

"As an EU member state, Latvia is acting contradictory to and disrespectfully to the principles of equality and nondiscrimination agreed and confirmed by various EU treaties," said executive director Patricia Prendiville. "Not only has Latvia now a discriminatory constitutional provision motivated solely by homophobia, but Latvia is still the only EU member state which did not ban sexual orientation discrimination in employment, as required by the EU employment equality directive."



Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga is no friend of same-sex marriage.

Polish Parade Ban Was Illegal

An administrative court in Poznan, Poland, ruled Dec. 14 that Mayor Ryszard Grobelny's banning of November's Gay Pride parade violated both Polish and European law.

He had cited "security concerns" in blocking the march. Local media reports did not say what penalty Grobelny might face for the infraction.

Despite the ban, a few hundred people marched anyhow. They were harassed by members of the group All Polish Youth, who shouted "Let's gas the fags" and "We'll do to you what Hitler did with Jews."

Police intervened near the end of the march, roughed up several marchers and arrested and interrogated more than 65, who were later released.

MIDEAST/AFRICA

Nigerian Sodomy Suspects Freed

Two Nigerian men charged with having gay sex were acquitted Dec. 7 by an Islamic court in Katsina, Nigeria, the French Press Agency reported.

Kabir Yusuf, 40, and Usman Sani, 18, were arrested and jailed six months ago after being seen leaving a public toilet together adjusting their pants. They faced death by stoning if convicted.

In freeing the two, Judge Mustapha Sani Saulawa said prosecutors had failed to present the required four witnesses to the alleged crime. Several northern Nigerian states have adopted Islamic Sharia law since the nation's return to civilian rule six years ago.

ASIA/PACIFIC

Aussie Activists Demand Partnership Recognition

As the United Kingdom's new Civil Partnership Act took effect last month, Australian queer activists demanded that their government create a national civil union scheme for straight and gay relationships.

"Certification is important when same-sex or heterosexual de facto couples are required to prove their relationship status, in areas as diverse as child custody...death benefits, passport applications or during a medical emergency," said Australian Coalition for Equality spokeswoman Kelly Pilgrim-Byrne.

However, a day later, Prime Minister John Howard said no way.

"I think marriage is for men and women. That's why we amended the Marriage Act [to ban same-sex marriage]," Howard said. "That's the common understanding of marriage in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and I would be opposed to the recognition of civil unions."

The state of Tasmania offers partnership registration, and the Australian Capital Territory has announced plans to follow suit.

South Korean Lesbians Report Discrimination

About 83 percent of South Korean lesbians say they've experienced discrimination, abuse or personal distress because of their sexual orientation, a survey by the Lesbian Rights Research Institute has found.

The organization questioned 507 lesbians in their 20s and 30s in the cities of Daego, Busan and Seoul, according to *The Chosun Ilbo* newspaper.

The women cited lack of emotional stability, impaired self-confidence, feelings of abnormality, conflict with families and friends, trouble at school or work, threats of being outed and sexual assault.

Additional findings included: 62 percent of those questioned figured out they were gay in their teens, and 31 percent realized it in their 20s. About 59 percent had dated men at some point.

"People in this society have a fixed and biased view that only heterosexuality is normal," the institute said. "That prejudice is leaving lesbians exposed to both conflict and crime."

N.Z. Marriage Ban Rejected

A bill to ban same-sex marriage was rejected Dec. 8 by New Zealand's Parliament. The vote was 47-73.

The measure also would have prohibited recognition of same-sex marriages from abroad and amended the Bill of Rights Act to specify that any law designed "to promote or advance marriage" was exempt from being found in violation of the act. A comprehensive civil union law for same-sex couples took effect in New Zealand eight months ago.



Factory 798, acclaimed site for contemporary Chinese art in the Dashanzi area of Beijing, was supposed to be the site of the first Beijing Gay and Lesbian Culture Festival.

Chinese Police Shut Down Gay Festival

Police shut down the first Beijing Gay and Lesbian Culture Festival as it opened Dec. 16, saying organizers had failed to secure permission to hold the events.

The festival initially was scheduled for the Factory 798 arts complex in the Dashanzi area of Beijing. But the Public Security Bureau banned the organizers from that site Dec. 14.

The organizing committee, some of whose members reported police surveillance, then moved the festival to the private On/Off bar, which police raided as the festival kicked off. The officers reportedly ripped down signs and decorations, videotaped attendees and closed the bar for a week.

The festival was to feature three days of exhibitions, seminars, plays and movies. **JO**

Compiled by REX WOCKNER, who has reported for the gay press since 1985. He has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Drake University and started his career as a radio reporter.

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