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Gay Tango Instructor Found With Throat Cut in St. Petersburg

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A lesbian tango teacher was found in St. Petersburg with her throat slashed in what police surmised could have been suicide and LGBT activists called a possible hate crime.

The body of Yekaterina Khomenko, 29, was found in her car in the city's north last week, Rosbalt.ru local news website reported.

She had a nine-centimeter wound to the neck. The car's engine and lights were on, and the vehicle had several dents.

Police initially considered suicide or drug abuse as possible reasons for Khomenko's stabbing, Piter.tv local television said, citing her father Valery.

But the incident is being investigated as murder, Rosbalt.ru said Friday. No motive or suspects were announced.

Regional news website Rrnews.ru speculated Monday that Khomenko's death could be linked

to her being openly gay.

But it provided no backing for that theory beyond a wave of hostile comments posted on Khomenko's page on social network Vkontakte in the wake of her death. Comments are currently disabled on her page.

Khomenko was known in the St. Petersburg community as an instructor in queer tango, a same-sex rendition of the Argentinian dance originally known for strict gender roles for each pair of performers.

Anti-gay sentiment is on the rise in Russia, with homophobia fueled by a 2013 law against "homosexual propaganda" and the government's increased adherence to ultraconservative rhetorics.

Physical attacks on openly gay people are not uncommon, and at least two members of the LGBT community were murdered in 2013 in confirmed hate crimes, according to anti-xenophobia watchdog Sova.

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