

Why Russia is seeking to ignite a civil war in the European Union and how to stop it?

Some recommendations for policymakers

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Summary

The European Union (EU) is going through a crisis that was not seen before. Nevertheless, despite of that the EU has demonstrated in the past that it is capable to resolve the crisis and come out of it even stronger. However, this time, disruptive external factors might have a devastating effect on the EU, and could become a 'straw that broke the camel's back'. One of the most important external factor that is meddling in the EU affairs is Russia. This country by many European Union policy makers is still considered as a friendly partner with whom it is possible to do business as usual. Perhaps it was that case in the past, but the paradigm shift took place in the Kremlins' view of the EU. The Kremlin does not see the EU as a friendly power because it understands that the EU's soft power and a prospect of joining it transforming societies and countries. It also understands that if such a transformation will take in the neighbouring Eastern European countries, the Russians will demand the same for Russia. And in the transformed Russia the current establishment will not find a place. Hence, the Kremlin would like the EU to collapse, even though it is rather obvious that having in mind the European history, consequences of it could be catastrophic. But the Kremlin is getting ready for that.

Keywords

European Union, Russia, Kremlin, Putin, Trump, Baltic states, Lithuania, Brexit, Germany, history, populism, nationalism, far right, far left, Georgian war, Crimea annexation, propaganda, misinformation, social networks, Facebook, VKontakte, Durov, Vladislav Surkov, Gerasimov doctrine, war, George Kennan, Cold War, Containment policy, war in Europe, Russian army, NATO, Britain, Italy, Austria, Cambridge Analytica, Nigerian elections, Lukoil, Putinism, Russian economy, sanctions on Russia, military spending.

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Great Russian writer Gogol may have said, that Russia has two misfortunes: fools and roads. I am not sure about the latter, since I have not been in Russia for a while, but if Gogol had seen Russia via the Russia's TV broadcasters, he would certainly have change his mind. If you watch Russian news bulletins, a day does not pass without the opening of a new road or bridge (why not to Crimea also), or a reminder of Russia's greatness, and its success in projecting that greatness. Russia has risen from its knees and from now on, you, the decadent West, will also listen to what Russia has to say, to paraphrase the new/old President Vladimir Putin. If Gogol had also watched some European Union TV stations. He would not believe his ears. Despite the fact that Putin and his regime despise the West, rather influential EU politicians from influential countries (who do not watch the Russian TV) are urging the EU to respect Putin's great power aspirations for Russia. They are also calling for closer cooperation with Russia, even a strategic partnership because 'we understand the real Russia'. This briefing will argue that Russia is seeking the opposite: the West is perceived by the Kremlin as a strategic threat to its very survival.

Furthermore, since the European Union is considered by the Kremlin to be its weakest link, the West's collapse should logically start within the EU. Russia's regime is planning for this and is facilitating this collapse by using the tools that it perfected: interference in the EU's political, media and financial establishments. Russia knows this history very well and perfectly understands that the collapse of the EU will bring chaos in Europe, with possibility of war inside of it. This is when Russia will step in as peace keeper with its influence stretching to the centre of a likely devastated and again divided continent.

Bigger threat to the Kremlin: the European Union v. NATO

It is not working; the relationship between the West and Russia keeps reaching new lows. Naïve expectations about the 'changing' Russia started crumbling in the Baltic States with the election of President Vladimir Putin in 2000. The wave of this scepticism towards Russia is slowly coming to the western capitals and to the minds and hearts for the Western Europeans. Will it take another 18 years for Western Europe to realise that it is already fighting an invisible war with Russia on its own territory and it is losing it?

The reality is that by claiming that NATO is Russia's number one strategic threat, the Kremlin is bluffing. It is not the USA, it is the European Union they have in mind. And they are literally destroying the EU with a lot of help from Europeans themselves, it must be added. In fact, Russia's plan is working so well that it might succeed, but Russia has to be careful what it wishes for.

It is no surprise that we, in the Baltic States, view every Russian move with some degree of suspicion. It took more than a dozen of years for our western partners to realise that when the Balts started ringing the alarm bells about Mr. Putin, it was not just because we are blind Russophobes. After the occupation of Crimea and Russia's aggression in Eastern Ukraine, various representatives from our Western allied institutions started coming to the Baltic States, asking, what is happening and what to do.

They started asking questions, and this has been a major shift. I had (and still do) a very clear answer to a question 'what to do': read the Long telegram by George Kennan and his The Sources of Soviet Conduct in the Foreign Affairs in 1947. One of the most important sentence is this: 'Once a given party line has been laid down on a given issue of current policy, the whole Soviet governmental machine, including the mechanism of diplomacy, moves inexorably along the prescribed path, like a persistent toy automobile wound up and headed in a given direction, stopping only when it meets with some unanswerable force.' And this is what Russia is doing now, like this persistent toy automobile, moving in a given direction which is to destroy the current order in Western Europe. Presently, it uses not only the governmental machine, but also oligarchs who support various Russia friendly initiatives using 'their' money. They even use organised crime to create black money boxes for covert operations and financing Russia friendly elements in western societies.¹

Westerners assumption and calculation that an illiberal regime will eventually turn into a democracy after it reached a certain level of economic development is not working and has suffered a total defeat. The end of history and march of liberal democracy to Russia is backfiring: Putin's illiberal order is on the offensive and the West has not yet found a way to fight it. Now, we are facing the march of Illiberalism, and Putin is very much a trend setter amongst some Europeans. Western liberalism is very much on the defensive, since the Putin regime brought that fight inside of our territory. Russia is not a match to the USSR during its glorious superpower years, however its modified toy automobile has crossed deeply in to Western territory and is persistently going ahead without any obstacles in its way. So, what is it that Russia is trying to achieve?

1 Read more about the Russian underworld charts, its rise from Soviet-era gangsters to Kremlin collaborators under Putin in Dr. Mark Galeotti's latest book *The Vory: Russia's Super Mafia* published by Yale University Press.

The West is losing to Russia because of its arrogance. President Obama called Russia a declining regional power. Many pundits measure the size of the Russian economy and its military spending, which is no match to that of NATO. Realpolitik constituted the notion that Russia is a capitalist country and doing business with Russia is only business, nothing personal. Furthermore, turning its blind eye on Russia becoming a mafia like authoritarian state by noticing in Putin a 'flawless democrat' in 2006². Trying to 'engage' Russia with various 'resets' made the situation much worse and ended with Crimea's annexation and the invasion of Eastern Ukraine. Integrating Russia and facilitating its migration in to a 'normal country' via cooperation could not possibly work: the Russian establishment does not want to change its system. Its subjects do not particularly mind being robbed by their rulers either. As long as the rulers provide their subjects with the means to fill up half of a fridge, the means to buy a TV set, and provide some entertainment, the subjects in Russia are very much 'manageable'. This social contract between the Putin regime and Russians is working rather well.

In Russia, only the ruling elite will decide if it wants to change the system, as long as there is no shake up similar to those of the First World War. Only if the ruling elite decide that enough is enough, then change will come. The system is working for them, not against them, so why to change it. They are plundering Russia's mineral resources and are happily keeping the stolen money in Western financial centres. The monies that the Western powers pay (very happily) for Russia's mineral resources are also feeding the expansion of Russia's military power and its state of the art misinformation machine. Some of those stolen monies ends up in the accounts of the European movements or political parties on the extreme left and extreme right that are rather rapidly gaining more and more political influence in Europe.

The scheme is, you, Europeans, buy our resources and we will bring some of that money back to your countries: banks, property, luxury items, boarding schools, you name it. The system worked so well for all parties concerned that it has created a new Russian ruling class which does not want to change anything in it. This scheme became so comfortable for the Russian establishment that they have also built a system in Russia to protect it. That system was named 'managed democracy' or simply, Putinism. The coronation of that system manifested itself in the last Russian Presidential election show, with re-selection of Mr Putin as President of Russia.

Putinism is there to stay until the system discontinues feeding the establishment with stolen money. Establishment has realised that its survival lays in keeping the country in its semi modernised status relying solely on the rents from natural resources and arms sales. In practice, the situation has not really changed since Soviet times, and modernisation of Russia is not in the interest of Putinism because it will destroy the system. Perhaps this explains the mystery of the phenomena that a country with arguably the most talented and educated population in the world is not able to 'kick start' its own modernisation. Once Medvedev's modernization completely failed, the Russian elite understood that it will never catch up with the West, nor with China. They do not need the modern world around them, the iPad's are great, but we can buy them with the oil money. To paraphrase Alexander III, Russia has only two allies: its navy and its army. If Alexander III would have lived until now, Russia's natural recourses would be added to the list. Worst comes to the worst, the Artificial Technology will save us all eventually.

Even when oil money from the west was pouring in to Russia during the first decade of the 21st century, the Kremlin skipped an opportunity to reform its economy, deciding to enrich its elites and reform its military instead. Only Russia's 'ally' oil is funding its other two 'allies': the army and the navy. This pattern goes throughout all of Russia's history: since Russia is not capable to gain its place under the sun by trading (not only its mineral resources and weapons), it chooses to gain its place with the help of its military might. As Lithuania's President Valdas Adamkus said to the Financial Times in January 2008 'The question comes up whether a very strong financial recovery in Russia is a stimulus for the new Russian leadership to return to the cold war.'

This perfectly functioning system is under a great threat however. And Russian establishment is ready for anything to save it. They see two imminent threats. One is the European Union and its successful enlargement to the east. It is not about NATO enlargement only, it is about the EU's enlargement. Russia is losing its sphere of influence to the EU, where it could feel at home and act as it is at home. EU membership incentives to reform change the former Soviet republics and Soviet satellites and turn them into alien to Russia. Russian establishment understands that if those reforms succeed in neighbouring countries, Russians will start pointing their fingers or will want to implement similar reforms at home. This will mean the end to Putin's system, the end of the current livelihoods enjoyed by the system's primary beneficiaries.

While Russia was 'getting up off of its' knees' and building Putinism, the post-Soviet space was left to their own fates and could make their own choices on future direction: go West, stay East or neither. The EU had no 'enlargement fatigue' and showed enthusiasm for new members. Having an opportunity to decide for themselves, while Russia was too weak to 'embrace' them back, they have taken their chances and joined the West. The new member states

² <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/spiegel-interview-with-ex-chancellor-gerhard-schroeder-i-m-an-anything-but-an-opponent-of-america-a-444069.html>

were admitted to the club after having implemented very painful reforms and undergoing tremendous change. The EU and NATO did not expand, the EU and NATO have enlarged. Admission to the Western club takes a lot of hard work and frankly, not all are destined to be admitted, as we see by the example of the EU's Eastern Partnership countries.

It could be said that the enlargement fatigue towards the East dramatically strengthened after the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine and Russia's invasion to Eastern Ukraine. Problems, such as the after effects of the financial and economic crisis, the Euro crisis, the refugee crisis, dramatic rise of populism, Brexit to mention a few, have shaken the foundations of the European Union. Not to mention dubious performance of Romania and Bulgaria and the march of illiberalism in Hungary and Poland. The EU's ambitions to enlarge in the Western Balkans in 2025 are welcome but hardly realistic. It is obvious that the EU is facing existential problems and talk of a new wave of enlargement in the short term is not realistic. However, the European Union usually finds consensus and emerges out of crisis even stronger, with ambitions of further enlargement. Russia is going to do everything available in its disposal to deepen the ongoing EU crisis: do not waste a crisis. The Kremlin understands that this crisis is not like the previous one and that it might end up in total break-up of the EU. This very much could be in medium term Kremlin planning. What are the signs of this plan?

What is Russia's army preparing for?

There are many signs that Russia is 'closing down' from the rest of the world.³ Historians will argue when that shift started but Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, where he challenged post-Cold-War establishment, could be seen as the first warning to the West. After the aggression against Georgia in 2008, Russia realised that it is not ready to 'get off its knees' yet. Its army was still too weak and, most importantly, Russia had lost on international information warfare front: Georgian point of view of the war was dominating the international information sphere and it overwhelmingly 'won' this propaganda war.

The Russian army went through remarkably rapid transformation. Karlis Neretnieks, Retired Major General of the Swedish Army, was one of the first to notice that Russia's army is getting stronger fast. He wrote that 'the exercise Zapad 2013 clearly shows that the Russian Armed Forces have left the deplorable state they were in some ten years ago, and that the lessons learned from the Georgian conflict in 2008 are being implemented'.⁴ One might wonder, why Russia decided to revamp its military while European countries were drastically cutting down on their military expenditure. Only if Russia kept its status quo for another decade or more, NATO could have turned into a gentlemen's talking shop, and a paper tiger.

Russia's strategists must have predicted the consequences of Russian army's rebirth: NATO found its purpose again. Even a non-NATO country such as Sweden is reluctantly rearming rapidly. The Russian establishment is perfectly aware of the fact that as long as NATO and the European Union are intact, a military threat from the West, to Russia, is almost non-existent. There could be a few explanations to this irrational behaviour, and all of them fit into a larger Russian plan. In the short term, Russian defence industry gains new clients, it is in effect a spill over of the arms race that Russia had started. Russia is the second largest arms exporter in the world after all.

The second part of the plan is to return prestige of the military to the society and boost the military as a profession for Russia's youth. The prospects of becoming an officer in the army is looked upon very favourably by many young Russians. This will lead to a semi-military society in the future, the society which will be much easier to control.

Arguably, the peaceful rise of the East that is China, is playing a part of rebuilding Russian military strength: getting ready for the Eastern front, but using the threat of the West as a reason to rearm. However, possibly the most important reason is preparation for the total collapse of the post-Cold War order where military strength and societal readiness/resilience will play a crucial role in future geopolitical gains. The Russian army is not going to attack anyone, it will come to help - sorting out future military conflicts and the chaos that those conflicts will bring. Furthermore, this is not going to be about traditional military conflict zones. Russia will come to sort out military conflict or war in Europe. Russia has always done rather well intervening in these conflicts, the last, and the most successful, was the Second World War. Even though it was not of Russia's making, and it brought catastrophic consequences to Europe and Russia itself, the outcome resulted in Russia becoming a super power, matching that of the USA.

3 Read an article by the Kremlin aide Vladislav Surkov who wrote that 'Russia's epic journey toward the West' is over, marking an end to its 'repeated fruitless attempts to become a part of Western civilization' is over four centuries.
<https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-adviser-surkov-says-russia-abandoning-hopes-integrating-with-west-loneliness-isolation-/29155700.html>

4 And the actual article in Russian <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/global-processes/Odinchestvo-polukrovki-14-19477>
<http://kkvra.se/zapad-13-observations-and-perspective/>

The Kremlin establishment also understands that it is possible to create conflict in the European Union without leaving comfort zone of Russia. The realisation came during the Arab Spring, which Moscow looked at as a covert Western operation. As General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, wrote in his article in 2013, that even 'a perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an arena of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war.'⁵ Arguably, the Arab Spring helped the Kremlin to appreciate the power of the new media environment and especially the opportunities that are brought by the social media. Phenomenally popular American social networks could become a perfect platform to access and possibly influence the most important person in the liberal democracy - a voter, and a lot of them.

It looked even more appealing, potentially, after representatives of Russia's largest company, Lukoil, saw a presentation by Cambridge Analytica about using 'election disruption strategies' in Nigerian elections. This country houses most of Africa's presence on global social media platforms such as Facebook. According to the Nigerian Guardian, 'The Special Counsel Agent Robert Mueller's investigation traced the first stage of the Russian operations of meddling to disrupt the 2016 US Election back to 2014, when the Russian state and CEO of LukOil – Vagit Alekperov made what appears to be its first concerted efforts to harness the power of America's social media platforms including Facebook to skew voter outcomes. Cambridge Analytica provided the Russian Oil firm with its datasets, capabilities and methodology. Documents focused on 'election disruption techniques'⁶

Having realised the power of 'micro targeting', algorithms and data the Kremlin has put a social network quarantine on its population: the Russia's Facebook equivalent VKontakte had been neutralised at the beginning of 2014 just a month after the annexation of Crimea. As the VK creator Pavel Durov posted, 'Today, VKontakte goes under the complete control of Igor Sechin and Alisher Usmanov.' Not a single hostile power will be able to 'micro target' more than 50 million Vkontakte users in Russia.⁷ After having built its social network defence at home the Kremlin set its eyes to the West.

The disinformation avalanche designed for the West is designed to erode swing voters' belief in their societies, their political and economic order. And the Kremlin's bet on Mr. Donald Trump was not only about his initially favourite attitude toward Russia and President Putin. The champagne corks were popping in the Kremlin because after Mr. Trump became the leader of the free world, they saw an ally in the new USA President for a crusade against the Post-Cold War world order, an order that Americans had created. Since the European Union is a creation of the Post-Cold War order its survival should not be taken for granted.

Stop blaming the Russians alone, the Europeans must get their act together

Two World Wars had begun in Europe, not to mention previous centuries of wars on the continent. Europe is a powerful continent which needs a nanny who keeps it safe from hurting itself. Arguably, the EU as we know it evolved with some degree of coaching from the USA. However, with Mr Trump winning the presidential election, the EU has lost the USA as a patron and an unquestionable ally. Furthermore, not to mention his support to the Leave campaign during the Brexit referendum, it appears that President Trump is as anti-EU as any European nationalist / populist from the far right and far left. Even though the Kremlin's favourite does not call NATO obsolete anymore, he has much more in common with the politicians who say 'France first', 'Germany first', 'Poland first'. Hence, despite some glitches, Kremlin's bet on Mr Trump is paying off. The European Union is left on its own to deal with its problems, and if it will fail, NATO may become obsolete.

The Kremlin seeks to divide the EU and, to be honest the Europeans themselves are to blame for it. The European Union is not coping with the external and internal pressures. Put aside the Brexit, financial crisis of 2008 and the Greek Euro crisis, the refugee crisis is going to have a long-lasting effect in Europe. It has divided the EU into the West and the East and is pouring water on the Orbansation mill in Hungary, Poland and the rest of Visegrad states. Let us not forget the effects in Western Europe. Austria's elections did not come as a surprise, since this country has a very peculiar relationship with right wing parties - which are more right of centre than is expected in an established Western European country. However, Italy, one of the founding members and the third largest EU economy, is in political turmoil again. One could say that it is not surprising either, but some 53% of its voters cast their vote for more or less anti-EU political parties and movements. Italy's Giuseppe Conte was appointed and sworn as the Prime Minister of Italy and this could set Italy on a collision course with the EU. Italy could turn into a 'new Greece' economically and into a new Hungary and Poland politically. And let us wait for the parliamentary elections' results in Sweden in September.

5 <https://inmoscowshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>

6 <https://guardian.ng/features/did-facebook-and-cambridge-analytica-attack-nigeria/>

7 <http://www.businessinsider.com/putin-has-taken-control-of-russian-facebook-2014-4>

In most instances, liberal democracies are fit to deal with economic crises and that could be said about the European Union as well. Boom and bust, and after a boom the bust comes, however, the tsunami like refugee crisis is here as well. The 'Refugees are Welcome' mood in Western societies is turning sour due to immigrant integration problems. The flow of the new refugees has declined, but the Western European states cannot cope with the refugees that flooded Europe in just a few years. Still, there are around a million displaced persons trapped in Syria, rising tensions over Iran, not to mention rapidly growing population of Africa. And this is where Russia has significant opportunity to launch disruptive actions in Europe.

Russia's assistance to the Assad regime in Syria is not only about a long-standing alliance between the two regimes and regaining its influence under the Middle Eastern sun. Russia's engagement in Syria served another purpose: flooding Europe with refugees from the Middle East and Africa. Short-term effects are damaging to Russia; overall, the Europeans are disgusted with the Kremlin's support of the Assad regime. However, in the mid-term, the new arrivals integration problem could potentially turn enthusiastic 'Refugees are welcome' into political fodder for populists.

The anti-establishment parties have long been admirers of Putin and Putinism and with reason: it is not only about ideology, but about financial support, which is difficult to track. Russian oligarchs, or Russian businesses operating in Europe make business-like arrangements with local proxy businesses, who in turn support pro-Russian politicians, NGOs and media outlets. An example stated by Dr. Mark Galeotti, when a Czech, Mr. Martin Nejedlý, in charge of a local branch of Lukoil gas company, donated a huge amount of his personal money to the Presidential campaign of pro-Russian Czech president candidate Zeman tells a lot. Furthermore, once Lukoil left the Czech Republic, 'one of the last things Lukoil did was pay off all of this man's debts, including the money he had just given to the Zeman campaign'.⁸ Such and similar schemes are in abundance. Anti-establishment parties are not only pro-Putin and anti-American, they are also anti-EU, anti-NATO and anti-immigration.⁹ Even though the post-Brexit elections in the Netherlands, France and Germany postponed the populists' advance in founding members of the European Union, Italy was not able to escape it.

Germany, and, 'do not mention the war'

Unlike in France, there was no major known Russian meddling in the German parliamentary elections and still, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) received 12.6% of votes. This is an unprecedented development in a country with a difficult history with its far-right politics. Russia realised that no interference in the elections was necessary: the job was done with more than a million refugees ending up in Germany from 2015. Furthermore, the alleged criminal case of Lisa F., a 13-year-old Russian-German girl who was reportedly missing in Berlin, first claiming she was kidnapped by three strangers, likely refugees, indicated that the Kremlin has a formidable force in Germany. Russian TV stations in Moscow, with some help from Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. S. Lavrov, managed to mobilise some Russian speaking Germans to demonstrate into the streets of Berlin and other German cities. There is no need for special disinformation campaigns in Germany, there are around three million Russian speaking Germans and their worldview is formed via Kremlin controlled TV stations broadcasted directly from Moscow.

Russia has most of the necessary ingredients for meddling in German politics: rising power of the AfD and potential problems with the refugee integration, a strong former-Communist party in nostalgic East Germany and nearly three million Russian speaking Germans who feed on the Russian information. The 'Schroeders' in the political and business establishment, Nord Stream 1 and the forthcoming Nord Stream 2 will feed those new 'Schroeders' in Germany. Why so much attention on Germany? Because President Putin knows Germany is the key to all European issues, and this is rather obvious to all.

Despite a healthy German economy, nearly 13% of Germans voted for the far right AfD. Such a threatening number of Germans had chosen the AfD even before the real everyday difficulties with the new immigrants' integration will start to emerge. Hence, there is a real possibility that the populists and anti-establishment parties will be gaining support in Germany. And Russia does not really have to put too much effort in paving the populist path to power in Germany, all is set in motion. Russia needs to keep the conflict in Syria active and continue the Kremlin's friendship with populists in Germany and all over Europe. Once populist anti-establishment and nationalistic parties will be in power, further existence of the European Union will be almost impossible.

⁸ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/foreign-affairs-committee/russian-corruption-and-the-uk/oral/82929.html>

⁹ Read more about peculiar relationship between Putin's Russia with the far-right parties in Europe in Anton Shekhosvtov's new book Russian and the Western Far Right, published by Routledge.

The anti-establishment and nationalist party leaders of Europe meet with each other on a regular basis. Those party leaders visit each other's congresses, summer camps or conferences organised in Russia. Now they are hugging each other but this personal comradeship will rapidly vanish once those leaders become presidents and prime ministers of their countries. Chancellor Angela Merkel had warned in 2010, in the midst of the Euro crisis, that 'We have a historical obligation: To protect by all means Europe's unification process begun by our forefathers after centuries of hatred and blood spill. None of us can foresee what the consequences would be if we were to fail! It cannot be that sometime in the future they say the political generation responsible for Europe in the second decade of the 21st century has failed in the face of history.'¹⁰

In addition, former Polish Minister of Finance Jasek Rostowski remembered his conversation with a prominent Polish banker and shared it with the European Parliament in Strasburg in 2011; 'We were talking about the crisis in Eurozone. He told me 'You know, after all these political shocks, economic shocks, it is very rare indeed that in the next 10 years we could avoid a war'. A war ladies and gentlemen. I am really thinking about obtaining a green card for my kids in the United States.'¹¹

April 2018 Emmanuel Macron said in the same Parliament that 'Nationalism will lead Europe into the abyss. We see authoritarianism rising all around us... I don't want to belong to a generation of sleepwalkers. I will not give in to any kind of fixation of authoritarianism'.

Given our history, the European establishment (I would like to include the Russians in it) understands that peace in Europe will not last for long if the EU collapses. NATO and the European Union is the glue that holds the nations of Europe together and keeps them away from turning against each other as they did so many times in the past. It could be argued that peace on the continent is the most important and most underappreciated merit of the European Union. This Union has so far managed to contain the power of Germany and in the future it should contain the rising power of ambitious Poland.

Germany is too big and too efficient for Europe. On one hand, peace in Europe could continue only if the spoils of German efficiency are shared with the rest of Europe. On the other hand, the mighty German economy needs access to the European markets. This contract between Germany and the rest of the EU has been working so far. Once this contract is broken consequences of it could be tragic to all. We already have the leaders of Poland raising the question of reparation from Germany for damages done during the Second World War. And this is happening inside of the EU! What questions and demands will come after the populists had formed the governments in Germany, possibly France, and Italy?

The memory span of a Human being is short and very selective. It took less than a generation for so many Hungarian, Polish and Czech voters' souls to be seduced by ideas of illiberal democracy. How deep the demons are hiding in the souls of the French, Dutch or German voters we do not really know. Germany had a reputation as a nation of poets, writers, philosophers and composers, however it took a few generations to turn this nation into a hegemon and trouble maker of Europe. We also have Poland, which is transforming itself from a victim nation to a 'never again' nation, with consequences that might be dear too. Transformations and changes are taking place much faster in post-industrial societies. Those thoughts were unthinkable just a few years ago, but the election of Mr. Trump and the Brexit vote only indicates that what was unthinkable is possible in this world.

It also has to be clear: Mr. Trump, Brexit, the Euro crisis, the refugee crisis in Europe, the Alternative for Germany, Le Pen, Orbamaia in Central Europe, the League and M5S in Italy and the rest. Those phenomena are a consequence of post-industrial transformation, and it appears so far that the West is not ready to cope with it. Russia is skilfully using the tools that are deepening this crisis and is weakening its strategic rivals. It sees the world as a zero-sum game, either you or me. Russian establishment thinks that Russia is sufficient enough and is ready for the collapse of the EU, NATO and for the chaos in Europe that will follow. Russia is ready for the 19th and 20th century geopolitical games and for another grand peace keeping operation in Europe.

Dear Kremlin, no help needed, thanks, but no, thanks

How to stop Russia from lending its hand to those who wish to see an end to the EU? The EU should acknowledge, that despite its economic weakness, Russia is a strategic rival and is seeking to destroy the EU. Hence, those European circles who are in favour of the EU but still call for closer relations with Russia, are contradicting themselves. As Timothy Snyder writes in his latest book about the Kremlin's thinking 'If Russia could not become the west, let the west become Russia.'¹² The part of EU establishment that longs for friendly relations with Russia has to choose between this and the survival of the European Union. Those numerous Europeans, who appreciate great classical

10 <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/279985/EU-summit-seals-one-trillion-euro-deal-after-Merkel-warns-of-war-in-Europe>

11 <http://www.businessinsider.com/jasek-rostowski-war-poland-2011-9>

12 Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom. Russia, Europe, America.* p.75. Tim Guggan books, New York, 2018, Ebook.

Russian culture, should not link it to a relationship with the Kremlin. Keep loving this great culture, but the Kremlin has very little to do with it.

Those who willingly do business with Russia should understand that with the huge margins one should expect the huge risks. 'Nothing personal, just business' does not exist in Russia. Most of the successful companies have strong links to the Kremlin. Lucrative contracts come with a price tag attached which come to the surface top sooner or later. The notion that 'we will change them via engagement with them' working wonders for the Russians. Yes, the Russians are changing us, not vice versa. Corruption is the new most successful export of Russia. Furthermore, by buying the Russian oil and planning to buy more of it, we indirectly finance the build-up of the Russian military, and Russia's aggressive foreign policy in East Ukraine, Syria and others. Some of that money also settles in the pockets of anti-EU parties.

The European Union should keep its doors open for new member states. Russia has its interests, no doubt, but the principle of free determination of nations should not be compromised. Furthermore, nations should not be pushed into 'forced marriages'. If a nation decided to pivot to the West it should feel that it is welcome here, if it decided to pivot to Russia, this decision should be also respected. If it would rather stay in between, so it be. However, if a nation decided to pivot to the EU, very strict entrance criteria should apply to it no matter how important geopolitically this country is. No one from the EU should be 'exporting democracy'. Rather opposite, if a country is ready for the pivot to the West it will be willing to 'import democracy' itself.

The economic sanctions against Russia do work: according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Russia's military spending in 2017 was 20% lower than in 2016, the first annual decrease since 1998. 'Military modernization remains a priority in Russia, but the military budget has been restricted by economic problems that the country has experienced since 2014,' said Siemon Wezeman from the institute.¹³ This is a very serious signal indicating that the Russian economy is struggling since the spending cuts reached even the most important pillar of the Russian state. In the medium-term, Russia's stagnation might reduce the Russian admiration for Putin and his system. Russia will be forced to let some reforms in. Russia will start reforming the Putineconomics and, possibly the Putin system only after the social contract between the Kremlin and the people will stop working. The Kremlin is able to brainwash Russians via their TV set, as long as the fridge is at least semi full. But when the semi-full fridge will become a semi-empty fridge, the power of Russian TV, and the unconditional love for President Putin might diminish drastically.

As discussed above, the Kremlin has been feeling strong enough to skilfully use the EU's internal problems in order break it up. The EU has not appreciated this fully yet, and it has no other counter measures than economic sanctions and going after the riches of the Russian oligarchs in the EU. The Kremlin has been constantly pushing EU soft power instruments out of Russia, the NGOs are marginalised, the reach of the Russian population via media is minimal. Opposition with whom the West could work is extremely weak and most of it in exile anyway. The Kremlin has taken all possible tools from the West to have any influence in Russia. On the other hand, all the tools needed to destabilise the European Union are extremely successful as used by the Kremlin so far.

The Russians have been studying the West even after the collapse of the Wall, but the Westerners' levels of expertise on Russia has drastically diminished. Hence, the Kremlin and its various structures are two or three steps ahead of us. They realised the potential of post-truth phenomena, pushed free media to the margins at home, invested in their infotainment industry, and found ways to poison the minds of the population of Russia. After having filled up the Russian information sphere with post-truth lies, the Kremlin pushed the post-truth reality into western societies. The West suddenly woke up to the fake news despite the numerous warnings from the Baltic States, since we had been under its attack for a decade already. And the West does not really have any antidotes because of its freedom of expression, legal system and traditions.

We can fight back with fact-checking measures, with name and shame, and putting pressure on social media channels to keep the lid on information posted there. However, this fight reminds one of a fight against the cancer: after applying therapy the cancer resurfaces in another part of the body. The damage to the body is done already: Brexit, confused voters, widespread mistrust of western institutions and the media, rise of populists on the right and on the left, increasing hatred to immigrants, and rapidly worsening attitudes toward the trans-Atlantic relationship, especially after Mr. Trump was elected with some assistance of Russian trolls. And this cancer like problem is so deep on the EU body, that it is only a matter of time when it will resurface soon. And the Kremlin is working hard on it, because the Kremlin has a huge number of well-trained specialists to come up with creative solutions and suggestions. The EU has set aside a million Euros per year for its StratCom operations.¹⁴

¹³ <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2018/global-military-spending-remains-high-17-trillion>

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/25/eu-anti-propaganda-unit-gets-1m-a-year-to-counter-russian-fake-news>

This sum is beyond ridicules. I would not be surprising if the Kremlin propaganda machine spends this much in a week.

Despite this, the awakening of the West, or a part of it, to the Russia's threat is encouraging, but it will have to do a lot of catch up if the European Union is to be saved. The Kremlin will continue using its methods to weaken the European Union because the crisis of the EU is not going to be solved immediately. There is no silver bullet to the problems of the EU. The EU should solve its problems, like it did in the past, but in the past the crises were of much smaller scale and the conditions for outside interference were much more limited. Hence, since this EU crisis is extraordinary, and potentially could be lengthy, the EU must make some hard decisions on how to cool down Kremlin's appetite for the interference. There are a few short-term and medium-term measures the EU should adopt.

The free flow of information and free media must be kept intact, but the legal definition of the misinformation should be established, with a system of penalties and legal actions against the spread of it. Freedom of speech and free flow of information should not be put on the same shelf as lies and misinformation, such as free trading of medical substances should not put on the equal treatment with drug trafficking. It was rather easy to spot misinformation and lies in the days of legacy media and the reliable gate keepers there. However, with legacy media influence diminishing, even the media literate populations of the UK and the USA could be manipulated rather easily.

More economic sanctions against Russia and particular individuals should follow after each cyber, misinformation and meddling in elections. Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Lords stated in its report *Moscow's Gold: Russian Corruption in the UK*: 'The use of London as a base for the corrupt assets of Kremlin-connected individuals is now clearly linked to a wider Russian strategy and has implications for our national security. Combating it should be a major UK foreign policy priority'.¹⁵ The words 'London' and the 'UK' could be replaced by Frankfurt, Paris, Berlin, Madrid or Rome. The Kremlin should get a tit for tat response, and be informed that after another round of sanctions, more will follow. Less money for the Kremlin to spend on its ambitions in Europe the better, semi-empty fridges should defeat the TV sets and the break-up of the social contract between Putin and ordinary Russians should spark changes in Russia.

In the spirit of reciprocity, Russian linked and sponsored organisations and political parties that receive financial and other support from the Kremlin should be brought to the public and called agents of Kremlin influence. It works in Russia, it should work in the EU also.

The EU and member states should think about strategies of reviving the positive message of the EU among its own citizens: it appears that the benefits of the EU are taken for granted by most of the EU citizens.

In the medium-term to the long-term the EU should speed up its political and military integration. The USA will continue losing its interest in Europe. Demographics of the US voter is rapidly changing; give it another generation and most of the USA voters' roots will be in Asia, Latin America or Africa. Hence, naturally, current political class will lose its ancestral links to Europe. In addition, rise of China will consume more and more of America's attention and its resources. The USA will have to deal with China, leaving the Europeans to deal with their own problems and with Russia. Hence, when EU officials call on more unification of the EU because of rising China, they should keep it in mind that it is a long-term challenge. In the short-term and medium-term, the EU should view Russia as the main threat to its survival. Only a reformed, closer integrated and better functioning EU can eliminate that threat.

The EU must realise that treating the Kremlin as a partner and a friend is naïve. The Kremlin, having declared NATO its enemy number one, is actually, acting against NATO members, the majority of whom are the members of the EU. NATO would disappear after the USA administration decided to leave it. However, theoretically NATO infrastructure and the chain of command could be quickly replaced by functioning EU structures. However, it would be very difficult for NATO to survive the fall of the EU. Hence, the policy 'help to destroy the EU, and NATO will be really absolute' looks more appealing to the Kremlin. And then, the managed chaos in Europe, might become unmanaged chaos with the consequences that might facilitate moving ready Russian troops to a peace keeping operation in to the heart of Europe. History would repeat itself.

In order not to allow European history of wars to repeat itself, we have to look back and realise that something will not change. Russia with its current mind-set, will continue be a threat. We cannot change Russia, but Europeans can change themselves and have been doing so very successfully so far. We proved that the Europeans are not only very efficient in fighting each other, but they are increasingly efficient learning from our mistakes and building the common home, a united Europe. The Western decision makers should also read the Long Telegram of George Kennan, and start seriously thinking about a new Containment policy toward Russia and other unfriendly

15 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcaff/932/93204.htm>

powers. The West should more effectively study the Kremlin's tools of interference and think of its own tools of containment. The West and especially the EU needs some time to sort out its fundamental problems and it would be more than helpful if this could be done without interference from the Kremlin.

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