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Russian MPs Back Adoption Ban on Countries Allowing Gender Reassignment

By AFP

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An orphanage in Moscow. **Moskva News Agency**

Russia's parliament Wednesday voted to back a bill banning the adoption of Russian children in countries that allow gender reassignment, the latest in a series of ultra-conservative social measures.

Moscow has long portrayed itself as a bulwark against liberal values, but that trend has hugely accelerated since the Kremlin launched its war in Ukraine, further rupturing ties with the West.

The bill would ban citizens of countries that authorize "the change of sex by medical intervention, including with the use of medicine," or allow individuals to change their gender on official identity documents.

It is the latest attack and stigmatization of LGBTQ+ people by Moscow as President Vladimir Putin has massively reinforced his conservative, anti-liberal vision for the country since launching his Ukraine campaign in February 2022.

A day earlier lawmakers had called for a ban on promoting childless lifestyles, depicting what they called the "movement" and "ideology" of couples choosing not to have children as a decadent Western influence, antithetical to Russia's "traditional values."

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MPs said Wednesday they wanted to ensure that adopted Russian children would not go through gender reassignment abroad.

"With this law we are protecting the child, we are doing everything for the child not to end up in a country where same-sex marriage and sex change is allowed," State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said.

Earlier this month gave an interview to Russian media in which he branded Europe and the U.S. as "sick" for allowing gender reassignment, and attacked people "who were men yesterday and who today call themselves women."

Foreign adoption virtually stopped

Lawmakers voted almost unanimously to back the proposed law in a first reading, with 397 in favor and one against.

The bill still needs to be passed in two more readings and approved by the upper chamber before it can be signed into law by Putin.

The foreign adoption of Russian children has fallen drastically since 2012, when Moscow banned Americans from adopting. It has virtually stopped completely since the Ukraine offensive was launched in 2022.

In 2023, only six Russian children were adopted by foreign citizens, according to official figures.

At the start of the year, some 358,000 children were in Russian care homes, Russian media reported citing government statistics.

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Children waiting to be adopted have been caught in the fallout of the conflict in Ukraine, as Moscow has considered a ban on adopting into "unfriendly countries" since 2022.

There are also now the logistical complications of physically getting to Russia for prospective parents looking to adopt.

Slumping demographics

The Kremlin, faced with an aging population, has tried to stop Russia's demographic slump — worsened by the Ukraine campaign, which has seen hundreds of thousands of men sent to the front. Experts have warned it has affected Russia's birthrate.

"I am generally against children being forcibly taken out of Russia like commodities," lawmaker Pyotr Tolstoy said.

"Are our demographics so good that we should turn into an incubator country? Or under the influence of liberal propaganda to change sex?" he added.

The latest proposals are a new version of a bill put forward in 2022 that aimed to ban the adoption of Russian children by parents from "unfriendly countries" — a term Moscow uses to refer to states that have sanctioned Russia for its Ukraine offensive.

A post on the State Duma website said the bill aimed to ban the adoption of Russian children by "NATO countries".

MP Nina Ostatina, one of its authors, said: "The hybrid war unleashed against us touches our children... Russia has become an outpost on preserving traditional values."

Russia has created an inhospitable environment for LBGTQ+ people for years. In July 2023, it made gender reassignment illegal and later that year banned the "international LGBT movement" as extremist.

Putin himself has repeatedly mocked people who have undergone gender reassignment, as well as LGBTQ+ people.

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