The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Activist Says Kremlin-Loyal Youth Organization Paying Activists to Sabotage LGBT Group

By Daria Litvinova

July 16, 2015



The founder of a support group for Russian LGBT teens has accused a Kremlin-loyal youth organization of paying young activists to lobby for the group's closure.

Yelena Klimova, founder of Deti-404 ("Children-404"), a support group on Russian social network VKontakte, lodged the claim of foul play against the ruling United Russia party's youth branch, Molodaya Gvardiya.

“United Russia's Molodaya Gvardiya launched an online petition on the Avaaz [website] on July 3 to close the Deti-404 group, and is actively promoting the cause,” Klimova wrote on her Facebook page Wednesday.

“Later on I found out all this fuss was actually for money. There are wages and plans and orders to collect signatures under the petition [that calls] for the prohibition of our project,

and Molodaya Gvardiya activists use all this to fake popular outrage," she wrote.

In the same posting Klimova published screenshots of messages sent by young people connected to Molodaya Gvardiya to their friends and associates, asking them to sign the petition and send their names to certain activists that needed to "fulfill the plan" in exchange for a "stipend."

"Two young people I wasn't previously acquainted with wrote to me, appalled by their friends' requests to sign the petition [and help Molodaya Gvardiya activists earn some cash in the process]," Klimova told The Moscow Times on Thursday. "I was outraged, so I took the screenshots and published them," she said, adding that she did not plan to file a formal complaint against the organization.

The petition, launched two weeks ago by Molodaya Gvardiya subdivision Mediagvardiya — a project whose stated aim is to fight for an "honest Internet" — had gathered nearly 5,000 signatures by the time of publication. Its goal is to collect 50,000 signatures.

It addresses Russia's Prosecutor General's Office and demands the initiation of a "trial in order to limit access to [Deti-404's] materials," which, according to the petition's authors, promote "untraditional sexual relationships."

"Under the guise of helping LGBT teens, the group actually aims to create a positive image of LGBT relationships among minors," the petition reads.

Kirill Grinchenko, coordinator of the Mediagvardia project, refuted Klimova's allegations on his VKontakte page, saying people were signing the petition voluntarily

"Klimova presented 'screenshots of [some users'] correspondence' as proof of her words. It's obvious that any schoolkid who knows his way around digitally editing pictures could make up these 'screenshots,'" he wrote on Wednesday. "I understand Klimova's desire to publicize herself, but I consider it inappropriate," he added.

During an online interview with The Moscow Times Klimova showed the actual chat logs she used to take the screenshots as evidence she had not altered any images.

Grinchenko did not respond to a request for comment on his belief that the images were doctored.

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