




NASH MIR (Our World) Gay & Lesbian Center:  
Ten Years Serving Ukrainian LGBT Community



This brochure is devoted to the tenth anniversary of the official registration of Nash Mir (Our World) Gay & Lesbian Center, Ukrainian non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation based in Kyiv.

The contents give brief information about the situation of LGBT people in Ukraine and describe the goals and activities of our NGO.



## **NASH MIR**

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On cover page: Members of Nash Mir with our organisation's rainbow flag



## GLANCE INTO THE CENTRE'S HISTORY

Nash Mir (Our World) Gay and Lesbian Centre began its history more than ten years ago in Luhansk in the East of Ukraine. Beginning at that time a small group of courageous individuals launched a grassroots initiative - an informational and educational magazine by the same name. Through this publication we provided the truth about homosexuals and homosexuality and publicly claimed our rights.

The Constituent Assembly of Nash Mir was held in late 1998. The founders of the organisation set out the following goals:

- > The protection of human rights and freedoms of homosexuals and the improvement of their legal protection at the state level. To further the fight



Nash Mir launching balloon against homophobia in the International Day Against Homophobia. Main square of Kyiv, 2005

against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation;

- > The improvement of society's attitude towards homosexuality and homosexuals. To end homophobia in the public consciousness;
- > The nurturing of self-awareness among gays and lesbians as equal and full-fledged members of society.

However, it turned out that in Ukraine there "wasn't a problem with

homosexuality" as long as it went unseen. At first, local judiciary officials simply did not know what to do with our organisation! Interviewed by a national newspaper, one official said "*How can we recognise them [the organisation] on an official level, as a juridical person? There is no legal basis, though this sort of orientation isn't forbidden, but neither are precedents... If I register them, excuse me, wankers will come,*





*and someone else... And what about morality?" Using far-fetched grounds they refused our registration.*

Certainly we didn't let ourselves be humbled by such obvious discrimination. Nash Mir was registered at the end of 1999. But this success was made possible only as the result of a determined battle by the members of the organization. In this struggle we were supported by Amnesty International; the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA); as



Nash Mir staff train local gay men in Vinnitsa about human rights and advocacy, 2009

well as the International Renaissance Foundation.

Since that time Nash Mir has developed as a full-fledged NGO, focusing our activities along several vectors:

First, it is monitoring LGBT human rights and conducting special studies in this field.

Second, it is furthering the legal education of LGBT community members and providing legal aid to the victims of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

Together with other Ukrainian LGBT NGOs we lobby for equal rights and freedoms for homosexuals on the legislative, political and state level.

Through mass-media and our own publication we work supplying opinion that promotes public awareness and tolerance towards LGBT community.

Finally, we try to support newly formed lesbian and gay NGOs by sharing our skills and knowledge, and by pro-



Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, at the meeting with Nash Mir's representative in Kyiv, 2007



viding trainings and counselling.

During recent years, Nash Mir has organised several seminars and three international conferences in Kyiv.

Nash Mir's publications include reports of research projects we realised, literature on legal education and legislative analysis -- also booklets on HIV/AIDS awareness, tolerance, educational materials, and periodicals.

Information provided by Nash Mir was used in Ukrainian mass-media publications as well as in the reports of Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, PACE Monitoring Committee, U.S. Department of State's Report 2007/08/09, OCSE, U.N. Periodical Review 2008 and other organisations.



Nash Mir's publications



## SITUATION WITH LGBT RIGHTS IN UKRAINE



Homophobia is raising his head in many countries of the world. Unfortunately negative attitudes towards gay and lesbians have been increasing in Ukraine during the past years as well.

In March 2007 at the request of Nash Mir, the TNS Ukraine sociological company conducted a national poll of the Ukrainian population on their attitudes towards granting equal rights to Ukrainian homosexuals. A similar poll was taken in March, 2002. A comparison of the results shows an increased polarization of negative attitudes towards the GLBT community. Over the past five years, the number of people who support granting equal rights to homosexual citizens has *decreased* from 42.5 % to 34.1 %. The number of people who think that homosexual citizens should have the right to

Protester in front of Kyiv municipality [No comments]



register their relations as a conventional couple, has decreased from 18.8 % to 15.8 %. The number of people who think that homosexual citizens have a right to raise children, has decreased from 21.5 % to 17.1 %.

In these social conditions LGBT people often face discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and other hate motivated crimes. In 2005, Nash Mir questioned more than 900 gay people across Ukraine in an attempt to ascertain statistical information and identify the most serious problems facing homosexuals. 54.4% of respondents reported acts of prejudice and discrimination against them on the basis of their sexual orientation. Among those respondents who do not try to conceal their sexual orientation the number reporting discrimination and abuse was much higher: more than 76%. Problems of discrimination and abuse were reported in the work place, in social and educational institutions and with representatives of law enforcement bodies. Most respondents noted problems of discrimination in



"Fagots & drug addicts are the cause of AIDS", "AIDS is fair for gays", and "Perverts get out of Ukraine". Anti-gay picket at main square of Kyiv, 2003

situations which cannot be easily qualified within a legal framework - with relatives, acquaintances and simply with strangers in the street.

Mainstream politicians increasingly oppose the fundamental rights of LGBT people with intolerant language, and their statements go unchallenged by persons in authority. Some of them continue to make highly intolerant homophobic statements. Here is just one example. In November, 2006 Chairman of the Committee on Human Rights, communist Leonid Grach stated, that *"homosexuality is an anomaly, which is caused by the amorality and the depravity of man"*. Later he continued to speak in public in that spirit: *"Me and my colleagues in the Parliament have to protect the society from infringement upon morality, to prevent penetration into consciousness and souls of people of any age the idea that the state is on the side of people who sow debauchery, promote dissoluteness, sexual permissiveness, bringing abomination of corruption of morals into society"*. In the opinion of this MP, *"the state must protect the society from evil, from violence, including such evil as homosexuality, lesbianism and such"*. Unfortunately despite calls from



Nash Mir's advertisement in Kyiv Metro line: "Are you gay?", 2005



Nash Mir to the state and political leaders, no leader from either group censured the homophobic statement by the chief of committee on human rights of Ukrainian Parliament.

All leaders of mainstream faith organisations in Ukraine have now united in opposing the rights of LGBT people, expressing their opposition in disturbingly intolerant language. Recent years also have seen increasing activity by extremist groups opposed to LGBT rights. One such group, *Love against Homosexuality*, since 2007 campaigned for laws in favour of criminal penalties for "propagandising" and "popularising" homosexual behaviour, on the grounds that these were threats to national security.

Indeed, it would be surprising if such statements did not result in even higher levels of violence and discrimination.



Picket organised by Nash Mir in support of a student who was dismissed from University because of his homosexuality. Kyiv, 2005



## LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS



Unfortunately, very often LGBT people do not speak out about violations of their rights, because they are afraid to be open about their sexual orientation as it can lead to homophobic reactions and even more violence against them.

Besides, gays and lesbians along with the majority of the population do

not individually have sufficient legal knowledge nor practical problem-solving skills in the troubling areas of housing, the family, medical issues, military service, employment, commu-





nication with law-enforcement and other organs of the state, etc.

That is why Nash Mir put special efforts into legal education and empowering LGBT community members to report cases of rights violations. We hope that our trainings and publications step-by-step help in solving this problem.

We also try to raise awareness about LGBT people and promote tolerance among the general population and professionals.

One such meeting was organised by representative of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine in Poltava oblast in September 2009. Representatives of Nash Mir met local police officers. "Bible is main law", said one representative of the law-enforcement division. Thus a lot educational work should be done in this direction. This work is sponsored by Open Society Institute.



Meeting with police officers in Poltava, 2009



## PR & NETWORKING

Ten years ago after international pressure on Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, officials understood that they must officially register our gay and lesbian organisation. Still they didn't want to allow us publicity and during an unofficial meeting they suggested co-founders of Nash Mir delete the words "gay and lesbian" from the title of organisation. Certainly we didn't accept that "advice", because as proud homosexual people we created our group to be visible and vocal!

We consider PR as a very important part of our work. Members of our



Speakers at International conference on LGBT Rights, organised by Nash Mir in Ukraine



group many times appeared on TV and in printed mass-media, participated in public discussions, organised seminars and conferences.

During the international conference held in Kyiv in October, 2009 participants coming from different parts of Europe discussed many important issues, such as: Situation of lesbian and gay people in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe; Historical dimension: persecution of homosexuals during Nazi Regime and during Soviet period; Legal measures to combat discrimination; Networking between gay and lesbian groups and organisations of broader civil society.

The conference was organised by Nash Mir in cooperation with Ukrainian Association Amnesty International and Hirschfeld Eddy Foundation (Germany).



Interviews with Andriy Maymulakhin, Coordinator of Nash Mir, in Ukrainian mass-media

## LGBT STUDIES

Nash Mir has long-term experience of monitoring and reporting violations of LGBT people rights in Ukraine. We are doing this work on an on-going basis and at present are the only organization which does such work. But we understand that our efforts are not enough. That is why we now try to pass the experience gained on to other groups, to create a monitoring network and to encourage local activists in the LGBT movement to take part in this important activity. We are willing and able to act as cadre, implementing new spin-offs.

One of the last research studies conducted by Nash Mir in 2009 was devoted to the situation of same-sex partnership. Before that no serious effort was made to investigate social and psychological aspects of gay families in Ukraine. Thus we tried to fill this gap.



"Diva" is dressing before performing on a gay discotheque organised by Nash Mir, the first ever one in Donetsk, 2005



In the Report prepared in cooperation with DonbassSoc-Project, the gay organisation from Donetsk in the East of Ukraine, one can find: 1) social identity of same-sex partners and how identities affect the everyday lives, needs and values of the couple, and 2) legal background factors and how the background discriminates against homosexuals. We understand the Report summed up pilot research; nonetheless for the time being it is useful for understanding the situation, advocating equal rights and as a professional precedent foreshadowing further studies.



This study was supported by ILGA-Europe via its Human Rights Monitoring and Documentation Fund.



“We are here, we are queer, and this is OUR WORLD too!”

## FIGHTING HIV/AIDS

The latest 2009 study of MSM in Ukraine showed that prevalence of HIV infection in this group averages 8.6% (but in three oblasts, Lviv, Odesa and Donetsk, it is two times the average rate -- 19%). At the same time the number of men having sex with men (MSM) in Ukraine is estimated to be between 177 to 430 thousand people.

In this dramatic background Nash Mir in cooperation with the German organization Connect Plus and three Ukrainian partners in 2009 launched Network initiative. The problem which the project attempts to address can be summed up as follows: MSM are frequently reluctant to reveal their sexual orientation to medical personnel, psychologists and other specialists because they fear maltreatment due to intolerant attitudes towards homosexuals. As a result, MSM cannot receive qualified aid -- or such prospective patients/clients fail to seek access to aid altogether.



Seminars with doctors, psychologists and teachers -- within the framework of Network Project. Vinnitsa, 2009



To improve this situation the project aims at creating and developing a network of gay-friendly professionals, to whom representatives of this group may be redirected. Besides, our other goal is to expand contacts within the gay community itself to inform people about possibilities to access qualified aid.

One of the project's local partners is Lyudy Bukoviny, a young gay NGO based in Chernivtsy in the West of Ukraine. It was established at the end of 2008 and Nash Mir's grant was the first funding received by this group. The grant enabled Lyudy Bukoviny to start up and develop its operations, namely: outreach work among MSM, trainings on HIV/STDs prevention, community mobilising and human rights for local gay community, expansion of contacts with professionals - - and finally to sustain its own institutional development.



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For more information please click [www.gay.org.ua](http://www.gay.org.ua)