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## world

### EUROPE

#### Putin Respects Gays, Worries About Birthrate

Prodded by a reporter, Russian President Vladimir Putin made his first public remarks about gays Feb. 1.

Responding to Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov's recent denunciation of Gay Pride parades as "satanic," Putin said: "I respect—and will respect—freedom of people in all their manifestations. [But I will not be drawn into] statements made by leaders of the regions.

"My attitude to sexual minorities is simple," he added. "It is connected with my fulfilling of my official obligations. One of the main problems of the country is demographic."

Putin was referring to the loss of population caused by Russia's declining birthrate.

Moscow Gay Pride organizer Nikolai Alekseev called Putin's remarks "a great breakthrough...the first serious reward for all our efforts to give input into the development of [a] free and democratic Russia, [although] we were expecting slightly more from him."

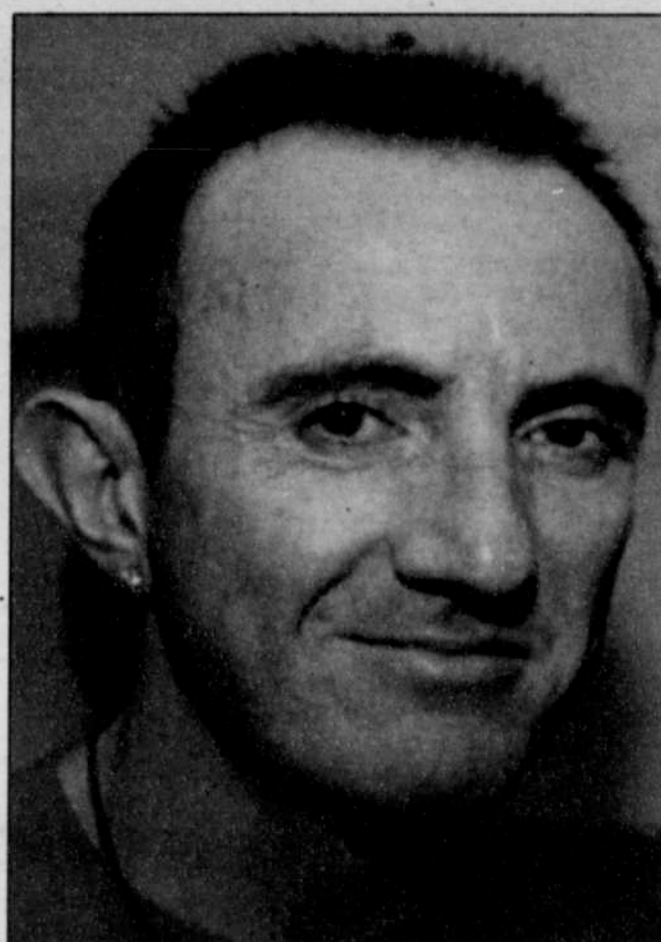
"But we did the main thing," Alekseev said. "Because of the mere idea of Gay Pride, [the] Russian president started to talk about sexual minorities."

Alekseev balked at the notion that homosexuality is to blame for Russia's low birthrate.

"It is hardly possible to imagine...5 or 7 percent of the population of a huge country to be responsible for the decrease of birthrates," he said. "The problem of demography lies, first of all, in the economic area, and it should be solved [by] enhancing of health protection level, education and elementary increase of the quality of lives of people."

Luzhkov told reporters Jan. 29: "Last year, Moscow came under unprecedented pressure to sanction the gay parade, which can be described in no other way than as satanic. We did not let the parade take place then, and we are not going to allow it in the future.... Some European nations bless single-sex marriages and introduce sexual guides in schools. Such things are a deadly moral poison for children."

Last year's Pride ban, supported by the courts, led organizers to replace the planned parade with attempts to lay flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and hold a rally across from City Hall. Participants in both small events were violently attacked by neofascists, skinheads, Christians



Gaydar Web site founder Gary Frisch died from a fall from his balcony.

and riot police. Organizers again have vowed to march this year, on May 27.

Luzhkov's comments came on the day Pride organizers filed suit in the European Court of Human Rights over last year's ban. They seek the right to march and \$26,000 in compensation.

"Not a single European legal expert we have spoken with doubts in the success of our application to the court," Alekseev said.

#### Ukrainian Parliament Human Rights Chief Denounces Gays

The Ukrainian Parliament's human rights chief denounced gays again Feb. 9, reported Kiev's Our World Gay and Lesbian Center.

Leonid Grach, head of the Committee on Human Rights, National Minorities and International Relations, said: "My colleagues and I in Parliament have to defend society from infringements upon morality and not admit into the consciousness and souls of people of any age the thought that the state is on the side of the people who are sowing debauchery, propagandizing for dissoluteness [or] sexual permissiveness, or bringing the abomination of seduction into society. [The] state must protect society from evil, from violence, including such evil as homosexuality, lesbianism and the like."

Our World, which translated the comments, responded, "Such public statements by a high-ranking politician whose duty it is to protect human rights are simply inadmissible in civilized democratic society."

The center asked activists in other nations to alert their governments to the situation and write protest letters to Grach and Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko. Last November, Grach called homosexuality "an anomaly that is caused by the amorality and depravity of man," Our World said.

#### Gaydar Co-Founder, Chairman Dies

The co-founder and chairman of the popular Gaydar Web site died in an eight-story fall from the balcony of his London penthouse Feb. 10.



The Ukrainian Parliament's human rights chief, Leonid Grach, says he must protect his country from immorality.