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EU leaders demand answers from Kyrgyz President over anti-LGBTI, anti-NGO bills

EP LGBTI Intergroup (01.04.2015) - During an official visit by Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev last week, EU leaders have sought reassurances over pending bills seeking to limit the rights of LGBTI people and civil society in general.

Kyrgyzstan is [considering](http://www.lgbt-ep.eu/press-releases/kyrgyz-parliament-considering-homophobic-anti-propaganda-law) an anti-LGBTI 'propaganda' bill, which would outlaw any public information 'aimed at forming positive attitudes toward non-traditional sexual relations' (<http://www.lgbt-ep.eu/press-releases/kyrgyz-parliament-considering-homophobic-anti-propaganda-law>) . Anyone found guilty under the proposals could be jailed for 12 months.

The Russian inspired 'foreign agents' bill would force nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) who receive funds from abroad to register as "foreign agents", subjecting them to additional reporting requirements.

This has led to fears that NGOs working to improve Human Rights in Kyrgyzstan could find themselves unable to operate

During the visit by the Kyrgyz President, EU leaders raised their concerns over the bills. Official communication from Mr Juncker emphasises he had "*underscored the link between EU support and the effective commitment to principles of respect of human rights and fundamental values.*"

Furthermore, he has "*urged President Atambaev not to endorse legislation violating human rights and weakening civil society.*"

European Parliament President Martin Schulz and European Council President Donald Tusk also raised the bills with President Atambaev.

This is the latest in a series of actions taken by the EU, after the European Parliament [urged](#) the Kyrgyz Parliament to reject the 'anti-propaganda' bill in January 2015.

[Daniele Viotti MEP](#), Co-President of the Intergroup on LGBTI Rights and part of the [Parliament's Delegation for relations with Kyrgyzstan](#), reacted: "By now we should all be aware of the poisonous consequences of these ill-informed and hateful bills: they produce hate and lead to impunity for violence and discrimination against minorities."

"This has no place in a country that has committed itself through its constitution to full protection of human and civil rights."

Similar Russian laws have led to an extreme clampdown on civil society, and a climate in which discrimination, hate speech and violence against LGBTI people go unpunished.

[Ian Duncan MEP](#), Vice-President of the Intergroup on LGBTI Rights added: "The situation in Kyrgystzan is desperate. You can't jail someone because of their sexual orientation or gender identity."

"The EU and its member states must be clear in their condemnation of this proposed discriminatory law."

Four Hizb ut-Tahrir members detained in Kyrgyzstan

Interfax (10.02.2015) - <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=11850> - Four members of the *Hizb ut-Tahrir* terrorist movement have been detained in northern Kyrgyzstan, a Kyrgyz Interior Ministry spokesman told *Interfax* on Tuesday.

The terrorist group's cell was active in the village of Ak-Terek, where the suspects were detained.

Fourteen books, 42 pamphlets, nine notebooks covered with writing, four DVDs promoting *Hizb ut-Tahrir* ideas and smooth-bore firearms owned without a permit were confiscated from them.

New law in Kyrgyzstan toughens penalties for bride kidnapping

Say No-Unite To End Violence Against Women (06.02.2013) - "Women should be beaten every day," says Kamilla,* repeating the grim words of her deceased sister's husband. At 19, he forcibly kidnapped her sister Kulipa for marriage. "The marriage was a nightmare," recalls Kamilla, trembling from the memory of her sister's suffering. The practice of bride kidnapping is widespread in Kyrgyzstan and is still considered by some as a valuable tradition.

"According to these 'traditions', when a Kyrgyz man wants to get married, he picks a bride and starts to arrange her kidnapping. This is a grave violation of human rights. Women often experience physical violence and rape. They feel humiliated and see themselves as property," explains 37-year-old Kamilla, a volunteer with the Women Support Center NGO.

"My sister experienced all of those terrible things and once she decided to finally divorce him, she was killed by her husband."

Her husband was subsequently convicted for murder and is serving a jail sentence.

But addressing the practice of bride-kidnapping remains a challenge. According to data by the NGO Women Support Centre, which works to eliminate violence against women, there are at least 11,800 cases of forced abduction of women and girls every year in Kyrgyzstan, with more than 2,000 of those girls reported being raped as well. **[1]**. Only one out of 700 cases is pursued by the justice sector, says Rimma Sultanova, an expert with the Women Support Centre, a statistic emblematic she says of the ineffective law

enforcement and justice sector. Only one in 1,500 cases of abduction results in a judicial sentence in Kyrgyzstan.[2]

In a step in the right direction, on 20 December 2012, the Parliament approved legislation toughening the penalty for the widely-practiced custom of bride-kidnapping. The President of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev, gave the amendment to the Criminal Code his official approval on 26 January 2013. Once published in early February, the new sentence for forcing women into marriage will now range up to 10 years. The offense was previously punishable by a maximum three-year prison term.

Even though Kyrgyzstan had ratified the UN **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** and other international treaties which prevent violence and discrimination against women and girls, years of advocacy and mobilization was needed for the legal reform.

"According to Article 36 of the Constitution, no marriage shall be registered without benevolent and mutual consent of the parties to the marriage," says Ainuru Altybaeva, a Member of Parliament in the Kyrgyz Republic who initiated amendments to Article 155 of the Penal Code, which increase penalties for "kidnapping a woman to marry her against her will."

Ms. Altybaeva and Kamilla, together with a wide range of NGOs, activists, artists, sportsmen football federation, media and the private sector are active participants of the UN Secretary-General's **UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign** in Kyrgyzstan, which is led by UN Women. A series of football matches, massive bicycle rides and a flag-installation activity designed to spread "155 slogans" were held in support of the amendments to Article 155 of the Criminal Code, to promote eradication of forced abduction of women.

Around 100 UNiTE activists took part in an activity to install coloured flags in the center of the capital of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek, on 10 December 2012. The 9800 red flags symbolize women who were kidnapped and married against their will, 2000 white flags symbolize the quantity of women suffering sexual violence and 7500 violet flags - women complained officially about domestic violence. Photo credit: UN Women/Eric Gourlan

"Speak out, tell your stories, don't be afraid – this is how you become the agent of change! You will break the chains, if you start fighting," says Kamilla. This is what she usually tells survivors who come to the Women Support Centre to seek help. She works there as a volunteer to assist others who faced challenges similar to that of her sister.

Advocacy efforts by civil society groups, supported by UN Women, led to the final approval of the legislation toughening the sanction for the broadly practiced custom of bride-kidnapping.

"It is an encouraging sign of the Kyrgyz Government's commitment towards the elimination of gender-based violence, and we shall certainly follow the implementation of the new article," said Sabine Machl, the UN Women Representative in Kyrgyzstan, after the President signed the changes to the law.

**The names of the women mentioned in this article have been changed in order to protect their identity.*
