

Lithuania

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH AND VIOLENCE

On 14 January, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in the case of Beizaras and Levickas v. Lithuania that Lithuania's failure to investigate online hateful comments against a gay couple, violated their right to private and family life (Article 8), right to effective legal remedies (Article 13), and was also discriminatory. The applicants in the case had posted a photograph of them kissing, which was met by hundreds of online hate comments.

On 24 February, the Ministry of the Interior established a working group on effective response to hate speech and hate crime, consisting of state and civil society representatives. In April, Lithuania's General Prosecutor issued comprehensive guidelines on investigating instances of hate speech and hate crime. Also, the Police Department has updated its internal recording system, introducing the possibility of flagging an offence as a potential hate crime at the initial stages of pre-trial investigation. Together with several NGOs, the Police Department are developing an online course for police officers on investigating hate crimes and hate speech. This could lead to an increase in the reporting and recording of hate crimes in the country.

On 1 March, singer Alen Chicco and a friend were physically assaulted in a bar in Vilnius. The owner of the bar did not help the victim, but asked why Chicco came to the bar in the first place. The police arrested one of several people who were involved in the fight. The case ended with a settlement and the perpetrator offering financial compensation to Chicco.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The FRA LGBTI Survey II found that 55% of Lithuanian LGBTI respondents have been discriminated against in the past 12 months - the highest rate in the EU.

In February, provisions banning trans people from taking up medical or legal professions, were abolished (see here, here, and here).

The process of amending the Law of Equal Treatment continued to be stalled this year. The most recent draft fails to include gender identity as a protected ground of discrimination, contrary to the 2019 Constitutional Court decision.

FAMILY

On 19 August, Social Democrat and Labour Party MPs announced that it was not likely that legal recognition would be granted to same-sex partners anytime soon. The draft legislation on cohabitation only recognises "a man and a woman" living

together. Last year, the Constitutional Court affirmed that contrary to the definition of marriage, the definition of 'family' is not restricted to different-sex couples.

Seven of the 17 political parties competing in the parliamentary elections in October expressed support for legally recognising partnerships in a gender-neutral manner. Only one party supported marriage equality. The winning party Homeland Union stated they have a variety of opinions within the party. The runner-up Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union are against legally recognising same-sex couples.

In December, leaders of the Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church called on the new coalition to not recognise same-sex couples as families.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

A small group gathered outside President Gitanas Nausėda's Office on 3 July, reminding him to live up to his promise and wear a rainbow badge to show his support for the LGBT community. The activists urged the President to display the badge on 3 July, a week before Vilnius Pride. Some conservative voices criticised the action.

Vilnius Pride was held to draw attention to injustice against the LGBT community, both in Lithuania and globally. Approximately 1,000 people participated in the event.

HEALTH

The FRA LGBTI Survey II found that more than a third (34%) of Lithuanian LGBTI respondents felt "downhearted or depressed" all the time or most of the time, the highest rate in the EU. Previous studies have also shown Lithuania has one of the highest rates of school bullying in Europe. As a response, LGL launched the first ever emotional support platform for LGBTI children and teens, where counseling is provided by trained volunteers. Parents and teachers can also access information on the platform.

LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION

Trans people continued to be able to access legal gender recognition through a judicial procedure this year, without surgery or sterilisation. Eight successful cases were recorded in 2020.

The newly founded Christian Union Party announced in June that it would seek to ban legal gender recognition, following the example of Hungary earlier this year. Civil society is deeply



concerned, and has warned that this would be in clear violation of the 2008 L. v. Lithuania judgment of the European Court of Human Rights.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

Politician and LGBT rights activist, Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius (Liberty Party) secured a seat in parliament during the autumn elections. The Liberty Party, which has formed a coalition with the Homeland Union, is the only political group that supports marriage equality and full inclusion of LGBT people. Civil partnership will be high on the Liberty Party's agenda in the next four years.

In June, the Lithuanian TV show *Colours* received the National Equality and Diversity Award, for its positive and meaningful coverage on LGBTI issues. The show was initially criticised by the public for violating the Law on the Protection of Minors Against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information.



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