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| **Proposal Title** | Russia in Europe: the reactionary values agenda | | | |
| **Reserve Fund** | Europe Reserve | | | |
| **Amount Requested** | 500,000 USD | | | |
| **Unforeseen Need (250 words)** | Ever since the start of the Ukraine crisis Russia has been able to attract a wide range of sympathizers across the political spectrum within the EU, and proved adept at nudging them in the required direction. The request to explore the work around Russia’s influence in Europe has come from the OSF Chairman after our work-plans and budget for 2015 had already been submitted.  The focus in the first year of this work at OSIFE will be to gauge the influence of Russia in diverting basic democratic values on EU proper. It will be about exposing Russia’s many messages that are increasingly well addressed to particular national discourses, especially building on the erosion of trust in national and EU-level politics. | | | |
| **Detail on Amount Requested (Optional)** | The planned mapping and in-depth country reports will require substantial research and investigative journalism; to guarantee good quality of the work and proper follow-up through dissemination activities the budget is forecasted for a higher estimate of the costs that will cover this work. See attached budget proposal. | | | |
| **Background (Optional)** | Russia is investing heavily in increasing its influence in many aspects of Europe’s political life, very often supporting groups that are against open society values. There is evidence of Russian support for radical parties of the Left and Right, including Eurosceptic nationalists like France’s Front National and Austria’s FPÖ, and extreme xenophobic parties like Ataka in Bulgaria, Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary. There is also evidence of support for individual political leaders, penetration in civil society, attempts to manipulate national debates (for instance, to defend Russia’s energy interests), propaganda to defend Russian international politics, and support for traditionalist movements. However, the evidence is still rather sketchy and based more on strong allegations, hence the need to first do a proper mapping.  Putin’s neo-imperial model has also incorporated an ideological pillar: the defense of traditional family values. Putin has deemed what he called a destruction of traditional values from above in the name of so-called tolerance and equality inherently anti-democratic because it runs counter to the will of the majority of people. This ideology has been used to advance Russian influence beyond its borders in Europe and Central Asia, and in international organizations. Our inclination is to engage in activities and with actors that will understand and counter Russian influence and support to movements defending traditional values. | | | |
| **Risks (Optional)** | The stakes are high when we engage in unpacking and uncovering such senstitive topics as the influence and role of Russia in Europe. While it has been clear for a while that Russia is using all means available to push their world view and interpretation of events (e.g.  the occupation of Crimea or conflict in Eastern Ukraine), the links with both left- and right-wing groups in Europe is not easily digestible for many Europeans and brings us to the borderline of conspiracy theories. The big challenge is what can be done a part from tracking the money and exposing Russia’s meddling in internal politics of EU and its Member States. Naming and shaming from us is problematic: we also are in the business of channeling money into other countries for political purposes. Directly confronting them is not easy either, as OSF does try to avoid being overly partisan, and that is what it would take to counter the likes of Austria's FPO or France's Front National.  Therefore the idea is to link this work with the Reclaiming Family Values portfolio of OSIFE and focus on one specific aspect of Russian influence and avoid entering directly in the ongoing geostrategic warfare reminiscent of the ‘cold-war’ era. | | | |
| **Activities Proposed (500 words)** | We will seek to understand in detail some of the activities by official and unofficial Russian institutions to promote a traditional values agenda as a means to extend its influence into EU member countries. Once these activities are mapped and understood, we will support the creation of tools for organizations that defend individual rights under attack (LGBTIQ, gender equality, reproductive rights) to understand and develop a strategy to counter the tactics that are being used in their countries with Russian support. The three main objectives for this work are:   1. To have a clearer picture with concrete examples and, where possible, hard data on Russian attempts to promote a socially regressive agenda in at least 5 countries of the European Union. The mapping will include tracking at least two different issues: a) both the actors that our outright supported and those who flirt with Russian support without actually receiving it; b) discourses that these actors engage in. 2. To equip organizations in these 5 countries defending liberal values with the information and tools to detect, understand, and counter Russian support for reactionary attacks on individual rights and freedoms. 3. To generate awareness and understanding in the LGBTIQ, gender equality and reproductive rights movements across Europe about this new threat to individual rights and freedoms.   The proposed activities would entail the following:   * 2 mapping consultancies (one for Western Europe, including at least Austria, France and Italy; one in Central and Eastern Europe, including at least all three Baltic Republics); * 6 in-depth country reports (countries will be selected after the mapping exercise); * 1 in-depth report about key players in Russia and their strategies; * Communications, dissemination and training consultancies to process and disseminate the results; * 1 seminar/workshop to share the lessons of the research and generate a tool kit for organizations; * 10 half-day presentations of conclusions, lessons and tool kit (6 in each target country, one in Brussels, one with donors, one in Central Europe, one in Southeast Europe) to activists, politicians and journalists.   We are building this work on existing links OSF has with groups in the above referenced movements and their indications of the disruptive role the Russian insistence on traditional family values is playing, particularly in the Baltics. Elsewhere there is so far limited but growing awareness of the funding streams reaching the actors in Western Europe, particularly the people behind the *Manif pour tous* in France and other defenders of reactionary values. | | | |
| **Summary for Board Reports (100 words)** | Russia is investing heavily in increasing its influence in many aspects of Europe’s political life, very often supporting groups that are against open society values. Putin’s neo-imperial model has also incorporated an ideological pillar: the defense of traditional family values. Putin claims the West is hell-bent on destroying traditional values from above in the name of so-called tolerance and equality, which is inherently anti-democratic because it runs counter to the will of the majority. The focus of this work in 2015 at OSIFE will be to gauge the influence of Russia in diverting basic democratic values on EU proper. | | | |
| **Collaborating Programs within OSF and essential partners or grantees** | OSIFE will work closely with the Eurasia program, the Think-Tank Fund (TTF) and the Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI) in the implementation of this work.  We will partner up with relevant researches and In case we find the adequate partner, which would be the preferred option, some of the above activities will become part of one or more grants. | | | |
| **Contributions expected from Collaborating Programs (250 words)** | None foreseen in financial terms for now but we will build on the experience of Eurasia program, OSEPI and TTF both with Russia and with researchers and investigative journalists in the selected countries. | | | |
| **Statement of who within OSF would guide the work** | The Open Society Initiative for Europe (OSIFE) will create a separate portfolio that will host this work and be led by Peter Matjašič, a Barcelona-based program officer. | | | |
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| **Allocator**  *(See list on* [*Reserve Funds KARL*](https://karl.soros.org/communities/reserves/view.html)*)* | | Name | Jordi Vaquer | |
| Date Approved | 5th April 2015 | |
| **Allocator Notes / Comments**  *(To be completed by allocator only)* | | *(Notes/Comments - Optional field)*  The origin of this request is a direct demand by George Soros for OSIFE to become active in this field, which came in November 2014, too late to incorporate this in the budget. This work will continue in the next years, but it will need to be part of OSIFE’s regular budget. | | |
| *(Criteria checklist)*  Is this an unforeseen opportunity or a genuinely new idea to advance core open society commitments?  Is the need time-sensitive?  Are we proposing to do something that others are not doing?  Is the plan compelling?  Does the planned activity take good advantage of OSF capacity?  Is the team leading the work up to the task? | | |
| **Urgency level for grant approval & payments** | | **Not** Rapid Response | | Rapid Response *(See procedure on* [*KARL*](https://karl.soros.org/communities/reserves/files/ii.-policies/rapid-response-as-of-10-november-2014.docx/)*)* |
| **If approved, where to allocate the budget?**  *(If the budget is split between multiple programs, please copy/paste this section as needed.)* | | Amount | | 500,000 USD (*see detailed budget attached*) |
| Category of Work | | CFE001: Encourage democratic politics beyond borders |
| Division/Program Code | | Russia in Europe |
| Entity *(i.e., FPOS, ZUG)* | | OSIFE |
| Fund Class *(i.e., Lobbying/Non-Lobbying)* | | Non-Lobbying |
| Geography *(of benefit)* | | Western Europe (most likely Austria, France and Italy); Central and Eastern Europe (most likely Hungary, one of the Baltic states) but the final countries will be selected based on the mapping exercise. |
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