

The French language website of Russian state-owned news agency Sputnik. The site does not reveal its government ownership and publishes disinformation and propaganda in line with Russian interests.

Ownership and Financing

Sputnik is a subsidiary of Rossiya Segodnya, a Russian state-owned international news agency. Rossiya Segodnya was set up by decree of Russian President Vladimir Putin in December 2013 as a replacement for Russia's previous state-run international news agency, RIA Novosti, and its international radio service, Voice of Russia. In a report on its own closure, RIA Novosti characterized the change as "the latest in a series of shifts in Russia's news landscape, which appear to point toward a tightening of state control in the already heavily regulated media sector."

In a separate decree the same day as RIA Novosti's closure, Putin appointed pro-Kremlin newscaster Dmitry Kiselyov as head of the replacement agency. Rossiya Segodnya launched Sputnik in November 2014.

The site runs advertisements.

Content

Russian state-owned television network RT has described Sputnik as targeting "global audiences with its non-mainstream take on world events." Sputnik France is one of the news agency's more than 30 international editions. Sections on Fr.SputnikNews.com include France, Russia, Africa, and International.

The site regularly runs news and opinion content defending Russian state interests and allies of President Putin, and attacking Russia's rivals. Popular topics include politics, military defense, culture, sports, crime, and the economy.

Typical articles have run under headlines including "'Safety, employment, health, food' ... the challenges of Mali's new government," ("Sécurité, emploi, santé, nourriture'... les défis du tout nouveau gouvernement malien"); "Is a nuclear deal between Moscow, Washington and Beijing truly possible?" ("Un accord nucléaire entre Moscou, Washington et Pékin est-il



Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic standards of credibility and transparency.

- ✗ Does not repeatedly publish false content**
- ✗ Gathers and presents information responsibly**
- ✗ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors**
- ✗ Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly**
- ✗ Avoids deceptive headlines**
- ✗ Website discloses ownership and financing**
- ✗ Clearly labels advertising**
- ✓ Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest**
- ✗ The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information**

Criteria are listed in order of importance.

[More information.](#)

vraiment possible?"); and "Three Yellow Vests lists for the European elections" ("Trois listes Gilets jaunes déposées pour les européennes.")

Readers can stream Sputnik's French-language radio station from the homepage. The site also links to audio broadcasts of its French radio programming. Many stories are republished in French from the Russian daily newspaper Izvestia.

Credibility

The site features original reporting, in text and video, by Sputnik staff. Articles also are often based on information provided by other news organizations or from social media. However, Sputnik France, similar to its editions in other languages, has repeatedly disseminated propaganda and false information on behalf of the Russian government.

Sputnik's mission has been well-documented by numerous governments and organizations. In January 2017, a U.S. intelligence report called Sputnik and RT part of a "Russia's state-run propaganda machine" used to benefit Donald Trump ahead of the 2016 presidential elections. In April 2017, President Emmanuel Macron banned Sputnik and RT from his campaign events, claiming the outlets had a "systematic desire to issue fake news and false information." Six months later, Twitter banned Sputnik and RT from advertising on the platform for interfering "with the election on behalf of the Russian government."

In January 2019, Facebook announced that the platform removed 364 Russian-linked Facebook pages and accounts for engaging in "coordinated inauthentic behavior on Facebook and Instagram." Although these pages primarily represented themselves as independent news or general interest pages, Facebook said they were linked to employees of Sputnik and "frequently posted about topics like anti-NATO sentiment, protest movements, and anti-corruption."

A NewsGuard review found that Fr.SputnikNews.com has repeatedly promoted conspiracy theories about 9/11 and other terrorist attacks. For instance, a July 2018 article titled "'Fake terrorism' and conspiracy: are special services behind many attacks?" ("Faux terrorisme et conspiration: les services spéciaux derrière de nombreux attentats?") suggested that terrorist

attacks in European capitals are "often plotted by special services," ("souvent tramés par les services spéciaux.") The article was based on claims by Elias Davidsson, an activist from Iceland who has spread 9/11 conspiracy theories. Without offering any evidence, the article publishes Davidsson's theory that the attack against the World Trade Center in New York was a state-sponsored operation planned by the Pentagon. The article does include one line at the end that experts are skeptical about these claims, but Sputnik lays them out without evidence nonetheless.

Without providing evidence, the article also said that according to Davidsson, the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York were "an operation planned at the state level, whose author was the Pentagon." ("c'était une opération planifiée au niveau de l'État, dont l'auteur est le Pentagone.")

Sputnik has also repeatedly advanced the narrative of the Russian government that Syrian government forces under Russian-backed President Bashar al-Assad did not carry out a chemical attack against civilians on April 7, 2018, in the town of Douma.

On April 13, 2018, for example, the site posted a story titled "Moscow provides evidence that the alleged attack in Douma was staged (video)" ("Moscou fournit les preuves de la mise en scène de l'attaque présumée à Douma (vidéo).") The article stated that "the Russian military describe photos of victims of the so-called chemical attack in Douma ... as fake. Moscow believes that the purpose of this false information is to protect terrorists and to justify any outside intervention." ("Les militaires russes ont qualifié de fausses les photos de victimes de la prétendue attaque chimique à Douma publiées par les 'Casques blancs' sur les réseaux sociaux. Moscou estime que l'objectif de ces informations mensongères est de protéger les terroristes et de justifier d'éventuelles actions extérieures.")

A year later, in April 2019, when evidence of the attack was largely undisputed by the international community, the site published an article titled "Douma: At the UN, Russian experts reveal conclusions of their own investigation," ("Douma: à l'Onu, des experts russes divulguent les conclusions de leur propre enquête") that described how Russian experts had concluded that the attacks had been "staged" ("truqué") by the Syria Civil

Defense, also known as the White Helmets, a volunteer humanitarian group. Sputnik's assertions about the chemical attack contradict a large body of evidence assembled since the attack by, among others, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and the Syrian-American Medical Society, as well as by press organizations including the BBC and The New York Times.

The site has repeatedly denied that Russia was responsible for the crash of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, which killed 298 people in eastern Ukraine in July 2014, despite evidence from an independent international criminal investigation. In May 2018, a Dutch-led team of investigators found that the missile "originated from the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade from Kursk, in the Russian Federation." Yet, Sputnik has since published multiple articles rejecting the findings and blaming the Ukrainian government, often quoting Russian officials or anonymous sources.

For example, a March 2019 article titled "The opening of Ukrainian airspace is the main reason for the MH17 crash" ("L'ouverture de l'espace aérien ukrainien serait la principale cause du crash du MH17") claimed that "the fact that Ukrainian airspace was left open, when it should have been closed, was found to be the main reason for the crash of the Malaysian Airlines Flight 17," quoting an unnamed source. ("Le fait d'avoir laissé ouvert l'espace aérien ukrainien, qui aurait dû être fermé à l'époque, a été défini comme la raison principale du crash du Boeing 777 de la Malaysia Airlines.")

Many stories on the site exaggerate France's migrant situation to paint a chaotic picture of the country. In a January 2018 article titled "Is France just as dangerous as the Democratic Republic of the Congo?" ("La France aussi dangereuse pour les Américains que la République Démocratique du Congo?") Sputnik falsely equated the US State Department's warnings about the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) with its advice on the European countries, citing as a source a travel advisory map on the department's official website.

In fact, the map shows that the US does not place France, Germany, or the UK on the same level as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. While the State

Department advises tourists to seriously reconsider travel to the DRC, it only recommends that tourists “exercise increased caution” in France.

Because Sputnik France articles have regularly presented false stories and distorted facts — often repeating official Russian positions without providing other views or facts that call those claims into question — NewsGuard has determined that the site repeatedly publishes false content and deceptive headlines and does not gather and present information responsibly.

The site does not post a corrections policy and does not appear to issue corrections and clarifications.

Opinion articles are published in a separate section of the site. However, news articles frequently contain cherry-picked or distorted facts to advance an undisclosed political agenda.

When reporting on Macron, for example, the site typically runs stories that disparage the president and his administration — such as “Isolated? Close relations of Macron are concerned about his state” (“Isolé? Des proches de Macron seraient inquiets de son état”) and “Ousting Emmanuel Macron? Hundreds of thousands of Internet users sign a petition” (“Destituer Emmanuel Macron? Des centaines de milliers d'internautes signent une pétition.”)

At the same time, the site consistently publishes flattering stories about Putin, under headlines such as “What qualities helped Putin succeed?” (“Quelles sont les qualités qui ont aidé Poutine à enregistrer ses succès?”). It also regularly promotes members of France’s far-right party Rassemblement National — which reportedly received a loan from a Russian bank in 2014 of at least 8 million euro — and its leader Marine Le Pen, who met with Putin in March 2017.

On May 2, 2019, the site published statements made by Jean-Marie Le Pen, Rassemblement National’s founder and the father of Marine Le Pen, claiming that the fire that ravaged Notre Dame Cathedral on April 15 was a criminal act, which he linked to “the transfer of population from non-European countries to Europe, in particular to France.” (“le transfert de population qui se fait des pays extra-européens vers l'Europe, en particulier vers la France.”) At the time of Le Pen’s comments, French prosecutors had found no signs of

criminal intent and had ruled out arson. However, Sputnik did report those findings and said that “All scenarios remain possible” (“Tous les scénarios restaient envisageables.”)

Because Fr.SputnikNews.com uses news coverage to advance its agenda, while not clearly disclosing that it is controlled by Russia, NewsGuard has concluded that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

Sputnik did not respond to two emails and one phone call to its offices in Moscow inquiring about its editorial practices, including its publication of false and misleading stories, its approach to corrections, and its blending of news and opinion.

Transparency

The About page (Qui sommes-nous?) states that Sputnik was created by Rossiya Segodnya and “registered by the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media.” (“enregistrée auprès du Service fédéral de supervision des communications, des technologies de l’information et des médias de masse.”) Thus, the site does not clearly disclose its ownership and funding by the Russian government.

The About page names its editor-in-chief, and provides a contact phone number and email address.

Some posts link to an author page that includes a biography, but most articles do not include the writer’s name.

Sponsored articles on the site are not clearly labelled and are presented in the same manner as news articles, under headlines such as “Say goodbye to fatigue thanks to these 5 tips” (“Dites adieu à la fatigue grâce à ces 5 conseils”) and “This revolutionary device will transform your WIFI speed.” (“Cet appareil révolutionne la vitesse du wi-fi chez vous.”)

Sputnik did not respond to two emails and one phone call inquiring about its lack of disclosure about its ownership and content creators and its handling of sponsored content.

History

Rossiia Segodnya's predecessor, RIA Novosti, was founded in 1941 as the Soviet Information Bureau.

Voice of Russia, the forerunner to Sputnik's radio programming arm, was founded in 1929 as Radio Moscow. While Rossiya Segodnya translates to "Russia Today," it is a separate entity from the Russian state-controlled television network RT (formerly known as Russia Today). However, Rossiya Segodnya and RT share an editor-in-chief.

Sputnik France launched in January 2015. It is named after the world's first satellite, launched by the Soviet Union in 1957. "I thought that's the only Russian word that has a positive connotation, and the whole world knows it," Margarita Simonyan, Sputnik's editor in chief, told The New York Times in 2017.

Written by: [Sophia Tewa](#)

Edited by: [John Gregory](#), [Eric Efron](#), [Kendrick McDonald](#)

Send feedback to NewsGuard:[Click Here](#)

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Ownership and Financing

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