How well protected are LGBTI public events in Europe and Central Asia?

Blog, Civil Rights and Freedom, Freedom of Assembly, Pride

> Oslo Pride was cancelled on Saturday in the wake of terrorist attack near the city's largest LGBTI bar, while over 373 Pride participants were detained in the Turkish capital of Istanbul. Meanwhile, after years of mounting tension and attacks in Poland, Warsaw Pride went ahead without any trouble this weekend. Here's our overview of the state and protection of freedom of assembly for LGBTI people in the region.

In some cities, Pride is celebrated with freedom, joy and dancing, but in others it is prohibited, as in Istanbul, where roughly 370 participants were arrested this weekend. Or participants are attacked, as they were in the Romanian city of Iasi earlier this month. In Oslo, after the tragic attack on the London Bar on Friday, June 24, the police decided that Pride in the city would be cancelled for the safety of all involved.

Freedom of assembly is a human right, that is the right of LGBTI people to gather in celebration or protest, or simply to put on an event, but as we are seeing, this cannot be taken for granted. Prides and other LGBTI public gatherings remain crucial, as they clearly give us a picture of how well protected the fundamental rights and physical safety of LGBTI people are in any country.

Have a look at some outstanding events from 2021 to 2022 that show the advancement, stagnation or regression of LGBTI people's freedom of assembly in Europe and Central Asia:

Azerbaijan

Activists in Azerbaijan have announced plans to celebrate Pride for the first time in the country's history. "We have launched this initiative together to be the voice of all those who are facing problems, are threatened by society and the government, and whose rights are being violated," feminist activist Rabiya Mammadova said at a press conference in Baku on June 9. "The LGBTQ+ community is threatened by both society and the state. Given the existing threats, the queer community must now find its place in society."

The exact format and dates of the events are still being decided.

Belgium

A family was attacked by several people after Belgian Pride in Brussels. Three young men, allegedly, first insulted the family because the child was wearing a rainbow flag, and then attacked physically the kid and his mother and sister. The suspects were quickly arrested nearby the place where the aggression took place.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Third Bosnia and Herzegovina Pride parade was held in Sarajevo under the slogan "Family reunion!" An anti-LGBTI rally was held in the neighborhood of Otoka in the city, entitled "Give us back the rainbow". The Pride march went without incident despite the counter demonstration.

Bulgaria

Nearly 12,000 people turned out on June 18 for the 15th annual Sofia Pride in Bulgaria, and the crowd was addressed by several foreign ambassadors. According to the Sofia Globe, there were three events in Sofia in protest against Pride and "in defence of the traditional Bulgarian family", while the week earlier saw the customary objection by the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and weeks ago, calls by ultra-nationalists in Sofia city council for Sofia Pride to be banned. Despite these counter demonstrations and recent attacks against LGBTI people and premises, Sofia Pride went without incidents

Croatia

The 21st Zagreb Pride took place on June 4 under the motto "Give us our four walls!", with activists demanding that LGBTI people be given afforded a centre in the city. Mayor Tomislav Tomaševi? announced he would talk with LGBT associations about their demands.

Estonia

On Saturday, June 11, Pride was held for the first time ever in Tartu, Estonia's second-largest city. About 1,000 people from the LGBT+ community and their supporters marched from Vanemuise Park to Tartu's Town Hall Square, where speeches were given among others by Brian Roraff, the temporary deputy assistant US ambassador to Estonia, Ingrid Tersman, the Swedish ambassador, and Ross Allen, the British ambassador in Tallinn.

France

Several trans women were attacked at Paris Pride by trans exclusionary forces in 2021. In Bordeaux Pride this year, a LGBTphobic sign read "Protect the children. Stop LGBT madness". Other participants were attacked and nine people were arrested. Furthermore, six people were injured after the structure of a float fell apart, an accident, in principle, not connected to the anti-LGBTI attacks.

Georgia

The safety and freedom of expression and assembly of "each individual" will be protected during the upcoming Tbilisi Pride Week, Georgia's Interior Ministry announced this week, as the city's celebrations began. The organisers however decided this year not hold the Dignity March, to see how the Ministry of Interior would protect closed events. The ministry also called on anti-LGBTI protest groups to "abide by the law", noting otherwise "each case" of violation would be prevented and a "strict legal response" would follow.

Organisers of the Pride Week announced at the weekend that the Conservative Movement political party, which is affiliated with the Georgian right-wing media outlet Alt-Info, had "openly declared" it would attack the Pride Week and "repeat the events" of July 5 last year, when right-wing activists assaulted and injured over 50 journalists who had gathered to cover the eventually cancelled Tbilisi Pride march.

Hungary

Amid the introduction of anti-LGBTI legislation by the ruling Fidesz party, last year's Budapest Pride march brought together a record 35,000 people and the country's first Pride march outside the capital took place in Pécs. After national elections that saw Fidesz hold on to power, although an anti-LGBTI referendum on the same day was invalidated, Budapest Pride will take place again on July 23.

Kazakhstan

On March 8, 2021, Feminita along with other grass roots feminist groups and activists managed to get a permission to organise the Women's March for the first time in one of the largest cities of Kazakhstan in Almaty. The march was a success gathering women of all walks, including LBQT women and displaying LGBTI symbols along the streets of Almaty. However, in 2022 the Women's March was restricted yet another time. Following the political crisis that spread all over the country in January 2022, the authorities banned various public events, including marches. Feminita and other local groups organised a gathering rather than a full-fledged march like the one the year before.

Liechtenstein

Pride took place in the country for the first time on 11 June, 2022.

Lithuania

Last year, Kaunas celebrated its first Pride after a court ruled against the refusal of the municipality to grant a permit. 2,000 people attended and although there were several counter-demonstrations and attacks, civil society assessed the police's work as generally good.

North Macedonia

The third Skopje Pride took place on 25 June under the slogan "Come Out for Love! Dignity. Equality. Justice". The Pride took place without incident.

Norway

An impromptu protest with hundreds of marchers took place in Oslo, after police cancelled Pride in the wake of an attack on the LGBTI community by radicalised Islamist, Zaniar Matapour in the early hours of the day. Two people were killed and 21 injured in the attack. An official demonstration of solidarity with the victims of the attack was held in the city yesterday, Monday June 27

Poland

This year, Warsaw Pride twinned with Kyiv Pride, in support of Ukrainian LGBTI people affected by the war in Ukraine and of course unable to hold Kyiv Pride in Kyiv itself this year. Many European officials were in attendance and the parade went ahead without any attempt at a ban or negative incidents.

Romania

Pride participants in Iasi, the largest city in eastern Romania, were attacked by conservative and religious protesters on June 5. The anti-Pride protesters chanted "Iasi is not Sodom' and then attacked the Pride marchers by throwing eggs and setting off flares. A police Gendarmerie bus separated the two groups along the route of the march, and officers were deployed to prevent tensions from escalating further. Last year Bucharest Pride and Ia?i Pride were blocked by their respective municipalities, but thanks to work of LGBTI activists were allowed to go ahead eventually, albeit with restrictions.

Turkey

On Sunday, June 26 police forcibly intervened in the Istanbul Pride march in Istanbul, detaining 373 demonstrators

including journalists and photographers. Hundreds of protesters carrying rainbow flags pressed ahead with the rally in defiance of police. This police attack on Pride was one of a number this year, as in previous years. Already on 20 May Bo?aziçi University Pride was forcibly repressed by police, with 70 detentions, and METU Pride was repressed on 10 June with 38 detentions. The first Canakkale LGBTI+ Pride Week, planned for 13-17 June, was banned by Çanakkale Governorship, the first Datça LGBTI+ Pride Week was attacked by police on 20 June, Izmir Pride was banned and police detained 12 people. Eski?ehir Pride is planned for 3 July but the governorate has already issued a ban, and Ankara Pride is scheduled for 28 July. Violent police intervention is expected at both events.