

4 Russian Journalists, Activist Seek Asylum in West, Citing Anti-LGBT Abuse

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Three journalists and an LGBT activist have fled Russia in recent days, seeking asylum in Germany and the U.S. on the basis of alleged homophobic abuse, a series of recent news reports revealed.

Lauding the move, St. Petersburg lawmaker Vitaly Milonov told the Russian News Service on Tuesday that now it is the best time for Russia's gays to leave their country.

"It is clear that St. Petersburg 'homos' felt that they were needed [by the West]. This is the right time to leave Russia, in a state of political humiliation. This situation even gives these people the possibility to claim social benefits [in the West]," said Milonov, who is well known for his anti-gay sentiments.

Television news correspondent Artur Akhmetgaliyev and graphic designer Alexander Izmailov left St. Petersburg for Germany after the former allegedly received threats for reporting

on LGBT activities, their former employer TV 100 said Monday.

Akhmetgaliyev and Izmailov are currently staying in a refugee camp in the German town of Giessen, the television station said. They have applied for political asylum.

Another journalist fled Russia for the United States last week citing homophobic harassment. Oleg Potapenko, head of the Amurburg news website in Khabarovsk, plans to seek asylum in the U.S., Radio Liberty reported on Tuesday.

Potapenko claims to have been harassed by Russian law enforcement officials, who he says tore away pages from his passport and detained him at the Khabarovsk airport before he finally managed to leave Russia via Vladivostok.

The local edition of Metro newspaper reported Tuesday that prominent St. Petersburg LGBT activist Kirill Lagutin also sought asylum in Germany.

Last year Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans said the Netherlands would consider political asylum requests from Russians who claim to have been persecuted under the so-called anti-gay propaganda law, which forbids any sort of promotion of non-traditional relationships around children.

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