

5 October 2021

## Poland: Trial of LGBTIQ+ rights defender Bart Staszewski

On 30 September 2021, the court of the Zakrzówek Commune (Lublin Voivodeship) was due to consider the defamation case against LGBTIQ+ rights defender **Bart Staszewski**. However, citing technical reasons, the hearing has been postponed until 25 November 2021. The authorities of the Zakrzówek Commune have accused the human rights defender of carrying out a defamation campaign against the Commune, after he placed multilingual signs with the slogan “LGBT-free zone” under the official road signs of the areas that have voted in support of the homophobic bill against LGBTIQ+ ideology in 2019.

[Bart Staszewski](#) is a Polish LGBTIQ+ defender and [documentary film director](#). In 2017, he produced a documentary film [Article18](#) about the Polish LGBTIQ+ community’s struggle for equality. Bart Staszewski is one of the founders of [Lublin Equality March Association](#) and organisers of the [Equality March in Lublin](#), a peaceful demonstration which is met with riots and protests from members of the right-wing every year. He is also member of the [Love Does not Exclude](#), a national non-governmental association which is committed to introducing marriage equality in Poland. His work for the LGBTIQ+ community has been recognized internationally. In 2019 he was awarded the [European Tolerantia Award](#).

On 30 September, the case of Bart Staszewski was scheduled to be heard before the court of Zakrzówek Commune (Lublin Voivodeship) but was rescheduled for 25 November 2021 due to technical reasons. The human rights defender has been accused of defamation against the Zakrzówek Commune in response to the signs ““LGBT-free zone”” he placed in communes who voted in favour of the homophobic bill discriminating against the LGBTIQ+ community and limiting their personal freedoms. If convicted, he may be asked to apologise publicly or to financially compensate the victims.

In 2019, about 50 municipalities in Poland declared themselves “free of LGBTIQ+ ideology”, pledging to fight against “LGBTIQ+-ideology” and to promote and protect “tradition and Christianity”. Bart Staszewski started a project aimed at attracting attention to the homophobic bills and contributing to public discussion about them in Poland. He created a multilingual “LGBT-free zone” road sign and travelled across Poland to take pictures of the names of homophobic towns with his sign and posted photos on social media. The human rights defenders public campaign attracted a lot of attention and several Polish politicians, including Prime Minister of Poland, called it defamatory and provocative. The representatives of Zakrzówek, Tuszów Narodowy and Niebylec municipalities lodged complaints against Bart Staszewski accusing him of defamation under Article 23 of Civil Code.

Front Line Defenders believes that the charges brought against Bart Staszewski are solely motivated by his peaceful and legitimate work against discrimination and in defence of the rights of LGBTIQ+ people in Poland.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Poland to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally cease all attempts of judicial harassment against human rights defender Bart Staszewski and withdraw accusations against him;
2. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Poland, in particular LGBTIQ+ rights defenders, and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate

human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

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