



AS IT IS

## Finnish Paper Uses Video Game to Avoid Russia's Press Restrictions

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Finland's largest daily newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, marked World Press Freedom Day on May 3 by using a popular online video game to get around Russian media restrictions.

Editor-in-chief Antero Mukka said the paper has hidden stories about Russia's war in Ukraine in the game Counter-Strike. The game is popular worldwide and among young Russian men.

Russia has restricted independent news sources in the country since its invasion of Ukraine. Since last year, the government has banned free reporting and blocked Russians from getting independent media content produced in other countries.

In answer to laws restricting press freedom in Russia, Helsingin Sanomat began publishing some of its Ukraine and Russia-related news in Russian last year. But Russia quickly restricted the content.

Mukka told Reuters reporters, "...We decided that maybe it's possible to find some new channels to provide Russian audience with some reliable, independent journalism for example about the situations in Ukraine."

So they turned to Counter-Strike. The game was released in 2012 by U.S.-based private game maker Valve Corporation. It ranks among the world's top 10 most popular computer games, data from the research firm Newzoo shows.

The newspaper built a map of an unspecified war-torn Slavic city and named it “de\_voyna.” The word “voyna” in Russian means war. The term is banned in Russia as a description of the conflict in Ukraine. The Russian government instead calls the war a “special military operation.”

The map hides a secret room where the paper keeps images and stories of the cruelties witnessed by its reporters and photographers in Ukraine.

Mukka said the Finnish newspaper did not seek Valve's permission to add its content to the game. Counter-Strike lets users create and add their own content to its platform.

Mukka said, "If some young men in Russia, just because of this game, happen to think for a couple of seconds what is going on in Ukraine then it's worth it."

I'm Ashley Thompson.

*Anne Kaurane reported this story for Reuters. Hai Do adapted the story for Learning English.*