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Public Outcry Across Russia as Bill to Euthanize Stray Animals Sparks Rare Protests

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Residents in at least three Russian cities staged rallies against animal euthanasia over the weekend, marking a rare instance of authorities permitting public dissent amid an ongoing crackdown on anti-war activism.

Animal rights activists took to the streets in Kaliningrad, Rostov-on-Don and Blagoveshchensk on Saturday and Sunday, following similar demonstrations in Novosibirsk and Kazan the previous weekend.

According to the Kaliningrad-based news outlet Klops, the protest there received official authorization from local authorities.

The demonstrations came in response to a proposed federal bill that would allow regional governments to euthanize stray animals held in shelters. The draft legislation followed a

series of recent incidents where stray dogs fatally attacked children.

Animal rights activists have long argued that the mass euthanization of animals at shelters is not an effective solution to solving Russia's stray animal problem, often leads to inhumane killings and should only be carried out when there is no other alternative.

Related article: Russian Court Bans Euthanasia of Stray Animals Unless They Threaten Humans

Public backlash has already led to delays in the bill's progress. The State Duma indefinitely postponed a vote on the measure two weeks ago, according to the business newspaper Vedomosti, while Senator Andrei Klishas confirmed that two committees in the Federation Council had rejected the proposal.

Meanwhile, a Change.org petition opposing the euthanasia bill has gathered nearly 50,000 signatures since early March.

Unlike in other cities, authorities in Krasnoyarsk refused to allow animal rights activists to hold a protest in mid-March, citing Covid-19 restrictions.

A regional lawmaker's attempt to organize a rally against broader limits on public demonstrations in Krasnoyarsk was also blocked — this time with officials citing Russia's invasion of Ukraine as the reason.

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