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GLOBAL

International News

by Andy Harley . UK Gay News

Lack of European LGBT rights still dramatic

Dutch European Parliament member welcomes report, U.K. pol says politicians need courage

BRUSSELS — A Dutch Member of the European Parliament (MEP) welcomed a report presented to the European Parliament last month, showing the rights of gay men and women and transgender people are insufficiently protected throughout the European Union (EU).

The report, "Homophobic Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in the EU Member States," also said that several EU members states actively discriminate against their citizens based on their sexual orientation.

"Every day I hear about people being pressured to keep their sexuality a secret, about unrestricted homophobic bullying in schools, about gay couples being denied to rent an apartment and even brute homophobic violence," Dutch Social-Democrat MEP Emine Bozkurt said in a statement.

"This report shows that these stories are not just [isolated] incidents and that the EU still has a long way to go in terms of LGBT-rights," she said.

According to the report, it is almost impossible for LGBT-rights groups in some EU countries to rent venues for political activities.

In 13 out of the 27 EU countries, inciting homophobic hatred, violence and discrimination is neither a criminal offense nor an aggravating factor and when gays wish to report homophobic crimes to the authorities they are often confronted with additional difficulties and little understanding from police officers.

During the presentation of the report Bozkurt expressed her disappointment that the report only addressed LGBT rights in current EU member states. She said the report should have also included situations and facts from those countries still waiting to join the confederation.

The criteria for countries to join the EU include the protection of fundamental rights. Bozkurt said she's received information showing a lack of LGBT rights in some candidate EU states.

She said that she will ask the chairman of the Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee to organize an official delegation to Turkey to investigate the situation of gays and transgender people there.

The 160-page report also lists positive examples of state intervention leading to decreased anti-LGBT discrimination. The report cited Spanish same-sex marriage inclusion as improving attitudes toward LGBT people in that country.

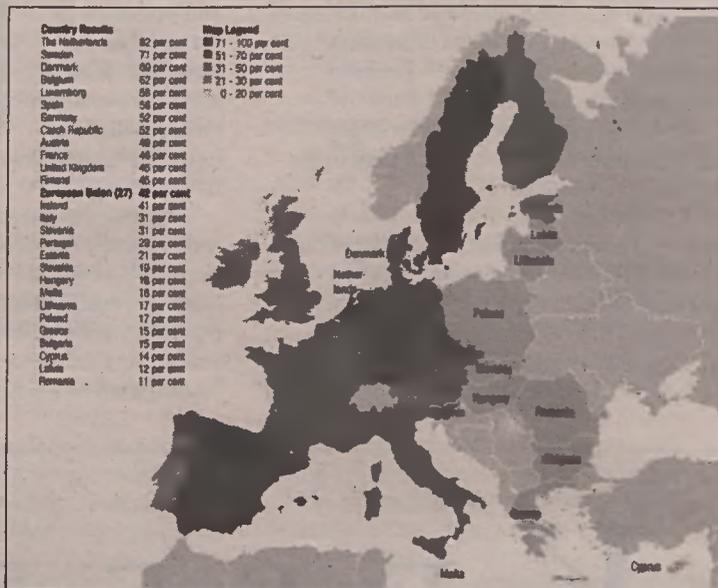
"This proves that discrimination and prejudices decrease when governments take a stand for equal rights," Bozkurt observed.

"Therefore, this report is a welcome support to my work as the European Parliament votes on an important new anti-discrimination directive which will also give more protection to gays."

U.K. Green Party MEP Jean Lambert, who is a member of the Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee and the cross-party "intergroup" on Gay and Lesbian Rights, also welcomed the report.

"It is disheartening to find that homophobia is still rife in many European countries," she said. "Incidences of hate crime still take place, bullying still exists at schools, harassment is still encountered in the workplace and, in retirement homes, there is little awareness of LGBT persons' needs."

"Under such circumstances people are afraid to come out and being 'invisible' becomes a survival strategy," she said.



European public views on the acceptance of same-sex marriage.
Graphic Credit: European Union Agency on Fundamental Rights

Lambert said situations in some countries remain "simply unacceptable." She said recent legislation in the European Parliament will help move the political dialogue forward.

"What we need now is for political leaders at EU and national level to take a firm stance against homophobia and discrimination against LGBT and transgendered persons to help create a positive shift in public attitudes and behaviour."

Michael Cashman, a U.K. Labour Party MEP and president of European Parliament's Intergroup on Gay and Lesbian Rights, said he hoped that politician across the European Union "would have the courage to end the discrimination which causes so much suffering to so many citizens of Europe."

"Now we have a report by an EU agency clearly showing that LGBT people are suffering severe and unacceptable levels of discrimination and harassment within the EU," he said.

"Politicians in Member States and the European Commission have a reliable factual data as well as good recommendations by [Agency for Fundamental Rights] to tackle the problems."

Online extra: Read the full 160-page report from the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.

— This article was originally published at UKGayNews.org.uk. It is reprinted with permission.

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