



2ND EUROPEAN LESBIAN\* CONFERENCE  
KYIV, APRIL 2019

# LET'S BRING LESBIAN GENIUS TO THE WORLD!

NARRATIVE REPORT



Photo credit: EL\*C Kyiv - Insight.

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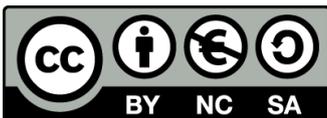
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# QUOTES FROM OUR KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

## MONICA BENICIO

**Human Rights Activist, Brazil**  
**Opening Keynote**

“We, as lesbo-feminists, need to build this revolution horizontally. We need to understand that love among women is revolutionary because it opposes the logic of macho and patriarchal domination.”



Photo Credit: Amnesty International



## ZHANAR SEKERBAYEVA

**Feminita, Kazakhstan**  
**Closing Keynote**

“The LBQ movement of Central Asia is moving towards the realization of its own agendas, their actualization, and understanding of the need for political participation. And this means that we will create political parties and will be promoted to the presidency! It is not easy, but we will go forward.”

## OKSANA POKALCHUK

**Amnesty International, Ukraine**  
**Closing Keynote**

“For Ukraine, this conference is an incredible shift of the paradigm. I could never imagine that the international lesbian conference could take place in my city, in my country; that I would be able to speak my language here. I am overwhelmed with emotions, and I understand that a major shift is happening within me.”



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# ABOUT THE EL\*C

The EL\*C is a collective of lesbian, queer, bi and trans women registered as an NGO, which aims to advocate for lesbian rights in Europe and Central Asia. Driven by the objective of increasing visibility of lesbian issues in all spheres, including the social, legal, health, and political ones, the EL\*C as an NGO has worked during the last two years towards the establishment of a pan-European-Central Asian Lesbian Network.

Our two conferences so far, in Vienna/Austria (October 2017) and most recently in Kyiv/Ukraine (April 2019), represent initial key steps in the long-expected and much needed construction of a strong lesbian movement in Europe & Central Asia that brings together a diverse team. We recognize that, as with any category or label, the term 'lesbian' may be contested and insufficient to describe the diversity of our communities. We are aware that many previous lesbian gatherings and organisations have struggled with inclusion/exclusion issues. However, using the word 'lesbian' is part of the political struggle for visibility, empowerment and representation. Therefore, we deliberately use 'lesbian' with an asterisk in the title so as to include anyone who identifies as lesbian, feminist, bi or queer, and all those who feel connected to lesbian activism.

The EL\*C started as a conference. Based on the recommendations coming from the first European Lesbian\* Conference in 2017, as well as a series of further consultations with the LBQ movements in Europe and Central Asia, our mission is to move beyond organizing a biennial event, and to take a bold step further by building and formally establishing an LBQ Women's Network for Europe and Central Asia. We are currently in the process of establishing a new name and network governance model. From now on, and based on a voting and collective feedback process set up at our conference in Kyiv, the EL\*C will have the following name: **EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community.**

“WE NEED TO TRANSFORM THE TRAUMA,  
AND THE VULNERABILITY INTO POWER. LET'S  
TRANSFORM OUR REALITY TOGETHER.”

Kseniya Kirichenko  
(EL\*C team member, based in Switzerland)



# INTRODUCTION

“Are you scared?!” Olena Shevchenko asked conference-goers speaking from the stage during the opening of the second EL\*C in Kyiv, drawing a chorus of “No!” in reply. “Are you prepared to fight?!” she added, while outside the venue, far-right demonstrators fiercely waved banners with slogans going from ‘We Are Against Gays’ to ‘Homosexuality is a Disease’ or ‘Sodomites go back to hell’.

Yes, the EL\*C was ready for sure, and prepared to fight. The team behind the conference is an amazing group composed of some of the most talented lesbian activists in Europe and Central Asia. From Kazakhstan to Spain, the EL\*Cs are 23 lesbian, bisexual, non-binary and trans women who have been working tirelessly and mainly for free during the first two years of the existence of the EL\*C. In fact, many are in a precarious situation and have invested all their energies in making this project possible. The other part of the team has full-time jobs and is working evenings and weekends on the creation of our lesbian NGO.

In two years, the EL\* C has organized two major lesbian conferences. The first one in Vienna, Austria, with 500 participants. The second in Kyiv, Ukraine, with 350 participants. To continue this work, to extend it, to create a lesbian network, to connect and transform our lives in Europe and in Central Asia, we need to find more consistent support. We need to count on all of you, on your resources, on your skills.

**“WE ARE PROUD DYKES AND WE WILL NOT STOP FIGHTING UNTIL THE LESBIAN MOVEMENT IS REBUILT.”**

Dragana Todorovic  
(EL\*C team member, based in Serbia)

Protesters outside the EL\*C venue in Kyiv are crowding the front entrance, holding up signs that read: ‘Homosexuality is a disease’, ‘Go back to hell sodomites’, ‘We are against gays’. The police are preventing them from coming into the hotel lobby.  
Photo credit: Alice Coffin



The EL\*C conference organising team.  
Photo credit: EL\*C Kyiv - Insight.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The EL\*C Team is deeply grateful to all those who have made this journey and fight possible so far. In particular, we would like to thank those who have supported us in making the second European lesbian conference possible this April in Kyiv, Ukraine.

The team was deeply involved in the planning process and managed to provide full support during the conference in Kyiv.

Without the relentless involvement of our 23 team members, the conference would have been impossible. In alphabetical order, special thanks to:

Aurora Baba, Patricia Bell, Silvia Casalino, Alice Coffin, Rhonda D'Vine, Anastasia Danilova, Henrie Dennis, Faika El-Nagashi, Marta Fernandez, Kika Fumero, Evgenia Giakoumopoulou, Biljana Ginova, Dettie Gould, Kseniya Kirichenko, Leila Lohman, Joëlle Sambu, Gulzada Serzhan, Olena Shevchenko, Mohira Suyarkulova, Evien Tjabbes, Ilaria Todde, Dragana Todorovic and Karima Zahi.

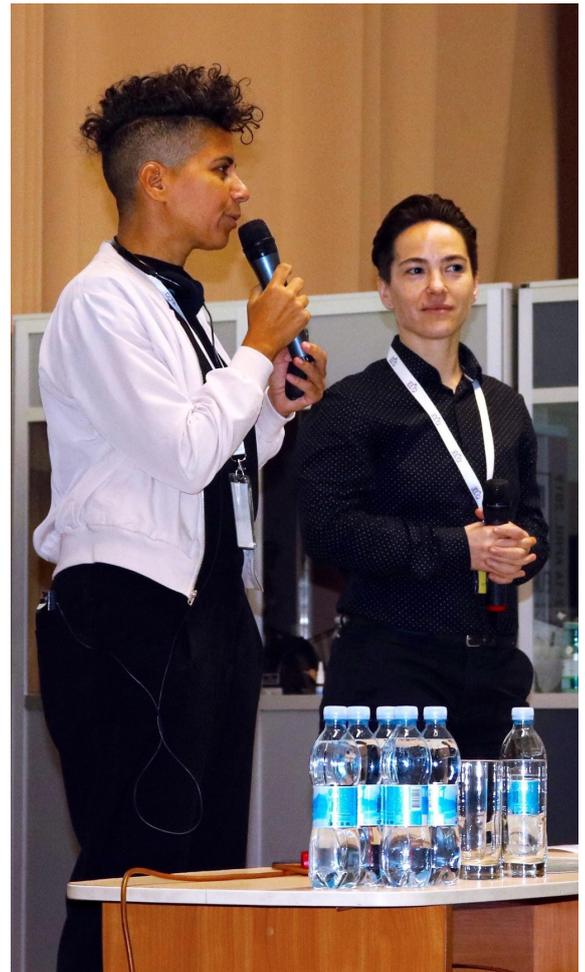
**WE ALSO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK OUR LOVERS, PARTNERS, WIVES, GIRLFRIENDS AND FRIENDS & FAMILY FOR PUTTING UP WITH US AND FOR THEIR AFFECTION, LOVE, AND SUPPORT!**

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Insight, the host organization in Ukraine, demonstrated true leadership both during the planning phase and during the conference. We are deeply grateful to Insight staff for all the going back and forth on so many details (impossible to elaborate here), and for making sure that everything was being taken care of on the ground. Insight was key in building a good relationship with hotel staff and security personnel, both crucial to our wellbeing during the conference.

Insight also helped with setting up a group of outstanding volunteers who provided support throughout the entire event.

Our onstage/plenary hosts Faika El-Nagashi and Olena Shevchenko must be thanked for their dedication, passion and political awareness. They represented a powerful force, joining together and sharing the mic to make us laugh, cry, think and question. Our rapporteurs, Evgenia Giakoumopoulou, Evien Tjabbes and Mohira Suyarkulova did an excellent job at collecting and feeding back many of the exchanges that took place over the course of the event!



Conference hosts Faika El-Nagashi and Olena Shevchenko. Photo credit: EL\*C Kyiv - Insight.

From the start, it felt important to ground the conference where it was taking place and we decided to have it in Russian, Ukrainian and in English.

Oksana Pokalchuk reflected on the meaning of language and identity in her closing remarks, "I will be speaking in Ukrainian, because to me, it is an extremely important part of my identity, as a woman from the post-Soviet space, namely from Ukraine. I am part of the community that was colonized and oppressed, whose language was prohibited and announced inferior (...). It is so important to me to speak Ukrainian at the European Lesbian Conference. Because this is a testimony to the fact that I exist in this culture, that other lesbians exist, and they speak out about themselves in their language on their land."

In turn, we relied heavily on the work of translators and interpreters throughout the entire event. Aside from professional translators, we would like to thank the many volunteers who provided translation support throughout the workshops and beyond.

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The EL\*C would like to especially acknowledge the tireless work of Leila Lohman, Silvia Casalino, Ulyana Movchan and Svetlana Malysheva who managed together, during several months, to build a four-day conference for 350 participants.

Last but not least, we would like to thank all of the conference participants, keynote speakers, panelists, workshop leaders and artists. We also want to extend our thanks to our funders and to our media partners for their continued trust and support! Some have been behind us since the beginning, others have stepped up more recently, and we are grateful to all!



Insight staff and volunteers.  
Photo credit: EL\*C Kyiv - Insight.

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# BRINGING LESBIAN GENIUS TO THE WORLD: RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the course of the 4-day conference in Kyiv, we heard about many of the empowering projects taking place throughout Europe and Central Asia, and we also discussed the strengths and potential challenges we face as a lesbian movement, both within the lesbian space, the LGBTIQ movement and beyond. In this section, we highlight the many recommendations coming from the conference. These **recommendations** are meant to be seen as a roadmap to help guide the future steps of the EL\*C and the European and Central Asian lesbian movement more broadly.

## STRENGTHENING OUR MOVEMENT & RALLYING OUR COMMUNITY

- **Diversify forms of activism** in order to reach out at the grass-roots level, to allow lesbians not currently engaged to find their way to contribute to the community.
- Make better use of the **skills and resources within the community** by appealing to the expertise of lesbians from different professions; and tackling a wider range of thematic issues of concern to members of the movement.
- Ensure better **representation** of youth groups and empowerment of youth in the movement; consider establishing a teenage support group that can be contacted via social media.
- Set up **mentorship projects**, and create an activist academy (potentially online) for (younger) lesbians\* who would be interested in engaging in activism or generally working on lesbian related topics, but who don't know where to start.

"THERE IS A VIEW THAT IN ORDER TO RECEIVE HELP, AS A WOMAN WITH A DISABILITY, SHE MUST HIDE HER PSYCHOSEXUAL ORIENTATION. THIS RESULTS IN THEIR DOUBLY DIFFICULT SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SITUATION. THEREFORE, COMBINING THESE PERSPECTIVES AND SHARING LESBIAN SKILLS IN OTHER FEMINIST MOVEMENTS, IN FAVOUR OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AND LGBT PERSONS IS NOT ONLY IMPORTANT, BUT ALSO NECESSARY. DISABILITY HAS A GENDER AND WE SHOULD TALK ABOUT IT."

Aneta Bilnic

(Conference participant, disability rights activist, based in Poland)

## BUILDING OUR MOVEMENT TO INCREASE OUR IMPACT

- **Forge strong alliances**, notably with feminist movements and the broader LGBTIQ movement, with the goal of building solid coalitions based on a common understanding of the intersection of racist, patriarchal and capitalist systems and the necessity to act jointly against all the forms of oppression they generate, including militarism, (neo-)colonialism.
- Set up a network and list of **emergency contact points** both in the countries of origin and destination countries to help coordinate speedy and safe evacuation processes when needed in case of persecution perpetrated against LBQ women.
- **Reclaim the streets**, including at night: organise walks or sit-outs at night, and/or create platforms for discussions on the notion of safer space and our relationship with darkness as queer women (both metaphorically and physically).
- **Deconstruct the strategies** and narratives of opponents, notably of the so-called anti-gender movement. And better understand the long-term impact of their rhetoric and politics.
- **Combat lesbotionalism**, a phenomenon which consists of governments, states, and/or political parties instrumentalizing lesbian struggles and agendas to promote a racist, classist, islamophobic, xenophobic and/or anti-migrant agenda; resist pink-washing and the commercialisation or instrumentalisation of our cause, our communities, events, and activities.
- Work with the **education sector** to ensure education is inclusive and democratic.

“BEING A LESBIAN MAKES US BETTER PROFESSIONALS.”

Alice Coffin

(EL\*C team member, based in France)

## REVAMPING OUR FUNDRAISING WORK

- **Improve and diversify fundraising strategies for lesbians**; think bigger and out of the box; engage with donors that do not yet support lesbian projects; join forces with existing lesbian structures, including informal ones, in order to have access to more resources; develop intersectional fundraising strategies; seek out individual donations from people across Europe - wealthy private donors but also symbolic monthly or annual membership contributions from the members of the EL\*C (aiming to gather a base of 1 million lesbians\*); explore the idea of social entrepreneurship, in such areas as tourism, event planning, agriculture, lesbians who tech, etc.

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- Consider asking for pro-bono work and contributions in kind from carefully chosen, ethical companies that may wish to support the creation of the new network but that would not want to or are not able to give monetary grants.

## INCREASING OUR DATA COLLECTION & RESEARCH

- Call on International and European institutions, such as the UN, the EU and the Council of Europe, to **conduct surveys on issues and experiences vital to LBQ communities**, and collect comparable and disaggregated data within the LGBTIQ population, in order to devise targeted and more efficient preventive measures and propose adequate solutions to lesbophobia.
- Reflect on how to reach more lesbians and **obtain increased representation**, keeping in mind that urban people with an academic background tend to be overrepresented. Issues of language, internet literacy, or otherwise might limit access to virtual platforms or exacerbate isolation and lack of connection to the community, etc.
- **Improve dissemination of information** by asking trusted organisations or entities to relay surveys and increase the likelihood that people take part.

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# HOW DO WE DO IT? LESBIANS IN EASTERN EUROPE AND UKRAINE

## EASTERN EUROPE

Overall, even where lesbian activists are leading the national LGBT movement, the lesbian agenda itself remains invisible. In some countries (for example, Russia) there are no institutionalised lesbian groups. In other countries (for instance, Moldova), there could be only one LGBT organisation for the whole country, and therefore separating the lesbian agenda (focusing on lesbian issues aside from the common LGBTIQ movement) was not feasible. Therefore, even when led by lesbian activists, the movements in these countries are often still associated with the 'gay' agenda. At the same time, in many countries, traditionalist and right-wing movements have become increasingly active in attacking women's rights, LGBTIQ rights and lesbian rights, with lesbian rights' activists representing the most threatening combination of both feminist and sexual rights activism in the eyes of patriarchy.

## UKRAINE

Ukraine was the host country for ELC\*'s 2nd conference, with Insight as the host organisation. The decision to organize the 2nd conference in Kyiv was made based on a number of important aspects:

- visibility for the Eastern European context within Europe
- accessibility for participants from Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- empowerment of lesbians from Eastern Europe and Central Asia



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Ukraine as a country carries significant geopolitical importance. Taking into account its geographical location, the annexation of Crimea, and the development of a human rights framework in a post-Soviet space, we saw a unique possibility for the Ukrainian lesbian movement to become visible on the European map. Lesbians in Ukraine represent an invisible group, which suffers from multiple forms of discrimination, based on gender and sexuality, without any access to resources. Ukraine is going through difficult times identity-wise. This process is complex and includes a number of negative developments, especially when it comes to gender oppression and 'nationalistic' discourse. Conservative movements against gender equality unite efforts with ultra-radicals, which affect the visibility and safety of women, especially of lesbians. This conservative radical agenda is trying to censor lesbian issues (issues of women, gender and sexuality). For these reasons, it was a crucial moment to bring a unique and important event such as the EL\*C to Kyiv and to put Ukraine at the center of the lesbian movement.

**“LGBTIQ WOMEN CHALLENGE THE HETERONORMATIVE MODEL IN FIGHTING AGAINST MISOGYNY AND PATRIARCHY.”**

Anastasia Divinskaya

(Conference participant, UN Women, based in Ukraine)

## CENTRAL ASIA

At the second EL\*C conference, Central Asia was included in the official name of the network. This was important for activists from the region, because it is crucial to recognize common experiences, issues and the need for solidarity with the countries of Eastern Europe and other post-Soviet republics. Central Asian lesbians want to be included in the European movement on equal footing, and it is strategically important that this region is not held to a different set of standards when it comes to women's rights and LGBTIQ rights. The purpose of Central Asian lesbian participation in the conference was to discuss the state, priorities and future of the direction of the lesbian movement in Central Asia and the possibilities of building international coalitions and solidarity in the framework of platforms like the EL\*C. As a result of formal and informal discussions during and after the conference, it became clear that there are a number of contradictions and challenges standing in the way of a consolidated lesbian movement in the region.

Firstly, despite lesbians being the backbone of LGBTIQ activism in Central Asia, activists there often lack the resources, time and energy to dedicate to forming and pursuing an lesbian-specific and context-sensitive agenda. Burnout, security issues and lack of womenpower are the major issues for all activists, including for Central Asian lesbian activists.

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Secondly, it is hard to form a movement in a context where few women publicly identify as lesbians due to a number of issues. To begin with, many women only start forming loving relationships with other women in their late twenties and thirties, after they have been in a heterosexual marriage and have had children following the pressures and expectations of the patriarchal societies. Additionally, 'lesbian' being a foreign and a highly stigmatised term, does not resonate with women-loving-women in the region and there is a lack of an adequate local equivalent. Moreover, visibility as a lesbian in Central Asia cannot be a priority in the context of state-sponsored homo- and lesbophobia, widespread forced marriages and corrective rape, economic dependence and insecurity, discrimination at work, in access to healthcare and in education.

In the light of our discussions, it appears that the most productive avenues for the movement formation in the region lie in the mobilisation and empowerment of the community and in articulating an agenda for action that is rooted in the regional context and needs while recognising the shared global challenges. The EL\*C can become the platform for these discussions, building international alliances and conducting international advocacy. Central Asian lesbian activists hope to host the EL\*C conference in their region soon!

# EL\*C 2019 DYKE DATA

## CONFERENCE DATA

With 350 participants, the EL\*C in Kyiv was sold out one month before the start of the conference. Overall, the participants were from 42 countries from all over the world, with a majority from Europe and Central Asia. Thanks to simultaneous interpretation throughout all the plenary sessions and whisper interpretation during the workshops, the conference was fully translated into English, Ukrainian and Russian.

Like at the first conference in Vienna, for this second edition, the commitment to having an inclusive and diverse conference was among the top priorities for the EL\*C organizers. From the beginning, the EL\*C chose to support the participation of individuals and NGOs from Eastern European countries (46% of the entire EL\*C participants).

In parallel, the outreach and grant making policy encouraged and supported diversity with regards to ethnic background and

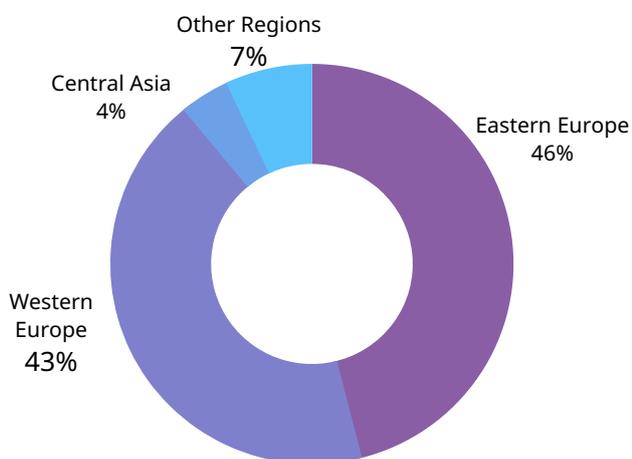
representation of minorities such as People of Color, Central Asians (4% of the global participants), and lesbians from the Balkans and Turkey, Latin America, and North Africa.

The EL\*C, with the help of donors, was able to invite 65 full scholars (incl. keynote speakers and panelists), 20 partial scholars (i.e. entry fee, meals and hotel), and 80 Ukrainian scholars and workshop leaders (i.e. entry fee and meals).

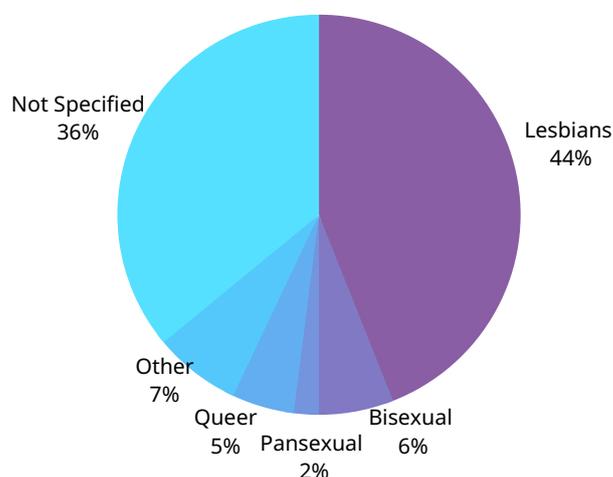
Additionally, several decisions were made:

- To elaborate a policy on diversity regarding selection criteria for workshop leaders, panelists, and keynote speakers.
- To keep a low participation fee, 70 Euros for a regular registration, 40 Euros for students & unemployed, and free for all the speakers (around 160 people).
- To present a cultural program & themes linked to diversity.

Participants by region



Sexual orientation among participants



Based on the analysis of all registrations (350 participants), using the Eventbrite Online Questionnaire, we find that around half of the participants did not specify their sexual orientation and gender identity. For the rest, 4% declared they identify as lesbians, 6% bisexual, 5% queer and 2% pansexual.

## CONFERENCE EVALUATION FORM FEEDBACK

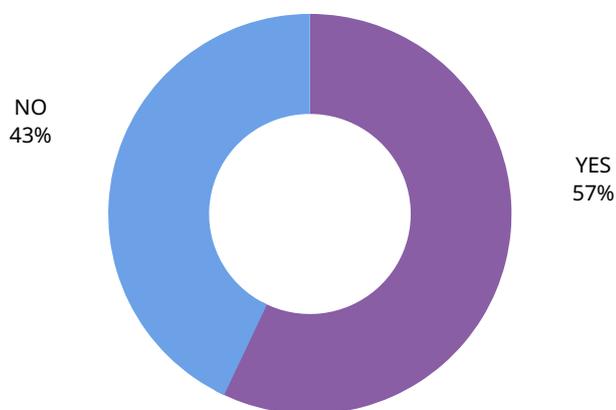
Following the conference, the EL\*C team sent an evaluation form to participants asking for feedback on the program, logistics, the representation of diversity and the overall organisation of the conference. The results were overwhelmingly positive. The EL\*C team also asked for qualitative comments on each aspect. In total, the EL\*C collected 80 completed evaluation forms. These will be fundamental to improving our future work both around the conference organisation and the network creation.

Here below is an overview of the results from the conference evaluation forms. Additional details can be found in the Annex 1 of this report.

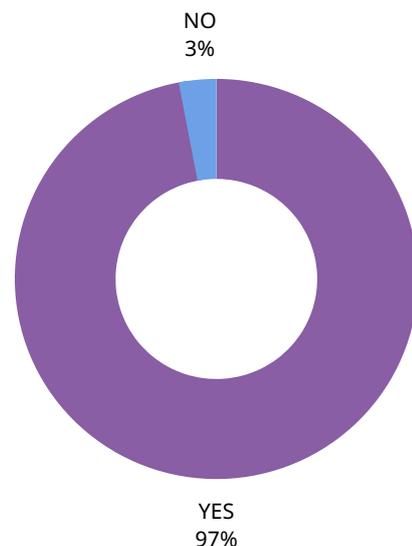
## THE EL\*C SURVEY ON LESBIAN\* LIVES IN EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA

The conference in Kyiv presented an opportunity to share the work the EL\*C has done since the first conference around data and research, and since it came out with its first report on lesbian lives[1]. This work was motivated by several reasons, mainly due to the lack of existing lesbian focused data and information, produced by lesbians. As a consequence, there is a void in available information surrounding lesbian lives and realities. For this purpose, in our survey, we decided to pay attention exclusively to lesbian communities.

Did you participate in the first European Lesbian\* Conference in Vienna?



Would you like to participate in the next conference?



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The survey and questions took some months to elaborate. The dissemination process was also thought through with the hope to reach lesbians across Europe and Central Asia and across all social and political spheres. At the time of the conference in Kyiv, the survey that was launched a couple of months before had generated 1,102 answers.[2]

Some preliminary survey results which were sometimes troubling were used by the team members throughout the conference to argue the importance and need of such events for lesbians. And while the survey results demonstrate the urgency to continue researching and producing information to grasp lesbian realities, there is a serious lack of funding; hence, the conference also served as a platform to call for an increase in resources to produce more data. Being able to carry out our survey and research in more depth implies institutions being aware of our precarious situation and allocating funds to lesbian projects and NGOs.

Lesbians in Europe and in Central Asia continue to lack the fundamental structures, tools and mechanisms to fight lesbophobia, sexism, misogyny, transphobia and interphobia, racism and all other types of discrimination experienced daily by members of our community. Without funds, it will continue being a challenge to collect the much needed data on lesbians in these regions. Yet, data is needed to draft policies to help improve our lives both as women and LGBTIQ persons.

“WE MUST TAKE OUR LIVES INTO OUR OWN HANDS AND EVERY ONE OF US MUST BE THE MAIN ROLE IN OUR OWN LIFE NOT THE SECONDARY ROLE. AND: WE MUST ALSO BE THE DIRECTORS OF OUR OWN MOVIES!”

Helena Vukovic  
(Conference Participant,  
trans rights activists, based in Serbia)

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[2] Link to the EL\*C survey: <https://goo.gl/forms/duKxQ8qI7HRXOaFx1>

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# NO SINGLE ISSUE STRUGGLE - A REFLECTION ON INTERSECTIONALITY



Photo credit: EL\*C Kyiv - Insight.

## ADDRESSING THE INTERSECTIONALITIES OF OUR LESBIAN LIVES

The speakers were just arriving to take their seats on the first panel of our conference[3] while downstairs, dozens of ultra-right nationalists moved in to block the doors of the hotel, attack us with pepper spray and to perform their ideal of masculinity. They were trying to spread fear and intimidation, all the while the unspoken implications of their violence towards us as lesbians were ever present, known to every woman and girl throughout her lifetime, the force and punishments of patriarchy.

One floor above, we were deliberating the anti-gender movement with its nationalist and religious fundamentalist components – in local contexts of activism and as part of a racist and violent global ideology with an agenda, with a strategy, and with proponents sitting in power throughout national governments.

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## CAN WE FIGURE THIS OUT TOGETHER?

We were faced with the question of how to confront such a reality that manifests itself while we are speaking. That benefits from each division among us, that tries to push boundaries and break taboos, that aims to normalize its transgressions.

When we came together on that first evening of the second European Lesbian\* Conference, we spoke from the point of a political imperative: to not be divided, to understand our movement as a political position, to be in solidarity. And to, at the same time, acknowledge, appreciate, politicize and make visible the intersections of our lesbian identities.

## ALL OF US OR NONE.

What set the tone at the beginning of the conference was reflected in continued discussions and exchanges that we experienced together: as part of the programme in keynotes, on panels and in workshops; and informally through shows of solidarity, self-organized spaces and interventions.

And it was no piece of cake. Because the differences between us matter. Sometimes more, sometimes other ones – and we need the time, the language, the courage and the commitment to address them properly, respectfully and collectively.

So when we come together, do we see who is here? And do we see those who are not here? And can we see the differences between how we are here and the different positions of power and privilege we hold when we are here and elsewhere? And can we then also avoid reproducing our own sets of hierarchies and performing our own exclusions while inventing our own ideologies?

When the conference organizing team came together to conceive and to organize the second edition of a European Lesbian\* Conference – with scarce resources and many rejections, with different backgrounds and experiences, with numerous identities and from various communities, with several struggles and many setbacks – moving beyond our individual positions became crucial. How can we see more than we know? And how to allow for dissent, for conflict and to not let go of each other?

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## PLANETARY UTOPIAS

Understanding where we come from – in a truly holistic sense – was a central contribution to being able to embark on this journey with each other, with almost-strangers. We wanted the conference to enable that: to be a space to meet, to engage, to recognize each other, to agree and to disagree, to learn, to care, to change, to stay.

We hoped, desired and imagined it to be inclusive, accessible, and supportive. We engraved it into the scholarship criteria, we inscribed it into the programming of keynotes and panels, and we carried it in the diversities that are our own.

Throughout the conference, we heard from lesbians from Black, PoC (people of color) and Roma communities who called out racism, exclusion and marginalization; from activists who addressed the injustices embedded in migration politics and border regimes; from human rights defenders from Eastern Europe and Central Asia who have to remain anonymous for fear of persecution; from older lesbians who struggle with poverty and seek to build different forms of support networks and communities; from lesbians with disabilities who are reclaiming their autonomy and sense of agency and are addressing the neglect of disability perspectives within feminist contexts and vice versa; from lesbians of faith who are looking for allies within and outside their religious communities; and from transnational lesbian theoreticians and practitioners who raise awareness about the dangers of falling into a “lesbonationalism”[4] of our own.

We took the stage together for trans\*-visibility and inclusion. And we stood in solidarity with and were moved to the core by the strength and resilience of Monica Benicio, her fight against fascist political parties and against racism, and for justice and the legacy of her partner, politician Marielle Franco, who was murdered a year ago in Brazil.

We hoped, desired and imagined. But we also felt the limits of our best efforts to do so.

“PLANETARY UTOPIAS’ INVOLVES NOT ONLY REFLECTING ON WHAT IS TO BE HOPED, DESIRED AND IMAGINED, BUT ALSO ON THE LIMITS OF OUR BEST EFFORTS TO DO SO. FOR IMAGINING THE UNIMAGINABLE AND HOPING IN THE FACE OF HOPELESSNESS IS PRECISELY THE TASK OF UTOPIAS, A NOSTALGIA FOR THAT WHICH IS YET TO BE, THE NOT-YET.”

Nikita Dhawan (Moving Backwards, January 2019)

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## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

One statement accompanied us through the days of the conference and as a reference was heard and committed to over and over again.

“THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SINGLE ISSUE STRUGGLE  
BECAUSE WE DO NOT LIVE SINGLE ISSUE LIVES.”

Audre Lorde (Sister Outsider, 1984)

We had named the plenary room of the conference ‘Room Audre’, in memory of the self-declared ‘Black, Lesbian, Mother, Warrior, Poet’ Audre Lorde, but we had not expected her to be so present with us and for her words to be so powerfully accurate.

We hoped, we desired and imagined – and we continue to explore the ways in which we can be strengthened by our differences and unified when fighting those who seek to divide us. We embark on an ongoing reflection and we invite our intersecting communities, our genius activists, our sisters at heart to join us in lifting each other up.



Following discussions at the conference around intersectionality, racism, exclusion and power structures, recognizing the diversity of our lesbian\* community and the potential of a unified movement and appreciating the diverse political and personal positionalities and experiences that we carry with us, we acknowledge the need to permanently and integrally address this in the growing network and community the EL\*C is becoming. **Thus, the team decided to set up a permanent working group on intersectionality, inclusion and diversity.**

“YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE ME IN ORDER FOR US TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE EACH OTHER. I DO NOT HAVE TO BE YOU TO RECOGNIZE THAT OUR WARS ARE THE SAME. WHAT WE MUST DO IS COMMIT OURSELVES TO SOME FUTURE THAT CAN INCLUDE EACH OTHER AND TO WORK TOWARD THAT FUTURE WITH THE PARTICULAR STRENGTHS OF OUR INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES. AND IN ORDER TO DO THIS, WE MUST ALLOW EACH OTHER OUR DIFFERENCES AT THE SAME TIME AS WE RECOGNIZE OUR SAMENESS.”

Audre Lorde (Sister Outsider, 1984)

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# MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

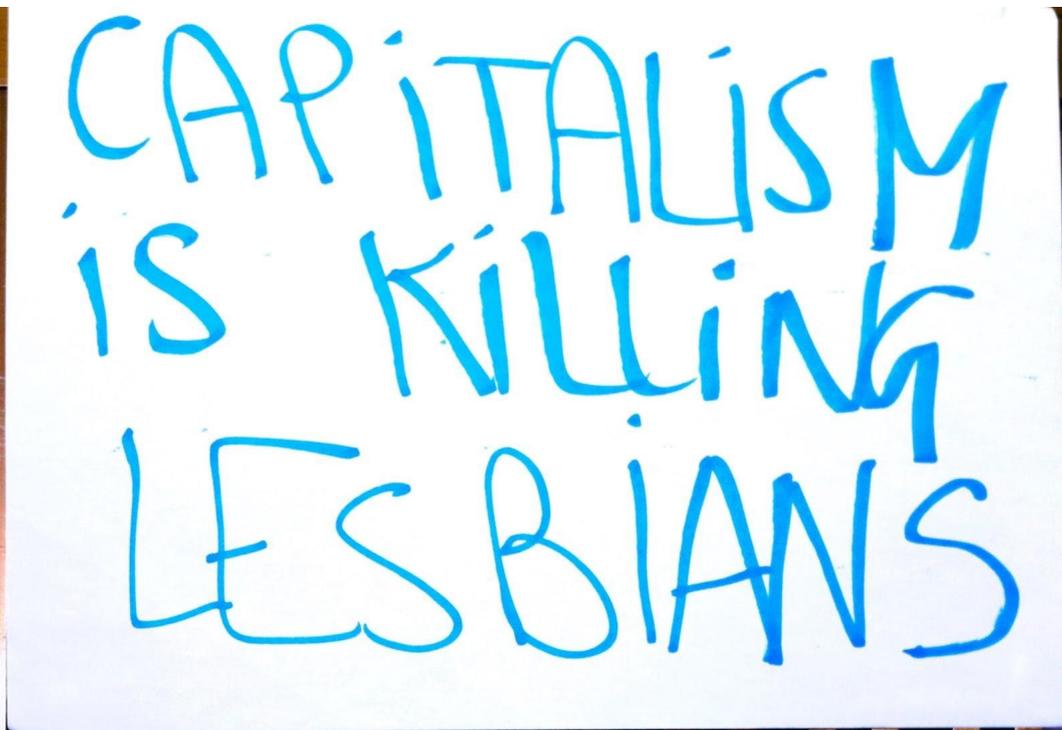


Photo credit: EL\*C Kyiv - Insight.

Here after, a brief synthesis of the economic model the EL\*C put in place in order to organize two major events, the Vienna and Kyiv conferences, to establish a cross-regional lesbian network and to advocate for the rights of lesbians in Europe and Central Asia, as well as the ambitions and economic objectives for the sustainability of the EL\*C project.

After two and a half years of EL\*C activity, the assessment of lesbian resources is still the same: LBQ activists and their organizations are severely affected by the limited access to funding making them one of the most underfunded social movements globally. Only 3% of available LGBTIQ funding goes towards lesbian issues and that value is decreasing compared to previous years[5].

---

EL\*C started fundraising from scratch at the beginning of 2017. We fixed our forecast budget for the first edition of the conference at 300.000 Euros. Drawing from our knowledge and skills, we directed our fundraising requests mainly to:

1. Donors (public and private foundations);
2. NGOs and public institutions in Western Europe;
3. Political parties locally in Austria and at the EU;
4. Private companies in Austria;
5. We wanted to keep the entry fee as cheap as possible, so this specific income only paid for a small fraction of the venue rental.

For the first conference in Vienna (2017), we managed to fund-raise 80.000 Euros approximately. Because of that, we had to reduce the number of scholarships (80 - instead of our initial plan which was to invite at least 300 participants). We were able to pay one full-time salary for the conference coordination for 3 months. All the rest of the work was done on a voluntary basis. The estimation of the unpaid womenpower to organise the conference was equivalent to 3 people working full-time for 8 months. Considering an average salary of 2500 Euros gross, the global cost of the women power was estimated at 60.000 Euros. But, as previously noted, we didn't find any donations to financially support this work.

The continuation of the EL\*C's existence in 2018 was made possible thanks to a seed grant from Mama Cash. More precisely, in 2018, the EL\*C spent around 25.000 Euros mainly for the organization of a team meeting with 25 LBQ lesbian activists and to reimburse 8 to 10 volunteers/ 'dykerekters' sharing 2 full-time salaries for approximately 4 months.

Following the first conference and despite the great success and visibility gained in Vienna (cf 2017 narrative report)[6], in 2018-2019 we only received 3 main donations from international donors of 8.000 + 23.000 + 35.000 Euros respectively. The Ukrainian Women's Fund supported the participation of 50 Ukrainian lesbian activists. The reasons behind this decrease are the following: one of our main donors changed their regional focus, and it was impossible to find private sponsorship in Ukraine. Only the PES (European Socialist Party) continued to support the conference. Regardless, we kept the policy of having a very low entrance fee in 2019.

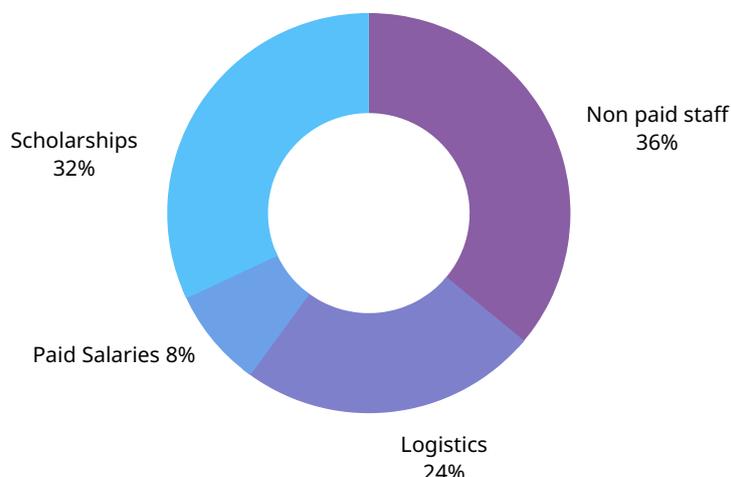
The total cost for the 2nd conference can be estimated, as for the first one, at 80.000 Euros. 30.000 Euros for the logistics of the conference (venue, meals, security, translations, printing). 10.000 Euros for 2 full-time salaries for 4 months that were shared between 9 people. 40.000 Euros for around 160 full and partial scholarships for speakers and board members (incl. travel, hotel and meal). As for the first edition, a huge part of the womenpower necessary to organize the conference in Kyiv was not remunerated. Using the same estimation, we can consider at least 2 full-time salaries for 8 months (45.000 Euros) not covered by any donation.

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[6] The EL\*C 2017 Conference Narrative Report: [https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ELC-2017\\_Narrative\\_Report-1.pdf](https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ELC-2017_Narrative_Report-1.pdf)

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## Kyiv Conference Cost Allocation



### THE MASTER'S TOOLS

To rely mainly on donations or money from foundations or international institutions has a multitude of consequences. One, which is rarely mentioned, is that this forces activists to reorient their strategy and goals towards a language and a practice which is charity-driven and/or fits the narrative established by the political interests of the funding bodies. Such guidelines narrow, shift and sometimes compromise our core values and the effectiveness of our work.

We should be able to critically engage with the prescribed ideologies of funding bodies to effectively create a different world - and not merely operate within the power structures of the existing one. It is evident that money - be it from the philanthropic endeavors of big foundations or through national (or supranational) funding - is embedded in neoliberal systems: from its genesis to its accumulation to its logic of distribution, control thereof and, eventually, reestablishment and safeguarding of power. It is not easy to break this chain. And, as Audre Lorde reminds us: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." At the same time, to have an amazing vision of a better future and the greatest goals, is not enough to achieve concrete change. As Sarah Schulman put it for the ACT UP Oral History Project: "How do you win, if you don't have power? You don't. You simply don't." Thanks to their tireless work, women, and particularly lesbian women, have been able to acquire respect and leadership in all activist movements. But if we want to win, we need to access both money and other types of power structures.

---

While the conservative parties are becoming increasingly dangerous for women and LGBTIQ lives, it is almost impossible to keep fighting for lesbians' rights in Europe and Central Asia without funds. Lesbian spaces, NGOs and informal groups have almost disappeared all over our regions.

## POWERFUL LESBIAN WARRIORS

So, the EL\*C is now embarking on a new challenge: to fundraise 1 Million Euros to achieve three main goals during the next two years:

- We estimate that the EL\*C would need three full-time staff members and one part-time staff member, who would work on the establishment of the EL\*C as a fully functioning membership based network, on building the movement and the EL\*C's sustainability, advocating for lesbians' needs and interests in Europe and Central Asia.
- We want to work on the third edition of the EL\*C conference which we want to keep as affordable as possible while having it in a country where this will be needed.
- In addition, one exciting initiative that we would like to launch soon is what we call "1 Million Lesbians - 1 Million Euros" - a bus tour throughout Europe and Central Asia during which we will try to reach 1 million lesbians to document and record some of their oral herstories (as well as our experiences). The bus tour would be live-broadcasted over a period of a few months. A parallel global crowdfunding campaign would be set up to help complete the task of reaching 1 million lesbians (and 1 million Euros).

Fundraising for a sustainable lesbian movement will take time. We need all the help we can get, and we need to be as innovative and creative as possible in order to be able to do it!

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Supreme Court clash

EUROPE · Published April 11

# an ultra-right spray tear gas over lesbian gathering

is in Ukraine have attempted to derail a lesbian gathering with security guards.

L'OBSESSE avec Rue89

LA VIE MATÉRIELLE NOTRE ÉPOQUE MOOC RUE89

M'identifier

## henko : celle qui voulait que les pays d'Europe de l'Est ne soient pas invités

The largest network of lesbian activists in the Eastern European region call for greater equality and inclusion.

Date: Thursday, April 18, 2019

UN WOMEN

поиск по сайту

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Главная » Новости

Киевляне вышли на майдан из-за конф

NACH ANGRIFF AUF LESBEN-KONFERENZ

11.04.2019 - 20:36

В Киеве несколько человек вышли на майдан из-за попытки проведения Европейской конференции ЛГБТ.

REUTERS

'Are you scared?' conference kicks off in Kyiv

Europe and Central Asia

# #LOVEFORELC - A WORLDWIDE AND MASSIVE MEDIA COVERAGE

The conference generated over 200 media publications. The coverage was intensive, very diverse, and worldwide. In the Annex 2, we include an overview with links to all the publications categorised by country. Ukrainian media produced 80 articles, Russian media 60, and the others were spread between the USA, Canada, and several European countries.

## RESOURCES

Lesbian media strategy is central to the work of the EL\*C. A member of the board was in charge of implementing it over a 4 month period leading up to the conference in Kyiv. Our media strategy was based on contacting all the international reporters based in Kyiv before the conference, in addition to the journalists covering LGBTIQ and feminist issues.

We also ensured the EL\*C's visibility in the media between the two conferences via frequent written published articles, TV or radio interviews.

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## ANALYSIS: GETTING FOX NEWS TO USE THE WORD 'LESBIAN' IN A TITLE!

Some of the world's most powerful media covered the conference, such as Fox News, The Washington Post and Deutsche Welle.

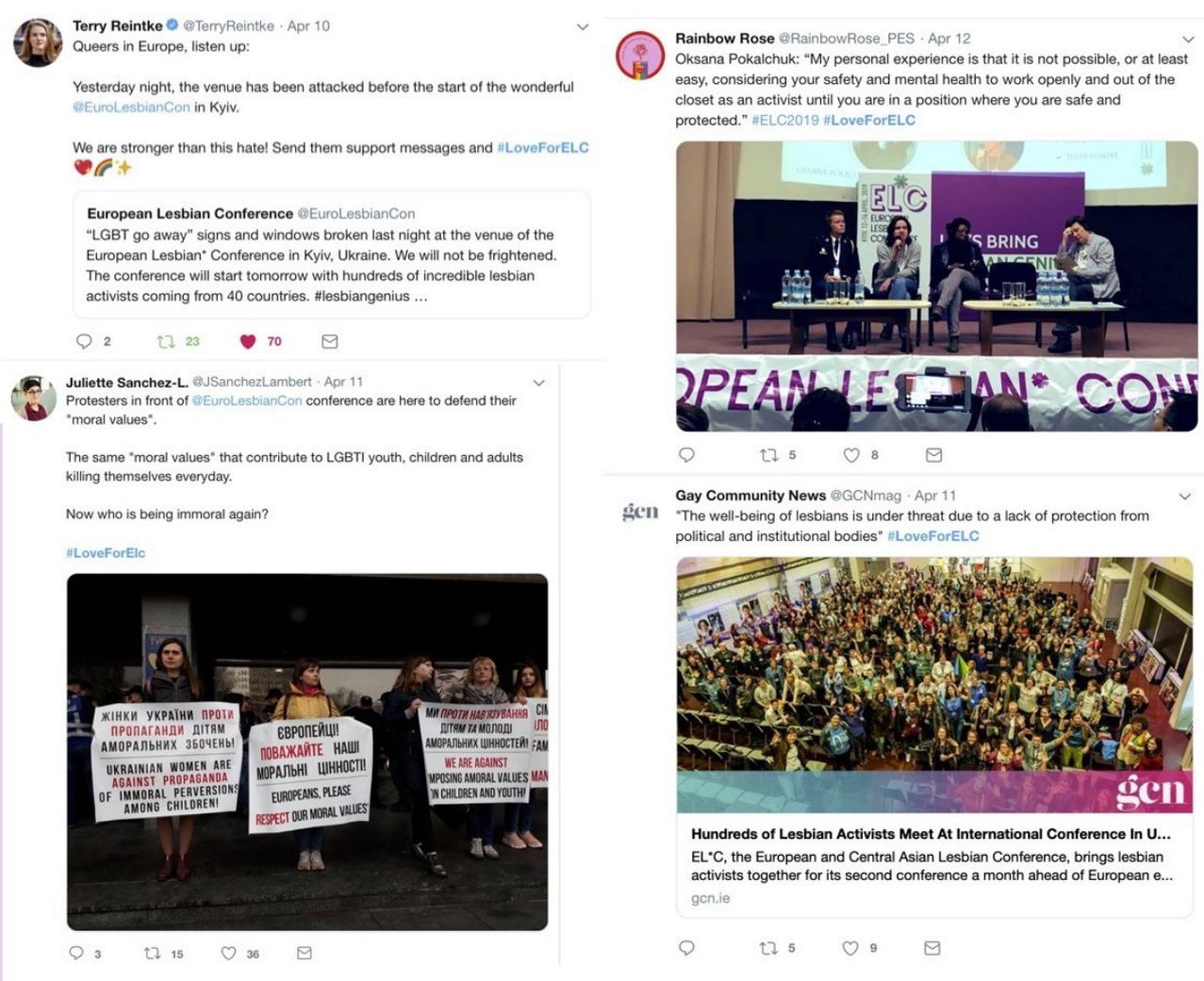
Two explanations for this:

- The coverage of the conference by the press agencies AP and Reuters: Most likely because of the location in Ukraine, a country which was, due to the national elections happening just at that time, on the media radar (which we had anticipated), the conference drew attention from press agencies themselves. This had not been the case for the first conference in Vienna.
- The lesbophobic attacks which gave a 'news' label to the conference: Something was happening. We ensured the interest of journalists through updating on Facebook and Twitter where the conference was massively supported and commented on by LGBTIQ organisations, human rights institutions, politicians, and numerous other allies.

## FROM THE WASHINGTON POST TO LESBIAN PUBLICATIONS

The conference was both covered by massive mainstream media and national lesbian media outlets. Whereas the mainstream media focused on the attacks, the LGBTIQ and lesbian publications were more likely to cover the presence of Monica Benicio. This enabled a variety of coverage from pure news to portraits of and interviews with board members and participants.

The activity on Facebook and Twitter was very high during the conference, with an interest in what was going on with regards to the attacks but also in the events happening inside the conference as some of them were livestreamed. Messages of support (#LoveForELC) and congratulations poured in on Twitter, coming from both big institutions (ref. Annex 2) and from dykes from all over the world.



Collage of screen grabs of the discussions and posts on the EL\*C on social media.

The hashtag #lesbiangenius proved itself very popular.

Photos from the conference can be found on our social media accounts. A slideshow with some impressions is online on our YouTube channel: <https://bit.ly/2QUy3cS>



Photo credit: EL\*C Kyiv - Insight.

## EL\*C INTERVENTIONS, MESSAGES OF SUPPORT & SOLIDARITY

During the Kyiv conference, board members and conference participants took a stand and loudly spoke out in support of an inclusive lesbian movement. The conference provided a space to discuss systems of oppression, to rethink our privileges, and challenge the lurking lesbophobia, biphobia, transphobia, racism and xenophobia that our communities are not immune to, while resisting the trap of falling into a hierarchy of oppressions.

We took the stage in support of Monica Benicio, self-declared 'lesbo-feminist', and wife of Marielle Franco, a councilor from Rio de Janeiro who was brutally murdered in 2018. As Monica explained during her keynote speech, Marielle's case has yet to be solved more than one year following her murder.

Her full speech can be read here:  
<https://bit.ly/2EXk4hK>

#EuSouPorqueNósSomos  
#WhoOrderedMariellesMurder  
#QuemMandouMatarMarielle  
#WhoKilledMarielleFranco #FightLikeMarielle  
#NossasFamiliasExistem

"THIS SHIRT, 'WHO ORDERED TO KILL MARIELLE?', IS A FIGHTING TOOL UNTIL THE BRAZILIAN STATE RESPONDS TO WHO HER REAL MURDERER WAS, IN ADDITION TO THE MURDERERS WHO WERE ARRESTED A YEAR AFTER THE EXECUTION. I LEAVE A MESSAGE TO YOU THAT FIGHTING LIKE MARIELLE IS KEEPING HOPE!"

Monica Benicio  
(Opening keynote speaker, human rights activists, based in Brazil)



“MY FREEDOM IS LINKED TO EVERYBODY HERE. THE WORK OF INTERSECTIONALITY IS NOT JUST ABOUT SAYING YOUR STUFF BUT MAKING SPACE FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT INCLUDED TO SHARE THEIR REALITY.”

Naomie Pieter  
(Conference participant, based in the Netherlands)

This year, QBPOC (Queer Black People of Color) took a fundamental place within the EL\*C. Following the attempts by right-wing demonstrators to disrupt the event, the security, organised to protect the venue, resulted in a strong presence of white male authoritarian figures. QBPOCs took the stage during the last plenary to ask organisers and participants to strengthen strategies of solidarity among lesbians.

“THE ASTERISK IS ALIVE AND WELL.”

Olave Nduwanje

(Conference participant, TGEU, based in Germany)

Team members and conference participants also organized an action in support of translesbians. In the midst of a rise in transphobic narratives and attacks, the EL\*C supported this action of solidarity to make a public statement reaffirming its mission to include anyone who identifies as lesbian, feminist, bi, trans or queer and all others who feel connected to lesbian activism.



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# WE DID IT!- KEY OUTCOMES

In a politically heated and hostile context, and despite repeated threats and attempts at intimidating the organisers and participants, the programme of the conference was maintained in its entirety, with every plenary session, workshop, as well as all cultural or social activities conducted successfully. Only the march, which was planned to be held outside of the venue and where security could not be sufficiently ensured by the police, had to be cancelled. Taking stock of the rich discussions and exchanges, this section outlines the main outcomes from the plenary panels and the workshops.

## SPEAKING WALLS: AN ASTERISK ALIVE AND WELL

The asterisk is a cornerstone of the EL\*C, and the starting point for the building up of a community that strives to reflect the diversity of its members. The commitment to being inclusive and to ensure an intersectional representation is however not in itself sufficient, and we must constantly keep questioning our methods.

The examples below have been pulled from workshop discussion notes. They remind us of the diversity of lesbians' experiences, aspirations, and that we must continue to be critical of our activism.

- **Gender constructs are racialized** and the decolonization of gender requires taking into consideration the racial component when tackling gender expectations and ideas of masculinity and femininity. Broader inclusivity in the lesbian movement is needed and should be a priority so as to allow us to live unique and individual lives.
- **Bi-erasure** is an issue. Space needs to be created for more visibility, and to challenge toxic misconceptions and stereotypes, as well as to discuss terminology (bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer).
- Many **elder lesbians\* experience poverty**. They suffer from the gender pay and gender pension gap. And even in same-sex relationships and where same-sex marriage is possible, they face higher degrees of difficulties despite pooling resources, shared housing costs, etc.
- **Not all lesbians want to marry** and the variety of lesbian lifestyles being incorporated and eclipsed by the dominant societal norm of monogamous coupledness needs to be kept in mind. It is important to campaign for same-sex marriage but we need to remember and honour the fact that lesbians have always formed relationships and communities in a different way.

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## UNITED IN LOVE, UNITED IN ANGER

One thing became very clear from the first moments of the conference: beyond our different realities and diverse identities, the feeling of community and thrill of coming together was palpable. Nevertheless, a recurring question from the workshops and plenary sessions was thinking about how to build a movement that encompasses all our realities and addresses the very different struggles that lesbians face across Europe and Central Asia, without prioritising the needs of those that have more space or safety to be vocal.

Concretely, this challenge is first and foremost manifested in the very different national and political contexts that lesbians live in, whether they are in Western or Eastern Europe or in the post-Soviet space. Some thoughts were shared during discussions on how to practically build a movement taking into account our different realities and contexts:

- Overcoming existing divides means **addressing the overarching invisibility, lesbophobia, discrimination and violence that all lesbians** are familiar with, but also understanding and devising custom-made strategies to promote the rights of lesbians on the basis of what is realistic and urgent in their countries or region.
- Speaking up and **centralising information is key** to understanding the situations that need to be addressed. Lesbian activists from Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and notably the North Caucasus, shared examples of the very serious and pervasive lesbophobic violence they endure, including cases of home arrests, physical violence, food deprivation, forced marriages, forced suicides and high rates of self-harm and suicides.
- Understanding that **one person's safe haven can be another person's nightmare** is crucial. Different realities also means recognising and taking into consideration the trauma that many lesbians may suffer due to state sponsored lesbophobia, institutionalised lesbophobia in law enforcement or the justice system, and the lack of trust they experience vis-à-vis the representatives of state/police. Similar experiences of harassment by law enforcement and the endured trauma were shared by lesbian BPOCs for instance, from all over Europe, highlighting again how frequently homophobia and racism intersect.

“FROM OUR EXPERIENCE, ROMA WOMEN CAN NOT EXPRESS THEIR SEXUALITY PUBLICLY, THEY USUALLY HIDE AND LIVE IN SOME FRAMEWORKS OF HETERONORMATIVITY. WE, AS ROMA WOMEN'S CENTRE 'ROMNJAKO ILO' WANT TO SUPPORT EVERY FEMALE WHO WANTS TO BE DIFFERENT IN HER OWN WAY BECAUSE THAT'S THE DIVERSITY, BECAUSE THOSE ARE FREEDOMS. WE THINK THAT WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT IT MORE IN THE COMMUNITY AND THE MOVEMENT. WE NEED TO LEARN TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER, TO BE IN SOLIDARITY AND TO STAY DISOBEDIENT!”

Vesna Cerimovic

(Conference participant, Roma activist, based in Serbia)

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While the movement is still in the process of being built, it has an immense pool of talent, experience, drive, and overall lesbian genius to draw from, be it from seasoned activists, eager young dykes, established organisations, informal grassroots groups, public figures and role models or local community leaders. Hearing from authors, politicians, artists, researchers, journalists, human rights advocates, etc., it became apparent that, in many and rich ways, the members of the EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community are already hard at work carving out space. We are pushing our voices through the media and public discourse, collecting the much-needed data on our lives and experiences, and unveiling our realities, struggles and passion through the arts. The following examples of lesbian organising and its multiple faces stood out:

- **Dyke marches** are taking place in Germany, Belgium, Switzerland and Austria. Dyke marches are needed everywhere, for more visibility, for lesbian joie de vivre, and for the political statement they represent. It was also hinted that using the word “dyke” is apparently more appealing and might get more lesbians out on the streets!
- The **generational shift** in how lesbians network was also raised and with this, the expansion of the use of the Internet has had an important impact on providing lesbians with information more easily and with networking spaces through groups, social media and so on.
- Groups like the Inspira Project in Poland were motivated as a result of the EL\*C in Vienna back in 2017. Participants shared that they experienced the EL\*C as a space to heal and gather energy which served to start national or local lesbian-led projects. On a regional level, the EL\*C has certainly created a momentum for re-building the international lesbian movement.

“WE NEED THE ANGER. WE NEED THE REALISM. WE NEED THE LOVE.”

Joelle Sambri

(EL\*C team member, based in Belgium)

## AN OBSTACLE RACE

Through the various discussions it became clear that in order to increase visibility and push for movement building and structural change, the following obstacles would need to be analysed and overcome:

- The **anti-gender ideology movement**. This movement represents a serious threat to lesbian lives in many different ways. Notably through its attacks on civil society, women's rights, LGBTIQ rights and racist and xenophobic rhetoric.[7]
- The **lack of funding for lesbian-centered projects or lesbian-led organisations** throughout Europe and Central Asia.
- The **lack of available comprehensive and comparable data** and research centered around lesbian lives.
- The **challenge of building a movement centered around a social group historically silenced or/and criminalised**.



“GET THE SHAME OUT OF THE WAY! WE NEED SHAME FREE ENVIRONMENTS FOR WOMEN BECAUSE WE ARE SHAMED FOR PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING.”

Marta Šušak  
(Conference participant,  
based in Germany)

Selection of drawings  
from the EL\*C conference  
in Kyiv by Marame Kane,  
Co-director of the Paris  
LGBT Center

[7] The anti-gender movement takes many shapes and appears in more spaces and institutions than we are even aware of. We see them in parliaments, advisory institutions or as part of governing bodies at the national, international and global level. They are well organized and financed and have been using human rights discourse (e.g. free speech) to make their case.

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## A LESBIAN NETWORK FOR A LESBIAN REVOLUTION

During the conference, the EL\*C team set up sessions called 'Massive Brainstorm!! What should the future network of the EL\*C look like?' to bring together lesbian activists interested in thinking about how to create a strong network - beyond biennial conference organising. The initial idea of creating a Euro-Central Asian lesbian network had come from the first conference organised in Vienna. In Kyiv, the EL\*C team took the opportunity to share the work it had done since 2017 on trying to envision the creation of the network. In Kyiv, the participants also had the opportunity to share their thoughts on the new name for the network to be called: EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community.[8]

Aside from the brainstorming session, below are highlights of how lesbian genius came together in Kyiv. We also heard and want to keep in mind for future collaboration, the multiple areas and spaces where lesbian genius is currently being played out:

### LESBIANIZE THE INSTITUTIONS

Our legal contexts vary greatly across Europe and Central Asia. We can not always use (inter)national law to claim what should be our right. Depending on the national situation and legislation, the strategies and cases we bring to court are very different. However, this work is being done all over Europe and Central Asia on a wide range of issues and with varying strategies.

Staff trainings at institutions came across as key to increase awareness. One example came from the Dutch police, who have been training officers to be able to adequately address LGBTIQ-phobic crimes. This kind of work is being done in several other countries as well.[9]

### LESBIAN ART BEATS

The conference started with a vernissage of dyke artworks showing, among other items, assemblages that express the tension between a fantasized Oriental past and an uncertain Western future.

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[8] Further outcomes from the 'brainstorm sessions' can be found in the conclusion and next steps part of this report.

[9] At the same time elsewhere police are our worst enemies. E.g. shortly after the conference, we received the worrying news that police raided the bar in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where lesbians were celebrating Lesbian\* Visibility Day. The police had invited press to film and photograph their action. Only a few days later, this was followed by right wing groups preventing the official May Day picnic by members of feminist movement '8/365' in Bishkek. Police were present but pretended they 'didn't see anything'.

---

The Dyke Market was about 'participation'. We conceived the place as an open space in which it would be possible to discover the artistic work of lesbians invited to the 2nd edition of the EL\*C. Four artists presented their works at the Dyke Market. In addition to the works exhibited on site, the artists led their respective workshops to offer a participative and creative moment that gave interesting results and sparked beautiful exchanges, like the Body Lab workshop that, in the aftermath of days of extreme right-wing attacks, emerged as an important moment of renewed self-confidence.

In the workshop 'Behind the books - celebrating lesbian\* and queer writers', Mantsha Khuzwayo, Joëlle Sambu and Dettie Gould, among other things spoke about growing up and living as a black lesbian, in Africa or between continents. Living conditions can be quite tough, especially for black lesbians, which led Joëlle Sambu to say: "I can either pick up a kalashnikov or a pen". "If we do not write our own stories no one else will!" said Dettie Gould, stressing that writing is extremely important to both handle our lives and get the word out. Dettie Gould and Mantsha Khuzwayo started self-publishing, and Mantsha Khuzwayo stepped up to publish others in response to the lack of willingness by mainstream publishing houses to do so.

## REMEMBRANCE, ARCHIVING & HERSTORY

Remembrance is an art and highly valuable to activists. In fact, the conference was also taken as an opportunity to celebrate some of the many lesbians who have helped carve out the spaces that we are still fighting to expand for ourselves. For this purpose we named our workshop rooms and plenary hall in honour of lesbian geniuses, such as: Audre Lorde, Billie Jean King, Lesya Ukrainka, Virginia Woolf, and The Lesbian Avengers, among others.

Understanding where we come from as a movement is vital. This can be done through research and archiving. This work is key to reclaiming our lesbian herstory.





**BILLIE  
JEAN  
ROOM**

Billie Jean King.  
American former World No. 1 professional tennis player. King won 39 Grand Slam titles: 12 in singles, 16 in women's doubles, and 11 in mixed doubles.

FLOOR # 10



**VIRGINIA  
ROOM**

Virginia Woolf 1882 - 1941.  
Writer and feminist, considered one of the most important modernist authors, pioneer in the use of stream of consciousness as a narrative device.

FLOOR # 20



**LESYA  
UKRAINKA  
ROOM**

Леся Українка 1871 - 1913.  
One of Ukrainian literature's foremost writers, best known for her poems and plays. She also was an active political, civil, and feminist activist.

FLOOR # 3



**AVENGERS  
ROOM**

The Lesbian Avengers

One example of recovering our herstory is the timeline that was made after the first EL\*C conference of ILIS, the International Lesbian Information Service[10]. ILIS was one of the predecessors of the EL\*C during the 1980s and 1990s. This pioneer project started mainly in Europe. In 1986, 400 lesbians from all over the world met during a conference in Geneva. From there, ILIS grew and several regional meetings were held in Asia and in Latin America. But herstory goes back a lot further if we look well.

## INFORMATION IS POWER

Beyond the EL\*C's efforts to produce comprehensive and comparable data on lesbians, the conference was a unique opportunity to share and discuss other similar research projects centered around lesbians. From these discussions came examples of portals set up to report hate crimes where the collected data would be used to investigate cases. Such portals, it was agreed, are useful and much needed to draw up statistics.

In one case, through a specific survey, researchers received information about a gynecologist who had referred a lesbian to a psychiatrist to be cured from her 'lesbianism' as a condition for further treatment. Based on this information, the research team started training gynecologists and succeeded in lowering the prevalence of lesbophobia.

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# ONE MILLION LESBIANS FOR A 'DYKER FUTURE'! WHAT IS NEXT IN BUILDING THE EUROCENTRALASIAN LESBIAN\* COMMUNITY?

Ever since the meeting in Cyprus in 2016, during which over 70 lesbians from Europe and Central Asia gathered and concluded that lesbians lack the fundamental structures, tools and mechanisms to fight lesbophobia, sexism, misogyny, and all other types of discrimination it became clear that there is an urgent need to come up with a permanent platform, that would provide for continuous,

coherent and strategic cooperation, exchange and joint actions. This assessment was further explored and confirmed at the first European Lesbian\* Conference in Vienna in October 2017. As a result, the EL\*C team was given the task to start the processes which are needed for the creation of the lesbian network for Europe and Central Asia.



A still from a video depicting the front of a bus with a hand-painted sign attached to the front reading 'Lesbian express'. Photo credit: Barbara Hammer - SUPERDYKE MEETS MADAME X video still (1975)

For this purpose, the EL\*C team has been working intensively during 2018 and 2019 on the following tasks: assessing and analyzing the state of lesbian organizing; gathering available evidence on the lived realities of lesbians; starting additional activities that generate data; identifying potential strategic priorities, objectives and activities of the EL\*C as network; and analyzing different models of network structures which would best fit the scope and aims of the EL\*C as a network. This was done in preparation for a wide consultation process with the lesbian movement across Europe and Central Asia, with the aim to establish the EL\*C as a permanent network structure.

With the above aims in mind, the outcomes and proposals of these processes were presented and tested at the European Lesbian\* Conference in Kyiv, within the two joint brainstorming sessions with conference participants. During these sessions, participants had the opportunity to discuss the vision and mission of the network, its values and principles, its strategic priorities, scope of work and activities, as well as the most effective methodologies and internal structures that would bring us closer to (re)building the lesbian movement and improving the lives of lesbians across Europe and Central Asia.

## WE HAVE A NEW NAME: EL\*C - EUROCENTRALASIAN LESBIAN\* COMMUNITY

The EL\*C started as a biennial conference, as first step towards bringing lesbian movements together, to exchange experiences and opinions, and carve out joint strategies for the future of lesbian organizing in Europe and

Central Asia. Based on the recommendations coming from the first European Lesbian\*Conference in 2017 and the preparatory processes in 2018 and 2019, as well as a series of further consultations with the lesbian movements, the EL\*C has moved beyond organizing the biennial events, and has taken a bold step further to build and formally establish the lesbian network, and to implement different advocacy, research and capacity building activities to strengthen and (re)build the weakened lesbian movement and advocate for lesbian rights. Following these transformations, the name of the EL\*C as European Lesbian\* Conference is no longer appropriate and needs to change, so as to reflect the scope of work of the EL\*C, and to explicitly also include Central Asia in the name, while also putting emphasis on the lesbian community, which is in the focus of our work. The new name of the EL\*C has been voted by conference participants and it has been decided that the new name will be: EL\*C - EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community.



Photo credit: EL\*C Kyiv - Insight.

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## WE HAVE AMBITIOUS AND REVOLUTIONARY PRIORITIES

During one of the conference brainstorming sessions, numerous conference participants engaged in exciting discussions about what the EL\*C, as it transforms into a network structure, should be focusing on. Conference participants exchanged and analyzed their opinions and experiences within the lesbian movement, and identified challenges, gaps and urgent needs. Participants also evaluated socio-political trends, environments and contexts, and provided the EL\*C with a bold, ambitious and revolutionary pathway for a dyker future. Based on participants' lesbian genius, it has been recommended that the EL\*C should:

- Support and connect lesbian communities in Europe and Central Asia, while reaching out to as many lesbians as possible, of diverse backgrounds and experiences, including those that are not engaged in activism and those that live in peripheral and rural areas;
- Empower lesbian organizing in Europe and Central Asia, while building capacities of lesbian activists and leaders, and countering negative trends that contribute to decreasing funding and resources for lesbian initiatives;
- Increase lesbian visibility in activism, media, politics, academia, different professions and in the society as a whole, ensuring that information and data about lesbians are collected, analyzed and disseminated widely;

- Fight all forms of violence, discrimination and intersecting oppressions faced by lesbians in Europe and Central Asia, both in public and private lives;
- Represent lesbian needs and interests, while lobbying and advocating for the protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of lesbians at regional and global levels, and supporting lesbians activists and organizations advocating at local levels.



Photo credit: EL\*C Kyiv - Insight.

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## WE WILL HAVE AN INNOVATIVE NETWORK STRUCTURE

The second brainstorming session was dedicated to exploring the future structural model of the EL\*C as it transforms into a permanent, membership-based network for lesbians in Europe and Central Asia (re. Annex 3) During this session, conference participants had an opportunity to reflect on the model of the structure that was proposed by the EL\*C team. Participants also had the opportunity to express ideas for further improvements, identify potential challenges and ways to overcome them, propose different governance methodologies and practical steps on how to make an innovative, collaborative and inclusive structure, that would be based on principles of democracy, transparency, accountability and horizontality, while centering on individual lesbians as members of the network, and providing innovative structural solutions that go beyond traditional and patriarchal structures which are based on vertical power distributions, as seen in many similar networks and organizations. To that end, the conference participants have proposed that the EL\*C as network should:

1. Be innovative and consider the specific and diverse needs of lesbian organizing in Europe and Central Asia;
2. Be based on individual lesbians as full members, and ensure transparent, democratic and accessible participation of lesbians with diverse backgrounds and experiences;
3. Be ambitious and try to reach out to as many lesbians as possible, with the aim to have 1 million lesbians as members of the network.
4. Include lesbian groups and organizations, in addition to individual members, as part of the network structure, so as to secure relevant, context based expertise, advice and support, through close strategic partnerships and sustainable collaboration;
5. Ensure that different parts of the network structure work in a horizontal way, while ensuring accessibility and permeability of diverse individual lesbian voices throughout the structure;

## WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

As part of efforts to transform the EL\*C into a permanent and sustainable network for lesbians in Europe and Central Asia, the EL\*C Advisory Committee was announced and established at the conference. The aim of the EL\*C Advisory Committee is to broaden and strengthen the capacities of the EL\*C to successfully transform itself into a network. Building a network of such magnitude and complexity, while its establishment will be one of the most important landmark events in the history of lesbian organizing, is both a challenging and exciting process, that requires a collaborative and inclusive effort. To that end, the Advisory Committee is open to everyone who wish to join us and share their lesbian skills so that we can build a strong and sustainable network, capable of affecting progressive change, that will bring lesbian genius to the world.

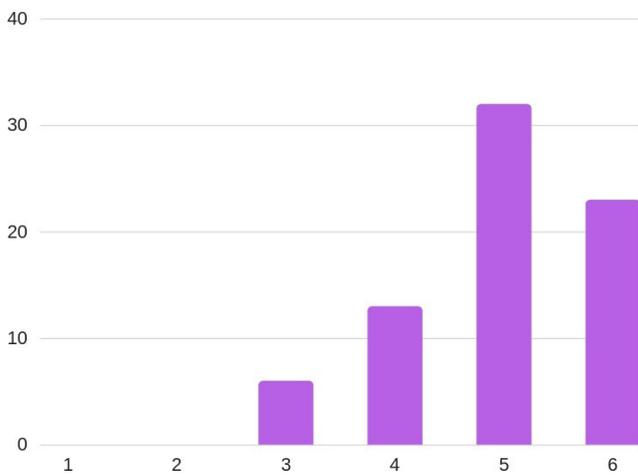
The Advisory Committee will work together with the current EL\*C team on different tasks related to further developing the aims, strategies and activities of the network, as well as network structures, procedures and documents, and will also be involved in developing sustainability models. The Advisory Committee will commence its work in September 2019, and will aim to finalize the processes of formal network establishment by mid 2020, which will enable us to embark on an exciting and revolutionary journey of reaching out to one million lesbians for a 'dyker future'.

# ANNEX 1- SUMMARY OF THE CONFERENCE

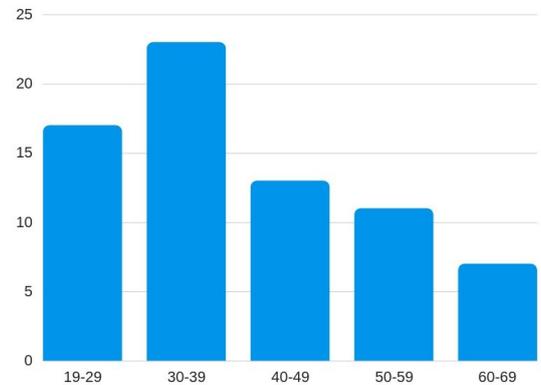
## EVALUATION FORMS

TOTAL: 80 answers

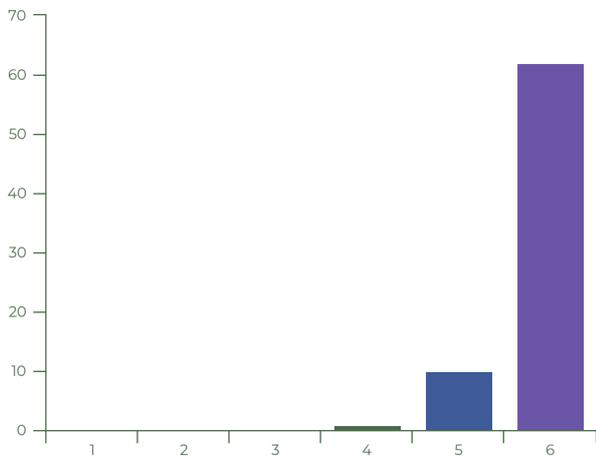
To what extent did the conference satisfy your expectations?  
(1: poor // 6: perfect)



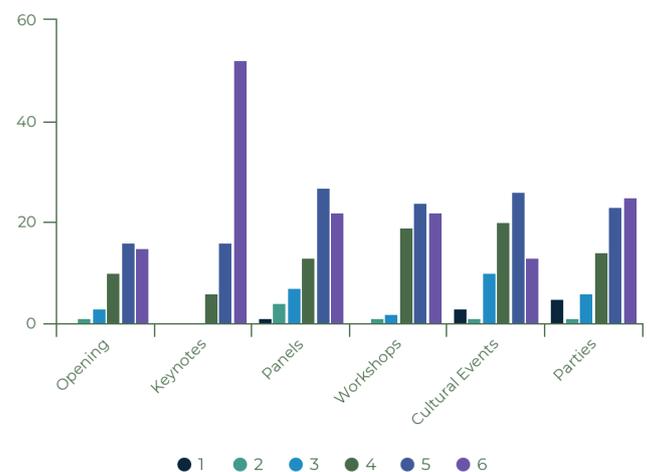
Age of Respondents



Was the conference needed by lesbian activists in Europe and Central Asia?  
(1: not at all // 6: very much)

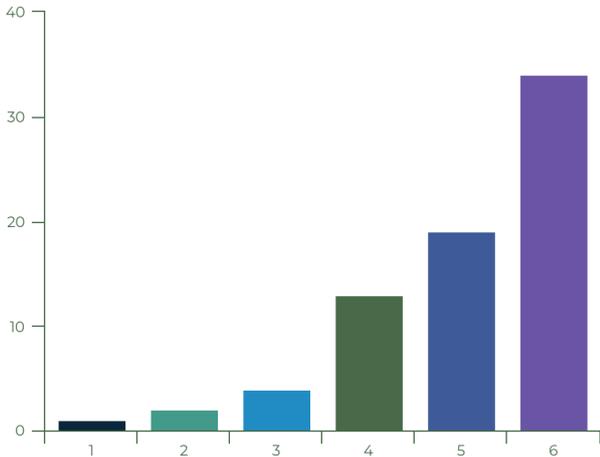


Evaluation of the program  
(1: poor // 6: excellent)

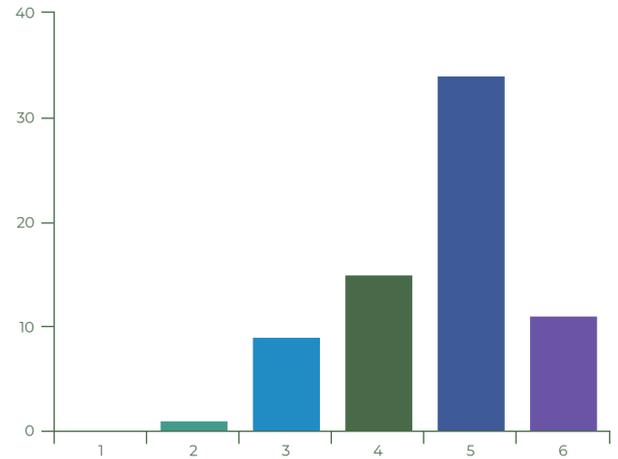


## General comments on diversity, inclusivity and intersectionality

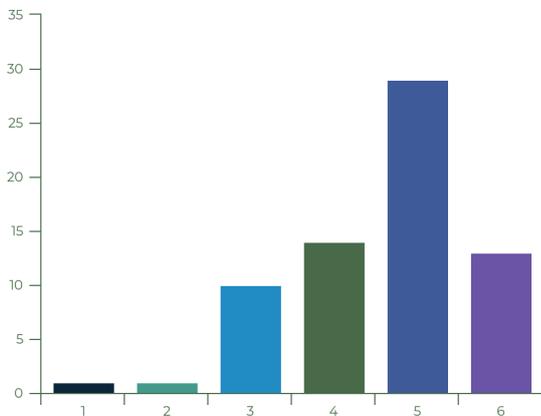
Possibility of expressing one's opinion  
(1: poor // 6: excellent)



Inclusivity  
(1: poor // 6: excellent)



Addressing intersectionality  
(1: poor // 6: excellent)



## Location in Kyiv and safety issues

64,8% considered the decision to hold the conference in Kyiv a very good idea.

Assessment of information related to security (1: poor // 6: excellent): 52,5%: 6; 29,5%: 5

Assessment of our efforts to ensure security (1: poor // 6: excellent): 66,2% 6; 23,9% 5

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## ANNEX 2- MEDIA COVERAGE

### UKRAINIAN ARTICLES: 65 ARTICLES IN UKRAINIAN

**dw.com:** How is the European conference of lesbians going in Kyiv?

**hromadske.ua:** Several people with posters “The Family is a union of men and women” came to a lesbian conference.

**humanrights.org.ua:** The ultra-right in Kyiv tried to disrupt the European Lesbian Conference.

**rubryka.com:** In Kyiv, radicals are rallying against the “European Lesbian Conference”

**ua.korrespondent.net:** Kyiv residents came to protest because of lesbian conference.

**espresso.tv:** In Kyiv participants of the “European Lesbian Conference” have been attacked.

**ukrinform.ua:** The police guard a lesbian conference in Kiev, which yesterday had been tried to disrupt.

**politkrytyka.org:** The Lesbian pan-European movement visited Kyiv.

**kiev.ua:** On the Livoberezhna tried to disrupt the European Lesbian conference.

**nv.ua:** In Kyiv, radicals with gas attacked participants of the Lesbian conference, ten victims

**kyivpost.com:** Hundreds of lesbian activists to meet in Kyiv on April 11-14

### UKRAINIAN TV

**euronews.com:** In Kyiv, they tried to disrupt the congress of lesbians.

**TCH Ukraine – YouTube channel:** The ultra-right organizations attacked the hotel where the lesbian conference took place.

**vikna.stb.ua:** <https://vikna.stb.ua/ua/issue/vipusk-vid-12-04-2019-22-00/> (Video only available in Ukraine)

### RUSSIAN ARTICLES: 80 ARTICLES IN RUSSIAN, MOST OF THEM ARE TRANSLATED COPIES OF UKRAINIAN VERSIONS.

**lenta.ru:** Ukrainian radicals turned against lesbians.

**rusnext.ru:** Kyiv residents went to the Maidan because of the lesbian conference.

**ruainform.com:** In Kyiv, protested against the lesbian conference.

**glavred.info:** In Kyiv, the radicals attacked a lesbian conference: there are victims.

### RUSSIAN TV

**ntv.ru:** In Kyiv, the radicals attacked the lesbian conference

### USA, CANADA, IRELAND & UK ARTICLES

**foxnews.com:** Ukrainian ultra-right spray tear gas over lesbian gathering

**washingtonpost.com:** Ultra-right activists hound European lesbian conference

**gaycitynews.nyc:** Lesbians Overcome Far-Right Protestors at Kiev Conference

**openlynews.com:** ‘Are you scared?’ – Protests as lesbian conference kicks off in Ukraine

**pinknews.co.uk:** Lesbian conference in Ukraine targeted by anti-LGBT protesters

**New Jersey Herald:** Ukrainian ultra-right spray tear gas over lesbian gathering

**msn.com:** Lesbian conference in Ukraine targeted by anti-LGBT protesters

**thestar.com:** Ultra-right activists hound European lesbian conference

**gcn.ie:** Hundreds of Lesbian Activists Meet At International Conference In Ukraine

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## FRENCH ARTICLES

**nouvelobs.com:** Olena Shevchenko : celle qui voulait que les lesbiennes d'Europe de l'Est ne soient pas oubliées

**komitid.fr:** Esprit de sororité et bulle de « génie lesbien » à Kiev : on vous raconte la 2ème édition de l'European Lesbian\* Conference

**Gouinement Lundi:** Radio show

**tetu.com:** « On veut mettre la pression à l'échelle internationale » : Silvia Casalino, co-présidente de la conférence européenne lesbienne

**liberation.fr:** Ukraine: la conférence lesbienne européenne prise pour cible par des manifestants anti-LGBT

## GERMAN ARTICLES

**bild.de:** After attack at Lesbians Conference, Video message from Minister Giffey

**dw.com:** Far-right protesters target European Lesbian Conference in Ukraine

**siegessaule.de:** European Lesbian Conference: Between Hate and Love

**l-mag.de:** European lesbian conference in Kiev: hatred, love and the lesbian revolution

**queer.de:** Germany as LGBTI advocate in Europe?

**blu.fm:** "We are not afraid": Lesbian conference in Kiev starts despite homophobic protests

**euronews.de:** Right-wing extremists attack LGBT conference in Kiev

**quarteera.de:** 2. European Lesbian\* Conference in Kiev

## ITALIAN ARTICLES

**eastjournal.net:** UKRAINE: The success of the second European Lesbian \* Conference

## SPANISH ARTICLES

**eldiario.es:** "Go back to hell, sodomites": several protesters try to boycott the European lesbian conference in Kiev

**player.fm:** Kika Fumero talks about the SECOND EUROPEAN LESBIAN \* CONFERENCE

**xarxanet.org:** Visibilitat i amenaces a la trobada europea de lesbianes

**Directa:** <https://directa.cat/llums-i-ombres-de-la-conferencia-lesbiana-a-kiev/>

## PRESS AGENCIES

**Associated Press:** Ultra-right activists hound European lesbian conference

**Reuters:** 'Are you scared?': Protests as lesbian conference kicks off in Ukraine

**Taiwan News:** Far-right protesters target European Lesbian Conference in Ukraine

## INSTITUTIONS

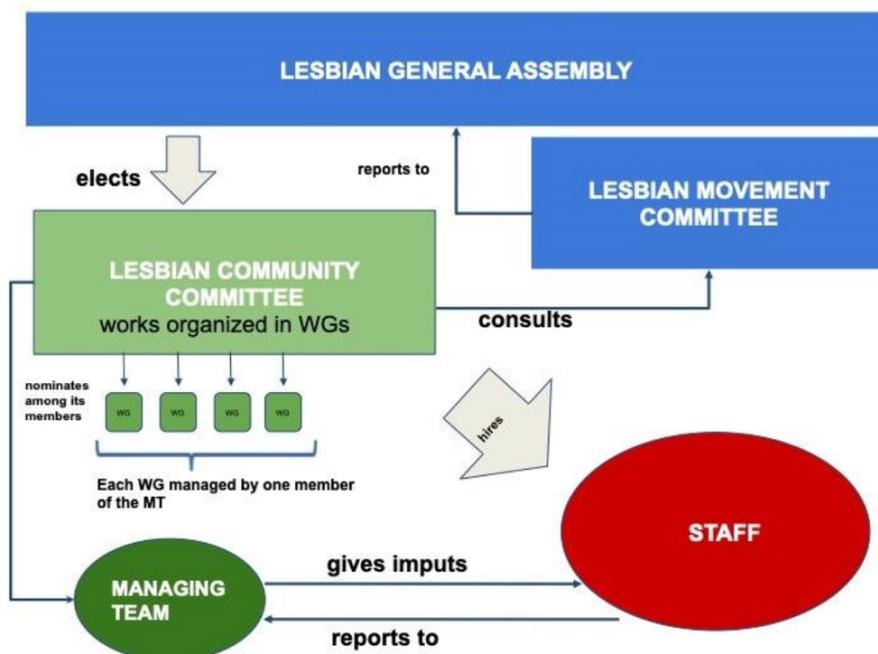
**UN Women:** The largest network of lesbian activists in the region call for greater equality and inclusion

**Human Rights Watch:** Lesbians Held Conference in Kyiv Despite Counter Protests

**Thomson Reuters Foundation:** 'Are you scared?' – Protests as lesbian conference kicks off in Ukraine

**Amnesty International:** Ukraine: Attacks on the European Lesbian Conference must be condemned.

# ANNEX 3- EL\*C'S FUTURE STRUCTURAL MODEL



## EL\*C KYIV FUNDERS



### DONATE TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF THE EL\*C!

EUROPEAN LESBIAN\* CONFERENCE

IBAN: AT 511 2000 100 200 34459

BIC BKAUATWW

Bank Austria

Remark: Donation EL\*C



“ACTIVISM IS THE RENT I PAY  
FOR LIVING ON THIS PLANET.”  
- ALICE WALKER

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

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<https://lesbiangenius.net>

**Twitter:** @EuroLesbianCon

**Facebook:** Europeanlesbianconference

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