

Torture of LGBTQ+ people and the regime's homophobic policies

Report of the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, co-authored with the Legal Initiative.

Based on data collected by the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus and HRC «Viasna».



Introduction

The rights of LGBTQ+ people are systematically violated by the Republic of Belarus. Violations affect many categories of human rights, including the right not to be subjected to torture, the right to a fair trial, the right not to be discriminated against (equality), and others. Negative public statements at the highest level, as well as active lobbying by representatives of Belarusian religious institutions (church) or pro-religious organizations for «traditional values» directly contribute to discrimination and create fertile ground for hate crimes against LGBTQ+ people. The events of 2020 demonstrated the level of homophobia of the Belarusian state.

Contents

Introduction	2
Discrimination against LGBTQ+ people - brief conclusions	4
Homophobia at the state level.....	5
«Apology» for sexual orientation and/or gender identity.....	7
The state's agenda for LGBTQ+ people after the events of 2020.....	8
Torture in places of detention, custody, and imprisonment of LGBTQ+ people and people considered by law enforcement officials to be LGBTQ+	10
Insulting people by humiliating LGBTQ+	10
Color, length of hair as a basis for violence and torture:	11
Clothing and personal belongings as a basis for even greater use of torture	12
Forced Coming Out ¹ , Outing ²	13
Threats of sexualized rape	15
Use of physical violence for being LGBTQ+	15
Testimonies of physical abuse for being LGBTQ+, including speculation and assumptions based on appearance:.....	16
Sexualized violence.....	17
Conclusions.....	18

1 Forced Coming Out is the public disclosure of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity without voluntary consent, free and safe circumstances.

2 Outing is the public disclosure of a person's membership in the LGBTQ+ community without voluntary consent.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBTQ+ PEOPLE - BRIEF CONCLUSIONS

As of April 2023, based on data from the International Committee for Investigation of Torture in Belarus and the Human Rights Center «Viasna,» psychological violence in the form of insults, humiliation and threats to persons who appeared «non-normative» was used in places of detention and places of imprisonment¹. Often law enforcement officials used humiliation through homophobic language: «faggots,» «cocksuckers» and others. Such words were used toward detainees who did not explicitly refer to themselves as LGBTQ+. Such actions are intended not only to humiliate, but also to keep in fear of the greater use of physical and sexualized violence. People who looked «non-normative» were at greater risk of torture.

The invisibility in society and the lack of serious discussion of the LGBTQ+ rights situation is a recurring theme in this piece. Many LGBTQ+ people hide their sexual orientation or gender identity in everyday life out of fear of negative reactions at school, at work, in their place of residence or in their families. They fear that the awareness of others about their sexual orientation and gender identity will lead to discrimination, harassment, rejection or even violence². In places of detention, custody, and imprisonment, hiding one's identity is much more difficult, as security forces have access to all personal belongings (from a bag to a phone), and voicing one's LGBTQ+ identity can lead to increased violence by security forces.

¹ Non-normative appearance in this material means any departure from the norms of «man» and «woman» and ideas of how «men» and «women» should look. For example, «men» - short hair, no makeup, certain clothes.

² Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Europe (Publisher - Council of Europe) Retrieved 04/26/2023 from: <https://rm.coe.int/-/16807b8ae5>

HOMOPHOBIA AT THE STATE LEVEL

Homophobia or homophobic behavior¹ has been widespread in Belarus for a long time and at the highest level. Since 2010, public homophobic statements of Alexander Lukashenko have been traced in the media^{2 3}.

The first homophobic attack recorded by the media in Belarus took place in 2014. In 2015, the victim, Mikhail Pischevsky, died because of his injuries, which had serious consequences: removal of the fifth part of his brain. The attacker, Dmitri Lukashevich, was found guilty of malicious hooliganism and causing grave bodily harm through negligence. He was sentenced to 2.8 years in a penal colony and ordered to pay 213 million Belarusian rubles in compensation [about \$12,000]. However, in early October 2015, Lukashevich was released under an amnesty⁴. After Mikhail died in hospital,

1 Homophobia or homophobic behavior is an irrational fear, hatred or disgust towards LGBTQ+ people (people who do not conform to society's traditional notions of gender or sexuality) - Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://www.unfe.org/definitions/>

2 In 2020, elections for the presidency of the Republic of Belarus were held, which were rigged by the current regime. Afterwards, mass protests against the rigged elections began, which were brutally suppressed, with the use of torture, violence, and special means. A number of European countries did not recognize Lukashenko as a legitimate president - Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://meduza.io/short/2020/09/23/kakie-strany-ne-priznali-lukashenko-legitimnym-prezidentom-belarusi-spisok>.

3 German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, who is openly gay, came to Minsk for talks and in February 2012 accused Lukashenko of dictatorship. At a state sporting event the same year, Lukashenko said of Westerwelle: «As for the other one - either pink or gay - who was there shouting about dictatorship, well, when I heard that, I thought: better to be a dictator than a gay, of course. Retrieved 05/01/2023 from - <https://zaborona.com/ru/kak-belaruskie-vlasti-ispolzuyut-gomofobiyu-dlya-repressij/>

4 According to one of the witnesses at the trial, the attacker said: «The faggots have gathered.» and Pischevsky, who was going out of the building later, asked the company, which included Lukashevich: «Who are the faggots here?» As a result of the ensuing altercation, Lukashevich hit Pischevsky, who fell to the asphalt. At the trial Lukashevich said that he «felt threatened». The doctors stated that Pischevski's skull was fractured and his brain hemorrhaged. Mikhail stayed in hospital for almost a year and a half - he did not move, rarely regained consciousness, and was fed through a catheter. Relatives spent

the sentence was increased by a year. The court never recognized the homophobic enmity⁵.

In August 2019, a similar thing happened again. An unidentified man attacked an LGBTQ company on Oktyabrskaya Street in Minsk, the capital of the Republic of Belarus. He beat the Belarussian filmmaker and cameraman Nikolai Kuprich, as a result of which the latter suffered multiple bruises and a broken nose. Another guy was taken to hospital. The court found the attacker guilty under the article «malicious hooliganism» and sentenced him to 1.5 years of restricted freedom without sending him to an open institution⁶.

Thus, in both the first and the second cases, the state turned a blind eye to hatred, calling the hate crime malicious hooliganism.

In March 2020, Vladislav Volokhovich, director of the Open Hearts charitable foundation [a pro-life organization that opposes abortion], Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz [Catholic Church] and Archpriest Andrei Lemeshonok [Orthodox Church] collected 52,600 signatures under a collective appeal to Lukashenka asking him to «initiate the adoption of a law banning the promotion and public display of homosexuality and other sexual deviations to minors». The purpose of collecting signatures was «to preserve traditional values». By traditional values they meant chastity before marriage, marital fidelity, having many children, openness to the birth of each child, and understanding of the family as the union of a man and a woman. The initiators of the appeal also sought to introduce criminal liability for people who «promote» LGBTQ+ in Belarus. The propaganda, according to the authors of the appeal, includes the rainbow flag on the building of the British Embassy, the festival of queer culture, the seminars on gender equality, and just an incident at one of the exhibitions, «when there a children's theater and an openly gay performance were held in one space»⁷.

The appeal resonated widely at the time, but no legal changes were made at that time.

up to 18 hours a day with him in the hospital. Retrieved 05/01/2023 from - <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/27329305.html>.

5 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://kyky.org/pain/chtoby-bolshe-nikto-ne-umer-kak-misha-pishevskiy-kak-sotsseti-reagiruyut-na-izbienie-kompanii-lgbt>

6 «Are you a fag too?» - was the phrase with which the unidentified man began his communication. Kuprich says he replied, «All right, let me be a fag - then what?» And he received a blow to the temple, after which he fell down. While he was unconscious, the man beat two other guys from Nikolai's company. Kuprich later said that he was heterosexual, but in that situation he did not want to be separated from his company on the grounds of «normality.» Retrieved 05/01/2023 from - <https://reform.by/19-letnij-paren-poluchil-prigovor-za-napadenie-na-lgbt-kompaniju>

7 «Adoption of such a law, amendments to the Criminal Code and a supra-departmental national program for preservation of traditional values are necessary for the future of our country, for the existence of Belarusians as a distinctive and sovereign nation» - claimed the authors of the appeal. Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://euroradio.fm/ru/52600-podpisey-za-zapret-lgbt-propagandy-zashchita-ili-razzhiganie>

«APOLOGY» FOR SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND/OR GENDER IDENTITY

After the 2020 presidential election, mass repressions began, including against LGBTQ+ people. Thus, the Belarusian state started using LGBTQ+ people for propaganda. For example, in the «penitential videos», detainees are forced to talk about their sexual orientation after being tortured. Detainee Vitaly Rubich says on camera that «since 2016 he is a supporter of non-traditional sexual orientations» and «periodically, two or three times a year, I have sex with a guy.» At the end, he adds: «I understand that this is immoral, I will fix it.» Belarusian human rights activists believe that the security forces use the disclosure of the detainees' homosexuality as an additional repressive tool to put pressure on other prisoners as well¹.

In 2021, Artem Boyarsky was detained. During interrogation, Artem told his lawyer that he was beaten with truncheons on his back and buttocks, forcing him to confess that he was the administrator of an extremist telegram channel and chat room «Maya Kraina Belarus», as well as that he belonged to the LGBTQ+ community².

Also, illegally detained (for supporting Ukraine) Igor Korolik in 2022 in a 17-second “penitential video” insults himself and «confesses» in criminal jargon to his homosexual orientation. The caption on the video in big red letters reads «GUBOPiK will not tolerate the faggot-fascist scum on our land...»³

1 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://zaborona.com/ru/kak-belaruskie-vlasti-ispolzuyut-gomofobiyu-dlya-repressij/>

2 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/7002.html>.

3 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://news.zerkalo.io/cellar/29236.html>

THE STATE'S AGENDA FOR LGBTQ+ PEOPLE AFTER THE EVENTS OF 2020

In 2021, Belarus ranked 61st out of 150 countries dangerous for LGBTQ+ representatives¹.

Due to the fact that in Belarus in 2021 almost all independent non-profit civil society organizations, including those working on the topic of LGBTQ+, were forcibly liquidated by the regime, LGBTQ+ people in Belarus are left with no instruments of protection against homophobia, ranging from homophobia in the street to homophobia by the state. There is no anti-discrimination legislation in Belarus, not a single Belarusian law mentions discrimination based on sexual orientation. Moreover, there is already a known fact of fixation of the principle of «preserving traditional family values» in the legislation regulating domestic violence².

All of the above demonstrates that the Republic of Belarus violates international law by failing to comply with the terms of the international treaties to which it is a party, since it cannot guarantee LGBTQ+ people protection from violence (see paragraphs 2 and 3), protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in custody (see paragraph 9) and - most importantly - protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

¹ Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://euroradio.fm/ru/v-reytinge-stran-opasnyh-dlya-lgbt-belarus-zanyala-61-e-mesto>

<https://rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking>

² Law of the Republic of Belarus «On the Fundamentals of Crime Prevention» as amended on 06/01/2022 N° 151-3.

Recently, beginning in 2022, the Belarusian pro-government media began to broadcast the position of the Russian authorities on the LGBTQ+ community³.

In 2022 Belarusian pro-government propagandist from Hrodna Olga Bondareva filed a complaint about a billboard with an advertisement for headphones in the center of Minsk, calling the model depicted on the poster a «transgender woman» and seeing her appearance as «LGBTQ+ propaganda». A day after the complaint to the «competent authorities,» the billboard disappeared: it was replaced by a social ad⁴.

On December 29, 2022, Chairwoman of the Council of the Republic Natalia Kochanova stated about the possible appearance of a law banning LGBTQ+ propaganda in Belarus⁵. In 2023, Lukashenko confirmed a similar opinion⁶.

Thus, public policy is aimed at forming and reinforcing homophobic views, opinions, and judgments, and homophobia and hate crimes [homophobia - hate] are not punishable.

With more than 800 non-governmental organizations liquidated in the country⁷, in conditions of legal default, lack of punishment for crimes, it is unfortunately possible to pass any laws that will violate human rights.

When we talk about torture of illegally detained people, hatred based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity is used by the regime as a tool of pressure and threats of torture at all stages of illegal detention and custody.

3 Retrieved 04/27/2023 from <https://t.me/sbbytoday/72521> - SB Belarus Today, <https://mlyn.by/04022023/lgbt-kak-verhushka-ajsberga-antitrendy-kotorye-navyazyvayutsya-obshhestvu>, <https://t.me/mlynby/81035> - Minsk Pravda, https://t.me/belta_telegramm/157298, https://t.me/belta_telegramm/162298 - Belta

4 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/23709.html>

5 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/29379.html>: «There is such an opinion, and maybe we should come up with a legislative initiative on the inadmissibility of LGBT propaganda. When I was on an official visit to Moscow, on that very day the State Duma passed a law banning LGBT propaganda. I guess we will have to pass it too. And that would be the right thing to do. We should not propagandize. We have family values, traditions that we pass down from generation to generation: the traditions of the family, Orthodoxy»

6 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://news.zerkalo.io/life/35880.html>

7 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://reform.by/321551-857-organizacij-likvidirovany-ili-nahodjatsja-v-processe-likvidacii-v-belarusi>

TORTURE IN PLACES OF DETENTION, CUSTODY, AND IMPRISONMENT OF LGBTQ+ PEOPLE AND PEOPLE CONSIDERED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS TO BE LGBTQ+

Insulting people by humiliating LGBTQ+

According to the illegally detained persons, the communication by the security forces was aggressive and insulting.

«There was profanity every second word, every second phrase. That is, it was all the time».

Many individuals have been subjected to insults such as «cocksuckers» and «faggots» - words that insult LGBTQ+ people, in this context equating the detainees with prisoners with "low social status", humiliating LGBTQ+ people even more this way. As a result, the LGBTQ+ people who were detained were even more fearful and unsafe.

- *«I was subscribed to a local gay activist's chat room on Telegram. And they found this chat room and were like: «Oh! So they're fags! They're fucking in the ass!» And everyone was like: «Ha-ha-ha!» Anyway, periodically there were these comments about us being 'faggots', 'fucked in the ass...»*

- *«There was a sergeant there with a baton. I was checking my stuff, and he was like, "Dirty faggot, what the fuck are you doing"»*

- *«One riot police officer started saying, "Man, these faggots and lesbians are going to walk around town. That's what you want.» I said: «We've been walking around the city for a long time already. You're a little late.».*

Insults and humiliations and the use of LGBTQ+ «jokes» are hate speech that leads to and supports violence.

Color, length of hair as a basis for violence and torture:

Also insults [in the form of «jokes»] were used against people with brightly colored hair (red, purple, blue, etc.) or with a certain length of hair::

- *«Then he started making jokes about my hair, I had this pink hair up here, I've dyed it now, and green at the bottom. Started making jokes about my hair being like a rainbow flag, at which point I tensed up, because this boss didn't inspire much confidence. He said: «Well, I certainly don't mind.» But something tells me that if he was against it, we'd be talking differently...»*

- *«I personally got hit, they really laughed at my hair, there were insults like, "Oh, faggot, what's that?, etc.»*

- *«... I had a Mohawk on my head at that point, you could say, and they were always stressing that, too, that I was a faggot.»*

Threatened and/or cut off the hair of people with male socialization. There were cases where hair was cut off with the skin.

- *«...One of the employees started saying that I had long hair, and he told the second employee to bring scissors. They were saying something unpleasant. But no one actually brought scissors, they were just mocking me... As far as I know, it happened that they could cut someone's hair to mock him. In any case it was a mockery. But all they did was just talking. I don't know how much they could have done, it's hard to estimate...»*

- *«They threatened, "Look, hair, so let's cut it off, get a knife.»*

In addition to insults and humiliation, threats were used, relating to both the detainees and the entire LGBTQ+ social group:

- «Suddenly the one we'd already met, the head of some department, burst into the room, shouted something: «What are you, a faggot, as it turns out,» and added that people like me should be killed, something like that, I don't remember the exact wording, but that's how it was. And he left quickly.

- «It's not clear in which cell to put it [the attitude to a trans person], let's take it out to the yard and shoot it. It was repeated several times that they would not keep such bitches like me: «Into the yard - and shoot», «Into the yard - and shoot», several times each».

Violence because of appearance is a consequence of the patriarchal way of society and the state, the lack of support and promotion of alternatives to development and, of course, the dictatorial regime of the state system. Thus, the patriarchal structure of the state is particularly evident in situations of torture and violence. «Not appropriate» appearances become grounds for the use of violence, as well as exemptions from responsibility (both in «calm» times as well as in legal defaults). More often than not, violence that is committed because of a «wrong» appearance has an underlying hatred of LGBTQ+ people, since, for example, a girl with short hair is immediately perceived by the enforcers as a lesbian and a man with long hair as a gay man, while people can be of different identities. Transgender persons, non-binary people are perceived by the state as something unknown, ridiculous, which also causes a reaction of increased psychological and physical violence.

Clothing and personal belongings as a basis for even greater use of torture

The colors of a person's clothing, which, according to the law enforcement officers, did not coincide with their stereotypical division into «male» and «female,» according to the victims, caused aggression and insults:

- «During the search they found red socks. This officer said that I was a faggot because I had red socks, that I should be "forcibly transferred to cell with "roosters"¹, that I was about to be sent to the cell with prisoners with such status, they would rape me there and make me one of them because of these red socks".

- «I had an LGBT bag hanging in my room. There was also lube. For them, it was also like, "Oh, they fuck in the ass...».

1 A concept of criminal jargon referring to a person occupying the lowest rung in the prison hierarchy – people who were forcibly made passive homosexuals.

While detaining people at an event with different people in attendance, one guy with bright makeup was given women's shoes:

- *«There was a guy there, when he asked for shoes - he was one of the people from the LGBT community there - and because he had such a bright makeup, they said they would only bring him women's shoes. They only brought women's shoes and didn't give him men's shoes.»*

This suggests that since society accepts that makeup is «feminine,» if suddenly a masculine person dyes his hair, wears make-up, or paints nails, this immediately equates him with the LGBTQ+ community, which is a humiliation in places of detention, confinement, and incarceration. LGBTQ+ people are more vulnerable in detention and prison than cisgender heterosexuals or people who look «normal».

- *«One cellmate had a diary taken away that he kept...he was worried that when they took him away, there was a painted nail or he had somehow bet that a friend would paint his nails, and he was worried that if they took him away with his nails still painted, there would be some problems. And the guards who took his diary, they read it. And at the next inspection they asked whose diary it was, they asked if he was gay, because it was about painted fingernails... All this with swearing, of course».*

The personal belongings were also grounds to believe that people were LGBTQ+. For example, if people looked masculine but had «feminine» items and supplies with them, they were «suspected of being homosexual,» which increases the risk of violence in places of detention and custody:

- *«...when they were doing the inventory, when they were going through my backpack, I had this little slanted pocket on the front. I was like, "You be careful, there's strings in there." The woman doing the inventory was like, "Are you gay?"*

- *[attitude towards transgender] «They were looking through all the things that were there, found sanitary pads, to which they asked, «What do you need them for?» At first with surprise, then with laughter.»*

Forced Coming Out, Outing

The attitude of law enforcement officers toward illegally detained people

was exacerbated especially if people were forced to come out (e.g. trans people), or when personal correspondence, photos - which spoke about people's sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as HIV status - were discovered during the inspection of phones. Thus, the experience of detaining a transgender throughout all procedures (from the moment of detention to release), shows a clear transphobia:

- *«The guy who has HIV, they knew his status. They said he should be burned together with this house, threatened... For example, one guy had his HIV status revealed... he was also there with his boyfriend. They even made a case against him for allegedly infecting him forcibly. That's a felony. They were taken to an investigative experiment».*

- *«He started like this, "So you're one of those? You promote sodomy and perversion here,» he said. Started asking questions. Like, what are you, active or passive? Ran up and down the floors, telling everybody we had a gay guy in custody, that's it. Like, he started saying something to me: «The state teaches people like you for free". Well, it was scary, of course, very scary. I felt bad, let's just say I had some kind of condition, I even wanted to vomit, so. It lasted about an hour, even more.*

Transphobia in places of detention. Once law enforcers find out the gender identity of detainees, they begin to receive so-called «special treatment,» which is expressed in the form of humiliating questions, insults, and threats. Sometimes it may come to physical violence.

- *«I mean, how is that you have a male name? So, you're a guy?», «Come on, I don't believe it, I mean, is it a guy?» They take a closer look, they're like, «What do you mean? Are you sure you're a guy?», «Did you or did you not have surgery yet?», «Don't get that wrong, it's a guy, you gotta go to the men's room,» with the comments: «I'm shocked myself, what nonsense it is, look who we are detaining, look at this, this guy», «Let's put him with the guys, see what happens», «Put him with the guys, they will teach him/her how to behave, they will figure it out, it will be fun, he wants to be a guy - now we will show him guys», «Now we will put you in a cell with real convicts. Let's see how you get fucked, and whether you're a guy or a girl».*

- *«I'm a transgender, I have breasts. I was told with foul language: 'Fuck you, you called yourself a guy, don't fuck around, if*

you are such a guy, then strip down to your underwear, we don't give a fuck...' They continued to discuss it all, passing it on to others who didn't have time to see what I had there, I have breasts».

Threats of sexualized rape

It is worth noting that often, when law enforcement officials believed that a person was LGBTQ+, threats of sexualized violence were immediately used against them. For example, the bright color of a person's hair for law enforcement officials means that the person is LGBTQ+:

- *«You cocksucker, we're going to fuck you in the ass.»*
- *«[after they noticed that my long hair was blue] «that's it, now we're going to put batons in your ass, now you're going to get raped,» and he calls the second OMON officer. A couple is standing over me, insulting me, saying that they're going to rape me and saying, "We need to call Tolik, he's our chief proctologist".*
- *«I was sitting on a chair, he [the enforcer] stood next to me, put his hand on my neck, started stroking my neck and face, and said, "You're such a beautiful boy, we like them here". «Now,» he says, «I'll take you into the other room. Five of us will fuck you there, and then I'll call your wife to come and get you, and we'll fuck her in front of you, and we'll see what you tell us, what you say, what you deny, and basically see how you behave under the circumstances".*

Linking LGBTQ+ people to drugs - this comparison is based on a primitive view: if people belong to one «marginal group,» then they belong to other «marginal groups». For example, if a man has HIV, then he is gay; if he is gay, then he is a drug user.

- *«In the police bus they thought I was a cocksucker, a faggot, there for some reason he started asking me about drugs, 'How do you feel about it, do you use it, don't you?''»*

Use of physical violence for being LGBTQ+

Once law enforcement officials learned that those illegally detained were LGBTQ+ persons or made these assumptions based on their stereotype-based perceptions, physical violence was often used against them, sometimes in conjunction with threats of sexualized violence:

- «Then they brought a girl. As it turned out, the girl was transgender, I don't know how to say it right. They started mocking her, saying that 'he's a faggot. It was the CYP staff... he didn't know what to do, how to act... He asked someone - and that person (we weren't allowed to turn our heads, I don't know who), said: «faggot too, handle like a man.» They put him face to the wall and started beating with a truncheon.»

- «But one of the employees in a balaclava was acting like a complete scum. He thought I was a man... He jumped up to me, grabbed my arms and started pushing me into the opposite wall. He kicked me in my butt. My hands hurt and ass-kick was very offensive and humiliating. He started yelling, "Why are you standing here? You have to stand with men". I kept quiet. And the girls started yelling, «This is a woman. He turned around, told me to take off my mask, I did, and he said he was shocked".

- «At that time everyone was beating me, because some guy of 40+ years of age came into the paddy wagon and said, "Oh, have fun, guys, you can do whatever you want today". After that they wanted to rape me, «Oh, let's rape him with a baton!» My fingernails were painted black. One of the riot policemen asked the other, «Fuck, is that even normal, is he some kind of faggot?»

- «The second time he did really well, because I didn't even expect it. He just hit my head against the car. A couple of times he hit me, he hit me in the stomach, he hit my legs, but not with a truncheon, but with his own boots, because they saw the shirt, they said that if there were sperm crosses up on the shirt, it meant that I was gay. And then they said that no one was here, we'll make you gay, we have batons, we can even do it without batons... And they said that «they can make me suck them».

Testimonies of physical abuse for being LGBTQ+, including speculation and assumptions based on appearance:

- «Here's one girl says she was brought in with a baton, she grabbed it from some riot police officer there, and they brought her in with a baton, and when they were taking her in the van, the riot police officer took out Vaseline and said: «Do you know what this is? We're going to rape you here, we're going to take you into the woods, all of us.» She said: «And I'm a lesbian,» and he was like, «Eww, we don't

rape people like that.» There were a lot of people there that were talking about rape, like, «Let's rape her altogether,» something like that. They kicked her in the legs, she had something wrong with her ligaments".

- *«One guy was assumed to be gay, and they beat him up badly and called him 'faggot.' At one point he went quiet, they said it was a problem and started taking him somewhere and then we couldn't hear him anymore.»*

- *«There was a guy in our jail cell who had pictures of him kissing his boyfriend, and they called him a pervert. I couldn't see what was going on there, because I was facing the wall. But the bus was wobbling from the beating. I mean, I don't know what was going on there, but I saw him beaten up, and he was driving on in the hitch the whole time. They wouldn't even let him go".*

Many victims confirmed situations where more violence was used against LGBTQ+ people, people who looked non-normative.

Sexualized violence

Sexualized violence against LGBTQ+ people is often combined with acts of verbal and physical homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and other phobias. Sometimes people from the LGBTQ+ community are targeted precisely because of their identity². People against whom the enforcers used threats of sexualized violence feared real action because there were such actions. According to one victim, after the enforcers were convinced of her sexual orientation, psychological violence followed, then physical violence, and then sexualized violence.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet also attests to this: «Our findings confirm the rape of detainees and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence against both men and women.» Bachelet continued. - The medical records examined by the OHCHR (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights) indicate the presence of injuries to the male genitals. The detainees were also subjected to psychological pressure, including threats of rape»³.

Victims of sexualized violence are at great risk of developing psychological and physical illness because it is one of the most severe degrees of violence.

2 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://pcar.org/about-sexual-violence/lgbtq>

3 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://news.un.org/ru/story/2022/03/1420122>

CONCLUSIONS

LGBTQ+ people often experience fear and discriminatory attitudes different from the general population:

- 1) Danger of being «exposed» (fear of outing), of being forced to reveal oneself by reporting sexualized violence (fear of going to the police, of speaking publicly about sexualized violence).
- 2) Risk of transphobic, homophobic and biphobic responses from social services (psychologist, psychiatrist, gynecologist, urologist, etc.) and victim services, law enforcement agencies, legal and medical female workers and other systems;
- 3) «Everyday expectation» of violence because of sexuality or gender identity that will not be punished or will be called «bullying» (disproportionately punished).

Thus, LGBTQ+ people living (or having lived) in Belarus are discriminated against on a daily basis, hate speech is often used against LGBTQ+ people, crimes against LGBTQ+ people are punished as «hooliganism» and are perceived by society as «right» and/or «necessary», and violence by security forces is encouraged by the state. All this makes it impossible to live in the

country. Stress levels are increasing, especially after the events of August 2020. People were subjected to violence for the color and length of their hair and nails. People were humiliated, insulted, and physically assaulted for their clothes and personal correspondence and the contents of their bags. People were subjected to different types of torture because of their identity, which was revealed through illegal detentions, searches, and coercion to give personal information.

This attitude is exacerbated by LGBTQ+-phobic publications in the media and public statements by representatives of the regime, which actually contain signs of offenses, crimes, but are not punished - incitement of hatred, threats, insults, and humiliation: Azarenok (host of pro-government shows, propagandist)¹, Gladkaya (pro-government propagandist)², Shunevich (former interior minister)³, Dzermant (pro-government philosopher, publicist, political scientist)⁴, Mukovozchik (publicist, propagandist)⁵, Kochanova (chairwoman of the Council of the Republic, regime worker)⁶, GUBOPiK headed by Ananenko (subdivision of the Interior Ministry)⁷ and others.

This reinforces and sustains LGBTQ+ phobia both in society and in the state. Hence the lack of proportionate and fair punishment for LGBTQ+ hate crimes in the context of legal default, the lack of punishability, the feeling of permissiveness because of all these LGBTQ+ representatives suffer more often. The very fact of being detained becomes a huge stressor, which includes everyday fears of outing, high levels of violence, and lack of support, because it is not known what the views of people who are detained together with LGBTQ+ people are.

Thus, LGBTQ+ people had a fear of being tortured by two sides: the state and society.

At the same time, we should respond to LGBTQ+ phobia sharply and directly by speaking out against violations of the rights of LGBTQ+ people. We can already respond to hate speech in the media and give public and political space to LGBTQ+ people, because in a democratic society, human rights apply to all people in society.

1 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://euroradio.fm/ru/raduzhnoe-znamyaya-sodoma-provlastnaya-propaganda-osedlala-temu-gomofobii>

2 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://by.tgstat.com/channel/@lgbelarussegodnya/19066>

3 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://kyky.org/news/dyryavye-lgbt-i-nravstvennyy-mvd-chto-nagovoril-igor-shunevich-v-epichnom-intervyyu-na-tv>

4 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://news.sb.by/video/lgbt-propaganda-navyazana-politikami-evropy-dlya-otvlecheniya-lyudey-ot-realnykh-problem-dzermant.html>

5 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://www.sb.by/articles/kak-solntse-otpravilos-vsypat.html>

6 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://www.belta.by/society/view/zakon-o-zaprete-propagandy-lgbt-mozhet-pojavitsja-v-belarusi-542513-2022/>

7 Retrieved 05/01/2023 from <https://www.dw.com/ru/gospropaganda-i-hejt-kak-rezhim-lukashenko-travit-lgbt/a-60587900>



**You can support
our work on Patreon**