Odesa Pride attacked by Ukrainian nationalist group ‘Tradition and Order’

News, Civil Rights and Freedom, Freedom of Assembly, Pride, Ukraine

On the 30th of August, Odesa Pride tried to hold a peaceful gathering on one of the central streets of Odesa, Ukraine. Despite the fact that the group Tradition and Order were issuing threats before the event and came prepared to the gathering, where they acted violently, the authorities failed to prevent the attacks and ensure the freedom of assembly of the Odesa Pride participants.

The municipal and police authorities had been informed of the event well in advance and they had been specifically requested to protect the members of Odesa Pride against foreseeable protests by nationalist group. The nationalist group Tradition and Order issued several threats against the event and declared a counter demonstration. Ukrainian local authorities thus knew the risks surrounding the event, and they had been asked to provide heightened protection to participants of Odesa Pride. However, only a limited number of police officers were initially deployed and they allowed the aggression of Tradition and Order to develop into physical violence against participants of the Pride. Several participants were pepper-sprayed and attacked with corrosive substances: one person received 1st degree burns, another person received severe head injuries.

Ukraine, as a signatory of international and regional human rights treaties, member of the Council of Europe and under the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union and under own Constitution, has an obligation to protect participants of peaceful demonstrations and prevent any attempts to unlawfully disrupt or inhibit the effective enjoyment of right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly of all people, including LGBTI people.

Given the fact that hate crimes against LGBTI people are investigated ineffectively, offenders often avoid responsibility or charged with petty crimes and motives of intolerance on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are often ignored in Ukraine, ILGA-Europe are concerned that the Ukrainian authorities will fail to conduct a proper investigation of Odesa Pride attacks and inadequate response of the police to the event as they failed to investigate attacks of Pride events and failure of police to protect the events in previous years.

ILGA-Europe calls on the European Union and Council of Europe to hold the Ukrainian authorities accountable to the human rights obligations they have committed to as part of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and member of the Council of Europe.

ILGA-Europe calls on the EU and Council of Europe to:

- Remind Ukraine of its obligations and duties under domestic law and international human rights law to respect, guarantee, protect and fulfil fundamental rights without discrimination
- Urge Ukraine to conduct a proper investigation of allegations of victims of attacks during the Odesa Pride and launch a comprehensive and meaningful inquiry into the circumstances and bring all perpetrators of hate crimes to justice and ensure effective remedy for victims, including compensation.
- Ensure non-repetition of such incidents and urge the respective authorities to provide well-trained, efficient and sufficient police protection to human rights defenders and Pride attendees, so as to ensure that their

respect to peaceful assembly can be effectively enjoyed
- Urge Ukraine to adopt legislation on hate crimes that is motivated by sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics or other minority status;

Background information

Preparation

In August, Odesa Pride organisers – Gay Alliance Odesa – held several preparatory meetings with the police to consult them on safety of the event. During these consultations, the police was provided with a final list of all events to be held during the Odesa Pride: format, location, time, and degree of openness. Police suggested live chain format to ensure safety of members of the event and suggested location for the event. Pride organisers agreed to all suggestions of the police.

On August 20, after consultation with the police, the EUAM and a representative of the Ombudsman Institute, organiser sent official notification to the City Hall and the police that Odesa Pride will held on August 29, 2020. At the same day, police contacted organisers and suggested to reschedule the event on August 30 and this proposal was supported by the Gay Alliance Odesa.

On August 25, organisers met with contact persons from the Dialogue Police, the Department of Preventive Work and Street Activities, as well as representatives of the EUAM at the chose location for the Odesa Pride. At the meeting, organisers informed police about threats by nationalist group – Tradition and Order. Police informed organisers that they are aware of threats and monitoring the situation.

On August 28, organisers held final consultation with police. Threats, provocations, possible disruptions and strategies of counter actions were discussed during the meeting. Police informed organisers that they are still monitoring the situation and contacted counter demonstrators and received assurance from organisers of the counter demonstration that no attacks are planned.

Odesa Pride and attacks

In the morning of August 30, around 11.00 a.m., prior to the start of the Odesa Pride, organisers called police to confirm location and safety of the situation. Upon arrival, around 14.00, Odesa Pride organisers found out that agreed location was occupied by counter demonstrators – Traditional and Order. Police had made no attempts to vacate the agreed location for the event. Police insisted on relocation of the Odesa Pride as agreed location was occupied by Tradition and Order.

At 14:40, after negotiations between police and organisers of the Odesa Pride, Odesa Pride was relocated to Dumskaya Square to ensure safety of all participants of the Pride event. After 15 minutes, counter demonstrators followed the Pride participants to Dumskaya Square. Police did not make any attempts to draw live chain between the parties despite aggression and threats of counter demonstrators.

After 10 minutes of counter demonstrators' arrival, they started attacking participants of the Odesa Pride and police failed to react to these attacks: no arrests were made. After first wave of attacks, police surrounded participants of the Odesa Pride to shield them from attacks but some participants were left outside of the circle and continued being under attack of counter demonstrators.

In next 10 minutes, Tradition and Order members attacked the police. Police began to react to the surrounding events and clashes broke out between Tradition and Order and police, during which one police officer was seriously injured. Police started arresting some members of Tradition and Order.

During next 1.5 hour, a group of about 30 activists surrounded by police were continuously attacked by counter

demonstrators: pepper spray, blows with sticks, bottles and other objects (paint, eggs, stones, sticks, water bottles) had been thrown at them by members of Tradition and Order. These attacks were accompanied by insults and threats of violence and murder.

After 1.5 hours, participants of the Odesa Pride were securely removed from the Dumskaya Square by the police.