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Putin Signs 'Blasphemy' and 'Gay Propaganda' Bills

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President Vladimir Putin has signed the so-called “blasphemy bill” and the “gay propaganda bill” — two pieces of legislation that have outraged the liberal opposition.

Both bills were passed unanimously by the State Duma on June 11, 2013, and their full texts appeared on the Kremlin's site Sunday.

The blasphemy law will punish “public actions expressing obvious disrespect toward society and committed to abuse the religious feelings of believers,” with potential punishment of up to three years behind bars, fines of up to 500,000 rubles ($15,430), and compulsory correctional labor, Lenta.ru reported

It also stipulates fines of 80,000-300,000 rubles and a prison term of up to three months for hindering the activities of religious organizations and preventing religious rites from being conducted.

A fine of over 200,000 rubles can be levied for deliberate destruction of religious or

theological literature.

The bill was introduced to the parliament last year following rock group Pussy Riot's “punk prayer” in Christ the Savior Cathedral, a performance that infuriated conservative leaning segments of Russian society.

Rights activists say the new law might be used for religious purposes, for example, to put pressure on the opposition or on free speech, and contradicts constitutional principles.

The legislation on gay propaganda will ban the distribution of any information that could make homosexuality seem attractive, promote the “distorted perception” that traditional and non-traditional sexual relations are equal, or force them to become interested in such relations, according to the bill's text.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel had asked Putin to veto the bill out of concern that it would lead to discrimination, but her pleas appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

Citizens found guilty of propagandizing “non-traditional” sexual relations among under 18-year-olds can be fined up to 5,000 rubles ($154), while officials could be fined up to 50,000 rubles.

The fines could rise to 100,000 rubles for citizens and 200,000 for officials if they use the media to distribute forbidden information.

Legal entities will have to pay up to 1 million rubles or suspend their activities for 90 days if they are in breach of the legislation. Foreign citizens would face fines and deportation.

Gay teens, many of whom face debilitating hostility at home and at school, look likely to be the hardest hit by the legislation, because the ban will probably make it harder to find objective information that could help them come to terms with their sexuality and find support

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