

To: Senate Standing Committees on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade

Subject: Submission for Enhanced Australian Support for Ukraine

Date: 10/05/2024

## Introduction

Svoboda Alliance SA Inc is non-for-profit organisation established in South Australia in 2021. Our missions are:

1. To promote universal human rights among the residents of South Australia in line with Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and related international agreements ratified by Australia.
2. To facilitate the connection between these universal values and Australian society.
3. To represent members and communities who support the organisation values and objectives.
4. To foster relations with other ethnic communities, develop joint initiatives of mutual benefit promoting tolerance and multiculturalism.
5. To defend human rights comprising but not limited to economic, social, cultural, civil rights and political freedoms, worldwide, and to expose violations of these rights to governments, media, and society at large.

## Executive Summary

In light of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Australia's role and responsibilities on the global stage call for a strategic review and possible enhancement of our support. This submission aims to evaluate the current scope of Australia's assistance to Ukraine, focusing on its timing, coordination, comprehensiveness, and effectiveness. It also addresses efforts to counteract misinformation and hold the aggressor, Russia, accountable in line with international norms and laws. Our key proposal here is to engage community organisations (like ours) to assist in countering mis- and dis-information, as part of creating a Whole-of-Country ecosystem capable of detecting, countering and even preventing the dissemination of Kremlin's influence.

# Terms of Reference

Australian support for Ukraine, with particular reference to:

## (a) Timeliness, Coordination, and Comprehensiveness of Support

Australia's initial response to the crisis in Ukraine was both prompt and symbolically strong, aligning with global sentiment and the immediate needs of the Ukrainian people defending their freedom and sovereignty. However, as the conflict has evolved, so too must Australia's approach to its continuing support for Ukraine. This involves assessing not just the timeliness but the sustainability and adaptability of our support mechanisms.

**Military and Defensive Aid:** Australia has provided substantial aid in the form of military equipment and financial assistance to Ukraine. Moving forward, it is imperative that this support not only continues but is responsive to the changing dynamics on the ground.

**Humanitarian Assistance:** Australia's contribution to humanitarian aid has been commendable but must be continually assessed against the backdrop of escalating refugee and internal displacement figures.

**Economic Sanctions:** The implementation of economic sanctions against Russia has been robust and in line with our international partners. Ensuring these sanctions remain effective requires ongoing monitoring and adjustment.

## (b) Coordination on a Whole-of-Government and Whole-of-Country Basis

The Australian government's approach has demonstrated a degree of inter-departmental coordination involving Defence, Foreign Affairs, Trade, and Human Services among others. However, further integration and a unified national strategy could enhance the effectiveness of our support:

**Interdepartmental Synergy:** Establish a dedicated task force to streamline efforts across all relevant government departments.

**Public Engagement:** Enhancing public understanding and support through transparent reporting and involvement of civil society can mobilize additional resources and reinforce national commitment.

Implement initiatives to identify and counter Russian propaganda and misinformation narratives within Australia. We recommend engaging community organisations to assist in countering misinformation. Despite the well-known noisy pro-Kremlin pockets, a majority of Russian-speaking community in Australia share Australian values and fully appreciate the global risks posed by the Kremlin. This is evidenced most recently by the exit polls at Australian-based polling stations during the Russian Presidential elections in March 2024 showing only 18% voting for Putin [1]. The figure is certainly much lower than 18% outside of this group of Russian passport holders residing in Australia – including the broader segment of Russian-speaking migrants from all ex-Soviet states. This community is an asset that can add unique value to Whole-of-Country response to the Kremlin influence.

The growing presence of Advanced Prescient Manipulators [2] across Australia's media landscape prosecuting a range of sustained Kremlin-driven influence operations, call for

a coordinated partnership between Government agencies, research sector, industry (media, creative arts, advertising) and community networks to develop a proactive, whole-of-society ecosystem [3] to counter these expansive mis- and dis-information campaigns in a comprehensive and timely manner.

In a most recent example, the tragedy at Bondi Junction was weaponised by a well-known actor – the “Aussie Cossack” – who is hiding in the Russian Consulate in Sydney. His lies about a Jewish attacker were skilfully amplified and went viral globally, with even mainstream media such as Channel 7, falling for it in a short window before it was debunked by the AFP revealing the actual identity of the attacker. This actor has a long history of anti-Ukraine and broader pro-Kremlin actions, and is on record bragging about how easy it is for him to exploit Australian freedoms “to attack the enemy from within”.

Our unique value proposition here flows from our established capability to track these actors. Our track record here includes direct interactions with DFAT and National media. In a recent example, we are in contact with the ABC with a suggestion to consider community voices in expanding the range of invited commentaries, following a recent appearance of a known influencer who delivered 7.5 minutes of unchallenged propaganda on ABC National News TV under the guise of an independent expert (details of our correspondence with the ABC and ABC Ombudsman are available on request).

On a broader scale, we recommend developing and supporting a coalition/network of like-minded community organisations who, due to being native to the threat sources, can add unique value to the detection of malign influence, to a coordinated and timely response and, possibly, to preventive countermeasures.

For example, our community network can nominate several speakers who are well-qualified to comment on the news originating from the Ukraine war, as well as other post-Soviet agendas (e.g., Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia). This would mitigate the unbalanced opinions of well-known actors prosecuting the Kremlin narratives, ultimately benefiting the Australian public.

### (c) Efforts to Hold Russia to Account

Holding Russia accountable on the international stage is critical, not only in terms of sanctions but also in combating misinformation that may affect public perception and policy:

Strengthen the enforcement of sanctions under the Australian Magnitsky legislation. In particular, enlist community organisations to enhance the detection of breaches.

Diplomatic Efforts: Continue to work with international bodies such as the United Nations, the G20, and the International Criminal Court (ICC), advocating for a concerted global response and adherence to international law. In particular:

1. Coordinate with the Dutch authorities and resource additional effort to prosecute those responsible for the MH17 tragedy; develop a coordinated campaign to keep this in the news cycle.

2. Call for additional ICC measures to prosecute war crimes committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, including the enforcement of extant arrest warrants and fast-tracking of ongoing investigations.

## (d) Related Matters

In addition to the above points, the following matters also require attention:

**Support for International Norms and Human Rights:** Strengthening our stance on human rights violations and supporting international inquiries and monitoring bodies.

**Cybersecurity:** As digital warfare and cybersecurity become increasingly prominent in this conflict, bolstering our defences as well as supporting Ukraine in this area will be crucial. In particular, the community collaboration with media outlets detailed at point (b) can and should be extended to employing digital platforms to detect, prevent and counter the dissemination of Kremlin's influence.

**Research and Analysis:** Invest in research to anticipate future developments in the conflict, including potential impacts on global security and economic stability.

## Conclusion

Australia has a pivotal role to play in not only supporting Ukraine but in maintaining the integrity of international laws and norms. Enhancing our current efforts will not only benefit the Ukrainian people but will also affirm Australia's commitment to global peace and security. It is recommended that this submission be taken under consideration to refine and escalate our support in a coordinated, timely, and comprehensive manner.

This submission is prepared with the utmost respect for the urgency and complexity of the situation and aims to contribute constructively towards Australia's ongoing response to the conflict in Ukraine.

We believe that community-based assets represent an un-tapped potential in this space and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to a whole-of-country effort here.

Mr Slava Grigoriev  
President  
Svoboda Alliance SA Inc  
president@sboboda.org.au

References:

1. <https://voteabroad.info/>
2. <https://information-professionals.org/advanced-persistent-manipulators/>
3. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/03/five-generations-of-online-manipulation-the-evolution-of-advanced-persistent-manipulators/>