

Peppa Pig: Intellectual Property Infringement as a Form of Retaliatory Sanction

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To end the harm following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, numerous forms of sanctions were imposed against the Russian government and economy. Many Western governments limited access to financial systems, denied entry of Russian nationals into their countries, and prohibited the import and export of certain Russian commodities. Even some Western-based companies imposed their own forms of sanctions, including ceasing all business from or within Russia, shuttering franchised restaurants, and even suspending the release of movies and products in the country, in order to reflect their stance against the war. But Russia has issued its own response, and one of its first surprising targets is the loveable pink cartoon pig, Peppa.

Peppa Pig is a British animated television series about Peppa, a female piglet, her

family, and friends of varying animal species. It first aired in May 2004, and has since been broadcast in nearly 180 countries and translated into over forty languages. In light of her worldwide popularity, undoubtedly because of her adorable demeanor, Peppa's brand value has soared. In December 2019, Hasbro, Inc. acquired Entertainment One, the television studio that owns rights to the *Peppa Pig* franchise, for \$3.8 billion, and renewed the series for additional seasons until 2027. Peppa has theme parks, videos games and feature films based on her adventures, and the series has won numerous awards and accolades, including the praise of British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who watches the series with his children.

But with fame comes those attempting to take advantage. In September 2021, Entertainment One sued a Russian entrepreneur, Ivan Kozhevnikov, for copyright infringement based on his unauthorized versions of the Peppa character and her friends. The compensation for copyright infringement was minimal compared to *Peppa Pig's* value—just 40,000 rubles, or about \$400 at the time—but Entertainment One had had prior success in enforcing its rights in the cartoon in Russia. But in a shock to intellectual property owners everywhere, Judge Andrei Slavinsky subsequently dismissed the case in March 2022, citing the “unfriendly actions of the United States of America and affiliated foreign countries.” Slavinsky noted that Russians were free to use the *Peppa Pig* characters as they pleased.

This ruling came on the heels of an official decree from the Kremlin, which opens the gates for willful intellectual property infringement. The decree states that Russian businesses are under no obligation to pay for their unauthorized use of patented inventions, industrial designs, and utility models from “unfriendly countries” such as the U.S. and the U.K. The list of “unfriendly countries” is expansive and also includes the Ukraine, all members of the European Union, Canada, Australia, Japan, and South Korea.

The ruling in Entertainment One's suit is alarming for many reasons, and opens up the door to rampant abuse of others' intellectual property rights, including trademark and copyright rights. Some companies even fear that local operators will be allowed to run shuttered Western-branded restaurants and stores left behind when companies exited the country. But as the impact of the war is felt, we will keep you updated on how companies are navigating the current restrictions on their ability to enforce rights, and what steps can be taken to mitigate harm.