

Proposal for Belgium to host the 22nd ILGA-Europe Annual Conference in October 2018

Submitted by ILGA-Europe Executive Board, in consultation with Belgian LGBTI organisations Arc-en-Ciel, Çavaria and Rainbow House

Introduction

At its September meeting the Board recognized the need for a thorough review of the Constitution in response to proposals submitted and in line with ongoing conversations on diversity of representation and governance structures. Changing a Constitution as a Belgian-based organization is far from simple and comes with a massive amount of paperwork and even more so, if done elsewhere. Not only is the process time consuming, it also involves substantial additional costs to do it outside Belgium; funds that could be better used to support our movement. To limit the administrative burden, costs involved and required capacity of staff, the Board therefore is taking the unusual step to propose a Belgian conference at the end of the governance review process in 2018.

Proposal

The Board is proposing that the host city for the 2018 Conference be in Belgium, co-hosted with Belgian organisations. The city will be decided in close consultation with Belgian LGBTI organisations Arc-en-Ciel, Çavaria and Rainbow House, local organization who are willing to host the conference.

Host city, local hosts and conference site

The proposed host city is Brussels. The final decision will be made together with the local host committee consisting of organisations Arc-en-Ciel, Çavaria and Rainbow House and is depending on capacity, availability and costs of venue, hotels, transportation, and possibilities for social programme.

Explanation

Following proposals by TGEU (received by deadline of 1 September) to amend the Constitution and install a Working Group on governing structures, the Board has at its meeting in September expressed full support of these proposals. It also recognized the need for a more thorough review together with its members of the Constitution, the Standing Orders and governing structures within ILGA-Europe to reflect the diversity of its membership and to ensure that our governance structures are suitable for a growing organisations.

In line with this the Board has proposed a process with a timeline of 2 years, after which proposals to amend the Constitution and Standing Orders shall be brought to the AGM. If the membership approves of this proposal and timeline, the 2018 Conference will be focusing on adopting the reviewed Constitution and Standing Orders.

Under Belgian law the presence of a Belgian notary is required when there are changes to the Constitution. Based on our experience in 2012 approving the new Constitution in Dublin, there are significant financial overheads, particularly in case of the AGM approving changes outside Belgium. For the changes to be legal, an additional number of administrative and legal steps are required to ratify in accordance with Belgian law.

Process

The Board is aware of three bids having been submitted to the membership for election of local host of the conference in 2018. The Board has reached out to the organisations that have submitted bids for hosting the 2018 Conference to inform them of our decision to propose this scenario highlighting the importance, and to consult their willingness to resubmit their candidacy for the 2019 Conference next year.

We're aware that if the ILGA Board are suggesting hosting the conference in Belgium, this may carry extra weight. Of course it is up to the members to decide where the 2018 conference will be by voting on the four proposals.

Within Belgium Çavaria, Rainbow House and Arc-en-Ciel have indicated their support. They would very much welcome the conference to be held in a Belgian city and expressed their willingness to act as local hosting committee.

Political context

Holding the ILGA-Europe annual conference in Belgium will allow us to engage in a more comprehensive way with the EU – the Council, Commission and Parliament – than is usual at our conferences. 2018 will be a crucial year for the EU, as it is expected that the final phase of negotiations on BREXIT will be taking place. How and where fundamental rights are integrated into those negotiations and what implications there are for these fundamental rights across the other countries in the EU will be key issues that matter not just to us in ILGA Europe, but to LGBTI people across the continent. The conference will also be held in the lead up to the next European Elections (in 2019), which will be crucial for the future of the EU. We will use the opportunity of the Conference in Belgium to seek to influence the Parties as they prepare their programmes and manifestos ahead of those elections.

Holding the conference in Belgium, to enable easier proposed updating of our Constitution and Standing Orders, will provide a unique opportunity to have a focus on the EU itself and the role of the EU in driving LGBTI equality as a broad theme, and to have those discussions with the principal people within the EU structures with responsibility for driving that change.

Programme / speakers

The proximity to Brussels will enable us to invite the leaders of the EU institutions to discuss LGBTI issues and the role that the EU currently plays, and would allow us to emphasise more directly the enhanced leadership which we believe that the EU should be playing in advancing LGBTI equality across the EU.

Moreover, there is an extensive list of potential Belgian speakers that could be invited. These are role models and allies in different sectors (politics, media, that have played a leading role in creating change at different levels in Belgian society, such as the Belgian MP and PACE-member Petra de Sutter, who played a key role in the adoption of the Council of Europe resolution on trans issues in 2015.

Fundraising

Holding the conference in Belgium offers a unique opportunity to capitalise on our annual fund raising event the European Equality Gala in Brussels. It will provide ILGA-Europe with an opportunity to show case the breadth and depth of our membership and collective work as a European LGBTI movement to key Brussels based stakeholders.

Throughout the 2 years, multiple fundraising efforts will be carried out. Together with the local organisations, we will target traditional sources (foundations and governments) and individual donors who applaud the work that we do. Collectively we will approach small and large businesses to support the conference either financially or in-kind towards i.e. social events, venue for the opening reception, catering closing party etc. For some of these we can build on local sponsorships resulting from the annual Gala.

Given the organisation of events in Brussels throughout the year, ILGA-Europe will have a stronger negotiating position than elsewhere with hotels and venues and may be able to pursue year-long deals that can reduce the costs overall.