



Weekly Briefing

Slovakia social briefing:

Summer parades - society-wide discussion on minority rights

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About 10,000 people took part in the PRIDE march which is held annually in July in Bratislava to promote the rights of the LGBTI community. At the same time, a second march was held to support the traditional family. Two camps once again met in one battlefield, thus re-verifying a public debate on the rights of the LGBTI community in Slovakia.

Already the 9th year of PRIDE was peaceful and with record attendance. The public defender of rights - ombudsman Maria Patakyova again spoke at the event after a year, although she was heavily criticized by SNS (the Slovak National Party). Patakyova regularly points out that LGBTI rights are not sufficiently addressed and that their status has not changed in any way in society. Slovak society, however, is still based on traditional Christian values and therefore the enforcement of the rights of this minority is not easy.

Several participants in both events called for political independence. Recently, it has been increasingly argued that PRIDE and the march for the family have been abused for political debates. The issue of LGBTI community rights has also been very resonant in the last presidential campaign and has caused a heated debate among supporters of individual candidates. The president Zuzana Caputova, however, did not directly participate in either march, although she supported the LGBTI community. However, some politicians and celebrities also attended both marches. The March for the family was attended by the head of parliament Andrej Danko, who regularly declares his values to the traditional family and openly opposes LGBTI rights. Besides him, representatives of Sme Rodina-Boris Kollar (We Are Family) or LSNS (People's Party - Our Slovakia) appeared on the march. PRIDE was attended by the Mayor of Bratislava and politicians of SAS (Freedom and Solidarity party). A number of politicians, although not directly involved, expressed their views mainly through social networks.

The debate on LGBTI resonated in addition to the elections after the Ministry of Culture stopped funding LGBTI-targeted projects. In Slovakia, there is no institutional support of organizations dedicated to LGBTI people by the state as in other European countries. LGBTI projects therefore tend to be funded through grants. The Ministry of Culture provided such resources from the subsidy program of the culture of disadvantaged groups. Some projects such as the film festival but even the PRIDE itself were financed in this way. None of the submitted projects were supported this year (there were 8 of them). However, the committee evaluating

the projects proposed to implement 6 of them. This gave rise to an indirect situation of mistrust, in which the actors of the community themselves do not understand the decision and attribute it to the minister herself. In addition, the Ministry substantially limited the activities that can be financed without any consultation with the entities concerned. Distrust of the decision is also aroused by the fact that the activities of the community were supported in the past by the Minister of Culture Marek Madaric or Daniel Krajcer, for example.

The question of the status of LGBTI in society has recently harmed Slovakia also on a European scale. Because of Brexit, some UK-based agencies are moving to other EU countries. It was Slovakia who aspired to become the seat of the European Medicines Agency. However, several staff members of the agency wrote a letter in which they publicly expressed concern that the agency should be based in a country that does not recognize the rights of LGBTI.

So what is the current status of LGBTI rights in Slovakia?

Slovakia grants same-sex couples limited legal rights, namely in the area of inheritance, however the country does not recognise same-sex marriage or registered partnership. In 2004, Slovakia adopted the Anti-Discrimination Act. The principle of equal treatment was enshrined in the areas of social security, health care, provision of goods, services and education, and in the field of labor and similar legal relations.

In 2012 an attempt was made to adopt the law on registered partnerships. The bill was prepared by deputies of SAS (Freedom and Solidarity party). However, the law did not reach the second reading in the National Council due to a lack of votes. Most MEPs pointed out either that they were solely against same-sex partnerships or that Slovakia first had to solve its economic and political problems, which were more important than the debate on registered partnerships for people from the LGBTI community.

An important element influencing the perception of LGBTI in the Slovak Republic was the constitutional change in 2014. The proposed amendment concerned the definition of marriage. This is to be solely a bond between a man and a woman. This is primarily to ensure the protection of the family and the protection of the rights of juveniles. On 4 June 2014, members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved an amendment to the Slovak Constitution. Of course, all the members of the SMER-SD (Direction – Social Democracy party) and also the members of the OĽANO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities) have voted in favour of the proposal. The adoption of the constitutional amendment worried society as well as the ombudsman. Recently, SMER-SD (Direction – Social Democracy party) chairman Fico said that the party had another draft of constitutional bill - this time forbidding

the adoption of children by homosexual couples. As Fico said *“the adoption of children by gay couples disturbs us”*. These laws are supposed to be directed especially against the ultraliberals in the government.

In 2015, a referendum was held in Slovakia, initiated by the Alliance for Family. The referendum was preceded by a broad debate as to whether it was legitimate at all, as human rights issues were to be voted on. Finally, the referendum was announced. The referendum asked three questions – about same-sex couples marriage, about adoption of children and about the sex education in schools. The referendum was invalid due to low participation.

Today’s life of the LGBTI people is much more accepted and easier in the bigger cities. The biggest community is, of course, concentrated in the capital city of Bratislava. The PRIDE is held every year in Bratislava, but there are also several specific bars and clubs. Thus, in Bratislava, LGBTI is generally accepted. However, the further away from the capital (or other larger cities), the more traditional negative perception prevails. Even the official website Travel in Slovakia – Good Idea does not explicitly recommend LGBTI persons to show mutual affection to the public. PRIDE alone does not often add popularity to LGBTI people. It is mainly eccentric costumes that fill the first pages of the newspaper. Because of this, the essential message of the march is often lost.

Although the very acceptance of LGBTI people in society has improved, Slovakia is divided mainly by two of the most important issues - the co-existence of these people in legal ties and the children adoptions. The answers to these two questions divide both society and political parties. Children are an important purpose of marriage for our society. This purpose is not fulfilled for same-sex couples. Two men or two women cannot replace mother and father and what they can give the child for his or her healthy mental development. Only a man and a woman are able to beget a child. All these are words from the Alliance for Families leaflet and represent the position of the group that disagrees with these issues as well as political parties strongly opposing the extension of LGBTI rights. On the other hand, there is the position of the Other initiative representing LGBTI people. Slovakia is one of the last countries that in no way recognizes the existence of same-sex couples and their families. The situation is not sustainable in the long term in terms of constitutionally guaranteed equality of rights and dignity. Prejudices against population groups can lead to a series of undesirable consequences: from fear of crime, inability to participate in everyday social activities, to endangering mental health. Gay and lesbian couples share the same values as other couples, as well as appreciating their families and helping their loved ones.

In any case, LGBTI rights are regularly raised in connection with parliamentary or presidential elections. And this probably won't change in the next year's parliamentary elections. New political actors on the scene tend to have liberal values, so it will be interesting to follow developments after the elections and the change in LGBTI rights in Slovakia.