

tass.com

The website for TASS, a major Russian government-owned wire agency. The site uncritically promotes the false claims of the Russian government.

 **20** / 100

Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic journalistic standards.

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- ✖ Does not repeatedly publish false content
 - ✖ Gathers and presents information responsibly
 - ✖ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors
 - ✖ Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly
 - ✖ Avoids deceptive headlines
 - ✓ Website discloses ownership and financing
 - ✓ Clearly labels advertising
 - ✓ Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest
 - ✖ The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information

Criteria are listed in order of importance. [Learn More.](#)

Ownership and Financing

TASS is organized as a Federal State Unitary Enterprise, meaning that it is a Russian government-owned corporation. Its name is the abbreviated form of a phrase that in English means “Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union,” although it has been known as TASS since 2014. The corporation’s legal name is ITAR-TASS News Agency and it is registered in Singapore. The site states on the About TASS page that it is a “state news agency.”

The site runs advertisements.

Content

TASS predominantly covers Russia’s domestic and foreign affairs. The site describes itself as “Russia’s leading state news agency,” and professes to publish approximately “2,000 news items and 600-800 photographs and videos from correspondents in Russia and across the world daily.”

The site’s domestic coverage is often focused on crime and the government’s purported anti-corruption efforts, such as reports on the placement of a journalist on the government’s anti-terrorism blacklist, the arrest of the governor of Russia’s Khabarovsk region on accusations of organizing contract killings, and the beefing up of regulations on entities found guilty of environmental violations in the wake of a massive fuel spill on the Arctic coast.

Foreign affairs stories generally report on Russia’s diplomatic and military activities, such as coverage of a meeting between Russian and Cypriot foreign ministers, Russia’s offer to help maintain an Indian aircraft carrier in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a Russian diplomat’s charge that British sanctions on Russia constitute meddling in internal affairs.

Content on the site is divided into sections including Russian Politics & Diplomacy, World, Business & Economy, Military & Defense, Science & Space, Emergencies, Society & Culture, and Sport. The site also publishes a daily press review summarizing the lead stories in the major Russian newspapers.

A Special Projects section features long-form features on topics such as how Pluto stopped being considered a planet, the lives of refugees, and Italian Middle Ages poet Dante.

TASS.com links to its Russian-language counterpart.

Credibility

The site states on the About TASS page that its coverage, drawing on correspondents around the world, forms “a complete and objective picture of events.” In fact, TASS’ news coverage regularly advances false claims and propaganda promoted by the Kremlin, and omits or refutes facts and positions that do not align with the goals of the Russian government, which owns and funds the website.

As tensions escalated over Russia’s buildup of troops on its border with Ukraine in late 2021 and early 2022, TASS published numerous false claims about developments in Ukraine’s eastern region of Donbas.

For example, a February 2022 article, “Developments in Donbass look like genocide — Putin,” stated that according to Russian President Vladimir Putin, “Kiev systematically violates human rights, including by legalising the discrimination of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine.” The article did not challenge these claims or provide any evidence to substantiate claims of “genocide” or systematic human-rights violations.

In fact, reports by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Criminal Court found no evidence of genocide in Ukraine. A 2021 Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights report blamed the authorities of the Russia-back Donetsk and Luhansk republics for various abuses, including severe restrictions on the freedom of movement, forcing Russian citizenship, refusing expert access to detainees, and arbitrary arrests. At the same time, the UN reported three cases of arbitrary detention and ill-treatment carried out by Ukraine’s SBU (secret service), and 13 such cases in the self-proclaimed republics, which the UN said were “usually” carried out by the ‘ministry of state security’ officers, known as MGB

In October 2021, the site published an article headlined “Zelensky’s claims on Donbass prove neo-Nazism in Kiev’s policy — LPR Foreign Minister.” The article claimed that Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky’s remarks that pro-Russia residents in Donbas should move to Russia show that

he is under the influence of neo-Nazis. (A part of Donbas, a region in Ukraine's east, has been controlled by Russian-backed separatists since 2014).

There is no evidence to support the claim that Zelensky supports Nazism or that Nazism has a substantial influence in Ukraine.

Radical far-right groups do exist in Ukraine and, according to a 2018 Freedom House report, they represent a “threat to the democratic development of Ukraine.” The report stated that “street activities,” which mostly involve the disruption of protests and anti-Semitic and homophobic vandalism by far-right groups, including C-14, are having a “serious impact on everyday life and societal development in Ukraine.”

However, the report also stated that far-right extremists have poor political representation in Ukraine and no plausible path to power. Indeed, in the 2014 parliamentary elections, the far-right nationalist party Svoboda received 4.7 percent of the vote. In the 2019 presidential election, the Svoboda candidate, Ruslan Koshulynskyy, won just 1.6 percent of the vote, and in the parliamentary elections, Svoboda won 2.2 percent of the vote.

For over a decade, the Russia-state media has claimed that Nazism is rampant in Ukrainian politics and society, including in the inner circle of former president Petro Poroshenko. The claim got a high-profile boost in late December 2021, when Putin said at his annual year-end news conference that President Zelensky, “like his predecessors, fell under the influence of radical elements – as they say in Ukraine, Nazis.” According to Logically, a U.K.-based technology firm that helps governments and businesses counter disinformation, articles and social media posts making such claims have sharply increased since early November 2021.

The site could not be immediately reached for comment regarding the articles cited above.

TASS also has advanced false claims about the August 2020 poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

For example, a July 2021 article titled, “OPCW report proves Germany’s link to provocation with Navalny — lower house’s commission,” claimed that the poisoning of Navalny was “anti-Russian provocation” linked to Germany.

There is no credible evidence to suggest that Germany was involved in poisoning Navalny or that Navalny's poisoning was "anti-Russian provocation," as TASS claimed. Navalny, who fell ill on an Aug. 20, 2020, flight from Tomsk, Russia, to Moscow, was poisoned with a Novichok-type of chemical nerve agent, according to multiple agencies and statements from authorities in Germany, where Navalny was treated.

Following tests conducted by the German army, which consulted with the Berlin hospital that treated Navalny, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Sept. 2, 2020: "Alexei Navalny was the victim of an attack with a chemical nerve agent of the Novichok group. This poison could be identified unequivocally in tests. So it's clear that Alexei Navalny is the victim of a crime." Novichok nerve agents are a type of chemical weapon developed by the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s.

Laboratories in France and Sweden confirmed that Navalny had been poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent, according to a Sept. 14, 2020, statement by the German federal government. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) stated on October 6, 2020 that blood and urine samples taken from Navalny showed a Novichok-type nerve agent had been used in the attack.

Video footage shown after Navalny's plane made an emergency landing in Omsk, a town in southwestern Siberia, filmed Navalny being wheeled off the plane on a gurney and taken by ambulance to a hospital. In another video taken from inside the plane, Navalny could be heard groaning as medical personnel boarded the plane.

TASS has repeatedly promoted Russia's denial of involvement in the crash of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) in July 2014. One such article, a July 2019 story titled "Investigation into MH17 crash is not objective, Kremlin reiterates," reported on the Russian government's criticism of a Dutch-led joint investigation team (JIT) that determined that the airplane was brought down by a "Buk" surface-to-air missile launcher belonging to Russia's 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade.

According to the TASS article, "In spite of the ongoing armed conflict on the ground, Kiev did not close its airspace over the Donbass region to international passenger flights.... Russian officials have repeatedly expressed doubts and distrust of the results of [the JIT's] work, pointing to the groundless nature of arguments behind the accusations and unwillingness to apply Russian conclusions in the course of the investigation."

Similarly, a February 2020 article, titled “No Buk missile systems detected near MH17 crash zone — leaked document,” reported on Dutch military documents stating that the crash “took place in the region where no Buk missile systems were deployed.” Unmentioned in the TASS article, however, is that other parties did detect a Buk missile system near the crash site. For example, open-source journalism outlet Bellingcat posted pictures and videos the day of the crash that traced the journey of a Buk missile launcher from Kursk — where Russia’s 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade is based — over the border into Ukraine, hours before MH17 was shot down.

In TASS articles about then U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s two-year investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, coverage reflected the views expressed by both U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian officials that Russia never attempted to influence the election in Donald Trump’s favor by spreading disinformation.

Such stories included “Putin calls Mueller probe’s outcome predictable: ‘the mountain gives birth to a mouse’” in April 2019, and “Kremlin slams ‘groundless’ Mueller indictment on alleged Russian meddling in US election” in February 2018. A June 2020 article, “Russia will never interfere in US elections, senior diplomat says,” reported remarks by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov stating that, “We again and again reiterate to our counterparts that we have never meddled, do not meddle and will never meddle in their domestic affairs from any deflection or angle.”

An April 2019 article, titled “Mueller report contains no evidence of Russian intervention in US election, says diplomat,” reported a Russian diplomat’s claim that “The report confirms the absence of any arguments to the effect Russia allegedly intervened in the US election.”

Thirteen Russian nationals and three entities, including Russia’s Internet Research Agency, were indicted on charges that they hacked into Democratic computers and spread disinformation on social media to influence the election. The indictments stated that the nationals were in communication with members of the Trump campaign, although the Mueller report said that “the investigation did not establish that the campaign coordinated or conspired with the Russian government in its election-interference activities.”

In reporting on the matter, TASS typically presented only the Russian perspective, omitting references to the evidence linking Russia to the hack uncovered by the Mueller probe and by

numerous U.S. Congressional investigations.

Multiple TASS articles have advanced claims that Russia's military agents were not responsible for the March 2018 poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia Skripal, in Britain.

For example, in September 2019, the site published an article titled "UK has no meaningful evidence of Russia's involvement in Skripal poisoning, embassy says," which uncritically repeated a Russian Embassy press officer's assertion that "London has no meaningful evidence of Moscow's involvement in the poisoning" of the Skripals. The article also repeated a Russian claim that "a program aimed at developing [Novichok, the nerve agent used in the poisoning] had existed neither in the Soviet Union nor in Russia."

An April 2018 article, "Russia awaits reply from London if 'Novichok' was ever produced at Porton Down," published a charge by Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, who stated: "Until now, [British chemical lab] Porton Down has failed to provide an answer to the key and very easy question: Have you ever dealt with that chemical? Have you ever produced, synthesized or researched it?"

According to the BBC, the UK government "dismissed as 'absolute nonsense' Moscow's allegations that it could have instead produced the toxin itself at the Porton Down research laboratory." In September 2018, the UK charged two men suspected of being Russian military agents with attempted murder in the Skripals' poisoning. British Prime Minister Theresa May said in a statement that "the two individuals named by the police and CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] are officers from the Russian military intelligence service."

Moreover, contrary to the Russian government's claim, the Russian and Soviet governments' research and development of Novichok was revealed in a series of articles in the early 1990s by state-employed chemist Vil Mirzayanov — for which he was tried on charges of revealing state secrets.

Because TASS has uncritically promoted the false and misleading claims of Russian government figures, NewsGuard has determined that the site publishes false information, does not gather and present information responsibly, and does not avoid misleading headlines.

The site does not typically publish opinionated content. However, because the site’s news coverage consistently advances the agenda of the Russian government, without disclosing the site’s pro-Russia agenda, NewsGuard has determined that TASS.com does not responsibly handle the separation of news from opinion.

TASS does not articulate a corrections policy and NewsGuard did not find any corrections on the site.

In July 2020, NewsGuard sent two emails to an email address listed on TASS’ Contacts page, as well as two messages to a TASS managing editor identified via LinkedIn, seeking comment on the site’s promotion of false government claims and its lack of corrections, but received no response. NewsGuard also called TASS asking to speak with an editor, and was directed to contact another email address; two emails sent to that account did not draw a response. A follow-up email in September 2021 to the address listed on the site’s Contacts page also did not receive a response.

Transparency

The site states on its About TASS page that it “is Russia’s leading state news agency” — a statement that in NewsGuard’s view is sufficient disclosure that the site is government-owned. However, this disclosure is hardly as clear as it could be; many readers might not understand that “state news agency” means a news agency owned and controlled by the government.

The Management page names the organization’s directors and editors. A general contact phone number is provided on the site’s Contacts page, as well as a Moscow street address and general email addresses for various parts of the organization.

Articles do not typically name the author, and the site does not provide biographical or contact information for its content creators.

In July 2020, there was no response to two emails sent to an email address listed on TASS’ Contacts page, as well as two messages to a TASS managing editor, seeking comment on the site’s lack of information about content creators. NewsGuard also called TASS asking to speak with an editor, and was directed to contact another email address; two emails sent to this account went unanswered. A follow-up email in September 2021 also did not draw a response.

Advertisements are distinguishable from editorial content.

History

According to its History page, TASS originated in 1904 as the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency, at the instigation of the Russian Empire's Finance, Interior, and Foreign Ministries, and with the approval of the Empire's last Tsar, Nicholas II.

The organization became the Petrograd Telegraph Agency in 1914, following the renaming of St. Petersburg. In 1917, it was declared the central government information agency by the new Bolshevik government, less than a month after its building was seized from the provisional government by revolutionary Baltic Fleet seamen. The agency was named the Russian Telegraph Agency, or ROSTA, from 1918 until 1925, when its name changed once more to the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union, or TASS. The government assigned TASS the exclusive right both to distribute Soviet information outside the Soviet Union and to distribute foreign information within it.

In 1992, following the fall of the Soviet Union, the organization was renamed the Information Telegraph Agency of Russia, or ITAR-TASS, and was rebranded TASS once again in 2014.

TASS.com was created in 1993.

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Sources

Ownership and Financing

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Transparency

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