
RUSSIA SEEKS TO INFLUENCE EUROPEAN POLITICS THROUGH YOUTH WINGS OF FAR-RIGHT AND FAR-LEFT PARTIES

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By Bellingcat (April 27, 2017)

Evidence suggests the Kremlin is reaching out to youth organizations, including the youth wings of European parties in order to work on goals such as campaigning to lift EU sanctions against Russia. Other youth groups have been targeted to help boost Russias image abroad. While these tactics are reminiscent of Soviet efforts to win the hearts and minds of Western youth, Russia has shown a readiness to work with groups across the political spectrum. This includes working with both the far-right AfD and with the far-left World Federation of Democratic Youth to host a large youth gathering set for later this year.

The Freedom for Europe Conference

The day after Donald Trumps inauguration, the Freedom for Europe conference was held in Germany. The conference was attended by the key European far-right leadership candidates like the Netherlands Gert Wilders, Frances Marine Le Pen and Frauke Petry of Germanys AfD. Russias Izvestia provided some of the earliest coverage in the run up to the conference. Izvestia spoke to the leader of AfDs Youth Wing, Markus Frohnmaier, recently married to a Russian journalist who has written articles for Izvestia on EU and German relations with Russia.

Izvestia suggested the main point of the conference was the the creation of a road map for the Alliance of Eurosceptics for year 2017.

But even though the conference was meant to have nothing to do with Russia, Frohnmaiers connections hint at Russias developing relationship with far-right parties, and they show Russia is paying attention to coming elections throughout Europe.

Frohnmaier connections to Russia

Last December, Frohnmaier had a meeting with Konstantin Petrichenko, head of international links of Vladimir Putins party United Russia and leaders from the youth organisation United Youth Front. During the same trip, Frohnmeier also met with Anton Morozov, Russian member of parliament and part of its committee for international affairs. United Youth Fronts Ksenia Shlyamina wrote on her Facebook page that the meeting was about perspective cooperation between Russia and Germany in terms of sanctions.

On its website, the United Youth Front outlines its projects. One of these is titled Europe: a new turn. This is described as a campaign to have dialogue between Russian politicians and representatives of youth wings of major European parties which campaign for the repeal of the

sanctions against the Russian Federation.

The United Youth Front describes itself as a public movement which campaigns in support of the policies of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. Ksenia and her husband Nikolai Shlyamin, who both run the United Youth Front had a number of meetings with Frohnmaier over the past year. Last July, the couple attended a conference hosted by the AfD's youth wing in Bingen Am Rhein, Germany. Shlyamina wrote one proposal from the conference was to create a common security zone with Russia instead of NATO: from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

Shlyamina has also mentioned that The United Youth Front and Frohnmaier agreed on the development of the project Ya Papa throughout the whole of Europe!. Ya Papa is described as a social project aiming to create a web portal and a number of clubs to assist young fathers. RT reported that Frohnmaier and others seemed interested in Russias approach to family values. According to German eurosceptic members of parliament Russia is an example of family politics, while in Germany there are problems in this regard. RT also announced that German Eurosceptic politicians agreed to translate the Ya papa site into English to make it accessible to Europeans.

But Russian officials have not limited their scope to Germanys AfD, a similar methodology has been used with the Freedom Party of Austria (FPO). Last December, it was reported that Russias ruling party and the Austrian nationalists signed an agreement, pledging to work together on youth, women, education, aid and other social organisations with the aim of strengthening the friendship and education of the young generation in the spirit of patriotism and joy of working.

Along with members of the OMF, Frohnmaier also met the international secretary of the Young Guard of United Russia, Daria Sharova in December 2016 in Moscow. The Young Guard of United Russia has also been instrumental in fostering links with between Russia and foreign youth movements.

Kaynak/Source: