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Serbia: Belgrade Pride 2014 – A victory for human rights

For the first time since 2010, Belgrade Pride march took place today – a victory for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community in Serbia, and their supporters, who have for several years struggled to peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

About 1000 people marched through central Belgrade, waving rainbow flags and banners, in solidarity with all victims of discrimination, hate and violence. The march was attended by LGBTI activists from Serbia and the region, representatives of the Serbian government, the City of Belgrade, the EU and international activists and diplomats.

An Amnesty International delegation, including human rights monitors, marched alongside the LGBTI community. A heavy police presence protected the participants, allowing the march to proceed according to plan, and without violence.

However, before and after the Pride, several demonstrations against the rights of LGBTI people took place. The night before, violence erupted when counter-demonstrators clashed with riot police in the city centre. Despite a ban on all public gatherings on the day of the Pride, a number of protests also followed the march, including by religious and nationalist groups opposed to the Pride.

Although the march was not marred by violence, a number of incidents took place elsewhere in the city, including at the building of independent broadcaster B92, which was stormed by 30 violent attackers, resulting in a small number of injuries. A bus was also set on fire.

Amnesty International welcomes measures taken by the authorities to contain the counter-demonstrations, and notes that a few people were arrested and fined for misdemeanours. However, the government now needs to robustly address the very visible discrimination and violence against LGBTI people in Serbia, and place a real focus on combatting hate crimes against LGBTI people and to protect all human rights defenders in Serbia.