

Aleksandar Vučić
President of Serbia

Ana Brnabić
Prime-Minister of Serbia

Cc:

Jadranka Joksimovic, Serbian Minister for European Integration
Emanuele Giaufret, Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia
Stefanno Sannino, Secretary-General of the European External Action Service
Stella Ronner-Grubacic, EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity

Brussels, 31 August 2022

Subject: Maintaining the organisation of EuroPride 2022 in Belgrade and deploying sufficient police protection to ensure its safety

Dear President,
Dear Prime-Minister,
Dear Minister,

Pride demonstrations are peaceful tools for political advocacy and one way in which the universal right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly is crystallised. They are a hallmark of the LGBTIQ activist movement, a pillar for social visibility and they are equally political demonstrations during which the community voices its concerns, highlights its achievements and gives the opportunity to its members to demonstrate in favour of equality.

The decision to host EuroPride in 2022 came with many expectations. Belgrade has for years been fighting for equality for LGBTIQ persons in the region. EuroPride taking place in Belgrade this coming September will therefore be a milestone both for the movement and the region. In effect, this would make Belgrade the first city in Southeast Europe and the first outside the European Economic Area to host a major event for the pan-European LGBTIQ community. It would take place precisely 21 years after the first Pride organised in Belgrade in 2001 and on the thirtieth anniversary of the first EuroPride.

EuroPride in Belgrade is highly significant because LGBTIQ people continue to face discrimination in the Balkans, as they do in other parts of Europe. No European country has managed to eliminate discrimination, which substantiates why the fight to end inequality and discrimination needs all the political support it can gather.
Awarding EuroPride to Belgrade was and remains the right decision.

As Members of the European Parliament committed to fighting for equality in all its forms, and in particular LGBTI equality through the work of the Intergroup on LGBTI rights, we deeply appreciate the political will that has played a role in cooperating with the EuroPride organisers. **Today, we ask you to continue this positive cooperation and to support the organisers in delivering a safe and affirming EuroPride March.**

We are aware that there are threats to the security of protestors, yet we maintain that banning this event outright is not the right solution. **The situation of anti-LGBTIQ counter-protests which are often violent is unfortunately not new to Prides and therefore the police response should be swift, efficient and sufficient.** Should there be a need, more police should be deployed to ensure the Pride march and surrounding events can effectively take place. According to Serbia's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, and following a 2010 landmark document adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

15. Member states should ensure that law enforcement authorities take appropriate measures to protect participants in peaceful demonstrations in favour of the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons from any attempts to unlawfully disrupt or inhibit the effective enjoyment of their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.¹

Additionally, the European Court of Human Rights has in the past ruled that a Pride ban is a breach of the Convention (*Bączkowski v Poland*²) and that failure to protect peaceful demonstrators during demonstrations such as Pride marches equally amounts to a violation (*Identoba and Others v. Georgia*³). Serbia's commitment to human rights is further underpinned by the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union, where all parties recognise the paramount importance of the rule of law and respect for human rights.⁴

Lastly, the EU Delegation to Serbia has regretted that EuroPride was banned, calling for further clarification.⁵

Prides have been and will remain being a crucial visibility tool for the LGBTIQ community all over the world. **It is in this spirit that we urge the leadership of the Serbian government to:**

1. **enable EuroPride to take place as scheduled;**
2. **additionally commit to deploying sufficient law enforcement to ensure its safety, thereby ensuring that all attendees can safely exercise their right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression;**
3. **maintain dialogue with the EU Delegation and organisers in order to find a solution that ensures the above.**

Yours sincerely,

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¹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity (31 March 2010), available at https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cf40a.

² Case of *Bączkowski and Others v. Poland* (24 September 2007), application no. 1543/06, available at <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-80464>.

³ Case of *Identoba and Others v. Georgia* (12 May 2015), application no. 73235/12, available at <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-5079814-6255003>.

⁴ Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States of the one part, and the Republic of Serbia, of the other part, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A22013A1018%2801%29>.

⁵ Delegation of the EU in Serbia (28 August 2022), "Statement on Europride", available at <https://europa.rs/statement-on-europride/?lang=en>.

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