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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

German Writer Joins Artists' Boycott of Russia, Report Says

By The Moscow Times

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A German playwright has become the latest international cultural figure to refuse to visit Russia over the country's controversial "gay propaganda" law, the Colta.ru cultural news website reported this week.

Marius von Mayenburg, a playwright-in-residence at Berlin's Schaubuhne theater, rejected an invitation to come to Moscow to attend a staging of his work and give a master class, citing a federal law passed in Russia in June that bans "the promotion of nontraditional sexual relationships" to minors, the website reported.

"I work with a lot of artists of nontraditional sexual orientation who are my friends, who I have ties with and who I feel responsible for," von Mayenburg wrote to the management of Moscow's Theater of Nations and the Territory international contemporary art festival, which are planning to showcase his work and had invited the award-winning playwright to give a master class on October 3, Colta.ru reported.

"I can't go to a country where those people would feel discriminated against by the state for their sexual orientation and not react to that. But at the same time, it is not my ambition to make myself into an activist in Russia. Therefore ... I have decided not to go to Moscow," he added.

Von Mayenburg is the latest in a growing wave of international figures to reject invitations to Russia because of the law, the original wording of which was "promotion of homosexuality." Last week, gay British choreographer Ben Wright rejected in an open letter an invitation to take part in a dance program sponsored by Russia's Culture Ministry, saying that President Vladimir Putin "has made it pointedly clear that people like me are not welcome in Russia."

Wright also echoed calls by British actor Stephen Fry to boycott the Winter Olympics that Russia is due to host in the city of Sochi in less than six months' time. Fry added his voice to the boycott campaign earlier this month in an open letter to British Prime Minister David Cameron in which he compared Russia's treatment of homosexuals to the discrimination Jews suffered in Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

In the same week that Wright's open letter was published, gay U.S. talk show host and TV producer Andy Cohen turned down the position of co-host for the upcoming Miss Universe beauty pageant in Moscow because "their discriminatory policies make it unsafe for the gays who live there and gays coming to work or visit."

Russian officials say the new law is intended solely to protect minors from "propaganda" about homosexuality and in no way impinges on the freedom of adults to make their own sexual choices.

Critics of the law, however, say it amounts to a state-sponsored crackdown on gay people.

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