



# Lithuania



**LGBTI-friendly events gained visibility in Lithuania in 2015, with Vilnius' mayor-elect speaking out in favour of Pride parades in the capital and the city's successful application for 2016 Baltic Pride. The President reacted to homophobic comments by a well-known performer and a man was fined for bias-motivated hate crime. However, polls showed that only a minority of the general public felt comfortable with the idea of LGBTI colleagues and support for civil partnership or marriage equality remains low overall. A controversial 'anti-propaganda' bill made a sudden and unwelcome reappearance on the legislative agenda and political discussions on civil partnership for both different- and same-sex couples continued throughout the year.**

## Access to goods and services

- In April, the National LGBT\* Rights Organization LGL made a complaint to the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson when the Julturas bus company refused to supply a bus for Europride in Riga. The bus had been pre-ordered but Julturas revoked the contract, saying the vehicle was unavailable. The acting Ombudsperson Edita Žiobienė stated that the bus company had violated equal opportunities legislation in a letter to LGL in May.

## Bias-motivated speech

- A complaint against homophobic comments on a Facebook photo of a gay couple kissing, originally brought by LGL in December 2014, was dismissed. On 18 February, the final instance District Court of the Klaipėda Region affirmed the order to terminate the complaint. The court held that such “an eccentric act” must anticipate a certain reaction from people who hold opposing opinions. An appeal to the ECtHR (citing lack of effective remedies, violation of private life and discrimination) was filed by LGL on 13 August.

- Marijus Adomaitis, who performs as DJ Ten Walls, called gay men “another breed” and compared them to paedophiles in a Facebook post from his personal account in June. He later deleted the comments, apologised and wrote a longer statement that was published in September, blaming his remarks on “stress”. Several music festivals dropped Ten Walls from their line-ups during the summer as a result of his comments. Following his apology, DJ Ten Walls recorded a song with a trans singer and launched it on the website of National LGBT\* Rights Organization LGL. He was also formally invited to perform at Baltic Pride 2016 but had not confirmed by the end of 2015.

- During the annual congress of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania political party and allied group The Polish Union of Lithuania, photos of participants in t-shirts with homophobic slogans appeared online. In July, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson opened an investigation into the incident before transferring the complaint to the Public Prosecutor’s Office in October, as the slogans were potentially punishable under criminal

law. On 20 October, the public prosecutor upheld the earlier decision of the police not to conduct a pre-trial investigation and dismissed the complaint.

## Bias-motivated violence

- In April, a man was fined EUR 3,350 for publicly harassing an openly gay singer based on his sexual orientation. In April, Laurynas Baltrūnas was ordered by a second instance court to compensate Ruslanas Kirilkinas for verbally abusing the singer as well as attacking him with eggs during a performance.

## Education

- In April, the director of a Vilnius school declared that a publication distributed by National LGBT\* Rights Organization LGL was tantamount to “propaganda”. The survey on homophobic bullying in schools was shared with 250 schools and institutions by LGL. In an interview with TV3, director of Pilaitė high school, Zotikas Popovas said that children might be tempted to ‘try’ homosexual relationships if LGBTI issues are openly discussed.

## Family

- In March, nine MPs from the Social Democrats (LSDP) and Liberal Movement (LRLS) parties submitted a joint bill on civil partnership for same-sex and different-sex couples. The Catholic Church in Lithuania immediately spoke out against the civil partnership proposal. The assistant secretary of the Lithuanian Bishops’ Conference stated that the Church “blesses marital love between a man and a woman and not between two men or two women”. Also in March, Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius (LSDP) said that he didn’t support the bill. In May, the parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs confirmed that the proposal was compatible with the constitution. In July, parliament speaker Loreta Graūžinienė (Labour Party, DP) said that Lithuania was not ready for same-sex partnership and shouldn’t be forced to legislate following the ECtHR’s *Oliari* judgment (see **Italy**). In October, MPs opposing the bill stated that such a proposal would need to be passed by public referendum.

Voting on the bill had still not taken place by the end of the year.

- Justice minister Juozas Bernatoniš (LSDP) introduced an amendment to the Civil Code that would permit different-sex couples to enter registered civil partnerships. NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and legal professors criticised the proposal, stating that it was discriminatory. In June, the justice minister reacted by saying that there are not enough same-sex couples in Lithuania to justify their inclusion. On 13 October, the bill was rejected by members of parliament as the number of MPs against (25) and abstaining (16) outnumbered those in favour (27). The Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) party opposed the bill. Several MPs who rejected the proposal said they did so because they feared that such a law would hasten the introduction of similar partnership laws for same-sex couples; Vilija Aleknaite-Abramikiene MP (TS-LKD) said "...it would be wrong to claim that we only want to help those guys and girls who live together, because we would have to automatically extend that right to gays and lesbians".
- On 15 September, 39 parliamentarians voted in favour of placing an amendment to child protection legislation on the agenda for the autumn legislative session. The proposal, put forward by Petras Gražulis MP (Order and Justice, TT; nationalist), explicitly stated that Lithuanian children cannot be jointly adopted by same-sex couples; only married couples can currently access adoption. The relevant committees had not delivered opinions on this proposal by the end of 2015.

## Foreign policy

- On 24 August, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed the UN Security Council. In a closed briefing, the Ministry raised the vulnerability of LGBT people to gross human rights violations and called on the international community to protect the human rights of all.

## Freedom of assembly

- Remigijus Šimašius (LRLS) was elected as Mayor of Vilnius in March. When asked about potential LGBT

equality events or Pride parades in the city, he said "All types of parades of whoever wants to march will be allowed, as long as they do not disturb other residents of Vilnius. We must enjoy democracy in Vilnius. I see no reasons for banning someone from marching along Gedimino Avenue, if it is not the rush hour". Outgoing mayor Artūras Zuokas (Lithuanian Freedom Union, LLS) had previously said that the city did not need events like Pride as they were antagonistic.

- A permit to hold the 2016 Baltic Pride celebrations in Vilnius was awarded to the National LGBT\* Rights Organization LGL in October. LGL reported that law enforcement and city officials had been more helpful than in previous years. An event of 1,000 people was authorised, along with a Pride march, rally and concert scheduled for 18 June 2016.

## Freedom of expression

- A bill proposing freedom of expression limitations similar to Russia's so-called anti-propaganda law reappeared in November. Bill XIP 4490(3), an amendment to the code of administrative violations which aimed to punish 'public denigration of constitutional moral values' had been discussed in 2013 and debated in 2014. A final vote had not yet taken place and was proposed for 10 November. The bill's provisions included fines for individuals organising events that offended public morality. Before the vote could take place on 10 November, 65 members of parliament voted to postpone consideration of the proposal. The bill could be reintroduced to the legislative voting schedule at any time.

## Legal gender recognition

- A joint Ministry of Justice- Ministry of Health working group was established in January to discuss the introduction of a legal gender recognition procedure. In July, the group recommended a system where gender reassignment surgery is a required pre-condition, regulated by medical professionals. A legislative motion was tabled in November and will be considered by the parliament in 2016.

## Participation in public, cultural and political life

- Reacting to online comments made by DJ Ten Walls (see **Bias-motivated speech**), President Dalia Grybauskaitė (independent) stated that national discussions about homophobia and intolerance were required in Lithuania. In June, she said “I believe discussions are a healthy thing, we need more of them, as the sooner Lithuania becomes more open and more tolerant, the better it will be for the country”.

## Public opinion

- In a poll carried out by market research firm RAIT, 15% of respondents stated they would be in favour of the introduction of recognised same-sex partnership (rising from 7% in a 2014 RAIT poll); 79% were against equal partnership. 8% expressed support for marriage equality, while 82% stated their opposition. The survey was conducted in November 2014 and the results published in February.

- According to Eurobarometer 2015, 57% of people surveyed in Lithuania believe that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is widespread (EU28 average was 58%). When asked about gender identity, 46% felt discrimination on this ground was widespread (EU 28 average was 56%). 44% totally agreed with the statement that LGB people should have the same rights as heterosexual people (EU 28 average was 71%). When asked to grade how comfortable they would be with certain scenarios on a scale of 1 (not comfortable at all) - 10 (totally comfortable), 46% said they would be comfortable or moderately comfortable with an LGB work colleague (EU28 average was 72%). When asked about a potential trans work colleague, 41% said they would be comfortable or moderately comfortable (EU28 average was 67%).

*“We must find a way to live in tolerance and equality in the world, and change the major opinion about gay men and women in my country.”*

- Vaidas Baumila, Lithuanian entry in the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest