



Pekka Kallioniemi @P_Kallioniemi

Sep 13, 2024 · 20 tweets · [P_Kallioniemi/status/1834508264156852448](https://twitter.com/P_Kallioniemi/status/1834508264156852448)

In today's #vatniksoup I'll introduce a Russian filmmaker, Anastasia Trofimova. She's best-known for her latest controversial documentary "Russians at War", and for working as a producer for Russian state-funded media outlet RT.

1/19



Soft power has been part of the Kremlin's hybrid warfare for a long time. It refers to the "ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion" and which can "be cultivated through relations with allies, economic assistance, and cultural exchanges."

2/19

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair



How Russia employs 'hard soft power' to influence overseas media and sow dissent and fear among foreign populations

Published: September 9, 2024 2.25pm CEST

Inside the studio during an RT broadcast. Misha Friedman/Getty Images



politics

POLITICS: 2015 VOL 35(3-4), 347-363

doi: 10.1111/1467-9256.12109

Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy

Alexander Sergunin

St Petersburg State University/Higher School of Economics

Leonid Karabeshkin

Euroacademy, Tallinn, Estonia

This article examines the specifics of Moscow's soft power strategy. The sources of the Kremlin's interest in the soft power concept are explained. The article discusses how the soft power concept fits in the current Russian foreign policy philosophy. Russia's soft power resources, institutions and instruments are described. Special attention is given to the limitations and constraints of Moscow's soft power strategies. The reasons why these strategies are often being inefficient are explained. The Kremlin's inclination to the combination of the soft and hard power strategies is identified.

Keywords: Russia; soft power; Kremlin; foreign policy

Russia has been using soft power to sow division and distrust in the West for decades. Documentaries like *Ukraine on Fire* offer a revisionist and pro-Kremlin view on what happened in Kyiv and in Ukraine in 2014. It was directed by the Russian master...



...propagandist and LA resident Igor Lopatonok and also featured Oliver Stone. The film was premiered at the Taormina Film Festival in Italy. GRU-connected Dutch Bonanza Media has also produced several documentaries whitewashing Russia's crimes against humanity.



Latest addition to Russia’s soft power propaganda is Anastasia Trofimova’s documentary, “Russians at War”. The film’s public premiere was at the Venice International Film Festival, which caused a huge backlash in the West and especially in the Ukrainian community.

5/19

europa news.

Latest Europe World EU Policy Business Euroviews Next Green Health Culture

> Culture > Culture news

Sympathetic view of Russian soldiers creates controversy at Venice Film Festival

Copyright I/AP

By Jonny Walfisz

Published on 06/09/2024 - 13:45 GMT+2

Trofimova is an experienced filmmaker, and she worked as a producer for Russia’s state-controlled RT for 7 years.

"Russians at War" was funded with both public and private Canadian funding, and in total it received at least 260,000 USD from these sources.

6/19



RT DOCUMENTARY DIRECTOR:
"VOLUNTEERS SAY WAR AGAINST ISIL IS THEIR WAR"



14:14
SWEDEN CONDUCTS LARGEST MILITARY DRILL IN OVER 20 YEARS

ANASTASIA TROFIMOVA

HOME FILMS COLLABORATIONS ABOUT

From WWII to the Olympic podium:
the champions of the first Team USSR.

CHAMPIONS OF THE SPIRIT

The Soviet Union made its first Olympic appearance in the 1952 Summer Games in Helsinki after decades of political antagonism. Many expected the USSR to fail miserably. WWII ended only 7 years prior. The country was in ruins. 27 million people perished in the war, more than in any other country. Soviet athletes had never before participated in international sporting events, with the last Olympic Games attended under the flag of the Russian Empire.

But Team USSR shocked the world, coming in second in medal count only to the USA in its first Olympic Games. Yet very few knew the stories of the champions from behind the Iron Curtain.

Team USSR included frontline soldiers, survivors of the 900-day Siege of Leningrad, and prisoners of multiple Nazi concentration camps. Against all odds and through sheer enthusiasm - a motto applicable not only to sport - Team USSR took 20 Gold, 30 Silver and 19 Bronze medals, establishing its leadership in sport competitions to come. Featuring first-hand accounts of the few remaining gold medalists, Galina Zyбина and Yuri Tukałov, we get a feel for a disappearing "old school" unlike any other - the Soviet school.



Champions of the Spirit (documentary)
Anastasia Trofimova



Archival photos were gathered from personal archives of Galina Zyбина and Yuri Tukałov.

ROLE: Director, producer, director of photography, co-editor

DURATION: 27 minutes

BROADCASTER: RT Documentary

AVAILABLE IN: English, Russian, Arabic



In the film, Trofimova enters Eastern Ukraine illegally and interviews Russian soldiers 180 km behind the front lines. According to The Moscow Times, the Russian soldiers were motivated by “vague patriotism”, “avenging fallen friends”, and, of course, money.

7/19

Trofimova takes the audience from 180 km behind the front lines where ranks are "replenished" to the trenches of the front line where the men die. The soldiers depicted are often volunteers who say they went to the front for various personal reasons: vague patriotism, avenging fallen friends, protecting loved ones, preventing their children from going to war in the future, or, more commonly, for money.

Most of the soldiers Trofimova interviewed were sent to the Bakhmut meat grinder, but somehow she missed all the violent criminals & forcibly drafted foreigners from countries such as Nepal, who were then used as meat walls by the more experienced Russian units like Wagner.

8/19



Russian convicts released to fight with Wagner accused of new crimes

10 August



War in Ukraine



JOINT PRESS SERVICE OF KRASNODAR REGIONAL COURTS

By **Arsenii Sokolov, Tim Whewell & Nina Nazarova**

BBC World Service

A prisoner believed to have been released early to fight with Wagner mercenaries in Ukraine has been accused of committing a double murder in Russia after returning home from the war.

The filmmaker gave an interview to local Russian media, which provides some insights on the filmmaking process and her worldview. These excerpts were translated and published by @TriggerLRSSG, and their thread on the topic can be found here:

 **Trigger**
@TriggerLRSSG · [Follow](#) ✕

Since [@TIFF_NET](#) still decided to premiere russians at War and think it's not propaganda, I will highlight a few things the film's creator Anastasia Trofimova said during an interview with russian media (baikal-journal.ru/2024/09/05/esl...). See 📖 below 📌

1/n Show more



2:57 AM · Sep 12, 2024 ⓘ

❤️ 3.6K 💬 Reply 🔗 Copy link

[Read 68 replies](#)

First of all, the Russian authorities and intelligence services have heavily cracked down on any video or audio recordings in the temporarily occupied regions. Recently, they've made dramatic gestures and demonstrations against any cell phone use.



Second, it is nearly impossible to go to the temporarily occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine, alone spending seven months relatively close to the front line and interviewing Russian soldiers freely about the war, without the knowledge of Russian intelligence agencies.



News | Freedom of the Press

Russia jails journalist for spreading 'fake news' about army in Ukraine war

Sergei Mikhailov was arrested in 2022 after publishing reports about civilian deaths in Bucha and Mariupol.



Sergei Mikhailov, a journalist and editor of the Listok publication, was arrested in 2022 near Moscow [SOTA/Telegram]

30 Aug 2024



LATEST NEWS UKRAINE

Russian FSB opens criminal cases against CNN journalist and Ukrainian reporters filming in Kursk Oblast

The Russian securities services announced that CNN's Nick Paton Walsh, along with two Ukrainian journalists Olesia Borovyk and Diana Butsko, are accused of illegally crossing into Russian territory to report on Ukrainian military activities in Kursk Oblast.

 BY VIRA KRAWCHUK · 22/08/2024 · 2 MINUTE READ



Journalists in Sudzha, Kursk Oblast. Source: Screenshot from CNN report by Nick Paton Walsh

Marina Ovsyannikova: Anti-war Russian journalist sentenced in absentia

4 October 2023

Share 



Watch: Anti-war demonstrator disrupts Russia's state TV news

Moscow's court has sentenced journalist Marina Ovsyannikova, who protested live on air against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to 8.5 years in jail.

Trofimova also said that all of the footage she recorded passed through the authorities of the made-up state of Luhansk People’s Republic, whom Anastasia described as “very nice” and “funny”, and that she learned a lot about “political life in Ukraine”.

12/19

- You obviously had gigabytes of video footage. What did you do with it? Carry it around with you?

— I had to somehow upload the materials, because it was unclear when I would go back to Moscow. And in general, it was really scary to carry all this with me. You never know, a rocket could hit the house and everything would burn down. So I went to the nearest city [in the territory of the self-proclaimed LPR — LBJ], went to the local administration and uploaded the materials there. The first time I came, they said, hello, I’m filming a movie here, can I use your internet to send the materials there. They were like, okay, fine. The only document I showed was my passport, that I was definitely from Russia, born in Moscow.

They sat me down at a table in the accounting department, gave me a table. I laid out everything there - a computer, a hard drive, cards. I agreed that I would leave my computer with materials in the accounting department so that they would be uploaded. I bought a cake. There are wonderful, incredible accountants working there, very nice, funny. From these jokes, of course, you learn a lot about political life in Ukraine. They were very tasty when they were talking about Zelensky. I was silent, just listening.

Trofimova also claimed that she didn’t witness any war crimes while doing the film. The main reason for this was probably that she was far away from the front lines. According to Kyiv Independent, the Russians have committed over 150,000 documented war crimes.

13/19

“Russians at War” is being marketed by the filmmakers as an anti-war documentary, and Trofimova has claimed in press coverage that she came to view the Russian soldiers she filmed as “**absolutely ordinary guys**” who are tools in a political game.

Critics say that the film’s attempts to “humanize” Russian soldiers are an affront to Ukrainian victims, particularly in light of the nearly 150,000 **documented Russian war crimes** committed in Ukraine since 2022.

It also seems that Anastasia is not immune to propaganda - she’s claimed that Russia “hasn’t participated in wars for many years,” neatly forgetting wars & occupations in Transnistria (1992-93), Abkhazia (1994-96), Chechnya (1999-2009), Georgia (2008) & Syria (2015-2022).

14/19

The Russian director begins by expressing her surprise at the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Throughout the film, Trofimova consistently uses the term “invasion” rather than “full-scale invasion” and fails to mention Russia’s invasion and **temporarily occupied Crimea** back in 2014.

Trofimova also claimed that her country “hasn’t participated in wars for many years and that she only read about wars in books.” Thus, the war in 2022 came as a “complete shock” to her.

“It’s puzzling how the director could have overlooked her country’s involvement in various wars and occupations for at least the last 30 years (Transnistria 1992-93, **Abkhazia** 1994-96, Chechnya 1999-2009, Georgia 2008, and **Syria** 2015-2022),” Bassel pointed out.

In Venice, Trofimova also took the time to criticize Olha Zhurba’s documentary Songs of Slow Burning Earth about the war in Ukraine. According to Anastasia, she wasn’t “that much of a fan” of the ending, as it “contrasted Ukrainian kids and Russian kids,...

15/19

SONGS OF SLOW BURNING EARTH

Dec 11, 2023



- **Director:** Olha Zhurba
- **Scriptwriter:** Olha Zhurba
- **Countries:** Ukraine / Denmark / Sweden / France
- **Genre:** Documentary
- **Country of shooting:** Ukraine
- **Language:** Ukrainian
- **Duration:** 95 min

SYNOPSIS

Landscapes, occasional conversations and encounters, and sounds that weave in and out of the frame compose SONGS OF SLOW BURNING EARTH. Captured in varying proximities to the frontline over two years, the audiovisual diary of Ukraine's immersion into the abyss of total war traces the subtle changes in Ukrainian society. The ragged chords of panic and horror of the first weeks of the Russian invasion slowly morph into the numb stillness of the acceptance of death and destruction, which eventually becomes the tragic normality for the local population, but just an afterthought for the rest of the world. Against the backdrop of the (meta)physical landscape of collective disaster, a new generation of Ukrainians aspires to imagine the future.

...with Ukrainian kids thinking about what they can do to build a better Ukraine for the future, and Russian kids were just shown as marching and singing war songs.” According to her, the film depicted Russians as “aggressive and awful people”.

16/19

To that point and in answer to a second question by the same journalist on whether she had seen the Ukrainian films in Venice, Trofimova voiced her disquiet at the ending of Olha Zhurba's documentary *Songs of Slow Burning Earth* which is also playing Out of Competition.

The audiovisual diary captures the impact on Ukrainian people and society in the first two years of the ongoing Russian invasion, which began in February 2022.

“I found it to be really good, especially the first 15, 20 minutes... when people just started to find out that the war is beginning... I found it to be really strong,” said Trofimova.

“The ending, though, I wasn't that much of a fan of because it sort of contrasted Ukrainian kids and Russian kids, with Ukrainian kids thinking about what they can do to build a better Ukraine for the future, and Russian kids were just shown as marching and singing war songs.

“I found this to be playing into that whole narrative that Russians, by definition, are these aggressive and awful people... you know that it's in their blood to be to be this way. “

I personally find Trofimova's “both sides” narrative problematic, because in this genocidal war we can clearly name the invader (Russia) and the defender (Ukraine).

Perhaps this is due to Trofimova's willingness to return to Russia one day.

17/19

— After the film’s release, you won’t return to Russia, will you?

— I will wait for the reaction of the authorities. It sounds naive, but I would really like to work in Russia. Because now there is a division, we do not see each other and do not hear each other. Therefore, I would still continue to try to bridge this huge gap. But it depends on the reaction to the film.

Toronto Film Festival eventually had to cancel the screening of “Russians at War” (which they described as “a spellbinding tale of sacrifice and disillusionment in which soldiers resemble pawns in a nefarious game”) due to massive backlash from the Ukrainian community.

18/19

The screenshot shows a news article on the SCREEN DAILY website. The header is a red bar with the text "SCREEN DAILY" in white. Below the header is a navigation bar with a home icon and links for NEWS, REVIEWS, FEATURES, FESTIVALS, BOX OFFICE, AWARDS, and STARS. The article is categorized under "NEWS" and has the headline "TIFF halts 'Russians At War' screenings after 'significant threats'; producers lament 'heartbreaking' situation". The byline is "BY JEREMY KAY | 13 SEPTEMBER 2024". There are social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Email, along with comment and bookmark icons. The article features a photograph of a soldier in a military uniform with a Russian flag patch on the sleeve. The text of the article states: "In a disturbing and unprecedented development, Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) has paused three upcoming screenings of the documentary *Russians At War* after top brass were made aware of 'significant threats to festival operations and public safety'."

SCREEN DAILY

NEWS

TIFF halts ‘Russians At War’ screenings after “significant threats”; producers lament “heartbreaking” situation

BY JEREMY KAY | 13 SEPTEMBER 2024

SOURCE: COURTESY OF TIFF
RUSSIANS AT WAR

In a disturbing and unprecedented development, Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) has paused three upcoming screenings of the documentary *Russians At War* after top brass were made aware of “significant threats to festival operations and public safety”.

STATEMENT

September 12, 2024

Update to *Russians at War* Screenings

Effectively immediately, TIFF is forced to pause the upcoming screenings of *Russians at War* on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday as we have been made aware of significant threats to festival operations and public safety. While we stand firm on our statement shared yesterday, this decision has been made in order to ensure the safety of all festival guests, staff, and volunteers.

This is an unprecedented move for TIFF.

As a cultural institution, we support civil discourse about and through films, including differences of opinion, and we fully support peaceful assembly. However, we have received reports indicating potential activity in the coming days that pose significant risk; given the severity of these concerns, we cannot proceed as planned.

This has been an incredibly difficult decision. When we select films, we're guided by TIFF's Mission, our Values, and our programming principles. We believe this film has earned a place in our Festival's lineup, and we are committed to screening it when it is safe to do so.

STATEMENT

September 11, 2024

The film's producers, which includes Canadian Oscar nominee Cornelia Principe, called TIFF's decision "heartbreaking" in a statement provided by the festival and condemned those who have spoken out publicly against *Russians At War*, including Freeland, Ukraine's consul-general for Toronto Oleh Nikolenko and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress.

"Their irresponsible, dishonest, and inflammatory public statements have incited the violent hate that has led to TIFF's painful decision," the producers wrote. "This temporary suppression is shockingly un-Canadian."



Trofimova has described her documentary as an "anti-war" film, which should land her around seven years in prison in Russia. So far, the Kremlin or Russian authorities haven't made any comments on the documentary.

I personally see it as a whitewashing propaganda.

July 03, 2024

By [RFE/RL's North.Realities](#)

Russian Anti-War Documentary Director's Prison Term Extended



Russian director Vsevolod Korolyov was convicted and sentenced to the three-year term in March on a charge of distributing false information about Russia's military.

A St. Petersburg court of appeals on July 2 extended the three-year prison term of documentary director Vsevolod Korolyov, known for his anti-war stance, to seven years, the court press service said. Korolyov was convicted and sentenced to the three-year term in March on a charge of distributing false information about Russia's military. He was arrested in July 2022 after he posted two reports online about Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, namely about alleged atrocities committed by Russian troops against civilians in Ukrainian towns and cities. He pleaded not guilty. *To read the original story by RFE/RL's North.Realities, click [here](#).*

Why do critics say *Russians at War* is propaganda?

Trofimova herself admitted in a recent interview that her film's source sample "is not ideal." The movie doesn't feature a single anti-invasion Ukrainian. Instead, viewers get a main protagonist from Donetsk fighting on Russia's side and a scene where an elderly woman in the Donbas receives Russian humanitarian aid and talks about how she fears Ukrainian troops. The people living in occupied Ukraine who do not welcome Russian invaders either refused to speak to her or had already fled the area, said Trofimova.

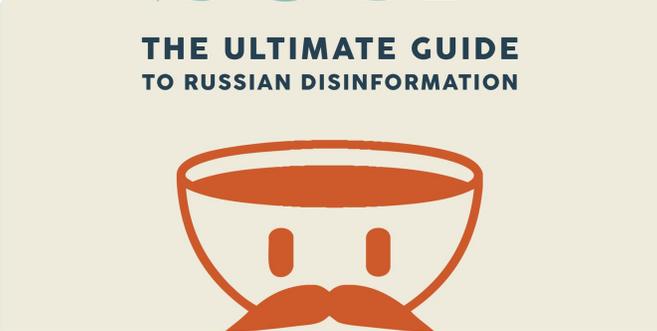
Film critic Anton Dolin told Meduza that Trofimova's documentary likely appealed to the Venice Festival's organizers because all her characters "curse the war and want peace," and the movie offers an overall message that resonates with "European humanists" who are "unlikely to delve into the nuances." Dolin said most of the European journalists who saw Trofimova's film in Venice described it privately as "peace-promoting and honest." "I am sure the selection committee came to the same conclusion," he said.

Documentarian Vitaly Mansky told [TV Rain](#) that *Russians at War* is a "professional" and "very important" propaganda piece that he compares to work by Nazi propaganda filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl. He said it would be "idiocy" to accept Trofimova's claim that she managed to film on Russia's frontlines for seven months without the Defense Ministry's permission. (Mansky said he tried previously to hire someone to record footage on Russia's side of the front, but the Russian authorities immediately arrested his cameraman.)

Trofimova insists that she witnessed no war crimes herself and “hid nothing from the audience,” but Ukrainian officials have denounced her film and Western organizations’ support for it. The charity platform United24 (an initiative by the Zelensky administration) says Trofimova “overlooked” the realities faced by the Ukrainians living in the regions she visited. (The group has also challenged the legality of her very presence in Ukraine’s occupied territories.) President Zelensky’s chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, argued in a Telegram post that there’s no place in “the civilized world” for work by Trofimova and “certain other figures of Russian culture.” In Canada, Ukrainian diplomat Oleh Nikolenko unsuccessfully lobbied the 49th annual Toronto International Film Festival to cancel its screenings of *Russians at War*.

The Ukrainian filmmakers behind *Songs of Slow Burning Earth*, which also screened at the Venice Festival, say Trofimova’s documentary evokes “pity, sadness, and emotion” for Russian soldiers without showing the consequences of their violence against Ukrainians. “[M]issiles are striking Ukrainian cities. The buttons are pushed by ordinary Russians. Are their crimes any less significant simply because they claim to be unaware of why they are involved in this war?” asked producer Darya Bassel.

My book titled “Vatnik Soup - The Ultimate Guide to Russian Disinformation” will be published on 20 Sep 2024, you can now pre-order it from here (comes with extra goodies!):



**THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
TO RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION**

Pre-Order * Vatnik Soup — KLE-art**
FOR ENGLISH TEXT on the site - please select language at the top *Pre-Order*
Do your friends believe Ukraine is full of neo-Nazis and secret biolabs? Do you feel overwhelmed by propaganda and lies...
<https://www.kleart.dk/webshop/p/vatnik-soup>

<https://www.amazon.com/Vatnik-Soup-Ultimate-Russian-Disinformation/dp/8792750400>

• • •