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# Gay German Minister Raps Russia on Homosexual Rights, Report Says

By The Moscow Times

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BERLIN — Germany's openly gay foreign minister told Moscow's envoy to Berlin a Russian bill banning "homosexual propaganda" contravenes human rights and could harm the country's ties with Europe, Spiegel online said.

The German Foreign Ministry confirmed the meeting Monday evening between Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and Russia's ambassador in Berlin, Vladimir Grinin, but declined to comment on what they discussed.

Westerwelle made it clear that in Germany's view the law violated the European human rights convention, said a Spiegel report published Tuesday.

"Such a law will hamper European-Russian relations and will harm Russia's image in Europe," it cited an unidentified official as saying, setting out Westerwelle's position.

Westerwelle told Grinin he spoke as a "friend of Russia" who wanted Moscow to better defend human rights and democracy, Spiegel said.

Scuffles broke out Friday between gay activists and Russian Orthodox Christians in Moscow when the State Duma backed the bill.

Critics see the proposal as an attempt to shore up support for President Vladimir Putin after months of protests that have sapped his popularity in the still largely conservative country.

The United States, which is at odds with Putin over a range of human rights issues, has voiced concern about the measure.

Germany has also criticized Putin's clampdown on dissent and its treatment of the punk band Pussy Riot, but trade ties between the two countries are booming. Putin put bilateral trade in 2011 at $72 billion.

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