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EU Berates Russia Over Rights Abuses

By The Moscow Times

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EU officials criticized Russia over its human rights record, a perceived crackdown on civil society and its justice system at a recent meeting in Brussels.

At EU-Russia consultations held Friday, EU officials urged Russia not to pass legislation hiking penalties for promoting homosexuality among minors, the EU said in a statement published Sunday.

International stars and rights groups earlier slammed the legislation for discriminating against Russia's gay citizens.

The legislation, which would impose fines of up to 500,000 rubles ($16,000) for so-called "homosexual propaganda," was tentatively approved by the State Duma in January and could be formally approved by mid-July.

EU officials also said they would follow developments affecting NGOs in Russia after local elections watchdog Golos was fined for refusing to comply with legislation that came

into force late last year requiring NGOs that receive funding from abroad and engage in "political activity" to register as "foreign agents."

The "foreign agents" law, which leading Russian NGOs have said they will boycott, was earlier criticized by the Council of Europe's human rights commissioner.

At the Brussels meeting, EU officials also questioned Russian counterparts about high-profile criminal cases against opposition leader Alexei Navalny and those charged with participating in mass riots on Bolotnaya Ploshchad last May, as well as the posthumous trial of Hermitage Capital lawyer Sergei Magnitsky.

EU delegates stressed that they would like to hold the next round of EU-Russia consultations in Moscow so that representatives from Russian ministries and government agencies could attend. The consultations are scheduled for the fall.

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