

By Banning Russian Media Outlets, EU Exposes Its Discomfort with Alternative Narratives of the Ukrainian Crisis

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Today, the dangers of military escalation are beyond description.

What is now happening in Ukraine has serious geopolitical implications. It could lead us into a World War III scenario.

It is important that a peace process be initiated with a view to preventing escalation.

Global Research condemns Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

A Bilateral Peace Agreement is required.

In an unprecedented move, the European Commission has banned Russian news outlets RT and Sputnik across the EU, calling them ‘Kremlin Media Machines’ and accusing them of indulging in pro-Russia propaganda

Amidst the ever growing list of sanctions against Russia by the US and its NATO allies since its attack on Ukraine on February 24, the European Unions’ announcement of banning some of Russia’s media outlets stands as unique and unprecedented. The move raises fundamental questions about the West’s commitments to freedom of speech and expression and democracy. It also exposes the West’s discomfort about narratives which challenge its preferred version of what is happening in the Eastern Europe.

On 27 February European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that the EU is banning Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik because they were spreading Russian government’s propaganda declaring that, these channels and their subsidiaries, “will no longer be able to spread their lies to justify Putin’s war and to sow division in our union.”

Since then, these channels have also faced a blockade on Meta owned social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook and Google owned Youtube. Twitter, a popular microblogging platform also announced that it will comply with the ban order when asked.

Though the US has not yet announced a formal ban on RT and Sputnik, it has supported the EU's move. Several users in the country have [claimed](#) that these channels are not accessible to them as well. Similar news has been reported from Australia as well.

Some ministers in the conservative government in the UK, including Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and several MPs from the party have pressured the Ofcom, the country's media regulator, to issue a EU-like ban on RT and Sputnik in the country. On Wednesday, March 2 [Ofcom](#) announced an investigation into RT's news coverage.

Violates the right to free information for viewers

Apart from curtailing the choices of its people by proscribing Russian channels, the EU's move also puts a question mark on its citizens' maturity to differentiate between fact and propaganda. It is also a clear violation of the right to free access to information which is part of the EU charter. Some public opinion [surveys](#) conducted on social media on the issue also confirm that EU leadership's decision to ban RT and Sputnik does not have popular support.

This is an example of seriously compromising freedom of speech and expression considered fundamental to liberal democratic systems preferred and glorified in the west. The EU has undertaken several punitive actions including sanctions against countries outside the union for their alleged violations of the same rights.

Though the amount of public outrage against the ban in Europe was limited mostly due to overt or covert censorship self-imposed by the Western media groups, there were several people from both within the [region](#) and [outside](#) who questioned EU leadership's commitments to free speech and democracy.

The commentators from within the European countries have emphasized that even if the Russian networks were following a particular agenda the correct course of action for the EU leadership was to disseminate counter facts in public domain instead of resorting to a ban. With varied amounts of qualifications, some commentators have also called it an assault on the freedom of press.

Some commentators also questioned the argument that continued broadcasting of these channels would have caused threat to security and unity of Europe.

Several commentators have also questioned the legality of the move as a pan EU ban does not have any precedence and there is no legal regime for the same.

One propaganda over the other

Speaking to RT, Nicola Mircovic called the ban an attempt by the European leadership of "fabrication of consent". He claimed that most of the electronic and print media in Europe has been disseminating a one sided and biased narrative of what is happening in eastern Europe and by banning RT and Sputnik they want to make sure that the people of Europe do not get to see the alternative side of the story.

Some of the commentators even while opposing the ban on Russian media channels tried to find justifications for demands for the same. Precious Chatterjee Doody, a lecturer in Open University in the UK [wrote](#) in *the Conversation*, that “there are some patterns in how its [RTs] coverage plays out. RT usually gives strictly factual-albeit heavily curated-news coverage that prioritizes sources and perspectives that correspond with Russian interests.” She forgets to add that this is done by most other so-called neutral media outlets as well.

Activists have also questioned the aggressive tagging of pages related to news outlets such as RT, Sputnik and Chinese media outlet CGTN among others as “state-affiliated media”. In some cases even journalists working with some of these outlets are tagged in a similar way by twitter. Activists blame that twitter uses the tags as a yardstick of neutrality very selectively. In most of the cases, western media outlets such as BBC which receives funds from the UK state are exempted from such practices. The [personal](#) accounts of several journalists such as Afsin Rattansi who hosts a show on RT called Going Underground, have been marked as “state affiliated media” by Twitter recently.

It is obvious that the West has adopted a tactic of media warfare where all those narratives which question its preferred take on the Russia-Ukraine crisis will be treated as “propaganda”. The ruling class in the west appears to have decided that they have the truth on their side and those who question about NATO’s eastward expansion and present Russia concerns about rise of neo-Nazis in Ukraine are misinformation agents. The people have to believe that, as Ali Abunimah, director of *Electronic Intifada* said in a twitter post, “all this censorship is to defend free speech, all this conformity is to protect democracy and all this repression is to guarantee freedom”.

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Featured image: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that the EU is banning Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik. (Source: Peoples Dispatch)

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