

Brisbane lord mayor Adrian Schrinner warns of propaganda war after foreign interference arrest

[Joseph Humphreys](#), The Australian, 23 August 2026



Adrian Schrinner with Ukrainian Armed Forces Second Lieutenant Viktoriia Savkiv.
Picture: Joseph Humphreys.

The leader of the country's largest local government has warned Australians of a "raging" propaganda war being fought online by pro-Russian groups, just days after the arrest of a dual Russian-Australian citizen on [foreign interference charges](#).

Brisbane lord mayor Adrian Schrinner said Australians needed to be "alert" and to "push back" against the social media disinformation war that was designed to divide the local Ukrainian community and broader community.

"The war is not just raging in Ukraine; it's also raging here in Australia in attempts to divide our community," Mr Schrinner said in a speech to the Brisbane Ukrainian Festival at the weekend.

"It (the foreign interference arrest) has been a wake-up call to the world because right now people in Brisbane are being fed propaganda through their social media.

“There are very co-ordinated attempts to divide our community and divide the Ukrainian community as well. We must be alert, we must push back, we can never allow ourselves to be divided.”

His speech came two days after 27-year-old Russian-Australian citizen [Vladimir Teslov was arrested in Brisbane](#), after allegedly sharing Ukrainian military secrets with the Kremlin’s intelligence services. Authorities allege Mr Teslov had served in Ukraine’s armed forces, after receiving military-style training in Russia in late 2024.



Ukrainian Community of Queensland president Peter Bongiorno, Viktoriia Savkiv of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and translator Anton Vitaly. Picture: Joseph Humphreys

Ukrainian Community of Queensland Inc president Peter Bongiorno said Mr Teslov’s arrest was a “sobering reminder” that foreign interference in Australia “was not theoretical” and it highlighted the need to closely examine organisations seeking to divide the community.

“Foreign interference is not only about espionage; it’s about influence, it is about narratives, it is about weakening trust, creating confusion and exploiting division,” Mr Bongiorno said at the festival, attended by hundreds including local politicians and Armed Forces of Ukraine representative Second Lieutenant Viktoriia Savkiv.

Mr Bongiorno said pro-Russian groups had rebranded with “Slavic unity” events, which undermined notions of a distinct Ukrainian identity. “While Ukrainians are being killed ... we are simultaneously being encouraged to blur the distinction between Ukrainian and Russian culture under labels like Slavic culture.”

Mr Bongiorno said his organisation had raised suspected Russian interference with relevant government officials, adding that concerns were based on “conduct” and “evidence”, not “somebody’s ethnicities or the language”.



Second Lieutenant Viktoriia Savkiv of the 214th Separate Assault Battalion OPFOR, Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Second Lieutenant Savkiv said she was interested to learn of the allegations against Mr Teslov but it demonstrated Russia’s sprawling intelligence network.

“I’m surprised that Russia has (alleged) spies in Australia, but it makes total sense in the context of a major war. Russia is a large empire; she has spies everywhere in all countries,” Second Lieutenant Savkiv said.

Second Lieutenant Savkiv pilots first person view (FPV) drones and commands an unmanned aerial systems platoon in the 214th Separate Assault Battalion in Ukraine.

She participated in the defence of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine during 2023, where she provided aid and evacuated wounded soldiers amid ferocious fighting.

Second Lieutenant Savkiv said it was “pleasing” to see Queensland’s Ukrainian community at the weekend event and thanked the Australian government for its \$1.8bn in military assistance for Ukraine.

“I’m grateful for the assistance and contribution to Ukraine to continue to defend itself; every piece of aid is important for Ukrainians, civilians and military,” she said.