



Charitable Foundation Sphere: <https://cfsphere.org/en>

Press secretary: Dilya Gafurova, @betweenity, dilyara.gafurova@cfsphere.org

Attempt to Liquidate Charitable Foundation Sphere

A lawsuit has been filed in the Kuibyshev District Court of the city of St. Petersburg by the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation on the liquidation of the Charitable Foundation Sphere, an organization that carries out all of the programs of the [Russian LGBT Network](#). Sphere has been working for more than 10 years, and is an expert at creating and coordinating human rights programs and initiatives to support and help LGBT+ people and their close ones, as well as acting as a partner for other organizations with similar goals.

Sphere was one of the first organizations in Russia to be recognized as a "foreign agent". The Ministry of Justice added the fund to the register back in 2016, since then Sphere has been forced to regularly provide additional reporting on its activities to government departments. In October 2021, Sphere faced an unscheduled inspection by the Russian Ministry of Justice. According to the document on the results of the audit, which Sphere received in December of 2021, the Ministry of Justice believes that gross violations were committed in the activities of the fund. **The claims include "the foundation's intentions to change the legislation and moral foundations in the Russian Federation," as well as attempts to "bring discord into Russian society by acting in violation of the country's Constitution."** Sphere's activity, according to the Ministry, does not correspond to that of a charitable organization and main Russian traditional values.

After the inspection, Sphere challenged the violations listed in the Ministry's act, presenting its objections. In response, only confirmation of having received the objections followed from the Department. **Sphere has not received any instructions from the Ministry of Justice on the need to eliminate the existing violations, as is needed for due process.**

Due to the government crackdown on activism, many organizations contributing to the solution of a wide range of human rights problems, as well as media representatives, are forced to stop their work in Russia - the especially shocking news came at the end of 2021, the liquidation of [International Memorial](#). **In many ways a similar attempt to liquidate Charitable Foundation Sphere is the contribution of the ruling structures in Russia to undermining the entire human rights movement, including the LGBT movement.** After

the start of unscheduled inspections in relation to Sphere, in November of 2021 Igor Kochetkov, the founder of the foundation, and the Russian LGBT Network, a movement whose programs are implemented by Sphere, were added to the registers of "foreign agents". By the end of 2021, the Far Eastern Center for LGBT and Victims of Violence "Lighthouse" and the St. Petersburg LGBT initiative group "Exit" also suffered the same fate. The register of the Ministry of Justice clearly states that Mayak, Exit and the Russian LGBT Network receive funding from the Sphere Foundation - **in other words, these organizations were persecuted among the first ones because their connection to Sphere is the most obvious, which means that legislative actions against them are easier to justify. There is every reason to believe that this trend will continue.** At the moment, the register of "unregistered public associations that are foreign agents" consists of six different organizations, four of them are represented by LGBT initiatives: **it seems that the authorities have created a separate list to suppress the LGBT movement, bypassing the need to name it as such directly.**

As Sphere, we declare: the attempt to liquidate the fund and the purposeful obstruction of the work of initiatives and persons associated with it are a logical continuation of the persecution by the authorities of the entire human rights community of Russia. We intend to fight the liquidation attempt.

Sphere provides legal and psychological assistance to LGBT+ people across the country, supports various initiatives and organizations, provides emergency assistance in crisis situations, and is engaged in monitoring and advocacy. In addition, the foundation promotes public awareness about LGBT+ people and discrimination against them, and makes a significant contribution to overcoming homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in Russian society.

In particular, Sphere is the initiator of [a campaign to counteract the discriminatory law banning "LGBT propaganda"](#), which stigmatizes the LGBT+ community, creates conditions of social hostility and complicates the living conditions of many people. In addition, Sphere has contributed to helping hundreds of LGBT+ survivors of abduction and torture in the North Caucasus, helping them to start a new life in a safe place. In 2017, when the massive nature of these crimes became known for the first time, the representatives of the foundation and their colleagues managed to activate the mechanisms of international investigation and draw the attention of the general public to this problem. At the same time, Russia demonstrated a complete lack of political will to recognize these crimes.

The liquidation of the fund will lead to the termination of all this work, leaving those who previously received assistance without systemic support.