



Newsletter

Netherlands

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the national and international work of COC Netherlands and partners
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EU accession starts: Turkey bans KAOS GL

Now that the European Union has decided to start membership negotiations with Turkey and Croatia COC Netherlands calls upon European Heads of Government and the European Parliament to pay extra attention to the position of gay men, lesbian women, bisexuals and transgenders. Especially because KAOS GL, the Turkish gay rights organisation, is under attack by actions taken by the deputy governor of Ankara.

"In the accession talks human rights are not negotiable. That is very important, because there is every reason for worry where Turkey is concerned", says COC chairman Frank van Dalen. "You can put everything on paper, but Turkey has to put all these rules in practice. Turkish human rights activists have stated numerous times that the current laws have too many holes in them for the Turkish government to show the outside world that everything is all right, while in Turkey nothing changes. I hope that the European Heads of Government will see through this."



A good example is the legal NGO registration by KAOS GL. On 15 July 2005, Kaos GL Gay and Lesbian Cultural Research and Solidarity Organisation - the Turkish LGBT organisation established and operating since 1994, applied for non-

government organisation's status at the Ministry of Interior. The Ministry approved the petition and forwarded it to its local branch in Ankara which functions under the Mayor of Ankara.

However, Selahattin Ekremoglu, the deputy governor of Ankara, came out with a statement referring to the Articles 56 and 4721 of the Turkish Civil Code prohibiting establishment of an organisation "that is against the laws and morality rules" and authorised a court procedure at the Principal Registry to close down KAOS GL. Frank van Dalen: "Here you see how it works. The national government is following the rules but leaves the dirty work to others. This way the minister keeps his hands clean."

"This is no surprise", says Ali Erol, general secretary of KAOS GL. "The law makes it possible to register an LGBT organisation, but apparently there is a difference between the letter of the law and what is allowed in practice. The bureaucracy is disturbed by the breaking of Turkey's last taboo: homosexuality."

COC Netherlands brought the KAOS case to the attention of Emine Bozkurt MEP. She reports on the position of women in Turkey to the Parliament and is member of the Intergroup Gay and Lesbian Rights. During her coming visit to Turkey she will have talks with KAOS GL and other Turkish human rights organisations to discuss the action taken by the deputy governor.

ILGA has started a special campaign to change the government's mind. All ILGA members have received a letter to send to the Turkish prime minister Recep Erdogan. A lot of international pressure is needed to make Turkey more democratic and safe.

Frank van Dalen: "It helps if the government knows that they are looked at closely. Accession to the EU allows the European Commission to ensure the position of LGBTs before countries like Turkey and Croatia become member states. Afterwards there are no sanctions possible. Just look at Poland."



Recep Erdogan, Turkish PM, speaking to the European Parliament

International action helps save Belfast Pride Parade

On 28 July 2005 ILGA sent out a very urgent e-mail to all its members. The Pride Parade in Belfast was under the threat of being banned due to the call thereto of some Christian groups. COC Netherlands was one of the many organisations and individuals to urge the Parades Commission to give the parade the green light. And with success.

James Knox, convenor at the Coalition on Sexual Orientation (CoSo) reacts to this international action: "I think that any form of e-mail or correspondence in regards these matters is helpful. I think as well that having the support of organisations from outside of Northern Ireland is completely beneficial. If only the support would also come from organisations in England, Scotland or Wales too. The Parades Commission was essentially set up to deal with contentious parades from either the protestant or catholic community and not necessarily any other parade. The objectors to the parade however tried to use the legislation and the commission to their own ends. This has on this occasion back-fired on them. I can only assume that next year will be even worse. The Commission itself has no powers to ban the parade but can place restrictions on it.



James Knox (seen here at the Budapest Conference), the newest member of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

"Any support given has been gratefully received by us here and also is extremely welcome. It shows that if we all work together on issues like this then we can have true equality. After all, this is a global struggle not an individual country thing. So we can all help each other out in these kinds of things."

More good news came from Belfast. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Hain MP, appointed James Knox as one of five new members of the Equality Commission. The Secretary stated: "Together, these five new Commissioners have the knowledge, practical skills and academic understanding to make a real contribution to the protection and promotion of equality in Northern Ireland. I am confident that they will continue to enhance the Commission's pivotal role in advancing rights and protection for everyone in Northern Ireland."

Commissioner Knox: "This will be an excellent thing for the LGBT community here in Northern Ireland as so far there are no 'out' people on the Commission. Hopefully this will allow for future developments in legislation etc here to be more inclusive of LGBT issues and keep Northern Ireland at the forefront of these issues within the UK."

Margo Niestadt leaves the COC

The manager of the COC project department, Margo Niestadt, is leaving the organisation on 1 November 2005. She has been working for the COC since January 2003.

Margo Niestadt has found a new employer in ANBO where she will be leading the new project department. With almost 160,000 senior members ANBO for over-50's is a strong, independent pressure group. ANBO promotes the interests of over-50's with national, provincial and local governments and authorities and gives information and advice to individual members. ANBO offers cultural, sportive and recreational activities and arranges discounts for its members.



Asked for her view on three years COC, Margo says: "After almost three years working with COC Netherlands I am ready for a new challenge... Looking back it was like riding a roller coaster with all the ups and downs! But the balance is very positive. The gay and lesbian community was rather new for me when I started but soon I felt very adopted in this society, both in the Netherlands and abroad. Thanks to all the great, national and international projects COC Netherlands is running I was able to meet and work together with a lot of inspired people. I hope they will keep up to good work they are doing and I am sure we will meet again ... somewhere!"

COC takes part in 10th Amsterdam Canal Parade

The first Saturday in August is traditionally reserved for the Canal Parade, part of Amsterdam Gay Pride. Apart from the Parade there are sporting events, street parties, performances and art exhibitions. But the Parade remains the eye catcher. This year for the tenth time.

The first boat in the Parade ("boat zero") was dedicated to the two Iranian boys who were hanged for being gay. The white boat only decorated with a big photo and pink flowers caused many of the 350.000 spectators to feel a lump in their throat.

COC Netherlands entered a boat dedicated to pink elderly. Richard Kollaard, secretary of the National Platform for gay and lesbian elderly, underlines the importance of this boat: "Joining the Canal Parade shows everyone that we, the pink elderly, are there! There are still too many gay and lesbian elderly feeling lonely. Unfortunately they can't bring themselves to search for contacts with other pink elderly. It is for them that the Platform organises activities. This must be shown to as many people as possible." The COC boat was funded by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.



A great number of organisations took part in the Parade such as the Dutch Red Cross, HIV Association, Aids Fund, Amnesty International, COC Amsterdam, and Expresszo. A special boat was funded by the European Commission as part of the EU-wide campaign "For Diversity. Against Discrimination". Willemien Ruygrok, one of the campaign leaders: "We are glad that the European Commission understands the impact of this event. They were willing to support it, they really gave a lot of money to have a perfect boat and a lot of material to give to

the public. The whole campaign has been initiated because it brings together people from different backgrounds: gays and lesbians, Roma people, people who fight against age discrimination or racism etc. We can learn from each other and we can show the public that it is possible, even that it is fun to work together with people who are so different. With this campaign the European Union demonstrates that it is not only rules and laws that matter, but it is the people in all their diversity that matter! In all the 24 other countries the pictures of this boat, the European Commission at the Gay Canal Parade, will support the emancipation of the gay and lesbian community".

Biggest eye catchers were the boats from the commercial gay businesses in Amsterdam. The blow up doll presented by the pubs in the Reguliersdwarsstraat won first prize. The prize for the best small boat went to COC Amsterdam.



For Jasna Magic from Slovenia, this Canal Parade was a very special experience. The president of IGLYO joined the volunteers of the LGB youth magazine Expresszo on their boat: "Being part of such a huge event was indeed a very unique experience. Coming from Slovenia we don't see events of such magnitude being organized especially connected to LGBT and human rights issues. Working on both international and national level showed me how much the issue of visibility is important

for LGBT community. And pride parades are foremost about visibility and self expression. I know from experience that many people come to watch and enjoy gay prides/parades just to finally shake off the feeling of 'not alone' for at least one day a year. And that was a reason enough for me to bite the bullet (although I had cold feet at first, I must admit) and 'jump on the boat'. I enjoy the feeling of being part of the LGBT community from work as well as personal perspective and I admire how pride events always manage to mix strong political messages with pure fun and through seriousness of their foundation carry a consoling feeling of a better day to come.."



Massive protest against execution of Iranian gays

Since the first news of the execution of two young gay boys in Iran massive protests and actions have been organised all over the world. However the Iranian government has not changed its policy to execute gay men and since July two more boys were hanged, officially for other reasons than being gay.

Under pressure of COC Netherlands the Dutch minister for immigration, Rita Verdonk, stopped the expulsion of Iranian asylum seekers until February. The Dutch embassy in Teheran will look into the position of LGBTs in Iran and will report back to the minister. The minister is willing to change her policy if the situation of LGBTs in Iran is indeed so terrible as reported. Also the minister promised the Dutch Parliament that in the official country reports the position of LGBTs will be mentioned on a structural basis.

Meanwhile the Iran Student News Association has released a new photo of the two gay teens - one 18, one 17 - hanged in the Iranian city of Mashad on 19 July as part of the Islamic Republic of Iran's lethal crackdown on gay people. This new photo is even more gruesome and shocking than the previous photos of the two boys on the scaffold.



COC chairman Frank van Dalen speaking at the Homomonument

COC Netherlands started a petition which already has more than 80.000 signatures. The petition was presented during the Amsterdam Gay Pride (see the article below). On 26 August the COC organised a wake next to the Homomonument in Amsterdam. Almost 200 people came together to show their concern for the position of LGBTs in Iran. COC chairman Frank van Dalen spoke about the difference between living in a free country and living in a country with a fanatic religious government.

Very moving was the speech made by an Iranian refugee who thanked the Dutch for their solidarity and urged everyone to keep fighting for the freedom of homosexuals all over the world and especially in Iran.



Iran petition presented during Amsterdam Gay Pride

During the Gay Pride Party on the Homomonument next to the Wester Church a petition with 18.136 signatures was presented to Emine Bozkurt (Dutch MEP, socialist) by COC chairman Frank van Dalen. The petition was a protest against the execution of homosexuals in Iran and the expulsion of gay asylum seekers by Western governments.

Emine Bozkurt promised to discuss the situation in Iran and countries like it within her own parliamentary party and the European Parliament. Van Dalen stated once again that the EU should, according to the COC, stop negotiating the EU-Iran association treaty. After the summer Emine Bozkurt will have a meeting with the Iranian ambassador to the Netherlands and she has put forward the position of homosexuals in Iran in questions to the Commission.

The party was presented by Dolly Bellefleur, who celebrated her 'sweet sixteenth birthday' and was organised by Amnesty International. For the last four years Amnesty uses the Pride to bring to the attention of the public the campaign "Gay rights are human rights". Visitors were asked to sign a petition to legalise homosexuality in Nicaragua, the only democratic country in South America that still has an anti-gay law.



Emine Bozkurt MEP being interviewed by Dolly Bellefleur. On the left COC chairman Frank van Dalen.

COC participates in 50+ fair

Part of the COC project for elderly gays and lesbians was the participation in the 50+ fair in Utrecht. This five day event attracts thousands of elderly people. The purpose of the COC was to give the vast majority of straight elderly an idea what it is like to be an elderly gay or lesbian in the Netherlands.



Cobie and Gerrie from COC Tilburg joined by Alice van Rooij, director of COC Netherlands

There are almost 300.000 over-50 gays and lesbians, mostly invisible. COC staff and volunteers from the local COCs distributed pink bracelets and the new brochure of the National Platform for gay and lesbian elderly.

Two of the local volunteers were Cobie and Gerrie from COC Tilburg: "Using the pink bracelets to attract the public we promoted the new folder of the National Platform. The short discussions went in general as follows: 'That folder is not for me, I'm not like that.' Our suggestion was: 'You can give it to someone who can use it'. 'But I don't know any pink elderly', was the frequent response. That is not surprising, because pink elderly are so often invisible. However, the people who did know elderly gays en lesbians said it was very important that we promoted special activities for gay and lesbian elderly because they often lead an isolated life."

Contribute to the Pink Film Days 2006

The Pink Film Days (in Dutch 'De Roze Filmdagen') is a gay, lesbian and transgender film festival which takes place in Amsterdam every year. Biannual a large edition is organised and in December 2006 the festival will celebrate its 10th anniversary.

In 2006 one of the festival themes will be 'The New Europe', which means that special attention is given to movies from countries in Eastern Europe, some of them already in the EU, some of them on the waiting list. The festival wants to draw attention to the Dutch gay and lesbian community about the severity and exuberance of the human rights conditions for the gays and lesbians in the Eastern European countries.

The festival will not only show films and documentaries about this subject but also wants to organise a debate and maybe invite film directors for interviews. Therefore, the organisers call on filmmakers and other contributors to contact them to see whether they can contribute to the 2006 edition. They also would like to get in touch with filmmakers or people involved in gay/lesbian related filmmaking. Furthermore the organisers want to get in touch with people who might have interesting home videos about events taking place in their own countries which have something to do with the human rights conditions for gays and lesbians in 'The New Europe'.



So gay and lesbian filmmakers, professional or an enthusiastic amateur, from Poland to Albania, from the Czech Republic to Belarus the Pink Film Days call upon you to get in touch!

For more information: check the website at www.rozefilmdagen.nl or e-mail to wernerborkes@rozefilmdagen.nl.

ILGA-Europe conference Paris 2005

Only a few days and the 2005 conference gets underway. The COC staff and volunteers from the advisory group on international policy are looking forward to participate and meeting old friends and making new ones.



Participants who want to have the pictures from Glasgow 2003 and Budapest 2004 are invited to bring with them a recordable cd so the pictures can be copied. For more information contact Maxim van Ooijen: maxim@coc.nl.

IGLYO at 7th Conference of European Ministers of Youth

In the last weekend of September all European Ministers of Youth gathered in Budapest for their three yearly meeting on Youth. Subject of this gathering was 'Human dignity and Social Cohesion', with a special focus on Violence Prevention.

IGLYO



The priorities for the work program of the Youth directorate of the Council of Europe were adopted in a resolution: homophobia was explicitly mentioned and it was recommended that this should be included in anti-violence policies (amongst other vulnerable groups). IGLYO called upon Council of Europe member states to involve LGBT

organisations in the development and execution of anti-violence projects.

IGLYO was invited to chair a working group on Gender Based violence, which took place in the Youth Event prior to the Ministers' meeting. Result of this workshop are some very practical recommendations to several institutions. The unique chance to represent the needs of LGBT Youth, as officially being part of the European Youth Forum delegation, made a strong effort through raising the visibility of LGBT youth.

A recommendation written by IGLYO for lobbying towards local and national governments upon basis of the adopted resolution and declaration is available on request. Please contact Björn van Roozendaal: bjorn@iglyo.com.



Queer Beograd Festival big success

In Beograd from 3 to 7 May the Queer Beograd Festival took place celebrating the right to freedom of sexual diversity. The idea for an indoor festival came about because of the impossibility of holding a pride march in Beograd, this indoor festival was seen as an achievable tactic in the face of the violence experienced at the 2001 pride and the cancellation of the 2004 pride due to the threat of violence.



The aim of the festival was to build positive energy in the queer community, to provide a safe space for the sharing of ideas and culture and through this to combat the pervasive homophobia of Serbian society. Many events took place over the six days of the festival, both inside the BIGZ building which acted as the main venue and in other more public spaces. Each day workshops took place which included theatre, gender and sexuality, safer sex, multi relationships, Roma women's issues and S/M culture.



An exhibition of works by artists from Slovenia and Beograd was made in the BIGZ space and an info kiosk-café was set up for the duration of the festival, here people could relax, eat lunch, take tea or coffee, socialize and read materials on queer issues from around the world.

Three evening events took place in the BIGZ building, an exhibition opening and festival launch, a presentation by Queer Zagreb with a film screening and a performance event.

On Saturday a street action-party was held in the main street of Beograd with the theme 'no more violence in the streets', a banner was hung in the street, food not bombs was served, music played and flyers were distributed giving information about discrimination, encouraging freedom and tolerance. Everyone was nervous about going to the street but we did it and this was an empowering moment for those present.

Queer Beograd wish to thank Women at Work (logistical support) and London Queeruption and X-Y foundation (financial support). Without this the festival wouldn't be realized.

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