

WAR ON UKRAINE - Media Insights #3

Between 16-22 May we have monitored Russian state media to detect their main war & propaganda narratives, as well as the independent international media to assess their coverage of the Russian war in Ukraine and anti-war/peace protests.

Between May and October 2022, we will be issuing a weekly newsletter containing the results of our monitoring, looking at the main propaganda narratives detected on Russian media during the week. This will be complemented by news from independent international media sources to distribute these insights outside the country. The newsletter will include main spotlights from Russian and international news coverage focusing on relevant information, key propaganda and disinformation narratives, statistics, quotes, interviews, expert opinions, independent views, as well as other pertinent developments. This is the third issue of the newsletter covering the period 16-22 May. All previous issues (since the beginning of monitoring on 4 May) can be found on our [website](#).

You can subscribe to the public newsletter [Media Insights - War on Ukraine](#) [here](#).

Main Events and Updates

From 16 - 22 May, the monitored **Russian media** reported on:

- The summit of member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (consisting of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia) and its 20th anniversary. It should be mentioned that the summit's declaration was silent on the events in Ukraine.
- The top event of the week was the surrender of several thousands of Azovstal "militants" and the final "liberation" of Mariupol. The coverage included blaming the Ukrainian regime for the "Nazi" ideology in general and the Azov regimen in particular.
- For the first time since the beginning of the monitoring, public criticism of Russia's "military operation" was aired on state television (Russia 1).
- The shooting in Buffalo, New York (60 minutes program on Russia 1 compared the Buffalo shooter to Azov fighters).

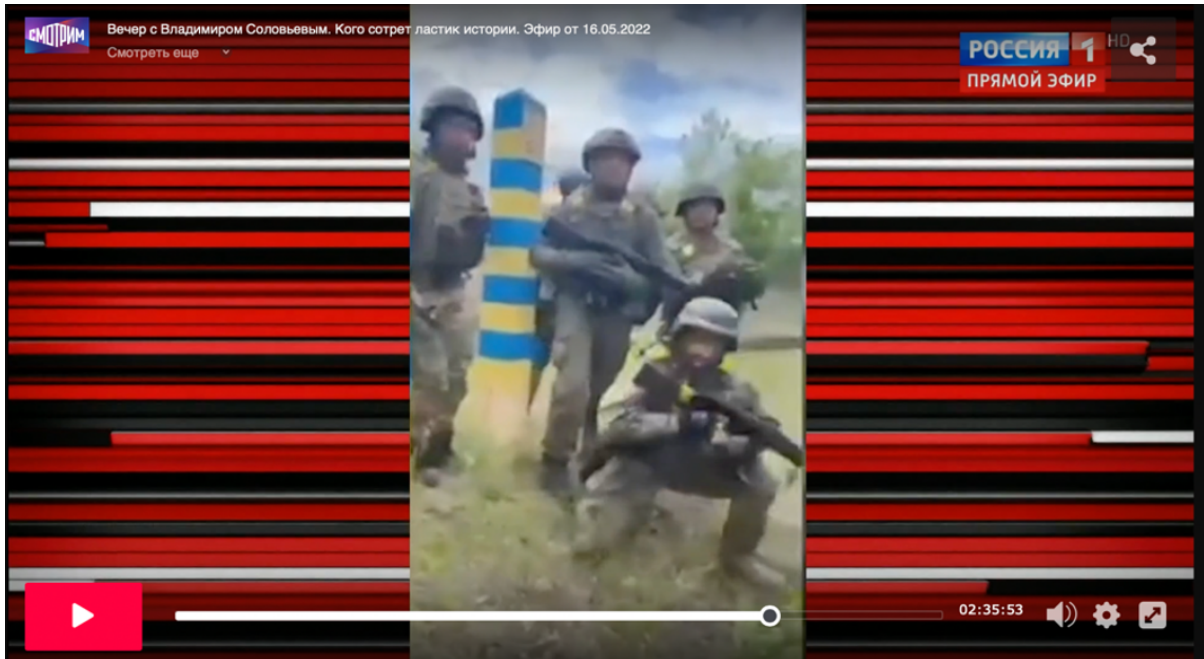
In the same period, **international media** coverage of the war focused on:

- The Swedish government [confirmed](#) its intention to apply for NATO membership, thus joining neighboring Finland in stopping the 200 years of neutrality (the Guardian, 16 May, 2022). On 18 May 2022, both countries officially submitted their bids to join NATO.
- The US Senate overwhelmingly [approved](#) the 40-billion package of military aid to Ukraine.
- Russia managed to occupy 90% of the Luhansk region.
- The Ukrainian Army pushed the Russian forces back to the border in the Kharkiv region.

Photos of the Week



Putin and his allies at the Summit of Collective Treaty Security Organization (CSTA) on 16 May.



Russia's 1 Channel [disputed](#) the fact that Ukrainian troops pushed the Russian army to the border in the Kharkiv region and reorted that Ukrainians carried a portable border post to the border, referring to the image above.



The picture of Putin from the Timothy Snyder [piece](#) “*We Should Say It. Russia Is Fascist*” (NYT, 19 May, 2022).

More buses reportedly leave Mariupol's Azovstal plant, according to Russian state media

From CNN's Katharina Krebs in London



Buses carrying service members of Ukrainian forces who spent weeks holed up at the Azovstal plant drive away under escort of the pro-Russian military in Mariupol, Ukraine, on May 17. (Alexander Ermochenko/Reuters)

CNN [reported](#) that buses "allegedly, with surrendered militants from the Azovstal plant, accompanied by armored vehicles, moved to the exit from Mariupol," RIA Novosti reported, adding that no shots were fired at the Azovstal plant for several hours before the column of buses left. On 17 May, the spokesperson of the Russian Defense Ministry, Major Gen. Igor Konashenkov, said that 265 militants, including 51 seriously injured, surrendered at the Azovstal and had been evacuated on Monday night.

Quotes of the Week

"All Finns are hostages of info-psychological propaganda," the human rights activist Johan Backman said, adding that the Finnish government is constantly threatening people with economic consequences and hard times.

(18 May, RIA Novosti)

"This is a NATO special operation against Finland and Russia," the political scientist Johan Beckman said. In addition, the expert called the results of the Finnish parliament vote, "theatre", where 188 out of 200 deputies approved the government's report proposing the country's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance.

(18 May, RIA Novosti)

*"Motherland is not the President's ass that needs to be kissed all the time", the leader of the Russian DDT band Yuriy Shevchuk at his concert in Ufa.
(19 May, Radio Liberty)*

*"A time traveler from the 1930s would have no difficulty identifying the Putin regime as fascist. [The symbol Z](#), the rallies, the propaganda, the war as a cleansing act of violence and the death pits around Ukrainian towns make it all very plain. The war against Ukraine is not only a return to the traditional fascist battleground but also a return to traditional fascist language and practice."
(Timothy Snyder, 19 May, 2022, [NYT](#))*

Media Insights

What were the main narratives on Russian state media?

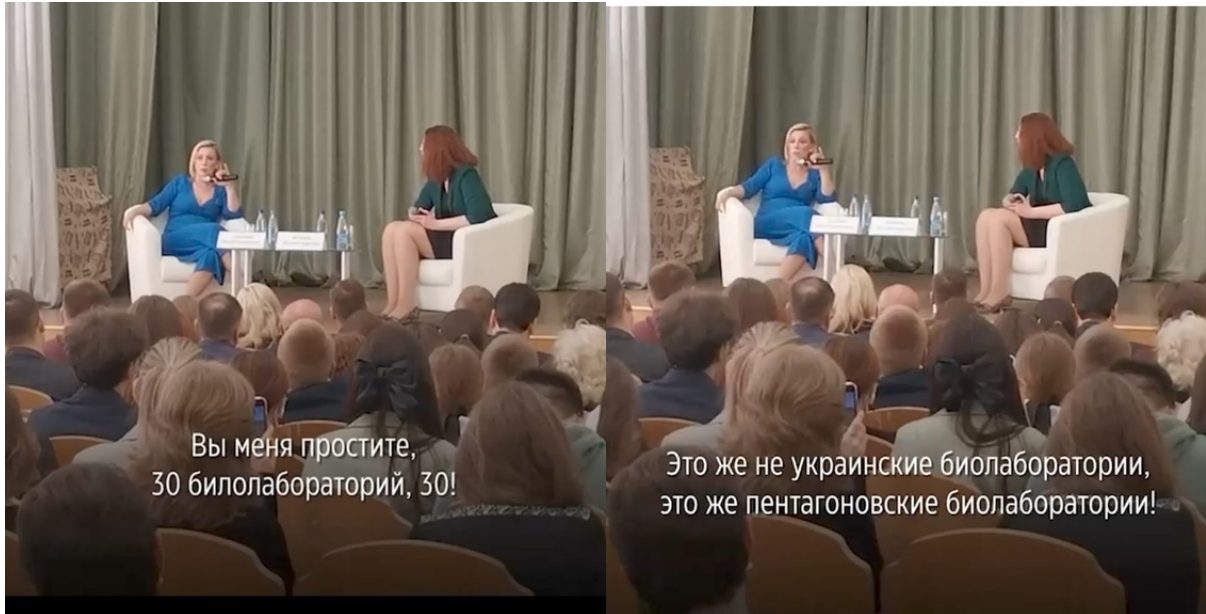
NATO expansion through the accession of Sweden and Finland will trigger a response from Russia

Speaking at the summit of CSTO member states, Putin [warned](#) that expansion of NATO's military infrastructure to Russia's border through the accession of Sweden and Finland will necessarily trigger a response from Russia, though "Russia has no problems with those countries" (16 May, *Gazeta.ru*). Maria Zakharova later [spoke](#) about the "surprise" response to Finland's decision to join NATO (18 May, *KP*)

USA and NATO develop biological weapons and viruses in Ukraine

Speaking at the CSTO summit, Putin [accused](#) the Pentagon of developing hundreds of biological laboratories in post-Soviet space to produce biological weapons and viruses (16 May, *KP*).

Marina Zakharova further [developed](#) this narrative claiming that Ukrainian refugees are, first of all, tested for tuberculosis because western countries know what NATO did in Ukraine (17 May, *KP*). On another occasion, during a meeting with students in Ekaterinburg, she [spoke](#) about 30 Pentagon laboratories in Ukraine engaged in the production of biological weapons.



Screenshots from the [video](#) of Zakharova's communication with students (22 May, Telegram channel "Stop War" [Net Voynе])

Ukrainian "militants" from Azovstal steelworks were abandoned by the Ukrainian government and laid down their arms, relying on the mercy of Russian soldiers

On Monday, 265 Ukrainian militants defending Azovstal, including 51 heavily injured, laid down their arms and [surrendered](#), according to the Russian Defense Ministry and its speaker Konashenkov on 16 May (17 May, TV Russia 24), and 694 militants [surrendered](#) later during that day (18 May, NTV), reaching the total number of 959. It continued further, and as of 20 May, as many as 1908 Ukrainian [militants](#) surrendered (20 May, NTV).

[NOTE: The footage by the Russian Foreign Ministry did not blur the soldiers' faces as the Western media did and tried to show their tattoos as a sign of adhering to Nazi ideology.]

"Nazis" leaving Azovstal were not dirty, had great outfits, and didn't look into our eyes" - [reported](#) the war correspondent for Komsomolska Pravda. He continued: "Azov militants believed in our mercy and knew for sure that they would not have their legs shot out and their eyes gouged out. Just as the Azovs did with our prisoners".

The Russian media repeatedly emphasized that Azov "militants" [received](#) good medical care in the hospitals of Novoazovsk and that Russia observes all military conventions regarding the treatment of captives (18 May, Russia 24).

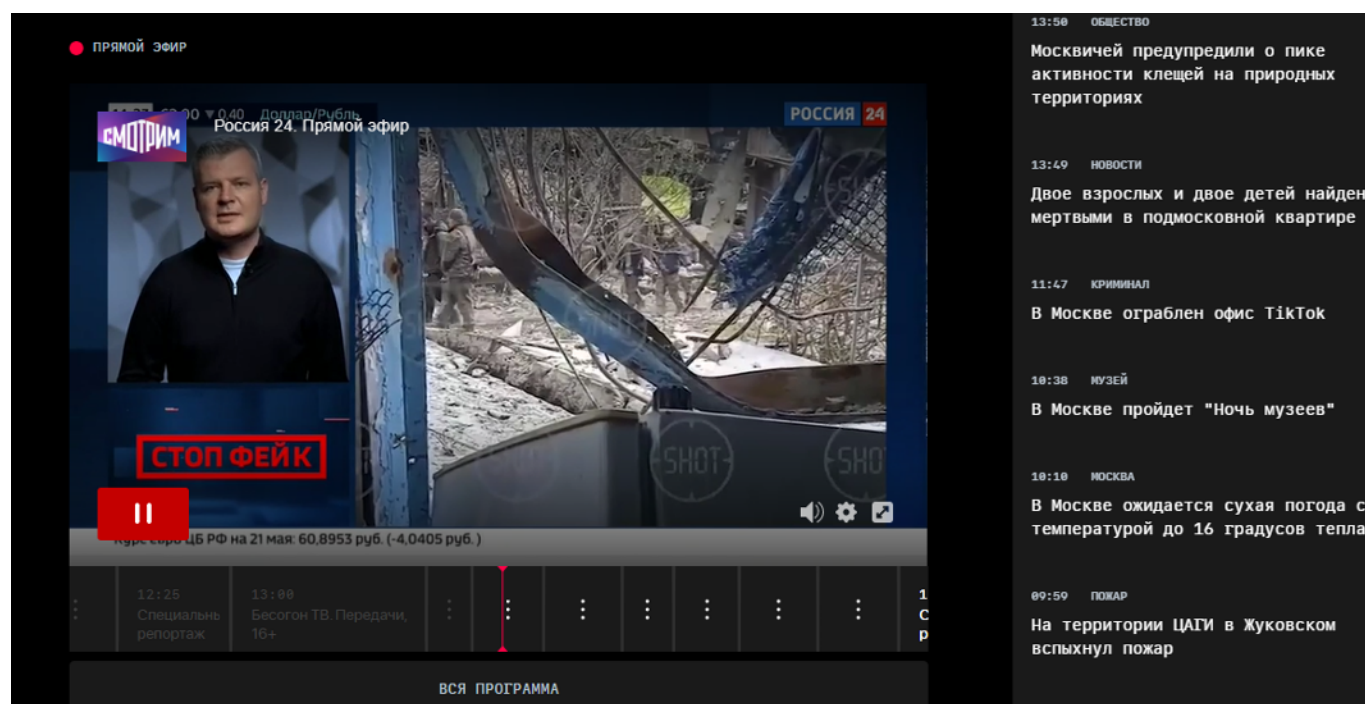
Earlier TV Russia24 reported that Ukrainian "radicals" were [abandoned](#) by Ukrainian authorities and had no chance of receiving help, while Kyiv was sending untrained Territorial Defense fighters to the frontline (17 May, Russia 24).

Ukraine produced "fakes" about the surrender of Azovstal militants

In a special Russia 24 program "Stop Fake" (a copycat of the well-known Ukrainian [initiative](#)

StopFake) broadcast on 21 May, Ukraine was accused of producing a fake narrative of “evacuation”, covering the surrender of the Azov regimen in Mariupol. One of the commentators, a political expert Roman Golovanov, derided this with a comparison to Hitler’s army’s defeat: *“Hitler’s army was also evacuated as far as Berlin?” He also said that pictures of the “rotten, stinky mutants being brought out of the Azovstal destroyed the ideal picture of Azovstal defenders, who were earlier compared in Ukraine to Brest fortress defenders”.*

Another version of the story was that the Kyiv regime never really intended to liberate the Azovstal defenders with a military operation and only spread false promises, including Zelenskyi’s promise after the meeting with the Pope.



Screenshot from the program 'Stop Fake' (21 May, Russia 24).

“Nazi brand” of Azov was developed for years by the Kyiv regime

A special [report](#) on the Azov regime produced by Russia 24 accused it of following the fascist ideology and neo-pagan religion of hatred. Below there are some statements voiced in this report:

A patient called Ukraine has a well-known disease - “fascism”. “Azov” is an incubator for a new neo-pagan religion of hatred. The Azov battalion was infamous for annihilating ideological opponents of the current regime, and it is also known for the cruel treatment of captives. The “runic” symbols of Azov are Nazi symbols. Neo-Nazis from Azov are not just a bunch of militants, it’s a well-financed international project who is a symbol for Nazis from the whole world. Its leader Andriy Biletsky called to chop heads of Russian children.

Earlier the official representative of Russia’s foreign ministry Mariya Zakharova [spoke](#) about the recruitment of minors by the “Azov” battalion, starting from 7 years of age, “neo-Nazi” training camps (18 May, Russia 24).

USA and Western countries are to be blamed for the imminent global food crisis

While the world warns about the looming global food crisis due to Russia's blockade of the Ukrainian ports, Russia accuses the USA and other Western countries of unwise economic moves, growing inflation and sanctions against the Russian economy that would lead to food shortages. The permanent Russian Envoy to the UN, Vasiliy Nebenzia, [boasted](#) of an expected record-high wheat harvest this year in Russia and its readiness to export 25 billion tons of wheat. (20 May, *Russia24*)

The "liberated" Ukraine's regions will soon flourish in the Russian family

Russian Vice-Prime-Minister Marat Khusnullin together with Sergey Aksenov visited the so-called "liberated" (under the Russian control) areas of the Kherson and Zaporizzhia regions and [reassured](#) the local residents that they would soon be rebuilt by Russia while the local population would soon receive salaries and pensions in rubles (19 May, *KP*).

Ukrainian army shell civilians in Donetsk and the Kursk region of Russia

According to the NTV report, the Ukrainian army is constantly [shelling](#) civilians in the Petrovskiy district of Donetsk, located not far from Marjanka under the control of the Ukrainian army (18 May, *NTV*). Allegedly one person died because of recent shelling.

Ukrainian military advances are "fake"

A video of the Ukrainian soldiers reaching the Russian border in the Kharkiv region was [dismissed](#) as "fake" and debunked by Russian "experts" claiming that soldiers could make a video with a log painted in Ukrainian national colours anywhere, in any field (16 May, *NTV*).

Nazis always surrender

At the beginning of the week, Russian news reported on the exit of the Azov battalion fighters and Ukrainian soldiers as a military victory, on the weekend's evening political shows they portrayed the surrender - as the most important success of all successes and equaled it to the surrender of Nazis, in the Evening with Vladimir Soloviev from [22 May, 2022](#).

Merciful Russia

Russia, unlike Ukraine, provides medical assistance to all wounded from Azovstal, said Russian MFA spokesperson, Maria Zakharova. (18 May, [Ria](#)).

Economic sanctions boost Russia's economic development

Sakhalin and Kirule Islands are the main growing points, as stated during Kiselev's [News of the Week](#), supporting a narrative that Western sanctions spur development. (22 May, *Russia 1/Smotrim*)

Margarita Simonyan declared that Western companies leaving Russia is our chance to promote our products. It's our chance to be a different country. Country - Garden. (22 May, *Russia 1/Smotrim - Evening with Vladimir Solovyov*)

What did independent media say about the main topics?

Sweden and Finland formally submit bids to join NATO

Finland and Sweden [submitted](#) their [bids to join NATO](#) on Wednesday, despite Turkey's threat to block the addition of the Nordic nations. Turkey claims that both Sweden and Finland have provided a refuge for Kurdish groups it labels "terrorists," and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan insists Ankara will not approve the expansion. (18 May, DW).

The decision of Sweden and Finland to join NATO is one of the biggest strategic consequences of Russia's invasion of [Ukraine](#) to date, though previously these countries for decades considered that joining the 30-member, US-led NATO alliance would represent an unnecessary provocation of Moscow (16 May, [Guardian](#)). "To remain outside of NATO alone would put Sweden in a very vulnerable position. So the best thing for Sweden's security and the Swedish people's security is that we join NATO together with Finland," - [said](#) Swedish PM Magdalena Andersson (16 May, NYT).

According to BBC correspondent [Paul Adams](#), Putin realizes - belatedly perhaps - that there's nothing he can do to stop the two Nordic countries from joining NATO (16 May, BBC).

Future of evacuated Ukrainian fighters from Azovstal is uncertain

While the Russian media speak about "surrender", Western media emphasize the importance of Mariupol's resistance to change the cause of war. It is remarkable that in their footage they blur the soldiers' faces, unlike the Russian media.

The Western media reported that Ukrainian soldiers, many of them wounded, were [evacuated](#) from the besieged Azovstal steel plant and will be later exchanged to bring them home. The general staff of Ukraine's armed forces said that the soldiers defending the steel plant had fulfilled their combat mission (17 May, [Guardian](#)).

The NYT's [report](#) emphasizes that the future of the Azovstal defenders who followed the surrender directive is uncertain. While Ukrainian authorities pledged they would soon be exchanged for Russian prisoners held by Ukraine, Russian officials raised the prospect that at least some of the prisoners would be treated as war criminals (17 May, NYT).

"Nazi criminals should not be exchanged," the speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament, Vyacheslav Volodin, [said](#) on Tuesday. "We should do everything to ensure they are put on trial." Another senior politician, Leonid Slutsky, went further, calling the evacuated combatants "animals in human form" and saying they should be executed (18 May, BBC).

UN warns of the global famine and urges Russia to free Ukrainian grain

UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres [warned](#) on Wednesday of years of mass hunger and famine if a growing global food crisis goes unchecked. He urged Russia to release Ukrainian grain as the ports of Odessa, Chornomorsk and others were cut off from the world by Russian warships (18 May, [France 24](#)).

Meanwhile, a former Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev [claimed](#) that Russia would not continue food supplies unless the west eased its sanctions on the Kremlin (20 May, *Guardian*).

Russia is a fascist country, according to a well-known historian Timothy Snyder

While the Russian propaganda narratives routinely portray Ukraine as a “Nazi country” and the “Azov” regimen as Nazis, it was quite unexpected to find the similar characteristics applied to Russia in the Western media. Probably for the first time it was called a fascist country in a [piece](#) by a well-known historian Timothy Snyder published by New York Times.

According to him, contemporary Russia has all the characteristics of fascism: *“The symbol Z, the rallies, the propaganda, the war as a cleansing act of violence and the death pits around Ukrainian towns make it all very plain”*. He also mentions the ruthless Russian propaganda techniques: *“Calling others fascists while being a fascist is the essential Putin-ist practice. Jason Stanley, an American philosopher, calls it “[undermining propaganda](#).” I have called it “[schizofascism](#).” The Ukrainians have the most elegant formulation. They call it “[ruscism](#)”*. (19 May, NYT).

Russian forces 'completely destroyed' the Donbas, - Zelenskyi

While Russian media speak about the alleged indiscriminate shelling of Donetsk by the Ukrainian army, Western media [quotes](#) Zelenskyi’s nightly video address to the nation on Thursday where he said that Russian forces completely destroyed Donbas. The Ukrainian President accused Russia of indiscriminate bombing, saying *“It is hell there — and that is not an exaggeration”* (DW, 20.05).

Twelve people were dead following a *“brutal and absolutely senseless bombardment”* of Severodonetsk on Thursday, according to the [President](#), and *“this is a deliberate and criminal attempt to kill as many Ukrainians as possible”* (20 May, *Guardian*).

New evidence of the war crimes in Bucha

New York Times [posted](#) a report with witness testimony and videos showing how Russian paratroopers executed at least eight Ukrainian men in a Kyiv suburb of Bucha on March 4, 2021. A photograph of the executed men’s bodies lying in a courtyard, some with their hands bound, was among a range of [images](#) that received global attention in early April after Russian forces withdrew from Bucha. Russian leaders at the [highest levels](#) have repeatedly [denied](#) wrongdoing in Bucha and described the images as a *“[provocation and fake](#).”* (19 May, NYT)

Summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in Moscow exposed lack of united response to Ukraine

At the summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organization in Moscow, only one of Russia’s five ally states, namely Belarus, spoke up to support Russia’s stand on Ukraine. The leaders of the other four C.S.T.O. members — Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan — did not even mention Ukraine in their televised remarks (16 May, [New York Times](#)).

More stories can be found here

- Infowars: Putin's propaganda permeates Italian media, (20 May, [Politico](#))
- More buses reportedly leave Mariupol's Azovstal plant, according to Russian state media, (18 May, [CNN](#))
- "We need a way out": Former Russian colonel criticizes war efforts in Ukraine, (18 May, [CNN](#))
- Ukraine ends bloody battle for Mariupol; Azovstal fighters evacuated, (17 May, [WP](#))
- Retired Russian colonel in apparent backtrack after criticizing Kremlin forces, (19 May, [WP](#))
- EU reputation at stake as Hungary continues to block Russia sanctions, (17 May, [Euroactiv](#))
- Finland's Bid to Join NATO is Good News for Poland, (16 May, [Wyborcza](#))

Anti-war/peace protests

Anti-war speech by Yuriy Shevchuk

"Motherland is not the President's ass that needs to be kissed all the time. Motherland is a poor grandma at a railway station selling potatoes", the leader of the Russian DDT band Yuriy Shevchuk [proclaimed](#) from a stage at his concert in Ufa on May 18. Right after the concert, an administrative protocol has been [drawn](#) up concerning his speech according to Article 20.3.3 (discrediting armed forces). (19 May, [RBC](#)).

The musician also delivered other anti-war messages: *"Why are people being killed in Ukraine now? Why are our young men dying there? What aims are there? Again, the youth of Russia and Ukraine is perishing, women, elderly, and children are dying for the sake of Napoleon-like plans of our Cesar?"*

Russian band "Bi-2" refused to perform under the banner supporting Putin

At the end of April, the Russian band "Bi-2" [refused](#) to perform at a stadium in Omsk under the large patriotic banner. The artists covered it with a black cloth, but when it was later uncovered, they cancelled the performance (16 May, [NTV](#)). According to [RBC](#), the banner was "Za Presidenta" ("In support of the President).

The NTV [report](#) mentions other celebrities criticizing the Russian aggression in Ukraine, namely, the frontman of the band "Nogu Svelo" Maks Pokrovskiy, a Russian actor and soap opera star Aleksandr Feklistov who admitted in his address to Ukrainian colleagues feeling enormous shame for Russia's actions, and frontman of the band "Mashina Vremeni" Andrey Makarevych. (16 May, [NTV](#))

Anti-war protest in Russia's province

Dmitry Skurikhin owns the building in a tiny Russian town Russko-Vysotskoye, and he made it a symbol of anti-war protests. In giant letters, he painted "Peace to Ukraine, Freedom to Russia!" In bright-red paint, he listed the names of Ukrainian towns that have been attacked by the Russian army - Mariupol, Bucha, Kherson, Chernihiv, and many more.



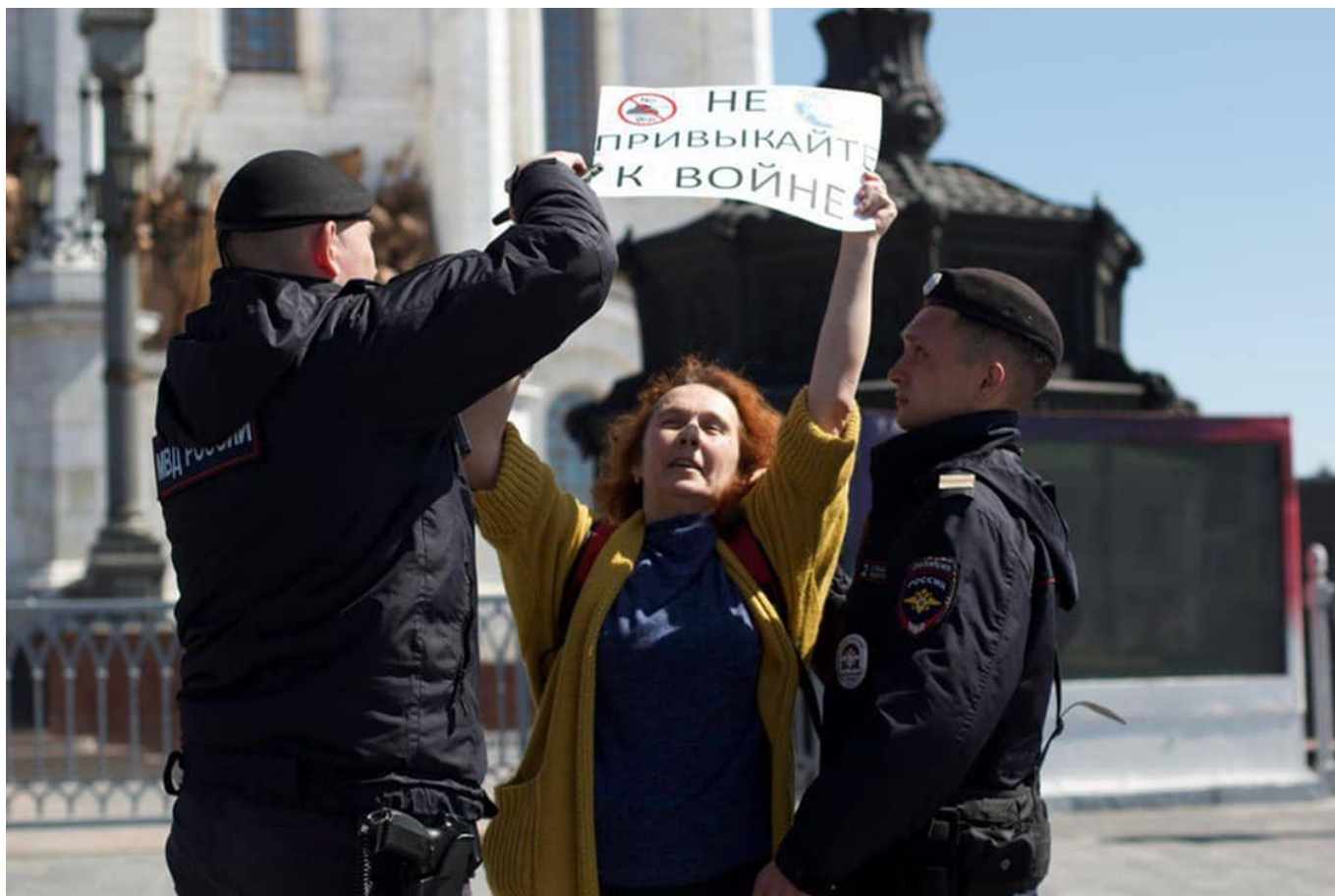
Dmitry realizes that he might be persecuted for his protest, but [confesses](#) he couldn't remain silent: "I couldn't just sit doing nothing. It would have torn me apart inside. But what I am doing is an act of desperation. Now Russians are outcasts. We deserve to be. This offensive will cast a shadow over us for a long time." (20 May, BBC).

Anti-war protest in Moscow's metro

Two brothers were standing with the placards "Stop War" on Pushkinska metro station in Moscow and were [detained](#) "for discrediting Russian military" (20 May, NTV)

One-person anti-war protest in Moscow

An activist Yekaterina Vorobyiova was detained for an anti-war protest near the temple of Christ the Savior in Moscow. She was carrying a banner "Do not get used to the war" (Telegram channel "No War")



Anti-war calligraphy in Bali

Angered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a Russian artist Pokras Lampras and his friend, a property businessman from Ukraine Alex Stephan, [created](#) a giant calligraphy project in Bali. They paint anti-war messages on the rooftops in different languages. It's already generating interest among locals and tourists (18 May, *Deutsche Welle*).

Unknown people doused the administration building in Evpatoria with yellow and blue paint on 16 May, informs the Telegram channel "No War".

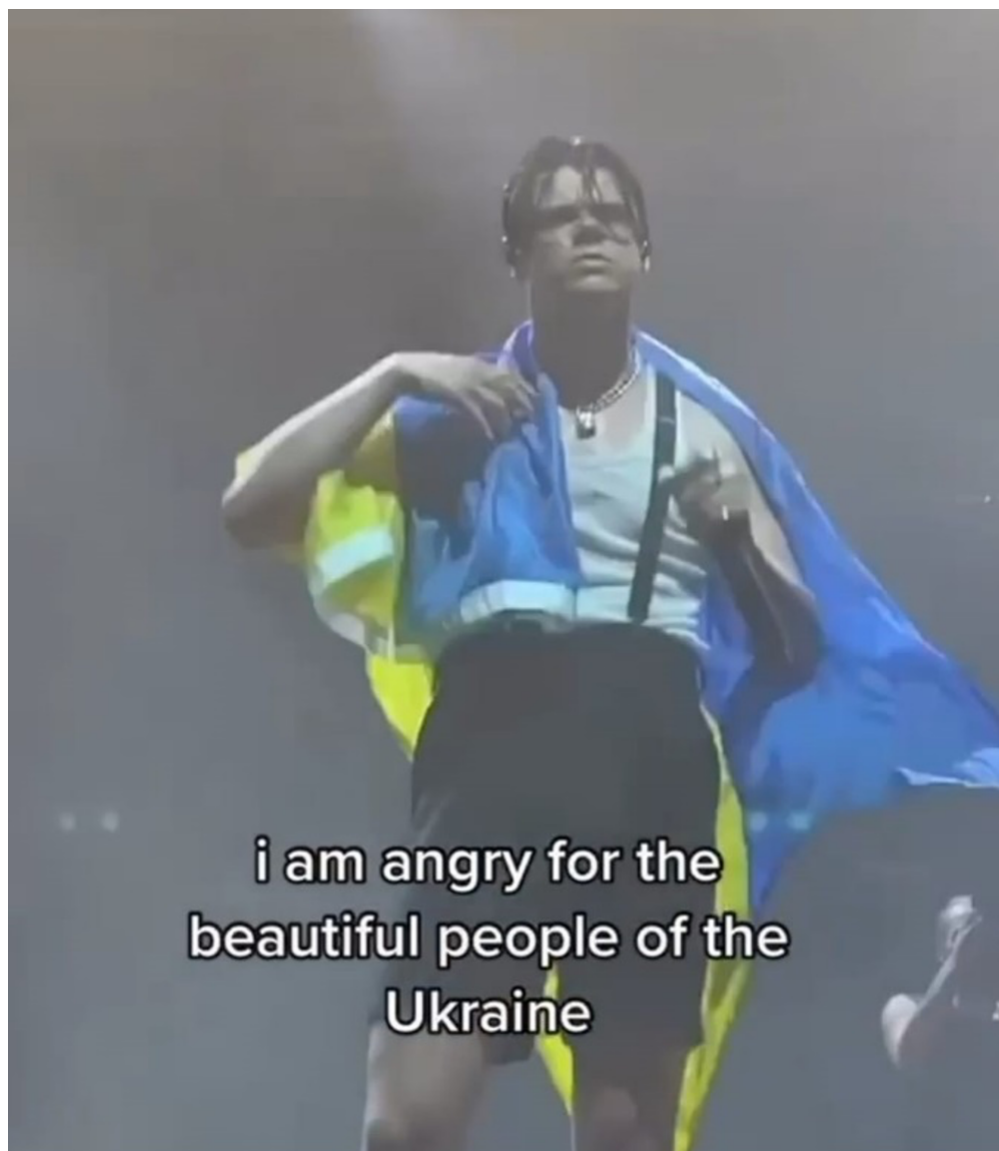
Moscow Basmanny Court arrests blogger Ruslan Leviev in absentia

According to open sources, Karpuk, also known as Leviev, is the creator of the Scanner project, which publishes data on Russian law enforcement officers, and the founder of the investigative Conflict Intelligence Team. The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation put him on the wanted list. (RFE Telegram channel - more info can also be found at the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#)).

Celebrities against the war

A famous British rocker Dominik Harrison aka Yungblud [called](#) to overthrow an "old scumbag" Putin during his recent concert in Vienna, - informs the Telegram channel "Leschenko here". He performed with a Ukrainian flag on his shoulders and shouted from the stage the following:

"I am terribly angry. I am terribly angry because of the beautiful people from Ukraine. Our generation can't support this shit. We need to replace those damn old freaks. We need to dump these old scumbags. Fuck Putin. We can make a difference. You have a voice, so use it! Glory to Ukraine!"



[Here](#) is the Russian version of the newsletter #3.