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## International Human Rights Conference

*Europride 2022 - closing remarks*

**Speech by Dunja Mijatović**

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Strasbourg, 16 September 2022

Dear colleagues,  
dear Europride organisers,  
dear activists,  
dear friends,

This Europride has gone through a lot of ups and downs.

It began in 2019 on a positive note when this pan-European event was attributed for the first time to a country in South-eastern Europe, with the support of the Serbian authorities. This was a strong signal that equality was making strides.

But over the past few weeks, Europride has faced political backtracking, displays of hate, and even a ban on the march.

And yet, we are here. In Belgrade. Members of the LGBTI community, members of international organisations, diplomats, supporters and activists, all showing determination to advance equal rights for LGBTI people despite the adversity.

It was immediately clear to me that Europride in Belgrade would be of great significance. I have stood with you through the uncertainty of the last weeks, pressing relentlessly for respect of the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression.

I have used my mandate to push for a successful Europride, through multiple contacts with the Serbian authorities at the highest level, in close coordination with the organisers and other stakeholders.

Looking back at what happened, it strikes me that this Europride is the perfect allegory for the struggle toward equal human rights for LGBTI people in Europe and beyond.

We may have hoped for a linear arc of progress, but the reality is that gains are followed by setbacks, which are then overcome again.

The fight to secure respect for the human rights of LGBTI people has been paved with enormous victories on our continent, from decriminalisation to the adoption of anti-hate and anti-discrimination laws, legal gender recognition, and same-sex marriage in many member states of the Council of Europe – even if progress remains uneven.

Crucially, the visibility and acceptance of LGBTI people in our societies is on the rise. Pride marches are a critical component of this. They enable LGBTI people in a country to be seen and to experience

solidarity, they give a voice to those whose rights are too often ignored or violated. They are about fighting misconceptions and prejudices.

It is important to remember these successes when times seem dark.

But the resistance to this year's Europride is a stark reminder that the work is not complete and that we are going through difficult times.

In recent years, several member states have taken steps to roll back the rights of LGBTI people. Powerful anti-gender movements are whipping intolerance and hatred across the continent.

Pride marches just re-started this year after a two year pause caused by the COVID19 pandemic, and it is striking that several have faced great challenges: the terrorist attack on the eve of Oslo Pride; the ban and subsequent massive arrests of participants at Istanbul Pride; the cancellation of Tbilisi Pride due to threats of violence and the inaction of the authorities to tackle them; and multiple physical attacks in the margins of Pride marches – including well established ones –, notably against transgender participants.

And now this tormenting battle around Europride. Why the sudden and last-minute turnaround by the Serbian authorities? Why the long uncertainty and contradicting messages from different authorities? The intimidation over the last days has been regrettable. It is at the very opposite of the authorities' obligations to uphold the human rights of LGBTI people.

Attacks against the human rights of LGBTI people are part of a more general trend seeking to undermine human rights. I have denounced the scapegoating of LGBTI people by unscrupulous politicians for political gain. Where LGBTI rights are under assault, so are women's rights, as well as the rights of migrants and of other minorities; civil society stands under pressure and media freedom is weakened.

Those who oppose LGBTI rights fail to honour their commitment to human rights in general. Their actions run counter our common European values of dignity, inclusion, equality, and respect for the rule of law.

This is why Europride is so important to expand the effective respect of European standards across the region and to counter these negative trends. Europride has come here in Belgrade no matter what. This international human rights conference is taking place. Important issues are being discussed. All this illustrates the strength of the LGBTI community and our collective commitment to continue supporting their fight for equality.

Where we go next is clear to me.

We will continue to be visible and vocal until LGBTI people can fully enjoy their human rights. I am proud to be here with you in Belgrade.

We will stand for a more equal society where LGBTI people can be seen and heard as equal citizens.

**Stay strong and proud as you fight for equal rights.**

**Let love win, not hate.**