



Bulgaria



Overt homophobia and transphobia expressed by government and religious leaders as well as by extremist groups remained common in Bulgaria. Reported cases of homophobic speech include (i) derogatory comments towards LGBTI community by the Minister of Culture; (ii) a call to violence against the Pride Parade marchers by a clergyman from the Bulgarian Orthodox Church; and (iii) a counter event organised by nationalist parties during the Pride Parade. Nonetheless, the Pride march was able to be held peacefully and without disturbance for the first time, with over 2000 participants marching through the streets of Sofia.

Bias motivated speech

- In January, the Minister of Culture, Vezhdi Rashidov controversially slammed the gay community in an interview for *Biograph* a local magazine. He said: "I find the gays to be the most unpleasant community, since they combine the worst qualities of women and the most despicable qualities of men." Rashidov's statement came after he was asked whether he behaves in an authoritative manner towards women.

- In June, prior to the Pride Parade, Evgeniy Yanakiev, a clergyman of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, from a provincial town of Sliven, stated: "Our whole society must in every possible way oppose the gay parade that is being planned. For this reason today I appeal to all those who consider themselves Christians and Bulgarians: throwing stones at gays is an appropriate way." As a result, the Sofia Pride initiative committee published an official statement asking the Church to separate itself from any calls to violence against the Parade made on behalf of its representatives. In response the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church issued a statement which did not mention the priest's remarks but declared that homosexuality was "an unnatural lust which unconditionally harms both the personality of those who commit it and the society as a whole".

- In July, prior to the Sofia Pride Parade held protesters affiliated with nationalist parties in Bulgaria (Ataka, the Bulgarian national movement, the Bulgarian National Union, the Bulgarian National Radical Party, and National Resistance) organised a counter event opposing 'homosexuality' and shouted bias motivated statements such as "Homosexuality is a perverted fashion imported from the United States" and "Death to faggots".

Bias motivated violence

- In April, the latest draft of a new *Criminal Code* was presented for consultation, clearly including coverage of hate crimes based on sexual orientation. The bill has not yet been adopted.

- In June, Amnesty International (AI) released a report on hate crimes against LGBTI people in Bulgaria *Changing Laws, Changing Minds*, criticising the lack of legislation

addressing bias motivated violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Due to insufficient legislation, the motives of such crimes are rarely uncovered. AI also drew attention to several cases of violence against LGBTI people in Bulgaria. According to AI, transgender individuals face additional discrimination and are attacked more frequently than LGB people. In some instances, police have reportedly refused to investigate violence against trans people.

- In June, a participant of the Sofia Pride was attacked and beaten a few hours after the March, on his way back home. The attack was particularly dangerous because it they nearly broke his insulin pump, as he suffers from a severe form of diabetes. He was saved by car drivers who stopped the perpetrators.

Equality and non-discrimination

- During the year, the equality body processed two applications submitted on the grounds of sexual orientation.

Foreign policy

- In August, the proposed Bulgarian ambassador to the Vatican was ultimately not confirmed in his position. It remains unclear whether this was linked to the fact that he had previously written a novel with a gay theme. There was no official comment or position on the case by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, however, another candidate was proposed for the position and Cyril Marichkov, the former candidate, still lives and works in Italy.

Freedom of assembly

- In July, over 2000 people participated in the fifth Sofia Pride Parade which took place peacefully and without disturbance for the first time. The ambassadors of the United Kingdom and United States and representatives of other foreign embassies were present. Additionally, a letter of support was received from 134 Members of the European Parliament. The police presence was less numerous than in previous years. It is worth mentioning that this was the first Pride in Bulgaria for which the organisers were not asked to pay for the services of police

officers and taxes to the municipality for the march. The opposition was confined to a licensed protest that same morning. No incidents were reported.

Public opinion

- According to Eurobarometer 2012, 20% of Bulgarians believe sexual orientation discrimination is widespread. This is significantly less than the EU27 average (46%). 16% believe gender identity discrimination is widespread. This is significantly less than the EU27 average (45%). Bulgarians scored 3.7 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). Bulgarians scored 3.4 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).

Member organisations of ILGA-Europe

Bilitis Resource Center Foundation
www.bilitis.org

Sofia Pride
www.sofiapride.info