

Israeli Party Pulls 'What, You're Not Jewish?' TV Ad After Russian Complaints

Complaints by Russian-speaking immigrants prompted an ultra-Orthodox party in Israel to pull a TV commercial plugging their election campaign which shows a man recoiling in horror at discovering his bride is not Jewish.

In the advert, a Russian-accented bride receives a faxed certificate during her wedding ceremony attesting to her conversion to Judaism. With disgust in his voice, her Israeli husband blurts out: "What, you're not Jewish?"

The controversy reflected long-standing tensions between the religious Shas party, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, whose core constituency is made up of Jews of Middle Eastern or North African descent, and parties representing immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

There are at least 2 million Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel and hundreds of thousands do not meet Orthodox standards for recognition as Jews.

Several immigrants complained about the commercial in letters to the Israel Central Elections Committee and many more posted protests on social media sites such.

Nino Abesadze, immigrant lawmaker and candidate for the centrist Labour party, denounced the Shas advert in a notice posted on her Facebook page as "racist and mocking of the immigrants", and demanded it be taken off the air.

In a statement the committee said late on Wednesday it had found the advert offensive and that Shas had agreed not to run it anymore. The minute-long spot aired for two nights in the

run-up to the Jan. 22 parliamentary election.

Parties championing Russian-speaking immigrants such as the far-right Yisrael Beiteinu led by former Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, want to simplify Jewish conversion procedures in Israel controlled by the Orthodox Rabbinate.

Shas opposes this, as it does calls for civil marriage in Israel. The Rabbinate, also in charge of marriage procedures, issues marriage licences only to couples it deems Jewish under ritual law.

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