

[DE] Proceedings opened against RT for broadcasting without a licence

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The dispute over the distribution of the RT DE television channel in Germany is threatening to become another area of conflict in what has, for many years, been an increasingly tense relationship between the Russian Federation and Germany.

On 16 December 2021, RT (previously known as Russia Today) launched RT DE, a new live German-language channel. However, it did not have a German broadcasting licence for the channel, but instead used a licence issued in Serbia. A previous attempt by the broadcaster to obtain a licence from Luxembourg had failed. However, since the broadcaster does not hold a German licence, the *Medienanstalt Berlin-Brandenburg* (Berlin-Brandenburg state media authority) opened proceedings against RT DE.

The channel was initially available in Germany online and via satellite. However, shortly after its launch, a new RT DE YouTube channel was closed down because the video-sharing platform had banned RT's German-language service a few weeks earlier. It was closed down after the broadcaster ignored a temporary ban, imposed after YouTube found that RT DE had broadcast Covid-related misinformation.

Satellite operator Eutelsat suspended satellite distribution of RT DE on 22 December 2021.

On the same day, the Russian ambassador in Germany, Sergey Nechaev, told journalists that he was “very concerned about reports that the satellite signal transmission of the Russian German-language TV channel RT DE, which began broadcasting on 16 December 2021, has ended at the request of the German media regulator. We state with regret that RT DE remains under constant pressure in Germany in order to prevent, or make it as difficult as possible for, RT DE to start broadcasting to a German audience. The attempts to eliminate a strong competitor in the media field and restrict access to an alternative, and at the same time extremely professional, point of view on world events are clearly discordant with statements about the inadmissibility of censorship and protection of freedom of speech, press freedoms and the right to information.”

The following day, 23 December 2021, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov was interviewed on the subject by the Russian RT channel and put the hostilities

in a broader context: “The Foreign Ministry is keeping a close eye on the environment in which Russian journalists work abroad, since discrimination against them has been all too common. RT and Sputnik have yet to be accredited by the Elysée Palace. Just a few days ago, President Vladimir Putin talked to his French counterpart, Emmanuel Macron, on the phone, and during the conversation he pointed out this fact, expressing hope that our French colleagues would do everything to enable the Russian media, including RT, to operate in France in the same journalist-friendly environment as French journalists enjoy in Russia. We would like the same principle to apply to RT in Germany and to any other Russian media outlet facing discrimination abroad. I believe that what happened in Germany was outrageous. From the outset, the German authorities went to great lengths to generate negative publicity about the channel, targeting the general public, as well as officials, even though some officials did try to distance themselves from what the German “regulator” was doing. It all started with attempts to block banking services, after which they refused to register the channel and prevented Luxembourg from doing so. Our colleagues in Serbia have been able to register the German-language RT channel as per the European Convention on Transfrontier Television, to which Germany is a party and must abide by its provisions. By all accounts, they will now try to shift the blame to social networks like YouTube, pretending that it was their initiative and that they are guided by their own in-house “criteria,” while the German state has nothing to do with this. This is not the way things are. The German state must be involved, since Germany has undertaken to ensure freedom of information and assumed these commitments. It is not YouTube who is to blame but the state on whose territory arbitrary actions of this kind take place. We have been witnessing discrimination against the Russian media for many years now. Quite often, we have been tempted to respond in kind, in a tit-for-tat manner. However, until recently there was a prevailing belief that we did not want to go along the same path of “strangling” the press and the media, following in the footsteps of our Western partners. That said, just as with efforts to ensure Russia’s security, this patience has its limits. I cannot rule out that this unacceptable situation will persist, leaving us with no other choice but to respond.”

In an interview with the German Press Agency on 2 January 2022, the Russian ambassador in Germany responded to the question of whether the removal of RT DE by Eutelsat would have consequences for the German media in Russia. “There will certainly be a reaction from the Russian side,” he said. “I’m not an Oracle from Delphi, but there are several possibilities. There are so many German journalists in Russia. All of these journalists feel comfortable in the Russian media market. And we don’t really want a conflict. We just want our station in Germany to have the same rights and opportunities and to be able to work in peace.” When asked whether Deutsche Welle, the German international broadcaster, might be affected in Russia, Nechaev replied: “There is no automatism. I don’t want to anticipate anything. I still hope that there is no more pressure on RT in Germany.”

In response to this interview, the *Deutscher Journalisten-Verband* (German Federation of Journalists – DJV) urged German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock to call on the Russian ambassador in Berlin to make it clear that threats against German journalists working in Russia are unacceptable. “Such a blatant threat cannot go unanswered. The foreign minister must finally send a clear message to Russia,” demanded DJV president Frank Überall. Referring to a law recently adopted in Russia requiring foreign journalists to undergo medical examinations, Überall stressed that the harassment of colleagues working in Russia was increasing all the time.

***Kommentar des Botschafters der Russischen Föderation in Deutschland
Sergej Netschajew für die Schweriner Volkszeitung***

<https://russische-botschaft.ru/de/2021/12/20/kommentar-des-botschafters-der-russischen-foederation-in-deutschland-sergej-netschajew-fuer-die-schweriner-volkszeitung/>

Comment of Sergey Nechaev, Russian ambassador in Germany, for the Schweriner Volkszeitung

Extract from the foreign minister Sergey Lavrov's interview with RT television channel, Moscow

<https://russische-botschaft.ru/de/2021/12/23/extract-from-the-foreign-minister-sergey-lavrovs-interview-with-rt-television-channel-moscow/>

Pressemitteilung des Deutschen Journalisten-Verbands, Gewerkschaft der Journalistinnen und Journalisten

<https://www.djv.de/startseite/service/news-kalender/detail/news-haende-weg>

Press release of the German Federation of Journalists

