

Gay rights parade

# Mayor provokes a pride protest

**There'll be no gay parade through the streets of Warsaw – at least if the mayor has anything to say about it**

Warsaw mayor Lech Kaczyński has attracted international ire after he put the skids on plans to hold a gay pride parade in the city for the second time

Kaczyński, a presidential candidate in the imminent elections, said: "I am for tolerance but am against propagating gay orientation." He said that there was no need for the parade as there is no homophobia in Poland, and therefore no need to promote homosexuality.

He also said that the parade could not be held on June 11, as originally planned, as this clashed with plans to unveil a memorial to General Stefan Rowecki, a Polish underground leader during the Nazi occupation of Poland. Kaczyński blasted plans to

hold a gay parade on this day as "a joke."

This has provoked howls of protest in Poland and abroad. A letter from scholars of Polish history, culture and language from mainly the US and Europe printed in daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* lambasted the mayor and made reference to Poland's tradition of fighting for human and civil rights, which was embodied in the anti-communist Solidarity movement. "Such a clear violation of the right to free assembly towards the organizers of the Warsaw Equality Parade awakens in us deep concern and disapproval," it said.

Kaczynski's office declined to comment on the criticism and a decision on the parade was to be taken over the weekend.

The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) criticized Kaczyński's reluctance to permit the march, saying it is an ominous sign for

homosexuals if the right-wing Law and Justice, the mayor's party, gets into government.

"We fear the dark night for gays and lesbians," ILGA said.

The human-rights group Helsinki Foundation says there is no basis in law to ban the march on grounds of Kaczyński's opinion of the parade.

This is not the first time the mayor has clashed with the pink army. Last year, he banned the fourth Equality Parade over fears that a fight would break out between gay pride marchers and opponents who had planned a counter-demonstration. This only provoked matters, and around 500 supporters of gay and lesbian rights descended on City Hall, chanting "homophobe" outside the mayor's window.

Tomasz Baczkowski, the leader of the group behind the march, Equality Foundation, said it planned to appeal the ban to regional authorities. (*Reuters*)

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