

How Putin coordinates Russia's efforts to sow trouble in Europe

World

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From the European Council on Foreign Relations, Sep 1, 2017 Russia sees 'active measures' – actions of political warfare – as an essential part of its efforts to influence Europe. Such measures range from supporting populist parties through disinformation and espionage campaigns to fomenting an attempted coup in Montenegro. A ground-breaking new [report from the European Council on Foreign Relations](#) assesses the extent to which these campaigns are planned and co-ordinated – and, if so, by whom. It finds little evidence of a 'master plan' or centralised command-and-control system. Rather, the Kremlin sets the broad objectives of weakening the European Union and NATO, and distancing Europe and the United States from each other. These objectives are then pursued by a range of state and non-state actors eager to please the Kremlin, and occasionally reacted to and amplified by the government itself. This was the case in the infamous 2016 'Lisa Case' when initial social media reports from Germany were recycled in Russian media and later cited by Russia's foreign minister. Yet in other cases there is clearly more overt guidance. Presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov meets the editors of the main government media platforms in the Kremlin each Friday to outline the expected – demanded – lines and topics for the week ahead; 'troll farms' receive daily and weekly targets and talking points; and telegrams from MID guide the activities of Russia's embassies abroad. Furthermore, the intelligence services, which are granted considerable freedom of manoeuvre, work closely with the political leadership. When major campaigns are launched, they tend to involve a wide range of different instruments used in coordination. In 2016, for example, the Kremlin launched a campaign to try and ensure Finland would not join NATO. The tempo of hostile trolling and disinformation picked up strikingly; Putin hinted at retaliation if Helsinki made such moves; and hours after Finland signed a limited defence cooperation pact with the US, Russian warplanes made suspected incursions into Finnish airspace. Insofar as there is coordination and control, the report finds that the Presidential Administration is the crucial institution through which requests for approval for such major active measures operations are routed and from which orders are issued. First deputy chief of staff Alexei Gromov (under US and EU sanctions for his role in the 2014 annexation of Crimea) responsible for foreign and media affairs likely has a key role, but almost every division of the Presidential Administration is involved in one way or another. As such, the report recommends that observing the Presidential Administration ought to become a priority for European governments – requiring a significant investment in analytic capacity. Given that most of the actions it greenlights or retrospectively supports are the initiatives of specific actors – from businesspeople to corporations – then it ought to be a priority to identify and target those individuals, too. Beyond that, the report outlines the different tactical objectives Moscow is pursuing in each European country, depending on their institutional strength and exposure to Russia. As such, it is vital to appreciate that no 'one size fits all' response is appropriate, and building up institutional capacity is every bit as important to responding to Russian meddling as more direct measures such as investing in counter-intelligence

and pushing back against disinformation. Read the paper online: [Controlling Chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe](#) Download the pdf: [Controlling Chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe](#)