

# fr.sputniknews.com

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.



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

## 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 and sponsored content.

## 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 (Russie), Africa (Afrique), 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 "Nazi criminals had accomplices in several European countries, Putin says" ("Les criminels nazis avaient des complices dans plusieurs pays d'Europe, rappelle

**Score:** 5/100

- ✗ Does not repeatedly publish false content (22 points)
- ✗ Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
- ✗ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
- ✗ Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
- ✗ Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
- ✗ Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
- ✗ Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
- ✓ Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)

- ✗ The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

*Criteria are listed in order of importance.*

[More information.](#)

"Poutine"); "Two French ministers were caught lying in a week" ("Deux ministres français pris en flagrant délit de mensonge en une semaine"); and "US bases in Germany on high alert in anticipation of an attack" ("Les bases US en Allemagne seraient en état d'alerte en prévision d'une attaque").

Readers can stream Sputnik's French-language radio station from the homepage. The site also links to audio broadcasts of its French radio programming. The site sometimes runs articles that were translated from the English-language edition of Sputnik.

#### 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, and it has published false or misleading information on many topics, including on the Wuhan coronavirus.

In February 2020, Sputnik France published an article titled "A British citizen reveals a homemade remedy that might have cured him from the Coronavirus." ("Un Britannique dévoile un remède maison traditionnel qui l'aurait guéri du coronavirus"). Citing a story first reported by the British tabloid The Sun, Sputnik wrote: "Diagnosed with the China coronavirus about two months ago, this British English teacher, aged 25, says he used two 'products' that finally cured him," namely whiskey and honey. ("Diagnostiqué du coronavirus en Chine il y a environ deux mois, ce professeur d'anglais britannique âgé de 25 ans affirme avoir eu recours à deux 'produits' qui l'ont finalement guéri").

The article did not question the man's claims or note that there is no scientific evidence that whiskey and honey can cure the virus. As of early March 2020, medical authorities have not identified any cure for Wuhan coronavirus.

In January 2020, Fr.SputnikNews.com published an article titled "Scientists promote a Chinese medicine that could stop the coronavirus." ("Des scientifiques mettent en avant un médicament chinois qui pourrait enrayer le coronavirus") The article stated that "scientists from the Pharmacological Institute of Shanghai at the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Wuhan Virology Institute have discovered that the Chinese medicine Shuanghuanglian Koufuye can inhibit the coronavirus." ("Des scientifiques de l'Institut pharmacologique de Shanghai de l'Académie chinoise des sciences et de l'Institut de virologie de Wuhan ont découvert que le médicament chinois Shuanghuanglian Koufuye peut inhiber le coronavirus").

Although clinical trials of this herbal remedy are underway, the site did not explain that its efficacy as a treatment for the Wuhan coronavirus has not been established. According to Foreign Policy, "As with most such practices, the clinical evidence is highly inconclusive; there is some suggestion shuanghuanglian may aid in respiratory tract illnesses, but there is no evidence it can achieve success in the treatment of bacterial and viral infections, especially at scale."

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."

Sputnik has 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.

For example, a January 2020 article titled "Alleged chemical attack in Douma, Syria: Why are the facts always overlooked?" ("Attaque chimique présumée à Douma, en Syrie: Pourquoi les faits sont-ils toujours négligés?") questioned a report by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which found evidence of chemical use in Douma. Citing a member of the Syrian parliament, Sputnik wrote that "OPCW representatives took note only of the testimony of witnesses from the [Al-Qaeda affiliate] Al-Nusra Front and the White Helmets." ("Les représentants de l'OIAC ne prenaient note que des dépositions des témoins du Front al-Nosra et des Casques blancs.") The White Helmets, also known as the Syrian Civil Defense, are Syrian relief workers.

In November 2019, the site published a story headlined "Russia warns of upcoming staging of chemical attack on Idlib" ("La Russie met en garde contre une mise en scène prochaine d'attaque chimique à Idlib") which said that the White Helmets and the Islamist militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham were going to stage a fake chemical attack in the Idlib province of northwest Syria, citing as a source Russia's Defense Ministry. The article states that "According to the Russian military, the terrorists pick locals to participate in the film shoot, showing damage caused by air strikes and the use of chemicals." ("Selon les militaires russes, les terroristes sélectionnent des locaux pour participer au tournage, en montrant des dégâts causés par des frappes aériennes et un usage de substances chimiques.")

According to the European Union's fact-checking unit EU vs. Disinfo, such claims are part of an ongoing Kremlin campaign to portray the White Helmets as

terrorists who were responsible for the chemical attacks. Claims that Syrian government forces did not conduct chemical attacks against civilians or that these attacks were staged have been contradicted by numerous international investigations, press reports, first-person accounts, and video footage.

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 made by Elias Davidsson, an activist from Iceland who has spread 9/11 conspiracy theories. Without offering any evidence, the article stated 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 includes one sentence at the end stating that experts are skeptical about these claims, but Sputnik lays them out without evidence nonetheless.

The site has also 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.")

Because Sputnik France regularly publishes false claims — often parroting 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 only published one correction in 2019. Moreover, the site has not corrected numerous articles found to be false. Therefore, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not meet the standard for having effective corrections practices.

The site includes a dedicated section for opinion. However, news articles frequently contain cherry-picked or distorted facts to advance an undisclosed political agenda.

When reporting on President Macron, for example, the site typically runs news stories that disparage him and his administration — such as articles headlined "Macron, the president of the rich? The study that hurts the executive power" ("Macron Président des riches? L'étude qui fait mal à l'exécutif"); "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 news headlines such as "What qualities helped Putin succeed?" ("Quelles sont les qualités qui ont aidé Poutine à enregistrer ses succès?"); "Putin is a strong political figure' for everyone 'except a few fools,' Czech

President says" ("Poutine est 'une figure politique forte' pour tous 'sauf quelques imbéciles', déclare le Président tchèque"); and "Swiss journalist explains why Putin seduces his interlocutors" ("Un journaliste suisse explique pourquoi Poutine séduit ses interlocuteurs").

The site 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 whose leader, leader Marine Le Pen, met with Putin in March 2017.

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 three 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.

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#### 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.") 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 — which does not meet NewsGuard's standard for providing information about content creators.

Some sponsored articles, which are provided by content-sharing company Taboola, are not clearly labelled. They appear on the site under the headings "Elsewhere on the web" or "Selected Content"

("Ailleurs sur le web... Contenus Sélectionnés"), which does not meet NewsGuard's standard for clearly labeling advertising.

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

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## History

Rossiya 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.

*Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on March 3, 2020.*

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

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#### Transparency

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