



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

Targeting LGBT+ Rights in Poland: Hate Speech and Hatred Can Kill Statement by the Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum is deeply concerned about a rising wave of hatred against LGBT+ people in Poland. We demand to bring to justice all perpetrators, who are guilty of attacks on LGBT+ activists in Białystok during the "Equality March" (Pride)¹.

During the first ever "Equality March" in Białystok on 20 July 2019, aggressive opponents of the event were verbally insulting its participants, attacking them and later police officers with stones, eggs and petards, as well as blocking the manifestation. As a result, some planned speeches were cancelled, and the course of the march had to be amended². More than 20 people were detained. As of now, over 100 perpetrators have been identified³.

Just a few days after the incidents in Białystok, on 24 July 2019, "Gazeta Polska", a paper receiving public money, together with its latest issue was distributing stickers which read 'LGBT-Free Zone' (Strefa wolna od LGBT). After being criticised by various actors and the biggest private Polish bookshop chain refusing to sell "Gazeta Polska" with these stickers, some copies came out with a slightly changed line: 'Zone Free from the LGBT Ideology' (Strefa wolna od ideologii LGBT)⁴.

The march in Białystok and the "Gazeta Polska" campaign are not single cases of hatred targeted at LGBT+ people in Poland. This is an unfortunate trend in a country, which has been heavily divided over the issue.

On the one hand, Rafał Trzaskowski, Mayor of Warsaw, signed in February 2019 the so-called LGBT+ Declaration, which, among others, introduces an anti-discrimination and sexual education in every school in the city⁵. On the other hand, dozens of regional or city assemblies in Poland declared themselves free of the 'LGBT ideology'⁶, while President Andrzej Duda earlier said he would be in favour of a law, which 'would ban propaganda of homosexuality and gender' in schools⁷.

¹ See www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-07-21/more-than-20-people-detained-for-attack-on-lgbt-parade-in-poland

² See www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/bialystok-marsz-rownosci-proby-zaklocenia-i-interwencje-policji,954562.html (in Polish)

³ See <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/603574,marsz-rownosci-bialystok-policja-zatrzymania-burdy.html> (in Polish)

⁴ See www.newsweek.pl/polska/strefa-wolna-od-ideologii-lgbt-gazeta-polska-zmienia-tresc-naklejek/wbz1n5r (in Polish)

⁵ See <https://mnw.org.pl/warszawska-deklaracja-lgbt> (in Polish)

⁶ See <https://queer.pl/news/203112/ustawy-regionow-wolnych-od-lgbt-sa-niezgodne-z-prawem> (in Polish)

⁷ See <https://oko.press/kierunek-moskwa-duda-podszedlbym-powaznie-do-ustawy-zakazujacej-homoseksualnej-propagandy> (in Polish)

We are especially concerned, having seen the effect of the Russian law prohibiting the so-called ‘LGBT propaganda’ among minors. It has been not only blocking much needed help to LGBT teenagers but also demonising the community as a whole⁸. Such climate allows not just for hate speech but for hate crimes, like the recent brutal murder of Elena Grigorieva, an activist. Elena was found dead in St. Petersburg on 21 July 2019⁹.

Hate speech and hatred can kill. The Board of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum calls on the Polish government to stop using anti-LGBT+ rhetoric in their statements¹⁰ and supporting anti-LGBT sentiments country-wide. The government should ensure equal rights for all Polish citizens. We demand the continuation of a duly conducted investigation of attacks in Białystok and informing the public on the legal consequences for the attackers. Finally, we strongly believe that such media as “Gazeta Polska” must be refused public money as a funding source.

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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, 175 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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⁸ See www.hrw.org/news/2014/12/15/russia-impunity-anti-lgbt-violence

⁹ See <https://meduza.io/en/news/2019/07/22/lgbtq-activist-killed-in-st-petersburg>

¹⁰ See, e.g., <https://oko.press/lgbt-nowym-paliwem-wyborczym-pis-szczuje-wedlug-scenariusza-na-uchodzcow> (in Polish)