

The ILGA-Europe conference, the largest LGBTI conference in Europe and Central Asia, meets in Bucharest this weekend

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The ILGA-Europe Annual Conference, the largest LGBTI conference of its kind in Europe, has brought over 400 LGBTI activists from across Europe and Central Asia to Bucharest.

Co-organised by ILGA-Europe member organisations from Romania, Accept and MozaiQ Associations, the theme of this year's Annual Conference is 'The Call to Courage', reflecting the need for constant and fearless engagement in the movement for LGBTI human rights and equality. The event aims to address issues facing the LGBTI community in Europe, so that international activists can exchange experiences and discuss topics important to the movement at a European level. It also represents a crucial opportunity to strengthen solidarity and collaboration among LGBTI organisations in the region, in the context of the rise of conservative and populist movements in several European countries.

Commenting on the choice to hold the Conference in Romania this year, **ILGA-Europe's Advocacy Director, Katrin Hugendubel** said: "As Romania gears up for elections, and at a time when the rights, protections and lives of LGBTI people are more at risk now than in the last decade, we are in Bucharest for the ILGA-Europe conference over with 400 LGBTI activist participants, from 52 countries. The European Courts have made two judgements saying Romania should recognise both same-sex partnerships and gender recognition that have taken place in another EU country. It is time that Romania caught up with the majority of the European Union and implemented these judgements. Romania also needs to put in place legislation to recognise partnerships and rainbow families, so that the human rights of LGBTI people can be respected and protected, instead of being used as political scapegoats with attempted legislations to limit their human rights."

Failures in Romania

Judgements against Romania's at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) are among the topics addressed during the Conference, including the need to recognise same-sex families, as well as the protection of the rights of the transgender community. These topics underline both the failures of the Romanian government in protecting fundamental rights and the urgency with which these rights violations must be remedied. These challenges are amplified by an increasingly polarised political climate, where hate speech and attempts to limit minority rights are on the rise.

In addition, the conference is being held at an essential moment for Romania, given that this year is an election year. The November-December parliamentary and presidential elections will test Romanian politicians' commitment to democratic values and respect for fundamental rights. At a time when repressive anti-LGBTI legislation from the Russian playbook is being promoted in neighbouring countries, Romania must reaffirm its commitment to the protection of all its citizens.

According to **Victor Ciobotaru, Executive Director of the Accept Association Romania**: "LGBTI people have never asked for special rights. We want equal rights for ourselves and our families. Politicians have probably never done this exercise of compassion of putting themselves in the other person's shoes, in the shoes of the person

you represent, to think about what it's like to live for 25 years with someone and not have the certainty that you can be with that person in difficult moments, such as if they have health problems, if an accident occurs, or if the other person dies. These are the pressures and fears we live with every day. Every day that goes by waiting for politicians to respect our rights, is a day when real people suffer.”

Vlad Viski, the Executive Director of MozaiQ added: “We have to put a mirror in front of the political class regarding LGBTI people in Romania. There are hateful political attitudes, which are still acceptable in the Romanian Parliament and now Romania is in the situation where it is one of the last five countries in the EU that does not recognise same-sex couples, while there are judgements on partnership rights and legal gender recognition from the EU courts that are yet to be implemented.”

According to **Renate Weber, Ombudsperson for Romania**: “The first thing we need, and this would be a major step forward, is a civil partnership law that applies to everyone, both same-sex couples and heterosexual couples, in a non-discriminatory manner. We need this if we want people to come to terms with change.”

Political candidates for the forthcoming Romanian parliamentary elections who attended the press conference also gave comments:

“The LGBTI community does not benefit from any kind of regulation of their rights in relation to state institutions. This is discrimination. Failure to regulate social situations invites discourses that incite discrimination, exclusion and even hatred,” said **Andreea Leonte, candidate on the lists of the REPER party in the parliamentary elections**.

“Politicians lack courage, but they are also ignorant,” said **Diana Buzoianu, USR deputy and USR parliamentary candidate**. “Not seeing the injustice in front of you is a form of huge ignorance. The biggest obstacle is their mentality, that no matter what they do, no one will hold them accountable. Those in parliament are ultra-privileged.”

“There is a need for commitment, courage and solidarity,” added **Florina Presada, former Executive Director of Accept and candidate on the lists of the SENS Movement for parliament**. “LGBTI people need more than civil partnership, they need more than half measures. The full right is civil marriage and everything that derives from it is needed. This means protecting the family in Romania. Let's stop operating with half measures.

“Only through joint efforts can we build a society where every individual, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, feels respected and protected. It takes courage not to let hatred and discrimination become the norm, and activists from across Europe and Central Asia gathered here are a voice of solidarity and resistance against injustice.”