The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Bill Broadening Gay Propaganda Law to All Sexual Orientations Submitted to Duma

By Christopher Brennan

January 26, 2014



The Moscow Triumphal Gate in St. Petersburg, lit up in honor of St. Petersburg Gay Pride 2010. **Yury Gavrikov**

A bill submitted to the State Duma proposes amending Russia's anti-gay propaganda law so that it would ban propagating sexual relations of any kind to children.

The proposed changes, submitted Friday evening, would change the wording of the original law passed in June on "propagandizing non-traditional sexual relations" to a prohibition on "propagandizing a priority of sexual relations," Itar-Tass reported Sunday.

The rest of the law, including punishments that include up to 1 million ruble ($29,000) fines and 90 day suspensions for organizations which publicly promote homosexuality, would be left unchanged. Similar changes would be made to other laws on the protection of children.

The initiative, submitted by members of the ruling United Russia party along with Communists and Liberal Democrats, may be intended to nullify criticism of the anti-gay law which has drawn condemnation from Western countries and motivated gay activists to call for a boycott of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

Notes to the bill cite a rise in sexual activity among Russian teens as a motivating factor for broadening the law's scope and say it aims to protect children from information "damaging to the values of family life, the spiritual and intellectual development of minors."

Responding to the proposed law on his VKontakte page, gay activist Nikolai Alexeyev said that changes to the law "in legal practice will still be directed, as before, at homosexuals" and that public events like gay pride parades would still be banned. Saying that he foresaw the move, Alexeyev added that he expects the possible changes to complicate legal challenges to the discriminatory nature of the original law in the European Court for Human Rights, which he intends to send to Strasbourg on Monday.

Though Alexeyev has been fined for violating the gay propaganda law after a picket outside an an Arkhangelsk children's library, the measure has led to few prosecutions. LGBT activists, however, say that the law has contributed to rising homophobia in Russia.

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