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Anger as Mikhalkov's Flop Wins Oscar Nod

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Nikita Mikhalkov's war movie "Citadel," a critical and commercial flop, has won Russia's nomination for a foreign-language Oscar, beating out two films that drew rave reviews at European film festivals.

Two prominent film directors denounced on Wednesday the decision by Russia's Oscar committee to submit "Citadel" for the award. The film cost an estimated $40 million to produce, a record for a Russian film, but grossed a dismal $5 million at the box office and reaped many scathing reviews.

"Citadel's" nomination received far more votes than two rivals, Alexander Sokurov's "Faust" — this year's winner of the Venice Film Festival — and Andrei Zvyagintsev's "Elena," which took a Special Jury Prize in Cannes.

The voting on Monday ended in scandal after Oscar committee head Vladimir Menshov

refused to sign a document confirming the selection of "Citadel," Interfax reported.

Menshov acknowledged at a news conference Wednesday that his refusal would not stop the nomination. But he criticized the vote, saying the committee is controlled by people appointed by Mikhalkov, who won a foreign-language Oscar in 1994 for "Burnt by the Sun," the prequel for "Citadel."

"I don't think the voting was democratic," said Menshov, who himself won the foreign-language Oscar in 1981 for the sentimental love story "Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears," Itar-Tass reported.

He said many leading Russian directors, including Alexei Balabanov, Vladimir Bortko and both Alexei German Sr. and Jr., are not part of the Oscar committee, possibly because of a quarrel with Mikhalkov. In 2009, a group of dissenters unsuccessfully attempted to replace Mikhalkov as head of the Cinematographers Union.

His criticism was echoed by Mikhalkov's own brother, director Andrei Konchalovsky, who said Tuesday that Russia's Oscar committee was not representative of the country's cinematographic community, RIA-Novosti reported.

Konchalovsky, who worked in Hollywood, directing "Runaway Train" (1985) and "Tango and Cash" (1989), said he opposed "Citadel's" nomination.

Mikhalkov has not commented on the uproar.

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