

Europe's soul is being tested in Budapest

As Hungarian authorities crack down on LGBTI rights, European mayors must stand united in defence of our shared values

By Femke Halsema, Mayor of Amsterdam; Haris Doukas, Mayor of Athens; and Jaume Collboni, Mayor of Barcelona

We, European Mayors, stand together in Budapest defending our civil rights and our freedom. When the Hungarian government bans Pride demonstrations and restricts the fundamental rights of LGBTI citizens, it forces all of us to confront a crucial question: what kind of Europe are we willing to defend?

The answer cannot be found in the comfort of our own cities, where rainbow flags fly freely and diversity is celebrated. It must be found here, in Budapest, where those same values are under direct assault.

For decades, Europe has been built on the promise of diversity and inclusion—a continent where differences are embraced as fundamental strengths. This vision of Europe as a haven for all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or origin, is not merely idealistic aspiration. It is the foundation upon which our democratic societies rest.

Yet today we witness systematic targeting of LGBTI communities and immigrants—groups that have become convenient scapegoats for populist rhetoric. In Hungary, laws restricting LGBTI content have created a climate of fear. Pride events face increasing restrictions. Young people are denied access to information about sexual and gender diversity.

These are not isolated policy decisions. They represent a fundamental challenge to European values.

Cities as democracy's guardians

As Mayors, we govern Europe's beating heart—places where people from different backgrounds live, work and build futures together. Our cities are where our principles and values become lived realities on our streets, in our schools and communities.

Amsterdam has long been a beacon for LGBTI rights, hosting one of the world's most vibrant Pride celebrations. Athens, democracy's birthplace, continues embracing its role as a welcoming harbour for those seeking refuge and opportunity. Barcelona stands as a proud

defender of human rights and cultural diversity, proving that regional identity and European values can coexist and strengthen each other.

But our work in our own cities is not enough. When fundamental rights are threatened anywhere in Europe, they are threatened in our hometowns too.

The restrictions imposed in Budapest today could become the template for restrictions in Paris, Rome or Berlin tomorrow.

Our presence in Budapest sends a clear message: European cities will not stand silent while democracy and human dignity are eroded. We come not to lecture or condemn, but to demonstrate that another Europe is possible—one where Pride marches fill streets with joy rather than fear, where young people can access the information and support they need, and where every citizen can live authentically and safely.

The Hungarian government may believe that by restricting demonstrations and limiting freedoms, it is protecting traditional values. We believe the opposite. True strength comes from embracing diversity, not suppressing it. Real security comes from building inclusive societies where everyone has a stake in our common future.

A call to action

What happens in Budapest matters for all Europe because it tests our collective commitment to the values we claim to share. Will we allow fear and division to define our continent's future? Or will we stand together for the Europe that has been a beacon of hope for generations—diverse, inclusive and free?

As Mayors of three of Europe's great cities, we call on fellow leaders across the continent to join us. Not just with words, but with actions. Host Pride events that welcome visitors from across Europe. Create exchange programmes bringing young people together across borders. Build networks of solidarity that make it impossible to isolate and target any community.

The Europe we believe in is not one of closed borders and silenced voices. It is a Europe where love is celebrated, not criminalised. It is a Europe worthy of the sacrifices made by previous generations to build it.

We stand in Budapest today because this is where that Europe's future is being decided. And we choose to fight for the Europe we believe in together.