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# Rainbows, Any Rainbows, Now Treated Like a Public Crisis in Russia

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Tomsk stairwell recently repainted by the Family Medicine Center. **Alexey Shpomer / LiveJournal**

There's a stairwell in the city of Tomsk that, until recently, was covered in filth. The patients at the Family Medicine Center, a nearby fertility clinic, got tired of walking past people smoking and drinking in the stairwell, so the clinic decided to do something about it, repainting the area in bright rainbow colors.

Enter Alexey Shpomer, a local right-wing activist, who has appealed to the mayor, complaining that his beloved stairway has been transformed into a symbol of gay pride.

Journalists later contacted Shpomer and tried to explain that the colors on the stairs differ slightly from the colors featured in traditional LGBT pride flags, but the activist refused to back down. "Is it possible that the rainbow is just a rainbow?" a reporter asked him. "It's a fact that we're looking at the flag of the LGBT community," Shpomer answered. "And the LGBT community flag belongs in a gay club. Rainbows appear in the sky as God wills it," he added, explaining that people should be careful where they draw rainbows.

Yelena Barsunova, one of the Family Medicine Center employees who painted the stairwell, accepted some blame for the confusion, saying it never occurred to her that anyone might mistake the rainbow colors for a political statement. She said the clinic chose bright colors to chase out the people who liked to smoke and drink on the stairs. The dark purple, used to repaint the walls of the stairwell, was selected because it covered up the graffiti, Barsunova explained.

Until two years ago, the "Patriots of Russia" political party also featured a rainbow in its official logo. According to Evgeny Krotov, the Tomsk regional head for the party, officials decided in 2014 that patriotic ribbons would be more appropriate in the party's visuals. But this had nothing to do with homophobic pressure, Krotov told the TV2 news website. "Personally I don't care. Let gays and lesbians exist. The important thing is that they don't conduct their propaganda here, like they do in the West, and they don't all come out."

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