

*“Being yourself is not an ideology. You are at home in the EU. The EU is an area of LGBTIQ freedom. LGBTIQ-free zones are humanity-free zones.”*

By saying these words on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March this year, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, recalled that the European Union is a zone of LGBTIQ freedom.

Why, when equal rights have been strengthened by legislation over the last decades, is it so crucial to emphasize them again?

Even though the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and international human rights law protects the enjoyment of human rights by LGBTIQ persons, the situation of LGBTIQ persons is of great concern today.

In 2019, 43% of LGBT persons in the European Union felt discriminated against compared to 37% in 2012 (source : European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights).

Violence and discrimination affect our fellow citizens in all areas of their lives. LGBTIQ persons face a disproportionate level of insecurity and violence - especially the youngest ones – as well as discrimination in access to employment or difficulties in accessing healthcare. What is more, there is a rise of hate speech and anti-LGBTIQ hatred on social networks and stigmatization going as far as the denial of their very identity. These attacks against LGBTIQ persons are intolerable and breach the core values of the European Union. In this context, a large number of LGBTIQ persons are at increased risk of marginalisation and social exclusion.

We, the Ministers of the European Union Member States, reaffirm that everyone must be able to live in safety and enjoy the exercise of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Everywhere on our territories, violations and abuses of the human rights of LGBTIQ persons must be resolutely combated and firmly condemned. We will never identify with social projects that divide and exclude.

The publication by the European Commission of the first EU Strategy on Equal Treatment for LGBTIQ persons is a significant step towards improving the equal treatment and situation of LGBTIQ persons and it is our common responsibility to implement the strategy, in accordance with our national strategies, to protect as well as to enhance the inclusion of LGBTIQ persons. While some Member States of the European Union are blowing on the embers of anti-LGBTIQ hatred in Europe, we welcome that the European Parliament has adopted a resolution on March 11, 2021, proclaiming the European Union a “zone of freedom for LGBTIQ persons”. But we must also go further.

This begins with the mobilisation of all the levers of action that EU law confers by systematically activating suspensions of European funding when the rights of LGBTIQ persons are infringed, and, where the law allows doing so, we encourage the European Commission to bring legal proceedings before the Court of Justice of the European Union.

This then involves reinforcing the protection of LGBTIQ persons against all forms of hate crimes and hate speech in order to safeguard everyone in the European Union against such violations and abuses.

Finally, this requires taking into account the diversity of families in Europe from a legal standpoint, based on the need for mutual recognition of family relations in the EU and the full exercise of freedom of movement for LGBTIQ persons and rainbow families.

Europe is not just an economic project. It is a political project. It has a story. It has values. Those of progressive emancipation of peoples based on the ideas and values of the Enlightenment. For that reason, we cannot allow the rejection of LGBTIQ persons to settle on European soil.

On May 17, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, we say to all Europeans, that they can be proud of who they are. That Europe is a land of freedom, equality, and respect for fundamental rights.

We will not compromise on these principles.

## Belgium

Ms Sarah Schlitz  
State Secretary for Gender Equality, Equal Opportunities and Diversity

## Cyprus

Mrs Emily Yiolitis  
Minister of Justice and Public Order of Cyprus

## Denmark

Mr Peter Hummelgaard  
Minister for Employment and Minister for Equal Opportunities

## Estonia

Ms Signe Riisalo  
Minister of Social Protection

## Finland

Mr. Thomas Blomqvist  
Minister for Nordic Cooperation and Equality

## France

Ms Elisabeth Moreno

Minister Delegate for Gender Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities attached to the Prime Minister

Germany

Mrs. Franziska Giffey  
Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

Ireland

Mr Roderic O'Gorman  
Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Italy

Ms Elena Bonetti  
Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family

Luxembourg

Ms Corinne Cahen  
Minister for Family Affairs and Integration

Malta

Mr Edward Zammit Lewis  
Minister for Justice, Equality and Governance

The Netherlands

Ms Ingrid van Engelshoven  
Minister of Education, Culture and Science

Spain

Ms Irene Montero  
Minister for Equality

Sweden

Ms Märta Stenevi

Minister for Gender Equality and Housing, with responsibility for urban development,  
anti-segregation and anti-discrimination