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Gay Activist Sues Over 'Girl' Remark

By Natalya Krainova

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A leading gay rights activist filed a defamation lawsuit Sunday against a St. Petersburg city lawmaker who had accused him of accepting financing from abroad and called him "a girl."

Nikolai Alexeyev, organizer of gay pride parades in Moscow, filed the 1 million ruble ($34,000) lawsuit in a St. Petersburg district court against Vitaly Milonov, a United Russia deputy and author of a controversial bill prohibiting "the promotion of homosexualism to minors," Alexeyev said on his LiveJournal blog.

Milonov had lashed out after Alexeyev announced plans to protest the bill once it becomes law with rallies outside kindergartens and secondary schools.

Milonov told Piter.TV, a local Internet television station, on March 2 that Alexeyev "urgently needs to justify the money that he has received in the form of Western grants. ... Therefore ... he is intentionally planning a provocation."

Milonov also said he didn't know Alexeyev's age but that "you don't usually ask girls about

this."

On Sunday, St. Petersburg Governor Georgy Poltavchenko signed the bill into law, and it will go into effect 10 days after its official publication.

The legislation effectively outlaws gay pride parades and any other public display or discussion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, equaling such displays to pedophilia.

The law introduces fines for promoting homosexualism to minors: up to 5,000 rubles ($170) for individuals; up to 50,000 rubles ($1,725) for officials; and up to 500,000 rubles ($17,250) for legal entities.

The legislation doesn't conform to Russia's international obligations, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Alexeyev said.

Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch, previously called on Poltavchenko to veto the bill, saying it "only serves to stoke existing homophobic sentiment in society" and "sets a dangerous precedent for freedom of expression more generally."

Most of the Russian populace remains vehemently anti-gay, and authorities have thrown out requests to hold gay pride rallies for years. Unsanctioned events have led to crackdowns by riot police and nationalists.

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