

UNDERSTANDING THE FIGHT TO PROTECT LGBTQI+ RIGHTS IN EUROPE AND EURASIA

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, ENERGY, THE
ENVIRONMENT AND CYBER

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

—————
June 11, 2021
—————

Serial No. 117-57

—————

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/>, <http://docs.house.gov/>,
or <http://www.govinfo.gov>

—————
U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

44-805PDF

WASHINGTON : 2021

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York, *Chairman*

BRAD SHERMAN, California	MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas, <i>Ranking Member</i>
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey	CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia	STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida	SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania
KAREN BASS, California	DARRELL ISSA, California
WILLIAM R. KEATING, Massachusetts	ADAM KINZINGER, Illinois
DAVID CICILLINE, Rhode Island	LEE ZELDIN, New York
AMI BERA, California	ANN WAGNER, Missouri
JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas	BRIAN MAST, Florida
DINA TITUS, Nevada	BRIAN FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania
TED LIEU, California	KEN BUCK, Colorado
SUSAN WILD, Pennsylvania	TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee
DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota	MARK GREEN, Tennessee
ILHAN OMAR, Minnesota	ANDY BARR, Kentucky
COLIN ALLRED, Texas	GREG STEUBE, Florida
ANDY LEVIN, Michigan	DAN MEUSER, Pennsylvania
ABIGAIL SPANBERGER, Virginia	AUGUST PFLUGER, Texas
CHRISSEY HOULAHAN, Pennsylvania	PETER MEIJER, Michigan
TOM MALINOWSKI, New Jersey	NICOLE MALLIOTAKIS, New York
ANDY KIM, New Jersey	RONNY JACKSON, Texas
SARA JACOBS, California	YOUNG KIM, California
KATHY MANNING, North Carolina	MARIA ELVIRA SALAZAR, Florida
JIM COSTA, California	JOE WILSON, South Carolina
JUAN VARGAS, California	RON WRIGHT, Texas
VICENTE GONZALEZ, Texas	
BRAD SCHNEIDER, Illinois	

JASON STEINBAUM, *Staff Director*

BRENDAN SHIELDS, *Republican Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CYBER

WILLIAM R. KEATING, Massachusetts, *Chairman*

SUSAN WILD, Pennsylvania	BRIAN FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania, <i>Ranking Member</i>
ABIGAIL SPANBERGER, Virginia	ANN WAGNER, Missouri
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey	ADAM KINZINGER, Illinois,
THEODORE DEUTCH, Florida	BRIAN MAST, Florida
DAVID CICILLINE, Rhode Island	DAN MEUSER, Pennsylvania
DINA TITUS, Nevada	AUGUST PFLUGER, Texas
DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota	NICOLE MALLIOTAKIS, New York
JIM COSTA, California	PETER MEIJER, Michigan
VICENTE GONZALEZ, Texas	
BRAD SCHNEIDER, Illinois	

LEAH NODVIN, *Staff Director*

CONTENTS

	Page
WITNESSES	
Van Roozendaal, Björn, Programmes Director, ILGA-Europe	6
Zakharova, Svetlana, Co-Secretary, ILGA-Europe Board Member, Russian LGBT Network	13
Dombos, Tamás, Board Member, Háttér Society	16
Emson, Dr. Lenny, Director, Kyivpride	20
APPENDIX	
Hearing Notice	35
Hearing Minutes	36
Hearing Attendance	37

UNDERSTANDING THE FIGHT TO PROTECT LGBTQI+ RIGHTS IN EUROPE AND EURASIA

Friday, June 11, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT,
AND CYBER,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:07 a.m., via Webex, Hon. William R. Keating (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. KEATING. Good morning, everyone.

And we would like to welcome our distinguish witnesses.

This month around the world we recognize Pride month, a celebration that started as a protest to advance the rights of the LGBTQI+ identifying people and ensure equal treatment under the law.

In anticipation of this month, we organized this hearing focused on the fight to protect these important civil rights in Europe and Eurasia. Under the leadership of Chairman Meeks, this will be the first hearing held by the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee focused solely on the advancement of LGBTQI+ rights, but it will not be the last, and it is built on the legislative work of many of my colleagues, especially those on the subcommittee.

Representative David Cicilline, the chair of the congressional LGBTQI+ Equality Caucus, has been leading the way with legislation like the Equality Act and the Global Respect Act. And Representative Titus has reintroduced the GLOBE Act just this month. Importantly, later this month Chairman Meeks will hold a hearing on LGBTQI+ rights globally.

All of these efforts are based on the belief in universal rights for all people. I am proud to stand with the human rights activists and defenders, fighting for this cause. Indeed, as a result of the work of human rights groups around the world, great strides have been made in the advancement of equally rights for all people, including LGBTQI+ identifying people. The European Union, along with our own country, are now considered some of the most open and free places for LGBTQI+ identifying people to not only live but to prosper.

Now we, the United States, as an historic leader for human rights globally, must make it clear that LGBTQI+ rights are universal. And I commend the Biden Administration for making it a U.S. policy to lead by the power of our example in the cause of advancing this important human right to all people around the world. For this reason we are here today to highlight and uplift the voices

of this community, a community that we continue to tirelessly work with to pave the way toward equality at home and abroad.

Unfortunately, in some countries in Europe and Eurasia, this work is far from over and some LGBTQI+ communities experience a range of discriminatory practices and outright violence. For this reason I have called this hearing and invited activists and experts on the ground in Europe and Eurasia to speak to the challenges faced by LGBTQI+ community members in the region and how the United States and its partners can create and implement tangible change, change that will protect these important human rights.

Inspired by initiatives like a resolution passed by the European Parliament, declaring the European Union an LGBTQI+ Freedom Zone, this morning, with the support of many of the members of the committee, I introduced a resolution that underscores the right of the LGBTQI+ identifying people to equal and unalienable human rights around the world including Europe and Eurasia. We can and we must do much more to uphold and promote the equal rights protection of these identifying people so that they, too, can live prosperous, happy, and free lives.

With that said, I would like to welcome the witnesses who are joining us today. We are deeply grateful for your willingness to share your knowledge and advice with the Subcommittee to better inform us and all of the U.S. and our transatlantic allies on important information and experiences for the advancement of rights at home here and abroad.

I will now turn to the ranking member, Representative Fitzpatrick, for his opening remarks.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Thank you, Chairman Keating, and to our friend and colleague, David Cicilline, and thanks to all the witnesses here today.

And this is an incredibly important topic, one very important to me, and it is also timely as June is Pride month here in the United States.

And today we will discuss the LGBTQI+ rights in Europe and Eurasia. I am sure our witnesses will discuss the progress that has been made over the last few decades, as well as areas that need immediate and decisive remedies. The Council of Europe Steering Committee for Human Rights noted substantial progress regarding the legal and social recognitions of the LGBTQI+ persons across its 47 member States over the last decade. However, they also recognize that the wide variation in the rights and protections lend itself to a myriad of challenges.

In a 2021 annual report by the counsel of Europe's Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, officials warned of a growing backlash against the protection of LGBTQI+ persons' human rights. Oppressive political policies that target members of the community like those in Russia are a strong indicator of human rights abuses in civil society as well. When we see these abuses, we have an obligation to take action.

Russian authorities destroyed families and stripped adoptive parents of their children on mere suspicions. Human rights monitors reported that in 2017 men were rounded up in Chechnya based on their suspected sexual orientation and were beaten and tortured, some to death. Human rights activists in Russia have suffered

wrongful imprisonment, physical assault, and egregious intimidation by the State for standing up for their friends and families.

These actions run contrary to our own nation's ideals of tolerance and diversity. And in the face of hate-based incidents, we must stand together, resolute in the pursuit of justice. No person should ever feel threatened based on who they are, what they believe, or who they love. Basic rights and human dignity are at the core of American values, and it should remain the top priority of our foreign policy objectives.

While we take this month to celebrate advancements made in civil rights throughout the United States, we must work to actively combat intolerance and stand together to promote equality and dignity for all.

I will tell you I will continue to do so throughout my tenure in Congress. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to do the same, and I am glad this subcommittee has recognized the value of this issue. I am grateful for our witnesses being here and look forward to your testimony today.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. I would like to thank the ranking member for his remarks.

And I would like to now turn to Representative Cicilline, the chair of the LGBTQI+ Equality Caucus, for a 3-minute opening statement.

Representative CICILLINE.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to you and to the ranking member for calling this really important hearing as we gather to reaffirm our commitment to advocate on behalf of those that are increasingly persecuted and marginalized because of who they are, who they love and how they identify. Without that commitment, we risk not the rights only of LGBTQI people, we risk not just democracy for LGBTQI+ people, we risk not just the safety and security of LGBTQI people, we risk it for all people. As chair of the congressional LGBTQ Equality Caucus, I hope today will serve as a marker on a path back to American, European, and global leadership on human rights for all.

Thirty years ago much of Eastern and Central Europe threw off the shackles of oppression and chartered a future that sought freedoms for all the people of Europe, the future in which human rights and democracy would define a continent that had been suppressed by the unrelenting despair of decades of tyranny and oppression. For many that optimism has been replaced by a sense of fear than even in parts of Europe today they cannot truly be free from discrimination, persecution, or violence.

In Poland, LGBTQI+ people must live in fear in LGBTQI+ free zones that deny them their very humanity. In Hungary, Viktor Orban scapegoats the LGBTQI+ community to continue his assaults on the freedoms of Hungarian. In Ukraine, the future of democracy and the rule of law is imperiled by the prospect of Russian-backed legislation that would deny the rights of Ukraine's LGBTQI+ population. In Chechnya, LGBTQI+ people must live underground for fear of being abducted and tortured by authorities.

It is perhaps unsurprising then that many of these States are also democratic laggards that have seen basic civil liberties like

freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and the right to voice political opposition curtailed. The mistakes some risk making is human regression of human rights of LGBTQI+ people in these States is an issue that affects just one group of people. Our own recent history here in United States has taught us that political opportunists will never stop finding a new scapegoat.

So let us remind ourselves of fundamental truths. The violence against any people because of who they are is a violence against all people. An injustice against any people of how they identify is an injustice against all people, that discrimination against any person is intolerable and cannot stand, and that equality is the indispensable tool for advancing the rights of all peoples everywhere.

And, Mr. Chairman, with the legislation on the Global Respect Act and the GLOBE Act, we can once again demonstrate our commitment to leading on behalf of some of the world's most vulnerable people. I thank you again for calling this hearing and look forward to working with you, my colleagues on this subcommittee, and all of our colleagues in the House to protect the rights of a few so that we may protect the rights of all.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative Cicilline. Thank you for your leadership.

I will now introduce our witnesses, and I thank you all for being here today.

Björn van Roozendaal is the program director for ILGA-Europe. Svetlana Zakharova is the co-secretary for ILGA-Europe and a board member at the Russian LGBT Network. Tamás mbos is a board member at the Háttér Society in Hungary. And Dr. Lenny Emson is the director of the NGO Kyiv Pride in Ukraine.

I will now recognize the witnesses for 5 minutes each. And, without objection, your prepared written statements will be made part of the record.

Mr. van Roozendaal, you are now recognized for your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF BJÖRN VAN ROOZENDAAL, PROGRAMMES
DIRECTOR, ILGA-EUROPE**

Mr. VAN ROOZENDAAL. Thank you, Chairman Keating, for the initiative of this hearing and thank you, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick and Representative Cicilline, for all of the work that you are doing in this area.

I appreciate the initiative for this hearing today and your interest in the situation of LGBTI rights in Europe and Central Asia. It comes as a critical time as, unfortunately, there is widespread and almost complete stagnation on the human rights of LGBTI people in the region. COVID-19 seems to have become an excuse to expunge LGBTI rights in many countries. Let me give a few examples.

Civil society space has been shrinking in countries like Poland, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Turkey, often limiting possibilities for LGBTI activists to exercise their human rights work. Uzbek government continues to penalize same-sex conduct between men, and it is high time that the criminal law is abolished.

The impact of anti-trans sentiments is unfortunately felt across the region, not just only in Eastern Europe and Central Asia but also in places where historically more progress on LGBTI rights was made like the United Kingdom, as well as Scandinavian countries. These sentiments are not just conceptual debates on the notion of gender. Unfortunately they deeply impact LGBTQI people in their everyday lives. Organizations from across the region have reported over the last year increasing hatred online but also in the streets.

While legal protections against violence and discrimination exists in many countries, there unfortunately also remain too many gaps. Hate crime laws are absent not just in countries like Armenia and Slovenia but also in Germany and Ireland. And we see the implementation of existing procedures on legal gender recognition worsening including in places like Georgia, Spain, and Serbia.

Distinguished members of this House, some countries in Europe once may have been the beacon of hope for LGBTI rights globally but we have learned that progress made in the work toward equality provide no guarantees for the future.

COVID-19 seems to have become an excuse for too many leaders in government in making progress on providing protection and equality through law or to speak out to rising anti-LGBTI sentiments.

It would be easy to blame it all on political attention being immersed in the public health response to COVID-19 and the ensuing the economic fallout, but the reality is a lot more complex. In too many countries progress is stopped because there is increased political polarization on LGBTI issues and because governments do not see it as a political issue, as a priority issue. LGBTQI organizations are at the very center of these developments.

Currently and often as a result of COVID, many provide humanitarian support to their communities, as governments fail to provide basic needs. In the context of rising opposition, providing security and emergent protection has become evermore important in the work. With scarce resources and fading political attention, too many activists struggle to balance the need to provide support to their communities, while keeping afloat the political work to advance LGBTQI rights.

The U.S. State Department and USAID have been financially and politically supportive toward the work of LGBTQI movements globally for several years and with bipartisan support. It is critically important this funding and political support continues, that the funding increases, and that it continues to focus on the European and Central Asian regions. And it is important that these efforts continue to be prioritized and integrated in wider efforts to support anti-democratic developments.

Thankfully in these difficult times European institutions have stepped up their work to support LGBTQI rights. The EU last year adopted the LGBTQI Equality Strategy which includes an extensive plan of action on many fronts. European Parliament, as was already said, like this House, undertakes cross-party action to advance the rights of LGBTQI people in the EU but also globally. And the Council of Europe has created an anti-discrimination

steering committee which works on sexual orientation and gender identity as part of its mandate.

In a time where working in alliances evermore important, there is political capital to work on both sides of the Atlantic. For the U.S. Government, the European institutions are important partners to work with, not just for the promotion of LGBTQI rights in foreign policy but also incorporating to strengthen human rights at home, which, given the growing polarization, I think is an important dimension in doing this work successfully as it builds political credibility to this important work. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Van Roozendaal follows:]

Written Statement by Bjorn van Roozendaal

Programmes Director, ILGA-Europe

Delivered at the Hearing 'Understanding the Fight to Protect LGBTQI+ Rights in Europe and Eurasia, for the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee: Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber, taking place on June 11, 2021 11:00 AM.

Thank you Chair Keating and Ranking Member Fitzpatrick,

I appreciate the initiative for this hearing and your interest in the situation of LGBTI rights in Europe and Central Asia. It comes at a critical time, as the 2021 Rainbow Europe Map that we launched last month tells the story of widespread and almost complete stagnation on human rights of LGBTI people in Europe. We are at a juncture when governments in Europe need to step-up their commitment to supporting LGBTI rights, to avoid further backlash.

Many legislative processes have been stalled in Europe over the past 12 months, in countries including Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. We also see the implementation of existing procedures, for example on legal gender recognition, worsening, including in Georgia, Spain, Serbia and Northern Ireland. Whilst legal protections against violence and discrimination exist in many countries, there remain too many gaps. Hate-crime laws are absent not just in countries like Armenia and Slovenia, but also in Germany and Ireland. The human right to self-determination is denied to transgender people in most countries, including in Greece, the UK and Switzerland. Whilst in previous years great progress has been made in protecting the rights of trans and intersex people, that progress now has come to a standstill. Millions of LGBTI families in the region today don't see their partners or children legally recognized. For more detailed information on the rights of LGBTI people I refer to our detailed Rainbow Europe Map.

Some countries in Europe may have been the beacon of hope for LGBTI rights globally, we now know that gained progress in our work towards equality provides no guarantees to the future. Covid-19 seems to have become an excuse for too many leaders in government in making progress on providing protection and equality through law, or to speak out to rising anti-LGBTI sentiments.

This is happening at time when we sadly see rising repression against LGBTI people in our region. The impact of anti-trans sentiments is felt across the region, not just in in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, but also in places where historically more progress on LGBTI rights was made. These sentiments are not just conceptual debates on the notion of gender, unfortunately they deeply impact LGBTI communities. Organizations from across the region have reported increasing hatred, online but also in the streets. Transphobia, biphobia and homophobia may for some be the result of moral disagreements, for our communities they mean stigma, violence and discrimination.

Civil society space has been shrinking in countries such as Poland, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Turkey – too often limiting the possibilities for LGBTI activists to exercise their human rights work. At the same time, LGBTI communities have increasingly called on LGBTI organizations for support. Over the past year many organizations provided humanitarian support to their communities as LGBTI people were not thought of in government’s responses to Covid-19. Community members also increasingly turn to LGBTI organizations for legal and social support. Organizations in the region do this with very little resources. The U.S. State Department and USAID have been financially supporting the work of LGBTI movements globally for several years. It is critically important that this funding increases and continues to focus on the European and Central Asian region.

It would be easy to blame it all on political attention being immersed in the public health response to COVID-19 and the ensuing economic fall-out, but the reality is a lot more complex. In too many countries, progress is stopped because there’s increased political polarisation on LGBTI issues, because some elected officials no longer see gains to be made by supporting LGBTI equality, and because governments don’t see it as a priority issue. We do really need governments across Europe to relaunch their political commitments to see legislative processes through, and to give everyone the means to ensure full implementation.

Thankfully, in these difficult times, European institutions have stepped-up their work to support LGBTI rights. The European Union last year adapted the LGBTI Equality Strategy, which includes an extensive plan of action on many fronts. The Council of Europe created a new Steering Committee – the Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI), in 2020, which includes in its mandate further formalisation and integration of SOGI issues into the non-discrimination framework. Additionally, the Secretariat of the European Focal Points Network, civil servants who coordinate LGBTI work for their governments at interdepartmental level- was relocated to be formally hosted within the SOGI Unit, adding weight to this long-standing intergovernmental space and opening a path to formalised intergovernmental dialogue on SOGIESC issues.

The work of these institutions is worth flagging because it is important that the U.S. government seeks to cooperate with these initiatives in its work to support LGBTI rights globally. We strongly encourage Congress to work with its European counterparts and the Government to work together with the European institutions, not just in terms of promoting LGBTI rights abroad, but also in terms of working together to ensure that the human rights of LGBTI people are protected at home. For our movement, cooperation and alliance building is at the heart of future progress.

Further to this, members of this House can support LGBTI rights in Europe and Central Asia by ensuring consistent integration of Europe in broader foreign policy and development agendas. In places where governments are actively repressing LGBTI rights, it is important that LGBTI rights aren’t singled out as a standalone issue, but instead made part of broader human rights agendas. When LGBTI rights are under attack, this is often part of wider government repressions. Indeed, LGBTI communities are often weaponized by political leaders as to cover wider efforts to undermine democracy. Effective responses then for instance ensure that so-called laws against the promotion of sexual orientation are

addressed in broader efforts to address freedom of expression. LGBTI civil society organizations are keen to be part of identifying effective responses, so that no unintended harm is done.

Thank you.

Executive Summary – Rainbow Europe Map & Index 2021

Rainbow Europe – ILGA-Europe’s annual benchmarking tool – comprises the Rainbow Map and Index and national recommendations. ILGA-Europe have produced the Rainbow Map and Index [since 2009](#), using it to illustrate the **legal and policy situation of LGBTI people in Europe**.

The Rainbow Map and Index ranks 49 European countries on their respective legal and policy practices for LGBTI people, **from 0-100%**.

In order to create our country ranking, ILGA-Europe examine the laws and policies in 49 countries using a set of criteria. From May 2021, the number of individual criteria used has risen to 71, divided between six thematic categories: **equality and non-discrimination; family; hate crime and hate speech; legal gender recognition and bodily integrity; civil society space; and asylum**. More information on the list of criteria and their weight on the total score can be found at www.rainbow-europe.org/about

Rainbow Europe 2021 **categories** and the **percentage ‘weight’** assigned to them remain exactly the same as the 2020 version. ILGA-Europe started assessing two new indicators: “Non-binary recognition” and “Legal gender recognition procedures exist for minors”. They are included under the category of legal gender recognition and bodily integrity; and the percentage ‘weight’ has been altered to accommodate these two new criteria.

Alterations to our criteria make year-on-year comparisons difficult, but certain lessons are clear – countries that are expanding their legislative horizons are moving up in the ranking.

Policymakers, researchers and journalists are able to go **‘behind’ the points** and see the original information sources that we base our Map and Index ranking on. This additional layer of information is available through **our updated Rainbow Europe web module**, www.rainbow-europe.org.

The Rainbow Map and Index presents a picture of what the policy landscape is like currently, while **our country-specific recommendations** attempt to answer the question “**what’s next?**” These recommendations are intended to encourage policymakers to address the most pressing legal and policy priorities within the framework of our Rainbow Map and Index. The recommendations were gathered following an online consultation with a wide range of LGBTI organisations in the various countries. As a result, the recommendations are tailored to the needs of activists working on the ground.

TOP 5, Rainbow Europe 2021	BOTTOM 5, Rainbow Europe 2021
----------------------------	-------------------------------

1. Malta (94%)	45. Monaco (11%)
2. Belgium (74%)	46. Russia (10%)
3. Luxembourg (72%)	47. Armenia (8%)
4. Portugal (68%)	48. Turkey (4%)
5. Norway (67%)	49. Azerbaijan (2%)

For the sixth year in a row, [Malta](#) continues to occupy the number one spot on the Rainbow Europe Map, with a score of 94%.

[Belgium](#) comes second place for the fourth time with a score of 74%.

[Luxembourg](#) receives 72 points and occupies the third spot on the ranking for the third year in a row.

The three countries at the other end of the Rainbow Europe scale are [Azerbaijan](#) (2%), [Turkey](#) (4%), and [Armenia](#) (8%), exactly the same as last year.

[Denmark](#) is the country with the most dramatic drop in its score, **losing 3.80% points** in relation to the irregularities for the criterion on depathologisation, with access to trans-specific healthcare still linked with a mental health assessment in the country.

[Georgia](#) has also dropped by 3.73% due to the lack of clear procedure for legal gender recognition and the risky situation of LGBTI human rights defenders in the country.

Another important deduction happened, with [Ukraine](#) losing 3.5% points due to the expiration of the government's action plan.

[Malta](#), [North Macedonia](#), and [Bosnia & Herzegovina](#) are the three countries with the biggest jump in scores. [Malta](#) added sex characteristics under protected grounds in the Refugees Act and published new policy guidelines for LGBTI asylum claims. [Malta](#) also received points in relation to ILGA-Europe's new indicators ("Non-binary recognition" and "Legal gender recognition procedures exist for minors").

[North Macedonia](#) and [Bosnia & Herzegovina](#) had a big jump in their scores and rankings, due to the fact that freedom of assembly has been improving in both countries.

Equality and non-discrimination

Equality action plans have expired in [Albania](#), [Norway](#), and [Ukraine](#), while [France](#) and [Kosovo](#) have shortcomings and implementation problems with their action plans. [Finland](#), [Ireland](#), [Sweden](#), and [Germany's](#) Saarland region's action plans were the only new ones that received points this year. Governments in [Bosnia & Herzegovina](#), [Czechia](#), and [Ukraine](#) are in the process of preparation of their next action plans.

[Albania](#) included sex characteristics protection in **anti-discrimination** legislation. The region of Cantabria in [Spain](#) introduced a new anti-discrimination law protecting on the ground of sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics. A court in [Poland](#) clarified that law prohibits discrimination based on gender identity at workplace.

[Portugal](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) (UK) revoked all restrictions on LGBTI people for blood donation, making it possible for everyone to donate blood safely and equally. [Ukraine](#) announced a similar change, but it hasn't been enacted yet.

Family

Recognition of family legislation is stagnating across Europe. This year, there was no single legal or policy change affecting LGBTI people.

Hate crime and hate speech

[Norway](#) was the only country to extend legal protection from hate crime, amending its Penal Code to add gender identity ground.

Legal gender recognition and bodily integrity

Since 6 January, 2021, legal recognition for non-binary people has been implemented in [Iceland](#), making it the only country in Europe to advance trans rights in the last 12 months.

Trans-specific healthcare became almost impossible to access in [Northern Ireland](#). Activists' reporting has revealed that trans people are unable to access the medical reports required to go through these processes without paying for private care, thus creating a class barrier to accessing LGR.

Civil society space

[North Macedonia](#) and [Bosnia & Herzegovina](#) have had no state obstruction of freedom of assembly within the past three years and Pride events were adequately protected by police.

[Poland](#)'s civil society space has shrunk more this year, because people are being actively attacked by the police during public events, instead of being protected. Poland also lost points related to freedom of expression, due to the anti-LGBT resolutions that have been passed by local governments.

The other country with a negative trend in this regard is [Georgia](#), which lost points with LGBTI human rights defenders at risk, due to a large number of attacks over the last 12 months.

Asylum

[Malta](#) introduced new amendments to the Refugees Act and published new guidelines on asylum claims. This was only development regarding protection of LGBTI asylum rights in the last 12 months.

[Finland](#)'s policies regarding LGBTI asylum seekers were criticised by LGBTI civil society for being only project based and not creating any systematic approach or policy. Points were deducted by ILGA-Europe from Finland, based on this report.

Mr. KEATING. Well, thank you, Mr. van Roozendaal.
 Now I will recognize Ms. Zakharova—Zakharova—I apologize—
 for your opening statement.
 Ms. ZAKHAROVA.

**STATEMENT OF SVETLANA ZAKHAROVA, CO-SECRETARY,
 ILGA-EUROPE BOARD MEMBER, RUSSIAN LGBT NETWORK**

Ms. ZAKHAROVA. Thank you, Chair Keating, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, and Representatives.

My name is Svetlana Zakharova. I am a lesbian, a feminist, and a human rights defender from Russia. I work with the Russian LGBT Network since 2014, and Russian LGBT Network is the biggest organization in the country that fights for equal rights for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Last December I became the director of the Legal and Social Support Charitable Foundation Sphere, organization-operator of the LGBT Network.

I am grateful for this opportunity to testify before the subcommittee, especially today. Exactly on said date, 8 years ago, the so-called propaganda law was adopted in Russia at Federal level.

This legislation is really bad in many ways but I think that the trickiest thing about this legislation is the fact that it do not define what exactly propaganda means and, as a result, every judge or State official or even police officer decide by himself or herself if a particular case is propaganda or not.

The truth is this legislation is not really used widely, but it creates an atmosphere of impunity for the perpetrators. Those people who commit hate crimes, they believe that they are doing the right thing. They believe that the authority is behind them. And LGBT+ communities on the other side feel targeted, vulnerable, and unprotected.

The consequences of this legislation on Euros open public discussion about LGBT+ rights in Russia is almost impossible. LGBT minors do not get any support because psychologists and social workers are just afraid to work with them. They are afraid of being accused of propaganda. Online sources the related to LGBT+ issues are being blocked. The amount of hate crimes has grown. Freedom of expression, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly are violated.

And the extreme case is what happened in Chechnya. LGBT people are deprived of the very basic right, the right to life. In 2017, the whole world learned that LGBT+ people in Chechnya are being kidnapped, tortured, and even killed just because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We started to support those people in 2017, and we still are doing that because it is far from being over.

Actually I planned to devote my testimony to the rights LGBT+ in Russia is growing and getting stronger, despite of all the pressure and everything that is going on in the country. I wanted to talk about the ways how public opinion is changing to the better because of the works of organizations and people who are working hard every day to do so, but yesterday happened something that changed my testimony completely.

Last night the shelter for victims of the domestic violence in Makhachkala Dagestan was attacked by the law enforcement agencies. Several women including Svetlana Anokhina, a human rights defender, were brutally detained. They are still detained for no reasons but helping other women. We believe that this shelter was attacked because Khalimatt Taramova was there—recently she contacted the Russian LGBT Network and she said that her life is in mortal danger because of her sexual orientation. With her girlfriend she managed to leave Chechnya. She went to the Daghestan Makhachkala, and she was in the shelter. She was waiting for evacuation to a safer place, but basically she was kidnapped by the law enforcement agencies. She was taken back to Chechnya, and probably she was given to her parents. We do not know if she is alive. Her girlfriend was released today. She managed to contact us and to tell us what really happened. She is out of Makhachkala Daghestan now.

The situation is just unbelievable. The law enforcement agencies are attacking shelters of the victims of the domestic violence and kidnap people they should protect. It happened in Russia right now. And I want to point your attention to that and to the ways how some people in Russia are deprived from this very basic right, the right to life. We all know that our Presidents are going to meet soon and I believe that this the situation with LGBT+ rights in Russia, in Chechnya, and especially the fate of Khalimat Taramova should be discussed.

Thank you for your attention.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Zakharova follows:]

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the
Environment and Cyber

11/06/2021

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

Written testimony by Svetlana Zakharova

Director of the Legal and Social Support Charitable Foundation Sphere (organization-operator of the
Russian LGBT Network)

Individual member of the Russian LGBT Network

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 changed 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.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Ms. Zakharova.
The chair now recognizes for 5 minutes Mr. Dombos.

**STATEMENT OF TAMAS DOMBOS, BOARD MEMBER, HATTER
SOCIETY**

Mr. DOMBOS. Chairman Keating, members of the subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you about the gross violations of human rights of LGBTQI people in Hungary. My testimony today is in my capacity as board member of Háttér Society and the Hungarian LGBT Alliance.

Historically speaking, Hungary was a country with a relatively high level of acceptance and legal protections afforded to sexual and gender minorities. The country decriminalized homosexuality in 1961. The first gay association was set up before the end of socialism. The law recognizes same-sex couples since 1996. Transgender people had access to legal gender recognition. Budapest, our lovely capital, hosted the first ever Pride march in the region more than two decades ago in 1997.

In the past decade and especially in the past 2 years, however, the legal, social, and political situation of LGBTQI people has severely deteriorated. It started with the adoption of a new constitution in 2012. It contains a provision that defines marriage as a union between a woman and a man and family with only reference to marriage and parent-child relationships. Since, then our families have lived in a legal vacuum.

Governmental homophobia and transphobia reached a new peak in 2019 when high-ranking public officials, governing politicians, and overwhelmingly government-controlled public and private media started to speak in an unprecedentedly hostile way about our community. The speaker of the parliament likened same-sex couples raising children to pedophiles. Prime Minister Orbán said homosexuals should keep their hands off our children. A senior member of parliament called for banning our Pride march and for boycotting Coca-Cola as they featured a same-sex couple in advertisements.

But the attacks did not stop at words. Last May the parliament banned legal gender recognition for trans and intersex people. Trans people now have to live with official documents that do not reflect their gender identity and/or their appearance.

In December 2020, the parliament restricted adoption by non-married couples—non-married persons. It will no longer be professionals but rather a politician, our openly homophobic Minister of Family Affairs, who will make decisions on who is a suitable parent.

Most recently, just yesterday, an amendment was introduced in parliament, copying the infamous Russian propaganda law. The amendment would ban discussions on homosexuality and trans persons in schools, ban advertisements portraying gay and lesbian couples, and sanction shops selling books or movies featuring LGBTQI+ people to minors. And we are not talking about the portrayal of sexual relations but any portrayal of a gay or lesbian person, a same-sex couple, or a transgender person.

Most of these legislative changes happened during the peak of the COVID crisis when hundreds of people were dying every day.

All these changes form part of a very conscious and diabolic political strategy to divert attention away from the inability of the government to tackle the health, social, and economic crisis COVID brought to our country.

While these discussions were happening in parliament, extreme right-wing paramilitary groups felt encouraged to disrupt our work in legal ways. Dozens of Nazis regularly come to our events, not just the Pride march but movie screenings, workshops, discussions. They threaten the participants, physically abuse the organizers, steal or burn our rainbow flags, and the police offer no protection.

We are sad, angry, and fearful. The rights we have fought for so hard for so long can be taken away from us at the glimpse of a moment. We have become tools in a political game. We became enemy No. 1 just because of the way we love or the way we identify. Don't be misled by the government's propaganda. The majority of Hungarians are not homophobes or transphobes. The majority agrees with legal equality for LGBTQI people, with legal gender recognition of trans people, with same-sex couples being a family. These are facts of public opinion polls.

We are not threatened by our society. We are threatened by a political leadership that creates and fights false enemies instead of governing the country, a political leadership that completely disregards not only its international obligations but binding court decisions. If they do not agree with a court ruling, they change the law the next day. They abolish checks and balances, dismantle democratic institutions, fill up our courts and public bodies with their friends.

The problems we face do not only target us as LGBTQI Pride persons, they target us as human rights defenders, as independent civil society actors, as autonomous citizens.

But we do not give up. We will fight our legal battles, and we will protect our community from these attacks. We will make sure that every person understands how living in such a hostile political environment undermines our everyday existence, our mental and physical well-being. And we will make sure that our country finds its way back to a community of democracies built on the respect for human rights, equality and the rule of law. But we need your help as well. You have to hold our government accountable to its international human rights commitments. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Dombos follows:]

Written Statement of
Tamás Dombos
board member of Hättér Society and the Hungarian LGBT Alliance
Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment
June 11, 2021

Chairman Keating, Members of the Sub-Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you about the gross violations of the human rights of LGBTQI people in Hungary. My testimony today is in my capacity as board member of Hättér Society, the oldest and largest LGBTQI organization in Hungary, and the Hungarian LGBT Alliance, the national umbrella organization.

Historically speaking, Hungary was a country with a relatively high level of acceptance and legal protections afforded to sexual and gender minorities. The country decriminalized homosexuality in 1961. The first gay civil society organization was set up in 1988, even before the end of socialism. Same-sex couples have been recognized by law since 1996. Transgender people had access to legal gender recognition since the early 2000s. Budapest, our lovely capital, hosted the first ever Pride March in Eastern and Central Europe more than two decades ago, in 1997.

In the past decade, and especially in the past two years, the legal, social, and political situation of LGBTQI people has severely deteriorated in the country. It started with the adoption of the new Fundamental Law, our constitution, in 2012. It contains a provision that defines 'marriage' as a union between a woman and a man, and 'family' only with reference to marriage and parent-child relationship. Since then, our families have lived in a legal vacuum.

Governmental homophobia and transphobia reached a new peak in 2019, when high ranking public officials, governing politicians and the overwhelmingly government-controlled public and private media started to speak in an unprecedentedly hostile way about our community. The Speaker of the Parliament likened same-sex couples raising children to pedophiles, Prime Minister Orbán said homosexuals should keep their hands off of children. A senior member of Parliament called for banning our Pride March and for boycotting Coca Cola as they featured a same-sex couple in an advertisement.

But the attacks did not stop at words: in May 2020 the Parliament banned legal gender recognition for trans and intersex people. Trans people now have to live with official documents that do not reflect their gender identity and / or their appearance. As a result, they are subjected to discrimination when looking for a job, when accessing health services or when applying for a bank card, just to name a few examples.

In December 2020, the Parliament restricted adoption by non-married persons: it will no longer be professionals, but rather a politician, our openly homophobic Minister of Family Affairs who will make decisions on who is a suitable parent. Most recently, just yesterday, an amendment was introduced in Parliament copying the infamous Russian propaganda law. The amendment would ban discussions on

homosexuality and trans persons in schools, ban advertisements portraying gay and lesbian couples, and sanction shops selling books or movies featuring LGBTQI people to minors. And we are not talking about the portrayal of sexual relations, but any portrayal of a gay or lesbian person, a same-sex couple or a transgender person.

Most of these legislative changes happened during the peak of the COVID crisis, when hundreds of people were dying every day. All these changes form part of a very conscious and diabolic political strategy to divert attention away from the inability of the government to tackle the health, social and economic crises COVID brought to our country. While these discussions were happening in Parliament, extreme right wing paramilitary groups felt encouraged to disrupt our work in illegal ways. Dozens of Nazis regularly come to our events, not just the Pride March, but movie screenings, workshops, discussions. They threaten the participants, physically abuse the organizers, steal or burn our rainbow flags. And the police offer no protection.

We are sad, angry and fearful. The rights we have fought for so hard for so many years can be taken away from us at a glimpse of a moment. We have become tools in a political game: the current Hungarian government uses us as scapegoats. We became enemy number one just because of the way we love or the way we identify. Don't be misled by the government's propaganda: the majority of Hungarians are not homophobes or transphobes. The majority agrees with legal equality for LGBTQI people, with legal gender recognition for trans people, with same-sex couples being a family.

We are not threatened by our society. We are threatened by a political leadership that creates and fights false enemies instead of governing the country. A political leadership that completely disregards not only its international obligations, but binding court decisions. If they don't agree with a court ruling, they change the law the next day. They abolished checks and balances, dismantled democratic institutions, filled up courts and public bodies with their friends. The problems we face do not only target us as LGBTQI persons, they target us human rights defenders, as independent civil society actors, as autonomous citizens.

But we do not give up. We will fight our legal battles, and we will protect our community from these attacks. We will make sure that every person understands how living in such a hostile political environment undermines our everyday existence, our mental and physical well-being. And we will make sure that our country finds its way back to the community of democracies built on the respect for human rights, equality and the rule of law.

But we need your help as well. You have to hold our government accountable to its international human rights commitments.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Dombos. I would now like to call on Dr. Emson for your opening statement. Dr. Emson.

STATEMENT OF DR. LENNY EMSON, DIRECTOR, KYIVPRIDE

Dr. EMSON. Chair Keating, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on this important issue during the Pride month.

I represent an NGO that annually organizes the largest LGBTQI rally newspaper Ukraine, Kyiv Pride March of Equality. Back in 2013, the Kyiv Pride march began on a short walk of about 50 people and took place in the outskirts of the city. It was tremendously hard to make sure that authorities didn't ban it to ensure our protection from groups opposing equal rights. In just 6 years the Kyiv Pride march has transformed into a massive rally of more than 10,000 people taking place in central Kyiv in 2019.

The striking difference in numbers within a span of just a few years demonstrates the progress our society has made in terms of respecting and protecting LGBTI rights. This progress would have not been possible without the consistent support of the United States. The efforts to strengthen Ukraine's police reform and civil society were not in vain.

However, some very serious challenges remain for our community. Our increased visibility has sparked a surge in the numbers of hate crimes against LGBTI people. Violent groups advocating hatred began targeting us. They often come to our events and do whatever they can to disrupt them including resorting to violence. These groups are operating in an organized manner. They are easy to identify, but they enjoy mere total impunity for their attacks.

Today several right-radical NGO's are clearly visible in acting in many cities of the country. In 2020, they have organized several attacks on LGBTI community centers and events such as Odesa Pride when a dozen participants was attacked and injured.

In 2021, the community center of the LGBT Association, LIGA, has received bomb threats twice. These actions are widely supported by many Ukrainian politicians. And MPs and the number of attacks on LGBTI activities by far right groups has sharply increased, 24 cases in 2020 against 11 in 2019.

Just within the last week of May this year there have been four such attacks including one attack on a Kyiv Pride-organized film screening.

Every time we have to live in fear of yet another attack. Unfortunately the police are not doing nearly enough to address such attacks and hold the perpetrators accountable. Currently Ukraine does not explicitly recognize homophobia as motives of a hate crime in its legislation. This issue is invisible for the State.

Holding perpetrators accountable, even without acknowledging hate motive, is also incredibly rare. In one emblematic case of activist Vitalina Koval, people who threw paint at her and caused chemical burns to her eyes were charged with causing her minor bodily harm and were brought before court. The court was looking into her case for almost 3 years and yet failed to prosecute Vitalina Koval's attackers because of an expired statute of limitations for such crimes.

The lack of legislation that recognizes homophobia as types of discriminatory motives, as well as the lack of effective investigations, is what keeps pulling our country back in terms of LGBTI rights progress.

The good news is our government has recently registered a bill that will introduce the reform of the anti-hate crime legislation. We expect this bill to be widely opposed and so we would like to ask for solidarity from the international community.

Our members of parliament should be urged that this reform is necessary. I would also like to emphasize that, even if we would have the most perfect law addressing hate crimes, this law would still have to be implemented. That is why any kind of support to continue Ukraine's police reform is most welcome.

In 2013, the Kyiv Pride March for Equality took place largely because of the international support from governments, embassies, and allied organizations. Today civil society in Ukraine needs that same support in order to ensure that legal reform continues and that these acts of violence against the LGBTI community are rightly considered hate crimes and are prosecuted as such.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Emson follows:]



ГРОМАДСЬКА ОРГАНІЗАЦІЯ «КИЇВПРАЙД»
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION «KYIVPRIDE»

Lenny Emson
Director
KyivPride NGO
Ukraine

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe
06/11/2021
Understanding the Fight to Protect LGBTQI+ Rights in Europe and Eurasia

Chair Keating, Ranking Member Fitzpatrick, and the distinguished members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting me to testify on this important subject during Pride Month. I represent an NGO that annually organizes the largest LGBTI rally in Ukraine - Kyiv Pride "March of Equality". The story of our Pride marches is illustrative of the wider history of the LGBTI movement in Ukraine.

Back in 2013, the Kyiv Pride march began as a short walk of about 50 people and took place in the outskirts of the city. It was tremendously hard to make sure the authorities didn't ban it and to ensure our protection from orchestrated groups opposing equal rights.

In just six years, the Kyiv Pride march has transformed into a massive rally of more than 10,000 people, taking place in central Kyiv in 2019.

This striking difference in numbers within a span of just a few years demonstrates the remarkable progress our society has made in terms of respecting and protecting LGBTI rights.

This progress would not have been possible without the consistent support of the United States: the efforts to strengthen Ukraine's police reform and civil society were not in vain.

However, some very serious challenges remain for our community. Our increased visibility has sparked a surge in the number of hate crimes against LGBTI people. Violent groups advocating hatred and discrimination began targeting us. They often come to our events and do whatever they can to disrupt them – including, resorting to violence. These groups are operating in an organized manner. They are easy to identify. But they are enjoying near total impunity for their attacks.

Today, several right-radical NGOs are clearly visible and acting in many cities of the country. In 2020, they've organized several attacks on LGBTI community centers and events, such as Odesa Pride when a dozen of participants were physically attacked and injured. In 2021 the community



ГРОМАДСЬКА ОРГАНІЗАЦІЯ «КІЇВПРАЙД»

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION «KYIVPRIDE»

center of the LGBT Association "LIGA" has received bomb threats twice this year. These actions are widely supported by many Ukrainian politicians and MPs and the number of attacks on LGBTI activities by far-right groups has sharply increased: 24 cases in 2020 against 11 in 2019.

Just within the last week of May this year, there have been four such attacks, including one attack on a KyivPride-organized film screening.

Every time, we have to live in fear of yet another attack. It takes courage to attend LGBTI events and it takes even more courage and emotional resources to organize them.

Unfortunately, the police are not doing nearly enough to address such attacks and hold the perpetrators accountable. Currently, Ukraine doesn't explicitly recognize homophobia and transphobia as motives of a hate crime in its legislation. This issue is invisible for the state under current legislature.

Holding perpetrators accountable even without acknowledging the hate motive is also incredibly rare.

In one emblematic case of activist Vitalina Koval, people who threw paint at her and caused chemical burns to her eyes were charged with causing her minor bodily harm and were brought before a court. The court was looking into her case for almost three years and, eventually, released Vitalina Koval's attackers on the grounds of an expired statute of limitations for such crimes.

The lack of legislation that recognizes homophobia and transphobia as types of discriminatory motives, as well as the lack of effective investigations, is what keeps pulling our country back in terms of LGBTI rights progress. The good news is our government has recently registered a bill that will introduce the long-overdue reform of the anti-hate crime legislation. We expect this bill to be widely opposed and so we would like to ask for solidarity from the international community. Our members of parliament should be urged and convinced that this reform is necessary.

I would also like to emphasize that even if we would have the most perfect law addressing hate crimes, this law would still have to be implemented. That is why, any kind of support to continue Ukraine's police reform is most welcome.

In 2013, the Kyiv Pride March of Equality took place largely because of the direct international support from governments, embassies, and allied organizations; today, civil society in Ukraine needs that same support in order to ensure that legal reform continues and that these acts of violence against the LGBTI community are rightly considered hate crimes and are prosecuted as such.

Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Dr. Emson, and thank all of you for your testimony.

I will now recognize all members for 5 minutes each pursuant to House rules. All time yielded is for the purposes of questioning witnesses. Because of the virtual format of this hearing, I will recognize members of the committee by seniority alternating between Democrats and Republicans. If you miss your turn, please let our staff know and we will circle back to you. If you seek recognition, you must unmute your microphone and address the chair verbally. I will now recognize myself for 5 minutes.

And I want to thank the witnesses. I think you all did a very good job of showing how the connection with LGBTQI+ rights, these basic civil rights, the deterioration of that coincides with other types of democratic backsliding.

One of the issues, whether it is rule of law, whether it is enforcement by police or law enforcement, security people, but—or the judiciary, I just want to start with one question—and I think it was Mr. Dombos that brought this up—but one of the areas of backsliding that are concerning are what is happening in these authoritarian countries with the media.

Could you—all comment on how they are using the media to really tamp down these basic human rights and the kind of things they are doing? I think that—we see what they are doing in Russia now with the foreign agents legislation. We are seeing the effect on Radio Free Europe. And we are seeing it on Meduza and other sources.

So could you share with us just how this is happening and what kind of a threat it presents? Anyone that would like to start with that would be great, yes.

Ms. ZAKHAROVA. Chair Keating, I would like to start.

Well, you started to talk about Russia and I myself am from Russia. At Charitable Foundation Sphere, I am the director of the organization added to the list of foreign agents since 2016. So I know exactly how to—how it to be a foreign agent.

Talking about mass media, most mass media in Russia is State controlled and it is really hard to go to them and to present a different image of LGBT+ community and most of them portray LGBT+ community as pedophiles, as foreign agents, as people who want to destroy our traditional values, whatever it is supposed to mean. But, of course, we have support from the independent mass media and we are really grateful for this support because it is almost the only chance for us to talk about LGBT rights.

Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. Anyone else want to comment on that?

I have another question. In a parliamentary system, unlike our own, we are finding in very close elections the coalitions coming together that are formed after those elections often rely on small minority parties to give them a coalition majority. Are you seeing some of the far-right right groups that are actually attacking these basic human rights, forming these colations and what kind of influence are they having, albeit a small minority, but also leveraging that for a coalition? Do you see any of that occurring in these small parties?

Mr. DOMBOS.

Mr. DOMBOS. Yes, just first to react to the media, currently in Hungary, the media is under strict governmental control. Yes, there is private media but many of the private media has been bought by pro-government businessmen with the help of loans from the government and the public media and all these pro-government media are micromanaged. They are told what message to send, which people to invite.

Just to give you an example, a few months ago I was invited to the public radio for a discussion about a specific topic. We set up an interview. And 15 minutes later I got a phone call, saying that, "I am sorry. We cannot have that interview because you appear on the list of banned persons." And so there is an official list in the public radio about organizations and people that they cannot invite. I mean, that is the level of oppression in the media that happens.

And regarding the second question, in Hungary I think the most extremist political party currently is Fidesz. It is the governing party. We have had Jobbik, an extreme-right party that, compared to Fidesz, now is a moderate centrist party. Over the past 10 years, month after month the government has become more xenophobic, racist, and most recently completely LGBTQI-phobic. They—they create now a fake party, Mi Hazán, and they play into the hands of this extremist party so that they can claim they are not the most extreme one but do not be fooled by it. This is a political game. They created a party that is more—that seems to be more extremist than them so that they can claim that they are a centrist moderate party and if they are not in power, then those Nazis will come in. Those Nazis are them. They are financing them. They are giving them media space to create this image that they are the moderate centrist parties. That is a lie.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you so much for that.

I now recognize Representative Deutch for 5 minutes for his questions.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thanks. Thanks so much, Mr. Chairman, and thanks for calling this really important and—I think we can say—historic hearing. In on our committee, I am just glad that I am one of several members of the congressional LGBTQI+—Equality Caucus, including our caucus chair, Mr. Cicilline. The caucus and this committee share a common understanding that the United States' responsibility to stand up for equality and human rights for the LGBTQI+ community does not stop at our borders, and this month in particular we stand in international solidarity not only with our own LGBTQI+ constituents here, but with communities around the world.

And as this hearing has already demonstrated, the right of every person to have equal opportunity, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, regardless of who they love or their gender presentation, is an unequivocal part of our nation's human rights vision and correspondingly of our nation's foreign policy. So I am really grateful to all the witnesses and to you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this important hearing.

I want, Mr. Chairman, to followup on your questions about democratic backsliding and we have—we have talked about this before. In recent years the backsliding we have seen across Europe and Eurasia has created a space for increased discrimination against

the LGBTQI+ community, and Hungary and Poland are certainly of particular concern, with rapid democratic deterioration and codified reversals in progress for the community.

Mr. Dombos, your last response about Fidesz creating a party so that they can appear to be the moderate party I think is a really troubling—a really troubling part of this conversation. But there is a trend here.

And so what I would like, I would ask all of our panelists, if you could put this—the struggles for, and the attacks on, the LGBTQI+ community in the context, the broader context, of the deterioration of democratic institutions across the—across Europe and Eurasia, what—what is—how does this fit in?

And, Mr. Dombos, you had made reference to this. Specifically, when you include this as part of the greater human rights struggle, how does the backsliding in your country—I will start with you and then everyone—how does it wind up—how does it wind up impacting the community specifically when you see this democratic backsliding taking place?

Mr. DOMBOS. Well, I think the reaction of most people is to just run away, run away, either, like, completely closing out politics from their lives, because, you know, every morning you get up and you read a statement like that. Or they run out of the country. I mean, you know, we are in the EU, unlike Ukraine and Russia. So it is a right of any citizen to just leave the country and live in another country, and that is what is happening. After the trans law was adopted, dozens and dozens of my trans friends left the country from one day to the other because they said they do not want to live in a country that denies them the basic right, the basic rights to be who they are and to have the name they want.

And, yes, I think it is very important to note this, that LGBTI people are just one among many other groups that are targeted. We are currently targeted the most in Hungary. But, you know, a few years ago it was homeless people. It was migrants. It was George Soros with very clear anti-Semitic tones. So it is—the logic of the government: to find an enemy and then pretend that they are saving the country from that enemy.

And, unfortunately, since they have 2/3 majority, they can do whatever they want with legislation. They can change the constitution from 1 day to the other. They can, if they do not like what a certain public body is doing, they just abolish the public body. So they do not—you know, they do not fire the person. They just abolish the public body, and this is what happened with the data protection ombuds.

Mr. DEUTCH. I appreciate that, Mr. Dombos. I just wanted to give—

Mr. DOMBOS. Yes.

Mr. DEUTCH. I would just like to provide an opportunity for the other witnesses.

Maybe, Ms. Zakharova, can I ask you to comment on this?

Ms. ZAKHAROVA. Yes. Absolutely. Thank you, Representative Deutch.

As well as Hungary, in Russia LGBT is not the only targeted group and it is very clear to me that this part of civil society and all civil society is really oppressed and we can see how it was in

the legislation of the foreign agents were adopted and we are now in the same box. Basically there is only one party in Russia and all the rest are considered to be the opposition and the opposition is oppressed.

Mr. DEUTCH. Well, I appreciate it.

Mr. Keating, I hope we will get to hear from the other witness on this as well but I will—I am out of time. So I will yield back. Thank you very much.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative. We might have time for a second round, too. So if you are interested in pursuing that, we will do it.

To the witnesses, I will say this, that when you answer the question, you do not have to be recognized, unless the member designates, you know, a question directly for you. So feel free to jump in with a question, unless it is a, you know, an appointed designation.

So with that, I am going to recognize Representative Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you again for this historic hearing. Thank you to the witnesses for being here. Happy Pride. Thank you for your heroic work around the world.

You know, as I was listening to the testimony, it struck me that, you know, there must be a set of conditions in places in Europe and Eurasia that are leading, you know, politicians and State actors to conclude that supporting anti-LGBTQ parties is in their best interest and so I wondered if you could speak to kind of: What are the social, economic, and political conditions that are contributing to that and what, you know, are the long-term implications of being prevented from representing positive, you know, providing positive representations of LGBTQI people, particularly to young people, and kind of next generation of attitudes? But, you know, what is causing this?

I think, Mr. Dombos, you said this is part of a strategy to divert attention from failed economic policies by rallying people around someone that they can create as a villain. I just wonder. What other conditions that you are seeing that are leading to this?

Dr. EMSON. If I may.

Mr. CICILLINE. Dr. Emson, do you want to start?

Dr. EMSON. Yes, all right. Thank you for question because it is a very important issue for our countries and I believe poverty is a big issue and, you know, economic pressure that people feel and government is really looking for some reason and looking for the channel where they can put people's anger, right. And governments in our countries, they are really looking at LGBTQI people as a group that can be really, you know, attacked without any consequences for attackers. Right?

In our country, for example, and after the pandemic crisis, the situation is really not easy and today we have a lot of young people, new generation that are really transphobic, they are really homophobic and really aggressive toward LGBTQI, and they gather in groups. They gather even in registered organizations and they attack LGBTQI events and LGBTQI people and even people who are not belonging to LGBTQI communities but, like, look like LGBT, right, so people who look not normal, right, people who are different from the majority of the society.

And this is very, very scary situation right now because, as my colleagues said before, it is not only about LGBTQI group. We have very visible. That is why we are attacked. But this anger is directed on many more groups like chroma people, like homeless people, and other groups that are not protected and, unfortunately, the government does not think about protecting them and about really making the country a safe place for everyone which is really important for us right now. Thank you.

Mr. CICILLINE. So can I ask any of the witnesses? You know, I think one of the things that we—the purpose of this hearing is to think about ways that the United States can partner with our European allies or European institutions like the Council of Europe to promote LGBT equality and dignity and obviously passing the Equality Act and passing some legislation that will reaffirm our commitment to the principles of equality for our community is one thing.

But what other things can we do as the U.S. Congress to support the work that you are doing? I mean, we are very conscious of not—you know, in many countries, you know, so much of the argument is this is about Western ideas being imported to poison society and destroy your way of life. So we are very sensitive on the way we do it and we want to be smart about it. But what kinds of things can the U.S. Congress do to help support LGBTQI+ equality in places where you live and work right now?

Björn, I think you are on—

Mr. VAN ROOZENDAAL. Sorry. If I can comment there, I think that legally in these and when we look at Europe, a lot of progress has been made and some of you have said it earlier. There is—there is a limited amount of work that is possible in that space, albeit it continues to be important, of course, to address situations like in Hungary, like in Russia.

I think beyond that what is important is that we—that we look at how hearts and minds can be won. And in order for that to happen, I think what needs to happen is, first, strengthening joint political commitment between countries and that is where a lot of work needs to happen.

And then I think also in doing that, looking at what kind of programming can happen across both sides of the Atlantic that supports the work that LGBTQI movements are doing in winning hearts and minds and there I think the Global Equality Fund has played a very detrimental role already but its contribution to the work is still, yes, compared to with other countries who I think limited.

So continuing to grow that and not just by the work that the State Department is doing but also the work that USAID is doing I think is important and within it also paying attention to the work that happens in places in Europe.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you so much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative.

The chair recognizes Representative Titus for her questions.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing. It has been a long time since the Foreign Affairs Committee addressed this topic, and I think it is a crying shame

that our colleagues from across the aisle couldn't find the time or have the concern to join us to hear about this issue.

I appreciate everything the witnesses have been saying and, as they may or may not know, we have just recently introduced the GLOBE Act to try to restore the U.S.'s leadership position in this area and so I hope that we will see some movement on that and have the State Department again start to take the lead.

We have also seen that COVID has made situations worse for groups that have traditionally, I guess, been discriminated against already. I wonder if you-all might address if you've seen any of the restrictions because of COVID been disproportionately applied to your community.

Mr. DOMBOS. Yes, clearly. Of course, I think all of the political developments that have been happening I think are also in the context of COVID, as I mentioned, but it has also direct impact on people. People were not able to access HIV testing. They were not able to access medication. Transgender surgeries or hormonal treatments were canceled because of COVID. Many LGBTQI people had to move back to their families' home, families that are not necessarily supportive of them. This often put people in danger of domestic abuse on behalf their parents or their siblings. Many people lost their jobs because of COVID and many LGBTQI people work already in informal sectors and then they get no protection whatsoever. So I think it is true that we are among one of the biggest losers of the COVID crisis. Thanks.

Dr. EMSON. If I may add to this, so last year one of the leaders of the Ukrainian church, orthodox church, he declared that COVID happened because of gay people, just for you to see, you know.

Well, and I would support my colleague from Hungary because, like, many people lost their jobs and many people need more support right now and specifically people with HIV positive status, right, because they really need more support and we need more testing and we need more support for this group. Right? And in terms of the LGBTQI rights, the situation is worsening as well because the government just used COVID in crisis as an excuse, right, from banning us from advocating our rights, right on the spot. Thank you.

Mr. VAN ROOZENDAAL. I have seen across the region that LGBTI groups have started to increase the kind of service proficient, service proficient that they do toward the LGBTI community, providing food, shelter, medical support in places with respect governments were hugely absent in providing the kind of services that LGBTQI people need. So I can say that in most places unfortunately governments have not met the space to think about the specific needs that the LGBTI community may need.

And so at the time of global backlash, I think it is fair to say that LGBTI organizations have not only been overwhelmed at this point to the backlash but also stepped up the ways in which they have to take care of the community and how that is affecting LGBTI organizations is hugely important to name as well because we see, unfortunately, a lot of cases of burnout while being issues with human rights defenders who simply have too many things to work on, on an everyday basis.

But you compare and it is just to put a number to it and you compare the level of funding between North America and Europe, we are at 1/10 of the amount of funding that is going around in the LGBTI movement in this region compared to our colleagues in the U.S. and Canada. So you can imagine that there is a situation of significant under-resourcing which really affects some activists in the movement at the moment as a result.

Ms. TITUS. I am sure that is true. Not only is the problem worse but the strain on the agencies trying to deal with the problem outside of government must be so great.

Well, right now our President is traveling in Europe and is announcing that he is going to have an international vaccine plan.

So, Mr. Chairman, maybe we can send a letter, encouraging him where he distribute this vaccine to our allies, that we are sure that all community are included, especially LGBTQ communities.

Thank you, and I will wait until the next round for another question.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative. That is a great suggestion, and I appreciate that. Now we will just quickly have a second round of questions, if we could.

I am just curious as we are talking about the control of the media, when we are talking about the way it is being manipulated. When instances occur—in our own country, we have instances of discrimination that make the press. Is that used at all, you know, by these other authoritarian countries where they highlight this is occurring in the U.S. or other democratic countries? Do you see that occurring at all as part of the media control and newspaper control? Anyone that might have seen that.

Mr. DOMBOS. Yes. I think this mapping of, you know, homosexuality or LGBTQI activity as, you know, coming from the West is very common. But I think it is—at least in the case of Hungary, you have to understand that Hungarians are very pro-Western in their attitudes. If you look at the public opinion polls about support for European Union membership or trust in EU institutions, the trust is way, way higher in EU institutions, in European institutions, than it is in the Hungarian—the local Hungarian government.

So I think it is very important to understand that yes, there is that, but that should not debilitate making a clear point about LGBTQI community.

And I think it is also very important to emphasize that, unfortunately, much of the conservative kind of family values, gender ideology discourse is coming from the U.S., and it is sponsored by United States bodies, evangelical churches, clear conservative groups that are losing out in their own country, and they export their homophobic and transphobic views in other countries.

We have seen this all over the world in the past 2 decades, in African countries, and it is currently happening in Hungary. I mean, our homophobic Minister of Family Affairs is regularly attending these meetings with U.S. evangelicals as well as with Russian, you know, strategists that are trying to build—on an international level—a coalition of conservative, family oriented countries and groups. And then, of course, they impact how policies and decisions are made in Hungary.

Mr. KEATING. Well, you know, thanks for that comment because I think it really underscores the importance of our committee having this hearing and the fact that this is an international issue and not just a domestic issue. I think there is—part of authoritarianism is the idea that, you know, they are closed to other borders, they make their own decisions, they have their own, but this is truly international.

And you mentioned Hungary again. You know, the poll is—you know, the polls taken there are quite clear, very high, 79, 80 percent of the people believe these issues are private matters, but still, you know, Orban is able to do what he is doing. How is he getting away with manipulating that with such a strong population in support of keeping this a private human rights issue?

Mr. DOMBOS. I think the reason is that they are very professional in polling people and finding issues where you have slightly less support, so that is why they picked on transgender people. That is why they picked on adoption issue. That is why they are picking up on school education now because those are the topics that many Hungarians feel a bit less secure about and more uncomfortable about.

And, also, those issues are very often, unfortunately, the ones which are not covered by the European Union law, so they are, you know, freer to venture into those areas. And, you know, they do not have to convince every single Hungarian.

They only have to convince those very loyal supporters that they need to take to the polls, and that is how they are working. They know, you know, each and every person, basically, that votes for them. And they target them, micro target them with very clear messages that resonate with what they think about the world. And, unfortunately, with some of the—with some groups in society, this kind of homophobia and transphobia resonates very well with their fears.

Mr. KEATING. Are you finding—and this is for any of the panel. You know, we have talked a great deal about the free speech, freedom of assembly, the ability to speak up, those type of freedoms too. But are you seeing in these countries where this kind of repression is occurring, issues like housing and employment being affected too? I mean, our Equality Act that we are passing here protects housing issues, employment issues, issues of getting loans and financing, but are you seeing housing? What other areas are you seeing this discrimination really spread to?

Dr. EMSON. Do I still have time?

Mr. KEATING. Yes. Oh, yes.

Dr. EMSON. Yes. Okay. If I may, I would sort of point out that housing is a big issue for LGBTQI people in Ukraine specifically like I believe in other countries in the region because people, in order to rent a house or a flat, right, they need to hide themselves, right. We cannot be visible. We cannot be open. If you are open, you stand no chance for getting rent or getting apartment. It is a big problem because the legislation does not mention any discriminated groups in terms of protecting their rights for housing or for food or for employment, right.

We do not have this in our legislation, and, unfortunately, this really affects LGBTQI people in the country.

Mr. KEATING. Any other comments in that regard? Go ahead. I am sorry.

Mr. VAN ROOZENDAAL. I am sorry. No. There is an increasing body of research around homelessness in particular amongst LGBTI young people in the region, and unfortunately, the numbers that are coming in have very stark similarities between what we see in the U.S. So there are huge instances of homelessness amongst young people who often can no longer stay with their parents and then sleep rough because they have no place to go to.

In the field of employment, I would say the European Union and its 27 member States have laws, anti-discrimination laws to employment, but the implementation there often fails. And in too many neighboring countries, that is not the case. And so what we see is also in recent years that the growing number of LGBTQ community members needs to turn to litigation to get their rights recognized in also a lot of the council of Europe countries.

So this is a huge body of work I think in the field of socio-economic rights where yet a lot of needs are there, but also a lot of, I think, opportunities for the LGBTI movement to work on.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you.

Representative Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Zakharova, I hope I pronounced it correctly, the Russian Federation is obviously a global leader in the persecution of LGBTQI+ persons and persuades Nations and individuals within its sphere of influence to adopt their hateful doctrine as their own. Activists face violence and detention.

Vladimir Putin regularly articulates his disdain not just for equality but the LGBTQI community in Russia but for human rights in general. And the Russian government, as you know, has failed to adequately address targeted criminal acts against Russia's LGBTQI community.

My question is in that context, what role does social media and enhanced tech monitoring play in anti-LGBTQI harassment and violence, both by private citizens and by national and regionally governments like those in Chechnya?

Ms. ZAKHAROVA. Well, thank you for this question. And I would say that social networks and technologies is a double-sided thing because on the one hand, it is a source—for many people, it is a source of information, especially for many young people. And I can see how young people in Russia are different from us. For instance, like several years ago there was a public poll opinion, and more than 50 percent of school children, people who are basically targeted by this propaganda law said that they support same sex marriages. But at the same time, of course, quite often, the same networks are used against LGBT+ communities, especially in such close communities and in Chechnya where people, like, literally cannot be open. It is dangerous. It threatens their lives.

And, of course, authorities, local authorities use their vulnerability. And—well, it is something that is happening, and I think that probably international business should pay more attention to security in such countries like Russia, especially such regions as Chechnya.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you.

Dr. Emson, you know, I think a lot of people are watching with some concern that in Ukraine, the ultra conservative far right is retaining a lot of influence and a lot of power, risking not only the rights of LGBTQI people but also Ukraine's democratic future.

And it has been reported that anti-LGBTQI+ legislation, including legislation introduced by members of President Zelensky's own party, has been circulated in Ukraine that closely resembles initiatives either introduced or enacted in Russia. And I wonder how much influence does Russia have over the debate for LGBTQI+ people in Ukraine and what you see the prospects for that law.

Dr. EMSON. Thank you very much for those questions because this is a very important issue as well. Right now, it is Russian influence, right.

So since 2012, right, we have experienced those efforts of different political parties to introduce the gay propaganda law in Ukraine, right. And last year and we know that some MPs are getting ready to introduce it again and again, and we know that political parties are standing behind those efforts.

And, moreover, it is not only about the legislation. It is about the far right groups that we believe are partly financed by the Russian government or the Russian security forces, and they train these groups. And they really put a lot of effort in erasing these groups inside Ukraine. And homophobia and transphobia is a big issue because of this Russian influence.

And young people right now in Ukraine, some of them are really under this influence, and we are afraid that this influence is growing. Unfortunately, this is very big. This is not only the Ukrainian government war and peace, right. This is the propaganda that goes from all sources like media, like social media, like money that really spread into these far right groups growing.

Mr. CICILLINE. Yes. I will just get in one quick question, Mr. Dombos. When you were talking about using particular issues like the transgender community adoption and school issues, we see the same things in the United States for organizations that are opposing our fight for full equality.

I wonder if you could just speak a little more about the role of U.S. groups and these evangelical groups because I think this is really alarming, you know. We are always accused of exporting, you know, tolerance for the LGBTQ community and acceptance, and what you are saying is just the opposite. The U.S. is exporting some pretty—you know, some organizations that are promoting undermining equality for our community, and I think we need to know more about that.

Mr. DOMBOS. Exactly. The World Congress of Families, for example, which is a hate group recognized by the Southern Poverty Law Center, they are—you know, they have done several conferences in Hungary. They are inviting, you know, public speakers.

You know, they try to sound as like support for family values, but it is very clearly an anti-LGBT rights and an anti-women's rights, anti-sexual and reproductive health rights coalition that is putting a lot of effort, money, and know-how as well in how to do this, what topics to look at, what—how to frame topics.

And I think that, of course, the reason why they are so similar is partly because, you know, humans all over the world have similar fears. They are afraid for their children, you know.

They want the best for their children. So if they are telling them that, oh, these monster trans freaks are going to turn your child into a trans person that you will never recognize, and you will lose your son or lose your daughter, then people resonate with this.

But it is also not just this, you know, basic human mentality but also, you know, very clear networks that are being put in place.

And policy learning, unfortunately, is taking place in its worst way. We see amendments to the Hungarian Constitution popping up in other countries. We see the propaganda law introduced in Hungary, copying Russia. Unfortunately, there is policy learning among these countries to the worse.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative.

Now I will recognize for the final questions the chief sponsor of the GLOBE Act, Representative Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

If you look back at the history of LGBT rights in this country, you find that much of that started at the State level. The Congress was late to get on board. We had initiatives at the State level. State legislatures passed equality laws or marriage laws. And then when they reached a tipping point, Congress came on board.

I realize that you all do not have the same kind of Federal system or maybe even referenda or initiatives like we do here, but have you had any luck at trying to deal with lower levels of governments like communities or States or regions, working your way up to the national level? Is that a possibility where you all are?

Ms. ZAKHAROVA. Can I start answering this question? I think that in Russia, the political process is quite different. There is only one ruling party, and basically there is no way, you know, to work with someone because local authorities are afraid of the central authorities, and they are just trying to do everything to please them. So I think that we have very specific situation where society is actually quite progressive, and authorities are very, very conservative. And they are trying to impose those conservative views onto all society, and there is this battle. Thank you.

Dr. EMSON. I would add on the Ukrainian side and say in Ukraine, we had, like, some friendly politicians and MPs that would help us. This is a very interesting phenomenon. They would get bullied in the parliament. Literally, their colleagues would blame them for all sorts of things just because they support LGBTI people. And in this situation, it is very hard for us to really advocate and lobby the legislation that we need right now.

Mr. VAN ROOZENDAAL. I would like to add to that, mention to that, because it is an intriguing question. I would like to tie it into the previous question on the opposition in that where we do see a lot of success often at the local level, it is not necessarily when it is political as [] Lenny and Svetlana have described but when it comes to looking at building other kinds of coalitions.

So where can LGBTI activists build alliances with doctors, with journalists, with teachers, with any kind of professionals who want

to exercise their profession in ethical and moral, morally high standards. And, there, often we see that a lot of change is possible when we do not only focus on the political and legal process.

And I think that recognizing that kind of important local work is important, and I would like to tie it into the opposition work because it is essentially also about alliance building. And Tamás just mentioned that a lot of the opposition is not just targeting the LGBTI movement but also the sexual rights movement and the women's rights movement, and that is true.

And I think what is important in ways in which we support activists who are working on sexual rights, on women's rights or LGBTI rights is to consider how we bring groups together, not just only on those fronts but also with mainstream human rights organizations and those that stands up to defend democracy. This is often where LGBTI activists need the time, the resources to build the connections.

So recognizing when it comes to funding the importance of alliance building is extremely important, and I think the ways in which you can all support that work is also looking out for opportunities in which embassies can be bringing people together and which you, as representatives, can bring in different kinds of allies together and help to work toward larger democratic agendas.

Ms. TITUS. You are right. Coalition building is so important, and we often find you put together a group of organizations on the liberal end of the political spectrum. They do not just have to be human rights. You might find allies in the environmental community, for example. I do not know if you have seen that, but we certainly see that here. Or the labor movement,]or—you know, it just depends. That is great.

Just briefly, Mr. Chairman, I wanted to ask about Turkey. In the last century, Turkey was seen as kind of a standard bearer for protecting LGBT rights and protecting them from the other countries in the neighborhood. But under Erdogan in the last 10 years, they have gotten much more repressive. I wonder if you have any suggestions on what the U.S. Can do in dealing with Turkey that might address this problem.

Mr. VAN ROOZENDAAL. Yes. Unfortunately, Turkey is also looking at putting its playbook in many ways increasingly in recent times, and I would almost answer the same things. Because when you look at how the movement currently is under attack, it is in the field of freedom of expression, in freedom of assembly.

All the things that have been mentioned during this hearing are affecting the community at the moment in that online spaces are increasingly no longer safe.

So I think what is extremely important is to raise these issues by letter but very carefully and very respectfully because Erdogan, in kind of defending his political territory at the moment, is really using the narrative of western values very much. So I think it is important that when the issue is brought up, that it is brought up as an issue that is about freedom of expression, that it is about defending democracy, that it is about defending pluralism.

And we see in the run up to the elections that will take place in Turkey in 2 years that Erdogan is losing popularity. So the question is really what is going to happen around those elections,

and what work can be done on the ground in building kind of a broader political agenda that is looking at different sets of value. So supporting broad civil society initiatives of which the LGBTI movement is a part, I think is one of the critical factors of success at the moment.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I yield back.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Representative.

I would like to thank Mr. van Roozendaal. I would like to thank Dr. Emson and Ms. Zakharova as well as Mr. Dombos for your excellent testimony here today. It is not just your testimony but the courage that you have given speaking up. You are speaking up, in many instances, in territories where it is very difficult to speak up. It is very difficult to come forward, and I want to let you know this committee appreciates your efforts but also your courage doing this. This is so important.

I also would like to ask you, since this came up as a subject matter in today's testimony, if you have any more specific suggested language you could add, we would like to move forward with Representative Titus' suggestion that we contact the White House and make sure with the distribution of vaccines, as we export that assistance, that it is done in an inclusive way so that groups like the LGBTQI+ community are not excluded from having these life-saving vaccines. I think that is very important as well.

And I do want, I do hope that all of you as witnesses appreciate the members that participated here today. I think if you check back on important legislation and advocacy, you are going to find that people who participated here are among the leaders in Congress in pushing forward protections for these very basic human rights. So I want to thank the members who are participating as well today.

So with that, I just would say that a little bit of housekeeping. The members of the committee will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous materials, and questions for the record subject to the limitation on rules.

Again, I want to thank everyone for participating. This was, indeed, a very important, if not historic congressional committee hearing today, and I think it will continue to break ground so that there is more attention to the global impact of this kind of discrimination. So, with that, I will call the hearing adjourned. Thank you all.

[Whereupon, at 12:25 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber

William R. Keating (D-MA), Chair

June 11, 2021

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment, and Cyber via Cisco WebEx (and available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>):

DATE: Friday, June 11, 2021

TIME: 11:00 a.m., EDT

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

WITNESS: Björn van Roozendaal
Programmes Director
ILGA-Europe

Svetlana Zakharova
Co-secretary
ILGA-Europe
Board Member
Russian LGBT Network

Tamás Dombos
Board Member
Háttér Society

Lenny Emson, M.D.
Director
KyivPride

By Direction of the Chair

To fill out this form online: Either use the tab key to travel through each field or mouse click each line or within blue box. Type in information.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Note: Red boxes with red type will NOT print.

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber HEARING

Day Friday Date 06/11/2021 Room Cisco Webex

Starting Time 11:07 Ending Time 12:25

Recesses (to to) (to to) (to to) (to to) (to to) (to to)

Presiding Member(s)

William R. Keating

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Executive (closed) Session

Televised

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Stenographic Record

To select a box, mouse click it, or tab to it and use the enter key to select. Another click on the same box will deselect it.

TITLE OF HEARING:

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

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See Attached

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes No
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

*Mr. Björn van Roozendaal's Testimony
Ms. Svetlana Zakharova's Testimony
Mr. Tamás Dombos' Testimony
Dr. Lenny Emson's Testimony*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED 12:25

Clear Form

Note: If listing additional witnesses not included on hearing notice, be sure to include title, agency, etc.

Benjamin Cooper
Subcommittee Staff Associate

WHEN COMPLETED: Please print for subcommittee staff director's signature and make at least one copy of the signed form. A signed copy is to be included with the hearing/markup transcript when ready for printing along with a copy of the final meeting notice (both will go into the appendix). The signed original, with a copy of the final meeting notice attached, goes to full committee. An electronic copy of this PDF file may be saved to your hearing folder, if desired.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
EUROPE, ENERGY, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND CYBER SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	William Keating, MA
	Abigail Spanberger, VA
	Susan Wild, PA
	Albio Sires, NJ
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
X	David Cicilline, RI
X	Dina Titus, NV
	Dean Phillips, MN
	Jim Costa, CA
	Vicente Gonzalez, TX
	Brad Schneider, IL

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Brian K. Fitzpatrick, PA
	Ann Wagner, MO
	Adam Kinzinger, IL
	Brian Mast, FL
	Dan Meuser, PA
	August Pfluger, TX
	Nicole Mallotakis, NY
	Peter Meijer, MI
	Claudia Tenney, NY