

it.sputniknews.com

The Italian website of a Russian state-owned international news agency. Sputnik does not disclose its ownership and publishes propaganda and disinformation in line with Russian interests.



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

Score: 12.5/100

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 press release reporting 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.

- ✗ 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)

Content

Russian state-owned television network RT described Sputnik as targeting "global audiences with its non-mainstream take on world events." Sputnik Italia is one of the news agency's more than 30 international editions, including the English language Sputnik International and Sputnik Mundo, in Spanish. Site sections include World (Mondo), Italy (Italia), Economy (Economia), Opinion (Opinioni), and Multimedia.

The site, which covers news in Italy and globally, regularly runs news and opinion articles defending Russian state interests and attacking those of its rivals. Typical headlines have included "Italy and Russia together for peace in Libya" ("Italia e Russia insieme per la pace in Libia"); "Not pleasing to the Gods, why the S-500 Prometey scares the American Patriot" ("Non gradito agli Dei, perché l'S-500 Prometey

Criteria are listed in order of importance.

[More information.](#)

spaventa il Patriot americano"); "Does the US and atheism go hand in hand?" ("Gli USA e l'ateismo vanno di pari passo?"); and "Russia: ongoing design of super atomic aircraft carrier" ("Russia: in corso di progettazione super portaerei atomica").

Sputnik Italia also runs articles by columnists and bloggers, including Giulietto Chiesa, a high-profile former Moscow correspondent for national newspapers L'Unità and La Stampa. Sputnik explains at the bottom of opinion articles that "the views expressed in this article are solely those of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect the official position of Sputnik" ("L'opinione dell'autore può non coincidere con la posizione della redazione").

Credibility

Sputnik Italia publishes news stories, opinion columns, and videos that feature original reporting or that are attributed to other media sources. However, alongside fellow Russian state news outlet RT, Sputnik has repeatedly disseminated propaganda and false information on behalf of the Russian government.

Russia's use of Sputnik to try to influence public opinion around the world has been the source of considerable controversy. In January 2017, the Swedish Institute of International Affairs accused Sputnik of running misleading reports in a deliberate bid to influence Swedish public opinion. In April 2017, then-French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron's campaign team banned Sputnik and RT from campaign events, claiming the outlets had a "systematic desire to issue fake news and false information." In November 2017, the then-Executive Chairman of Alphabet, Eric Schmidt, announced that Alphabet's Google News would be "deranking" Sputnik and RT — making them appear lower on search results — because, he said, they had encouraged the "spread of misinformation — or worse."

Sputnik Italia has repeatedly advanced the narrative of the Russian government that Syrian government forces under Russia-backed President Bashar al-Assad did not engage in a chemical attack against the country's citizens in April 2018. Articles published in the wake of

the attack included one that was headlined, "The Russian military does not find victims of the chemical attack in the Syrian city of Douma" ("I militari russi non trovano vittime dell'attacco chimico nella città siriana di Duma").

A year later, when evidence of the attack was largely undisputed, the site published an article that described how Syrian and Russian experts had concluded that the attacks had been "staged" ("inscenato") 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 White Helmets, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and the Syrian-American Medical Society, as well as by press organizations including the BBC, The New York Times, and others.

In February 2020, Sputnik Italia promoted a conspiracy theory about the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak. An article titled "Ufologist identifies suspected alien aircraft near the ISS 'fleeing the coronavirus' - Video" ("Ufologo individua sospetti velivoli alieni vicino alla ISS 'in fuga dal coronavirus' - Video"), reported that the "UFO hunter," Scott C. Waring, "claims to have spotted an alien spacecraft near the International Space Station ISS."

The article included a video from Waring's YouTube account, which shared film from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, showing a small object near the space station. Sputnik's article referred to Waring's speculation, stating that "the alien sighting could be connected to the coronavirus. ... Aliens, who may still be present on Earth could now be fleeing the planet."

Sputnik Italia has also repeatedly published stories in line with the Russian government's claim that Russia was not involved in the poisoning of former Russian intelligence double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia, in the southern English town of Salisbury in March 2018. UK intelligence and military

officials determined that Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with Novichok, a toxic nerve agent produced in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 80s, by two members of Russian military intelligence, also known as the GRU. As a result of the attacks, the UK, the U.S., and several other countries expelled Russian diplomats.

In April 2018, Sputnik Italia published an article headlined "Skripal not poisoned with the substance A234 [Novichok], says its developer" ("Skripal avvelenato non con la sostanza A234, ha detto il suo sviluppatore"). In July 2018, the site ran an article titled "The Skripal Case: expert explains why the West will continue to blame Russia" ("Caso Skripal, esperto spiega perché l'Occidente continuerà a incolpare la Russia").

UK intelligence said the suspects in the poisoning were GRU agents, and in the fall of 2018, the British investigative news outlet Bellingcat reported details about some of their prior intelligence activities and provided what the site said was their real names. Sputnik, however, ran an interview with the men (which was conducted by Sputnik News' and RT's editor-in-chief and also appeared in RT) denying any involvement. The men said they worked in the fitness industry and were in Salisbury on vacation to see the town's "famous" cathedral. Sputnik did not include any of the evidence calling those assertions into question.

The site has also advanced the position that Russia was not responsible for the crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in July 2014 in eastern Ukraine, killing all 283 passengers and 15 crew members. A multinational investigation led by the Netherlands concluded in 2016 that the plane was brought down by a missile that was shot from territory in Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian fighters. Investigators later said the missile was supplied from "a unit of the Russian army from Kursk in the Russian Federation."

Sputnik Italia has published multiple stories calling these conclusions into question without offering countervailing evidence. In January 2019, for example, the site published a story headlined, "Foreign Minister:

Holland tries to hide data on investigations into the MH17 disaster" ("Ministro Esteri: Olanda cerca di nascondere dati sulle indagini sul disastro del MH17:") The article quoted this allegation from Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman but did not include information to support the charge.

On domestic issues in Italy, the site also selectively publishes stories and claims to advance the state's interests or those of its allies.

For example, Sputnik Italia regularly publishes stories pushing the anti-immigration stance of Italy's far-right, which are in sync with Russian interests and help to exacerbate divisions in the country. In July 2018, the site posted an article headlined "Immigration, how many false myths to dispel" ("Immigrazione, quanti falsi miti da sfatare") in which the writer interviewed anti-immigration journalist Laura Tecce. Tecce stated that Italian leaders who favor immigration — including the former president of the National Institute of Social Security (Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale, INPS), Tito Boeri — are in favor of the "replacement of the Italian population" ("pro sostituzione della popolazione italiana"), which is a distortion of the position of Boeri and others who support immigration. The notion of white people being "replaced" by immigrants is a popular theme among white nationalists.

In April 2018, the site ran an article titled "The dangerous relationship between immigration and terrorism" ("Il pericoloso rapporto fra immigrazione e terrorismo"), which claimed, without evidence, that there is a definitive link between immigration and terrorism. In fact, as Italy's immigration levels have increased, data from Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) shows that the share of crimes committed by foreigners have decreased.

Because Sputnik Italia, without disclosing that it is Russian-owned, has repeatedly advanced the official positions of the Russian government without challenging them or including available evidence calling those positions into question, NewsGuard has determined that the site has repeatedly published false

information and headlines, does not gather and present news responsibly, and does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

Sputnik does not have a dedicated corrections page or a stated corrections policy, and NewsGuard did not find any corrections posted on the site since 2017.

NewsGuard sent two emails to Sputnik Italia's general email address and left two phone messages with the main newsroom in Moscow, asking about the site's editorial standards, including its publishing of false news, mixing of news and opinion, and approach to corrections. The site did not respond. NewsGuard also sent a WhatsApp message to a Sputnik Italian correspondent, who declined comment.

Transparency

The site does not directly or clearly disclose that it is owned and funded by the Russian government. Sputnik notes on its About page (Su di noi) that "The SPUTNIK online media outlet was registered by the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media (Roskomnadzor) on November 17, 2014." ("SPUTNIK è una testata giornalistica online registrata presso l'Autorità Federale per la garanzie nella rete, nelle tecnologie informatiche e nei mezzi di comunicazione (Roskomnadzor) in data 17 novembre 2014").

The About page also states that "the Sputnik brand was launched on November 10, 2014, by the Russian media group 'Rossiya Segodnya'" ("Il brand Sputnik è stato lanciato il 10 novembre 2014 dalla holding media 'Rossiya Segodnya'").

Because neither of these disclosures makes it clear the site is an organ of the Russian government, NewsGuard has determined that Sputnik Italia does not meet its standard for disclosing ownership.

The website names its general manager (direttore generale) on its About (Su di noi) page, along with providing five general email addresses to contact the news agency and one Russian phone number. A Contact (Contatti) page hosts a web form for contacting the newsroom.

Although most opinions and blog articles are attributed to an author, most news stories are not. The site generally provides a short biography of its authors, with no contact information. Because most articles are not attributed to a writer, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not disclose information about its content creators.

Advertising is distinguished from editorial content.

NewsGuard sent two emails to Sputnik's general email address and left two phone messages with the newsroom, asking about the site's lack of information about its ownership and content creators, but did not receive a response. NewsGuard also sent a WhatsApp message to a Sputnik Italian correspondent, who declined comment.

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). Sputnik and RT share an editor-in-chief.

Sputnik Italia appears to have started publishing in 2015.

Correction: An earlier version of this Nutrition Label gave the incorrect date for the site's article headlined "Immigration, how many false myths to dispel."

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on March 5, 2020.

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

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