

## **War in Ukraine: 'Providing the Russian population with professional, diversified and non-warlike information is one of the keys to the conflict'**

### **Op-Ed**

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The raging war waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and more generally against democracy, is not only a matter of tanks, planes, missiles, gas or oil. It is also a propaganda war, made of disinformation and hate and genocide mongering, which Russia has been waging daily for years in the media and on social media.

The information war, theorized by the strategists of the new Russian imperialism since the 1990s, is played out on two fronts: domestic propaganda, aimed at the Russian population, and disinformation targeting the rest of the world. For its disinformation work, Russia uses all possible channels: embassies, institutional networks of influence, television channels, social media and the hidden financing of political parties.

European institutions, European countries, European civil society and several Russian opposition journalists based in Europe are developing various ways to respond to this offensive. The most significant ones are the sanctions introduced by the European Union and several member states against Russian propaganda channels and, more recently, Russian media groups. They have yet to be fully implemented.

### **A response to the limitations on free speech**

Since coming to power in 2000, Putin and his allies have taken over Russia's national media system. They have assumed control of the state media directly and of private media through their friends, and imprisoned and murdered several journalists. The war against Ukraine has reinforced this trend: The main human rights NGOs and professional journalists' unions have been dissolved and access to the internet has been blocked.

The main TV programs promote the aggression against Ukraine and suggest that a third world war started by the satanic and decadent West will soon break out. The Russian opposition, which has taken refuge abroad, has few resources at its disposal to respond to this limitation on freedom of expression.

Different media, most of them internet-based (on websites and YouTube or Telegram channels) and a single independent television channel (Rain TV) are trying to get

organized and are struggling to survive. Systems to bypass censorship on the internet (such as VPNs and mirror sites) and funds to support journalists in exile have been (...)