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RT (earlier - Russia Today)

Institution

All actors • Russia

Official position/function regarding the conflict

[RT](#) (until 2008 - Russia Today) is a media holding established in 2005 for broadcasting to a foreign audience, including a Russian-speaking audience. Includes channels RT America, RT UK, RT International, RT Deutsch, as well as broadcasting from Moscow in Arabic, Spanish, French and Russian, RTD channel, Ruptly video news agency. It positions itself as a non-governmental organization, but the managing non-profit organization TV-Novosti is fully funded from the federal budget. [Funding for TV-Novosti in 2020 amounts to almost RUR 23 billion \(approximately \\$310.55 million\), which is RUR 12 billion more than in 2013.](#) The editor-in-chief from the very beginning has been Margarita Simonyan.

The Kremlin assigns a special role to RT - to justify Russia's actions and whitewash its image for

an external audience. The channel has clearly succeeded in this: using manipulation of facts, widespread ignorance of the situation Russia, Ukraine, and in general the problems of Eastern Europe among the foreign audience, as well as a traditional dislike of Europeans for America, playing on facts that can cause controversy and polarization of society, abusing the principle of freedom of speech in countries where it broadcasts. RT manages to influence public opinion in the West, however, mainly among the uneducated emigrant public, nostalgic for “strong Russia.”

RT German, Spanish and French offices were opened in 2014-2015. The opening of new offices and the growth of funding for the company coincide with the post-Maidan period. [The connection between the opening of new channels and Ukrainian events is confirmed, for example, by the following entry in the *About Us* section of German RT Deutsch:](#) “The Ukrainian crisis has shown how the established German-language media landscape is characterized by a one-sided, often manipulative and simplistic view of things.”

RT boasts a record number of views and likes (positive reviews), however, according to journalists, the channel’s audience is generally small. [For example, in the spring of 2020, the Anti-Corruption Foundation of Alexei Navalny conducted an investigation into the cheating of views of the channel’s videos on YouTube, have found that up to 2/3 views, likes, and comments were received using bots or paid “votes.”](#)

Interests/goals in the conflict region

RT, like other propagandist channels, does not have its own independent position. At the same time, RT’s mission is to form a positive image of Russia abroad, as well as to convey the position of the Russian authorities to the international community. Another goal is to weaken the Western world from within.

Actions regarding the conflict

The activities of the RT channels are aimed, first of all, at the formation of positive attitudes of the international community to Putin’s policy towards Ukraine, a dismissive and even contemptuous attitude towards Ukraine as a “non-state.” RT has always denied the role of Russia in fomenting the conflict and involvement in the crash of MH17, denied the presence of Russian troops in Donbas.

RT conducts information activities against Ukraine through the dissemination of one-sided information, fakes and lies. Another area of action for Simonyan and her holding is to split Western public opinion by purposefully artificially inflating topics that cast doubt on democratic values and the priority of human rights in the world, inciting hatred and enmity towards social groups in Europe and Germany, primarily migrants, as well as to liberal politicians, human rights activists, thinkers who supported Ukraine.

The general narrative of RT’s coverage of events during the conflict is “genocide of Russian speakers is taking place in Ukraine.” RT has become the spokesperson and disseminator of conspiracy theories and unverified claims. The most marginal social media accounts, publishing rumors, fakes, and annoying fantasies were in demand by Russian state channels, including RT. It was RT that was the first to spread information about the mythical Spanish “dispatcher Carlos”

who allegedly reported that MH17 was fired upon by a Ukrainian military aircraft. [Later, it supported the myth of the “crucified boy” in Sloviansk. RT constantly criticizes and ridicules the Ukrainian authorities.](#)

Since August 2014, the channel has been banned from broadcasting in Ukraine. Since September 2015, RT has been under Ukrainian sanctions. [In November 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning “propaganda from Russia and Islamist terrorist groups,” in which the deeds of RT and Sputnik were especially noted.](#) The document says that “the Kremlin has intensified its propaganda against the EU since the annexation of Crimea and the start of the hybrid war in Donbas.” [To do this, the Russian government uses “a wide range of tools” such as “think tanks, ... multilingual TV companies \(e.g., RT\), pseudo-news agencies and multimedia services \(e.g., Sputnik\).”](#)

[In July 2019, UK media regulator Ofcom issued a £200,000 fine against RT for violating broadcasting rules in the United Kingdom. In November 2017, RT was registered in the United States as a “foreign agent.”](#)