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Institute for
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THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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"Transnational History of the Far Right" Series

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TransHistFarRight

A Collective Research Project led by Marlene Laruelle

At a time when global political dynamics seem to be moving in favor of illiberal regimes around the world, this research project seeks to fill in some of the blank pages in the contemporary history of the far right, with a particular focus on the transnational dimensions of far-right movements in the broader Europe/Eurasia region.

www.historyofthefarright.org/

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The contribution of the White Russian émigré community to the global anticommunist struggle remains to be written. While we know about the role some Russian emigres played in supporting the U.S.-led anticommunist struggle during the Cold War period, we still know very little about their connections with the first anticommunist organizations in the interwar period. This article contributes to the field by looking at White Russian monarchist circles based in France and their attraction to Nazi Germany. The transition from a national anticommunist struggle —liberating Russia from Soviet power—to a global one drew many Whites into the magnetic field of fascism. This study is based mostly on declassified archives from the French police and intelligence services, especially the National Security Directorate, the Police Prefecture for Paris, and the Administrative Policy and General Intelligence for the rest of the territory.

France and Germany: Fighting for the Romanov Throne

After the murder of Tsar Nicholas II and his brother Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich in 1918, the Russian line of succession became disputed. One faction pledged for Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich, the eldest surviving son of Alexander III; another faction supported Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, a grandson of Emperor Nicholas I. The two rivals took different roads: Nikolai Nikolaevich fled to France and settled in his castle of Choigny near Paris, while Kirill Vladimirovich settled in Bavaria and made connections with the German monarchist and nationalist circles supported by his wife, Victoria Melita of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.

In Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm II's constitutional monarchy was replaced in 1919 by a democratic parliamentary republic that later became known as the Weimar Republic. The new German republic and the new Soviet government decided to bury the hatchet and to put a stop in each other's expansionist politics, signing the Treaty of Rapallo in 1922. The White Russians who fled to Germany, led by Kirill Vladimirovich, disapproved greatly of this newfound cordiality with the Soviets who had brought about their downfall. Since they could not find allies in the German government, they began to build themselves an entourage among the political opposition of the time. Among those who were opposed to the Weimar Republic were nationalists and former members of the imperial German army Adolf Hitler and Erich Ludendorff.

Thanks to their shared anticommunism and antisemitism, friendly relations between the two parties developed quickly. By 1921, Kirill Vladimirovich's wife, Victoria Melita of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, was funding Hitler's emerging NSDAP; hence, she indirectly facilitated the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923.

Those White Russians who settled in France found themselves in a more complex situation. Originally, France was sympathetic to the House of Romanov. During the First World War, the Russian Empire and France were allied against the Triple Alliance concluded between the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Kingdom of Italy. After the October Revolution, France remained loyal to the fallen Romanov dynasty. Paris provided support to the Whites by supplying them with military equipment and, notably, participated in the Allied intervention in the Russian Civil War on the side of the Whites. When it became abundantly clear the Whites would never take back Russia, France switched sides, recognizing the Soviet

Union in 1924. Having lost Paris' support, France-based White Russians turned to the political opposition for support. They made connections with several factions of the French extreme right, including the largest far-right organization at the time, *Action Française*.

In 1932, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Maxim Litvinov, urged Stalin to attempt a rapprochement with France and the United Kingdom to contain the advances of Nazism. In 1934, this policy was welcomed by the French Foreign Minister, Louis Barthou, and allowed for negotiations that led to the 1935 Mutual Assistance Treaty between France and the Soviet Union. However, in the meantime Barthou had died following the attack of *Ustashe* terrorist Vlado Chernozemski. He was replaced by the very anti-communist Pierre Laval, who became in 1940 the second-in-command of the collaborationist Vichy government.

At this time of growing political polarization between anti-communism and antifascism, the French government sought to contain both the French Communist Party, perceived as a bridgehead of the Comintern,¹ and far-right groups agitating the dangers of a Bolshevik revolution in France. It is in this tense context that one can observe a gradual linking of White Russian communities with international anti-communist networks. If the Italian fascist model could not but attract emulators, it was National Socialist Germany that became the center of White émigrés' fascization.

Divided on the Ashes of the Empire

At the demographic level, the Russian community in France was sizable. Russians quickly became the third-largest contingent of immigrants in Paris: at 51,578 individuals in 1929, they lagged behind only Italy and Poland. In addition, a significant proportion of the community were political migrants: 67.8%, compared to 0.9% of Poles and 17.9% of Italians. Put another way, Russians—who accounted for 9.3% of foreigners in France at that time—comprised 90% of the country's political immigrants. Internal processes of socio-political control were also developed: in 1935, a popular restaurant was opened in Paris for all unemployed Ukrainian workers in need, with the notable exception of communists.²

The "Russian colony" in France, to use the terminology of the time, was made up of different and even conflicting political communities: monarchists hoping for a restoration of tsarism, social-democrats hoping to preserve the legacy of the February revolution, and later different groups of communist dissidents, in particular Trotskyists. Given the inability of the imperial dynasty to designate a single candidate for the Restoration, even the monarchist community was divided between the two exiled candidates fighting for the Russian throne: Grand Dukes Kirill Vladimirovich and Nikolai Nikolaevich.

Kirill Vladimirovich proclaimed himself tsar in London on November 5, 1924, to the irritation of the entire Romanov house. Kirill had lived in France since 1921, with the exception of four years spent in Coburg, Germany, between 1924 and 1928 and occasional tours to meet supporters (in the winter of 1930–1931, he traveled to Greece, Serbia, Palestine, and Italy). Kirill seemed to entertain the hope that a restoration of the German monarchy would provide him with the tools to take the Russian throne.³ Thanks to the Bavarian connections of his wife, Victoria Melita, Kirill was surrounded by Germanophiles, had associations with pan-Germanists, and received German funds for his propaganda. Though Nicholas II had managed to ostracize

¹ This factor is more acute evidence than the electoral results of the French section of the Communist International (9.82% of votes in the legislative elections in 1924, 15.26% in 1936), which had long faced difficulties due to the isolationist strategy of "Communism in One Country." France's institutions functioned largely on a two-round electoral system, and it was traditional for left-wing candidates to stand down in order to place themselves in the best position.

² Police Prefecture (PP), "A/S de l'œuvre de Secours des Chômeurs Ukrainiens et du nommé Nikitukiv," AN/19940497/70

³ "Chez les Russes : le Grand-duc Cyrille," June 27, 1922; Sûreté Nationale (SN), "Monarchistes russes-Parti du grand-duc Cyrille," October 9, 1932, AN/F/7/15943/1.

Kirill after the latter's marriage to Victoria, a divorced and non-Orthodox German woman, Kirill's supporters did not recognize as legitimate any debate about the succession.

For his part, Nikolai Nikolaevich enjoyed the sympathy of the House of Bourbon. He was also supported by General Piotr Wrangel, who had agreed to proclaim Nikolai leader of the Russian All-Military Union (*Russkii obshchevoinskii soiuz*, ROVS).⁴

In 1926, a new organization, the Russian Legitimist-Monarchist Union, was founded in Munich to bring together all the movements that supported Kirill Vladimirovich.⁵ Eventually, beginning in 1925, Nikolai's cancer—to which he would succumb in 1929—gave the advantage to the Kirill camp.

In short, according to a detailed 1933 report by the French political police, Russians in France were integrated but not assimilated: their rate of ordinary crimes and misdemeanors was very low, and they commonly learned French, but they seldom asked to be naturalized. Their tendency to seek to establish a miniature Russia in exile sometimes provoked tensions with the French authorities: for example, the French administration had to ask Grand Duke Kirill to stop awarding decorations that competed with those of the French state. The police report concluded in unambiguous terms: "In summary, it appears that, with the exception of smaller Bolshevik groups, the existence in France of an increasing number of White Russian movements tends to constitute, on our soil, a kind of 'national minority', obeying the political nuances of the former regime and constantly influenced by external events."⁶

For the French authorities, this "White question" was a particularly sensitive issue primarily because of the tendency of the first wave of tsarist refugees to have pro-German feelings.⁷ The advent of Hitler strengthened their pro-Germanism, a dynamic that was reinforced by the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935, seen as a betrayal of the Whites' hopes for a tsarist restoration in Russia. The situation was considered serious enough to warrant close police surveillance of all Russian immigrants on the Côte d'Azur.⁸ Moreover, the political assassinations of foreigners committed in Paris in the second half of the 1920s were mostly of Soviet refugees and Italian fascists⁹—a phenomenon that was conducive to the rapprochement of these two groups.

One of the clear signs of the tendency to recreate an imperial Russia on the banks of the Seine River was the constitution of a Union of Knights of the Russian Imperial Military Order of St. George in Paris. Officially, the group was formed in 1938, but it was informally visible as early as 1922, when Kirill distributed honor medals.¹⁰ Similarly, Russian Freemasonry, which had been proscribed in Soviet Russia, was re-established on French soil and came to include a large number of lodges: by 1933 there were two Russian lodges in Paris in the *Grand Orient de France*, six in the *Grande Loge de France*, and one in *Le Droit Humain*.¹¹ According to the White Russian newspaper *Vozrozhdenie* (Renaissance), Russian Freemasons actively worked to steer their French brothers in an anti-Soviet direction.¹²

⁴ Police spéciale des Chemins de fer et de la frontière (PSC), report dated October 8, 1924, 4 p.; "Les monarchistes russes et l'Italie," November 9, 1922, AN/F/7/15943/1.

⁵ PSC, report dated October 8, 1924, 4 p.; "Les monarchistes russes et l'Italie," November 9, 1922, AN/F/7/15943/1.

⁶ PP, report dated August 1933, 15 p., AN/19880206/7.

⁷ The Nice special commissioner to the SN director, "Au sujet des agissements germanophiles de quelques personnages russes officiels, dont Basile Lebedeff," August 7, 1918, 4 p., AN/20010216/282.

⁸ The prefect of the Maritime Alps to the Interior Minister, August 23, 1918, 2 p., AN/20010216/282

⁹ "Personnalités politiques étrangères qui furent victimes d'attentats commis à Paris au cours de ces dernières années," March 20, 1930, 2 p., AN/F/7/13975/1.

¹⁰ PP, "A/S de l'Union des chevaliers de l'Ordre militaire impérial russe de Saint-Georges," November 6, 1939, 3 p., AN/19940497/70; Ibid., "Un entretien avec le Grand-duc Cyrille," November 9, 1922, AN/F/7/15943/1.

¹¹ PP, "La franc-maçonnerie russe," August 1933, 2 p., AN/19940500/306.

¹² PP, "La résurrection de la franc-maçonnerie en Russie," June 13, 1935, 2 p., AN/19940500/306.

Eventually, traditions lost in Soviet Russia were reconstituted abroad, as was the social and political dominance of military veterans and clergy members. In 1936, when the Committee of Russian Émigré Organizations—the umbrella group for the vast majority of White Russian groups in France—appointed its members, they included 20 generals, four colonels, two admirals, a frigate captain, an archbishop, and 23 archpriests.¹³ Many noble titles were usurped, a fact that underlined both the social weight of the Russian nobility and its decomposition. The Union of Russian Nobility, an association founded in Paris in 1926, tried to counter the phenomenon by seeking to verify genealogies.¹⁴

The political divide between Kirill's and Nikolai's supporters had repercussions for émigré community life. It even affected the domain of worship, threatening the bond between the sword and the clergy. Supporters of the Grand Duke Kirill and far-right-oriented Russians recognized as their spiritual guide Archbishop Antony of Serbia, who had proclaimed himself independent of the Moscow Patriarchate. The moderates followed Archbishop Euloghi, who, being based in Paris, was neutral toward Soviet ecclesiastical institutions; ROVS leader General Aleksandr Kutepov demanded strenuously but in vain that Euloghi engage in anti-Soviet activities.¹⁵

This fragmentation among émigré associations had its share of attempts at unification. Among these stillborn initiatives was the Unification Center for Russian Nationalist Organizations, comprising the Russian journal *Tribune Libre* (Free Tribune), the Friendship Union of Russian Veterans, the Patriotic Association of Young Russians in Paris, and the Russian Empire Union. These associations' goal was to bring together all the groups, and especially to attract the most important association, ROVS,¹⁶ which had 9,000 members in France and 35,000 worldwide.

The Russian National Union of Participants in the War (*Russkii natsional'nyi soiuz uchastnikov voyny*, RSNUV), a ROVS splinter group, attracted 1,000 members—a number that, when compared to the general population, is sufficient to demonstrate the special weight of these military circles. The RNSUV was founded in 1936 by General Anton Turkul, who considered General Miller too weak a Germanophile. Turkul notably participated in the Russian National Front, launched in 1938 to bring together pro-Third-Reich organizations. Starting from France, the RSNUV subsequently established branches in Germany, Belgium, Greece, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia, and it was clearly oriented in favor of the Third Reich. It was from this community of Germanophile veterans that the approximately 700 White Russians who volunteered to fight in Spain for General Franco originated.¹⁷

In the fall of 1937, the RSNUV attempted a new unifying process, this time at a meeting in Berlin with the leaders of the All-Russian Fascist Party and the Russian National Socialist Party.¹⁸ The political weakness induced by the crumbling of the Russian émigré community in France strengthened monarchists' and fascists' capacity to work together. Veteran circles were particularly sensitive to Hitler's influence, and Nazi agents regularly visited the RNSUV in Paris.¹⁹

The link among White émigrés was also ensured by a high volume of publications highlighting the religious dimension of emigration. The productivity of the Russian press in France demonstrates real vitality, yet its offerings were divided into multiple small print runs. Russian community life often followed the rhythm of rumors, such as, in 1930, whispers of an imminent attack on the Soviet embassy by joint commandos of White Russians and militants of the French royalist organization *Action française*. No one knows how this

¹³ PP, "A/S du Comité des organisations d'émigrés russes," July 9, 1936, 2 p., AN/19940500/307.

¹⁴ PP, report dated August 1933, 2 p., AN/19940500/306.

¹⁵ PP, "A/S de effervescence dans les milieux croyants de l'émigration russe," January 14, 1930, 3 p., AN/19940500/35.

¹⁶ "A/S du Centre d'Unification des Organisations Nationalistes Russes," September 1937, 2 p., AN/19880206/7.

¹⁷ RG, "Les émigrés russes en France et l'influence hitlérienne sur leurs groupements," January 29, 1938, pp. 10–11, AN/20010216/282.

¹⁸ Interior Minister to the Foreign Affairs Minister, November 5, 1937, AN/19880206/7.

¹⁹ Blanc, September 18, 1937, AN/19880206/7.

rumor arose, but it reveals the temptation to work with the French far right to defend the White cause.²⁰ Igor Zawadsky Krasmopolsky, Secretary of the All-Russian National Party, did actually garner support and subsidies from French far-right groups: *Action française*, *Les Francistes*, and *Solidarité française* all allegedly supported the All-Russian National Party at its inception.²¹

White Russians in the Anti-Communist Internationals

Russian counter-revolutionary émigrés in France participated both in transnational organizations specifically dedicated to their national cause and in those that took a more global view of the fight against communism.

First and foremost, the support structures for contenders to the Romanov throne were transnational. However, if dynastic competition was a matter that mobilized the diaspora globally, the debate over the succession essentially took place between Paris and Munich. The International Congress of Russian Monarchists was held in Bavaria in 1921 and brought together 200 figures from 33 countries. It enabled the establishment of the High Council of the Monarchy (HCM), which organized its first congress in Paris the following year. If the choice between the descendants of Nicholas II had not yet been made, the HCM clearly leaned toward Nikolai,²² only to later reconsider by postponing the choice of king until after the fall of the USSR. The Russian Monarchist Party was a rather inactive French branch of the HCM (with 250 members, including about 100 in the Paris region).

The Union of the Russian Empire, founded in 1928 as the discreetly pro-Kirill Russian Empire Union, had only 200 members spread across Paris, Nice, Belgium, Bulgaria, China, the United States, and Poland; some of its members went to fight for General Franco. Another organization, the Russian National Unification, was founded in 1926 after the world congress held that year in Paris, and in 1937 it became the Russian Central Union, which had 80,000 members worldwide, including 10,000 in Paris, a strong presence in China and Yugoslavia, and sections in Germany, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Switzerland. It was a front that brought together right-wing monarchists and pro-Hitlerites.²³

Even before proclaiming himself tsar, Kirill appointed personal representatives throughout Europe (Germany, Austria, America, England, Bavaria, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Serbia, and Switzerland). In 1924, he even sent his wife, Grand Duchess Victoria Melita of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, to the United States to petition funding from Henry Ford, the anti-Semitic car magnate. When Kirill negotiated with a far-right French parliamentarian (whose name is unknown to us) for financial support for his cause, the pair agreed that in order to avoid getting into any trouble with the French authorities, the funds should be paid to Munich. Munich was a strategic choice, since the Bavarian monarchists also filled up the coffers of Kirill's cause, making it possible for General Vasily Biskupsky—the first White Russian to give unqualified support to Hitler and who also helped Kirill finance his rise to power—to organize this funding from Germany.

Indeed, the imaginaries of Russian and German monarchists were mutually reinforcing. In the summer of 1923, the French intelligence services observed these monarchists' interest in the secessionist movement

²⁰ PP, report dated February 6, 1930, AN/F/7/13975/1.

²¹ "Le Parti national pan-russe et les partis politiques français," May 28, 1934, 2 p., AN/20010216/283.

²² Nicolas Glady, "Les partis monarchistes russes émigrés à Paris 1919–1939," *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin* 9 (2000): 84–100.

²³ RG, "Les émigrés russes en France et l'influence hitlérienne sur leurs groupements," January 29, 1938, pp. 1–6, AN/20010216/282. Five years earlier, the estimated number of members was 90,000, including 20,000 in Yugoslavia and France, concentrated in the Paris region and the Moselle-Maritime Alps axis; 50,000 in China; 5,000 in Prague and Sofia; 3,000 in New York; 500 in Berlin; 400 in Brussels and Charleroi; 200 in Lausanne and Geneva; and 100 in Vienna (PP, "Union Centrale russe," August 1933, pp. 1–2, AN/20010216/282).

of the Rhine Republic. The Russian monarchists were convinced that such a partition would lead to a mass nationalist movement, allowing the Bavarian prince to carry out a coup d'état and establish monarchical rule over southern Germany, thus supporting the Kirillists' campaign to pull Ukraine out of the Soviet Union and leading to the creation of a German-Russian restoration bloc. When Kirill published a manifesto proclaiming himself tsar, he clearly kept in mind this potential German-Russian bloc, stating that the Third International constituted the government of the USSR and that his cause of restoring a national government in Russia was in fact a genuine European question.²⁴

The main White restorationist organization was the Russian All-Military Union (ROVS), also known in France as the *Union Militaire Russe* or the *Fédération Générale des Associations d'anciens combattants russes à l'étranger*. The French section was created in 1925. Its establishment in Asia fostered contacts with Imperial Japan.²⁵ After the death of its founding father, General Wrangel, Grand Duke Nikolai appointed General Kutepov as the new head.²⁶ In 1930, the kidnapping of Kutepov on the streets of Paris by Soviet agents generated a state of psychosis—in 36 hours, 200 people went to the police to reveal the “truth” about the case—and gave rise to a meeting organized by the French far right, including *Action française*.

During this meeting, a public letter from Paul Taittinger, then-leader of the *Jeunesses Patriotes*, was read. (Taittinger would later, in 1934, play a critical role in trying to constitute a unified National Front, a group whose central notion would be revamped, this time successfully, by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972.) The meeting featured no Russian speakers, but many White Russians were among the 4,500 people who showed up at the *Salle des Sociétés Savantes*—which had a capacity of 1,500 people.²⁷ Following the kidnapping of Kutepov's successor, General Miller, in 1937, ROVS leaders stopped establishing themselves in Paris: General Abramov took up residence in Sofia in 1938, while General Arkhangelsky went to live in Brussels.

The White Russians in France were also involved in the proliferation of initiatives aimed at forming anti-Comintern organizations, which were closer to shadow business schemes than well-oiled ideological efforts. When perfumer François Coty, a financier of the French far right and of some international anti-communist initiatives, proposed a Bureau Politique International in 1928, his inaugural event attracted many Parisian Russians, including General Wrangel.²⁸ Similarly, in 1932, when Coty launched his *Croisade des patries* (Crusade of Fatherlands) from Belgium, his Russian representative was General Hartman, President of the Union of Russian Veterans in Belgium.²⁹

In France, the Coty-funded organization also relayed the documentation of the International Centre for the Active Struggle against Communism (CILACC), founded in 1929 by Victor and Joseph Douillet—whose successful 1928 book was the reference used by Hergé for his volume *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*. Joseph Douillet tried to integrate the International Anticommunist Entente (EIA), also known as the “Aubert League” after its founder. The latter was established in 1924 as the International Entente against the Third International and maintained close links with the Russian Labor Christian Movement (*Russkoe trudovoe*

²⁴ SN, “Le Grand-duc Cyrille,” June 15, 1922; “Monarchistes russes (parti du grand-duc Cyrille),” January 30, 1923; Ibid., February 8, 1924; “Le général Biskoupsky, agent principal du Grand-duc Cyrille,” June 5, 1923; “Les monarchistes russes et la République rhénane,” August 20, 1923; “Manifeste de l'Empereur de la Russie,” September 1924, 2 p.; “Action des monarchistes russes,” December 16, 1924, AN/F/7/15943/1.

²⁵ PP, report dated September 3, 1930, 4 p., AN/19880206/7.

²⁶ “A/S d'articles de presse signalant la découverte d'un complot tsariste à Moscou,” May 1927, 3 p., report dated May 15, 1928, AN/F/7/13975/1.

²⁷ “Koutepoff : psychose à Paris,” February 3, 1930; “Meeting organisé pour protester contre l'enlèvement du général Koutepoff, sous le patronage du journal *La Liberté* et avec le concours du Bureau International Contre-révolutionnaire,” February 12, 1930, 6 p., AN/F/7/13975/1.

²⁸ PP, report dated February 3, 1928, AN/20010216/168.

²⁹ PP, “La Croisade des patries,” May 18, 1933, 2 p., AN/1994500/240.

khristianskoe dvizhenie, RTCD), itself financed by the Swiss and Dutch governments.³⁰ But Prince Andrey Kuragin, the Russian secretary of the EIA and a naturalized French citizen, rejected Douillet as corrupt. Douillet's reputation for corruption was reinforced when Colonel Aleksandr Resanov, a member of White Russian counterintelligence during the Civil War, published an indictment after leaving CILACC³¹ in which he alleged that the Douillet family was raising funds for personal gain—a claim confirmed by the French police, who considered CILACC “a purely commercial venture.”³²

Paris was also the starting point of White Russian international organizations such as the International Anti-Bolshevik Initiative Committee (IABIC), founded in 1930 by the Russian Massialas Galitzin and the Romanian Theodore Crivez. The IABIC maintained links with the Ukrainian Anti-Bolshevik Committee, which aimed to have the Soviet republics join the League of Nations and participate in establishing a European Confederation.³³

The Committee's profile was moderate, setting it apart from another, more radical organization, the *Ligue Internationale Anti-Communiste*, which claimed to have sections in Argentina, Belgium, France, Italy, Poland, Switzerland, and the United States. In France, the League's Nice section was led by George Reno, the son of the former Nicaraguan consul in Odessa; the younger Reno had once acted as a strike breaker in Germany and dreamed of attracting both *Action française* militants and fascist Italians. He had links with the Nazis, and while the organization may have regretted German “excesses” against Jews, it went on to roundly claim that the Jews had organized the Russian Revolution, that a majority of Soviet leaders were Jewish, and that they had unleashed violence on their population that would dwarf the violence meted out by the authorities of the Third Reich against the Jews. Nevertheless, the group's Russian members appeared to many of their compatriots to be too corrupt, which prevented the League from really taking off.³⁴

Some secret societies attracted the attention of the French authorities. According to a German document that circulated in French diplomatic and police circles in 1920, the *Société des Fidèles* (Society of the Faithful) was an esoteric, subversive organization that, based in Germany, claimed to have members from Paris to Moscow. Its goal was allegedly to restore the Russian political and territorial order that had existed prior to February 1917 by forming an alliance with Germany, Japan, and Turkey.³⁵ It was made up, among others, of former members of the Brotherhood of Russian Truth (*Bratsvo russkoi pravdy*, BRT), an international anti-Soviet terrorist network that carried out attacks in the USSR: the BRT claimed responsibility for a tank fire; a kolkhoz fire; stopping a train, tying up its employees, and stealing its goods; etc. Founded in 1921, the BRT had bases in Germany, the United States, France, Manchuria, the Baltic states, and Yugoslavia. Its conspiratorial style and opportunistic claim to perpetrate violence on Soviet territories guaranteed it a certain aura.³⁶

³⁰ *Rapport général du Bureau permanent de l'Entente internationale contre la III^e Internationale pour 1938*, Geneva, 1939, p. 9, AN/20010216/170.

³¹ Marc Swennen, “Les mouvements anticommunistes dans les années 1920,” *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP* 2059, no. 14 (2010): 5–51.

³² PP, “Note confidentielle (sous les plus extrêmes réserves) A/S du CILACC,” May 3, 1933, 1 p.; The special commissioner in Lille to the Prefect of the North, October 22, 1933, 2 p., AN/20010216/168.

³³ PP, “Comité d'initiative international anti-bolchévique,” January 12, 1933, 4 p.; Ibid., “Comité d'initiative international anti-bolchévique,” August 1933, 2 p., AN/20010216/168.

³⁴ PP, “Ligue Internationale Anti Communiste,” 3 p., May 31, 1933; State police of Nice to the General Director of National Safety, “A/S de la Ligue Anti Communiste,” 2 p., July 6, 1933; Central Commissioner of Bordeaux to the Interior Minister, “Ligue Anti Communiste,” May 10, 1933, 3 p.; General Commissioner of Bordeaux to the General Director of National Safety, “Ligue Anti Communiste,” 2 p., May 4, 1934, AN/20010216/168.

³⁵ “Internal Organization of the Society of the Faithful and Make-Up of Its Action Committee” (translation of a German document), October 1920, 9 p., AN/F/7/13424.

³⁶ The archives AN/20010216/282 contain several communiqués from the CVR translated by the PP.

Together with other nationalist organizations, the BRT advocated for a unified anti-Soviet front on a “global scale” with the aim of establishing a “liberation movement” of peoples who had come under communist rule. It held that this unifying principle could only succeed, however, after the White movements had been “purified” of their “suspect” elements.³⁷ Although the BRT succumbed to internal quarrels and Soviet infiltration in 1932, it actually kept running, albeit rather weakened.³⁸ Upon the death of its leader, Prince Alexander Lieven, a meeting took place in Berlin in 1937 at which Anatole Toll, a Finnish resident who seems to have worked for the French intelligence services in the mid-1920s, was appointed president. The exchanges between the Finnish and French services led to the conclusion that the BRT was simply a bluff.³⁹

The BRT’s leader in France was General Piotr Krasnov, former Ataman of the Don Cossacks, who would be hanged by the Soviet regime in 1947 for having joined the Axis forces. In Paris, its members were linked to the Russian Sportsmen’s Union, an organization that carried out paramilitary preparations under the guise of sports activities and was downright pro-Nazi.⁴⁰ Indeed, after an initial Italian temptation, it was Germany that increasingly came to occupy the horizon of the Russian counterrevolutionaries.

A Fascist Dynamic among White Russian Organizations

The fact that Nice was a crucial base for the Russian emigration had an immediate political consequence. The county of Nice only came under French sovereignty in 1860, giving birth to the administrative department of the Maritime Alps. The city itself is located less than 40 kilometers from the Italian border. With the arrival of the railway in 1865, the city became a seaside resort popular with wealthy English and Russian visitors, leading to strong economic and demographic development. But in 1936 the city elected a communist deputy, whereupon right-wing extremists started to cause unrest. Among them were members of the French *Parti populaire* of Jacques Doriot, a former communist leader who had turned to fascism.⁴¹ From 1940 to 1942, the Italian army occupied the eastern part of the department; Nice was fully absorbed when the occupation zone was extended to Switzerland. The historical, geographical, and political situation was therefore particularly conducive to the production of transnational far-right connections.

As for the choice of pretender to the Russian throne, the Italians were initially divided: Mussolini leaned toward Kirill, but the monarchy preferred Nikolai, since the Italian queen was his sister-in-law.⁴² A key concern for the French intelligence services was the potential rapprochement between Russian and Italian emigrants to the benefit of fascist Italy—for a fascist dynamic was sweeping through the various Russian groups, thanks first to their attraction to Italy and then to the polarizing effect of Nazism.

The Order of the Knights of the Russian National Fascist Patriots was led from Nice by its lifetime president, the false Count Nicholas Stroganoff. However, the group’s name may have been mere fashion: until 1930, the individual in question had only ever expressed pro-monarchist views, and the organization’s declaration of principles refers solely to royalty, with no mention of fascism.⁴³ Above all, his motivations were more pecuniary than ideological. Claiming to be the last representative of the Stroganoffs, the false nobleman sued the widow of Sergei Stroganoff, who had died in Nice in 1923 and whose estate was estimated in the French

³⁷ PP, “A/S de la Confrérie de la Vérité Russe,” August 1933, 10 p., AN/20010216/282.

³⁸ Wim Coudenys, “Activisme politique et militaire dans l’émigration russe : réalité ou sujet littéraire ? À propos du ‘Bratstvo Russkoj Pravdy’ après sa disparition,” at *Les Premières Rencontres de l’Institut européen Est-Ouest*, Lyon, ENS LSH, December 2–4, 2004, http://russie-europe.ens-lsh.fr/article.php3?id_article=62.

³⁹ RG, “Les émigrés russes en France et l’influence hitlérienne sur leurs groupements,” January 29, 1938, pp. 8–9, AN/20010216/282.

⁴⁰ PP, “Union des sportsmen Russes,” February 1, 1939, AN/19940500/307.

⁴¹ Ralph Schor, “Le Parti Populaire Français dans les Alpes-Maritimes (1936–1939),” *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 33–34 (1986): 99–125.

⁴² “Les monarchistes russes et l’Italie,” November 9, 1922, AN/F/7/15943/1.

⁴³ “Statuts du Pacte de la convention entre les hautes personnalités contractantes,” July 18, 1930, 2 p., AN/19880206/7.

press at several hundred million francs. A significant part of the coveted property being domiciled in Italy, the pretender wrote to Mussolini asking him to intervene on his behalf. This Order's phantom political construction therefore seems to have been, above all, a hopeful means of influencing the Duce.⁴⁴

Much more serious is the case of the *Mladorossy*, or Young Russians. Alexandre Kazem-Beg, the movement's guide, lived in Le Vésinet in the Paris region. The French branch of the Young Russians was proclaimed on March 30, 1927, and the Paris section was presided over by Prince Vladimir Krasinsky, officially the son of Grand Duke Andrei but whose paternity is rumored to be attributable to Nicholas II. Like the rest of the movement, the French section was clearly pro-Kirill. Of its 1,000 activists worldwide, about 300 resided in France, with about half in the Paris region and the other half largely spread between Lyon and Nice. Its audience was made even larger by the two Russian-language newspapers it published: *Mladoross* and *Russkaia iskra*.⁴⁵ The Young Russians allegedly had contacts with fascist Germany and Italy, whose style they adopted. On a personal level, Kazem-Beg entertained links with Krasnov and the Brotherhood of Russian Truth.⁴⁶

Their program was not one of restoration: "The Young Russians, while defending the idea of a social monarchy (tsar and soviets), seek to collaborate with Russian nationalists who are working towards national recovery and defense."⁴⁷ They considered Stalin's regime "despotic" but also thought that it had awakened national forces against "machinism." The Young Russians believed that the revolution could only end with "a social monarchy, a federated empire, and a managed economy."⁴⁸ In fact, Kazem-Beg made it his specialty to present Soviet policy in terms that were conducive to adoption by the Russian far right. He continued to use the formula "The Tsar and the Soviets" as his slogan. He was thus quickly deemed to be a Soviet agent. That he left for the United States in 1941, where he provided information about the Russian opposition to the U.S. intelligence services, and then returned to Soviet Russia to promote the ecumenical relations of the Moscow Patriarchate,⁴⁹ may lend support to this hypothesis.

The nature of the link between the Whites in France and Germany is well encapsulated by the Russian Fascist Party (*Russkaia fashistkaia partiia*, RFP). The party affirmed that, ultimately, émigrés must develop reconcilable orientations on a global scale and join in an international military intervention against Moscow.⁵⁰ According to its call published in *Signal*, the RNSUV newspaper in France, this unification began with the agreement remotely sponsored by Berlin between the Russian Fascist Party (based in Harbin), the National Labor Union of the New Generation (*Natsional'no-trudovoi soiuz novogo pokoleniia*, NTSNP, based in Belgrade), the Russian Liberation National Movement (*Rossiiskoe osvoboditel'noe natsional'noe dvizhenie*) (ROND, based in Berlin), and the RNSUV. The Russian section of this unified organization was tasked with liberating Russia by joining an Anti-Comintern International, meant to bring together "the religious, national, fascist, national socialist, popular, cultural forces of all countries."⁵¹

Overall, Hitler's advent was met "with enthusiasm" among those Russians in France. Many shared the dream of an imminent German-Soviet war that would bring them to power quickly, and many heard the rumors that Japan would support an autonomous state in Eastern Siberia entrusted to the White Russians. Some

⁴⁴ Commissaire Divisionnaire de police spéciale to the Préfet des Alpes maritimes, "A/S de l'Ordre des Chevaliers des Patriotes Fascistes Nationaux Russes," October 16, 1930, 2 p., AN/19880206/7.

⁴⁵ PP, "A/S d'une propagande en faveur des doctrines soviétiques qui serait faite parmi les membres de l'Association des Jeunes Russes," January 1932, pp. 1–2, AN/19880206/7; "A/S de Vladimir Krassinsky et de l'Union des Jeunes Russes," April 1932, 6 p., AN/20010216/283. The succession of official names ran as follows: Association des Jeunes Russes, then Union des Associations des Jeunes Russes, and lastly Union des Jeunes Russes.

⁴⁶ PP, report on the Confrérie de la Vérité Russe, undated, p. 5, AN/20010216/282.

⁴⁷ Translation given by *La Côte d'émeraude*, October 25, 1935.

⁴⁸ "Union des Young Russians," August 1933, 10 p., AN/20010216/282.

⁴⁹ Alexandre Jevakhoff, *Les Russes blancs* (Paris: Tallandier, 2011).

⁵⁰ PP, July 27, 1937, AN/19880206/7.

⁵¹ Report dated July 27, 1937, 2 p., AN/20010216/283.

Russian émigrés in Paris enthused that the Third Reich sought to offer them a new state consisting of Slovakia, Ruthenia, and Bessarabia. This provoked an internal upheaval in the White Russian émigré community, with some groups suddenly supporting the Ukrainian and Georgian separatists. Globally, however, the rise of minorities' secessionism was seen with suspicion; many White Russians believed that only Germany would protect the territorial integrity of Russia.

The White Russians who had settled in Germany pushed to mobilize for the Reich: General Pavel Bermond-Avalov, who was the leader of the Nazi-controlled ROND in 1932-1933, sent his emissaries from Berlin to Paris. They met willing officers, many of whom felt that General Miller had become too much of a Francophile. But this pro-German activism also raised concerns. According to the French intelligence services, on September 22, 1933, a meeting took place in the ROND headquarters in Berlin-Wilmersdorf between a delegation from ROND, led by Bermond-Avalov; a delegation from the Mladorossy, led by Alexander Kazem-Beg; and Anastasy Vonsiatsky, leader of the All-Russian Fascist Organization (*Vserossiiskaia fashistskaia organizatsiia*, VFO). A Russian who had naturalized as a U.S. citizen, Vonsiatsky would ultimately be arrested and jailed in the United States in 1942 for spying for the Axis. Despite benefitting from the wealth of his American wife, the mythomaniac tendencies of this former U.S.-based leader of the Brotherhood of Russian Truth led to his downfall.

Vonsiatsky and Kazem-Beg were reportedly welcomed to Berlin by Goering and Rosenberg. Kazem-Beg was also allegedly offered 50,000 francs from Vonsiatsky to work toward the unification of Russian émigrés, but he was reluctant to accept the money, as overly Nazifying his movement would make it very difficult to keep it going in France. The leader of the Young Russians preferred to look to Italy, from which he obtained funds.⁵²

The publications of the Young Russians testify to a shift in 1938: if the consolidation of Germany had once appeared to be an asset to White Russians, the Reich's territorial ambitions over Ukraine now aroused concerns, with some Whites calling for an understanding between the USSR and the West.⁵³ Faced with General Miller's resistance to turning ROVS into a fascist organization, the Third Reich sought to set up its own Russian movement. According to the French intelligence services, the Reich hedged its bets on the prestigious thinker Ivan Solonevich, whom Alfred Rosenberg is said to have received in person in Berlin to offer him the leadership of a potential international philo-Nazi union of ex-Russian officers.⁵⁴ The project was stillborn, but Solonevich's newspaper, *Nasha gazeta*, read in France mainly by former junior officers, still sided with the German camp,⁵⁵ as did *Civilisation et bolchévisme*, a Belgian White Russian newspaper published in France; Solonevich participated in and possibly also provided financial support to the latter publication.⁵⁶ The difficulty for Solonevich seems to have been Rosenberg's demand for radical anti-Semitic propaganda.

Solonevich's message enjoyed wide circulation: when Solonevich and his brother Boris went to France in 1937 to hold six talks, the RNSUV periodical *Signal* published their texts. The publication testified to the change in logic that was under way. It claimed that the White Russians could not be satisfied with wanting

⁵² PP, March 23, 1934, AN/19940497/70; "A/S de l'activité de l'émigration russe en France," September 1934, 9 p., AN / 20010216/282; August 1934, 2 p., AN/19940500/307; "Note de renseignements : affaires russes," February 7, 1940, 5 p., AN/19940500/305; September 11, 1937, AN/19940500/309; DRG, "Les émigrés russes en France et l'influence hitlérienne sur leurs groupements," January 29, 1938, p. 3; "Attitude des principales organisations d'émigrés russes en présence des événements," September 28, 1938; "A/S de l'opinion des nationalistes russes de Paris après la conférence de Munich," September 30, 1938; "A/S d'une propagande des Russes blancs en faveur de l'Allemagne," October 3, 1938, AN/20010216/282; Nicolas Ross, *De Koutieпов à Miller. Le Combat des Russes blancs 1930-1940*, p. 18 (Geneva: Syrtes, 2007).

⁵³ "Les émigrés russes de France et le pacte germano-soviétique," October 26, 1939, p. 2, AN/20010216/282.

⁵⁴ RG, report dated April 13, 1936, 2 p., AN/19940500/305.

⁵⁵ "Les émigrés russes de France et le pacte germano-soviétique," October 26, 1939, p. 3, AN/20010216/282.

⁵⁶ Police Administrative (PA), "A/S du journal *Civilisation et bolchevisme*," May 16, 1939, 3 p., AN/20010216/283.

to defeat Bolshevism in Russia but must fight it wherever they found themselves—that is, allied with every enemy of the Soviet Union.⁵⁷ Solonevich himself participated with General Turkul in the National Party of Russia, which they founded in Berlin in 1938 together with General Biskupsky—who had been put in charge of Russian affairs by the Third Reich. The first task of the organization was to try to build new networks in Paris.⁵⁸

This transition from a national to a global struggle drew many Whites from the anti-communist camp into the magnetic field of fascism. In 1935, Vonsiatsky's personal representative in Paris, Alexandre Sipelgas, together with a former journalist from *Le Tocsin* and another journalist who had previously published the daily *Les Dernières Nouvelles*, ultimately set up an agency whose role was to translate articles from German and organize the migration of Russians in France to the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo.⁵⁹ The Gestapo thus found a ready pool of agents among the White Russians in France, enabling it to infiltrate broader émigré circles.

A transnational nomadism therefore emerged in the service of international anti-communism. One of the important figures in this nomadic spy network was Jean Kologrivov, who was born in 1890 and arrived in France in 1922. He naturalized as a French citizen in 1927 and was then ordained as a Catholic priest there. His regular trips to Berlin linked him to the Nazi party, and in particular to Paul Schulz, who came to be one of the Nazis' main recruiting agents among Russian émigrés from 1934.⁶⁰

Conclusion

On January 19, 1938, in Moscow, one of Stalin's main aides, Andrei Zhdanov, fulminated against the protection that the French government was providing the White Russians and their "criminal organizations, which are in reality nests of terrorist vipers, openly practicing their anti-Soviet work under the protection of the French authorities."⁶¹ In reality, even if France constituted a central base for the White Russians, their transnational networks were more polarized by and oriented toward Berlin, Rome, and Tokyo than they were geared toward organizing seditious activity on Soviet territory.

According to a report from the French intelligence services, before the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939, most of the White Russians in France, "even those who had no sympathy for National Socialist doctrines," considered that the Third Reich was "the only dangerous opponent of Bolshevism." Following the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, however, the Third Reich dissolved all Russian anti-Soviet organizations on its territory. This astonished White Russians; many of those who had naturalized would join the French army. For the International Anticommunist Entente, the Pact was a ploy by Germany to destroy Western democracies and bring about world revolution.⁶² Kazem-Beg, for his part, reacted to the invasion of Poland not by supporting German and Soviet policies, but instead by sending a telegram of support to the President of the French Council, ending with these words: "I wish to renew in the name of the Young Russian Movement our commitment to fight alongside France against our implacable enemy, Germany. I am, like all the members of

⁵⁷ DRG, "Les émigrés russes en France et l'influence hitlérienne sur leurs groupements," January 29, 1938, pp. 20–21, AN/20010216/282.

⁵⁸ PA, report dated November 9, 1938, AN/20010216/283.

⁵⁹ "A/S d'un nouveau journal russe, *Autour du Monde*, créé par Alexandre Sipelgas, 4 juillet 1935," 2 p., AN/19940500/309.

⁶⁰ "A/S des nommés Kologrivov Hans, Oujitzky et Moussard, signalés comme agents de la Gestapo," November 1937, 3 p., AN/19940500/308.

⁶¹ RG, "Les émigrés russes en France et l'influence hitlérienne sur leurs groupements," January 29, 1938, p. 1, AN/20010216/282

⁶² International Anticommunist Entente against the 3rd International, *Les Soviets se détachent-ils de l'Allemagne?*, April 5, 1940, 7 p.

the Young Russian party, at your entire disposal.”⁶³ German propaganda tried to stage a counterattack through a paper written by Ivan Solonevich and printed in Bulgaria, which promised, among other Nazi war goals, the accession of Grand Duke Kirill’s German son-in-law to the Russian throne.⁶⁴

Having never succeeded in establishing a minimum of common aspirations or actions, White Russian émigrés in France were bound to enter the war in a state of dispersion, more or less in accordance with the dynamics of previous transnational alliances. Limiting themselves to international anti-communist agitation left them powerless in 1939. Some would flee a Europe at war; others would remain loyal to a defeated France led by Marshal Pétain; and still others would venture into the world of collaborationism.

⁶³ “Les émigrés russes de France et le pacte germano-soviétique,” October 26, 1939, p. 19, AN/20010216/282.

⁶⁴ “Au sujet de la propagande allemande auprès des Russes établis en France,” May 27, 1940, AN/20010216/283.