



NISO POSITION PAPER

The Voice OUT campaigners, 70 students from Belgium, Estonia, Italy and the Netherlands, meeting in Brussels on the 1st and 2nd of October 2012:

1. Have received training with regard to LGBT issues, gender stereotypes, human rights and the role of the media in their respective countries, subsequent to which they organized campaigns in their schools and/or regions with respect to these issues;
2. Have exchanged ideas, views and experiences with regard to the topics mentioned above in Brussels on the 1st and 2nd of October 2012;
3. Have concluded that there is room for improvement in all of the participating countries with regard to the public view vis-à-vis sexual diversity, thereby increasing general tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity;
4. Therefore recommend that the following constructive steps are taken in the area of education, media and judicial issues.

With regard to EDUCATION:

We have noted that bullying, in the form of verbal and non-verbal aggression, as well as digital bullying, specifically by means of social media, takes on worrying forms. This then leads to the social exclusion of LGBT teachers and students who are literally set apart in a type of Apartheid based on sexual diversity.

The levels of bullying and exclusion depend on cultural and religious background and the dominant school culture, i.e. up to which extent does a school, as a mini-society as it were, deal with intolerance towards LGBT people. Overall the level of LGBT awareness amongst teachers and school leaders needs to be effectively improved, teachers either do not know how to react, or are judgmental, they convey their own intolerance in class. In certain countries sexual diversity is a taboo subject, its issues are entirely ignored by schools and teachers. This is the case for general education about LGBT itself, but also when the historical, literary or social context includes LGBT.



Within the prevailing youth cultures the words “gay” or “homo” have been ingrained as very common expletive descriptions, and anything associated with LGBT is seen in a very negative light.

To create a safer school environment we propose the following:

- Training for students with regard to gender stereotypes and bullying of LGBT teachers and students.
- Training for teachers with regard to gender stereotypes and bullying of LGBT colleagues and students, specifically in how to deal with LGBT issues at school.
- Educational material should propose non stereotypical representation of family and gender.
- Increased subsidies to LGBT associations to support their activities to raise awareness and tolerance in schools.

With regard to MEDIA:

We have noted that on the whole mainstream magazines and television there are differences between countries; in some cases media does not directly reinforce negative stereotyping, though this may be the case when LGBT people are presented in extreme stereotypical form. However, there is a definite indirect reinforcement of negative stereotyping. First of all the media emphasize an image of “normality” in which LGBT is either ignored entirely (think of advertising) or only vaguely referenced to (think of magazines aimed at the teen market). Either way, in their representation of average (family) life LGBT do not play a part of any significance as an alternative way of existing. Currently the media uses too many stereotypes which affect division and misunderstanding among (young) people and intensifies the levels of intolerance.

The media has a huge influence on public perception. It is a very important instrument of reaching the public, which leads to increasing awareness.

In order to adapt media portrayal of “normality” and use the media to reinforce acceptance and tolerance of sexual diversity, we recommend:

- Books, cartoons and films to propose non-stereotypical images of family and gender related matters.
- The financing of a long-term media campaign in which LGBT issues are discussed and tolerance and acceptance are encouraged. We think that the appointment of ‘ambassadors’, in the form of highly influential



celebrities from the world of music, sports and entertainment, would work well.

With regard to LAW:

We have noted that many EU countries have stated that while free speech is a cornerstone of democracy on a national and Pan-European level, the incitement to discrimination and violence can have serious direct and indirect consequences. Therefore, if a group is threatened, insulted or degraded due to race, national or ethnic origin, faith, sexual orientation or gender identity then this would fall under the category of hate speech, which in some countries is expressly forbidden. With regard to LGBT issues, this is very positive.

However, some countries with such laws in effect do not always uphold said laws, and other nations in the EU have not enacted similar laws.

We therefore recommend:

- That the EU encourages and stimulates states to either uphold laws against hate speech with respect to LGBT issues, or introduce said laws.

CONCLUSION

We would really appreciate it if you would appreciate the efforts we have gone to in order to exchange and discuss problems with regard to LGBT issues as well as to initiate solutions.

This is the society in which we live, work and will grow old, why should it not be a better place for everyone? It is our future.

We have a vision of a future in which differences unite us, in which differences become irrelevant. A future in which we don't add the word "gay" to café, literature, clubs, marriages. This because a marriage, for example, is a marriage regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of those marrying. In this vision people are not judged on whether they are LGBT or not, as this no longer makes a difference. People are accepted for who, and not what, they are. We are willing to fight for this. We have done so at our schools, in our countries and now in our European Union. Will you help us?

