

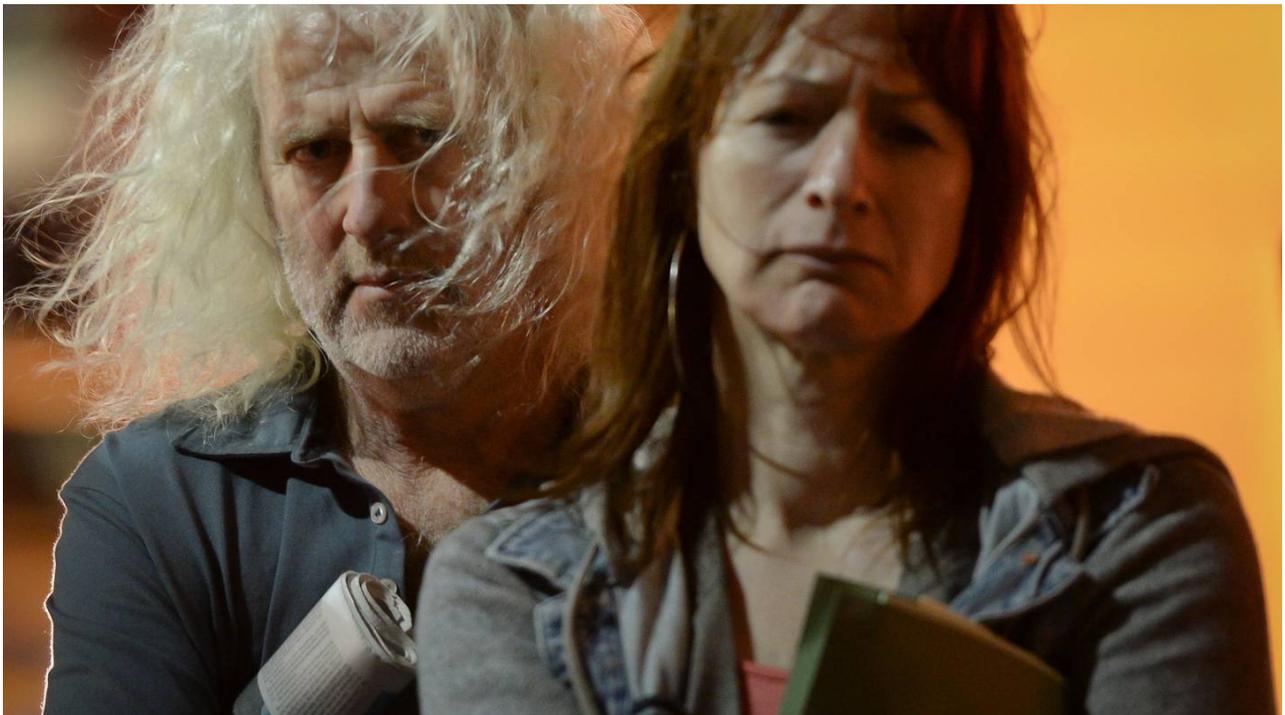
# How Clare Daly and Mick Wallace became stars of authoritarian state media

**IT** [irishtimes.com/news/world/how-clare-daly-and-mick-wallace-became-stars-of-authoritarian-state-media-1.4854028](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/how-clare-daly-and-mick-wallace-became-stars-of-authoritarian-state-media-1.4854028)

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World

## A new Irish Times investigation shows the MEPs' outsized profile in regime-controlled media



Mick Wallace and Clare Daly have become staples of state-controlled media in the Russian, Chinese, and Arabic language. File photograph: Artur Widak/NurPhoto via Getty Images



Naomi O'Leary

Sat Apr 16 2022 - 06:00

When Dublin MEP Clare Daly stood up to denounce sanctions on Russia last week in the European Parliament and say that the EU's response makes her "absolutely sick", within a day the clip was being played on Russian state television.

The speech was broadcast on the country's two most popular channels, the state-controlled Rossiya-1 and Channel One, where a presenter and a guest discussed it as evidence that western politicians were coming around to the Kremlin point of view on the Ukraine invasion.

"This is a very important precedent which suggests that many politicians in Europe don't want to participate in this information campaign which demonises our country," remarked the guest, Nikita Danyuk of a Russian strategic studies institute.

STOP KILLING DONBASS CHILDREN! Сегодня в Европарламенте было жарко! Дебаты по ситуации на Украине длились почти три...

Posted by [Tatjana Ždanoka](#) on [Wednesday, February 16, 2022](#)

It's an example of how Daly and her close political ally Mick Wallace have become staples of state-controlled media in the Russian, Chinese, and Arabic languages since they were elected to the European Parliament, coverage in which they are presented as important international figures who confirm regime positions.

A 10-month investigation by The Irish Times to track the international footprint of the two MEPs has revealed their outsized profile in the state-controlled media operations of various authoritarian regimes.

'Those two Irish people are absolutely involved on the wrong side of history,' said one Lithuanian MEP

While their activities may not always make waves in their own home constituencies of Dublin and Ireland South, in the past year their mere tweets have repeatedly made headlines internationally, from Russia Today to Iranian state news.

Their speeches have gone viral multiple times in China, boosted by Chinese government officials: since the invasion of Ukraine, speeches by Daly in the European Parliament have been posted at least four times by official Chinese foreign ministry accounts on Twitter.

Since January 2021 the two have received far more coverage in Chinese-language media than Ireland's top political leaders or even Irish celebrities and sports stars like Conor McGregor and Rory McIlroy, according to news database LexisNexis, becoming so familiar to viewers that Wallace was given a nickname in Chinese: "Golden Lion King."

Last month the two appeared in a very different place: in Lithuania, where they travelled to meet and speak in support of a man convicted of spying for Russia – even appearing on his chat show.

## Supporting the spy

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In November 2021, the two travelled to Lithuania to join a handful of people to protest in support of Algirdas Paleckis, a former Lithuanian politician who is appealing a conviction of spying for Russia.

The small demonstration and the MEPs' attendance was covered by Russian state-controlled Sputnik news and by the pro-Kremlin EADaily and RusDnepr sites, which present Paleckis as a dissident persecuted by the West.

The scion of a well-known political family whose grandfather is associated with the induction of Lithuania into the Soviet Union, Paleckis was once a mainstream MP who became increasingly isolated in his political views over time and is known as a critic of Lithuania's membership of the European Union and Nato.

His quick repayment of a mortgage raised the suspicion of authorities, and, following an investigation, in July Paleckis was convicted of collecting information for Russian intelligence services in return for money and other benefits, after a businessman who was also on trial pleaded guilty and turned witness against him, Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT reported.

An attempt to reach Paleckis for comment was not answered, but he has denied wrongdoing and maintained he was gathering information as part of a journalistic investigation.



Clare Daly supports Algirdas Paleckis at his court appeal, March 15th, 2022. Videograb: YouTube

Three weeks into the invasion of Ukraine, on March 16th Daly and Wallace returned to Lithuania to attend court as Paleckis's appeal was being heard.

In a video distributed by fringe pro-Kremlin Lithuanian media, Daly and Wallace stood alongside the convicted spy, making statements condemning the conviction.

Daly called the case “frightening” and said there had been no evidence, while Wallace questioned whether Lithuania was following the rule of law.

The Irish MEPs also joined Paleckis as guests on a YouTube chat show that he hosts. On the show, Daly told Paleckis his case was “reminiscent of the worst of times in Northern Ireland” and “part of a bigger clampdown on differing views and dissenting voices”.

“What is being unleashed is a really dangerous Russiaphobia, which was under way anyway, but it’s now accelerating and Russian children are being targeted in European communities,” she added.

As the Lithuanian translated for his viewers, Wallace told Paleckis that “this conflict in Ukraine is being used to silence dissent”.

“If we want peace, we should dissolve Nato,” Wallace said.

Lithuanian politicians contacted by The Irish Times were surprised to hear that Wallace and Daly even knew about the case, which they described as a marginal event with little public purchase even within Lithuania.

“It’s such a local story, with no meaning for the average Irish man on the street. It’s like a traffic accident that happened in a province of the Democratic Republic of [the] Congo, ” marvelled Petras Austrevicius, a liberal Lithuanian MEP.

“Those two Irish people are absolutely involved on the wrong side of history,” he added. “Keep them in Ireland.”

How did the case come to their attention?

## **Ally MEP**

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A likely clue is an MEP from Latvia, Tatjana Zdanoka, who Daly and Wallace have joined for political events and demonstrations four times since September.

At the time of Latvia’s struggle for independence Zdanoka advocated for it remaining in the Soviet Union. She has been banned from running for national office on the grounds that she was a member of the Communist Party of Latvia after the country declared independence, at a time when the Latvian state considers the party to have backed an attempted Soviet coup to overthrow the new government.

Zdanoka unsuccessfully challenged this ban in the European Court of Human Rights, but first won election to the European Parliament in 2004, backed by a support base in Latvia’s ethnic Russian minority, which constitutes about one-quarter of its population.

In September, Zdanoka's Latvian Russian Union issued a statement in Russian to say Daly and Wallace had taken part in an online seminar about "politically motivated persecution in the Baltic states", providing sympathetic statements from the Irish MEPs on the issue. Wallace thanked Zdanoka for bringing the Paleckis case to his attention, the statement read.

When they first visited Lithuania to take part in the pro-Paleckis demonstration in November, Zdanoka was at their side, as she was again when they returned for his March court hearing.

Eight days before Russia invaded Ukraine, Daly and Wallace joined the Latvian MEP for a protest again.

The three donned T-shirts bearing the slogan "stop killing Donbas children", and posed together in the European Parliament for photographs shared on Zdanoka's Facebook page.

The accusation that Ukrainian forces have killed children in the eastern region has been a central part of Moscow's justification for invading its neighbour, reflected in the slogan "for the children", which was written on a Russian missile used to strike Ukraine's Kramatorsk train station in a recent attack that killed dozens of evacuating civilians.

Zdanoka's protest about the issue was widely covered in pro-Kremlin media, particularly as she was reprimanded for breaking parliamentary rules that day for holding up a related poster in the EU chamber. She did not respond to a request for comment.

Nils Usakovs, a senior Latvian Social Democrat politician who is the former mayor of Riga, told The Irish Times it was not correct to describe his fellow MEP Zdanoka as "pro-Russian". Rather, she represents a particular subsection of the ethnic Russian electorate, he explained.

"I myself am ethnic Russian, and the majority of my voters come from the Russian-speaking community," Usakovs said. "She's regarded as a representative of the Russian Federation, of the Kremlin."

Usakovs said he could understand the political activities of Zdanoka because they reflected her electorate. But the actions of Wallace and Daly puzzled him.

"She has a certain amount of Russian-speaking voters who elect her. You may like it, you may not, but she acts rationally because it's about her voters," Usakovs said.

"But I'm not sure that you've got that many pro-Russian-minded voters in Ireland. So for me, I don't really understand the logic of these MEPs. But everything I've heard from these MEPs, in committees, in the hemicycle, is the same as what you hear from Zdanoka."

In January, Wallace criticised Nato expansion in an interview he gave to Belarus state television, which is a propaganda operation for the dictator and isolated Kremlin ally Alexander Lukashenko.

## **Golden Lion King**

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Further east, Mick Wallace's rising prominence in Chinese-language media has been enough to win him the Chinese-language nickname Golden Lion King.

The nickname was bestowed by Chinese social media users "because he has spoken up for China many times", Sina news reported in February.

Such nicknames are often given to prominent figures such as sportspeople, and they indicate familiarity and often affection.

"Golden Lion King" refers to Wallace's hair, and to an old martial arts master with similarly flowing locks from a well-known book and television series, remembered for coming to the fierce defence of the protagonist at key moments. A later profile of Wallace reported a variation on the nickname: "Silver Lion King."

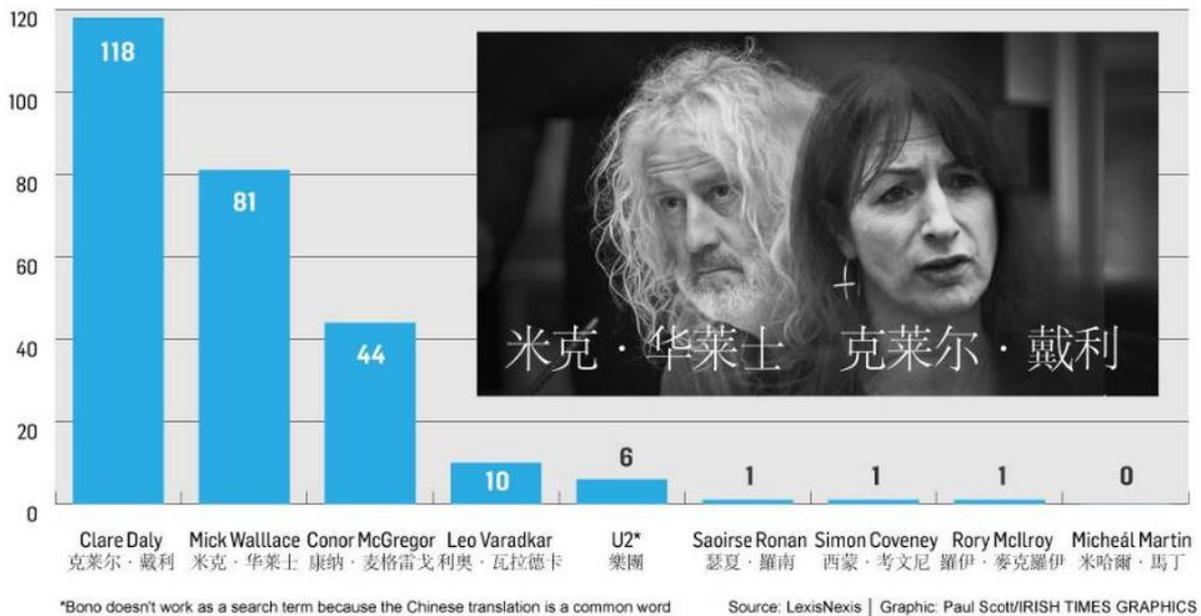
As Wallace's prominence grew this spring, Chen Weihua, the Brussels bureau chief of Chinese Communist Party newspaper China Daily, got in touch to organise an interview with him, and the two met in the MEP's office.

"I actually joked with Mick Wallace, I said: 'You are famous in China!'" Weihua recalled to The Irish Times, adding that Wallace had reached a level of fame there that was rare for most western politicians, without ever having visited the country.

"Wallace really speaks with a voice that many Chinese feel speaks on their behalf," he explained. The article introduced Wallace as the man whose tweets and speeches "have been widely reported by Chinese news outlets and social media" even though he has "never been to China".

Indeed, data suggests the media footprint of Daly and Wallace in China is coming to exceed that of Ireland's most famous celebrity exports.

Lexis Nexis news hits in Chinese since 01/01/2021



## More news hits than Conor McGregor

Measuring mentions of Wallace and Daly compared with mentions of other prominent Irish figures in Chinese-language news reveals they may be becoming Ireland's most prominent figures in the country.

Since January 2021, Daly has been mentioned in 118 Chinese-language news items picked up by LexisNexis, and Mick Wallace in 81.

In comparison, globally famous MMA fighter Conor McGregor had 44 news hits in Chinese in the same period, Bono about six, and Saoirse Ronan and Rory McIlroy one each.

Among political figures, Leo Varadkar had 10, Simon Coveney one, and Taoiseach Micheál Martin zero.

Mick Wallace has been mentioned 29 times since February 2021 by China Youth Daily alone – the official newspaper of the Communist Youth League of China – while Daly was the subject of five such articles.

Speeches by both MEPs with Chinese subtitles have gone viral in China various times and both have given various interviews to Chinese state media.

Particularly popular were an interview of Daly's to state newspaper Global Times in which she said that "I don't see China as the threat at all", and a speech in which she said the EU should abandon its alliance with the US.

A tweet by Wallace in which he declared that "Taiwan is part of China" made headlines, as did an address in which he said "China has not bombed anyone in the last 40 years".

Boosts by the Chinese government itself don't hurt. Since the invasion of Ukraine, clips of Daly's speeches in parliament criticising the western response to the war have been posted no less than four times by spokespeople of China's foreign ministry on Twitter.

### **Promoted by Syria's ministry of information**

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Beijing is not the only government that has cited an Irish MEP in its communications.

In April 2021, Syria's ministry of information issued a release detailing statements by Wallace and Daly, describing them as "western voices debunking the false allegations" of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

It followed a session in the European Parliament in which Daly and Wallace had challenged the head of the Hague-based organisation.

The same comments by Daly were reported by the Syrian state news agency, as well as the party newspaper of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, in news articles to say that the OPCW had lost credibility and could not be trusted regarding a chemical weapons attack on civilians of which the Syrian regime was accused by the OPCW.

Wallace subsequently visited Syria, sharing more statements that chimed with those of the regime, in social media posts from Damascus.

At the time of the Daly and Wallace visit, there was already a lot of evidence against the PMF

Since the invasion of Ukraine various speeches by Daly – criticising sanctions on Russia, accusing the West of hypocrisy, and blaming Nato – have made news in Arabic, including on the Arabic channel of Chinese state television.

The Arabic-language editions of Russian state media have also covered the various activities of Daly and Wallace for Middle Eastern audiences, from Daly's criticism of Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny as a "racist", to the MEPs' opposition to the European Parliament's motion condemning the invasion of Ukraine.

But perhaps most popular of all in the Middle East has been the two MEPs' praise of Qassem Soleimani, who led the overseas and clandestine operations of Iran through its Quds Force before he was killed by a United States drone strike in 2020.

### **Iran-backed militias**

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Wallace made the news in Iran and Iraq in December when he retweeted a post by Iran's embassy to the EU commemorating "the second anniversary of the martyrdom" of Soleimani, while adding his own words of praise of the general and criticism of the US.

The same happened a week later when Daly shared a similar tweet in remembrance of Soleimani, and of a commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) who was killed in the same strike.

“Their heroic struggles against terrorism will never be forgotten,” she wrote. “Their legacy will prevail.”

It was a visit of the two to the headquarters of the PMF, or Hashed al-Shaabi, in Iraq in April 2021 that raised concerns among some political colleagues that their views were becoming increasingly fringe.

In a promotional video published at the time by the PMF, an umbrella group of militias believed to be backed by Iran, Daly said the group “upholds international law” and praised its “egalitarian nature” and “inclusiveness”.

Last month, Human Rights Watch released an 86-page report describing 39 cases in which the NGO had evidence that PMF militia members attacked Iraqi civilians who they perceived to be LGBT, including cases of disappearances, kidnapping, torture, burning, death threats, and rape.

Rasha Younes, the NGO’s LGBT rights researcher, said the evidence had been painstaking to compile because victims were terrified to come forward due to the level of power and control that the militias wield in Iraqi society.

“The Popular Mobilisation Forces are actually under the prime minister’s control since 2016, so they are de facto state actors,” Younes explained.

Prominent foreigners who support regime points of view are highly valued by authoritarian regimes, analysts say

The militias, who operate checkpoints that civilians must pass through across Iraq, take their role to be policing social order and morality, and target people who they perceive to be LGBT as a scapegoat. Often, those picked out are teenagers with painted nails or an adventurous hairstyle, who are perceived as deviant, Younes said. “It really depends on who they encounter” at the checkpoint, Younes added.

Khadija, a 31-year-old transgender woman, told the NGO that men who identified themselves as PMF found her at home in Baghdad, doused her with gasoline, and set her on fire.

Anwar, a 21-year-old gay man, said he had been imprisoned for 10 days by PMF members, electrocuted and sexually tortured.

Rania, a 21-year-old transgender woman, said that after weeks of death threats PMF members kidnapped her on her way to university, and raped her.

The 39 cases are those in which the NGO has evidence of a PMF link, such as threatening messages sent to victims in which the attackers identified themselves. The report also documented multiple cases of LGBT people who had been murdered or disappeared.

At the time of the Daly and Wallace visit, there was already a lot of evidence indicating that PMF forces had been assassinating protesters and activists who were demonstrating against the government, Younes said.

“It is definitely unacceptable for any . . . official to praise these groups who are involved in the most heinous crimes against individuals, against ordinary people,” she said.

### **Request to bar reporter from parliament**

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Daly did not respond when approached for comment about the contents of this article outside the voting chamber of the European Parliament. When asked specifically whether she stood by her praise of the PMF, she did not respond, and walked away.

Wallace said “No thanks”, and subsequently remained silent other than to occasionally laugh in response to questions.

The MEPs then called security and requested the Irish Times reporter be barred from European Parliament, this newspaper was informed. The reporter currently remains accredited with access to the parliament.

The two MEPs did not respond to follow-up calls and emails.

Daly and Wallace have a growing reputation among Irish journalists as combative figures to cover, who use complaints and the implied threat of legal action to quash reporting.

This week the MEPs both separately lodged High Court proceedings against the broadcaster RTÉ concerning alleged defamation. The details of what it regards have not been released.

A report on RTÉ’s Drivetime programme about their activities in the European Parliament was pulled from public access following a complaint last year.

### **What’s going on?**

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Prominent foreigners who support regime points of view are highly valued by authoritarian regimes for internal propaganda purposes, analysts of Russian and Chinese media told The Irish Times.

It is difficult for fringe figures to gain prominence in authoritarian societies that enforce conformity. So to an audience within such a country, someone with an important title like Member of the European Parliament is assumed to represent influential and authoritative views.

"It's impressive when they are watching TV and see a foreign politician and they are repeating these narratives of propaganda – it's impressive for a Russian audience," said Viktor Denisenko, an associate professor at Vilnius University specialising in media coverage.

“They do not know how popular these politicians are in their own countries. They are presented as very important.”

Wallace and Daly are among various western figures who get featured on Russian and Chinese state media. In Russia, the Fox News host Tucker Carlson is particularly popular for his criticisms of Nato and view that Russia is acting in self-defence in Ukraine, a view widely dismissed in the West. (A memo from the Kremlin's information department telling friendly Russian media outlets to feature him "as much as possible" was leaked to the US magazine Mother Jones. )

Beijing highly appreciates praise from abroad and pays online influencers to post pro-China content, according to investigations by the London Times and New York Times, something the Chinese government denies. There is no suggestion that has happened in the case of Wallace and Daly.

The value of Daly and Wallace for the Chinese government lies in their European Parliament titles rather than the fact that they are Irish, according to Wu Min Hsuan, CEO of Taiwan-based nonprofit organisation Doublethink Lab, which monitors Chinese state media.

“I personally don’t think that they are quoting those people because they are Irish. The most important [thing] is that they are a European Union MP. If you look, every quotation is about the European Union. They try to use this voice to depict an alternative universe within China where even the West doesn’t agree with [what US president Joe] Biden or Nato are doing,” he said.

“Personally, I think it’s very effective.”

The most effective kind of advocate for such views is not someone who is paid to do it, but someone who is genuinely ideologically committed to those beliefs, analysts said.

# New documents reveal top-level UN policy setting soft language on Ukraine

**IT** [irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/new-documents-reveal-top-level-un-policy-setting-soft-language-on-ukraine-1.4822376](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/new-documents-reveal-top-level-un-policy-setting-soft-language-on-ukraine-1.4822376)



Newly arrived refugees are assisted by volunteers to board a train bound for Krakow just after crossing the border into Poland from Ukraine. Photograph: Louisa Gouliamaki/AFP via Getty

Naomi O'Leary, Europe Correspondent

Wed Mar 9 2022 - 13:49

Fresh documents from within the United Nations have shown that a decision to avoid the word "invasion" and instruct staff to moderate their language around the war in Ukraine was passed down from the top soon after Moscow sent its army to attempt to seize control of Ukraine.

As **revealed by The Irish Times**, on Monday the UN's Department of Global Communications emailed a staff mailing list to instruct employees not to use "war" or "invasion" in regard to Ukraine, and to use "conflict" or "military offensive" instead.

This order was hastily reversed on Tuesday morning Brussels time as fresh guidance was issued UN-wide, according to a further internal email seen by The Irish Times, while a spokesman for the organisation denied that the original email represented the organisation's "official position".

However, staff within the UN have said that the Monday email was just the latest and most explicit instruction in a series urging them to moderate their words about the invasion or not to mention it, as the international organisation struggles to balance

political sensitivities at a time when powerful member state Russia is forcefully cracking down on those who describe its war of aggression as such at home.

Emails to staff seen by The Irish Times showed senior officials and communications staff moved quickly to try to control how staff described the invasion on social media.

In addition, “key messages” drawn up and provided to senior staff and spokespeople to instruct them as to what phrases to use when speaking to media included the terms “conflict” and “military offensive” and did not use “war” or “invasion”, according to documents from February 26th and March 6th.

These phrases were drawn up by a crisis communications team within the United Nations Communications Group, a body that co-ordinates communication for the entire global organisation, before being distributed to branches of the UN, the documents showed.

The decision not to use the word “invasion” came from the very top, according to an email from a senior official in the Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy United Nations Development Programme in New York that instructed colleagues how to communicate on February 25th.

“The SG has decided to use the phrase ‘military operations’ (not invasion or incursion),” the email read, using an abbreviation to refer to the UN’s secretary general António Guterres and his office (SG).

Asked for comment, spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said: “From the first moment of this war, the secretary-general has been unequivocal. And every day since his focus has been stopping the war, saving civilians and getting into Ukraine desperately needed life-saving humanitarian aid.”

He pointed to statements by Mr Guterres in which the UN chief said: “President Putin, stop your troops from attacking Ukraine,” and “In the name of humanity do not allow to start in Europe what could be the worst war since the beginning of the century.”

## **The context**

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Staff communications are tightly regulated in the UN. Employees must agree upon joining the agency not to make public pronouncements that could impact the “independence and impartiality required by their status as international civil servants”, according to a staff handbook that sets out that disciplinary procedures may be used if they do not follow the instructions of their supervisors.

Staff who spoke to The Irish Times on condition of anonymity explained that a series of instructions warning about mentioning the invasion of Ukraine on social media were distributed to broad staffing mailing lists from the morning of the invasion on, culminating in the Monday email which was understood by those who received it to constitute a ban on using the words “war” and “invasion” by their superiors.

“We were really shocked when we received it,” a UN official told The Irish Times, speaking on condition of anonymity due to the prohibition on speaking to the media.

“This being at the same time when you get 15 years in Russia for saying those exact same words. We were stunned. We couldn’t believe what we were seeing.”

Another employee described the policy as part of a long-running trend of holding back language for fear of upsetting member states.

“It is truly soul-destroying when you are a UN staffer to be continuously, endlessly told that you cannot say a single thing on ‘controversial issues’, such as mass murder, ethnic cleansing or genocide . . . in case it sounds like ‘criticism of a member state’,” the official said.

The manner of distribution of the email reflected the typical way that instructions from senior levels in the UN are passed on through the organisation’s network of regional offices, offshoots and programmes, staff members said.

### **A timeline of communications**

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On the morning of the invasion on February 24th, staff at the UN Development Programme (UNDP) were sent an email by communications telling them to “refrain from engaging around sensitive issues on your personal social media accounts” and reminding them of the UN social media policy.

On February 25th, UNDP staff were sent an email by a top UNDP official in New York, the deputy assistant administrator and deputy director of the Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy.

This email passed on the “latest updates from the UNCG”, a reference to the pan-organisation United Nations Communications Group, crediting a senior communications official for providing the newest instructions.

“The SG has decided to use the phrase ‘military operations’ (not invasion or incursion),” the email read, using an acronym used to refer to the UN’s secretary general (SG) António Guterres or his office.

On February 26th, a “key messages” document was sent to senior UN staff internationally by top official Rosemary DiCarlo, the UN’s under-secretary general for political and peacebuilding affairs, The Irish Times understands. Seen by The Irish Times, the document provided phrases to be “used by UN principals and spokespeople when speaking to media”.

It set out the terms “military offensive” and “conflict” to describe the situation, as well as “crisis” and “hostilities”. It did not use the word “invasion”. It used the word “war” to say “an information war is under way”.

As sample key phrases to use when speaking to the media, the document gave: “The Russian Federation’s military offensive is a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine” and “This conflict must stop now. We must give peace a chance.”

The document stated that it had been produced by the “UNCG Crisis Communications Cell . . . based on information received from across the UN system”. The UN website describes the UNCG as the “common communications platform of the United Nations system” that “comprises the information offices of the United Nations family of organisations, including the Secretariat, specialised agencies, programmes and funds”.

This language set by the key messages was reflected in an email sent internally to all UN Development Programme staff globally on February 27th, which referred to “the situation in Ukraine”, “Russian military operations”, “military operation”, “military action”, and “conflict”, but did not use “war” or “invasion”.

An updated “key messages” document was drawn up by the UN Communications Group and distributed to staff on Monday 6th.

The language it provided for senior staff and spokespeople to use when speaking to media began with the sentence “This conflict must stop now . . . The military offensive is not reversible.”

Overall, the document used the term “military offensive” four times and “conflict” 11 times. It did not use the word “invasion”. The word “war” was used twice, to refer to “the fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe since World War II” and in the sentence, “Children may suffer lifelong trauma after witnessing war.”

Finally, staff in Europe on Monday 7th received the explicit instruction not to use “war” or “invasion” and to use “conflict” or “military offensive” instead.

The instruction was sent to a staff mailing list by the director of the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, part of the Department of Global Communications. The Irish Times has confirmed that the email was received across different UN agencies in Europe.

A subsequent email passed on to The Irish Times suggests that the instruction not to use “war” or “invasion” was quickly reversed.

“Please note the change from guidance sent by UN system just yesterday (below) concerning key messaging language re: ‘conflict’ and/or ‘military offensive’ as today’s approved key messages now refer to ‘war’ and/or ‘invasion’,” read an email sent to a group of UN staff in Europe on Tuesday.

## **Response of the UN**

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UN spokespeople have denied that it was official policy to avoid the terms “war” and “invasion”. The UN spokesperson’s Twitter account initially described The Irish Times report as “fake”. Since then, spokespeople have acknowledged that the email was sent to

staff instructing them not to use the words.

But spokeswoman Melissa Fleming wrote on Twitter in response to a request for clarification by Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba that the email “only went to about 25 staff”.

“It was sent by a local office without clearance and does not represent the official position of the organisation,” Ms Fleming wrote.

Ms Fleming shared messages on Twitter and Instagram late on Tuesday afternoon Brussels time that read: “Two million refugees with many more on their way, trying desperately to escape this horrific, senseless, brutal invasion.”



Ukraine crisis

# United Nations advises staff against using ‘war’ or ‘invasion’ regarding Ukraine

**IT** [irishtimes.com/news/world/united-nations-advises-staff-against-using-war-or-invasion-regarding-ukraine-1.4821438](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/united-nations-advises-staff-against-using-war-or-invasion-regarding-ukraine-1.4821438)



People carry a wounded woman during the evacuation by civilians of the city of Irpin, northwest of Kyiv, on Tuesday. Photograph: Getty

Naomi O’Leary

Tue Mar 8 2022 - 13:02

The United Nations' Department of Global Communications instructed staff of the international organisation not to refer to the situation in Ukraine as a "war" or "invasion", in a move to balance political sensitivities as powerful member state Russia cracks down domestically on those who use the words.

Instead, UN staff were instructed to use the terms “conflict” or “military offensive” to describe Russia’s invasion of its neighbour, which has killed hundreds of civilians and forced two million people to flee the country.

In an email to a staff mailing list on Monday with the subject line "Ukraine crisis communications guidelines", the director of the United Nations Regional Information Centre instructed employees not to describe the situation as a war and not to add the Ukrainian flag to personal or official social media accounts or websites.

“Some specific examples of language to use/not use at the moment,” read the email, seen by the Irish Times.

“Use ‘conflict’ or ‘military offensive’ and NOT ‘war’ or ‘invasion’ when referring to the situation in Ukraine.”

“Do NOT add the Ukrainian flag to personal or official social media accounts or websites,” the email continued, referring to a practice that has become common to show support for Ukraine.

## **Reputational risk’**

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“This is an important reminder that we, as international civil servants, have a responsibility to be impartial,” it read. “There is a serious possibility of reputational risk that has been flagged by senior officials recently.”

UN spokesman Stéphane Dujarric acknowledged the email was sent but denied it was official policy. “I don’t dispute the validity of that email but it can not be considered official policy to staff,” he told The Irish Times.

A later email sent to UN staff on Tuesday morning, also seen by The Irish Times, suggests the language policy regarding Ukraine was updated to reverse the initial guidance and allow for the use of “war” and “invasion”.

The UN Spokesperson Twitter account initially described The Irish Times’ reporting as “fake”, before deleting the Tweet.

The instruction to staff not to use "invasion" and "war" fuelled concern that the organisation was going too far in a bid to avoid offending Russia, a powerful member state that holds one of the five permanent seats on the UN Security Council.

“It’s hard to believe that the UN could essentially impose the same kind of censorship that the Kremlin imposes inside Russia now by banning the use of the words ‘war’ and ‘invasion’,” wrote Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba. “UN reputation at stake.”

Russian officials do not use the word "invasion": the Kremlin's preferred term to use is "special military operation", and the regime of Vladimir Putin has taken efforts to enforce this language domestically.

Two days after Russia launched its offensive, media regulator Roskomnadzor ordered local news outlets to delete reporting that used the words "assault," "invasion," or "declaration of war", or risk being fined or blocked.

## **Prison terms**

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This was followed by a new law imposing prison terms of up to 15 years for anyone who spreads news deemed to be “fake”, the arrest of thousands of people who protested against the war, the shuttering of two local independent broadcasters, and the blocking of international media websites including the BBC and Deutsche Welle.

The Soviet Union was a founding member of the United Nations when it was set up with the aim of preventing future wars in the wake of the second World War, and the Russian Federation inherited its seat and permanent UN Security Council (UNSC) membership when the bloc dissolved in 1991.

As a temporary elected member of the UNCS, Ireland has lobbied for the removal of the veto system that allowed Russia as one of its five permanent members to block a council resolution that would have demanded that Moscow stop its attack on Ukraine and withdraw its troops.

A resolution demanding Russia's withdrawal was later overwhelmingly passed by the 193-member General Assembly of the UN, something that is politically significant, but unlike UNSC resolutions cannot be legally binding.

