

Vladimir Špidla
Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities
European Commission

20 July 2006
Ref: b_566

Dear Commissioner Špidla,

Subject: Freedom of assembly in Latvia

Prior to your visit to Poland three weeks ago, Amnesty International wrote to you to express our concerns about the climate of discrimination and intimidation against the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community in Poland, but also in Latvia.

In our public statement on the situation in Latvia, we had noted that the country's failure to transpose the EU Employment Equality Directive takes place amidst a series of events relating to LGTB issues which have marred Latvia's human rights record, referring notably to the authorities' attempt to prohibit last year's Gay Pride March.

Once again we hear that the Riga City Council in accordance with the Latvian Interior Minister, has denied a permit for the "Riga Pride 2006" this upcoming Saturday, arguing security considerations as the police has received information that the opposition to the March could be violent. Several LBGT organisations are challenging the decision before the Administrative Court, which we hope will overturn the Council's decision like it did last year.

Amnesty International is very concerned about the City Council's decision to deny permission to the second Gay Pride March in Riga, even after last year's precedent and the international mobilisation around the event. Such a decision shows a total disregard for the rights of the LGBT community and casts a serious shadow on Latvia's commitment to respect its obligations to guarantee the right to freedom of assembly and non-discrimination. Please find enclosed Amnesty International's new public statement released today.

We call on the Commission to take a clear stance on this issue and to take concrete steps to ensure that EU fundamental values are upheld.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Dick Oosting

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dick Oosting".

Director
Amnesty International EU Office

Enclosed:

Amnesty International Public Statement on Latvia: *Latvia must protect the rights to freedom of assembly and expression for all*, AI Index: EUR 52/002/2006 (Public).