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# ArtDocFest Under Fire Over Ukraine Films

## In its tenth year, the popular Russian festival of documentary films continues to attract controversy

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**Vitaly Mansky (Sergei Savostyanov / TASS)**

ArtDocFest, a popular Russian festival of documentary films in its tenth year, made news in Moscow this weekend — but not on the culture pages.

Ultranationalist supporters of separatists in eastern Ukraine disrupted the screening of a film about the ongoing war in Donbass and caused the auditorium to be evacuated.

Problems began on Saturday with the premiere of "Bullet's Flight" by Beata Bubenets.

The documentary about the Ukrainian Aidar battalion was filmed in a single 80-minute

sequence. The battalion, accused of war crimes by Amnesty International, was disbanded by the Ukrainian government in March 2015, a year after the film was shot.

A group of activists watched the film and then argued with the filmmaker. They demanded that the festival administrators remove it from the program. Vitaly Mansky, director of the film festival, refused.

"I am utterly convinced that the film doesn't make heroes out of the characters," he said. "It opens up a discussion about the tragedy going on in Ukraine. I thought that these were reasonable people who saw that there was nothing to protest against."

Igor Beketov, an activist of the nationalist group SERB (South-East Radical Bloc), who prefers to be identified as Gosha Tarasevich, told The Moscow Times that a first group had taped the film on a cellphone and then shared with others.

He said that the film "showed hatred for Russia and Russians. It showed people who killed and continued to kill the population of Donbass as fighting for their homeland, but they are murderers."

**Embed:**

The next day the activists returned as the audience was filling the hall. Footage by Radio Liberty and other sources shows the activists, audience members and festival staff arguing in the hallway in front of the theater.

The arguing leads to scuffles as the group members try to get into the hall. The police are called and eventually lead away some of the activists.

Inside, the first 15 minutes were shown to a packed hall before one of the activists who slipped in covered the projector.

When a noxious smell filled the hall, the screening was canceled and the hall emptied. Mansky said he'd never seen anything like it. "They stormed the hall, and people's lives were in danger."

Tarasevich said that he and several other activists were detained on hooliganism charges and were under investigation. His group was planning to launch a countersuit against the festival organizers for showing a film that, in their view, incited interethnic violence.

They also objected to a scene that showed the passport of a separatist, which Tarasevich said put the man's family in Ukraine at risk.

Tarasevich said he didn't regret his actions and would "continue to fight against films like this being shown in Russia at festivals."

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This is not the first time the festival has experienced problems. Culture Minister Vladimir

Medinsky once vowed to never again give ArtDocFest government funding because of Mansky's "anti-state" position.

Mansky, who was born in Ukraine and has been openly critical about Russian involvement there, doesn't think the problem is the film.

"It is obvious that there is a problem in our society, people who have been deceived. They don't know what's going on and they don't want any dialog."

Another film, "War for Peace," by Ukrainian director Yevgeny Titarenko, was also dropped from the program. In an official announcement on the festival site, the Czech Embassy cultural center, which was set to host the film, wrote that they didn't have time or resources to prepare for any possible incidents.

A third film, "Mustafa," about Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev, directed by Ernes Sarykhalilov, was removed from the program following a request from the Center to Combat Extremism. It can now only be shown once it is determined that the film does not feature extremist content.

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