

## **PLATFORM TO PROMOTE THE PROTECTION OF JOURNALISM AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS**

Reply by the Government of Estonia to the platform alert concerning the Russian State News agency Sputnik

Media freedom is of extremely important value to Estonia and our high ranking – 11th out of 180 countries – in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index attests to that. Estonia fully protects the right to freedom of expression and the right to receive and impart information and ideas without interference.

With regard to the Russian News Agency Sputnik, Estonia would like to note that the Director General of Rossiya Segodnya, the parent company of Sputnik Estonia, is on the list of persons sanctioned by the European Union. As a Member State of the European Union, Estonia is obliged to implement the said sanctions.

It is important to note that the journalistic content of Sputnik has been irrelevant in the sanctioning process and remains untouched. Being an online media outlet, their website continues to be operational and there are no restrictions to it.

Rossiya Segodnya founded Sputnik in 2014 as its international branch. Dmitry Kiselyov, the Director General of Rossiya Segodnya, was added to the list of individuals subject to sanctions by the European Union (Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP and Council Regulation (EU) No 269/2014) because he played a central role in the propaganda of the Russian Federation that supported the deployment of Russian forces in Ukraine (i.e. the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the military actions of the Russian Federation in eastern and southeast Ukraine).

As Dmitry Kiselyov is subject to financial sanctions and exercises control over Rossiya Segodnya, Estonian banks froze the bank accounts and payments of Rossiya Segodnya. In December 2019, the Financial Intelligence Unit informed the persons employed or contracted by Rossiya Segodnya that knowingly working for or offering paid services to a sanctioned person may constitute as an infringement of the law. The EU financial sanctions aim not to make the sanctioned person's economic resources located in the EU available to them. Working for or renting space to such individuals clearly constitutes making economic resources available.

Given the above, Estonia does not consider this case to be about media freedom nor pressure towards journalists.