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HUNGARY: What do LGBTQ people think about Hungary's controversial referendum?

By *Ádám Magyar*

Euronews (03/04/2022) - <https://bit.ly/3J0Gwol> - Hungary is holding a controversial referendum on LGBTQ rights on Sunday (3 April), at the same time as a parliamentary election.

Voters will be asked for their views on legislation that limits schools' teaching about homosexuality and transgender issues.

Critics say the law, passed last year, was discriminatory, contravened European values and equates homosexuality with paedophilia.

Ahead of the vote, Euronews spoke to four members of Hungary's LGBTQ community to find out how they were feeling.

Three of them told us if things don't improve, they might not be living in Hungary much longer.

Mónika Magasházi: 'I wish the state would leave me alone'

"It's not that the state doesn't represent me or doesn't protect my rights. It's about being put on the spot and put in front of the gun."

This is how Mónika Magasházi summed up her feelings as a member of the LGBTQ community in Hungary in 2022.

"I no longer even think about being represented and protected by the state," Mónika added. "That's just in the dream category, now. I would be at least a bit happy if they would just leave me alone."

The 49-year-old trans woman has been on hormone therapy for about six months and is now preparing for her first reconstructive surgery.

She has been living as a woman for a year and a half, but it was the day of our interview that she first spoke to her boss at work about it.

In some ways, Mónika feels that coming out at work has even been made easier by the Hungarian government's handling of LGBTQ issues.

"I have a very strange feeling about this," said Mónika. "I feel very upset that the government has actually attacked us with this propaganda. It's coming out of the public media, it's coming out of the billboards. On the other hand, it can also be counterproductive for them. Because now that the government has shoved it in everybody's face, more and more families, work communities and friends are talking about it. In many ways, it's damaging to us, but maybe we don't need so much to explain. For example, I didn't need to explain so much to my boss," she said.

But that doesn't mean everything will go smoothly at work. Even if her colleagues and bosses accept the new situation without any problems, changing her IDs and email addresses in the IT system will be a more difficult task. Since May 2020, it is not possible to change the gender registered in the civil registry in Hungary, so Mónika cannot submit new documents with her new, female name. And IT systems are based on official documents and the employment contract at her workplace.

"The parent companies don't even understand this problem because they don't have it. If you are in transition in the West, you go to the office, get your new documents, bring them to the company and they will rewrite your details," she said, adding that if a woman who is in transition and looks like a woman has to show her male documents anywhere, it is very inconvenient.

Emmett Hegedűs: 'With the new law, my dreams became impossible'

Emmett Hegedűs, 18, is in a similar situation to Mónika. The new law has made it impossible for both of them to change their gender and name.

"I really don't like signing my name or taking out my ID. When I was 16, I had [the] motivation to go ahead in life and that was of course that in two years I wouldn't have to take out my female ID, I wouldn't have to menstruate or anything like that. With the change in the law, the dreams, the plans that I had built up became impossible," said Emmett, who has become an activist recently. His goal is to dispel fears in people about members of the LGBTQ community.

"If I don't know something and the first information I hear is that it's dangerous, I might believe it. Provided I otherwise agree with the decisions of the government from whom the information comes. It sounds very scary that someone would go up to your child and tell them to change gender," he said, referring to the upcoming referendum, about which he has strong views.

"No one in their right mind can say 'yes' to any of the questions with a clear heart. I don't want any of these statements to come true either. However, there is no reality to any of them. So it's a very evil way of amplifying the fear that people already have."

The referendum on 3 April will include four questions, proposed by Hungary's ruling party, Fidesz:

- Do you support the teaching of sexual orientation to underage children in public education institutions without parental consent?
- Do you support the promotion of sex reassignment therapy for underage children?
- Do you support the unrestricted exposure of underage children to sexually explicit media content that may affect their development?
- Do you support the showing of sex-change media content to minors?

There was a fifth question, but this was not certified by the court:

- Do you support the availability of sex-change treatments for minors?

According to Mónika, the timing of the referendum is no coincidence:

"It is a disgusting thing. It is clearly about trying to somehow keep the Fidesz camp together and get them to the polls. They are hoping that they can mobilise these people by threatening to operate on kindergarten children. You can only give invalid answers to these stupid questions."

Márió Dányi-Nagy: 'Threats can suck the everyday joy out of your life'

Márió Dányi-Nagy also sees political motivation in the organisation of the referendum.

"It is held on election day to ensure a high turnout. On the other hand, they want to confuse things in people's minds, they want to suggest that Fidesz is protecting children from paedophiles."

The LGBTQ community and pedophiles in Hungary

The so-called child protection law passed by the Hungarian parliament last year was framed by the governing Fidesz party as an instrument to protect children from paedophilia and any sexual influence that is not approved by parents. The law banned any content portraying or "promoting" homosexuality or sex reassignment to anyone under 18. A lot of NGOs and EU member states criticised the law, not just because they thought it is against the LGBTQ community, but also because it deals with paedophilia and LGBTQ issues in the same text, making it possible to conflate the two.

The 35-year-old trainer from Budapest feels that as a gay man, the pressure has been mounting on him in recent years:

"It's annoying when someone starts shouting loudly next to you. But it is also annoying when something keeps buzzing constantly, louder and louder. That's kind of what's happening now," he said.

"My previous partner and I were harassed on the street many times, once physically, but it was more of a case of being called names. This causes self-censorship. I get the feeling that I am not safe in my own country because I could be attacked at any time. Politicians say things like I am not an equal citizen. And when it came to the association with paedophiles, it sent me to the floor. It was as if they had put a target on my back, that I was someone to be attacked. I bought pepper spray at the time, but I wasn't attacked in the end. But recently, for example, at the end of a date, a guy kissed me in a public place and it made me nervous, even though I didn't used to be like that. That kind of threat can suck the everyday joy out of your life."

Mário studies behavioural psychology and clearly sees the government's responsibility for the deterioration of the situation.

"It is coded in human behaviour to exclude, discriminate, hurt those who are not like the others," he said. "If you put the incendiary under this, it will be reinforced. And it needs real effort to promote not that, but acceptance, peace."

Last year, Mario started planning to move to Vienna, Austria, but eventually decided to stay because he felt that society was not as dismissive of him as the government. In the future, however, he can imagine leaving the country, just as our other interviewees are strongly considering moving - especially if Fidesz remains in power and introduces further restrictive measures with the new mandate.

Ákos Modolo: 'The law has given us visibility like never before'

"A lot of my friends have gone abroad because they don't feel valued by this country, they don't feel they can hold their heads high, they can't stand the rhetoric that is being hurled at them on a daily basis, and they are restricted by the laws," said Ákos Modolo, who wants to stay in Hungary.

"I went to Stockholm last year and it was like a sudden breath of fresh air. But in Budapest, I have a very good, supportive community of friends and a vibrant activist community. I know many authentic and courageous people who inspire me.

"In Stockholm, I saw that they already have what we are fighting for in Hungary, legally and in terms of social acceptance. I feel I have more work to do here," said the 27-year-old, who comes from a small town in the lowlands of Hungary, Mezőberény, and grew up in a conservative, religious community. He found out he was gay at the age of 14 but didn't tell anyone until he moved to Budapest at the age of 19.

"I felt that in the countryside the subject was taboo, or if they had spoken about it, they did it in a negative sense. For example, it was made fun of at school, or sometimes in a sermon it was said that it was a sin to live your homosexuality," he explained.

Akos said in his role as an activist he was targeted by the government. He used to hold gay awareness programmes mainly in secondary schools, but the new law means this is no longer possible. Instead, he targets universities, workplaces and bible study groups. According to him, the sessions were aimed at showing how LGBTQ people live, rather than being about sex education.

"Since the law was passed, we have not been able to go to secondary schools, even though two-thirds of our invitations used to come from secondary schools. Legally, the wording of the law is very vague, which shows that it is all about communication for Fidesz. It is also not clear if we really cannot go to secondary schools now by the text of the law. In any case, the teachers dare not invite us. Not even the most liberal ones, because they are afraid of retaliation, of being on the front page of the government media the next day for having engaged in sexual propaganda," he said.

Despite all the difficulties, however, Ákos believes that the situation of the LGBTQ community in Hungary is not hopeless.

"I see that the acceptance of LGBTQ people has increased recently, despite the political campaign. The laws have given us visibility like never before. Several of my conservative gay friends who used to vote for Fidesz and opposed me being an activist have come out and said enough is enough. We lost some battles in the short term, but I think we can be optimistic in the long term."

LITHUANIA / ECtHR: A children's book of fairy tales and same-sex marriages

Labelling a book of fairy tales as harmful to children solely because of LGBTI content breached the Convention

Registrar of the European Court (23.01.2023) - The case of [Macate v. Lithuania](#) (application no. 61435/19) concerned a children's book of fairy tales containing storylines about same-sex marriage. Distribution of the book had been suspended soon after its publication in 2013. It had been resumed one year later after the book had been labelled as possibly harmful to children under the age of 14. This was the first case in which the European Court of Human Rights had assessed restrictions on literature about same-sex relationships written specifically for children.

In today's **Grand Chamber** judgment¹ in the case the European Court held, unanimously, that there had been:

a violation of Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Court found that the measures against the applicant's book had intended to limit children's access to information depicting same-sex relationships as essentially equivalent to different-sex relationships.

In particular it could not see how, according to the national courts and the Government, certain passages – a princess and a shoemaker's daughter sleeping in one another's arms after their wedding – had been sexually explicit. Nor was it convinced by the Government's argument that the book had promoted same-sex families over others. To the contrary, the fairy tales had advocated respect for and acceptance of *all* members of society in a fundamental aspect of their lives, namely a committed relationship.

As a result, it concluded that restricting children's access to such information had not pursued any aims that it could accept as legitimate.

A legal summary of this case will be available in the Court's database HUDOC ([link](#))

Principal facts

The applicant, Neringa Dangvyde Macate, was a Lithuanian national who was born in 1975 and lived in Vilnius. She died in March 2020 and her mother continued the proceedings in her place.

The applicant was an openly lesbian children's author. In December 2013 the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences published one of her books, *Amber Heart (Gintarinė širdis)*, which contained fairy tales aimed at nine-ten-year olds, with partial funding from the Ministry of Culture. Adapted from traditional fairy tales, the book included characters from different ethnic groups or with intellectual disabilities and addressed issues such as stigmatisation, bullying, divorced families and emigration. Two of the six fairy tales in the book had story lines about relationships and marriages between persons of the same sex.

Soon after publication, the Ministry of Culture was forwarded a complaint alleging that the book was "encouraging perversions". The Ministry asked the Inspectorate of Journalistic Ethics to assess whether the book might be harmful to children.

Around the same time, eight members of the Lithuanian Parliament sent a letter to the University, relaying to it concerns expressed by associations representing families about literature which "sought to instil in children the idea that marriage between persons of the same sex was a welcome phenomenon".

The Inspectorate concluded that the two fairy tales which depicted same-sex couples did not comply with section 4 § 2 (16) of the Act on the Protection of Minors from Negative Effects of Public Information ("the Minors Protection Act"). That provision states that any information which "expresses contempt for family values" or "encourages a different concept of marriage and creation of family than the one enshrined in the Constitution or the Civil Code" is considered as having a negative effect on minors. The Inspectorate recommended that the book be labelled with a warning that it might be harmful to children under 14 years of age.

The University's publishing house suspended distribution of the book in March 2014. A year later distribution was resumed, with the book bearing a warning label, in line with the Inspectorate's recommendation.

The applicant lodged civil proceedings against the University, arguing that depiction of same-sex relationships could not be considered harmful for children of any age, but in 2019 the courts ultimately endorsed the measures taken against the book and dismissed her claim.

In particular, in February 2019 the Vilnius Regional Court – in a second round of proceedings after the Supreme Court had remitted the case for fresh examination – upheld an assessment at first instance of the harm the book could cause children. The regional court also found that certain passages were too sexually explicit and that the way in which the fairy tales depicted a new family model raised the question of whether the applicant herself had sought to discriminate against those who held values different from her own.

Complaints, procedure and composition of the Court

The application was lodged with the European Court of Human Rights on 22 November 2019.

Relying on Article 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights taken alone and in conjunction with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination), the applicant complained about the temporary suspension of the distribution of her book and its subsequent labelling as harmful to children, alleging that those measures had been taken solely because the book contained a positive depiction of same-sex relationships. She also argued that section 4 § 2 (16) of the Minors Protection Act, although seemingly neutral, had in reality aimed at limiting the dissemination of any positive information about LGBTI persons, on the pretext of protecting children.

She also complained, under Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) in conjunction with Article 10, that the reason behind the restrictions on her book had been prejudice against sexual minorities.

On 18 June 2020 the Lithuanian Government were given notice² of the application, with questions from the Court.

The Chamber to which the case had been allocated relinquished jurisdiction in favour of the Grand Chamber on 31 August 2021.

ILGA-Europe (the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), ARTICLE 19 and Professor David Kaye, acting jointly, and Hättér Society were granted leave to intervene in the written proceedings as third parties.

A Grand Chamber hearing on the case took place on 23 March 2022 in the Human Rights Building, Strasbourg.

Judgment was given by the Grand Chamber of 17 judges (...).

Decision of the Court

Article 10

Firstly, the Court found that the temporary suspension of the distribution of the book and its subsequent labelling with a warning could be attributed to the State. In particular, the measures had been taken by the University, a public body, had directly resulted from the domestic legislation and had been examined and endorsed by the national courts.

It considered that those measures had interfered with the applicant's freedom of expression. The books had been recalled from bookshops, thus reducing availability to readers. It was also likely that the warning labels had decreased readership: a significant number of parents with children from the book's intended age group would have been dissuaded from letting their children read it, especially given the prejudice against the LGBTI community in Lithuania; and children over the age of 14 were in general far less interested in reading fairy tales. Furthermore, the labels had to have impacted the applicant's reputation as an established children's author and discouraged her and others from publishing similar literature.

The Court then went on to find that the measures had had a basis in domestic law, namely section 4 § 2 (16) of the Minors Protection Act.

The applicant and the Government disagreed as to what had been the aim of the restrictions. The Court rejected the Government's argument that they had sought to protect children from sexually explicit information. It could not see how certain passages – a princess and a shoemaker's daughter sleeping in one another's arms after their wedding – depicted carnal love. Nor did it find convincing the Government's submission that the fairy tales had been seeking to "insult", "degrade" or "belittle" different-sex relationships

and “promote families of the same sex”. The Court could not see any such aim in the applicant’s writings which, to the contrary, advocated respect for and acceptance of *all* members of a given society in a fundamental aspect of their lives, namely a committed relationship.

Furthermore, the Court found that the legislative history of section 4 § 2 (16), and the examples of its application, revealed an underlying intent to restrict children’s access to information about same- sex relationships. In particular, the text of section 4 § 2 (16) had clearly meant to refer to same-sex relationships and marriages, since both the Constitution and the Civil Code only provided for marriage between a man and a woman and Lithuanian legislation did not permit legal recognition of same-sex unions.

Having established that the aim pursued by the measures had been to restrict children’s access to content depicting same-sex relationships as being essentially equivalent to different-sex relationships, the Court then examined whether such an aim could be regarded as legitimate under the Convention.

The Court had already held in its case-law that there was no scientific evidence – as confirmed by various international bodies – to suggest that the mere mention of homosexuality, or open public debate about sexual minorities’ social status, would adversely affect children. The Court also took note of the fact that the laws of a significant number of Council of Europe member States – including Lithuania – either explicitly included education on same-sex relationships in school curricula, or contained provisions on ensuring respect for diversity and prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in teaching.

Lastly, it held that restricting children’s access to information about same-sex relationships – where such information could not be considered inappropriate or harmful to them on any other basis than sexual orientation – demonstrated that the authorities had a preference for some types of relationships and families over others and that they saw different-sex relationships as more socially acceptable and valuable than same-sex relationships, thereby contributing to continuing stigmatisation. Therefore, such restrictions, however limited in their scope and effects, were incompatible with the notions of equality, pluralism and tolerance inherent in a democratic society.

The Court therefore concluded that the measures against the applicant’s book had not pursued any aims that it could accept as legitimate for the purposes of Article 10.

Other articles

The Court held, by 12 votes to 5, that there was no need to examine separately the applicant’s complaint under Article 14 of the Convention taken in conjunction with Article 10.

Article 41 (just satisfaction)

The Court held that Lithuania was to pay the applicant’s mother 12,000 euros (EUR) in respect of non-pecuniary damage and EUR 5,000 in respect of costs and expenses.

Separate opinions

Judges Yudkivska, Lubarda, Guerra Martins and Zünd, joined by Judge Kūris, expressed a joint partly dissenting opinion which is annexed to the judgment.

The judgment is available in English and French.

RUSSIA: LGBTQ history museum in St Petersburg is shut down

[Euronews](#) (09.12.2022) – A museum devoted to Russia's LGBTQ history in St Petersburg has opened and closed in the space of a few days after Russia's tough new 'gay propaganda' law came into force.

Pyotr Voskresensky is the founder of the museum. He dedicated years to amassing the collection of Russian-made statues, jewellery, vases, books and other art objects that showcased the history of the country's LGBTQ subculture

However, the collection fell foul of the law that completely bans what the authorities regard as the promotion of "non-traditional" sexual relations.

On the 5th of December, Russian president Vladimir Putin signed a law which banned completely anything deemed "propaganda" of non-traditional sexual relations, gender reassignment and paedophilia. This extends to media, the internet, advertisements, books or films.

If found guilty of disseminating "LGBT propaganda" among minors, a person faces a fine of up to €75,000 (5 million roubles), while among adults the fine is more than €60,000 (4 million roubles). Fines for "propaganda promoting paedophilia" will be €150,000 (10 million roubles) while "gender change propaganda" faces a fine of €60,000 (4 million roubles).

The new legislation had already hardened harsh anti-gay laws. The museum's brief opening was a symbolic protest against the crackdown on an embattled minority community.

RUSSIA: Fines for LGBT propaganda to be from 50,000 to 200,000 rubles

Interfax (31.08.2022) - <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=16660> - Fines for the propaganda of non-traditional relations will be from 50,000 rubles to 200,000 rubles for citizens, Russian State Duma Information Policy Committee head Alexander Khinshtein, the author of the relevant bill, said.

The draft law changes Article 6.21 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offenses by envisaging "the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations or preferences expressed in the dissemination of information aimed at forming non-traditional sexual preferences, the attractiveness of non-traditional sexual relations or preferences, a distorted idea of the social equivalence of traditional and non-traditional sexual relations or preferences, or forcing information on non-traditional sexual relations or preferences that arouses interest in such relations."

Under the draft law, which Khinshtein published on his Telegram channel, the document envisages administrative fines for such offenses in an amount of 50,000 rubles to 100,000 rubles for citizens, 100,000 rubles to 200,000 rubles for officials, and 800,000 rubles to one million rubles for legal entities.

If these violations are committed using mass media or the Internet, the fine will be 100,000 rubles to 200,000 rubles for citizens, 200,000 rubles to 400,000 rubles for officials, and one million rubles to four million rubles for legal entities.

If the said violations were committed among minors, the fine will be 100,000 rubles to

200,000 rubles for citizens, 200,000 rubles to 400,000 rubles for officials, and one million rubles to two million rubles for legal entities.

If these offenses were committed using mass media or the Internet, the fine will be 200,000 rubles to 400,000 rubles for citizens, 400,000 rubles to 800,000 rubles for officials, and two million rubles to five million rubles for legal entities.

The bill also includes new articles, 6.21(1) and 6.21(2), in the Code of Administrative Offenses.

The first of them envisages liability for the propaganda of pedophilia expressed in "dissemination of information aimed at forming the attractiveness of pedophilia or forcing information on pedophilia causing interest in pedophilia." Such offenses may be punishable by a fine in an amount of 200,000 rubles to 400,000 rubles for citizens, 400,000 rubles to 800,000 rubles for officials, and one million rubles to four million rubles for legal entities.

Harsher punishment is envisaged if such offenses are committed using mass media or the Internet. In that case, the fine will be 400,000 rubles to 800,000 rubles for citizens, 800,000 rubles to two million rubles for officials, and four million rubles to ten million rubles for legal entities.

New Article 6.21(2) envisages liability for dissemination among minors of information "demonstrating non-traditional sexual relations or preferences, including description, images of non-traditional sexual relations or preferences." In that case, a fine is envisaged in an amount of 50,000 rubles to 100,000 rubles for citizens, 100,000 rubles to 200,000 rubles for officials, and 800,000 rubles to one million rubles for legal entities.

Harsher punishment is also envisaged if such offenses are committed using mass media or the Internet. In that case, the fine will be 100,000 rubles to 200,000 rubles for citizens, 200,000 rubles to 400,000 rubles for officials, and one million rubles to four million rubles for legal entities.

If all of the said offenses are committed by foreigners or stateless persons, they will be given the same fines as Russian citizens, but with expulsion from Russia or administrative arrest for 15 days and also expulsion.

Khinshtein said earlier on Wednesday that he had sent a bill on administrative liability for the propaganda of pedophilia and LGBT to the Russian government for review.

He said such liability is now envisaged only for the propaganda of LGBT among children. "We and our colleagues in the IT Committee want to apply it to any propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations, regardless of age," the parliamentarian said.

He also said the committee is completing the work on an earlier announced bill, which makes corresponding changes to some laws and imposes a ban on the dissemination of such information offline and online.

The committee will be ready to hold a public debate of these initiatives after the start of the fall session of the State Duma, Khinshtein said.

State Duma Deputy Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin earlier spoke about the plans to organize a public debate on these bills and consider them in the fall session. "Bearing in mind the stated position of most factions, there is confidence that the bills banning the propaganda of non-traditional values and introducing liability for its dissemination will be adopted," Volodin told reporters.

RUSSIAS: Fleeing War and Discrimination, LGBT Russians Find Refuge in South Caucasus

By Anastasia Tenisheva

The Moscow Times (01.08.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3AvfCUz> - When tens of thousands of Russians fled the country this spring following the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine, many chose to resettle in Armenia and Georgia.

But for LGBT Russians, their new homes in the conservative South Caucasus — where there are few protections against homophobic violence — may mean facing even greater risks than in the hostile environment they left behind.

Watching her friends in Russia being arrested for their anti-war activism, body-positive blogger and LGBT advocate Ollie decided to move to the Armenian capital to work with a project helping LGBT people affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Ollie, 27, said she chose Yerevan because many Armenians speak Russian as a second language and Russians do not need a visa to enter the country.

"Nothing is scary after living [as an LGBT person] in Russia," said Ollie, who declined to give her full name. "Here I have not experienced homophobia or transphobia... Probably around 50% of my queer acquaintances moved to Yerevan."

Armenia and Georgia are socially conservative societies, and LGBT people face a number of legal and social obstacles, as well as discrimination and occasional violence. Armenia [placed](#) 47th out of 49 European and Eurasian countries in a ranking of civil liberties, protections and recognitions afforded to LGBT people.

Like Russia, the Armenian Constitution only [recognizes](#) marriage between men and women.

But while LGBT Armenians struggle for acceptance, a number of LGBT Russians said they feel safe in Armenia because — at least for the moment — they are treated as guests.

"It feels like local rules don't apply to me as I'm a foreigner," said one member of the Russian LGBT community in Armenia who requested anonymity to speak freely.

"Armenia has legal discrimination [against LGBT people], same-sex marriage is illegal and local LGBT communities are even more closed. It's a conservative country. But I haven't experienced discrimination," she said.

Several local and international LGBT organizations in Armenia are working to help new Russian emigrants to integrate.

The Queer Svit [project](#), where Ollie works as a marketing director, helps LGBT people from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus flee abroad and provides temporary shelter in Armenia.

In Armenia, locals are "tolerant" toward LGBT foreigners, said Mamikon Hovsepyan, the communications director at Pink Armenia.

"The capital is quite active and diverse and there are some [LGBT-friendly] places, cafes, clubs and parties, but the general attitude is negative," he told The Moscow Times.

"[LGBT] Russians will be accepted by [Armenian] society unless they show their sexuality," he added. "Homophobia usually targets the local community."

Local human rights group Pink Armenia last year [registered](#) at least 35 human rights violations against LGBT people, as well as discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

A trans person [was sexually assaulted](#) in Yerevan in June.

The situation in neighboring Georgia is similar. A far-right group staged a rally to disrupt an LGBT event in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi earlier this summer and one of the group's members [died](#) after setting himself on fire in a protest against non-traditional relationships.

Russian activist Alexander Sofeev, who visited the event targeted by protesters, said the situation was tense, but police ensured the safety of participants.

"I think the Georgian government does not promote homophobia, it is usually done by individual far-right activists," Sofeev, a member of the Pussy Riot feminist art group who moved to Tbilisi last year, told The Moscow Times.

"On the contrary, in Russia, it [homophobia] is imposed at the state level," he said.

Russian activists said that Moscow's crackdown on anything perceived as "Western" in the wake of the war has had an acute impact on the LGBT community.

"Tensions in Russian society have increased since the war began and it affects the most vulnerable groups, including sexual minorities," said Anna Akulina, 32, who left the southern city of Rostov-on-Don for Yerevan in early April.

Since the Kremlin launched its invasion of Ukraine in February, Russian state television coverage has cast LGBT rights as foreign values that threaten the country. A Chechen military commander [said](#) on state television last month that Russia is fighting a "holy war" against "satanist values" such as LGBT rights.

Last month Russian lawmakers [submitted](#) legislation that would ban any information deemed "LGBT propaganda."

"Russia is not a safe place for a queer person: you face being outed at work, bullying, even beatings. You get used to hiding all the time in Russia," said body-positive blogger Ollie.

Many LGBT Russians fled abroad in fear of human rights abuses if they were detained or arrested by Russian police for their anti-war views.

"Can you imagine me calling the police in Russia if anything happens? I cannot. I don't trust them," Ivan Sokolov, who is openly gay, told The Moscow Times.

"I'm more likely to get help [from the police] in Armenia."

But Sokolov, 23, who moved to Yerevan a week after the war started, said he's experienced homophobic slurs, and that he worries about what might happen in the future.

"I feel safer here than in Russia," he said. "But what will the situation be in three or six months?"

RUSSIA : 390 Duma members co-author anti-LGBT

HRWF with Interfax (24.10.2022) - A bill banning the propaganda of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) and pedophilia, the demonstration of LGBT-related information, and information inciting sex change among adolescents was submitted to the State Duma on 20 October.

The initiative was co-authored by 390 Duma members, including all faction leaders and deputy speakers.

According to the draft law, the changes to the 2013 law banning the exposition of minors to what authorities deem "gay propaganda will affect the Internet, mass media, books, audiovisual services, cinematography, and advertising.

The bill extends the list of information prohibited from dissemination among children: the propaganda and demonstration of non-traditional sexual relations and (or) preferences, as well as information which can make children to want to change their sex. The new changes also formally draw a distinction between the notions of "demonstration" and "propaganda."

The bill mandates a paid subscription and additional security features for access to television and radio content which is banned for children, and labelling of promo material for such content.

In addition, the bill prohibits advertising content containing information that demonstrates non-traditional sexual relations or preferences.

Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations or preferences, including the propaganda of pedophilia, would be banned among Russian citizens, both adults and minors.

In all, five laws would be affected: "On information, information technologies, and information protection," "On mass media," "On protecting children from information which harms their health and development," "On advertising," and "On state support for Russian cinematography."

Another bill submitted on Thursday contains amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses.

LGBT propaganda would entail fines of between 50,000 - 400,000 rubles for individuals, 100,000 - 800,000 rubles for officials and 800,000 - 5,000,000 rubles or up to 90 days of suspended operation for legal entities.

The propaganda of pedophilia would entail fines of 200,000 - 800,000 rubles for individuals, 400,000 - 2,000,000 rubles for officials, and 1,000,000 - 10,000,000 rubles or up to 90 days' suspended operation for legal entities.

Fines for violating the ban on LGBT demonstration and information inciting sex change among adolescents: 50,000 - 200,000 rubles for individuals, 100,000 - 400,000 rubles for officials, and 800,000 - 4,000,000 rubles or up to 90 days of suspended operation for legal entities.

For foreign nationals and stateless persons, the penalty would be an administrative expulsion from the Russian Federation.

Lawmakers argued the law needs to be toughened amid Russia's intensified confrontation with the West and as its armed forces battle next-door.

Alexander Khinsein, a senior lawmaker and the head of the Duma's information committee, said the Ukraine offensive had given the proposed law "new relevance."

"The special operation takes place not only on the battlefield, but also in the minds and souls of people," Khinsein said.

Konstantin Malofeyev, a banker and conservative media baron, told the Duma hearing that passing the law is part of Russia's war effort.

"The war is not only on the battlefield. It is also in the smart-phones of our children, in cartoons and films," Malofeyev said.

"Our enemy really holds the propaganda of sodomy as the core of its influence," he said.

RUSSIA: Pro-Putin Chechen general who led 'gay purge' killed in Ukraine

Chechen general Magomed Tushayev was killed on Saturday, and was responsible for for torturing and murdering LGBTQ+ individuals.

By Benjamin Weinthal

The Jerusalem Post (01.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3tHwyE7> - Ukraine forces killed Chechen general Magomed Tushayev on Saturday at the Antonov International Airport (GML) northwest of Kyiv. Tushayev is responsible for the torture and murders of LGBTQ+ individuals in the largely Muslim region of Chechnya in Russia.

The Ukrainian Armed Forces confirmed his death, writing in a tweet that "Magomed Tushayev, leader of the 141 motorized regiment of the Chechen National Guard, was killed!."

Illia Ponomarenko, a defense reporter for *The Kyiv Independent*, tweeted: "Magomed Tushayev, one of Ramzan Kadyrov's top warlords, has been killed in action in Hostomel. Ukraine's elite Alpha Group is reportedly fighting Chechens in the airfield."

Peter Tatchell, a British LGBTQ+ activist and human rights campaigner, told *The Jerusalem Post* that "While I never rejoice at the killing of anyone, his death means one less mass murderer on the loose. Those who live by the sword should not be surprised if they die by the sword. This will mean that he is no longer able to abduct, torture and kill Chechen LGBTs and dissidents, which is a good thing."

Kadyrov said on Saturday that the Chechen fighters did not have "one single casualty or wounded" combatant, according to Reuters.

Kadyrov, who has been widely criticized for his repressive rule, said: "The president [Putin] took the right decision, and we will carry out his orders under any circumstances."

LGBTQ publication *The Los Angeles Blade* reported that "Tushayev, who was one of three top advisors and military commanders for Kadyrov, prior to the Ukrainian invasion by Russian forces, was directly involved in the campaign of terrorizing the LGBTQ+ community in Chechnya."

According to the *Blade*: "Sources with Russian-based human rights organizations confirmed that Tushayev played an unspecified role as recently as May of 2021 when human rights activist and a gay man, Ibragim Selimkhanov, was abducted from a subway station in the Novogireyev District of the Russian capital city of Moscow by four Chechen operatives and flown against his will to the Chechen capital city of Grozny.

"Since 2017, human and LGBTQ+ activists noted that Chechen security operatives and other officials in the Kadyrov regime, including Tushayev sources confirmed, have rounded up dozens of men on suspicion of being gay, held them in unofficial detention facilities for days, humiliated, starved and tortured them, in what has been dubbed Chechnya's 'anti-gay purge,' the report added.

Fox News Digital reported "The Chechens are part of a Russian national garud unit and are well known for fighting insurgencies, using brutal tactics that even jolted Russia during its two brutal wars in the '90s against them. The Chechens have been employed to hunt down terrorists in Syria and used by Russia to fight elsewhere, including in Georgia. They also fought the Ukrainians in Donbas when hostilities began there in 2014."

RUSSIA: Russian church leader appears to blame gay pride parades for Ukraine war

The Moscow Times (07.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3vLFqdo> - The head of Russia's Orthodox Church appeared to blame liberal Western values — drawing particular attention to gay pride parades — for Russia's invasion of Ukraine in his Sunday sermon.

President Vladimir Putin ordered the deadly "special operation" in Ukraine on Feb. 24 to "demilitarize and denazify" the pro-Western country after recognizing eastern Ukraine's two breakaway territories as independent republics.

But Patriarch Kirill said the war is about "which side of God humanity will be on" in the divide between supporters of gay pride events — or the Western governments that allow them — and their opponents in Russian-backed eastern Ukraine.

"Pride parades are designed to demonstrate that sin is one variation of human behavior. That's why in order to join the club of those countries, you have to have a gay pride parade," he said in his Forgiveness Sunday sermon.

The Russian church leader characterized gay pride parades as a "loyalty test" to Western governments, which Ukraine's breakaway republics have "fundamentally rejected."

"For eight years there have been attempts to destroy what exists in Donbas," Patriarch Kirill said, referring to the region where Kyiv has been at war with the separatist republics since 2014.

"And in Donbas there is a rejection, a fundamental rejection of the so-called values that are offered today by those who claim world power," he said.

"We know that if people or countries reject these demands, they are not part of that world, they become strangers to it."

Patriarch Kirill painted the Russian invasion of Ukraine in more apocalyptic colors as a conflict "far more important than politics."

"If humanity accepts that sin is not a violation of God's law, if humanity accepts that sin is a variation of human behavior, then human civilization will end there," said there.

The Russian Orthodox Church has been accused of aligning itself with the officially secular Kremlin during Putin's years in power.

SERBIA: Serbian police ban EuroPride march, citing security concerns

By Dusan Stojanovic

AP News (13.09.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3xrTLeM> - Serbia's police on Tuesday banned a Pride march planned amid pan-European LGBTQ events being held this week in Belgrade, citing a risk of clashes with far-right anti-gay activists. Organizers vowed to appeal the ban.

Pro-Serbian [Orthodox Church](#) conservative groups, who have been marching unhindered for weeks on the Serbian capital's streets to protest the LGBTQ events, had scheduled a new demonstration for Sept. 17 — the day of the Pride parade. Police also banned that anti-gay protest.

"After the security assessment, it was determined that there is a high risk the safety of participants in both (marches) on the announced routes will be endangered, as well as the safety of other citizens," police said in a statement.

Serbia's populist president had earlier warned the gay Pride march would be banned.

Organizers of EuroPride, the largest annual Pride event in Europe — which includes a week of festivities — said they hoped their legal appeal against the ban will be accepted and that they would hold the festivities as planned.

"Belgrade Pride will use all available means to overturn this decision," their statement said. After the ban was announced, gay activists booed and jeered Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic, who is openly lesbian but has been accused by the Serbian gay community of doing nothing to improve their status. She attended a human rights conference that was a part of the weeklong LGBTQ events.

The Council of Europe's human rights commissioner, Dunja Mijatovic, said Serbian authorities should withdraw the ban on the march and protect participants. The CoE is Europe's top human rights body.

"It is highly regrettable that the Serbian authorities have decided to ban the EuroPride march scheduled for 17 September," Mijatovic said in a statement. "Weeks of uncertainty concerning the holding of this march have sent a wrong message to the public and made space for hateful rhetoric and more threats against LGBTI people, including from religious leaders"

Members of the European Pride Organizers Association chose Serbia's capital three years ago to host the annual event, hoping it would represent a major breakthrough for a Slavic country that is traditionally conservative and strongly influenced by the Orthodox Church. Serbia's rights groups have urged supporters to join the Pride march as part of a struggle for democracy that they say is under threat from President Aleksandar Vucic's autocratic regime. Serbia is formally seeking European Union membership — and has pledged to boost LGBTQ rights — but has for years been moving closer to Russia's political orbit.

Several EU officials have said they will join the LGBTQ events, while those calling on the Serbian government to reverse the previously heralded ban included U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Vucic, who has for weeks warned the Pride march would be banned, said police can't cope with possible riots by right-wing groups against the Pride march amid a crisis over [relations with Serbia's breakaway province of Kosovo](#) as well as the energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine.

"In the current geopolitical situation and tensions in the region, senseless clashes on the streets of Belgrade would make the position of our country more difficult, (and) endanger the safety of participants in the marches, as well as other citizens," Serbian Interior Minister Aleksandar Vulin said.

UNITED KINGDOM: Church of England bishops refuse to allow same-sex marriages

The Church of England will refuse to allow same-sex couples to get married in its churches

By Muvija M.

[Openly](#) (19.01.2023) - The Church of England will refuse to allow same-sex couples to get married in its churches under proposals set out on Wednesday in which the centuries-old institution said it would stick to its teaching that marriage is between a man and a woman.

The proposals were developed by bishops, who form one of three parts of the Church's governing body known as the General Synod, after the Church of England's six-year consultation on sexuality and marriage - among other subjects - and will be put to the General Synod at a meeting next month.

The Church of England is central to the wider Anglican communion, which represents more than 85 million people in over 165 countries.

"Same-sex couples would still not be able to get married in a Church of England church," the statement said, confirming a BBC report overnight that [bishops had refused to support a change in teaching](#) to allow priests to marry gay couples.

Under the proposals, same-sex couples could have a service in which there would be "prayers of dedication, thanksgiving or for God's blessing on the couple" in church after a civil marriage. Gay marriage was legalised in Britain in 2013.

Still, the prayers would be voluntary for clergy to use and could be used in combinations "reflecting the theological diversity of the Church", the Church of England said, implying spiritual leaders could choose not to offer such blessings.

"I am under no illusions that what we are proposing today will appear to go too far for some and not nearly far enough for others, but it is my hope that what we have agreed will be received in a spirit of generosity, seeking the common good," said Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Separately, Church of England bishops will be issuing an apology later this week to LGBTQI+ people for the "rejection, exclusion and hostility" they have faced in churches, according to the statement.

The Church of England, which was founded in 1534, has been divided for years on how to deal with same-sex marriages, with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activists fighting for the same rights as heterosexual Christians.

Seeking to address the contentious issue, Welby called on the bishops last year to "abound in love for all", even as he backed the validity of a resolution passed in 1998 that rejected "homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture".
