

Interview with Denitsa Lyubenova: Bulgaria's LGBTI crisis and what the international community can do to help

[Blog](#), [Civil Rights and Freedom](#), [Legal Protection](#), [Anti-LGBTI](#), [Anti-propaganda Laws](#), [Bulgaria](#)

Amidst growing oppression, Bulgarian activists rally for LGBTI rights and call for European solidarity

Bulgaria has [recently passed a draconian law](#) banning "LGBTI propaganda" in schools, echoing similar legislation in Russia and Hungary. This has sparked widespread fear and uncertainty within the LGBTI community. To shed light on the situation, we spoke with Denitsa Lyubenova from [Deystvie](#), an organisation at the forefront of the fight for LGBTI rights in Bulgaria.

A community in shock and resilience

When the anti-LGBTI law was swiftly passed, the shockwaves were immediate. "It happened so quickly," Denitsa recounted. "Within just one day, everything changed. The environment in the country turned hostile almost overnight." The sudden enactment of the law, coupled with the overwhelmingly negative media coverage, has left the community reeling. "People are scared, and there's a deep sense of hopelessness," she explained. Many activists, who have spent years pushing for incremental progress, now find themselves grappling with a wave of despair. "Everything we've fought for feels like it's been shattered overnight," Denitsa shared.

Despite the grim outlook, the resilience of Bulgaria's LGBTI activists is evident. In response to the law, organisations and activists have mobilised quickly, organising protests and petitions, and rallying international support. Denitsa emphasised the critical role that international bodies like the European Parliament and the European Commission must play in exerting political pressure on the Bulgarian government.

The legal battle ahead

One of the most pressing challenges for the LGBTI community is the legal harassment they face. Denitsa's organisation, along with others, has formed a legal team comprising 16 professionals, including university professors and community members, to strategise their fight against the law. "We've built a strong team to brainstorm ways to fight this law and any future ones," she explained. This team is not just focused on challenging the current legislation but also on preparing for future legal battles.

The situation is particularly dire for organisations like [Single Step](#), which has been targeted with threats to revoke its license to work with children. Denitsa herself has been subjected to police inquiries and investigations, a clear indication of the increasing pressure on visible LGBTI activists. "We've already had to visit the police several times due to investigations into our work," she shared. Despite the severity of these threats, Denitsa remains defiant, "We've been threatened before, but it hasn't stopped us, and it won't stop us now."

Personal toll on activists

The intensity of the situation is taking a personal toll on activists. Denitsa spoke candidly about the strain of being on the frontlines, acknowledging that the past 20 days have been particularly overwhelming. “It’s emergency time,” she said, noting that self-care has become a rare luxury. Despite the pressures, she finds solace in moments of disconnect, like escaping to the mountains, though such moments have been scarce recently. “My partner is a psychologist, which helps,” Denitsa laughed about with a hint of relief. “But the situation demands so much attention that finding time to step away has been nearly impossible.”

Overlooked aspects of the crisis

One aspect that shouldn’t be overlooked in this situation is Bulgaria’s ongoing political instability. The country has seen six elections in four years, creating an environment where far-right forces can push through conservative agendas with alarming ease. “This political instability gives far-right groups a golden opportunity to push their conservative laws and suppress civil society,” Denitsa warned. She stressed the importance of international collaboration to counteract this political crisis “We need to fight this together, on an international level, to prevent further damage.”

Call to action: Support Bulgarian LGBTI activists

Denitsa’s message to European LGBTI organisations is clear: the Bulgarian community needs your support. She urges activists across Europe to [sign the petition](#) launched by Deystvie and their partners, and to help raise awareness about the situation in Bulgaria. “We’re providing pro bono legal support to teachers and school directors who may be sanctioned under this law,” she explained. That is why financial support is also crucial, as organisations like Deystvie prepare for a prolonged legal and advocacy battle. Contributions can be made [directly through their website](#), where details for donations are provided.

This is a critical moment for the LGBTI community in Bulgaria. While the challenges are immense, the solidarity and support from across Europe can make a significant difference. As Denitsa aptly put it, “We have to be prepared for the long run. We don’t know when this crisis will end, but we’re not giving up.”