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Understanding the Fight to Protect LGBTQI+ Rights in Europe and Eurasia

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For the last 10 years, many political events, decisions, and structural changes have either directly or discursively affected the situation with LGBT+ rights in the Russian Federation. The introduction of the “gay propaganda” state law to the Administrative Code of Russian Federation in June 2013 prohibited any public manifestation around the equality of heterosexual and non-heterosexual relations in the public spaces. According to this legislation, it is forbidden to “propagate non-traditional sexual relations among minor” but as there is no specification of the word propaganda, it is used to silence any public discussion about LGBT+ community. Moreover, the law has proven to have a negative effect on children and youth, especially for those identifying as LGBT+. According to the recent report titled by Human Rights Watch regarding the effect, the “gay propaganda” Law throughout these years has had on LGBT youth concluded, that [“the law directly harms children by denying them access to essential information and increasing stigma against LGBT youth and their families.”](#) The law, while promoting child protection rhetoric, has marked the beginning of the new wave of state-sanctioned hatred towards LGBT+ individuals in Russia, where state heterosexism and homophobia by mutually affecting each other, create the atmosphere impunity for those, inciting violence and committing hate crimes against LGBT+ people. Today, the Law continues to serve as a justification for restriction of public events concerning positive engagement with LGBT+ issues, including not only public demonstrations but also media (including social media) engagement with the matter. Discrimination monitoring shows that the scope of discrimination and violence against LGBT people has expanded drastically since 2013. It is important to mention that under this law there is an attack on freedom of information.

Since 2015 conservative rhetoric has been in the state propaganda spotlight, the “conservative turn” in Russian politics is deeply rooted in various enactments of hatred towards minorities and in the promotion of traditional values, which, according to the Russian leaders, are deeply opposed to the values promoted by the liberal West. Melissa Hooper from Human Rights First noted that [“\[w\]ithin this framework Russians refer to Europe as Gayropa to emphasize its acceptance of altered gender roles and LGBT relationships that Russians deem ‘deviant’; a framing that has perhaps been more about solidifying a Russian identity than about describing a culture.”](#) The traditionalist contribution to the national identity debate definitively calls for consistent neglect, or, perhaps, eradication of LGBT community, whom the state saw as foreign and opposed to all what Russia thought itself to represent.

Described events and changes are a discursive addition to the events of 2017 when LGBT+ community in Chechnya found itself under attack. In February-March 2017, the local authorities launched a large-scale systemic and systematic persecution of LGBT individuals in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation. Hundreds of gay men or men suspected of being gay, lesbian and bisexual women were rounded up, illegally detained in secret prisons, and tortured due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. Authorities still deny even the fact of mass persecution.

At the same time, it is important to note that the LGBT+ movement in Russia is getting stronger and it is growing despite all the restrictions and persecutions.