

Russian LGBT Activist Fined for Disseminating 'Gay Propaganda'

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Founded in March 2013, Deti-404 (Children-404) strives to provide Russia's LGBT teenagers with a safe space where they can receive support from professional psychologists.

Yelena Klimova, the founder of an online support group for LGBT teenagers, has been fined 50,000 rubles (\$780) for violating Russia's controversial law against the "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations among minors," she announced Friday.

Founded in March 2013, Deti-404 (Children-404) strives to provide Russia's LGBT teenagers with a safe space where they can receive support from professional psychologists or share their experiences with bullying and homophobia.

Russia's media watchdog, Roskomnadzor, opened a case against Klimova last November after it claimed to have received some 150 complaints from "citizens and organizations" about Deti-404's pages on social media networks. At the time, Roskomnadzor also accused Klimova, a journalist by trade, of not being adequately qualified to assist LGBT teenagers.

"The information uploaded onto the [Deti-404's online] community is mostly geared toward creating a positive image of nontraditional sexual relations in the eyes of children, to make them seem equivalent and, in some cases, superior to traditional ones," Roskomnadzor's report said.

A court in the Sverdlovsk region city of Nizhny Tagil, apparently satisfied with the veracity of Roskomnadzor's complaint, ordered Klimova to pay the steep fine, Klimova wrote on her Facebook page. For context, the average monthly salary across Russia was 33,088 rubles in November, according to state statistics service Rosstat.

"How was any propaganda expressed [by the Deti-404 online support group]?" Klimova wrote. "That is still unknown... I can assume that [the court's explanation] will fully repeat Roskomnadzor's complaint against me."

Klimova added that she expected to receive a notice explaining the court's decision in the coming week and vowed to appeal the decision.

Critics of the so-called "gay propaganda" law, which came into force in June 2013, claim its enactment has stigmatized Russia's LGBT community, limited its rights and freedoms and led to an increased number of hate crimes.

Deti-404's supporters have begun an online petition urging Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev to "stop the persecution" against the support group.

St. Petersburg lawmaker Vitaly Milonov, the architect of regional legislation that served as the model for the federal anti-gay law, demanded the closure of Deti-404 last January, urging authorities to investigate the organization's activities he thought violated the gay propaganda law.

Klimova was more successful in that case. One month after Milonov made the complaint, a Nizhny Tagil court found no evidence that Deti-404's activities constituted "propaganda" of nontraditional sexual relationships, and dropped the case against Klimova.

Four people were fined for violating the anti-gay law during its first year in existence, including three activists who staged one-person pickets with messages of support for LGBT rights, Human Rights Watch reported in June.

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