

# Fighting homophobia, Support EuroPride!

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George Bush's recent pronouncements that he wants to amend the US constitution to enshrine marriage as something that can only take place between a man and a woman is not a piece of homophobia dreamt up in his own brain. For once the most powerful politician in the world is following someone else's political ideas - in this case the right wing "preachers party" in Latvia which successfully amended their constitution in this way last year.

But it's not just at the level of the law that lesbians, gay men, transgender people and bisexuals have faced increasing discrimination in Eastern Europe in particular.

On May 27, a gay pride march in Moscow was banned by the city's mayor Yuri Luzhkov. Luzhkov said such a march would never take place while he was in office and denounced homosexuality as "mad licentiousness".

But despite this a small group of Russians together with their international supporters went ahead with the protest and were then viciously attacked by right-wing thugs, chanting obscene and threatening slogans and hurling smoke bombs.

One of their chants was 'Gays and lesbians to Kolmya', a reference to the gruesome gulag camp where dissidents were incarcerated and abused during the Soviet area.

Initially the police did nothing to stop this assault and then later arrested two of the two co-organisers of the Pride event; Nikolai Alekseev and Yevgenia Debryanskaya while apparently trying to keep the two sides apart. The gay German Green MP, Volker Beck, was one of those who was bloodied, having been hit in the eye and on the nose with a rock and fists. He was arrested but his attacker was not.

Activist Peter Tatchell, who was one of those present concludes his report on this web site by saying: "The Moscow Pride events of 27 May remind me of my teenage memories of the black civil rights marchers in the 1960s. They, too, defied an authoritarian state and faced bloody repression. But they triumphed in the end, as will Russian lesbians and gays.

Moscow Pride 2006 is over. But the battle for the right to protest that it sparked has only just begun. Nikolai Alekseev and the others who were arrested will appeal against the ban on Moscow Pride, and against their arrest by the police. They plan to take their appeal all the way to the European Court of Human Rights. This is a battle that looks set to run and run. Undeterred, they are already planning Moscow Pride 2007. Be there! "

Subsequently on June 2 about forty people protested in Brussels outside the Russian Federation Delegation to the European Commission about the banning of the protest and the subsequent violence. And the French Communist Party have broken off relations with the Russian CP over the banning of the Moscow march.

And sadly Moscow was not a complete aberration, though the level of violence was particularly bad. Two days later on May 29 a "gay tolerance march" in the southern Polish city of Krakow was attacked by members of the far-right All Poland Youth Group, throwing stones and eggs.

Activists say that the overall situation in the country has become worse since the election of the conservative Law and Justice Party came to power last September which campaigned on traditional, family and Catholic values. Shortly after he became Prime Minister, Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz said in an interview that homosexuality is unnatural. Surveys suggest that 9 out of 10 Poles agree with him.

In Bucharest the second Pride March took place on June 3 with around 500 marching through the streets of the capital. But egg-throwing counter-demonstrators organised mainly by the Romanian Orthodox churches marred the day. The growth of visible homophobia in Eastern and Central Europe will be a key theme of the Europride events taking place in London at the end of June/beginning of July.

On June 30 a conference will take place organised by Amnesty International, the European Prides Organisation Association and ILG-Europe. Its aim is "to provide practical support to LGBT activists who organise or plan to organise a Pride event in a hostile environment, whether in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, or elsewhere in Europe. It will build on successes achieved so far by sharing the lessons gained and by exploring the ways that European institutions and international solidarity can contribute to further advances".

It is certainly hoped that as well as looking at how to strengthen solidarity with those in Eastern Europe the conference will address other issues such as the important fight against transphobia which has been taking place in Portugal and the need to act to widen that struggle.

In February 2006, Gisberta Salce Júnior, a Brazilian transsexual living in the Portuguese city of Porto, was tortured and anally raped with sticks for three days and then thrown into a pit and left to die in an abandoned construction site.

Gisberta had been in very poor health. She was HIV Positive, and had tuberculosis. She lived on the streets, and engaged in sex work to earn some money.

The coverage of this crime in the Portuguese media was an outrage. The press refused to publish her photo, neglected to mention that she was transsexual and generally tried to dehumanise her. They ignored the public statements of LGBT organisations.

Although a group of boys aged 12-16 confessed to the crime, at one point it seemed they would not be prosecuted. However on June 6 the legal process started against twelve adolescents, all of whom were in a care home run by the Catholic Church. Their defence team is attempting to argue there was no intention to murder and to have the charges reduced from murder to manslaughter.

These latest developments happened in the run up to a successful international day of action demanding justice for Gisberta and opposing transphobia. The horror not only of Gisberta's death and the manner of it but the response from Portuguese society shows the depth of prejudice facing trans people.

And while the situation in a number of other European countries (including Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark) is undoubtedly better both from the point of view legal rights (legal partnership agreements, anti-discrimination laws) and public attitudes as high-profile lesbians and gays in political in many spheres of life including politics have a positive impact but real discrimination, hatred and violence are part of the daily lives of far too many in our communities.

In Britain, the increase in homophobic bullying in schools and a number of high profile murders are particular causes for concern. At the same time as linking arms with our sisters and brothers across Europe and across the world, we have to ensure that our own Pride is visible and militant.

It is obviously important that there is an increasingly organised presence of LGBT people in many trade unions and that those contingents are likely to be visible at Pride in London as well as at various other events across the country throughout the year. But the left needs to give this issue a higher priority and a higher profile in its activities.

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