



PREZYDENT MIASTA KRAKOWA
JACEK MAJCHROWSKI

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Justice Commission

Ms. Elisa Ferreira
Commissioner
Regional and Urban Policy Commission

Esteemed Vice-President, Esteemed Commissioners,

Human rights constitute a fundamental value in any democracy. Unfortunately, in recent months, respect for essential rights in our country has been significantly disrupted. The most glaring example of the disruption are the initiatives of certain Polish local authorities aimed against the LGBT+ community. Among the most flagrant expression of such homophobic sentiment is the introduction of *LGBT-free zones* by some municipalities and regions of our country including, sadly, Małopolska.

As Mayor of Małopolska's capital – Kraków, I want to strongly emphasise that Kraków has always been and will remain a city proud of its diverse nature. Solidarity, tolerance and respect for the rights of every member of our community constitute the spiritual heritage of our city, no less important than history or culture. We wish to base Kraków's future on this particular spirit of community.

This is why no zone of exclusion has been, nor ever will be, established in Kraków. What is more, in order to voice my objection to similar practices, in July 2020, I issued an address to Krakovians, stressing that we oppose hate speech and discrimination against LGBT+ people and will, above all, protect and uphold equal rights guaranteed by the Polish Constitution. *Kraków is home for all* is the main message of my address. I enclose its complete text with this letter.

I want to assure you, however, that the address is more than just empty words. A key tangible example of my stance is the establishment of the Equal Treatment Council in 2019. The body brings together representatives of universities, various associations and communities working for equality, as well as members of municipal authorities. The Council's task is to counteract all forms of discrimination and to dialogue with residents on the subject of human rights. In October 2020, I also appointed my Advisor for Equality Policy, which also demonstrates the important role these issues play in the city's policy. It is also worth emphasising the unanimity on this question presented by the municipal executive authorities and the Kraków City Council, which in April this year appealed to the Regional Assembly of the Małopolska Region for withdrawal from the declaration "opposing the introduction of LGBT ideology into local government communities". In its resolution the Kraków City Council "distances itself from this plainly discriminatory declaration, which stands in stark contradiction to the fundamental constitutional principle of equality". The City Hall and municipal institutions regularly engage in the organisation of various equality-focused events and projects, such as *Festiwal Maj Równości (May for Equality Festival)*. Other particularly noteworthy initiatives include: the comprehensive *Open Krakow* programme launched in 2016, Kraków's commitment with the *ICORN* programme providing asylum to persecuted artists and the *Scholars at Risk* network sheltering persecuted academics, or the awarding of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Sérgio Vieira de Mello Prize.

I do realise that social dialogue is of utmost importance in the implementation of such activities. Therefore, as part of our cooperation and financial support for the *Queerowy Maj* Association, we researched the situation of LGBT+ students in Kraków's secondary schools and analysed anti-discrimination policies in local educational institutions. Based on the research, we have prepared a set of recommendations aimed at improving the situation of students, in particular members of the LGBT+ community, in Kraków's schools. Another example of the city's cooperation with NGOs in this context was the *Hate Free Zone* social campaign, which aimed to raise popular awareness regarding the needs of LGBT+ people and to draw attention to a tolerant Kraków.

Apart from such concrete initiatives, Kraków also emphasised its openness in a symbolic, yet very visible way: on the World Coming Out Day, I decided to light up selected city buildings in rainbow colours.

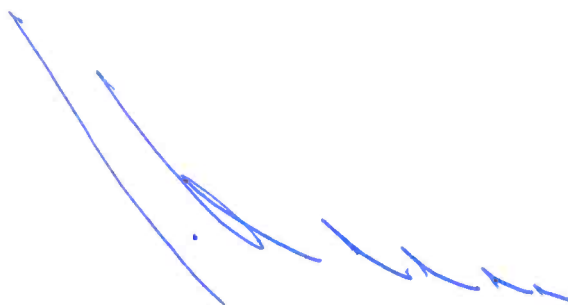
Krakow's efforts regarding human rights awareness have been noticed and appreciated by the international community. My address to Krakovians and other initiatives met with a very positive response from our partner cities, as evidenced by letters of congratulations from major European metropolises: Budapest, Frankfurt am Main, Leipzig or Nuremberg. Our policy of openness and tolerance also encouraged a group of Bundestag members to visit Kraków in October 2020. A nice - and unambiguous - accent introducing the topic of our talks was a decorative *ikebana* in rainbow colours, which was immortalised on the German parliamentarians' social media.

The most explicit mark of appreciation, materialised last December when Kraków was selected to host the launch of the annual *Global Report on Freedom of LGBT+ Artistic Expression*, produced by *Freemuse*, an international NGO working for human rights, freedom of speech, artistic expression, and cultural diversity.

In May this year, during an international conference on LGBT+ rights hosted by the authorities of Paris, I also strongly stressed Kraków's commitment to equality policy. In order to voice my objection to the ongoing discriminatory practices against the LGBT+ community, this year for the first time I granted my honorary patronage to the local Equality March, which passed through the streets of Kraków on 14 August.

I want to clearly accentuate that Kraków's local government manages its affairs independently, taking action and solving problems with a view to meeting the needs of all residents. The autonomy allows the city authorities to make independent decisions without supervision of regional authorities. Our fight against homophobia and related hate speech is a perfect example of the independence. Our stance is based on the conviction that only open communities which stand in solidarity with each other are capable of shaping a solid foundation for a better, more democratic and more equal Europe and for a safer world.

I trust that Kraków's attitude coincides with EU policy and so I hope our practices and policies will be assessed individually and independently of the steps taken by the authorities of the Małopolska Region. I believe that the people of Kraków should not bear the consequences of decisions, mainly of a political nature, taken by the regional authorities, which discriminate against the LGBT+ community. To exclude our city from the opportunity to benefit from EU funds and other instruments would be highly unfair to us, and could shake our conviction in European Union's support to our efforts focused on promoting openness and mutual respect.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping, sweeping strokes that form a cursive, somewhat abstract shape.

Kraków, September 2021

CC:

1/ Mr. Normunds Popens, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General of Regional and Urban Policy

2/ Ms. Maria Galewska, Teamleader Communication and Major Projects, Directorate-General of Regional and Urban Policy