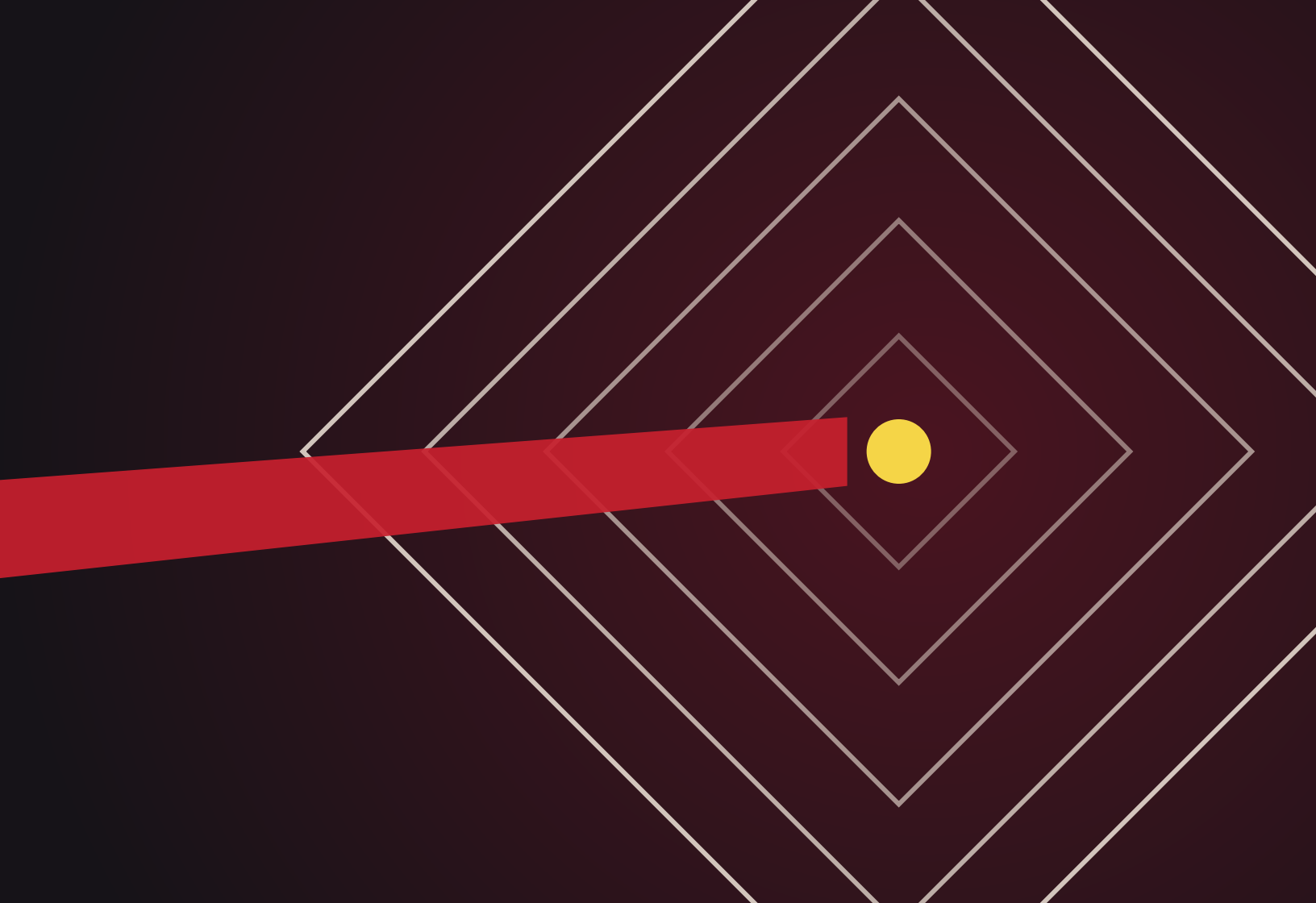




Russia's Trojan Horses: Populism and the Security Challenge for Europe

Norito Kunisue

INTRODUCTION

In the nineteenth century, Carl von Clausewitz famously observed that "war is merely the continuation of politics by other means." Had he lived in the twenty-first century, he might well have reversed this dictum, suggesting that "politics is merely the continuation of war by other means."

No matter how extensively a state equips its armed forces or trains its soldiers, national security cannot be assured if hostile actors succeed in penetrating the core of state power and manipulating the political process from within. It is precisely this form of political subversion that has become a growing concern for major Western countries today. Russia, whose confrontation with European states has deepened in recent years, has sought to compensate for its relative military disadvantages by cultivating sympathetic political forces within European countries and undermining them from the inside. Alternatively, it has endeavored to encourage the establishment of governments more inclined to cooperate with Russia, thereby reshaping the international order in ways more favorable to its own interests.

Domestic political actors, for their part, often seek to expand their influence by cooperating with Russia. In doing so, they effectively function as "Trojan horses,"

facilitating Russian penetration into domestic political systems. In Europe, many of the political forces that play this role are commonly categorized as populist parties or populist politicians. While addressing this phenomenon has become an increasing concern among European policymakers, premature regulatory measures risk undermining freedom of expression and democratic institutions, leaving many countries deeply ambivalent about how to respond.

This article focuses primarily on France, where this phenomenon is particularly pronounced. By examining the characteristics of populist political forces in France, it seeks to clarify how they have forged close ties with the Putin administration in Russia and how, as a result, they have come to pose a threat to France's national security. Although formulating clear-cut countermeasures remains difficult, this study aims to draw several instructive lessons from the French case, while also touching on cases from other European countries that share common characteristics.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF POPULISM

This article proposes a two-phase model of contemporary populism, arguing that since the late 2000s populism has evolved from protest-oriented movements into power-

seeking governing projects.ⁱ Accordingly, it proposes a distinction between a "first phase" and a "second phase" of populism. Such a distinction is crucial because the concept of "populism" has long resisted precise conceptual definition. This difficulty stems from several factors: populism manifests itself in diverse forms through its association with other ideologies; populist politicians and parties frequently alter their claims and policy positions; their rhetoric does not always align with their actions; and the term "populism," much like "terrorism," has often been used pejoratively as a label of denunciation rather than as an analytical category.

In recent political science scholarship, a widely accepted definition has emerged, describing populism as a political discourse that divides society into two homogeneous groups - "the elite" and "the people" — and claims to represent the latter in opposition to the former.ⁱⁱ Under this definition, populism, as an explicitly anti-elite ideology, possesses a fundamentally anti-establishment character.

The debate concerning the normative evaluation of populism has been no less persistent. One influential perspective emphasizes its role in mobilizing previously marginalized voters and regards populism as a force that can reinforce democracy. Another highlights its tendency to deny pluralism and views it as a threat to democratic governance. While populism in practice appears to embody both characteristics, scholars have remained divided over which dimension is more fundamental or deserving of analytical focus.

Despite these complexities, this article adopts a framework that divides populism into two phases. Although some scholars trace the origins of populism to movements such as the U.S. People's Party or Russia's *Narodnik* movement, the rapid rise of populism in its current form became evident after the end of the Cold War in 1989. As socialism rapidly lost legitimacy and left-wing politics receded, populist politicians expanded their support by filling the resulting political vacuum. Notable examples include Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of France's far-right National Front (*Front National*), and Pim Fortuyn, the Dutch right-wing politician assassinated in 2002. Their primary objective was not the acquisition of governmental power but rather the mobilization of popular discontent and anxiety. In practice, they failed to secure sufficient support to seriously challenge for power. This period can be characterized as the first phase of populism.

In contrast, the 2010s witnessed the rise of populist leaders who explicitly sought — and in some cases succeeded in obtaining — political power. Viktor Orbán's assumption of the Hungarian premiership in 2010 marked an early turning point, followed by the electoral victory of Poland's Law and Justice Party in 2015 and Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.ⁱⁱⁱ The social anxiety triggered by the 2008 global financial crisis and the European sovereign debt crisis, compounded by the 2015 refugee crisis and a series of Islamist terrorist attacks in France and Belgium, created fertile ground for populist appeals. This period constitutes the second phase of populism.



The hemicycle of the Louise Weiss building, seat of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, France. | Photo via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0

The contrast between these two phases is vividly illustrated by the political trajectories of Jean-Marie Le Pen and his daughter, Marine Le Pen, in France. Jean-Marie Le Pen, who led the *National Front* from its founding in 1972, remained a marginal figure of the anti-communist far right throughout the 1970s. In the 1980s, he expanded his support by centering his platform on anti-immigration rhetoric, and after the collapse of the Cold War order he continued to gain ground, ultimately reaching the second round of the 2002 presidential election. Nevertheless, he largely confined himself to inflammatory rhetoric and personal attacks against political opponents.^{iv}

Marine Le Pen, who ascended to the leadership of the National Front in 2011, by contrast, sought to transform the party into

a viable governing party. Through a process she termed *dédiabolisation* (de-demonization), she banned overtly antisemitic discourse frequently observed within the party, expelled neo-Nazi elements, and sought to normalize the party's image. Economically and socially, she adopted a left-leaning, welfare-oriented discourse emphasizing social protection and civil rights. As a result, the party broadened its electoral base, incorporating not only older and wealthier voters but also working-class constituencies during the 2010s. She reached the second round of the 2017 presidential election, renamed the party the National Rally (*Rassemblement National*) in 2018, expanded support in rural areas during the 2020s, and again advanced to the runoff in the 2022 election. As of January 2026, her approval ratings

exceed 30 percent, leading many observers to regard her victory in the 2027 presidential election as a probable outcome.^v

THE EUROPEAN FAR RIGHT'S RAPPROCHEMENT WITH RUSSIA: FRENCH AND OTHER COUNTRIES' EXAMPLES

One of the factors contributing to this rise has been the National Front's relationship with Russia. Jean-Marie Le Pen, whose political orientation was strongly pro-American, began to develop ties with Russia in the 1990s. However, these connections remained limited to marginal actors, such as cooperation among far-right figures including Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. At the time, the National Front also maintained cordial relations with right-wing nationalist parties in Ukraine and thus did not articulate a coherent or consistent policy toward Russia. Meanwhile, in the early 2000s, Vladimir Putin cultivated friendly relations with then French President Jacques Chirac through their shared opposition to the Iraq War. Given Jean-Marie Le Pen's antagonistic relationship with Chirac, there was little room for the emergence of a close relationship between Le Pen and Putin. It was only under the leadership of Marine Le Pen that strong ties with the Putin administration were established.

From the outset of her tenure as party leader in 2011, Marine Le Pen expressed admiration for Vladimir Putin. From 2013 onward, she frequently visited Moscow, and although Le Pen herself has denied it, there are testimonies suggesting that she met with Putin in person on multiple

occasions.^{vi} In 2014, the National Front and companies owned by the Le Pen family received loans totaling approximately EUR 11 million from Russia-linked financial institutions. These loans have been widely interpreted as a form of compensation for Le Pen's support of Russia's occupation of Crimea.^{vii}

One of the most influential figures shaping Le Pen's rapprochement with the Putin regime was Aymeric Chauprade, an international relations scholar and former Member of the European Parliament who advocated for closer Franco-Russian cooperation. A self-described realist and former head of a department at the French War College, Chauprade became Le Pen's de facto foreign policy adviser in 2010 and played a central role in formulating her foreign policy during the 2012 presidential election. He argued that the primary axis of global conflict was no longer liberalism versus socialism, but rather "materialism versus traditionalism," positioning himself firmly on the side of the latter.^{viii} Openly expressing affinity toward Russia, Chauprade participated in the "international observer mission" organized by Russian authorities for the 2014 referendum on Crimea's status, repeatedly advancing narratives that sought to legitimize Russia's occupation of the peninsula.

Although Chauprade left the National Front in 2015 due to a loss of an internal power struggle, Le Pen's pro-Russian orientation remained persistent. In the 2017 presidential election, she made foreign policy a central pillar of her campaign, advocating withdrawal from NATO's integrated military command structure and the establishment of a strategic alliance

with Russia. She also proposed strengthening cooperation among Paris, Berlin, and Moscow, and advocated the creation of a pan-European confederation of sovereign states — including Russia and Switzerland — as an alternative to the European Union.

By the mid-2010s, this French phenomenon, embodying second-wave populism, had become a broader trend among far-right populist parties across Europe. From 2013 to 2014, party leaders and senior officials from the British National Party, Greece's far-right Golden Dawn, and Italy's Northern League visited Russia. Even in post-Cold War Eastern European countries, where suspicion toward Russia had traditionally been strong, closer engagement with Moscow became increasingly visible during this period. In 2014, Konstantin Malofeev, a Russian oligarch close to Putin, together with conservative ideologue Aleksandr Dugin, convened a meeting in Vienna with representatives of France's National Front and Austria's Freedom Party. Bulgaria's far-right party Ataka also participated in this gathering.^{ix}

WHY POPULISM ALIGNS WITH RUSSIA

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, many right-wing populist parties fell conspicuously silent regarding their ties to Russia. In the French presidential election held in April of that year, references to Russia disappeared from Marine Le Pen's campaign platform, and — except for her continued opposition to France's participation in NATO's integrated military command — foreign policy was largely absent from her

manifesto. In media interviews, she even expressed support for accepting the Ukrainian refugees, signaling an apparent attempt to distance herself from Moscow.^x

Nevertheless, Le Pen has not fundamentally altered her pro-Russian stance. She has argued that Ukraine's NATO membership prospect served as a justification for Russian aggression and has criticized economic sanctions against Russia on the grounds that they undermine French purchasing power.^{xixii} Jordan Bardella, a young politician who succeeded Le Pen as president of the National Rally in 2021, criticized Russia's invasion during a televised debate for the 2024 parliamentary elections, stating that "Russia must not be allowed to absorb Ukraine."^{xiii} However, many observers interpret this comment as a strategic attempt to influence public opinion rather than a substantive shift in policy.^{xiv} Similarly, Matteo Salvini, the leader of Italy's League, has shown no clear sign of abandoning his pro-Russian orientation.

"Populist parties function as 'Trojan horses' within democratic political systems, while influence agents operate as secondary Trojan horses embedded within the populist parties themselves."

Why, then, do right-wing populist parties align so closely with Vladimir Putin's Russia? Several factors help explain this alignment. First, the Putin regime functions as a model of governance for populist parties. According to a 2014 report by the Hungarian Political Capital Institute titled

The Russian Connection: The Spread of Pro-Russian Policies among Europe's Far Right, Putin's Russia appears to many European far-right parties as an ideal political system. Russia's authoritarian political system, its heavy-handed leader, its great power rhetoric, the suppression of basic freedoms, state control over strategic sectors, the constant reference to "national interests" overriding market mechanisms and a controlled economy keeping "big-capital" in check offer a state-organization model for some European far-right parties.^{xv} These characteristics are often perceived by populist parties as a blueprint for their own future governance.

This perception is closely linked to the transformation of populism since the late 2000s. Whereas populism had previously existed as a niche, anti-establishment movement, Putin's Russia provided populist actors with tangible examples of how such movements could actually govern. Populist leaders believed that by emulating Putin's policies, they themselves could win elections and take control of their countries. Moreover, in 2014, Russia occupied Crimea quickly and decisively. This enhanced Putin's image as a decisive strongman among European right-wing populists.^{xvi} Ironically, the success of this operation itself depended on Russia's extensive use of political subversion, including the cultivation of collaborators and sympathizers among Ukrainian and Crimean political elites as part of its broader hybrid warfare strategy.

Second, support from the Putin regime offers tangible benefits. Although many aspects remain opaque, it is widely believed that Russia provides various forms of assistance to European populist

parties. Russian banks gave loans to the National Front and Marine Le Pen, which is one clear example, but support for the National Front is not limited to financial assistance.

Russian-sponsored disinformation campaigns, efforts to inflame social unrest, and the orchestration or radicalization of protests and mass mobilizations across Europe often have the indirect effect of boosting populist parties. For these parties, the ability to influence public opinion while remaining formally within legal boundaries constitutes a significant strategic advantage.

Third, the relationship is reinforced by the fact that they share conspiracy narratives. One defining feature of populist parties is their frequent reliance on conspiracy theories to amplify perceptions of crisis and mobilize support. This approach closely resembles the methods employed by the Putin regime, which routinely attributes inconvenient developments to conspiracies orchestrated by such as the CIA. Populist actors and the Russian state promote similar messages that reinforce each other. This leads to a shared ideology and practical cooperation.

Fourth, long-standing pro-Russian networks persist within populist parties. Some of the most influential figures within Europe's far-right movements have had strong connections with Russia for a long time. In some cases, these connections are rooted in shared antisemitic or white supremacist ideologies. Within France's National Rally, for example, some veteran party officials who have close links to Russia have reportedly maintained ties with the Assad regime in Syria, a key ally of Moscow.^{xvii}

In addition, Russian intelligence services are also known to cultivate so-called agents of influence within foreign academic systems.^{xviii} These individuals, who may perceive intelligence operatives as friends or valuable sources of information, act based on narratives provided to them and help disseminate those narratives domestically — often without being fully aware that they are serving Russian interests. The same can be said for political systems. Many populist parties are believed to contain multiple such figures within their ranks or immediate surroundings. Given that populist parties often lack experienced personnel with specialized policy expertise or governing capacity, they are particularly susceptible to and vulnerable to the influence of such actors and the narratives they promote.

In this sense, populist parties function as "Trojan horses" within democratic political systems, while influence agents operate as secondary Trojan horses embedded within the populist parties themselves. Russia's efforts to shape the politics of major democratic states thus exhibit a multilayered, nested, *matryoshka*-like structure.

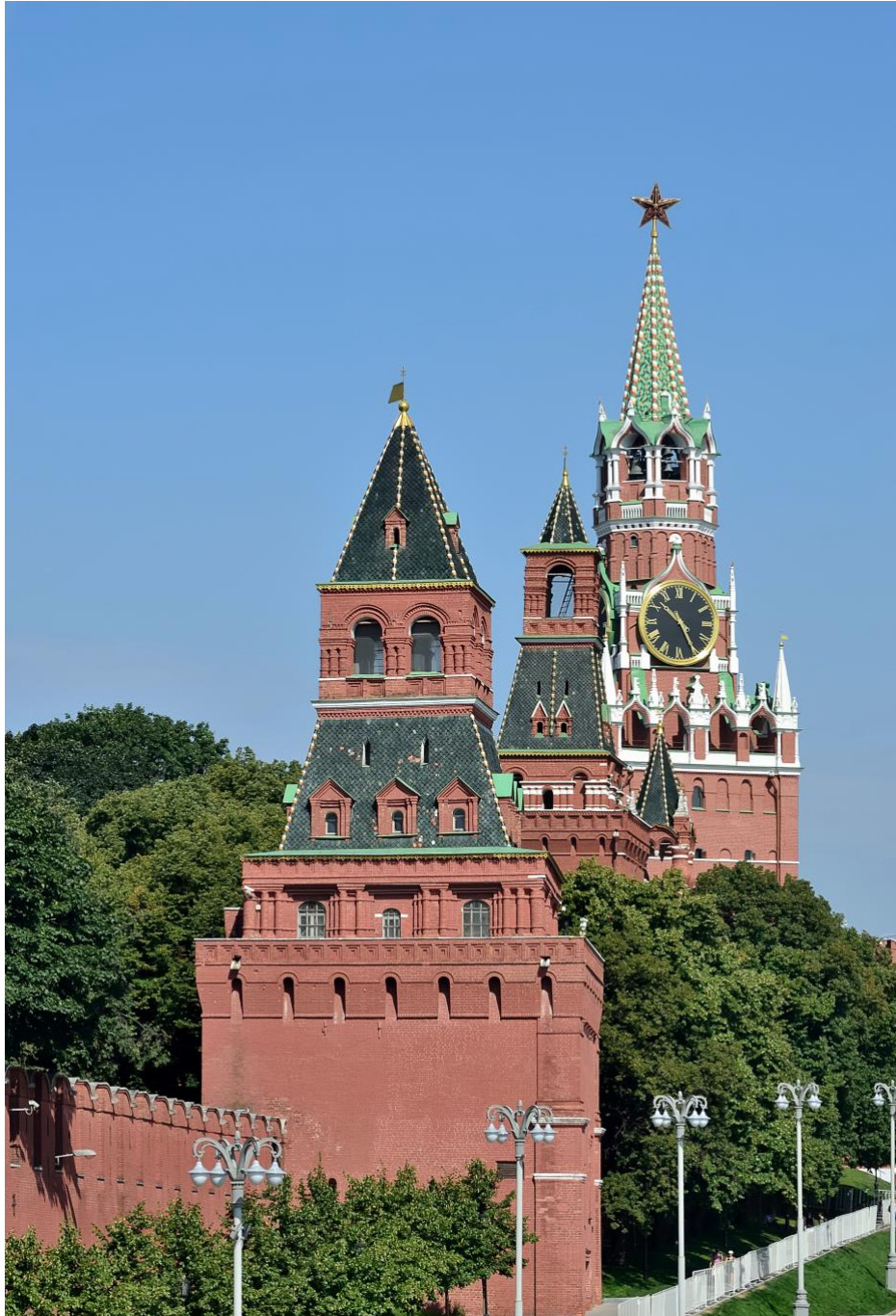
A CRISIS INSUFFICIENTLY RECOGNIZED BY THE PUBLIC

Experts in France have increasingly expressed concerns about the National Rally and its potential impact on national security. France held parliamentary elections between June and July of 2024, resulting in a victory for the National Rally, which emerged as the largest party in the

National Assembly. On July 5, 2024 — the day following the election — prominent French foreign policy specialists, including Deputy Director of the Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS) Bruno Tertrais, former director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) François Heisbourg, and former Ambassador to the United States Gérard Araud, published a joint statement in *Le Figaro* titled "While the Kremlin Threatens our Security, the National Rally Proposes France's Subordination to Russia."^{xix} The statement urged citizens to remain vigilant.

The authors pointed out that pro-Russian websites had supported National Rally leader Jordan Bardella during the election campaign and that many of the party's candidates had adopted pro-Putin positions while criticizing sanctions against Russia. They condemned the National Rally for seeking to "dramatically alter our alliances, turn away from our allies and historical friends, and align with Eurosceptic, authoritarian, and populist leaders such as Putin's Russia, Assad's Syria, Orbán's Hungary, Morawiecki's Poland, and Trump's United States." Regarding defense policy, they expressed deep mistrust, noting that the party had repeatedly reversed its position — initially advocating withdrawal from NATO, later calling for withdrawal from NATO's integrated military command, and most recently abandoning even that stance without public explanation. The statement warned that the party was effectively

seeking to subordinate France to Russia.



Towers of the eastern wall of the Moscow Kremlin. | Photo by Dmitry Ivanov, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Concerns regarding Russian interference through social media have also become increasingly concrete. In 2024, David Chavalarias, research director at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), published the results of an analysis

of approximately 700 million social media messages posted between 2016 and 2023.^{xx} According to the study, Russia's principal disinformation strategies have been conducted primarily on social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and

Facebook. Before the European Parliament elections in June 2024, for example, false narratives circulated claiming that France was recruiting soldiers for deployment to Ukraine. This created the impression that President Emmanuel Macron was preparing for war with Russia. Disinformation networks also created fake websites that looked like they belonged to the presidential party. Numerous accounts suspected of being managed by actors linked to the Putin regime reportedly amassed a large following. Notably, some of these narratives supported not only the National Rally but also the left-wing party *La France Insoumise* (LFI), which is likewise known for its pro-Russian positions. The report concluded that such activities exacerbated divisions within the political landscape.

Despite these warnings, it remains unclear whether the broader public fully grasps the gravity of the situation. Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella both have approval ratings over 30 percent, which are much higher than those of other major political figures. Observers increasingly regard the possibility that one of them could win the 2027 presidential election as entirely plausible.

Russian influence operations appear to extend beyond France. In the United Kingdom, Nathan Gill, a former Wales representative of the populist party Reform UK, was convicted of accepting bribes and making pro-Russian statements during his tenure as a Member of the European Parliament.^{xxi} He reportedly acted under the direction of Oleg Voloshyn, a pro-Russian Ukrainian politician who fled the country shortly before the full-scale invasion. Voloshyn's wife, Nadia Borodi, was also

known to maintain close ties with Nigel Farage, the leader of Reform UK, as well as with Nicolas Bay, a former National Front executive.

In Germany, it was revealed in December 2025 that Ringo Mühlmann, a state parliamentarian from Thuringia who is affiliated with the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD), had repeatedly demanded that the state government disclose sensitive information regarding drone defense systems or arms transfers to Ukraine. The state interior minister commented that it was difficult to dispel the impression that these actions were undertaken at the behest of the Kremlin.^{xxii}

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that some form of response to these populist movements is necessary from the perspective of national security. The challenge lies in the fact that these parties operate within the formal rules of democratic systems, and excessive restrictions risk devolving into political repression. Moreover, while populist parties may constitute a security threat through their ties to Russia, they sometimes also fulfill certain functions for the state and society in areas unrelated to foreign and security policy. Russia seeks precisely to exploit the vulnerabilities inherent in democratic systems.

Accordingly, one possible response is to address these political forces through democratic political competition. In this regard, the example of Italy under Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is instructive. Although Meloni was known in her youth as a right-wing activist and previously

expressed sympathy for Russia's position, she has adopted a markedly pragmatic and realistic approach since assuming office in 2022. She has unequivocally condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, rejected conspiracy narratives, and emphasized the primacy of national security. At the same time, she has incorporated the pro-Russian right-wing populist League — potentially a security liability akin to France's National Rally — into her governing coalition, thereby effectively constraining its behavior. While far from perfect, this approach may nonetheless serve as a useful model.

Finally, given that both populism and Russian influence operations rely heavily on conspiracy-driven discourse, the maintenance of a transparent, fair, and robust public sphere — as well as the protection of independent journalism — is indispensable. In France, particular concern has been raised over the growing media influence of Vincent Bollóre, a business magnate who heads one of the country's largest logistics groups and has

systematically acquired newspapers and television networks, thereby consolidating control over a vast media empire. Many of these outlets reportedly employ former staff members of Russian propaganda organizations as journalists.^{xxiii}

The situation confronting France is one that other European countries — and Japan as well — are likely to face sooner rather than later. The United States appears to be even further along this trajectory and may already be experiencing a national security crisis of this nature. While military equipment and troop deployments serve as tangible symbols of national defense and help bolster public morale, efforts to counter domestic populist parties may appear comparatively abstract, diffuse, and lacking in urgency. Yet neglecting this challenge risks rendering even the most carefully constructed deterrent capabilities ineffective over time. Informing citizens of this danger and addressing it through international cooperation constitutes an urgent challenge for democratic states.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Norito Kunisue is Project Professor at Research Center for Advanced Science and Technology of The University of Tokyo. He was born in Okayama Prefecture in Japan in 1963. He graduated from Osaka University in 1985. He pursued studies at the French Press Institute (IFP) of the University of Paris II, and he joined the Asahi Shimbun in 1987. He has served as Paris bureau chief, editorial writer, editor-in-chief of GLOBE, and European bureau chief. He has held his current position since January 2024.



NOTES

i The idea of dividing contemporary populism into two periods was inspired by the following essay. Thibault Muzergues, *Postpopulisme: La nouvelle vague qui va secouer l'Occident* (Paris: Editions de l'Observatoire, 2024). For Muzergues's argument, see; Interviewed by Norito Kunisue "Trump, Meloni, Le Pen...Différences à l'ère post-populisme : Interview de Thibault Muzergues", RCAST Open Laboratory for Emergence Strategies, February 15, 2025, <https://roles.rcast.u-tokyo.ac.jp/publication/20250215> (accessed February 1, 2026).

ii Although their respective positions and perspectives may differ somewhat, the following major essays on populism all develop arguments consistent with this concept. Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Cas Mudde, Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Pascal Perrineau, *Le populisme* (Paris: Que sais-je?, 2021).

iii Orbán also served as prime minister from 1998 to 2002.

iv According to Henri Emmanuelli, former First Secretary (party leader) of the French Socialist Party, Francois Mitterrand, who served as President of France from 1981 to 1995, said that Jean-Marie Le Pen was "nothing to be afraid of." This was because Mitterrand was convinced that Le Pen only wanted to secure a place in the spotlight for himself and had no desire to hold power. Dominique Albertini, David Doucet, *Histoire du Front National* (Paris: Tallandier, 2013).

v In 2025, Le Pen was convicted of misappropriating party funds to pay for her parliamentary secretary while serving as a Member of the European Parliament, and her right to stand for election was suspended. Unless the conviction is overturned on appeal or there is a legal amendment granting her a de facto pardon, she will be unable to run for president. In that case, current party leader Jordan Bardella is expected to run as a kind of puppet candidate. As of 2025, Bardella has at times surpassed Le Pen in popularity.

vi Nicolas Hénin, *La France russe: Enquête sur les réseaux de Poutine* (Paris: Fayard, 2016).

vii Agathe Duparc, Karl Laske, and Marine Turchi, "Crimea, Russian loans and the Le Pens: the

- Kremlin's intriguing SMS messages", Mediapart, April 4, 2015, <https://www.mediapart.fr/en/journal/france/040415/crimea-russian-loans-and-le-pens-kremlins-intriguing-sms-messages> (accessed February 1, 2026); Romain Geoffroy, Maxime Vaudano, "Quels sont les liens de Marine Le Pen avec la Russie de Vladimir Poutine ?", *Le Monde*, April 20, 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2022/04/20/quels-sont-les-liens-de-marine-le-pen-avec-la-russie-de-vladimir-poutine_6122903_4355770.html (accessed February 1, 2026).
- viii Interview in Paris on May 13, 2015. For details on Chauprade's logic, See Aymeric Chauprade, *Chronique du choc des civilisations: Nouvelle Édition* (Paris: Éditions Chronique, 2013).
- ix Bernhard Odehnal, "Gipfeltreffen mit Putins fünfter Kolonne", *Tages-Anzeiger*, June 3, 2014, <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/gipfeltreffen-mit-putins-fuenfter-kolonne-335546606907> (accessed February 1, 2026).
- x 'Le Pen, "Oui, il faut aider à accueillir les réfugiés ukrainiens", RMC, February 25, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2IuvuL6f1k> (accessed February 1, 2026).
- xi Tetyana Vysotska, "French far-right politician Le Pen: Promising Ukraine NATO and EU membership is a big lie and risk for peace", *Ukrainska Pravda*, March 3, 2025, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/03/03/7501117/> (accessed February 1, 2026).
- xii "Guerre en Ukraine, en direct : le convoi humanitaire vers Marioupol espéré dans l'après-midi de lundi", *Le Monde*, April 12, 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/live/2022/03/13/guerre-en-ukraine-en-direct-washing-ton-avertit-pekin-de-consequences-en-cas-d-aide-a-la-russie-face-aux-sanctions-internationale_s_6117301_3210.html (accessed February 1, 2026).
- xiii "French far right chief Bardella vows he won't let 'Russian imperialism' absorb Ukraine", *Le Monde*, June 27, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2024/06/27/french-far-right-chief-bardella-vows-won-t-let-russian-imperialism-absorb-ukraine_6675991_7.html (accessed February 1, 2026).
- xiv Bardella advised Le Pen to distance himself from Putin, following the example of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who has taken a hard line against Russia, but Le Pen reportedly dismissed the suggestion. See Pierre-Stéphane Fort, *Le Grand remplaçant: La face cachée de Jordan Bardella*, (Paris: StudioFact, 2024).
- xv Political Capital, "The Russian connection: The spread of pro-Russian policies on the European far right", Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, March 14, 2014, https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_FlashReport_RussianConnection_140314.pdf (accessed February 1, 2026).
- xvi Muzergues, op.cit.
- xvii Nicolas Lebourg, Olivier Schmitt, *Paris-Moscou : Un siècle d'extrême droite* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2024).
- xviii Sanshiro Hosaka, "Epistemic Communities and 'Agents of Influence': Insights from Soviet Intelligence Documents", *Europe-Asia Studies* Volume 77, 2025 - Issue 2, March 3, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2025.2463399> (accessed February 1, 2026)
- xix Bruno Tertrais, Christian Lequesne, Gérard Araud, Nicolas Tenzer, Pierre Buhler, François Heisbourg, «Alors que le Kremlin menace notre sécurité, le RN propose la vassalisation de la

France vis-à-vis de la Russie», Le Figaro, July 5, 2025,
<https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/alors-que-le-kremlin-menace-notre-securite-le-rn-propos-e-la-vassalisation-de-la-france-vis-a-vis-de-la-russie-20240704> (accessed February 1, 2026).

xx Clara Hidalgo “Législatives 2024 : comment le Kremlin aurait tenté d’influencer le scrutin pour déstabiliser la France”, Le Figaro, July 3, 2024,
<https://www.lefigaro.fr/elections/legislatives/legislatives-2024-comment-le-kremlin-aurait-tente-d-influencer-le-scrutin-pour-destabiliser-la-france-20240703> (accessed February 1, 2026);
The survey results are as follows: David Chavalarias, “Minuit moins dix à l’horloge de Poutine”, HAL open science, August 29, 2024, <https://hal.science/hal-04629585v1> (accessed February 1, 2026).

xxi Lizzie Dearden, “U.K. Politician Admits Making Pro-Russia Statements in Return for Bribes”, The New York Times, September 26, 2025,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/26/world/europe/gill-russia-britain-bribery.html?smid=tw-share> (accessed February 1, 2026).

xxii Nette Nöstlinger, “Germany’s far-right AfD accused of gathering information for the Kremlin”, Politico, December 23, 2025,
<https://www.politico.eu/article/germanys-far-right-afd-accused-of-gathering-information-for-the-kremlin/> (accessed February 1, 2026).

xxiii Lebourg, Schmitt, op.cit.