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Russian Lawmakers Vote to Ban Gender Reassignment

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Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Family, Women and Children Nina Ostanina. **duma.gov.ru**

Russian lawmakers voted on Wednesday to ban legal or surgical sex changes, the latest in a series of conservative proposals put forward since Russia invaded neighboring Ukraine last year.

Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, approved in its first reading the bill that bans "medical interventions aimed at changing the sex of a person" and "the state registration of a change of gender without an operation."

The government will determine a list of allowed interventions "related to the treatment of congenital physiological anomalies in children," the Duma website said.

All 365 State Duma deputies present for the vote supported the bill.

Ruling United Russia party deputy Pyotr Tolstoy said the bill was about "erecting a barrier" against the "penetration of Western anti-family ideology."

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"I really want the guys who are now defending the honor of Russia at the cost of their lives to return home and see that the country has changed," he said on Telegram.

"That we are all fighting for a new sovereign Russia, as a united front free from Western influence."

State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin also said: "in the United States, where these new pseudo-values are promoted, the proportion of transgender people among teenagers is already three times higher than among adults. This is the result of propaganda."

Human rights activists warn that banning gender reassignment will lead to the emergence of an underground market for surgeries and an increase in cases of gender dysphoria.

Russian officials including President Vladimir Putin have frequently cast Western liberal values, particularly gender and sexual freedoms, as a foreign ideology that threatens Russia's so-called "traditional and spiritual values."

This rhetoric has correlated with a widening crackdown on LGBT freedoms, particularly in the 15 months since the invasion of Ukraine.

In November, Putin signed a law banning the "propaganda" of LGBT relationships and lifestyles toward all ages, effectively outlawing public displays and media portrayals of non-heterosexual identities.

The Kommersant business daily reported last month, citing a source in the State Duma, that Russian lawmakers were concerned about an "increasing number of cases" where Russian men "used gender reassignment certificates to avoid being drafted into the military" and being sent to the frontline in Ukraine.

The bill banning gender reassignment must now pass its second and third readings in the State Duma as well as a single reading in the upper-house Federation Council before it can be signed into law by Putin.

AFP contributed reporting.

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