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Ukraine:

Feminist group Bilkis addresses Brussels Conference

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Ivanna Vynna, a member of the Ukrainian feminist group *Bilkis*, took part on 27 March 2025 in the workshop on feminist struggles in Ukraine at the Brussels conference organised by the European Solidarity Network with Ukraine. The text of her speech is published below.

If Russia has not yet fought you on the battlefield, it is doing so in the field of information, influencing elections in your country, spreading disinformation and promoting propaganda. It denies the existence of Ukrainians as members of a distinct nation and refuses to recognise imperialist policies as criminal. It destroys nations that aspire to decolonisation, threatens women with sexual violence (which has become its military strategy), kidnaps children and demonises homosexuals.

Even its so-called liberal voices serve only one purpose: to justify and normalise Russia. Ukraine is blamed: it is 'to blame', it has 'provoked', it 'lets itself do too much', along with other rhetoric often applied to those who suffer violence. So we must remember that the fault always lies with those who took up arms and crossed an internationally recognised border (including one they themselves recognised).

Right now, for us at *Bilkis*, it's important to participate in the transformations of Ukraine by amplifying the voices of women and queer people, addressing violence and inequality, and promoting inclusion. We have made significant progress in these areas: the end of professions forbidden to women, the updating of spelling rules for the use of feminine forms, laws against hate crimes, sex education and the fight against gender-based violence. Ukraine is developing despite all the hardships of war.

Ukrainian society is becoming increasingly aware of gender issues and the need for decolonisation. This is the logical continuation of our cultural and intellectual tradition, which was interrupted by the Soviet occupation. Our feminist movement was closely linked to the movement for independence from empires (at the time, the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires). However, resistance to Russian colonisation remained a question of survival, as it was for many countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Because if Ukraine does not resist, it will be the next victim. Russian propagandists talk openly about this on prime-time television.

As far as the activities of the *Bilkis* organisation are concerned, we are united by five fundamental values:

- Feminism (the fight for women's rights)
- Horizontality (absence of hierarchies and domination, collective decision-making, open communication, equality of voices)
- Social equality (we care about the rights of vulnerable groups, social justice and the development of tools for public influence)
- Decolonisation (we oppose colonial policies and wars of aggression, and defend the independence and development of formerly colonised nations)
- Intersectionality (we talk about discrimination, bearing in mind the multiplicity of inequalities and power relations that cause it).

We began our activities in 2019 by collecting and publishing accounts of violence against women. This annual tradition continues: we call on local illustrators and photographers to share publications on social networks and spread the stories of Ukrainian women in order to create a space for condemning violence and supporting each other.

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In November 2024, we launched the 'FemObjective' film club, where we meet twice a month for feminist film screenings, talks and debates. Among the films we have screened are 'Le Journal d'une adolescente', 'Persepolis', 'Blink Twice', 'Disclosure' and many others. On 8 March this year, we organised a screening of 'When the Trees Fall' by Ukrainian director Marysia Nikitiuk, and the filmmaker herself gave a talk on female sexuality in film.

We also have a YouTube project, Dear Diary, which features video essays on society, film and popular culture through the lens of intersectional feminism. To date, eight episodes have been broadcast and our channel has over 5,000 subscribers. Topics covered in the videos include compulsive heterosexuality, rape culture, toxic tolerance and many others.

Most of the participants in Bilkis are vegans. For us, it's important to take care of the environment, resist reckless consumerism and offer everyone the chance to get rid of the superfluous and receive the necessary for free. In 2022, we launched our 'Space of Things' social project.

We also published two zines. The electronic versions are available in our Instagram profile description. The first, entitled 'Activist', tells the story of women activists who protect us on the front line, provide humanitarian aid or help Ukraine to survive in other ways. The second, self-published, 'Les Autres sont comme nous', is a collection of stories about the lives of homeless women. These are reflections on the female experience of homelessness and on ways of strengthening solidarity.

Of course, we also organise street actions. On 8 March, we co-organised the 'Demand justice, not women' action in Lviv and put up posters against violence against women in Kyiv. A few days later (on 30 March), we planned an action in Lviv for the Transgender Day of Visibility.

Our Instagram profile is a project in its own right. We regularly post information on the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people in Ukraine. This includes texts on misogyny in various fields (medicine, history, etc.), recommendations for feminist and queer books and films, announcements of events, and much more. Our Instagram page is viewed over 230,000 times a month. We currently have over 6,500 followers, and these are just our numbers for our page.

We are currently looking for financial resources, as funding for gender equality programmes has been drastically reduced due to the shift to the right. We need funds to support our current projects and create new ones. For example, we want to start translating left-wing feminist literature into Ukrainian, as there is currently very little available. We would also like to create an interview project with women from various professions.

We would greatly appreciate any financial or informational support for our organisation!

We take part in international events to remind the world that the Russian-Ukrainian war is still going on. And that Russia is the aggressor, just as it was in Chechnya, Moldova and Georgia. It begins by forcibly Russifying, destroying local culture and intellectuals, and then claims that this is the way it has always been. Culture in the hands of an empire is a weapon of appropriation, devaluation and destruction. To counter this, and not just in Ukraine, we plan to focus more on defending international issues in the future. We find it very useful to look for points of connection, in our experiences and our cultures, with the countries that support us, in order to create common information projects and to mutually amplify our voices.

[Reseau Bastille](#) 27 March 2025