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WORLD news

THE NETHERLANDS

The upstart political party of slain Dutch gay politician Pim Fortuyn grabbed 26 of the 150 seats in Parliament on May 15, coming in second behind the conservative Christian Democrats, who won 43.

In order to govern, the Christian Democrats likely will need to form a coalition that includes the members of Parliament from Pim Fortuyn's List. Eight other parties are represented in Parliament with two to 23 seats each.

Fortuyn stood for reduced immigration (especially by Muslims, whose beliefs he believed to be in conflict with Dutch society), a crackdown on crime and attention to hospital waiting lists, train delays, education funding and other problems. Many media reports labeled him a right-winger; in fact, he was not easily classified. He also could have been called a populist, a maverick, an independent or a libertarian.

Fortuyn was shot to death May 6, allegedly by an animal rights activist who was upset about his support for raising animals, such as mink, for their fur. The suspect, Volkert van der Graaf, 32, has not made any statement.

Meanwhile, the man who is likely to become the next prime minister, Christian Democrat Jan Peter Balkenende, recently told reporters that gay marriage and euthanasia will remain legal even though he opposed them in the past. However, he would like to halt the sale of soft drugs, such as marijuana, in the nation's ubiquitous "coffeehouses."

GERMANY

Germany has wiped clean the criminal records of 50,000 gays and 22,000 military deserters who were sent to concentration camps by the Nazis. The May 17 move by the lower house of Parliament was opposed by the conservative opposition, which argued that deserters' cases should be considered individually rather than erased via a general pardon.

Germany's most famous trans person, Charlotte von Mahlsdorf (Lothar Berfelde), died of a heart attack April 30 in Berlin. She was 74.

Von Mahlsdorf received the Federal Cross of Honor (Bundesverdienstkreuz), the nation's highest civilian award, in 1992 for founding East Berlin's Grunderzeit Museum, which preserves furniture and household appliances made between 1870 and 1900.

"I am not at all keen on medals," she said at the time. "But what I find even more important is that a homosexual, a transvestite, is honored in this way.... I hope this encourages other gays and lesbians and demonstrates to heterosexuals that we, too, can achieve things."

Von Mahlsdorf emigrated to Sweden in 1997 after the museum was attacked by anti-gay hoodlums. She was on a visit to Berlin when she died.

SWEDEN

Parliament passed a law May 16 banning anti-gay hate speech.

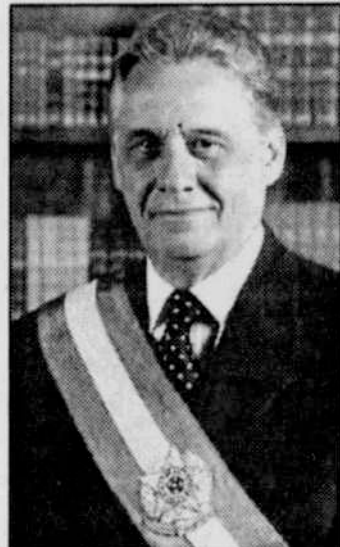
The vote was 196-74 with 36 abstentions and 43 absences. Because the legislation will modify the nation's constitution, the measure will not become law until after a second vote later this year.

It will ban speech that threatens or condemns gay people. Violators will face up to two years in prison.

BRAZIL

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso unveiled a human rights program May 14 that includes a proposal to recognize gay partnerships.

"The state tries to meet the needs of society, which is more organized and aware of its rights each day," he said. After announcing his plans, Cardoso posed for photos waving the gay rainbow flag, according to a United Press International report.



Fernando Henrique Cardoso

AUSTRALIA

Sydney Catholic Archbishop George Pell denied communion to about 15 gay men and lesbians May 19.

The group approached the altar wearing rainbow-colored sashes to protest the church's anti-gay teachings. Another group of eight protesters from the Rainbow Sash movement was denied communion in Melbourne by Archbishop Denis Hart.

The state of New South Wales, where Sydney is located, is moving to treat gay couples more like married people, the Australian Associated Press reported May 22. A total of 23 statutes will be modified to remove gender references in laws concerned with crime and evidence, death benefits, pensions and other matters, the news service said.

CROATIA

The Zagreb gay group Iskorak and the lesbian group Kontra announced May 22 they will stage the nation's first Gay Pride parade June 29.

They also demanded the government legalize gay marriage and treat unmarried gay couples the same as common-law heterosexual couples. A recent poll found that 66.2 percent of Croats oppose gay marriage.

RUSSIA

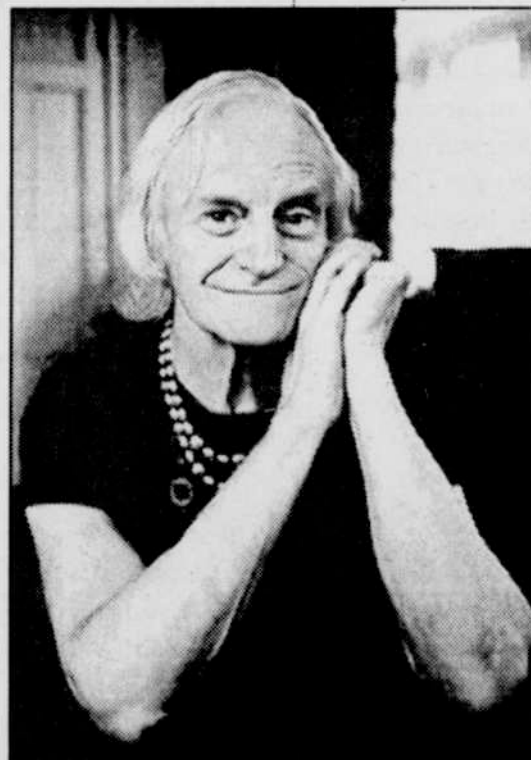
The youth group HS Association Gay-Straight Alliance in St. Petersburg has launched a protest action against the British Broadcasting Corp. World Service's Russian-language division, complaining it usually ignores gay issues and, when it does cover them, reports them in a homophobic fashion.

"The team of the BBC Russian service never covers gay equality problems in Russia and very rarely touches on these questions...in the rest of the world," the organization said. "When they do it, nevertheless, it comes out to be at least controversial if not homophobic."

TAIWAN

Blackmailers are preying on gay men who congregate at Sha Lun nude beach, the Taipei Times reported May 2. The paper said few of the incidents are reported to police.

"The victim is approached by a man while alone at the beach," the report said. "After striking up a conversation—with the victim responding positively to the man's friendly overtures—a group of three or four other men appear, threat-



The late Charlotte von Mahlsdorf was Germany's most famous trans person