

Two Injured in Attack on St. Petersburg LGBT Gathering

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More than 150 protesters gathered at an "anti-hate march" in St. Petersburg on Saturday. **National-Democratic Party**

Two masked men broke into a party at an LGBT organization in St. Petersburg on Sunday, shooting participants in the face with air guns and injuring at least one man.

The Sunday night party was hosted by LaSky, a group that provides free HIV testing and counseling for gay men, to discuss an "anti-hate march" that had gathered some 150 people in downtown St. Petersburg the previous day, Interfax reported.

Participants in the rally carried banners that said "Russia without pogroms" and called for an end to ethnic, gender, and religious discrimination. The rally was organized by the Democratic St. Petersburg coalition of some 20 public organizations and political parties in response to recent ethnic riots in Moscow's Biryulyovo district.

"We gathered to discuss the results of the anti-hate march, when we were suddenly attacked," LGBT activist Kirill Kalugin told news agency Rosbalt.

Kalugin said a second victim, a young woman, was also injured.

"A young woman, who was injured in the attack, has written a police report; the second victim will submit his report in the nearest future," he told Russian News Service.

"Pogroms are becoming a reality," Anastasia Smirnova, a project manager with the Interregional Social Movement Russian LGBT Network, said in a statement on the group's facebook page following the attack.

Two masked assailants, armed with air guns and baseball bats broke into the party and opened fire, Smirnova said. A St.Petersburg Interior Ministry statement said at least one of the party attendants was hospitalized, and police were still investigating.

But Smirnova said the police officers who arrived at the scene turned a blind eye to the violence and left "immediately," declaring that they saw no evidence of a crime.

The attack on the eve of National Unity Day, a public holiday marked on Nov. 4, is the latest episode in an outbreak of anti-gay violence in Russia, following the adoption last summer of a law that bans "propaganda" of "non-traditional relationships" to minors.

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