



LICENSOR OF EUROPRIDE

**EUROPEAN
PRIDE** ORGANISERS
ASSOCIATION

31 January 2024

Dr Graeme Reid
Independent Expert SOGI
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations

Via email to hrc-ie-sogi@un.org

Dear Dr Reid

Protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, in relation to the human rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly

1. The European Pride Organisers Association represents and advocates for Pride organisations in all Council of Europe member states and Belarus and Russia. Established for thirty years, today we have over 120 member Pride organisations in more than 35 countries. We also licence the EuroPride event to a different member each year.
2. We very much welcome your focus on the freedoms of expression, association and assembly as it relates to LGBTI+ people. These freedoms are often overlooked and we are encouraged that your first call for input focuses on this area.
3. Given our role as an international organisation with a remit covering almost fifty countries, our input is provided in a different format to the country-focused input you requested from individual organisations but we are confident that our input will still be instructive and informative.
4. As a small NGO without staff and relying on the generosity of time of our board members we are not able to collect data in any sustainable way but the anecdotal evidence we hear at our annual conference, at EuroPride and at Prides, and from talking to our members directly suggests there is, Europe-wide, a widespread increase in hostility towards our community including at Pride events.
5. This hostility has taken its most violent form at Oslo Pride (NO) in June 2022 when [two people were shot and killed](#) outside an LGBTI+ venue in the city on the eve of the Pride march. Planned attacks on [Cumbria Pride](#) (UK) in 2017, [Pride in London](#) (UK) in 2019 and [Vienna Pride](#) (AT) in 2023 were only prevented by the diligence of security services and police.

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6. Less violent attacks against Pride events are common. Participants at a Pride in Iasi (RO) were [pelted with eggs](#) in 2022. The city centre office of Belgrade Pride (RS) [has been attacked](#) 19 times in six years, with zero prosecutions. In 2021, participants at Zagreb Pride (HR) [faced 'fascist violence'](#) for the first time in years. Four thousand far right 'activists' [threatened participants](#) in Białystok Pride (PL) in 2019, and [nationalist groups attacked](#) Odessa Pride (UA) the same year.
7. Individual participants are also targeted, even in supposedly 'safe' regions. In 2022 a trans man [was murdered](#) after intervening to prevent homophobic abuse at a Pride event in Münster (DE). A male couple [were violently attacked](#) on their way home from UK Black Pride in London (UK) in 2023. A young trans boy and his family [were attacked](#) after Brussels Pride (BE) in 2022. A Pride attendee [was attacked](#) after the opening event of EuroPride 2023 in Gozo (MT).
8. These three groups of examples – of terrorist threats, of attacks on Pride events, and attacks on individuals – are all increasing in frequency and possibly also ferocity. Our communities are living in increasing fear, wondering if they or their Pride or gathering will be the next target.
9. Threats to our peaceful assembly are also orchestrated, on a prima facie basis at least, from within our community. Transphobic and gender critical fanatics have disrupted Pride marches and parades across Europe and indeed farther afield. These groups present as respectable groups who often claim to speak for a lesbian majority. The reality, as exposed by [research published by the European Parliament](#), is that they are often linked to funding from Russia and the evangelical church in the United States.
10. The interference of religious groups was most recently witnessed in stark terms at EuroPride in Belgrade (RS) in September 2022. EuroPride status had been awarded to Belgrade Pride three years earlier, and the news had passed without incident including in Serbia. A month before the start of EuroPride, however, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić announced that EuroPride was 'cancelled' despite this being outwith his powers. Three intense weeks of political shapeshifting and power-grabbing followed, during which time a senior member of the church said that if he had a gun, he "would use it against EuroPride". For a full account of the incidents at EuroPride in Belgrade we recommend [this blog post](#) by our former President, Kristine Garina.
11. Our geographic scope includes Russia, where Pride is banned under the auspices of the various 'anti-propaganda' laws enacted in the last decade, and Türkiye where there has been a ban on Pride marches since 2015, upheld by domestic courts but not tried at any international tribunal. Restrictions on freedom of assembly in Belarus prevent any tangible form of civil society organising of anything similar to a 'Pride' march, and entrenched religious opposition continues to pose a major barrier to Pride in countries such as Azerbaijan.
12. Legislation does not have to include an outright ban in order to have the effect of shrinking space for civil society and freedom of assembly. In the United Kingdom (England and Wales), 2023 legislation gives any police officer the authority to determine that any demonstration or protest is causing public nuisance and is

therefore immediately prohibited. The legislation includes imprisonment as a punishment for breaches of the law. We believe it is only a matter of time before this legislation is used against individuals organising or attending a Pride.

13. Some organisations believe that law enforcement officials are using emergency legislation introduced during the coronavirus pandemic to limit assembly for public health reasons to continue to prevent assembly for political reasons. In Italy, student and worker demonstrations are among those attacked by police perhaps using this legislation. We believe that this warrants further research.
14. The judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in [Bączkowski and Others v. Poland](#) (2007) that a ban on Pride was a breach of articles 11, 13 and 14 of the Convention continues to be used to challenge attempts to ban Pride. This has happened most often in Poland, where our Association has challenged municipalities and political leadership on several occasions in recent years. That some political leaders continue to think that Pride can be banned (as in Türkiye with the national 'ban') and the lack of serious sanction as a result, is troubling.

Without a change in the political winds in Europe we expect challenges of the type described above to increase further in the coming years. The role of civil society organisations and international treaty bodies in protecting our rights will be critical.

We hope the information provided is useful to your inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further information or elaboration.

Yours faithfully

Lenny Emson (he/him)
President

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