



LYMEC Digital Assembly Outcomes Report

(Hybrid - Online and Rome, Italy)

3 February 2024

'Non dica gay' - Protection of LGBTQIA+ rights in Italy and beyond

On Saturday, 3 February 2024, the LYMEC Bureau together with the **Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom - European Dialogue** gathered in Rome, Italy, to facilitate this year's **first Digital Assembly**. The event occurred in a hybrid format, with young liberal representatives from all over Europe connecting to discuss the pressing question of the LGBT rights in Italy. Facilitated by LYMEC Project Officer **Chiara Liguori** and **Gréta Kiss**, Programme Manager at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom - European Dialogue, the event featured multiple guest speakers, including:

- **Marco Mariani**, European Affairs Director of the Luigi Einaudi Foundation
- **Barbara Masini**, Member of the Italian Senate - Azione Party
- **Yuri Guaiana**, President of LGBTI Liberals of Europe and International Officer +Europa
- **Luis Cano**, Founder and Manager of the Rainbow Platform

After a brief set of introductory remarks, **Dan-Aria Sucuri**, LYMEC President, invited **Marco Mariani** to kick off the hybrid session with an opening speech. In his brief remarks, Mr Mariani started by giving a detailed overview of the Luigi Einaudi Foundation's scholarly work researching and promoting the core liberal values of liberty and freedom. As part of this, he referenced several publications that the foundation has produced in partnership with the European Liberal Forum on the issue of LGBTI rights. This includes a 2021 publication titled [*'Religions and LGBTI rights: God is not a trump card'*](#) and a 2022 paper on [*'LGBT+ Rights in Eastern Europe'*](#).

Central to his remarks was the notion that, sadly, while much of the world has advanced on the issue of LGBTI rights, integrating this minority, the situation in Italy has, in many ways, "taken a turn for the worse... a turn back to outdated traditional values".

Italian Senator **Barbara Masini** then took the floor as she delivered an impassioned speech warning the audience about the growing dangers to civil rights in Italy, especially for minority groups such as the LGBTI community. To this end, Senator Masini unashamedly cautioned that "since this government took power... everything has shifted backwards".



Ending on a powerful note, Senator Masini concluded her remarks with a call to action for the participants in the room. "No society has fallen as a result of widening the provision of rights", she said, and "we must remind politicians" of this.

*Following these remarks, **Chiara Liguori** thanked the Senator and handed over to **Yuri Guaiana**, President of LGBTI Liberals of Europe, for his presentation.*

Mr Guaiana began by displaying a 'Rainbow Map' which showcased how each European country fared on indicators, including human rights and full equality. Honing in on Italy's distinct lower-end score, he stated that this was the combination of numerous factors that extended far beyond the much-trotted observation that, as the capital of Catholicism, it is religion alone that has made Italy so resistant to fully unlocking LGBT freedoms. Pointing to polls suggesting that 69% of Italians support same-sex marriages - for reference, the EU average is 72% - Mr Guaiana pointed to parental indicators and the notion of proximity to the issue as the key influencing factors. Presenting a vast array of carefully calibrated statistical analyses, he again pinned the blame on parents - stating that it is generational cognitive and open biases which have created a system whereby discrimination is so openly done and publicly acknowledged. According to Mr Guaiana, the lack of comprehensive sexual education in schools is a prime reason why this issue continues to exist.

Elaborating on this point, Mr Guaiana pointed to the lack of anti-discrimination legislation in Italy that prohibits the negative targeting and exclusion of LGBTI minorities. As part of this, he asserted that the only protections minority groups such as these have are confined to the work realm - a development which came shortly following a new EU directive banning workplace discrimination.

In his remarks, Mr Guaiana asserted that beyond harming the LGBTI community, recent legislative moves in Italy constitute a fundamental affront against the rights of children. These include a January 2023 Directive issued by the Meloni government instructing local authorities to discontinue the automatic transcription of foreign birth certificates of children born through surrogacy. A second Directive was later issued, which extended these guidelines to cases of children born following other artificial reproduction means. Finally, he proposed for the European elections together with his party +Europa to launch the *Rainbow liberal manifesto*.

Returning to his work at the Rainbow Platform, **Mr Luis Cano** replied in the affirmative, stating that while he acknowledges that there are various opposing conceptions of what should be covered under the term "Queer rights", he believed that this is where the lack of



adequate political representation is again an issue. Asserting that "it's a question of [party] culture", Mr Cano elaborated that to approach these issues in a meaningful way, political parties must be willing to look at the mirror and vow to diversify their structures to allow for new, younger voices - and those from minority backgrounds - to hold meaningful sway.

This prompted the moderator, **Gréta Kiss**, to ask a follow-up question about whether diversity quotas offer the solution to this. Seeking to skirt the traditional equality vs. equity debate, Mr Cano acknowledged that "we [as liberals] cannot promote one solution; as every case is individual and each party has its own DNA" and will therefore approach the issue differently. Contrasting the examples of Austria's NEOS and the Progressive Slovakia Party - one being a longstanding liberal party which does not practise quotas and the other being one which has for years. Following that, Mr Cano boldly proclaimed the following:

"Quotas will not address the challenges some who belong to intersectional backgrounds face, whereas local models of empowerment will"

Summarising his remarks, Mr Cano circled back to the basics and the guiding philosophy that has come to define the work of the Rainbow Platform. Here, he expanded on how, rather than seeking to work with likely candidates, the platform is focused on connecting with what he terms the "talent managers" (i.e. the individuals hidden in the backgrounds who approve the selection of candidates and see them rise up the ranks). Through lobbying (and training), he believes this is how parties can ensure that they promote accessible internal party structures that pave the way for more candidates to come forward, as well as ensure that marginalised communities feel that they are genuinely and adequately being listened to by parties even outside of elections season.

Fabian Grepper, a participant affiliated with our Swiss member organisation **Jungfreisinnige Schweiz**, raised an insightful point about how best to operate in the diversity promotion space at a time when it seems harder and harder to reconcile the left and right on the issue of Queer rights. He also brought up the point on the trust of the community for certain political forces and how liberals should work to gain that.

*Shortly after this detailed response, **Gréta Kiss** concluded the speaker event.*

Event Conclusions:

Overall, there was a lot of interaction and focused engagement throughout the main theme-based portion of the event. In this first part of the event, there was more of a back-to-back exchange of ideas that underscored the clear and present threat that the LGBTI



community faces in Italy and beyond. Here is where the discussion proved super interesting - not only were participants taken through an analytic tour of the situation on the ground in Europe concerning the state of LGBTI rights in Europe, but participants were guided through the more mainstream challenges and barriers that face young LGBTI individuals who aspire to become candidates even within the liberal political party bubble.

With expert interventions from inspiring figures, participants were introduced to the tools and advocacy methods that already exist and are out there to help combat both of these challenges by boosting LGBTI representation, disabling claims that minority candidates stand a bigger chance of losing and more generally making them the playing field more aware of the barriers that continue to exist.

The focus on the normative, the personal case studies and the unfiltered opinions of the speakers made for a refreshingly open discussion. This created a cosy ambience where - although most participants appeared to have their questions answered by the speaker's fantastic presentations - those that had difficult questions, including on heated topics such as the issue of whether quotas should be introduced to guarantee minority representation, felt comfortable doing so.

This energy naturally progressed into the second half of the Digital Assembly, where members once again showed their strong passions for this subject. It is worth noting that we had over 75 participants - a sign of how much interest this session brought but also how well this event was presented and advertised to our membership.

We want to thank the **Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom - European Dialogue** for the opportunity to co-organise this Digital Assembly event and for helping to make it the success it was. The insights gathered during the event and the main messages shared as an outcome will be used further in the coming weeks on social media and within our organisation ahead of the Spring Electoral Congress in Brussels, Belgium.

On behalf of LYMEC,

Dan-Aria Sucuri
LYMEC President