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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Celebrities, Public Figures Speak Out Against Ukraine War

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An armoured vehicle moves across the town of Armyansk, northern Crimea. **Sergei Malgavko / TASS**

Russian celebrities, journalists and other public figures have voiced opposition to President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine on Thursday, with activists planning to stage an anti-war rally in central Moscow this evening.

Pop stars, late-night television hosts and film directors have been posting black squares to Instagram in protest of the war.

"We the Russians will be dealing with the consequences of today for many more years," wrote socialite and former presidential candidate Ksenia Sobchak.

An anti-war petition launched by Kommersant business daily reporter Elena Chernenko has collected at least 100 journalists' signatures. The signatories include employees of outlets including RBC, Novaya Gazeta, Dozhd, Ekho Moskvy, Snob and The Bell, as well as state-run media TASS and RT.

Novaya Gazeta editor-in-chief and 2021 Nobel Peace Prize winner Dmitry Muratov denounced Putin's warnings against outside interference and echoed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy's appeal for Russians to stand up against the war.

"The commander-in-chief spins the 'nuclear button' in his hands like a keychain from an expensive car. Is the next step a nuclear salvo? I cannot interpret Vladimir Putin's words about a retaliatory weapon in any other way," Muratov said.

"Only the anti-war movement of Russians can save life on this planet," he said in a video message announcing that the newspaper's next edition will be published in both Russian and Ukrainian.

Later, a coalition of 30 independent Russian media outlets declared opposition to "the massacre started by the Russian leadership."

"We promise that we will be honest about what is happening while we have this opportunity," the Syndicate-100 coalition wrote.

"We wish resilience and strength to the people of Ukraine who are resisting aggression and to everyone in Russia who is now trying to resist militaristic madness," it added.

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The Memorial human rights organization, which Russia ordered to be liquidated late last year, said the war will mark "a shameful chapter in Russian history."

More than 150 Russian scientists and scientific journalists signed an open letter against the "unfair and frankly meaningless" Russian military action in Ukraine.

"By unleashing the war, Russia has condemned itself to international isolation and the position of a rogue state," said the letter published on the TrV-Nauka scientific news website.

"This means that we scientists will no longer be able to do our job properly... Russia's isolation from the world means the further cultural and technological degradation of our country."

More than 150 municipal deputies from Russian cities signed an open letter condemning the deadly attack on Ukraine.

"This is an unprecedented atrocity, for which there is no and cannot be any justification," the local lawmakers wrote.

"We are convinced that the citizens of Russia did not give him such a mandate," they added. "Hopes for a good life in Russia are crumbling before our eyes."

Several cultural figures have also made statements against the war.

"Soviet crimes went unpunished in Russia, and so they recur. The price for what was not done in 1991 are the Russian missiles and bombs killing Ukrainians today," Sergei Lebedev, author

of “Untraceable,” wrote under a photograph of the Bykivnia graves outside Kyiv where “enemies of the people” executed by the NKVD were buried.

"It is too early to ask Ukrainians to forgive us," he wrote. "We will ask for forgiveness after the criminals who began this war are punished. If they are punished."

Yelena Kovalskaya, director of the Meyerhold Theater Center, announced her resignation from the state theater Thursday, saying: "It is impossible to work for a murderer and receive salary from him. I will finish the work I’ve started, but without pay."

The police-monitoring website OVD-Info reported dozens of detentions in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other Russian cities for staging solo pickets against the war.

Activist Marina Litvinovich called on Russians to attend a “walk” against the war at 7 p.m. Moscow time, including on Pushkin Square in central Moscow.

Soon after, authorities detained Litvinovich outside her home, the independent broadcaster Dozhd reported.

Moscow prosecutors warned that unauthorized gatherings are illegal and will lead to “negative consequences.”

The Kremlin said Thursday that it believes public opinion is “no less supportive” of Russia’s military operation in Ukraine than of Putin’s recognition of Ukraine’s two breakaway regions, which state-run polling said enjoys support among four out of five Russians.

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