

Meet Simeon from the Bulgarian organisation, GLAS Foundation, co-host of our Annual Conference

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Simeon Vasilev, Chairman and Co-Founder of [GLAS Foundation](#), one of the three Bulgarian LGBTI organisations co-hosting the ILGA-Europe Annual Conference in Sofia this month. Here Simeon talks about the recent elections in Bulgaria and what the possible outcome will mean for LGBTI people in the country.

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Simeon Vasilev

Hi Simeon! Can you tell us what it means for your organisation to co-host ILGA-Europe’s Annual Conference in Sofia this year?

Beyond the great honour of being a host country for a second time in ILGA-Europe’s herstory, we are hoping that this gathering will help to put a focus on Bulgaria. Despite being part of the EU for so many years, we are drastically behind many other member states when it comes to legal protection and rights. For GLAS foundation, which I lead, it’s also a great opportunity to elevate our skills and competences and broaden our networks. We are glad to have a chance to put into practice so much of what we have learned from organising large scale events like Sofia Pride in the last couple of years. It also means strengthening our relationship with ILGA-Europe and not least – another great work flow with your team!

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Simeon Vasilev

Originally, the decision to celebrate the Annual Conference in Sofia was made in 2019 but it was postponed it for well-known reasons. What key changes or events have taken place for the LGBTI movement and communities in Bulgaria ever since?

The major key change during that time has been the political environment. In 2021 alone, we had four elections. Again, this month another national election took place. It’s a constantly changing political flora and fauna, but I do believe it’s for the good. During that time our community centre – the Rainbow Hub, which we run with Bilitis foundation, was physically attacked by a far-right political candidate. We were later kicked out of the premises by other landlords.

However, the response of the local and international community was heart-warming. We managed to secure a new place with the donations we raised. I also think this period of time has made the local LGBTI community more politically engaged, which we have been advocating for a long time. It should be noted that in 2019 we had around 3,500 people at Sofia Pride, and this year we had over 12,000. This number alone speaks loudly for the recent

progress during the last two or three years.

The GERB party has won the parliamentary elections and they will form a coalition. How do you expect this will affect LGBTI people's rights and communities and organisations?

The GERB party have been silent or complicit to nationalist parties in the past and I don't expect a major shift to happen among their leadership. It will be far more alarming if they make a coalition with the fourth party in votes – the ultranationalist, anti-EU and anti-Western Revival (Vazrazhdane). This would be a wake-up call for their EU political partners. I'm cautiously optimistic that the democratic liberal parties, second and sixth in the last elections, will be more vocal on the LGBTI rights.

The ILGA-Europe Annual Conference takes place in Sofia, Bulgaria from October 19-22. To learn more about Glas Foundation, [visit their website here](#).