The Moscow Times
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Russian Political Ad Bashes Gay Marriage

By AFP

June 02, 2020



A video backing constitutional reforms that President Vladimir Putin is putting to a national vote next month sparked widespread criticism Tuesday for its anti-gay message.

In the video made by a media group called Patriot linked to U.S.-sanctioned Putin ally Yevgeny Prigozhin, a small boy from a Russian orphanage finds out he is being adopted by a gay couple.

"Here's your new mum. Don't be upset," one of them says while the other pulls out a dress for him to wear.

"What Russia do you choose?" the voiceover says.

"Decide the future of the country. Vote for the amendments to the constitution."

Despite the ongoing virus crisis, Russians are set to vote July 1 on constitutional changes that

would allow Putin to stand again as president.

The video focuses on another proposed change, a stipulation that marriage is a union between a man and woman.

Patriot released the ad on social media on Monday where it has had tens of thousands of views. It says it shot the video with its own money and is making others.

Leading opposition politician Alexei Navalny posted the video on social media with mocking comments.

"Putin's officials have gone completely out of their minds on the subject of homosexuality," he tweeted.

'Defending the family'

Patriot's head Nikolai Stolyarchuk said in a statement on Tuesday that the video was "not campaigning against homosexuals" but "defending the institute of family as a union of a man and a woman," while adding he disapproves of adoption by gay couples.

The vote will not in fact affect Russia's existing lack of gay marriage or official adoption by gay couples.

Since returning to the Kremlin in 2012, Putin has brought in legislation banning "gay propaganda" to minors that has been used to silence activists and shut down gay pride events.

The head of the board of trustees at Patriot is Prigozhin, according to its website.

The businessman nicknamed "Putin's chef" owns a company called Concord that the US has accused of funding the campaign to meddle in their 2016 presidential election. He and his company are on the US sanctions list.

Reports in Russian and Western media have said he also funds the Wagner private military group active in the Middle East and Africa.

He denies all these allegations.

This latest video is reminiscent of another clip released in 2018 urging Russians to re-elect Putin or live in a "nightmare" future in which they are forced to co-habitate with gay men.

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