

Nov 04, 2016 by [Mark Dillen](#)

(Not) An Indie Film ^[1]

There's nothing quite as satisfying as a good patriotic cry. Russians and like-minded Ukrainians are lining up these days to see a movie, "Taras Bulba", that allows them this public pleasure while undercutting Ukraine's separate national identity. A real "twofer" for the movie's sponsors, the Russian government.

The NYT report on the film's opening in Russia and Ukraine is worth reading in full. When the film's hero, a fictional 15th Century Ukrainian Cossack, dies at the hands of Polish invaders, he swears allegiance to Russia with a stirring salute to the Russian soul. The Times quotes Russian ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky as saying the film is "better than a hundred books and a hundred lessons. Everyone...will understand that Russians and Ukrainians are one people — and that the enemy is from the West," he said.

Using film to reinforce patriotic messages is nothing new, but here the goal is not so much to reawaken patriotism in Russia as to stir Russian patriotism among residents of Ukraine. Many Ukrainian citizens, particularly in the East, already feel themselves to be culturally Russian; the apparent goal of this film is to make more Ukrainians feel that way.

One might also recall that the author of "Taras Bulba", Nikolai Gogol, was a Ukrainian writer who wrote in Russian at a time (some two hundred years ago) when Ukraine and Ukrainians were firmly under Russian political and cultural control. Today's circumstances are those of a Ukrainian state and people as independent of Moscow as they have ever been, but these circumstances may be in flux.

Moscow certainly hopes so. The producers wish fervently not for a blockbuster, but for a success that might help restore a bloc.

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