

[defenseone.com](http://www.defenseone.com)

Putin's DNC Hackers Actively Targeting French Elections

By Patrick Tucker Read bio

Putin's efforts to destabilize Western democratic processes are moving across Europe.

The same Putin-state backed actors that [stole emails](#) from the DNC and John Podesta are targeting campaigns in France in the run up to critical elections in that country. The spear phish campaigns are identical to the attacks that the "Fancy Bear" group launched against the DNC and John Podesta.

As the American press, intelligence community and Donald Trump play out a sordid spy drama, Vladimir Putin's [kompromat campaign](#) of attempted data theft and election meddling continues across Europe, according to a cybersecurity professional with direct knowledge of the ongoing attempts.

France's Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian told French newspapers on Jan. 8 that he expected Russian actors to target France. "Of course, one cannot be naive," he [said](#).

The objective in France is to advance Marine Le Pen's National Front Party. Le Pen [has advocated](#) a weakening the EU and has supported Vladimir Putin on the issue of the illegal annexation of Crimea.

Subscribe

Receive daily email updates:

Subscribe to the Defense One daily.

Be the first to receive updates.

France's election will take place on April 23.

The cybersecurity source declined to name specific parties that had been targeted, but the

rares themselves provide good indication of the Kremlin picks. The attack follows similar news from Germany. In December, Thomas Haldenwang, deputy president of the domestic security agency, or BfV, [said](#) Germany was also seeing increased spear phish attacks. Those attacks are also continuing, the source said.

In Sweden, Major General Gunnar Karlson, the head of the Swedish Military Intelligence and Security Service, has [also described](#) increased an ongoing Russian spear phish campaigns against political targets in that country.

Putin's primary target in Germany is widely understood to be Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union. Germany's will take place in September.

At his Senate confirmation hearing on Thursday, Rep. Mike Pompeo, R-Kansas, Trump's pick to head the CIA, warned against attempted election meddling by Russia in Europe. "We have important elections taking place in the year ahead in Europe and around the world and. We need to be deeply cognizant of all of the foreign actors with maligned intent who are attempting to impact those elections as well," he said.

A senior Defense Department official on Thursday framed Putin's influence campaign as part of Russia's grand push to weaken the U.S.-European alliance and soften their will to maintain sanctions.

"The goal for Russia is to put in place across Europe as many Eurosceptic, NATO skeptic parties as it can," said the defense official. "So think about them being an adversary to NATO and viewing this as a sort of competition short of conflict, you go for those means at your disposal which are low cost high impact."

There's little the Pentagon can do to help allies defend their elections against Kremlin meddling. But timely intelligence sharing with allies was essential.

"It's a, lot of it is working with allied intelligence services, liaison work. It's working with our partners to understand how things worked here so they have less to learn." Most of the work to fight Russian election meddling had to occur from within targeted countries, the official said.

"In terms of the Kompromat, fake news, and trolling and the information warfare, part of the answer has to be greater transparency across all countries in terms of party financing, financing for media outlets, news organizations. Everyone knows about RT and Sputnik, but take a look at what media companies in Europe does Gazprom own? Editorial policy is

compromised when you have these levers of funding. Look at the funding for these parties, like Le Pen's party?"

Russian election meddling in other parts of Europe has a long history, (the [Mitrokhin Archive](#) provides an excellent history.) But the moves by Russia to directly interfere in the United States election show a clear and frightening escalation according to the Defense official.

"Now Russia is more brazen and more bold, more willing to confront the West and the United States on our turf. Everyone knows that there was lots of propaganda in Moldova's election. But it's Moldova, right? ... Now we're talking about this seriously on our own home turf. We are taking it seriously, learning and adapting sharing information about how to deal with this and it's difficult. It's not an easy technical fix or an easy political fix. You have to do a variety of things."

The only real way to curb Russian meddling activities is to show steady and wavering commitment to push back on Russian boundary stepping, said the official. "What is provocative to Russia is lack of resolve."

The degree of resolve is somewhat in question given President-elect Donald Trump's adamant refusal to criticize Vladimir Putin for election hacking activities in the United States.

Not long after Pompeo made his comment to the Intelligence Committee, Le Pen [appeared](#) in the lobby of Trump Tower. Trump tower resident and Trump friend Guido "George" Lombardi told reporters she was there to discuss fundraising for her campaign. 