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Russian Cinemas Furious After Culture Ministry Pulls a Fast One

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A still from the movie First Time. **First Time**

Several of Russia's largest movie theaters have joined forces to lobby the Culture Ministry to reverse a decision postponing the release of upcoming Hollywood blockbuster The Fast and the Furious 8 in Russia, the Vedomosti newspaper reported on March 28.

The release was delayed to avoid overlap with the release of First Time, a government-sponsored Russian film about cosmonaut Alexei Leonov and the first spacewalk in history, sources in the Russian Culture Ministry told Vedomosti.

The Fast and the Furious 8 is scheduled for worldwide release on April 13, the day after Russia celebrates Cosmonaut Day. First Time has timed its release for the annual holiday. Movie theaters are lobbying the Culture Ministry to reverse course, citing concerns with the Russian film's profitability.

"There are simply no other blockbuster premieres in April," Vedomosti cited a letter written

by several movie theater executives as saying. “First Time will hardly bring in more than a few hundred million rubles.”

The letter was reportedly signed by the heads of Cinema Park, Karo, Formula Kino, and Kinomaks, some of the largest operators in Russia.

The previous installment in the Fast and the Furious franchise was one of the highest grossing releases on the Russian market, raking in 1.7 billion rubles ($30 million).

The proposal to postpone the American film came not from the Culture Ministry, but the producers of First Time, Vedomosti reported. The producers also eliminated their Russian-made cinematic rival about the Soviet space program, Salyut-7. The producers of both films failed to come to an agreement on release dates.

In the end, Culture Minister Medinsky intervened in favor of First Time, unidentified sources told Vedomosti.

First Time was directed by Russian filmmaker Dmitry Kiselyov, who recently directed a commercial for telephone operator Megafon featuring Steven Seagal.

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