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EU Leaders to Fight Russian Media's 'Disinformation' on Ukraine

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European leaders will ask their foreign policy chief next week to draw up a plan to counter Russian "disinformation campaigns" over the conflict in Ukraine, draft conclusions of an EU summit showed.

EU leaders, meeting on March 19-20, will give the High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini three months — until their next summit in June — to work out how to support media freedom and European values in Russia.

"The European Council stresses the need to challenge Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns and invites the High Representative...to prepare by the June European Council an action plan on strategic communication in support of media freedom and EU values," the draft said.

"It welcomes the establishment of a communication team as a first step in this regard," said the draft.

Russian government-funded TV stations, like RT, broadcasting in English, Spanish, Arabic, German and French have been steadily expanding their operations. Many Western broadcasters cut back their Russian-language services after the Cold War.

Sputnik

EU diplomats said the EU would need to find a way to tackle Russian disinformation within Russia itself, as well as in west European countries like Germany and in Russia's EU neighbors with large Russian minorities, like the Baltic states.

Russian domestic television, under strong state control, has portrayed the pro-Russian insurrection in eastern Ukraine as a spontaneous reaction to a coup by nationalist Ukrainian forces in Kiev. The West accuses Moscow of fomenting the fighting, providing arms and troops — something the Kremlin denies.

Last November, Russia launched a state-of-the-art media organization with hundreds of journalists abroad intended to wean the world off what it called aggressive Western propaganda — dubbing it, with echoes of the Cold War, Sputnik.

RT's London-based correspondent Sara Firth resigned last July over the station's coverage of the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, accusing it of the "most shockingly obvious misinformation."

Four months earlier RT's Washington-based correspondent Liz Wahl resigned live on air, blaming the network's "whitewashing" of Moscow's military intervention in Crimea.

"There has been growing concern with the Russian propaganda and it is coming to a head now," one EU diplomat said.

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