

The German website of RT, a Russian government disinformation and propaganda effort previously known as Russia Today.



Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic journalistic standards.

Ownership and Financing

RT Deutsch is owned by RT DE Productions GmbH, a private company registered in Berlin.

RT's Deutsch's About Us (Über uns) states that "RT is an autonomous, non-profit organization publicly funded from the budget of the Russian Federation." The disclosure is similar to statements on the English-language version of RT.com, which also says that the website is owned by the Russian government.

The site runs advertising.

Content

RT Deutsch's About Us (Über uns) page says it aims to "counter the public narrative and to expose media manipulations. In this sense, we will give a voice to voices that present an alternative, unconventional point of view. Our guiding principle is, 'We show the missing part of the overall picture.' This is precisely the part that is normally concealed or cut away."

The page states that RT Deutsch was launched because of "the initiative of thousands of people in German-speaking countries who started a campaign to use RT as an alternative source of information, in German, beyond the mainstream."

RT Deutsch, which covers German and global news, divides content into sections including Latest (Aktuell), Analysis (Analysen), Opinion (Meinung), Reports (Reportagen), and Interviews. The site also prominently features video content from six RT Deutsch YouTube channels: Echokammer, CLASH, Fasbenders Woche, 451°, Der fehlende Part, and Einmal in Russland. Videos are regularly embedded in articles. Many video news segments are critical of the reporting and work of news media in Germany.

Typical stories on the site include "Border protection in Europe': AfD and FPÖ want to intensify cooperation" ("Grenzschutz in Europa': AfD und FPÖ wollen Zusammenarbeit intensivieren"), "Sad record: USA used more bombs and ammunition in Afghanistan in 2019 than ever before" ("Trauriger Rekord: USA setzten

Score: 32.5/100

- ✗ 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.](#)

2019 in Afghanistan mehr Bomben und Munition ein als je zuvor”), and “Once in Russia: A day with the special forces” (“Einmal in Russland: Ein Tag bei den Spezialeinheiten”).

Credibility

RT’s news coverage regularly advances false claims and propaganda promoted by the Kremlin, and omits or refutes facts and positions that do not align with the aims of the Russian government, which owns and funds RT.

While RT Deutsch accurately quotes Russian officials in its reports, NewsGuard has determined that RT Deutsch, as a Russian government-owned outlet publishing the Russian government’s false claims, has repeatedly published false content and advanced conspiracy theories that support the Kremlin’s interests.

A January 2020 article titled “Just in time for the US election: The Russian hackers are back!” (“Pünktlich zur US-Wahl: Die russischen Hacker sind zurück!”) claimed that there is “no evidence whatsoever” that Russian hackers were behind the November 2019 cyberattack on the Ukrainian gas company Burisma Holdings, and suggested that the incident was staged by former U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden Jr., who has been accused of pressuring Ukraine to fire a prosecutor to avert an investigation of the company and protect his son, a Burisma board member at the time.

“There’s no better way for Joe Biden to just dismiss all information about him and his son than to say that it was Russia,” the RT article said.

The U.S. cybersecurity company Area 1 Security released a report in January 2020, concluding that the cyberattack against Burisma had been carried out by the Russian military intelligence unit GRU. “Beginning in early November of 2019, the [GRU] launched a phishing campaign targeting Burisma Holdings,” the report states, which coincided with the start of public testimonies in President Donald Trump’s impeachment inquiry. The report made no mention of Biden.

In multiple articles published between 2014 and 2020, RT denied Russia’s involvement in the 2014 downing of the passenger aircraft MH17, which was shot down by an anti-aircraft missile in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014, killing all 298 people on board. Detailed and comprehensive investigations by a Joint Investigation

Team, consisting of investigators from several countries, as well as investigations by independent researchers, proved that the missile came from a Russian brigade and was transported into Eastern Ukraine by pro-Russian fighters.

RT articles repeatedly criticized the findings of the investigation team, conveying Russian officials' assessments that aligned with the Kremlin. For example, a September 2018 article repeated the Russian Ministry of Defense's claim that a Russian investigation concluded that the rocket responsible for hitting MH17 belonged to Ukraine. "The evidence presented refutes the allegations of Ukraine and others alleging that the Malaysian Boeing was shot down by a Russian rocket secretly shipped from Russia, according to the Russian Ministry's report," the article states. A July 2019 article on the investigation five years after the crash said, "Moscow rejected involvement in the shooting down of MH17 and stressed that the JIT investigation was designed to blame Russia." A January 2020 article claimed that "the cause of [the crash] is still unclear"

Deutsch.RT.com has also published misinformation about the 2020 global coronavirus outbreak.

A March 2020 article titled "Peter König on Corona virus and EVENT 201: 'People are being tested right now!'" ("Peter König zu Corona-Virus und EVENT 201: 'Menschen werden gerade getestet!'") included a video interview with economist and former World Bank employee, Peter König, who suggested that a pandemic simulation ("Event 201") hosted by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security had predicted the 2020 coronavirus outbreak in 2019. "This is not a coincidence. A computer simulation of exactly this coronavirus, which then caused 65 million deaths in the computer," König stated in the video. "In my opinion, that's too much of a coincidence to be a coincidence. The first victim was discovered in Wuhan only about two weeks later."

The Gates Foundation did participate in a simulated emergency preparedness exercise in October 2019. However, according to FactCheck.org, the exercise involved a mock coronavirus with different features than the COVID-19 virus. "For the scenario, we modeled a fictional coronavirus pandemic, but we explicitly stated

that it was not a prediction,” the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, which co-hosted the event, said in a January 2020 statement.

Asked to comment on claims in the article, RT Deutsch representative Sebastian Range told NewsGuard in an email, “As you have correctly pointed out, this is an interview. This statement is the personal opinion of Mr. König (‘in my opinion’) and not that of our network. Such a distinction should be obvious from a journalistic point of view.”

RT has also advanced the Kremlin’s claim that the Russia-backed Syrian government did not use chemical weapons in April 2018 against its own citizens. Those claims have been contradicted by eyewitness accounts, photos, and videos documenting the victims, reports from the United Nations, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and France.

The RT stories have advanced Russian government officials’ assertions that activists’ accounts of the chemical attacks were invented and OPCW reports falsified to provide a reason for the U.S. and foreign governments to attack Syria. For example, an April 2018 RT Deutsch article stated, “There is more and more evidence that the alleged chemical attack in Douma was staged, just like Moscow suspected.” A January 2020 article claimed that the OPCW had “manipulated its report in order to hold the Syrian government responsible” and that there were “serious doubts as to whether a poison gas attack had taken place at all.”

A U.N. commission report shared with The New York Times in 2018 detailed Syria’s responsibility for the attacks. And in 2018, France released a declassified report stating that it had assessed “with a high degree of confidence” that the April 2018 chemical attacks were carried out by the Syrian regime based on “testimonies, photos and videos that spontaneously appeared on specialized websites, in the press and on social media in the hours and days following the attack.” The report of the OPCW’s fact-finding mission concluded that the evidence “provide reasonable grounds that the use of a toxic chemical as a weapon took place.”

In a May 2019 email response to NewsGuard's questions about how RT characterized the Syrian chemical attacks, Anna Belkina, RT Deputy Editor-in-Chief/Head of Communications, Marketing, and Strategic Development, wrote, "Given the major role Russia plays in many of the world's most significant geopolitical events, such as the conflict in Syria, to not include the official Russian perspective would not only be irresponsible, but would also make it impossible to provide a complete picture of the situation for our audience and the public at large."

Multiple RT videos and articles have advanced claims that Russia's military agents were not responsible for the March 2018 poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal in the United Kingdom, claiming that it was part of a "false flag" attack, orchestrated by the U.K.

For example, a March 2019 RT Deutsch story asserted that the British media spread "new conspiracy theories from the orbit of intelligence agencies" and published a lengthy portion of a statement by the Russian embassy in London detailing the alleged inconsistencies in the British investigation. A December 2019 article stated that, "In the Skripal case, constitutional principles were disregarded from the outset in order to be able to blame Moscow," and a December 2018 story repeated Putin's claims that the poisoning was just a "pretext to launch another attack on Russia."

In September 2018, the U.K. announced it was charging two men suspected of being Russian military agents with attempted murder in Skripal's poisoning. British Prime Minister Theresa May said in a statement that "the two individuals named by the police and CPS are officers from the Russian military intelligence service."

In response to NewsGuard's inquiries about RT's coverage of the poisoning, Belkina said, "... In line with our overall editorial line, we have brought to light different sides of the story by sharing the opinions of a wide variety of commentators. This includes frequently referring to the opinions of the British government, the Russian government, international experts and other parties across its coverage."

RT's Skripal coverage fits into the broadcaster's mission of sowing "political dysfunction" in countries of special interest to the Russian government, according

to a 2019 study published by the Policy Institute at King's College London. RT, as well as the Russian state-owned news agency Sputnik, accomplished this through many “separate – and often contradictory – narratives,” the study said, including by airing the theory that Skripal was never poisoned and the incident was a hoax, and that the U.K. government staged the attack to frame Russia.

RT Deutsch has also falsely reported that brush fires that destroyed thousands of homes in Australia in 2019 were primarily started by arsonists. A January 2020 article titled “Arson or climate change? Hundreds of bush fire arrests in Australia” (“Brandstiftung oder Klimawandel? Hunderte Festnahmen wegen Buschfeuern in Australien”) claimed that “183 people have so far been arrested for allegedly setting fires.” And, “despite these numbers, the bushfires have been repeatedly linked to climate change... apparently because it fits so nicely into the prevailing discourse.”

The Australian Government's Bureau for Meteorology did in fact cite climate change as a contributing factor to the fires, saying on its website in 2019 that “climate change is influencing the frequency and severity of dangerous bushfire conditions in Australia” and that “there have been significant changes observed in recent decades towards more dangerous bushfire weather conditions.”

In numerous opinion columns, RT Deutsch contributors accused German journalist Hajo Seppelt, who works for the public broadcaster ARD and has extensively covered doping in professional sports, of inventing reporting about systematic doping practices sanctioned by Russian officials. Seppelt's reporting about the practices was confirmed by the official McLaren Independent Investigation Report, which had been commissioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency. Nonetheless, RT Deutsch claimed Seppelt's reporting was politically motivated. In May 2018 and June 2018 columns, an RT contributor described ARD's coverage of the doping scandal as a “fact-free conspiracy theory” (“faktenfreie Verschwörungstheorie”) and said that Seppelt's reporting is “nothing but a series of conjectures” (“nichts weiter als eine Aneinanderreihung von Mutmaßungen”).

Because RT Deutsch has published false information and distorted coverage to support the views of the Russian government that owns it, and, through its reporting, serves a mission of sowing dysfunction in other countries, NewsGuard has determined that the website does not gather and present information responsibly, publishes deceptive headlines, and does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

RT Deutsch does not have a stated corrections policy. However, NewsGuard found that the website regularly publishes corrections of mistakes, which typically appear as an editor's note at the bottom of the story.

RT Deutsch did not respond to two NewsGuard emails and a telephone call, including an inquiry sent in January 2020, seeking comment on its editorial practices and the articles listed above, as well as its mixing of news and opinion.

Transparency

RT Deutsch discloses that it is owned and financed by the Russian government on its About Us page. The Imprint (Impressum) page names RT Deutsch's director, but it does not identify other RT editorial staff. The Imprint page also provides RT Deutsch's address, a general telephone number, and a general email address.

Many news articles on Deutsch.RT.com do not name authors, and in most cases, biographical or contact information is not provided.

Advertisements and sponsored content are distinguishable from editorial content.

RT Deutsch did not respond to two NewsGuard emails and a telephone call seeking comment about its lack of information about content creators.

History

RT grew out of a decision in 2005 by the Russian government to extend its public opinion activities outside the country. Funded by the government, the broadcast channel launched as Russia Today in 2005. In 2009, it changed its name to RT (obscuring its status as an entity funded by the Russian government), later began paying U.S. cable companies to carry its channel, and launched a newsroom in Washington the following year.

The network focused on the internet as social media began to grow in popularity. In 2013, RT became the first news organization to gain more than 1 billion views on YouTube. In 2017, The Wall Street Journal reported that the English-language version of RT was close to CNN in having among the most views and subscribers for news channels on YouTube, with 2.1 billion views and 2.2 million subscribers.

RT Deutsch was founded in 2014. Entries in the German business registry (Handelsregister) show that RT Deutsch had a profit transfer agreement with the Russian news agency Ruptly, a subsidiary of RT based in Berlin, until August 2015.

In 2019, RT Deutsch's director, Ivan Rodionov, confirmed to Tagesspiegel that RT planned to apply for a license to begin broadcasting on German television. Tagesspiegel and Bild reported that RT hired former editor-in-chief of the public service broadcaster MDR, Wolfgang Kenntemich, as a consultant in charge of the license application.

Correction: An earlier version of this Nutrition Label erroneously cited a Deutsch.RT.com article as an example of a story that made a false claim about the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. While the article's headline, "Thailand apparently cures corona patient with medication mix," and its first paragraph were misleading because they characterized the doctors' account of the successful treatment of one patient as a cure, the rest of the article accurately quoted the medical authorities and did not present false information about the pandemic. The reference to the article has been removed from the Nutrition Label. NewsGuard apologizes for the error.

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was last updated on May 8, 2020, to include new comments from a site representative about an article on the COVID-19 pandemic. This Nutrition Label was also updated in September 2019 to reflect NewsGuard's determination that Deutsch.rt.com currently meets NewsGuard's standard for clearly disclosing ownership and financing.

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Ownership and Financing

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