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## Antenna Documentary Film Festival's screening tonight of *Russians at War* film endangers truth, undermines Australia's support for Ukraine and encourages pro-Putin supporters

The Antenna Documentary Film Festival's screening tonight of *Russians at War* — a film which normalises Russian aggression, spreads toxic misinformation, and betrays shared Ukrainian and Australian democratic values — has led to pro-Putin supporters threatening to use the screening as a rallying point for further extremism.

Over the weekend, **pro-Kremlin supporters have mobilised online with anti-Ukrainian rhetoric** including:

- “I’ll be there to watch the film and happily deck any banderist (*derogatory term for Ukrainians*) that gets near me”
- “Throw the Ukronazi out of Australia...”
- “Let the documentary air and laugh at the stooges protesting it”

The Australian-Ukrainian community has regularly faced harassment from pro-Putin agitators, but remains determined and, in full consultation with police, will be holding a **protest tonight at the Dendy Cinema, Newtown, at 5:45pm to ensure festival goers are aware of the film's deep and fundamental flaws.**

The community has been backed by festival cultural partner, the Italian Cultural Institute of Sydney, who have posted a [statement](#) acknowledging the ‘legitimate concerns’ of the Australian-Ukrainian community and film creatives, including British-Australian filmmaker, Simon Target. In an email to festival organisers, Mr Target refers to the work as ‘nasty Russian propaganda’ and insists screening the film would be “a terribly culturally regressive thing for an Aussie festival to do”.

Key points being made by the AFUO and the Australian-Ukrainian community include:

### 1. Artistic expression is valuable - but propaganda is not art

While artistic freedom is a valued principle, it must not be exploited as a shield for propaganda or weaponised to rewrite history and dilute the truth.

The decision to screen *Russians at War* under the guise of artistic expression effectively normalises Kremlin narratives which seek to raise empathy for Russia, whitewash aggression and obscure war crimes. **To use empathy or compassion without accountability is the true danger of disinformation.** Such disinformation erodes the quality of our public discourse and amplifies narratives which seek to question and halt Western and Australian military support for Ukraine.

## 2. Screening *Russians at War* has encouraged anti-Ukrainian hate speech

Pro-Putin supporters in Australia have urged their followers to disrupt the Ukrainian community's peaceful protest. Their social media posts have been aggressive and threatening to community safety, incite violence and seek to tear at the multicultural fabric of our community and deliberately distress the Australian-Ukrainian community.

## 3. Public institutions should not facilitate the spread of propaganda

The fact that public support — through the NSW Government, Screen NSW and the City of Sydney — is indirectly supporting the amplification of Russian messaging is entirely at odds with the Australian Government's principled support for Ukraine, and is a misuse of public funding. We remain unclear about the role of Screen Australia in providing financial or in-kind funding support for the Antenna Documentary Film Festival, as their logo was recently removed from the Festival website.

The AFUO has urged government agencies to review their partnerships with the festival to ensure taxpayer funds are not used to facilitate disinformation which misleads Australian audiences about Russia's war, a measure that was recommended by the September 2024 Senate Inquiry into Australian Support for Ukraine.

## 4. Call on festival to cancel remaining screenings of the film

It is essential that our cultural platforms reflect the truth, and honour the values of justice and human rights. In showing this film, Antenna has shown limited understanding of the true issues at stake, instead being misled into promoting moral ambivalence about Russia's illegal and genocidal war in Ukraine. The rally will call for Antenna to listen to the Ukrainian Government, Ukrainian cultural institutions, and the Australian-Ukrainian community and its supporters, and cancel the film.

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### Additional facts about the film

#### A distorted narrative

*Russians at War* claims to offer an alternative perspective on the conflict, yet it does so by encouraging sympathy for invading Russian soldiers while failing to acknowledge the brutal realities of their actions and their active participation in a genocidal war. The film's approach creates a false equivalence between aggressor and victim, undermining the historical and legal truths about Russia's invasion of a sovereign nation.

#### Questionable credentials and state influence

The documentary's director, Anastasia Trofimova, asserts her independence as a journalist. However, her background includes work with Russia Today—a state-controlled outlet notorious for spreading

misinformation and manipulating global narratives, and banned in multiple democratic nations. Furthermore, Trofimova's seven-month embedding with a Russian military unit in occupied Ukrainian territory was conducted she claims without permission from the Russian Ministry of Defence—a detail that is significant and difficult to believe, as independent journalists are typically not granted access to the front lines without Kremlin approval. Trofimova has also referred to Russian soldiers active in Ukraine as 'heroes'. Coupled with the film's editing being completed in Russia, there are grave concerns about its honesty, integrity, objectivity, and its function as a vetted piece of Russian state propaganda.

### **Opposition from the Ukrainian community and beyond**

Key stakeholders have voiced their disapproval:

- The Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations (AFUO), along with the Ukrainian Council of NSW (UCNSW) and Ukrainian Ambassador Vasyl Myroshnychenko, have all strongly opposed the screening.
- More than 1,350 protest emails from members and supporters of the Australian-Ukrainian community have been sent to festival organisers and their sponsors.
- In Ukraine, the state-funded cultural advocacy agency—the Ukrainian Institute—has [condemned the film](#) as an attempt to whitewash the crimes committed by Russian soldiers and to absolve them of responsibility.
- The Ukrainian Government has noted that Trofimova's unauthorised travel to occupied Ukrainian territories constitutes a violation of Ukrainian legislation, rendering any platform that features this film complicit in breaching legal norms.