

European Rights Court Orders Russia to Recognize Same-Sex Unions

July 13, 2021



While gay marriage isn't technically illegal in Russia, the country does not register same-sex marriage nor any other form of same-sex civil union. **Ritchie B. Tongo / EPA / TASS**

Europe's top human rights court has [ordered](#) Russia to recognize same-sex unions in a new ruling on Tuesday.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)'s ruling came in response to complaints filed in 2010 by three Russian same-sex couples whose attempts to register their marriages in Russia were rejected.

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The ECHR judges unanimously ruled that Russia violated Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights — the right to respect for private and family life — by not granting legal status to the couples' unions, the court said in a press release.

The court ruled that Russia had an obligation to ensure respect for the applicants' private and family life by establishing a framework for their relationships to be legally acknowledged and protected.

Although Article 8 does not explicitly oblige Council of Europe member states to recognize same-sex marriage, it does imply a need to strike a fair balance between same-sex couples' needs and those of the community, the court said.

The ECHR rejected the Russian government's argument that recognizing same-sex unions would be impossible given the high share of Russians who disapprove of these unions, saying "access to rights for a minority could not be dependent on the acceptance of the majority."

"As regards same-sex couples, the Court reaffirmed that they were just as capable as different-sex couples of entering into committed relationships, with a need for formal acknowledgment and protection of their relationship," it added.

Russia, which does not register same-sex marriage nor any other form of same-sex civil union, has long been criticized for its treatment of the LGBT community by European countries.

During his two decades in power, President Vladimir Putin has closely aligned himself with the Russian Orthodox Church and sought to distance Russia from Western values including liberal attitudes toward homosexuality and gender fluidity. Last year, Putin signed a series of constitutional amendments into law which, among other things, formally define marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

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