

Destabilisation – the Kremlin agenda

June 2023

KCS Group Europe has long talked about Russia’s attempts to infiltrate the governments of its border countries, many of which were once part of the USSR. We’ve seen issues in the Baltics, with politicians and individuals attempting to generate resistance to the current elected government by building opposition parties, all instigated and paid for by the Kremlin.



Russia has also been accused of trying to infiltrate and destabilise other neighbouring countries. Crimea, eastern Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, Finland and Hungary have all experienced alleged actions by Russia, aimed at undermining their governments and fostering instability. These actions range from disinformation campaigns to covert operations and economic ties.

Crimea and Ukraine

One of the historic examples of Russia’s efforts to destabilise its neighbours is its annexation of Crimea in 2014. In eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donbas region, Russia’s support for separatist movements has led to conflict and an unstable government.

Georgia

In Georgia, Russia created the party of opposition, the Dream party, backed by a pro-Putin billionaire, who aimed to derail Georgia’s intentions to join the EU and NATO.

Moldova

Russia has been accused of meddling in Moldova’s political affairs. This includes supporting politicians and their policies aimed at undermining the pro-Western government.

The Baltic States

In the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), there have been reports of disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks and support for political and social movements aimed at destabilising the governments of these countries.

Belarus

Economic ties and energy dependence have allowed Russia to have substantial influence over Belarus. There have been allegations of Russian support for President Alexander Lukashenko's regime during the widespread protests in 2020 which followed disputed elections.

Finland

While Finland is currently not a NATO member, it shares a border with Russia and has also raised concerns over Russia's activities. Finland has reported incidents of airspace violations by Russian military aircraft and has been cautiously handling potential threats, such as disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks.

Hungary

Hungarian politician Béla Kovács, who is in the pay of the Kremlin, is now serving time in prison for treason. He tried to build the minority Jobbit party and use it to destabilise the elected Hungarian government.

Summary

The actions and tactics used by the Kremlin to exert its influence are plentiful. **Disinformation campaigns** are commonplace, with known examples of Russia using propaganda to manipulate public opinion and sow discord. Russia has also been accused of **supplying financial and political support to opposition parties and movements**. By backing opposition forces, Russia aims to weaken and destabilise governments that are seen as pro-Western or are seeking closer ties with the European Union or NATO. Russia has used its significant **energy resources, such as natural gas, as leverage**.

Through its control over energy supplies and infrastructure, it can apply economic pressure and even manipulate energy prices to influence the policies and decision-making of neighbouring states. Russia has been associated with various **cyberattacks and acts of hybrid warfare** against its border countries. These include hacking government institutions, critical infrastructure and political organisations. Russia's 'annexation' of Crimea in 2014 and its support for separatist movements in eastern Ukraine, such as in Donbas, have been significant instances of destabilisation. Russia has reportedly engaged in **covert operations and intelligence activities** aimed at influencing political processes, elections and decision-making. These activities often involve the recruitment of local agents and the use of intelligence services to gather information and manipulate events. Russia has also **leveraged economic ties and dependency** to exert control. By maintaining economic relationships, such as trade partnerships and investments, Russia can exert pressure and influence political and economic decisions in these countries.

The scale of financial resources dedicated to these efforts is substantial, with billions of dollars allegedly funnelled through the Kremlin's network of agents to provoke disorder and unrest. These actions highlight Russia's continued efforts to exert influence and control over its border countries and maintain leverage in the region.

KCS Group Europe – Strategic Intelligence & Corporate Security

KCS Group Europe is a leading provider of security and intelligence services, operating in some of the world's most difficult environments on complex cases of fraud, theft, corruption or market dynamics. We gather intelligence through the discreet use of human sources to level the playing field and help our clients identify and deal with any risks, weaknesses and threats which could impact on their business, financially or reputationally.

Our key areas of expertise include: Corporate Intelligence Services - New market or sector entry research - Know your customer screening.

In addition, we offer a unique service in the areas of Cyber Security and Cyber Risk. This covers penetration testing, vulnerability assessments, intelligence gathering and cyber security audits – providing unparalleled analysis, contingency planning and implementation.

To find out more or to arrange a meeting to discuss your business needs, please email the team at info@kcsgroupeurope.com or call (00 44) 20 7245 1191 – www.kcsgroup.com