

Ukraine: Lutsk LGBT+ center attacked

Saturday 24 June 2023, by [LE TRÉHONDAT Patrick](#), [LYSHKA Yana](#) (Date first published: 14 June 2023).

On June 13, 2023 the LGBT+ center in the city of Lutsk was attacked and ransacked. Yana Lyshka, coordinator of the Loutsk center was kind enough to answer our questions.

Will you tell us about the history of your center and its activities before and after February 24?

Our LGBT+ initiative in Lutsk appeared in 2019, when NGO Insight supported the desire of LGBT+ people in the city to have their own cultural center and conduct activism. Until February 24, 2022, we developed dynamically: from separate educational lectures, cultural and educational events to the creation of a full-fledged representative office, with our office in 2021. It was and still is quite difficult, because Volyn is a conservative region. And the authorities in Lutsk have been openly homophobic for years. Over the years, the city government has repeatedly accepted appeals to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, with demands to ban public actions of the LGBT+ community, legislative activities that would ensure equal rights for LGBT+ people, and the like. Despite the difficult and often hostile environment, the representative office of NGO Insight in Lutsk participated in all-Ukrainian events, such as the March of Equality and the Women's March. And in 2021, a small March of LBT women in Lutsk was held for the first time in the city.

The full-scale invasion of Russia changed a lot. "Insight" actively participated in humanitarian aid as a whole. Despite all the difficulties, we in Lutsk also continued to function as the only LGBT center in the city. Under the conditions when, according to the law, public actions are impossible during martial law, the Lutsk LGBT+ community initiated the collection of signatures on a petition to President Zelensky asking him to support the bill on same-sex partnerships. As well as writing letters to the Committees and individual deputies of the Verkhovna Rada, so that they support the right of LGBT+ people to partnerships. They did not stop their activism. And we continue to act as the only LGBT+ cultural center in the city.

What is the situation with the LGBTQIA+ community in Ukraine and in particular in the city of Lutsk. I know, for example, that many representatives of the LGBTQIA+ community are in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Due to the conservatism and religiosity of the region (especially the older generation), LGBT+ people were very closed for years. It was the activity of NGO Insight in the city that began to change this situation. People felt that they could be proud of who they were. That it is worth fighting for your rights. Despite this, many are still closed due to security risks.

With the beginning of the war, many representatives of the LGBT+ community volunteered for the Armed Forces of Ukraine to defend their country from the Russian invaders. I personally know the stories of gays, lesbians, and non-binary transwomen from Lutsk and the Volyn region in general who are currently serving. The army is still not a tolerant place. Recently, there was a survey about the presence of LGBT+ people in their ranks, which was very far from anonymity and respect. Nevertheless, LGBT+ people open up there as well, rallying in the organization of the LGBT+

military of Ukraine [1]. We also have one openly LGBT+ military woman in Volyn, who before the war was an Insight volunteer in Lutsk - Maria Zhmud. But there are many closed military personnel, including those who during rotations stay in Lutsk for a short time before returning to the front and then come to our community center.

Let's talk about the terrorist attack on June 13. What happened ? What are the implications for you? Who do you think committed this hate crime?

They broke into our office at night and destroyed the office, smashed the doors and communications. Unfortunately, such cases are not isolated: even before the start of a full-scale war, there were attacks on Insight offices in Kyiv and Odesa. The investigation is ongoing, the suspects have been detained. But due to the lack of a law on hate crimes in our country, where responsibility for crimes based on homophobia and transphobia would be prescribed, there is a high probability that this will not appear in the criminal proceedings. It shouldn't be like that. But the corresponding draft law has been sitting in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine without movement for years.

Such attacks and lenient sentences, or their absence, demotivate LGBT+ people. They do not feel safe, they suffer physical and psychological injuries, they are afraid to be open, to fight for their rights. We are waiting for a fair investigation. But for now, they are forced to take care of security protocols on their own, as a public organization. This should not be the case, it is the duty of the state to ensure the protection of its citizens.

How do you see the future of the LGBTQIA+ community? What fight should she lead?

I believe that with the movement of Ukraine to join the EU, we will be able to win a number of rights for the LGBT+ community. Now it is important to connect to activism at the level of petitions, letters, statements to Ukrainian politicians and authorities. Form allied coalitions. And to support people humanitarily, to preserve community centers as centers of public life of LGBT+ communities in Ukrainian cities. The war will eventually end and I believe that in one way or another it will be a victory and our final departure from Russia, its values and the integration of Ukraine into the free Western world. And then the return to public shares will be important again. Now it is important to preserve LGBT+ organizations, the activist movement. But to help LGBT+ military personnel.

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Footnotes

[1] See [Військові ЛГБТ: the Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ union in uniform](#).