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Військові ЛГБТ: the Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ union in uniform

Thursday 27 April 2023, by [LE TRÉHONDAT Patrick](#) (Date first published: 25 April 2023).

The Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ community in uniform is angry. The Ukrainian Minister of Defence does not support the draft law No. 9103 on same-sex “partnerships”. Oleksiy Reznikov stated that the bill is contrary to the Constitution. The Ministry of Defence also expressed dissatisfaction with Article 14 of the bill, which proposes to grant commanders (chiefs) of the military “the right to draft and certify the registration act of a registered partnership in cases where one or both registered partners are military personnel”. The LGBT military union Військові ЛГБТ denounced these statements. According to the LGBTQIA+ rights association “the armed forces and national guard, where about 1 million people currently serve, could have 50-100,000 people belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community”. For Viktor Pylypenko, head of the trade union “Ukrainians are ready for gay marriage ... polls show that 82% of Ukrainians support the participation of the LGBTQIA+ community in the fight against Russian aggression, and 64% think that the community should have the same rights as other citizens. First of all, to marriage.

In 2022, in its annual report, the LGBTQIA+ centre Nash svit [Our World] reported that 16 cases of violations of the rights of members of the LGBTQIA+ community by military personnel of the Armed Forces, as well as by paramilitary formations, were documented. Fifteen of these cases involved violations by military personnel, and in one case the perpetrators were representatives of the municipal guard. Other assaults were likely to have occurred but were not recorded, partly due to the victims’ self-imposed silence. An estimated 10 per cent of LGBTQIA+ adults enlisted or volunteered in the military after the large-scale invasion of Russia began.

The LGBTQIA+ Military and Veterans Association was founded in 2018 by Viktor Pylypenko, an openly gay veteran who fought in the ranks of the Donbass Battalion. He came out during Anton Shebetko’s exhibition “We were here”. Currently, Військові ЛГБТ reportedly has over 300 openly LGBTQIA+ soldiers members. Its goal is to achieve equal rights with other Ukrainian citizens. In 2018, she marched in the Pride March, organised by Kyiv Pride [1].

In its founding statement, Військові ЛГБТ set itself the following goals:

Our association defends the values proclaimed by the Dignity Revolution (EuroMaidan). Our goal is to ensure that the LGBTQIA+ community has the same rights as any Ukrainian citizen, including the right to marry, the right to found a family and the right to non-discrimination. In addition to enforcing our rights, we demand the building of an inclusive and egalitarian society, including minorities and groups of citizens who respect the laws of Ukraine. It is through the struggle for equality that our society will become more humane, inclusive, overcome prejudice and come closer to the ideals of a free European Ukraine. We participated in the revolution on Mayan and have been fighting the Russian occupier and his supporters since the beginning of the unrest in Donbass in 2014, like many other Ukrainian citizens. So why should we remain second-class citizens?

An exhibition in Kyiv

In November 2022 the photo exhibition “LGBTQIA+ for the defence of Ukraine” was held in Kyiv. For Olena Globa, the organiser of the exhibition, such events should be held to increase the visibility of military members of the community, as well as to fight stereotypes: “In general, the idea of photographing our LGBTIQ+ warriors came to my son. He himself is gay, lives in America, but was at one time a well-known LGBTQIA+ activist in Ukraine. He had to leave because he is openly gay. He made a speech even in the Verkhovna Rada [parliament]. As a result, he received many threats, he was even attacked in the street by ‘brave’ fighters who were defending the so-called traditional values.” “Our LGBTQIA+ children are now fighting. Their sexual orientation does not prevent them from defending their homeland on an equal footing with their heterosexual compatriots. And why, sharing all the burdens for their homeland, can they not share equal rights? Why are we still debating whether or not to vote for gay marriage? These people are now risking their lives and they believe in Ukraine. We parents, who are mostly heterosexual, all have rights, but not our children. It’s very sad,” Olena adds.

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Footnotes

[1] See “Kharkiv Pride” [Support to the Resistant Ukraine No. 12](#).