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Russian courts liquidate and dissolve life-saving LGBT+ rights charity in yet another sinister move

Friday 29 April 2022, by [KELLEHER Patrick](#) (Date first published: 21 April 2022).

An LGBT+ charity in Russia that has provided support to the community for more than a decade has been formally dissolved by the courts.

Charitable Foundation [Sphere](#) was formally dissolved by Kuibyshev District Court judge Tatiana Kuzovkina on Thursday (21 April) after the Russian ministry for justice argued that they were carrying out “political activities”.

The ministry claimed one of CF Sphere’s goals is to change Russian legislation, which is not a permissible charitable goal under federal law.

A representative for the ministry claimed that Sphere “carried out political activities using foreign property, which does not correspond to the statutory goals”.

The ministry argued in court that [liquidating Sphere](#) was the only way to successfully curb the organisation’s “illegal activities”.

Vitaly Isakov, the lawyer representing Sphere, argued against the move, telling the court that liquidating the charity would have a severe impact on LGBT+ people in Russia, who would find themselves left without any protection.

Judge Kuzovkina granted the ministry of justice’s request to liquidate Sphere, according to a press release from the charity.

Decision to liquidate LGBT+ charity in Russia is ‘politically and ideologically motivated’

“The decision to liquidate the foundation, especially on these grounds, is absolutely unreasonable and inconsistent with the norms of the law,” a Sphere spokesperson said.

“We consider it politically and ideologically motivated, separately noting the state’s desire to destroy the majority of civil and human rights organisations in the country.

“At the moment, our services continue to provide legal, psychological and emergency assistance to the LGBT+ community, and we will do everything possible to ensure this work continues without interruption, regardless of the legal status of our team.”

They continued: “We cannot leave the community without protection and support at such a difficult time. Our team has always seen it as a duty to help the community and unite it based on the principles of human rights and humanitarianism.”

Sphere has been providing legal and psychological assistance to LGBT+ people in Russia since it was founded in 2011.

In late 2021, Russia's ministry of justice launched an "unscheduled audit" of the charity. As part of that audit, Sphere handed over more than 5,000 pages of documentation.

The ministry found that "all the actual activities of the organisation are aimed at supporting the LGBT+ movement in Russia".

The state agency said that the country's constitution upholds "traditional family values". It said Sphere was trying to change the "legislation and moral foundations in the Russian Federation" through its work.

The ministry formally asked the courts to dissolve Sphere in February.

Russia wants to 'negate the entire human rights movement'

In a press release, Sphere said this is not the first time human rights groups have been forced to stop operating because of state interference. The International Memorial and the Memorial Human Rights Center were shut at the end of 2021.

"In many ways, a similar attempt to liquidate Sphere is the contribution of the ruling structures to negating the entire human rights movement, including the LGBT movement," a Sphere spokesperson said.

Since it was set up 11 years ago, Sphere has opposed Russia's much-criticised ban on "LGBT propaganda". It has also supported LGBT+ people who have survived abduction and torture.

Russia has become an increasingly hostile place for LGBT+ people over the last decade.

In 2013, the country faced international backlash when it enacted its infamous "gay propaganda" law, which prohibits the promotion of homosexuality.

In 2020, [Putin sought to legislate against marriage equality](#) and same-sex adoption as well as trying to legally erase trans people on a constitutional level.

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