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Russian Censorship Scandal Forces Ministry to Reissue Paddington 2 License

January 19, 2018



Paddington 2 / Warner Bros.

A British family comedy about a friendly bear has sparked an unlikely scandal over government discrimination against foreign films in Russia this week.

Russian cinemas were left dumbfounded after the Culture Ministry delayed issuing a screening license for "Paddington 2," one day before it was scheduled to be released in theaters. The ministry said it delayed the Jan. 18 screening until Feb. 1 because of another film scheduled to premiere on the same day, the film's distributor told the Kommersant business daily.

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Russia's Culture Minister ⊠Vladimir Medinsky⊠ said the decision was made in the interests of Russian films and "not in the interests of Hollywood," the Kommersant reported on Thursday.

"They probably wanted to remove potential competition for the local movie 'Skif' [Scythian], released on the same day," The Hollywood Reporter magazine cited a source in the Russian film industry as saying.

The association of Russian cinema owners complained of "unprecedented" government overreach in a Facebook statement on Thursday.

"You and your initiatives have turned the ordinary state service of issuing screening licenses into a censorship tool!" the association wrote in an address to Medinsky.

Remarkably, the distributing company announced late on Friday that the ministry's decision had been overturned after public pressure and an official appeal to Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev.

"We have come to a consensus with the industry, and have decided to meet the Volgafilm company halfway and allow the release of the film tomorrow [Jan. 20]," Medinsky was cited as saying at a press conference on Friday by the RBC business portal.

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