

Press release | 2 March 2022 | Brussels

# Ukraine: Sanctions on Kremlin-backed outlets Russia Today and Sputnik

The European Union adopted sanctions against the Kremlin's disinformation and information manipulation assets. Following the [announcement](#) by Commission President Ursula **von der Leyen** on Sunday, the Council of the European Union decided to suspend the distribution of State-owned disinformation outlets Russia Today and Sputnik across the EU, as of today.

President **von der Leyen** said: *“In this time of war, words matter. We are witnessing massive propaganda and disinformation over this outrageous attack on a free and independent country. We will not let Kremlin apologists pour their toxic lies justifying Putin's war or sow the seeds of division in our Union.”*

High Representative and Vice-President Josep **Borrell** said: *“Systematic information manipulation and disinformation by the Kremlin is applied as an operational tool in its assault on Ukraine. It is also a significant and direct threat to the Union's*

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*public order and security. Today, we are taking an important step against Putin's manipulation operation and turning off the tap for Russian state-controlled media in the EU. We have already earlier put sanctions on leadership of RT, including the editor-in-chief Simonyan, and it is only logical to also target the activities the organisations have been conducting within our Union.”*

Russia Today and Sputnik are essential and instrumental in bringing forward and supporting Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This constitutes a significant and direct threat to the EU's public order and security. Both outlets are part of a coordinated information manipulation effort, including disinformation, as documented since 2015 by the European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force.

In view of the gravity of the situation, and in response to Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine, it is necessary and consistent with fundamental rights and freedoms to introduce further restrictive measures and to suspend the broadcasting activities of Russia Today and Sputnik in or directed at the EU. The sanctions cover all means for transmission and distribution, such as via cable, satellite, IPTV, platforms, websites and apps. All relevant licences, authorisations and distribution arrangements are suspended. These measures are covering all EU Member States and are directly applicable immediately.

Cooperation with and between the independent media regulators within the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) is crucial in ensuring swift implementation of the measures by the operators. Some of the regulators have already taken concrete actions restricting Russian assets involved in disinformation, information manipulation and interference in their respective territories under EU audiovisual media rules.

## **Background**

Several regulators in EU Member States have already taken actions against Russian state-controlled broadcasters and channels who are involved in the disinformation and information manipulation ecosystem (e.g. in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland), while Germany prohibited broadcasting of a German edition of Russia Today due to a lack of a license.

The past year has seen an unprecedented crackdown on independent media in Russia. Russian authorities have used draconian legislation – in particular the law on ‘foreign agents’ – to muzzle independent media and individual journalists seen as critical of the government. Russian journalists have been threatened, prosecuted, and forced to flee the country simply for doing their work. This is unacceptable.

Free access to information is a fundamental right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights: The EU will continue supporting media freedom and pluralism everywhere in the world.

## **For More Information**

[Link to sanction measure](#)

ERGA website: <https://erga-online.eu/>

EUvsDisinfo: [www.euvsdisinfo.eu](http://www.euvsdisinfo.eu)

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