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Latvia caves in to gay rights

The Advocate

Friday 22 September, 2006 10:22 | More from this date | Today's headlines

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Discrimination in the workplace against gay men and lesbians has been banned by lawmakers in Latvia, reversing an earlier decision that earned them sharp criticism at home and abroad, Agence France-Presse reports.

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Forty-six of the 84 lawmakers present in the 100-seat parliament for the session voted on Thursday in favour of an amendment to impose the ban, 35 against, and three abstained.

sex talk

The decision reverses a vote in June which failed to endorse a ban on discrimination against employees drawn from sexual minorities, drawing stinging attacks not only from human rights and gay and lesbian groups but also from Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis and President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, says AFP.

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Kalvitis slammed parliamentarians' alleged disregard for serious issues and accused them of intolerance, while Vike-Freiberga vetoed the legislation, telling parliament to review it to ensure that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is clearly banned in Latvia.

The European Union commissioner for employment, social affairs, and equal opportunities, Vladimir Spila, also expressed concern. Janis Smits, from the centrist Latvia First Party, voted against the amendment, both in June and on Thursday.

"This ban means that a small, marginal group will be protected, while other groups of normal people can still be discriminated against," Smits, whose party claims to support Christian and family values, told AFP.

In the first vote on the amendment in June, Smits had said that including a ban on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation would "open the floodgates to pederasty, lesbianism, pedophilia, zoophilia, and will legalise other pathologies." (The Advocate)

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