THEMES

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

AUSTRIA

Drag Queen Candy Licious shared that her reading events for children now only happen with police protection in place. A reading in March had 15 police officers present.

FPÖ’s attempts to ban drag story time and threats by right-wing groups to attack readings for children led to a demonstration against drag story time and a counter-demonstration for LGBTIQ-visibility outside Vienna’s Türkis Rosa Lila Villa during a reading event. Several politicians went to the scene and spoke out against anti-LGBTI hate.

In October, FPÖ pushed the Vienna city council to cancel yearly funding to Türkis Rosa Lila Villa after the Palestine flag was hung by an occupant of the building. On a local level, FPÖ pushed for tearing down the centre and building social housing on the site. Both attempts failed.

AZERBAIJAN

In June, the Minister of Education was criticised after sharing a picture on social media on Children’s Day, which featured a rainbow-coloured kite.

Following the adoption of Russia’s latest anti-LGBT propaganda law, several politicians, including from the government, said Azerbaijan should adopt a similar law.

In February, a year after the homophobic murder of LGBTQ+ activist Avaz Hafizli a documentary about his life was screened in Baku.

In March, the Turkish singer Kalben hung a trans flag during her concert in Baku.

BOSNIA HERZEGOVINA

In July, the Republika Srpska Parliament adopted amendments to the Criminal Code, which will impose thousands of Euros of fines for defamation, which many believe would contribute to censorship. The EU called for the withdrawal of the law.

BULGARIA

Sofia Pride billboard campaign, featuring both rainbow and traditional families, was formally investigate for “promoting same-sex families as superior”. Two women photographed in the campaign with their children were later summoned to the Ministry of Interior directorate in Sofia. This investigation is ongoing (see under Bias-motivated Violence).

NORTHEN CYPRUS

Two rainbow coloured sculptures were removed from the METU Northern Cyprus Campus in July, seen by civil society as a move to restrict freedom of expression.

FINLAND

(see under Bias-motivated Speech)

GEORGIA

Media freedom continued to deteriorate. Alt-Info continued attacking events (see here and here).

In March, the parliament voted against the draft foreign agents law following massive public outcry and demonstrations (see here, here, here, and here) in the country and criticism from abroad. Over 60 media outlets and civil society groups had promised they would not comply with the law. The police used excessive force, including water cannons and tear gas, against the protesters.

Far-right politicians and religious leaders called for a ban on a number of books and screenings this year, for spreading ‘LGBT propaganda’.

Several political and religious leaders again suggested introducing an ‘LGBT propaganda’ law, including the Prime Minister (see here, here, and here).

In June, rainbow-coloured umbrellas were removed from a park in Tbilisi.

GREECE

Far-right politicians took issue with a rainbow painted on a school’s wall in Corinth. The mayor and the deputy Minister of Education both stated the painting had nothing to do with LGBTIQ+ rights and it was merely a rainbow.

HUNGARY

In January, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in Macaté v. Lithuania that restricting and labelling a book of fairy tales as harmful to children for including LGBTIQ+ characters is a violation of Art. 10 (freedom of expression). The ruling repeatedly mentions the Hungarian Child Protection law and the censoring of Wonderland is for
Everyone as a similar example of censorship. Hátter had submitted a third-party intervention.

Also in January, a court confirmed the obligation of the Prime Minister Office to release the data on the measures taken against “LGBTQ propaganda”.

The European Commission’s infringement procedures continued against Hungary over its anti-LGBT Child Protection Law. By the April deadline, 15 EU Member States and the European Parliament joined the proceedings this year.

Bookstores were fined this year for not complying with the ‘propaganda law’ (see here, here, here, here, and here). A different decree sets out that stores within a 200-metre radius of a school or church cannot sell any books that feature LGBTQ characters and that stores outside this radius must remove them from the youth section, wrap them in foil, and put a 18+ mark on them. In July, for instance, the bookshop Líra was fined 12,000,000 huf (32,000 EURO) for displaying Heartstopper, an award-winning YA novel, at the children’s section without a plastic cover. The establishment requested a review of the case, another fined bookstore too. The author of Heartstopper condemned the government’s backlash. 34 Hungarian authors published a joint statement condemning the government’s censorship.

In July, college students set up tables outside a Libri store with a “banned books for free” sign, selling the foiled books for a donation. Civil society launched the www.folianelkul.com website (Eng: without a foil) and the hashtag #homofolia trended on social media (ed: ‘folia’ means plastic cover) for weeks.

In May, the Metropolitan Court ruled that Háttér’s request to the Media Council regarding the number of proceedings the Council was initiated on the basis of the Child Protection Law. Háttér lost the appeal and the case is pending for review before the Curia.

Budapest Pride turned to court after the Media Council refused to classify this year’s campaign film as a Public Service Announcement and would only allow it to be streamed between 10pm and 5am. TV channel RTLKlub also turned to court to challenge the Council’s anti-LGBTQ classification.

The Ferencváros municipality and Amnesty International Hungary painted a bench with rainbow colours ahead of the Budapest Pride march. The bench was repainted every day for a week by far-right extremists, who also tagged it with hateful slogans, and then painted again, or wrapped in foil (see above) by LGBTQ activists. The bench had to be removed after getting damaged in the process.

The Consumer Protection Department of the Budapest Government Office launched an investigation into Sziget Festival’s promotional video for featuring a same-sex kiss. Google/Youtube were investigated as well for showing the video.

The Ministry of Culture banned the entry of minors to the World Press Photo exhibition because photos of LGBTI seniors were portrayed.

ICELAND
Rainbow flags and trans flags were raised across the capital on the occasion of IDAHOBIT on 17 May and during trans visibility week.

IRELAND
Several protests took place across the country against LGBTQ-themed books and/or books written by trans authors in public libraries, for instance in Dublin, Cork, among other towns (see here, here, here, here and here). The far-right protesters harassed, intimidated and filmed librarians and called for the removal of the books. The cities’ leadership and Ministers condemned the attacks. In July, the Cork library closed due to safety concerns after the protesters hung up a “there are only two genders” sign at the entrance. Kerry’s library was stormed during a drag storytime event in July. Solidarity protests were also held (see here, here, and here) throughout the year.

Children’s Books Ireland launched a new campaign, Reading Matters, in response to the hateful attacks.

Several young adult books with LGBTQ content have been reclassified by some libraries as adult content.

In December, Dublin City Council passed a motion to support libraries that provide LGBTQ literature and protect them from intimidation by far-right protestors.

KAZAKHSTAN
In October, the Kazakhstan Parents’ Union launched a
campaign against the children’s theatre studio, ‘Fourth Wall’ in Semey after a post on Instagram claimed the teachers were inviting children to a “homo-performance.”

KYRGYSTAN

In Spring, several draft amendments to the Mass Media Law were tabled, prohibiting materials that “form a positive attitude towards non-traditional sexual relationships” and promote the “propaganda of same-sex marriages”. National and international civil society called for the withdrawal of the amendments (see here and here).

In June, the parliament adopted the new law On Measures to Prevent Harm to Children’s Health, Their Recovery, Intellectual, Mental, Spiritual, and Moral Development, which was first tabled in March and signed into law by the President in August.

The law is similar to those in Russia and Hungary, and bans the spreading of information that denies family values, promotes “non-traditional sexual relationships”. The law calls for age limit signs on media content, books, and other materials, similar to the ‘foiling’ in Hungarian bookstores and a complete ban on discussing LGBT rights and experiences in schools. The law also calls for SIM cards for children to be registered, to ensure that harmful content is blocked on their phones.

In July, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the crackdown on the media and freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan, expressing deep concern about the law, which was also criticised by civil society in the country and abroad (see here and here).

LITHUANIA

In January, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in Macatē v. Lithuania that restricting and labelling a book of fairy tales as harmful to children for including LGBTIQ+ characters is a violation of Art. 10 (freedom of expression) (see more here, here, and here). To implement the judgement, the Ministry of Justice prepared the necessary amendments to the Law on the Protection of Minors from the Negative Effects of Public Information in July. With the proposed change, information about same-sex relationships and diverse families would no longer be considered harmful. Heated debates are expected on the issue. LGL started a petition in support of the legal amendments and held a protest in September.

The Lithuanian Family Movement announced plans to submit motions to municipality councils to adopt a declaration on “stopping gender propaganda and LGBTQ+ ideology”. The plans included motions in Kaunas, Šilalė, Šilutė and Pagėgiai. Some council members expressed their support (see here and here). Motions were tabled but rejected in Prienai.

In November, the Parliament rejected the Ministry of Justice’s proposal to repeal the “anti-LGBTIQ propaganda” law. President Gitanas Nausėda said that a repeal would give “green light to denigrate family.”

MOLDOVA

Disney’s Strange World was removed from cinema schedules in the Transnistrian region due to alleged ‘LGBT propaganda’.

In February, Alexandr Nesterovschi, a deputy from the Communists and Socialists Bloc, proposed the inclusion of a draft law on the parliamentary plenary session’s agenda that bans LGBTI “propaganda” in schools. The parliamentary majority declined this initiative.

NORWAY

The commission reviewing the state of freedom of expression in Norway published its report. The Norwegian Patient Organisation for Gender Incongruence criticised the report for being more focused on the chilling effects of the hate speech legislation than protecting minorities from hate speech, which also was supported by other organisations.

POLAND

In April, the Częstochowa District Court sentenced, in first instance, two activists to community service and a fine for
General Prosecutor Ziebro sent an extraordinary complaint following the 2022 ruling of the Częstochowa District Court, which found that carrying the rainbow-haloed Mary at the 2019 Equality March was not offensive. The case is with the Supreme Court.

The trials against the creators of Atlas of Hate continued this year. The Białystok appeals court ruled in favour of the activists in April. In October, the Powiat Przysuski Court decided to discontinue the case.

PORTUGAL

The second edition of the children’s book No Meu Bairro was presented in a bookstore in Lisbon and was met with a hostile and intimidating protest outside. The book features 12 stories of children who talk about their lives, racism, gender identity, religion, bullying and activism.

ROMANIA

In February, two far-right MPs tabled the legislative initiative B68/2023 to ban any visual, audio or video materials about LGBTQ+ people, allegedly for the “protection of minors”. Civil society widely condemned the move and asked for the bill to be withdrawn.

RUSSIA

(See also under Bias-motivated Speech; and Education)

The 2022 propaganda law had a detrimental impact on the community this year (see here, here, here). The law prohibits positive and also neutral information about LGBT people to minors and adults, information about “gender reassignment” and the “promotion of paedophilia”. Individuals can be fined roughly 4,200 EURO and organisations 52,000 EURO. In March, MP Vitaly Milonov (United Russia) proposed to create a register of all materials that contain ‘LGBT propaganda’ and previously suggested introducing a special unit to detect such materials. In April, the Ministry of Justice approved a set of criteria for “LGBT propaganda, pedophilia and gender reassignment”, which entered into force in September.

The law was used against several LGBT people and organisations this year (see here, here, and a list here), including minors. People were fired from their jobs, expelled from school, arrested, and deported (see here, here, here and here). TV channels and streaming platforms were also fined (see here, and here). Cinema screenings, theatre plays, books and bookstores were also targeted (see here, here, here, and here).

There were several attempts again to block LGBTI-themed websites and some faced prosecution for groups on social media/messaging sites or for blogging (see here, here, here, here, and here). Search functions started failing on VKontakte. Channels on messaging apps were also shut down and dating apps blocked. In May, a (German) man was deported from Russia for messages sent on a dating app.

SPAIN

Legal rows over the display of rainbow flags continued this year. Vox council members requested that the flags be removed from public buildings in several regions (see here, here, here, here, and here). The Superior Court of Justice of Castilla y León ruled the flag should not be removed from the regional parliament’s building or the city council of Valladolid. Madrid’s Superior Court of Justice ruled against the flag.

Vox and ultra-conservative religious groups continued to wage a cultural war on LGBTI+-themed works, including plays, books, exhibitions and films (see here and here).

In A Coruña, ruled by the left party PSOE, the city council has not flown the rainbow flag in the last four years, despite this being requested every year by LGBTI+ organisations.

SWITZERLAND

Four MPs in Valais tried to ban drag story events; the motion was rejected by a clear majority of the parliament. The Federal Council concluded that libraries are free to organise their own activities and that the story events were fully in line with their mandate.

TAIKISTAN

LGBT bloggers living abroad were targeted by intimidation and threats online. Their families back home were also harassed by police.

TURKEY

President Erdogan announced new measures to curb Turkey’s media content, saying reprisals are needed to protect Turkish culture and children.
The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) fined several streaming platforms this year because of LGBT+ characters (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

Journalist Semra Çelebi was acquitted for posting a rainbow flag on her social media during the 2020 Pride march.

In Dugan v. Turkey, the ECtHR found a violation of Art 5.1, right to liberty, when the police took a trans woman sex worker to a police station to identify her and eventually fined her for disruption of traffic, as this is usually done on the spot.

TURKMENISTAN
Most social media sites continue to be blocked and TV channels are censored.

UKRAINE
In February, the parliament rejected a bill that would have banned “propaganda of homosexuality and transgenderism”. A number of similar bills are also being discussed.

The parliament also dismissed a resolution that would have withdrawn state support for the production of a film, *My Young Prince*.

UNITED KINGDOM
A trans-themed poster was removed from the V&A children’s museum before its opening.

UZBEKISTAN
Human rights defenders continued to be prosecuted under the 2022 law, which criminalises “insult and slander” against Uzbek leaders, prohibits “disrespect for society, the state, state symbols (national and universal values)”, and labels demonstrations as being “in violation of the established order.”

In May, Nezir Sinani, an LGBTQI activist from Kosovo, who was attending a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) meeting in Samarkand, was harassed and surveilled by police who confiscated rainbow-coloured bags he had with him. Sinani urged the EBRD and other international financial institutions that support Uzbekistan, to condemn such actions and call for decriminalisation.