



ILGA-Europe
NICOSIA 2016



Welcoming from 2016 Conference Hosts, Accept-LGBT Cyprus

Nicosia, 19 June 2016

Dear Delegates,

As the President of Accept – LGBT Cyprus, this year's ILGA-Europe Conference hosts, it is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you to Cyprus for the 2016 Annual Conference of the European Region of ILGA, in the year that also marks the 20th Anniversary of the organisation.

The conference will be taking place in Nicosia, the divided capital of Cyprus for the past 42 years, and the last divided capital of Europe. The city is rich with history and we wanted to capture that in our selection of this year's conference logo which depicts the



Venetian-built Walls of Nicosia that engulf the old part of the city. The Walls of Nicosia are among the best preserved Renaissance fortifications in the Eastern Mediterranean and include 11 bastions that are expanding out like arrows. We combined those bastions and the LGBTI rainbow flag colours, to resemble how the LGBTI movement is expanding and moving on, to all directions.

On reaching the 20th year of ILGA-Europe, it is a wonderful opportunity to look back at the past two decades and see what the organisation has achieved as well as the areas that still need to be addressed for a fairer, less discriminatory and more inclusive Europe. As such it is great that this year's Conference theme "*Power to the People - Celebrating 20 years of the strength within*" aims to unashamedly publicly acknowledge the past successes of the LGBTI movement itself, while exploring key questions, such as:

- What is our vision of the society we want to live in?
- What is people power and what does it mean for the LGBTI movement?
- How can we make sure that the 'people power' we create is a force for good for all people in our community, not a select few?
- Who are left behind and how do we bring them on board?
- How do we forge new solidarity and alliances to respond to growing apathy and ambivalence in dealing with human rights?
- How do we engage supportive leaders, whether they are political, religious, or cultural leaders? How do they see people power – a support or a treat?
- How can we increase our powerbase? What role do data, media and resources play in this?

Cyprus, the south-eastern corner of Europe and the only EU Country that officially falls in the Middle East, has seen big improvements in the rights, visibility and acceptance of the LGBTI in just a couple of years, a big change considering that Accept – LGBT Cyprus was only officially formed in 2011. The support offered by ILGA-Europe, and our wider Cypriot, European and Global LGBTI family, is what helped us make such improvements and for this we are very thankful.

Just two short years ago, in January 2014, we saw the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the areas not controlled by the Republic of Cyprus finally happening, the last place in Europe where



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homosexuality was still a criminal offence. In May 2014, the first Cyprus Pride took place on both sides of the island, a feat that many in the LGBTI community never dreamed would be possible in Cyprus only 5 years ago. Last year we also saw the criminalisation of homophobic and transphobic rhetoric as well as the long awaited Civil Union Law covering equally same-sex partners, becoming a reality in the Republic of Cyprus.

These are the changes that finally helped push Cyprus up in the rankings of ILGA-Europe's 2016 Rainbow Map Index, marking the first time the country doesn't find itself in the last place amongst other EU peers or in one of the lowest rankings positions amongst all European nations. The country still features well below the European and EU average, but it was very rewarding to finally see some positive change reflected in the score received.

We have a long way ahead of us still, and as such we are delighted to welcome our ILGA-Europe family at a time when we feel that the presence of so many international LGBTI activists and policy makers will help increase local public awareness and political commitment for issues that are now on top of our political agenda, namely the legal gender recognition to help the trans community, the tackling of homo-, bi- and transphobia in schools, and the importance to fully recognise the rights of rainbow families, including joint adoption. We trust that the conference will also offer possibilities for further co-operation and networking with neighbouring non-European countries such as, amongst others, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and Libya and help bridge the gap that exists in the rights of LGBTI in areas bordering Europe and in places where people are fleeing prosecution because of who they are.

In addition to these objectives, we don't neglect our duty for hospitality and we are very excited that we can show how welcoming the island can be to the wider international LGBTI community.

I am sure most of you know Cyprus as a destination for sun, beaches and relaxing holidays, all of which are very true and, with a bit of luck, still possible even in the month of October! We are already planning a number of activities that will ensure that the inside of the Conference Hotel is not all that you see while in Cyprus and we urge you to take on the opportunity and stay with us a bit longer, either before or after the conference ends. Nicosia is only half an hour away from the nearest beach, and the hotel where the conference will be taking place does have an inviting pool for all to dip into, so please make sure you bring your swimsuits along!

We, Accept – LGBT Cyprus, and the whole LGBTI community of the island, are looking forward to welcoming you to Cyprus and will do our outmost to make your stay as enjoyable as possible. See you all in Cyprus! See you all in Nicosia!

Costa Gavrielides

President, Accept – LGBT Cyprus &
Board Member of ILGA-Europe Executive Board

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