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Russian Duma Defends Controversial Film Amid 'Aggressive' Religious Protests

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Still from the movie “Mathilde.” **Mathilde**

Russia's State Duma has refused to condemn a controversial new film depicting the life of Russian Tsar Nicholas⊠II, despite religious protesters threatening to burn cinemas to the ground if screenings go ahead.

Members of the Duma Culture Committee⊠said that attacks on Alexei Uchitel's “Mathilde” — the story of⊠Nicholas' affair with Polish ballerina Mathilde Kschessinska — were⊠damaging Russians' right to freedom of expression.

“The law protects the rights and⊠freedoms of citizens. The State Duma Culture Committee will continue⊠to protect Russians' freedom of creativity,” the committee said in⊠a statement.

"We do not support any attack⊠aimed at a work of art or freedom of creativity."

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Religious activists had petitioned officials to ban the film, claiming that its depiction of Tsar Nicholas II — who was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000 — was offensive.

Some protesters also threatened movie theaters directly, claiming that "cinemas would burn, maybe people will even suffer," if they chose to show the film.

"Citizens have every right to be indignant and to express their point of view," Culture Committee chief Stanislav Govorukhin told the Interfax news agency. "But when this indignation turns into aggression and vandalism, that is unacceptable."

"Mathilde" is currently due for release in October.

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