

STATEMENT

by the

European Pride Organisers Association (EPOA)

to the

2004 OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

Warsaw, 4-15 October 2004

Working Sessions 14 and 15: *Freedom of Assembly and Association*

(13 October 2004)

I am speaking on behalf of the European Pride Organisers Association (EPOA) which is for the first time represented at an OSCE Human Dimension meeting. Therefore, let me briefly introduce this European network. It is, as its name partly indicates, a federation of associations organising gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pride events and pride parades around Europe. EPOA, as the umbrella association, was established in 1991, and has since also been licensing the title “EUROPRIDE”, an annual pride event that is taking place in a different European city every year. This year, Europride was hosted by Hamburg, Germany, and next year it will take place in Oslo, Norway.

In many countries LGBT – lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender – pride parades have become huge events that already form part of popular folklore attended or at least watched by many non-LGBT people to celebrate the diversity of society. And some cities promote these parades even to attract more tourists. However, in some countries pride organisers experience enormous difficulties and hostility. In some cases LGBT pride parades were even exposed to violent attacks and had to be dissolved due to insufficient police protection. Video

documentaries about such incidences were shown yesterday during ILGA-Europe's side-event. For example, in 2001, the first pride parade in Belgrade, Serbia, was attacked by a large crowd of hooligans and fascists, and the police, although warned in advance, did not provide adequate protection. Several marchers were injured, all participants were left terrified. The LGBT movement in Belgrade has not recovered from that trauma since, and has not dared to organise another pride march as the police has also signalled that they could not guarantee the safety of such a march. The parade planned for 17 July 2004, therefore, had to be cancelled because, in the end, the organisers had no trust in the police to be able – and willing – to adequately protect the marchers.

This year in May, the first so-called “Parade of Tolerance” in Cracow, Poland, also ended in chaos and blood. The police had to even shoot into the air to stop the violent Neo-nazi and Catholic mob that had attacked the march. Several parade participants and policemen were injured and wounded.

Here in Warsaw, the mayor prohibited the “Parade for Equality” scheduled to take place in June 2004. He argued that such a march would present the views of sexual minorities, and this would contradict the “rules of public decency”.

EPOA and many other human rights organisations are deeply chocked and appalled not only by these violent incidents but also by the fact that the mayor of a capital city of a European Union member state, for his own moral values, is imposing such restrictions on certain people's right to freedom of assembly. This is simply not acceptable.

Therefore, we appeal to the governments of all OSCE member states to make sure that the fundamental human right to assembly freely is fully granted to LGBT groups and to LGBT pride organisers. We demand that public security forces are instructed to guarantee the safety of any such pride arrangements. If the responsible minister of the interior – or a chief police for that matter – is not capable or willing to guarantee fully the exercise of the right to freedom of assembly to all groups in society, as long as they do not incite to hatred and violence, there are only two solutions to such a situation in a democratic society: Such a minister or chief of police must resign or be sacked from his job.

Thank you, Mr Moderator.