsegetesi-tamogatásban-nem-reszesulo-partok-2005-2008-évi-gazdalkodása-torvenyességenek-ellenorzeserol/0937j000.pdf>

⁴⁵ "Korrupciós kockázatok Magyarországon 2011", Transparency International, 2012, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.transparency.hu/uploads/docs/Korrupcios_kockazatok_final.pdf

⁴⁶ "Éves beszámoló", Jobbik, Januar 19, 2010, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.jobbik.hu/rovatok/eves_beszamolok/eves_beszamolok

Later, Béla Kovács was also helped in Brussels by Balázs Molnár, who, among others, prepared voting ballots for Jobbik representatives in the EP. Molnár's name is well known in underground far-right circles; Hungarian authorities have accused him of being the editor-in-chief of an illegal online news service, Kuruc.info, infamous for publishing anti-Semitic, racist and inciting articles. However, the authorities never managed to make those charges stick.

Molnár – who, in the meantime, had a falling-out with Jobbik and OLAF launched investigation against Béla Kovács és Csanád Szegedi based on Molnár's complaint – is convinced today that Kovács spied for the Russian regime. “In the fall of 2011 we traveled to Warsaw together, where Russian, Polish and EP parliamentary representatives held a joint meeting. A friend of Kovács, Mateusz Piskorski, was there as well, perhaps the only pro-Moscow politician in Poland. Earlier he was a member of *Samoobrona* (self-protection) a parliamentary peasant party, but today he has a small party with no representative in parliament. Béla and Mateusz were talking in Polish. He told me that a long time ago he had a Polish girlfriend, and that's how he learned the language... Well then, could it have been before Svetlana? I doubt it,” Molnár recalled. When in May the media questioned Kovács about his past, he insisted that he has been together with his wife since 1978, and never mentioned a Polish girlfriend. According to his foster father, in 1978 Kovács spoke neither Russian nor Polish. All this is further proof that his past life is full of contradictions. His ties to Mateusz Piskorski are also of interest because, similarly to Kovács, the Polish politician has also been a frequent visitor to various republics in Russian Federation. Furthermore, Piskorski has recently established his new anti-American and pro-Russia party *Zmiana* (Change).⁴⁷

Within Jobbik, Kovács worked hard to steer the emerging party to develop close ties with his contacts: the Russian political actors. In 2008, the party president, Gábor Vona, visited Moscow at his initiative and in his company. Soon after the visit, Jobbik's foreign policy took an open turn to Russia. For instance, in 2007 Kovács invited one of his party colleagues to the inauguration ceremony of the head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, saying he was on his way to the event and the colleague should accompany him. It is worth noting that instead of Jobbik, Kovács always paid for his trips himself.⁴⁸

According to some Jobbik sources, Béla Kovács was definitely instrumental in Jobbik's turn to Russia, although many also maintain that Kovács' efforts succeed only because Gábor Vona saw the opportunity in finding allies for Jobbik's anti-EU stance in an eastern opening. As we have already stated in our study entitled “Russian Connection,”⁴⁹ the first sign of the party's pro-Russian shift became apparent at the time of a border dispute between Russia and Georgia in 2008, with Jobbik politicians taking Russia's side, and, after some hesitation, the media affiliated with Jobbik took a position against Georgia as well. In December 2008, party president Gábor Vona traveled to Russia where, among others, he delivered a speech to members of the United Russia Party, entitled “Is there a Europe without Russia?” Similarly, the party's economic program calls for an opening to eastern markets, maintaining that instead of in the European Union, Hungarian products should be sold in Russia, China and even Iran.

⁴⁷ *Zmiana* supports Vladimir Putin's politics, considers Russia a natural ally for both Poland and the EU, supports pro-Russian separatists and denies Russian aggression against Ukraine. Piskorski considers Crimea's secession referendum fair, deemed illegal by the EU and UN. „*New pro-Russia party emerges in Poland*”, EU Observer, March 23, 2015, accessed March 25, 2015, <https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/128075>

⁴⁸ “*Kágébéla lehet a Jobbik veszte*”, Index.hu, May 15, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://index.hu/belfold/2014/05/15/kagebela_lehet_a_jobbik_veszte/

⁴⁹ “*Az orosz kapcsolatot*”, Political Capital, April 10, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/pc_elemzes_20140410_az_orosz_kapcsolat.pdf

The party took a similarly unequivocal position regarding the country's energy policy. Instead of the Union-sponsored Nabucco gas line, it put its support behind the South Stream project preferred by Russia. In 2010, Jobbik's election program already included provisions related to Russia, describing the development and maintenance of good relations with a "Russia wielding increasing influence" as vitally important. The establishment of the Hungarian national chapter of the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) was another important development of that year. A meeting of the organization's Hungarian-Russian friendship section was also attended by Russian ambassador, Alexander Tolkach. At the meeting the ambassador referred to Jobbik as one of Russia's constructive partners. In 2011 and 2012 the party continued to make frequent references to the need for an "eastern opening."

In 2013, the year before local and EU parliamentary elections, Gábor Vona became highly active. In his lecture at Moscow's Lomonosov University he described Russia as the protector of European traditions as opposed to a "traitorous" Europe. In fact, on the visit to Russia it was Vona who accompanied Jobbik's EU parliamentary representative, Béla Kovács. On the same trip they also met the First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on International Affairs in the Russian Duma, Leonid Ivanovich Kalashnikov, who became subject of an asset freeze and a travel ban by the EU in September 2014, and who used to be the secretary of the Communist Party in charge for international and economic relations. Kovács, the president of the party's foreign affairs cabinet and a key figure in Jobbik's Russian connection, was elected co-chair of the EU-Russian Interparliamentary Work Group in 2013. At the Group's 2013 meeting in Kaliningrad, Béla Kovács asked a representative of the Russian Federation Council: "What is the future possibility of an EU member state initiating accession talks with the Eurasian Union?" In October 2013, the Group's third meeting in Moscow was chaired by Béla Kovács, and in November of the same year Jobbik organized a gas conference with the participation of Gazprom, Russian parliamentary delegates and representatives of Russian companies, where Gábor Vona expressed his support for gas-powered transportation.⁵⁰

In January 2014, Gábor Vona gave an interview to the Russian iarex.ru, describing the advantages of the Eurasian initiative. *"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-Atlantism. (...) For Hungary Euro-Atlantism 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. I realize that the origin of this concept leads to Russia, I'm familiar with Trubetzkoy's work, and I'm also lucky to have met Professor Dugin. 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."*⁵¹

In April 2014, under the supervision of Béla Kovács the first off-site meeting of the European Union and the Russian Federation Energy Parliamentary Work Group was held in Hungary to discuss opportunities for expanding cooperation between the European Union and Russia.

⁵⁰ "Az orosz kapcsolatok", Political Capital, April 10, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/pc_elemzes_20140410_az_orsosz_kapcsolatok.pdf

⁵¹ „Лидер партии «Йоббик – За лучшую Венгрию» Габор Вона о евроатлантизме, России, Грузии, русинах, Трансильвании и Сербии”, iarex.ru, January 22, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.iarex.ru/interviews/44688.html>

On the first day of the conference, in the Paks nuclear plant, the president of the Hungarian-Russian interparliamentary society, Gábor Vona, announced: Europe, led by the USA, finally has to stand on its own feet and develop its independent policy towards Russia.⁵² Along with the Hungarian government, Jobbik is also an enthusiastic supporter of the Paks nuclear plant investment and all other Russian energy policy initiatives involving Hungary.

Béla Kovács' carrier and the far-right's foreign policy, developed with the help of Kovács, make it apparent what the party's fundamental objectives are: provision of external political legitimization of the Russian regime, spread of disinformation through Béla Kovács and, in respect to Ukraine and the Eurasian Union, destabilization of the EU and the region.

Jobbik's position on the Ukrainian-Russian crisis

As we've seen, representation of the "Eurasian foreign policy paradigm," embodying Russian interests, and the related attempt to renegotiate Hungary's EU and NATO membership, are the cornerstones of Jobbik's foreign policy. Accordingly, moving beyond energy policy, Jobbik consistently promotes Russian interests on international issues, such as the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.

In the early stages of the Ukrainian-Russian crisis, Béla Kovács acted as an observer in Crimea, with the aim of presenting Russia in a positive light. In the fall of 2014, as a member of an international observation team, Márton Gyöngyösi monitored the presidential election of the Donetsk Republic; he was accompanied by Adrienn Szaniszló, also in the capacity of an observer, although she did not cross the Ukrainian-Russian border and remained on Russian territory.⁵³ Gyöngyösi and Szaniszló were part of a group of European far-right politicians,⁵⁴ who legitimized the election in Donetsk and Luhansk counties in Eastern Ukraine with their presence. The legitimacy of the election was accepted only by Moscow and rejected by both the United States and European Union. Jobbik recognized the legitimacy of the election in a statement and the party indicated that they would "respect the results".⁵⁵ Subsequently, Béla Kovács and allegedly Márton Gyöngyösi were banned from Ukraine. Márton Gyöngyösi spoke about his ban in a recent interview:

"Who invited you to the elections as an observer?"

I received the invitation from Russia, from Moscow. Apparently, the elections in Donetsk and Luhansk were followed in Russia with great interest. Many organizations and parties represented in the parliament sent observers to the elections. Since Donetsk is only accessible from Russia and not through Ukraine, we entered the territory of Donbas from Russia. I entered through Rostov.

⁵² "Hatalmasak a lehetőségek az uniós-orosz és az orosz-magyar szakmai kapcsolatok területén", Jobbik.hu, April 23, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://jobbik.hu/hireink/hatalmasak-lehetosegek-az-unios-orosz-es-az-orosz-magyar-szakmai-kapcsolatok-területen>

⁵³ "International "observers": Moscow - Rostov – Donetsk", Anton Shekhovtsov's blog, November 8, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.co.at/2014/11/international-observers-moscow-rostov.html>

⁵⁴ "Fake monitors "observe" fake elections in the Donbass", Anton Shekhovtsov's blog, November 1, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://anton-shekhovtsov.blogspot.ca/2014/11/fake-monitors-observe-fake-elections-in.html?m=1>

⁵⁵ „Jobbik: Tiszteletben tartjuk a választás eredményét”, alfahir.hu, November 3, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014

But which organization exactly did you receive the invitation from?

I cannot recall the name right away. There is a news agency focusing on the happenings in Donbas. I think Novorossia Press is the exact name. This is the organization that sent me the invitation and they organized the trip for me.

Were only pro-Russian European parties represented among observers during the elections or did MSZP and Fidesz receive such invitations as well?

I don't know. You should ask them about it. There I met the representatives of Ataka from Bulgaria, Vlaams Belang from Belgium and a former MP of FPÖ from Austria. Mateusz Piskorski from Poland was also there. I was in Donetsk but there was another contingent in Luhansk as well. We had been brought together by a common matter, which is the similar view on the events in Ukraine. And, of course, the desire to see the situation in the civil war zone with our own eyes, independent from the one-sided Western propaganda."⁵⁶

In the spring 2014 election campaign, Márton Gyöngyösi already suggested that following the election "Gábor Vona would first travel to Moscow." The trip took place in June, when the Jobbik delegation asked Russia to support the establishment of Hungarian-Rusyn autonomy in the Trans-Carpathian region. At the meeting, Gábor Vona said that in his view there was ethnic cleansing in Eastern Ukraine and he feared it could be repeated in Trans-Carpathia as well. Accompanied by Márton Gyöngyösi and Béla Kovács, the president of Jobbik arrived to Moscow and met in the Lower House of the Duma with Aleksey Zhuravlev, head of the Rodina (Motherland) nationalist party and MP of the governing United Russia group. Márton Gyöngyösi expressed his view on the Ukrainian crisis in Moscow, saying that the conflict has escalated into a bloody civil war. The geopolitical struggle over the region that exists since 1989 has moved to Ukraine. He stated that his party takes the position that rather than Russia, the West is the aggressor in Ukraine and Russia is only protecting the Russian minority living in the region. Jobbik's foreign policy expert described the Crimean referendum as exemplary, "holding out the promise of autonomy for the Hungarian and Rusyn population of Trans-Carpathia." He believed that the Hungarian government and diplomats must advance this cause. Gábor Vona welcomed the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union. In his view, "in the economic and political sphere the region should stand up to Euro-Atlantism." While he sees little chance for Hungary's accession to the Eurasian Union, he urges Budapest to develop very close cooperation with the organization. Furthermore, he stated that Jobbik wishes to be the most steadfast and reliable partner in this endeavor. Jobbik's top politicians have repeatedly emphasized that Russia is among their foreign partners, and on the issue of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict the party has consistently sided with Russia and accepted the legitimacy of plebiscites aimed at breaking away from Ukraine.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ „Keleten senki nem bízik Orbánban”, 444.hu, March 30, 2015, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://444.hu/2015/03/30/jobbik-kulpol-gyongyosi/>

⁵⁷ „Moszkvába ment az autonómiáról tárgyalni Vona Gábor”, Jobbik.hu, June 19, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://jobbik.hu/hireink/moszkvaba-ment-az-autonomiarol-targyalni-vona-gabor>

In August, Jobbik announced⁵⁸ plans to demand compensation from the European Union for economic damages suffered by Hungary related to the sanctions imposed on Russia. At the end of the same month, Jobbik's official weekly, *Barikád* described events in Eastern Ukraine as a form of genocide. Adrienn Szaniszló, the party's presidential secretary responsible for Hungarian-Russian relations and a member of its foreign affairs staff, put it this way: "The current conflict no longer serves anyone's interests, either in the White House, in Brussels or in the Kremlin. However, the mechanism has already been set in motion and no one knows how to stop it. At the same time, Putin's popularity in his own country has hit record highs, while Obama is steadily losing support in America." Adrienn Szaniszló stressed that "concurrent to the Ukrainian crisis, the 'global background power' intends to defeat the government of the Russian president."⁵⁹

In September, as a reaction to criticism from NATO, Jobbik denounced the United States of America and "the most recent provocation in Ukraine by NATO, a cover organization bent on promoting America's geopolitical interests." Furthermore, the party statement contains the following: "*Just as secret American-Russian talks in Finland and subsequent multi-lateral meetings in Minsk have started to ease tensions in the region and the parties involved in the conflict have engaged in dialogue, NATO's aggressive allegations may lead to rising distrust among the parties and an aggravation of the conflict. According to the absurd claims of the North Atlantic alliance, currently around 1000 Russian soldiers are fighting in Ukraine, although such claims are not backed up by any credible evidence.*"⁶⁰ Numerous types of evidence (e.g., statements of Russian soldiers) makes it patently clear that the Russian army is involved in the Ukraine conflict.⁶¹ Márton Gyöngyösi called on the Hungarian government and its diplomatic corps that instead of blindly following American interests, they should stand up for the interests of Hungary and the region, call for the abandonment of sanctions and move forward the resolution of the Ukraine conflict through the dialogue started in Minsk. At the same time, Jobbik called on Hungarian political parties, "especially political forces pursuing extremist left-liberal policies, that if unable to make constructive contributions to our national interests, they should at least help with their passivity and stop their activities aimed at promoting foreign interests, because they cause irreparable damages to Hungary with all their pronouncements."

Jobbik also condemned resolutions passed at the Wales NATO summit. As they put it: "instead of increasing, Hungary's NATO membership undermines the country's security." Therefore, Jobbik called on the Hungarian government to "stop supporting decisions threatening the security of Hungary and reconsider the country's membership in NATO."⁶²

"Today Ukraine's territorial integrity, repeated ad nauseam by NATO and, unfortunately, by Hungarian diplomats, is nothing but an illusion," Márton Gyöngyösi told *Barikád* at the end of November. He also talked about his experiences as an election observer.

⁵⁸ "Kell-e kártérítés? Ellentmondásokban az államtitkár", Jobbik.hu, August 12, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://jobbik.hu/hireink/kell-e-karterites-ellentmondasokban-az-allamtitkar>

⁵⁹ "Budapest összenemzeti ügy – Interjú Staudt Gáborral a Barikádban", Jobbik.hu, August 21, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://jobbik.hu/hireink/budapest-osszenemzeti-ugy-interju-staudt-gaborral-barkadban>

⁶⁰ "Az Oroszország elleni provokáció nem magyar és európai érdek", Jobbik.hu, September 1, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://jobbik.hu/hireink/az-oroszorszag-elleni-provokacio-nem-magyar-es-europai-erdek>

⁶¹ "Evidence mounting of Russian troops in Ukraine", Deutsche Welle, March 4, 2015, accessed March 6, 2015, <http://www.dw.de/evidence-mounting-of-russian-troops-in-ukraine/a-18294255>

⁶² "Jobbik: Magyarország biztonságát nem növeli, hanem veszélyezteti a NATO-tagság", Jobbik.hu, September 8, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://jobbik.hu/hireink/jobbik-magyarorszag-biztonsagat-nem-noveli-hanem-veszelyeztet-nato-tagsag>

This is how he described his ban from Ukraine: “I’m not overwhelmed with grief that I can no longer enter the territory of a chauvinist country waging a war against its own people. The only thing that makes me sad is that Trans-Carpathia is still a part of this terrorist state. We have no choice but to work even harder to achieve territorial autonomy for Trans-Carpathia.”⁶³

At the end of the year Gábor Vona took a short trip to Moscow, which he described in the following words:

“In addition to a number of background talks where I discussed international developments with government advisers and experts, I also had the opportunity to conduct talks in the Duma. I met Mr. Zuravljov, representative of United Russia and president of the Rodina party, and we mutually expressed the desire to develop closer professional and political cooperation between our respective parties. I again met Mr. Grachov, president of the Duma’s energy committee, and had lunch with governing party representatives Fjodorov and Romanov, experts and staunch defenders of the issue of national sovereignty. Aside from these talks, I was asked for a number of interviews, including an appearance in an evening news show on state television. These talks confirmed my belief that Hungarian-Russian relations have a promising future that will not be overshadowed either by the polemics of small leftist parties or the Hungarian government’s double-dealing policies. And this is of vital importance for the Hungarian economy, the country’s energy security and the future of our brethren living in Trans-Carpathia.”⁶⁴

At the beginning of 2015, objection to fulfillment of duties, arising from Hungary’s EU and NATO membership, was an important element of Gábor Vona’s beginning-of-year speech⁶⁵ as well. Vona argued for Hungary’s neutrality in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict and supported ending the sanctions against Russia. Simultaneously, Jobbik launched a citizens' initiative to hold a referendum on four questions: (1) men’s retirement after 40 years of labor relations; (2) free internet for every household; (3) restriction of immigration; (4) Hungary’s neutrality in case of a war in Ukraine. The latter question touches on an international obligation of Hungary and, therefore, cannot be the subject of plebiscite.

At the time of President Putin’s visit to Hungary that triggered harsh criticism on the international stage, Jobbik expressed its support for closer bilateral relations between Hungary and Russia. Although the party does not back the classification of the agreements related to the planned Paks Nuclear Plant extension signed with Russia, Jobbik is very much in favor of the project as such.

⁶³ “Ukrajna már soha nem lesz a régi - donyecki beszámoló”, Jobbik.hu, November 21, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://jobbik.hu/hireink/ukrajna-mar-soha-nem-lesz-regi-donyecki-beszamololo>

⁶⁴ Vona Gábor, Facebook, November 20, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/vonagabor/photos/a.10150160184994623.341499.247920204622/10152955158964623/?type=1>

⁶⁵ „Határozott, kemény program, nyugodt, higgadt erő”, jobbik.hu, February 2, 2015, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://jobbik.hu/hireink/hatarozott-kemeny-program-nyugodt-higgadt-ero>

In line with Russia's interests, essentially the far-right party expressed its support for separatist tendencies in Eastern Ukraine and criticized Hungarian government's stance opposing it. Some further typical examples of Jobbik's stance:

- In order to spread its propaganda, Jobbik launched a series of public discussions of national scope to "inform the Hungarian public credibly on the background and development of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, and the possible consequences that might affect Hungary."⁶⁶
- Jobbik MP and member of the Parliament's National Security Committee, Ádám Mirkóczki underlined in the committee's closed session⁶⁷ on February 3, 2015 that the Hungarian government should stop worrying about the territorial integrity of Ukraine since it has been out of force for long. According to him, there is no chance for Ukraine to be the same as it used to be before the conflict.
- In his open letter to the peoples of Ukraine⁶⁸ on February 17, 2015, Gábor Vona stressed the importance of "national self-determination" and criticized the Ukrainian government for committing crimes against humanity, stressing that it came to power due to a bloody coup financed by the USA, after which the government only follows orders from its "Master."
- Sixty-four County Youth Movement (HVIM), Jobbik and Jobbik Youth Division (Jobbik IT) organized a torch march on February 9, 2015 in order to protest against the conscription of Hungarians living in the Ukrainian province Trans-Carpathia.⁶⁹ During the march that went from the Parliament to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, protesters carried a banner displaying "Not our war," a black flag and a coffin. Member of HVIM's board, Adrián Magvasi condemned the pressure by NATO and the West and criticized the government's foreign policy for not doing enough to protect Hungarians living in Trans-Carpathia.

From the point of view of domestic politics, all the above mentioned gestures are of importance because they are not a consequence of Jobbik's "move in the middle"; on the contrary, they happen despite it. On the other hand, the surveys presented above clearly show that neither the general public nor the voter base of Jobbik is really responsive to such messages. Jobbik's and its media's apparent and servile orientation toward the Kremlin cannot be explained by domestic political goals.

⁶⁶ „Jobbik-sajtótájékoztató: Országos fórumorozatot hirdet a Jobbik”, Szabolcs Online, February 11, 2015, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.szon.hu/jobik-sajtotajekoztato-orszagos-forumorozatot-hirdet-a-jobbik/2761214>

⁶⁷ „A kormánynak kötelessége megmentenie a kárpátaljai magyarokat”, *alfahir.hu*, February 3, 2015, accessed February 5, 2015

⁶⁸ Vona Gábor: *Nyílt levél Ukrajna népeihez*, *Mandiner*, February 17, 2015, accessed February 20, 2015, http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20150207_vona_gabor_nyilt_level_ukrajna_nepeihez

⁶⁹ „Koporsóval a háború ellen”, *Jobbik.hu*, February 10, 2015, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://jobbik.hu/hireink/koporsoval-haboru-ellen>

KREMLIN'S PROPAGANDA IN HUNGARIAN FAR-RIGHT COMMUNICATION

Kuruc.info's pro-Russia turnaround

The Russian influence has not passed by one of the Hungarian far-right's most prominent news organizations, the illegal Kuruc.info, Jobbik's officially unrecognized online news service. In other words, efforts at legitimizing the Russian regime and spreading its propaganda (information and disinformation) go beyond Jobbik and extend to the party's media orbit. Based on data made available by the portal, the site has 130-140 thousand visitors a day, of which 70-80 thousand are direct visitors.⁷⁰ Even if the page visit data provided by the organization is not fully credible, Kuruc.info's leading role in the field of far-right media is beyond doubt. While the portal operates illegally and its editors hide behind anonymity, in confidential talks former leading Jobbik politicians, who had already left the party, unanimously agree that some members of the party top brass, including Előd Novák, have major roles in editing content on Kuruc.info. On one occasion, Novák indirectly admitted that much at a public parliamentary committee meeting.⁷¹

At the time of its foundation the portal, in operation since 2005 under the Kuruc.info logo, was not closely affiliated with Jobbik and simply sympathized with the party. However, by the end of the 2000s some party leaders gained control over the organization. By 2009, when Kuruc.info's readership already matched that of some mainstream online organizations, the portal gained special relevance for Jobbik, still without its own media outlet at the time.

A source, asking for anonymity, once active in editing the portal said that the handling and management of the organization's finances was taken over by a person also active in the management of Jobbik's finances, and by 2009 staff members not seen as "party-loyalists" were dropped from the top management. The applied method was simple: those who acquired control over the portal withdrew all administrative rights. With all that, a number of the original staff members still work for the portal. The only difference is that since then the news service has adopted Jobbik's position on almost all issues. "If a media organization airs the dirty laundry of the governing or any other party, Kuruc.info runs the piece. However, when an article discloses corruption in Jobbik, Kuruc.info talks about 'conspiracy by the secret service' and deceitful journalists," explained Kuruc.info's former editor, referring to how the once independent and openly rightist organization essentially became a party rag.

Undoubtedly, in the event of internal conflicts the portal regularly reflects the position of Jobbik's vice president, Előd Novák – a clear evidence that Novák pulls the strings at the portal. This was also the case in 2011, when Novák locked horns with Zsolt Tyirityán, the leader of the paramilitary Outlaws Army, which is considered to be a Jobbik ally. "The leader of the Outlaws Army hit Előd Novák without warning, after which Előd Novák declared at a party forum: no one will benefit if the outlaws convince the national side that having a criminal record is trendy," the portal commented at the time.

⁷⁰ „A Kuruc.info hirdetésszervezője magyarországi áfás számlát is tud adni”, Kuruc.info, September 29, 2013, accessed October 20, 2014

⁷¹ „L. Simon: Novák Előd elszólta magát”, Hír24, October 29, 2013, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.hir24.hu/poszt-itt-l-simon-laszlo/2013/10/29/l.-simon-novak-elod-elszolta-magat/>

Later the portal reported that “by the evidence of stacks of letters from the readers of Kuruc.info, sadly, the Outlaws Army has regularly abused good Hungarian patriots.”⁷²

Similarly, the online service also served as a mouthpiece for Novák when, in 2012, it turned out that one of the party’s vice presidents, Csanád Szegedi, was a Jew and Novák argued that Szegedi must leave the party: “if Csanád believes that the future of the nation is more important than his own career, he should resign and apologize, and in that case he could still return one day, he is only 30 years old, and if there is contrition, I believe there is exoneration.”⁷³

Kuruc.info clearly reveals the Jobbik party line, not only in respect to domestic but also foreign policy issues, especially the party’s relationship with Russia. Kuruc.info, anti-Russian in 2007, became clearly pro-Russian in the last years. The most obvious sign of shift is the way the portal has handled the 2007 Estonian-Russian conflict and seven years later the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.

At the time of the 2007 riots in Tallinn, the portal talked about “Estonian patriots” clashing with “marauding Russians.” The portal described Russian protesters as “a Russian mob settled in the country from the outside,” as “communist trash” who “steal and rob.”⁷⁴ About the riots they wrote that it was instigated by Russia, and the Russians were consistently referred to as occupiers and “ruskies,” a pejorative term in Hungarian:

“Estonia, reclaiming its independence, rightly only gives citizenship to Russians if they pledge allegiance to the Estonian state and pass an Estonian language test, and otherwise it doesn’t give a damn about the absurd demands of the intruders making up one quarter of the country’s 1.3 million population. Occupiers don’t deserve citizenship, and the Soviet Union held the small Baltic country under occupation for decades. Incidentally, people in Tallinn worry that if Russians are given citizenship, in the name of family reunification they are going to import hordes of Russian relatives (who hate Estonians but want their standard of living) and the indigenous Estonian population may find itself in the minority. It would be best to kick out every Russian who or whose parents arrived in the country as occupiers during the Soviet era.”⁷⁵ „(...) while they celebrate Russia and even the Soviet Union with Russian flags and red stars, they go on wild rampages. Yet they keep whining because the Estonian citizenship and living standards, something they receive even without naturalization, are still more attractive than that offered by Moscow. They don’t have the slightest intention of leaving, and instead demand the empire’s military intervention (and, of course, mother Russia incites rebellion from the outside).”⁷⁶

⁷² „Nem először vert magyarokat a Betyársereg - Tyirityán Zsolt válaszával frissítve”, kuruc.info, September 28, 2011, accessed October 20, 2014

⁷³ „Novák Előd a Facebookon: Nem hallgathatok tovább Csanád ügyében”, kuruc.info, July 24, 2012, accessed October 20, 2014

⁷⁴ „Észt hazafiak vs fosztogató oroszok + fotó - Az indexes taknyok megint hazudnak”, kuruc.info, April 28, 2007, accessed October 20, 2014

⁷⁵ „Észt hazafiak vs fosztogató oroszok + fotó - Az indexes taknyok megint hazudnak”, kuruc.info, April 28, 2007, accessed October 20, 2014

⁷⁶ „Videó: Nézegessen fosztogató oroszokat Tallinnban”, kuruc.info, April 29, 2007, accessed October 20, 2014

Around the same time they had the following to say about the Russian media – incidentally, based on a BBC report:

“Watching Russian television you get the feeling that World War II has never ended. There are endless series of war movies and documentaries extolling the bravery of the Soviet soldier, and citizens are called upon to demonstrate their patriotism.”⁷⁷

The Russian population was not spared in a 2008 article either, and Estonia, a country with a population of 1.5 million standing up to a “150 million-strong Russian bear,” is held up as an example:

“In contrast to a soppy, disloyal and cowardly Hungarian political (robber) elite, Estonia is proving time and time again that a tiny state can also be strong and independent. After one third of the population was annihilated and exiled, state assets stripped and the country was settled by Russians during the Soviet occupation, in just 17 years Estonia achieved close to Western living standards. More importantly, it has a national self-confidence bursting with law and order – the key to its success (...) And, of course, without hesitating for a moment, last year they threw out of Tallinn the murderous Soviet’s memorials, although previously Russia had threatened the Estonians and then incited riots in the Estonian capital, and finally launched a cyber-attack. In response, the Estonians smashed the Russian-communist rebellion and sent an even sterner message to Putin. With his speech, the Estonian president caused a useful and resounding political scandal at the World Congress of the Finno-Ugric Peoples. Toomas Hendrik Ilves presented his independent homeland as an example to be followed by the occupied Finno-Ugric peoples living in Russia. His comments were criticized by the president of the Russian Duma’s foreign affairs committee, taking the Estonian president to task for speaking in English, instead of his native language, as did the Hungarian and Finnish presidents.

(Well, although we have nothing in common with the Finno-Ugric peoples, we sympathize with them – the editor.)”⁷⁸

In the 2008 Georgian-Russian border dispute, however, kuruc.info took a clear pro-Russian stand. According to the general interpretation of related articles that appeared on the portal, Georgia was the “beachhead of Israel.” For instance, one of the portal’s opinion piece was titled “Tsar Putin cleared away Israel from Georgia.” According to a former editor of Kuruc.info, this had nothing to do with the fact that Jobbik supported the Russian position in the conflict. “*It would be a mistake to equate the events in Georgia and Estonia. The Estonians are civilized people, while Georgia has been a small mafia state forever. One should make a distinction between Muscovites and Estonians, while differences between Muscovites and the Caucasian oligarchy are negligible. Georgia has never been packed full of Russians, not to mention that they attacked first at the instigation of some governments. Of course, Moscow didn’t stand by idly,*” explained the former Kuruc.info editor, referring to the paper’s reluctance to stand by the Georgians. However, the spectacular turnaround within one and a half years raises serious questions indeed (in the perception of Kuruc.info, Russia transformed from an enemy into a hero, albeit in the context of different conflicts).

⁷⁷ „Május 9-e Oroszországban és a többi ex-CCCP államban”, kuruc.info, May 10, 2007, accessed October 20, 2014

⁷⁸ „A másfél milliós Észtország elnöke beszólt a 150 milliós orosz medvének”, kuruc.info, June 29, 2008, accessed October 20, 2014

Compared to its editorial policy in 2007, today Kuruc.info has a completely different take on Putin. We present a sample of articles published by Kuruc.info in connection to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict and the EU sanctions imposed on Russia. When the head of the French oil company died in an airplane accident over Moscow, the portal wrote mockingly that the West is certain to blame Putin for this as well.⁷⁹ At other times the portal criticized EU sanctions against Russia, claiming that the “Germans also feel the heat” due to the restrictions.⁸⁰ According to Kuruc.info, the Ukrainian crisis was provoked by the West⁸¹, and the Financial Times “stirs tension with the threat of a Russian assault”⁸².

Reporting on the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, by now Kuruc.info uncritically posts “news reports” published on Hungarian-language Russian propaganda sites, such as the SouthFront.hu Facebook page, established in June 2014 and serving as a mouthpiece in support of Russian intervention in Ukraine. Thus the portal runs rumors such as the one circulated by SouthFront.hu, claiming that Ukrainians use phosphorous bombs to kill people in a village in the Donetsk region.⁸³

In the spy case involving Béla Kovács, Kuruc.info also followed Jobbik's position, and the portal did not run a single critical piece challenging the veracity of the politician's statements. Moreover, in May, two days before the scandal erupted, they posted a video entitled “Béla Kovács, one of the most effective EP-representatives without a faction”⁸⁴. The timing was no coincidence. Simultaneous to the revelation of the Kovács-case, Jobbik politicians indicated they had received reports that their EP-representative would be targeted in the campaign.⁸⁵ When in the summer Béla Kovács was banned from Ukraine, Kuruc.info wrote about Kiev's “petty revenge” taken against the Crimean observers.⁸⁶ However, Kuruc.info was not convinced by an investigative report in Index, and instead adopted the arguments of Regnum, a Russian news service, saying that the spy case against Béla Kovács doesn't have a leg to stand on and it is completely groundless, and the journalist signing the piece in Index took instructions from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)⁸⁷. The fact that Kuruc.info, clearly anti-Russian in 2007, accepts Regnum (established in 2002) as a reliable news source is highly remarkable. According to the Estonian secret police's (Kapo) 2005 yearbook, the Russian news agency was established by the Putin administration to assist the foreign operations of the Russian secret service by promoting Moscow's state propaganda.⁸⁸

⁷⁹ „Repülőbaleset áldozata lett egy francia olajcég vezetője Moszkva mellett - várhatóan ezért is Putyin lesz majd a hibás”, kuruc.info, October 21, 2014, accessed October 22, 2014

⁸⁰ „Már a németek is vakaróznak az oroszellenes szankciók miatt: "Hiba volt az újabb büntetőintézkedések bevezetése", kuruc.info, September 14, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁸¹ „Amerika egyik legbefolyásosabb tudósa: a Nyugat provokálta ki az ukrán válságot; az USA mit szólna, ha Kanada és Mexikó Kína katonai szövetségébe akarna lépni?”, kuruc.info, September 4, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁸² „Az orosz támadás rémképével és a szankciók fokozásával kelti a feszültséget a Financial Times”, kuruc.info, August 30, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁸³ „Kazettás bombákkal "büntették" pártunk és kormányunk ukrain barátai az egyik oroszbarát falut”, kuruc.info, June 12, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁸⁴ „Kovács Béla a legeredményesebb a frakció nélküli EP-képviselők között”, kuruc.info, May 13, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁸⁵ Incidentally, following the national elections, in a background conversation with some journalists a Fidesz politician accidentally mentioned weeks before the eruption of the scandal that the prosecutor's office would submit charges against Kovács involving a "serious national security issue." If this information had reached some people in the media, it is conceivable that Jobbik had indeed known that Kovács was in Fidesz' scope.

⁸⁶ „Kovács Bélát kitiltották Ukrajnából - Kijev kicsinyes bosszúja a krími népszavazási megfigyelők ellen”, kuruc.info, August 29, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁸⁷ „Orosz hírportál: a Kovács elleni vád gyengeségéről árulkodik felesége bevonása a "kémügybe"”, kuruc.info, September 29, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁸⁸ *Kaitsepolitsei Aastaraamat 2005*, Peadirektori Eessona, 2005, accessed October 20, 2014, https://www.kapo.ee/cms-data/_text/38/44/files/aastaraamat-2005-est.pdf

There is no reliable evidence whether Kuruc.info, has come under direct Russian influence, or whether it took a 180° turn only after it adopted Jobbik's foreign policy agenda. Sources close to the portal claim that in addition to a number of other Jobbik politicians, such as former Jobbik EP-representative Csanád Szegedi, the organization also received financial support from MEP Béla Kovács, a claim that so far has not been substantiated by evidence.

Hídfő.net – a Russian secret service messaging board

Aside from Kuruc.info, Hídfő.net, a far-right news portal established in 2012, is also worthy of attention. Similarly to Kuruc.info, it is operated illegally with the help of anonymous contributors. At the same time, according to information coming from far-right sources, originally Hídfő.net was one of the projects launched by the Hungarian National Front (MNA) to promote the organization's events (e.g., training camps) and views. While MNA started as a Győrkös-family "venture," it split in two in September 2012. In 1995 the founder, István Győrkös, gained full control in the Hungarist organization established in 1989, and years later his son, István Győrkös Jr., also joined the MNA leadership. Following 2011, tensions developed within the MNA after the Győrkös family started to cooperate with Gyula Thürmer's Workers Party, eventually leading to the breakup of the organization in 2012. One faction was led by István Győrkös and his son, while the breakaway party is run by Gábor Szalma and his friends. The Szalma group could not tolerate that Győrkös "cozied up to the Communists," which in their view betrays the Front's original principles. In contrast, the followers of Győrkös posted the following on Hídfő.net about befriending the Communists: *"The past decades spent in constant struggle left us a wealth of practical experience. (...) When we say that we gained a lot of experience, the 'we' does not simply refer to the Front but to the Hungarist Movement as well. The Movement, which under the leadership of István Győrkös made a radical break with the myths built up around him and right-wing radicalism, i.e., political instincts hampering future development. For there are Communists who think in national terms, work for the nation and fight against parasites – of course, there are. Similarly, there are Hungarists who selfishly defend their physical and material desires even in the face of the leader's instructions (...) In the course of his career, István Győrkös has encountered good and bad alike. With time spent in Communist and liberal-democratic prisons, he faced many challenges. (...) He has been simultaneously called a neo-Nazi and a Communist. Some broken/breakaway circles accuse him of betraying the nation."*⁸⁹

The hitherto MNA-affiliated Jövőnk.info came under the control of the Szalma faction, while the Győrkös wing set up Hídfő.net at the end of 2012. Since then, just as the Győrkös and Szalma clans, the two portals are sworn enemies. While Jövőnk.info also publishes pieces sympathetic to Russia and Putin, Szalma's portal and the related Facebook page continue to propagate Hungarist and Arrow Cross ideology, and the site cannot be called pro-Russian. In a 2013 article this is what they say about the Győrkös faction and its affiliate, Hídfő.net: *"I thank Kitartás.net and Harcunk.info for their report on the tour. And special thanks go to Hídfő.net website, because negative advertisement is also good advertisement. We did not deviate from the street course. Instead of empty propaganda and lies, we simply follow the path of day-to-day action. I am especially honored when a former national-socialist turned communist criticizes my actions. It must be awful to be completely isolated and left out of everything"*.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ „Az értetlenkedők kifürkészhető útjai”, hidfo.net.ru, November 30, 2012, accessed January 13, 2013

⁹⁰ „A budapesti túraszervező bajtársunk közleménye”, jovonk.info, December 12, 2013, accessed October 20, 2014

At the same time, the Győrökös-affiliated and openly anti-West Hídfő.net and its Facebook page has clearly and unequivocally become a tool in the hands of Russian government propaganda. Until recently the portal was openly accessible under Russian based URL address (hidfo.net.ru) while today it is found on a temporary free blog platform (hidfo2015.wordpress.com). According to the page, Hídfő.net will be extended in late May 2015 and a “new and up-to-date page with bigger capacity and oftener updates” will come back under the previous link. While compared to mainstream portals, both Jövönk.info and Hídfő.net are marginal news portals, it is worth noting that pro-Russian Hídfő.net managed to take a foothold. By now the number of Hídfő.net Facebook followers is five times that of Szalma's page. Posts on Hídfő.net's Facebook page are regularly shared by the Facebook page “Secret news in images” with almost 50 thousand followers. Furthermore, the Győrökös-affiliated site has professional editing and regular content updating. This confirms information coming from circles close to Hídfő.net claiming that the content editing of the pro-Russian portal is assisted by a professional journalist. This is all the more surprising because, according to sources close to the MNA, following the organization's split the Győrökös faction was in the minority, which means that their technical and financial resources must have been curtailed as well. Hídfő.net's relationship with Jobbik is also revealing.

Typically, with the exception of the Kovács spy case, the portal does not cover party news. However, in this case they came to the defense of the Jobbik politician describing the “questionable” revelation as part of a CIA smear campaign⁹¹. It is even more interesting to see the reaction of Hídfő.net editors to the fact that Jobbik – a party that had already developed ties with Russia through Béla Kovács – is also making overtures to Turkey.⁹² In August 2014, Hídfő.net published an article, “Jobbik: Two articles, one lesson—Don't steal because you will be caught!”⁹³ In this piece, Hídfő.net criticizes an analysis published on Jobbik's official site, Alfahír, and written by László Zábóri (a pseudonym) about the fate of Syrian, Iraqi and West Bank Christians, claiming that it is an almost verbatim adaptation from a study by sociologist Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya. However, Hídfő.net does not take issue with the charge of plagiarism but with Alfahír's attempt to cover up for Turkey. The portal claims that the Hungarian “author” simply “forgot to mention” those sections which present that “*Turkey led by the Erdogan-Davutoglu political tandem has had a hand in the atrocities against Christians in the Middle East.*” According to Hídfő.net, “*The fact that [the Hungarian author] has systematically deleted these sections from the original and that Alfahír, considered to be Jobbik's official portal, regularly publishes articles lauding the policies of the Erdogan-Davutoglu duo suggest that the party is cozying up to the current Turkish leadership.*”⁹⁴

The provision of professional and regular content, exclusive information published on the portal, analyses revealing deeper-than-average familiarity with geopolitical, energy policy, economic and foreign affairs issues, and references to the Kremlin all suggest that Hídfő.net is not a simple website edited by the Hungarists, but a public messaging board and propaganda site maintained by Russian intelligence officers residing or operating in Hungary.

⁹¹ „Nyilvánosság elé állt egy CIA által szervezett újságíró”, hidfo.net.ru, October 18, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁹² The fact that Jobbik started to put out feelers to Turkey become clear for the public in the fall of 2013, when Gábor Vona visited the country. At the time the party president - to the surprise of his party colleagues - described Islam as the “last hope for humanity” in the “darkness of globalization and liberalism” and, in fact, stated that Islam has more community cohesion force than Christianity.

⁹³ „Jobbik: Két cikk egy tanulság: Ne lopj, mert rajtakapnak!”, hidfo.net.ru, August 22, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁹⁴ „Jobbik: Két cikk egy tanulság: Ne lopj, mert rajtakapnak!”, hidfo.net.ru, August 22, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

This leads to the conclusion that the Hungarian far-right, stretching from Jobbik through marginal paramilitary neo-Nazi organizations, can be put to the service of the Kremlin to serve its legitimizing and propaganda purposes.

It is also interesting to note that a number of articles run on Hídfő.net read as if they had not been written for Hungarian audience. For instance, in one of the articles the author explains that Index is a Hungarian-language media organization with the largest readership⁹⁵, a piece of information more than evident to those living in Hungary. However, this is not the only indication that information published on Hídfő.net is not destined for Hungarian audience, and its intended readers are those connected to and working for the Kremlin. In the fall of 2012, Hídfő.net's first Facebook posting was in Russian using Cyrillic alphabet: *Новый новостной сайт запущен!* ("New news site launched!").⁹⁶

Almost all reports about the Hungarian government's actions, decisions and plans look at related economic and foreign relations topics in the context of the Eastern Opening policy and from a Russian perspective. For instance, in connection to the Internet tax the government planned to introduce, the unknown author argues that with the tax the government would like to squeeze out Western companies from the Hungarian market, create a market niche that, in turn, would provide the government a better negotiating position in respect to countries with no or only a limited exposure in Hungary. The bank tax is brought up as an example, claiming it has forced a number of Western banks to leave the country. "For instance, the government will be in a better position when it sits down to negotiate with Moscow; as a bargaining chip, it can offer to ease current regulations a few years down the line, i.e., create a market niche where the other side's financial institutions can make a breach. In the interim period, the government executes state acquisitions, which means that the population would barely notice the withdrawal of Western banks," the author states.

In their content and format alike, pieces run by Hídfő.net closely resemble cables forwarded by foreign missions with underlined and highlighted text. However, the most revealing sign that the portal is more than a simple propaganda tool and additionally serves as a "messaging board" for Russian intelligence services, is that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also referred to an article in Hídfő.net.⁹⁷ Namely, in August 2014 there was a minor diplomatic squabble between Moscow and Budapest when Hídfő.net reported on Hungary's secret tank deliveries to Ukraine. The portal also printed a photograph about the tanks without identifying the source. In fact, Hungarian Parliament's National Security Committee met to discuss the tank case, which is an issue with details left in the dark to this day.

The public was puzzled by the fact that the Kremlin reprimanded the Hungarian government based on information from a hitherto unknown, marginal far-right portal, indicating the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between the two countries. Apparent aim of the Kremlin was to "counter-balance" the criticism of Russia's involvement in Ukraine by NATO and the EU.

⁹⁵ „Nyilvánosság elé állt egy CIA által szervezett újságíró”, hidfo.net.ru, October 18, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁹⁶ „Moszkva ukrainai fegyverszállítással vádolja Magyarországot”, Index.hu, August 15, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://index.hu/kulfold/2014/08/15/moszkva_fegyverszallitással_vadolja_magyarorszagot/

⁹⁷ „Комментарий Департамента информации и печати МИД России в связи с сообщениями о поставках бронетехники Украине”, Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации, August 15, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/390EFC694D10BB5244257D35005CC8C7?OpenDocument

It is also noteworthy that Hídfő.net, originally a mouth-piece of MNA propagating openly Hungarian (extreme nationalist) and neo-Nazi views, adopted the style of Russian propaganda sites when in an August report it referred to a Ukrainian “fascist parade of shame”: “According to a report by *Ukrainian Pravda*, in Donetsk a parade of shame was held for Ukrainian fascists captured in battle for the south-eastern region. The majority of the 80 Ukrainian soldiers forced to march in the parade in Donetsk are members of the far-right organization, the Right Sector. Also, people captured and accused of theft and other offenses committed in closed sectors were forced to march in the center of the city”⁹⁸.

And finally, it cannot be overlooked that on military affairs Hídfő.net is often better informed than major news agencies.

For instance, in an article entitled “Tactical victory, status report from the Eastern front,” the portal reports in detail that “in the first week of August the campaign launched in early July by the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Militia came to an end, which aimed to drive out three Ukrainian military units with 5500-6000 servicemen (the 72nd mechanized brigade and the 79th and 24th air-borne regiments) wedged between territory occupied by the insurgents and the Ukrainian-Russian border, and take over the roughly 120 km border section under Ukrainian control”⁹⁹.

Kremlin’s influence on media controlled by far-right paramilitary organizations

The success of Russian influence on the far-right media is well illustrated by the fact the online site, *deres.tv* also regularly publishes pro-Russian articles regarding the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. For instance, the website took over without alteration Hídfő.net's tank-story, causing a scandal. While just as in the case of Hídfő.net, the name of *deres.tv*'s domain owner is also kept secret. According to the information coming from far-right sources, *deres.tv* is affiliated with the Sixty-four County Youth Movement (HVIM), as is the movement’s Internet-based Szent Korona Rádió, whose founder and editor-in-chief is HVIM co-president, Gábor Turner.

Until 2010 the *Szentkoronaradio.com* domain belonged to Turner, when it was transferred to Domain By Proxy, providing anonymity. The same service provider is also the host of *deres.tv*. *Deres.tv*, Szent Korona Rádió and mail servers of Magyar Sziget (another HVIM-affiliated operation) all run on Russian servers and under the same IP address, providing additional evidence for their central administration. Earlier, HVIM honorary president (and former MP in Jobbik’s parliamentary faction), György Gyula Zagyva said that system administrators tend to use Russian servers because they find those professionally reliable.¹⁰⁰

Betyárvilág, another site also regularly publishes anti-Semitic and pro-Russian propaganda pieces. The owners of the portal are unknown because in the summer of 2014 they registered the *Birkakvagytok.hu* (“youareallsheep.hu”) domain name through a company providing anonymous domain registration. For the most part, the site republishes conspiracy theories and anti-Western articles from other websites. It pays special attention to Russia and Putin, whom it presents as a victim of Western conspiracy.

⁹⁸ „Fasiszta szégyenmenet Donyeckben”, *hidfo.net.ru*, August 27, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

⁹⁹ „Kivédekezett győzelem – Helyzetjelentés a keleti frontról”, *hidfo.net.ru*, August 9, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

¹⁰⁰ „Nemzeti radikális hírportálok: Oroszország magyar hangjai”, August 26, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://atlatszo.hu/2014/08/26/nemzeti-radikalis-hirportalok-oroszorszag-magyar-hangjai/>

The portal republished a speech (originally published on Kuruc.info) delivered in Budapest by Jared Taylor, one of the top organizers of a conference that was to be held in Budapest (banned by Hungarian authorities) by the racist American National Policy Institute¹⁰¹. Betyárvilág has over 50,000 followers on Facebook, although this is most likely due not only to its political pieces, but to tabloid news steeped in conspiracy theory (about vaccines, viruses and bank loans). For the most part, articles on foreign policy and economic issues are sampled from Kuruc.info and Hídfő.net.

In light of the developments in Ukraine and regional separatist aspirations, as well as the Hungarian far-right's typically revisionist ideology, Russian influence that apparently extends to less and less marginal media, although it is still tied to mainly marginal far-right paramilitary organizations, poses a political and national security risk.

However, despite the active promotion of Kremlin's propaganda, not all far-right groups have turned to Moscow. For instance, internal power struggle apparent in Jobbik after 2010 and intensifying since then has led to a point in 2012 when a number of nationally known party politicians and MPs left the organization. Among the defectors one finds politicians from the party's moderate wing, as well as from its radical wing, and in the fall of 2013 some of those making up the latter group established the Hungarian Dawn Party, which cannot be considered pro-Russian, in contrast to Jobbik.

When the far-right and the far-left meet

The Conquest of the Homeland 2000 Association, an umbrella organization for the elderly people looking at the Horthy-era with nostalgia, has also become a tool for the Russian regime's propaganda. Already in the middle of the 2000s, this was the first far-right group that shared the same platform with the far-left. The mini-organization led by György Szilvássy can mobilize a couple dozen elderly people at best, making it truly marginal compared to other far-right organizations. While in 2003 they held a joint demonstration with Jobbik demanding the return of Hungarian soldiers from Iraq,¹⁰² three years later they already cooperated with the Workers Party.¹⁰³ In a 2006 television program, Szilvássy and Thürmer justified their cooperation saying that due to a common enemy, ideological differences must be set aside. According to Szilvássy, while the political right and the left are at each other's throat, the "financial world," the laughing third-party, skims off the profit. In his view, "there are neither accursed leftists nor fascist right-wing extremists." *"I'd like to remind television viewers that Hungary is not a country of 10 million, but a country of 2 times 5 million. A trench runs down the middle and we have been set against each other, the left and the right,"* he said in the program.¹⁰⁴

By now, members of this far-right Association are unequivocally pro-Russian. On January 22, 2014, in cooperation with the Thürmer-led Workers Party, they held a sympathy rally in front of the Russian Embassy in Budapest, in support of the Russian-financed expansion of the Paks nuclear plant.

¹⁰¹ „Amit szigorúan tilos elolvasnunk: a betiltott (de mégis lezajlott) „fajvédő” konferencia egyik főszervezőjének beszéde”, birkakvagytok.hu, October 15, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014

¹⁰² „Tüntet a Jobbik”, Nemzeti Audiovizuális Archivum, December 6, 2003, accessed October 20, 2014, http://nava.hu/id/10671_2003

¹⁰³ „Két veszelkedőt látva a harmadik örül: a nemzetközi pénzvilág”, kadarizmus.gportal.hu/, December 15, 2007, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://kadarizmus.gportal.hu/gindex.php?pg=25042693&nid=4033974>

¹⁰⁴ „Két veszelkedőt látva a harmadik örül: a nemzetközi pénzvilág”, kadarizmus.gportal.hu/, December 15, 2007, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://kadarizmus.gportal.hu/gindex.php?pg=25042693&nid=4033974>

They held a joint press conference and issued the following statement: *“The Conquest of the Homeland 2000 Association and the Workers Party welcomes the Hungarian-Russian agreement on the expansion of the Paks nuclear plant. There are times when political differences must be set aside. 25 years ago the cause of Bős-Nagymaros had already been ‘politicized to death’, to the loss of the entire country. Hungary needs Paks.”*¹⁰⁵ Incidentally, this case is not without precedent; marginal pro-Russian organizations, even those with a miniscule number of followers, regularly demonstrate in support of Russia all across Europe in connection to the Ukrainian crisis, since the only point is to make sure that images of the demonstration are picked up by mainstream media both in the given country and in Russia.

The Paks investment project was not the only cause bringing together the Workers Party and the Conquest of the Homeland 2000 Association: in June 2013 Thürmer and Szilvásy confronted the European Union at a joint press conference. *“We condemn European Union attacks against Hungary,”* their joint statement said.

The fact that the leader of Conquest of the Homeland 2000 became a friend of the communists by the middle of 2000s is all the more intriguing because by his own admission, his family suffered under the Communists and in 1951 his family was evacuated to the Great Plains. It is also curious that while in the communist era, again by his own admission, Szilvásy was pushed to the periphery, after the socialist consolidation, when obtaining a world passport was a rare privilege, he traveled freely around the world. *“Then we experienced some years when things were going well financially, we managed to travel a lot and I’ve been to almost every corner of the world. I traveled to the United States at the invitation of a person we hid until January 1945, and my wife and I also spent months in Australia,”* he said in an interview¹⁰⁶

The last time Conquest of the Homeland 2000 got into the news was immediately preceding the Russian president’s visit to Budapest in February 2015. They asked Mr Putin in a press release to reaffirm agreements signed earlier (e.g., the agreement on Paks’ extension and gas supply) and to grant exemption to Hungary from trade embargo imposed by Russia. As they wrote, during their demonstration *“the speakers stressed the Russian president’s personal merits that he earned through his efforts to strengthen his homeland and nation, improve the sense of national belonging and fight liberalism, the most destructive ideology of our time.”* Furthermore, they stated that President Putin has played a significant role in the Ukraine ceasefire agreement which is a *“relief also for Hungarians living in Trans-Carpathia.”* Due to all these achievements, they asked the Hungarian Academy of Sciences to nominate Vladimir Putin for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015.¹⁰⁷

The fact that the Hungarian far-right and the far-left ended up on the same platform on the issue of Russia and East-West relations was due to the Kremlin's active influencing is best demonstrated by far-left websites that give the Eastern Opening the same interpretation as their far-right counterparts. The far-left Bal-Rad¹⁰⁸, for instance, defines itself as a *“national radical left-wing news portal.”* Ten years ago such self-definition would have been unimaginable in the Hungarian political arena because the *“national”* far-right saw itself to be a mortal enemy of a self-styled communist far-left. Just as Hídfő.net, Bal-Rad is regularly updated and the company logo of Lukoil, a Russian oil company, is featured on the website, which is also a hint at outside financing.

¹⁰⁵ Munkáspárt Kadarkúti Szervezete, Facebook, January 23, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=701926013181709&id=524970060884130&stream_ref=10

¹⁰⁶ „Szilvásy György - a Honfoglalás 2000 egyesület elnöke”, Demokrata, 2009:29, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.demokrata.hu/cikk/szilvasy-gyorgy-honfoglalas-2000-egyesulet-elnoke-0>

¹⁰⁷ „Putyinnak adná a Nobel-békedíjat a Honfoglalás 2000 egyesület”, Hír24, February 13, 2015, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.hir24.hu/belfold/2015/02/13/putyinnak-adna-a-nobel-bekedijat-a-honfoglalas-2000-egyesulet/>

¹⁰⁸ balrad.wordpress.com

Articles and reports published on Bal-Rad make it clear that the site sympathizes with the Workers Party: it regularly features statements issued by the Workers Party, speeches by Gyula Thürmer and reports on party events. Although Bal-Rad opened a Facebook account in June 2013, the number of its followers on social media has yet to reach 300.

Hungarian-language pro-Kremlin propaganda sites on social media

Aside from focusing on Hungarian far-right groups and affiliated news portals, the captains of Russia's propaganda war are also highly active on Facebook. Through these channels, Russian secret service's "active measures" go beyond extremist formations and try exercising direct influence over the Hungarian public by destabilizing the political system, providing external legitimization of the Russian regime and policies, and spreading disinformation.

The "We stand by Russia" ("Kiállunk Oroszország mellett") Facebook page provides admittedly biased reporting on the Ukrainian crisis and fights to counter "liberal, Atlantist media." The propaganda is built on the following premises: (1) demonization of the United States and Kiev with a hint of conspiracy, (2) embracing Ukrainian separatist aspirations, (3) uncritical presentation of the position taken by Russian diplomacy and Putin, and (4) "war reporting" on fighting in Eastern Ukraine. In this frame of reference, the West and the USA successfully manipulate and mislead the population of West Ukraine using undercover methods, while after having done it in the Middle East, this time NATO deploys its forces in the Balkans to play out a "war scenario" in order to provoke. The leadership in Kiev is presented as a puppet of the West, surrounded and controlled by Western advisors in all ministries. This line of argument includes standard references to Kosovo: if the West supported Albanian separatists, then Russia can do the same in respect to East Ukrainian "self-defense forces," otherwise we have a double standard. Quotes from the Russian president serve as justification for Russia's military-diplomatic steps by referring to international law, and at the same time such discourse situates the events in a global-conspiracy setting. According to this narrative, in World War II Russia was the victim of Germany due to the betrayal of Bolsheviks, and to this day continues to fight certain states and their allies for independence.

The page openly supports the separatists. It publishes images carrying messages from HVIM, tied to far-right Jobbik, and from Moldavian young communists. HVIM members pose with fake Kalashnikovs, demanding the return of Ukrainian and Romanian territories with a Hungarian minority population and expressing support for a "New Russia" in Donetsk. The success of the campaign is attested by the fact that the image in question has been carried by a number of Hungarian and Romanian mainstream media, to the delight of the site.

From the site one can reach an article in which Jobbik and Polish Ruch Narodowy (receiving 1.4% of the votes in the 2014 EP election) call on the Hungarian and Polish governments to guarantee the right of self-determination for Hungarian and Polish minorities living in Ukraine.

Exploiting a total news blackout, the main purpose of the "war coverage" on the Eastern Ukrainian situation, often based on fake news, is to demonize the "Fascist Kiev Junta," involve the population in the conflict by presenting civilian casualties as well as misinforming about the brutality of the Ukrainian army and "extremists." The site takes the position that the military operation of Ukrainian "fascist militias" provides sufficient ground for a potential Russian intervention. Since the situation in Ukraine is highly unpredictable despite the Minsk II Agreement, statements like these and the conditioning of the public offers Russian diplomacy ample opportunities for maneuvering regarding the future of Ukraine.

Typical for war propaganda, this site also published the separatists' English-language recruitment video, encouraging foreigners to join their ranks, giving the lie to Kremlin statements denying foreign involvement (e.g., the participation of Chechen warriors). Aside from disinformation, "war correspondents" present a wide range of relevant information concerning the moves of the opposing parties. In contrast to the more selective coverage of Western media, they inundate the reader with an overload of local news, stretching from political statements through images of destroyed vehicles that are perfectly suitable for maintaining ethnic-linguistic tensions, panic and war psychosis. The site not only gives biased interpretation of the news, but also its identified sources come almost exclusively from the Russian media (e.g., Itar Tass, Voice of Russia) or far-right Hungarian media, including the Kuruc.info portal. This provides additional evidence for the existing Russian connection of the Hungarian far-right in general, and Jobbik in particular.

The domestic messages of the "We stand by Russia" page follow Jobbik's communication: in line with the party's political strategy, it attacks leftist parties as much as Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Fidesz. In contrast to the latter, it came to the defence of Béla Kovács.

The Hungarian Facebook disinformation network's "We stand by Russia" page is linked to a number of Hungarian and foreign sites. (At the same time, not all sites in the network serve the goal of disinformation.) The Hungarian-language, theoretically leftist-Marxist Hungarian Youth Community Organisation (MIKSZ), registered in Slovakia, is an intriguing member of the network.

While MIKSZ cannot boast of many Facebook followers, it is deeply embedded in the network of pages potentially serving Russian interests (e.g., The International Committee for Solidarity with president Lukashenko, the Hungarian Friends of the Venezuelan United Socialist Party, World Federation of Democratic Youth, Communist Party of Ukraine, Transnistria, etc.). MIKSZ is also a good example of "NGO-diplomacy" pursued through phony European civic organizations.¹⁰⁹ The page was launched in 2010, and between 2011 and 2012 it showed minimal activity, only to come to life in 2013 and become an active promoter of Russia's geopolitical objectives. Starting in January 2014, the organization published a number of images and comments by Fabrice Beaur, a far-right Frenchman affiliated with the anti-American and anti-Zionist National European Community Party, criticizing the Ukrainian revolution. The party was one of the organizations legitimizing the Crimean referendum. After only a relatively few postings earlier in the year, MIKSZ recognized and legitimized the new Donetsk state and – joining the war propaganda – described the Ukrainian Army as a bunch of "fascist, murderous storm troopers." It encouraged Ukrainian conscripts to desert, supported the Russian military intervention, spread rumours (with statements such as "in the course of the fighting, the Ukrainian Army used foreign-made ammunition and poisonous gas") and posted the recruitment video mentioned above.

Next to the "We stand by Russia" page, MIKSZ also called attention to a Facebook campaign meant to present civilian opposition to anti-terror operations in the Donbass region, "to save the people of Donbass." They ask participants to produce videos and images about themselves and their families, holding up a sign inscribed "#SaveDonbassPeople." If one enters these words into the Facebook search, one finds a flood of messages and images showing in part manipulated and in part genuine civic protests, giving the impression of grassroots support for the separatists and promoting the human rights cause of "popular sovereignty" trumpeted by Russian diplomacy.

¹⁰⁹ "Az orosz kapcsolatok", Political Capital, April 10, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/pc_elemzes_20140410_az_orsosz_kapcsolatok.pdf

The largely conspiratorial “Secret news in images” (“Titkolt hírek képekben”) page has joined the Kremlin’s line since January 2014, focusing almost exclusively on developments in Ukraine. While the propaganda components mentioned above return here as well, the context is entirely different. In a predictable manner, the Russian aggression in Crimea is explained by US conspiracy, i.e. “the Yankees planned to build a navy base on the Crimean peninsula” that, under terms of relevant international treaties, is obviously an absurd position. Sporadic anti-Semitic statements already found on the “We stand by Russia” became systematic on the “Secret news in images” page. For instance, the conflict in Odessa, claiming several lives, is explained based on a phone conversation “providing evidence that Kolomoisky, a Jewish Ukrainian billionaire, ordered the massacre in Odessa, paying USD 1 million. He offered a bounty for anyone supporting self-determination of Eastern Ukraine and for every occupied building.” For all practical purposes, the piece attacking the European Union and the 2014 EP election equates the EU with “Zionist interests,” when the EU joins Israel in a fight to “rule over Europe.” The attack of the political mainstream returns as well: “In 2001 Martonyi stated himself in a private conversation that Hungary will become the logistical center of Europe (buildings and housing estates have been completed, palaces in Pest and Buda are waiting for their residents). However, to this end it is not enough if Israel occupies only Hungary, a project that, incidentally, has been all but completed.”

The direct Facebook network of “Secret news in images” features 13 conspiratorial pages. While providing less coverage, a number of these also deal with the Ukrainian crisis. At one end of the conspiracy-continuum, the crisis is explained as the “machinations” of Russia and the USA, both striving for world domination, where the two powers essentially collaborate. This holistic explanation is presented by the Zeitgeist Hungary page. A slightly more specific explanation was provided by the “Wake up” Movement (Ébredj Mozgalom), presenting recent developments as an aggression on the part of Wall Street and NATO, where the West hopes to prevent Russia from decoupling its currency from the US dollar and introducing a “gold-based rouble.” The other end of the continuum features “Don’t just look – see” (“Láss, ne csak nézz”) page, describing Russia as a force opposing a “Zionist and fascist conspiracy.” In their view, with the help of oil and gas deals Putin successfully prevented the fascist Saudis and their Zionist allies to grab Syria, and a takeover of Ukraine by Zionist EU. This kind of fusion of far-left and far-right ideas contributes to the maintenance of a general attitude of distrust and a political atmosphere where targeted communication and manipulation as practiced in Russia works to perfection. Besides offering an easy universal explanation, thanks to the theory's embeddedness in the news media and, in this case, its adjustment to a global campaign, its conspiratorial and misleading content gains special weight. The “We stand by Russia” page also reveals that messages developed for a Hungarian public form part of a global campaign, with one stop involving a rally in support of the New Russia to be held in New York on May 28, 2015.

Another page, SouthFront.hu, plays an extremely important role in the spread of Russian propaganda. While the page is available only on Facebook and YouTube in Hungarian, it is accessible on various platforms in English language. Each day, the page with over 10,000 followers features (dis)information and images of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, of course reflecting only the Russian point of view. The introductory notes of the page also reveal how seriously it can be taken as an independent source of information: *“Eastern Ukraine has become a bloody battlefield where in many cases professional Ukrainian troops decimate an innocent and unarmed local population. This is genocide.”*¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ South Front Hu, Facebook, About, accessed October 20, 2014

Some of the articles reprinted in SouthFront.hu come directly from Hídfő.net, but the fact that the Facebook page is regularly updated several times a day – obviously using materials translated from a foreign language – suggests that, similarly to Hídfő.net, it is edited and maintained efficiently and along a well-conceived communication strategy. The page also features local coverage, in many cases without identifying the original source, while Hungarian and Russian-language media, including materials from news agencies, are regularly sampled.

The above cases and examples clearly show that in the past year Kremlin's influence of the far-right has substantially increased, in no small part due to the unprecedented proliferation of Kremlin-linked propaganda sites. Of course, there is no direct evidence that these pages are the result of active measures. At the same time, the method itself is a well-known and proven tool in the hands of the Russian intelligence service. The examples listed above also demonstrate the excellent breeding ground available for the Kremlin's strategy in one of the key areas targeted by active measures: undermining Western political and social values and simultaneously promoting the role of Russia as the bulwark of traditional standards. According to national security experts, with some exaggeration one can say that in this context, there are two kinds of Internet sites: one that has been sponsored by the Kremlin from its inception, and the other that will be sponsored by the Kremlin after it is discovered.

KREMLIN'S PROPAGANDA IN THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA

By now, Russian influence is no longer limited to the far-right media and it is increasingly evident in some mainstream media organizations as well. On the list of staff of some national right-wing news organizations, one also finds journalists who regularly show up at various political events in Moscow, aside from openly expressing their pro-Russian position. Through their public appearance, as “Western opinion makers,” in the eyes of the Russian public they inadvertently contribute to the legitimization of Putin’s foreign policy and his role played in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.

In October 2014, a conference was held in Moscow for openly pro-Russian journalists. The event was attended by Putin, who also gave a speech there. A pro-Russian journalist, Gábor Stier, working for Magyar Nemzet, the most popular right-wing Hungarian daily with an openly pro-government stance at that time, was also invited. However, Stier is not simply a journalist – he is the chief columnist of the paper’s foreign-policy section. Magyar Nemzet ran an article on the conference that quoted Stier. In his view, the Kremlin is particularly interested in the Hungarian government sparring with the United States and Europe. “Time and time again I was asked what’s happening in Hungary. Incidentally, the majority believes that corruption is not the real issue and that, while corruption is not good, actually the United States watches with suspicion that Hungary looks for a pragmatic relationship with Russia,” Gábor Stier said.¹¹¹ In the 1980s, Stier and Béla Kovács studied at the same Moscow State University, and between 1995 and 1997 he was the Moscow correspondent for Magyar Nemzet, and today he is a regular author¹¹² of the international Valdai Club, founded in 2004. The club played an important role in establishing contact between Russia and Western intellectuals that, in fact, has been the stated purpose of the club from the very start. Although the Valdai Club describes itself as an independent organization, its members hold regular meetings with President Putin and the Russian Prime Minister. Furthermore, the Club also provides a platform for events propagating Kremlin positions.¹¹³ In one of his pieces published in Pravda, Gábor Stier writes: “*Putin’s conservative revolution, which focuses on developing nations instead of empires, might give new momentum to the European thinking currently in crisis in order to define common human values.*”¹¹⁴

Similarly to Stier and Kovács, the pro-Russian and openly anti-American Ferenc Szaniszló also studied at Moscow State University. Currently, Szaniszló is on the staff of Echo TV and maintains close contact with Jobbik. He is a regular guest at the party’s events, and at one time Jobbik awarded him in recognition of his “journalistic achievement.”¹¹⁵ Szaniszló has his own foreign policy program on the national Echo TV, where Jobbik is regularly invited.

¹¹¹ “*Putyin Magyarországot állította párhuzamba Ukrajnával*”, Hír TV, October 25, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://mno.hu/hirtvkulfold/putyin-magyarorszagot-allitotta-parhuzamba-ukrajnaval-1255160>

¹¹² „*Contributors*”, Valdai Discussion Club, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://valdaiclub.com/authors/22184.html>

¹¹³ “*The Club*”, Valdai Discussion Club, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://valdaiclub.com/about/>; „*The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*”, The Interpreter, November 22, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.interpretermag.com/the-menace-of-unreality-how-the-kremlin-weaponizes-information-culture-and-money/>

¹¹⁴ „*Ukrajna eszköz Oroszország gyengítésére? Stier Gábor cikke a Pravdában*”, oroszvilag.hu, August 14, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://oroszvilag.hu/?t1=sajtoszemle&hid=5306>

¹¹⁵ “*Harc a rotytyantó galambok ellen*”, index.hu, October 26, 2013, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://index.hu/belfold/2013/10/26/jobbbik/>

In his program, Szaniszló typically explains domestic and international developments in the context of conspiracy theories, with an “evil West” and a “benevolent Russia” in the background.¹¹⁶

Gábor Széles, with close business ties to Russia, is the owner of Echo TV, Ferenc Szaniszló's employer, and Magyar Hírlap a daily newspaper promoting the same values as the television station. Magyar Hírlap's economic journalist, Mihály Szalontay is also known for his pro-Russian writings.¹¹⁷ Szalontay similarly earned a diploma at the Moscow State University and, in fact, in October 2014 he and Béla Kovács attended the world conference of MGIMO alumni. Szalontay's son is also a prominent figure in Hungarian-Russian economic relations; he is the managing director of the Moscow-based Buran Venture Capital, a venture-capital company that, among others, is engaged in identifying investment targets in Hungary.¹¹⁸

Ferenc Szaniszló's daughter, Adrienn Szaniszló, works for Jobbik MP Márton Gyöngyösi, and was ranked 30th on the party's EP list. In the fall of 2014, she accompanied Gyöngyösi as a member of the international monitoring group to “observe” the “presidential election” in the Donetsk Republic. Adrienn Szaniszló has described events on Kiev's Maiden Square as a Western coup and Putin as a hero of our time. In the summer of 2014 Adrienn Szaniszló, who speaks excellent Russian and regularly shares Russian content on her Facebook page, accompanied Jobbik chairman, Gábor Vona, on a visit to the parliament of Kazakhstan and in the fall, along with Gyöngyösi, she acted as an “observer” at the St. Petersburg municipal election.¹¹⁹

For the leaders in Moscow, the parading of “Western election observers” is important as a way to legitimize the outcome of obviously tainted elections in the Russian media. However, it is interesting to note that while Márton Gyöngyösi from Jobbik legitimized the election and accepted the results, describing it as completely clean and free would have been too much even for him. In a statement recognizing the election results he stated: “Jobbik respects elections and their results held in the Donetsk and Luhansk counties, while it also recognizes the fact that due to a close to six-month military conflict conditions for election were far from ideal and the fighting represents a serious challenge for the region. According to Jobbik, Donetsk and Luhansk are experiencing a humanitarian disaster with hundreds of thousands leaving their homes in search of more secure areas. Consequently, elections had to be held not only in the affected counties, but also in refugee camps located in Russia. While the holding of normal elections was hampered by these and similar obstacles, in the assessment of Jobbik representatives, the fundamental principle of democracy, i.e., to take their fate into their own hands citizens shall determine their own future, has prevailed. Jobbik recognizes the election as transparent, reflecting the will of the electorate”¹²⁰.

¹¹⁶ „Csak ukrán és orosz ügy?”, Szaniszló Ferenc: Világ-Panoráma, Echo TV, March 4, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IAktORe9ag>

¹¹⁷ “Search for Mihály Szalontay's arcticles”, Magyar Hírlap, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://archivum.magyarhirlap.hu/szalontay-mihaly>

¹¹⁸ “A régióban terjeszkedik a Buran Venture Capital”, Portoflio, June 2, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.portfolio.hu/vallalatok/corpfina_regioban_terjeszkedik_a_buran_venture_capital.199660.html

¹¹⁹ “Eltársak, mi történik a Jobbikban?”, Heti Válasz, November 3, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://valasz.hu/vilag/elvtarsak-mi-tortenik-a-jobbikban-106089>

¹²⁰ „Jobbik: Tiszteletben tartjuk a választás eredményét”, alfabir.hu, November 3, 2014, accessed December 12, 2014

JOBBIK'S ASSESSMENT IN RUSSIAN ONLINE MEDIA

As a general rule, it may be stated that the Russian online media give extensive coverage of European far-right parties. In the news sites analyzed within the research¹²¹, a large number of articles have been published about Eurosceptic radical parties and the importance of their presence in the EU Parliament from Russia's point of view. In the majority of the articles, Jobbik is mentioned in the company of such parties as the French National Front (FN), Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), Belgian Vlaams Belang (VB), Danish National Party (DN), Polish Falanga, Great Romania Party (PRM), British National Party (BNP), Italian Northern League (LN) and Greek Golden Dawn. However, neither independent nor Kremlin-affiliated sites handle these parties the same way. For instance, of all the parties mentioned above an article in the independent Kommersant¹²² refers to Jobbik, the German National Democratic Party (NPD) and Golden Dawn as openly neo-Nazi parties. Also, in two articles published in RIA Novosti¹²³ the French political scientists, Jean-Yves Camus, described Jobbik and Golden Dawn as being more radical than the French National Front.

Often, these articles also reveal the relationship of these parties to Jobbik. For instance, in an article published by Kommersant¹²⁴ the BNP spokesperson – after talking about his party's sympathy towards Russia – went on to say that he also sympathized with Golden Dawn and Jobbik. An article published on Russia Today's website¹²⁵ quoted German Der Tagesspiegel, claiming that Ukraine's Svoboda (Freedom) party is clearly in contact with Jobbik.

¹²¹ In our examination of the Hungarian far-right's media presence in Russia we limited our scope from the 26 potential sources to 6, based on a combination of popularity and content. For the selection based on popularity, we used research data on Russian media from the global media research company, TNS. In assessing the various media, we took into account three major content criteria: the number and content of far-right articles published in the medium, the medium's political orientation and the composition of the medium's readership. Based on the selection criteria, three pro-government media targeting domestic audience and one independent medium, as well as two international media proved to be suitable for our research. The relevance of the Voice of Russia aimed at a foreign audience is based on the fact that with its help the Kremlin tries to inform/influence the population of a given country directly through its own language. Admittedly, Russia Today competes with CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera in an effort to present the Russian perspective in a global news competition. However, in some cases its coverage turned out to be so biased, e.g., reporting on the Ukrainian crisis, that a number of Western journalists resigned in a public gesture. Subsequently, we subjected relevant articles published by the selected media to a two-round analysis. In the first round, based on leads we classified them by issue-categories, identifying the most common topics of far-right media representation. In the second round, we selected the patterns and analyzed articles giving the most in-depth treatment of major topics. As a result, the analysis presents the Hungarian far-right along the typical issues of the Russian media, from the side of the pro-Kremlin and the opposition media alike. The period under review focused on developments prior to and following the eruption of the Ukrainian conflict, bringing articles published between October 2013 and October 2014 into our scope.

¹²² "Европа просит не беспокоиться" ("Europe asks us not to worry"), Kommersant, June 2, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2469320>

¹²³ "Жан-Ив Камю: укрепление ультраправых говорит о глубоком кризисе в ЕС" ("Jean-Yves Camus: The consolidation of the far-right may lead to a deep crisis in the European Union"), RIA Novosytzi, July 3, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://ria.ru/interview/20140703/1014546695.html>; "Европарламент в новом составе будет больше ориентирован на Россию" ("The new composition of the European Union will be more amenable to Russia"), RIA Novosytzi, May 28, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://ria.ru/world/20140528/1009753415.html>

¹²⁴ "Брюссельский капустник" ("Burlesque in Brussels. Would Russia benefit from the consolidation of radical parties within the European Parliament?"), Kommersant, May 26, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2475660>

¹²⁵ "Немецкие СМИ: Ключевую роль в смене власти на Украине сыграли ультранационалисты" ("German media: radical nationalists played a key role in taking over in Ukraine"), Russia Today, March 13, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://russian.rt.com/article/24201>

Béla Kovács' spy case in the Russian online media

Of the selected news sites only Kremlin-affiliated media, Lenta and RIA Novosti reported on the Kovács spy scandal, although the politician's statements were also seen on other news sites, such as the independent Kommersant (e.g., Kovács talking about the suspension of the South Stream project,¹²⁶ about the sanctions and the Crimean referendum,¹²⁷ as well as about the energy issues between Russia and the European Union¹²⁸). The piece published in Lenta¹²⁹ makes no attempt to put Béla Kovács on the spot: at the end of the article, written in a neutral tone, the author notes that according to the Hungarian daily, Magyar Nemzet, the charges were dropped (a statement that is not true) and Béla Kovács told the media that the spy scandal was fabricated and purposely timed to coincide with the European parliamentary election. The article mentions no other positions concerning the case.

An article published in RIA Novosti¹³⁰ not only mentions the spy case but also provides an insight into the relationship between Hungary and the European Union, with the help of András Rácz, a well-respected political scientist and expert on Russia. Here the relationship between Orbán and Jobbik is also mentioned, and in this context the political scientist notes that in his view, the spy scandal is part of Fidesz' smear campaign aimed at Jobbik. In other words, the two Kremlin-affiliated media sources avoid treating the spy case as a fact, instead presenting it as a conspiracy against Béla Kovács, providing statements by Kovács to support that interpretation.

In the Russian media, the figure of Béla Kovács is not presented in a negative light at all, and he is typically referred to as an EU parliamentary representative and an energy expert, rather than a Jobbik politician. Furthermore, his statements are never challenged. This is a typical media strategy that allows the Kremlin-affiliated Russian media to hide the true political affiliations of politicians loyal to Putin, in order to present their opinion as more credible and more representative.

¹²⁶ “Депутат Европарламента Бела Ковач: Болгария и Сербия приостановили строительство «Южного потока» из-за США” (“Béla Kovács, European Union MP: Bulgaria and Serbia stopped construction of the Southern Stream under US pressure”), Kommersant, June 18, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2493762>; “Депутат ЕП: работы по “Южному потоку” приостановлены из-за США” (“EU parliamentary representative: construction of the Southern Stream stopped under US pressure”), RIA Novosti, June 18, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://ria.ru/economy/20140618/1012587142.html>

¹²⁷ “Чешский парламент не поддержал экономические санкции против России” (“The Czech Parliament does not support economic sanctions imposed on Russia”), Komsomolskaia Pravda, May 26, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26211/3095965/>; “Депутат ЕП: голосование в Крыму прошло в соответствии с нормами” (“EU representative: the Crimean referendum took place in accordance with the law”), RIA Novosti, March 17, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014 <http://ria.ru/world/20140317/999850439.html>; “Референдум в Крыму абсолютно законен, считает депутат Европарламента” (“The Crimean referendum was legal, EU MP believes”), RIA Novosti, March 15, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://ria.ru/world/20140315/999645712.html>; “Евродепутат: Санкции в отношении России могут отменить уже в мае” (“European parliamentary representative: sanctions against Russia may be eliminated as early as May”), Russia Today, March 26, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://russian.rt.com/article/25397>

¹²⁸ “На форуме РФ и ЕС предложили создать Евразийский энергетический союз” (“At the forum, Russia and the European Union made a proposal for establishment of the Eurasian Energy Alliance”), RIA Novosti, December 12, 2013, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://ria.ru/economy/20131212/983717458.html>

¹²⁹ “Власти Венгрии нашли прокремлевского ультраправого шпиона” (“The Hungarian authorities found a far-right, pro-Kremlin spy”), Lenta, May 16, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://lenta.ru/news/2014/05/16/jobbik/>

¹³⁰ “Эксперт: за места в ЕП в Венгрии борются евроскептики и еврореалисты” (“An expert: in Hungary eurosceptics and euro realists are fighting for EU parliamentary seats”), RIA Novosti, May 25, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://ria.ru/world/20140525/1009301972.html>

The Kremlin-affiliated Komsomolskaia Pravda published an interview with Béla Kovács on August 27, 2014.¹³¹ While the interview was made well after the eruption of the scandal, it is interesting to note that the article makes no mention of the incident. It only notes at the end of the interview that Béla Kovács is an MEP from Hungary and vice-chair of the Russian Federation Energy Parliamentary Working Group, with a diploma in international affairs earned at Moscow State University's Department of International Relations.

The interviewer, Galina Saposnikova's questions all but put the answers into the mouth of Kovács. First, she mentioned that she had visited Hungary recently and noticed that Hungarians' aversion to Russia has disappeared and people were no longer afraid to speak Russian, and those who may have forgotten the language are brushing up on their Russian. Then the conversation switched to the EU, emphasizing the difficulties Hungary has to face since the accession because, according to Béla Kovács, Hungary and other countries are needed by the EU simply to offer new markets: "I meet representatives of these countries at various events and I ask them: where are you heading? To a sinking ship? They need you and you don't need them. They're going to make you clear away the European garbage!" In the interview Trans-Carpathia was also mentioned and Kovács said that in Trans-Carpathia he was considered a provocateur, and he has been threatened that if he returns to the area he would be killed, so he was forced to close his local office.¹³²

At a later point, Saposnikova returned to the issue of Russophobia and said that "with the exception of a few (e.g., Béla Kovács) the EU is a hotbed of Russophobia." At the end of the article the future of the Union also came up: "in the current atmosphere of Euroskepticism, at the recent European parliamentary election your party, Jobbik finished second. Do you see the possibility that with rising popular discontent of the EU you are going to win at the next election?" To this Kovács responded that in his view, there would be no more European parliamentary elections because the Union is not going to last much longer. He ended the conversation on the following note: "The European Union is drowning and if we don't turn to the East, we won't have a 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."

An assessment of the relationship between Jobbik and Russia

The interview cited above places great emphasis on the friendly relation between Hungary and Russia (where the mutual enemy, the European Union is given a central role), and Béla Kovács and Jobbik are described as the promoters of this friendship. However, this is not the only article discussing the relationship of the two countries.

One piece published in Lenta¹³³ states the following: "There's one more issue that brings together Falanga and Jobbik, and other right-wing parties in the European Union: it is their sympathy towards the Russian power. In their view, Vladimir Putin is a great national leader who preserves traditional values, bans gay marches and refuses to kowtow before the USA," writes Vladislav Malcev, referring to the ideological link between Jobbik and Russia.

¹³¹ "Депутат в Европарламент от Венгрии Бела Ковач: Спасать Европу опять придется России" ("Béla Kovács, Hungary's EU parliamentary representative: again, Europe must be rescued by Russian"), Komsomolskaia Pravda, August 27, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26275.3/3152225/>

¹³² Along with a number of other European party representatives, Ukraine banned Béla Kovács from its territory for personally legitimizing the Crimean annexation in his capacity of an independent European observer. "Kitiltották a jobbikos Kovács Bélát Ukrajnából", Origo, August 29, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20140829-kitiltottak-a-jobbikos-kovacs-belat-ukrajnabol.html>

¹³³ "Ультраправый сектор" ("Far-right sector"), Lenta, June 9, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://lenta.ru/articles/2014/06/09/falanga>

An article in Komsomolskaia Pravda¹³⁴ collected statements by Eurosceptic party leaders on Russia and Putin. While the article did not quote Gábor Vona's statement, at the end of the piece the author mentioned that Jobbik is one of the parties sympathizing with Russia.

However, Jobbik's pro-Russian stance is mentioned not only in the Kremlin-affiliated media, but on independent sites as well: in an article in Kommersant¹³⁵ one finds the following caption under a photograph of Gábor Vona: *"The leader of Hungarian far-right Jobbik, Gábor Vona, is delighted with Kremlin policies."* The same article also mentions the Kremlin's position, which in fact denies the extreme political leaning of these organizations: *"(...) United Russia prefers to refer to European nationalist movements, such as Golden Dawn and Jobbik, as the champions of traditional values. From the very start, the main objective of cooperation with European right-wing parties was the protection of these values (...)".*

Reporting on a speech delivered by the Prime Minister of Ukraine in the European Parliament, another piece carried by the independent Kommersant¹³⁶ pointed out that "the only delegate refraining from criticizing Moscow was the representative of the Hungarian far-right Jobbik."

In yet another Kommersant article¹³⁷ Vladimir Brutyer, an expert at an international political research Institute, said: "I have the impression that Jobbik shows absolutely no signs of hostility towards Russia. Jobbik is a party of Hungarian nationalists, and today's nationalists don't look at Russia as a hostile state. Jobbik received some 5% more votes than four years ago. While this is an excellent achievement, of course this will not have a major impact on the parliamentary agenda or the country's political life. Jobbik will not have much influence and if by any chance it does, it is not going to be directed at Russia."

Overall picture

The media with close ties to the Russian leadership take an ambivalent but rather positive position on Jobbik. While they present the party as a European political player and/or a nationalist force supporting Kremlin policies, they do not necessarily hide Jobbik's anti-Semitism and hostility to the Roma. However, Komsomolskaia Pravda may be seen as the exception with nothing negative to say about Jobbik. The newspaper does not consider Jobbik a nationalist/anti-Semitic/extremist party, and instead refers to it as an increasingly popular movement with a huge appeal among young people, emphasizing its Euroscepticism and sympathy towards Russia.

Russian Kremlin-affiliated media make active use of Jobbik in the service of the Kremlin's current policy objectives and anti-EU propaganda. Similarly to a number of other European far-right parties, Jobbik legitimizes the Russian regime based on a set of "conservative" ideological values shared with Russia and Vladimir Putin.

¹³⁴ "«Российский след» на выборах в Европарламент" ("Russian footprints at the European parliamentary election"), Komsomolskaia Pravda, July 3, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26238/3120858/>

¹³⁵ "Брюссельский капустник" ("Burlesque in Brussels. Would Russia benefit from the consolidation of radical parties within the European Parliament?"), Kommersant, May 26, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2475660>

¹³⁶ "Петр Порошенко запасся готовым решением" ("Petro Poroshenko presents decisions already taken"), Kommersant, July 27, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2499577>

¹³⁷ "Если правящая партия выигрывает выборы, то она редко меняет свой курс" ("If the right-wing party wins the election, it is unlikely to change course"), Kommersant, April 7, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2447465>

The pro-Kremlin media consistently defend Béla Kovács, the Jobbik politician accused of spying for Russia, by publishing his denials without challenge, and referring to him as a prominent EU parliamentary representative and energy expert. Moreover, envisioning the imminent demise of the Union, Béla Kovács depicts the EU as “Russophobe” and a “sinking ship,” essentially serving the Kremlin's political agenda.

The pro-Kremlin media present Jobbik's revisionist views and Viktor Orbán's statements concerning Trans-Carpathian autonomy as a legitimate expression of Trans-Carpathian and, by logical extension, East Ukrainian separatist aspirations, while referring to Ukraine merely as an “artificial state.” More alarmingly, citing statements by Jobbik politicians, the biased Russian media are openly and clearly bent on instigating regional separatism by making references to “minorities in need of protection” from Ukrainian authorities, Jobbik's revisionist rallies, “young men with athletic physique” traveling from Hungary to Ukraine, and Hungarians living in Trans-Carpathia “with a personal stake.”

In contrast, independent Russian media identify Jobbik as an openly neo-Nazi and xenophobe formation, serving the interests of the Kremlin. In pieces published by independent Kommersant, Jobbik is presented in a more negative light compared to other news sites, with more coverage devoted to fiascos and scandals associated with the party. In their piece reporting on the municipal elections¹³⁸ in connection to Jobbik they pointed out that the party did not manage to win seats in a single major urban area. And in connection to the April national elections they wrote that “despite the fears of many, Jobbik failed to finish second even with 21% of the votes.”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ “Правящая партия Венгрии закрепила на местах. Борьба за власть” (“The Hungarian right consolidated its positions. Struggle for power”), Kommersant, October 14, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2589232>

¹³⁹ “Венгрия проголосовала по-новому, но премьером остался Виктор Орбан” (“Hungary went to the polls again, but the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán kept his position”), Kommersant, April 7, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2447557>

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