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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Cinema's Meryl Streep Moment

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AP Photo / Mikhail Metzel

This Tuesday, Russia celebrated the 30th annual Nika Awards — a national film ceremony presented by the Russian Academy of Cinema Arts and Sciences. Established in 1987, it's basically Russia's domestic version of the Oscars, where winners take home a little statue modelled on the Winged Victory of Samothrace, instead of a tiny golden knight.

This year's Nika Awards were more like the last Golden Globes, however, thanks to several speeches by winners who took the opportunity to criticize how the Russian authorities handled last Sunday's anti-corruption protests.

Granted, nobody stood up and delivered a six-minute attack on the president in the spirit of Meryl Streep's remarks in January about Donald Trump, but the public show of support was itself remarkable, given that Vladimir Putin would compare the demonstrations to an armed coup, just two days later.

Alexander Sokurov, who won the Eldar Ryazanov award for Honor and Dignity, said from the stage that the "state is making a mistake" by cracking down on schoolchildren and students.

“The government should be listening to them,” he said, also criticizing the justice system for locking up Oleg Sentsov, the Ukrainian filmmaker sentenced to 20 years in prison for allegedly plotting terrorist acts in Crimea.

Sokurov also called on Russian lawmakers to adopt legislation that would make it illegal to arrest or even to lay hands on women who participate in mass demonstrations.

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Accepting the Discovery of the Year award for his film “Collector,” director Alexei Krasovsky called on Russian filmmakers to stand up for the thousand demonstrators arrested in last Sunday’s nationwide protests, telling the audience that “there were more than twice as many [detentions] than there are people in this room.”

Mark Zakharov, the director of the Lenkom theater, voiced his support for these remarks, telling the audience, “I’m glad Krasovsky spoke up about some of our worst, most serious problems in this country.”

Claiming her award for Best Supporting Actress, Yelena Koreneva also shared her support for several Russian political prisoners, including Oleg Sentsov, Sergei Mokhnatkin (sentenced to 4.5 years for assaulting a police officer at a protest in December 2013), and Oleg Navalny (the imprisoned brother of opposition leader Alexei Navalny).

While video footage of this year’s Nika Awards exists and can be found in excerpts on social media, the ceremony was not broadcast on Russian national television.

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