

Bulgaria

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

In May, the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) annulled a decision by the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD), which previously refused to process a complaint on homophobic threats and insults on a social media platform. The threats were posted on the occasion of the exhibition, 'Balkan Pride', organised by GLAS foundation, which took place in Plovdiv in 2019. The court ruling obliges the CPD to duly process the complaint. The CPD dismissed the application again in November. An appeal is pending.

The anti-gender rhetoric continued to gain more space in Bulgaria this year, to a large extent due to the efforts of the nationalist and populist Bulgarian National Movement (IMRO) party, which is the coalition partner of the ruling conservative GERB party. Speaking about anti-government protesters in September, deputy Minister for Public Order and Security, Minister of Defence and leader of IMRO Krasimir Karakachanov said:

"We cannot let a few Sorosoid NGOs and small parties, that are not even in the parliament, get in power and destroy the country. In the name of what? To introduce gay marriage and to create a gender republic."

He further stated that the government should protect Bulgaria from the "introduction of a third, fifth, or a 30th gender" and that mandatory military service will save children from "the dangerous influence of gender ideology." Local NGOs submitted a complaint to the CPD.

In October, the leader of parliamentary opposition, Kornelia Ninova, chair of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, criticised the European Parliament's resolution on fundamental rights in Bulgaria, which called on the government to ratify the Istanbul Convention. Ninova claimed that the Convention promotes 'gender ideology.'

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

In July, a group of masked men set a large rainbow flag on fire, which was displayed on the facade of the Walltopia building in Sofia.

In August, banners that were part of a campaign in support of minorities, including LGBTI and Roma communities, were vandalised in the centre of Sofia.

On the last weekend of September, a group of teenagers called

on others on social media to "clean up" Plovdiv and assaulted a group of young people because of their perceived sexual orientation. They verbally and physically assaulted several girls because of their appearance. The case is being investigated by the Prosecutor's Office. Solidarity events were held in Burgas, without incidents, and in Plovdiv. The latter met with a counter-protest, but there was a fast police response.

In August, Deystvie submitted a proposal to relevant institutions, including the parliamentary Judicial Commission, to criminalise hate crimes committed on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. No response has followed.

Bilitis and Deystvie launched a series of tools to address anti-LGBTI hate crimes, including workshops materials for the police, a website, a handbook, and videos.

DATA COLLECTION

The FRA EU LGBTI Survey II showed that over half (54%) of LGBTI people in Bulgaria were almost never out about their identity. Bulgaria had one of the highest rates of discrimination when looking for work (17%) and while at work (29%). 40% of Bulgarian respondents said they often or always avoided certain places or locations for fear of being assaulted, threatened or harassed.

EDUCATION

In March, Bilitis and Single Step's report, 'Attitudes towards LGBTI students in Bulgarian High schools' found that 71% of LGBTI student respondents have been verbally harassed, 34% physically harassed and 19% physically assaulted. 57% heard homophobic remarks from teachers.

In August, Bilitis launched the Live Without Bullying Platform, offering psychological support to youth, their parents, and teachers.

FAMILY

In late 2019, Deystvie, Bilitis and GLAS launched the "Family for Everyone" campaign, advocating for registered partnerships for all. On 14 February 2020, Deystvie invited couples of any sexual orientation to file their applications at the Sofia Municipality - 220 applications were submitted.

In September, Deystvie filed the first complaint for recognition of marriage concluded abroad before the European Court of Human Rights.



In October, another complaint reached the European Court of Justice, concerning the refusal of the Bulgarian authorities to issue a birth certificate to a child born abroad to two mothers. The mothers are both featured on the child's Spanish birth certificate, but as neither of them are citizens there, the child was not granted Spanish citizenship. Currently, the child is stateless.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Sofia Pride was held online on 13 June. The organisers [held](#) a live concert online, and embassies and companies sent [video statements](#) in support.

On 14 July, participants in the mass protest in Sofia for the resignation of the government and the Prosecutor General, were verbally and physically attacked for carrying the rainbow flag. At least one of the attackers [was wearing](#) a t-shirt featuring a modified version of the Nazi eagle clutching a proto-Bulgarian rune instead of a swastika.

30 LGBTI, Roma rights and disability rights organisations [joined](#) the anti-government protests in August as part of the “[March for Equality](#)”, organised by the League of Equality in Sofia. The aim was to put minority rights issues back on the agenda, amidst the broader protests. The participants published a “[Manifesto for Equality](#)”, endorsed by 28 different civil society organisations.

HEALTH

GLAS and Bilitis' joint study, gathering 420 responses, found that one in two respondents have suffered from depression and anxiety, and one in four have had panic attacks and suicidal thoughts or attempts. Another joint study later [found](#) that 28% felt their mental health deteriorate during the COVID-19 pandemic and 11% have lost their jobs.

In March, Bilitis launched [#WithCareForThyself](#), a free online psychological support service during the pandemic.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In April due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Rainbow Hub, Bulgaria's only LGBTI+ community centre had to permanently close.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

GLAS's exhibition ‘Shit Storm: A Collection of Online Hate exhibition’ was held in November, focusing on online hate speech.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Deystvie trained over 100 police officers in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and the National Police Academy, and an online event on policing hate crimes with the Council of Europe was [held](#).

PUBLIC OPINION AND ATTITUDES

In July, a research study by Pew centre [showed](#) that only 32% of Bulgarians accept LGBT people, showing regression compared to previous years.

In November, Noema's national representative [survey](#) launched by GLAS found that half of Bulgarians are unaware that the Constitution does not recognise the LGBTI people's equality and over half think “gender” is a synonym for “gay”.



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