

In Guayaquil, Ecuador, the second annual Festival of Art and Diversity brought 300 people to the Kennedy Mall district June 28 under the theme "The problem is not homosexuality but rather homophobia." Stage performances ran from 6 p.m. to midnight.

The third Pride parade in Panama City took place June 30 on Argentina Way, ending at Andrés Bello Park. Some 260 participants carried signs demanding equal rights and urging tolerance and safe sex. Organizers also announced 10 winners of their new Pink Egg prize, awarded to people who "have committed the most acts of discrimination against the GLBT population of Panama."

Anti-Luzhkov Protesters Arrested in Moscow

Three pro-gay protesters were arrested June 27 outside the European Commission office in Moscow during a picket by 25 people urging the European Union to revoke Mayor Yuri Luzhkov's right to travel in the 25-country bloc.

The protesters said Luzhkov doesn't deserve to visit the EU because he has twice banned Moscow's Gay Pride parade, calling it "satanic."

Police halted the protest and arrested its apparent leaders even though the activists had a permit for the event. They were charged with "breach of a street demonstration order."

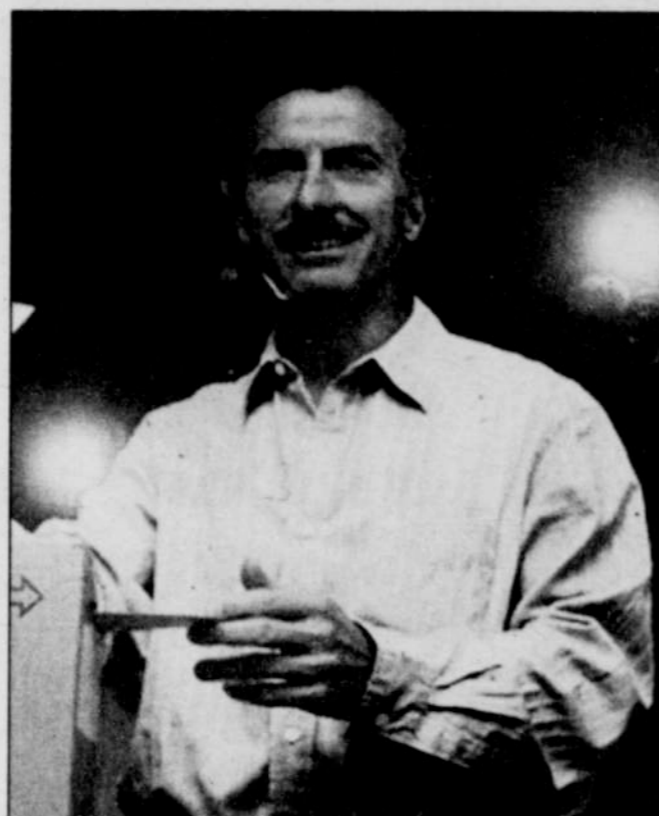
"The formal reason [for the police action] was the construction which had suddenly appeared in front of European Commission office just a day ago," said gay activist Nikolai Baev. "The police argued it could not protect demonstrators in this situation.... There was no construction technique, just two holes dugged on a huge and enclosed area. Perhaps this 'construction' will disappear in few days as suddenly as it appeared."

The picket had received approval from city officials June 25. The people who requested the permission were not known to the city as gay activists. But the media then reported that the picket was related to Luzhkov's anti-gay actions. On June 26, the organizers received phone calls from officials saying the picket could not be held because of street construction. On June 27, the authorities announced they could not guarantee the safety of the protesters. On June 28, at the picket itself, police then produced a document banning the event.

"Activists applied [for] this picket as a demonstration which formally was not related to the Moscow gay community," said Baev. "Among picket organizers was no one who was known by the homophobic authorities as gay or lesbian activist. Therefore, the picket was originally approved in such an easy way. But as soon as mass media announced the picket as a demonstration of LGBT people, the Moscow authorities decided to cancel the rally.... This is a very clear example of homophobic discrimination which is practiced by the Luzhkov administration."

The picketers did manage to deliver a letter to the European Commission office demanding that Luzhkov's EU visa be revoked. Addressed to EC President José Manuel Barroso, the letter detailed Luzhkov's "homophobic...violations of freedom of assembly."

For the past two years, attempts to stage banned Pride events in Moscow have ended in violence and bloodshed.



Buenos Aires Mayor Mauricio Macri, who once called homosexuality a "sickness," now opposes anti-gay discrimination.

AMERICAS

New Buenos Aires Mayor Was Once Anti-Gay

Newly elected Buenos Aires Mayor Mauricio Macri once told a daily newspaper that gay people are sick.

In a 1997 interview with *Página/12*, Macri was asked if he'd accept gay players on the Boca Juniors soccer team he owns.

He answered: "This situation hasn't come up. It's a complicated situation. It's a sickness. This is not a 100 percent healthy person. It's an undesirable deviation."

The interviewer responded that seeing homosexuality as a sickness is "a bit of an old-fashioned idea."

And Macri replied: "Would you be happy if your son were homosexual? Please. The world has made us so we join with a woman. Why are we going to join with a man?"

By last month, however, Macri had moderated his stance. Answering a candidate questionnaire from the organization Argentina Homosexual Community, he said, "Society as a whole needs public campaigns that discourage and condemn all types of violence and discrimination, and that includes sexual orientation."

But Macri was otherwise cautious in answering several specific questions, choosing to speak against discrimination in general and not committing to any other specific actions on behalf of gay people.

ASIA/PACIFIC

Gays to Be Protected in New Thai Constitution

The Thai government's Constitutional Drafting Assembly reportedly has agreed to include queer people in the new constitution, adding a clause protecting "those of other sexual identities" from discrimination.

The vote by the 100-member committee was unanimous. The draft constitution will be put to a national referendum in August.

The current Thai government was installed by the military after a coup d'état in September 2006.

REX WOCKNER 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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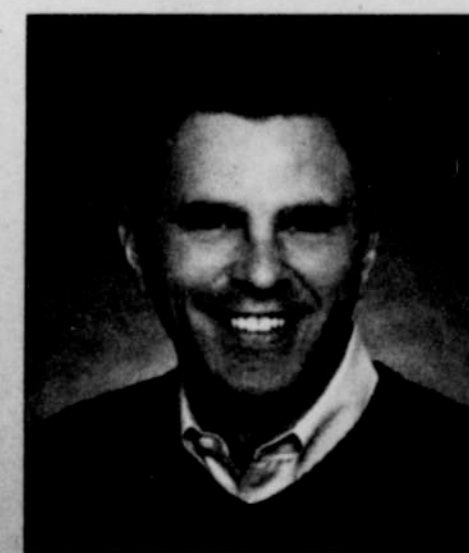
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