

Germany 'Very Worried' by Russian Bill on Gay 'Propaganda'

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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BERLIN — Germany has condemned a new Russian law banning homosexual "propaganda," with Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle — himself gay — saying on Wednesday that attempts to stigmatize same-sex relationships had no place in a democracy.

The strong words from Berlin reflect growing unease with Moscow's record on human rights and German Chancellor Angela Merkel's willingness to openly criticize it, despite Russia's vital importance as an energy exporter.

Critics say the new bill, which bans the spreading of "propaganda for nontraditional sexual relations" to minors and sets fines, will in effect ban gay rights rallies and could be used to prosecute anyone actively supporting them.

"Foreign Minister Westerwelle is very worried about this law," his ministry said in a statement.

"The deliberate stigmatization of same-sex relations and the threat of prosecution has no place in a society which claims to be modern and democratic."

Merkel's spokesman said the law contradicted the spirit of Russia's obligations under human rights conventions.

The chancellor expressed her concern about domestic developments in Russia to Vladimir Putin as recently as April, when they met in the German city of Hanover, including the way the state treats homosexuals, Merkel's spokesman said.

"We are not giving up hope that the Russian government and Duma will revoke this measure. In any case, Germany will keep this issue on the agenda," he added.

The bill, passed by the lower house on Tuesday, still needs the approval of the upper house and Putin's signature.

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