

Russian State-Run News Agency Triggers Outcry With OSCE Kerfuffle

By [Allison Quinn](#)

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The  Moscow Times

As the elections in the separatist stronghold of Donetsk got under way Sunday, some Western journalists were sounding the alarm over an erroneous Russian state-run media report on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's role in monitoring the vote.

State-run news agency RIA Novosti reported a day ahead of the vote on its English-language website that the OSCE had visited Donetsk to inspect polling stations and voter registration booths.

Citing a correspondent on the ground in Donetsk, the report, published Saturday, said the OSCE monitors had inspected the city's School No. 1, where voting was set to be held.

The OSCE almost immediately issued a denial, however, writing on its official Twitter feed that it had no monitors in Donetsk. The denial came from the secretary-general of the OSCE, Lamberto Zannier.

The organization was likely quick to call malarkey on the false report because the West had unequivocally condemned the elections on the eve of the vote, with both the U.S. administration and the United Nations refusing to recognize its legitimacy.

As many Western journalists noted, having OSCE observers at the vote would have granted the election a degree of legitimacy.

An editor at RIA Novosti, Dmitry Gornostaev, dismissed speculation in the Western press that the error had somehow been made intentionally.

"We're preparing a story that is about to appear on our newswire later tonight explaining the situation," he told The Moscow Times three days after the report was initially published. At the time of publication Tuesday evening, the original report remained on RIA Novosti's website.

"I wonder only what are the grounds for alleging that RIA has done something [like this] intentionally? We report the facts only and never try to mislead our readers — which runs counter to our principles and the style guide," Gornostaev said.

Speculation of foul play gained momentum as it became clear that the "international observers" cited by Russian media came not from the OSCE but from an entirely different organization, a newly minted group made up of far-right European politicians: the Agency for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The organization with a suspiciously similar acronym, ASCE, announced its founding at a press conference in Donetsk the night before the elections, according to Canada's Globe and Mail.

The group's frontman, Ewald Stadler, is a far-right Austrian politician who was ejected from the Alliance for the Future of Austria and resigned from the Freedom Party of Austria. Stadler had trouble remembering whether the group was an "agency" or "association" during the recent press conference, according to The Globe and Mail.

A quick Google search of Stadler reveals that he is renowned among U.S.-based neo-Nazis for having delivered "the most racist speech ever" in a European parliament in 2010, according to the extremist website Stormfront.org.

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