

Russian Activists Accept Mayor's Challenge to Hold Gay Parade on Infamous Paratroopers Day

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Paratroopers Day in Russia is infamous for crowds of often drunk current and former paratroopers wearing blue berets and blue-and-white striped shirts roaming city streets and parks across Russia.

The LGBT community of Russia's northern city of Arkhangelsk took the city mayor up on his challenge Tuesday, filing a request for permission to hold a gay parade on Paratroopers Day — notorious for its drunken violence and macho atmosphere, the FlashNord news agency reported.

Arkhangelsk Mayor Viktor Pavlenko promised earlier this month he would approve a gay parade on Aug. 2, after noting that LGBT activists had been “getting on my nerves.”

“This year our airborne forces celebrate their 85th anniversary, so on Aug. 2, we'll let them [the LGBT movement] go ahead for sure. I guarantee it. To let off steam,” he was reported as saying during a council meeting.

Now LGBT rights activists, who are repeatedly rebuffed by the authorities in their requests to hold public events around Russia, appear to be calling his bluff, and have reportedly filed a request to hold an event for up to 100 people.

“We've received a request [from the LGBT community] and will consider it. The situation is, obviously, awkward,” an unidentified official from the local administration was quoted by FlashNord as saying Tuesday.

Paratroopers Day in Russia is infamous for crowds of often drunk current and former paratroopers wearing blue berets and blue-and-white striped shirts roaming city streets and parks across Russia. They drink outside all day long, fool around in fountains and often provoke fistfights, usually facing little resistance from the authorities.

On Paratroopers Day in 2013, an LGBT activist in St. Petersburg was attacked by inebriated paratroopers for picketing on Palace Square, where the State Hermitage Museum is located. Police attempted to arrest the man who started the fight, but let him go after his fellow paratroopers stood up for him, video footage of the event posted online showed.

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