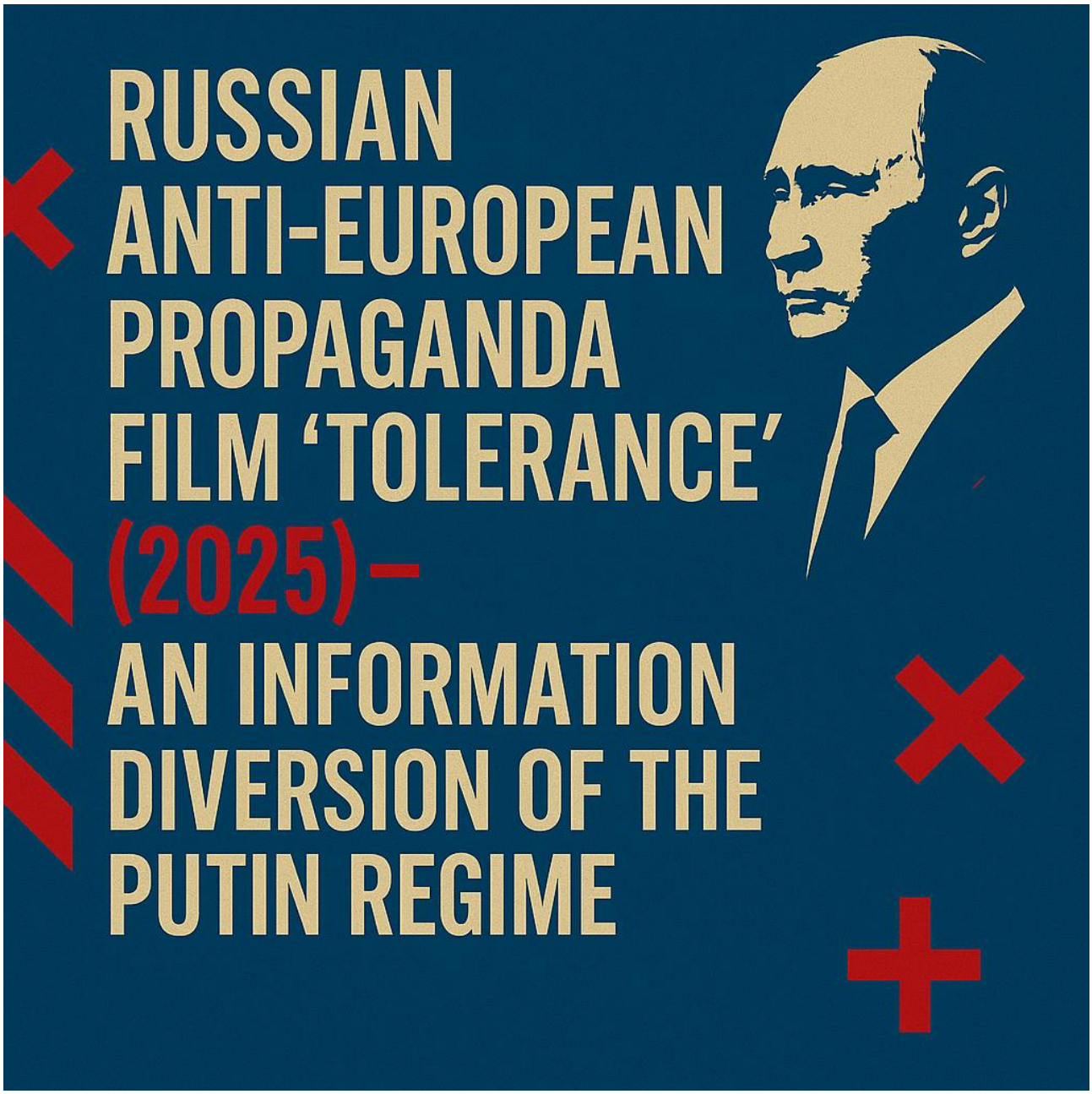
Russian Film “Tolerance” (2025) as an Instrument of Hybrid Anti-Democratic Propaganda: Factology, Analysis, Threats, and Counteraction



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Abstract

The film “Tolerance” (2025, Russian Federation) is not merely a feature film but a component of Russia’s modern strategy of informational, ideological, and psychological influence on the international community.

Based on verified factual data, this article examines who stands behind the production and financing of the project, the objectives of its implementation, the ideological and political narratives embedded within it, and the ways in which these narratives resonate with the Kremlin's official anti-democratic rhetoric — particularly with Vladimir Putin's speech at the Valdai Forum on October 2, 2025.

The study analyzes the threats posed by this film as a propaganda product to the democratic world, the European Union, NATO, Ukraine, and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

It provides a factual foundation, conducts a political, psychological, and legal analysis, and offers forecasts, recommendations, and an assessment of the potential consequences of spreading such ideological content.

Keywords:
film "Tolerance"; Russian propaganda; hybrid warfare; anti-democratic narratives; disinformation; Kremlin; psychological influence; political and legal analysis; Ukraine; countering propaganda.

Film "Tolerance": Country of Production, Production Process, Financing, Director, Cast, Release Date, and Purpose of Dissemination

Country of Production

The film was produced in the Russian Federation.

The production company was "Russian United Studios", with distribution handled by Cinemaus Studio [1].

Director, Screenwriter, and Cast

The film was directed and written by Andrey Grachev, known for his involvement in several film projects with a conservative and ideologically biased orientation [1].

The leading role was performed by Zakhar Prilepin, a Russian writer, politician, militant, and participant in the Russian aggression against Ukraine, well known for his chauvinistic and anti-Western stance.

Other notable cast members include Sergey Chonishvili, Dmitry Miller, Yegor Barinov, and Aleksandr Lykov [1].

Financing and Support

The film was financed with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and several commercial partners closely affiliated with state structures.

According to published reports, "Tolerance" was included in the list of so-called "socially significant film projects" [1].

The official production budget has not been disclosed; however, Russian media sources estimate that it exceeded 200 million rubles [1] (according to the official exchange rate of the Bank of Russia — 81.5478 rubles per 1 USD as of October 9, 2025 — approximately 2,452,000 US dollars).

Release Date, Distribution, and Promotion

- Premiere in Russia: September 11, 2025
- Duration: 163 minutes (2 hours 43 minutes) [1]
- Box office performance: Extremely low — during the first three weeks of release, the film grossed only about 100,000 rubles, averaging three viewers per screening [1].

The film's promotional campaign emphasized the alleged "threat to traditional values" and the supposed "decay of Europe."

The promotional materials showcased scenes of the "moral decline of the West," while portraying Russia as the "bearer of spiritual salvation" [1].

Ideological Purpose and Political Preparation

The film's central aim is to construct a psychological and symbolic antithesis to the liberal democratic West, reproducing the mythologeme of Russia as the "protector of traditional values."

Presented as a moral parable about the decline of civilization, the film is, in fact, an information-psychological operation designed to:

- discredit European democratic values;
- legitimize the concept of a "holy war" for so-called "spiritual bonds";
- promote the cult of "righteous violence" against dissenters;
- reinforce anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western propaganda [1].

Analysis of Narratives and Parallels with Vladimir Putin's Anti-Democratic, Anti-European, and Propagandist Rhetoric at the Valdai Forum (2025)

Main Themes of the Film

The film "Tolerance" (2025) reproduces classical propagandist narratives of the Russian political regime, aimed at legitimizing anti-Western and anti-democratic ideology.

The most notable motifs include:

1. **Criticism of liberalism** — portrayed as the alleged cause of moral decline, cultural degradation, and the erosion of family values.
2. **Europe as a "decaying civilization"** that has lost faith, morality, and its spiritual foundation.
3. **Loss of sovereignty among EU and NATO member states,** which are depicted as "puppets of globalization" and "victims of American domination."
4. **Glorification of Russia's "spiritual bonds"** as the only alternative to the "rotting West," accompanied by messianic rhetoric about Russia's "higher spiritual mission."
5. **Justification of violence in the struggle for "truth" and "spiritual purity."**
   The protagonist, played by Zakhar Prilepin, acts as an "avenger for tradition," allegedly "cleansing" society of "moral decay" [1].

Thus, the film constructs an ideological paradigm of confrontation — contrasting the "corrupt West" with the "morally superior Russia," which is presented as the "defender of spirituality."

Parallels with Vladimir Putin's Speech at the Valdai Forum on October 2, 2025

During the plenary session and subsequent Q&A with representatives of Hungary, Serbia, and other post-socialist states,

Vladimir Putin employed identical ideological messages that mirror the film's embedded narratives:

1. **Criticism of liberalism and democracy.**
   Putin described liberal values as a "destructive ideology imposed by the West" [1], echoing the film's motif of "Europe's decay through tolerance."
2. **Assertions of Europe's moral decline.**
   He stated that "Europe is losing its moral compass" and "is incapable of making independent decisions" [1].
   This concept of the West's "moral bankruptcy" is central to the film's storyline.
3. **Accusations of the EU's loss of sovereignty.**
   According to Putin, "European countries live under rules dictated from the outside" [1].
   The film translates this message through symbolic imagery of Europe's "submission" to a liberal dictatorship.
4. **Anti-Western and pseudo-pacifist rhetoric.**
   Putin claimed: "We are not attacking anyone; we are merely defending our identity" — a classic justification of aggression under the guise of defense [1].
   The film conveys this message emotionally through the self-sacrificial figure of the protagonist, who supposedly "purifies the world" from "evil."

Unity of the Propaganda Discourse

Thus, the film "Tolerance" and Putin's speech at the Valdai Forum together form a unified communicative framework of Russian propaganda.

Their convergence manifests a two-level mechanism of influence:

- Emotional-imagery level (through cinema): appealing to fear, anger, and the sense of lost ideals.
- Rational-political level (through official rhetoric): constructing logical justification for aggression and demonizing the West.

This symbiosis constitutes a complete model of hybrid ideological aggression, in which cultural, psychological, and political tools operate in synchrony — reinforcing manipulation and legitimizing violence as an alleged "defense of tradition."

Political-Psychological and Legal Assessment

Political-Psychological Aspect

The film "Tolerance" (2025) appeals to emotions of fear, anger, and shame, deliberately creating the image of an external enemy — the so-called "liberal West."

Viewers are led to believe that freedom, democracy, and tolerance are threats to traditional values, spirituality, and moral order, and therefore allegedly dangerous for both the individual and society.

Particularly psychologically hazardous is the portrayal of the protagonist — a self-proclaimed avenger (played by Zakhar Prilepin) — who acts "in the name of morality."

This artistic construction implants in the viewer's consciousness a model of violence as a spiritual mission, thereby distorting the moral categories of good and evil.

In this way, the film legitimizes fanaticism, forming emotional and moral prerequisites for justifying aggression, intolerance, and violence [1].

In this context, "Tolerance" functions as a psychological trigger, evoking fear, moral panic, and a readiness for confrontation — all under the pretext of "defending spiritual values."

Legal Aspect and International Implications

The film "Tolerance" represents an element of hybrid warfare, falling under the definition of an information-psychological operation aimed at manipulating public consciousness.

Such actions violate Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), which explicitly prohibits propaganda of war, violence, and hatred.

The use of religion as a tool for legitimizing violence contradicts the fundamental principles of freedom of conscience and belief, enshrined in the Statute of the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights.

This creates a precedent of religious manipulation, where ecclesiastical rhetoric is exploited to politically justify aggression.

Moreover, the film's subversive use of cultural production could serve as grounds for international sanctions against its producers and distributors, by analogy with European Union decisions in 2023–2024 that restricted and sanctioned Russian media outlets such as RT and Sputnik for spreading disinformation and anti-Western propaganda [1].

Thus, the film "Tolerance" possesses not only a cultural-ideological dimension but also a legal dimension of threat, as it facilitates the spread of hostility, interstate animosity, and religious fanaticism — all masked under the guise of "defending traditions."

Forecasts and Challenges

Short-term (6–12 months).

The emergence of a number of similar film projects and cultural products promoting anti-European and anti-Ukrainian narratives is expected, particularly through local and regional distribution channels and online platforms.

This trend will create an informational foundation for political influence in vulnerable Central and Eastern European countries [1].

Medium-term (1–3 years).

A significant increase is anticipated in the use of cultural space — including film, television series, music, and social networks — as an instrument of Russia's "soft power."

Such activities may involve synchronized campaigns, targeted messaging to vulnerable audiences, and the use of emotional amplification and visual manipulation technologies.

Long-term (beyond 3 years).

There is a risk of forming an entire generation whose worldview and understanding of history and geopolitics will be shaped through the lens of a "sacred struggle" and imperial-nationalist narratives.

This development may have a sustained negative impact on social cohesion, interethnic relations, and the resilience of democratic institutions [1].

Recommendations for Counteraction

State Level

1. **Establish joint monitoring centers** (Ukraine — EU — NATO) to ensure the timely identification, classification, and counteraction of subversive cultural products originating from the Russian Federation and other hostile states.
2. **Implement a transparent labeling system** for information-psychological and ideologically driven content originating from sources linked to subversive activities of the Russian Federation, in full compliance with legal standards of freedom of speech.
3. **Introduce public reporting requirements** for streaming platforms and major distributors regarding the origin of content, sources of funding, and moderation policies.
   This measure would enhance accountability and provide tools for evidence-based requests and justified restrictions on high-risk content [1].

Educational and Societal Level

1. Strengthen media literacy programs across schools, vocational, pre-tertiary, and higher education institutions, as well as in local communities.
   Educational modules should include critical analysis of cultural products and exposure of manipulation techniques.
2. Conduct open expert discussions and public analyses of films and series exhibiting propagandist features — involving psychologists, historians, political scientists, theologians, and film critics.
3. Develop a national counter-narrative through support for film production, publishing, and educational and enlightenment programs that promote the values of democracy, human rights, spiritual maturity, the Ukrainian national idea, and high Ukrainian cultural and spiritual traditions.
   Such activity must be systematic, regular, and strategically consistent rather than reactive or episodic [1].

International Cooperation

1. **Enhance analytical exchange and operational communication** among EU and NATO member states regarding identified subversive content; establish joint registries and evidence databases.
2. **Advance diplomatic and legal initiatives to** expose and dismantle financing and distribution networks responsible for such content, including the initiation of investigations and, when necessary, the application of sanctions.

Conclusions

The film “Tolerance” (2025) is a typical example of using artistic form as a tool of ideological warfare. It combines emotional manipulation with public political rhetoric, forming an effective communicative circuit of propaganda.

Its ideological essence — a blend of imperial, anti-democratic, and anti-European rhetoric — aims to fracture the democratic space, undermine trust in institutions, and legitimize violent practices under the guise of “defending traditions.”

The danger of the film lies not only in its direct propagandist content but also in its ability to influence the psyche, subconscious, and value orientations of vulnerable social groups — primarily youth, wounded veterans, religiously indoctrinated individuals, and marginalized segments of society.

The most effective counteraction must be comprehensive — combining legal mechanisms (monitoring, labeling, targeted measures), educational and awareness initiatives (media literacy, counter-narratives), and international cooperation (coordination, evidence sharing).

Only through the integration of these approaches can the destructive impact of such information products be minimized.

Ukraine must take the lead at both the national and international levels (through the UN, EU, NATO, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE) in initiating legal decisions to block, ban, and restrict the distribution and reproduction of cultural products of a subversive, anti-democratic, and propagandist nature, including the film “Tolerance.”

At the domestic level, it is advisable to:

- introduce a comprehensive system of expert evaluation and labeling of potentially harmful cultural content;
- expand the powers of state institutions (the State Film Agency of Ukraine, the National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Security Service of Ukraine, and the Ministry of Culture) to detect and limit the distribution of such materials;
- initiate amendments to Ukrainian legislation on cinematography, information security, and national security to enable the blocking of hostile media products based on their content and origin.

At the international level, Ukraine should:

- establish a permanent coordination platform among states and international organizations for the exchange of information on subversive content;

- initiate sanction mechanisms against individuals, studios, and media holdings engaged in the production or distribution of such materials;
- advocate for the recognition of cultural and informational propaganda as a form of hybrid aggression that entails political and legal responsibility.

Author's Note

Due to restricted access to several electronic resources within Ukraine — resulting from the blocking of Russian information platforms and media outlets — the author utilized VPN access to review the contents of primary sources that are unavailable in the open national internet segment.

The following sources were examined:

- Film.ru (Tolerance (2025) — information about the film, director, cast, and distributor);
- Kino-teatr.ru (Tolerance (2025) — technical and production data);
- RIA.ru, Lenta.ru, KP.ru, RBC.ru (publications covering Vladimir Putin's speech at the Valdai Forum on October 2, 2025);
- Meduza.io (How Russia Uses Cinema as an Instrument of Propaganda — an analytical article on the ideological use of cinema).

Considering accessibility restrictions within Ukraine, only the Wikipedia page has been retained in the printed version as an officially open electronic source, confirming the basic factual information about the film.

The analytical section of this study, as well as the conclusions and evaluations, have been prepared by the author based on independent analysis of the above-mentioned sources verified via VPN access, along with the author's own political, legal, and psychological observations and research findings.

List of References

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