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## **Successful Pride Parade in Riga despite heavy protests**

With the number of police officers in the street almost outnumbering the participants the Latvian capital Riga Saturday hosted its most successful and peaceful Gay Pride Parade so far.

Police presence was heavy as religious groups and some Neo-Nazis had announced their resistance to the Baltic Pride in Riga ahead of the event. But the counter demonstrators were not to be seen and between 300 and 400 people marched through the cobblestone paved streets of the Latvian capital carrying flags, banners, singing and playing music.

Amnesty is welcoming the cooperation between the government authorities, organisations and civil society in Latvia to ensure a successful Pride this year.

Lars Normann Jørgensen, Secretary general of Amnesty International Denmark and chair of the European Association of Amnesty International said:

“The top level governmental support is a major step forward for the LGBT community in Latvia and for non-discrimination in the country, the Baltics and all of Europe. Discriminatory speech and laws are on the rise again in the region and hate crimes occur regularly. We hope this proud Pride will be an encouragement to us all, and particularly our friends further East, to continue demonstrating that human rights are for all irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity.”

Among the Pride participants were several foreign ambassadors to Latvia and the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Thomas O. Melia. And contrary to previous years, the city council and the mayor of Riga did not ban the Pride ahead of the event, despite a recent poll revealing that three fourths of the citizens in Riga are opposed to it.

A delegation of about forty Amnesty International’s activists from 16 European countries joined the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activists from Baltic countries attending and monitoring the event. During the Pride a few incidents of assault were recorded.

### **Background information:**

In previous years Pride events in the Baltic region faced threats of violence and attempts to be banned by local authorities. In 2006, a LGBT Pride march in Riga was banned owing to what the authorities referred to as "security threats" against the participants and violent protesters threw eggs and human excrement at people elsewhere. In 2007, the Pride march was allowed to go ahead, but inside an enclosed park. Outside the park, crowds of counter-demonstrators shouted abuses at the Pride marchers and threw two explosive devices which exploded in the park. In May 2009 Riga City Council initially revoked permission for the Baltic Pride march. Amnesty International has been supporting Pride events in the Baltic region through campaigning, participation and monitoring since 2008.