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Russian Cartoons Only! State TV Station Launches Kids Channel

By Mark Lammey

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The hugely popular Russian animated version of A. A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh.

A state-owned television holding answered the calls of the country's leadership on Sunday by launching Mult, a new channel for children that will show only Russian-made cartoons, Vedomosti reported.

The All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting holding company already co-owns the Carousel children's television channel, which is aimed at children younger than 14, but about half of its cartoons and films are foreign-made.

Politicians have been pushing for Russian children's exposure to foreign-made cartoons to be reduced for some time, and anti-Western sentiment has become louder since the U.S. and EU imposed sanctions on top Russian officials and lawmakers after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in March.

According to a recent survey ordered by the holding, most Russians back the idea of having a channel showing only domestically produced cartoons, its general director Tatyana Tsyvareva told Vedomosti on Thursday.

"It's important to protect and pass on the national cultural code to children," she said.

At a meeting of the government council for cinematography in March, Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky said that quotas need to be brought in to make sure that Russian animated programs are guaranteed a certain amount of airtime — for both spiritual and financial reasons.

But Medinsky then lamented that a lot of money is spent on producing Russian cartoons that channels are ultimately unwilling to broadcast, and added that children were missing out on important lessons as a result: "In Russia we need national heroes; it is important to show children what is good and what is bad," he said.

At a Cabinet meeting in April, Medinsky appeared to have overcome his worries about quality, proposing to rebrand Carousel as a channel showing only Russian and Soviet cartoons — an idea supported by President Vladimir Putin. But Mult will fill the void itself.

"We are choosing not only the best, but also the sweetest Russian cartoons for our channel," Tsyvareva said.

Mult, which is short for Multfilm, or "cartoon" in Russian, will be on air round-the-clock, with no advertisements, and will be included on the packages of the country's main cable television providers.

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