

**No. 168
August
2009**

EURO-LETTER

**ILGA-Europe's monthly
electronic LGBT political
and legal news bulletin**

Euro-Letter is published by ILGA-Europe - the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Intersex Association (ILGA)

ISSN 1998-8117

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ILGA-Europe is grateful to **Pantelis Ravidas**, **Danae Panagiotopoulou** and **Evdokia Sakka** for the Greek translations.



This publication is supported by the Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities of the European Commission.

Its funding is provided for under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013). This programme was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields.

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Staff news:

- **Nanna Moe - new Communications Officer**

by *Juris Lavrikovs, ILGA-Europe's Communications Manager*



On 17 August we welcomed Nanna Moe as our new Communications Officer. Nanna is joining our Communications team and will be contributing towards implementation of ILGA-Europe's Communications Strategy. Nanna's will be responsible for providing effective information services and from now on she is our first point of contact for all information requests we receive. Nanna will take over maintenance and further development of our website and completing the development of the organisation's database. These are just a few examples of areas Nanna is going to be working on. Our communications work is already very diverse, but we are sure that Nanna's expertise, enthusiasm and energy will

help to take our communications work to new and even greater heights!

Nanna is originally from Denmark, and has been involved in LGBT activism since 2001 on various levels.

Before coming to Brussels and ILGA-Europe, Nanna has worked with communication and marketing of World Outgames 2009 in Copenhagen. This summer, Nanna finished as a MA graduate in Communication from Roskilde University (RUC) in Denmark, and does also hold a BA in Communication and English from Copenhagen Business School (CBS).

From 2006-2008, Nanna was the chair of the youth branch of The Danish National Association of Gays & Lesbians (LBL) - LBL-Ungdom, and is an elected board member of IGLYO (International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organisation).

Nanna's e-mail: nanna@ilga-europe.org

- **Aksinia Gencheva – Project Coordinator**

by Olimpia Ciripoiu, ILGA-Europe's Administration & Finance Manager



On 3 August ILGA-Europe team welcomed Aksinia Gencheva as Project Coordinator for our Annual Conference. Aksinia joined the Finance Administrative staff team and her main responsibilities are to provide organisational and administrative support to Finance Administrative Service Area with specific focus on assisting in organising of ILGA-Europe's annual conference. Aksinia's key tasks are to assist in the planning, coordination, preparation and running of ILGA-Europe's annual conference and to provide support to the Finance Administrative team in the every day running of the office.

Aksinia is originally from Bulgaria, has been devoted to the LGBT movement in Bulgaria LGBT activism for many years. Prior to her joining ILGA-Europe, she worked as Executive Director of BGO Gemini and Information and Communication manager at the Bulgarian Donors Forum. She is well experienced in developing organisational operational systems, administration and project and human resources management. She has demonstrated professional experience in the field of LGBT human rights and social justice, while working with national and international non-governmental organisations and ILGA-Europe. Aksinia has carried out advocacy campaigns and lobbying with the Bulgarian government in relation to recognition of civil partnerships for same-sex couples and criminal law.

Aksinia's e-mail: aksinia@ilga-europe.org

Building partnerships to advocate for LGBT equality in Eastern Europe: a success project

by *Lilit Poghosyan, ILGA-Europe's Programmes Officer*

'Take action! United against LGBT Discrimination in Eastern Europe' project has been funded by Open Society Institute and implemented by ILGA-Europe and three national partner organisations from Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Moldova in the course of three years (April 2006-May 2009). It aimed to improve legal and social position of LGBT people in the Balkans and Western Newly Independent States (NIS). The project consisted of 3 components and ultimately had three main objectives:

- to build the professional capacities of project partners in the field of advocacy and documentation of human rights violations against LGBT people by means of training, coaching and consultancy.
- To collect evidence of legal and social discrimination against LGBT people in the project countries by documenting social attitudes, experiences of discrimination and breaches of international human rights standards.
- To advocate at national and European level for action by the respective governments to address discrimination against LGBT people.

The evaluation of the project demonstrated that despite certain limitations the project has been a success. It had an impact on the organisational development of project partners and on their capacity to do effective national and EU level advocacy, which led to improved legal protection of LGBT people in the project countries.

The partnership with ILGA-Europe was essential in this success and its consultancy and capacity building role has been highly appreciated by all project partners:

'ILGA-Europe is an important actor in lobby and advocacy work at international level. The help and support for its members/partners is enormous and it is really appreciated. The permanent support and information, expertise [provided by ILGA-Europe] is important and helpful in our work.'

'We established excellent collaboration with ILGA Europe [...] ILGA-Europe facilitated meetings with representatives of the European institutions and opened advocacy pathways for its partners. There is continuous collaboration with ILGA-Europe on reporting about hate crimes and human rights violations against LGBTIQ people. ILGA-Europe provides us with fundamental information on current achievements on the level of EU policies as well as with information on further actions where our organizations might be actively included.'

ILGA-Europe will use this project as a learning experience for implementation of similar projects in the future.

Albanian Prime Minister supports the rights of LGBT people

by *Lilit Poghosyan, ILGA-Europe's Programmes Officer*

On July 29, Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha endorsed the draft anti-discrimination legislation which is up for consideration in the parliament in September 2009. He has also expressed his support for same-sex marriage which, however, is outside the scope of the mentioned law.

The adoption of the comprehensive anti-discrimination law, which includes protection from discrimination on a number of grounds (including sexual orientation and gender identity) flow from the international human rights obligations of the Government of Albania as well as the obligation to transpose the EU acquis into national legislation as a precondition for EU membership.

The European Commission 2008 progress report on Albania states 'As regards anti-discrimination policies, there has been little progress on establishing a proper legal definition of discrimination or specific anti-discrimination legislation.[...]There is continuing serious hostility in public and the media towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. The government has taken no action to combat discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Arbitrary arrests and mistreatment of LGBT persons persist. This has already led to the emigration of leading activists. What is needed now, in addition to increasing legislative efforts, is to develop an action programme to counter discrimination, including on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.'

LGBT people in Albania are often subject to discriminatory treatment and violence and rarely seek protection from law enforcement bodies. Moreover, law enforcement authorities themselves are often the perpetrators of violence against LGBT people.

As stated in the Report by the Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg on his visit to Albania 'LGBT persons are routinely subject to intolerance, physical and psychological violence and seen by many as persons suffering from an "illness". There were reports from the OSCE Mission, human rights NGOs and LGBT groups whom the Commissioner met that the LGBT community suffers abuses not only from the general public, but that there have also been cases of mistreatment by the police'.¹

ILGA-Europe, therefore, welcomes the PM's leadership in nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity which would allow Albania to join the growing number of countries that respect the human rights of LGBT people.

¹ Report by the Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, Strasbourg, 18 June 2008-

<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1327977&Site=CommDH&BackColorInternet=FEC65B&BackColorIntranet=FEC65B&BackColorLogged=FFC679>

UN Human Rights Committee makes recommendation to Government of Azerbaijan to combat harassment of LGBT by state employees

by **Beth Fernandez**, *ILGA-Europe's Programmes Officer*

From 20 to 21 July the UN Human Rights Committee considered the third periodic state report of Azerbaijan on meeting its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

ILGA-Europe together with Global Rights (www.globalrights.org) and Azeri LGBT organization, Gender and Development (www.lgbt.az) submitted a shadow report in respect of LGBT which can be found at www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/ngos/LGBT_Azerbaijan96.pdf. The joint report contained numerous cases of blackmail and harassment by the police of men having sex with men (MSM) and transgender sex workers in particular.

Once a State has signed the ICCPR, governments are required to provide a report on actions that it has taken, or plans to take, to implement and safeguard the rights contained in the treaty. The practice of shadow reporting provides an alternative source of information concerning state compliance. At the beginning of August the Human Rights Committee released its recommendations after consideration of the State report, shadow reports and other sources of information. With regard to Article 26 (Non Discrimination) the Human Rights Committee expressed its concern *'at reports that individuals have been harassed by police and prison officials because of their sexual orientation'*. It made the recommendation that *'The State party should take measures in this respect by providing training activities to its law enforcement and penitentiary authorities and by elaborating a relevant Code of Conduct'*.

This recommendation is an important recognition of the need for governmental action to tackle a serious human rights violation which Gender and Development have been documenting over the three years of their existence. It therefore constitutes an important advocacy tool which can be used by Gender and Development in persuading the Azeri Government of the need for tolerance programmes in state structures.

EU study on media and diversity

Source: European Commission

The European Commission has published a study entitled “Media4diversity -Taking the pulse of diversity in the media”. The study looks at the many measures media, including newspapers, TV and radio, have undertaken to tackle discrimination and to promote diversity. It highlights 30 initiatives that merit attention because, on the one hand, they were able to combine innovation and originality in addressing diversity issues in an increasing competitive and commercial European media space; on the other hand, they can give lessons on how to create media cultures of diversity across Europe. The publication also includes a set of recommendations to the media, civil society organisations and policy-makers.

ILGA-Europe took part in this project by identifying various initiatives on sexual orientation and gender identity and contributed towards NGO’s recommendations and feedback. The Study is available on:

www.media4diversity.eu/

Portuguese Supreme Court upholds same-sex marriage ban

Source: *Deutsche Welle*, www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4533457,00.html, 1 August 2009

Portugal's highest court has maintained a ban on same-sex marriage in the Roman Catholic country. Two women in Portugal attempted to marry in 2006. After being refused a license by a Lisbon registry office, they sued.

In a divided ruling against Teresa Pires and Helena Paixao, the high court said in a statement that it had reviewed a successful appeal by the two women that reversed an earlier court ruling denying them the right to wed, and reinstated the lower court's verdict by three votes to two.

The Portuguese constitution forbids discrimination based on sexual orientation. The women had been trying since 2006 to overturn the decision using that article.

The two women were turned away by a Lisbon registry office because the law stipulates that marriage is between people of different sexes.

The Constitutional Court said in a statement on July 31 that the constitution does not state that same-sex marriages must be permitted.

On July 29, Prime Minister Jose Socrates and his Socialist Party presented its manifesto for the Sept. 27 general election. Allowing people of the same sex to wed in the predominantly Roman Catholic country was among the proposals.

The Portuguese chapter of the International Gay and Lesbian Association said in a statement: "The decision makes more evident the urgency of solving this issue via parliament by parties wanting to fight discrimination and promote basic equality."

Irish Government Publishes Civil Partnership Bill

by **Brian Sheehan**, GLEN

In June 2009, the Irish Government published a Civil Partnership Bill that will deliver many of the rights and obligations of civil marriage to same-sex couples who register their relationships, with the critical exception of provision for children. The Bill also proposes a separate redress scheme to provide basic protections to couples, same-sex or opposite sex, who do not marry or register their civil partnership. Taken together the provisions of the Bill have been described as the single biggest change in family law in Ireland in a generation.

GLEN - Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, welcomed the Bill as a major step forward but highlighted the lack of recognition of parenting and children (the Bill for example, does not allow for joint adoption) as a major and critical gap.

Like the UK Civil Partnership Act, the Irish Civil Partnership Bill is long as it enumerates the rights and obligations of civil partners through amendment of over 130 separate pieces of legislation that confer rights or place obligations on spouses. While not dealt with in the Bill itself, Dermot Ahern, the Government Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform who has tabled the Bill, has stated that civil partners will be treated on an equivalent basis as spouses in terms of tax, social welfare and immigration through changes in associated pieces of legislation. The Minister has said that the Bill will be enacted by the end of this year.

The legislation draws on the options proposed by the Government's Working Group on Domestic Partnership commonly referred to as the 'Colley Group' after its chair, former politician Anne Colley. The Colley Group put forward just two legislative options for same-sex couples, civil marriage and full civil partnership. Civil Marriage was considered the full equality option that would 'underpin a wider equality for lesbian and gay people'. Alternatively, full civil partnership, giving equivalent rights and obligations to civil marriage (but without the Constitutional recognition accorded to marriage) was proposed as a constitutionally feasible means of immediately delivering protections for same-sex couples. The Government's Civil Partnership proposals, apart from the critical gap around parenting and children, is the full civil partnership option proposed by Colley.

For a detailed analysis of the Bill contents, see GLEN website at www.glen.ie.

Denmark: Major improvement for lesbian couples with children

by *Søren Laursen, LBL - the Danish National LGBT-organisation*

This summer has seen a significant improvement for rainbow families consisting of lesbian couples with children conceived by means of assisted fertilisation using anonymous sperm donation.

As of July 1, 2009 two rules concerning second parent adoption have been abolished. One rule said, that the adoptee, i.e. the co-mother, should be at least 25 years old. The other rule said, that approval to the adoption by the biological parent could not be given before three months after the birth of the child.

The consequence of the first rule was, that a number of mothers were living for years without legal recognition of their parenthood. The consequence of the second rule was, that co-mothers could not be recognized as legal parents immediately, thus depriving them the right to parental leave after the birth.

The changes were part of a major revision of the Adoption Act. LBL wished for a more thorough revision of the legal situation of this kind of families. We want the kinship of all children to be regulated in the same way. Today these children of lesbian couples have their kinship regulated in the Adoption Act, whereas for all other children, it is regulated in the Children's Act.

In spite of the knowledge of the problem, the government did not want to solve the problem of citizenship of the child. Citizenship is inherited in the Children's Act but not in the Adoption Act. Thus, if a foreign woman give birth to a child in Denmark, then if her partner is a Danish man, the child gets Danish citizenship, but if it is a Danish woman, that is not the case.

Nevertheless the abolishing of the two rules is a major step forward. For a thorough introduction to the Danish situation, see the 2008 study: www.lbl.dk/fileadmin/site/politik/familier/Rainbow_Families_2008.pdf

Romania: Discriminatory Partnership and Adoption Provisions in New Civil Code

by *Adrian Coman*

On June 22, 2009 the executive government of Romania assumed responsibility for the new civil and criminal codes. Then, on July 20, 2009, Romanian President Traian Basescu signed decrees promulgating these codes.

In the Civil Code, Articles 277, 258, 259, and 462 prevent same-sex couples and other non-traditional families from enjoying their rights to nondiscrimination, freedom of movement, and privacy under international and European law and policy.

On July 30, 2009, ACCEPT, IGLHRC, and ILGA-Europe sent a letter to President Basescu expressing disappointment with the new laws and calling on him to support any efforts to repeal them and to ensure nondiscrimination for all people, regardless of sexual orientation.

Despite the inclusion of Article 30 in the new Civil Code, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, these provisions are clearly discriminatory and deny the existence of LGBT and non-traditional heterosexual families, increasing social stigma and discrimination against them.

Summary of new partnership and adoption provisions

- **Article 277** on the interdiction or equating of forms of living together with marriage prohibits same-sex marriage, prohibits recognition of same sex marriage performed abroad, and prohibits recognition of all civil partnerships regardless of gender.
- **Article 462** on simultaneous adoption prohibits two unmarried persons from adopting a child simultaneously or one after the other, and also specifically indicates that this includes same sex couples.
- **Article 258** on family defines spouses as being a man and a woman united through marriage and defines family as being based on marriage between spouses.
- **Article 259** on marriage defines marriage as being between a man and a woman and makes marriage a right.

English translation of these provisions on www.iglhrc.org/binary-data/ATTACHMENT/file/000/000/300-1.pdf

Joint letter is available on our website www.ilga-europe.org/europe/guide/country_by_country/romania/romania_discriminatory_partnership_and_adoption_provisions_in_new_civil_code

Croatia is condemned by European Social Rights Body for Homophobic School Text Books

Source: media release by Interights, 11 August 2009

The European Committee of Social Rights, which monitors state compliance with the European Social Charter, has today found that Croatia's limited curriculum covering sex education discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation. The Committee affirmed that the state has an obligation to ensure that educational materials do not reinforce demeaning stereotypes and perpetuate forms of prejudice which contribute to social exclusion, embedded discrimination and denial of human dignity. The Committee noted that statements found in the curriculum "...stigmatize homosexuals and are based upon negative, distorted, reprehensible and degrading stereotypes...."

Interights, the International Centre for the Legal Protection of Human Rights, in collaboration with the Center for Reproductive Rights and the Center for Education, Counseling and Research (CESI), filed the case against Croatia in October 2007.

Iain Byrne, Senior Lawyer for INTERIGHTS, said, "This decision sends a strong signal to all European countries that they must not promote homophobia in the classroom. Young people need to be made aware that the LGBT community has the right to equal treatment and respect."

The complaint alleged that one of the country's state-sponsored sex education programmes, TeenStar, violated young people's basic rights to health and non-discrimination. TeenStar's abstinence-based curriculum teaches that condoms do not prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, that gay relationships are "deviant" and that stay-at-home mothers make for better families. The complaint also addressed the lack of a comprehensive mandatory sexuality education curriculum, as required by Article 11 of the European Social Charter.

In its decision, the Committee stated that governments that have signed the European Social Charter are obliged to provide scientifically-based and non-discriminatory sex education to young people that does not involve censoring, withholding or intentionally misrepresenting information such as on contraception. The Committee recommended that such education be provided throughout the entire period of schooling. It stated that sexual and reproductive health education should be aimed at developing the capacity of children and young people to understand their sexuality in its biological and cultural dimensions with the aim of enabling them to make responsible decisions with regard to sexual and reproductive health behaviour. "This is an extremely important decision because it is the first time that an international human rights body has addressed a complaint on the issue of sex education in schools and articulated detailed standards on

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countries' obligation to provide accurate and science-based sex-education," said Christina Zampas, Regional Manager and Senior Legal Adviser for Europe at the Center for Reproductive Rights.

While the Committee found some content of TeenStar problematic, it did not address whether Croatia is in breach of its Charter obligations by allowing it to be taught in school, on the grounds that the course is elective and not mandatory. The Committee did, however, reaffirm that any elective courses must remain objective and respect human rights.

Croatia had considered making a TeenStar-based programme mandatory, but dropped the plan in December 2008 after the Charter complaint resulted in widespread criticism.

Croatia currently has no mandatory comprehensive sex-education programme. The Committee, whilst noting that the number of hours and the information taught in the existing programme are limited, did not deem them as "sufficiently deficient" based on the ground that pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection rates among Croatian young people are generally not worse than in other European countries.

"In accordance with the Committee's standards on sex education, CESI and its partners will continue to pursue, for the health, rights and well-being of Croatia's youth, a sex education programme that is comprehensive, mandatory, non-discriminatory and that is evidence-based" said Sanja Cesar, Program Manager of CESI, a feminist organisation based in Zagreb, Croatia.

Full text of the decision can be found at the European Committee of Social Rights website:

www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/Complaints/Complaints_en.asp

Gay man in Poland wins court case: 'Faggot' is derogatory

by *Greg Czarnecki*

In a groundbreaking decision, a woman was fined 15,000 PLN (3,750 euro) on 4 August for defamation after having consistently harassed a neighbor, calling him a faggot. Ryszard G., 24 yrs old, lives in a town of 5,000 near Szczecin in northwest Poland. A middle-aged neighbor called him and his boyfriend faggot in public places such as the store, in his apartment building and on the street. She also harassed him by calling the police on made-up charges.

Ryszard began to be verbally assaulted by others in the town and even had rocks thrown at his window where he and his boyfriend live. With the help of Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH) he brought the case to court and won after 5 months. The judge ruled that using the word "faggot" is not only offensive but violates his right to dignity and privacy in this context.

KPH recently published a report showing that the level of hate speech against LGBT people remains high in Poland. KPH is currently lobbying to include sexual orientation and gender expression in the list of grounds which are protected against hate speech in the already existing penal code.

HATE & VIOLENCE:

Recent homophobic attacks in Belgrade prior to Pride March

Source: statement by Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), www.gsa.org.rs, 19 August 2009 and www.setimes.com, 20 August 2009

Gay Straight Alliance is an organisation that focuses on improving the rights and lifestyle of LGBT population in Serbia. Moreover, GSA is working on collecting documentation regarding the cases of violence and discrimination involving the members of the LGBT community as well as offering legal assistance for the victims of violence and discrimination based on their sexual orientation. On this occasion, we would like to inform you about two particular incidents.

The first incident occurred on Sunday, July 12, 2009 at 2 AM, when the tear gas was fired inside the gay club "Hrabro Srce" premises in Belgrade. The club had to close down for the night and more than 200 people were evacuated from the premises.

The second incident occurred in the night between August 6-7, 2009. The group of approximately 10 FC Crvena Zvezda supporters attacked a 30yo N.A. who happened to be a lesbian. The incident took place on a night bus, route 56, in Belgrade. One of the attackers was identified as S.T., age 20, from Belgrade, and others, among which were two women, are currently listed as unknown perpetrators of the criminal offence.

N.A., on her way home with her partner took a bus-ride, was initially verbally attacked with insults such as "Lesbian groups", "Dike whores", "Kill a fag" and similar. When she reacted against this kind of behavior, the group attacked her. They were kicking her in the stomach, head and her backside. The beating continued even after she passed out while the bus was on its regular route. The driver, or anyone else on the bus in that moment, did not do anything to stop this brutal act of violence. The attack was initiated at a Serbian National Assembly bus stop and was ended at Ada Ciganlija bus stop when two members of the police department Āukarica boarded the bus.

The very concerning fact would be the reaction of the Serbian police department in both of these instances. According to the testimonies of the people who were guests of the Hrabro Srce gay club that night, the police department representatives were not acting in a professional manner, moreover, they were laughing at the terrified victims.

Furthermore, instead of arresting the attackers, the FC Crvena Zvezda supporters, the police decided to take in custody the attacked woman N.A. She was imprisoned for 12 hours under public disorderly conduct charge. After she was released, N.A. was able to seek medical attention at Klinicki Centar in Belgrade where the doctors have established and documented multiple injuries to the head, legs, stomach, as well as injuries to the thighs and a brain concussion.

GSA appeals to both Serbian and international organisations to recognise a rise in LGBT-related violence in Serbia, especially in times before and after the Pride parade. In the case of new incidents, your timely reaction in supporting the LGBT organisations in their fight for human rights and equality will be highly appreciated.

On 19 August, Ivica Dacic, Serbian Interior Minister, vowed that police will protect participants in Belgrade's Gay Pride parade scheduled for September 20th. "In this country, no one will be allowed to threaten or bother anyone," Dacic said, adding police will do their best to guarantee public order and safety. Parade organisers welcomed Dacic's commitment. Anti-gay graffiti has appeared in Belgrade ahead of the event and several groups have warned they will interrupt it. Several people were severely beaten during the 2001 Gay Pride march.

Denmark: Study on decisions in LGBT asylum cases

by Søren Laursen, LBL – the Danish National LGBT- organisation

At the World Outgames Human Rights Conference 2009 in Copenhagen, a new study on decisions in LGBT asylum cases in Denmark was released.

Based on a database containing all decisions of the Danish Refugee Appeals Board a study was made of all LGBT cases, which have been decided by the Board since the late 80-ies. The first reason to make the study was to extract quality information on persecution of LGBT-persons, but at the same time an insight into the practice is obtained.

Approx. 150 cases are included in the study, and the report outlines a large number of those cases, which are considered credible.

The study is made by LBL and the Danish Refugee Council (a private humanitarian organisation). The report, Disturbing Knowledge, can be downloaded here:

<http://www.lbl.dk/uploads/media/DisturbingKnowledge.PA.01.pdf>

Sex change ops under review in Sweden

Source: *The Local*, www.thelocal.se/20996/20090730/, 30 July 2009

The Swedish Board for Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) has launched a review of the healthcare alternatives available to transsexuals seeking to change gender. Organisations representing gay, bisexual and transsexual people have long argued that often inconsistent healthcare services do not cater fully to their needs.

Criticism has centred on issues such as the long delays in the sex reassignment process with variations of up to several years depending on locality. There are also significant differences in price for various operations and procedures among the county health authorities and inconsistencies in how much the transsexuals themselves have to contribute.

"The hope is that we shall offer healthcare for this group which is of high quality and which is consistent across the country, and that it should improve the quality of life for transsexual people," Håkan Ceder at the board said to Sveriges Radio (SR).

According to legislation passed in 1972, to undergo a sex change operation a person must be over 18-years-old, a Swedish citizen, be sterilized and unmarried. In order to establish a persons gender a psychiatric examination must have been completed before an application can be submitted to the Health and Welfare Board's legal council for confirmation.

Following the confirmation of a new gender the transsexual person is issued with a new personal identification number (personnummer) and are then able to elect to undergo sex reassignment surgery.

The number of people applying for sex reassignment surgery is increasing.

For thirty years it averaged at about 12-15 people per year until 2003, when it climbed to around 25 per year, according to the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights (RFSL).

Beyond the pink curtain

Source: Mathew Charles

Some documentaries in the past few years have suggested that a Pink Curtain has replaced the Iron Curtain, but is the West of Europe in any position to pass judgement? A new film, **Beyond the Pink Curtain**, questions this bias and investigates the power and responsibility of the European Union to protect us. Writer and director Mathew Charles explains:

"I am always amazed at how many people in the West believe homophobia is only an Eastern European problem. It is of course true to say that it is much more of an issue in the former Communist states, where a powerful extreme nationalism and religious fundamentalism make it hard to imagine how LGBT equality will ever be achieved. But what has happened in the West that makes us believe we have it all? There is a dangerous complacency out there; one that appears to be almost reinforced by the struggle of the East. Their misfortune rather inappropriately seems to highlight our achievements.

"So many of us in the West take our rights for granted. Pride has become a party, but is the struggle completely over? We may have legislative protection, but do we really have full social acceptance? Homophobia in Western societies may not be of the organised public variety we see across parts of Central and Eastern Europe, but it is present nonetheless, just in a more private form. The so-called 'pink curtain' therefore makes dangerously false distinctions. East and West are not so far removed. The battle for equality continues, wherever we live.

"Sexuality and homophobia transcend nationality. That is why the European Union's new anti-discrimination directive is so important. Not only does it recognise LGBT people as full and equal citizens for the first time, it provides a powerful legal tool in the fight to eradicate prejudice and could also be a catalyst for real social change.

Homophobia is undoubtedly present in all corners of Europe. Only together can we defeat it.

We must therefore look **Beyond the pink curtain.**"

For more information of the film and to buy a copy, please visit the website at www.beyondthepinkcurtain.com.