

# de.sputniknews.com

The German-language site of Sputnik News, a Russian state-owned news agency that publishes propaganda and disinformation to serve the Kremlin's interests.



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

**Score: 12.5/100**

## Ownership and Financing

Sputnik Deutschland is a subsidiary of Rossiya Segodnya, a Russian government-owned international news agency. Rossiya Segodnya was established in December 2013 by Russian President Vladimir Putin. The international broadcasting service, Voice of Russia, and the state-run news agency, RIA Novosti, were dissolved and merged into Rossiya Segodnya.

Rossiya Segodnya launched Sputnik in November 2014. Sputnik Deutschland also runs the radio station SNA-Radio, which broadcasts in collaboration with the Bavarian radio station Mega Radio.

The site runs advertisements.

## Content

Sputnik Deutschland covers international politics, business, science, technology, culture, and celebrities. It has a separate section for German news, which primarily covers politics and major crime stories.

The site states on its About Us (Über Uns) page that it “reports on global politics and business only for audiences abroad.” Sputnik is headquartered in Moscow, has bureaus in 34 countries, and produces content in 30 languages.

Sputnik Deutschland hosts a large amount of radio content, and says on the website that its global network produces an estimated 800 hours of daily radio programming. The site also has separate pages for video and photos.

Typical articles include “Pleitgen: Relationship between Russia and Germany is catastrophic and unacceptable“ (“Pleitgen: Beziehung Russland - Deutschland ist katastrophal und nicht hinnehmbar”); “No Trump Russia conspiracy: US Attorney General confirmed” (“Keine Trump-Russland-Verschwörung: US-Justizminister bestätigt”); and “Putin assures Volkswagen of support for production in Russia” (“Putin sichert Volkswagen Unterstützung bei Produktion in Russland zu”).

- Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)
- 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.](#)

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## Credibility

The website publishes original reported stories, in text and video, by Sputnik staff. Articles are often based on information provided by other news organizations or from social media. However, Sputnik Deutschland, similar to its editions in other languages, has repeatedly disseminated propaganda and false information on behalf of the Russian government, and has published false information about the 2020 Wuhan coronavirus outbreak.

Sputnik's agenda has been well-documented. 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, French 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 Deutschland articles have advanced the Kremlin's false claims that the Syrian government did not engage in chemical attacks against its citizens. In multiple articles in 2018 and 2019, Sputnik published claims that elements of the April 2018 attack in Douma, Syria, were "staged," such as in the February 2019 article, "'Chemical attack' in Duma: Recordings staged in hospital - BBC producer" ("'Chemieangriff' in Duma: Aufnahmen in Hospital inszeniert – BBC-Produzent"), and the May 2019 article, "Unpublished OPCW report: Poison gas attack staged in Syrian Duma" ("Unveröffentlichter OPCW-Bericht: Giftgasangriff im syrischen Duma inszeniert"). In the latter article, Sputnik cited an unpublished report by the chemical weapons watchdog group, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which the article says "makes it

clear that the incident was staged.” In fact, the organization’s report, released in early 2019, concluded that chlorine was likely used as a weapon in the Douma attack, which killed more than 40 people. The claims that attacks in Syria have been staged have been contradicted for years by first-person accounts, photos, and videos documenting the victims, as well as reports from the United Nations.

In February 2020, Sputnik Deutschland promoted a conspiracy theory about the Wuhan coronavirus outbreak. An article titled “Aliens fleeing Earth because of coronavirus? UFO appears near the ISS” (“Außerirdische fliehen von der Erde wegen Coronavirus? Ufo taucht nahe der ISS auf”), 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 did not provide context for these claims and presented them as facts.

Multiple Sputnik Deutschland stories have published false and misleading stories that negatively portray the Ukraine, which has been in military conflict with Russia since 2014.

In February 2018, the site published an article titled “Ukraine trains terrorists for operations in Europe and the Middle East - Media” (“Ukraine bildet Terroristen für Operationen in Europa und Nahost aus - Medien.”), citing as its source a report by Russian television station Tsargrad and other unspecified “media reports.” Tsargrad based its report, which was denied by Ukrainian police, on a photograph of a Russian document that described a “training camp next to Krasnograd,” according to Stop Fake, a Ukrainian fact-checking organization. The document, which was not clearly attributed, did not discuss terrorism, according to Stop Fake.

In May 2018, Sputnik Deutschland published “Nato soldiers killed in Donbass explosion - Source” (“Nato-Soldaten bei Explosion im Donbass getötet - Quelle”), which reported that three Canadian soldiers were killed by the Ukrainian military. The article, attributed to a military source in the “People’s Republic of Donetsk,” was denied by Canadian officials. Canadian channel CTV News reported that the claim was based on rumors circulated by Russian social media accounts.

In 2014, Sputnik Deutschland illustrated the article “Amnesty International: Blocked aid convoys - disaster for Eastern Ukraine” (“Amnesty International: Blockierte Hilfskonvois - Katastrophe für Ost-Ukraine”), with a photograph of trucks bearing signs that said “humanitarian help by the Russian Federation.” While Russia did send aid convoys to the Ukraine in 2014, the blocked convoys that Amnesty International described in the article were actually financed by the foundation of a Ukrainian billionaire, Rinat Akhmetov.

While Sputnik does not disclose it is owned by the Russian government or that it has a political orientation, its articles regularly advance narratives that support Russian interests. For example, a July 2017 article that reported on a Putin speech at the G20 summit, “Russophobia as an export commodity: 'Kiev leadership was established by European countries’” (“Russophobie als Exportware: 'Kiewer Führung wurde von europäischen Ländern etabliert’”), portrayed Ukraine as a failed state riven with corruption and chaos. Ukraine “is not just a destabilizing factor in Europe, but also a geopolitical risk,” the article said. “The existence of a country on the European continent whose conduct only fuels civil war and anti-Russian hysteria and promotes corruption is a danger for all.”

Because Sputnik Deutschland has regularly published false content and propaganda that advance Russian interests, without disclosing that it is owned by Russia’s government, NewsGuard has determined that it repeatedly publishes false content and deceptive headlines, does not gather and present information responsibly and does not differentiate news and opinion responsibly.

Sputnik Deutschland does not state a correction policy on the website. A NewsGuard review did not find regular corrections on the site and Sputnik has left false content uncorrected on the site.

After an initial email exchange with NewsGuard, Sputnik Deutschland did not answer questions about the site's false content and editorial practices. NewsGuard called a Moscow-based telephone number listed on the website twice, and was directed to submit questions by email.

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#### Transparency

Sputnik Deutschland's Imprint (Impressum) section discloses that Rossiya Segodnya is a Federal State Unitary Enterprise (a unitary enterprise is a government owned corporation in Russia). However, the site does not explicitly say that it is owned and funded by the Russian government.

Sputnik Deutschland's About Us page names its editor-in-chief, and provides a contact phone number and email address.

Most articles are not attributed to authors. Those articles that do have bylines sometimes link to the writer's author page, which lists the writer's other work. However, no contact or biographical information is provided.

After an initial email exchange with NewsGuard, Sputnik Deutschland did not answer questions about the site's failure to disclose the Russian government's ownership and its lack of information about content creators. NewsGuard called a Moscow-based telephone number listed on the website twice, and was directed to submit questions by email.

Advertisements are clearly distinguishable from editorial content.

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#### 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 Rossiia Segodnya translates to "Russia Today," it is a separate entity from the Russian state-controlled television network RT (formerly known as Russia Today).

*Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on April 27, 2020.*

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### Credibility

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Transparency

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