



**President of Bulgaria, *Rumen Radev***  
**Caretaker Prime-Minister, *Stefan Yanev***  
**Caretaker Deputy Prime-Minister for Public Order and Security and Minister of Interior, *Boyko Rashkov***  
**Caretaker Minister of Justice, *Ivan Demerdzhiev***

Brussels, 10 November 2021

**Subject: Recent far-right attack against the LGBTI community centre Rainbow Hub in Sofia highlights the urgent need for legislation criminalising hate crimes and hate speech based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics**

Dear President,  
Dear Prime-Minister,  
Dear Ministers,

As Members of the LGBTI Intergroup in the European Parliament, we write to you with regards to the recent attack against the LGBTI community centre Rainbow Hub in Sofia.

As you are already aware, the attack took place around 17:30 on Saturday, 30 October, during a trans community gathering. According to reports, around 10 people stormed the Rainbow Hub, hitting Gloria Filipova (from Bilitis Foundation) in the face and proceeding to vandalise the space and destroying property. One of the attackers – and the person who assaulted Gloria – is none other than Boyan Rasate, founder and leader of the far-right Bulgarian National Union, currently a candidate for the Presidential elections which will take place on 14 November.

We welcome the fact that Boyan Rasate was arrested on Tuesday, 2 November, after his immunity was lifted by the Central Election Commission.<sup>1</sup> We call on the authorities to take all measures to ensure an impartial and thorough investigation in order to assess the facts of the case and to deliver a conviction in line with the Bulgarian legal order.

Despite this positive development, we remain cautious of the fact that Bulgaria still does not have legislation criminalising hate crime and hate speech on account of a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, expression or sex characteristics. In fact, it is crucial to note that this attack has taken place in a context of heightened hostility against LGBTI people in Bulgaria, where a divisive and misleading debate about the rights of LGBTI persons endures. We need not go too far back in time to recap the series of anti-LGBTI attacks in several Bulgarian cities during the Pride season:

- On 15 May, the Burgas Pride, with some 40 participants, was attacked by 300 counter protesters who harassed and assaulted participants and burned a rainbow flag. On 25 May, a meeting with the author of the children's book "Mravin and the Planet Forest" was interrupted by a group of men, most of them

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<sup>1</sup> RFE/RL's Bulgarian Service (1 November 2021), "*Bulgarian Presidential Candidate Accused Of Attack On LGBT Center Loses Immunity*", accessible at <https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-rasate-lgbt-attack/31540213.html>.

wearing branded T-shirts and masks of the Bulgarian National Union. Since they were not allowed in, they became verbally aggressive and vandalized the windows, putting stickers with the slogan "Stop LGBT virus".

- On 6 June, the movie screening of the documentary "Snake", included in the Sofia Pride Film Fest program, was attacked. Political leaders of the Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO) organised a counter-demonstration during the screening shouting during the entire screening that it promoted paedophilia.
- On 12 June, during the evening after Sofia Pride, young people threaten two Pride participants with a knife and took their rainbow flag;
- On 20 June, an LGBTI youth group was attacked in Plovdiv by other young people. One of them was seriously hit several times and taken to hospital.

The most recent attack, on account of the impossibility to be trialled as a homophobic and transphobic hate crime (due to lack of legal recognition), might most probably proceed with a charge of hooliganism with extreme audacity.<sup>2</sup> This does not reflect the real reasons for this human rights abuse.

Allow us to repeat that, in a resolution on the rule of law and fundamental rights in Bulgaria adopted last year, the European Parliament stated the following:

*18. Considers it necessary to eliminate discrimination against persons on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity, both in law and in practice in all spheres; calls on the Bulgarian authorities to amend the Protection against Discrimination Act to explicitly include gender identity as grounds for discrimination; **calls on the Bulgarian authorities to amend the current Criminal Code to encompass hate crimes and hate speech on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics**; calls on the Bulgarian authorities to implement the relevant case law of the Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights and, in that context, to address the situation of same-sex spouses and parents with a view to ensuring their enjoyment of the right to non-discrimination in law and in fact, and to establish an appropriate legal framework that provides equal rights for all couples;<sup>3</sup>*

In fact, the same recommendations have been mentioned already in 2014 by the Council of Europe's European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI):<sup>4</sup>

- 106. ECRI recommends that the authorities include sexual orientation and gender identity in all the Articles of the Criminal Code addressing hate speech and hate crime (Article 162, 163, 131 and 116).
- 108. ECRI recommends that the authorities amend the Anti-Discrimination Act to include gender identity as a ground for discrimination.

**Dear Prime-Minister and Ministers, we understand that you are currently in a caretaker position until the executive is composed. Nevertheless, the defence of human rights cannot be put on hold and therefore we feel obliged to address you and to call for meaningful action:**

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<sup>2</sup> Reuters (3 November 2021), "Bulgarian Presidential candidate charged after storming LGBT office", accessible at <https://www.reuters.com/world/bulgarian-presidential-candidate-charged-after-storming-lgbt-office-2021-11-03/>.

<sup>3</sup> European Parliament (8 October 2020), "Resolution on the rule of law and fundamental rights in Bulgaria", accessible at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0264\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0264_EN.html).

<sup>4</sup> European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (16 September 2014), "ECRI Report on Bulgaria (5th Monitoring Cycle)", available at <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-bulgaria/16808b55d8>.

1. **We urge the President, the Prime-Minister and the Ministers to publicly condemn the attack and to make possible the investigation and sanction of the perpetrators, so that impunity will not reign in the face of hatred.**
2. **We invite the government to schedule a meeting with concerned LGBTI NGOs on violence LGBTI people are facing in order to explore avenues for their better protection and safety.**
3. **Lastly, and importantly, we call on the government to start working on a legislative proposal that will implement the calls of the European Parliament and ECRI, so as to comply fully and unreservedly with European human rights obligations and recommendations.**

We look forward to a reply on your behalf.

Yours sincerely,

Marc ANGEL, *Co-Chair, LGBTI Intergroup (S&D)*

Terry REINTKE, *Co-Chair, LGBTI Intergroup (Greens-EFA, Vice-President)*

Fabio Massimo CASTALDO, *Vice-President, LGBTI Intergroup (EP Vice-President, Non-attached)*

Liesje SCHREINEMACHER, *Vice-President, LGBTI Intergroup (Renew Europe)*

Malin BJÖRK, *Vice-President, LGBTI Intergroup (The Left)*

Maria WALSH, *Vice-President, LGBTI Intergroup (EPP)*

Heidi HAUTALA, *EP Vice-President*

Frédérique RIES, *Vice-President, Renew Europe*

Michal ŠIMEČKA, *Vice-President, Renew Europe*

Alice KUHNKE, *Vice-President, Greens/European Free Alliance*

Ernest URTASUN, *Vice-President, Greens/European Free Alliance*

Gwendoline DELBOS-CORFIELD, *Vice-President, Greens/European Free Alliance*

Sira REGO, *Vice-President, The Left*

Marisa MATIAS, *Vice-President, The Left*

Anja HAZEKAMP (The Left)

Billy KELLEHER (Renew Europe)

Birgit SIPPEL (S&D)

Clare DALY (The Left)

Cyrus ENGERER (S&D)

Delara BURKHARDT (S&D)

Dietmar KÖSTER (S&D)

Eleonora EVI (Greens-EFA)

Evelyne GEBHARDT (S&D)

Evin INCIR (S&D)

Gabriele BISCHOFF (S&D)

Grace O'SULLIVAN (Greens-EFA)

Hanna NEUMANN (Greens-EFA)

Hilde VAUTMANS (Renew Europe)

José GUSMÃO (The Left)

Karin KARLSBRO (Renew Europe)

Kim VAN SPARENTAK (Greens-EFA)

Manu PINEDA (The Left)

Manuel BOMPARD (The Left)

Martin HOJSÍK (Renew Europe)

Milan BRGLEZ (S&D)

Monika VANA (Greens-EFA)

Mounir SATOURI (Greens-EFA)

Niklas NIENASS (Greens-EFA)

Olivier CHASTEL (Renew Europe)

Petar VITANOV (S&D)

Pierre KARLESKIND (Renew Europe)

Radka MAXOVÁ (S&D)

Rasmus ANDRESEN (Greens-EFA)

Robert BIEDROŃ (S&D)

Rosa D'AMATO (Greens-EFA)

Salima YENBOU (Greens-EFA)

Sándor RÓNAI (S&D)

Saskia BRICMONT (Greens-EFA)

Sophie IN'T VELD (Renew Europe)

Stelios KOULOGLOU (The Left)

Tanja FAJON (S&D)

Thijs REUTEN (S&D)

Tilly METZ (Greens-EFA)