



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



CommDH/Speech(2018)8

Video message of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović

On the occasion of the Pride Forum Serbia - 15.09.18

Dear friends,

It is a pleasure for me to participate in the opening of your event through this video. The protection and promotion of human rights of LGBTI people is high on my agenda and I therefore welcome the series of events you are planning.

In recent years, there has been increasing awareness about the various forms of discrimination that LGBTI people suffer from. In many countries, pride events have been organised in safer conditions, public discourse has improved and legislation has evolved. Today, for example, more than half of Council of Europe member states provide some form of legal recognition for same-sex couples and many prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity explicitly in their national laws.

This progress has been possible thanks to activists, human rights defenders, lawyers, politicians, opinion makers, athletes, and family members who have refused to be bystanders and have chosen to stand up and fight for a more just society.

As you prepare for Pride Week, I would like to take a moment to salute their remarkable work. They helped European societies become more conscious of the inequalities and human rights violations experienced by LGBTI people. Thanks to them, there is much to celebrate. But there still remains a lot of work to be done.

Although there has been progress, we have no reason to be complacent. Even today, children are bullied at school or cast out by their families, adults lose their jobs because of their sexual orientation or are persecuted, beaten and threatened because of who they are or whom they love.

This situation causes enormous human suffering and we must change it. We must demand that our governments adopt laws and policies based on the international human rights treaties that they have ratified, and which require the protection of all people from discrimination, torture, violence or illegal state interference with people's private lives.

In particular, they should base their action on the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights and of the European Committee of Social Rights, which has made the following principle clear: the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in the European Convention on Human Rights and in the European Social Charter must be secured without discrimination on any ground, including sexual orientation and gender identity.

Governments must also uphold the Court's position which considers that bans of Pride events or other forms of LGBTI people's expressions are a violation of the rights to freedom of assembly and expression. The Court also affirmed that laws prohibiting discussion about homosexuality reinforce prejudice and encourage homophobia.

Regrettably, legislation and practice very often contradicts these standards. In Serbia, for example, despite legislative and judiciary progress in fighting discrimination, homophobia remains a serious problem. For years, the Belgrade Pride could not take place, and it is not uncommon that LGBTI people are verbally or even physically attacked, while the perpetrators go unpunished.

The situation is alarming in many other countries in Europe where national or local authorities attempt to deny or undermine freedom of assembly and speech of LGBTI people, or use demeaning discourse against them.

In this context, events like the Pride Week acquire even more significance. They help people stand up together to demand justice and equality for LGBTI people. They confront the prejudices that fuel homophobia and discrimination. They bring visibility to the community and help more persons understand that LGBT people do not demand special rights, but just the same rights as everybody else.

As your Commissioner for Human Rights, I will stand by your side in this fight for dignity, justice and equality. I will continue reminding governments, parliaments, and judges of their human rights obligations in the protection and promotion of the human rights of LGBTI people. I will engage with students, journalists, and the public at large to promote a more factual debate around human rights for all. I will support NGOs and human rights defenders who challenge prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination against LGBTI people.

I am very proud of what you have achieved so far. The long march to equality and dignity is not over yet. We must continue to move forward, together.

I wish you a successful pride. Thank you.