

Bulgaria passes anti-LGBTI propaganda law

[Press Release](#), [Civil Rights and Freedom](#), [Anti-propaganda Laws](#), [Bulgaria](#)

ILGA-Europe have condemned a fast-tracked law banning the portrayal of LGBTI identities in Bulgarian educational institutions, warning that it is an attack on children's rights and a distraction to secure votes for far-right and Russia-aligned parties in forthcoming elections.

Today the Bulgarian Parliament voted with almost a full majority to adopt an anti-LGBT propaganda law which prohibits "the carrying out of propaganda, promotion and incitement in any way, directly or indirectly, of ideas and views related to non-traditional homosexual orientation and/or the determination of gender identity other than biological" in the system of pre-school and school education, by amending the Preschool and School Education Act (PSEA).

In both the reasoning behind the bill and during today's debates it was mentioned that content "in the vicinity of" these educational establishments should also be banned. This means that any portrayal of LGBT people will be banned from schools and pre-schools, as well as any entity in the vicinity of them.

Both the first and second readings were held today, seven days after passing the Committee, in a clear fast tracking of the legislation through parliament in their last session before the summer and while most watchdogs and international institutions are on holiday.

The Revival Party drafted the law using wording based off the Russian and Hungarian anti-LGBT propaganda laws, which both countries have been promoting in Europe. The Revival Party is a member of the the Europe of Sovereign Nations group of the European Parliament, which includes MEPs who have declared interest in forming a "pacifist" and eurosceptic group to improve relations with Russia, and MEPs who were expelled from the Identity and Democracy (ID) Group shortly before the European election, due to reports of Nazi sympathising.

According to the Executive Director of ILGA-Europe, Chaber: "The proponents of the law, the Revival Party, and all those who voted in favour of the law claim that this is to protect young people, however the truth is that this is an attack on the rights of children, particularly LGBTI children."

The aim of the law is extremely similar to the Russian anti-LGBT propaganda law adopted in 2012, and the Hungarian anti-LGBT propaganda law adopted in 2021, both of which have been deemed by various international stakeholders and institutions as incompatible with international and European human rights standards (see the Venice Commission's opinions on the Russian^[1] and Hungarian laws^[2]).

The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe has repeatedly found such anti-LGBT propaganda laws to be in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The more recent Venice Commission Opinion on the Hungarian anti-LGBT propaganda law found it to be incompatible with the ECHR and international human rights standards, including the law's amendments regarding the educational sector.

It found that the law "fails to comply with the positive obligation of Hungary to ensure that the educational system provides children with objective and non-biased information on gender identity and sexual orientation and protects them from discrimination on the same grounds."

According to Denitsa Lyubenova, Lawyer at LGBTI organisation Deystvie in Bulgaria: “The previous opinion of the Venice Commission makes it clear that such “anti-propaganda” bills put children and youth at risk by contributing to creating a threatening environment where LGBTI children can be subject to health-related risks, bullying and harassment, and they exclude LGBTI people from fully participating in a democratic society.”

A growing trend in Europe

This law follows repeated attempts in recent years by the Revival Party to table a Russia-style Foreign Agent Law, which would see civic space severely curtailed and contribute to the erosion of democratic checks and balances. In fact, this combination of Russian-style Foreign Agent laws and anti-LGBT propaganda laws is a growing trend in Europe, with Georgia most recently having adopted a Foreign Agent Law in May this year and then only five days later announcing an anti-LGBT legislative package which includes a ban on LGBT content in education, media and the arts.^[3]

Says ILGA-Europe’s Executive Director, Chaber: “Today’s fast-tracking of this law through the Bulgarian parliament is a clear attempt to avoid scrutiny, and highlights the political nature of this law. Both Bulgaria and Georgia have national elections upcoming in October. LGBTI people are being used in both scenarios as scapegoats and as a distraction to secure votes for far-right and Russia-aligned political parties.”

The European Commission has highlighted, in its 2024 Rule of Law report, that the current procedure of legislative initiatives tabled by MPs in Bulgaria does not adhere to desired standards, such as allowing civil society consultation, conducting impact assessments, and assessing compliance with EU law.^[4] This adopted law is a clear example of these rule of law shortcomings.

Says Chaber: “Given the extremely fast-tracked procedure for this law, its clear political aim is to scapegoat LGBTI people and legislate against their human rights. It is incompatible with Council of Europe and EU standards on law-making and non-discrimination. As such, ILGA-Europe request that the European Commission assess the law’s compatibility with EU law and call for a strong reaction from all EU Member States.”

^[1] [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2013\)022-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2013)022-e)

^[2] [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2021\)050-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2021)050-e)

^[3] <https://www.ilga-europe.org/blog/the-fight-against-georgias-foreign-agent-law-and-anti-lgbti-legislation/>

^[4] European Commission (2024), Rule of Law report, Bulgaria chapter, accessible at: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/fd6bb85d-4aaa-4c79-88a2-8709edfb2002_en?filename=10_1_58051_coun_chap_bulgaria_en.pdf

^[5] (C/2023/8627 final) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=PI_COM%3AC%282023%298627

^[6] See pp 33-34.