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RT Gets 1.22 Bln Rubles to Start French Channel

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Maxim Stulov / Vedomosti

The Russian state-owned satellite television network RT has been given an additional 1.22 billion rubles ($19 million) in order to start a French-language channel.

The additional funds were allocated in a draft for the 2017 state budget which was approved by the State Duma on Dec.7. This means a total of 18.74 billion rubles is earmarked for the satellite channel next year.

RT's intention to create a French-language channel was first revealed in 2014, when the project was projected to cost 1.4 billion rubles. Like RT America, the channel's main studio and its staff would be located in France, according to Chief Editor Margarita Simonyan.

So far, however, only the French-language RT website has been launched.

"The amount that we were given in 2014 was partially spent on the technical base of the French channel, but then due to the devaluation of the ruble the project was frozen," RT's

press service told the RBC newspaper.

Experts have told RBC that the reason for creating a French-language channel has nothing to do with the network's efficiency or performance but rather geopolitics.

"If there was peace and quiet on the world stage, I don't think this would have happened," said Sergei Smirnov, associate professor of journalism at Moscow State University.

Smirnov also said that given the fact that the network already has channels in English, Spanish and Arabic, French is the next logical choice because of the size of the global French-speaking audience.

Igor Bunin, director of the Center for Political Technology, has another explanation for why RT wants to reach French audiences. According to him, President Putin wants Francois Fillon to win France's elections next year.

"Fillon isn't his (Putin's) close friend, but they have a very good relationship, and he would like to somehow influence France too" Bunin said.

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