The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Confectioners at Odds Over Soviet Chocolate Brand

By Lena Smirnova

September 03, 2012



The Alyonka brand is a battleground in a conflict between companies. **Maxim Stulov**

The young girl on the cover of the Alyonka chocolate bar may look timid and sweet, but to Russian confectioners she is more dangerous than her namesake, Helen of Troy.

The fight for Alyonka between confectioners in the two Russian capitals started when the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service prohibited the St. Petersburg-based Krupskaya Factory from producing Krupskaya Alyonka chocolate. Moscow's United Confectioners, which had patented the Soviet Alyonka brand in 1999, had complained that the products' wrappers were too similar.

But now Krupskaya is striking back by producing the Mechta Alyonki (Alyonka's Dream) chocolate bar. The confectioner, which is owned by Orkla Brands Russia, has also filed a notice with the Federal Service for Intellectual Property to get rights to produce other sweets under the Mechta Alyonki brand, Marker.ru reported, citing Olga Agafonova, a spokeswoman

for Orkla Brands.

Representatives of Orkla Brands Russia and Krupskaya Factory could not be reached to confirm these plans.

The Mechta Alyonki brand was registered by Azart, an Orkla subsidiary, in 2003. Sergei Lapin, a partner at Nadmitov, Ivanov & Partners law firm, said that Krupskaya's use of the brand would not be in violation of the antitrust ruling, but he added that officials could still decide whether this form of the name is acceptable.

The battle for Soviet brands is gaining more momentum now, with companies also squaring off to get rights to old alcohol brands, as well as the famous Vologda butter.

Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization has given local companies new mechanisms for getting and protecting intellectual property rights, which is helping to fuel the fight.

"Now the law allows you to fight for Soviet brands and gives you a sufficiently effective arsenal, which was not the case in the Soviet period," Lapin said. "So yes, it will become more important to register one or another trademark for yourself to ensure priority use and, if need be, use this trademark to battle the competition."

But some experts question the value of this struggle. Andrei Stas, founder of Stas Marketing, said that it is not beneficial for companies to have Soviet brands anymore because the younger generations are not loyal to them.

"Their time has passed," he said. "The generation that grew up on these brands is getting old, and the youth are not interested."

However, Stas expects that the battle for Soviet brands may still continue for years, in part because companies want to capitalize on the society-wide nostalgia for old times. Zhiguli beer and Yantar and Druzhba processed cheeses are some of the Soviet brands that are still thriving on this nostalgia.

"As long as those who ate these products in Soviet times are alive, the battles will continue," Stas said.

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