



Paris, 31 January 2017

In July 2016, the *Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies* (WMCES) published a report on Russian influence in Europe, a topic of particular importance in the present context, entitled *The Bear in Sheep's Clothing, Russia's Government-Funded Organisations in the EU*. This report directly implicates the French Institute of International Relations (the *Institut français des relations internationales* or Ifri), claiming that this organisation is an “example of indirect Russian influence through funding” and has received funding from *Gazprom*. Ifri has denied these false allegations.

In correspondence dated 30 August 2016, Ifri asked WMCES to rectify its claims and to consider Ifri's publications and other output relating to Russia before pronouncing such a verdict. WMCES's response, dated 16 September 2016, is fundamentally specious. In a letter dated 22 September 2016, Ifri informed WMCES's governing bodies of the serious risks that this report posed to the institutional credibility of WMCES. Following this communication, on 24 November 2016 WMCES proposed a meeting, which took place at Ifri in Paris on 20 December 2016. During this discussion, WMCES representatives refused to provide any factual evidence or reasoned explanation whatsoever, entrenching themselves behind legal arguments.

Consequently, Ifri wishes to clarify the following points:

- 1- In terms of methodology, WMCES's report ignores the elementary rules of scientific research. The charge against Ifri is based on one single anonymous testimony. It has not been cross-checked against other sources. Ifri has never been interviewed by the authors of the WMCES report. The authors constructed a false argument, which is indicative of a biased approach with no scientific rigour in establishing the basic facts. Furthermore, Ifri's output on Russia, which is easily accessible, was subjected to no analysis whatsoever.
- 2- On an organisational level, Ifri is compelled to note WMCES's failings in the production of the report. Indeed, the reviewer of the report had recommended, in June 2016, that the section dealing with Ifri should not be published: “*One of the specific issues I proposed in my review was to remove the reference to Ifri (the Institut français des relations internationales). I did so because the paper presented no evidence to substantiate what is a very serious claim about a respected institution that publishes what I and others regard as high quality research about Russia. By including the specific reference to Ifri without providing supporting disclosed evidence, you risk weakening the important research and arguments in the paper about the ways the Russian government seeks to influence internationally the debate about Russia and European policies,*” the reviewer noted, in a message sent to WMCES on 17 September 2016.
- 3- In terms of ethics, the report and the attitude of the representatives of WMCES raise questions about its integrity and partisan character. On a subject as sensitive as that of Russian influence, the practice of attacking and defaming institutions and individuals connected with them opens the door to all kinds of speculation and manoeuvring. This practice is fundamentally incompatible with the ethics of Think Tanks, whose collective legitimacy is based on a shared methodology. This shared methodology requires the facts to be established, fieldwork to be carried out, literature on the relevant subject to be assimilated, and finally, debate to be organised showing respect for all the different points of view. Think Tanks are not partisan bodies or media troublemakers; they are organisations for research and debate, composed of qualified researchers working on an objective basis. Freedom of expression and research is also an ethic of responsibility.

Ifri deplores WMCES's lack of responsibility and hopes that its members will demonstrate a modicum of seriousness in the future.