



BULGARIA

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Anti-LGBT hate speech from political figures continued to be an issue this year. Leading up to Sofia Pride, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Krasimir Karakachanov, leader of the ultra-nationalist VMRO-BND party, published hateful comments on social media. The Ataka political party also made negative remarks. Sofia Pride condemned the statements.

During the municipal elections in October, the radical nationalist candidate and current MEP Angel Dzhambazki (VMRO-BND), was targeted by hate speech because of his perceived sexual orientation. Sofia Pride made a public statement against these remarks.

Dzhambazki (VMRO-BND), Volen Siderov (Ataka), and Nikolay Drenchev (Vazrajdan), all candidates for local elections in Sofia from ultra-nationalist parties, promised to ban Sofia Pride if elected.

The Supreme Court of Cassation (SCC) denied protection from victimisation under EU law to an LGBTI activist from a prominent Bulgarian journalist who publicly attacked him in a 20-minute televised segment in 2014.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

NGO Deystvie documented and filed a report in 22 hate crime and hate speech incidents in 2019. Examples include physical assault against two lesbians in January and February, and two gay men in Plovdiv and in Varna, both in February. Civil society demanded investigations and SOGI-inclusive hate crime laws.

Five attacks were carried out against the LGBTI community centre, Rainbow Hub in the spring. First, a skinhead entered the centre, grabbed the rainbow flag inside and left with it. Ten days later an attacker stole the centre's entrance sign. Three weeks later, a stone was thrown through a window. The district and regional prosecution of Sofia failed to investigate the cases. The case is before the Sofia Appellate Prosecution.

DATA COLLECTION

From November, Deystvie will be administering the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights' (OSCE ODIHR) hate crime reporting system, and cooperating with an NGO coalition.

EDUCATION

Ultra-conservative forces continued their fight against LGBTI rights and gender equality in education.

In February, loud criticism followed the release of the European Commission's SELFIE survey in schools for offering four gender options to students ('male', 'female', 'other', 'prefer not to say'). The Minister of Education promised to request the Commission to remove options other than 'male' and 'female' and vowed that "gender ideology" will not be spread.

A few days later, an STI prevention brochure with pictures of gay couples, approved by the Ministry of Health and distributed in schools, sparked strong backlash. The leaflets were mistakenly with young children and then promptly withdrawn.

In April, the National Children's Strategy 2019-2030, drafted by a working group including civil society, faced harsh criticism and was eventually withdrawn by Prime Minister Borissov. Anti-LGBT groups posted false allegations, e.g. that children will be given for adoption by same-sex couples. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy announced they would prepare a new draft.

The National LGBTI School Climate Survey, run by Bilitis and Single Step, found that LGBTI students feel unsafe at school; verbal harassment by peers, teachers and staff is widespread; support from schools is lacking, and anti-bullying policies are ineffective.

FAMILY

On 24 July, the Supreme Court upheld the Sofia City Administrative Court's positive judgment from 2018, that granted the right of residency for the same-sex spouse of an EU citizen - in line with the Coman judgment.

"What motivated us to continue to fight was the dream that our case would open many new doors not only to justice and equality, but also to the freedom for same-sex couples to live together in a secure family environment within the EU." - Christina Palm and Mariama Diallo (Deystvie)

In September, the Sofia Regional Court ruled that a woman in a same-sex marriage could take her partner's family name.



In December, the Supreme Administrative Court refused to recognise the marriage of a lesbian couple that took place in the UK.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

A record number of 6,500 people attended Sofia Pride on 8 June, as part of Pride month. The march was again harshly criticised by leading political figures (see under **Bias motivated speech**). On 16 November, Deystvie, and Roma and disability rights organisations held a joint diversity march in Plovdiv.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Early in the year, the Varna Regional and District Prosecutor dismissed the case of vandalism against GLAS Foundation's billboards. Local officials tried to ban the "Balkan Pride" exhibition in Plovdiv, one of Europe's cultural capitals in 2019, and sought to remove the head of the Municipal Cultural Foundation, Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva. Kuyumdzhieva said the ban would be discriminatory. The case stirred considerable public debate, some of it hateful. The facade of the Plovdiv 2019 headquarters was vandalised and some LGBTI people were insulted and threatened. In the end, the exhibition successfully opened on 4 July.

HEALTH

Thanks to the lobbying, which resulted in legal reform, medications for people living with HIV are now prescribed for three months instead of one.

In May, a person living with HIV died because he was refused treatment by three hospitals. The cause of his death is uncertain, as no one was willing to conduct an autopsy. The medical investigation was closed.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

On 9 May, Bilitis organised an event to promote the ILGA-Europe Come Out pledge for the EP Elections. Toma Belev was the only Bulgarian MEP candidate to sign it. Bilitis, Deystvie and its partners from the Equality League organised a debate featuring politicians from across the political spectrum. All participants promised inclusion for Roma, LGBTI and people with disabilities. Several LGBTI cultural events were organised this year, including

the Glamoral Kombat Ball 2019 on 16 February and the Power Politics Kiki Ball on 18 May in Sofia.

The Sofia Pride Film Fest, organised by Deystvie, gathered over 1,500 people and featured three queer films. Screenings took place in Plovdiv and Kardzhali.

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

In June, Deystvie held the first ever national training for a total of 54 police officers and 27 representatives of the Ministry of Interior on responding to anti-LGBT hate crimes.

PUBLIC OPINION

In its survey on public attitudes, GLAS Foundation found that the numbers who believe that LGBT people should not be able to live their lives as they wish, has increased from 18 to 25 per cent since 2012. Negative attitudes were most common in the two biggest cities.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In October, the Supreme Administrative Court upheld lower court judgments that found no discrimination in the case of a lesbian couple who were denied the cost coverage of their IVF procedure by the Centre for Assisted Reproduction. Deystvie is taking the case to the European Court of Human Rights.