

Most of the “Fact-Checking” Organizations Facebook Uses in Ukraine Are Directly Funded by Washington

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Most of the fact-checking organizations Facebook has partnered with to monitor and regulate information about Ukraine are directly funded by the U.S. government, either through the U.S. Embassy or via the notorious National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

In light of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, an information war as bitter as the ground fighting has erupted, and Meta (Facebook’s official name) announced it had [partnered](#) with nine organizations to help it sort fact from fiction for Ukrainian, Russian and other Eastern European users. These nine organizations are: StopFake, VoxCheck, Fact Check Georgia, Demagog, Myth Detector, Lead Stories, Patikrinta 15min, Re:Baltica and Delfi.

“To reduce the spread of misinformation and provide more reliable information to users, we partner with independent third-party fact-checkers globally,” the Silicon Valley giant [wrote](#), adding, “Facebook’s independent third-party fact-checkers are all certified by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). The IFCN, a subsidiary of the journalism research organization Poynter Institute, is dedicated to bringing together fact-checkers worldwide.”

The problem with this? At least five of the nine organizations are directly in the pay of the United States government, a major belligerent in the conflict. The Poynter Institute is also [funded](#) by the NED. Furthermore, many of the other fact-checking organizations also have deep connections with other NATO powers, including direct funding.

StopFake

Perhaps the most well-known and notorious of the nine groups is StopFake. Established in 2014, StopFake is [funded by](#) NATO’s [Atlantic Council](#), by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Embassy in Ukraine and the Czech Foreign Ministry. It has

also received money from the U.S. via the National Endowment for Democracy, although that fact is far from trumpeted by either party.

One potential reason for this was alluded to in a 2016 [article](#) reprinted by StopFake itself. As the article notes, “in the case of StopFake.org when opponents want to insult the project, they immediately invoke National Endowment for Democracy donor support as evidence of U.S. government and CIA involvement.”

In the wake of the Russian invasion, the NED pulled all public records of their Ukraine projects from the internet. Nevertheless, incomplete archived copies of those records [confirm](#) a financial relationship between the groups.

StopFake was explicitly set up as a partisan organization. As a glowing [report](#) on them from the International Journalists’ Network notes, the majority of StopFake’s fact-checks are on stories from Russian media, and the motivation for its creation was “Russia’s 2014 occupation of Crimea and a campaign to portray Ukraine as a fascist state where anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia and xenophobia thrived.”

While it is indeed incorrect to label Ukraine a fascist state, the country clearly has one of the strongest far-right movements anywhere in Europe. And unfortunately, StopFake itself is far from an apolitical bystander in that rise. Multiple established Western media outlets, including [The New York Times](#), have reported on StopFake’s ties to white power or Nazi groups. When local journalist Ekaterina Sergatskova exposed these links, death threats from far-right figures forced her to [flee](#) her home.

Indeed, according to some, one of StopFake’s primary functions appears to be to promote the far-right. A long exposé by Lev Golinkin in [The Nation](#) cataloged what it called StopFake’s history of “aggressively whitewashing two Ukrainian neo-Nazi groups with a long track record of violence, including war crimes.”

Surely StopFake’s most famous former host is [Nina Jankowicz](#). Jankowicz was briefly head of President Biden’s newly formed Disinformation Governance Board before public uproar caused her to resign. Dubbed the “Ministry of Truth”, both the board and Jankowicz generated strong opposition. Yet few mentioned the fact that, while at StopFake, Jankowicz herself had, on camera, enthusiastically extolled the virtues of multiple fascist paramilitaries.

In a 2017 [TV segment](#) about the Aidar, Dnipro-1 and Azov Battalions, Jankowicz presented the groups as heroic volunteers deafening Ukraine from “further Russian separatist encroachment.” As she stated,

The volunteer movement in Ukraine extends far beyond military service. Volunteer groups are active in supporting Ukraine’s military with food, clothing, medicine, and post-battle rehabilitation, as well as working actively with the nearly two million internal refugees displaced by the war in Ukraine.”

This framing jars with multiple [reports](#) from human rights groups such as Amnesty International, who claim that the Aidar Battalion is guilty of a litany of abuses, “including abductions, unlawful detention, ill-treatment, theft, extortion, and possible executions.” Amnesty also [accuses](#) Aidar and Dnipro-1 of “Using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare.”

Azov, meanwhile, is the most infamous organization of the lot. The group's insignia is directly lifted from the 2nd Waffen-SS Panzer Division, a unit responsible for carrying out some of the worst crimes of Hitler's holocaust. The Azov Battalion also [dip](#) their bullets in pig fat before battle as a calculated hate crime, attempting to block Jewish or Muslim enemies from a better afterlife. Andriy Biletsky, the group's founder, [said](#) in 2010 that he believes Ukraine's mission is to "lead the white races of the world in a final crusade ... against Semite-led Untermenschen" – the word Hitler used to describe Jews, Poles, Ukrainians and other peoples he designated for extermination.

In February, Facebook announced that it was changing its rules on hate speech to allow praise and promotion of the Azov Battalion. Was this on StopFake's recommendation? *MintPress* asked Meta/Facebook for comment on their fact checking partner's ties to far right groups and if StopFake had influenced their decision to allow pro-Nazi content on their platform, but did not receive a reply.

As Golinkin noted in his article for *The Nation*, StopFake has also defended C14, another fascist paramilitary, describing it merely as a "community organization", citing C14's own denial of its pogroms against Roma people as "evidence" of its innocence. This designation clashes even with the U.S. State Department, which classifies C14 as a "nationalist hate group." The "14" in its name [refers](#) to the "14 words" white supremacist slogan.

Nazi fact-checking, brought to you by the National Endowment for Democracy
<https://t.co/RYbiRGHjxZ> pic.twitter.com/9Lawg0yWN8

— Mark Ames (@MarkAmesExiled) [May 6, 2018](#)

StopFake has made a number of controversial claims, including that the rise in anti-semitism in Ukraine is "[fake](#)" – even going so far as to brand well-established outlets like *NBC News* and *Al-Jazeera* as printing fake news about the Azov Battalion's role in this. In an [article entitled](#) "Russia as Evil: False Historical Parallels. Some peculiarities of Russian Political Culture," it also [insisted](#) that Hitler's concentration camps were modeled on Russian ones set up by Vladimir Lenin. In reality, the German government pioneered the use of concentration camps during their genocide of the Herero and Namaqua peoples between 1904 and 1908 in Namibia. The British and Spanish were also early adopters.

In addition, StopFake has close links with *The Kyiv Post*, a Ukrainian outlet directly [funded and trained](#) by the National Endowment for Democracy. Since 2016, the *Post* has [published](#) 191 StopFake reports.

Who is the need?

Why receiving funding from the National Endowment for Democracy should immediately raise suspicions of any organization is because the NED was explicitly established by the Reagan administration as a front group for the Central Intelligence Agency.

Although it is funded by Washington and staffed by state officials, it is technically a private company and therefore not subject to the same legal regulations and public scrutiny as state institutions.

The CIA has used the NED to carry out many of its more controversial operations. In recent

years, it has trained and [funneled](#) money to the leaders of the Hong Kong protesters to keep the insurrection alive, [fomented](#) a nationwide campaign of demonstrations in Cuba, and helped [attempts](#) to [topple](#) the government of Venezuela. Perhaps most importantly for this story, however, the NED was also [involved](#) in the 2014 coup that removed Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich from power. Regime change is, in short, one of its primary functions.

The NED does this by establishing, funding, supporting and training all manner of political, economic and social groups in target countries. According to its 2019 annual [report](#), Ukraine is the NED's "top priority". The agency has (officially) [spent](#) over \$22 million in Ukraine since 2014.

In their more candid moments, NED leaders are explicit about the organization's role. "It would be terrible for democratic groups around the world to be seen as subsidized by the CIA," Carl Gershman, NED president from 1984 to 2021 [said](#), explaining why his organization was set up. NED co-founder Allen Weinstein agreed: "A lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA," he [told](#) *The Washington Post*.

Vox

VoxCheck

VoxCheck receives substantial monetary assistance from the U.S. government through both the NED and the U.S. Embassy. It is also funded by the Dutch and German governments. Incomplete NED records show VoxCheck [receives](#) substantial yearly grants and has accepted around \$250,000 in total.

That sort of money goes an extremely long way in Ukraine, which is by quite some way the poorest nation in Europe. The country's [GNI per capita](#) of \$3,500 per year is well below that of even Russia, which stands at \$10,700. One \$15,000 NED [grant](#) given to a Ukrainian media foundation, for instance, was enough to pay for over 100 articles to be written.

Despite its funding, Western media portray VoxCheck extremely positively. *The Washington Post*, for example, [describes](#) them as "a small group of independent fact-checkers." In common parlance, the word "independent" is usually reserved for any media group not owned or funded by governments (as if that is the only type of dependence). But even at this extremely low bar, VoxCheck falls.

Fostering Reforms and Promoting Government Accountability

VoxUkraine

Supplement: \$40,000

To facilitate informed public discussion on domestic reforms and promote governmental accountability and transparency. While continuing to develop its resource website, Voxukraine.org, the organization will track and assess the progress of reforms, push parliamentarians to produce reports on their activities, launch a new fact-checking component to improve the veracity of public debates. In cooperation with Hromadske TV, the organization will produce weekly clips that highlight and debunk politicians' factual mistakes and manipulations.

An NED document shows a 2020 grant given to VoxUkraine

In the article, the *Washington Post* describes VoxCheck's fact-checking process, which largely consists of "sourcing credible news sources – such as a BBC article," and then

labeling Russian claims as false on this basis. In other words, the official state mouthpiece of the British government – one that was instrumental in promoting the lies which led to the invasions of [Iraq](#) and [Libya](#) – is considered sacrosanct.

What comes across in the *Post*'s glowing exposé is that VoxCheck staff have few pretensions about being neutral and see themselves as digital foot soldiers in a crusade against Russia. As one employee said, the mission is to “prevent someone from falling into Russian lies and manipulation.” Indeed, one of the staff quit his job to volunteer for the Ukrainian Army. Other VoxCheck employees revealed that they felt guilty for not doing so themselves and only contributing virtually to the fight.

Of course, Russia has lied constantly during this war; the entire invasion was based on a lie. Throughout the winter, Russian officials consistently [repeated](#) that they had no intention of invading Ukraine. Russian media, meanwhile, claimed that President Zelensky had fled the country in the wake of the invasion. But in war, all sides lie. And when a fact-checking operation constantly critiques only one side and stays largely quiet about the other, it has clearly taken a side in the conflict and is therefore acting in a partisan fashion. People interested in thinking critically should be scrutinizing claims made by all sides.

Fact Check Georgia

Fact Check Georgia [describes](#) itself as “an independent and non-partisan website which offers readers researched, verified and evidence-based information.” Yet it is [bankrolled](#) by a litany of dubious organizations, including the NED and the U.S. Embassy, the German Marshall Fund, the Dutch government and the European Endowment for Democracy, a European government-funded “private” organization explicitly modeled on the NED.

Among the supporters of the project are the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands in Georgia, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), German Marshall Fund, European Endowment for Democracy and the Embassy of the United States of America to Georgia.

FactCheck is a [team](#) of motivated and like-minded individuals and brings together young professionals in the fields of journalism, economics, law, international relations, public policy and other realms.

Fact Check Georgia's “About Us” section reveals just how independent the fact checking organization really is

Fact Check Georgia's independence is potentially undermined by the fact that at the bottom of every page of its website, it displays the crests of both the NED and the U.S. Embassy in Georgia. This is accompanied by the disclaimer, “The views and opinions expressed on this website belong to Factcheck.ge and are not the views and opinions of project support organizations” – a sentence that would not be necessary to attach if an organization was truly independent.

Furthermore, some of its staff have notable backgrounds. The first person listed on Fact Check Georgia's “our team” section was formerly the Deputy Minister of Defense for Georgia – a country that fought a war against Russia in 2008.

Myth Detector

Another Georgia-based company, Myth Detector, was [funded](#) by the U.S. Embassy to the

tune of €42,000 in financial year 2021. German state broadcaster Deutsche Welle contributed €41,000. Also donating €41,000 last year, according to Myth Detector's financial report, is a group called "Zinc." This is quite possibly the Zinc Network, a shadowy intelligence firm that [conducts](#) information warfare operations on behalf of the U.K. and U.S. governments.

Demagog

Not only is the U.S. Embassy in Poland [funding](#) Demagog, it is also carrying out training in how to think. Demagog's website notes that the embassy established a "fact-checking academy" on "how to deal with false information." "Thanks to the [embassy] cooperation," it [notes](#), "classes were conducted for students and teachers on fake news, reliable sources of information and fact-checking."

Alongside the U.S. government, Demagog also receives money from Polish government, European Union and European Economic Area organizations.

Together, these five organizations' operations are all directly bankrolled by Washington. However, many of the other fact-checking groups Facebook pays to serve as content police on their platform have similarly close connections to Western state power. Indeed, the only one of the nine that appears relatively free from direct government collaboration is self-funded outlet Lead Stories.

Patikrinta 15min

Lithuanian outlet Patikrinta 15min insist that they are an independent, non-partisan group. As their "About" section [states](#): "Sponsors of Patikrinta 15min cannot be political parties, politicians, state organizations or companies or organizations related to politicians." They do, however, accept funding from the Poynter Institute, the journalism group that owns U.S. fact-checking organization Politifact. Since 2016, the Poynter Institute has sought for and received at least [seven grants](#) from the National Endowment for Democracy, totaling well over half a million dollars.

Notably, some of these grants are clearly a way of funneling cash to Eastern European fact-checking groups. As one NED grant summary for \$78,000 [notes](#), the goal of the money is to "promote the use of fact-checking websites as an effective accountability tool in Central and Eastern Europe, and strengthen the global fact-checking community." The NED goes on to note that Poynter will bring over 70 journalists to a training summit and afterward continue to "train" "mentor," "support," and help them and their organizations with "capacity building."

Project Title:	Fact-Checking: Promoting Accountability and Improving the Quality of News	Year: 2020
Organization Name:	Poynter Institute for Media Studies	Award Amount: \$129,000
Project Region:	Global	<i>Note: This is the total grant amount and includes a supplement that was approved separately.</i>
Project Country:	_ Global	
Project Focus:	Accountability and Governance	
Description:	To strengthen the practice of fact-checking as a way to promote accountability and improve the accuracy and reliability of news and information. The organization will support a global network of fact-checking groups to share best practices and methodologies to enhance their capacity and credibility. Activities will include the organization of an annual global summit of fact-checkers, ongoing engagement with emerging fact-checking groups, promotion of a code of principles for fact-checking, and the coordination of trainings and joint initiatives with network participants.	

One of several grants given to the ostensibly neutral Poynter Institute by the US State Dept's NED

A cynic might conclude that the NED was simply trying to launder its money through Poynter. *MintPress* asked Patikrinta 15min to confirm or deny whether they were one of the Eastern European groups mentioned in the NED filings but has not received a response.

Like other groups, Patikrinta 15min's non-partisan veneer frequently slips. This can be seen in [headlines](#) such as "Russian cynicism knows no bounds" and the fact that they frequently defend Nazi groups like the Azov Battalion.

Like StopFake, n 15min has [argued](#) that Azov's use of the Waffen SS symbol is coincidental. It also presented Azov as an apolitical organization and has used quotes from Azov founder Andriy Biletsky – possibly the world's most infamous living [neo-Nazi](#) – as "proof" that charges against it are Russian disinformation.

Re:Baltica

While there is no evidence that Re:Baltica has a financial relationship with the United States government, the lion's share of its funding still comes from the West. As they [note](#) on their website, around two-thirds of their funding comes "from the institutions based in EU/NATO countries." They also list "the Kingdom of the Netherlands" as one of their "friends" – i.e., donors.

Who pays for this

Our income is built from three sources. First is competitive grants, mostly from the institutions based in EU/NATO countries (for example, we have been beneficiaries in the first competitive call for cross-border investigative journalism in EU, IJ4EU, Open Society Foundations, Sigrid Rausing Trust, Latvian Culture Capital Foundation, POBB program etc). Second is our own income which we earn from teaching, moderating the events, doing research, scripting documentaries. Third source of income are donations, both from physical and legal persons, list of which is attached to our annual reports. *Re:Baltica* has been recognised as the organisation which is doing the public good, therefore the donors can get the tax-break. All donors – individual or institutional – who gives more than EUR 4999 have to sign an agreement which protects *Re:Baltica*'s editorial independence.

In 2020, 6 percent of our income were donations, 66 percent grants and 28 percent we earned ourselves.

Re:Baltica is generously funded by western govt's and NGOs, including George Soro's Open Society Foundation

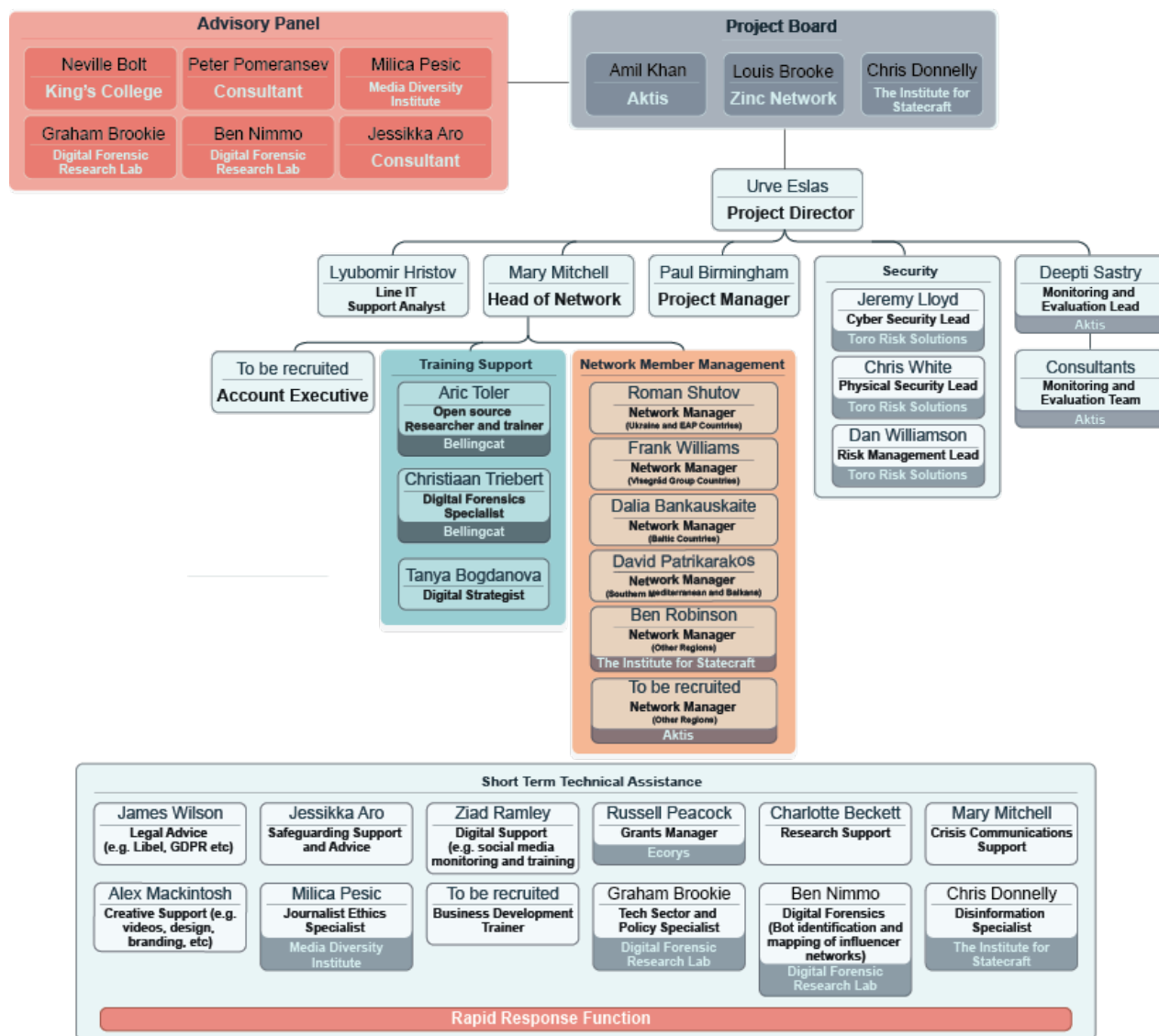
Delfi

Delfi is a major web portal in Eastern Europe and the Baltic. The company does not disclose if it receives foreign funding. It does, undeniably, however, have a close relationship with the NED. In 2015, Delfi [interviewed](#) Christopher Walker, a senior NED manager about the best way they could counter Russian propaganda. Two years later, NED President Gershman addressed the Lithuanian parliament, [revealing](#) that his organization had,

[W]orked with Lithuania in countering Russian efforts to subvert and destroy democracy

in Lithuania, in Europe, and in Russia itself. We have supported the work of the Lithuania-based Delfi and the East European Studies Center in monitoring, documenting, and combatting Russian disinformation in Lithuania and the Baltic states.”

Later that year, Delfi teamed up with the NED to [hold](#) the 1st Vilnius Young Leaders Meeting, whereby handpicked young activists were invited to rub shoulders with journalists and spooks from across Europe and the United States, in the hope of building up a Western-friendly force in civil society.



A chart showing the leadership structure of the EXPOSE network published as part of the Integrity Initiative Leak 7

Delfi, Re:Baltica and StopFake were all identified as proposed members of a “counter”-propaganda network hoping to be established by the EXPOSE Network. EXPOSE was allegedly a secret U.K.-government funded initiative that would have brought together journalists and state operatives in an alliance to shape public discourse in a manner more conducive to the priorities of Western governments.

As EXPOSE [wrote](#), “An opportunity exists to upskill civil society organizations around Europe, enhancing their existing activities and unleashing their potential” to be the next generation of activists in the fight against Kremlin disinformation.”

“Coordinat[ing] their activities,” wrote EXPOSE, “represents a unique opportunity” for the British government in their fight against Russia. Unfortunately, they lamented, StopFake’s “monomaniacal fixation” on Russia had hurt its credibility.

Remarkably, EXPOSE also wrote that, “Another barrier to combating disinformation is the fact that certain Kremlin-backed narratives are factually true” – an admission that underlines that, to many governments and media outlets, “disinformation” is rapidly coming to simply mean “information we disagree with.”

The names of those individuals [listed](#) as potential employees of this network are a who’s who of state-linked operatives, including the Zinc Network, multiple individuals from [NED-funded](#) investigative journalism website Bellingcat and Ben Nimmo, a former NATO spokesperson who is now head of global intelligence for Facebook.

Facebook’s Cyber War

Nimmo is only one of a great many former state agents now working in the higher echelons of Facebook, however. Last month, *MintPress* published a [study](#) revealing that the Silicon Valley giant has hired dozens of ex-CIA personnel into influential positions within the company, especially in security, content moderation and trust and safety.

Given how influential Facebook is as a media and communications giant, this sort of relationship constitutes a national security issue to every other country in the world. And this is not a hypothetical threat either. In November, Nimmo led a team that effectively attempted to swing the Nicaraguan elections away from the ruling Sandinista party and towards the U.S.-backed candidate. In the days leading up to the election, Facebook [deleted](#) hundreds of accounts and pages of pro-Sandinista media.

This action underlines the fact that Facebook is not an international company existing only in the ether, but an American operation bound by American laws. And increasingly, it is moving closer to the U.S. government itself.

Who will guard the guardians?

Fake news abounds online, and we as a society are wholly unprepared to counter it. A [study](#) conducted by Stanford University found that the vast majority of people – even the digitally savvy youth – were unable to tell factual reporting from obvious falsehoods online. Many will fall for Russian propaganda. Russian media is indeed pumping out misleading information constantly. But so are NATO countries. And if the fact-checkers who have volunteered to sort truth from fiction for us relentlessly attack Russia but are quiet on their own side’s spin, many more will fall for Western propaganda.

The implicit outlook of many of these fact-checking groups is that “only Russia lies.” This is the position of a partisan organization, one that cares little about truth and more about imposing control over the means of communication. And this is all being done in the name of keeping us safe.

Who is fact-checking the fact-checkers? Unfortunately, it is up to small, independent media outlets to do so. However, *MintPress* has faced constant suppression for doing so, being blocked from communicating with our 400,000+ Facebook followers, suppressed algorithmically by the Silicon Valley giants, and being removed from financial transaction services like PayPal.

The solution is to teach and develop critical media literacy. All media outlets have biases and agendas. It is up to the individual to learn these and constantly scrutinize and evaluate everything they read. However, governments do not want their populations thinking critically; they want their message to be dominant, one reason why the NED has been quietly bankrolling so many fact-checking organizations to do its work for it.

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