

Gay Parade Rumors and A Shameless Opposition

By [Matthew Collin](#)

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An event that was never even planned and would probably be impossible to stage has created a summertime scandal in Georgia that again highlights the dubious ideologies of some politicians who claim to be democratic.

Rumors that a gay pride march was due to take place this month started circulating on Internet forums earlier in the year. A Georgian opposition leader then entered the debate, suggesting that the government was responsible for organizing it, as part of what he described as its mission to destroy Georgian values. “The goal is to break this absolutely rock-solid part of the Georgian mentality and Georgian identity — Christian morality,” said Goga Khaindrava, a former minister.

A few days ago, the influential Georgian Orthodox Church issued a statement calling on the authorities to prevent the acolytes of “Sodom and Gomorrah” from marching through the streets in order to avoid social unrest. “Homosexual deviation is a great sin,” admonished the

Georgian Patriarchate. It also warned that those who supported the legalization of homosexuality would suffer “God’s wrath” and bring down divine punishment on the entire country.

Homosexuality is, of course, legal in Georgia, and the country is signed up to European anti-discrimination conventions. But the authorities have kept silent on the dispute so far, perhaps because they are fearful of public disapproval in what remains an overwhelmingly socially conservative nation. Three years ago, an event dedicated to “tolerance” was even canceled after rumors spread that it was going to be a gay rights promotion.

Some opposition radicals — including, ironically, a representative of the Freedom party — have been using the mythical gay pride march to try to make political capital at the expense of President Mikheil Saakashvili’s administration. By doing so, they have shown that they have less concern for human rights than a government that they accuse of restricting civil liberties.

But Paata Subelashvili, a spokesman for Georgia’s only gay rights organization, the Inclusive Foundation, said he was not worried by such displays of what he called “modern-day primitive thinking.” Subelashvili believes, somewhat optimistically, that the scandal has at least inspired a public debate about homosexuality. “There is progress because it’s no longer a taboo; it’s being discussed,” he said. “Even such negative things can be positive in the long run.”

Matthew Collin is a journalist based in Tbilisi.

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