



Jan Fischer  
Prime Minister of the Czech Republic  
Presidency of the EU

Brussels, 14 May 2009  
Ref: B 866

Dear Mr Fischer

**Subject: Urgent call to lift the ban on Baltic Pride event**

Amnesty International is concerned that permission for the Baltic pride event, scheduled to take place in Riga this Saturday 16 May, has been revoked at the last minute by the Riga City Council (RCC), despite prior agreement between the organizers, the City Council and the police on the march's venue and the necessary security arrangements.

This is a long planned event to promote Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights on the sub-regional level within the EU. It is organized jointly by activists from the EU member states of the Baltic region – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It has gathered support from a number of EU governments and a high participation by people from all over the EU is expected.

Although permission was initially granted to go ahead with the event by the RCC Commission on Meetings, Marches and Demonstrations, the same Commission has now revoked its decision following pressure from the City Councillors.

Only three days before the date of the march, a majority of City Councillors signed an open letter to the Executive Director of the City Council, Andris Grinbergs, calling on him to revoke permission for the march on the grounds that it was offensive to public decency and posed a threat to public security. They further stated that if the Executive Director did not revoke permission by 4pm on 14 May, they would seek to overrule the decision through a vote in the City Council.

Representatives of the organizers have decided to take the issue to court with a view of seeking a court hearing on Friday to allow the march to go ahead as originally planned. According to the organizers the police assured that they can protect the marches at any location and that there have been no major changes in their evaluation of the situation. Amnesty International fully supports the legal challenge by the organizers and believes that the decision violates Latvian law and the rights of Baltic LGBT people to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

A ban would accentuate a worrying trend of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation within the EU, as highlighted in a recent report of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency. This trend has been consistently condemned by the EU institutions as contrary to core EU human rights values and anti-discrimination policies.

Amnesty International strongly believes that the EU has a responsibility to address human rights violations by its member states and to ensure equality for all. Amnesty International therefore calls on the EU to press the Latvian authorities, as a matter of urgency, to allow the Baltic Pride event to go ahead as previously agreed.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to your response.

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