

Homophobic Star of Russian Sitcom Leaves Phone Retailer Post

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Okhlobystin during a shoot for a Yevroset advertisement **Maxim Stulov / Vedomosti**

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Sitcom star Ivan Okhlobystin announced Tuesday that he is leaving his position as creative director of cell phone retailer Yevroset after causing uproar by saying that gay people should be burned alive in ovens.

Okhlobystin wrote on his Twitter account that he was leaving his post due to "the incessant threats, provocations and insults from sodomites concerning my friends, partners and family."

Using TwitLonger, a platform for Twitter messages that exceed the site's character limit, the actor ended his message by saying "Sodom and Gomorrah should be annihilated!"

He did not have to wait long to find a new job, however, as the owner of clothing retailer Baon

said later Tuesday that Okhlobystin would be his company's creative director, Prime news agency reported.

The campaign pressuring Yevroset to remove Okhlobystin, famous for his role in the Russian medical sitcom "Interny," from his duties first began in December after the actor told fans in Novosibirsk that gay people should all be put "alive in an oven ... It's a living danger to my children." The sitcom star, who was an Orthodox priest before being suspended from the Church in 2010, also told his Siberian audience about "gay fascism" and that gay people should be stripped of their right to vote.

Yevroset CEO Alexander Malis, who earlier said that he would not fire Okhlobystin, but that the actor would not make any such remarks in the future, wrote on the company's Facebook page that the actor had left the company "in order to engage in public activities." The statement continued by saying that Yevroset "understands and respects" the actor's position and that he had received a special bonus for his work.

Malis and Yevroset came under additional pressure last week when gay rights groups from Russia, Europe and the U.S. wrote a letter to openly gay Apple CEO Tim Cook, asking him to reconsider his company's business relationship with the Russian retailer in light of its ties to the homophobic actor.

Cook did not publicly respond to the gay activists, but Okhlobystin grabbed headlines again last week when he wrote a letter of his own to President Vladimir Putin, asking for the return of a Soviet-era law that criminalized homosexual relations.

Baon owner Ilya Yaroshenko said that after the scandal about the actor's comments and letter to Putin became well known, "We decided, unanimously, that this is our guy," Prime news agency reported.

In light of Boan's decision to hire Okhlobystin, it is unclear whether the actor will go ahead with his plans to get involved in public activities or focus on his new role at the clothing company instead.

Okhlobystin's Twitter announcement about his decision to leave Yevroset had come as a surprise, given that the actor wrote earlier about his switch to the social networking site Vkontakte for fear that "sodomites" would block off his Twitter account. The actor's interests, as listed on the site, include humor, family and philosophy.

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