



FYR Macedonia



Discrimination and stigmatisation of the LGBTI community remained widespread in the country, and often fuelled by bias motivated speech from public officials. One of the most high profile incidents revolved around the derogatory comments of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy about LGBTI families, comments made under the guise of protecting minors and defending of the heterosexual family unit. Likewise, journalists also contributed significantly towards the stigmatisation of the LGBTI community through sensationalist and inflammatory articles. Furthermore, there were cases of violence against LGBTI human rights defenders, including an attempt to set the LGBTI Support Centre on fire.

Bias motivated speech

- In October, Spiro Ristovski, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, reiterated his claims that “homosexuals cannot raise healthy children” on national TV station SITEL. The journalists of the station presented homosexuality as a threat to the nation and to civilisation, drawing parallels between homosexuality and paedophilia, incest and zoophilia. Civil society organisations held a press conference criticising the statement by the Minister and calling on him to respect existing national laws on non-discrimination. Widespread media coverage of the press conference presented civil society’s demands as that of “same-sex marriage and adoption of children” and hence a threat to family values. This was followed by numerous media articles with homophobic discourse. Four front pages of the newspaper Vecer on four subsequent days published articles containing images from gay porn films under the following titles: “There will be No Homosexual Marriages in Macedonia”, “Chicks with Condoms”, “We want nephews, not faggots” and “Researchers prove that children of homosexual couples are victims of paedophilia”. These provocative and homophobic articles fuelled a hostile environment. Homophobic hate speech continued on the internet editions of some newspapers, in internet forums and social networks.

Bias motivated violence

- In October, the Macedonian Helsinki Committee opened an LGBTI Support Centre in Skopje with the aim of providing space for LGBTI groups to self-organise and provide support. A day after the opening of the Centre (and following the above mentioned media portrayal of the issue), three masked assailants stoned the Centre and broke the glass at the entrance. The Helsinki Committee reported the attack to the police and the case is under investigation.
- In December, there was another attempt to attack and set fire to the LGBTI Support Centre. The face of one of the attackers was captured on the security camera which was sent to the police. The case is under investigation.

- In total, ILGA-Europe collected information on six hate crimes perpetrated during the year. Apart from the attacks targeting the LGBTI support centre, cases of violence occurred within families as well as against a gay man belonging to an ethnic minority. 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 2011, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPAD) ruled that a textbook used in third-year secondary education contained discriminatory portrayals of LGBT people. The textbook calls being LGBT “wickedness”, and refers to LGBT people as “persons with mental health difficulties and obstacles” with “neurotic and psychotic personalities”, who are “participants in such perverted, unnatural, and [...] abnormal sexual life”. The Commission requested that the Ministry of Education review the textbook and change the homophobic content. In 2012, the Ministry of Education and Science announced that the textbook would be revised. The textbook for Pedagogy printed in 2012 had the discriminatory parts removed. However, no positive new content was introduced in the textbook to cover LGBTI issues.

Enlargement

- In October, the European Commission issued the *2012 Progress Report on FYR Macedonia* where it noted that the “LGBT community continue to suffer from discrimination and stigmatisation” and reiterated that the anti-discrimination law is still not fully in line with the *acquis* as protection from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is still omitted. It further recommended that the government of FYR Macedonia establish structured and systematic data analysis on discrimination and conduct awareness raising activities on equality and non-discrimination.

Family

- In June, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Spiro Ristovski, stated that he will do everything to keep the

legal provision defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman. The Minister's remarks came as a response to the Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights' initiative, before the Constitutional Court, to reassess a provision in the *Family Law* regulating close personal relations as "personal relations between people of different sexes". Macedonian Helsinki Committee claimed that this definition provides grounds for discrimination against people who are in same-sex relationships in cases of protection from domestic violence. In November, the Constitutional Court rejected the submitted initiative on the basis that there is no single category of citizens excluded from protection from domestic violence and the law recognises the potential victims of family violence (including same-sex couples) as those who live in a 'common household'.

- In October, Minister Ristovski, in the frame of a public presentation related to the *International Day of the Girl Child*, stated that he did not even want to consider the possibility of adoption of children by homosexual people because he believes that "[...] a child should be brought up correctly, to grow and develop in a marriage with a mother and a father in a true and biological sense of the word." He further commented on the reaction of the Coalition of Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalised Communities and the Network for Protection from Discrimination to his initial statements, "I and the party I belong to make efforts for a healthy nation [not a racially clean nation as the Coalition and the Network claimed]. In fact, statistics show a decrease in the birth rate, and how otherwise shall we increase it, if not by births of healthy children in a healthy natural environment".

Freedom of assembly

- In November, the March of Tolerance was organised by the Macedonian Helsinki Committee/LGBTI Support Centre together with other civil society representatives working on non-discrimination and equality. Before the start of the March, as the organisers were setting up information stands at the central square, one masked man threatened and punched two LGBT activists. The police arrested and charged the attacker with violent behaviour.

Helsinki committee also brought charges against the attacker for obstruction of the planned public gathering.

- Preparations were made by a group of LGBT organisations, women's rights and mainstream human rights organisations to organise Skopje Pride in June 2013.

Member organisations of ILGA-Europe

LGBT United Macedonia
www.facebook.com/lgbtunitedmacedonia

Women's Alliance
www.womensalliance.mk