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Enclosed information material is submitted by the Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company

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Company

## Information on JTI project

A little more than a year ago (April 2018) the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) was launched in Paris by the Reporters without Borders, Agence France-Presse, Global Editors Network and the EBU. We were informed on that by a circular from Noel Curran, the EBU General Director, in late April last year. The initiative was launched with the good intention “to counter online disinformation and to promote journalism that is compliant with the consistent standards in terms of trust and transparency in the media functioning”. The standards which were yet to be elaborated at the JTI workshops and then written down in the Workshop Agreement of the European Centre of Standardization. Presumably, the participants should have developed an elaborate set of basic criteria and trust indicators, the compliancy to which would provide the content consumers (citizens, advertisers, distributors, platforms and regulators) with an opportunity to make perceived decisions when choosing the media. “All these beneficiaries will be involved in the Initiative, though the major criteria should be set exclusively by us – journalists. It is with this aim that we invite you to participate in this project”. Based on the conditions of inclusiveness, transparency, free will – the key principles of participation in the project.

Regretfully, from the first workshop onwards practicing journalists (as well as the EBU Members) could be counted on the fingers of one hand. In our view the leading role in the JTI activities should have been played by the media representatives (practicing journalists) who provide the media content to be aired or published on a regular basis. In reality, the majority of workshop participants are partially or distantly related to journalism (companies dealing with online disinformation, regulators, IT-companies, representatives of the Internet platforms, even funds and firms close to the United States Department of State and other US governmental structures).

So, the idea behind the JTI is to provide a “set” of indicators and criteria, which, if matched, would allow mass media outlets (no matter a “one-man” or huge international companies) to complete the certification procedure successfully, and thus to be acknowledged as a trustworthy news source. Basically, this certification process will allow one to identify a particular news source as either a “friend” or a “foe”. The “friendly” media will not only be trusted, but also promoted in every possible way as trustworthy information sources. However, that is not all. The friendly media will be recommended to advertisement companies as information sources that deserve public trust. This will lead to the redistribution in the advertising funds’ allocation. Ultimately, the friendly media will get the financing.

I would like to quote here the Secretary General of Reporters without Borders Christophe Deloire, who speaking at the international conference

“Democracies facing the manipulation of information” in April (Conférence sur "Les démocraties face aux manipulations de l'information" - 4 avril 2018)

(unofficial translation, please, refer to the original video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk-1A30o94&feature=youtu.be> )

*“In order to bring the (planned) to life, we should interest the media. We could interest the media in getting the certification by providing them with quality markings as well as algorithmic advantages, which means the opportunity to move up in the search results list of the search engines. This means they will be more often noticed and thus the advertising revenues will ultimately grow. It would then be possible to make the advertisers invest into the same trustworthy media. We are trying to put an end to the situation in which the bad information edges out the good information”.*

For us there is an exact and clear term for that - the so-called “POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION”.

Together with Drafting Groups a Technical Task Force was set up. Its primary goal was to elaborate a questionnaire based on suggested standards and transfer the questioning results into algorithms in machine readable format. IT companies from both the US and the UK joined their forces working in the group. We suggested that IT experts from Russia should join the Task Force to combine efforts in the search for best practices. However, an uncompromising decision was made by the organizers not to let IT specialists from the Russian Federation to be involved in the project. That was surprising if not astonishing to us because from the very start the JTI was proclaimed as a fully open and a transparent project. Moreover, the Task Force was dissolved with no clear results of its more than a year activity. We asked the organisers to explain why, but our queries were completely ignored.

If the Technical Task Force was dissolved, one cannot help but wonder how will the technical side of the project be managed further on, including the elaboration of the required algorithm and the principles of its functioning.

It is unclear who is going to be responsible for analysis of the questionnaire results and construction of the required algorithm. Is there any specific organisation?

It is absolutely incomprehensible how the data are going to be processed and stored, how big is the threat of potential distortion of the results, as well as of unauthorised interference in the process.

What we have now? The Draft of standards and the questionnaire based on it with more than 200 questions. Some of the questions are particularly sensitive and can be considered a potential threat for the media safety, safety of the information sources, as well as of journalists working on the material. In particular, these questionnaires require full online disclosure of the contact information not only for

the whole production staff, starting from the news reporters and the news editor to the media CEO, but also for the similar data for the information sources to be provided as well. Another group of questions infers the disclosure of the financial and economic indexes of the media, including the funding sources. *We wonder how the latter can guarantee transparency, impartiality of trustworthy and ethical journalism and prevent different fakes, distortions, blackmail and damaging information appear in publications?*

Now, the final draft has been passed to the grass-roots organisations for a trial run. Surprisingly, the first to be chosen by the organisers were not the media organisations, as one would expect. The draft has been passed on to a Canadian charity fund, an Italian advertising agency and a structure of the World Bank. And what about the media, you might ask? After all, it should be a media outlet which should understand and make decisions on the major principles of the JTI functioning.

The big question is still there: how can the compliancy to the criteria and the certification procedure in their present form strengthen public trust in the media, and exclude the spread of disinformation? However, the true answer has been already provided. Without even engaging us in the decision-making?

Quote from Christophe's speech.

(ibid.) 00.59.13

*Of course, we could teach people to become literate in the areas of information and media, and while such education is apparently of fundamental importance, it also has a drawback: when a person, whatever level of his or her information literacy was, faces a flood of fake or distorted information, this information will in one way or another harm this person. I will provide you with a single example: I have performed a little random search, and this was the only such experiment that I have made while preparing for this talk, so I wrote a word Guta in the search engine, and the first four suggestions made by the search engine (and it was a quite well-known search engine) were the following: in the first line was a French daily edition, then – Sputnik, then in the third line – Sputnik, and in the fourth line it was Sputnik again...*

In our view, the implementation of the Initiative in its current form will lead to the alteration of the European media map, creation of new virtual boundaries, changes to the advertising market, the virtual isolation of the European information space and, as a result, to splitting of the European journalistic community. A new “Berlin Wall” will appear. This time constructed by the West, not the East. These conclusions have been supported by the members of the Russian Union of Journalists, which includes 100 000 journalists from various regions of the Russian Federation (please, see the attached **Annex 1** with the Union's expert remarks).

## **Annex 1.**

### **The Expert's Review of the "Journalism Trust Initiative" (JTI)**

#### **The Union of Journalists of Russia**

According to our data, the implementation of the JTI standards the way they are stated in the working documents imposes a considerable restriction on mass media within the criteria established by the authors of the initiative and thus directly effects the concept of freedom of mass media. The point of special concern is that the authors of the initiative intend to recommend it for general use not only in Europe but also worldwide. Below we would like to express our doubts in the advisability of implementing this initiative:

1. The international trade union journalist movement that includes the Russian segment (the Union of Journalists of Russia has been a full-fledged member of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) for many years) treats negatively the initiatives that do not involve the professional community/professional journalist organizations. It should be noted that the IFJ has not participated and has no intention to participate in the discussion of the initiative.
2. The certification based of the proposed criteria in fact could split mass media into insiders and outsiders. Besides the proposed criteria do not answer directly the question why the compliance with these criteria is a positive factor that allows to put mass media on the list of the so-called "insiders".
3. The results of the certification proposed to advertisers practically undermine the right to free competition and may shortly lead to automatic liquidation of a number of mass media following the principle of financial underperformance. This would evidently provoke job losses and damage professional and social status of journalists, which contradicts the statutory goals of the Union of Journalists of Russia.
4. The disclosure of the information stated in the standards of "identity and transparency" of mass media in fact gives the authors of the initiative a free access to all personal data of owners, managers and employees of mass media including freelancers, registration and financial data of mass media and other data, which will certainly contravene the legislation of some countries engaged in the initiative.
5. Publishing the list of managing principles that make the basis of everyday work of the editors' office and may classify a mass medium as an outsider in our opinion is nothing but an act of censorship prohibited by the main Law of the Russian Federation.

6. The “external control” over the correction of mistakes and discrepancies in mass media publications is also a direct violation of a number of legislative acts which leads to open external censorship of mass media.

Judging from the abovementioned and some other aspects of the initiative, we think that it has considerable and serious divergences with historical principles of free journalism. The Union of Journalists of Russia deems it inappropriate to participate as an observer in further discussion of the Journalism Trust Initiative.

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