Dear colleagues,

The protection of human rights and minorities forms the basis of our common European values, as established in the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights reads “the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.”

Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights states “any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.”

It goes without saying that this also applies to LGBTI people.

As a member of the Council of Europe and of the European Union, Poland is party to the Convention and has accepted to implement the rights and freedoms of the Charter.

Therefore, we express our concern about the development of the human rights situation in Poland regarding the adoption of discriminatory resolutions proclaiming municipalities as “LGBTI-free zones”. What’s more, the promotion of the Local Government Charter of the Rights of the Family, presented under the guise of “protecting family values and children”, also raises alarm as it is essentially another way of excluding other forms of living and formalises intolerance.

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According to the online Atlas of Hate, which tracks the adoption of discriminatory resolutions in Poland, more than 100 Polish local governments, including 5 voivodeships, have proclaimed themselves to be “free from LGBTI ideology” since the beginning of 2019. In addition to making the LGBTI community feel threatened, this has concrete implications for school activities and the distribution of public funds.

The EU Fundamental Rights Agency’s survey on experiences of LGBTI people in Europe, released on 14 May, found that in Poland intolerance has increased overall (68 percent of respondents). The path from divisive and hateful rhetoric shifts quickly to harassment and violence – we have already seen it happen to local councillors and mayors.

We are concerned about these troubling developments and wish to thank those Polish municipalities, counties and regions who have rejected or chosen not to introduce discriminatory projects or resolutions for their courage in defending our European values in these difficult circumstances. We want to encourage them to stay strong and know that you are an example and an inspiring model to others. To those who are being lobbied and pressured to introduce such resolutions or projects, we also encourage you to stay strong and true to our common European values of freedom and human rights.

To those who have embarked on a path towards exclusion and intolerance, it is never too late to rethink the decision.

Leaders of municipalities, counties and regions of Poland, we will not turn away from you and the challenges you are facing. Know and remember that you have friends and allies across Europe. We are listening and open for exchanges. We are watching developments and our hand remains extended to you in partnership and solidarity.

We also invite European municipalities and cities that have twinning cooperation in place with sister cities in Poland to take similar action.

Yours sincerely,

Frédéric Vallier
Secretary General, CEMR

Emil Broberg
Chair, CEMR Standing Committee for Equality