**Kyrgyzstan to vote on controversial anti-gay law**

2015-02-26 09:51 (Punit Paranjpe, AFP)

Bishkek - Kyrgyzstan is set to vote on a controversial bill that would make it a crime punishable by up to six months in jail to present gay relationships in a positive way in the ex-Soviet state.

The move by the predominantly Muslim Central Asian country follows an anti-gay law passed in Russia in 2013 which bans promoting gay relationships to minors.

The Kyrgyz legislation would criminalise "forming positive attitudes toward non-traditional sexual relations", a euphemism for gay relationships.

Lawmaker Nurkamil Madaliev, one of the bill's backers, said that he expected the legislation to receive its second reading "before the end of the month", although a civil servant at the parliament told AFP that a vote would not go ahead on Friday as originally planned.

The bill has strong support in Kyrgyzstan's pro-Russian parliament, where MPs overwhelmingly voted for it in the first of its three mandatory readings last year. It is also backed by nationalist groups.

But it faces opposition from Western governments and rights organisations.

The European Parliament warned in a resolution last month that the "adoption of this bill could affect relations with the EU", which provides budget support and other assistance to aid-dependent Kyrgyzstan.

In January, Human Rights Watch said that "discriminatory legislative proposals" threaten to "erode the democratic progress" in the republic, where a violent revolution in 2010 toppled former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

**'Alien to the majority'**

Nationalist groups have defended the bill against Western critics, however, rejecting LGBT rights as a foreign concept.

On 5 February, the Kalys [Justice] group rallied in support of the text outside the main government building in the capital Bishkek.

"Between five and 10 NGOs are actively lobbying the interests of the LGBT community," the group's leader, 31-year-old Jenishbek Moldokmatov, told journalists. "What gives them the right to speak for the rest of the country?"

In the country's more conservative provinces, a homosexual will still be "met with pitchforks", he warned.

The protesters accused the West of hypocrisy over its support for gay rights. They held up images from conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Moldokmatov is known for his anti-gay stance.

Last year he burned an image of a Kyrgyz-born Ukrainian man he deemed a "gay activist" outside the US embassy in Kyrgyzstan.

Another patriotic group, Kyrk Choro (Forty Warriors), wrote an open letter to Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev claiming that homosexuality "is alien to the majority of the population".

Public morals should "stand higher" than individual rights, Uran Ryskulov, Kyrk Choro's head of ideology, told AFP.

In their nomadic past Kyrgyz people "always lived in harmony with nature" Ryskulov added, explaining his opposition to same-sex relations.

**Tired of 'Western slogans'**

Support for the bill can be attributed to "fatigue" with "Western slogans", said Cholpon Djakupova, a political commentator.

Political revolutions in 2005 and 2010 promised reforms and new freedoms, but failed to curb corruption or raise living standards.

"The idea of personal liberties and the rule of law are fading," she said.

"Vague national values that can be used to manipulate people have become the new political rhetoric."

Patriotic conservative groups like Kalys and Kyrk Choro have gotten more prominent as Kyrgyzstan has grown closer to Russia politically, and Djakupova says it is "impossible to rule out" that some receive funding from the Kremlin.

"Russia has seen that this strategy has helped Western countries promote their values abroad, so why not try it?"

Kyrgyzstan is the only of the five former Communist states of Central Asia to host competitive elections and have an independent multi-party parliament, but it has been plagued by political unrest and instability.

Source: <http://www.news24.com/World/News/Kyrgyzstan-to-vote-on-controversial-anti-gay-law-20150226-5>