

Russian ban on gay 'propaganda' not healthy



By [George Wood](#), Deputy Muse Editor (2012/13)

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The Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, recently passed a bill banning the promotion of "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" among minors unanimously. But the broadness of the ban effectively stigmatises gay relationships and undermines gay rights efforts in an increasingly Orthodox and conservative Russia.

In liberal, Westernised countries, we expect homophobia and opposition to gay rights to come under fire in political debate. They present challenges to gay rights activists, but challenges that we hope are resolvable through dialogue and debate. While we cannot expect other countries to be the same, the idea that Russia is actually regressing on such basic human and political rights rather than moving forward seems ludicrous.

Yet here is a ban that will not only marginalise LGBT groups and supporters of gay rights, but deafens and penalises public attempts to speak in defence of gay rights or equate gay relationships with heterosexual ones. Such discrimination may only be power play for Putin and his attempts to rally traditionalists and strengthen Orthodox values, but for promoters of gay rights everywhere it is a dangerous spiral back to homophobic arguments that deny any kind of rationalisation.

Of course, no political outcomes regarding gay rights are ever reached easily. The protestors that targeted the French Open recently, along with violent riots in Paris, suggest intense discontent towards France's recent decision to legalise gay marriage. But while we should not downplay this opposition, it is showing all the signs of a last-ditch attempt to stop a seemingly inevitable change to French civil society.

Opposition in Russia is far more deep-rooted. Nearly half of Russians believe the gay and lesbian community should not enjoy the same rights as other citizens, according to a recent poll quoted by the BBC. Simultaneously playing into Orthodox fears and values regarding gay rights while banning public education about it means that the minds of opposers will never be swayed, and their response to gay rights will never develop beyond the "Russia is not Sodom" chanting that is circulating violent protestors today. Political debate has taken so long to move past homophobic sentiments; with one fell swoop, Russia is undoing all dialectic developments. "Russia is not Sodom" cannot be argued or reasoned with. This ban on gay "propaganda" effectively legitimises these types of statements.

Gay rights is not an easy issue to deal with. The UK gay rights charity Stonewall might suggest that we just need to "get over it" when it comes to LGBT equality, but there are more factors involved. Gay marriage is an especially contentious issue. In the US in particular, the very definition of marriage is being questioned, with some gay couples against same-sex marriage on the grounds of the blurred lines between somewhat irrelevant historical and religious values associated with marriage, and the legal benefits that the state attaches to marriage. On top of that, is the strive for same-sex marriage really showing a true acceptance by society, or is it simply a compromise in the attempt to mimic a heterosexual institutional practice?

At the current rate of the country's regression on the gay rights debate, this kind of question will never

have an answer in Russia, but more importantly, won't even be asked. Genuine, intellectual challenges to minority rights as a whole can never be presented when parliament is tripping over the first hurdles: stigmatisation and discursive exclusion. As a result, we are never going to come feasible solutions to gay rights when countries like Russia are taking steps to increase dangerously basic discrimination.

Arguably the most horrifying thing about this whole issue is how little the Russian state seems to care. Perhaps this is just a sign of Putin's corrupt regime, but the police are taking no action to stop violence on the streets against gay rights campaigners. Aggression is the lowest form of discrimination, made clear in the clash between campaigners and anti-gay activists outside the Duma when the ban was passed.

At the very least, countries such as Germany have condemned this law, and it still needs approval by the upper house and President Vladimir Putin's signature to pass into effect. Whether or not international pressure will make a change to Russia's human rights record remains to be seen, but action needs to be taken soon before anti-gay crime takes a foothold following this ban.



One comment

Medvedev

4 Jul '13 at 2:10 pm

All hail Putin, a true leader of conviction, he won't let mother Russia become a victim of cultural subversion from these leftists. We have already suffered enough under Communism.

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