



**Christian Lesbians in Europe  
Telling their Stories**

**Randi O. Solberg (Editor)**

A Project of the European Forum  
of Lesbian and Gay Christian Groups

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# Let Our Voices Be Heard!

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# BELARUS

*Population:* 10,1 Mio

*Area:* 207.595 km<sup>2</sup>

## Part 1: Laws concerning Homosexuality

*Forbidden by law:* No

Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1994 for the first time. The Law Code in force at the moment was passed in 2000. The only homosexual acts that remain criminal are those that violate the consent of the sexual partner.

*Age of consent:* 16 for homosexual and heterosexual acts

*Registered partnership/marriage:* No

*Anti-discrimination law, protecting lesbians/gays (L/G) against discrimination:* No

*Other groups in society protected through such a law:* Belarusian legislation contains one constitutional provision against discrimination, as well as a few anti-discrimination provisions in other individual laws.

Article 22 of the currently effective Belarusian Constitution states: "All are equal before the law and have the right to equal protection... without any discrimination". The constitution doesn't describe the social characteristics on whose basis discrimination is prohibited.

As of late 2002, anti-discrimination texts exist in the following laws: The Labour Code (prohibits discrimination in the exercise of rights and responsibilities of labour relations), The Law on Free Economic Zones (prohibits discrimination in the sphere of commercial rights), the Law on Military Doctrine (prohibits discrimination of Belarusian citizens in foreign states), the Law on Social Welfare of Handicapped Persons (prohibits discrimination of handicapped persons).

There is no special law against discrimination. Sexual orientation is left out of the list of social characteristics on whose basis discrimination is legally prohibited. In other words, victims of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation have no right to protection.

*Incidents that briefly describe the situation of L/G in society:*

Report on murder, persecution and discrimination of gays in Belarus during 2001- June 2003, prepared by the "Belarusian League for Sexual Equality (BLL) on September 6<sup>th</sup> 2003:

In spite of the fact that Belarusian gays are not subject to imprisonment for voluntary homosexual acts any more, as they were in times of the Soviet Union, unfortunately there is next to no progress with regard to homosexuality now. Homophobic attitudes, suspicions and prejudices are still very strong. According to the survey held by BLL in April 2002, 47% of questioned Belarusians think that gays should be imprisoned. It is not surprising that hate crimes against gays are common, and some famous officials remain openly homophobic.

Below is the report of the cases known to us of persecution and discrimination of gays in Belarus during the period of January 2001 to June 2003. This is only a small visible part of the iceberg of crimes, as most gays and lesbians still fear to speak openly about the crimes committed against them.

2001:

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April the dead body of pensioner Alexander Stephanovich, a known gay man in Minsk, was found in the yard of the apartment block where he lived. His body had been stabbed with knives all over.



In the night between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of May the activist of BLL Andrei Babkin was badly beaten and raped at the entrance to his flat, and subsequently was taken to hospital with severe injuries.

In the early morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July the owner of the gay club "Oskar", Ivan Suchinski, 30, was killed. The club was closed by the authorities in February 2002 and Ivan tried to seek civil remedy against unfair actions of the police. 6 cases of murder of homosexuals were reported in Minsk, and parts of their bodies were scattered around the city. To this day the police has not found the murderers.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July the police in Minsk detained and beat up Andrei Scherbakov, one of the founders of BLL.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August an unidentified person broke into and vandalised the flat of the BLL activist Andrei Babkin where flyers, posters and booklets of the festival "Gay Pride 2001" had been kept.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of November in Molodechno, the leader of BLL Edward Tarletski was seriously assaulted, which resulted in a brain concussion, diagnosed at the hospital where he was rushed to and had to spend seven days. The police refused to take actions in connection with the assault saying that "it was impossible to find the criminals".

2002:

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of February in Zhlobin (Gomel Region) the dead body of the 34 year old accountant Victor Kovyl was found in his parents' flat. He was openly gay both at work and in public. The police refused to give the details of the murder to Kovyl's partner Alexander. One of the members of the police said to him: "It serves you right, sodomites (faggots)!".

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of February in Gomel the police detained and beat up the activist of BLL Roman Myshkovski. During the action called "Chain of Those Who Care" Roman had carried a gay rainbow flag.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of March the leader of the biggest oppositional organisation "Young Front" Pavel Severinets, issued a letter published in the media, where he called homosexuality "a death worthy sin and perversion". According to Severinets the fact of the existence of homosexuals is "the result of the spoiled and sinful world".

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of April an assault and beating of gay men took place outside the gay club "Babylon". According to witnesses a group of skinheads (10-12 men) who attacked 3 visitors of the gay club ran away before the police arrived. Among the victims was Edward Tarletski, Chief Editor of the gay magazine Forum Lambda and leader of BLL.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June in the town Kommunar of Buda-Koshelyovo, district of the Gomel region, three unidentified men heavily beat and raped the local resident Dmitrii L., 18. The victim was taken to the reanimation ward of Gomel Regional hospital where he spent 2 weeks.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of August before the festival "Gay Pride 2002" the leader of BLL and Chief Editor Edward Tarletski was called to the City Department of the Minsk Police where he was told that in case he organised a gay parade in the streets of the city, the police would not take any responsibility for possible disorders. The police also threatened Tarletski with criminal prosecution in case of a street demonstration like the one in 2001.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October at 10 pm Edward Tarletski, the leader of BLL and Chief Editor of the magazine Forum Lambda was seriously assaulted outside his flat entrance on his way home. Four unidentified men asked him if his name was Tarletski and started beating him. That night he was taken to the hospital. He had a broken shoulder and three teeth smashed.

Minsk Police started a criminal case in connection with the murder of Mikhail M., 50, whose mutilated body was found in his flat on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November. According to the police this was the 5<sup>th</sup> murder of this kind committed in the capital of Belarus.

In December the administration of the Belarusian State University in Minsk banned access to all gay internet resources in the computer classes of the university.

2003:

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January Roman Myshkovski, activist of BLL, was attacked and badly beaten outside his house. With a jaw injury Roman was taken to Minsk Institute of Traumatology.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of February Edward Tarletski, leader of BLL and Chief Editor of Forum Lambda was beaten by unidentified persons near his house. Edward was taken to hospital with a head injury and a great number of bruises on his body.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of March the administration of the internet café "Soyuz Online", the biggest and most popular internet-café in Minsk among gays, blocked the Belarusian gay and lesbian website "Apagay".

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of March the security guard of the night club "Budda-Bar" in Minsk heavily beat Yuliya Yukhnovetz, volunteer for Minsk Pride, only because she kissed a girl in the club hallway. She was taken into hospital where she was diagnosed with internal head injuries.

In April the activist of BLL and radio journalist Roman Myshkovski was called to the KGB of Belarus where it was demanded of him, in the nature of an ultimatum, to give the names of all gays and lesbians who work in the State Tele-Radio Company of Belarus. KGB officials told him that the state would not guarantee him protection if he refused to cooperate.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May an unknown hacker broke into the Belarusian gay and lesbian website "Apagay". He deleted all the topics of the site's forum and introduced a new one containing an appeal to kill gays. In addition during the downloading of the APAGAY.com homepage the notification "gays must die" and "stop gays in Belarus" appeared on the screen. The hacker's action was followed by telephone calls to the members of the website team with threats of physical violence.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of May the administration of the European Humanitarian University in Minsk banned the showing of the documentary film "Outlawed" about the discrimination of gays and lesbians abroad. The film show had been planned for the *Amnesty Film Festival*, which should have taken place at the University. According to the University staff the ban was made under pressure of the Russian Orthodox Church.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of June Edward Tarletski, leader of BLL and Chief Editor of Forum Lambda, addressed a letter to the state company "Minsk Postal Service" asking to explain why all international correspondence of BLL, Forum Lambda and Tarletski is always received open and damaged.

## Part 2: Situation in the Church(es)

*Open L/G welcome to*

*Eucharist: No*

*Do volunteer work: No*

*Work as ordained ministers: No*

*Other employment in church(es): No*

*Partnership blessing possible: No*

### Part 3: Christian Lesbian/Gay Networks

No specifically Christian network exists.

For information about Belarus:

Amnesty International LGBT-Belarus: [amnesty@tut.by](mailto:amnesty@tut.by)

*Questionnaire filled in by Amnesty International -LGBT Belarus*

Anastasia (20), Roman Catholic

## Daring to enter an unmapped tropical rain forest

I am a student. I was born and still live in Gomel, South East of the capital Minsk. It is close to the boarder with the Ukraine in the South and Russia in the East. Gomel is the second biggest city in Belarus. The whole area was seriously damaged after the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986.

I had just become 14 years old when I first started to visit a Catholic church. Because my parents were not baptised, not much attention had been paid to my religious education. Nevertheless, to my joy, they reacted not only with understanding but even with a certain measure of approval.

The word fell unto fertile ground and the ideas of the church soon became fundamental principles of my life. I had found what I had been looking for: answers to questions that had tortured me. Around me there were many people and especially friends who shared my opinions and further deepened my religious commitment. Already I could not imagine life without the church and her postulates. The preparation for my baptism I took very seriously. As consciously as possible I tried to find access to the meaning of the secret into which I was to be initiated. The baptism seemed to me to be the most important event in my life. At this time the further outline of my life had already been determined, so I believed. I would turn eighteen and become a nun. Even the order had already been selected.

Around this time (I was 16) and in this mental state I met a woman, and I was forced to make a decision that wasn't easy to take. I had to choose between a path that was known to me and one which resembled that of a young girl walking through an unmapped tropical rain forest. Combine them I could in no way as the uncompromising attitude of the church towards homosexuality was well-known to me. The choice to be made was undoubtedly a difficult one. On the other hand it resulted in a thorough searching of my own soul the outcome of which restored my balance and finalized my point of view. Many moments which I before hadn't understood and which had lain strewn about like the pieces of a mosaic, suddenly fell into place and formed a completely new picture. Then followed a state of complete inner harmony which I could not negate.

I lived with that woman for four years and there wasn't one moment when I doubted the rightness of my decision. Concerning my current relationship with the church I might say that it is very contradictory. On the one hand I understand that I absolutely need the Church as a means of communication with God. On the other hand I can't accept the fact that it treats homosexuality as a satanic phenomenon. At this given moment I don't go to church because I can't accept such a negative attitude towards something that is part of my life. I don't dispute the fact, though, that the Church has greatly influenced the way I feel about the world.



To my mind there are few possibilities in this regard as long as society doesn't acknowledge the fact that homosexuality is neither pathological nor a disease, but a normal phenomenon due to the special psychic condition of some people. Just like the mindset of Europeans differs from the mindset for instance of Asians and nobody gets it in his head to call the Asian mindset pathological, so homosexuality should also be handled. We don't need reservations. What we absolutely need, though, is the acknowledgement of homosexuals as normal members of society, for that is the minimum a human being needs to feel him- or herself to be in harmony with their own life.

For Belarus this problem is extremely typical, because the policies of our government towards homosexuals are getting ever more extreme. To broaden the attitudes of society, to reach a more ethical approach towards homosexuality, we will need decades. I believe that it is to a great extent related to the economic conditions in this country. For if people are using all their strength only to survive there is hardly any energy left to develop the morals of society and its ethical and cultural foundations.

*Translated from Russian to English by Ernst von Waldenfels*

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