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Vilnius municipal authorities ban upcoming Baltic Pride march

The municipal authorities of the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, must allow the upcoming Baltic Pride to take place, Amnesty International said today.

After a meeting held today with the Lithuania Gay League, organizers of the 27 July march, and Amnesty International, the Vilnius municipality authorities said the event cannot be held in the city centre and failed to propose an alternative route.

“It is appalling that despite domestic rulings in favour of Baltic Pride organisers, the city of Vilnius has decided to ban the Baltic Pride march, in blatant violation of the right to freedom of assembly of Baltic Pride’s organisers and other participants,” said John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Director at Amnesty International.

“The Vilnius authorities must promptly reopen the discussions with Baltic Pride organizers to ensure that the event takes place without hindrance and with adequate protection by police.”

On 20 June, Lithuania’s Supreme Administrative Court confirmed a ruling from the First Instance Court, stating that the Vilnius municipality was in breach of domestic law on peaceful assemblies by denying the possibility for the march to take place in the city centre.

Last January, municipal authorities said the march could not be held along the Gediminas Avenue, in the centre of the city, claiming it would force shops and hotels to shut down due to security concerns, and, instead, proposed a secluded location along the banks of the Neris River.

Municipal authorities also claim the proposed route is too close to judicial and governmental buildings, raising national security concerns. However, in the past, demonstrations have been allowed on the same avenue.

“The decision to ban the Baltic Pride march on security grounds is disproportionate, given that the Vilnius authorities refused to engage in constructive discussions with the Lithuania Gay League, despite rulings by domestic Courts’ saying that negotiations had to be re-opened,” said Dalhuisen.

Amnesty International has launched a petition calling on Lithuanian authorities to ensure the event takes place according to the organizers’ plans and that adequate protection is provided.

The Vilnius municipal authorities sought to block the first Baltic Pride in Vilnius in 2010, but the event ultimately went ahead following a court-ruling.

“It is frankly amazing that three years after the first Baltic Pride in Vilnius, we are back in exactly the same situation as before, with the City authorities openly refusing to respect the freedom of assembly of Pride participants and seemingly prepared to ignore administrative court rulings.”

In recent years, Lithuania has also adopted or initiated legislative measures aimed at restricting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people.

Most recently, in May 2013 the Lithuanian Parliament approved at first reading an amendments to the Code of Administrative Violations to impose fines for the “public denigration of constitutional moral values and of constitutional fundamentals of family life, as well as the organization of public events contravening public morality”. The proponent of this bill said its aim is to prevent events such as Baltic Pride from taking place.