



EL*C - EuroCentralAsian Lesbian*Community
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Brussels, 24 April 2020

Ms Helena Dalli
Commissioner for Equality
European Commission
200 Rue de la Loi, Berlaymont, 1049, Brussels
[Letter sent via email]

Dear Commissioner Dalli,

We are writing to you in our capacity as Co-Chairs of the EuroCentralAsian Lesbian* Community (EL*C) on the occasion of the **International Lesbian Visibility Day on the 26th of April**. EL*C is a feminist network of lesbian organisations and lesbian, bisexual and trans women, non-binary and intersex persons from over 50 countries of Europe and Central Asia. EL*C was founded in 2017 with the aim to improve the lives of lesbians and (re)build the lesbian movement. As such, EL*C strives to be a representative and powerful voice of the lesbian movements in Europe and Central Asia. In this letter, the term “lesbian” includes all non-heterosexual LGBTIQ women, unless otherwise specified, in line with EL*C’s policy to give visibility and empowerment through the use of the word lesbian.

As **(in)visibility remains a critical issue, and the root-cause of growing violence and discrimination towards lesbians** in the European Union, accession countries and beyond, we would welcome an opportunity to **meet with you**, online as a start, or in any other way convenient to you given the current situation, and **discuss** with you ways in which **future EU actions** can take on board the **fight against lesbophobia, gender-based violence, discrimination and stigma against lesbians**. We firmly believe that **your mandate as the first EU Equality Commissioner is a historic opportunity** to ensure that the needs of lesbians are addressed by the European Union, especially with regard to the Gender Equality and the LGBTI Strategies, and to reinforce engagement with lesbian led civil society, so as to increase representativity in decision making.

The **intersectional approach** that you have chosen in designing the European Commission’s strategies on equality **is a fundamental step in building a more equal and inclusive European society**. An additional step is necessary in recognising the specific **intersectional position of lesbians as women and as part of the LGBTI community**, avoiding a “one-size-fits-all” approach that contributes to the marginalisation and invisibility of lesbians. It is fundamental to mention also that the levels of stigma multiply and intensify depending on other perceived or claimed social identities that a lesbian might embody, such as ‘gender identity’, ‘race,’ ‘class,’ or ‘ableness.’ For example, lesbians of color and black lesbians are exposed to misogyny, racism and lesbophobia in overlapping and mutually reinforcing ways.

In the current crisis caused by the COVID-19, **marginalised communities find themselves in particularly precarious situations**. EL*C is in contact with many lesbians across Europe, trapped in potentially dangerous situations due to the crisis, from young lesbians obliged to quarantine with their lesbophobic families, to older lesbians that cannot go out, do not have family on which to rely, and are provided food and medication by the local lesbian community. Lesbians are being fired by their employer, as a result to their families not being recognised as equal to heterosexual ones, or not recognised at all. We are also witnessing with great concern the recent attacks in Hungary and Poland against the trans community and against women's rights, specifically their sexual and reproductive rights. **These acts of violence demonstrate how the crisis is being instrumentalised**, in some contexts, **to roll back on the rights of minorities and on women's bodily autonomy**. Lesbian movements, often at the forefront of the fight for women and LGBTI rights, constitute an easy target for nationalist, far-right and anti-gender narratives. **We fear that**, even in countries, which are perceived as progressive, **the current crisis will result in the de-prioritisation of lesbian rights**, as it is happening in France with the postponing once again of the extension of access to IVF to lesbian couples and single mothers.

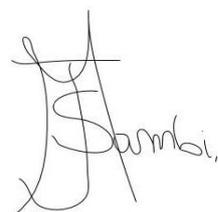
Due to lesbians' invisibility in the political discourse, in society and in research, **lesbians still remain extremely marginalized socially, economically and politically**. At the same time, **lesbian organisations and spaces find themselves especially deprived of funds and resources** and have been obliged to close down or are struggling to continue providing the increasingly indispensable services for the lesbian community. It is therefore **particularly timely that the Commission acts to empower and to improve the life of lesbians** in the European Union, in particular by ensuring that:

- The implementation of the **Gender Equality Strategy** guarantees that policies on gender-based violence and socio-economic equality are built, applied and evaluated **taking into consideration the needs of lesbians**;
- The upcoming **LGBTI Strategy** takes lesbians specifically into consideration, by **avoiding a "one-size-fits-all" approach** and by securing a **full coordination** with the other strategic frameworks on equality and non-discrimination. To guarantee this coordination, **the approval of this strategy by the end of the year is, therefore, fundamental**;
- **Data is properly collected** and **research is regularly financed** on the level of acceptance and status of lesbians in society, but also on their needs, as well as on the impact and assessment of existing and upcoming policies concerning the fundamental rights and freedoms of lesbians;
- **Adequate funding opportunities** are available for lesbian civil society organisations and that **lesbians** are explicitly recognised **as a target group** in funding priorities.

EL*C stands ready to further discuss further with you these recommendations, **to make sure that the work of the EU**, in general, and the **European Commission**, in particular, **ensures full protection and empowerment of lesbians** in the European Union, accession countries and beyond.

Yours sincerely,

Joëlle Sambu Nzeba
EL*C Co-Chair



Olena Shevchenko
EL*C Co-Chair

