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HYBRID MEDDLING OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION: GOALS, AGENTS AND KREMLIN'S METHODS IN LATVIA

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1.

Introduction. The concept of the “natural” sphere of influence of the Russian Federation and the part the Baltic States play in this concept

When assessing any aspect of the policy of the Russian Federation, first of all, one must take into account that this state is a direct and organic continuation of the Soviet Union. According to the basic principles of international law, the Russian Federation is not even a successor state to the USSR. It is the USSR, which lost part of its territories, and changed its name and state symbols. The most striking proof of this fact is that the Russian Federation, without any additional procedures, inherited the Soviet nuclear arsenal, acquired the status of official nuclear power, and gained a permanent member seat in the UN Security Council.

At the same time, the ruling stratum of the Russian Federation remained Soviet. As Sergei Volkov, Doctor of Historical Sciences, notes in his research: “... Even by the time of the highest peak of 'democratic rule' - in the spring of 1993 (before the first elections of heads of administrations and before Yeltsin conceded to the opposition regarding the composition of the government), it is found that among the two hundred people who ruled the country at the time of the 'flourishing of democracy' (the top of the presidential apparatus, members of the Presidential Council, governments, “governors” and heads of legislative assemblies of “federal subjects”) three quarters (75%) were representatives of the old communist nomenklatura, and 9 out of 10 (90%) were communists. Subsequently, the “nomenklatura” nature of the higher administration increased even further (to the point that up to a dozen regions were headed not just by representatives of the nomenklatura, but even by the first secretaries of the same regional Communist Party committees). If you look at the composition of the leadership of the “power structures,” the diplomatic corps, the prosecutor's office, and other state bodies, then there have not been any changes at all: no new people who did not belong to the cadres of these structures before have appeared there, with a few exceptions. The composition of the scientific and cultural elite has remained unchanged.”¹

It should be especially noted that in the Russian Federation, in principle, lustration was not carried out, even among employees of the Soviet special services, even among those who worked in the units specializing in political investigation and political repression. (First of all, it was not carried out in the Fifth Main Directorate of the KGB of the USSR, which was engaged in “ideological sabotage.”)

¹ Волков С.В., «Советский истеблишмент»: <http://swolkov.org/sov/05.htm>

Under these conditions, it is quite natural that the foreign policy of the Russian Federation largely repeats the ideological and methodological guidelines inherited from the Soviet era and developed by the Soviet diplomatic and KGB schools.

From the moment of its inception and, formally, until the very end, the Soviet state was an “ideological power” which based its existence on the idea of an irreconcilable class struggle. The Declaration on the formation of the USSR formulated the ultimate goal of this statehood very clearly: “...it will serve as a faithful bulwark against world capitalism and as a new decisive step towards uniting the working people of all countries into the World Socialist Soviet Republic.”²

The ultimate goal was the seizure of power on a global scale, and the period between the formation of the USSR and the coming world revolution was regarded as a period of “respite.” However, the idea of a quick seizure of power on a worldwide scale revealed itself to be unrealistic already in the first years of Bolshevik power. Already in December 1925, Stalin declared: “...There was established a certain temporary balance of power between our country of socialism under construction and the countries of the capitalist world, a balance that determined the current phase of “peaceful cohabitation” between the Country of Soviets and the countries of capitalism. What we considered at one time as a short respite after the war turned into a whole period of respite.”³

Based on this, two fundamental principles of Soviet foreign policy crystallized:

- The confrontation between the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union and the capitalist world cannot end in any other way than the complete victory of one of the camps.
- At the same time, long periods of their peaceful coexistence are possible, “...while observing the principle of equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states.”⁴

Despite the fundamentally unavoidable confrontation, the second principle made it possible to build diplomatic relations within the framework of the “spheres of influence” logic, an approach which was customary for European diplomacy in the first half of the 20th century. It was this logic that formed the basis of Soviet foreign policy, which was later supplemented by the “Brezhnev doctrine,” i.e. the unofficial “right” of the USSR to interference, including by force, in the internal affairs of other states from within their “own” (socialist) sphere of influence. (The most striking example of this was the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968).

² Декларация и Договор об образовании Союза Советских Социалистических Республик: <https://doc.histrf.ru/20/deklaratsiya-i-dogovor-ob-obrazovanii-soyuza-sovetskikh-sotsialisticheskikh-respublik/>

³ Сталин И.В., «Политический отчет Центрального Комитета XIV съезду ВКП(б) 18 декабря 1925 г.». М.: Сочинения. Т. 7. Государственное издательство политической литературы, 1952. С. 261–352

⁴ Сталин И.В. «Ответы на вопросы группы редакторов американских газет»: https://www.marxists.org/russkij/stalin/t16/t16_34.htm

Post-Soviet or neo-Soviet diplomacy of the Russian Federation dropped the idea of an irreparable contradiction between different “systems,” but at the same time, in general, continues to think and operate with the concept of “spheres of influence.” A typical example of this logic was the recent article by the former president, and now the deputy chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Medvedev, “Why contacts with the current Ukrainian leadership are meaningless.” His statement about the Ukrainian authorities is quite typical: “...it makes no sense for us to deal with the vassals. Business must be done with the overlord.”⁵ From the point of view of the ruling stratum of the Russian Federation, international relations are structured hierarchically, and here there are “legitimate” and “natural” spheres of influence, “suzerains” and “vassals.”

If in the days of the Soviet Union the “people's democracies” of Eastern Europe were the “legal” vassal territory, the territory of the former USSR is considered as such. From the first days of the existence of the independent Russian Federation, the Kremlin was making attempts to reintegrate it. This included quite radical attempts (the project of the Union State of Russia and Belarus). At the same time, those countries whose political elites are trying to leave the “sphere” can be effectively controlled through so-called frozen conflicts.

Initially, President Yeltsin’s administration began implementing this method. In conflicts in Transnistria it blocked the rapprochement of Moldova and Romania. In South Ossetia, it destabilized the nationalist government of Georgia under Zviad Gamsakhurdia which was unconnected with the Soviet nomenklatura and negatively disposed towards reintegration. Even within the CIS), being “frozen” due to the intervention of Russian troops has become an effective method of pressure on “unreliable” post-Soviet states.

In some cases, full-fledged military intervention was possible within the framework of a proxy conflict. (In the civil war in Tajikistan, representatives of the old Soviet nomenklatura were able to hold out thanks, among other things, to the military support of Moscow.)

Subsequently, Putin used this model of hybrid intervention against Georgia in 2008 and against Ukraine in 2014.

In general, conceptually, the attitude of the Russian Federation, especially during the rule of Vladimir Putin, toward the countries of the former USSR repeats the Brezhnev doctrine concerning the “people's democracies” of Eastern Europe.

⁵ Д.А. Медведев, «Почему бессмысленны контакты с нынешним украинским руководством». <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5028300#id2123318>

With this approach, in the eyes of Moscow, the Baltic states inevitably acquire the status of being “illegally” torn away from the neo-Soviet zone of influence, a kind of enemy outpost. The most problematic, from the point of view of the Russian authorities, are the following:

- Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia are former Soviet republics, which at the same time deny any form of state-legal succession from the Soviet Union. They regard their stay in the USSR as a period of occupation. Moreover, this approach has always been shared by the United States of America, which recorded its rejection of the annexation of the Baltic republics to the USSR in the Welles Declaration in 1940. De jure, the United States has always recognized their independence, and diplomatic missions of independent Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia operated on American territory. It was not only the American government that adhered to this position. Over 50 countries recognized the independence of Latvia de jure.⁶
- Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have been members of the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) since 2004. According to the logic of “spheres of influence,” they belong not only to an alien but also to a hostile camp.
- The legal and political concept of the Soviet occupation inevitably destroys one of the main narratives of neo-Soviet propaganda during the rule of Vladimir Putin, a narrative about the exclusively “liberating” nature of the USSR's actions in Eastern Europe during World War II. Over the past ten years or so, when the Russian authorities have been deliberately betting on ideological re-Sovietisation, among other things, this state of affairs has become especially painful.
- Practical considerations of a military (defensive) order take into account the existence of a common border with NATO member states, especially in connection with the aggravation of relations with the Alliance after the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in southeastern Ukraine.

Within the framework of the concept of the neo-Soviet “sphere of influence,” the combination of these factors makes the Baltic region a particularly problematic region for the authorities of the Russian Federation, a state of affairs which must somehow be brought to the “norm.”

2.

Latvia as a “weak link” in the theory and practice

⁶ “Par Latvijas Republikas neatkarības atjaunošanu”. 4.05.1990: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=75539&mode=DOC>

of the Kremlin's hybrid expansion

The Russian authorities consider Latvia to be a “weak link” in the Baltic states due to the following social, economic, political, and geographical reasons:

- By the time of the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Soviet occupation in Latvia, as well as in Estonia, there was a very large Russian community. At the same time, the majority of ethnic Russians (as well as Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russian-speakers of other peoples of the USSR) had moved here already during the occupation. So, if before 1940, the percentage of Russians was about 10%, then by 1990, there were already 34% Russians; one should also take into account mainly Russian-speaking Belarusians (4.5%) and Ukrainians (3.5%)⁷. In total, during the occupation, about 1.5 million people moved to Latvia. The percentage of Latvians in the total mass of the population, according to official data, decreased from 77% in 1935 to 52% in 1989.⁸

Such a social structure of the local Russian-speaking community in large part sympathetic to the USSR and bearers of Soviet identity created favorable preconditions for the development of pro-Kremlin activities.

- It was in Latvia that one of the main oil export ports of the USSR was located - the port of Ventspils. The transit of oil cargoes (and transit in general), providing extremely high profits in the nineties, became the lever of economic pressure that made it possible to support people from the Soviet nomenklatura inside Latvia. It is characteristic that one of the most famous and most influential Latvian oligarchs, consistently speaking from anti-American positions, had been the long-serving head of Ventspils since Soviet times and a representative of the communist nomenklatura, Aivars Lembergs.
- Lustration in Latvia was limited and affected only the KGB employees. The top of the Communist Party has successfully integrated into both the political and business elite of the independent Republic of Latvia (and, possibly, in some cases, has become the core of such an elite).

⁷ К.О. Иванов, «Этническая структура населения Латвии». Псковский государственный университет. https://arch.pskgu.ru/projects/pgu/storage/prj/prj_12/prj_12_08.pdf

⁸ Министерство иностранных дел Латвийской республики: «Этнический состав, сохранение и развитие культурной идентичности национальных меньшинств». <https://www2.mfa.gov.lv/ru/novosti/integraciya-obshchestva-v-latvii/etnicheskij-sostav-sohranenie-i-razvitie-kulturnoj-identichnosti-nacionalnyh-menshinstv?>

- It was in Latvia, unlike in Estonia and Lithuania, where the national oligarchy was formed. There are three major oligarchs: Aivars Lembergs, Ainārs Šlesers, and Andris Šķēle. All of them have commercial and even political connections with the Russian Federation.
- Economically, Latvia is the least successful Baltic country and one of the poorest countries in the European Union. This situation, in turn, inevitably increases social tension and gives rise to the activities of opposition forces of any kind.
- The geographical position of Latvia is such that the implementation of hybrid control over it by the Russian Federation will destruct the Baltic States as a whole; land connections between Lithuania and Estonia would be under threat, and Estonia could be completely blocked on land.

Due to this situation, it is Latvia that is the mainstream area of activity for the special services of the Russian Federation in the Baltic States, and it is through Latvia that many of their special operations are carried out, including those that may have access to the EU and NATO countries outside the region.

3.

Human resources and socio-political basis of the pro-Kremlin forces

We can distinguish the following groups as a kind of personnel reserve from which both the agents of influence of the Russian Federation and the agents of the Kremlin's special services are recruited:

1. Agents of the Soviet KGB, recruited back in the Soviet period (in particular, during Perestroika, in 1986-91). Many of them subsequently had significant careers in politics and business.
2. Agents of the FSB and SVR of the Russian Federation, recruited later.
3. Nomenklatura of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Komsomol. Despite the ban of the Communist Party, many of its former high-ranking members have also made careers in politics and business. Moreover, the skills they acquired, as well as the contacts they developed, made it especially easy for them to build business contacts in the Russian Federation and other countries of the former USSR.

4. Chekist corporation - KGB veterans who remained in Latvia and took influential positions in the business community, non-political associations, and, presumably, in organized crime.
5. Representatives of the younger generation of Latvian politicians and businessmen who have formed around such nomenklatura figures.
6. Leadership and activists of the so-called “Russian” (in reality, pro-Kremlin) parties. Such structures often have formalized ties with the Russian Federation. Thus, the largest and most successful political party of this kind, Saskaņa (Harmony), had an official agreement with United Russia until 2017.
7. Leadership and activists of “Russian” (neo-Soviet) socio-political and “cultural” organizations associated with the Russian Federation, in particular, through the Coordinating Councils of Compatriots and other structures of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, formally independent non-profit organizations, etc.
8. Pro-Kremlin-oriented representatives of the journalistic community, primarily those working in Russian-language media and with a Russian-speaking audience.

It is these circles - relatively numerous in Latvia and, to some extent, in Estonia - that are the main suppliers of “recruits” for the needs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the special services of the Russian Federation.

Individuals, groups, and organizations, which we mention as further examples of representatives of the pro-Kremlin forces and agents of influence, have not been exposed in most cases, and therefore our claim is just an assumption. However, there exists extensive factual material.

Possible KGB agents

The database of former KGB agents of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR), published in 2018, is deliberately incomplete. Besides, the agents’ index cards at our disposal, in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Latvia, are not even legal evidence of the fact of cooperation with the KGB. It is on this formal basis that, as a rule, persons mentioned in the declassified KGB file of the LSSR file their lawsuits with a demand to officially refute the very fact of their cooperation with Soviet state security.

Nevertheless, the mentioning of certain people on the index cards, especially in combination with their connections and subsequent professional and political pursuits, deserves

Subsequently, he built a political career as the head of the Association for the Support of Russian Schools and was elected from the pro-Kremlin parties (such as the Harmony Center and the Harmony Party) as a member of the Latvian Saeima of the 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, and 13th convocations (and he is still a member of the parliament)¹².

An example of the activity of a supposed KGB agent not only in the political, but also in the financial and economic sphere, is the area where the interests of various pro-Kremlin figures intersect, Valery Belokon. Presumably, he was recruited by the 5th department of the KGB (political police, “the fight against ideological sabotage”) on October 9, 1987, with the operational pseudonym Myachikov¹³.

1-883

Псевдоним Мячиков

1. Фам. Белоконь № 2.3306 № _____
 личн. дела архива

2. Имя Валерий Катег. освет

3. Отч. Валерьевич Когда заверб. 6 октбр. 1987 г.

4. Год рожд. 1960 Дата рожд. 14.02 Кем заверб. М.В.Климан
 фамилия

5. Место рожд. г. Рига « 5 » отдел « 6 » отделение
 орган КГБ ЛССР

6. Адрес Рига, ул. Кривиню 5а-144 Оформить личное дело и
 взять на учет

7. Место работы и должность редакция журн. «Советская Молодежь» г. Рига Нач. [подпись] отдела

8. Парг. эл. КПСС [подпись] подпись

9. Нац. украинск 10. Гражд. СССР [подпись] фамилия

11. Образов. среднее Алфавитная карточка, форма 3

1-883.98

12. Сведения о движении личного дела

Дата	Отметки	Дата	Отметки
9.10.87.	5 отдел		

13. Сведения о движении рабочего дела и его архивный номер

Subsequently, he achieved success in the banking business. Now he is a chairman of the Council and a shareholder of the Baltic International Bank.¹⁴ Valery Belokon financially supported¹⁵ the Russian-language media, Open City, which regularly published his interviews. The editor of this media, Tatiana Fast, ran to become a member of the Riga City Council from the party Honor to Serve Riga, allied to the pro-Kremlin Harmony, in 2000. He also published the Russian-language newspapers Respublika and Telegraph. In 2008, Belokon, according to media reports,¹⁶ sold Telegraph to the Cypriot company Kinonon Holdings Limited.

¹² https://titania.saeima.lv/personal/deputati/saeima13_depweb_public.nsf/depArchive.html?ReadForm&unid=CE9D2E3A1EDC54F5C22583320029E460&url=../CE9D2E3A1EDC54F5C22583320029E460?OpenDocument&lang=LV

¹³ <https://kgb.arhivi.lv/dokumenti/vdk/agenti/alfabetiski/14#&gid=1&pid=13>

¹⁴ <https://www.bib.eu/ru/valeriy-belokon>

¹⁵ http://www.baltic-course.com/rus/drugie_otrasli/?doc=25613&ins_print

¹⁶ <https://rus.delfi.lv/biznes/bnews/telegraf-prodan-kiprskoj-kompanii.d?id=22136159&all=true>

According to media reports, Belokon's closest circle includes Yuri Shabashov, a former KGB officer of the LSSR, now a major businessman with stable ties with the oligarch Šlesers, as well as a prominent representative of the pro-Kremlin forces, Arnolds Babris. The last is the former head of the economic security department of the Satversmes Protection Bureau (Satversmes aizsardzības birojs, SAB), one of the Latvian special services.¹⁷ (See below for details.)

Псевдоним ИТАГЕИО

1. Фам. Кудряшова
 2. Имя Александр
 3. Отч. Иванович
 4. Год рожд. 1939 Дата рожд. 3 окт
 5. Место рожд. Фрейлянский р-ч
 6. Адрес в Рига, ул Курьева 69-59
 7. Место работы и должность Служба правительственной связи
 8. Парт. С/п
 9. Нап. русский 10. Гражд. СССР
 11. Образов. Высшее

№ лич. дела 20765 № архива _____
 Катег. агент
 Когда заверб. 26.01 1976 г.
 Кем заверб. Иванов А.И. фамилия
5 отдел 4 отделение
КГБ МВБ КГБ СССР
 орган

Оформить личное дело и
 взять на учет
Ван Нач. Иванов отдела
 и-к _____
 подпись С.В. Зубов
 фамилия

Алфавитная карточка, форма 3

C-800

12. Сведения о движении личного дела
 13. Сведения о движении рабочего дела и его архивный номер

Дата	Отметки	Дата	Отметки
18.01.84 г.	-5 отдел		

There is also an old and stable connection between Belokon and Babris. It can be assumed that information about the agent's past helped Babris become a business partner of Belokon as well as a comrade in political work immediately after his dismissal. In 2004, together they created the Conservative Party from which they ran for the European Parliament,¹⁸ although Babris¹⁹ himself denied his active participation in the political project.²⁰ Belokon called Latvia's accession to the European Union “a pure sale of Latvia's independence, and at a very low price.”²¹

At the same time, the activity of the alleged former KGB agents in Latvia is not limited to politics or commerce in its purest form. In fact, they can be found operating in all spheres of society including, for example, religious organizations. Thus, the current

¹⁷ <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/analitika/analitika/v-arhivah-kgb-tolko-kartoteki-i-neponjatno-kto-realno-bil-agentom-diskussija.a266253/>

¹⁸ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=9137>

¹⁹ <https://mixnews.lv/latviya/2010/03/27/sozdana-novaya-partiya-za-prezidentskuyu-respubliku-dopolneno/>

²⁰ «Как пишет Телеграф.lv, инициатором создания партии стала группа предпринимателей, которую координирует председатель правления ООО Aģēna Rīga и АО Brīvais Vilnis Арнольд Бабрис. Фамилию Бабриса часто связывают с именем банкира и издателя Валерия Белоконого. Так, когда Белоконый создал Консервативную партию, то он позвал в нее Арнольда Бабриса. Бабрис баллотировался в Сейм в списке Консервативной партии, а после провала на выборах возглавил принадлежащее Белоконому АО Brīvais Vilnis. Сам Бабрис отрицает свое активное участие в политическом объединении. «У меня сейчас слишком много рабочих проектов. Но в случае необходимости я буду готов уделить время партии», — говорит он».

²¹ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=9129>

economic, cultural and even religious life of Latvia, and their activities objectively correspond to the goals of the Russian Federation.

Oligarchs and former nomenklatura of the Komsomol and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

As in all countries of the former USSR, the former Soviet party and Komsomol nomenklatura became the operational nucleus, a kind of crystallization point for the emergence of an oligarchic stratum. Aivars Lembergs can rightfully be called a reference example in Latvia.

From 1978, Lembergs was a Communist Party employee of the Ventspils City and District Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia, rising from an instructor to a district committee secretary. Then he worked for a short time in the apparatus of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania, and in 1988, he headed the Ventspils City Executive Committee.²⁶ From that time until 2019, he was the de facto head of Ventspils, a large port through which the USSR and subsequently the Russian Federation exported oil. At the same time, he was also doing business, officially topping the list of the richest people in Latvia in 2009.²⁷

After the restoration of independence, Lembergs, being one of the de facto leaders of the Union of Greens and Peasants (ZZS), positioned himself as a politician of national-conservative views. At the same time, he consistently opposed Latvia's accession to the EU and NATO and repeatedly made harsh anti-American statements.²⁸ He is a supporter of Latvia's participation in the construction of Nord Stream-2, and he described the refusal of the Latvian government to support this project as “a betrayal of national interests.”²⁹

He repeatedly became involved in scandals related to possible corruption in political circles (“the case of the Lembergs scholarships,” “the case of the oligarchs”).³⁰ In 2019, he came under the sanctions of the US Treasury Department on the basis of the Magnitsky Act.³¹

²⁶ <https://www.kompromat.lv/index.php?docid=personnel&id=48>

²⁷ <https://www.apollo.lv/5525860/publicets-jaunais-latvijas-bagatako-cilveku-saraksts>

²⁸ О США: <http://www.aivarslebergs.lv/al/2009/04/14/latvijas-cena/> ; О НАТО: <http://www.aivarslebergs.lv/al/2013/05/03/ложные-цели-нам-не-нужны-02-05-2013/> ; О еврозоне: <http://www.aivarslebergs.lv/al/2011/02/16/нам-нужны-тысячи-лужков-суббота-16-02-2011/>.

²⁹ <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/politika/mer-ventspilsa-otkaz-uchastvovat-v-nord-stream-2--vreditelstvo.a233665/>

³⁰ <https://ir.lv/2012/02/27/aivars-lebergs/#s71>

³¹ <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-50729930>

(To date, this is the first and only case in which the Magnitsky Act sanctions have been applied to the mayor of an EU and NATO city.)

At the moment, Lembergs is under arrest.³² He considers himself a political prisoner and compares his case with the case of Navalny.³³

Ainārs Šlesers is an example of an oligarch whose career took shape after the end of the Soviet occupation, and at the same time, it is closely associated with the pro-Kremlin forces. He earned his first capital in the early 1990s. Then he was the head and co-owner of several enterprises. In 1998, he was elected to the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia from the New Party, and in 1998-1999, he served as an Acting Minister of Economy. In 2002, he was elected to the Saeima from the Latvian First Party, where he served as a deputy of the Prime Minister and Minister of Railways. In 2006, he was again elected to the Saeima, where he became the Minister of Railways; in August 2007, he became co-chairman of the Latvian First Party / Latvian Way (LPP / LP) association.³⁴ In 2010, he was elected to the Saeima from the For a Better Latvia association.³⁵

In 2009, Šlesers took part in the municipal elections in Riga, through which the LPP / LP, headed by him, successfully entered the Riga City Council, where it joined in coalition with the pro-Kremlin Harmony (Saskaņa) party. Šlesers himself received the post of vice-mayor. During the same period, speaking on behalf of the city leadership of Riga, he signed a protocol of intent (in January 2010) on the construction of a gambling center on the banks of the Daugava river. The project was to be implemented by SIA P.V.B. with a registered capital of 2000 lats (approximately four thousand euros), and the only member of the board of P.V.B. was a retired employee of the KGB LSSR Yuri Shabashov. Another co-owner of this company was Baltic Strategic Security Alliance, co-owner of which was Arnolds Babris.³⁶

Another example of the supposed stable connection between Šlesers and the KGB community is Euro Rail Trans, created with the participation of Russian Railways-Logistics. According to Šlesers' plan (who, after the dissolution of the Saeima and several scandals, moved away from direct participation in politics), the company was supposed to compete for traffic flows to the Kaliningrad region, etc. According to the information portal CrediWeb, the true

³² <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/proisshestvija/lemberts-uzhe-v-trety-raz-pitaetsja-dobitsja-osvobozhdenija.a423363/>

³³ <https://rus.tvnet.lv/7185880/v-prigovore-suda-lemberts-uzmotrel-scenarij-navalnogo>

³⁴ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=personnel&id=4>

³⁵ <https://www.cvk.lv/lv/velesanas/saeimas-velesanas/10-saeimas-velesanas/10-saeima-ieveletie-deputati>

³⁶ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=5662>

beneficiary of this company is Ivars Sormulis, through the Cyprus-registered DAMORO HOLDINGS LIMITED (Karaiskaki 13, 3032, Lemesos, Cyprus).

Истинные выгодополучатели	
Имя, Фамилия	Ivars Sormulis, [REDACTED] с 19.07.2021, Страна проживания: Латвия, Национальность: Латвия
Вид контроля: на основе права собственности	Контроль через: - DAMORO HOLDINGS LIMITED, Karaiskaki 13, 3032, Lemesos, Cyprus
Вид контроля: на основе права собственности	Контроль через: - DAMORO HOLDINGS LIMITED, Karaiskaki 13, 3032, Lemesos, Cyprus
Хозяйственная деятельность	
Отрасль (NACE 2)	49.20 Грузовой железнодорожный транспорт

This name coincides with the name of the representative of the famous Ventspils family of Sormulis. The father, Imants Sormulis (Imant Rudolfovich Sormulis) headed the Ventspils city department of the KGB. Both he and his children, Ansis and Ivars Sormulis, were part of the inner circle of Lembergs, including Ansis, who was a defendant in one of the criminal cases together with Lembergs.³⁷

	Телефоны			
	ОС, МОС, ПМС, ПР.	Внутрен.	Городской ж. д.	Домашний Дачный
ВЕНТСПИЛССКИЙ ГОРОТДЕЛ				
СОРМУЛИС Имант Рудольфович	МОС-42-(25)		24050 ж. д. 0382222	69222
ПУИДА Ян Янович			24440	
МАРШАЛОВ Александр Степанович	МОС-42-(27)		24372	21687
Секретарь			22056	69166
Оперсостав			22640 23479 22119	
Дежурный горотдела	МОС-42-(27)		22056 ж. д. 0382276	
ЛАУГАВПИЛССКИЙ				

³⁷ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=6819>

Currently, Šlesers is trying to use the so-called covid dissident protest to form his new party Latvia First, while advocating “constructive, like Finland's” relations with the Russian Federation. (For more details, see the corresponding section).

A striking example of how representatives of the nomenklatura actively participated (and, in fact, brought under control) the Latvian media community was the case of Peteris Šmidre. In his own words, he worked in the party and Komsomol structures, where “I did what I liked... did what I wanted and how I wanted...”.³⁸ After the restoration of independence, he became a successful businessman (millionaire) heading the Baltcom TV company. He was also very active in the social and political sphere. He became the president of the Latvian Telecommunications Association and also served on the board of the Latvian Chess Federation. In 2014, according to media reports, he actively lobbied a prominent functionary of the Russian regime, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov presumably. Thanks to Šmidre's efforts, the Latvian Chess Federation supported Ilyumzhinov in the elections of the President of the International Chess Federation (FIDE) and not his opponent, Garry Kasparov.³⁹

Šmidre publicly spoke out against the sanctions imposed by the Latvian authorities against the Kremlin's propaganda media outlets.⁴⁰ In 2018, he took part in the solemn celebration of the centenary of the founding of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth Union (Komsomol) held in Riga in the House of Moscow, but he did not advertise this fact himself.⁴¹

The communist and Komsomol nomenklatura became the socio-political and economic nucleus around which a Russian-oriented oligarchy was formed, and the adjacent commercial, media and political lobby are unambiguously pro-Kremlin. As a rule, veterans of the CPSU and the Komsomol have connections in the Russian Federation dating back from their youth, and it is these connections that can be both the source of their financial success and a means of pressure, thanks to which they turn into agents of Moscow influence.

Chekist corporation and persons associated with it

³⁸ <https://mixnews.lv/exclusive/2018/04/20/biznesmen-o-sovetskom-proshlom-upreknut-skazhu-idite-nafig-by-la-otli4naya-zhizn/>

³⁹ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=8213>

⁴⁰ <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20160820/2646670.html>

⁴¹ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=9100>

The legislation of the Republic of Latvia prohibits former employees and agents of the KGB of the USSR from running in national and municipal elections.⁴² However, in practice, it is very difficult to prove the fact of an agent's cooperation with the State Security Committee. As already noted, even an agent card, according to the norms of Latvian law, is not legally sufficient evidence. For this reason, arguably, a significant number of such agents escaped lustration.

The exposed personnel of the LSSR KGB, though being excluded from the official politics, directed their energy into the commercial and public sphere, where they achieved significant success.

The benchmark for this success is Juris Savickis. In the past, he was a KGB colonel who, in his words, served “only in intelligence” (that is, in the elite First Main Directorate of the KGB of the USSR), including in the GDR. He denies his acquaintance with Putin, although he notes that he worked with him “along the same line.”⁴³ After the restoration of independence, Savickis made a brilliant career; he is the Deputy Chairman of the Board of Latvijas Gaze.⁴⁴ (The largest shareholder of Latvijas Gaze was and remains Gazprom, which owns 34% of the shares)⁴⁵, as well as the President of the Council of the sports club Dinamo Riga.⁴⁶ The role of the patron of the arts and sports helps him to establish contacts among the Latvian elite. So, the first president of Latvia (after the end of the Soviet occupation), Guntis Ulmanis, is on the Board of Dinamo Riga headed by him.⁴⁷ Savickis’s friendly circle also includes the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Latvia after the restoration of independence, later MEP Ivars Godmanis and his wife, former Interior Minister Ilze Pētersone-Godmane. (She was forced to leave her post after she was deprived of access to state secrets.)⁴⁸ The former head of the state police, Ints Ķuzis, also has friendly relationships with Savickis, so much so that they even managed to dance together.⁴⁹

⁴² “Saeimas vēlēšanu likums” <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/35261-saeimas-velesanu-likums> ; “Pašvaldības domes vēlēšanu likums” <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/57839-pasvaldibas-domes-velesanu-likums>

⁴³ http://www.baltic-course.com/rus/business_people/?doc=1838

⁴⁴ <https://lg.lv/ru/par-mums/management/juris-savickis>

⁴⁵ <https://lg.lv/ru/o-nas/akcionery>

⁴⁶ <https://www.dinamoriga.lv/ru/klub/rukovodstvo-kluba>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ <https://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/ohota-yahty-i-vakcina-ot-raka-chem-sejchas-zanimayutsya-12-byvshih-premerov-latvii.d?id=49693559&page=1>

⁴⁹ <https://bnn-news.ru/druzhba-kyuzisa-s-saviczkisom-ne-pomeha-novomu-edinstvu-startovat-nim-na-vyborah-v-dumu-228226>

If Juris Savickis is a classic representative of the neo-Soviet KGB elite with strong ties in the Russian Federation and Europe as well as to the Latvian establishment, then an example of a KGB veteran of the middle level, along with the aforementioned Imants Sormulis, is Yuri Shabashov. In the past, he was an employee of the 2nd department (counterintelligence), where he was on the “American direction.”⁵⁰ After the restoration of independence, he also turned out to be very successful in business. So, in 1995, he created SIA LAT-VEST-IST,⁵¹ which took part in organizing oil exports from the Russian Federation; Yuri Shabashov became the general director of this company. Transshipment of oil products was carried out through the port of Ventspils.⁵² Apparently, it was this activity that laid the foundations for the financial well-being of the retired security officer.

It is characteristic that Arnolds Babris appears in a few projects implemented by Shabashov. He is not a former Chekist, but he managed to work in the special services of independent Latvia; he was the head of the economic security department of the Constitution Protection Bureau. After his dismissal, Babris consistently spoke from pro-Kremlin positions, in particular, and the Kremlin's propaganda media Sputnik often referred to him. He also tried to participate in official politics together with the alleged former KGB agent Belokon.⁵³ As a rule, Babris positioned himself as a conservative politician who favors “constructive” relations with the Russian Federation.

In 2020, Babris returned to public politics, as one of the de facto leaders of the covid dissident protest, at the same time actively promoting rapprochement with the Russian Federation along the lines of Finland. (For more details, see the corresponding section).

In general, it can be argued that the Russian Federation has a huge personnel base in Latvia from among the former nomenklatura of the CPSU and Komsomol, former employees and agents of the KGB, as well as political, commercial, non-profit and religious structures

⁵⁰ Борис Карпичков, бывший сотрудник КГБ: «Юрик Шабашов сначала, до своего прихода во 2-й отдел, 1-е ("американское") отделение (бессменным начальником которого вплоть до своего ухода на пенсию в 1990-м являлся Володя Комогорцев, параллельно занимавший пост зам начальника 2-го отдела "конторы") работал в "семерке" - был самым обычным "топтуном". Затем Шабашов отличился - задержал во время ведения наружного наблюдения, вооруженного криминала, который вообще не был объектом. Все случилось спонтанно - Юрик ехал за объектом на трамвае (в одном и том же), и случайно заметил находящегося в розыске по линии уголовного розыска бандюгана. Будучи парнем далеко не хилым (Шабашов по праву считался в "конторе" одним из лучших "рукопашников" - оттуда и пошла его дружба с теперь уже покойным Сергеем Генераловым) в одиночку скрутил криминала». (<https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=9129>)

Сергей Генералов, другой ветеран КГБ ЛССР также был одним из учредителей SIA LAT-VEST-IST, впоследствии убит. (<https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=1461>)

⁵¹ <https://company.lursoft.lv/lat-vest-ist/40003004042>

⁵² <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=1193>

⁵³ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=9129>

controlled by them. Besides, these persons base their support on the massive community of pro-Kremlin-minded Russian-speakers. For example, in the Russian “presidential elections” in 2018 in Latvia, 95% of the citizens of the Russian Federation living there voted for Vladimir Putin.⁵⁴ For a long time, the Kremlin has maintained this base of potential and actual agents of influence economically through access to oil and gas surplus profits. At the same time, formal ideological and political affiliation or ethnicity did not play any role. We see both ethnic Russians and Latvians in this environment and representatives of other ethnic groups, both “apolitical” patrons and frontmen of “Russian” parties as well as Latvian “national conservatives.” However, behind the facade of political and national contradictions, we find stable ties backed, first of all, by common financial interests.

Taking into account all these facts, we can assume that the pro-Kremlin lobby in Latvia is more massive, ramified, influential and echeloned than in any other country of the European Union.

4.

Pro-Kremlin forces in official Latvian politics

Determining the circle of pro-Kremlin political parties in the modern Republic of Latvia, we, first of all, must abandon the generally accepted ethnic criterion, i.e. their division into “Latvian” and “Russian” ones (and, accordingly, the initial inclusion of “Russian” parties among the pro-Kremlin and the exclusion of “Latvian” parties from this list.) The social and political activity of ethnic and confessional minorities is not only normal in itself, but also necessary for any legal society. On the other hand, the above facts clearly indicate that not only non-Russian politicians and businessmen can act in the interests of the Kremlin in Latvia, but even those among them who are officially considered conservatives and Latvian nationalists.

For this reason, we consider only those among them who consistently act in the interests of the Russian Federation both in Latvia and at the level of the European Union.

From this point of view, the undisputed flagship of pro-Kremlin politics in Latvia is the Social Democratic Party Harmony (Saskaņa). It began in 1994 as a social democratic and center-left Party of People's Harmony. One of its goals was officially “stronger cooperation with Russia.” The head of the party is Jānis Urbanovičs, formerly the first secretary of the Komsomol

⁵⁴ <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/abroad/global/za-predelami-rossii-za-putina-progolosovali-84-izbiratelej-v-latvii-95.d?id=77469797>

of Latvia.⁵⁵ Then, the Harmony Center coalition was created on its basis, with the same left-wing agenda. In the elections to the Saeima in 2006, it managed to take 17 seats.⁵⁶ It is significant that at that time their partner, elected with them on the same list, was the Latvian Socialist Party, headed by Alfrēds Rubiks (the last head of the Latvian Communist Party who was convicted and served prison time after the restoration of independence). The LSP is a Marxist organization, de facto successor of the banned Communist Party of Latvia.⁵⁷

The party achieved its first significant success in 2009, when the Harmony Center managed to take the first place in the elections in Riga with the support of the Latvian First Party / Latvian Way of Ainārs Šlesers to get the mayor's seat, taken by Nils Ušakovs.⁵⁸ This gave the party control over the capital, the largest city not only politically but also the socio-economic center of Latvia, as well as over the Port of Riga.

In the 2010 elections to the Saeima, the Harmony Center won 29 seats, taking first place in terms of the number of seats among parliamentary parties in Latvia.⁵⁹ In all subsequent elections, the Harmony held this position but never could enter the coalition.

In 2009, the Harmony entered into a cooperation agreement with the United Russia Party.⁶⁰ In 2017, it announced that this agreement had been terminated back in 2015 in connection with the entry of the Harmony into the Party of European Socialists (PES).⁶¹ The almost two-year pause before the disclosure of this fact can be explained by the expected sharply negative reactions from the party electorate. On the other hand, after the annexation of Crimea and the war unleashed by the Russian Federation in southeastern Ukraine, such an agreement caused serious damage to the party's image in Latvia, the EU, and NATO.

At the same time, the Harmony faction continues to vote in the Saeima in the interests of the Kremlin on issues that are painful for the Russian authorities. So, in 2018, during the voting on sanctions in the Magnitsky case, the Harmony MPs were the only ones who voted against

⁵⁵ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=personnel&id=3>

⁵⁶ <https://saskana.eu/ru/o-nas/>

⁵⁷ <http://socparty.lv/ru/party/history/>

⁵⁸ <https://lenta.ru/news/2009/07/01/mayor/>

⁵⁹ <https://saskana.eu/ru/o-nas/>

⁶⁰ https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2014/10/141005_ru_s_latvia_election_results

⁶¹ <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/politika/ushakov-u-soglasija-bolshe-net-dogovora-s-edinoy-rossiey.a252980/>

them (some also abstained, one voted for).⁶² During the voting on the resolution in support of the director Oleg Sentsov, arrested in the Russian Federation, the Harmony faction abstained in its entirety.⁶³

Balsošanas rezultāti

par 60, pret 7, atturas 3

Datums: 08.02.2018 13:52:19

Balsošanas motīvs: Par aicinājumu noteikt sankcijas Sergeja Magnitska lietā iesaistītajām personām (668/Lm12)

Grupēt: pēc balsojuma rezultāta alfabētiskā kārtībā

Vārds	Frakcija	Balss	Vārds	Frakcija	Balss
PAR: 60			PRET: 7		
1. Hosams Abu Meri	VIENOTĪBA	Par	43. Imants Parādnieks	VL-TB/LNNK	Par
2. Aldis Adamovičs	VIENOTĪBA	Par	44. Renārs Putniņš	VIENOTĪBA	Par
3. Ringolds Balodis		Par	45. Edgars Putra	ZZS	Par
4. Aija Barča	ZZS	Par	46. Romualds Ražuks	VIENOTĪBA	Par
5. Andris Bērziņš	ZZS	Par	47. Jānis Ruks	LRA	Par
6. Gaidis Bērziņš	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	48. Inguna Rībena	VL-TB/LNNK	Par
7. Augusts Brigmanis	ZZS	Par	49. Andris Siliņš	ZZS	Par
8. Ivars Brīvers	LRA	Par	50. Valdis Skujiņš	ZZS	Par
9. Andris Buikis	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	51. Veiko Spolītis	VIENOTĪBA	Par
10. Boriss Čilevičs	SASKAŅA	Par	52. Laimdota Straujuma	VIENOTĪBA	Par
11. Einārs Čilinskis	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	53. Mārtiņš Šics	LRA	Par
12. Lolita Čigāne	VIENOTĪBA	Par	54. Edvīns Šnore	VL-TB/LNNK	Par
13. Valters Dambe	ZZS	Par	55. Juris Šulcs	VIENOTĪBA	Par
14. Jānis Dombrava	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	56. Jānis Trupovnieks	ZZS	Par
15. Raivis Dzintars	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	57. Jānis Upenieks	VIENOTĪBA	Par
16. Artis Gustovskis	VIENOTĪBA	Par	58. Viktors Valainis		Par
17. Astrīda Harju	VIENOTĪBA	Par	59. Juris Viļums	LRA	Par
18. Ritvars Jansons	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	60. Dzintars Zaķis	VIENOTĪBA	Par
19. Artuss Kaimiņš		Par	ATTURAS: 3		
20. Guntis Kalniņš	ZZS	Par	1. Valdis Kalnozols	ZZS	Atturas
21. Ojārs Ēriks Kalniņš	VIENOTĪBA	Par	2. Artūrs Rubiks	SASKAŅA	Atturas
22. Aleksandrs Kiršteins	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	3. Raimonds Rubiks	SASKAŅA	Atturas
23. Nellija Kleinberga	LRA	Par	NEBALSO: 11		
24. Askolds Kļaviņš	ZZS	Par	1. Jeļena Lazareva	SASKAŅA	Nebalsoja
25. Rihards Kols	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	2. Romans Miloslavskis		Nebalsoja
26. Līga Kozlovskā	ZZS	Par	3. Sergejs Mirskis	SASKAŅA	Nebalsoja
27. Armands Krauze	ZZS	Par	4. Andris Morozovs	SASKAŅA	Nebalsoja
28. Kārlis Krēsliņš	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	5. Vitālijs Orlovs	SASKAŅA	Nebalsoja
29. Varis Krūmiņš	LRA	Par	6. Igors Pimenovs	SASKAŅA	Nebalsoja
30. Janīna Kursīte-Pakule	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	7. Inguna Sudraba		Nebalsoja
31. Gunārs Kūtris		Par	8. Silvija Šimfa		Nebalsoja
32. Inese Laizāne	VL-TB/LNNK	Par	9. Jānis Tutins	SASKAŅA	Nebalsoja
33. Ainars Latkovskis	VIENOTĪBA	Par	10. Ivars Zariņš	SASKAŅA	Nebalsoja
34. Ilmārs Latkovskis		Par	11. Igors Zujevs	SASKAŅA	Nebalsoja
35. Atis Lejiņš	VIENOTĪBA	Par			
36. Ingmārs Līdaka	ZZS	Par			
37. Anrijs Matīss	VIENOTĪBA	Par			
38. Aivars Meija		Par			
39. Rihards Melgailis	LRA	Par			
40. Ainārs Mežulis	ZZS	Par			
41. Ināra Mūrniece	VL-TB/LNNK	Par			
42. Romāns Naudiņš	VL-TB/LNNK	Par			

⁶² http://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS12/saeimalivs2_dk.nsf/0/F2CDA760C7EA77A6C225822E007E5943?OpenDocument

⁶³ http://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS12/saeimalivs2_dk.nsf/0/CD09B000995C3691C22583070078DC30?OpenDocument

It is noteworthy that the working group of the Saeima in cooperation with the Russian parliament consists mainly of the MPs from the Harmony. Of particular note is the head of this working group, Jānis Ādamsons. The State Security Service of the Republic of Latvia suspects him of spying for the Russian Federation. (There are about at least 40 episodes.) On June 10, 2021, the Saeima authorized his arrest (Ādamsons enjoyed parliamentary immunity).⁶⁴ Former LSSR KGB officer Karpchikov characterizes Ādamsons as “a particularly valuable agent of influence” who has been working for Moscow from 1991-92.⁶⁵

But Ādamsons is not the only MP from the Harmony who has dubious connections in the Russian Federation. For example, Nikolai Kabanov, who was repeatedly elected to the Saeima from this party (and is sitting there now), at least before the coronavirus pandemic, maintained regular contacts with Vladimir Simindey, who is part of Dmitry Ermolaev's group. Both of them are persona non grata in Latvia, and Ermolaev was exposed as an employee of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service.⁶⁶ Through this channel, inter alia, contacts are made with the Historical Memory Foundation, an organization actively participating in the information and propaganda war against the Baltic states, which is a kind of think-tank of the Kremlin's neo-Soviet propaganda.

For more than ten years, it was the Harmony that was the main stake of the Russian Federation in Latvian politics. In turn, the non-admission of this party to the ruling coalition was and remains one of the main goals of the conventionally “Latvian” parties.

The Russian Union of Latvia also acts as a junior satellite pro-Kremlin party. (Until 2014, it was called For Human Rights in United Latvia, ZaPCHEL.) Initially, it took shape as a left-wing bloc in 1998, which included the so-called Russian Party, the Popular Accord Party, the Socialist Party and the Ravnopravie Party.⁶⁷ However, later on, the moderate wing, which was considered more liberal and negotiable, split from ZaPCHEL and formed the Harmony Center. The bloc, which was relatively successful in the elections, gradually began to lose not only popular but also Moscow support.

However, the loss of the Russian Union's positions within Latvia (in the elections to the Saeima they cannot overcome the 5% barrier) did not completely deprive them of their political capital. They have one member in the European Parliament, Tatjana Ždanoka, who has consistently supported the Kremlin's policy. One of her most notorious actions was her visit to

⁶⁴ <https://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/sud-ostavil-pod-arestom-podozrevaemogo-v-shpionazhe-deputata-cejma-adamsonsa.d?id=53676559>

⁶⁵ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=9312>

⁶⁶ <https://www.sab.gov.lv/?a=s&id=17&pgoffset=4&jid=17>

⁶⁷ <https://rusojuz.lv/2002-god-raskol-v-zapchel-komu-vygodno/>

Bashar al-Assad in 2017 together with other European parliamentarians elected from Latvia's Harmony, Andrejs Mamikins and Yana Toom (Estonian Center Party).⁶⁸

In general, it is the Harmony and, partially, RUL, that carry out open and official political representation of the pro-Kremlin forces in Latvia. It is these structures that are the main political window through which various public associations and movements of the pro-Kremlin wing are trying to enter politics. Other attempts to create "Russian" parties with the same agenda have so far had no noticeable success.

The main ideas and methods of the hybrid offensive of the Russian Federation in Latvia and the Baltic States

The overview in this section is general in nature. Nevertheless, the proposed theses help to show more clearly how and for what purpose the above-described pool of agents of influence of the Russian Federation is being used.

Considering the hybrid meddling of the Russian Federation into Latvian politics, economy and culture, we can distinguish the following conditional blocks:

1) Ideology

Perhaps the Baltics, primarily Latvia and Estonia, can be called a kind of a "pilot region" in the field of ideological re-Sovietization. The fundamental ideological principles on which all the pro-Kremlin forces build their policies are the following:

- Denial of the fact of the Soviet occupation.
- Declaring the "liberating" nature of the USSR actions in the Baltic States during the Second World War.

In fact, the whole concept of Russianness in the interpretation of the local so-called "Russian" parties has these two theses as a starting point. It is quite natural that May 9, under these conditions, became the main holiday and the only assemblage point for a "Russian," and in reality, a Soviet, identity. In this regard, the Latvian Russian-speaking community and the pro-Kremlin forces that control it really outstripped the Russian Federation, where open re-Sovietisation (in the "Soviet means Russian" way) began after 2008 but took shape only after 2012.

⁶⁸ <https://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/mamykin-vstretilsya-v-damaske-s-sirijskim-liderom-asadom.d?id=48613941&all=true>

The combination of the two named theses is extremely important, since it 1) rehabilitates the USSR and 2) allows the linking of ethnic identity (Russianness, Russian language) with loyalty to the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation as its continuation.

This is exactly what all the propaganda activity of the Russian Federation is doing in relation to Russians and Russian-speakers in Latvia and the Baltics as a whole.

2) Propaganda

In relation to Latvia and Estonia, the propaganda of the Russian Federation has two very important advantages:

- Widespread use of the Russian language. Not only Russians (and those for whom Russian is their native language), but also almost all residents of Latvia who graduated from school before 1991, generally, speak Russian. The Russian language is still widely spoken and in demand, including among Latvian youth. Moreover, ethnic Latvians who do not speak Russian often have problems finding employment.⁶⁹ Therefore, almost the entire population of Latvia, with a few exceptions, is an audience of the Russian-language information products (primarily television), and the Russian Federation remains their main producer. Technically, all channels are open for propaganda influence. This includes not only politicized talk shows, but also entertainment content, historical cinema, etc. In fact, the entire network of Russian television channels in one way or another works as a propaganda tool.
- Technical impossibility for Latvia or Estonia to compete with the media resources of the Russian Federation. The current population of the Republic of Latvia is less than 1.9 million people⁷⁰ while the population of the Russian Federation is 145.8 million.⁷¹ Even if we do not take into account the Russian-speaking population in the countries of the former USSR, it is obvious that we are talking about an incomparably larger audience - a consumer of any type of media product and, first of all, of television. Therefore, the market volumes, profits, and possible investments are fundamentally different. It is also obvious that the democracies of Latvia or Estonia are incapable of allocating budgets at the expense of the state, comparable, for example, to the budgets of Russia Today.

⁶⁹ <https://rus.jauns.lv/article/novosti/111177-latviyskaya-realnost-bez-znaniya-russkogo-yazyka-nelzya-nayti-rabotu>

⁷⁰ <https://stat.gov.lv/lv/statistikas-temas/iedzivotaji/iedzivotaju-skaits/247-iedzivotaju-skaits-un-ta-izmainas?themeCode=IR>

⁷¹ <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/796151>

Theoretically, a partial way out of this situation could be the creation of a single Baltic Russian-language TV channel, and this idea was discussed after 2014. However, in the end, Latvia and Estonia decided to create their own Russian-language media.⁷² The reason for this decision, which seems illogical to an outside observer, may lie in the fact that in reality the "Baltics" as a single socio-political space (as is often seen from Moscow) does not exist. The socio-economic and political reality in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is very different. For a resident of Estonia, including a Russian, the state of affairs in Finland is often more interesting than the situation in Latvia. In practice, it is very difficult to develop a unified agenda and content that would be important and interesting for all Russian and Russian-speaking residents of the Baltics.

As a result, each of the Baltic states and the Russian community of each of these countries are left face to face with the Kremlin's propaganda machine.

Lack of resources, including funding, is a big problem for the Latvian journalistic community, including the Latvian-speaking one. Low salaries and small fees are an objective prerequisite for the corruption of journalistic circles, where high-paid Sputnik, state media agency of the Russian Federation, is a striking contrast example.⁷³

One can distinguish the following main schemes, which the Russian Federation presumably uses to establish control over the journalistic community and, more broadly, the Russian-speaking and Latvian intelligentsia:

1. "Buying out" the authors, sometimes openly, sometimes secretly (the ability to publish under a pseudonym) by the media resources of the Russian Federation.
2. Organization of contests and awards for Russian-speaking authors by the Russian Embassy.
3. Informal assistance with the publication of books: scientific works, literary texts, etc.
4. Various grant programs implemented through the structures of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.
5. Corruption and agent recruitment.

⁷² <https://www.delfi.lt/ru/news/live/latviya-i-estoniya-sozdayut-telekanaly-na-russkom-v-litve-nablyudayut.d?id=67647544>

⁷³ Эти легенды автор настоящего доклада неоднократно слышал лично.

These methods provide, if not support, then at least the tacit loyalty of a significant part of the Russian-speaking intelligentsia, which does not want to be deprived of financial and other resources when the support of Russian-language projects in the media or in the cultural sphere from the Latvian state is extremely small. This, in turn, creates a generally unreliable picture of the “unanimity” of Russians and Russian-speakers in their support of the Russian Federation and Vladimir Putin personally (since in the public space, there are almost exclusively the voices of pro-Kremlin propagandists).

3) Political technologies

Basically, we are talking about a standard set of soft power technologies, political lobbying and, as an apotheosis, attempts to force destabilization and a coup d'etat. As in the days of the USSR, the official propaganda of the Russian Federation often ascribes its own methods to the enemy; on the other hand, their use, within the framework of the logic of confrontation and spheres of influence, seems to be a kind of acceptable form of confrontation. For this reason, there is nothing surprising in the fact that the Russian Federation may try to carry out the “proper” color revolution in its own interests.

It is possible that the so-called “bronze night” occurred on April 26-27, 2007 in Tallinn and Ida-Viru County, when, due to riots, the Estonian authorities had to take such unprecedented measures as a curfew.⁷⁴ At the same time, pro-Kremlin activists from Latvia also took part in the orchestrated protests.⁷⁵ Dmitry Linter, a well-known figure of the “anti-fascist” movement in Estonia, was subsequently tried for organizing the riots. The degree of his closeness to the Russian authorities is evidenced at least by the fact that in 2014 he officially became Assistant to the Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation Medinsky. In early March of the same year, on the eve of the annexation of Crimea, he announced the recruitment of volunteers “for a proper holiday in Crimea.”⁷⁶

Less brutal methods include:

- Support for openly pro-Kremlin political parties (the aforementioned Harmony and RUL).
- Support (including alleged corruption) of politicians from other parliamentary parties.
- Economic ties, primarily related to transit and the banking sector.

⁷⁴ <https://rus.postimees.ee/4091545/bronzovye-nochi-hronologiya-sobytiy>

⁷⁵ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=1293>

⁷⁶ <https://rus.delfi.ee/statja/69994159/dmitriy-linter-stal-pomoshchnikom-ministra-kultury-rf-i-vystupaet-s-dokladami-v-krymu>

- “Cultural” and “educational” projects carried out under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the special services of the Russian Federation (through the foundations “Russian World” and “Historical Memory”).
- Work with the diaspora through public organizations, primarily through the coordination councils of compatriots.⁷⁷
- Operations in cyberspace, which became noticeable during the coronavirus pandemic.

6. New strategy of the pro-Kremlin forces in the context of the coronavirus crisis

The coronavirus pandemic has fundamentally changed not only the socio-economic but also the political situation in Latvia. The faulty decisions of the Ministry of Health that led to delays in the start of mass vaccinations,⁷⁸ ineffective communication between the government and society, and, of course, the economic and social consequences of lockdowns have created extremely fertile ground for the development of covid dissident protests of all kinds.

The aforementioned Babris immediately joined the organization of the corresponding protest actions, receiving informational support from the propaganda media of the Russian Federation.⁷⁹ By December 2020, he had already acted as one of the de facto leaders of the protesters, representing their interests during a meeting in the presidential office on December 18, 2020.⁸⁰ Currently, he positions himself as a representative of an informal social movement ready to support those parties that will act with the “proper” agenda. According to him, this

⁷⁷ <https://russiancouncil.ru/blogs/vesyoliy/v-latvii-uchrezhden-molodyezhnyy-koordinatsionnyy-sovet-obedineniy-ros/>

⁷⁸ <https://rus.tvnet.lv/7148653/vinkele-ob-otkaze-ot-dopolnitelnyh-doz-pfizer-eto-lozh-takaya-zhe-belaya-kak-volosy-gospodina-karinsha>

⁷⁹ <https://lv.sputniknews.ru/20201224/Kak-v-revoljutsiyu-1905-go-latviyskie-biznesmeny-progoziruyut-vzryvoopasnuyu-situatsiyu-14908331.html>

⁸⁰ <https://www.president.lv/lv/jaunums/andris-teikmanis-tiesibas-brivi-paust-savus-uzskatus-nedrikst-radit-apdraudejumu-sabiedribai#gsc.tab=0>

includes, in particular, building positive relations with the Russian Federation on the model of Finland.⁸¹

Following Babris, another person mentioned in this report, Ainārs Šlesers, openly returned to politics with a similar covid-dissident policy and created a new party, Latvia First. Its program also includes the idea of Finlandization. While remaining a member of the EU and NATO, it proposes to build relations with neighbors “as Finland is doing.” Besides, Latvia First stands for direct presidential elections, that is, for the transformation of Latvia into a presidential republic.⁸² At the same time, Šlesers cooperates with Babris, jointly organizing mass anti-vaccination rallies.⁸³

However, the obvious political favorite there is Aldis Gobzems, a populist politician whose stable ties with pro-Kremlin forces, until recently, were not revealed. In the past, a lawyer who was elected to the Saeima on the list of the KPV LV party,⁸⁴ he became one of the most recognizable and prominent frontmen of covid dissidence during the pandemic. His new party, Law and Order, also stands on the de facto pro-Kremlin positions. It is noteworthy that during the discussion of the resolution in support of Alexei Navalny (adopted by the Latvian Saeima on February 4, 2021), Gobzems (the current MP) spoke out sharply against it.⁸⁵ This position caused surprise in wide circles of the Latvian society, and he had to explain it in a special post on Facebook, which, however, has now been deleted or blocked.

In its program, Gobzems's party somewhat vaguely promises “real independence,” declaring that it will participate only in those joint projects with NATO that meet the “interests” of the country and only as equal partners. They also promised to accept any investments, which is already a clear signal for the capital holders, including dubious ones, from the Russian Federation and other countries of the former USSR.⁸⁶ And if Babris and Šlesers call Finland

⁸¹ <https://youtu.be/F0fhPwp3QII>

⁸² <https://latvijapirmajavieta.lv/latvija-pirmaja-vieta-programma/>

⁸³ <https://rus.lsm.lv/statja/novosti/obschestvo/foto-na-nabereznoy-v-rige--massovaja-akcija-za-dobrovolnuyu-vakcinaciju.a421890/>

⁸⁴ <https://sv2018.cvk.lv/pub/Candidates/Candidate?id=Pi4Gt5R13wbFbzwjy%2BZuTxQ%3D%3D>

⁸⁵ https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS13/saeimalivs_imp.nsf/0/B48EAEA4C4862204C225867800341679?OpenDocument

⁸⁶ <https://www.likumsunkartiba.lv/programma>

their ideal, then Gobzems, during the meeting of the Saeima commission, which considered the resolution on Navalny, called for focusing on the Swiss neutrality model.⁸⁷

When analyzing the activities of the pro-Kremlin forces in Latvia back in December 2020, we predicted that the goal of the Russian Federation would be “1) to oppose Latvia to NATO allies and 2) to strengthen the political positions of the pro-Kremlin forces. The most logical ideological agenda for the implementation of this task is “patriotic” disengagement from Washington and Brussels, the so-called covid dissidence and “supra-ethnic” protest.”⁸⁸ What is happening clearly confirms the validity of this forecast: in Latvia, several new political parties are being formed using “covid-dissident” sentiments, with an active participation of probable agents of influence of the Russian Federation. The agenda of these parties is also very similar: the unification of Latvians and Russians on the wave of dissatisfaction with the existing government; the concept of “professional” - technocratic, government; the idea of “strong power” - the regime of a presidential republic; “technocratic” building of “constructive” relations with Moscow; “patriotic” distancing from the EU and NATO.

At the same time, some of these parties are more acceptable for a conventionally Latvian voter, some for a conventionally Russian. Assumingly, the experience of the Harmony party was taken into account, which, gaining the largest percentage of votes in the elections, nevertheless never managed to enter the ruling coalition and participate in the formation of the government. The launch of several pro-Kremlin party projects at once, presumably makes the model more flexible: the total amount of votes collected (together with Consent) and MP mandates increases, and the configuration of the ruling coalition desirable for the Russian Federation becomes more flexible and multivariate. The task is especially urgent also because new parliamentary elections are to be held in Latvia in October 2022.

Under these conditions, Moscow's maximum program looks quite unambiguous: the transformation of Latvia into a buffer state like post-war Finland, with a high probability of its subsequent inclusion in the “natural” sphere of influence of the Russian Federation. At the same time, the preservation of the membership of the Republic of Latvia in the EU and NATO is extremely important: this would allow the pro-Kremlin forces, having come to power in Riga, to influence the policy of the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance as a whole.

⁸⁷ https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS13/saeimalivs_imp.nsf/0/B48EAEA4C4862204C225867800341679?OpenDocument

⁸⁸ <https://www.kompromat.lv/item.php?docid=readn&id=9262>