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Russian State TV to Launch Reality Show About Army

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Two state-run TV channels are preparing patriotic programs in conjunction with the Defense Ministry, including a reality show featuring soldiers, in a move that one activist said is aimed at increasing military propaganda amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Kommersant newspaper reported Wednesday.

The Rossia-2 channel is to launch a reality TV show following professional soldiers in their fight for survival on an uninhabited island, Kommersant said, citing sources in the Defense Ministry.

The program, which was developed jointly with the ministry, will be called "Natural Selection," and the first four episodes are scheduled to air in December, according to the newspaper.

Another military-related program is in the pipeline over at Channel One, the report said,

citing Alexander Ilin, an adviser to the channel's general director.

"Sendoff to the Army," which will see Defense Ministry officials attend ceremonial send-offs for conscripts at Moscow's Olimpiisky Stadium, has yet to be approved by the ministry and the Moscow Mayor's Office, the report said. The channel's press service told Kommersant it had no knowledge of such a program.

Svetlana Kuznetsova, chairwoman of Soldiers' Mothers, an NGO that campaigns for the rights of soldiers and their families, said in comments to Kommersant that the programs were likely part of the state's wider propaganda campaign, which she said had already affected many young men joining the military.

"There are fewer guys who don't want to join the army," Kuznetsova was cited as saying, adding that the increased propaganda was likely tied to events in neighboring Ukraine.

Kuznetsova said the military should boost its ranks with older, more experienced men rather than teenagers, noting that younger men were more impressionable and easy to persuade to join the military, "including by means of such programs."

The Defense Ministry has taken steps in recent years to improve its reputation, following multiple reports of serious hazing among military conscripts. Military service of one year is mandatory for Russian men.

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