

## Spread of Russian-Style Propaganda Laws



The international LGBT community has watched in horror as Russia’s brand of discriminatory propaganda legislation has taken root outside its borders. The flagship piece of that legislation, the federal law banning “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors,” has become a chief Russian export. Since the law went into effect, in June, 2013, legislators from Eastern Europe to Central Asia have begun to emulate the Russian Duma by introducing nearly identical versions of the law to their legislative bodies.

### Armenia

In August 2013, Armenian authorities briefly introduced a law aimed at protecting Armenian family values from public promotion of “non-traditional sexual relationships.” If passed, the law would have introduced fines of \$4,000.00 against violators. Mere days after the introduction, officials removed the bill from consideration, insisting that international pressure played no part in its removal, and that it was shelved solely for its shortcomings.

### Belarus

In July 2013, the Belarusian parliament proposed a gay propaganda law in the name of protecting traditional family values. The Liberal Democratic Party claimed that “under the

guise of protecting the rights of sexual minorities, is the promotion and advocacy of homosexuality, especially among minors, thus destroying the family and public morality.” Some reports suggest that the law would be introduced into the National Assembly in late 2014.

### Kazakhstan

Anti-homosexual rhetoric is increasing among lawmakers, but proposed anti-LGBT laws have received negligible traction and do not seem to have strong support from President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Thus far a Kazakhstan version of the anti-“propaganda” law has not been formally introduced, but a request to do so is moving forward. In September 2013, member of Kazakhstan’s lower house of parliament, Aldan Smayil, filed a petition to ban so-called gay

propaganda, saying, “I asked to ban gay clubs, demonstrations and any and all of these disgusting relations.”

### **Kyrgyzstan**

In May, 2014, Kyrgyz lawmakers again introduced legislation that would target freedoms of speech and assembly of LGBT persons and allies within the country. If passed the law would be significantly more severe than the Russian propaganda law that serves as its inspiration. Unlike the version signed into law by Russian President Vladimir Putin last year, the Kyrgyz bill would make all information regarding “nontraditional sexual relationships” illegal, whether in the presence of minors or not. Additionally, violations of the law could be punished with prison sentences in addition to fines. The bill has passed one legal hurdle already, having been approved by the Kyrgyz Parliament’s committee on Human Rights and the Committee on the Rule of Law, the leading committee of Parliament.

### **Latvia**

In November 2013, Latvia’s Central Election Commission allowed anti-LGBT groups to begin collecting signatures for a referendum introducing a measure banning gay propaganda. The proponents of the referendum need to collect 30,000 signatures by this coming November to move forward in the legal process.

### **Lithuania**

In March 2014, the Lithuanian Parliament deliberated upon amendments to the Code of Administrative Violations that would levy harsh fines against participants in public acts that violate the constitutionally established value of family. The amendment would give teeth to a 2010 law on protection of minors against detrimental effects of public information, providing punitive guidelines to be used against individuals and organizations. Posters, placards, slogans, lyrics, and public speeches fall under the vaguely-worded bill.

### **Moldova**

In June 2013, Moldovan lawmakers passed a bill banning the promotion of “relationships other than those linked to marriage and the family.” Only four months later the clause was removed, despite strong objections from the Orthodox Church and officials in Moscow. The removal was likely due to a desire on the part of leadership to gain membership in the European Union. Some municipal laws, however, are still in effect.

### **Ukraine**

Draft Law No. 1155, entitled “On the Prohibition of Propaganda of Homosexuality Aimed at Children” was submitted to the Verkhovna Rada in late 2012. Fortunately, the bill was removed from consideration in April, 2014. The law would have banned any information that could “do harm to physical and psychological health, moral and spiritual development of the child, as well as form misconceptions about the social equivalence of conventional and unconventional sexual relationships, and in the future to influence their choice of sexual orientation.” If made into law, the bill would have banned positive or neutral statements made in print, on air, or as part of any public demonstration or action, and levied fines against first time offenders and mandated jail terms for repeat offenses.

### **\*Crimea**

Following a controversial annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and a disputed referendum, a transitional period of integration of Russian laws into Crimea was begun. As the federal law banning “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors” continues to be codified in Russian law, it is in effect in Crimea.