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# UKRAINE'S WAR TRAINS

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60'

 **particules**  
DOCS

# SUMMARY

Our film is a journey.

Behind the windows of the trains crossing Ukraine, war. Behind every passenger on those trains, war too. We want to get on these trains with our camera, and show Ukraine at war, on its way to Europe, moving away from the Russian world. We want to capture these moments of movement, of human fragility: the goodbyes, the reunions, the time suspended in the long hours on the train, night and day. Women alone with their children, grandparents accompanying their grandchildren abroad. The many single women who come and go abroad, to take a breather, to study, to work. The men who join the front lines: these trains head east, and no one envies them, everyone admires them. The men who return, worn out and exhausted by months in the trenches, often wounded in body and soul. We would like to take several train routes in and out of Ukraine, each of which will allow us to meet different characters, and therefore tell different stories. For example, there are trains that run to and from Poland. Others criss-cross the country, linking the capital Kyiv with the combat zones or the Carpathian mountains, where the echoes of war are less deafening.

The stations in Kyiv and Lviv are places where people can meet and talk to each other.



# THE CONTEXT

Ukraine is a country of trains.

Like all the countries of the former Soviet empire, Ukraine has developed a wide, powerful and relatively fast rail network. Trains transport passengers, goods and the country's wealth, particularly coal. Today, it is one of the most important symbols of Ukraine at war, turning its back definitively on the Russian world to join Europe.

The film we want to make will take place exclusively on the country's trains and stations, meeting Ukrainians who are fleeing, and those who are returning, but also those who simply move around. Through birch-tree landscapes, villages and gloomy suburbs, we will capture the anguish of a nation that has entered into resistance against one of the most powerful armies in the world.

A few numbers to give you an idea of Ukrzaliznytsia (abbreviated to UZ), the official name of the railway:

27,000 km of lines, 10,000 of which are electric, 400,000 railway workers, the 14th largest railway network in the world and the 6th largest passenger network in the world.



Of course, this network was very dependent on Russia, developed during the USSR. At that time, Kyiv was one of the most important stations in the Soviet empire, providing a link with Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. Since independence, and especially since 2014 and the Russian invasion of Crimea, Kyiv has turned to the United States and Europe to modernise and link up with Europe more effectively. The last agreement signed by Ukraine, 10 days after the invasion, was with Alstom for the supply of new locomotives.

Ukraine, like the rest of the former Russian world, has a track gauge of 1520 mm, while the rest of the world is 1435 mm. This still causes endless wheel changes at the border. It will take decades for Ukraine to change all the rails, but the government in Kyiv is committed to it: a symbol to be knocked down, and the EU train to be taken at full speed.

Since the start of the Russian invasion on February 24th 2022, the Ukrainian authorities have relied on trains. Resistance rail workers immediately brought to a halt the lines that were supplying Russian troops during the siege of Kyiv. At the same time, 4 million Ukrainians calmly took secondary lines to reach the main stations and flee the country. In Lviv, the 5 platforms and 10 tracks saw dozens of trains leaving for Poland, packed with women and children, when the men called up to fight had to rejoin their units. No major incidents were recorded. Except, on April 8th, the Russian bombardment of Kramatorsk station, the crossroads for soldiers leaving for the front: 52 dead.



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