

# MARCH FOR TOLERANCE RESULTS IN VIOLENCE

On May 6-9, the Cracow branch of *Campaign against Homophobia (Kampania Przeciw Homofobii, KPH)*, organised the Days of Culture for Tolerance in Krakow. The festival programme included parties, lectures, poetry evenings, a visit of LGBT activists to the former concentration camp in Auschwitz, and other events. But it was the march in support of LGBT rights that stirred unrest and gave rise to protests of local right-wing politicians and dogmatically anti-gay organizations, which evolved into violent riots lasting until the evening on that day. ILGA-Europe received a number of reports from KPH activists and the participants.

"We were expecting about 300 people to march. We thought people would be too scared

to show up after all the fuss in the media. Instead, a river of 1,500 people chanting tolerance and singing, marched in support of democracy, freedom of speech and LGBT rights", said Sylwester Gumienny, the KPH's secretary.

The organisers had been expecting a counter-demonstration of the Pan-Polish Youth, and groups of football supporters and hooligans promised they would come to oppose the parade. Hence, the peaceful march for tolerance had to be escorted by the police, who changed the route of the march wherever Pan-Polish Youth organised blockades.

Malgosia, who also walked in it, told us that before the festival there had been threats from extreme

right-wing organizations. "I saw a lot of leaflets and posters saying 'Let's kick homosexuals out of Cracow', and similar, more offensive slogans. Many participants were really scared." Some organisers had received text messages on their phones, saying: "Show up at the Old Town, and you will die."

When the parade approached the Wawel Castle, where it was to end, they met the protesters, who threw eggs, stones, and even bottles at them. "They appeared to be well organised. The police prevented us from any direct contact with them. We acted calmly. We didn't want anyone to get provoked to retaliate. We threw flowers at our opponents and chanted peaceful phrases in their direction. They only got more

aggressive. We couldn't move any further."

Finally, the police and the organisers agreed it would be best to tell people to disperse. But as small groups were moving back towards the Old Town square via the only way out – a nearby park – they were chased by neo-Nazi youth. "We stormed into the square trying to find a place to hide, but the restaurant owners refused to let us in," recalled Sylwester. "So we scattered throughout the square, and blended into the crowd not knowing where to go and what to do next, completely helpless and horrified."

The square was crowded with people – strolling or sitting at outdoor cafes and restaurants. When the police