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Anti-Gay Russian Lawmaker Milonov Protests Homoerotic Finnish Stamps

By Allison Quinn

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Some Tom of Finland stamps.

St. Petersburg lawmaker Vitaly Milonov has appealed to Russian Post to prevent an influx of postage stamps depicting homoerotic scenes by a Finnish artist that the outspoken deputy says violate Russia's anti-gay-propaganda law.

Milonov has demanded that all letters and parcels featuring the stamps — a series of six released in September by Finland's postal service to commemorate the artist Touko Laaksonen — be returned to sender and not allowed to enter Russia. Laaksonen, also known as Tom of Finland, was renowned for his homoerotic fetish art.

The stamps that have so enraged Milonov feature several provocative images, such as a man's bare buttocks with another man's face visible between his legs, and a naked man sitting between another man's legs.

In a letter to the head of Russian Post, Dmitry Strashnov, Milonov condemned the stamps for "contravening Russian law," the TASS news agency reported Saturday.

"They are basically elements of homosexual propaganda, which is banned in our country. I ask the leadership of Russian Post to pay close attention to this request. In addition, I urge the Finns themselves, our close neighbors, to refrain from using these stamps when sending letters to Russia," Milonov wrote, TASS reported.

Russia's anti-gay propaganda law, which came into effect in summer 2013, prohibits the promotion of nontraditional sexual relations among minors.

Milonov, who spearheaded the legislation's adoption, told TASS that he learned of the stamps from a "like-minded person" in Finland who was equally outraged by their appearance.

Finnish broadcasting company Yle apparently anticipated Milonov's reaction, having conducted an experiment in September immediately after the release of the stamps to see if they could get past Russian customs officials, TASS reported.

Several letters featuring the stamps were sent from Finland to Moscow and St. Petersburg, and all of them reached their destinations, the report said.

The stamps proved hugely popular even before their release, with advance orders coming in from 178 different countries, Finland's postal service, Itella Posti, said on its website.

"Tens of thousands of Tom of Finland stamp sheets were pre-ordered before issuing," Markku Penttinen, the company's development director, was quoted as saying by Forbes earlier this month.

The stamps, available for purchase on the Finnish postal service's website, cost three euros per sheet.

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