

## The 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 emulated the Russian Duma by introducing nearly identical versions of the law in 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 December 2013, members of the Belarusian parliament introduced a “Bill on the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development.” In May 2016, the president of Belarus signed the bill into law. While the bill does not explicitly mention the term ‘homosexuality,’ it prohibits the dissemination of information that “encourages habits contradicting the development of a healthy lifestyle” and/or “that discredits the institution of the family and marriage.” Many worry it could be interpreted to infringe on the human rights of LGBT Belarusians. The law is set to go into effect on July 1, 2017.

### Kazakhstan

In May 2015, Kazakhstan's Constitutional Court invalidated a bill titled "On Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development." Modeled after Russia's infamous law, the bill would have introduced a ban on the promotion of "non-traditional sexual orientation." The bill was ostensibly withdrawn due to vague wording. At the time, the country was bidding to host the 2022 Olympics and such a law would have come into direct conflict with Principle 6 of the Olympic Charter, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, among other protected categories.

### Kyrgyzstan

In March 2014, Kyrgyz lawmakers published draft legislation that would severely curtail the freedoms of speech and assembly of LGBT persons and allies within the country. The draft bill goes beyond the 2013 Russian law, making all information about "nontraditional sexual relationships" illegal, whether in the presence of minors or not. Additionally, violations of the law could be punished with prison sentences of up to one year in addition to fines. One year after its introduction, the Kyrgyz Minister of Justice expressed an opinion that the law would violate the country's ongoing human rights commitments. In an unusual move, the bill was sent back to second reading in May 2016, after having passed an initial second reading in June 2015. The bill remains a serious threat. If passed, it would be sent to President Atambayev for his signature or veto.

### 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 needed to collect 30,000 signatures to move forward in the legal process before a November 2014 deadline. Ultimately, their efforts failed and no further actions have been taken.

### Lithuania

In March 2014, the Lithuanian Parliament deliberated on amendments to the Code of

Administrative Violations that would have levied harsh fines against participants in public acts that violate the constitutionally established value of family. The amendment would complement a previous Lithuanian propaganda law that entered into force in 2010. The proposed amendments would introduce penalties against individuals and organizations who are found to be in violation. Posters, placards, slogans, lyrics, and public speeches would have fallen under the vaguely-worded bill. Ultimately, the amendment did not receive enough support for consideration in 2014; it was resubmitted as part of the parliament's agenda in the fall of 2015, but was again tabled for possible reconsideration at a later date.

### Moldova

In June 2013, Moldovan lawmakers passed a bill banning the promotion of "relationships other than those linked to marriage and the family." Four months later, the clause was removed despite 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. In April 2016, lawmakers introduced a similar bill, which was approved in committee in May 2016 and is pending in parliament.

### Ukraine

Draft Law No. 1155, titled "On the Prohibition of Propaganda of Homosexuality Aimed at Children" was submitted to the Ukrainian Parliament in late 2012. The bill was removed from consideration in April 2014. The bill would have banned positive or neutral statements made in print, on air, or as part of any public demonstration or action. The legislation would have levied fines against first time offenders and mandated jail terms for repeat offenses.

### \*Crimea

The controversial annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the disputed referendum ushered in a transitional period of integration of Russian laws into Crimea. As such, Russia's federal law banning "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors" is also in effect in Crimea.