

Situation of LGBT People in Ukraine

Overview

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

General information

Ukraine is a large Eastern European country with a population of about 45 million (it permanently decreased after the disintegration of the Soviet Union). The nation's history began in the IX century AD when Kyiv (Kiev in modern Russian) became a capital of the first Eastern Slavonic state – Rus (also referred to as Ancient or Kievan Rus). After the decline of this ancient empire, the territory of Ancient Rus was eventually divided between two new powers, Poland and Russia. Thus appeared three Eastern Slavonic nations – Belarusian and Ukrainian within Polish territory, and Russian in Moscow state. The conception of an unique Ukrainian nation with the very modern name of Ukraine for the first time appeared within the XVI - XVII centuries AD time frame in the age of the Cossack state. But it was finally shaped only by the end of the XIX century, when the name *Ukrainians* was adopted by all people of this land who had previously called themselves by various names, particularly Rusyns.

Until 1919, the area making up present-day Ukraine was never united in a single state. The smaller western part of Ukraine was included in the liberal and more developed Austro-Hungarian Empire, whereas the majority was under the rule of the authoritarian Russian Empire. After the overthrow of the monarchies in both empires, the democratic Ukrainian People's Republic (1917 to 1920) and the Western Ukrainian People's Republic (anno 1919) were declared. The two republics briefly merged into a single Ukrainian state, before being re-founded as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as it would be known until 1991. Only between 1939 and 1940 were Ukrainian ethnic lands again united in a single state when Soviet forces, under an agreement with Nazi Germany, occupied the present-day western regions of Ukraine, then constituting parts of Poland and Romania. Later, small parts of present-day Ukraine were peacefully incorporated after the end of World War II: Transcarpathia in 1945 and Crimea in 1954.

Thus, in its current borders, Ukraine was formed in 1954 within the Soviet Union. With the exception of western Ukraine, the rest of the country had never had the experience of free political activity under the rule of law and liberal legislation, and decades of implanting communist ideology and the one-party totalitarian system under Soviet rule had destroyed even scant remains of any other political traditions. The only alternative to the official communist ideology proved to be Ukrainian nationalism which remained mainly in the west of the country, where during the Second World War and immediately after there existed an influential Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), which even created its own Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Since its inception, the organisation professed ideas of radical nationalism bordering on fascism, and collaborated with the occupying Nazi authorities. Although by the end of the war the OUN had significantly softened its political program regarding ideas of democracy and equality, and had begun military

operations against the occupying German forces, echoes of this period of its activity still linger in the ideology, actions and the reputations of numerous Ukrainian nationalist parties.

The main historical factor characterising the current social, political and legal situation in Ukraine is that it was the successor of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union. Having virtually no experience of other forms of a state and social system, Ukraine inherited all the features of the totalitarian Soviet regime, namely no tradition of the rule of law, civil society, respect for human and civil rights, tolerance of minorities or dissent. At the same time, a great influence on modern Ukraine was the fact that the central, western and eastern parts of the country had different historical experiences, and were first brought together in one state only in the early twentieth century. As a result, there is no single view shared by all Ukrainians of their own history; and the linguistic, cultural and religious traditions of various regions differ substantially. On the one hand, this leads to a relatively low confidence in national institutions and, as a result, weakens the government. On the other hand, it leads to an absence of a common ideology, and a tolerance and pluralism of opinions which is relatively high compared to other post-Soviet states. Political life in the country can be characterised by the fact that ideology plays a relatively minor role compared to the language, cultural and political sympathies of citizens which are far more significant factors in determining support for individual politicians and political forces. Residents of the western part of the country perceive the Soviet period of Ukraine's history as a foreign occupation; they perceive Russia as a hostile state, speak primarily in Ukrainian, vote for nationalist parties, and support Ukraine's accession to the European Union. Residents of the south-eastern part of the country perceive the Soviet and Russian periods as their own history, sympathise with Russia, speak primarily in Russian, vote for parties that do not condemn the Soviet regime, and maintain a closer union with Russia. Residents of the central part of the country fall, in all respects, somewhere between these extremes, and the fluctuations in their support of political forces usually determine the outcome of elections.

Although formally in Ukraine there is a large Russian minority, Russians (except in Crimea) do not constitute an ethnic community separate from Ukrainians; they mostly differ from Russian-speaking Ukrainians, who make up the majority of the population in the southwestern part of the country, by virtue only of self-identification. Language is an important part of political life and has the greatest symbolic importance in determining support of certain political forces, but it is rarely a concern in the everyday life of Ukrainian citizens. Most Ukrainians consider themselves believers in God, and the churches have the highest formal authority in society. However, save in the western part of the country, nowhere is there any particularly strong willingness to listen to the church on important social and political issues. Due to the split between the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches of Moscow and Kyiv Patriarchates, a person's membership in a particular Orthodox Church is seen as a cultural and political, rather than a religious, choice. Membership in the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Greek Catholic Church equate with pro-European and pro-Ukrainian; and Moscow Patriarchate membership equates to being pro-Russian (that is, of course, often wrong assumption).

There remain a number of problems for Ukrainian society: low standards of living, low social and legal protections, a very high level of corruption, and a lack of consensus among the main political forces over the choice of what path to take in pursuit of development. Due to the approximate equality in size of the political forces standing for decisive reforms commensurate with the European model, and the political forces seeking to preserve the post-Soviet status quo, neither force is able to secure a decisive advantage sufficient to prevent the other's efforts to implement any state reforms. Although all Ukrainian governments since the declaration of independence have declared their commitment to "the European choice", the main objective of each of them has been to preserve its own power. Implementation of planned reforms on each occasion has been postponed. Both among politicians and the broad public there is no acceptance that the declared principles and planned reforms are necessarily to be placed in first place for Ukrainian society and the state; instead, they are perceived as being imposed from the outside as obligations to foreign donors.

The main ethnic groups of the population according to the 2001 census are Ukrainians (77.8% of the total population) and Russians (17.3%); other ethnic groups each constitute less than 1% of the population. Ukrainians make up the majority of the population in all regions except the Crimean peninsula. Russians live mainly in the southwest of the country, most frequently in large cities, and constitute the majority of the population of Crimea. A proportion of ethnic Ukrainians (15%) consider Russian as their mother tongue.

The state (official) language of Ukraine is Ukrainian, an East Slavic language, similar to Belarusian and Russian, and with a big degree of shared understanding. Russian is commonly spoken in Ukraine: it is used by the majority of the population in everyday life, and is understood by the vast majority of the population. Other languages are spoken, but infrequently.

Approximately 71% of Ukrainian citizens consider themselves believers in God, with a further 12% agnostic or unsure. Approximately 68% of Ukrainians consider themselves Orthodox Christian, 8% Greek Catholic, and 7% as simply Christian. Orthodox Christianity in Ukraine is represented by two major churches and a large number of very small groups. The two major churches are:

- Ukrainian Orthodox Church: a self-governing church within the Russian Orthodox Church (also known as Moscow Patriarchate), comprising 24% of the adult population. This church is present in all regions of the country and is the dominant religion in all but the western regions.
- Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kyiv Patriarchate: an independent church which split from the Russian Orthodox Church after the declaration of independence of Ukraine and which is not recognised by the main Orthodox churches of the world, including the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. It consists of approximately 15% of the adult population and is professed mainly in the western and central regions.

Catholicism is represented in Ukraine mostly by the self-governing Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which preserves the Orthodox rites, but recognises the Catholic dogmas and supreme authority of the Pope. Approximately 8% of the adult population of Ukraine consider themselves Greek Catholic. More than 90% of Greek Catholics live in four southwestern oblasts of the country. Roman Catholics in Ukraine comprise approximately 0.4% of the adult population, and are mostly Polish. Protestantism is represented in Ukraine mostly by Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals and other similar churches. Approximately 2% of the adult population identify themselves as belonging to these denominations; the location of them is mostly in the eastern regions of the country. Approximately 1% of the population professes Islam, mostly Crimean Tatars in Crimea.

LGBT History of Ukraine

Historical data on same-sex relationships in Ukrainian society until the twentieth century are very scarce. After the adoption of Christianity (988 AD) homosexuality came to be regarded as a sin, forbidden behavior condemned by the official church. Nevertheless, mentions of "sodomy" or same-sex relationships, so close that they would certainly be perceived as a homosexual liaison in today's society, are found in chronicles and documents from the earliest times. However, it should be underlined that there exists no reliable information about homosexuality of any known historical figures of Ukraine; no references are based on definitive evidence, but only on a free interpretation of the known facts or assumptions. Apparently, the first known bisexual Ukrainian was Archduke Wilhelm Habsburg, a member of the imperial dynasty of Austria-Hungary, who fell in love with Ukrainian language and culture, and participated in the Ukrainian national liberation movement in the early twentieth century under the name of Vasyl Vyshyvanyi.

Prior to 1917, male homosexual sex was considered a crime both in the main territory of Ukraine under rule of the Russian Empire and in the west of the country, then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. However, in both parts of the Ukraine, it was not considered a particularly serious crime: by the beginning of the XX century punishment for it in Austria-Hungary was imprisonment of one year maximum, and in Russia – 3 months minimum. In practice, these legal provisions were used quite rarely, and in high society of both empires were a number of famous homosexuals. However, as Ukraine was a province far from the capitals, we do not have such information on the life of Ukrainian citizens of these countries.

After the tsarist regime in Russia was overthrown, the Bolshevik government abolished all previous laws, so in the early years of Soviet Ukraine gay sex was lawful. However, in the early 1930s a propaganda campaign was launched under the slogan "Homosexuality leads to fascism," and in 1934 under the direction of Joseph Stalin male homosexual sex was again declared a criminal offense with a penalty of up to five years in prison. The most prominent victim of this law in Ukraine was Sergei Paradzhanov, a world famous film director, who was sentenced in 1973 to the specified maximum punishment.

After declaring Ukraine's independence in 1991, one of the first laws of the new state was the abolition of criminal prosecution for voluntary sex between men – Ukraine became the first former Soviet republic that abolished this provision of the Soviet legislation. In the next twenty years of independence, the visibility and activity of Ukrainian LGBT community gradually increased; there appeared the first known people who do not hide their homosexuality, and public organizations representing and protecting the interests of LGBT people. But no quick and dramatic changes in the LGBT socio-political and legal situation happened.

MODERN SITUATION OF LGBT PEOPLE IN UKRAINE

LGBT Community

Noteworthy LGBT communities exist only in the largest cities of Ukraine – first of all, in Kyiv, Odesa, Donetsk, and Lviv, each of them hosting several LGBT organizations. However, now almost every oblast center or major city has at least one grassroots group, whose members regularly meet and occasionally organize entertainment and social events. Thanks to the Internet, residents of the nearby smaller towns also can participate in the activities of such groups, but LGBT people from rural areas remain virtually isolated even from the local community.

For historical reasons, the western part of Ukraine is the least urbanized, and the local society is characterized by conservatism, religiosity, and dominance of the Ukrainian language. LGBT communities in this region have to live under conditions of the especially intolerable attitude of wider society there and to lead a very closed way of life. The rest of the country is notably more urbanized and modernized; its population is much less religious and mostly uses Russian language for everyday communication. In particular, these values are typical for the southeastern region, where most of the major cities of Ukraine are situated, as well as typical for the country's capital, Kyiv, that overall contributes to a more open and free life of LGBT communities in this part of the country. Due to these circumstances, the majority of Ukrainian LGBT people are predominantly Russian-speaking, and Russian language is also dominant in the Ukrainian sector of the Internet. In addition, Ukrainian LGBT people actively use the resources of the Russian sector of the Internet – for example, such as the popular social network VKontakte and the largest Russian-language LGBT website Gay.ru.

Spread of the Internet (presently about half of Ukraine's population constantly use it) also has led to a change in major ways of dating and communication within the LGBT community. Once popular cruising places (*plashka*) have lost their value, as well as newspaper ads about dating. Instead, dating and virtual communication is carried out through specialized websites, social networks, as well as advertisements with mobile phone number appearing on the popular entertainment TV channels. However, one should note the recent increase in cases of intentional tracking of LGBT people online by homophobic groups or the police.

Over recent years the number of LGBT people has increased who are leading a somewhat or quite open lifestyle, although almost all of them live in big cities. Concurrently we observe an increasing number of cases of homophobic aggression and discrimination. Due to the extremely low degree of social security and protection from discrimination provided on the part of the state to all citizens, Ukrainian LGBT people do not stand out against the background of general lawlessness. Of course, they do experience additional discrimination and harassment in comparison with other inhabitants of the country, but because they usually live a hidden life (not disclosing their sexual orientation), not too often do they face open discrimination and violence because of their homosexuality or transgenerness, except in the sphere of family relations.

Both individuals and Ukrainian LGBT community as a whole lead a mostly closed way of life and are barely visible to the external public. Due to the prevailing homophobia in society, for security reasons important events – both entertaining and social – are usually closed to the general public, and information about them is spread through personal contacts and closed mailing lists. The first attempt to organize a mass public gay Pride parade in 2012 was thwarted by organized groups of homophobes; the following year the march did take place, but it was attended by very few in number.

LGBT and Friendly Non-governmental Organizations

The first openly LGBT organization was officially registered in Ukraine in 1999; since then their number has grown and by the end of 2013 approaches 40. Most of these organizations are members of the Council of LGBT Organizations of Ukraine. In addition, constantly appearing and disappearing are many initiative-type groups in the various regions, bringing about and leading their activities without formal state registration.

The bulk of the existing LGBT organizations are concentrated in the nation's capital – Kyiv. Notable activity is also observed in cities such as Odesa, Mykolaiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Lviv, Ternopil, Chernivtsi, Cherkasy. The main activities of LGBT organizations are creating community centers, conducting cultural and recreational activities, providing psychological and legal assistance, advocating the rights and interests of the LGBT community, preventing and controlling the overall spread of HIV / AIDS.

Among the LGBT-friendly organizations should be noted, first of all, those addressing HIV / AIDS issues, and human rights organizations of general purpose. Recently in Kyiv emerged and was registered the first in the country organization of parents and friends of LGBT people – *Tergo*, the Initiative for Parents of LGBT Children.

Gay Business, Entertainment

A niche market serving the interests of LGBT people in Ukraine is barely developed. In Kyiv are several nightclubs focused mainly on meeting the LGBT public's needs; the most famous are *Androgin*, *Pomada*, *Matrosskaya tishina*; one to two clubs exists in some other cities, mostly seaside resorts. For details please see <http://nightlife.tochka.net/gay/>

In addition are several online stores selling LGBT magazines, books and videos, and men's underwear promoted for gay customers. Some travel agencies provide services for gay tourism.

Among the most popular holiday destinations in Ukraine should be noted the small resort village of Simeiz on the Southern coast of Crimea. Since the days of the Soviet Union it has become popular among LGBT people from over all the former Soviet Union. Although there are practically no specific gay establishments there, the general village atmosphere is remarkably tolerant and friendly, and on the outskirts of the place are adjoining a nudist beach and a gay beach (mostly nudist too). Though completely devoid of any facilities, the beaches lie among the bare rocks in a beautiful and secluded location. The main LGBT cultural event in Ukraine since 2001 is a thematic program *Sunny Bunny* within the annual *Molodist* International Film Festival. It has become the second such program at international film festivals after the *Berlinale*.

Health

Ukraine remains a leader in the spread of HIV in Europe. According to UNAIDS experts, up to 270,000 people with HIV live in Ukraine, with only half being aware of their diagnosis. In 2012, for the first time in the history of Ukraine, the HIV / AIDS epidemic slowed, as a result of national programs aimed at vulnerable groups, and large-scale information campaigns on HIV / AIDS. More than half of the new cases of HIV transmission happen through unprotected sex. Most cases of HIV infection in Ukraine today are recorded among young people aged 15 to 30. The regions most affected by HIV / AIDS are Mykolaiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Odesa, Donetsk Oblasts and the city of Sevastopol. Thanks to the cooperation between the Ukrainian government and international organizations, about 50,000 Ukrainians receive active antiretroviral therapy.

In addition to HIV, a major problem is the spread of tuberculosis – according to the published statistics its rate in Ukraine over the past year was 68.1 cases per 100 thousand of population. Precise data on the spread of hepatitis C in Ukraine are not available, but the WHO estimates that about 3% of the population may be infected with this virus.

Social, Legal and Political Context, Human Rights and Discrimination Issues

Although voluntary gay sexual acts were decriminalized in the country in 1991, at present Ukrainian LGBT citizens in fact still do not have the same rights as their heterosexual fellow citizens. The law does not protect them explicitly from discrimination nor hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation nor gender identity and, on the contrary, legislative provisions exist that imply effective discrimination on these grounds. Up to the present time, all attempts to persuade the Ukrainian authorities to include explicitly sexual orientation and gender identity in protected anti-discrimination grounds were unsuccessful. This inadequacy sends the clear message that Ukrainian authorities do not consider LGBT rights to be an important issue and that they do not want to take steps to improve protections against discrimination nor to combat hate motivated crimes. In particular, no work is done to promote tolerance towards LGBT in the mass consciousness.

Various surveys indicate that Ukrainians have mostly negative attitudes toward LGBT people; and, based on our experience and observation, the situation has substantially worsened in the recent years:

In March 2011, at the request of Nash Mir Center, the sociological company TNS Ukraine conducted a national poll on attitudes toward granting equal rights to Ukrainian homosexuals. Similar polls were taken in 2002 and 2007. A comparison of the results shows increasing polarization and rise of negative attitudes towards LGBT community. Over the past ten years the number of people who reject granting equal rights to LGBT citizens has increased from 34% to 49%. The number of people who think that homosexual citizens should not have the right to register their relations as a conventional couple has increased from 54% to 64%. The number of people who think that homosexual citizens have no right to raise children has increased from 49% to 69%.

As the result of such social and legal conditions, Ukrainian LGBT people face various discriminations and are under social pressure. In spring 2011 Nash Mir Center carried out a survey of Ukrainian LGBT people in which 1721 respondents participated. 61% of the respondents stated that for the past three years they at least once experienced violations of their rights or discrimination on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This indicator data amounted to 89% among those respondents whose sexual orientation was known or inferred by other people. The most common problems LGBT persons face are hate motivated crimes, discrimination from the police and in the workplace.

Overall, for the period from September 2012 to August 2013 Nash Mir Center documented 50 cases of human rights violations and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. More than half of them are associated with hate-motivated actions toward LGBT persons, including physical violence and threats of its use (20), disclosure of sexual orientation of victims or threats of disclosure (8), damage to property (4). In almost all cases insulting remarks were observed about sexual orientation or gender identity of the victims.

Observed were nearly 20 cases of violations made by the law enforcement agencies toward LGBT persons. Often there were violations of procedural rules (11), including illegal detention (3) and denial to protect rights (7). In addition, police officers have illegally disclosed information about the personal lives of LGBT people (4) and demanded a bribe (3).

In practice, *provoking* crime has become a popular way to improve the figures of activity for the Ukrainian police. To do this (to bring about entrapment), police officers register at one of the online dating websites for gay men and ask one of its customers to open his intimate photos. The act of opening photos, then, entails a criminal charge of pornography distribution, or exacts a bribe for silence. Another type of violations by the police is disclosure of information about one's private life to third parties that violates the Ukrainian legislation and is a criminal offense.

Similar illegal activity is also carried out through the Internet by some homophobic groupings, particularly so-called *Okkupai-pedofilai* (or just *Pedofilai*). Under the guise of being minors, they meet (entrap) gay men online, and during the personal meeting phase they surround the victim, force him (through fear of violence and sometimes by actual violence) into self-incrimination, and then spread the video of the "confession" out upon the social networks. Usually, neither "pedofilais" nor their victims apply to the

police, which omission only contributes to the increase of the number of such incidents. Over 2012-2013 such groups have been active covering all the major cities of Ukraine.

Despite the severity and multiplicity of various violations of Ukrainian LGBT people's rights, in our experience we find that they very rarely complain about such actions and do not wish to assert their rights. Ineffective investigations of illegal acts and the threat of disclosure of information about their sexual orientation from the police, even without malicious intent, make defending their rights for them almost as dangerous as their violation.

Thus, we can conclude that homophobic and transphobic attitudes in society are largely retained because of current stereotypes and ignorance, absence of education work to combat xenophobia, dominant social taboos surrounding LGBT community, and invisibility of real LGBT people in personal contacts with others. It is obvious that increased visibility of LGBT people could help to solve these problems but it is restrained by the absence of legal protection and anti-discrimination policy on the part of the state. LGBT people just could not afford to be more visible as long as their material well-being, health and sometimes even their very life depends on the degree of their openness.

Along with Ukraine's approach to Association and Visa Liberalization agreements with the EU is a significant increase of social and political debates around LGBT issues in the country. Despite the obvious desire of Ukrainian politicians to avoid discussing these issues, they have to respond to pressure from their Western partners and the overall increase of attention to LGBT issues in the world, particularly due to adoption of several relevant laws in some countries. The Ukrainian parliament is also considering a few draft laws relating to LGBT rights. Among the most important should be mentioned Bills 0945 (formerly 8711) and 1155, proposing to limit freedom of speech in order to "prohibit promotion of homosexuality"; and 2342, which proposes to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment.

Representatives of the Ukrainian government (up to the level of the Prime Minister) have repeatedly claimed that the draft laws discriminating against LGBT persons will never be adopted and, conversely, that the anti-discrimination bill from the Cabinet of Ministers will be adopted by the parliament before the summit in Vilnius. However, for the time being one can see a stubborn refusal of all factions, except the UDAR Party, to consider and vote on the anti-discrimination law; on the contrary, their public support for discriminatory initiatives is apparent. At that, government officials refrain from calling for MPs to support a particular document. Generally, regarding political forces represented in the Ukrainian parliament, the Party of Regions and Batkivshchyna try to avoid any discussions on these problems, the UDAR Party calls for following modern Western standards, the Communist Party of Ukraine promotes imitation of the Russian anti-gay policy, and Svoboda the most active of all expresses its own homophobic stance.

Leading Ukrainian churches have preserved, though somewhat softened, an openly hostile attitude toward LGBT people. Their officials have not expressed support for LGBT discrimination, but oppose adoption of any law that could "encourage citizens to same-sex relationships" (in particular, in the declaration of the Local Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Kyiv Patriarchate from 27.06.2013, the statement of the Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) from 03.15.2013).

Official government representatives over the last year have refrained from expressing any support or condemnation of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, while representatives of local authorities and MPs have repeatedly expressed openly homophobic views, except for the UDAR party. However, recently one of the informal leaders of the opposition Yuriy Lutsenko said: "It is better to allow a gay parade once a year than to expect Russian tanks every day." It should also be noted that the 2013 annual report of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights for the first time mentioned problems of Ukrainian LGBT people, and the annual address of the President to the Parliament mentioned LGBT movement in an entirely positive context.

In the meantime, the Kyiv City State Administration decided not to block completely the March of Equality for the rights of LGBT people in May of 2013. They agreed with the March's organizers upon the appropriate place, and the police provided effective protection from homophobic aggression.

In our opinion, the tolerance of the city authorities to the March of Equality arises from the close attention paid to this event by a large number of foreign politicians and their very participation in the event. The real attitude of the Kyiv authorities towards LGBT citizens' right to freedom of peaceful assemblies could be

observed in December 2012, when a peaceful march in honor of International Human Rights Day was banned, and some of the organizers and participants were subjected to administrative penalty. The litigation concerning decisions of Kyiv courts in this matter, illegal in our view, continues to this day and has already reached the European Court of Human Rights.

TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

Since 2012 a new trend has become evident – the growing support of tolerance and respect toward LGBT people in the Ukrainian mass media, particularly among professional journalists. Topics related to discrimination and violence against LGBT people began to attract more public attention in connection with the preparation of agreements between Ukraine and the EU, as well as changes in the situation of LGBT people around the world – both positive, such as the increasing recognition of same-sex marriage, and negative, such as the Russian law banning "propaganda of homosexuality". A debate is unfolding in society about the need to change attitudes toward homosexuality and transgenderism as a prerequisite for modernization and approaching the Western standards of living.

In 2013 there sounded the first openly made statements by individual deputies of the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian parliament) about their support of the ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation and the modern European standards in this area (namely, by factions of the UDAR Party, Batkivshchyna, and the Party of Regions), although homophobic statements from MPs still dominate. Representatives of government agencies in 2013 consistently refrained from homophobic statements and the Cabinet of Ministers has made efforts to develop and adopt an anti-discrimination legislation in line with the EU requirements. It should be noted that the State Committee on Television and Radio of Ukraine this year declared that it no longer supports Bill 9405 banning "propaganda of homosexuality", while in the previous year it had twice approved this draft law. One should also pay attention to the significant easing of homophobic rhetoric from the leading Ukrainian churches, and their declarations that they do not call for discrimination. The desire to dissociate themselves from the Russian politics and to look like modern Europeans makes Ukrainian politicians and public figures change gradually their attitudes to LGBT issues towards greater tolerance and acceptance. It appears that in the near future Ukrainian government and parliament in one way or another will recognize sexual orientation as a prohibited ground for discrimination in employment according to the EU standards. This would be the needed first step and the basis for further advocacy work to change the law and the whole situation of LGBT people in Ukraine.