

Russia: Parliament votes to outlaw promotion of LGBTIQ relationships

Monday 7 November 2022, by [NICHOLS Dick](#) (Date first published: 5 November 2022).

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Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, passed on its first reading a bill on October 27, to outlaw promotion of "non-traditional sexual relations". Not one of the 400 MPs opposed it.

Duma chairman [Vyacheslav Volodin](#), of President Vladimir Putin's United Russia (UR) party stated: "We must do everything to protect our children and those who want to live a normal life. Everything else is sin, sodomy, darkness, and our country is fighting against it."

Linking the legislation to Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine, he added: "We must protect our citizens and Russia from degradation and extinction, from the darkness spread by the US and European states."

Volodin promised second-reading amendments to eliminate any remaining loopholes in the legislation.

If, as seems certain, the Federal Council (Senate) also supports the law and Putin ratifies it, the ban on promoting "non-traditional sexual relationships or preferences" will extend to all public media, including the internet and print publications.

Providing information about "non-traditional lifestyles" and "the rejection of family values" will then be crimes, with the same legal status as producing child pornography, promoting violence, and stirring racial, ethnic and religious tensions.

The bill generalises 2013 legislation that makes providing information to children about being LGBTIQ a crime, and now includes a provision banning information that might "cause minors to desire to change their sex".

It provides for fines of between 50,000 roubles (\$A1265) and 400,000 roubles (\$A10,117) for individuals and five million roubles (\$A126,000) for companies. Non-Russians who violate the law face deportation.

The bill passed despite warnings from publishers that under it many important books, including classics of Russian literature, could be banned for "promoting non-traditional relationships".

Origins and justifications

The legislation united two separate initiatives that were before the Duma into a single draft.

One text was supported by the "opposition" parties, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation

(KPRF), the “social-democratic” but socially conservative Just Russia and the ultra-nationalist Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR).

Its sponsor was [Nina Ostanina](#) (KPRF), chairwoman of the Duma Committee on Family, Women and Children’s Affairs. The second draft was presented by the UR deputy [Alexander Khinshtein](#), head of the Duma’s information committee.

According to an October 18 post on the Telegram channel of Feminist Anti-War Resistance (FAS), both drafts affected Russia’s media and information laws, but it was Khinshtein’s that proposed expanding the 2013 law from minors to the entire population and adopting amendments on “protecting” children from “harmful information” on gender change.

After an inter-party working group had done its work, the draft bill replaced “alien concepts” like “gender” and “LGBT” with the “clear, familiar concepts” of “sex” and “sodomy” and treated paedophilia and “non-traditional relationships” as if they were the same thing.

FAS commented: “Obviously, nostalgia for the Soviet criminal code article 121 (On Sodomy) is more acute than ever.”

With this move the legislators continued to reverse minor gains achieved for LGBTIQ rights in a country where homosexuality, decriminalised after the 1917 revolution, was recriminalised by Stalin in 1933 and remained an offence until 1993 and a “mental illness” until 1999.

It follows on the 2020 adoption of a new constitution that defines marriage solely as the union of a man and a woman. When the European Court of Human Rights ordered Russia in 2021 to accept same-sex marriage, it was told to stop meddling in internal Russian affairs.

Defeat *Peppa Pig*!

The proponents of the law made no secret of its link with Russia’s war in Ukraine and its struggle over civilisational values with “the collective West”.

According to UP deputy [Pyotr Tolstoy](#): “This is a battle we cannot lose, for the future of Russian civilisation depends on it.”

For monarchist [Konstantin Malofeev](#), UR deputy and owner of the Tsargrad TV channel “it is here, in the denial of traditional family values, that the forefront of this war lies”.

Russia’s failures on the Ukraine front are thus linked to the decline of morality: defeating “sodomy” and the LGBTIQ agents of “the West’s hybrid war” will thus help military victory.

The “communist” Ostanina echoed the UP lawmakers: while minors were “protected” from LGBTIQ influence by the 2013 law “the adult population now also needs protection. We need to protect people from this advancing ideological weapon. The war is happening on all fronts.”

In his Duma speech supporting the bill, Khinshtein said Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine were there to protect traditional Christian values and that the “special operation” was happening “not only on the battlefield, but also in the minds and souls of people”.

On this front, the enemies to be driven from the field are cartoons like *South Park* and *Peppa Pig*. During his Duma speech, Khinshtein projected screenshots of these TV programs, claiming they were part of a war being “waged against our society”.

Damning proof was the episode of *Peppa Pig* in which Penny the Polar Bear appears with two mothers.

Khinshtein's message repeats that of Putin, during whose rule anti-gay outbursts have been a recurring, even pathological, feature. For example, in a speech after the Russian Federation annexed four Ukrainian territories, the Russian president sneered about "certain genders" and families with a "parent number one and a parent number two".

The legislation also has the full support of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy. According to Patriarch Kirill, Russia's war in Ukraine is a battle between those who support pro-Western gay pride events and those who reject them.

Win against the West?

Khinshtein, however, was at pains to make clear that the bill is not aimed at banning the LGBTIQ community, just to ban the promotion of non-heterosexual behaviours.

He told the media: "Our bill is not an act of censorship. We do not ban LGBT as a phenomenon. We do not put a ban on mentioning it, we only say that propaganda, that is, positive promotion, praise, that this is normal and maybe even better than traditional sexual relations, should be banned."

Khinshtein's is a defensive manoeuvre aimed at neutralising sympathy with Russia's LGBTIQ community, which has grown in strength and organisation ever since homosexuality ceased to be classified as a mental illness.

LGBTQ Network spokesperson [Natalia Soloviova](#) told *Agence France Presse* the new law would "create a situation in which no one can speak openly or positively about LGBTQ people", making an increase in hate crimes inevitable.

She added, however, that ordinary Russians do not see the issue of sexual minorities as a priority, especially as daily life has become harder due to economic sanctions and international isolation.

Rather, the regime was abusing the rights of sexual minorities to "score geopolitical triumphs. The LGBTQ community is seen as a Western thing. So, this is like a small victory against the West, even if, in reality, it is nothing of the sort."

And now?

The [Sphere Human Rights Foundation](#), dedicated to the defence of the LGTBQ rights and already threatened with prohibition, has launched a "No to State Homophobia" campaign against the bill. It is not likely to succeed, given that the community looks to have not one friend in the Russian parliament.

FAS summarises the situation: "The situation for the queer community will be even more frightening and grim after the new laws on LGBT propaganda are passed. Not only public activists, but all non-heterosexual and transgender people will be at risk of harassment by the authorities in the event of 'propaganda'."

Lilya, one of FAS's coordinators, wrote on October 28 to its non-hetero subscribers: "We are witnessing a new phase of state violence unfold. The authorities are trying to ban any mention of the existence of LGBTQ people. Repression against any minority, against people who think or feel differently, is nothing new. An authoritarian regime needs internal enemies to pit society against. And now you and I have become such enemies."

“But I want to tell you: no matter what happens, no matter what cannibalistic laws are passed, no matter how much they try to convince you that you are not worthy of existing, you are not alone! You are loved, worthy and good enough. You are not a mistake. There is nothing wrong with you.

“I know this may be hard to believe now and it may only get worse in the years to come, but eventually this terrible time will inevitably come to an end.”

Author Name is *Green Left*'s European correspondent, based in Barcelona.

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