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News | 17.05.2017

Chechnya

The Atrocities On Our Doorstep

On 1 April 2017 an article was published in the Russian independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta, reporting that over one hundred men, gay or perceived to be gay, had been abducted and detained in the autonomous Republic of Chechnya in the Russian Federation, as part of a coordinated campaign. This imprisonment was allegedly organised by the Republic`s authorities and security forces on the direct orders of the President of Chechnya, Ramzan Khadyrov. Novaya Gazeta reported that the abducted victims had been mistreated, tortured and forced to disclose the identity of other LGBTI individuals; it was also reported that at least three men had been killed, two as the result of treatment in custody and one killed by his family in a so called “honour killing”,

These initial reports have been separately confirmed by Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group, both of which cite on-the-ground sources that confirm that men perceived as gay have been targeted for detention by the police and security forces. Victims largely refrain from seeking justice, as they fear retaliation by local authorities. Those who perceived to be gay are particularly vulnerable due to strong societal homophobia and risk falling victim to honour killings by their relatives.

What has made these revelations even more despicable has been the claim made by Chechen government spokesperson denying the existence of homosexuals in Chechnya and discrediting the report as ‘lies and absolute disinformation’. The idea that the Chechen leadership would deny the very existence of LGBTI people in their country while simultaneously pursuing an agenda of wiping them out is an atrocious act that Europe cannot stand back from.

Today, the Greens/EFA are urging the Russian authorities to respect that the right to freedom of assembly, association and expression are universal and apply to all people. We’re calling on them to ensure legal and physical protection for victims as well as human rights defenders and journalists who have worked on this case. Those that have been detained under this brutal regime must be released immediately.

In response to the claims of honour killing within families, we're calling on the Chechen but also on the Russian authorities to adhere to domestic legislation and international commitments. It is vital that they uphold the rule of law, promote equality and non-discrimination and universal human rights standards, including for those from the LGBTI+ community.

Following the shocking vote from the Russian parliament to reduce the level of domestic abuse protections in their country, those who wish to commit such heinous acts within their households have been given a clear signal that their government is willing to look the other way. We strongly condemn this change in legislation and call for a revision of the decision.

Since the revelations of the horrific crimes perpetrated against gay men in Chechnya (latest sources even speak of some lesbian women being persecuted), it has become increasingly clear that the European Community must take action. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, also known as the UN Refugee Agency, have stated that refugees from an LGBTI background are particularly vulnerable [1], stating that "that legislative, social, and cultural discrimination against LGBTI persons is pervasive globally, and that such discrimination significantly impedes UNHCR's LGBTI-focused protection efforts... Offices also reported that laws of general application, including laws pertaining to public decency, marriage, and sex work, may be disproportionately applied to target LGBTI persons. Even where legal protections exist for LGBTI persons, some offices noted these protections may not be guaranteed in practice."

We're calling on the European Commission to work with international human rights organisations and Russian civil society to help those who have fled Chechnya and to bring this campaign of abuse into the open. Furthermore, we're calling on EU Member States to consider increasing resettlement spaces for victims, journalists and human rights defenders from Chechnya and to organise direct resettlement of those fleeing because they fear for their own safety.

These atrocities cannot go on. The Greens/EFA will continue to fight for equality for all – be it within the European Union or anywhere else. Nobody should be targeted for who they are or who they love. It is now that we have to stand up and give a voice to all those targeted because of their sexual orientation. Not only today, but every day.

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[1] https://www.boell.de/de/node/289777

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