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Mayor of Northern Russian City Breaks Promise, Rejects Request for Gay Parade

By Shura Collinson

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The request was rejected on the grounds that holding a gay parade would break the law on protecting children from harmful information.

The mayor of the northern Russian city of Arkhangelsk who had unofficially promised to allow a gay parade to go ahead on Paratroopers Day — a day notorious for drunken fistfights and displays of macho aggression — has declined an official request from the LGBT community to go ahead with the march, a media report said Friday.

The request was rejected on the grounds that holding a gay parade would break the law on protecting children from harmful information, the Govorit Moskva radio station reported, citing a copy of a letter from the mayor's office.

“The information banned from being distributed among children includes information that undermines family values and promotes non-traditional sexual relations,” the radio station cited the letter, signed by the mayor's PR officer Georgy Gudim-Levkovich, as saying. He said

that holding a public event on the city's central square and in other central locations where there are a lot of people would violate that law.

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

"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.

LGBT rights activists, who are consistently rebuffed by the authorities in their requests to hold public events around Russia, called his bluff and promptly filed a request to hold an event for up to 100 people.

The letter also said that no alternative locations for the requested event would be offered as "there are no places without any children."

Every year on Aug. 2, current and former paratroopers wearing blue-and-white striped shirts and often in an inebriated state celebrate by meeting up and wandering city streets and parks across Russia. The day is notorious for two common sights: paratroopers frolicking in fountains and picking fights with hapless passers-by.

On Paratroopers Day in 2013, an LGBT activist in St. Petersburg was attacked by 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.

Contact the author at s.collinson@imedia.ru

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