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Kazakh Official Denounces SpongeBob SquarePants as 'Hooligan'

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To many viewers, SpongeBob SquarePants is an enthusiastic and irritatingly cheerful cartoon character but one official in Kazakhstan sees something altogether more sinister in the "hooligan" sea sponge.

"SpongeBob beats up his neighbor, misbehaves and enjoys that," Zabira Orazaliyeva, who oversees children's rights at the Kazakh Education and Science Ministry, was quoted as saying Wednesday by news site Newskaz.ru.

"This hooligan behavior stays in the child's mind. They [see SpongeBob] as a role model and try to re-enact [his behavior] in real life," Orazaliyeva added.

Orazaliyeva went on to blast cable channels such as U.S.-based Nickelodeon and France's TiJi for running cartoons that promote a "substandard educational message," as well as parents who let children watch the cartoons unsupervised.

It remained unclear whether Orazaliyeva or her ministry advocated any censorship against SpongeBob.

This is not the first time the wacky cartoon character has got himself into hot water — in 2012 conservatives in Ukraine called for the show to be banned on the grounds it promoted homosexuality — but he has never before stood accused of hooliganism.

Kazakhstan, a post-Soviet oil-rich republic with a population of 17 million, is known for its political censorship but does not have any high-profile censorship legislation.

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