

# FORBIDDEN

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A story about the personal price you pay when fighting against the state for human rights and filming it.



Feature documentary / 99 min / 2024  
a film by Anelise Sălan

produced by THE  STUDIO

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# SYNOPSIS

Anelise is a 44-year-old gay woman living in Romania. When her girlfriend gives her a ring, she is confronted for the first time with the limitations of her rights. Hoping to one day have a legally recognized and protected family, she decides to sue Romania at the European Court of Human Rights and joins 6 more couples in bringing the case with the support of the Accept NGO. Along the way more couples join in. With a total of 21 same-sex couples participating, this is the biggest LGBT case in the court's history.

To open the case, she needs official written refusals. Therefore, she must submit a request for same-sex marriage to local authorities, knowing that in Romania this is forbidden. The experiences at the marital registry are humiliating for most of couples, foreshadowing an ugly fight.

The film is a mix between the case and their relationship. Their domestic life is captured through the camera lens of her girlfriend, who is the film's first DOP. The shots are intimate and warm, allowing the viewer to witness a love story.

The trial and the documentary put more pressure on the couple than they expected. During a Zoom call with their lawyers, they find out the Romanian Government has breached the initial confidentiality agreement.

The girlfriend panics. Maintaining a love life while fighting a ruthless system proves to be a difficult mission. The pressure becomes overwhelming and they start to argue about everything, including the documentary. The arguments become too painful, and they slowly drift apart and break up.

Anelise goes through a severe anxiety crisis, having problems eating and sleeping. Soon she realizes she cannot give up and she tries to put herself together and continue fighting. She begins to document everything she is experiencing, becoming the new DOP of the film. She records her sessions with her therapist and all the activities that make her feel better, while waiting for the verdict of a trial that has already changed her life. When a favourable verdict is delivered in May 2023, she feels empty-hearted. Will she find the strength to love again?

# Director's note

I never imagined myself in any kind of battle related to my sexual orientation. It was never an issue for me, people never treated me differently or badly for who I was. I never considered myself an activist of any kind, although I did take positions whenever I saw injustice around me. But when my girlfriend gave me a ring, I was confronted for the first time with our lack of legal protection.

The same year, the parliament held a Referendum against same-sex families. Although it failed, the aggressive campaign of the state authorities made me realize that those who are against us are the same politicians who are supposed to protect us as citizens. We are citizens just like everyone else, paying the same taxes, bearing the same responsibilities, but with fewer rights. Suddenly, my love for another woman became a human rights issue. That's how the trial and the film began.

When I filmed the first couples in the Marital Status offices of Bucharest, I understood that it would be an ugly fight. The negative reactions of the state employees made me reconsider how to make this film. I understand that to this aggressiveness and lack of understanding, I must respond with a non-confrontational story, as I have done all my life with my coming out. I realized that only a personal story could evoke empathy for gay lives given the limitation of rights. They gave us War; I will give Love in return.

I decided to focus the story on my own relationship and my girlfriend suggested that she film our life together, since the camera should capture the love and beauty of our couple, the way I feel and look at her. The film is an intimate portrait of a loving couple that gradually becomes a couple in crisis.

By showing the impact that these types of laws have on the freedom and happiness of minorities, the film allows us to question the current Romanian society: an intolerant and discriminatory society in which the evolution of minority rights is slow or non-existent. The harsh reality of this fight affects the private life and the film shows the difficulty to fight for social progress and to keep a love life when public and private are mixed.

My goal with this film is to create a representation and visibility of gay love, hoping for understanding and empathy that can bring changes in Romanian mentality.

# Social context

Homosexuality was decriminalized in Romania in 2001, under pressure from the Council of Europe, by the repeal of Article 200. This article, introduced in 1968 under the communist regime, was a section of Romania's penal code that criminalized homosexual relationship with a prison sentence of between 1 and 5 years.

In 2018, Romanians were called to vote to redefine the definition of "family" in the constitution as "the union between a man and a woman." The ruling party and the Romanian Orthodox Church launched an aggressive campaign. The referendum law was changed to allow two days of voting instead of one. Large anti-gay ads were run by local authorities throughout the country spreading hate speech: "If you don't vote, your child can be stolen by two homosexuals". Priests spoke of the sin of not voting during church services in their churches. Despite this, the final turnout was 21.1 percent, below the 30 percent threshold needed for it to be valid.

Many organizations, such as Accept, which fights for LGBT rights, have consistently tried to make the authorities understand the necessity of such a law. Almost 10 different law projects proposals have been introduced and debated in Parliament, but all have been rejected. In April 2019, the official argument was that "there is no real social need for same-sex partnerships", as senator Serban Nicolae declared.

The 21 same-sex couples who sued Romania wanted to show that there is a social need and that same-sex families exist.

This is not just a Romanian story. 15 other European countries have the same problem: Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine. Only 19 countries out of 44 from Europe legally recognize and perform same sex marriages.

# Director’s bio&filmography



Anelise Salan is a Romanian filmmaker living in Bucharest. She is currently a PhD student in Communication Studies at the University of Bucharest. She has earned a Journalism degree, completed her Master’s and took a photography course at The Art School of Bucharest.

Since she was a student, she has been working in television. After 12 years in PROTV, she has decided to become a freelance cinematographer .

She is also an cultural entrepreneur, organizing educational workshops in rural areas and small towns.

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|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ESTERA<br>short doc 2018               | DOP/Director                | Best documentary award Aristoteles Workshop 2018<br>Filmul de Piatra Romania, 2019                                                                 |
| TELECORONA<br>short doc 2021           | DOP/Director                | Filmul de Piatra Romania, 2021<br>Metropolis Film Festival, Italy 2022<br>Lisbon Film Festival 2022                                                |
| I FEAR<br>short doc 2022               | DOP/Director                | Special jury mention at Filmul de Piatra 2022.                                                                                                     |
| SPREAD YOUR<br>WINGS<br>short doc 2024 | DOP/Director                | Special jury mention at Filmul de Piatra 2024.                                                                                                     |
| Forbidden<br>as work in<br>progress    | Director/Editor<br>Producer | ZagrebDox 2020 – DAE mentorship award<br>Balkan Documentary Center 2020 - Best pitch award<br>Thessaloniki Pitching forum in 2021 - Beldocs award. |

# Key cast& team

## Director&Editor&Producer

Anelise Sălan

## Executive Producer

Simona Pătraşcu

## with

Anelise Sălan  
Ivona Sălan  
Iustina Ionescu  
Teodora Rotaru  
Gheorghe Sălan  
Victor Ciobotaru  
Florin Buhuceanu

## DOP

I.P.  
Anelise Sălan

## Additional Camera

Roxana Ardelean  
Adriana Georgescu

## Sound restauration&Music

Vlaicu Golcea

## Color Correction

Lex

## DCP&post

Cristina Mertic



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