Russia's new Oligarchs: Networks, Services, and Regime Stability

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Abstract

In Russia, the political system is usually described as a power vertical with President Vladimir Putin on top. Below, smaller networks are situated around distinct political actors. This thesis explores to what extent such networks are able to influence Russian politics by the provision of particular services to the regime. The thesis analyses the emergence of the networks, the services they deliver, and their widespread connections. Combining Henry E. Hale's model on Patronal Politics (2015) and Marlene Laruelle's concept of entrepreneurs of influence (2021), the thesis discusses the networks, and finds that the relationship between the apex of the Putin-regime and the various networks is crucial for regime stability, but it also involves a risk.

The networks of Evgeniy Prigozhin and Konstantin Malofeev are studied as cases through a content analysis of 285 Russian language media articles. Social network analysis is used to visualise these networks. This thesis takes the wide range of services they deliver and their networks position into consideration and explores to what extent these patriotic entrepreneurs affect the distribution of power within the political system itself. Their service rendering might also be a double-edged sword – by offering services within ideology (conservatism) and public deniability (military services), they place themselves in mainstream Russian politics, but the wider consequences of these services at the meso-level of analysis have not been studied thoroughly.

The theories used are placed in the broader landscape of hybrid regime theories and governance theories. The thesis concludes that networks of patriotic entrepreneurs are able to influence the Russian political sphere through services delivered to the regime by evaluating what the Kremlin needs based on current situations within Russia and abroad. The networks then provide services according to this, and thus receive rewards, be it in terms of influence, profit, or position within the political system in Russia.

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Note on transliteration

Russian names have been transliterated using the BGN/PCGN transliteration system. Some exceptions are made when western sources continuously write the names differently than done in this transliteration. This is because I want the names to be written as they are commonly done by others in the West. Malofeev (not Malofeyev) is an example of this. In cases where authors with Russian names have been written in the Latin alphabet, this transliteration is used.

1 Introduction

We do not have oligarchs anymore … Oligarchs are those who use their proximity to the authorities to receive super profits … these are practically non-existent (Putin 2019).

This statement was made by Putin in 2019 in an interview with the *Financial Times*. It can be understood as an expression of how the Kremlin, over decades, has sought to alter the concept of oligarchy within Russia, by pulling in a new generation of service providers, instead of traditional profit seekers. The oligarchs of the 1990s are no longer active in the political sphere in Russia, after Putin put up a fight against them in the early years of his presidency.

However, the new generation of service providers operate in proximity of the regime and receive rewards according to what they deliver. Two such service providers, their emergence, services and networks will be examined in detail in this thesis. First - Evgeniy Viktorovich Prigozhin, also known as "Putin's chef", who has delivered catering services to the Kremlin, in addition to various services of other sorts. His relation to the Kremlin goes back to the early 2000s. The other entrepreneur is the orthodox businessman Konstantin Valeryevich Malofeev whose relations to the Kremlin are more dependent on other political actors, but whose ideological services has established him as a trustworthy service provider following the Kremlin's conservative narrative.

1.1   The research question:

The thesis will analyse the relationship between the regime and the patriotic entrepreneurs, and the extent to which they influence politics today. Therefore, the research question asked is:

To what extent are networks of patriotic entrepreneurs able to influence the Russian political sphere through services they deliver to the regime?

Answering this question requires a deeper understanding of what influence is, and how to measure it. Influence is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as "to affect or change how someone or something develops, behaves, or thinks" (Cambridge Dictionary – Influence). This is not to say that the entrepreneurs are influencing Putin directly and having a significant impact on his actions. But rather that the services they provide can have an effect on how the Kremlin politics and narrative develops. However, influence is not easily measured, and therefore an exploration of the possible effects the services and networks might have on the regime and the dynamics of the patron-client structure discussed within context can give an indication of the extent of their

influence on the Russian political sphere. A clear definition of patriotic entrepreneurs and what kind of services they deliver to the regime must be established.

The thesis will examine how entrepreneurs used Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 to provide services for the regime in line with Putin's conservative turn. The entrepreneurs positioned themselves according to the conservative turn and have since provided services to the regime and worked as sub-contractors for some state-services. The entrepreneurs have not challenged the regime; however, they have made room for manoeuvre in the political field and have contributed to the incursion on popular mobilisation against Putin (Girin 2012, Telekanal Tsargrad 2021).

To do this the thesis will do a case study of the mentioned entrepreneurs using content analysis and social network analysis to research three points of analysis: The networks' rise to position, services, and network details. Based on this, and the empirical data researched in this thesis, which shows their loyal support for the current regime and the deliverance of patriotic services the term patriotic entrepreneur is used in this thesis. A further discussion on terminology will follow in Chapter 2.

The close media focus and analysis in this thesis provides a new angle for analysing these patriotic entrepreneurs, their networks, actions, and services. Previous research and theories often mention such networks but often do not analyse them further. The media analysis will provide information about the emergence of these networks, how they built their position and what services they deliver to the regime. These activities and services are relevant for the larger backdrop of theoretically driven assumption.

Through studying the cases of two current entrepreneurial networks in Putin's second presidency, the thesis will contribute to the broader studies of the dynamics of patronal politics (Hale 2015), regime stability, and the future of Russian Politics. The choice of doing a case study of two important networks using media analysis is a novelty; this method of studying these dynamics has not been done before. It will give insightful information about how they are portrayed and framed inn different Russian newspapers, and how their actions contribute to shaping Russian politics.

It is important to understand how the political system in Russia functions, what roles different actors have, and how they are important in and for the system. The development of Russian regime dynamics is fundamental to understand the position of today's actors in Russian politics.

1.2   Background

In Russia in the 1990s the term "oligarch" was made common to mean a businessman with enough assets to have an influence on national politics (Guriev and Rachinsky 2005: 132). Many of these oligarchs built their positions through the "loans-for-shares" auctions and the privatisation period in the middle of the 1990s (Hoffman 2002: 2, Guriev and Rachinsky 2005: 138). The positions they acquired were strong and had been built up through connections to the government, who had little control over the oligarchs as they broadened their range of activities well beyond business. In a situation where a "political capitalism emerged and the relationship of economic interests to the state predominated over market relations" (Sakwa 1997: 7), the oligarchs were crucial in securing Boris Yeltsin's victory in the 1996 election (Foy 2019). When Putin came to power, he was wary of the oligarch's involvement in politics, and he declared that they could keep their assets as long as they refrained from interfering in politics (Goldman 2004: 36). If they did not stay out of politics this would have significant consequences, which was clearly demonstrated in cases where former oligarchs fled the country and remain in exile to this day (Foy 2019).

Though the original oligarchs, or the first generation of oligarchs, in Russia are no longer prominent public figures in Russian political life after Putin's crackdown on disloyal oligarchs best illustrated with the Khodorkovsky case in 2003 (Woodruff 2003), new actors have replaced them in important positions. In the place of the first-generation of oligarchs we now find tycoons and businessmen closely connected to politics, but the situation has changed slightly. The state has grown stronger, and these new oligarchs cannot ignore the opinions and actions of the governmental institutions as they did in the 1990s (Szakoniy 2017). They are much more reliant on the generosity of the Kremlin, rather than dictating to power (Foy 2019). In the 90s the oligarchs held a position of major influence, whereas after 2012 their position has been one of limited influence on the core of Putin's limited access order (Yakovlev 2021: 422). The tables have turned from the situation in the 90s where the oligarchs had the upper hand. Today the Kremlin has this position, even though both parts depend on each other.

Because of this change in the relationship, it is worth discussing alternative terms to classify these actors. Laruelle and Limonier defines these new oligarchs in the Russian political sphere as entrepreneurs of influence (2021a). An entrepreneur here is based on the classic definition of entrepreneurs as individuals who by risk and initiative uses their own means, be it political, financial, or social, to earn a profit. Laruelle and Limonier (2021a:) define entrepreneurs of influence as individuals engaging in entrepreneurial activities to build social influence in the

hopes of being rewarded by the Kremlin (2021a: 1-2). However, as this thesis is not examining the *social* influence these entrepreneurs have but rather the influence it has on Russian politics, they are described as *Patriotic entrepreneurs*, as the services they deliver are highly patriotic in nature.

These patriotic entrepreneurs operate in a political system that is severely personalised and based on informal contacts and signals. This system has been defined in many ways, and the thesis will build on Henry E. Hale's theory of patronal politics, where the strong personal position of the president and his close connections to businessmen, media and politicians are of importance, and patron-client networks are what patronal politics is grounded in (Hale 2015). The theory will be discussed in chapter 2, but some of its basic features, as opposed to the institutional approach to Russian politics, will be listed below.

First, constitutionally Russia has three independent branches of government, the judicial, legislative, and executive branch. However, in practice and with an increasing number of amendments and presidential decrees, the executive branch continues to grow stronger. As a result of this, the elite equilibrium could be jeopardised, and the executive branch, with the president and his administration, is stronger than the two other branches (Shiraev 2021: 253). Second, the system should, according to the constitution, include the full extent of political liberties. But in practice it does not, as the government suppresses the opposition by regulating free speech, using violence, and prosecuting journalists, which has led to self-censorship being necessary (Shiraev 2021: 254, Mickiewicz 2019: 100). The party system is one of multiple parties and gives an illusion of being a functional system. However, it has one main party with centralised power, United Russia, which results in other parties having little real power. Most parties outside the systemic opposition struggle to become serious forces for change (Remington 2008: 959).

Third, except for four years as prime minister from 2008 to 2012, Putin has been the head of state since 2000. It is widely agreed that even as prime minister Putin had a significant degree of control (Sakwa 2019:14, Wilson 2015: 155). After Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 he initiated a conservative turn, an ideological shift in the political narrative towards a significant increase in the focus on traditional values and identity (Robinson 2020: 11, Laruelle 2013: 2). This tangible shift towards a conservatism marked a significant watershed compared to Putin's two first periods as president. In his first term as president, 2000-2004, the focus was on reconstructing the state and the power vertical, and on taking Russia towards modernisation (Laruelle 2013:2). This was when the oligarchs' position was fought. In his second presidential

period, 2004-2008, different ideological groups rose, but the Kremlin had control over them by allowing these groups room to operate, and in this way minimising the political dissatisfaction (Laruelle: 2019: 75), and through a "de-ideologized technocracy and through patriotic rhetoric" (Laruelle 2013: 2).

How should we understand the fusion between personalised power and the new ideological turn? Laruelle argues that the conservative turn is an attempt from the Kremlin to bridge the gap between the regime and the society. As ideology is unconstitutional in Russia, there seems to be few other ways to make this turn than by offering the people a "different" Putin. It must be kept in mind that before 2012, the Russian regime was designed to limit and downplay divisions and divisive issues in the public sphere, therefore Putin had to be the statesman that introduced change. Major issues such as national identity, migration policies, the development of federalism, and how to relate to the Soviet past, needed to be addressed anew. Moreover, issues that touch upon factors outside Russia's border were becoming more pressing, such as relations to the near abroad and issues of economic reform. In addition, consensus was cracking up on issues of who the enemy was; NATO and the West, or Islam and China (Laruelle 2013: 3).

Subsequently, Laurelle holds, patriotism, or the promotion of shared social values and practices, and for the collective memory centred on Soviet culture and the Second World War, served as a linchpin (Laruelle 2013: 3). This, in fusion with a personalised system, reinvented Putinism, and set up a new arena for the provision of services. The personalised system in Russia has been described in many different ways; however, it is commonly agreed that the purpose and main ambition of the regime is self-preservation (Kolesnikov 2018: 5, Wilson 2015: 154), and the conservative turn allowed for a sense of a regime that "renewed" itself, albeit on a severely traditional footing; it was an attempt to maintain the *status quo*.

Based on this background we can understand the environment in which the networks of entrepreneurs established themselves as:

a) A Russian political system deinstitutionalised to a large degree. Some even argue that the only institution that functions is the presidency because of the selective implementation of rules of law and legislation (Kolesnikov 2018: 1).

b) Putin's return to the presidency initiated the conservative turn. This signalled to the elite that Putin was back and in need of specific patriotic services. Entrepreneurs knew that there was something in it for the if they could deliver such services.

c) As a system where the new generation of entrepreneurs could find their playground. The entrepreneurs are important because of their loyalty to the regime, and the chief-patron, the president. This loyalty comes from an expectation of the chief-patron to remain in power. At the same time as this expectation contributes to regime stability, it is also a risk for the current regime. If the expectations change, and the oligarchs believe that an oppositional candidate might take power, there is a high chance that this will happen (Hale 2015: 34).

To understand not only the environment in which they established their positions, but also the system where the entrepreneurs operate this thesis will draw on Hale's theory of the patronal political system. In Hale's theory this is explained as an equilibrium where the strong personal position of the president and his close connections to businessmen, media and politicians are of central importance for the maintenance of public power (Hale 2015).

1.3   Theoretical considerations and assumptions

Assumptions will be drawn from the theoretical framework provided by Hale in his book *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (2015). The clear-cut presentation of the theoretically drawn assumptions enables the reader to critically evaluate them. Based on the theoretical assumptions the further sub-questions are developed. The theory, framework and the assumptions drawn from this contribute to the design of the research model. This will be elaborated on in the next chapter. By focusing on a specific viewpoint, the scope of research is limited. The theoretical framework established in chapter 2 will do this.

In the patronal regime in Russia, politics are structured as a single-pyramid system, where Putin is the chief patron. In such a system several different networks are a part of, or aligned with, the larger network under the chief-patron. While respecting his power, they compete for position (Hale 2015: 64). This system is based on personal connections, and punishment and rewards (Hale 2015: 20).

Based on Hale's theory it is assumed that these entrepreneurs are important for the regime because they are loyal to it, and to Putin as chief-patron. This loyalty comes from an expectation that the chief-patron will remain in power. At the same time as this expectation contributes to regime stability, it is also a risk for the current regime. If the expectations change, and the oligarchs believe that an oppositional candidate might take power, there is a high chance that this will happen (Hale 2015: 34).

Hale's theory allows a deeper understanding of the dynamics in the Russian political system. Through this understanding and the assumptions drawn, it will be easier to think about the political future of Russia, especially regarding succession and the upcoming election in 2024. Public opinion and network relationships will be of extra concern for Putin in the coming years because this indicates how much power he will have over a possible succession and how much of a risk there is that certain networks turn their back on him, the chief-patron (Hale 2019: 216).

1.4   The selected cases

This thesis will do a case study of two networks of current patriotic entrepreneurs. The case study is done through analysis of Russian media articles about the two entrepreneurs followed by a social network analysis of the networks based on the information found in the content analysis. The case study is chosen as method because it allows a thorough analysis of two similar, yet different cases in a structured way. The research methods used in this thesis will be discussed and evaluated in chapter 3.

Evgeniy Viktorovich Prigozhin and Konstantin Valeryevich Malofeev as individuals are not the cases in themselves, but rather the networks they are patrons of. Malofeev is building a monarchist network with foundations and organisations, and his orthodox conservative TV-channel, Tsargrad (Laruelle and Limonier 2021a: 324). Prigozhin has built a media empire (Laruelle and Limonier 2021a: 322) but is also occupied in the business of Private Military Companies (Laruelle and Limonier 2021a: 324).

Both the networks surrounding Prigozhin and Malofeev started to develop before 2011, Prigozhin's already in the 1990s and Malofeev's in the 2000s. However, it was with the conservative turn in Russia in 2012 that their positions as service providers for the Kremlin were firmly established as loyal service providers for the regime. Both Prigozhin and Malofeev have connections to the Russian political elite and even direct connections to President Putin (Kanygin 2011, Petlyanova 2011a, Baza SPISOK PUTINA a). Since the networks were already established, they were in a position to make use of the new ideational incentives of conservatism and patriotism and came to play central roles in 2014-2015 when Putin's Russia engaged in illegal military expeditionary activities in Ukraine, Syria, and Africa (Soldatov 2014, Kanygin 2015, Kanev and Zhirayev 2014).

Evgeny Viktorovich Prigozhin started out with a hot-dog stand, has ventured into the business of fine dining, but also provided food for Moscow-schools, ran a troll-factory, and is now preoccupied with private military companies operating in Syria and several African countries

(Baza SPISOK PUTINA b, Panov 2020). Though active in business since the 90's, his appearances in media articles show that he did not become significantly important until after 2011.

Konstantin Valeryevich Malofeev started out with a holdings company, Marshall Capital Partners, with shares in state owned companies, among them Rostelecom (Zhilyayev 2012). He was allegedly funding the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 (Kanygin 2015). His TV channel, Tsargrad TV, used for propaganda in support of the regime and promotion of orthodox ideology (Telekanal Tsargrad). He is a direct beneficiary of the ruling regime by delivering support, propaganda and loyalty to the regime and getting preferences in business in return (Baza SPISOK PUTINA a). As Prigozhin, Malofeev began to appear in media articles around 2011.

However, it is important to point out that neither Prigozhin nor Malofeev have taken on a role as a political contender to Putin (Though Malofeev dabbled with political membership and thoughts of establishing a political party (Pankratova 2019, Gazeta Kommersant 2019). Rather, they positioned themselves as service providers, sub-contractors to some state services, and appear as loyal supporters of the regime. They have established separate power platforms and have supported, and contributed to, the regime's incursion on popular mobilisation against Putin (Baza SPISOK PUTINA n.d.a, Baza SPISOK PUTINA b). Their relevance and importance in Russian politics is clearly demonstrated through this thesis' empirical research.

Both Prigozhin and Malofeev are sanctioned by the EU and the US. Prigozhin was first sanctioned by the US in 2016 for interference in the for his actions through the mercenary company Wagner in Libya he was sanctioned by the EU in 2020 (Official Journal of the European Union L 341 2020). In 2019 and 2021 he was sanctioned by the US for interference in the 2016 US elections. And in 2020 for activities in the Central African Republic. Malofeev has been sanctioned for his involvement in the war in Ukraine by both the EU and the US (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2014, Official Journal of the European Union L 826/16 2014).

This has in cases resulted in the Kremlin distancing itself from the networks. However, Putin's mediatised public denial of the services granted by these networks does not imply that they are of no importance. Rather the deniability is a public asset for the presidency, as it helps to create an impression that Putin is situated above policies, and that the West's accusations are attacks on the political sovereignty of the regime.

1.5   Overview

The thesis will start with a theoretical discussion about the Russian regime and whether it is run by "bad governance" or as Henry Hale argues, that this is just how things work in the Russian patronal system and is inherent in the wider society. Then, based on the theory of Patronal Politics, the theoretical framework will be established with elements from other theoretical models, to fit the meso-level of analysis which is used in this thesis. Chapter 3 will go through the different methods chosen to study the networks of the patriotic entrepreneurs. The three methods used are case study, content analysis and social network analysis of 285 news articles from Russian language sources. The chapter discusses these methods, the weaknesses and strengths that make them the most appropriate methods for this thesis. The cases of Evgeny Prigozhin's and Konstantin Malofeev's network are presented and explained. In chapter 4 the cases will be further presented and analysed through a content analysis of sources from *Novaya Gazeta* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. Chapter 5 does a social network analysis from the same sources, analysed using the coding language R for statistical and graphic computing. Chapter 6 will discuss the networks, their relation to the Russian political regime and the services they provide. Finally, the last chapter offers a conclusion with an answer to the research question, and a discussion around future research in this field, as well as addressing topics of interest beyond the scope of this thesis.

2 Regime governance – networks of personalised relations

This chapter will discuss the Russian regime and how to best approach this when studying networks of patriotic entrepreneurs. This will be done by discussing two different approaches to understanding the Russian regime and the system in which Russian regime governance operates. The main distinction is between hybrid authoritarian regimes (competitive authoritarian regimes) and patronage-based regimes. The categorisation of the Russian regime is not the purpose of this thesis; however, it is important to be aware of the overarching theoretical debate surrounding this to better understand the theoretical framework at use in this thesis. Understanding the regime dynamics and the Russian political context is crucial to understand the environment in which the patriotic entrepreneurs operate.

The discussion will first inform about the many ways of understanding the Russian regime and its governance, and then move on to explain Gel'man's theory of "bad governance" as a way to approach Russian politics (Gel'man 2021). From this, the chapter moves on to argue that for the purpose of this thesis, Hale's theory of patronal politics is better suited to establish a theoretical framework. Other models will be considered, and some elements useful in this thesis will be added to adjust Hale's theory to this thesis. Following this, core assumptions are drawn from Hale's theory, and these assumptions will function as a guide throughout the thesis, and aid the process of reaching and answer to the research question – *To what extent are networks of patriotic entrepreneurs able to influence the Russian political sphere through services they deliver to the regime?*

To analyse the cases in this thesis and explain their room for manoeuvre, how they rise and position themselves, what keeps them going, and how they avoid a "fall from grace", it is crucial to understand that a patronal system is not static. Rather, on the contrary, such systems evolve, and they do so along several lines (Hale 2015: 62-63).

Regime types are discussed continuously, and various theories have developed. The Russian regime has been defined and categorised in numerous different ways. By some, Russia has been termed a hybrid regime, a mix between a democracy and an autocracy (Hale 2015). By others it is described as personalist authoritarian regime (Gel'man 2021: 73), a kleptocracy (Dawisha 2014, Lanskoy and Myles-Primakoff 2018), and an electoral authoritarian regime (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Terms such as patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism, clientelism, corruption, nepotism, kleptocracy and others of similar character can, and have, been used to explain contemporary Russian politics (Dawisha 2014, Ledeneva 2006)

2.1 Hybrid regime theory

The theory of hybrid regimes came about in the late 1990s and has an intellectual foundation in the transition paradigm and other comparative work done on democracy in the end of the 20th century (Diamond 2002: 24). The transition paradigm was developed when the political landscape of the world changed as several countries in each region of the world moved away from dictatorial rule at the same time, and toward a more liberal and democratic governance (Carothers 2002: 5). Several regions saw the fall of right-wing authoritarian regimes, replacements of military regimes, the collapse of communist regimes, and of course the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, and though these processes were different they were argued to build on and influence each other. Samuel Huntington saw this as a global trend towards democracy, and thus coined the term the "third wave" of democracy (Carothers 2002: 5).

The world, and especially the West, saw this as a turn to a democratic world, and the model of the transition paradigm, a three-part process from authoritarianism towards democracy, became a universal paradigm for understanding democratisation. The main assumption of the paradigm was that all countries moving away from dictatorship are considered to transition to a democracy (Carothers 2002: 5).

However, as time has passed since the transition to democracy started, many of the states never became fully democratic and has not followed the model of the transition paradigm. Carothers therefore argued for a new and better lens to analyse such states (2002: 5). Many of the countries of the "third wave" of democratisation entered a political grey zone, with some characteristics of a democratic state, but still significant shortcomings. Such countries have often been described democracies with adjectives, or what Carothers calls "qualified democracies" (2002: 10). The problem with this is that the assumption of a democratic transition is still in place.

The term hybrid regime means a regime that combines elements of democracy and authoritarianism (Diamond 2002: 23, Colton and Hale 2014:3). Hybrid regimes have been thought of as regimes in transition, or unstable regimes where the elements form each of the regime types are in tension (Colton and Hale 2014: 5). The hybrid regime in Russia developed after the fall of the Soviet Union and the incomplete attempt of democratisation (Sakwa 1997: 7), and in the 90's the political process in the country was termed a 'prolonged democratic

transition', which then in the 2000' was followed by a failure to consolidate democracy (Levitsky and Way 2010: 4).

The hybrid-regime theory has been suffering from what Levitsky and Way calls a "democratisation bias" meaning that they have been seen as flawed and incomplete democracies, or simply in transition towards democracy (2010: 3). Instead of viewing hybrid regimes in continuation of the transition paradigm several scholars now view to these regimes as a regime type in itself, neither democratic, nor authoritarian, but hybrid (Levitsky and Way 2010, Mufti 2018). A hybrid regime then, is better understood as a distinct non-democratic regime type (Levitsky and Way 2010: 4).

The case of Russia, and several other hybrid regimes, show that many hybrid regimes are long-lived and, to a certain degree, stable regimes. This is often a result of public attitudes and support from the people, plausible deniability, institutional and repressive apparatus (Colton and Hale 2014:20), or passive acceptance. Other non-democratic regimes with elections are Mexico, China, Egypt, Jordan, Taiwan, and Vietnam (Colton and Hale 2014: 5).

What are the characteristics of a hybrid regime, and what makes it stable? Why is it not in transition, but remain in this middle-position between democracy and autocracy?

Gel'man explains this longevity of some hybrid regimes with what he calls «bad governance». When we talk about regime governance, we mean the various ways in which regimes govern their states. Bad governance is not just the opposite of good governance. A minimalist definition of bad governance is drawn from four characteristics of state governance: lack and/or perversion of the rule of law, corruption, poor quality of regulation, and ineffectiveness of government (Gelman 2017: 498).

The origins of bad governance can be explained in different ways but can be divided into three complementary groups. First, causes of bad governance can be linked to historical path-dependency and legacies of the past. Second, some explanations are agency-driven and «deal with the configurations and incentives of post-Soviet political and economic elites and their effect on state-society relations. The third group are of explanations with a focus on the specific international influence on post-Soviet Eurasia (Gelman 2017: 504).

In the early 2000's Russia, policy changes were implemented, however the results were incomplete, and did not lead to further democratisation. In the 2010's, the Russian regime continued to develop its system of rent-seeking and corruption to ensure the political status quo. In just over 20 years this system has become an integral part of political and economic sectors

in Russia, which is what Gelman calls a "politico-economic order of bad governance" (Gel'man 2021: 75).

Gel'man states that "in most categories Russia is graded much lower than many countries with a comparable level of socio-economic development" (2021: 72). In 2021, Russia was ranked as number 136 out of 180 countries in the Corruption Perception index and is well below the global average (Transparency International).

Gel'man (2021) classifies Russia as an electoral authoritarianism (a subtype of hybrid regime) under personalist rule. And argues that the meaningful, but still unfree and unfair elections have contributed to the development and preservation of bad governance and amplified the incentives for short-term policy advancements. This is because short-term accomplishments are effective before an election, and elections with the "right" results minimise the chance of post-election protests and thus contributes to regime stability (Gel'man 2021: 76). From this he argues that it prevents any movement to further evolution towards democracy and that it preserves and maintains bad governance. This explains the bad governance in Russia through institutional and rational terms. However, this explanation has been contested by Hale who argues that the explanation does not lie within the institutions, and that the bad governance is actually the way the regime operates, through networks (Hale 2015).

2.2 Patrimonialism

Patrimonialism as a concept was developed in the early twentieth century by the well-known sociologist Max Weber. Initially it was a tool that made it possible to explore political systems in which a ruler exerts power on the basis of kin-ties and patron-client relations. Patrimonialism can be understood in contrast to Weber's rational-legal bureaucracy, usually defined as involving a written set of regulations, nonhereditary position, a command chain, and impersonal rules. With its nonbureaucratic organisation form centred around personal networks, patrimonialism stands at the other end of the ideal-type spectrum. It has been used to understand the rise and fall of world empires (Theobald 1982).

The appeal of patrimonialism as an idea lies in the very elasticity that ideal types provide and, in the flexibility, attached to the concept and its family resemblances. However, terms such as these (patrimonialism, neo-patrimonialism, clientelism, corruption) are complex, confusing and in some cases lack the ability to fully explain the political environment in Russia today, Hale introduced and coined the term of patronalism (Hale 2010; 2015; 2017a) as a foundation in the analysis of personalised politics.

Patronalism is a more general concept than other concepts such as those mentioned above. However, rather than denying their applicability and the features these terms give, Hale has included them in the term patronalism. In this way he avoids stretching the existing concepts, which would risk the overdoing of this to such a degree that they lost their meaning. Therefore, the concept of patronal politics covers a broader field of features of regime dynamics in Eurasian countries (Hale 2015: 22-23). In comparison to other patronage-based terms such as patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism, the concept of patronalism covers the broader social context and, with this, ties the other phenomena together. Patronal politics is a general pattern of structure in the post-soviet states and is a key to understand the politics in this region (Hale 2017b).

2.2.2 Why Patronal Politics?

The main distinction then, is that for Gel'man and others who view Russia as a hybrid regime and argue in term of modernisation and authoritarianism see the governance in Russia as "bad", while the patronal regime theory see this "bad" governance as a particularity of the regime itself, and therefore not "bad" governance as such. Rather, it is a mode of regime maintenance and something that is considered obligatory for all that want to act *within* this system (Hale 2017a: 30). Based on recent developments, and the use of theory in this thesis, Hale's theory of patronal politics is more applicable. Subsequently, for the purpose of this thesis, the arguments of the bad governance model are not considered useful, although they offer highly plausible hypotheses for analysing Russian politics. A central part of the hybrid regime model is, for example, that elections are manipulated, unfree and unfair. I am not contesting this; however, it is not useful in finding an answer to my research question, and on how networks of service providers establish their positions in the hierarchy of patronal politics. This theory is the basis for the theoretical framework in this thesis. This decision is made after consideration according to usefulness. The hybrid regime and authoritarian state theories are less useful in explaining the RQ than Hale's theory. There is not much that points to Russia being a grey zone regime.

To specify: for Hale the operative mode of a patronal system it is not "bad governance", but informal social networks operating in a set equilibrium with certain structures and 'rules. It is not power and governance-rule that is the driving force of "bad governance", rather it is inherent in the structural system in which informal social networks operate in and pattern they follow. It is a mode of social organisation (Weber 2019). Patronal societies control the people, both patrons and clients. The patrons must "act in accordance with patronal laws of motion beyond their control" (Weber, D.G. 2019). This is inherent in the patronal system.

It follows from this that patronal politics is described by Hale as a social equilibrium where personal connections and collective action dominates and is driven by individualised rewards and punishments. This equilibrium is complex and deeply entrenched in how people relate to each other in political activity (Hale 2017a: 35). In this environment the rule of law is weak, and corruption and nepotism are norms that must be followed if one wishes to operate her (Hale 2017a: 30).

Defined as a social equilibrium, patronalism is – then – a self-reinforcing system in that the social outcome in which collective pursuit of political or economic needs tends to be organised in a system of personalised rewards and punishments (Hale 2017b). The equilibrium is self-reinforcing both at the state level and the level of the society. This is not necessarily because of egotism and taking advantage of this system for personal gain (though it can be that too), but also because it is the way things work in a patronal society. To get things done you must follow the structures of the system. At the state level this can be seen in political parties that consist of people from the extended personal network of the president (Hale 2017b). In society this structure is visible in corruption. People might not like to bribe others but do it to get the service they need. It is not evil, or calculated, rather it is the norm.

Patronalism is "the way things really work" according to Hale. It is a regime-form:

> […] where individuals organise their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalised exchange of concrete rewards and punishments through chains of actual acquaintance, and not primarily around abstract, impersonal principles such as ideological belief or categorisations like economic class (Hale 2015: 9-10).

In this system connections matter, things get done through friends and connections and friends of friends, and friends of friends of friends. In some cases, connections to opponents and foes are useful to get things done as everything is based in informal signals and unwritten norms (Ledeneva 2006, Ledeneva 2013, Hale 2015), By working through people they know, they get things done. Relations are the foundation of how things get done in a patronal system, and Hale connects this organisation society back to the historical norm in the world and argues that this way of structuring society should not be seen as something deviant and unusual. Rather it is the impersonal politics of the west that is unusual (Hale 2017b).

The networks in this system are of more importance than the formal institutions. And they are held together by interpersonal connections (Hale 2017b). In Hale's theory personal connections are key and is considered to be of higher importance than positions, ideology, or identity (Hale 2017a: 30).

The networks need a direct and personal access to power to survive and thrive, because they cannot trust the rule of law to protect them if they fall out of favour with the people in power (Hale 2017b). This desire for a personal connection to power becomes inherent. Expectations are not just about who will come to or remain in power, but also the expectations that everyone else is involved in corruption and therefore the equilibrium is maintained in the wider society (Hale 2017b).

Based on this, Hale's patronalist explanation, and the equilibrium of patronal politics, offers a better base to understand the role of patriotic entrepreneurs within the system of Russian politics.

2.3 Patronal Politics – theoretical assumptions

To ease the process of critically evaluating the theoretical assumptions they are presented here in a clear-cut manner. The assumptions are presented below and serve a further deepening of the principles launched in chapter 1. From this presentation sub-questions which will help answer the main research question are developed, and the theoretical framework, the thesis's specific viewpoint, will aid the limitation of the scope of research. Further, the theory, framework and the assumptions presented in this chapter will contribute to the design of the research model.

Hale's theory operates on a macro-level of analysis, where the concept of patronal politics is at work in most Eurasian countries, some more similar, some outliers, but all share similar features and characteristics (Hale 2015). The theory was introduced to reorientate the scholarship from the logic of regime change to a logic of regime dynamics. This reorientation allows us to examine the shift and progress of various components in patronal politics, such as oligarch networks. Such movements of rearrangement can be seen as predictable and conventional. But really, it is informal principles at work (Hale 2015: 15).

The first assumption is that the political system in Russia is structured as a single pyramid system. In this system there is one chief patron – President Putin. Several different networks are a part of, or aligned with, the larger network under the chief patron. While respecting the presidents' power, the smaller networks compete for position (Hale 2015: 64). This single-pyramid structure is seen in figure 2.1 below. When discussing patronal networks, Hale focuses on the large network, not the sub-networks that are of focus in this thesis.

Figure 2.1 'Hale's figure of a single-pyramid system'
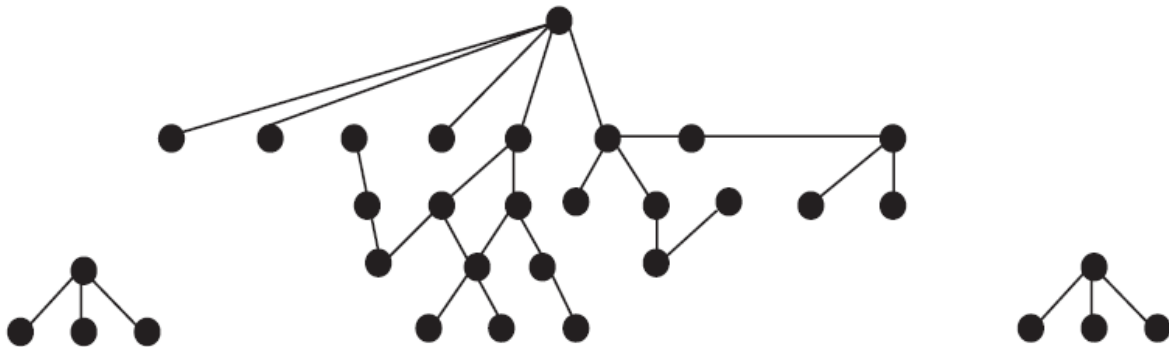
Source: Hale 2015: 65 figure 4.1 'Example of an ideal-type single-pyramid system'.

The second assumption is that in a patronal environment, the primary collective political "actors" are usually extended networks of actual personal acquaintances rather than formal institutions such as political parties or interest groups (Hale 2017a: 31). In Russia, the most capable networks have been well represented in the spheres of business and politics, and they cut across formal institutions (Hale 2017a: 33). This particular system is based on personal connections, punishments and rewards (Hale 2015: 20), or practices that align with Gel'man's expectations of "bad governance".

The third assumption is that the role of expectations is what brings stability to the regime. This is also why the "oligarchs" role is so important. In Hale's theory it is assumed that these entrepreneurs are loyal to Putin as a chief-patron. This loyalty comes from an expectation of him to remain in power. At the same time as this expectation contributes to regime-stability, it is also a risk. If the expectations change, and the "oligarchs" believe that an oppositional candidate might take power, there is a high chance that this will happen. Hale calls this the "great power of expectations" (Hale 2015: 34).

The case studies in this thesis, cannot, of course, serve as an illustration of the validity of these assumptions at the macro-level. Rather, Hale's model will serve as a heuristic devise throughout the discussion of the cases, and the cases will – subsequently – be treated as smaller sub-networks, that do not challenge the primary pyramid of power, but that serve as service-providers within a segment of the power-structure. Moreover, Hale's model is a comparative one, and serves as an interpretive model also for other regimes than Russia's. Following from this, I will rely on a more Russia-specific framework to supplement the model. This will be discussed in the next part of the chapter.

2.4 Patronal Politics and other models operationalised on different levels of analysis

While Hale does a comparative study of the Eurasian region, Alyona Ledeneva studies Russia as a separate case in her books *How Russia Really Works* (2006) and *Can Russia Modernize?* (2013). In the first book she explains how informal practices have adapted to post-soviet conditions, and how "thing really works" in Russia especially focusing on bribery and corruption (2006: 2).

In the book from 2013 she writes about Putin's system of governance "Sistema" and aims to reveal how informal power is at work in Russian politics. The system is characterised as corrupt, but functional (Ledeneva 2013: 213). The way it functions is beneficial for the elite, especially for the president. For example, it is a source of plausible deniability.

Within this "Sistema", Ledeneva identifies four types of networks who serve themselves and the system: the president's inner circle, useful friends, core contacts, and more diffuse ties and connections (2013). The complexity of this system of networks makes it unpredictable, but it is also binding society together and contributes to stability (Ledeneva 2013: 3). She specifies Putin's Sistema as the reliance of power-network for governance (Ledeneva 2013: 4).

Similarly to Hale, Ledeneva argues that what Gel'man terms "bad governance" is actually something inherent in the Russian society. However, Hale and Ledeneva's theories differ in their approach to studying Russia. As mentioned, while Hale did a comparative study of countries in Eurasia, Ledeneva has carried out a study specifically on Russia. Arguably she has done a study on a meso-level as she has considered the functions of society in Russia. However, as she also includes interviews and personal opinions, her study is moving towards a micro-level of analysis.

2.4.1 Laruelle and the concept of entrepreneurs of influence

Hale's focus on the Eurasian regions, and Ledeneva's focus on Russia leads us towards a theoretical framework adequate to analyse the emergence, services and network details of sub-networks within the single-pyramid structure. But it is necessary to establish a theoretical framework also around the actors leading the sub-networks. To do this Marlene Laruelle's works will be discussed, especially her concept of ideological entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs of influence.

Marlene Laruelle has written much about nationalism in Russia and the ideological narrative the Kremlin promotes both within Russia and abroad. In this context she uses the term *ideological entrepreneur*. In 2021, in two articles written together with Kevin Limonier (2021a, 2021b) the term *entrepreneur of influence* is used.

Laruelle explains the ideological entrepreneur's position in that "they have room to act, to determine their preferences, and to cultivate their own networks" (Laruelle 2017). This means that they can act with a certain immunity and on conditions of service provisions. These entrepreneurs promote their own views on religion and thoughts on how the Russian society should be structured and what it should revolve around and aims to get their narratives adopted into the narrative promoted by the Kremlin. The conservative turn offered an explicit, but blurry narrative of conservatism (Laruelle 2017). This opened room for entrepreneurs with strong ideological beliefs to promote their thoughts and narratives.

Since the relationship between the regime and the oligarchs has changed since the 90s, and Laruelle's introduction of new terms has come about, it is worth discussion the terminology used to classify these actors. The definition of an entrepreneur of influence is based on the classic definition of entrepreneurs as individuals who, by risk or initiative, use their own means, be it political, financial, or social, to earn a profit. This can be done in private business, the public sector and in bureaucracy (Baumol 1990 in Yakovlev 2021: 419). Laruelle and Limonier adds "of influence" to this and defines these entrepreneurs as "People who invest their own money or social capital to build social influence abroad in hopes of being rewarded by the Kremlin" (2021: 318). I understand this as that they are entrepreneurs, and thus have a goal of earning a profit. Then, to achieve this they try to exert influence in a way that is beneficial for the Kremlin, which will result in rewards for the entrepreneurs. Therefore, Laruelle's term *ideological entrepreneur* is understood as an entrepreneur who specifically aims to influence ideological attitudes.

The definition of entrepreneurs of influence above is delimited to influence abroad as this was the specific area of interest in Laruelle and Limonier's article (2021a). However, in the development of this definition they write "like all entrepreneurs, these individuals take on the risks and perils of their actions; they often use their own financial and social capital to invest in a sector, hoping that the Kremlin will provide a return on investment – whether financial and/or political – but knowing that they may fail and be disavowed by the Russian authorities or become a causality of their competitors' "settling of scores"" (2021a: 318-319). From this development of the definition, it is evident that the term can be used both about entrepreneurs of influence who operate abroad and those who operate domestically, or both.

Taking base in Laruelle's terms I have developed a definition of use in this thesis. This is done to have a definition specifically for the purpose of answering my research question. The actors I am interested in are entrepreneurs. However, even though the actors of interest in this thesis

are entrepreneurs of influence, and one of them is an ideological entrepreneur according to Laruelle, I want a term that covers both my cases and all of the services they deliver to the regime. Therefore, I propose to use "patriotic entrepreneur". This is because the entrepreneurs provide services that will gain the regime, which they are loyal to. They also work for the call from the Kremlin for a "nationalisation of elites" (Gelman 2021: 78). It is an important distinction because members of the Russian elite see the opportunity for ownership in the West, schooling, and in general a life abroad as better, than a life in Russia. Patriotic entrepreneur also fits with the period after 2012, with the conservative turn.

2.4.2 The entrepreneur model and patronal politics – compatible?

The theoretical frameworks discussed in the previous section operate at different levels of analysis. There are three different levels of analysis, they are macro, meso and micro. The macro-level analyses perspectives on societies and culture, and this is where Hale's model of patronal politics operates with a focus on the wider society, its organisation, and differences in the Eurasian region. The meso-level analyses organisations and groups, and this is what Laruelle, and Laruelle and Limonier have in their studies focused on entrepreneurs, their organisations and networks. The micro-level analyses the relationships of individual identity, motives, and cognition (Hartman 2017 in Serpa and Ferreira 2019: 121). In this context that would be an analysis of the entrepreneurs' driving forces and motivation.

Figure 2.2 'Levels of Analysis'
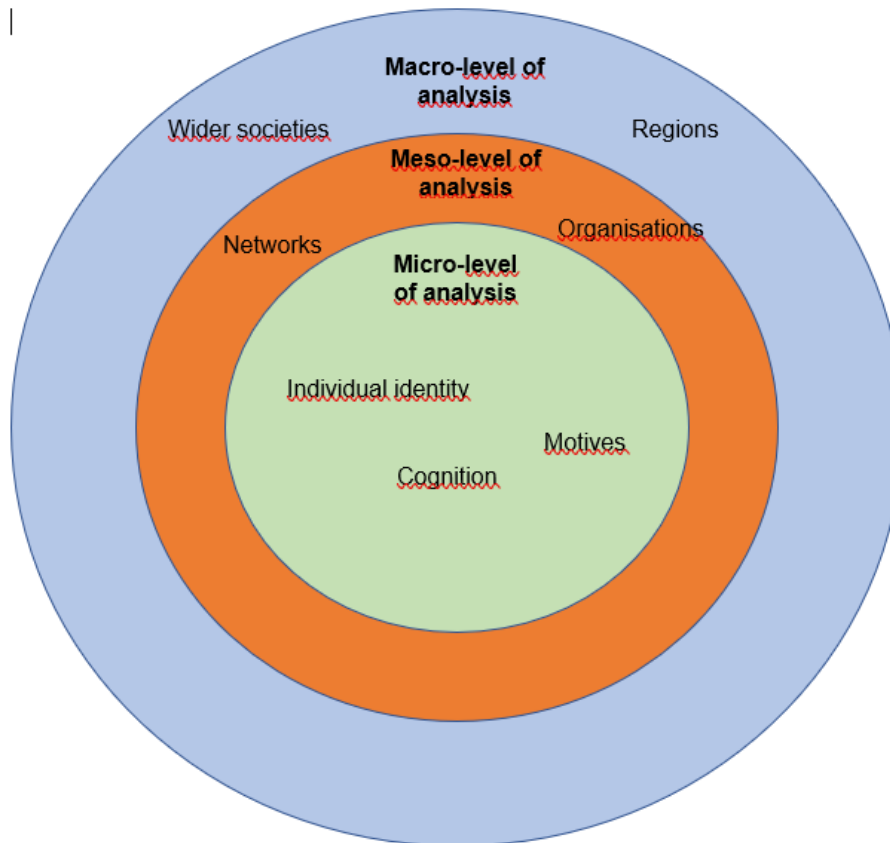
However, it must be addressed that these levels of analysis are not rigid divisions as processes, actions, and connections are complex and often overlap (Pyyhtinen 2017: 298 in Serpa and Ferreira 2019: 123). Still, because Hale and Laruelle and Limonier operate on a different level of analysis and therefore they cannot be directly compared. This is because where Hale views patronal politics as something further away and compares different situations in various countries to each other, Laruelle and Limonier views the components in these situations much closer. Where Hale sees patronal politics as structured in a pyramid, Laruelle has zoomed in and sees interconnected circles.

To summarise, although situated at different levels, the two models are compatible and provide a thorough theoretical framework for use in this thesis. The interpretive model's major assumptions are to be found in Hale (2015, 2017), whereas the case-related assumptions are to be found in Laruelle and Limonier (2021a).

Hale's macro-level perspective has proved useful in comparative politics, and in developing broader generalisations appropriate for the region. However, the specific components within

this perspective are left out. How do these smaller networks with their own patron fit into the larger system which Hale examines? This is what is of interest in this thesis and therefore the level of analysis here will be on a meso-level as in Laruelle and Limonier's studies.

To supply the use of Hale's macro-level concepts, this thesis will operate on a meso-level of analysis. By taking base in Hale's macro-level theory but analysing on a meso-level the analysis will provide a more thorough insight into the functions of the patriotic entrepreneur's networks. It is different than Laruelle's work because she focuses solely on their operations abroad (Laruelle and Limonier 2021a) and in other works more focused on ideology and the way they are able to promote their own ideological stands hoping that these will be included in the Kremlin's narrative (Laruelle 2019).

The two models are similar in that they both view the networks of entrepreneurs in tension and competition with each other, and negotiation with the Kremlin (Laruelle 2017, Hale 2015).

In the final analysis, this thesis argues that the two perspectives can be combined and offer a new perspective. The pyramid is the overarching structure, while when zooming in and narrowing the focus we see that in this pyramid there are circles constituting several nodes. So, the circles are a part of the pyramid. The thesis will contribute to advance the contextual knowledge about hybrid regimes, electoral competitive regimes, and patronal regimes. While the distinction between hybrid regimes and patronal regimes is not an object of inquiry, and while electoral issues are not of relevance here, the study of smaller networks and providers of services, can bring about findings that are of comparative relevance, also concerning the type of politicians that the Kremlin favours above others. Therefore, by choosing Hale's theory as the foundation of the theoretical framework, I do not exclude that the inquiry of smaller networks, and with the supplement of elements from other scholars, such as Ledeneva, but especially Laruelle and Limonier and their model of entrepreneurs of influence, cannot infer larger conclusions about Russian politics and the various groundworks of political drivers.

3 Method and methodology

A research strategy is a specific way of collecting and analysing empirical evidence. Each such method follows its own logic, which results in different advantages and limitations. Different strategies are not separated by strict lines and rules, they overlap (Yin 2003: 5). The goal is to find the strategy that gives the research the most advantages. Meaning that it, in the best way possible, gives an answer to the research question.

The research design in this thesis is a case study, which will be driven by a content analysis of mainly Russian language sources and complemented with a social network analysis. The case study consists of two carefully selected cases who will be studied through a content analysis. The content analysis systematically works with news articles from two Russian newspapers, one loyal to the state and one independent. The social network analysis is added to visualise the findings from the content analysis, and to view the patterns of social relations in patronal networks on a meso-level of analysis.

This chapter will explain the choice of methods, the case selection process will be explained in detail, and as will the selection of the sources for the content analysis. The strengths and weaknesses of the methods will be discussed, and elements that will be kept in mind with the purpose of getting the most out of the methods used, and what weaknesses to be aware of for minimising or avoiding them, will be highlighted. The chapter starts with the main method of this thesis, the case study, especially focusing on the important task of case selection. The next part of the chapter explains the content analysis that will drive the case study forward, and the selection process for the sources of this part of the study. The last part briefly explains social network analysis that will be used to visualise the networks studied based on the findings from the content analysis.

3.1 Case studies

What it means to do a case study can be understood in different ways, and therefore the method is often criticised for being ambiguous. Seawright and Gerring offer this definition of a case study:

> The intensive (qualitative or quantitative) analysis of a single unit or small number of units (the cases), where the researcher's goal is to understand a larger class of similar units (the larger population of cases) (2008: 296).

Based on what this study aims to find out the case study research method is the most promising. According to Yin (2003) three conditions distinguish which research methods are appropriate.

The first condition is the type of research question asked. Second, is the amount of control the researcher has over behavioural events because they happen within a real-life context. The third condition is the time period of the events discussed whether they are historical or contemporary. Case studies are of most advantage when used to answer research questions asking "how" or "why" concerning contemporary events that does not require control over behavioural events (Yin 2003: 9).

To answer the research question in this thesis several "how" questions must be asked: how the networks emerged, how they position themselves, and how they operate within the patronal equilibrium. The events that will be discussed and analysed are beyond the control I, the researcher, have over actual behavioural events, and they are contemporary, recent events. Therefore, the case study is a natural choice of method for this thesis.

Another factor that makes the case study method relevant for this thesis is that I see them as particularly useful in area studies. This is because it recognises the comprehensive aspects of real-life events, and context is a fundamental part of the method which provides understanding of social phenomena and their complexity. The method provides a deeper understanding of cases through the focus on context and interconnected phenomena. As a field, area studies focus on the particularities within one country or region, and these particularities and contextual factors will be examined and analysed in a case study. The importance of context and understanding of phenomena in case studies allows for these particularities to play an essential role in the research.

3.1.1 Strengths and weaknesses

As all research methods, case studies have certain strengths and weaknesses. It is crucial to be aware of these to create a research design that attempts to avoid or minimise the weaknesses, and to assess results and findings in an appropriate way.

Case studies are often criticised to be too exploratory and seen as a preliminary research strategy unable to test hypotheses or describe causes and effects. Following this critique, experiments are seen as the only way of doing explanatory and descriptive studies. However, Yin argues that this is a misconception and that case studies can also be explanatory and descriptive (2003: 3). This is showed in a number of case studies done which shows good descriptive work and explanatory findings Laruelle and Limonier (2021a) work is one such example.

Though the reputation of being a simplistic and weak method in the social sciences is undeserved, there is a base from which the stereotypes have come from (Yin 2003: xiii).

Because of this, it is especially important while doing a case study to include an understanding of the limitations and addressing them while doing the work. By doing this, reflecting of the limitations and how to minimise their effect, and how to make the most of the strengths a case study has, it is possible to deliver strong and useful results. This chapter aims to do this.

The weaknesses George and Bennett have identified are a combination of trade-offs, inherent limitations, and possible limitations. Recurrent trade-offs in case study research are the problem of case selection; the trade-off between parsimony and richness; the relevant tension between achieving high internal validity and good historical explanations of select cases versus a case selection that allows room for generalisations that apply to a broad population. Inherent limitations are a relative inability to render judgements on the frequency or representativeness of particular cases; and a weak capability for estimating the average "causal effect" of variables for a sample. And potential limitations are indeterminacy and a lack of independent cases (2005: 30).

Much can be done to limit negative effects of the limitations and trade-offs and to make sure that they do not affect the results and findings in the study, by working systematically and focusing on the purpose of the research.

George and Bennett have identified the following strengths of case studies; potential for achieving high conceptual validity; strong procedures for fostering new hypotheses; value as a useful means to closely examine the hypothesized role of causal mechanisms in the context of individual cases; and their capacity for addressing causal complexity (George and Bennett 2005: 25).

Common for most of these strengths is the importance of contextual factors. A careful analysis and examination of contextual and intervening variables will allow the study to reach its full potential and make the most of the abovementioned strengths. This will allow left out variables to become apparent, and broader generalisations to be specified into narrower and more contingent generalisations which will refine the concepts used.

Case selection can be challenging, and therefore the process and choices must be well addressed and explained. This is done in the next section.

3.1.2 The case selection

The selection of cases is perhaps one of the most important considerations to be made when using a case study methodology (George and Bennett 2005: 31). This is because this choice the researcher also sets the agenda for the study. The task of choosing cases can therefore not be

separated from the analysis of the cases, but the cases must intersect to provide a possibility for examining the broader context of the phenomenon (Seawright and Gerring 2008: 294).

Cases should not be chosen solely for pragmatic reasons; however, some pragmatic considerations have contributed to the process. The relevance of the selected cases in Russian political life in the specified time period, and their prominence in Russian media in the same period.

Seawright and Gerring identify seven different types of case studies; typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential, most similar, and most different (2008: 296). This thesis will do a typical case study. In such a case study the cases are typical examples of the wider phenomena discussed. This makes it easier to make generalisations that are useful when explaining the wider phenomenon. But because of this the cases have more responsibility of representing the broad population (Seawright and Gerring 2008: 297). Because of this the process of selecting the cases is very important and will therefore be explained in detail in this section.

However, since this thesis only has two cases making broad generalisations will be a difficult task, and the few cases would limit the validity of such broad generalisations. Subsequently, the relevance and scope of the findings must be attentively defined and to a certain degree limited to the selected cases. The overall aim is to examine the dynamics within the selected case networks, and the function they have in providing services beneficial to the regime. The thesis wants to explore the function as service providers these networks have and how the dynamics in these networks operate through a closer analysis of them, their connections, and the services they provide.

Finding a case that is truly representative of the wider population of cases is not possible (Seawright and Gerring 2008: 294). When referring to a typical case, this means that the case is highly representative compared to other cases, and that they comply to the expectations about a general causal relationship – that they "perform as expected" (Gerring 2009: 649). The cases' situation within the rest of the case population is established through a cross-case analysis and the assumptions drawn from theory (Gerring 2009: 646). From this I establish that they are representatives of typical values of such networks of entrepreneurs in a patronal system.

3.1.3 The cases: The networks of Prigozhin and Malofeev

In this study the cases of Prigozhin's network and Malofeev's network are selected because they fit into the theoretical assumptions drawn from Hale's macro-level analysis of patronal politics in Eurasian states which were discussed in the previous chapter. The theoretical

assumptions drawn from Hale were specified, and also considerations and other factors were drawn from Laruelle and Limonier's work. The theoretical considerations taken when choosing the cases were that they fit into the theoretical framework provided by Hale, in the way that the networks have connections to the regime and provide services for them.

The cases are chosen based on their theoretical relevance and their conformance to the theoretical assumptions - they are considered as representative units of analysis adjacent to the single-pyramid structure that Hale presents. This does not imply that they are to be considered in competition with the single-pyramid. In this system they are proxy clients to other patrons in the hierarchy and the chief-patron, Putin, but they are also patrons on their own in their networks. Their networks compete for position within this system to build and maintain their position and get rewards after providing services. Their networks are constituted by personal connections and acquaintances. And their expectations govern their actions, where their loyalty lies, and what kind of services they provide. However, it must be taken into account that these cases, their positioning and service provisions can validate some assumptions drawn from Hale, but not all.

A question arises: To what extent are the Malofeev and Prigozhin networks representative of the wider population of entrepreneurial networks? The cases share some relevant features of the larger population of which they are typical cases. They are business-clusters who have a strong core of connections that expand and reach other clusters, including connections to the Kremlin. These connections are both formal and informal in nature and in different fields such as politics and media (Malkova and Bayev 2019).

Moreover, both cases are networks of well-established businessmen and entrepreneurs in Russia. They have been active in much of the same period and both networks have been particularly active and important in the 2010s. This is apparent when looking at the sources and the number of articles written about the cases. The networks provide services in several of the same fields, such as media and business activities in African countries (Girin 2016, Novaya Gazeta 2019a, Novaya Gazeta 2019b, Zhilyayev 2012, Gordiyenko 2019a). Both networks both allegedly enjoy close relations to the political regime (Hosaka 2019, Novaya Gazeta 2011a) and the nature of these relations is of interest in this thesis. However, they are also quite different entrepreneurs as they differ in service provisions.

One variable which differs is the connection between the clusters and the Kremlin. Prigozhin himself is directly connected to Putin and is commonly nick-named "Putin's chef" (Malkova

and Bayev 2019). In addition to this it has been speculated that the Private Military Company "Wagner" work closely with GRU (Malkova and Bayev 2019). Malofeev's network is not so well connected, meaning that some nodes in this network does have direct contact with Putin himself, such as Igor Shchegolev who was an aide to the President in the period from 2012 to 2018 (Kremlin.ru). But Malofeev there does not seem to be a direct connection, an arc, between Malofeev and Putin. The network surrounding him, which Laruelle calls them White Nostalgics as they are Orthodox (white) and nostalgic to Tsarist Russia (2017), is seemingly less integrated into the state administration and rely more on personal connections and other powerful patrons (Laruelle 2017). So, with these two cases I cover both entrepreneurial networks with a higher degree of direct contact to Putin, and those not so established with contacts in the Kremlin, but not directly to the president.

Another variable that differs are the types of services the networks provide for the regime. Where Malofeev started the TV-channel "Tsargrad" to promote propaganda and ideological opinions, Prigozhin delivers services of a more physical manner, such as military services, catering, and internet content (however of a different type than that of Malofeev's Tsargrad). The type of services they deliver can also be an indication of their driving forces. While Malofeev often is described as being driven by his orthodox faith and ideological opinions, Prigozhin gives the impression of being opportunistic and providing services wherever he can profit from it, whether this be economic profit or social gains (Belov 2013, Petlyanova 2011a, Polyanova 2011). However, these are assumptions, and must be examined closer as it might be simplistic to simply state that they are different types of entrepreneurs. But it is a factor that has aided the case selection.

These variations are interesting and makes it possible to make inferences and understand the dynamics in this larger network, Putin's single-pyramid system. It is also of interest to examine whether this has any effect on their positions, services, rewards, and punishments.

When it comes to differences in variables it could be argued that a selected case should have a different dependent variable, a different result. For example, I could have considered a case of a network that has lost its position within this single pyramid-system. Such examples could be the cluster surrounding Vladimir Yakunin, the former leader of Russian Railways (a position from which he was fired), or the politician Evgeniy Fëdorov, leader of The National Liberation Movement (NOD – *Natsional'no osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie*) – a proxy movement to United Russia (Laruelle 2019: 78, Litoy 2014). However, including these cases in this study would require a different research question focusing more on the position within the single-pyramid

system and why networks are excluded from this system. This would lead to the services and the relations in these networks to be overshadowed by the cause for exclusion. These cases are no longer representing the wider population of interest, namely those in connection with the regime, which is what this thesis is interested in. However, their "loss of grace" is very interesting and examining this would provide insightful information and understanding of the processes within this system and the expectations the entrepreneurs must live up to keep their position, but this would be answering a different research question than mine.

3.2 Content Analysis

To study the selected cases, the thesis will do a content analysis of newspaper articles about the selected cases. The empirical data will be collected systematically from Russian language newspapers and analysed with focus on the services delivered, actions taken, and especially the relations and connections within the networks. Furthermore, the examination of how the cases is portrayed and reflected upon, the sentiment, in different sources, will give useful information.

Klaus Krippendorf's definition of content analysis states that it is "a technique to draw replicable and valid inferences from data to context" (Krippendofr 2012: 21 in Bratberg 2021: 119). In its broadest sense, a content analysis is any analysis that systematically compile text content, this can be done qualitatively as well as quantitative (Bratberg 2021: 119). This thesis will do a qualitative analysis of the news-sources with the purpose of presenting an overview of the network's activities, relations, and services which is discussed in connection to theory. Which together with the context of the Russian regime system and Hale's theory of patronal politics will explore the dynamics of the networks. Other sources will be used to verify content and get a better picture of the situation when information in the selected sources needs to be expanded upon.

 As a method it is strong because it is verifiable as the empirical material is standardised and the process must therefore be well documented. When a content analysis is done in a qualitative manner, the focus is not on statistics or frequencies, but rather on tracking information and content in a text and drawing inferences from the text and apply it to context (Bratberg 2021: 120). From the content analysis a narrative will be built on observations and explanations which will enable generalisation and verifiability of the networks' services and relations. The news articles are the empirical material in this thesis. It is this qualitative method of systematic and structured content analysis that will be of use in this thesis.

The texts that are selected to be analysed are clearly defined and delimited empirical material. The sources are from *Novaya Gazeta*, an independent Russian newspaper, and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, a newspaper loyal to the regime. The analysis is done in close consideration of context, as the way the text has been created (when, where, who) and its intertextuality is important to understand the text as a whole and the meaningful references the text is a part of (Bratberg 2021: 137). This is especially important because of the difference in relation to the regime between the two selected newspapers.

Using media analysis to investigate the two cases will give a new angle to how they are viewed and how they operate in the Russian political system. The analysis will highlight continuity and changes over the years, and differences between media sources. This is information that would be difficult to find when analysing other types of documents, such as official documents. Another reason for the choice of media articles as opposed to official documents is because using media as sources allows the choice of sources with different relation to the state. In contrast, official documents will only show official information approved by the state. Another issue is that the relations and networks studied largely operate in an informal manner, and official documents are therefore difficult to find, which is especially important to consider when studying authoritarian regimes.

Studying networks is especially a challenge in authoritarian states because, as discussed in the theory chapter, the most important relations are informal, and therefore not well documented. The relationship the networks have to the chief-patron for example is often not obvious as this would limit the ability for the regime to claim plausible deniability. This will be further discussed in chapter 6. Though much research has been done on Prigozhin, and on Malofeev, this has mainly been done in connection to provide insights into their specific services and activities. Examples are Prigozhin's funding of the private military company Wagner (Reynolds 2019), Malofeev's cooperation and influence on European far right parties (Laruelle 2018), or Malofeev and Prigozhin's international influence (Laruelle and Limonier 2021a). These topics are important and allow for a deep focus of areas of business that are prominent internationally. However, the narrow focus on elements of their services, has left out a lot of information about the dynamics *within* their networks, the relations that made them emerge in the first place, and why they deliver *particular* services. By studying the whole picture of these networks, we can get a better understanding of their relationship to the Russian regime, regime stability, and function in the political system.

The choice of newspaper articles is both pragmatic and methodological. Firstly, the access to newspaper publications is available online in a structured way, with easily accessible solutions to search for keywords and specific dates. The text corpus thus displays continuity and allows for the analysis of network dynamics over a specific period. The newspapers chosen, have been publishing continuously during the relevant stretch of time. The methodological justification for the choice of newspaper articles is the distinction between state-loyal sources and independent sources.

Table 3.1 'Distribution of articles in the selected sources'

Rossiyskaya Gazeta																
Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Evgeniy Prigozhin	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	10	2	2	8	27
Konstantin Malofeev	0	0	0	1	4	2	2	6	2	0	0	3	0	0	1	21

Novaya Gazeta																
Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Evgeniy Prigozhin	0	0	0	0	11	4	3	3	2	17	7	48	35	23	22	175
Konstantin Malofeev	0	0	0	0	2	6	6	10	5	0	4	2	13	8	6	**62**

The goal when doing a content analysis is to draw inferences to relations beyond the text material. The immediate relation between text and context is about the origin of the text and its creation (Bratberg 2021: 120). Therefore, the role the media has in the country must be considered, as it can be problematic because much of the media is controlled by the state (Walker and Orttung 2014). Because of the authoritarian system in Russia, it is also a deliberate choice to both select a newspaper loyal to the Kremlin and one independent. Examination of how the cases is portrayed, and what topics are reported on in different sources is of importance. This has the potential to reveal interesting findings on roles, portrayal, and sentiment. And this will give information that is crucial in a content analysis, where the perspective of the informer is important (Bratberg 2021: 120). The role of independent media versus the role of state-oriented media in Russia must therefore be addressed.

Since Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 independent media has increasingly come under great pressure from the regime (Walker and Orttung 2013:2). The media is mainly state-controlled and does not provide a balanced media-picture and does not have a space for open debates and discussions. Walker and Orttung states that

> (…) state media works to provide Russian viewers with an officially approved version of what is happening in Russia and the world, while discrediting potential opposition voices or forces that are critical of the incumbent powers (Walker and Orttung 2013: 2).

This is done to undermine the few independent media sources (Walker and Orttung 2013:5). While television has long been the main news-source for Russians, the role of online newspapers is increasing (Volkov et al. 2021).

As mentioned above, the selected newspapers are *Novaya Gazeta*, an independent source, and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the Kremlin's official newspaper. Some articles have been published both in the print version of the newspaper and online, while others have only been published online. Since all articles, both those printed and those only online, are available online this is where the articles have been retrieved from. These newspapers were chosen because they present two different attitudes towards the Russian regime, and they are both well-known newspapers with an established role in Russian media. *Novaya 's* reputation as independent is irrefutable, and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* is equally considered as loyal to the regime, with an edge towards reporting back on all matters of state and governance. Other independent and state loyal newspapers were considered by searching for Евгений Пригожин (Evgeny Prigozhin) and Константин Малофеев (Konstantin Malofeev) and tracking how much had been written about them, and when. By searching for specific dates, I was able to find the first article where the names were mentioned and track all the articles with the names included up until 2022. This resulted in the following findings which again resulted in the choice of *Novaya Gazeta* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. The first year listed is the first news-article published found with the search words used.

Table 3.2 'Search in Meduza'

Evgeniy Prigozhin - Meduza			Konstantin Malofeev - Meduza		
2015	2		2015	8	
2016	28		2016	2	
2017	30		2017	5	
2018	85		2018	2	
2019	117		2019	11	
2020	58		2020	7	
2021	51		2021	8	
2022	5		2022	1	

Table 3.3 'Search in Rossiyskaya Gazeta'

Evgeniy Prigozhin - Rossiyskaya Gazeta			Konstantin Malofeev - Rossiyskaya Gazeta			
2007	1		2007	0		
2008	0		2008	0		
2009	0		2009	0		
2010	1		2010	1		
2011	0		2011	4		
2012	1		2012	2		
2013	0		2013	2		
2014	0		2014	6		
2015	0		2015	2		
2016	1		2016	0		
2017	1		2017	0		
2018	10		2018	3		
2019	2		2019	0		
2020	2		2020	0		
2021	8		2021	1		

Table 3.4 'Search in TASS'

Evgeniy Prigozhin - TASS			Konstantin Malofeev - TASS		
2011	0		2011	3	
2012	1		2012	8	
2013	1		2013	6	
2014	0		2014	18	
2015	1		2015	8	
2016	10		2016	3	
2017	13		2017	6	
2018	55		2018	1	
2019	13		2019	13	
2020	46		2020	11	
2021	40		2021	14	

Table 3.5 'Search in Novaya Gazeta'

Evgeniy Prigozhin - Novaya Gazeta				Konstantin Malofeev - Novaya Gazeta			
2011	11			2011	2		
2012	4			2012	6		
2013	3			2013	6		
2014	3			2014	10		
2015	2			2015	5		
2016	17			2016	0		
2017	7			2017	4		
2018	48			2018	2		
2019	35			2019	13		
2020	23			2020	8		
2021	22			2021	6		

It should be noted that *Meduza.io* was founded in 2014 and therefore have no news-articles from the years prior to this. Because of this Meduza was not chosen as a main source, although it has provided deep-plunging material that supports main tendencies found in the other main sources. Though TASS has written about Prigozhin and Malofeev continuously and are state owned, this newspaper was not selected because *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* are the official government newspaper and therefore presents the official view of these entrepreneurs. *Novaya Gazeta* present a more critical view independent from the state narrative.

In a content analysis the categories of interest, specific and observable content in a text, are specified and they define what traits and characteristics to look for and then to be analysed (Bratberg 2021: 121). The designated units of analysis are called recording units found in the selected texts called sampling units. The specification of these improves the verifiability of the thesis (Bratberg 2021: 124).

The analysis started by randomly selecting one article per year for each case from each newspaper. This gave an overview of activities, services, and relations, and was a good starting point for the analysis. Further I thematised the articles according to services and projects. This, together with predetermined questions structured the analysis and made it easier to research on a deeper level. The predetermined questions are listed in the beginning of chapter 4. In addition to these I tracked the recording units, predetermined categories of variables were topic of the article; service; persons mentioned; relations to persons; relations to organisations and companies. In addition to this, practical details such as source, its alliance and date were noted.

The coding of the empirical data was complemented with contextual information about the source and conditions in which the text was created, this is based in the information above about the media-situation in Russia. However, the researcher's role when doing a content analysis should be passive and neutral. The information found in the content analysis is what exists, not what I as the researcher interpret. Rather I must deal with the selected empirical material as it is (Bratberg 2021: 138).

The content analysis will be used to find connections between individuals to map out the networks that are the cases of the thesis. Further, this information will be used to do a social network analysis.

3.3 Social network analysis

In a social network analysis, the fundamental unit of analysis is the relationship between actors. These can be individuals, organisations, states, or other actors (Erikson 2013: 221). Based on this a small network analysis is a useful way to visualise the relations analysed in this thesis. Understanding these relations are crucial to understand the dynamics in these networks within the set theoretical framework.

Social network analysis is a perspective that offers a new angle to look at a problem and a perspective that can guide the researcher to where one should look for answers (Marin and Wellman 2014: 22). The analysis will be of use to see the larger patterns and will be helpful to understand how the information from the content analysis are connected. The network analysis is especially useful for the discussion around the networks' relation to the Kremlin and other political actors in Russia. The social network analysis is used to inform my research with a network perspective, to study the cases on a meso-level of analysis, and to visualise the empirical data found.

A social network was made in R, which is a coding programme and language, and the package *Igraph* was downloaded to read the dataset and structure it into a network. A plot consists of nodes, the actors, and edges (the tie) between the nodes.

Studying a social network means to study both individuals and groups, organisations, or institutions (Kadushin 2012: 193). Then, my case selection is a good starting point for the study of the networks surrounding the two patriotic entrepreneurs of interest. A social network analysis has two crucial components – actors and relationships. These components are shown as objects in the analysis, actors are shown with nodes, and relationships with arcs. That is what is of interest in this thesis, so a visualisation of this will be very helpful to organise the findings.

Kadushin simply defines a network as "a set of relationships" (2012: 29) but more formally it can be defined as "a set of socially relevant nodes (network members) that are tied by one or more types of relations" (Wasserman and Faust 1994 in Marin and Wellman 2014: 11). Social network analysis can be used on different levels of analysis, macro for nations and international organisations, meso for groups, companies and smaller organisations, and micro for relations between people (Kadushin 2012: 28). Since this thesis is working on a meso-level of analysis the nodes are people and organisations whose relation pattern is studied (Marin and Wellman 2014: 11).

A social network analysis must have defined network boundaries. This is done by defining which nodes should be included in the analysis and can often be a challenge of delimitation. However, this was not an issue in the analysis done in this thesis as I had decided to use all the data retrieved from the two newspapers chosen for the content analysis. The sources were all the articles found when searching for Evgeny Prigozhin and Konstantin Malofeev in each of the newspapers, from the first time they were mentioned up until 2021. This data selection set a natural boundary for my analysis. This is a relation-based approach where the starting point was the two patrons of interest, and then expanded the networks by including other nodes with a confirmed (in the sources) relationship. A discussion of the validity of the information from these sources will follow.

The relationships are defined as where the nodes have been in connection with each other in different ways: working together; employee/boss, meetings, collaborations, funding-–kinship; friendship and family. As much information as possible were drawn from the sources to confirm the relations. However, less specific relations have been included in the social network analysis as they were mentioned in my sources as valid connections. The connections included corresponds to social relations and interactions, but also similarities in the form of group membership. Such similarities are usually treated as relations in social network analyses.

By taking base in Hale's network, the single-pyramid structure, I imagine that within this large network/single-pyramid system, there are several clusters and groups, that are, all connected to the larger network. I also assume that these clusters and groups perform as smaller networks. Again, this is a starting point for this thesis. Within the Putin-network, there are several clusters and groups with their own patron which again has their own clients. Prigozhin is one such patron in such a cluster-network. And so is Malofeev.

The social network analysis makes it easier to study patterns of relations, rather than just relations between a pair of actors. This is not to say that the relations between pairs are not relevant, but that understanding the effect and meaning of one relationship between a pair of nodes must be done in relation to the broader pattern of ties within the network (Barnes 1972 in Marin and Wellman 2014).

A final note must be made on the significance of personalities as nodal points in networks. When studying networks one can either focus on ego-networks or whole networks. Ego-networks focus on the network around one particular node, the ego. The data are nodes with shared relations to the ego, and other relations between these nodes (Marin and Wellman 2014: 20). My network is a second-order ego-network because it extends "to nodes sharing relations with nodes related to the ego (friends of friends) (Marin and Wellman 2014: 20). The way I picture these ego-networks is that they are parts of a larger, whole network which is Putin's single pyramid system.

Doing a social network analysis was chosen as a method because of the important role of context, the possibility of visualising the data found, and as an attempt to use social network analysis on networks in an authoritarian state.

Due to the length of the thesis and time- and knowledge-limitations, the social network analysis is used mainly to provide a visualisation of the findings in the content analysis. Nodes (actors) and edges (ties between actors) are included, and the number of edges connected to each node will impact the size of the node. However, various centrality measures such as degrees, closeness and betweenness are not included in this social network analysis. These measures would be useful for a closer examination of the relationships and their essence, but in this thesis the mapping of the networks provide enough information about the extent of the networks, and their relations to the single pyramid system. The network is undirected, meaning the relations have no direction, who is the "sender" and the "receiver", or if the relationship goes both ways is not included in the data. This is because the sources used to create the dataset often did not specify these details. However, it can be assumed that the relations in the dataset made go both ways as most relations are based on working together and direct contact.

Social network analyses often include challenges revolving around research ethics. This is because individuals embedded in larger network contexts might not be willing to share information to the network analysis. Such scenarios are likely to happen through social network analysis using Facebook or other social media and can expose people or organisations who have

no interest or might be damaged by the inclusion in a social network analysis (Kadushin 2012: 193). Studying social networks in Russia I consider the challenge around research ethics as especially important because of the political climate in Russia today which is increasingly becoming more difficult and dangerous. Even something as 'innocent' as social media might be problematic, even dangerous, for Russian citizens. For example, people wanting to leave Russia after the invasion of Ukraine in February this year, are deleting all their social media before attempting to leave because they know that if anything is found that can link them to negative content about Russia, they can be detained or refused to leave the country. Ethical considerations must be made when in direct contact with respondents to surveys, interviews, or other "hands-on" research.

However, working with this thesis, the ethical question has not been a consideration necessary in my data collection. This is because all my material is content published by others and verified in other sources. All sources are referenced. It is my belief that the journalists wanted this material to be open for the public, read, and considered. Therefore, I consider the use of this content as ethically used. I am using what others have published, and from this making my own analyses and reaching my own conclusions.

4 The cases presented through findings from content analysis

This chapter will give a structured presentation of the cases by means of extracting and triangulating information from the sources. The content analysis is done by retrieving articles from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* and *Novaya Gazeta*. As already outlined above, the articles have been retrieved by simple search-strings like Konstantin Malofeev (Константин Малофеев) and Evgeny Prigozhin (Евгений Пригожин). The number of relevant articles differ between the sources. In *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* the search resulted in a total of 48 articles, and in *Novaya Gazeta* a total of 237 articles. The large difference in number of articles, the difference between the number of sources for each case, and what this shows, will be discussed in chapter 6.

The distribution of articles as laid out in the table below. This distribution of sources is already indicating interesting findings, as the number of articles for each year show certain peaks in public notoriety. For example, the year 2018 produced a peak in the notoriety of Prigozhin, and in 2014 of Malofeev. Questions arise, then, around the increased number of articles these years. However, it is of equal interest that some years have fewer or no articles. And a last indication this table gives is the difference between the two sources, first, the significant difference in number of articles found, but also in cases where one newspaper has many articles, while the other has new in the same year. The clearest example of this is about Malofeev in 2019, when *Novaya Gazeta* published 13 articles mentioning him, while *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* had none.

The table starts in 2007 because that is the first news article mentioning any of the cases when doing the searches. The first article about Konstantin Malofeev was published in 2010 in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta.*

Table 4.1 'Distribution of articles in the selected sources'

Rossiyskaya Gazeta Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Evgeniy Prigozhin	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	10	2	2	8	27
Konstantin Malofeev	0	0	0	1	4	2	2	6	2	0	0	3	0	0	1	21
Novaya Gazeta Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total
Evgeniy Prigozhin	0	0	0	0	11	4	3	3	2	17	7	48	35	23	22	175
Konstantin Malofeev	0	0	0	0	2	6	6	10	5	0	4	2	13	8	6	**62**

For each of the cases a table will show the themes of the articles and how they are distributed among these. This gives an indicator of what services the networks deliver and what projects have been most successful.

The cases, the networks of Evgeniy Prigozhin and Konstantin Malofeev, will be presented using the findings from the content analysis. In addition, I will interrogate the findings and critically assess them. For the purpose of extending the narrative and provide a deeper fact-based analysis, I will bring in relevant secondary literature, both academic articles and news articles from other sources, Russian as well as international. While I can assume that the main sources are accurate in their reporting, triangulation of the information retrieved will help certify the accuracy of the main case-specific narrative about the networks. Subsequently, this part of the thesis will add information to the meta-narrative of the wider project.

A broader theoretical discussion surrounding the topics analysed in this chapter will be done in chapter 6. The narrative of their activities, projects, and network provided in this chapter will naturally be shaped by the imbalance in number of articles from the sources which also will be discussed in chapter 5.

As for chapter 4, it will analyse Prigozhin's network and Malofeev's network separately. The analysis of each of the networks are divided into three parts, first, their rise to position, when and why the patrons, Prigozhin and Malofeev, first appeared in the media and what made them and their networks relevant in a political context. The second part of the analysis focuses on their services they deliver and how they remain relevant and useful to the regime. This part will also give information about who they work with and the relations in the networks. The third part is a continuation of this, and analyses the networks, which also will be built on in the next chapter when a social network analysis is done.

The analytical measures taken in this chapter includes specific research questions outlining what I have been looking for in the empirical data retrieved. Perspectives from other scholars will be included in the analysis to verify and contest the findings.

This type of systematic analysis of Prigozhin and Malofeev, their activities and their networks over time has not been done before. Rather scholars have used them as examples of someone who delivers specific services, for example as entrepreneurs of influence abroad, ideological influence,or financing for private military companies (PMCs). (Laruelle and Limonier 2021a, Laruelle 2017, Suslov 2017, Reynolds 2019). This lacuna will be filled with this systematic content analysis. The goal with this is to give a new way of discussing their activities, services and networks, a new way of studying them, the position and function they have in the Russian political sphere. It will show how they are presented to the domestic audience in Russia. Studying networks in this way may also be a contribution to Hale's theory. Hale is primarily

focusing on the emergence of a dominant network, and not so much on how this network is maintained over time. Certainly, Hale presupposes that smaller networks can be at work within or adjacent to the dominant system, but the main part of the study is dedicated to the rise of one single pyramid network, at the behest of smaller ones. This said, Hale's theory of elite expectations certainly serves as a key variable to understand the persistence of Putinism. I assume that for both the Prigozhin and the Malofeev networks, expectations are expressed in a dual manner: first, they expect that under given circumstances, their network services will be of importance for the Kremlin; second, they expect that the provision of services will keep them aligned with the regime and serve as guarantees against executive crackdowns on their networks.

When reading through the publications I looked especially for details about:

- Which case the publication was about?
- The sentiment and framing of the topic/people discussed
- The topic/service of the publication
- Other persons mentioned (networks)
- Mentioned relations to people
- Mentioned relations to companies and organisations

By tracking this information, I can answer questions such as:

- How did they get into a position where they were useful for the regime as entrepreneurs?
- What kind of services do they deliver?
- Who they are working with, who are in their network?
- Scandals and issues, how this is dealt with in the Kremlin?
- How do they remain relevant? Come back after sanctions or other issues?
- How do they know what services will be useful? What signals are these services based on?

4.1 Evgeniy Prigozhin and his network of various services

Evgeniy Viktorovich Prigpzhin, better known as "Putin's chef", was born in Leningrad in 1961 (Shiryayev 2014). As a child he was an active skier and went to a boarding school for Olympic reserves. Later he studied at the chemical-pharmaceutical institute in Leningrad (Petlyanova 2011a). He has a history of criminal activity which is no secret even though he himself has commented about it. In the 1980's he served time and today has an expired criminal record. The document from a court hearing on the 6th of October 1981 show that the Zhdanovsky

District People's Court of Leningrad sentenced Prigozhin to 13 years in prison, to be served in a medium-security penal colony. The charges were multiple criminal offences. The majority of these were theft, both alone and in conspiracy with others, but the offences also included physical violence and assault (Meduza 2021). He did not spend the full 13 years in prison, but it is unclear if he spent 8 or 9 years inside bars (Peter 2019, Chambelland 2022). Other sources say he was pardoned in 1988 and released from the penal colony in 1990 (Garmazhapova 2014). What is clear is that he started his career in business in 1990 and built his way up from there.

Jardar Østbø writes about the myth surrounding Evgeniy Prigozhin, that he is an "omnipresent puppet" master who offers the Kremlin plausible deniability in more contested areas such as military operations and involvement in developing countries (Østbø 2021: 186).

The articles retrieved from the search 'Evgeniy Prigozhin' (Евгений Пригожин) were distributed as follows (some articles cover more than one topic and are counted under each):

Table 4.2 'Articles in Rossiyskaya Gazeta mentioning Evgeniy Prigozhin sorted by topic'

Rossiyskaya Gazeta - Evgeniy Prigozhin	
Topic	**Number of news articles**
Concord	8
Personal relations to Putin	8
Internet Research Agency	11
Wagner PMC	3
Conflict with Police	1
Conflict with Media	1
Other companies	3
Patriotism	1

Table 4.3 'Articles in Novaya Gazeta mentioning Evgeniy Prigozhin sorted by topic'

Novaya Gazeta - Evgeniy Prigozhin	
Topic	Number of news articles
Concord	42
Gambling business	1
Personal relations to Putin	8
Mention	5
Propaganda/patriotism/provocations	12
Newspaper about Newspapers	4
Internet Research Agency	44
Crimea	5
Security Service	5
Conflict with police	3
Conflict with media	19
Wagner PMC	25
Syria	8
CAR	19
Africa	16
Domestic Politics	24
Accusations from Navalny	10
RIA FAN	17

4.1.1 Rise to Position

Unlike the 1st generation of Oligarchs who made their fortunes from the privatisation of state assets, Prigozhin took another route. He started out selling hot-dogs with the help from his mother in Aprashka, the main flea-market in Leningrad (Petlyanova 2011a). Prigozhin has himself said that this was in 1990, but at the same time he was involved in the gambling business in the city, building a business and making connections to people of importance to him later.

It is often written that he started out selling hot-dogs in Leningrad, and then managed to build a restaurant empire from this. But there is a missing link in this narrative. After selling hot dogs in Aprashka in 1990 but before he ventured into the restaurant and fine-dining business, he was involved in the gambling business in the early 90's. About the same time as President Vladimir Putin, worked as the chairman of the Supervisory board for Casinos and Gambling under the Mayor's office. In 1993 Putin was given the role of issuing licences for the right to engage in the gambling business (Novaya Gazeta 2011a). It is possible that it was at this time Prigozhin met Putin for the first time, because at this time Prigozhin was the general director of a gambling company called Spektr which was owned by Igor Gorbenko and Boris Spektor. Together they started the company Contrast Consulting and served on the board of directors for CJSC Viking

(Novaya Gazeta 2011a). While Prigozhin worked with these businessmen, they also worked with other people. For example, Mikahil Mirilashvili who later served a sentence for the kidnapping of two persons (Novaya Gazeta 2011a). This shows that early in his career Prigozhin did business and established connections with prominent figures and did not exclude contacts with criminals.

And Prigozhin was not the only one with criminal contacts. It has been argued that in his time in the Leningrad mayor's office, Putin was collaborating with criminal organisations in the regulation of the gambling industry in the city (Dawisha 2014: 106). By order of Mayor Sobchak in 1993, Putin was made head of the supervisory council overseeing the entire gambling industry in St. Petersburg. With this he had the authority to license all activities, to allocate city properties for casinos, to work with tax collection agencies, and to oversee compliance (Dawisha 2014: 126). He also led the Committee for Foreign Liaison that created Neva-Chance, a municipal enterprise created to structure the stakes the city received from the gambling establishments and to regulate the business in Leningrad (Petlyanova 2011a). The idea of the Neva-Chance company came from Dmitry Medvedev who at the time was the legal advisor of the committee. Neva Chance was a joint stock company, and through this the city government became the major owner of the gambling industry there. The Neva Chance created over twenty-five companies working in the gambling business, and many of these companies were headed by ex-FSB officials (Dawisha 2014: 127). Subsequently, informal networking was in place already at this stage, and the shady business of St. Petersburg operated in a context where the granting of certain "services" also implied protection from the city executive offices.

In fact, the deputy director of Neva-Chance was none other than Prigozhin's partner in the gambling business, Igor Gorbenko. At the same time as he was the deputy director for Neva-Chance, Gorbenko was a shareholder of the Konti Casino, together with Prigozhin's other partner Boris Spektor. This is a peculiar combination, as the Konti Casino should have been an object of regulation by Neva-Chance (Novaya Gazeta 2011a). Gorbenko supervised the gambling business in St. Petersburg, where the city authorities owned 51% of the capital, allowing Gorbenko himself, Spektor, and Prigozhin to strengthen their positions in this structure (Petlyanova 2011a). The issue of Gorbenko's double position as a shareholder of a major casino and the deputy director of the company regulating gambling in the city can be discussed at length, as can the activity of Putin in his position at the Mayor's office, but in this thesis, it serves a purpose of exemplifying the overlap of positions, of law and dodgy business, and the way in which connections quickly go from the state to the shady world of the gambling

business. And this shows that Prigozhin and Putin worked in the same business, were in contact with the same people, already in the early 90's.

However, there is no confirmed meeting or direct connection between the two until 2000, when Putin dined at Prigozhin's steamboat restaurant in St. Petersburg together with Japanese prime minister Yoshiro Mori, which was the first of many visits to this restaurant. In 2002 US President George Bush visited the restaurant together with Putin, and in 2003 Putin celebrated his 51st birthday here According to Prigozhin, his first meeting with the Russian president was Putin's visit to the restaurant together with prime minister Mori in 2000 (Petlyanova 2011b, Polyanova 2011, Malkova and Bayev 2019).

In 1995 Prigozhin founded his company "Concord" in 1995, and to this day he runs the company. The catering division of this company, Concord Catering, developed and expanded from 1997 with fine-dining restaurants, catering, and even an attempt at a fast-food chain named "Blin Donalts" (Fontanka 2010, Petlyanova 2011c). The Concord group of companies consists of several companies with Concord included in their names. There is Concord, Concord Catering, Concord Management and Investment and other names involving Concord. However, in the media it is not always specified which specific Concord-company they are referring to. Therefore, I will use Concord or the Concord group of companies when talking about any of these sub-companies within the Concord group, unless the specific company is of importance for the analysis.

The St. Peterburg restaurants owned by Concord are another possible arena for Prigozhin to have met Putin already in the 1990's (Polyanova 2011, Petlyanova 2011b, Malkova and Bayev 2019). The first contract between the Kremlin and Prigozhin's company Concord Catering was in 2003 when the company catered at the official celebration of St. Petersburg's 300th anniversary (Al'perina 2007, Fontanka 2010). Concord catering expanded their business to Moscow around 2009 when they opened a restaurant in the Russian parliamentary building. This is the reason for why Prigozhin is called Putin's chef.

Prigozhin's early years in business shows that although he arguably is best known as a restaurant owner and catering provider, he has dealt in more than one business from the very beginning. This is a trend that continues throughout his career. His network spans across various fields of business and thus, it can deliver a wide range of services to the Kremlin.

4.1.2 Services

As for the provision of services, Prigozhin's network seemed to expand into other well-known areas of business, such as media, political consulting, and also, private security companies (PMC Wagner). Notably, from 2003 and until 2008, the sources used in this thesis do not mention any specific service arrangements between Concord and the Russian state, or to any other companies or organisations for that matter. On the other hand, this was in the period when the new executive (Putin) drew a red line to demarcate independence from the oligarchs of the 1990s starting with the arrest of Khodorkovskiy, and the break-up of the Yukos company (Woodruff 2003). However, it is safe to assume that the company was active in business and continued to build its network and strengthen its position in the catering and restaurant business. What we know is that in 2008 Concord won the tender for the supply of food to school cafeterias in St. Petersburg and opened the first factory for the catering industry in 2010. In 2009 the company opened a restaurant in the Russian parliament building, and around this time Concord also provided catering for the annual economic forum in St. Petersburg, hosted gala dinners, and a dinner in the occasion of Dmitry Medvedev's presidential inauguration in 2008 (Girin 2016, Polyanova 2011, Novaya Gazeta 2011a).

The opening of the factory in 2010 was in the Leningrad region, and the plan was that the factory was going to provide food for the schools in the entire North-West of the country. The food was in the style of "in-flight" meals, cheap and quick to make, supposedly high quality and no preservatives. This, however, was questioned later when parents of schoolchildren found out that the food was stored for 21 days before being served at the schools (Polyanova 2011). The Project was mainly funded by the state-owned Vneshekonombank where the Kremlin insider and former guest at Prigozhin's steamboat restaurant (Malkova and Baev 2019), Sergey Ivanov, sat in the board until 2011 (Dawisha 2014: 237). The bank provided 30 out of the 40 million euros necessary for the building of the factory. The loan was given on preferential terms (Girin 2016). The bank also stated that they would continue to lend money to Prigozhin's companies for the building of another 260 factories for the catering industry over the next ten years. It was Vladimir Putin, prime minster at the time, who headed the supervisory board of the project, and he also attended the opening of the factory (Novaya Gazeta 2011a, Polyanova 2011).

The catering-project was successful for a while, providing food for school cafeterias without proper kitchens in the Leningrad region, prison, and military kitchens (Sidibe 2010). The fact that the loan was given to do this project and that Putin visited the factory show the direct

support from the Kremlin. Even after several scandals with the catering company in 2010 and spring 2011, the Kremlin still gave Concord the state-tender to provide school-lunches to children in Moscow as well. The scandals around Concord started when parents in the Leningrad region complained about the increased prices and the poor quality of the children's food in autumn of 2010. Then, in spring 2011, 207 Russian soldiers in the Urals got food poisoning after eating food provided by a Concord sub-company, MedStroy. A company that had been founded by Prigozhin's mother, and then the been transferred to his mother-in-law (Kutuzov 2012). And it did not stop there, the children in Moscow were left without any lunch for weeks, which resulted in the schools refusing to work with Prigozhin's company (Girin 2016). After all this, the Kremlin started to distance themselves from Concord and Prigozhin, but without cutting all ties.

Despite all this Concord's work with providing food for school-cafeterias expanded and *Novaya Gazeta* argued that between 2011 and 2021 the group of companies ran a school food cartel (Asanova et al. 2021). Not all the companies in this cartel are Concord-companies, some are sub-companies such as the abovementioned MedStroy and other are difficult to link to Prigozhin by anything else than speculations. Change of ownership, addresses, manager, phone-number and even names of companies are changed frequently, and government-contracts go from one company to another. However, MedStroy gives a good example for why such speculations might have something to them. The founder was Prigozhin's mother, and the ownership was later transferred to his mother-in-law. This strongly supports speculations that Prigozhin is working with this company. Other things that strengthen the cartel-theory is that several catering companies have the same addresses and phone numbers (Asanova et al. 2021).

The Kremlin continued to use services provided by Concord. Since 2013, Concord delivered catering at the Kremlin's New Year's reception. The company did this for 5 years, until 2018. This year the company was not contacted by the Kremlin, and the task of delivering catering to the reception went to another company (Novaya Gazeta 2018a). Events earlier in 2018 might be the reason for the Kremlin not wanting Concord to deliver the catering. In 2018 Concord management and investment, Concord catering, the Internet Research Agency, plus Prigozhin as an individual were sanctioned by the United States for alleged interfering in the US presidential election in 2016. Also, the PMC Wagner, which is connected to Prigozhin and will be further discussed later in the chapter, was sanctioned (Lenin 2018). This exacerbated the situation, and Putin denied all connections to Concord and Prigozhin, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Media and political interference

In the early 2010's it was not only catering Prigozhin and his companies were delivering to the Kremlin. *Novaya Gazeta* wrote about Concord's deliverance of "special services" which included bot attacks on webpages deemed objectionable, infiltration of oppositional political movements, arranged provocations, and the shooting of the propaganda film "Anatomy of Protest". The film – which severely discredited domestic opposition forces for being agent of foreign powers - was showed on the federal TV-channel NTV (Girin and Khachatryan 2012), and *Novaya Gazeta* speculated that government employees could have been involved in its production. It was development director of Concord-catering, Dmitry Koshar, who infiltrated the organisers of the movement "for fair elections" to get inside information about upcoming events and collecting dirt on Putin's political opponents. This information he passed on to his boss, Evgeny Prigozhin. Koshar also organised provocations against the demonstrators to get film-material for the propaganda-film (Girin and Khachatryan 2012). It must be mentioned that *Novaya Gazeta* includes a disclaimer in their article explaining that they are writing this story based on narratives from individuals in the movement "from fair elections" and that some inconsistency with reality might occur, and that all conclusions are based on these narratives and documents they have received. They also end the article with a note saying that they are ready to publish any comment Dmitri Koshar or Prigozhin might have on the story (Girin and Khachatryan 2012).

In my research I have not been able to find any comment from Prigozhin on this particular issue. However, in 2013 the St. Petersburg *Newspaper about newspapers* made a list where they rated "corrupt" media in Russia. In this list *Novaya Gazeta* was ranked as number 1. The website of gazetaogazetah.ru (*Newspaper about Newspapers)* is no longer operating or blocked in the West. However, on their page on VKontakte it states that Newspaper about Newspapers is a project intending to expose lies in the media, and to identify and fix disinformation. Their "Rating of distrust" shows which publications they deem less faithful. Further they inform that anyone can become a member by signing up on their website. The VKontakte page is not very active, and the last post from the page themselves is from the 21st of May 2017 (Gazeta o Gazetakh).

Novaya Gazeta called this list and the investigation done by *Newspaper about Newspapers* "a series of artificially provoked public attacks" on several news sources and individuals in the Russian media sphere (Petlyanova 2013). To be sure, the "Newspaper about Newspapers" is linked to Prigozhin, and Concord, according to *Novaya Gazeta*. They state that a provocateur

was sent by Prigozhin and Concord, who provided her with a salary and accommodation, in exchange for her to establish connections with people in *Novaya Gazeta*, find and share information about the newspaper, and take photos and videos from the offices. This attack on Russian media came after a series of critical articles had been written about Prigozhin and his businesses (Petlyanova 2013).

It is widely recognised that media control has been a priority for the rise of Putin, and also, that the take-over of television companies and major media outlets has been instrumental in shaping public discourse in a way that favours Putin above all other contenders for Power. This being said, the new generation of service providers have expanded into the media industry, among other things by seeking to discredit opposition newspapers, like *Novaya* Gazeta. This activity has not been sanctioned by the authorities – rather on the contrary. Prigozhin's work with media continued, and in October 2019 the Patriot Media Group started working and Prigozhin is the head of the board of trustees of the group. This is stated on the group's website (Patriot Media) and is the first official link between Prigozhin and the troll factories. The media group aims to disseminate information about events in Russia "in order to create a modern information space aimed at the development of the country" (Novaya Gazeta 2019a, Patriot Media). The service is working as a counterpoint to what they refer to as anti-Russian media who are not aware of all the good things happening in Russia (Patriot Media).

While media of the 1990s served to scrutinise the executive, the new service providers, the patriotic entrepreneurs, are more focused on rendering services to the Kremlin, including shadowy ones, such as support to Kremlin-sanctioned candidates, and interference in elections abroad. Prigozhin's media holding RIA FAN offer political support to Kremlin politicians, like Beglov and Tsukanov, and defaming information and publications about opposition politicians like Reznik (Karpenko 2019).

Interference in US presidential election 2016

Prigozhin and his "troll factory", The Internet Research Agency (IRA), was accused, together with 12 other individuals and 2 Russian organizations, by Robert Mueller of interfering in the presidential election in the US in 2016, and of having links to Donald Trump's campaign headquartes. It was stated that Concord-companies and Prigozhin were funding the IRA (Khamdokhov 2018, Mueller 2019). As mentioned above, this accusation came with sanctions.

The interference in the US election was done by companies associated with Prigozhin, notably the Concord group of companies and IRA, which gained access to Americans' personal data

and used this to show them political ads. The purpose of this was either to popularise Donald Trump or minimise the popularity of Hillary Clinton (Kirpanova 2018, Mueller 2019). The companies were financed by Prigozhin's Internet Research Agency, better known as the "St. Petersburg Troll Factory". The employees were instructed to "litter" and "mess up" discussions in social networks and online resources of major media (Kirpanova 2018). In the Mueller rapport this is referred to as "active measures", "a term that typically refers to operations conducted by Russian security services aimed at influencing the course of international affairs" (Mueller 2019: 14).

Prigozhin was included in the FBI's wanted list for "collusion against the United States" and "interference in the country's interal affairs" (Rossiyskaya Gazeta 2021a). The FBI wrote about Prigozhin and the reason for why he was on the wanted list:

> Yevgeniy Viktorovich Prigozhin is wanted by the FBI for his alleged involvement in a conspiracy to defraud the United States by impairing, obstructing, and defeating the lawful functions of the Federal Election Commission, the United States Department of Justice, and the United States Department of State. This occurred in Washington, D.C., from early 2014 to February 16, 2018. Prigozhin was the primary funder of the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency (IRA). He allegedly oversaw and approved their political and electoral interference operations in the United States which included the purchase of American computer server space, the creation of hundreds of fictitious online personas, and the use of stolen identities of persons from the United States. These actions were allegedly taken to reach significant numbers of Americans for the purposes of interfering with the United States political system, including the 2016 Presidential Election (FBI 2020).

Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, stated that the Robert Mueller accusations were not backed by evidence. The American side had stated that the Russian side did not 'recognize obvious facts', as an answer to this Lavrov said that the "facts" presented were not obvious at all and are not facts. Maria Zakharova who at the time was the official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry called the accusations "absolutely absurd" (Khamdokhov 2018).

Following the sanctions for the interference in the US presidential elections, Putin was asked directly about his friendship with Prigozhin in an interview with NBC. He answered that he knew him, but that calling it a friendship was a "distortion of facts" (Latukhina 2018, Putin 2018a). In the same interview he denied any Russian interference in the US-election and returned the accusation to the US (Latukhina 2018).

In the Interview Putin said about Prigozhin:

I know such a person, but he is not listed among my friends. There is such a businessman, he is working in the restaurant business, and then also something else. Understand this, he is not a state official, we do not have any relationship to him … he is not a state official, he is not in the public service, he is just a private person, a businessman … (Putin 2018a).

When asked whether he cared or not if any of the accused did interfere in the election Putin stated that he does not care, is indifferent, because they do not represent the state or the interests of the state (Putin 2018a).

In a similar interview with the Austrian TV-channel ORF Putin stated:

How low everything that happens in the information and political sphere in the countries of the united West has fallen if a restaurateur from Russia can influence elections in some European country or in the United States! It's not funny?" (Kirpanova 2018).

This shows that not only is Putin distancing himself from Prigozhin by stating that he is not an official, but he is also minimizing Prigozhin role within Russia. On the other hand, this does not in any way exclude that the services rendered by the Prigozhin network are not *useful* for the Kremlin's overarching aims. Would an army contractor in a democracy not be charged if similar information about his activities came to the service?

PMC Wagner

The Wagner group is a Russian private military company (PMC) commanded by Prigozhin's former colleague Dmitri Utkin, and allegedly financed by Prigozhin himself (Martens 2019). The Russian Private Military Company (PMC) Wagner was founded in 2010. According to *the Bell*, and rendered in *Novaya Gazeta*, it was the leadership of the General Staff of the Military Forces of Russia who came up with the idea of the PMC. They entrusted the implementation of the project to Evgeny Prigozhin. Prigozhin himself denies any involvement with the PMC (Novaya Gazeta 2019c, Malokova and Bayev 2019).

However, it seems fair to assume that the PMC, Wagner, is associated with Prigozhin (Novaya Gazeta 2019c). Sources confirm this, and the St. Petersburg newspaper *Fontanka* wrote that the PMC appeared in 2013, then named the "Slavonic corps". When Russian managers of the private military company Moran Security Group, Vadim Gusev and Evgeny Sidorov, formed a detachment of 267 "contractors" to "protect fields and oil pipelines" in Syria, its members subsequently formed the Wagner group (Novaya Gazeta 2019c, Rukompromat n.d.).

The idea of the PMC came already in 2009 when the military leadership wanted to establish a team consisting of retired security officials with experience from combat. At the St. Petersburg Economic Forum (SPIEF) in 2010 the idea was discussed with Eben Barlow, the creator of the world's first legal PMC Executive Outcomes. *The Bell* and *Novaya Gazeta* writes that the creation of a PMC was agreed upon by President Putin and the new head of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov in 2012. In 2013 mercenaries were recruited (Novaya Gazeta 2019c).

Prigozhin was offered to lead the organisation of the PMC. The Bell argued that he was offered this because he was not a part of Putin's inner circle, like for example Gennady Timchenko and Arkadiy Rotenberg. This meant that Prigozhin had remained in the shadowns for much longer, and therefore was a better choice. The bell also argued that Prigozhin initially did not want to take part in the project because of the lack of clear benefits, but that he did not refuse (Novaya Gazeta 2019c, Malkova and Bayev 2019). Still, Prigozhin denies any involvement with the PMC or any existence of Russian PMCs at all. "The fact that my name was mentioned in connection with the PMC is a consequence of information originally released to the public through the Security Service of Ukraine" he said (Novaya Gazeta 2019c).

The Wagner Group is a private and independent unit (Chambelland 2022) whose forces operated in Ukraine 2014, Syria 2015-2018, and since 2017 in several countries in Africa. Who actually owns the group and how the leadership is structured remains a mystery according to some (Østbø 2021: 198). Finding information about the group is also rendered as difficult (Marten 2019), but it remains an established fact that journalists that have tried to establish connections between Wagner and the Prigozhin network, have been subject to DDoS (distributed denial-of-service) attacks from the IRA (Marten 2019).

Whatever these connections amount to, whenever the issue of military activities surface in press-conferences with Putin, the response is evasive, and sculpted around full deniability. For instance, in 2018, Putin commented about Prigozhin's alleged activity in Syria:

> Well, I know that there are several companies, we have a couple of companies there that are involved, including, perhaps, his, but this has nothing to do with our policy in Syria. And if he does something, he does it not in agreement with us, but, most likely, in agreement with the Syrian authorities or the Syrian business with which he works there. We do not interfere in this. Does your government interfere in every step of the representatives of your business, especially a fairly modest one? This is, in fact, a medium-sized business. And what, your President interferes in the affairs of every American medium-sized company, or what? Isn't this nonsense? (Putin 2018a).

The Wall Street Journal wrote that Wagner took part in military conflicts in Donbass in 2014 and in Syria. Following this, *Novaya Gazeta* wrote about the PMC's presence in the Central African Republic and Sudan, and Bloomberg reported on activity in eight other African countries. According to the agency, in exchange for the right to extract minerals, their tasks involve protection of high-ranking officials, training the local military, and contributing to the organisation of election campaigns (Novaya Gazeta 2019c).

In 2017 the PMC Wagner was included in USA's sanctions list together with 27 representatives of Russian defence and intelligence (Novaya Gazeta 2018b). Prigozhin was already sanctioned by the US for interference in the 2016 presidential election. The new sanctions were against individuals allegedly linked to Russian intelligence and defence. In addition to being on the list as an individual, Prigozhin's companies "The Internet Research Agency", "Concord Management and Consulting", and "Concord Catering" were added. And the PMC "Wagner", which was not already sanctioned, was now included. Russia denies the Wagner PMC's existence (Novaya Gazeta 2018b). The decision to sanction these individuals and companies came after US president, Donald Trump, signed an executive order on the 20th of September 2018 to tighten control over US sanctions against Russia under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) (Novaya Gazeta 2018b). When questioned about the Wagner group after these sanctions, Putin argued that as long as the group acted within the law, they have a right to pursue their interests anywhere in the world (Mislivskaya 2018).

Wagner in Syria and Africa:

It is important to note that the reach of the Wagner Company is beyond Russia's territory. Subsequently, the services provided are not only domestic, but also linked to overarching foreign policy aims. Here, the Kremlin is – as is to be expected – hands off; in the interview with NBC the interviewer connects Prigozhin to military operations in Syria, but Putin answers:

> This person may have a variety of interests, including for example, interests in the fuel and energy complex in Syria. But we do not support it, we do not interfere, and we do not contribute to it. This is his personal initiative, private (Putin 2018a).

There are, however, clear indications that the Wagner group enjoys ties to other state-led service branches of Russia, such as the Military Intelligence Unit GRU. In 2017, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Russian minister of energy, Novak, and the Russian firm Evro Polis, which is linked to Prigozhin. Evro Polis, according to the memorandum, in Syria to

liberate and then guard energy infrastructures captured by the regime's enemies. However, it has also been reported that Evro Polis also trained individuals working in Syrian special operations forces (Martens 2019: 194).

The Battle of Deir ez-Zour early in 2018 killed and wounded numbers of Wagner soldiers, and it was after this event that the world first heard about the PMC Wagner (Chambelland 2022). There was an attack from Russian-speaking militia against a US-supported military base, and the US-forces fought back. The Kremlin denied that these Russian-speaking militias were official Russian military, but it is believed that the Kremlin knew who they were, and the question is then why the militia group (most likely Wagner) were not ordered to withdraw (Marten 2019: 194).

Wagner in CAR

Deniability has not always stood out as effective. The murder of the three Russian journalists in CAR, Orkhan Dzhemal', Kirill Radchenko and Aleksandr Rastorguyev, was according to Putin being investigated and handled through diplomatic channels. He claimed that the journalists had been in the Central African Republic without notifying the authorities of the country about their status, they did not come to the country as journalists, but as tourists, and were then attacked by local groups (Mislivskaya 2018, Putin 2018b). But investigative journalists in *Novaya Gazeta* did find several relations from Prigozhin's companies to individuals under suspicion for the journalists' deaths (Gordiyenko 2021a, Gordiyenko 2019a, Sokolov 2020).

Again, Putin has not refrained from responding to questions about Wagner, which is somewhat strange, as one would have expected this to be a realm of the press- secretary, Peskov. Putin seems, however, keen to have message control when it comes to questions of Wagner's activities, such as in this response:

> Now about Wagner and what people are doing. Everyone must stay within the law, everyone. If there is any… We can ban private security activities altogether, but once we do that, I think that they will come to you with a large number of petitions, demanding to protect this labour market. We have almost a million people working there. If this Wagner group violates something, then the Prosecutor General's Office should give a legal assessment. Now about their presence somewhere abroad. If, I repeat once again, they do not violate Russian law, they have the right to work, push their business interests anywhere in the world (Putin 2018b).

Formally, Russia has a law that regulates private security companies, but this has so far not come to apply to Wagner. This said, Prigozhin himself misses no opportunity to pledge loyalty to the Kremlin, even when the Kremlin is putting in a lot of effort to distance itself from the entrepreneur. Distancing does not imply a fall from grace, however. Again, in 2018, right after he was re-elected as president, Vladimir Putin was interviewed by the Austrian TV-channel ORF. In this interview he was asked directly about his "friendship" with Prigozhin, and the interference in the US elections. Putin denied any such friendship and stated once again that Prigozhin simply was a restaurant-owner and a businessman and had no connection to the state. In this interview he also emphasises that all his chefs worked in the Federal Security Service and there were no exceptions (Kirpanova 2018). What he did, was to ridicule allegations that the IRA had served as the Kremlin's prolonged arm into interfering with the U.S. elections. To quote at length:

> How low everything that happens in the information and political sphere in the countries of the United West has fallen is a restaurant owner from Russia can influence elecctions in some European country or the US. Is it not funny (Putin 2018c)?

To make this point even clearer and engaging with the well-known "whataboutism" of Kremlin rhetoric (to blame the West for "doing the same thing"), Putin compared Prigozhin to the American billionaire George Sorors who "intervenes in all affairs around the world".

> Right now, there are rumours that Soros wants to rock the euro. Ask the [American] state department, why is he doing this? They will answer you that the state department has nothing to do with this, this is a personal matter of Mr. Soros. And with us, this is a personal matter of Prigozhin (Putin 2018c).

Both in *Novaya Gazeta* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the part of the interview which was about Prigozhin, was mentioned as a highlight. They both emphasises the denial of any state involvement in the interference in the US presidential elections, however, *Novaya Gazeta*, naturally, were more sceptical to this denial. This was visible in the way they wrote about Prigozhin, and the fact that *Novaya Gazeta* mentioned Prigozhin by name much more frequently than what *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* did. Here the name was only used when the questions from the interview were repeated and the few times that Putin mentioned it.

Assuming that a) Prigozhin's services allows for deniability; b) that the services are somehow "cleared" with the Kremlin; and c) that the services rendered also protects the patron, questions should be raised about the immediate use that the Kremlin has for such services. Nowhere else

is this clearer than during the annexation of Crimea in 2014. During the annexation of Crimea in 2014 there are speculations that Prigozhin funded PR-companies in Ukraine. The Kharkiv News Agency which was founded at this time has relation to the Internet Research Agency, Prigozhin's troll factory. The relation is funding from the Internet Research Agency to start the News Agency (Kanev and Shiryayev 2014).

4.1.3 The Network - details

In this section, I will provide a figure that gives oversight over the network analysed above. Suffice to say, as a point of departure that Prigozhin is well connected both within Russia and abroad. Abroad it is especially in Syria and the Central African Republic he has the most contacts in high positions.

A central person is Dmitry Utkin, who worked with Prigozhin to found Concord in 1995. Utkin is now best known as the commander for Wagner PMC. *Novaya Gazeta* refers to Prigozhin as the main financer of the PMC, and this is a commonly accepted in most western media, however in the sources for this thesis there are no hard evidence for this.

Prigozhin has connections to several Russian politicians, but his networks also expand to politicians in other countries as well. On the 7th of November 2018 he took part in a meeting with Sergey Shoigu together with Khalia Haftar (Murtazin 2018).

The figure below is not a comprehensive or detailed overview of Prigozhin's network, this will be provided in Chapter 5. Rather, this map is a simple visualisation of where Prigozhin's network provide services and but is meant to give an understanding of the span in time, connections and services within Prigozhin's network.

Figure 4.1 Network details – Evgeniy Prigozhin
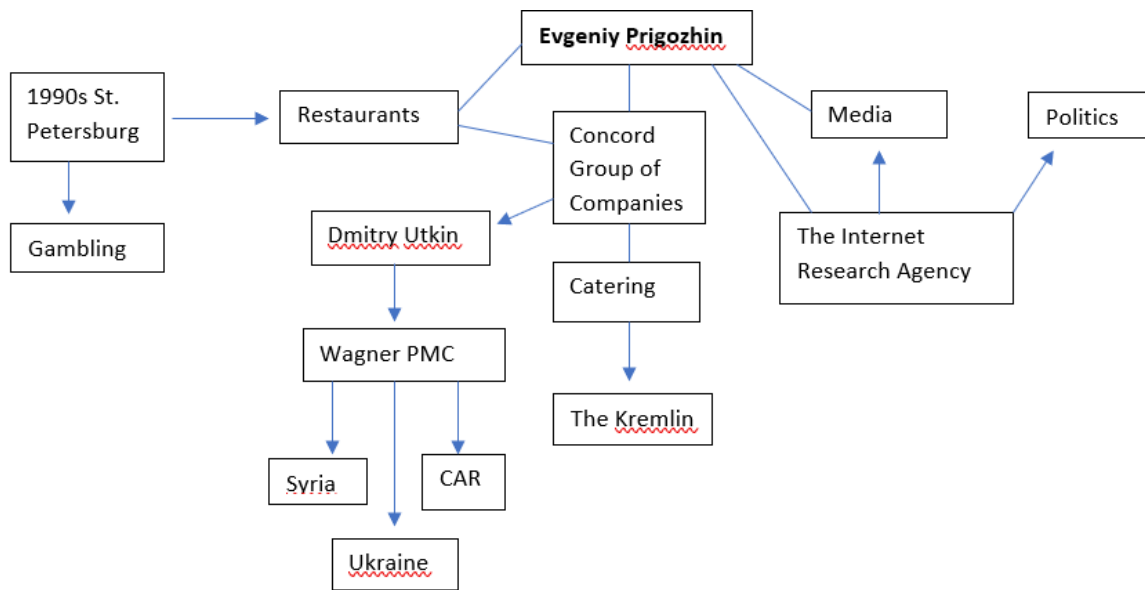
4.2 Konstantin Malofeev and his orthodox political network

Konstantin Valeryevich Malofeev was born in 1974 in Moscow. He has a degree in law from Moscow State University, where he studied from 1991 to 1996. After getting his degree he worked as a lawyer for a few years in an investment back, Renaissance Capital. Later he became the general director for Regent European Securities, and then the head of the corporate finance department of the investment block of the MDM Bank, which is one of the largest private banks in Russia (Baza SPISOK PUTINA n.d.a, MDM bank).

He is nicknamed the "Orthodox Oligarch" (Shevtchyk 2020), and is a prominent businessman well known for his right-wing views. Following Bluhm and Varga's (2022) argument that the right wing in Russia is divided into two groups: The mainstream right and the far right, Malofeev is a fringe character in the mainstream right group. This group mainly consists of factions of the ruling elite close to the Putin regime and members of United Russia. It is in the ideological fringe Malofeev is positioned with his far-right views of the traditional family values, Orthodoxy, and view of Russians as a distinct civilisation (Telekanal Tsargrad), however he remains in the mainstream group because he is supportive of the regime and as will be shown in this chapter, he follows the directives and signals embedded in the conservative turn. Though he might criticize the regime, but not Putin, as he wishes he would become tsar in a Monarchist Russia. (Malofeev 2015). Whether he does this because of personal conviction,

or because he knows that this is how he can best position himself to get reward from the Kremlin cannot be said. In this position on the ideological fringe of the mainstream right, Malofeev is an important ally to the members of the Izborsk Club with his TV channel Tsargrad and the "political-analytical centre" Kathekon. In Kathekon's supervisory board is Sergey Glazyev, former advisor to President Putin (Bluhm and Varga 2022).

The articles retrieved from the search 'Konstantin Malofeev' (Константин Малофеев) on each newspaper's webpage, were distributed as follows (some articles cover more than one topic and are counted under each):

Table 4.4 'Articles in Rossiyskaya Gazeta mentioning Konstantin Malofeev sorted by topic'

Rossiiskaya Gazeta - Konstantin Malofeev	
Topic	Number of news articles
The Safe Internet League	4
St. Basil The Great Foundation	5
Rostelecom/Svyazinvest	1
Political activity	4
Crimea	3
Bosnian and Herzegovinian "Black list'	3
The World Russian People's Council	1

Table 4.5 'Articles in Novaya Gazeta mentioning Konstantin Malofeev sorted by topic'

Novaya Gazeta - Konstantin Malofeev	
Topic	Number of articles
The Safe Internet League	10
St. Basil the Great foundation	5
Rostelecom/Svyazinvest	11
Political Activity	14
'war' with VTB	4
Marshall Capital	8
Promotion of Orthodoxy	6
Crimea	19
International activity	4
mention	2
Two-headed eagle society	2
Tsargrad	11
Bitcoin	9

4.2.1 Rise to position

Malofeev founded his company "Marshall Capital" in 2005 which mainly worked in telecommunications, media, and technology (Baza SPISOK PUTNA a). Based on my findings this was his starting point and allowed him to earn a considerable amount of money, which

again allowed him to establish a position in business, build a network, and deliver services to the regime.

In 2009, Malofeev entered the media- and communication business, by becoming a member of the board of directors of the state-owned telecom company "Svyazinvest". At that time Mikhail Leschenko was the deputy director of the company. He and Malofeev had worked together first in the MDM bank and then in Malofeev's "Marshall Capital". Through this partnership Malofeev was able to take an active part in the management of Svyazinvest and even make policy statements in the press about the fate of the telecommunications giant's assets (Sysoyev 2010). He also acquired about 10% of the shares of Rostelecom. 3% of these shares were sold to him by the general director of Svyazinvest and Rostelecom Evgeniy Yurchenko (Zhilyaev 2012).

Malofeev's active role in the company received some negative reactions in 2010. At this time Yurchenko resigned from his position and explained this by stating that he made the decision because of disagreements with the management of Rostelecom about the transfer of management of state assets to one person. Later he clarified that he was in fact talking about Malofeev (Sysoyev 2010). Yurchenko also wrote an open letter to the then minister of communications, Igor Shchegolev. In this letter he stated that "he would no longer work in a strategic industry that has been turned into a source of enrichment for 'people close to the body'" (Zhilyaev 2012). This statement suggests that Malofeev from the very start was considered to be in a close circle around Putin – who is often referred to as simply *"telo"* – or the *"body"*.

When Svyazinvest and Rostelecom, two state-owned telecommunications companies, were merged, problems arose. At a political level the leadership of the state operator was considered ineffective. In the beginning of 2012, the company's share price had a two-fold drop compared to the price in June 2011. Market experts claimed that this situation was in part caused by Malofeev's influence on the company's management. He had placed his people in senior positions and bought shares in Svyazinvest, these factors were seen as contributing factors to the poor management and drop in share prices (Zhilyaev 2012, Shekovtsoy 2017: 181-182).

There were also murky bank-connections involved. Rostelecom invested about 300 million dollars in Gazprombank, and *Novaya Gazeta* wrote that these funds could have been used to acquire shares in the interregional companies of Svyazinvest and Rostelecom in the interest of Malofeev's Marshall Capital. This way, Malofeev got his hands on 7% of Rostelecom and more

than 3% of the shared were sold to him by the former general director of Svyazinvest, Evgeny Yurchenko (before he criticised Malofeev this must have been). In 2012, Malofeev owned 10% of Rostelecom (Zhilyaev 2012).

When Rostelecom held a tender for the construction of communication facilities for an amount of 14.8 billion roubles, it was won by Infra Engineering Holding, managed by a former colleague of Malofeev, Sergey Ogorodnov. Ogorodnov then dealt with subcontractors but withheld 40% of the initial mediation (Zhilyaev 2012). This is probably what they meant when they argued that Malofeev's activities were bad for the company.

Malofeev's entrance unleashed a conflict with VTB. In 2012, VTB stated that they were presented with incorrect information about the value of Malofeev's collateral when he obtained a loan of 230 million dollars (Zhilyaev 2012). But as *Novaya Gazeta* put it, the conflict with VTB was just the tip of the iceberg" (Latynina 2012, Murtazin 2012). This iceberg will be unravelled later in the chapter. The conflict with VTB came to an end in 2015 when Malofeev paid 100 million dollars to the bank as a settlement agreement. The total dept was much higher, plus interest and penalties for overdue payments. In addition to Malofeev's cheap way out of the conflict, the ministry of internal affairs closed the criminal case on a theft of a loan from the bank where Malofeev was listed as a witness (Novaya Gazeta 2015a).

While the case with Rostelecom, Svyazinvest, Marshall capital and the "war" with VTB is interesting because it shows how some people could rise with "protection". Malofeev's position seemed secured, and he did not face consequences like asset stripping or charges of tax-evasion, which is normally the fate of oligarchs that "stir the house" in a manner that the Kremlin does not approve of. Moreover, Malofeev soon returned services, among other things by his involvement with the Safe Internet League where he really showed his intentions of being an important actor in politics.

> It was at the very moment when the Orthodox billionaire Konstantin Malofeev was considered an all-powerful man in the Ministry of Communications that the Safe Internet League founded by him became the developer of the "anti-pedophile" law, brought like a club over the entire Russian Internet (Latynina 2012).

Malofeev's rise to position was not only about making a profit, but to make a "morally acceptable" profit, among other things by aligning closely with the conservative turn. He built himself a strong position as a fighter for the online safety of children through his Safe Internet League which he founded in 2011. The League is a non-profit partnership, funded by private

contributors, and took the initiative to cooperate with several of the largest players in the Russian internet technology market to invest in the development of a technical solution, a type of filter, that would remove dangerous content from the internet. The initiative was presented at the second forum For a Safer Internet, held in 2011. Malofeev stated that several companies were already involved and ready to invest in the development of such a software product, and specified the dangerous content as pornographic images online, especially on social media (Blagoveshchenskiy 2011).

In addition to the filter-software, Malofeev also announced that a grant of 2.5 million roubles would be created to be used to establish a centre for the monitoring of dangerous content on the internet (Blagoveshchenskiy 2011a). However, later writing about this part of the project reveals that it did not go as well as planned, that there was only one person working on monitoring the internet and reporting "bad" content. This was Denis Davydov, working in the League (Kanygin 2011).

The League and the plans of the filter and the monitoring of online content received positive feedbаслю The Safe internet League included large companies such as MTS, VimpelCom, Megafon, Rostelecom, Kaspersky Lab, and Mail.ru (Blagoveshchenskiy 2011a).

At the launch of the League, then Minister of Communications, Igor Shchegolev, said that the new organisation would be more effective in combating harmful sites than the FSB or the Ministry of internal Affairs were, because the police will have to go to court, while the League will be able to contact providers directly through partnership solutions with even the largest providers, and that this will be a much faster way to remove dangerous content. He also stated that the state was not directly involved in the project, only in the person of their specific representatives (Kanygin 2011). Here Shchegolev was most likely referring to himself, as he was a member of the board of trustees of the League.

However, *Novaya Gazeta* were suspicious of the project. They wrote that the attempt to enrol volunteers to the management of internet content had failed (Kanygin 2011). Malofeev had talked about the "brigade of volunteers" that would find and remove dangerous content online when he spoke at the launch of the League. Denis Davydov, a member of the League, could told *Novaya Gazeta* that at the moment he was the only one working to monitor the internet for dangerous content (Kanygin 2011). This shows that a lot of what Malofeev said, was just words, and that things did not work properly in reality.

It seems to be the safe internet league that was the start of Malofeev establishing his position with Russian charitable foundations, however, in the first articles *Novaya Gazeta* write about him, his "St. Basil the Great foundation" is mentioned as a reference to who Malofeev is and what he is working with. This is done also when they introduce his work with the safe internet league (Kanygin 2011, Andreyeva 2012).

4.2.2 Services

Malofeev's Safe Internet League opened other doors for him as a *patriotic* entrepreneur. Being one of the major players in the Russian telecommunications market he had funds, and with his Safe internet league he established his position as a patriotic entrepreneur, someone who invests into projects of patriotic value, in agreement with the Kremlin narrative. Among his services was partaking in political activity; he engaged in discussions of an internet law and amendments to the constitution of the Russian Federation, but also abroad, where he became a nodal point of influence working with far-right groups in Europe. Malofeev has also attempted to enter the formal political sphere by entering elections, however these attempts have not been successful. Other services are promotion of Orthodoxy (that are not direct political activity): arranging exhibitions and tours with holy relics, forums for "large families", and orthodox conferences. He has founded and is in the leadership of several orthodox organisations; among them St. Basil the Great foundation and the double headed eagle, in addition to his orthodox TV-channel "Tsargrad".

The safe internet league gave him a way into politics. He worked with politicians on a law on children's safety online. The Safe Internet League proposed to finalise the federal law "On the protection of Children from information harmful to their health and development". This law would be based on the British model of combating dangerous content online after a suggestion from Konstantin Malofeev through the Safe Internet League (Ashirova 2011).

This was discussed at the Russian Internet Week in 2011 in a section called "safe Runet". The discussion was attended by state representatives: Elena Mizulina – Deputy of the State Duma for Women, Family and Children – who heads the working group for the preparation of the Law. Also present was Ekaterina Larina – director of the state media policy department of the ministry of communication. In addition, representatives of various groups working on the law attended: Mikhail Yakushev – vice president of the Mail.ru group, Denis Davydov – executive director of the Safe Internet League, plus representatives from Microsoft, Google Russia, Beeline, and Intensys (Ashirova 2011).

The attendants discussed the weaknesses of Federal Law no. 436 and the need for Russian citizens to have access to global internet sources. Though their opinions differed on some points, there was still an overall agreement of the need to protect children from inappropriate content and a full eradication of child pornography (Ashirova 2011). After getting public appraisal from Vladimir Putin the League presented heavy political power, and the law they discussed was adopted shortly after it was proposed (Belov 2013).

Novaya Gazeta wrote that even though there is no doubt that the censorship the League introduced was put forward could be used for good things, independent experts also warned that the League could be used by the authorities whenever necessary to fight dissident and opposition politicians (Belov 2013).

Some of the politicians he discussed the internet law with, he also worked with to promote amendments to the constitution, which was amended in 2020, including the change of the role of Orthodoxy in the country. Already in 2013 Malofeev and other orthodox politicians worked for a change of the role of orthodoxy in the constitution. Together with historians, jurists, and philosophers he headed the initiative of a group that put forward a proposal to amend the constitution by introducing a provision on the special, state-forming role of Orthodoxy. The proposal was published in the media as an open letter to the Russian President. State Duma deputy Elena Mizulina brought the proposal to an interfactional deputy group called "In Defence of Christian Values". The letter states that Orthodoxy is the national idea of Russia, its special civilisational code, the essence of the country's spiritual sovereignty, and the basis of Russian identity (Rogovtseva 2013). In an interview about this on Russia's "Perviy Kanal" Malofeev said:

> Orthodoxy is Russia's soul. Orthodoxy is her national idea. For a thousand years our ancestors built the state in exactly this image. And funnily enough we are sitting in offices inventing a national ideology. The national idea of Russia is well known (My translation) (Malofeev in Rogovtseva 2013).

Connected to this work of getting Orthodoxy officially into the Russian constitution the conference "The Triumph and Fall of the Empire: Lessons from History" was arranged in 2013. The conference was opened by Chairman of the State Duma – Sergey Naryshkin. Speeches were delivered by Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky, President of the Russian Cultural Foundation Nikita Mikhailkov, and Executive Secretary of the Patriarchal Council for Culture Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov. The working group on the institutionalisation of Orthodoxy

as a state religion was created by the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (RISI) headed by Leonid Reshetnikov. He has previously worked for the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (Belov 2013). Malofeev was also present. *Novaya Gazeta* writes about him as the chairman of the Romanov Jubilee public organisation, an Orthodox public organisation working to promote Russian cultural heritage (Belov 2013).

When the Russian Parliament considered the initiative in 2014, Konstantin Malofeev organised a forum "Large families and the future of mankind" through the St. Basil the Great Foundation where he is the chairman of the board of trustees. At the forum he was nostalgic about the Russian Empire and the wonderful time it was in terms of fertility and argued that this was because of the strong position of Orthodoxy, and that the Tsars' considered themselves "defenders of Christianity" (Ermoshkina 2014).

Connection to European Far-Right groups.

Like Prigozhin's network, Malofeev also delivers services abroad. In 2014 Malofeev organised a closed congress for a group of far-right politicians in Europe. Among the attendees were the Russian "eurasianist" Aleksandr Dugin, Marine Le Pen's international advisor Aymeric Choprade who is also one of the main contacts between the National Front party and Russia, leader of the Austrian "Freedom"-party Heinz-Christian Strache and the leader of the Hungarian "Attack"-party Volen Siderov (Safronov 2014).

Choprade participated in the forum "Large Families and the future of mankind" which Malofeev was organising together with among others, Nataliya Yakunina, Vladimir Yakunin, and Elena Mizulina (Shekhovtsov 2017, Rossiyskaya Gazeta 2014).

Choprade also came to the Crimean referendum to show his support for Russia. With him was his long-time friend Philippe de Villiers who had a meeting with Putin in Crimea on the 14th of August 2014. De Villiers was the leader of the ultra-conservative party "Movement for France" and was a Vendean monarchist in his youth. With his visit to the residence of Russian Emperors the Livadia Palace, he became the first foreign guest Putin welcomed here. In the meeting, de Villiers showed his admiration for Putin (Izotov 2014a, Izotov 2014b).

The conversation took place during the hot season of the Ukrainian war, when the assessments of a "prominent French politician and businessman" acquired an increased value. The assessments coincided with the signing of a protocol of understanding regarding the construction of two – one in Crimea and one in the Moscow region - "historical parks"

(Tsargradov) which de Villiers company will build with the participation of the Orthodox billionaire Malofeev (Safronov 2014). De Villiers has such a park in France that tells the history of the country (Izotov 2014a).

Rossiyskaya Gazeta wrote about these parks and the plans to build them as a way of making Crimea even more attractive for tourists and to firmly ground the Russian historical connections to Crimea (Izotov 2014a, Izotov2014b). Adding to this, *Novaya Gazeta* also speculated in a new Kremlin-project about the creation of an "Orthodox" opposition. Where the left-right paradigm would be obsolete and the new would be Pro-western liberals against Orthodox patriots (Beloev 2013). What is clear is that Konstantin Malofeev has founded and is an active member of several boards for Orthodox organisations. The most prominent of these is the St. Basil the Great Foundation. Another one of these organisations is the Two-Headed Eagle. His TV-Channel, Tsargrad TV, is another channel for him to promote orthodoxy and spread orthodox and pro-regime propaganda. The moral superiority of orthodox values was not easily sold in elections, however, and soon scandals erupted around of bribing of voters, such as in the Smolensk local elections in 2012.

At around the same time as the abovementioned "war" with VTB, Malofeev won the by-election of deputy for the council of deputies of the Znamensky rural settlement in the Ugransky district in the Smolensk region where he ran as a self-nominated candidate (Raichev 2012a). The deputy role almost appeared to be reserved for Malofeev. The governor in the region, Aleksei Ostrovsky, presented Malofeev to the rest of the local community during an event some weeks before (Mironova 2013, Raichev 2012b). *Rossiyskaya gazeta* wrote that some media had speculated about Malofeev's intentions with the participation, without specifying which media they referred to. The speculations were that Malofeev had run for the deputy role so that he could be appointed as the region's governor's representative in the upper house of the Russian Parliament (Raichev 2012a).

Later Malofeev was investigated for bribing voters to vote for him. The investigating authorities opened a criminal case accusing Malofeev of obstructing the free exercise of electoral rights by citizens (Paragraph A of part 2 of article 141 of the criminal code of the Russian Federation). Malofeev was not personally accused of physically doing the bribing, it was an unidentified person who had done this. Receipts from several voters were considered as evidence. They showed that the voters received 500 roubles in exchange for the obligation to vote for Malofeev in the election (Raichev 2012b). After this was revealed Governor Ostroivsky criticised the

media for "the vile assumption" that he would nominate a representative to the executive power from the region in the federation council for money (Raichev 2012a).

Malofeev appealed, but in the end, he was eliminated from the election (Mironova 2013).

While not being electable, Malofeev certainly wanted to breed Orthodox politicians. In 2015 he founded a media company, the Tsargrad TV channel. The channel says itself that it is the "first Russian conservative information and analytical TV channel" (Novaya Gazeta 2020a). For two years the channel was broadcasting in addition to being an active news-source online, before it in 2017 went fully online and stopped broadcasting. In 2017 Malofeev also founded the religious organisation "The Two-Headed Eagle" which he says is "a society for the development of Russian historical education" (Novaya Gazeta 2020a). The organisation's aim is to encourage support for monarchism and spread knowledge about the Russian Empire (Novaya Gazeta 2020a). Both these initiatives aim at promoting orthodoxy, monarchism and to glorify the history of the Russian Empire, in addition to political views mainly in accordance with the Kremlin's narrative, however on occasions even more extreme. For example, Malofeev, personally, Tsargrad TV and The Two-Headed Eagle organisation are for reinstating the Russian Monarchy, and have claimed that they wanted this reinstated before the 2024 election (Telekanal Tsargrad 2017). The resolution of the two-headed eagle society emphasised "unconditional support for Vladimir Putin and the intention to restore the Russian Monarchy" (Britskaya 2019). They are also channels through which political support to Putin is conveyed.

Crimea

There can be no doubts as to the involvement of Malofeev in the annexation of Crimea (Hosaka 2018, Hosaka 2019). In 2014 he funded the Luhansk and Donetsk people's republics (Hosaka 2018: 346-347). The Ukrainian internal ministry opened a criminal case against Konstantin Malofeev in July 2014 for the alleged financing of illegal paramilitary groups said to be created by Russian Defence minister Sergei Shoigu (Novaya Gazeta 2014). The Ukrainian ministry said that armed groups were operating, with the support of the Russian ministry of defence, in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in Ukraine (Novaya Gazeta 2014). Already before this, Malofeev was suspected to have collaborated with the Donetsk People's republic, and especially Aleksandr Boroday who was the Prime Minister of DNR in 2014. This was because they were former colleagues, Borodai worked as a political consultant for Marshall Capital. Also, DPR's Defence Minister Igor Strelkov-Girkin worked at Marshall Capital, as the head of the security service (Novaya Gazeta 2014). In the spring of 2014 Malofeev was actively

working to mobilise people in southeast Ukraine through Orthodox exhibitions and Russian history (Hosaka 2018)

The armed revolt in Donetsk and Lughansk in April 2014 also seemed to be a first step in a long-durée plan of dismembering these parts from Ukraine. *Novaya Gazeta* revealed that Russian plans to annex regions of Eastern Ukraine had been planned already in February 2014. The evidence they had was a document with a plan for a Russian seizure of several territories in Eastern Ukraine. *Novaya Gazeta* argued that Malofeev could have taken part in the preparation of this document which was written in the period between the 4th and 12th of February 2014, about two weeks before the annexation of Crimea. The information in the document matched a lot of the actual actions and developments on the Russian side (Novaya Gazeta 2015b).

Novaya Gazeta, referencing the newspaper "Meduza", writes that Konstantin Malofeev was behind the movement and organisation "The Union of Donbass Volunteers" and this is confirmed in other sources (Hosaka 2018). Malofeev and his press office denies this (Novaya Gazeta 2019a).

Two-headed eagle society "The resolution, also published on the Orel website, expresses "unconditional support for Vladimir Putin" and the intention to restore the Russian monarchy by 2024" (Britskaya 2019). As Prigozhin's network does, Malofeev's network also operates in Africa. The organisation "The International Agency for Sovereign Developmen" (IASD), is headed by Malofeev and provides economic help to several African countries including Niger, Guinea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The money is earmarked improvement of transport networks and the development of a new oil-pipeline (Novaya Gazeta 2019b). Malofeev referred to the energy sector and transport infrastructure as key for the development of African countries (Novaya Gazeta 2019b).

4.2.3 Network – details

As with figure 4.1 of Prigozhin's network, this figure, 4.2, is not comprehensive or detailed, but serves a purpose of visualising the main lines in the network.

Malofeev has business relations with several important individuals in the Russian Orthodox Church, mainly through the St. Basil The Great Foundation. The closeness he has to the church does give him a significant political capital (Zhilyaev 2012).

Figure 4.2: Network details – Konstantin Malofeev
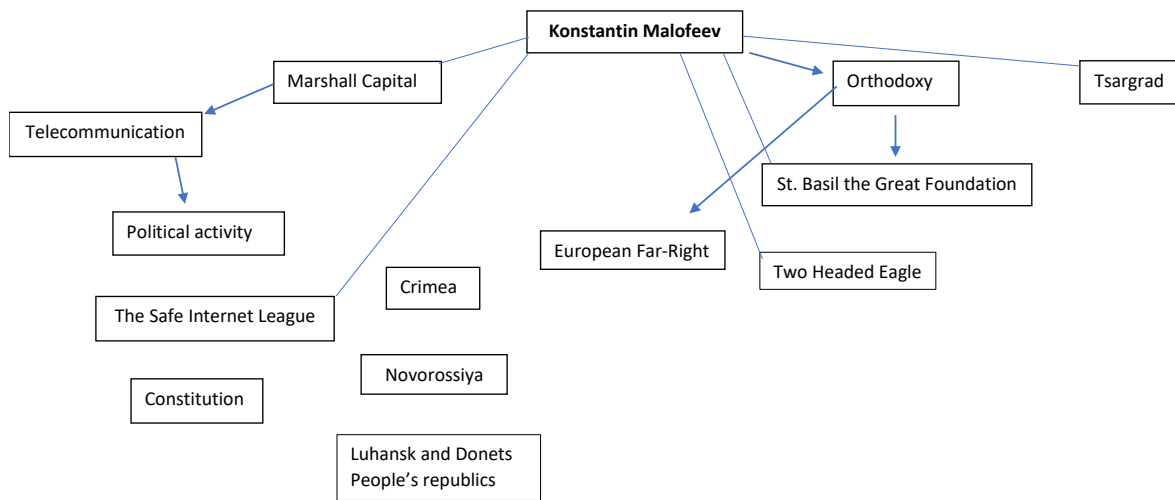
5 Social Network Analysis

The previous chapter presented a content analysis of media articles from *Novaya Gazeta* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. As a continuation of this, chapter 5 will complement the content analysis with a social network analysis based on the same data. To do the social network analysis I registered and systematised the data of relations between different actors in a dataset. The first file listed all the nodes, whether they belonged to Prigozhin's or Malofeev's network, and what type of node they were, person or company/organization. The second file listed the relations between the nodes by using two columns where the nodes in the same row have a relation. A relation is defined as a confirmed social relation such as working together, employee/boss, meetings, collaborations, funding – kinship, friendship, and family. However, when the source has written about a relationship without specifying it further it has still been included in the dataset. The data was then imported into R where the plot analysed in this chapter was made. In R I also used colour parameters to change the colours of the nodes according to network and symbol parameters to assign one shape to persons, and another to companies/organisations. This resulted in the plot shown in figure 5.1 showing the two networks, their extent, and relations between nodes. The chapter will show the visualised networks, and then discuss them, the main nodes, and interesting connections, and what this shows. The chapter also addresses some relevant strengths and weaknesses.
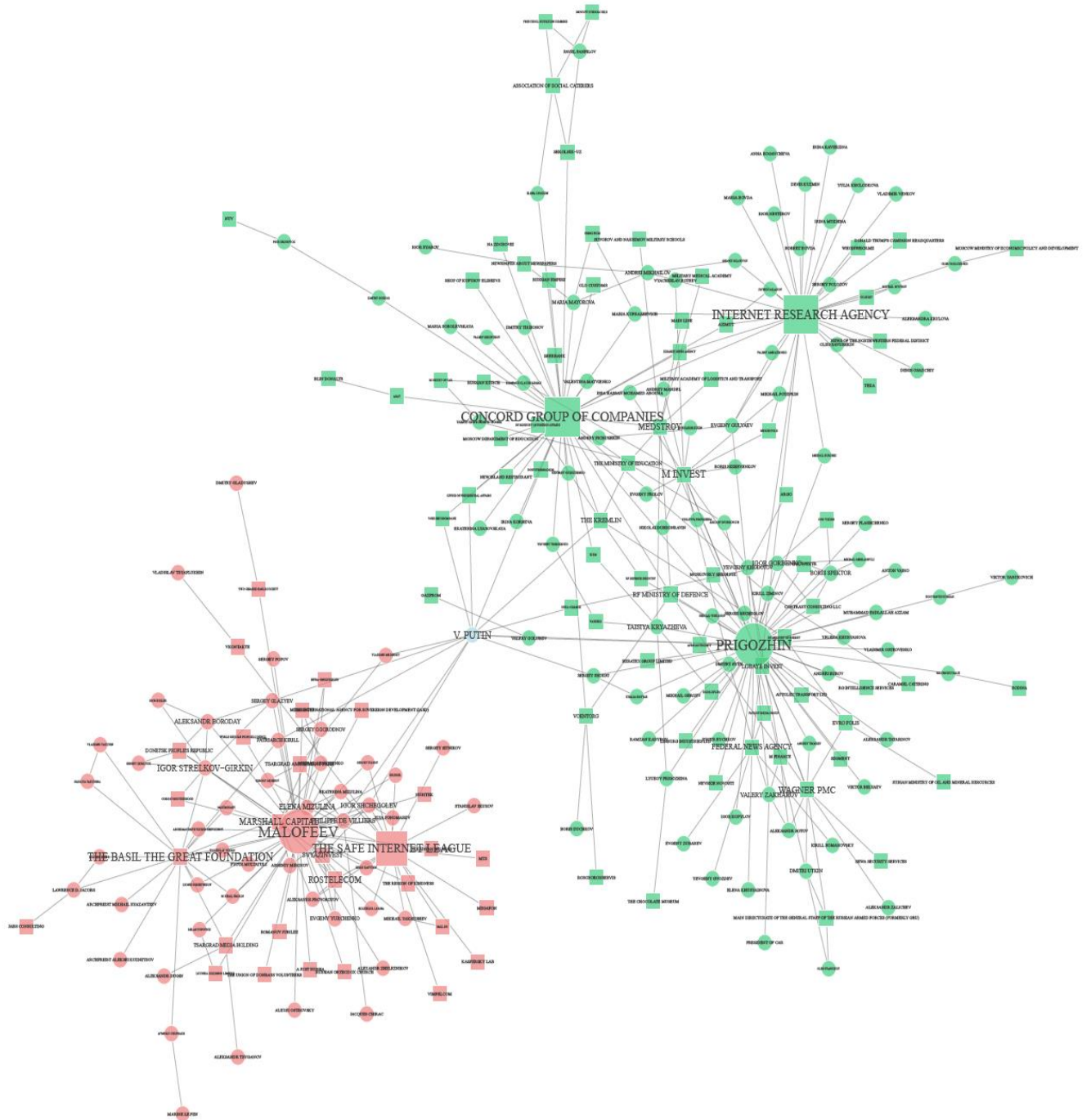
The first thing the network shows is the existence of two clearly divided networks. All green nodes are in Prigozhin's network, all red nodes are in Malofeev's, and the light node appears in both networks. The squares represent companies and organisations, and the circles represent people. The arches are undirected, meaning that they do not show which direction the relationship is going, but based on the definition of relations used it can be assumed that the relations go both ways. Nodes with more edges connecting them to other nodes are larger than nodes with fewer edges.

Further, the plot shows that the Prigozhin-network is, by far, the larger network of the two. An explanation of this can be that Prigozhin and his network are active in several fields of business and provide a larger variation of services to the Kremlin. While Malofeev is mainly involved in projects connected to traditional values, orthodoxy, and ideology, Prigozhin delivers services from catering to funding PMC's. This is especially visible with the Concord group of companies and the Internet Research Agency as particularly prominent nodes. Interestingly enough, Concord has several common nodes with the Internet Research Agency. Maria Mayorovna and Maria Kuprashevich have worked for both companies. Untangling this web shows the significant involvement Concord has in media services with all these ties to the Internet Research Agency, but also the *Newspaper about Newspapers.* Such bridges between different companies and organisation are also important in the Prigozhin network's international expansion. The Internet Research Agency is connected through Mikhail Potepkin to M-invest and Meroe Gold, both companies working in mining in Africa.

In comparison, the Malofeev-network is smaller and more compact, which shows that the services it provides are less varied and operate in more specific areas such as Orthodoxy and media. However, politics is an important part of the services the network provides, something that is especially visible in the politicians connected to The Safe Internet League like Elena Mizulina and Igor Shchegolev. But maybe more interesting are Malofeev's direct connections to Shchegolev and also Sergey Glazyev, who both are connected to Putin.

Furthermore, it is in some ways natural that the Malofeev-network is smaller, less developed and extended than Prigozhin's network. This is logical firstly because Prigozhin, who had already started his business-career in the early 1990s, has been active for longer and thus has had more time to build his network and make connections to important people. Following from this, as Prigozhin himself has a direct tie with Putin, it is natural to think that this has opened several doors for him, enabling the network to expand further.

Negative relations, relations where there have only been conflict and arguments, are also not included in the network, as these relations are not likely to be a part of the network. Prigozhin's conflict with Aleksei Navalny and Lyubóv' Sobol, leading opposition leaders, for example, is a relationship consisting of accusations and blaming that went on for a longer period of time (Novaya Gazeta 2020b), so there is clearly a relation. However, I see these relations as not being a part of Prigozhin's network and have, therefore, not included them in the social network analysis.

However, as this network analysis is done based on data covering a large timespan, some relations that once were good, have soured over time. One example is Evgeny Yurchenko, who sold Svyasinvest and Rostelecom shares to Malofeev when the latter joined the board of directors of Svyazinvest, which points to a positive and friendly relationship (working together); Later though, in 2010, Yurchenko heavily criticised Malofeev and Shchegolev, and their working in the companies (Zhilyaev 2012). After this there is no documented relationship between Malofeev and Yurchenko.

Between the two networks there is only one node they have in common, the light-blue node of Vladimir Putin. Prigozhin has a direct edge to Putin, in addition to bridges that connects him to the president. Malofeev on the other hand is only connected to Putin via bridges, meaning via other nodes. As mentioned in Chapter 3.3, the networks I work with are ego-networks part of a whole network. These ego-networks are the smaller networks in Putin's single-pyramid network, and therefore it is natural that Prigozhin's and Malofeev's networks have Putin as a common connection. This shows that the smaller networks are at different levels in this pyramid-system, because of Prigozhin's direct link to Putin this network is a step above Malofeev's, who is connected to Putin through bridges.

That the networks do not overlap more can be explained by these different places in the hierarchy of Putin's whole network. Where they are placed in this network are based on the services they deliver, which decides their usefulness to the regime. Because Prigozhin's and Malofeev's networks deliver different services, and Prigozhin's network is closer to the chief patron, Putin, it is natural that their networks operate on different levels and do not overlap.

Though on different levels, we know, from the content analysis, that the Malofeev-network is more politically involved than the Prigozhin network. However, the Prigozhin network is connected to several important politicians and ministries, more than the Malofeev network is. Though directly connected to Igor Shchegolev, Sergey Glazyev, and Elena Mizulina, indirectly

to Vladimir Medinsky, and having participated in discussions on law-formulations, Malofeev's network has not worked directly with any state ministries like the Prigozhin network has. This shows that even though Malofeev's network has a more political message with Orthodoxy and traditional values, Prigozhin's network is also highly political in that there are significant connections to politicians and state ministries. This can also point to a more opportunistic agenda from the Prigozhin network, and a more ideological agenda from the Malofeev network.

As the tables in the Chapter 3 show, there are more articles mentioning Prigozhin, than Malofeev. This is visible in the network as Prigozhin's network is more detailed and developed than Malofeev's. This is because the more "important" an actor becomes, the more likely it is that these relations are written about in the media, and hence has been included in the dataset used to do this social network analysis.

In this plot there are likely missing relations in both networks. This is firstly because the network only builds on data from two newspapers, and secondly because much of the relations in the network are informal in nature and therefore not documented. This is a limitation of doing social network analysis of networks in authoritarian states.

However, despite these limitations, the analysis in this chapter shows extensive and well-connected networks with direct ties between important nodes like Malofeev and Shchegolev, and Prigozhin and Putin. But also bridges connecting Malofeev with Putin, and Marine Le Pen, and Prigozhin with the president of the Central African Republic and individuals working for the Syrian ministry. The plot also provides a visualization of the various services the networks provide. Such comprehensive a study of these networks and their services on a meso-level of analysis has not been done before, as Hale's analysis operated on a macro-level of analysis, and others who have studied these patriotic entrepreneurs have focused on specific services, especially internationally.

6 Discussion

Based on the findings presented and discussed in chapter 4 and 5 I will, in this chapter, discuss why it is so and what this means to the political system in Russia and for regime stability. The chapter will first remind the reader of the research question and the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2. The findings from the content analysis and the social media analysis will be summarised before they will be discussed in the same structure as the content analysis – rise to position – services – network.

The research question in this thesis *asks how networks of patriotic entrepreneurs able to influence the Russian political sphere through services they deliver to the regime?* Within the theoretical framework that was established in Chapter 2 of this thesis I drew theoretical assumptions from Henry Hale's model of patronal politics and added, to this, theoretical concepts from Laruelle (2017, 2019) and Laruelle and Limonier (2021).

The assumptions drawn from Hale start with the single-pyramid system, where President Putin is the chief-patron. Below him in this pyramid are several smaller networks. These smaller networks have their own patrons, but these patrons are clients to Putin. Within this pyramid system, Hale argues, the smaller networks compete for position (Hale 2015:64). Personalised rewards and punishments are the drivers and the foundation of how things work in this system. Within this theoretical framework, what others consider "bad governance" is seen as inherent to this structural system (Hale 2017a:35).

These assumptions provide a background of how to understand the environment the networks analysed in this thesis operate in. The thesis uses the case studies of two prominent "patriotic entrepreneurs", Prigozhin and Malofeev to analyse the emergence, services, and relations of their networks.

The analysis from the two previous chapters has identified the following key findings:

Already in the content analysis it is evident that Prigozhin's and Malofeev's networks are separate, but that they both have important connections to the Kremlin and to Putin. The connections are visualised in the social network analysis in Chapter 5. The networks deliver services following the ideological path directed by the conservative turn and are of use for the Kremlin. This political adherence to Kremlin politics gives the networks rewards in terms of state contracts and support, like Concord with state-contracts for catering to schools even after previous failure to deliver. The political impact is benefitting the Kremlin, and in some cases the services they provide are the "dirty work" the Kremlin do not want on their hand, such as

illegal military operations, election interference, and doing a "test-run" of repressive laws. Even when such services have had negative consequences in the form of sanctions, the networks, have been able to come back and deliver new services to the regime. These findings lead us to a wider discussion of why this is the situation, and how the networks are able to influence the political sphere in Russia.

Rise to position

As seen in chapter 4 both the Malofeev network and the Prigozhin network started to build their position before Putin returned to his 3rd period as president in 2012. Prigozhin started to build his network already in the 1990s, and Malofeev in the early 2000s. In the 2000's it is documented that both networks gained large economic profits through business. However, it was in the beginning of Putin's third period as president, both networks expanded their service repertoire and settled their standing and relevance as patriotic entrepreneurs. With this they established their networks as important sub-networks within the pyramid system.

This opportunity to position themselves as trusted service providers for the Kremlin came with the conservative turn. After four years with Medvedev as president, and a "thaw" in Russian politics, Putin marked his return with a signal of increased conservatism, focus on traditional values, and the importance of Russia's civilisational power. This signalled a need for a wide pool of services, and both Prigozhin's and Malofeev's networks expanded their repertoire of services. Concord delivered "special services" like bot-attacks and the filming of propaganda-films, and Malofeev started the Safe Internet League that would test a potential restriction of the Russian internet, and later discussed an actual law-change.

Both networks provide services aligned with the Kremlin's changed politics and narrative. For example, the Kremlin organised the Russia-Africa forum in Sochi in 2019 where Putin informed that Russia had written off African countries' debts, amounting to more than 20 billion dollars. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov explained that this was done as a way of opening for Russian companies to work on the continent (Novaya Gazeta 2019b), and this is a signal that both the Prigozhin and Malofeev networks have responded to by establishing themselves in Africa.

Services

As has been shown both in the content analysis and the social network analysis, the Prigozhin network provides a broader variation of services than the Malofeev network. As discussed

above, there can be several explanations for this, both within the cases themselves but also because of the data retrieved for this research. However, the explanations within the cases are much stronger, as the services the Prigozhin network provides generate more media content and the network has a higher position in the hierarchy of the pyramid system. When putting everything together, Prigozhin providing a wider array of services can be a signal of a less specific personal agenda. Where Malofeev has strong Orthodox beliefs that he wants to promote and influence the Kremlin with, Prigozhin can arguably be more focused on profit and social standing.

The entrepreneur's loyalty to the regime can be explained by Hale's theory and what he calls "the power of expectations" which bring us to the political activities the networks have worked on. Though Putin clearly stated that the Oligarchs from the 1990s had to stay out of politics, this does not seem to be the case for the new oligarchs as long as their political activities are in favour of the regime. Both Prigozhin's and Malofeev's networks are involved in politics, especially promotion of political campaigns in media and media support for the regime. Malofeev is more directly involved in political activities himself, and also dabbled with political membership in parties and attempted to be elected in regional elections in the past. The development of Tsargrad and the two-headed eagle society especially can indicate his work for a strengthened position of the Orthodox in Russia's political sphere. However, Prigozhin is also active in politics, though more disguised in form of loyalty to the regime and services the Kremlin do not want to be associated with.

Their political activities can in connection to this part of Hale's theory indicate an expectation that Putin will stay in power, or at least someone wishing to maintain the political regime as it is. The entrepreneurs must work to maintain their position within the pyramid network of the elite and supporting the regime with services is a way of ensuring this.

Though both Malofeev and Prigozhin are successful in many of their projects, they have not been able to avoid "wars", scandals, and sanctions. For other oligarchs, similar situations have resulted in a loss of position (Kopylov 2013), but both networks in this thesis have managed to remain relevant and useful for the Kremlin by delivering new services. This has been the case several times. Malofeev came back after the "war" with VTB with the Safe Internet League in 2015. After the fraudulent election in the Smolensk region in 2012 he remained active in politics by discussing law changes about Russian internet and the introduction of Orthodoxy in the constitution, and after the sanctions in 2014 he created Tsargrad in 2015. Prigozhin's catering to school cafeterias and military units has been heavily criticised, both by independent and state-

loyal media, but he was still able to get new state contracts, catered official events in the Kremlin, and provided other services as well. After the sanctions in 2014, the Internet Research Agency was active, which resulted in new sanctions. However, this did not stop Prigozhin's activities in several African countries, or the establishment of new media projects such as the Patriot media group.

As seen in chapter 4, Prigozhin takes all the opportunities he gets to pledge loyalty to the Kremlin. In contrast, the Kremlin has increasingly distanced itself from the entrepreneur since 2018. This can be explained by the "dirty work" Prigozhin arguably is doing for the Kremlin. Because the Prigozhin network does this "dirty work", and this is well known, there is too much of a risk for Putin to highlight his relation to Prigozhin and his network. By keeping a distance Putin has plausible deniability for the services provided by Prigozhin. The distancing, and clear denial of any connection between Putin and the Kremlin with Prigozhin's activities enables the Kremlin to maintain a position of a non-intervening power which shows the balance between formal and informal policy (Østbø 2021: 186). This means that if the services fail, Putin can claim that he had nothing to do with it. If it succeeds, he can embrace it, and possibly also take responsibility.

Several scholars have written about the role of the Wagner group, and the plausible deniability it gives the Russian state for activities carried out abroad (Reynolds 2019, Østbø 2021). My thesis finds that this relationship is also present within Russia, with other services provided by the Prigozhin network, for example the Internet Research Agency, propaganda-videos, and attack on media.

The situation is similar in relation to the Malofeev-network. The 2014 operation in Eastern Ukraine shows that the promotion of Novorossiya was supported by the Kremlin for a while, until it backfired. When this happened, the Kremlin could easily drop the Novorossiya-narrative as it had not been official policy. However, Putin had used the term and the historical references in speeches. This shows that the service provided by Malofeev at one point was deemed to be useful, and strong enough to be adopted into the Kremlin-narrative.

Malofeev's Safe Internet League provided the Kremlin with a "test run" on limiting the Russian internet before any official laws were implemented. The reactions to the League and their actions provided information on how the Russian people would react to laws restricting the internet, as well as framing the limitations as beneficial for the society. That Malofeev worked

directly with Kremlin-politicians on the development of the law clearly shows his political importance as a patriotic entrepreneur.

Both networks operate within the single-pyramid structure and is therefore under similar constraints and opportunities. This leads to adaption, which is when actors in a network make similar choices because of their similar positions within a larger network. (Marin and Wellman 2014: 18). This adaption explains why the two networks analysed here make similar choices in the types of services they deliver, such as promoting Russian influence abroad, pro-Kremlin media services, and patriotism. This maintains the ties the networks have with the Kremlin.

Network

The findings from the analyses in this thesis show that the networks continuously renew themselves to remain useful to the regime. If this renewal continues and the loyalty the networks have to the regime remains, the services provided by them will likely continue to be useful for the regime. However, this is dependent on the expectation the networks have of who will be the chief patron of the single-pyramid system. If their expectations of political leadership and the structure of the pyramid-system drives them to shift their loyalty to another possible chief-patron, the services are likely to follow the needs of the potential new chief-patron.

The single-pyramid structure where these networks are situated relies on the sub/networks' loyalty to the chief-patron, and that no sub-network grows so large and influential that it poses a threat to the current chief-patron. The networks of Prigozhin and Malofeev has not positioned them as such a threat and is therefore rewarded with a maintained position within the singe-pyramid structure. This hierarchy thus shows that the extent to which the networks can influence the regime is limited and must remain loyal and supportive of the regime.

The thesis concludes that networks of patriotic entrepreneurs are able to influence the Russian political sphere through services delivered to the regime by evaluating what the Kremlin needs based on current situations within Russia and abroad. The networks then provide services according to this, and thus have the opportunity to angle it in their favour, be it in terms of influence, profit or position within the political system in Russia.

The extent of this influence though, is not deemed to be extensive as the Kremlin has the upper hand and punish actors who do not deliver according to the Kremlin's needs. Therefore, there seems to be a fine balance between the goals of the networks and the needs of the Kremlin in these services provided.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Summary of findings and answering the research question

Even in Norwegian media it is established that Prigozhin is important and has ties to the Kremlin. However, most analyses focus on Prigozhin's activities abroad and only certain parts of his network is considered important. Such analyses do not discuss how Prigozhin and his network emerged as prominent actors in the political sphere in Russia. Malofeev, though not as well known as Prigozhin, has also been the object of studies. But these studies view him mainly as an ideological service provider.

This thesis has added to this, using a different approach by using Russian media sources to study the networks and services of two of Russia's new oligarchs – Evgeniy Prigozhin and Konstantin Malofeev.

The introduction gave a background of the oligarch's role in Russia in the 1990s vs. today, and laid out an overview of what to expect in the thesis attempting to answer the research question

> *How are networks of patriotic entrepreneurs able to influence the Russian political sphere/realm through services they deliver to the regime?*

In Chapter 2 the theoretical framework was established by discussing different approaches to understanding regime governance in Russia and arguing for Hale's theory of patronal politics as the best framework for this thesis. Hale's theory of patronal politics was a starting point to which elements from Laruelle's research and narrowing the research to a meso-level of analysis adapted the theory to a fitting theoretical framework for this thesis. Chapter 3 presented the thesis' research design, which is a case study of two cases, the networks of Prigozhin and Malofeev, driven by a content analysis of 285 news articles from Russian newspapers, which also was used to do a social network analysis. The content analysis was presented in chapter 4 and the social network analysis in chapter 5. Moving on from this, Chapter 6 provided a discussion around the emergence of these networks and their services.

From this the thesis concludes that networks of patriotic entrepreneurs are able to influence the Russian political sphere through services delivered to the regime by evaluating what the Kremlin needs based on current situations within Russia and abroad. The networks then provide services according to this, and thus receive rewards from the Kremlin, be it in terms of influence, profit, or position within the political system in Russia.

So, the networks can influence the Russian political sphere, however, the extent of this influence is not deemed to be extensive as the Kremlin has the upper hand and punish actors who do not deliver according to the Kremlin's needs. Therefore, there seems to be a fine balance between the goals of the networks and the needs of the Kremlin in these services provided.

7.2 Thoughts on methods and future research

As mentioned in the methodology-chapter, it is a challenge to study networks within authoritarian states. This is because much of the processes of connection, communication, and cooperation happen through informal channels and are not well documented. What is documented and public is often presented in a specific way by the regime. This is a challenge to researchers because these networks are important. It is vital to try to grasp them in different ways, and this thesis has attempted to do so through a media analysis.

The newspaper sources, one independent and one state loyal show different perspectives of the patriotic entrepreneurs and conveys different degrees of information. Because little official information is available, various sources must be used in addition to verify. The validity of some of these sources can be contested, such as Spisok Putina and Ruskompromat, however I have found that the information found in these sources corresponds to information found elsewhere.

There are both gains and losses when doing a social network analysis based on media sources in an authoritarian state. One issue when using the method of searching for names in media became apparent when doing research for this thesis. When searching for the first name and surname of network patrons, I assumed all articles where the named searched for was mentioned would come up as a result. This was not the case all the time. Even though the search function found articles where just the first name or just the surname was mentioned, there were instances where I found articles later where both first name and surname was in the article, but the article was not found when using this as a search. A possible reason for this is the tags of the article. If the article was not tagged with the names, then it would not be found with the search of first name and surname. This was the case with an article *Novaya Gazeta* wrote about the possibility of including/annexing parts of eastern Ukraine. In this article Konstantin Malofeev was mentioned and there was even a section of "Konstantin Malofeev, who is he". This article did not come up as a search result from the search "Konstantin Malofeev".

This social network analysis in this thesis covers a long period of time giving a full overview of the networks over time. However, this analysis shows that social network analysis could be useful as a tool to compare snapshots of the networks from shorter time periods to see how they change over time.

Lastly it must be addressed that because of the current situation with the war in Ukraine, not only is it difficult when to travel to Russia, and increased restriction on information makes studying Russia hard. But it also has implications for these patriotic entrepreneurs, their roles and services. The services they have delivered, such as military services and military funding, are now done through conventional channels. This study cannot infer on the war in Ukraine and what comes next, but the war does signal a shift where plausible deniability and services from patriotic entrepreneurs are not first in line when it comes to what the Kremlin wants. The roles of these entrepreneurs in the upcoming election in 2024 are therefore also uncertain. However, due to the scope and timeframe of this thesis, these questions must be addressed at a point later in time.

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Appendix 1 – R-script and explanation

The R-script used to make the plot, figure 5.1 'Social network plot'.

```
1  #
2
3  library(igraph)
4
5  MA.2 <- read.csv("C:/Users/lisa.samuelsen/OneDrive - NUPI/MASTER'S DISSERTATION/data/MA 2.csv", sep=";")
6  MA.1 <- read.csv("C:/Users/lisa.samuelsen/OneDrive - NUPI/MASTER'S DISSERTATION/data/MA 1.csv", sep=";")
7  #load edges sheet
8  dfedges<-MA.2
9  dfvertex<-MA.1
10 dfedges$Person.org.company<-toupper(dfedges$Person.org.company)
11 dfedges$Person.org.company.1<-toupper(dfedges$Person.org.company.1)
12 dfvertex$Actor<-toupper(dfvertex$Actor)
13 dfedges$Person.org.company<-trimws(dfedges$Person.org.company)
14 dfedges$Person.org.company.1<-trimws(dfedges$Person.org.company.1)
15 dfvertex$Actor<-trimws(dfvertex$Actor)
16
17
18
19
20 #check
21 setdiff(union(dfedges$Person.org.company, dfedges$Person.org.company.1), dfvertex$Actor)
22 dfvertex$Actor[which(duplicated(dfvertex$Actor))]
23 #re make graph with attributes
24 gb <- graph_from_data_frame(dfedges,
25                             directed = F,
26                             vertices = dfvertex)
27
28 V(gb)$color <- ifelse(V(gb)$Patron.2.M == "Malofeev" & V(gb)$Patron.1.P == "Prigozhin", "lightblue",
29                    ifelse(V(gb)$Patron.2.M == "Malofeev" & V(gb)$Patron.1.P == "","lightcoral",
30                           ifelse(V(gb)$Patron.2.M == "" & V(gb)$Patron.1.P == "Prigozhin","seagreen3","gray52")))
31 V(gb)$labels <- ifelse(degree(gb) > 1,log10(degree(gb)), 0.5)
32 V(gb)$size <- ifelse(log(degree(gb)) < 3,3,log(degree(gb))*2)
33
34 V(gb)$shapes <- ifelse(V(gb)$Person.org.company  == "Person", "circle",  "square")
35 gb<-simplify(gb)
36
37 l<-layout.graphopt(gb)
38
39 plot(gb,  vertex.label.cex = V(gb)$labels, vertex.label.color = adjustcolor("gray20",alpha=0.9), edge.color = adjustcolor("gray40",alpha=0.5),
40     vertex.size = V(gb)$size, vertex.shape = V(gb)$shapes, vertex.color = adjustcolor(V(gb)$color,alpha=0.7), vertex.frame.color = adjustcolor("white",alpha=0.7),
41     layout = l)
42 get.vertex.attribute(gb)
43
44
45
```

Line 1-9 reads the files in the datset (see appendix 2).

Line 10-12 changes all writing in the dataset to upper case.

Line 13-15 trims the dataset, meaning it removes any duplicate relations, so that only one line shows the relation in the plot.

Line 20-22 searches the dataset for any differences, often in spelling. If any mistakes are found they are listed, making it easy to correct in the dataset.

Line 23 makes the plot from the data read earlier in the script.

Line 24-26 makes the edges undirected.

Line 28-30 sets the colour parameters, light blue for nodes that appear in both networks, light coral for nodes in Malofeev's network, and seagreen3 for nodes in Prigozhin's network.

Line 31-32 adjusts the size of the nodes

Line 34-35 sets the shape parameters, circle for persons and square if company or organisation.

Line 35 simplifies the plot by taking out duplicated relations.

Line 37 sets the network distribution of the layout.

Line 39-42 sets the colour of edges and lines around nodes.

Appendix 2 – Dataset

MA 1 – This list all the nodes, the actors, that are included in the network and their parameters, whether they are a company, organisation or a person, and which network they belong to. *Patron 1 P* is Prigozhin's and *Patron 2 M* is Malofeev's.

Actor	Person/org/company	Patron 1 P	Patron 2 M
Concord group of companies	Company	Prigozhin	
Vnesheconombank	Company	Prigozhin	
V. Putin	Person	Prigozhin	Malofeev
Valery Serdyukov	Person	Prigozhin	
Gennady Onishchenko	Person	Prigozhin	
Viktor Belyaev	Person	Prigozhin	
Internet Research Agency	Company	Prigozhin	
RF Defence industry	Org.	Prigozhin	
RG intelligence services	Org.	Prigozhin	
Denis Kuzmin	Person	Prigozhin	
Igor Nesterov	Person	Prigozhin	
Donald Trump's campaign headquarters	Org.	Prigozhin	
Autolex Transport LTD	Company	Prigozhin	
Beratex Group Limited	Company	Prigozhin	
Linburg Industries LTD	Company	Prigozhin	
Igor Kopylov	Person	Prigozhin	
Sergei Shcheglov	Person	Prigozhin	
Rosoboronservis	Company	Prigozhin	
Voentorg	Company	Prigozhin	
Boris Duchkov	Person	Prigozhin	
RF Ministry of Defence	Org.	Prigozhin	
Alexandr Zheleznikov	Person		Malofeev
Svyazinvest	Company		Malofeev
Rostelecom	Company		Malofeev
Evgeny Yurchenko	Person		Malofeev
MDM group	Company		Malofeev
Mikhail Leshchenko	Person		Malofeev
The Safe Internet League	Org.		Malofeev
Mail.ru	Company		Malofeev
MTS	Company		Malofeev
VimpelCom	Company		Malofeev
Megafon	Company		Malofeev
Kaspersky Lab	Company		Malofeev
Alexei Ostrovsky	Person		Malofeev
The Basil the Great Foundation	Org.		Malofeev
Philippe de Villiers	Person		Malofeev
Jacques Chirac	Person		Malofeev
Sergey Aksenov	Person		Malofeev

Tsargrad Amusement Park	Company		Malofeev
Vladimir Medinsky	Person		Malofeev
World Russian People's Council	Org.		Malofeev
Vkontakte	Company		Malofeev
Vladislav Tsyaplukhin	Person		Malofeev
Elena Mizulina	Person		Malofeev
Romanov Jubilee	Org.		Malofeev
Leonid Reshetnikov	Person		Malofeev
Maxim Isaev	Person		Malofeev
Mikhail Smolin	Person		Malofeev
Pyotr Multatuli	Person		Malofeev
Vladislav Tetrin	Person		Malofeev
Ekaterina Larina	Person		Malofeev
Mikhail Yakhushev	Person		Malofeev
Denis Davydov	Person		Malofeev
Igor Shchegolev	Person		Malofeev
Patriarch Kirill	Person		Malofeev
Ukrainian Militias	Org.		Malofeev
The Region of Kindness	Org.		Malofeev
Natalya Yakunina	Person		Malofeev
Lawrence D. Jacobs	Person		Malofeev
Jabs Consulting	Company		Malofeev
Donald Feder	Person		Malofeev
Archpriest Mikhail Ryazantsev	Person		Malofeev
RF Ministry of foreign affairs	Org.	Prigozhin	
Sberbank	Company	Prigozhin	
CJSC Spektr	Company	Prigozhin	
Igor Gorbenko	Person	Prigozhin	
Boris Spektor	Person	Prigozhin	
Mikhail Mirilashvili	Person	Prigozhin	
New Island restaurant	Company	Prigozhin	
Valentina Matvienko	Person	Prigozhin	
Contrast Consulting LLC	Company	Prigozhin	
CJSC Viking	Company	Prigozhin	
Neva-chance	Company	Prigozhin	
Moscow department of education	Org.	Prigozhin	
The Kremlin	Org.	Prigozhin	
Irina Korneva	Person	Prigozhin	
Rospotrebnadzor	Company	Prigozhin	
Violetta Prigozhina	Person	Prigozhin	
Valery Golubev	Person	Prigozhin	
Andrei Burov	Person	Prigozhin	
Russian Kitsch	Company	Prigozhin	
Old Customs	Company	Prigozhin	
Russian Empire	Company	Prigozhin	
Na Zdorovie	Company	Prigozhin	

Agat	Company	Prigozhin	
Blin Donalts	Company	Prigozhin	
Arkady Dvorkovich	Person	Prigozhin	
The ministry of Education	Org.	Prigozhin	
MedStroy	Company	Prigozhin	
Taisiya Kryazheva	Person	Prigozhin	
Ritm	Company	Prigozhin	
DonAltPlus	Company	Prigozhin	
Maria Sobolevskaya	Person	Prigozhin	
Lyubov Prigozhina	Person	Prigozhin	
The Chocolate Museum	Company	Prigozhin	
Yevgeny Tishchenko	Person	Prigozhin	
Varteks	Company	Prigozhin	
Suvorov and Nakhimov military Schools	Org.	Prigozhin	
Military academy of logistics and transport	Org.	Prigozhin	
Military medical academy	Org.	Prigozhin	
Main Line	Company	Prigozhin	
Dmitry Koshar	Person	Prigozhin	
Petr Drogovoz	Person	Prigozhin	
NTV	Company	Prigozhin	
Shop of Kuptsov Eliseevs	Company	Prigozhin	
Newspaper about Newspapers	Company	Prigozhin	
Maria Mayorova	Person	Prigozhin	
Principium	Company	Prigozhin	
Igor Ryabov	Person	Prigozhin	
Maria Kuprashevich	Person	Prigozhin	
Andrei Mikhailov	Person	Prigozhin	
Denis Osadchiy	Person	Prigozhin	
Ekaterina Lyasovskaya	Person	Prigozhin	
Igor Strelkov-Girkin	Person		Malofeev
Aleksandr Boroday	Person		Malofeev
Glavset	Company	Prigozhin	
Oleg Savushkin	Person	Prigozhin	
Sergey Plashchenko	Person	Prigozhin	
Kharkiv News Agency	Company	Prigozhin	
Konstantin Kobzar	Person	Prigozhin	
Viktor Yanukovich	Person	Prigozhin	
Wagner PMC	Company	Prigozhin	
Aleksandr Tatarinov	Person	Prigozhin	
Whoiswhos.me	Company	Prigozhin	
Teka	Company	Prigozhin	
Evro Polis	Company	Prigozhin	
Syrian Ministry of oil and mineral resources	Org.	Prigozhin	

News of the northwestern federal district	Company	Prigozhin	
Federal news agency	Company	Prigozhin	
Evgeny Zubarev	Person	Prigozhin	
Mikhail Bystrov	Person	Prigozhin	
Mikhail Burchik	Person	Prigozhin	
Aleksandra Krylova	Person	Prigozhin	
Sergey Polozov	Person	Prigozhin	
Anna Bogavcheva	Person	Prigozhin	
Maria Bovda	Person	Prigozhin	
Robert Bovda	Person	Prigozhin	
Jeyhun Aslanov	Person	Prigozhin	
Azimut	Company	Prigozhin	
Gleb Vasilchenko	Person	Prigozhin	
Irina Kaverzina	Person	Prigozhin	
Vladimir Venkov	Person	Prigozhin	
Anton Vaino	Person	Prigozhin	
Vladimir Ostrovenko	Person	Prigozhin	
Muhammad Fadlallah Azzam	Person	Prigozhin	
Moscow ministry of economic policy and development	Org.	Prigozhin	
Nikolai Tsukanov	Person	Prigozhin	
M Invest	Company	Prigozhin	
Meroe Gold	Company	Prigozhin	
African Project	Org.	Prigozhin	
Lobaye Invest	Company	Prigozhin	
Yevgeny Khodotov	Person	Prigozhin	
Kirill Romanovsky	Person	Prigozhin	
Yelena Khusyanova	Person	Prigozhin	
Evgeny Gulyaev	Person	Prigozhin	
Dmitri Utkin	Person	Prigozhin	
Andrey Troshev	Person	Prigozhin	
Sergey Solovyov	Person	Prigozhin	
Irina Mukhina	Person	Prigozhin	
Yulia Kholodkova	Person	Prigozhin	
Valery Amelchenko	Person	Prigozhin	
Andery Pichushkin	Person	Prigozhin	
Sergey Shoigu	Person	Prigozhin	
Khalia Haftar	Person	Prigozhin	
Elena Khusyainova	Person	Prigozhin	
Argo	Company	Prigozhin	
Sewa Security Services	Company	Prigozhin	
Office of presidential affairs	Org.	Prigozhin	
Aleksandr Sotov	Person	Prigozhin	
Valery Zakharov	Person	Prigozhin	
M Finance	Company	Prigozhin	
Dmitry Syty	Person	Prigozhin	

Aleksandr Zalichev	Person	Prigozhin	
Main directorate of the general staff of the Russian armed forces (formerly GRU)	Org.	Prigozhin	
Oleg Ivannikov	Person	Prigozhin	
RF ministry of energy	Org.	Prigozhin	
Dmitry Tikhonov	Person	Prigozhin	
Segment	Company	Prigozhin	
Nevskie Novosti	Company	Prigozhin	
President of CAR	Person	Prigozhin	
Ministry of CAR	Org.	Prigozhin	
Yevgeny Gvozdev	Person	Prigozhin	
Pyotr Bychkov	Person	Prigozhin	
Thierry Herve Oronfei-Fiogbia	Person	Prigozhin	
Rameaux Claude Bireau	Person	Prigozhin	
Issa Hassan Mohamed Abouna	Person	Prigozhin	
Evgeny Frolov	Person	Prigozhin	
Nikolai Dobronravin	Person	Prigozhin	
Boris Nizhevenkov	Person	Prigozhin	
Vyacheslav Boteev	Person	Prigozhin	
Alexandr Kuzin	Person	Prigozhin	
Patriot media group	Company	Prigozhin	
Shkolnik-UZ	Company	Prigozhin	
Pavel Panfilov	Person	Prigozhin	
Association of Social Caterers	Org.	Prigozhin	
Elena Lyashun	Person	Prigozhin	
Preschool nutrition combine	Company	Prigozhin	
Moscow Schoolchild	Company	Prigozhin	
Andrey Mandel	Person	Prigozhin	
Mikhail Potepkin	Person	Prigozhin	
Maxim Shugalei	Person	Prigozhin	
Rodina	Org.	Prigozhin	
Ramzan Kadyrov	Person	Prigozhin	
Moskovsky Shkolnik	Company	Prigozhin	
Mikhail Geroev	Person	Prigozhin	
Kirill Ziminov	Person	Prigozhin	
Caramel Catering	Company	Prigozhin	
Marshall Capital	Company		Malofeev
INFRA-Engineering	Company		Malofeev
Sergey Ogorodnov	Person		Malofeev
Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov	Person		Malofeev
Stanislav Skusov	Person		Malofeev
Aleksandr Provorotov	Person		Malofeev
Sergey Popov	Person		Malofeev
Arseniy Mironov	Person		Malofeev
Sergey Sitnikov	Person		Malofeev
Shlegel	Person		Malofeev

Ilya Ponomarev	Person		Malofeev
Donetsk People's Republic	Org.		Malofeev
Sergey Ivanov	Person		Malofeev
Vladimir Yakunin	Person		Malofeev
Aymeric Choprade	Person		Malofeev
Nuritek	Company		Malofeev
Russian Orthodox Church	org.		Malofeev
Combat Brotherhood	Org.		Malofeev
Lounika Holdings Limited	Company		Malofeev
Milan Popovich	Person		Malofeev
Two-headed eagle society	Org.		Malofeev
Tsargrad media Holding	Company		Malofeev
Dmitry Gladyshev	Person		Malofeev
Ekaterina Mizulina	Person		Malofeev
The International Agency for Sovereign Development (iasd)	Company		Malofeev
The Union of Donbass Volunteers	Org.		Malofeev
Igor Bezler	Person		Malofeev
Sergey Zdrilyuk	Person		Malofeev
Sergey Glazyev	Person		Malofeev
Aleksandr Dugin	Person		Malofeev
Aleksandr Tsyganov	Person		Malofeev
Archpriest Aleksei Kuznetsov	Person		Malofeev
Malofeev	Person		Malofeev
Prigozhin	Person	Prigozhin	
a just russia	Org.		Malofeev
Gazprom	Company	Prigozhin	
marine le pen	Person		Malofeev

MA2 – this lists the relations between nodes, the actors.

Person/org/company	Person/org/company
Concord group of companies	Prigozhin
Concord group of companies	Vnesheconombank
V. Putin	Concord group of companies
V. Putin	Prigozhin
Valery Serdyukov	Concord group of companies
Gennady Onishchenko	Concord group of companies
Viktor Belyaev	Prigozhin
Internet Research Agency	Prigozhin
RF Defence industry	The Kremlin
RF Defence industry	Prigozhin
RG intelligence services	Prigozhin
Denis Kuzmin	Internet Research Agency
Igor Nesterov	Internet Research Agency

Internet Research Agency	Donald Trump's campaign headquarters
Autolex Transport LTD	Prigozhin
Beratex Group Limited	Prigozhin
Linburg Industries LTD	Prigozhin
Igor Kopylov	Prigozhin
Sergei Shcheglov	Prigozhin
RF Ministry of Defence	Concord group of companies
Rosoboronservis	Voentorg
Voentorg	Boris Duchkov
Voentorg	Concord group of companies
RF Ministry of Defence	Prigozhin
Wagner PMC	Prigozhin
Marshall Capital	Malofeev
Svyazinvest	Malofeev
Rostelecom	Malofeev
Evgeny Yurchenko	Malofeev
Mikhail Leshchenko	Marshall Capital
Mikhail Leshchenko	MDM group
Mikhail Leshchenko	Malofeev
The Safe Internet League	Malofeev
Mail.ru	The Safe Internet League
MTS	The Safe Internet League
VimpelCom	The Safe Internet League
Megafon	The Safe Internet League
Rostelecom	The Safe Internet League
Kaspersky Lab	The Safe Internet League
Alexei Ostrovsky	Malofeev
The Basil the Great Foundation	Malofeev
Philippe de Villiers	Malofeev
Philippe de Villiers	Jacques Chirac
Malofeev	Tsargrad Amusement Park
Philippe de Villiers	Tsargrad Amusement Park
Sergey Aksenov	Tsargrad Amusement Park
Sergey Aksenov	Philippe de Villiers
Vladimir Medinsky	Tsargrad Amusement Park
Vladimir Medinsky	V. Putin
Patriarch Kirill	V. Putin
Patriarch Kirill	World Russian People's Council
Patriarch Kirill	The Basil the Great Foundation
Vkontakte	The Safe Internet League
Vladislav Tsyaplukhin	Vkontakte
Romanov Jubilee	Malofeev
Elena Mizulina	Malofeev
Elena Mizulina	The Basil the Great Foundation
Leonid Reshetnikov	The Basil the Great Foundation
Leonid Reshetnikov	Malofeev

Maxim Isaev	Malofeev
Maxim Isaev	The Basil the Great Foundation
Mikhail Smolin	Malofeev
Mikhail Smolin	The Basil the Great Foundation
Pyotr Multatuli	Malofeev
Pyotr Multatuli	The Basil the Great Foundation
Vladislav Tetrin	Malofeev
Vladislav Tetrin	The Basil the Great Foundation
Elena Mizulina	The Safe Internet League
Elena Mizulina	Malofeev
Ekaterina Larina	The Safe Internet League
Ekaterina Larina	Malofeev
Mikhail Yakhushev	Mail.ru
Mikhail Yakhushev	The Safe Internet League
Mikhail Yakhushev	Malofeev
Denis Davydov	The Safe Internet League
Denis Davydov	Malofeev
Igor Shchegolev	Malofeev
Igor Shchegolev	The Safe Internet League
Ukrainian Militias	Malofeev
The region of kindness	Malofeev
Alexandr Zheleznikov	Malofeev
Lawrence D. Jacobs	The Basil the Great Foundation
Lawrence D. Jacobs	Jabs Consulting
Donald Feder	Lawrence D. Jacobs
Donald Feder	The Basil the Great Foundation
The Basil the Great Foundation	Malofeev
Archpriest Mikhail Ryazantsev	The Basil the Great Foundation
V. Putin	Prigozhin
RF Ministry of foreign affairs	The Kremlin
RF Ministry of foreign affairs	Concord group of companies
Sberbank	Concord group of companies
CJSC Spektr	Prigozhin
Igor Gorbenko	CJSC Spektr
Boris Spektor	CJSC Spektr
Igor Gorbenko	Prigozhin
Boris Spektor	Prigozhin
Igor Gorbenko	Mikhail Mirilashvili
Boris Spektor	Mikhail Mirilashvili
V. Putin	Vnesheconombank
Concord group of companies	New Island restaurant
Valentina Matvienko	Concord group of companies
Contrast Consulting LLC	Prigozhin
Contrast Consulting LLC	Boris Spektor
Contrast Consulting LLC	Igor Gorbenko
Boris Spektor	CJSC Viking

Igor Gorbenko	CJSC Viking
Igor Gorbenko	Neva-Chance
V. Putin	Neva-Chance
Concord group of companies	Moscow department of education
V. Putin	The Kremlin
Concord group of companies	The Kremlin
Irina Korneva	Concord group of companies
Rospotrebnadzor	Concord group of companies
Valery Serdyukov	Concord group of companies
Gennady Onishchenko	Rospotrebnadzor
Violetta Prigozhina	Prigozhin
Valery Golubev	Prigozhin
Valery Golubev	Gazprom
Valery Golubev	V. Putin
Andrei Burov	Prigozhin
Russian Kitsch	Concord group of companies
Old Customs	Concord group of companies
Russian Empire	Concord group of companies
Na Zdorovie	Concord group of companies
Agat	Concord group of companies
Blin Donalts	Agat
Arkady Dvorkovich	Prigozhin
Arkady Dvorkovich	The ministry of Education
The Kremlin	The ministry of Education
Concord group of companies	The ministry of Education
MedStroy	Concord group of companies
MedStroy	The ministry of Education
Taisiya Kryazheva	MedStroy
Taisiya Kryazheva	Prigozhin
Ritm	Concord group of companies
DonAltPlus	Taisiya Kryazheva
Ritm	Taisiya Kryazheva
DonAltPlus	Prigozhin
Maria Sobolevskaya	Concord group of companies
MedStroy	Violetta Prigozhina
The Chocolate Museum	Lyubov Prigozhina
Lyubov Prigozhina	Prigozhin
Lyubov Prigozhina	Taisiya Kryazheva
Yevgeny Tishchenko	Varteks
Yevgeny Tishchenko	Concord group of companies
Varteks	Taisiya Kryazheva
MedStroy	Suvorov and Nakhimov military Schools
MedStroy	Military academy of logistics and transport
MedStroy	Military medical academy
Alexandr Kuzin	MedStroy
Main Line	MedStroy

Medstroy	RF Ministry of defence
Dmitry Koshar	Concord group of companies
Petr Drogovoz	Dmitry Koshar
NTV	Petr Drogovoz
Shop of Kuptsov Eliseevs	Concord group of companies
Newspaper about newspapers	Maria Mayorova
Maria Mayorova	Concord group of companies
Principium	Maria Mayorova
Igor Ryabov	Newspaper about newspapers
Maria Kuprashevich	Principium
Maria Kuprashevich	Concord group of companies
Andrei Mikhailov	Maria Mayorova
Internet Research Agency	Concord group of companies
Maria Kuprashevich	Internet Research Agency
Denis Osadchiy	Internet Research Agency
Ekaterina Lyasovskaya	Concord group of companies
Concord group of companies	Kharkiv News Agency
Voentorg	RF Ministry of defence
Igor Strelkov-Girkin	Malofeev
Igor Strelkov-Girkin	Marshall Capital
Aleksandr Boroday	Malofeev
Malofeev	The Safe Internet League
Marshall Capital	Rostelecom
Glavset	Internet Research Agency
Teka	Internet Research Agency
Oleg Savushkin	Internet Research Agency
Sergey Plashchenko	Prigozhin
Internet Research Agency	Kharkiv News Agency
Konstantin Kobzar	Prigozhin
Konstantin Kobzar	Viktor Yanukovich
Aleksandr Tatarinov	Prigozhin
Internet Research Agency	Whoiswhos.me
Evro Polis	Prigozhin
Evro Polis	Syrian ministry of oil and mineral resources
News of the northwestern federal district	Internet Research Agency
Federal News agency	Internet Research Agency
Federal News agency	Prigozhin
Federal News agency	Evgeny Zubarev
Evro Polis	Wagner PMC
Wagner PMC	RF Ministry of defence
Mikhail Bystrov	Internet Research Agency
Mikhail Bystrov	Glavset
Mikhail Burchik	Internet Research Agency
Mikhail Burchik	Prigozhin
Aleksandra Krylova	Internet Research Agency

Sergey Polozov	Internet Research Agency
Anna Bogavcheva	Internet Research Agency
Maria Bovda	Internet Research Agency
Robert Bovda	Internet Research Agency
Jeyhun Aslanov	Internet Research Agency
Jeyhun Aslanov	Azimut
Azimut	Internet Research Agency
Azimut	Concord group of companies
Gleb Vasilchenko	Internet Research Agency
Irina Kaverzina	Internet Research Agency
Vladimir Venkov	Internet Research Agency
Anton Vaino	Prigozhin
Vladimir Ostrovenko	Prigozhin
Muhammad Fadlallah Azzam	Prigozhin
Gleb Vasilchenko	Moscow ministry of economic policy and development
Nikolai Tsukanov	Prigozhin
M Invest	Prigozhin
Nikolai Tsukanov	African Project
Prigozhin	African Project
Lobaye Invest	Wagner PMC
Lobaye Invest	M Invest
Yevgeny Khodotov	Lobaye Invest
Yevgeny Khodotov	M Invest
Kirill Romanovsky	Federal News agency
Yelena Khusyanova	Prigozhin
Andrei Mikhailov	Internet Research Agency
Evgeny Gulyaev	Prigozhin
Dmitri Utkin	Prigozhin
Andrey Troshev	Prigozhin
Dmitri Utkin	Wagner PMC
Andrey Troshev	Wagner PMC
Sergey Solovyov	Internet Research Agency
Sergey Solovyov	Andrei Mikhailov
Andrei Mikhailov	Newspaper about newspapers
Irina Mukhina	Internet Research Agency
Yulia Kholodkova	Internet Research Agency
Evgeny Gulyaev	Internet Research Agency
Andery Pichushkin	Evgeny Gulyaev
Valery Amelchenko	Evgeny Gulyaev
Valery Amelchenko	Internet Research Agency
Sergey Shoigu	Prigozhin
Sergey Shoigu	V. Putin
Khalia Haftar	Prigozhin
Sergey Shoigu	Khalia Haftar
Elena Khusyainova	Federal News agency

Yevgeny Khodotov	Argo
Lobaye Invest	Prigozhin
Sewa Security Services	Wagner PMC
Concord group of companies	Office of presidential affairs
V. Putin	Office of presidential affairs
Aleksandr Sotov	Valery Zakharov
Valery Zakharov	Prigozhin
Valery Zakharov	Wagner PMC
Aleksandr Sotov	Wagner PMC
Valery Zakharov	M Finance
Aleksandr Sotov	M Finance
Dmitry Syty	Lobaye Invest
Aleksandr Zalichev	Wagner PMC
RF ministry of defence	Wagner PMC
Prigozhin	Wagner PMC
Wagner PMC	Main directorate of the general staff of the Russian armed forces (formerly GRU)
Dmitri Utkin	Oleg Ivannikov
Oleg Ivannikov	Main directorate of the general staff of the Russian armed forces (formerly GRU)
The Kremlin	RF ministry of energy
Evro Polis	RF ministry of energy
Dmitry Tikhonov	Concord group of companies
Segment	Prigozhin
Nevskie Novosti	Prigozhin
Valery Zakharov	President of CAR
Yevgeny Gvozdev	Federal News agency
Pyotr Bychkov	Prigozhin
Dmitry Syty	Valery Zakharov
Dmitry Syty	M Invest
Evgeny Frolov	M Invest
Nikolai Dobronravin	M Invest
Boris Nizhevenkov	M Invest
Vyacheslav Boteev	M Invest
Alexandr Kuzin	M Invest
Thierry Herve Oronfei-Fiogbia	M Invest
Rameaux Claude Bireau	M Invest
Thierry Herve Oronfei-Fiogbia	Ministry of CAR
Rameaux Claude Bireau	Ministry of CAR
Issa Hassan Mohamed Abouna	M Invest
Patriot media group	Prigozhin
Patriot media group	Federal News agency
Shkolnik-UZ	Concord group of companies
Pavel Panfilov	Shkolnik-UZ
Association of Social Caterers	Elena Lyashun

Elena Lyashun	Concord group of companies
Pavel Panfilov	Preschool nutrition combine
Moscow Schoolchild	Pavel Panfilov
Preschool nutrition combine	Association of social caterers
Moscow Schoolchild	Association of social caterers
Shkolnik-UZ	Association of social caterers
M Invest	Meroe gold
Andrey Mandel	M Invest
Mikhail Potepkin	Internet Research Agency
Mikhail Potepkin	M Invest
Mikhail Potepkin	Meroe gold
Maxim Shugalei	Rodina
Maxim Shugalei	Prigozhin
M Finance	Yevgeny khodotov
Ramzan Kadyrov	Prigozhin
Moskovsky Shkolnik	Prigozhin
Dmitri Utkin	Main directorate of the general staff of the Russian armed forces (formerly GRU)
Mikhail Geroev	Prigozhin
Kirill Ziminov	Prigozhin
Kirill Ziminov	Concord group of companies
Kirill Ziminov	Caramel Catering
The Basil The Great Foundation	Malofeev
Rostelecom	Malofeev
INFRA-Engineering	Malofeev
Svyazinvest	Malofeev
Svyazinvest	Rostelecom
Igor Shchegolev	Svyazinvest
Marshall Capital	Rostelecom
Marshall Capital	Svyazinvest
Evgeny Yurchenko	Svyazinvest
Evgeny Yurchenko	Rostelecom
Evgeny Yurchenko	Malofeev
Sergey Ogorodnov	Malofeev
Sergey Ogorodnov	Marshall Capital
Sergey Ogorodnov	MDM group
Malofeev	MDM Group
Sergey Ogorodnov	INFRA-Engineering
Igor Shchegolev	V. Putin
Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov	The Basil the Great foundation
Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov	Malofeev
Rostelecom	The Safe Internet League
Stanislav Skusov	The Safe Internet League
Vkontakte	The Safe Internet League
Aleksandr Provorotov	Rostelecom
Aleksandr Provorotov	Marshall Capital

Sergey Popov	Malofeev
Arseniy Mironov	Malofeev
Arseniy Mironov	Igor Shchegolev
Arseniy Mironov	Marshall Capital
Marshall Capital	Rostelecom
Sergey Sitnikov	The Safe Internet League
Shlegel	Malofeev
Elena Mizulina	Malofeev
Shlegel	The Safe Internet League
Elena Mizulina	The Safe Internet League
Aleksandr Provorotov	The Safe Internet League
Ilya Ponomarev	Igor Shchegolev
Ilya Ponomarev	Malofeev
Ilya Ponomarev	The Safe Internet League
Donetsk People's Republic	Malofeev
Aleksandr Boroday	Malofeev
Igor Strelkov-Girkin	Malofeev
Igor Strelkov-Girkin	Aleksandr Boroday
Aleksandr Boroday	Donetsk People's Republic
Igor Strelkov-Girkin	Donetsk People's Republic
Patriarch Kirill	Malofeev
Igor Strelkov-Girkin	The Basil the Great foundation
Sergey Ivanov	Malofeev
Sergey Ivanov	The Safe Internet League
Natalya Yakunina	The Basil the Great foundation
Natalya Yakunina	Vladimir Yakunin
Vladimir Yakunin	The Basil the Great foundation
Aymeric Choprade	The Basil the Great foundation
Aymeric Choprade	Marine le Pen
Philippe de Villiers	Malofeev
Philippe de Villiers	V. Putin
Nuritek	Malofeev
Malofeev	Russian Orthodox Church
Igor Strelkov-Girkin	Combat Brotherhood
Malofeev	Combat Brotherhood
Lounika Holdings Limited	Malofeev
Lounika Holdings Limited	Milan Popovich
Milan Popovich	Malofeev
Two-headed eagle society	Malofeev
Tsargrad media Holding	Malofeev
Dmitry Gladyshev	Two-headed eagle society
Pyotr Multatuli	Malofeev
A Just Russia	Malofeev
Ekaterina Mizulina	Elena Mizulina
Ekaterina Mizulina	The Safe Internet League
Ekaterina Mizulina	Malofeev

World Russian People's Council	Malofeev
The International Agency for Sovereign Development (IASD)	Malofeev
The Union of Donbass Volunteers	Malofeev
Igor Bezler	Igor Strelkov-Girkin
Igor Bezler	Aleksandr Boroday
Sergey Zdrilyuk	Igor Strelkov-Girkin
Sergey Zdrilyuk	Donetsk People's Republic
Igor Strelkov-Girkin	Sergey Glazyev
Aleksandr Boroday	Sergey Glazyev
Sergey Glazyev	V. Putin
Sergey Glazyev	Malofeev
Aleksandr Dugin	Tsargrad Media Holding
Aleksandr Tsyganov	Tsargrad Media Holding
Archpriest Aleksei Kuznetsov	The Basil the Great foundation
Tsargrad media Holding	The Basil the Great foundation