



# Latvia



Latvia continued to show signs of progress towards greater LGBTI equality, as witnessed through the state-guaranteed respect of freedom of assembly of LGBTI people (which was previously highly contentious). The country's participation in the Council of Europe's LGBT project, as well as initiatives in the field of education, are two more examples of steps forward. However, on a negative note, the Ombudsman published an opinion saying that recognition of same-sex couples continues to be regarded as "unacceptable" by a majority of people in the country while the Eurobarometer poll revealed that the Latvians are the least comfortable in the European Union with openly LGBT person elected to high political position.

## Bias motivated violence

- In November, Prosecutor General Ēriks Kalnmeiers said that Article 78 of the *Criminal Code*, which criminalises hate speech on the basis of race, ethnicity and nationality, should be amended to also protect such minority groups as homosexuals, pensioners and disabled people.
- ILGA-Europe collected information on four hate crimes perpetrated during the year. These crimes included an assault and cases of threats of violence against LGBT people, as well as a relatively minor attack against the Baltic Pride participants in June. This information was collected as part of documentation activities in preparation of the OSCE/ODIHR's annual hate crime report, to be published in November 2013.

## Education

- In September, the Ministry of Welfare launched two books for pre-schools *The Day when Ruth was Richard* and *The Day when Karlis was Karlina* addressing the issues of gender equality and tackling understanding of traditional gender roles. 54 family values and Christian organisations signed and sent a letter to the Prime Minister, the Ombudsman, the Minister of Justice and the State Children's Rights Protection Inspectorate demanding that publication and distribution of the books be halted and that the Minister of Welfare Ilze Viņķele resign. The Ministry of Welfare refused to ban the books and they were also made available on the Ministry's website.

## Equality and non-discrimination

- In November, the Council of Europe and the Latvian government co-organised the start-up conference of the Council of Europe's LGBT project. The project's objective is to support Latvia and other Member States in their efforts to develop strong, cross-sectoral LGBT policy, supporting the national fight against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and applying the *Recommendation (2010)5 of the Committee of Ministers* that was adopted in 2010. Representatives of various Latvian ministerial departments and of the police, as well as NGOs, contributed to the conference and discussed the situation of LGBT people in Latvia in that perspective.

## Family

- In January, the Ombudsman published an opinion in which he concluded that "the majority of people in Latvia [...] are not prepared to compare registration of same-gender partnership to the institution of marriage or to accept homosexual relations as a normatively acceptable lifestyle." The Ombudsman therefore considered that the proposals made by LGBT and Their Friends' Association Mozaika should not be accepted. Instead, the Ombudsman considered that "amendments to a series of legal acts" could be considered to bring the legal protections of unmarried couples closer to the legal protections of married couples, as regards the rights of patients, the protection of conflicts of interest, and some social rights relating to labour or social subsidies legislation.

## Freedom of assembly

- In March, a member of the Riga City Council tabled amendments to the city's internal order regulation to ban "public propaganda of homosexuality" in order to prohibit the Baltic Pride Parade scheduled for the end of spring. However, this proposal was not even examined by the City Council, which is a sign of remarkable evolution given the serious ban threats experienced ahead of the previous Baltic Pride Parade organised in Riga in 2009.
- In June, the Baltic Pride Parade took place peacefully in Riga. Contrary to what had happened at the previous Pride Parade held in Riga in 2009, participants walked without being separated from other citizens by police forces. No serious attack was registered.
- In June, various events took place around the celebration of the Baltic Pride. A conference was held in the premises of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the participation of a number of Latvian officials. The Minister for Welfare, Ms. Ilze Viņķele, and the Mayor of Riga, Mr. Nils Ušakovs also took part in a reception to celebrate the Baltic Pride, and the Minister presented Mozaika with a plaque of recognition for its contribution towards the improvement of the human rights situation of LGBTI people in the country. In addition, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Edgars Rinkēvičs, attended the

closing event of the Pride March, which was the first participation of a government representative in a Pride event in Latvia.

## Health

- In May, on the basis of collaboration with the AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), Mozaika engaged in the distribution of condoms and lubricants in all Riga gay venues, during Baltic Pride events and during other public events.
- In June, Mozaika, in collaboration with the Latvian Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, organised the first free testing for HIV and STI in one of Riga's nightclubs. Mozaika also participated in the Latvian Coordination Committee meetings on HIV/AIDS/STI and in the Northern Dimension Expert Group on HIV/AIDS and AI Meetings, initiating future regional projects on HIV prevention among MSM.

## Police and law enforcement

- In February and March, two seminars were organised by the NGO Mozaika and the State Police College on prevention and response to hate crimes. These seminars benefited from the support and participation of the US Embassy.

## Public opinion

- According to Eurobarometer 2012, 26% of Latvians believe sexual orientation discrimination is widespread. This is slightly below the EU27 average (46%). 17% believe gender identity discrimination is widespread. This is significantly below the EU27 average (45%). Latvians scored 3.2 on a scale from 1 ('totally uncomfortable') to 10 ('totally comfortable') when asked how comfortable they would feel with an LGB individual in the highest elected political position in their country. This is significantly below the EU27 average (6.6) and is the lowest in the EU. Latvians scored 2.8 on a similar scale when asked about a transgender/transsexual person in the highest elected political position in their country. This is significantly below the EU27 average (5.7) and is the lowest in the EU.

## Member organisations of ILGA-Europe

Alliance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans people and their friends – Mozaika  
[www.mozaika.lv](http://www.mozaika.lv)