







# Weekly Briefing

**Slovakia Social briefing:**  
**The 2018 Rainbow Pride and LGBTI issues in Slovakia**  
**Institute of Asian Studies, Bratislava**

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## **The 2018 Rainbow Pride and LGBTI issues in Slovakia**

*On July 14th, Bratislava hosted the 8th annual Rainbow Pride. The march together with one week of side events was, according to its organizers, meant to focus on the situation of the Slovak LGBTI community, which is still being marginalized and doesn't enjoy the same rights as the majority population. The reaction to this year's event has demonstrated that while Slovakia has walked a long way in regards of the question of LGBTI acceptance, the issue still provokes significant controversy and progress in legal guarantees for LGBTI people is lacking.*

### **Protests and anti-protests**

About 4000 people participated in this year's Rainbow Pride in Bratislava. Compared to the very first event that took place in 2010 when many participants were attacked by the right-wing extremists protesting the event, this year's Pride was largely without any disturbances. According to the organizers, in Slovakia, the Rainbow Pride is still more of a protest than a celebration of LGBTI rights because of the many issues still faced by the community. This year, the motto of the event was "We are not going anywhere – we are coming". The meaning behind this statement is that LGBTI people feel themselves as part of the Slovak society and they want to stay there and help change it rather than just move to some more LGBTI-friendly places, which would be an easier option for them.

In the most recent ranking of European states based on the laws and policies of the governments that impact the lives of LGBTI people, Slovakia took the 31<sup>st</sup> position from 49 states, which shows a very slow but positive trend. Polls among self-identified LGBTI people show that the community faces discrimination, bullying, ignorance and non-acceptance by the majority society.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> --, "Veľký slovenský prieskum LGBTI komunity: Chcú registrované partnerstvá, trpia šikanou a volia SaS", Topky, 16 May 2018 <https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/1710251/Velky-slovensky-prieskum-LGBTI-komunity--Chcu-registrovane-partnerstva--trpia-sikanou-a-volia-SaS>.

At the same time, the public support for LGBTI rights has risen quite significantly. While in 2005, only 20% of the population supported same-sex partnerships, now the number has risen to 50%.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of legal guarantees of LGBTI rights Slovakia is lagging behind many of the members of the EU. Currently, the Slovak law does not recognize registered partnerships of people of the same sex, not to speak of same-sex marriages or adoptions. On the contrary, in the past few years there have been moves in the opposite direction. In 2014, the Slovak parliament passed an amendment to the Constitution directly aimed at precluding the possibility of same-sex marriages by defining marriage as a union specifically between a man and a woman. This was followed in 2015 by a referendum “for family” targeting same-sex marriages (although already unconstitutional under the constitutional amendment) and child adoption by same-sex couples. However, as only little more than 20% of the eligible voters voted in the referendum it was declared invalid.

It is exactly the perceived threat to the “traditional family” that animates a big part of the opposition to LGBTI rights in Slovakia, especially among the Christian conservatives. On the same day people were marching for LGBTI rights in Bratislava another march under the title “Proud of Family” was organized by Christian groups. Spokesmen for the group claimed that they were not protesting the other event. Instead, they only wanted to focus attention on the importance of the traditional family. At the same time, they claimed that the championing of LGBTI rights needs to be countered, citing the slippery slope argument that claims that once registered partnerships are legalized the supporters of LGBTI rights would push for further changes, including child adoption, etc.

In general, the traditional values cherished by the conservatives are seen being under attack by liberal ideas coming from the West, specifically the EU.

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<sup>2</sup> Zuzana Matkovská, “Alternatívu k manželstvu podporuje väčšina spoločnosti”, 5 October 2015. <https://domov.sme.sk/c/8029654/alternativu-k-manzelstvu-podporuje-vacsina-spolocnosti.html>.

Just a few months ago, the public debate in Slovakia was dominated by the so-called Istanbul Convention that was thought by its opponents to be a Trojan horse of “gender ideology” in Slovakia. The law designed at limiting access to abortions that was put forward by the extremist party has also garnered a lot of attention and controversy, showing how sensitive these issues are.

### **Controversy but also lack of interest**

As practically every year the Pride has given rise to an upsurge of politicians commenting on the issue. The most outspoken critics of the Rainbow Pride, unsurprisingly, come from the coalition member party the Slovak National Party (SNS) that likes to paint itself as the defender of traditional Slovak culture and values. The head of the party, Andrej Danko, who also holds the post of the Speaker of the Parliament, made a statement vowing that his party will make sure that registered partnerships will not become Slovak law under the current government. Another member of the party said that organizers of the Rainbow Pride only take advantage of the existence of “these communities” to further “neoliberal gender ideology” that “seeks to erode the traditional family, which has always been and continues to be a cornerstone of an orderly society and stable state”.<sup>3</sup>

SNS’ opposition to the promotion of the 'LGBTI agenda' also caused a minor rift in the coalition government. The SNS had repeatedly criticized the current ombudsman Patakyová for lending support to the LGBTI cause and attending the Pride. Patakyová was voted into the post after being nominated by another coalition party, Most. The SNS supported the nomination at the time, but has been unsatisfied with Patakyová’s performance. Patakyová has allegedly not been fair and honest in her post as the ombudsman, and has privileged one part of the population at the expense of the majority of the population. Patakyová’s support for the Pride march caused a controversy last year as well.

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<sup>3</sup> --, „Črtá sa ďalší spor SNS s ombudsmankou. Genderová ideológia chce rozložiť klasicú rodinu, tvrdí Hrnko“, Hospodárske Noviny, 30 June 2018 <<https://slovensko.hnonline.sk/1771795-crta-sa-dalsi-spor-sns-s-ombudsmankou-genderova-ideologia-chce-rozlozit-klasicku-rodinu-tvrdi-hrnko>>.

Therefore, the SNS stated that in future nominations it will be more cautious in supporting its coalition partners.

The recently established non-parliamentary party Progressive Slovakia has built much of its agenda on the question of LGBTI rights in Slovakia. However, due to the disposition of forces on the Slovak political scene, it is very unlikely that any legislation favoring the LGBTI community could now be approved.

Interestingly, the main coalition party Smer-Social Democracy has long been rather muted on the issue of LGBTI rights. Although nominally a social-democratic party, Smer, contrary to parties of the same leaning in Western Europe, has not taken up the issues of LGBTI or other minority rights. Dictated by the idiosyncrasies of the Slovak political environment, Smer can actually be characterized more as a leftist conservative party with strong populist leanings. Therefore, in a relatively conservative Slovakia, it would not be in Smer's interest to promote the issue. Moreover, Smer has actually supported the aforementioned change to the constitution banning the same-sex marriage, although more for reasons of political maneuvering than ideological belief. Members of the party have often had contradictory pronouncements on the issue of LGBTI, which shows that there is no unified policy of the party. For Smer, it is best to just ignore this potentially controversial issue as much as possible in order to avoid any impact on its support among the electorate. Therefore, any moves spearheaded by Smer in this direction cannot be expected, save for in case it decides to rebrand itself as more of a progressive leftist party.

## **Conclusion**

The 2018, the Rainbow Pride has focused on the issue of LGBTI rights in Slovakia. While the public perceptions are slowly but surely shifting, there is still lack of political will to make headways in guaranteeing the rights of these minorities. Coupled with the growing backlash against “neoliberal ideology” in the conservative circles, including LGBTI rights, gender and other issues, the prospects for progress in the short-term are not positive. What is certain is that

the topics of LGBTI will grow as a hot topic of public debate in Slovak society and further inflame the ongoing “culture war” between the traditionalists and liberals.