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WRITTEN STATEMENT

by the

EUROPEAN PRIDE ORGANISERS ASSOCIATION (EPOA)

to the

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

**FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY, ASSOCIATION AND EXPRESSION:
FOSTERING FULL AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN PLURALIST SOCIETIES**

Vienna, 29-30 March 2007

Freedom of assembly must also be granted to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people

EPOA is the European federation of associations organising gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pride events and pride parades. EPOA was established in 1991 and has since been licensing the title “EuroPride”, an annual event that is taking place in a different European city every year. All across Europe, LGBT pride marches bring millions of people into the streets to celebrate diversity.

In the last three years, EPOA has addressed the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings in Warsaw denouncing the problems and difficulties LGBT pride organisers had faced in recent years in a couple of cities in OSCE member states such as **Croatia, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia and Serbia**. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved everywhere over these years.

As positive developments, we can report some legal victories: both the Constitutional Court of Latvia and the Supreme Court of Moldova have recently handed down landmark judgments overruling the ban of gay pride marches pronounced by local authorities in these countries. Moreover, the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has declared admissible an

application filed by five organisers of the 2005 Equality Parade in Warsaw which was banned by the city's then mayor, Lech Kaczyński, today President of Poland.

On the negative side we have to report that in Moscow, the controversy and hostility against a pride march continues to be fuelled by homophobic remarks and agitation of mayor Yuri Luzhkov who seems to be determined to ban the planned pride parade also this coming May. City authorities had already banned "Moscow Pride 06" last year. A demonstration to protest against this restriction of the right to assemble freely was attacked by a fascist and religious mob. Due to the complete failure of the police to protect the legal demonstrators a couple of them suffered heavy physical injuries. Counter demonstrators were beaten up under the eyes of the police.

In July 2006, a homophobic mob besieged a hotel in Riga where LGBT activists held a conference au lieu of the banned parade. Earlier that day the mob also had attacked LGBT people leaving a church in Riga where a holy mess was held, thus infringing not only on the freedom of assembly but also the freedom of religion of LGBT people. On both occasions, the people who peacefully assembled in a church and in the private setting of a hotel meeting room were completely left without any protection by the Latvian police forces.

While it seems that the Council of Europe and the OSCE have given up any hope that Russia will ever become a normal European country from which the respect of basic human rights can be expected and for which, therefore, today different standards seem to apply, it is even more frustrating and appalling that an EU member state such as Latvia violates fundamental human rights and European values in such a way.

We call upon the OSCE member states to finally put adequate pressure on the countries concerned to force them to not only respect the freedom of assembly of all people, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, but also to guarantee this freedom by protecting them against violent counter demonstrations and hate speech.