

Dear Corrina,

(...). Below are information about organizing Pride March in Belgrade and some thoughts on ways you can maybe help us. The most important help is about increasing safety of Pride March since Serbia is highly homophobic society and we had very bad experience in 2001, so this year is very important for us.

This year brought us a lot of changes regarding the position of LGBT people in Serbia. After five years of lobbying and advocacy, the Law against Discrimination has been adopted in April; the visibility of LGBT people and issues related to LGBT human rights has increased, both in media and within the political agenda; LGBT activists are more often the source of information in print and electronic media and there is an improved cooperation between LGBT organizations. Finally, the cooperation with democratic political parties, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of human and minority rights is on a much higher level than ever before.

All of these changes resulted in several public protests of LGBT and HR NGOs:

- In October 2008 there was the Anti-fascists March in which many LGBT organizations and activists took part with visible banners and rainbow flags. The fascists and right-wing organizations also announced their protest, but the Minister of Interior had banned their march. The police protection of this anti-fascist march was adequate.
- In February 2009 the management of Belgrade congress center "Sava" banned the press conference of the LGBT group Gay Straight Alliance. This is a place where LGBT groups organized press conferences before, but due to the political change of the management, this conference was banned simply because it was organized by an LGBT group. The LGBT and HR activists organized the unannounced and spontaneous protest in front of the congress center and this protest was also protected by the police, although it was not announced. This was the first public protest of LGBT activists after the attempt of organizing the Pride March in 2001.
- During the International Women Day Protest March in the center of Belgrade this year, there was a second public protest of LGBT people, together with women's and HR organizations, which was also adequately protected by the police.

Taking all of these changes into consideration, we have decided to organize the Pride March in Belgrade this year. We estimate that this is the crucial political moment in Serbia to start organizing the Pride March and to demand the freedom of movement, peaceful protest and gathering for LGBT people and the movement. We believe that the Pride March is the event which will increase the visibility of LGBT people, as well as the visibility of the main problems and the position of LGBT people in the Serbian society.

So far, we have established the Belgrade Pride Organizing Committee, which consists of representatives from LGBT groups and individual activists. We have started the cooperation related to organization of Pride March with some democratic political parties (Liberal Democratic Party, Social Democratic Party, League for Social Democracy of

Vojvodina, etc.), the Republic Ombudsperson, and Ministry of Human and Minority Rights. We have also received the support of more than 60 HR, women's, and LGBT organizations, both Serbian and international, which signed the Declaration – Let there be Pride March. Some of these organizations will also be involved with some parts of the event organization. We have also contacted and have assured the support of several celebrities from Serbia in order to ensure and increase the security of the event. In the end, we have contacted and have assured the support of some international organizations, such as ILGA Europe, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, etc.

The safety of all participants of Pride March is the most important for us and there is a good cooperation established between police and the organizers of Belgrade Pride. The police representatives assured us they will do their best to ensure the protection of the participants. After we have contacted the high-level representatives in the police administration hierarchy, they have assigned the police officials which will be responsible for the operational issues of protection and preventive measures for safe realization of Belgrade Pride 2009. The presence of the internationals, celebrities and public persons will help us increase the safety and security of the participants of this march for equality.

The Pride March is announced to be held on September 20th, and we are doing our best to ensure the safety for all participants, through support from different HR activists, celebrities, etc. People from different countries (USA, UK, Germany, Greece, Austria, Turkey, Italy, etc) announced their arrival, thus providing the most important manner of support for us at the moment. There is also a great regional connection, and we expect the LGBT activists from all Balkan countries. This is why the support for the Belgrade Pride March given by international organizations is a necessity, especially concerning the fact that a lot of LGBT and human rights activists from different countries will come to join us in this peaceful protest for the equality of the LGBT population in Serbia.

Attached you will find the contacts for the Serbian President, Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, Minister for Human and Minority Rights, as well as the Mayor of Belgrade. I am also sending you the template letter with a kind request that you forward it to our government representatives and help us in increasing security for all participants by asking for their support and protection of basic human rights and the right for peaceful assembly of LGBT population. All kind of publicity and efforts for ensuring the safe Pride March are welcomed. You can also write to German embassy in Belgrade and ask for their support, as well to ask them to contact Serbian Government representatives and kindly ask for support.

Finally, on behalf of Belgrade Pride Organizing Committee, I would like to invite you to march with us and personally support our efforts to improve the democratic society and equality in Serbia. If you or any other people from Germany would like to join us on 20 September, please inform me as soon as possible, and I will send you all the information about accommodation and stay in Belgrade.

Best regards, with hopes for your prompt reply,

Marija Savic