

German Ministers Say Anti-Gay Law Smacks of Dictatorship

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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BERLIN — Two German cabinet ministers have added to criticism of Russia's law banning "gay propaganda," saying President Vladimir Putin appeared to be leading his country into a "flawless dictatorship."

The words chosen by the two members of the Free Democrats (FDP), the party of the Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, himself gay and a critic of the legislation, play on comments by former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder that Putin was a "flawless democrat."

The criticisms indicate how once-close ties between the two countries have chilled since Angela Merkel took over from Schroeder as chancellor in 2005.

"We must make clear when in contact with Russian politicians that this collapse in fundamental democratic values is not acceptable, and that Russia is moving towards becoming a flawless dictatorship," Development Minister Dirk Niebel told broadcaster N24

on Monday.

Justice Minister Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger told the newspaper Welt am Sonntag a day earlier that "Russia is taking a another big step toward becoming a flawless dictatorship in ostracizing homosexuals."

Critics of the law have said it effectively disallows all gay rights rallies and could be used to prosecute anyone voicing support for homosexuals.

The law, as well as a ban on adoptions of children by same-sex couples, is part of a more conservative course taken by Putin on social issues since his return to the Kremlin last year.

Last Friday, International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge asked Russia to explain how it will implement the law ahead of next year's Sochi Winter Olympics.

Germany does not intend to boycott the games. Westerwelle, who said that any attempts to stigmatize same-sex relationships had no place in a democracy, sees a boycott of Sochi as counterproductive.

Merkel has expressed her concern about domestic developments in Russia to Putin, including the way the state treats homosexuals, her spokesman said in June. But her Christian Democrat party's foreign affairs spokesman, Ruprecht Polenz, criticized the FDP ministers' comments as "unhelpful."

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