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# Defiant Russian LGBT+ alliance silenced by authorities vows to 'change this shameful reality'

Wednesday 28 April 2021, by [MILTON Josh](#) (Date first published: 3 April 2021).

**An LGBT+ social media page followed by tens of thousands of queer [Russians](#) and allies blocked by authorities has vowed to continue fighting for equality.**

The Alliance of Straights and LGBT for Equality page on VKontakte, Russia's most popular social network, was removed on 19 March at the behest of the country's communications regulator for "promoting non-traditional sexual relations".

Now, those hoping to speak openly with friends and fellow activists are met with a blank page that reads: "This index of the page of the site on the internet contains information, the distribution of which, is prohibited by a court decision in the Russian Federation."

Representatives of VKontakte wrote in a [public statement](#) that the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media, otherwise known as the Roskomnadzor, ordered the platform to take down the Alliance's page or else face fines.

"The regulation of social networks in Russia is tightening," the statement read, referencing new laws that force social media platforms [to censor content deemed illegal by the state](#).

With some 32,000 followers, the Alliance was one of the network's most-followed LGBT+ pages. It acted as both a bulletin board for news and protests as well as a forum for queer folk and allies to chat.

Aleksei Sergeev, the Alliance's coordinator, told PinkNews: "We knew it could happen any day." He reflected how it feels as if almost "every LGBT+ activist or initiative who make public activity about LGBT+ rights" is eventually squashed by the so-called "[gay propaganda law](#)".

"We want to change this shameful reality where the LGBT people are second-class citizens," Sergeev added.

"We demand equality. We want to make Russia a more tolerant society without homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity."

## Why was the page taken down?

After the page was abruptly removed, it emerged that the Roskomnadzor had used a two-year-old district court ruling against the group that the Alliance's operators were completely unaware of.

In 2019, prosecutors petitioned the Metallurgical District Court of Chelyabinsk to strip the page

from VKontakte – judge Anastasia Zalutskaya ruled in their favour.

She wrote that the page “clearly promotes non-traditional sexual relations, namely homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexual relationships, transgender people,” and creates “a positive image of public order violators and a negative one – of law enforcement officers”, according to [court documents](#) seen by [Paper](#).

In doing so, Zalutskaya wrote, the group was “denying family values”. No specific examples of these breaches were provided in the decision, however.

It is understood that the entire decision was made without the Alliance’s knowledge. None of its associates appeared in court – recorded in filings as “absent”.

The Alliance confirmed to PinkNews that its attorneys are aiming to appeal the court decision.

The Alliance was founded in 2012 to remind Russias that “LGBT+ rights are not just an LGBT+ issue, but they have friends and allies in their struggle”, Sergeev recalled, at a time when Russia was steadily chipping away at civil rights.

Working from St Petersburg, volunteers of the Alliance desperate sought to stop – or even just slow – a rumoured law that would prohibit the “promotion” of homosexuality completely.

Members packed the streets of the conservative heartland, holding Pride flags, megaphones and one another, in protest.

But within months, lawmakers [banned passed the “gay propaganda law” in 2013](#) – codifying the decades of persecution, discrimination and worse that queer people have suffered into law.

In the eight years since, the Alliance has staged “hundreds” of street demonstrations, whether they be in far-flung mining towns or major cities, with many of its picketers detained by police.

Its members brave the cold – and the threat of prison and fines – not to earn a paycheque, Sergeev said, but for their “enthusiasm” for the cause.

To Sergeev, president [Vladimir Putin](#)’s government peddles “homophobic policy” to stoke further hatred.

“LGBT+ people in Russia are constantly facing discrimination, homophobic bullying and aggression,” he said.

“You can be insulted, humiliated, fired, beaten and killed for being gay. Hate crimes against LGBT+ people often go unpunished, the police do not investigate them.”

Over the years, Russians have increasingly seen their social media restricted and surveilled. Last year a [student was threatened with expulsion](#) for being part of queer social groups, while [high school teachers are instructed to “monitor” pupils’ pages for “LGBT+ propaganda”](#).

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**Josh Milton**

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**P.S.**

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