

Putin Marks Start of RT Broadcasts in Argentina

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin speaks at the summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in Minsk, October 10, 2014.

President Vladimir Putin has announced the start of broadcasts by Russia's RT television in Argentina and suggested a new term to describe the controversial channel: an "alternative source of information."

During a video conference with Argentinian President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, which opened RT programming in the South American country, Putin said Thursday that broadcasts by RT were intended to counteract the increasing spread of online media.

He described online media as a "formidable weapon, allowing, if it is so desired, to manipulate public consciousness," according to a transcript of the video conference published on the Kremlin's website.

"In these conditions, particular demand arises for alternative sources of information," Putin said, adding that RT would service precisely that purpose.

According to the Russian president, unlike other online news agencies, RT "does not use methods to aggressively impose its own views on others" and is "always open for discussion," with "a wide palette of opinions on politics, public life, history and culture" offered to viewers.

Media watchdog groups, former RT staffers, mainstream journalists and many foreign officials may be inclined to disagree with Putin's assessment of the channel, all having previously described the network as a Kremlin propaganda mouthpiece.

Britain's The Economist quipped in a tongue-in-cheek review that RT's idiosyncratic style of reporting may be the result of its having been "infiltrated by Western infowar specialists who are trying to discredit it with kooky programming."

Others have been more mournful.

Former RT correspondent Sara Firth, who resigned this summer in protest of the network's coverage of the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over eastern Ukraine, told Britain's The Guardian that "it was the most shockingly obvious misinformation and it got to the point where I couldn't defend it any more."

Earlier in the Ukraine crisis, Firth said via Twitter: "RT style guide Rule 1: It is ALWAYS * Ukraine's fault (* add name as applicable)."

The network began its Spanish-language broadcasts in Argentina on Thursday, and Putin said it would mark the "first case of connecting a foreign media outlet to Argentina's state airwaves, which had previously included only national channels."

Putin said that the start of RT broadcasts — which comes a few months later — were a "joint initiative" with the Argentinian president.

RT "offers people an opportunity to judge for themselves about current affairs and make their own conclusions," he said.

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