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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Ads Denying Existence of Russian Santa Claus Raise Outcry in Moscow

By The Moscow Times

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Russian authorities take denial of the existence of Ded Moroz very seriously.

A Moscow real estate developer is in hot water for that most egregious of advertising sins: telling kids that Father Frost, a Russian equivalent to Santa Claus, doesn't exist.

“There's no Father Frost, but there are discounts!” runs the slogan from developer Donstroy that appeared on billboards across Moscow in recent weeks.

Distressed parents immediately took to social networks with worries that the ads could be psychologically traumatic for young Muscovites.

Several citizens sent complaints to the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service, the state agency that monitors compliance with advertising legislation, and it is now looking into the issue, a spokesman told news agency Interfax.

The agency's deputy head Andrei Kashevarov told Interfax that no infraction appears to have

been committed — yet. Father Frost doesn't come until New Year's Eve, after all, so for now the phrase is simply a statement of fact.

But “the ad will be understood very differently in the second half of December,” Kashevarov said. If Donstroy's Father Frost ads are still up as New Year's approaches, the agency will take it under consideration, he said.

This is not the first time that the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service has been called upon to defend Russian children from unpleasant revelations about the existential status of their favorite bearded gift-giver.

In 2007, retail chain Eto raised controversy with an ad bearing the phrase “Father Frost doesn't exist.” The committee on advertising ultimately concluded that the information could be “shocking” to children, and advised advertisers and television channels not to carry such ads.

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