

STATEMENT

by the

EUROPEAN PRIDE ORGANISERS ASSOCIATION (EPOA)

to the

2005 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, 19-30 September 2005

Working Sessions 16 and 17: *Tolerance and Non-discrimination*

(29 September 2005)

This statement is presented on behalf of the European Pride Organisers Association (EPOA) which is participating in the OSCE Human Dimension meeting for the second time. EPOA is the European federation of associations organising gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pride events and pride parades. EPOA was established in 1991 and has since been licensing the title “EuroPride”, an annual event that is taking place in a different European city every year. LGBT pride marches bring millions of people into the streets across Europe, celebrating diversity.

When we addressed the HDIM a year ago, we denounced the problems LGBT pride organisers had faced in 2004 in a few cities in the OSCE region such as Belgrade, Cracow, and the host city of the HDIM – Warsaw – where the Lord Mayor had prohibited the “Parade for Equality”.

While there were only few incidents of that kind in 2004, we had to observe a severe and alarming increase in the number of similar incidents and problems this year. Cities where LGBT pride event organisers faced difficulties, hostility, and again outright prohibition of marches and parades this year include Riga, Varna, Tallinn, Bucharest, Chişinău and again Cracow and Warsaw. And authorities in Ukraine and Russia already announced they would ban such events planned for next year.

Most of the events in the cities mentioned, however, took place despite the hostile attitudes both of officials and parts of the public. But the fierce opposition to the events also impacted in a very negative way upon the LGBT community in the countries concerned, leaving a poisoned climate in society such as in Latvia, or activists being prosecuted for organising an illegal demonstration, such as here in Warsaw.

We are deeply concerned by these increasing attacks on the fundamental freedom of assembly in many OSCE member states, including members of the European Union. These developments also have the potential to foster hate crimes. The authorities, the media and society at large, therefore, are called upon not only to stop their own hostile attitudes towards pride events of LGBT people but also to defend pro-actively the basic right to assemble freely, also against the homophobic campaigns of both radical political groups and fundamental church groups. As the representative of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the European Union, pointed out yesterday afternoon, churches also preach hatred, and that is absolutely unacceptable, especially if such religious hate speech encourage or lead to violent attacks on certain groups in society – as we had to experience in Cracow last year and in Riga this year where a Catholic and a Protestant mob had violently attacked the LGBT pride marches.

We are here in a city where the mayor has banned the pride march for the second time now. Therefore, we call upon ODIHR to have a serious word with the city government of Warsaw and to make them understand that such a ban is not acceptable. If the city government cannot be persuaded to guarantee fundamental rights of all citizens, we think, the logical consequence must be for ODIHR to move the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting to another place – because it would be a completely wrong signal to continue to hold this meeting in a city that does not respect fully the basic human rights of all its citizens.