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Anti-Gay Russian Lawmaker Disrupts Opening of LGBT Film Festival

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Vitaly Milonov (Sergei Fadeichev / TASS)

State Duma deputy and notorious anti-gay crusader Vitaly Milonov reportedly attempted to shut down Russia's only LGBT film festival on its opening night Wednesday.

Milonov, a lawmaker from the ruling United Russia party, has earned a reputation for his inflammatory anti-LGBT rhetoric and is best known for spearheading Russia's ban on "gay propaganda."

The St. Petersburg-based Fontanka news website reported that the deputy, accompanied by six men, physically blocked the entrance to the "Side by Side" film festival on Wednesday evening.

In footage posted online, the lawmaker is heard accusing festival-goers trying to get into the venue of participating in an unsanctioned demonstration.

“Dear citizens, you know yourselves that you are perverts; you need to disperse,” he is heard saying.

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“We are Russian people who are on our home soil. And you’re not. Your motherland is Sodom and Gomorrah,” he adds.

According to the festival’s organizers, Milonov claimed that a hostage crisis had unfolded inside the cinema and called the police.

Prompted by Milonov’s call, police officers reportedly evacuated the building. According to Fontanka, around 400 filmgoers who bought tickets were unable to attend the screenings planned for Wednesday.

“The first day of Side by Side was interrupted in an outrageous manner and eventually disrupted by State Duma deputy Vitaly Milonov,” the festival organizers were cited as saying.

Milonov denied that he had alarmed the police about a possible hostage crisis, saying that he came to the event because he believed it may have been “violating Russian law.”

The festival organizers rejected Milonov’s claims that they had broken Russia’s “gay propaganda” law — which bans promoting LGBT values among minors — as minors were not allowed to attend the festival.

Side by Side, Russia’s only annual LGBT film festival — now in its 11th year — has in the past been threatened by government officials and nationalist activists.

The organizers said that the festival would continue as planned this week, despite what they described as Milonov’s “illegal actions.”

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