

## **“Anti-propaganda Laws” target homosexuals and other sexual minorities**

**By Dr Mark Barwick, *Human Rights Without Frontiers***

HRWF (10.06.2013) - MEP Michael Cashman, Chair of the LGBT Intergroup in the European Parliament, organised a hearing on “anti-propaganda laws” which are being promoted in some European countries, targeting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) persons and tightening censorship of information concerning sexual minorities.

Andrew Smith of Article 19 outlined the restrictive legislation. Article 19 is a London-based organisation named for the provision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which guarantees the freedom of opinion and expression. Smith observed that laws banning “homosexual propaganda” are a direct affront to the freedom of expression and are already having a negative impact. The laws have been adopted in several regions of the Russian Federation, where a campaign in favour of “traditional values” has been promoted by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Such repressive measures are a growing and worrisome trend that is influencing other legislatures in the region, notably those of Ukraine, Moldova, Lithuania and Hungary. The difficulty is not only in the discriminatory nature of these laws but also in the arbitrary nature with which they are applied. Evelyne Paradis of ILGA-Europe observed that the laws themselves are often ambiguous, leaving their application open to local interpretation and random enforcement. This environment widens the space for the homophobic discourse of far-right groups and legitimises violence against LGBT people.

Dmitri Bartenev of the International Commission of Jurists likewise condemned the “homosexual propaganda” laws, calling them blatant discrimination which violates basic freedoms that are protected by international conventions. Anastasia Smirnova of the Russian LGBT Network and Stanislav Mishchenko of the Ukrainian LGBT Council reported on incidents of violence and social hostility in their respective countries as a result of the new laws.

Concluding remarks were offered by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis. Lambrinidis noted the positive direction within the European Union for the protection of LGBT rights, including the adoption of the LGTB guidelines which advises EU delegations on how to deal with such issues. However, the current trend in some Central and Eastern European countries is indeed problematic, he said, and needs to be addressed in a decisive manner. Various country situations should be monitored carefully, concerns raised to the appropriate body and EU officials should engage in constructive dialogue to promote social change and protection for LGBT people.