



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

Ensure the Safety and Duly Investigate the Death Threats against Igor Kochetkov

Statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is dismayed at the silence of Russian authorities about and their lack of action on the death threats against Igor Kochetkov, Programme Director of the Russian LGBT Network, a Forum member organisation. We call on the Russian government to ensure the safety of our colleague and demand an immediate investigation into the threats.

The death threats were published shortly after Mr Kochetkov filed a complaint to the Investigative Committee of Russia demanding to investigate continued persecution of LGBT people in the Chechen Republic. In a video addressed to Mr Kochetkov¹, Mr Ali Baskhanov, a Chechen public figure and a representative of the Organising Committee of the informal pro-government group “Noah’s Ark”, states that if Mr Kochetkov ‘leaves the train [he is riding in Chechnya]’, he will arrive ‘at his final stop’.

First reports of LGBT persecution in the Chechen Republic appeared in April 2017. The Russian LGBT Network brought the situation to public attention stating that based on its sources, at least 100 persons had been arrested and tortured, which in some cases had led to their death. The Network opened an emergency hotline for victims and began evacuating people. Since the beginning of the crisis, about 150 people have been evacuated from the region.

The persecution allegedly resumed in December 2018 when, according to the Russian LGBT Network’s information, about 40 individuals, men and women, were detained in Chechnya on suspicion of homosexuality. The detainees were beaten, sexually abused and tortured and at least two of them died in custody².

The threats from the Chechen Republic continued, when journalists of “Novaya Gazeta”, an independent media outlet in Russia, which uncovered the persecution cases back in 2017 and has followed up on the story since then, also got warnings from various sources in Chechnya, including Jambulat Umarov, Minister of National Politics, External Affairs, Press and Information of the Republic³.

¹ See a video copy published on the Facebook page of the Russian LGBT Network: www.facebook.com/lgbtnet/videos/vb.106592406129121/386894168804255/?type=2&theater (in Russian)

² See <https://lgbtnet.org/en/newseng/new-wave-persecution-against-lgbt-people-chechnya-around-40-people-detained-least-two-killed>

³ See www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/02/04/79426-natsiya-straha (in Russian)

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum joins in multiple appeals from international organisations and institutions⁴ regarding the abovementioned cases and demands from the Russian authorities to ensure the safety of Igor Kochetkov, immediate investigation into the threats against our colleagues and benevolent conditions for the operation of human rights defenders and journalists in Russia. As Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, put it in her Facebook post of 4 February 2019, 'LGBTI people are human beings with human rights. The authorities must ensure that they are treated on an equal footing as everyone else.'

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The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 162 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are members or supporters of the Forum. It aims at development of cooperation of civil society organisations from Russia and EU and greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitation of visa regime, development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, dealing with history and civic education.

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⁴ See, eg, www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/russia-death-threats-against-igor-kochetkov-russian-lgbt-network-s?fbclid=IwAR2UXnJLxoAVqggruGdN7K_TWXIbtt2-D02-HAF2MONjhe3FZWbnkF5WgQ and www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/death-threats-sent-lgbt-rights-defender-igor-kochetkov