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Ukraine Sanctions 'Masha and the Bear' Creators Over Alleged Kremlin Propaganda

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A still image from the children's cartoon "Masha and the Bear." **Video grab / YouTube**

Ukraine has imposed sanctions on the creators of the popular animated series "Masha and the Bear" for allegedly spreading "pro-Russia narratives" and posing a threat to national security, according to a decree signed Thursday by President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The measures target Animaccord Animation Studio — the production company behind the series — alongside its founder and chief executive. So, too, were the director, screenwriter and co-producer of "Masha and the Bear" sanctioned.

Ukrainian officials accused "Masha and the Bear," which has been translated into dozens of languages and is watched worldwide, of generating revenue for the Russian state and disseminating Kremlin propaganda.

"We must respond separately to Russian propaganda, especially when it is aimed at children

and is distributed through large international platforms," said Vladyslav Vlasyuk, sanctions policy adviser to Zelensky.

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Earlier this summer, a group of British lawmakers sent an open letter to U.K. Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy urging streaming platforms to pull "Masha and the Bear." The letter claimed certain episodes in the series contain Russian propaganda.

Animaccord Studios representative Melanie Bonvicino called the claims "false and defamatory," emphasizing that the production studio operates independently and receives no funding from the Russian government.

The Kremlin condemned the Ukrainian sanctions on Friday, saying that targeting a children's cartoon "shows once again the ugliness of the Kyiv regime."

"Masha and the Bear" is loosely based on a traditional Russian folktale and is one of the most popular shows of all time on YouTube.

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