



INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA AND TRANSPHOBIA

LEARNING AND
STRATEGISING
IN EUROPE

EDITORIAL

Since its inception in 2005, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia has seen an impressive range of stakeholders take action every year around May 17th. Today, the day serves as a platform for action in more than 100 countries; mainly, of course, for civil society organisations focused on advancing sexual and gender diversity, but also for national and local governments, corporations, transnational institutions like the United Nations agencies or the European Union, celebrities and opinion leaders, schools and universities, police stations, and many more.

All this mobilisation has built, over the years, a wealth of experience, expertise and knowledge. In order to facilitate the sharing of this corpus, we have conducted a series of workshops and reviews in several world regions. After the publication of the results of consultations held in Latin America and Asia, we conducted a range of interviews with stakeholders in Europe in 2012. Through these discussions, we wanted to identify a range of strategic elements that a space like the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia provides, both in terms of the added value/specific advantage it gives, as well as the limitations it poses.

This analysis provides a range of arguments that we hope will provide useful food for thought to stakeholders who have not yet seen a strategic interest in making the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia a key moment in their strategies. But we also hope that it will appeal to organisations who have been taking action on the Day for many years, and may find in these testimonies fresh ideas and renewed momentum for action.

We sincerely thank the many participants who made this possible, and hope their voices herein will contribute to reinforce a vibrant, diverse and effective global movement in favour of sexual and gender diversity.

IDAHO Committee, ILGA-Europe, Transgender Europe, IGLYO

SOME KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND ANALYSIS FROM THE FIELD

“ The Day provides a clear focus and allows for easy actions, that can be done by small groups, be it ‘simple’ social gatherings or more elaborate public happenings, street actions, flashmobs, etc....”



RUSSIA

“ The Day is inclusive of all sexual and gender minorities. Make sure you use it to reinforce the unity of the movement rather than ignore or even increase imbalances.”

The Day provides an interesting framework for cross-fertilization, as it offers similar opportunities and challenges through very diverse contexts, from very homophobic or transphobic places to seemingly very ‘friendly’ ones. Many IDAHO initiatives were started with inspiration from others. It is therefore important to invest some resources in documenting experience and making it available to others, in order to facilitate dissemination.

Opposing homo/transphobia can form a common denominator for a large spectrum of stakeholders. Hardly anyone, including religious authorities, will want to appear to support homophobia and transphobia, even if they refuse to support any concrete progressive measure to fight them as well. This can be used to encourage them to get on board, even symbolically. This framing also facilitates outreach to straight people and can move them from a ‘neutral’ position to a more proactive one.

“ Don’t let ownership by public authorities or very authoritative players, like big NGOs, minimize the importance of the mobilisation of smaller entities. Smaller stakeholders should use the momentum that bigger players bring in order to increase the clout of their own actions.”

For networks or umbrella organisations, the Day often provides an interesting platform for joint activity amongst members, and offers a way to bind people together. Some networks organise very structured joint actions, with a central strategy, and in some cases provide campaign material. Others will let members develop their specific actions and create a very light overarching framework.

“ Talking about homo/transphobia can be quite ‘depressing’ and have a negative effect on mobilisation, so you might want to balance this out through the format of the mobilisation and do something enjoyable, colourful, fun.”

‘Homophobia’ and ‘Transphobia’ are concepts which could lead to put the focus too narrowly on the issue of the stigma and discrimination that sexual and gender minorities face. They can also be narrow frames, in that they draw people’s attention towards more visible expressions of sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination, and away from a broader focus on heteronormativity, as a basic structure of societies. The two concepts are therefore perhaps best taken as ‘entry points’ into discussions on the broader picture.

This discussion about the broader picture also offers an entry point to address the negative impact of homo/transphobia on everybody, including straight people. This favours ‘win-win’ approaches to social change.

The ‘mental health’ argument that the Day is built on can be used in more ways than one. Even in contexts where mainstream attitudes don’t consciously associate homosexuality with mental disorder anymore, it can be useful to analyse how this perception still underlies, perhaps unconsciously, remaining homophobic attitudes, such as opposition to same-sex marriage and parenting.

Being a global event, the Day can be labelled by opponents as not respecting national cultural specificities, and/or as being driven by foreign agendas. As in other instances where this argument is put forward, the counter position is to frame debates in locally relevant terms.



RUSSIA



TURKEY

“ Look at what was done by politicians (in your country or in ‘similar’ countries) on the Day in previous years and use it to set the standard in your own dialogue with decision makers.”

For organisations which aim at getting support from diplomatic representations of more progressive countries, like the UK or the Netherlands, the Day can provide a useful hook for requesting political and/or financial assistance. Some countries, like the UK, France, the Netherlands, Spain, have recognized the Day officially. In the guidelines that the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of these countries send to their Embassies, the Day is mentioned as a key moment for action. This can be used as a key argument to get political and/or financial support. Formal recognition by the European Parliament, and the annual IDAHO celebrations in Brussels/Strasbourg, provide a specific argument to get the EU representations on board.

The Day is a truly global event. It constitutes a relevant moment to look at what happens beyond borders and to raise public awareness of the situation of gender and sexual minorities worldwide. This is especially interesting in places where the national/local situation is not perceived as being very difficult. In quite a few of these contexts, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia has already become the ‘international LGBT solidarity day’. Even in difficult contexts this can be useful, as it takes the focus away from the internal situation and helps create room for discussions on an issue without needing to be confrontational. Talking about the situation beyond borders allows people to get messages across that would face strong opposition if they were addressed upfront at national targets.



“ Pedagogy is about repetition and an annual recurring event is therefore good to conduct strategies to educate the public, authorities, the media, etc...”

“ Use the international dimension of the Day, and specific information on major events that happen around the world, to create a sense of solemnity that will make the media want to cover your stories.”

“ The fact that the Day appeals to national authorities is a double-edged sword: on the one hand it creates good conditions to achieve concrete changes and constitutes a moment in the year where these authorities can be held accountable. On the other hand, it can become a day for token lip-service to the cause, without concrete action. To avoid this, organisations have to set up their own accountability initiative for the Day, such as an assessment of Ministries or a report on policy advances, etc...”

In contexts where the terminology around ‘pride’ triggers generic negative reactions, the Day provides a useful opportunity to ‘repackage’ the fight against stigma and discrimination, as related to sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, into a less confrontational vision. But opponents will want to keep using the term ‘Pride’, and the media will also often stick to a simplifying approach, so you have to be particularly strategic in your communication.”

“ By addressing both homophobia and transphobia, the Day encourages people to keep thinking about the commonalities of these two aspects of hetero and cisnormativities. It also provides an entry point to questioning the transphobia within LG and B communities.”



BULGARIA

TRANSGENDER EUROPE

“ THERE is a debate on whether a Day that is both against homophobia and transphobia does not undermine the visibility of the Trans community. I think that the Day actually provides the opportunity to reflect on the common root causes of both, and acts as a catalyst for strengthening the links between both issues, and therefore potentially offers a bridge to both “communities”. The issue of pathologization for example remains crucial for us all. Like it or not, and despite the WHO decision, we are all still conditioned by the fact that people continue to see us as ‘abnormal’, ‘mentally ill’, or at least with some psychological development problem.

In addition, this common Day helps us to question our own Transphobia, as a movement. In this respect, the international focus that IDAHO had in 2009 on Transphobia has been very helpful in raising awareness of Transphobia within the LGB organisations. So my feeling is that it would be very helpful to have a specific global Trans mobilization each year, like an annual campaign. Be it only to ground this awareness that we have common battles to fight.

There is also a threat that the Day reinforces the normativities within our movement, so it is important that organizations really harness the potential of the Day to deconstruct normativities: By being inclusive of everything that is not hetero-normative, the Day allows us to refocus on ‘Diversity’, not ‘Difference’. That is to me a fundamental distinction. ‘Different’ is a notion that is dividing, while ‘Diversity’ is unifying. So we should maybe move away from homo/transphobia and be more explicit about the fact that it’s a Day against hetero-normativity and gender-normativity (or cis-normativity). ”

Vreer VERKERKE

IN 2007, the European Parliament adopted a resolution committing itself to marking the Day every year. Several events were organised, and since 2010 the Day is marked every year officially by the President of the European Parliament, and other EU institutions like the Commission, the Council and the Fundamental Rights Agency. This helped make the Day more official each year in the European Union, with EU countries following the example of official celebrations. It's also a good occasion for civil society to call out to EU institutions, and remind them of the huge gap remaining between reality and genuine equality.

One of the most popular things we did on the Day was the 2012 *It Gets Better* video, with over 50 EU politicians and leaders (www.vimeo.com/LGBTintergroup/itgetsbetter).

To us, the Day is an occasion to remind our fellow Members of the European Parliament of what remains to be achieved for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Europe and in the world. It's also the time to remind them visibly that their votes, their reports and their resolutions must reflect and advance equal rights and non-discrimination, values on which the European Union is founded. It's a yearly reminder that the EU hasn't yet achieved complete LGBT equality, and that we need to keep working on eliminating homophobia and transphobia everywhere, throughout the year.

With the 2014 European elections coming up, we'll use IDAHO to remind candidates and voters how important the EU is for equal rights.

Michael CASHMAN and Ulrike LUNACEK
 Members of the European Parliament
 Co-Presidents of the Parliament's LGBT Intergroup

INTERVIEWS



ALBANIA

PINK Embassy/LGBT Pro Albania has been actively involved with IDAHO activities for three years in a row, but in 2012 we decided to take one further step by organizing outdoor activities in order to assess the readiness and level of acceptance of Albanian society. We used the term Pride as well as «Festival of Diversity» because to us they meant the same thing. Even though Albanian media and society continued their debate on the value of it, we continued with our efforts to have all supporters join us at the event.

As the Netherlands have given the Day official recognition at their national level, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has encouraged their Embassies to support IDAHO actions in the countries where there are present. Here, the Dutch Ambassador was a strong supporter, along many other international colleagues. National authorities and stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Equal Opportunities, the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, the Ombudsperson, NGO's, students etc, also showed their support by participating in the event. We realized that support from each and everyone makes a difference and plays a role, because it is a concrete expression against homo and transphobia.

IDAHO is a great opportunity to draw this kind of catalytic support.

ALBANIA

In Albania, we have been consistent in marking the Day for many years. In 2011, Albanian activists organized a series of activities including film screenings, a public lecture at Tirana University, a poster campaign entitled «Homophobia has had its day,» and a stand in central Tirana where anyone could express their views against discrimination and where activists handed out T-shirts with anti-homophobia messages. The celebrations also included the second annual «Rock against Homophobia» concert, in celebration of IDAHO. In 2012, we had to battle heavy rain and dodge explosives hurled at us by youths on our bicycle «Ride against Homophobia» along the main boulevard of the capital.

The Day has now become a fantastic opportunity to harness media interest. In 2012, the Talk Show that was organized ahead of IDAHO had a 60% higher audience than the finals of our local version of «Big Brother». The Prime Minister himself requested a recording of the program so he could watch it. Part of this success is of course due to some form of 'sensationalist' curiosity for homosexuality, but also to the fact that we bring real arguments to the debates, not just the usual old ideological positions, that we engage constructively and that we create a positive surprise just by not corresponding to stereotypes.

The fact that the Day is truly international has worked to our benefit, as it is seen as something modern, especially by young people who have a positive attitude towards globalization. Sometimes we think that opponents might use the international nature of the Day to flag 'cultural imperialism' from the West, but these arguments always exist anyway, and one should not stand passive in front of this threat. For example, we have started a project to create a national LGBT archives centre, following the finding of huge quantities of reports from the communist regime period. This will be the best argument to oppose to those who think sexual diversity is a recent 'import' and allow us to really focus our IDAHO actions around a totally local agenda, which will probably be the most effective strategy to combat homo/transphobia here.



GERMANY

ARMENIA

In Armenia, we develop a whole 'cycle' of actions in spring, starting with the Day of Silence in mid-April and ending with IDAHO, which serves to specifically focus on the issue of 'phobia' and provides an annual opportunity to engage on this issue. Pedagogy is about repetition and this annual recurrence is therefore good to conduct strategies to educate the public, authorities, the media, etc... And this pedagogy is much needed, as here the main attitude towards homosexuality and gender variance, including within higher education curricula, is to consider them as mental health problems.

So last year we got a specialist from the Ministry of Health to talk about the reality of the WHO classifications on TV. Over the foreseeable future, communication around the date of May 17 and what it means will unfortunately remain a very much necessary part of our pedagogy.

Obviously, the strength of the IDAHO mobilisation in other countries is an asset for us, but for historical reasons, the strongest influence comes from Russia, so we keep a critical eye on what happens there and always respond positively to suggestions to connect that come from Russian activists. The support of international groups, such as for example Education International, is also essential for us. There could also be a strong rationale for encouraging multinational corporations to take strong stands on IDAHO. We have this example of a foreign travel agency which cancelled its cooperation with a radio station because of its homophobia, and big corporations would definitely be able to have a very strong influence. This is also the case for Higher Education networks like University alliances, Professional associations like the Psychologists Association, Trade Unions, International networks of political parties such as exist in the European Parliament. The IDAHO Committee's mission to mobilise these actors, and channel their contributions down to field level is certainly underinvested at the moment.

BELGIUM

In 2005, immediately when the Day was launched, some MPs got a motion through in the Federal Parliament to get May 17 recognized as the National Day against Homophobia. One of the ambitions of this motion was explicitly to favour the connection between LGBT organizations and mainstream Human Rights organizations, as this was identified as one of the main added values of the Day.

This recognition at federal level was an important factor for our organization, which works at the level of the francophone region of Wallonia, to set up a framework agreement with the French community authorities. One of the major elements of this partnership is that each year for IDAHO, the French community authorities distribute to all the schools in the Brussels and Wallonia, the awareness raising material against homophobia that our organization develops. For the last 4 years, they have distributed 40 000 pin badges every year and since 2011, they also include as many copies of the brochure against homophobia which we have edited.

Clearly, the recognition that the Day got from the Parliament has been an essential element for the schools. This is also the case for quite a few City councils, which fly the rainbow flag on May 17.



CROATIA

CROATIA

For us, the Day was mainly identified as a good opportunity to attract media attention. This is why we always staged very visual forms of mobilisation, that would increase this interest. One year our activists dressed up as doctors and handed the members of government individual prescriptions on how to cure Croatia from homophobia (our focus was on the reform of the homophobic education curriculum). Another year, we dressed up as judges and went in front of the Court of Justice to read out a 'verdict' condemning the Croatian Government for homophobia. Last year, we rolled out a big rainbow flag in front of the Government building. In our communication to the media on these actions, we always underline the moral and political authority of the day by sharing information about special IDAHO activities and features around the world.

Although we generally focus more on discrimination than on the phobia per se, we still underline systematically the argument of the depathologisation of homosexuality. First because we use this to keep the pressure on the medical system by reminding them of the devastating damage caused by psychiatry in the past. Secondly because there are definitely still some remains of this, as for example some 'reparative' therapy practices in some clinics (recently exposed in major public scandals), or a very pathologising vision in the biology curriculum or in religious education. So the Day acts as a good catalyst for communication on these elements.

In Croatia, we are supporting community building in small rural cities, but a large majority of people there are not 'out', so the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is not really a useful concept for them. As I see things, the Day is more useful once people have reached a certain level of confidence.

DENMARK

In 2010, we generated a big event on the City Council's main square, with a huge metal frame installation entitled 'Equality under construction' and used this to collect signatures in favour of equality, including marriage. In our context, the notions of 'homo/transphobia' are quite old fashioned and we definitely need to be either specific in the focus of our actions (focus on hate crimes), or brand the Day as being more positively 'for equality'.

There could be a rationale to use the day to raise awareness of the situation outside of Denmark. Yet, if we focus too much on the international dimension, there is a danger that the Day will be used by our authorities to 'pinkwash', i.e. promote their involvement on foreign issues as a smokescreen to cover up for bad domestic records. This would also be the case with the official recognition: the government has talked about it, but we think that although official recognition would be a way to keep the issues on the agenda, there is a real danger of tokenism. But then again, the regularity and predictability of the Day makes it a good instrument for public authorities, which often have complicated programming and vetting procedures. In this respect, the Day is quite well suited for institutional involvement.

FINLAND

Initially, attention to the Day was brought to Finland by an LGBTI online media group. Although this group focuses more on gay men's concerns, it helped to get the Day on the agenda. Gradually, other parts of the LGBTI community started taking interest and later on the focus has shifted more on human rights and policy work. In the wake, other human rights organisations like Amnesty have also joined.

The international dimension is certainly one of the crucial aspects, as the Day offers us the opportunity to be more visible on the international scene, to mobilise more in favour of international issues, and to network with partners across the borders.

What makes the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia more relevant for us is when there are European-wide or global events happening, such as the presentation of the ILGA-Europe reports and maps, or the European conference that is planned for IDAHO 2013 in partnership with the Council of Europe. Regional entities can indeed have a lead role in mobilising national organisations to act on the Day in a coordinated manner.

But we are also aware that the international dimension could 'distract' Finnish media and politicians from the much-needed focus on the national agenda, specifically on trans issues, such as forced sterilisation. So we need to remember to keep using IDAHO also to get our own government to work on a comprehensive LGBTI roadmap.



FRANCE

FRANCE

In France, the Day has been invested as a favourite moment for action mainly in places and by constituencies who lacked other spaces for action, for example smaller cities, where Pride marches were not organised. Over the years, it became more and more visible and we think there is still an enormous potential for growth, especially amongst allies in civil society, local authorities, companies, etc...

The regularity of the date makes it for us a perfect tool for lobbying, as we can plan initiatives based on progress reports from one year to another, so it is a good instrument to work on the accountability of stakeholders who find us, on May 17, demanding reports on past commitments, ongoing initiatives, etc... We found that sometimes in the weeks before May 17, some projects were revitalised, delayed decisions finally taken, commitments announced. Surfing on the interest that the media shows for ranking initiatives, we also have developed in the past years some "IDAHometers" that rank ministries, cities and companies according to their performance in terms of LGBT policies.

One specific challenge we find today, is the need for ensuring coordination of information at national level, so that the strength of the day stays visible especially for the media and politicians. For several years the Comité IDAHO-France has played this role but it is extremely time and energy consuming, and this function to collect information flows can also generate a feeling of accountability towards a 'central' structure, which is not what we want to see. I believe this happens in other contexts too, and is something we should learn to address.

GEORGIA

We started to reflect on how we could best use the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia after the US Embassy in Tbilisi organised a major meeting on this with several civil society organisations. This is how we came to choose to hold our first ever public street action on May 17th, as a closing event of a 5-day agenda, which included a range of different events. The inclusion of several Human Rights organisations made this event much bigger than what was originally planned, and as the information leaked, we eventually had to face attacks on the march.

Our experience makes us think that there could sometimes be a tension between the desire from the UN, the EU, INGOs and Embassies to support IDAHO and local ownership, and we must make sure that we always stay the ones driving the agenda.

In any case, the Day proved a very good hook to talk to the media, and we had around 200 sources covering the 5-day IDAHO program. There is now quite a pressure to have similar events next year, and we must see how we handle these expectations. By all means, inclusiveness will be central to our strategies as the Day provides a very good platform for this. Although the support from Human Rights organisations is far from being a given, organisations like Amnesty are increasingly on board and would find it very difficult not to stand with us on the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, given the support from the organisations at international level.

Sadly, in our context we will have to keep going back to the message that homosexuality is not an illness, and national social science institutions are just not ready to support us on this, so we need to keep relying on authorities beyond our borders, like WHO. It would certainly help if WHO's voice on IDAHO was louder and better disseminated here, so that we could use it better for campaigning.

GERMANY – RAINBOW FLASHMOB

We launched this initiative in Hamburg back in 2008, initially as a support to friends in Russia. While of course we needed to keep the sense of outrage in the face of hate crimes, violence and other forms of homo/transphobia, we also wanted to create the image of a very positive, joyful, powerful community.

So we decided to organise a balloon release event in a very visible public space, and asked participants to tie messages of solidarity and hope to the balloons. The event gathered a few hundred people, which proved to be more successful than expected. It was filmed and the video posted on youtube and buzzed.

Ever since, the Rainbow Flashmob community has kept growing for every IDAHO and we now have groups from a dozen countries joining in.

The predictability and regularity of the Day and the fact that it is not rooted within one organisation or dominated by the mobilisation in one particular country (for example the USA) are essential assets for the involvement of groups.

HUNGARY

In Hungary, most events and days have a specific leadership at national level: Pride, World Aids Day, Transgender Day of Remembrance, etc... each are piloted by one organisation, with others joining in and supporting as they see relevant. For IDAHO, we don't have this kind of process. As the remit is very inclusive, there is a broad ownership.

For instance, in 2012 the main mobilisation happened through the mobilisations of Amnesty International and the Trans organisation TransVanilla. The activities in 2011 illustrate the range of the mobilisation, with on the one hand a conference on «How to Combat Homophobia and Transphobia in Present Day Hungary» organized by the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Science, and on the other hand activists marched in the city centre wearing T-shirts with the most frequently used swear-words used by Hungarians for sexual and gender minorities, while shouting out messages such as “homophobia is a disease; not homosexuality.”

The down side of this large ownership is that the momentum can fall quite easily, if one year there is no organisation to take action. The annual focus themes, which are taken forward by the IDAHO Committee, can be useful insofar as they generate this kind of leadership, but that depends obviously on the relevance of the theme in the national context.

Between 2005 and 2007, the government took some action to celebrate the day. We even tried to get official recognition of the day, but our action ended up being too close to the 2010 election to be successful. Now with the very right-wing current government in place, there is no policy agenda anymore on LGBT issues. So we concentrate on lobbying the opposition parties and the Day has provided a focus for this with some success, as two of them did some declarations on IDAHO. This might pave the way for moments in future with better conditions.



HUNGARY

IRELAND

The international focus that the IDAHO Committee placed on homophobic and transphobic bullying definitely made a difference to us, as this is one of the main focuses of our work. We probably would not have gotten as involved in IDAHO in 2012 if this hadn't been the focus area. It was definitely a very good hook to get increased political and media attention on LGBT young people and the need to combat homophobic and transphobic bullying in our schools and communities.

The occasion provided us with a very significant platform. We spoke in Paris at the launch of UNESCO's global guide on tackling homophobic bullying and, along with other LGBT organizations, we spoke about the rights of LGBT young people at a Parliamentary Committee. Over the preceding weeks BeLonG To and GLEN provided all parliamentarians with a two-page briefing on the issue on homophobic and transphobic bullying and secured an all-party statement of support for young LGBT people to mark the Day. Significantly the Department of Education held a national forum on bullying on IDAHO and both BeLonG To and GLEN spoke about homophobic and transphobic bullying at this.

An additional benefit of the Day is that a strong response from politicians in one year sets the standards for the future, and organizations in Ireland can now refer back to 2012 to put pressure on other ministries, and further different LGBT agendas.

We also managed to get a good deal of media attention on the Day. Of particular importance was an opinion piece in the Irish Times about homophobic bullying. We'd been trying to secure this for a number of years and the flagging of IDAHO as a hook provided this additional argument that eventually got it through. So we really encourage other organizations to make the most out of the international dimension in their outreach to the media

LATVIA

The acknowledgement of the Day by the international community does have some impact on how the Day is invested here. For example, in 2011 and in 2012 the UK Embassy contacted us to enquire about our IDAHO plans and to offer their support, so this somehow nudged us into action. In 2012, the decision was to do something positive, 'a street action but a sweet action', in order to break away from the negative information that was constantly associated with LGBT issues. So we decided to build little paper boats, light a candle inside and let them drift down the river that flows through the capital. The symbol of light and of moving along the stream were very much in line with how we wanted to express the fight against homophobia.

I feel that one of the advantages of the Day is that it is more inclusive than maybe some other activities. And the fact that joint initiatives could happen across borders on that day is certainly something that the IDAHO Committee should be focusing on more; here at least it would provide a good incentive.

MALTA

For us, an organization of LGBT Christians whose main objectives includes to dialogue with religious authorities, the main advantage of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia is that it does not necessarily carry a message that the Church opposes. Much on the contrary, fighting homo/transphobia is the one position that the Church regularly supports.

The most interesting development for us might be the possibility to do some joint activity with like-minded organizations in other countries. In Italy, the Gionata project has been organizing vigils on the Sunday prior to IDAHO for quite a few years. Changing Attitudes in Ireland too. We are now discussing within the European Forum of LGBT Christians if we could not tie all these actions together in a joint “IDAHO Vigil”. That might give us some leverage to further discuss with the World Council of Churches to get their support, which would be very useful of course for our individual strategies at home.



MALTA

PORTUGAL

MONTENEGRO

In 2011 the attacks on the concert that was organized for IDAHO acted as an early warning signal on the lack of adequate security from police forces. The Pride march that was planned for June was cancelled as a consequence of this lack of security. In 2012, we decided to take a different approach and rather take the focus away from the national situation and rather focus on what happens elsewhere. The dramatic situation of Trans people in Turkey lead us to stage a protest in front of the Turkish Embassy, which was the first ever public LGBT protest in the country. It was an expression of our solidarity as a movement across borders, which is exactly what IDAHO is, isn't it ?

This action created a way to denounce homophobia and transphobia and get our voices heard, without appearing to attack anyone upfront at national level, which took some pressure off and led to less reactions from conservative movements, which had less of an argument to fight back, as we didn't appear to target them in the first place.

NETHERLANDS

When the Dutch Government in 2007 decided to create a biannual prize to distinguish outstanding contributions to the emancipation of LGBT people, it identified the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) as a good date to hold the ceremonies. IDAHO commemorates the World Health Organisation's decision to remove homosexuality from the list of mental disorders and is a perfect opportunity to hold this kind of award ceremony.

But IDAHO is only relevant for the Dutch Government as an official spur and opportunity for action when civil society organizations also recognize it as an important moment for action, on the domestic level as well as abroad and beyond Europe. That is why Dutch embassies across the world have provided support on the occasion of IDAHO; in 2012, in a number of countries. But they only do so of course in support of local initiatives.

For the Gender & LGBT Emancipation Department, IDAHO also provides a good opportunity to concentrate various LGBT-focused initiatives, which enables the creation of a stronger critical mass (which is badly needed in a world where small initiatives mostly end up unnoticed). This also reduces the overall human and financial costs of these events, and allows better synergies and cooperation. This is why the Government minister for Gender & LGBT Emancipation decided, for IDAHO 2013, to bring a number of public LGBT policy events together. This includes the Dutch Government LGBT emancipation Award (the Jos Brink Prize), the ceremony for the meeting of the Rainbow Cities network, the informal European Network of Government LGBT Focal Points, and the informal NATO LGBT Working Group. This created a snowball effect and now the IDAHO conference 2013 has several other initiatives on its program, making it a European-wide conference marked by the presence of the Fundamental Rights Agency, ILGA Europe, the Council of Europe, the European LGBT Police Association network and Transgender Europe.

We hope that in future years, other governments will take this IDAHO approach on and that each year IDAHO will become a key annual moment for public policy co-operation and policy exchange, not only at the national level but also at the European level and in other regions of the world.

“ One of the main characteristics I see with the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia in Western Europe is that it is heavily invested by NGOs and public authorities, but that there is often some disconnection with the people at the grassroots. This is all the more a shame, as the Day provides a really good opportunity to engage the people at field level, where the effects of homo/transphobia are vividly felt on a daily basis.”

NETHERLANDS

MOVISIE manages the “Local LGBT Policy Program”, which brings together 40 municipalities in the Netherlands over strategizing and implementing LGBT policies in the domains which are the priorities of local authorities. We provide support, and encourage municipalities to celebrate various days throughout the year, including IDAHO. But so far, municipalities have been keener to engage for action on coming-out Day, on October 11th, mainly because it builds around a more positive message than homo/transphobia. Moreover, the government at national level has been more vocal on Coming Out Day, and organizations like COC develop specific communication material, which is very useful for local authorities who don't have the time nor the specific skills to develop their own. And this has an impact over the mobilization.

Nevertheless, the fact that Coming Out Day celebrates a US event (*The 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights*) makes it culturally specific, and bigger cities – who might want to develop activities in the field of international LGBT solidarity – might find that the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia also provides a relevant framework. As IDAHO is celebrated so broadly across Europe now, marking the Day is a way for cities to feel and show that they are ‘part of the world’. As such, IDAHO might be a good instrument for the “Rainbow Cities” project, which is being set up at the moment and hopes to form a network of about 10 international cities in 7 countries, next to the participating Dutch cities. It might offer in future a good platform for cooperation and joint action.

PORTUGAL

The Day possesses a kind of ‘formalness’ that helps in reaching out to allies. For example, this year we presented a general motion to commemorate IDAHO at the annual meeting of the Portuguese National Youth Council, which is a federation of Portuguese youth organizations funded by the Government and with a consultative status on policies regarding youth. It also includes representations from political parties, through their corresponding youth organizations. The motion was the only one that won unanimous support, which indicates that the focus on fighting homo/transphobia provides a good ground for consensus, even in contexts where there are strong tensions between different political visions.

The Day also provides a good opportunity to talk to local authorities. Interestingly, the Day is recognised officially by some local authorities as the result of a letter writing campaign to the authorities from local activists, which was based on a campaign opposing same-sex parenting. The letter urged authorities to recognise the day officially, so some cities and other places did so. But because of a lack of follow-up mechanisms, it was hard to find out if motions sent by mail to some cities and places where proposed for discussion and voting and/or approved.



RUSSIA

RUSSIA

The International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia is a great opportunity for the LGBT activists and community to stand up for their rights and speak out loudly. In many countries of Europe, this opportunity is provided by Gay Pride marches. Russians, however, view the brand of Pride as being purely confrontational. The public does not understand the concept of pride as a human rights event, and media and the government readily propagate the stereotypical image of a «naked carnival.» The Day provides us a good alternative to mobilize the community to come out on the street in defense of their rights.

For some years IDAHO took the form of Rainbow Flashmob, an initiative started by German LGBT organizations in 2009 and quickly spread over to 20 cities across Russia and the world. Rainbow Flashmob involves rallying, speeches by LGBT and human rights activists, and, at the end, letting rainbow-colored balloons out in the air, symbolizing the dream of diverse world without homophobia and transphobia.

Advantages of Rainbow Flashmob is that it is a positive, colorful, peaceful event, more readily understood by the public. It is also an educational event, main message centering around the message that homosexuality is not a disease and has been removed from the list of mental disorders by the World Health Association. The overwhelming majority of the Russian public still believes homosexuality is a disorder, a disease, with many people not even being aware it's no longer a crime in the Russian Federation.

Obviously, the anti-“propaganda” law will have a strong effect on how the mobilisation around the Day develops in future. Maybe it can provide the backdrop for concerted action from allies around Europe and beyond. We sense that there is a growing interest from organisations in Western Europe to do some international solidarity around IDAHO, and this is one very concrete outcome for us.

SERBIA

In Serbia IDAHO is both a community event and an institutional moment. IDAHO has a good uniting and mobilizing potential amongst volunteers, and this usefully strengthens the movement. As it is not labelled 'Pride', we can hold street actions without facing the same hostility and this is probably why IDAHO is useful for the LGBT community, as it creates an alternative space that is not ideologically loaded and does not generate the same automated attitudes that 'Pride' does.

This year, for example, Labris along with the organization «Women in black» took for the first time our 'living library' action to the streets, by which we invited people on the street to come and 'borrow' us for a while, to discover our realities, our lives. This was a major success and very much underpinned by the rationale that homo/transphobic stigma can best be opposed by exposure to people who can break down the stereotypes that stigma is based upon.

It is worth mentioning that in 2008 Labris - a lesbian human rights organization - had received (after three years of hard lobbying) an informal statement from the Serbian Medical Chamber, that this institution recognizes the official position of the World Health Organization (WHO) according to which homosexuality is not a disease but a natural variance of sexual orientation. Since receiving this important statement from the Serbian Medical Chamber, it made total sense for us to celebrate this event.

SLOVENIA

2009 was our biggest 'IDAHO' year so far. In earlier years, we had done press releases, with very limited impact. So we wanted to make use of the fact that the day was virtually unknown to the public and the media to catch their attention. Something "new", especially related to this topic, is bound to get picked up. Our initial intention was to get celebrities to issue supportive messages, but this proved too difficult. So we turned towards politicians, and the fact that the Day was recognized officially by the European Parliament was essential in getting them mobilised. In the end, we got powerful quotes from the Minister of Interior ("Boundaries should be set by law, and love has no boundaries"), the Mayor of Ljubljana ("Let's be tolerant and work in Solidarity"), the Minister of Education or the Ombudsperson for Human Rights. Each of these quotes was made into a campaign board, which were posted all over the capital. This action required a 6-month preparation effort but it helped to firmly get the Day on the calendar.

In subsequent years, the revision of the Family Code focused all the attention, with very polarized debates which led to a referendum. What is interesting in this context in relation to IDAHO is that the issue of homosexuality as a mental health problem, which we thought we had put behind us in Slovenia, resurfaced in the questioning of whether same-sex couples were 'fit' to raise children. So maybe we should never totally assume that the messaging over homosexuality not being a mental illness is obsolete.

During these years, organisations like DIH staged same-sex weddings for IDAHO, and used these to do street interviews, which were edited and disseminated on YouTube as educational and campaigning tools to increase the perception of the 'normality' of same-sex families.

SPAIN

In Spain, the FELGTB organization presented the theme of the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia as a matter of basic human rights. For right-wing politicians it was a good opportunity for them to prove that they supported Human Rights, even though they were opposed to marriage and other specific laws in favour of the LGBT community. As a matter of fact, they felt they weren't committing themselves to anything, because they weren't supporting any concrete rights; rather, they felt that they were 'washing their faces' (that they were getting cleaned of their bad image, in some way), that they were being 'progressive'.

What do I think? Well, I think that although the right-wing politicians felt that they weren't giving anything, they did much more than they thought, because the recognition is symbolic. And symbols - even though it may not seem so - are crucial, because they define us as a society and as individuals. This proves that even in hostile environments, the LGBT community has adequate space for some progress. At least it's possible to request politicians, even conservative ones, that they say 'homophobia is bad and harmful for society'. It was like this that we were able to get all 300 members of parliament to unanimously declare May 17th as the National Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, in May 2009. That declaration, additionally, exhorted the government to request that the UN made a similar declaration.

I think that when you go for a recognition at national level, it's always much more effective to have previously secured the support of hundreds of mayors. And it's often more effective to have a local celebration or a rainbow flag flying over a small town as a result of this local-level recognition than to have a text coming out of Parliament, that nobody in these small towns would ever hear of.

Also essential for the success of this strategy was the internal work that was done with the 50 organizations that compose the FELGTB. A briefing kit about the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia was distributed to each organization, so that each one of them worked in favor of official recognition on both the provincial and regional levels.



SWEDEN

For quite a few years now, IDAHO has been celebrated by the local chapters of our network. Many events in Sweden are quite political, like the Day of Silence, or the Transgender Day of Remembrance. Even Stockholm pride is very political, with a strong support from national authorities and many conferences and workshops. So IDAHO provided young people locally with an opportunity to do something more colourful, more fun, focusing on progress. The Day provides a clear focus and allows for easy actions, that can be done by small groups, be it 'simple' social gatherings or more elaborate public happenings, street actions, flashmobs, etc... So it was very useful in building up the local movements, and allowing them to experiment initiatives.

For a few years now, RFSL Ungdom has started providing some coordination and campaign material for IDAHOT actions, such as shooting a video for the 'It Gets Better' campaign in 2011, but the strongest advantage of the Day is that ownership really exists at local level and that every year, suggestions for actions come from the grassroots, where young activists devise their actions and create their own material. This is also why the international focus themes don't work too well here, because they don't necessarily correspond to the very specific experience of homo/transphobia by young people in their local community. The same thing goes with the international dimension of the Day, which is interesting in theory, but does not meet the interest and the lived experience of young people here in Sweden (although the issue of asylum for LGBT people, which young Swedes are very concerned with, might open up new perspectives in this respect).

TURKEY

Kaos GL was fully registered in 2005. From then onwards, we could start to build a long term strategy. We realised from the start that we would strongly benefit from having a pivotal annual focus to build this strategy on, and construct our visibility. The International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia provided the ideal framework for us, because in Turkey, violence is our biggest issue, and also not least because the underpinning political message on the fact that homosexuality is not an illness is particularly relevant in the Turkish context: you might remember that Selma Aliye Kavaf, the Minister for Women and Family, said in 2010 a few weeks before IDAHO that she "believes homosexuality is a biological disorder, a disease that needs treatment."

So we decided to make IDAHO the backbone of our annual planning, with Human Rights Day on December 10th, Women's Day on March 8th and Labour day on May 1st being important landmarks, but conceived as stepping stones towards IDAHO.

During the mid-May week, our mobilisation culminates in a series of events, which we label "International Meeting Against Homophobia". The meeting includes academic conferences, which bring together activists and intellectual from several countries. But it also always culminates with a street demonstration, with hundreds of participants.

The IDAHO march is somewhat different. We march barely a kilometre away from the parliament in the capital city, with our casual clothes and as "casual" people, in alliance with various other social groups in the country and every year we have a lot of straight people joining the march.

The Day has definitely become part of our 'brand' in Turkey. We always use the IDAHO logo and have created a specific official webpage for IDAHO, as well as official IDAHO pages in the Kaos GL Magazine. Activities are now being conducted in 16 cities across the country, and IDAHO is strongly associated with Kaos GL. IDAHO really helped build our organisational identity. The international dimension and aura of the Day has been useful to attract personalities like Judith Butler in 2010, which in turn is helpful to ensure media coverage and policy attention, as well as the participation of an enormous variety of audience which is almost impossible to gather under one roof in Turkey's polarized reality.

The Day is actually one of the very main occasions on which we get any attention at all from policy makers, and the "International Meeting Against Homophobia" is attended by several Members of Parliament. Unfortunately, non LGBT-specific Human Rights organizations are still very reluctant to take up the defence of sexual and gender minorities, so we hope that the increasing recognition that the Day is getting from non-LGBT stakeholders will help to overcome this attitude and that the support that the Day gets will act as a 'gauge' to indicate the levels of worldwide support to Human Rights for sexual and gender minorities.

One of the added values of the Day is that it allows us to access information on activities in other countries and we actually drew inspiration from actions in France, Cuba or Ireland. This is also very useful for exchanges within the Regional Network Against Homophobia, which we are facilitating since 2010. For example, Lebanon's experience in dealing with the Day has given other organizations in the network a lot of interesting elements to reflect on. The fact that the Day is a common context for everyone makes these good-practice exchanges much more relevant.



UK

The International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, which we chose here (in Brighton & Hove) to re-name IDAHOBIT since last year (adding a reference to Bisexuals, Intersex and Transgender People), has provided us since the beginning with a good opportunity for action.

For historical reasons, there was a situation of mistrust between the Council and the LGBTI community. IDAHO provided one instrument to mend this (along with other avenues of reengagement), as it was a new initiative that had no history of its own in our context, and it provided fresh ground to start new relationships, to build trust and encourage confidence.

But the Day has a very high “formal” connotation in the UK, with initiatives from authorities at all levels, up to the Ministers. So there was a danger that it could have been perceived at local level as an instrument of the Council to pay lip-service to the LGBTI community. So, it was important for us to make sure that from the beginning, IDAHO was a moment that was driven by the community and fully supported by the statutory authorities. Every year, when we support IDAHO-related activities, we make sure that the organisations have the final say and that the politicians who attend the events (every year, all political parties send representatives to the events) do so in support of the LGBTI community.

And as we, the LGBT people working in the Council on supporting the community are also driving the Council’s LGBTI workers Forum, we also celebrate IDAHOBIT as part of the community. So the IDAHOBIT, as an event which is both ‘official’ and ‘community’, offers a good bridge between different stakeholders, who are were often in a conflict relationship, this is one of many bridges where understanding can deepen and other minority communities – such as Black and Minority Ethnic groups or disabled communities, can be engaged with, as we often all encounter the same prejudice and harassments.

Contrary to other initiatives that impose a discourse or an agenda, the Day focuses on the least common denominator, the fight against violence and hatred, which everybody can relate to, and which lead to a very large range of organisations to see this Day as a relevant moment for action since its very beginning.

Following several initiatives from MPs and Ministers over the years, the Day got more visibility and political importance and each year there are now several Ministers making public statements on IDAHO, which in turn triggers more awareness and interest from other stakeholders. This capacity of the Day to attract this kind of official attention is probably a determining factor for initiatives like the one taken each year by the Greater Manchester Area Police Force, which has the rainbow flag flown on all police stations.

This ‘formal’ identity of the Day probably also contributes to the fact that there is a growing interest from Companies to use the Day to address homo/transphobia within their Human Resources policies. Last year, the Liverpool based « Homotopia project » managed to get fifty companies and organisations in Merseyside to fly the rainbow flag. Again, the Day allows to have a joint focus moment and an easy messaging. Organisations could probably be more proactive in teaming up with companies over specific ‘IDAHO’ partnerships.

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