

# SPAIN

It is well known that Russian secret services employ various tactics to exert influence, one of which involves supporting political parties across different ideologies, including both “left” and “right” factions. This strategy is evident in real-world politics; for instance, in Germany, Russia is reported by The Washington Post<sup>1</sup> to be collaborating with both the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* and the left-wing *Die Linke*. In France, the Russian Federation’s funding of the right-wing National Front (*Rassemblement National*) has been exposed<sup>2</sup>, along with confirmed connections<sup>3</sup> with Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s far-left *La France insoumise*. Similar activities are observed in several other nations. This strategy not only allows Russia to occupy various electoral niches and exacerbate societal polarisation but also to establish footholds of influence for a range of active measures.

In contemporary Spain, characterised by the traditionally tumultuous leftist regions of Catalonia and the Basque Country, ideological polarisation stands out as one of the most prominent in Europe. This was evident in protests<sup>4</sup> of several hundred thousand people in November 2023 against the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party’s (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) intention to form a government alongside the right-wing “Together for Catalonia” (*Junts per Catalunya*) party, which advocates for regional independence. It’s worth noting for the purposes of this analysis that such polarisation is also evident among retired Spanish military personnel. This stems from the historical backdrop of the civil conflict of 1936–1939 between the “left-wing” Republicans, backed by the USSR<sup>5</sup>, and the nationalists led by Francisco Franco. A manifestation of this divide was the discord over the letter<sup>6</sup>, signed by 50 retired Francoist officers

Ideological diversity among the Spanish military is historically influenced by the confrontation of the years 1936–1939 between the “left-wing” Republicans, backed by the USSR, and the nationalists led by Franco



The founder of the Podemos party, a former member of the youth organization of the Communist Party of Spain, Pablo Iglesias

and published<sup>7</sup> in November 2023 by the Spanish Military Association (*Asociación de Militares Españoles*), demanding the removal of the current Prime Minister **Pedro Sánchez Pérez-Castejón**. It was sharply criticised by retired military officers on the “left” flank, who opposed the “Francoist legacy” in the army.

This ideological fracturing provides fertile ground for Russian secret services to directly influence select members of the Spanish military, influencing them directly and engaging in various specialised activities.

In Spain, retired officers are involved in activities aligned with the interests of the Russian government through political parties with ties to Russia, namely the left-wing<sup>8</sup> Podemos (“We Can!”) and the far-right<sup>9</sup> Vox (“Voice”). This study will also examine non-partisan retired Spanish officers with connections to Russia, their affiliated organisations, and their activities serving the interests of the Russian government.

## SPANISH OFFICERS IN THE RANKS OF THE LEFT-WING PODEMOS PARTY, TIES TO RUSSIA, AND ACTIVITIES ALIGNED WITH THE INTERESTS OF THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT

One of the left-wing political forces involving retired Spanish officers is the **Podemos** party. Created in co-operation<sup>10</sup> with representatives of the Trotskyist force “Left Anti-Capitalists” (*Izquierda Anticapitalista*), in 2016, as part of the broad coalition of leftist forces **Unidas Podemos**, it became<sup>11</sup> a partner of the “**United Left**” (*Izquierda Unida*), whose founder and key political force – the Communist Party of Spain (*Partido Comunista de España*) – is historically<sup>12</sup> associated with the USSR and modern Russia. Some of its members participated<sup>13</sup> in armed aggression against Ukraine within the “DPR” and “LPR” terrorist groups.

Despite its electoral setbacks in the 2023 legislative elections, Podemos has achieved significant milestones since its inception. It has secured<sup>14</sup> parliamentary seats multiple times, held positions<sup>15</sup> within the Spanish government, and currently maintains representation<sup>16</sup> in

The appeal to the EU to cease supplying military aid to Ukraine was signed by approximately 30 retired officers and former military personnel from various branches of the Spanish army, and the campaign was supported by Russia Today

the European Parliament. Podemos has received<sup>17</sup> media support from Spanish-language Russian state media outlets such as **Russia Today** and **Sputnik**. The party's founder, **Pablo Iglesias**, a former member<sup>18</sup> of the youth organisation of the Communist Party of Spain (*Unión de Juventudes Comunistas de España*), was<sup>19</sup> a regular guest on Russian media platforms. The party has faced repeated accusations of being financed by the Russian Federation, particularly from Spanish government officials. In 2015, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, José Manuel García-Margallo, made a corresponding statement<sup>20</sup>. During hearings of the National Security Committee of the Spanish Congress, a report was presented<sup>21</sup> suggesting that Podemos may receive funding from the Russian government.

Since the onset of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, both the party itself and retired officers

from its ranks have systematically exerted influence in line with the interests of the Russian government. Their actions aim, among other things, to alleviate sanctions pressure on Russia and undermine the supply of military and technical assistance to Ukraine. For instance, in March 2022, during a meeting of the European Parliament, Podemos voted<sup>22</sup> against expanding sanctions against Russia in response to a full-scale invasion. The party's official stance is to blame<sup>23</sup> NATO for starting the war. It has consistently opposed<sup>24</sup> granting Ukraine the EU candidate status and is against providing financial and military<sup>25</sup> assistance to Ukraine.

## MANIFESTO TO THE EU DEMANDING A CESSATION OF ARMS SUPPLY TO UKRAINE

Regarding the personal involvement of retired Spanish officers who are members of Podemos and exerting influence that aligns with the interests of the Russian government, the manifesto<sup>26</sup> released by former members of the Spanish Armed Forces in June 2023 is noteworthy. The manifesto calls for the European Union to cease supplying military aid to Ukraine and to initiate what they term as "peace talks" with Russia.

The appeal was endorsed by approximately 30 retired officers and former military personnel from various branches of the Spanish army. Additionally, the campaign received support from the Spanish-language Russian state media outlet Russia Today<sup>27</sup>.





Former Chief of the Defense Staff of the Spanish Armed Forces general José Julio Rodríguez Fernández

One of the prominent signatories of the manifesto was the former<sup>28</sup> Chief of the General Staff of the Spanish Defense Ministry (*Jefe del Estado Mayor de la Defensa*) and a member<sup>29</sup> of the Coordination Council and the National Public Council of Podemos, Air General **José Julio Rodríguez Fernández**. General Julio Rodríguez, who also served<sup>30</sup> as the head of the NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control program and the Director General<sup>31</sup> of Armaments and Material of the Ministry of Defense of Spain, has consistently advocated for policies aimed at countering the supply of arms to Ukraine. For instance, in 2023, he expressed<sup>32</sup> opposition to the transfer of Leopard heavy tanks to Ukraine via a post on his Twitter page, stating that such a decision would “lead to military escalation” and “prolong the war”. The retired Spanish army officer also maintains the belief<sup>33</sup> that the occupied Crimea cannot be returned “no matter what kind of military assistance is provided to Ukraine”.

Furthermore, General Rodriguez's stance on the issue of Catalan independence is significant. Alongside advocating for the region to remain part of Spain, he supported<sup>34</sup> the holding of an unconstitutional referendum on Catalan separation. According to Spanish intelligence<sup>35</sup>, Russian secret services were also interested in promoting the referendum within Spanish society.

General José Julio Rodríguez Fernández has been linked<sup>36</sup> by Spanish media to several left-wing associations of retired Spanish officers, including the **“Militaries Anti-Francoists”** (*Militares Anti Franquistas*), the group **“Military Democrats for the ANEMOI Republic”** (*Colectivo de Militares Demócratas por la República “ANEMOI”,* hereafter referred to as ANEMOI), and the **Military and Democracy Forum** (*el Foro Milicia y Democracia, hereafter – FMD*), all of which will be further discussed in this report.



Spanish Navy retired officer Manuel Pardo de Donlebún Montesino co-organized the anti-NATO protest in Madrid in 2022, which received information support from the Russian channel Sputnik

In January 2022, on the eve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Military Anti-Francoists published<sup>37</sup> an official statement through its partner organisation, the **Association for the Memory of the Military Democrats** (*Asociación por la Memoria Militar Democrática*, hereafter – AMMD), accusing NATO, not Russia, of preparing for such an invasion. They demanded that Spain remain "neutral" in the conflict. It is noteworthy that after the onset of Russian aggression in 2014, the president of AMMD and a member of ANEMOI, Captain of the Spanish Navy in reserve Manuel Pardo de Donlebún Montesino, became an expert on the platform of the Span-

ish-language Russian media Sputnik<sup>38</sup>, where among other things, he exerted influence aimed at discrediting NATO. In particular, he referred<sup>39</sup> to the alliance as "an instrument of US domination". Retired Spanish Navy officer, Montesino is also the founder<sup>40</sup> of the organisation "**Veterans for Peace in Spain**" (*Veteranos por la Paz España*) and a member<sup>41</sup> of the so-called International **Anti-imperialistic Front** (*Frente Antiimperialista Internacionalista*). During the NATO summit in Madrid in 2022, Montesino co-organized<sup>42</sup> an anti-NATO protest in the capital, which received information support from Russia's Sputnik<sup>43</sup>.

**On the eve of Russia's invasion, on the Militares Antifranquistas' site a statement of the Asociación por la Memoria Militar Democrática was published, accusing NATO, not Russia, in preparing for an invasion, and demanding the "neutrality" from Spain**

"Veterans for Peace in Spain" is part<sup>44</sup> of the international organisation Veterans for Peace, which is registered in the United States. Both Veterans for Peace in Spain and its American parent organisation have been influencing<sup>45</sup> opposition to the supply of Western weapons to Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion.



In April 2023, Ecologists in Action participated in pacifist demonstrations in Spain, demanding to stop military and technical assistance to Ukraine and advocating for "peace talks" with Russia

The aforementioned ANEMOI group also officially opposes<sup>46</sup> the provision of Western military aid to Ukraine. Several representatives of ANEMOI and the Military and Democracy Forum have signed the aforementioned appeal to the EU, which will receive further focus later in this paper.

Another retired officer, a member of Podemos and signatory of the manifesto, is the former Chief<sup>47</sup> of the Spanish Air Combat Command (*General Jefe del Mando Aéreo de Combate*), retired Lieutenant General **César Miguel Simón López**. Lieutenant General López is the party's representative<sup>48</sup> in the municipality of Guadalajara and a member<sup>49</sup> of the Military and Democracy Forum. He also serves as a military consultant<sup>50</sup> to the president of the **Airbus** aerospace company's Spanish branch.

Other Spanish officers and retired military personnel, who supported the demand<sup>51</sup> to the EU to halt arms supply, are not affiliated with political parties, but have established ties to Russia and are involved in campaigns that align with the interests of the Russian government. Therefore, they also deserve special attention.

For example, retired<sup>52</sup> Spanish army lieutenant **Luis Gonzalo Segura** is a regular contributor<sup>53</sup> to the Spanish-language version of *Russia Today*. Through his work on the platform, Lieutenant Segura, among other things, exerts influence aimed<sup>54</sup> at discrediting Ukraine as an "undemocratic state" and discrediting<sup>55</sup> the North Atlantic Alliance.

In August 2023, Segura published a book<sup>56</sup> titled "The Ukrainian Trap" ("La trampa Ucraniana"), which criticises the "demonisation of Russia by the West" and accuses Western media of "disinformation and distortion of facts about the war".

Another signatory of the demand<sup>57</sup> to the EU to stop supplying arms to Ukraine was retired Lieutenant Colonel<sup>58</sup> of the Spanish Air Force, **José Ignacio Domínguez**. Domínguez has also engaged with Spanish-language Russian state media, this time – with *Sputnik*<sup>59</sup>. He serves as the regional coordinator<sup>60</sup> and lawyer for **Ecologists in Action** (*Ecologistas en Acción*), which has been systematically involved in influencing the interests of the Russian government. In April 2023, Ecologists in Action participated<sup>61</sup> in pacifist demonstrations in Spain, demanding an end to military and technical assistance to Ukraine and



Retired Spanish Army Lieutenant Luis Gonzalo Segura backed the Manifesto to the EU, urging to halt arms shipments to Ukraine

advocating for “peace talks” with Russia, echoing<sup>62</sup> similar arguments as those put forth by the Kremlin regarding the “threat of direct conflict between NATO and Russia”, along with employing classic leftist rhetoric about “reducing military spending” and the “urgency to bolster” social spending.

Participation of Ecologists in Action in campaigns<sup>63</sup> to shut down nuclear power plants in Spain and oppose the construction of the **MidCat** (Midi-Catalonia) gas pipeline also deserves attention. Analysts estimated<sup>64</sup>, if completed, the MidCat project could reduce European reliance on Russian natural gas by 10 to 40%. Opposition to the pipeline’s construction in 2017 was cited<sup>65</sup> by subversion experts as one of the economic reasons why Russian intelligence services support Catalan separatists.

Among the signatories of the appeal to the EU is **Manuel Ruiz Robles**, a retired captain of the Spanish Navy and former member<sup>66</sup> of the left-wing anti-Franco **Democratic Military Union** (*Unión Militar Democrática*, hereafter – UMD). Robles is an official partner<sup>67</sup> of the aforementioned Military and Democracy Forum, a member<sup>68</sup> of the board of directors of the **Militia and Republic Civil Association** (*la Asociación Civil Milicia y Repùblica*, hereafter – AC MYR), and a member<sup>69</sup> of the organisation “**Friends of Combatants in Republican Spain**” (*Amigos de los Combatientes en la España Republicana*, hereafter – ACER). **ACER**, among its various activities, examines<sup>70</sup> the archives of the International Brigades in Moscow and collaborates with several other memorial organisations. Notably, it has a partner organisation in Russia that has received recognition for its



The 'Militaries for the Future' union held a rally, demanding changes to Spain's legislation to permit active-duty military personnel to join political parties

efforts from the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation.

One more signatory of the manifesto is a retired officer<sup>71</sup> of the Spanish Air Force **Floren Dimas**, who is a member of all three of the aforementioned officers' associations, including ACER and ANEMOI. Dimas is also one of the contributors<sup>72</sup> to the Military and Democracy Forum and the head<sup>73</sup> of the Militia and Republic Civil Association (AC MYR). In his public activities, Lieutenant<sup>74</sup> Dimas calls<sup>75</sup> "NATO expansion" as a reason for the war and opposes<sup>76</sup> Spain's purchase of Patriot systems for further transfer to Ukraine.

Interestingly, all aforementioned retired Spanish officers who signed the manifesto to the EU, along with the Ecologists in Action, are contributors to the Spanish-language left-wing publisher **Rebelion**. The platform boasts approximately 4.5 million visits monthly and is considered one of the most influential left-wing re-

sources in Europe. While the owner of the publishing company remains unknown, one of *Rebelion*'s authors<sup>77</sup> is **Leonid Savin** (Леонид Савин), the editor-in-chief<sup>78</sup> of the think tank **Katehon**, which is funded<sup>79</sup> by Russian oligarch **Konstantin Malofeev**. The *Rebelion* site regularly reprints materials from *Katehon*<sup>80</sup> and another think tank associated with Malofeev<sup>81</sup>, **Geopolitica.ru**<sup>82</sup>. Additionally, **Maksym Goldrab** (Максим Гольдраб), leader of the **Union of Left Forces** party, banned in Ukraine and accused by the Security Service of Ukraine of collaborating with the Russian Federation, contributes to *Rebelion*. The Union of Left Forces party participated<sup>83</sup> in the so-called "elections" in the territories occupied by the Russian militia groups "DPR" and "LPR". On the *Rebelion* portal, Goldrab addresses topics such as "Nazism in Ukraine"<sup>84</sup>, "military corruption"<sup>85</sup>, and "the destruction of freedom of speech"<sup>86</sup>. Pablo Iglesias, the founder of the Podemos party, has also collaborated<sup>87</sup> as a contributor with the *Rebelion* platform.

It's important to note that the manifesto directly impacts the Spanish military, as it calls<sup>88</sup> for officers and representatives of the Spanish army to join the campaign.

## PODEMOS' CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ASSOCIATIONS OF RETIRED MILITARY PERSONNEL

In regards to *Podemos*'s potential influence on both active and retired Spanish military personnel, the party's ties<sup>89</sup> with the organisation "**Militaries for the Future**" (*Militares con Futuro*) deserve attention. One of the primary objectives of this organisation is to lobby for "amendments to Spanish legislation" to permit<sup>90</sup> military personnel to join political parties. Notably, *Podemos* actively sought to draw military personnel to this association, employing<sup>91</sup> its own official media platform for this purpose.

"Militaries for the Future" has faced accusations<sup>92</sup> from Spanish intelligence of engaging in "subversive activities" within the Spanish Armed Forces. During the migrant crisis in the Ceuta region (a Spanish exclave on the northern coast of Africa) in 2021, the organisation reportedly utilised the "**Citizens in Uniform**" (*Ciudadanos de Uniforme*) Telegram channel for anonymous military complaints, encouraging active military personnel to disregard<sup>93</sup> orders from their command and refrain from impeding attempts to

breach the border fence with Morocco.

"Citizens in Uniform" has been subject to coverage by Russian state media outlet *Sputnik* as part of efforts to discredit the Spanish Armed Forces and the NATO alliance. For instance, *Sputnik* published an article<sup>94</sup> about the alleged presence of "neo-Nazis" within NATO armies, citing a report by "Citizens in Uniform" submitted to the Spanish Ministry of Defense on the alleged "presence of such neo-Nazis in the Spanish Armed Forces".

It is noteworthy that representatives of the political alliance *Unidas Podemos*, comprising the *Podemos* party, have participated in events alongside "Militaries for the Future". For instance, on September 4, 2021, a rally<sup>95</sup> organised by the "**Union of Private Soldiers**" (*La Unión de Militares de Tropa*) was held in front of the Spanish Congress in Plaza de la Cortes, Madrid. Various associations of the Spanish military attended the event – the Professional **Military Association "Old Spanish Tercios"** (*La asociación "Tercios Viejos españoles" (TERVIES)*) that unites<sup>96</sup> military personnel from various branches of the army, the association "**Request for Justice and Honor**" (*Cuestión de Justicia y Honor*) that exposes internal violations within the Armed Forces, and representatives of the "Militaries for the Future". Members of the *Unidas Podemos* alliance also<sup>97</sup> were present at the rally, including **Enrique San-**

**Militares con Futuro has faced accusations from Spanish intelligence of engaging in "subversive activities" wothin the Spanish Armed Forces**

**tiago**, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain, who is considered<sup>98</sup> by Spanish media to be very close to the leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias.



A former Chief of Staff of the Spanish Army Ground Force, Army General Fulgencio Coll Bucher (on the left)

## VOX RIGHTS, TIES TO RUSSIA AND INFLUENCE ON THE SPANISH MILITARY

From the perspective of ties with Russia exposed in this study, the Vox (Voice) political party deserves special attention among the “right-wing” political forces for its direct impact on the groups of active and former Spanish military personnel and the threats associated with such influence.

In 2019, Vox emerged<sup>99</sup> as a significant platform for engaging high-ranking retired officers of the Spanish Armed Forces in the country’s political landscape. Notably, several retired military figures accepted prominent roles within the party’s ranks. For instance, in various regional parliamentary elections, Vox fielded<sup>100</sup> candidates such as former Chief of Staff of the Ground

Forces (Jefe de Estado Mayor del Ejército de Tierra) Army General **Fulgencio Coll Bucher**<sup>101</sup>, awarded the highest royal award – the Cross of Isabella the Catholic; **Agustín Rosety Fernández de Castro**, a retired Brigadier General of the Spanish Navy with experience in special operations, who also held<sup>102</sup> positions in the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Spain; **Antonio Budiño Carballo**, a retired Brigadier General, who previously<sup>103</sup> taught at the General Staff School of the Spanish Armed Forces; and **Alberto Asarta Cuevas**, a retired Major General of the Spanish Armed Forces and former commander<sup>104</sup> of the UN Interim Mission in Lebanon.

In 2023, the Vox candidate for the municipality of Orihuela was a retired lieutenant general of the Spanish Air Force, one<sup>105</sup> of the co-authors of the Spanish Air Force doctrine, **Manuel Mestre Barea**<sup>106</sup>. In the Navarra region, the party was represented<sup>107</sup> by retired military officer **Emilio Jiménez**. Additionally, the list of candidates in the last elections included<sup>108</sup> retired non-commissioned officer **Manuel Ángel González**, as well as the former head<sup>109</sup> of the security service of the Cerro Muriano military base, retired officer **José Tuñón**.

According<sup>110</sup> to Rafa Martínez, a professor of political science at the University of Barcelona, the majority of military personnel in the Spanish Armed Forces hold conservative views, with some sympathising with the former regime of dictator Francisco Franco. As a result, the conservative and far-right rhetoric of Vox resonates and garners support among both retired and active Spanish military personnel and officers.

During its formation, Vox faced scrutiny for its connections to Russia. Its leader, **Santiago Abascal**, publicly expressed<sup>111</sup> sympathy for the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Additionally, the party has consistently worked to undermine the European Union, aligning with Russian interests in terms of influence.

It should also be noted that the activities of Vox's leader and the party itself were occasionally covered<sup>119</sup> by the *Katehon* think tank's platform, funded by Konstantin Malofeev. For example, *Katehon* reprinted<sup>120</sup> Santiago Abascal's critiques of so-called "international globalism", which he claimed seeks to disintegrate nation-states.



Close to Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, the president of the World Congress of Families, Alexei Komov, is a member of the executive board of CitizenGO

An investigation by Open Democracy<sup>112</sup> revealed that Vox was indirectly funded by the non-profit international association **HazteOir** (*Hazte Oir Víctimas de la ideología de género*), associated with Russian oligarch **Konstantin Malofeev**. In 2013, *HazteOir* founded an online platform to "protect traditional values" in Europe, called *CitizenGO*, with Alexey Komov, a Russian businessman close<sup>113</sup> to Malofeev, on the board of directors<sup>114</sup>. According<sup>115</sup> to *Tagesspiegel*, a German court confirmed the facts that Malofeev financed *CitizenGO*. Both *HazteOir* and *CitizenGO* played roles in promoting<sup>116</sup> Vox in Spain. **Ignacio Arsuaga**, founder and president of *HazteOir* and *CitizenGO*, is a close associate<sup>117</sup> of Vox party leader Santiago Abascal, although the organisations publicly severed<sup>118</sup> ties in 2019.

*CitizenGO* has also supported<sup>121</sup> other right-wing Eurosceptic parties with ties<sup>122</sup> to Russia, such as Germany's **AfD** (*Alternative für Deutschland*) and Italy's **League of the North** (*Lega Nord*). Vox interacts<sup>123</sup> with these parties as well.

Open criticism of NATO and the EU in Spain poses a significant risk of marginalisation and electoral setbacks for any political party since such sentiments are not widely popular in Spanish society. Nevertheless, given Vox's history of ties to Russia and its connections with Russian-linked political parties, one can observe the party's consistent policy of discrediting the European Union. In fact, Vox has made criticising<sup>124</sup> the EU a fundamental aspect of its platform. Although the party does not openly advocate for Spain's withdrawal from the European Union like the French "National Front" and the Italian "League of the North", it emphasises the "need to restore the sovereignty of European countries". It calls for a "revision of the EU Treaty"<sup>125</sup>.

According to Xabier Deop, a professor of international public law and European Union law at the Catholic University of Avila, the program presented by Vox in the 2023 parliamentary elections is incompatible<sup>126</sup> with Spain's membership in the European Union.

Moreover, given the significant public trust in the institutions of the Armed Forces, as seen from the study<sup>127</sup> conducted by the University of Murcia, the involvement of retired Spanish officers serves as an effective tool in legitimising the Eurosceptic agenda for a broader audience in the country.



July 1994, Alexander Dugin signs the "National Bolshevik Act" in Spain with the leader of the fascist MSR party Juan Antonio Llopis (left). Today, the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics is associated with Dugin

## SPANISH INSTITUTE OF GEOPOLITICS, DUGIN, MALOFEEV AND RETIRED SPANISH OFFICERS

Within the scope of this study, particular attention is drawn to the **Spanish Institute of Geopolitics** (*Instituto Español de Geopolítica*, hereafter – IEG). The organisation operates its own online platform, **Geoestrategia.es**<sup>128</sup>, catering to the

Spanish-speaking audience and specialising in the analysis of contemporary issues in security and defense, to which retired Spanish officers are active contributors. The Spanish Institute of Geopolitics maintains several connections with the Russian Federation and consistently wields influence that aligns with the interests of the Russian government. Moreover, its organisational structure exhibits signs of being a front cover for Russian secret services.

The director of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics, **Juan A. Aguilar**, is a political scientist and a reserve member of the Spanish army. He has authored<sup>129</sup> pieces on the portal **Geopolitica.ru**, which was co-founded by Alexander Dugin, a key ideologist and proponent of the "Russian world" concept, notorious for his appeals to the President of Russia on the invasion of Ukraine and the leader<sup>130</sup> of the International Eurasian Movement (IEM). *El País*<sup>131</sup> reports that one of the sponsors of the portal is oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, who maintains close ties with Vladimir Putin. Notably, the editor-in-chief<sup>132</sup> of the IEG platform is a Spanish political scientist affiliated<sup>133</sup> with the analytical center **Katehon** (which is also a part of Malofeev's holding) **Enrique J. Refoyo**. Refoyo served as an observer<sup>134</sup> during the so-called Russian "referendum" in the occupied territory of the Kherson region in 2023. Moreover, one of the prin-

Particular attention should be paid to the Instituto Spanish Institute of Geopolitics, which exhibits signs of being a cover organization for Russian secret services, and to which retired Spanish officers are actively engaged

pal authors<sup>135</sup> of the IEG platform is Alexander Dugin, and the platform is actively promoting his vision of the “Russian world” and so-called “Eurasianism” concepts. Both Juan Aguilar and Enrique Refoyo are involved in translating Dugin’s books into Spanish, two of which – “Fundamentos de Geopolítica” and “Platonismo Político” – were presented<sup>136</sup> in Madrid in 2023.

Alexander Dugin is one of the key contributors to the IEG site; his vision of the “Russian world” and the concepts of so-called “Eurasianism” are being actively promoted on the platform

In April 2023, Juan Aguilar and other members of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics participated<sup>137</sup> in the **“World Conference on Multi-polarity”**, spearheaded by Dugin’s International Eurasian Movement and the **International Movement of Russophiles (IMR)**. The head of the IMR, **Nikolay Malinov**, faced accusations from the Bulgarian government of spying for the Russian Federation. A separate section of the study delves into the activities of retired Bulgarian officers associated with the Russophiles movement, which align with the interests of the Russian government. The conference drew notable attendees<sup>138</sup>, including Russian Foreign Minister **Sergei Lavrov**, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson **Maria Zakharova**, the aforementioned oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, and numerous participants from over 60 countries. Throughout the conference, efforts were made to discredit the United States of America, with a key

focus on criticising “American colonial policy” and justifying Russian aggression against Ukraine under the guise of a “Russian struggle in Ukraine for a multipolar world”.

As previously mentioned, retired officers of the Spanish Armed Forces are actively engaged in activities of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics. Among the contributors<sup>139</sup> to the platform is a former Commander<sup>140</sup> of the Spanish Ground Forces and ex-Commander<sup>141</sup> of the European Corps (*Eurocorp*), retired Lieutenant General **Pedro Pitarch**. Pitarch has published<sup>142</sup> on Konstantin Malofeev’s *Geopolitica.ru*, where he addressed the complexities of elections in Catalonia, and participated regularly in Spanish-language broadcasts on Russian media outlet Russia Today<sup>143</sup>, where he sought to discredit NATO. The IEG website promotes<sup>144</sup> the personal blog of Lieutenant General Pedro Pitarch.

At the onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in an interview with the Spanish edition of *El Confidencial*<sup>145</sup>, Pedro Pitarch echoed the official position of the Russian government regarding the alleged “civil war in Ukraine”, asserting that the conflict purportedly “bears signs of a civil war”. In 2023, in his aforementioned personal blog, Lieutenant General Pitarch expressed support for the efforts of Russian secret services to undermine military and technical assistance to Ukraine<sup>146</sup>, highlighting “the fatigue of the US and EU from the exorbitant costs of military assistance to Ukraine”. It’s noteworthy that the utilisation of socially sensitive rhetoric resonates within the Spanish military itself: in June<sup>147</sup> 2022, three military

associations – **ASFAS PRO** (*Professional Association of Sergeants of the Armed Forces*), **ATME** (*Association of Spanish Soldiers and Sailors*), and **UMT** (*Union of Military Personnel*) – organised a rally, demanding that the government in-

ploying nuclear weapons in a conflict with Ukraine, particularly “if it faces the risk of defeat”. In February 2023, in his interview with Spanish RTVE<sup>150</sup>, Pedro Pitarch suggested that Ukraine was embroiled in “essentially a war between NATO and Russia”, warning that a Russian defeat could result in the emergence of “Islamic republics” armed with nuclear capabilities.

Lieutenant General Pitarch also serves as a regular analyst<sup>151</sup> for the **Association of Spanish Military** (AME), an organisation that brings together the Spanish military and members of the Civil Guard. Through this platform, he seeks to undermine the supply of weapons to Ukraine and cultivate the fatigue from providing military assistance to the country. Thus, in October 2023, AME published<sup>152</sup> Pitarch’s work titled “Growing Reluctance to Aid Ukraine with Weapons”.

increase military salaries (which was indeed planned by the Spanish government in 2023). Additionally, in 2023, in his own analytical article for ABC<sup>148</sup>, General Pitarch warned of the alleged “threat of global war” due to the supply of tanks to Ukraine.

Lieutenant General Pitarch’s blog posts, among other content, are directed towards nuclear intimidation of the West, a tactic that aligns with one of the strategic influence operations of the Russian secret services. For instance, in one piece, the retired lieutenant general discusses the potential threat<sup>149</sup> of Russia em-

The Spanish Institute of Geopolitics also employs<sup>153</sup> a retired colonel of the Spanish Armed Forces with experience<sup>154</sup> participating in six UN and NATO multinational operations, **Enrique Vega Fernández**. Having studied<sup>155</sup> alongside Lt. Gen. Pitarch at the Academia General Militar, Zaragoza, Colonel Vega has worked in the General Directorate of Foreign Affairs of the Spanish Ministry of Defense and currently holds teaching positions<sup>156</sup> at the Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado and several other military training centers in Spain.

A former Commander of the Spanish Ground Forces, Pedro Pitarch, has been published on Konstantin Malofeev’s Geopolitica.ru and has regularly participated in broadcasts on Russia Today



One of the authors of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics, a former Commander of the Spanish Ground Forces and ex-Commander of the European Corps (Eurocorp), Lieutenant General Pedro Pitarch

Colonel Vega consistently advances the interests of the Russian government through his activities, which involve undermining Western military assistance to Ukraine and justifying Russia's aggression against the country.

In January 2023, as Western countries deliberated supplying Ukraine with Leopard tanks, on the **Military and Democracy Forum's (FMD)** website<sup>157</sup>, which attracts former Spanish military personnel, Colonel Vega published an article named "Reflections on Leopard", where he alleged that Ukraine was engaged in "conflict between NATO and Russia", and criticised Spain for seemingly "bowing to the United States" in its decision to aid Ukraine militarily.

In February 2023, in his own post on FMD – a platform where he regularly contributes – Colonel Vega engaged in nuclear intimidation tactics against the West. In an article titled "Everything You Were Not Told About Sending Leopard Tanks to Ukraine", he suggested<sup>158</sup> that the Russian Federation could "offset the repercussions of supplying arms to Ukraine by resorting to tactical nuclear weapons".

Earlier, in October 2022, following the explosion on the Nord Stream gas pipeline, in his personal column<sup>159</sup>, Colonel Vega dismissed Russia's possible involvement in the incident.

Apart from the FMD, Enrique Vega is also a member<sup>160</sup> of the **Association for the Memory of Democratic Military (AMMD)**, which brings together Spanish citizens "with past or present affiliations with the

Armed Forces and the Civil Guard". Following the onset of Russian aggression in 2014, the president of the association, **Manuel Pardo de Donlebun Montesino**, as mentioned previously, became a commentator for the Russian state media *Sputnik*<sup>161</sup>. Notably, the AMMD association itself blames<sup>162</sup> NATO for Russia's war against Ukraine and advocates for Spain's "neutralinity in the conflict".

Among other authors<sup>163</sup> associated with the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics, from the ranks of retired officers of the Armed Forces of Spain, particular attention should be given to retired Colonel of the Ground Forces<sup>164</sup> **José Antonio Crespo-Francés**. He holds a Doctorate in Arts and Humanities from the University of Navarra and has authored numerous works, often in collaboration with the Spanish Ministry of Defense, the **Spanish Commission of Military History** (*Comisión española de historia militar*), and some other reputable institutions.

Following the commencement of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on February 26, 2022, Colonel Crespo-Francés used the *La Paseata*<sup>165</sup> platform to advocate for the legalisation of Russian aggression and undermine Spain's aid to Ukraine. He argued that the conflict was occurring on "historical Russian territories" and asserted that Spain "has no relation to the war".

Colonel Crespo is also a contributor to the **Association of Spanish Military** (*Asociación de Militares Españoles – AME*), an organisation that consists of retired Spanish officers<sup>166</sup>, among other members.

On the eighth of April 2022, on the association's website, José Antonio Crespo-Francés published an article<sup>167</sup> that criticised the speech of the President of Ukraine to the Spanish Congress, alleging that "the Azov battalion committed crimes at Donbas and in Mariupol".



An IEG author, the president of the Spanish Association of Military Writers, a retired Spanish Brigadier General, Salvador Fontenla Ballesta. He was published on the Malofeev-funded platform Geopolitica.ru

Colonel Crespo-Francés is the author of a series of books, among which the attention should be given to the work "White Slaves: Islam and the Conquest of Europe". Notably, one of the book presentations<sup>168</sup> that took place in May 2022 was hosted by the currently acting fascist party "Falange Española".

The list of IGE authors<sup>169</sup> also contains a Spanish brigadier reserve general and former Chief of Staff of the Rapid Action Forces (*Estado Mayor de la Fuerza de Acción Rápida*) **Salvador Fontenla Ballesta**. Salvador Ballesta serves as the president<sup>170</sup> of the **Spanish Association of Military Writers** (*La Asociación Española de Militares Escritores*) and is a co-author<sup>171</sup> of a guide to defense culture for students. Like some of his counterparts mentioned in this report, Brigadier General Ballesta has published<sup>172</sup> on the *Katehon* platform, fund-

ed<sup>173</sup> by Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, where he denied the Russian threat to the Baltic States in 2017. Also, he has contributed to the aforementioned Geopolitica.ru platform<sup>174</sup>.

Following the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in March 2022, Brigadier General Ballesta engaged in activities seemingly aimed at nuclear intimidation of the West. In an interview with the Spanish edition of *El Debate*<sup>175</sup>, the retired brigadier general asserted that "Russia will not resort to nuclear weapons unless it faces direct threats". Additionally, during the same interview, he advocated for a more neutral stance from Spain regarding the conflict and questioned<sup>176</sup> the potential repercussions of aligning with Russia.

In his public engagements, Salvador Ballesta also endeavours to discredit the North Atlantic Alliance. For instance, in 2021, he authored an article critiquing the Spanish and NATO mission in Afghanistan that was blocked<sup>177</sup> from publication by the Spanish Ministry of Defense. In another piece for *Periodista Digital*<sup>178</sup>, Ballesta criticised NATO for its perceived lack of readiness to defend Ceuta and Melilla (Spanish territories in Africa bordering Morocco, which serve as the primary route for illegal migration to Spain). Additionally, in 2007, in his article<sup>179</sup> "The Military Potential of the European Union", the general criticised NATO's "multinational composition", contending that it negatively impacts the military capabilities of member countries and advocated for the enhancement of Spain's national armed forces.

## RETIRED COLONEL PEDRO BAÑOS, TIES TO RUSSIA AND INFLUENCE IN THE INTERESTS OF THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT

In Spain, particular attention should be paid to the former head<sup>180</sup> of the Counterintelligence and Security Directorate of the European Corps (a tactical association of the armed forces of the EU member states – Eurocorp), former head<sup>181</sup> of the Geopolitical Analysis Department of the General Secretariat of Defense Policy of the Spanish Ministry of Defense, and a former professor<sup>182</sup> at the Higher School of the Spanish Armed Forces, retired Colonel **Pedro Baños**. Pedro Baños cherishes a personal story of his connections with Russia itself, as well as individuals and organisations linked to Russia. Both before and after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, he has exerted influence in line with the interests of the Russian government.

Pedro Baños contributes to Spanish-language Russian state-run platforms such as Russia Today and Sputnik, where he has consistently advocated for the interests of the Russian Federation. For instance, in 2015, following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Baños participated in a radio program<sup>183</sup> on *Sputnik*,

where he advocated forming an alliance between the EU and Russia. In an interview with *Russia Today*<sup>184</sup>, Colonel Baños suggested the involvement of a Ukrainian fighter jet in the downing of Malaysian Boeing MH17 over Donbas, a narrative aligned with the official stance<sup>185</sup> of the Russian government.

In 2018, Pedro Baños was considered<sup>186</sup> for the position of head of the Department of National Security (*Departamento de Seguridad Nacional*) in the government of Pedro Sánchez. However, Baños did not receive this position because of the public outcry over his ties to Russia. *Russia Today*<sup>187</sup> and *Sputnik*<sup>188</sup> reported then on an alleged "planned attack" by Western intelligence against the Spanish officer.

Both before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Baños has worked to undermine the European Union's sanctions against Russia. In this context, he referred<sup>189</sup> to the EU sanctions in response to the occupation of Crimea as "an unnecessary mistake". Furthermore, in 2023, during an interview with the Spanish channel Canal 26, he emphasised<sup>190</sup> that "Western sanctions against Russia have backfired".

This study reveals the cooperation of Pedro Baños with individuals and organisations linked to the ideologist

**Pedro Baños was considered for the position of head of the Department of National Security, but he did not get the appointment because of the public outcry over his ties to the Russian Federation. Russia Today and Sputnik then reported on an alleged "planned attack" against the officer**



Former Chief of Eurocorp Counterintelligence Pedro Baños (on the right) and Russian Ambassador to Spain Yuri Korchagin, 2020

of “Russian World”, Alexander Dugin, repeatedly mentioned in this report. Thus, in 2019, Baños participated in a conference on metapolitics organised by the cultural association **OHKA** and the neo-fascist<sup>191</sup> publishing house Fides. OHKA is a regular contributor<sup>192</sup> to the *Geopolitica.ru* platform, which, according to the findings<sup>193</sup> of the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, is controlled by Alexander Dugin. During this conference, Baños presented his book **“Soros: Destroying Spain”**. Another participant<sup>194</sup> of the conference was the aforementioned observer of “local elections” in the so-called “DPR” and the editor-in-chief of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics (IGE), **Enrique Refoyo**.

In turn, in 2019, the *Geopolitica.ru* platform republished Pedro Baños’ program “Vision Geopolitic”, featuring **Juan Aguilar**, the currently acting director of the Spanish Institute of Geopolitics, as a guest.

Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Reserve Colonel Pedro Baños has consistently exerted influence aimed at undermining the supply of military and technical assistance to Ukraine while justifying Russian aggression. Thus, at a literary conference in Pamplona, Spain, Pedro Baños criticised<sup>195</sup> the provision of arms to Ukraine as a “false path”. Later, in the interview with *Tiempo* during his visit to Buenos Aires in July 2023, where he was presenting his new book “The World’s Crossroads”, he blamed<sup>196</sup> NATO and the EU for Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.

## CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned before, according to the study<sup>197</sup> by the University of Murcia and the Valencia Anti-Fraud Agency published in December 2022, the Spanish Armed Forces enjoy the greatest support among the state institutions in Spanish society. Therefore, the involvement of re-

Spanish citizens are the most likely to support the idea of “peace talks” with the Russian Federation among other eight countries of Central and Western Europe, “even if such negotiations assume that Ukraine loses its own territories”, which indirectly indicates the effectiveness of the systemic influence being exerted

tired officers in exercising influence over unpopular social topics serves as an effective tool in the hands of Russian-affiliated actors.

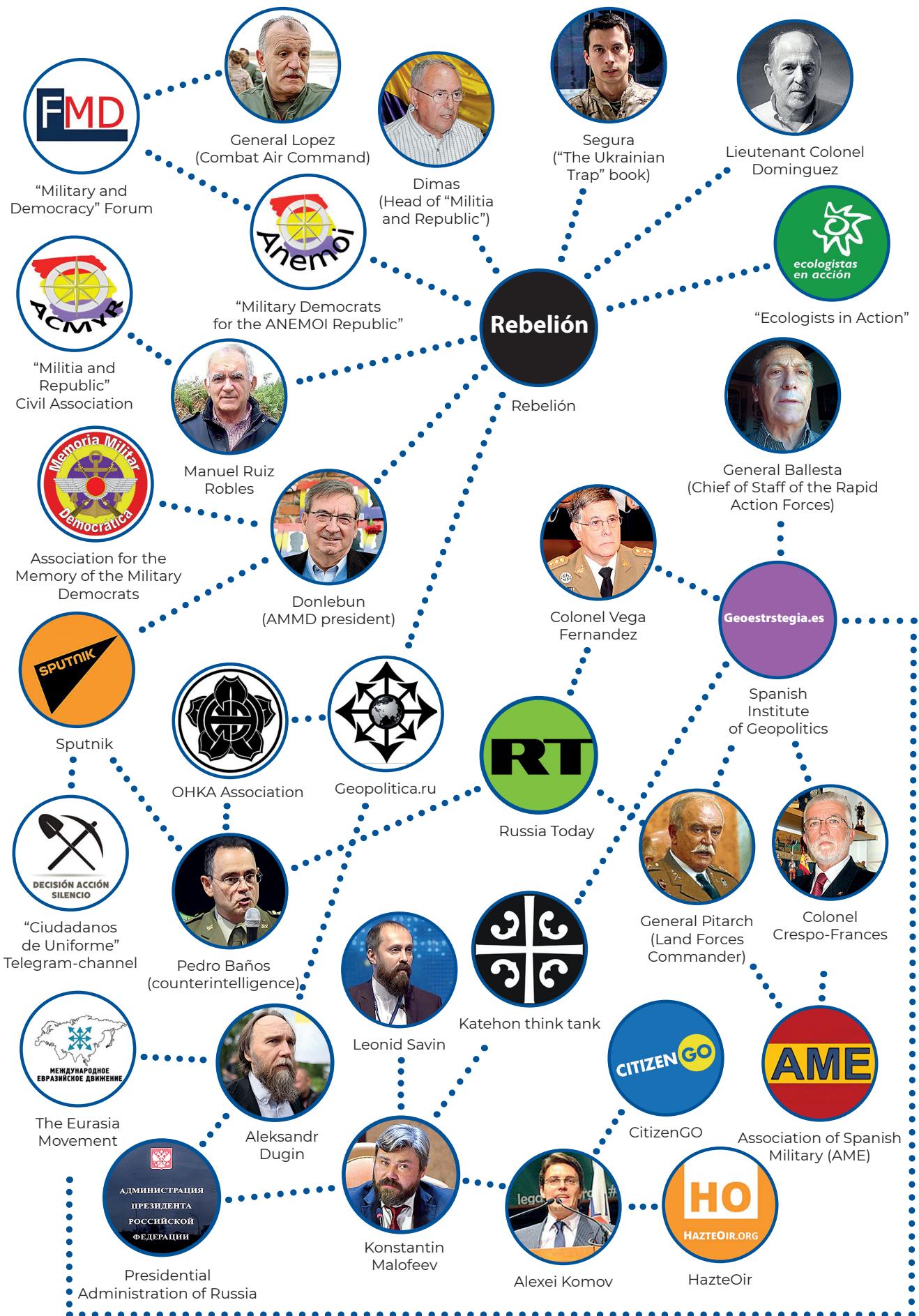
The key areas in which the engagement of retired officers in Spain was identified are undermining the supply of military and technical assistance to Ukraine, weakening Western anti-Russian sanctions, and forcing Ukraine into so-called “peace talks” with Russia.

The latest *Euroskopia pol*<sup>198</sup> dated May 2023 shows that Spanish citizens are the most likely to support the idea of such “peace talks” with Russia among eight other countries of Central and Western Europe (Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Greece, Belgium), “even if such negotiations involve Ukraine losing its own territories”, which indirectly indicates the effectiveness of the systemic implementation of the relevant impact.



# TOY SOLDIERS:

NATO MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS IN RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURES



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