

Italian Gay Activist Says Detained in Sochi

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Former Italian politician Vladimir Luxuria. **Riccardo de Luca / AP**

Police in Sochi detained a transgender former member of the Italian parliament for holding a sign that read "Gay is OK" in an apparent violation of Russia's "gay propaganda" law, Italian LGBT rights activists said.

"I'm in Sochi! Saluting with the colors of the rainbow, in Putin's face!" Vladimir Luxuria said in a Twitter message before her detention on Sunday.

The message was accompanied by a picture of herself wearing a rainbow-colored skirt and holding a rainbow umbrella and fan.

After several hours in custody, Luxuria was released, said Ivan Scalfarotto, the openly gay vice president of Italy's Democratic Party.

"I have spoken to Luxuria," Scalfarotto said in a Twitter message Sunday night. "They have

released her and she is fine."

A spokesman for Italy's Gay Center Fabrizio Marrazzo said that he also received a text message from Luxuria, saying that she had been freed from custody and planned to attend the Games on Monday, according to a statement on Luxuria's website.

The leaders of two Italian gay rights groups said earlier that Luxuria had called them after her detention on Sunday, and that supporters appealed to Italy's Foreign Minister Emma Bonino to help secure her release.

"She was arrested while attending the Olympics in Sochi with a banner that said in Russian: 'Gay is OK,'" said Imma Battaglia, honorary president of Italy's Gay Project group, Italy's La Stampa reported.

The police were "brutal and aggressive. No one speaks English," Battaglia said.

Sochi organizers said Monday they had no information on the incident, The Associated Press reported.

"We have talked to police and they have told us there is no record whatsoever of any detention or arrest," the AP quoted Sochi organizing committee spokeswoman Alexandra Kosterina as saying.

Luxuria had traveled to Sochi specifically to challenge the 2013 law, signed last summer by President Vladimir Putin, that outlaws the dissemination of gay propaganda to minors.

"Rebellious, free and unafraid of the state's morality police," openly gay Italian politician and regional leader Nichi Vendola said in a Twitter message on Sunday.

No information was immediately available about whether formal charges have been filed against Luxuria. Under Russian law, foreigners can be extradited if found guilty of promoting "non-traditional sexual relations" in the presence of children.

Luxuria had worn the rainbow outfit to stand outside the main spectator entrance to the Games on Saturday, The Wall Street Journal reported. Spectators who were on their way to watch the U.S.-Russia hockey game stopped to take pictures with her, while a few Olympic volunteers watched the scene but did not ask Luxuria to leave.

Luxuria — who was born a man but lives as a woman — was also briefly detained during a gay rights march in Moscow almost seven years ago.

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