

EU Launches First Step in Spreading Word Against Russian 'Disinformation'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The EU will produce and broadcast Russian-language programs in a bid to counter what its says is the spread of misinformation coordinated by the Kremlin.

The European Union is set to launch a first operation in a new propaganda war with Russia within days of EU leaders giving formal approval to the campaign at a summit on Thursday.

Officials said a dozen public relations and communications experts would start work by the end of March in Brussels with a brief to counter what the EU says is deliberate misinformation coordinated by the Kremlin over Moscow's role and aims in Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe.

It is the first stage of a plan that leaders want EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini to finalize by June, which may include efforts to produce and share Russian-language broadcast programming, notably for ethnic Russians in ex-Soviet states.

Those communities currently tune in heavily to Russian state broadcasters, which have bigger

production budgets than local stations for their entertainment output, as well as news.

EU leaders, most especially in the Baltic states, have been alarmed at how Moscow has used its media to gain support for its views and policies — with budgets that are still likely to dwarf the few million euros a year that officials said the EU may provide.

EU leaders agreed on Thursday to extend economic sanctions to push Russia to respect a Ukraine peace deal. And a summit statement also said they "stressed the need to challenge Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns," tasking Mogherini with delivering a fully fledged plan by June.

The new Brussels unit's immediate task is the "correction and fact-checking of misinformation" and to "develop an EU narrative through key messages, articles, op-eds, factsheets, infographics, including material in Russian language," according to a description circulating among EU officials.

Staff will be drawn from civil servants already employed by EU institutions or seconded from some of the 28 member states.

Return on Investment

The EU already provides some support for media within the bloc and beyond, including grants and technical assistance to support diverse cultural programming and coverage of EU affairs. It could now look at linking some of that aid to countering Russian influence. "We may ask for a higher return for our investment," said one official involved in preparing the plan, who declined to be named.

The EU-funded European Endowment for Democracy (EED), which promotes democratic development in neighboring regions, will present proposals on media issues to a summit in Latvia on May 21-22, where EU leaders will meet those from Ukraine and a handful of Russia's other ex-Soviet neighbors.

EED director Jerzy Pomianowski said one option being studied was "greater integration and cooperation" among existing Russian-language media in states bordering Russia, to share content that can compete for audiences with Moscow-funded programming.

The EU official said experts could be brought in to help produce programs to attract Russian-speakers who do not tune in to existing Western-funded Russian-language media such as the BBC, RFI, Deutsche Welle or Radio Free Europe. "We need to spread the word beyond the usual suspects," he said.

Still, EU officials involved in the project said they could not hope to compete head-on with the expensive news and entertainment channels that Russia beams far beyond its borders, or the teams that promote Kremlin ideas on social media.

The bloc is also constrained by a reluctance to be seen to as manipulating news content or to engage in overt "propaganda."

"Countering Russia's hard propaganda with its same weapons would not be effective and is not feasible," a second EU official said.

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