

Message from the co-founders

Welcome to the 'East meets West World'!

Is this title to introduce the 2019 East meets West Newsletter a little too pushy? Not really, as one of the most striking changes we saw in 2019 was the fact that we started growing out of our traditional home market, the **Central & Eastern Europe (CEE)** region, and became much more involved in pan-European activities, mainly because of the fact that large and established European Organisations reached out to us, recognising the drive and potential of EmW such as the newly **established European LGBTI Chamber of Commerce (EGLCC)**. This made us proud and extra motivated.

Does it mean that we will lower the focus on **our home market, Central & Eastern Europe**? Not at all! Our partners in this part of Europe can count on our support and involvement, even more than before! In this Newsletter, you will get updates on the activities of the many organisations in this region we work with and will continue to do so. You will see that they have not lost any of their drive. Some booked quite amazing results while others continued to fight to reach their goals. They remain a key pillar of East meets West and they can count on our never decreasing support.

In addition to this, we will look back at the extensive list of all the projects, conferences and initiatives, we drove or were part of in 2019. We will reflect a little more on two highlights: the **2019 International East meets West Conference** and the take-off of our biggest project ever... **the European Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (EGLCC)**.

And East meets West would not be East meets West if we would not yet have some ambitious and concrete plans for the future! A major focus in 2020 will be to expand to new regions and become an organisation that really is a meeting place for the East and for the West. To support this important step forward, the two EmW co-founders will have each their specific target area. **Ludo**, now newly located near Brussels, will work on developing the **West European region** and the link to the **European Commission**. **Pavel**, located in Vienna, will look after Austria and the **Central and East European region** and additionally develop it further to the east, beyond CEE. But this will not change the strong partnership the two of us have... we will still be 'the dynamic duo'!

Anxious to know more about it all? Now sit down and enjoy reading the 2019 Pages.

Ludo & Pavel



How to navigate through EmW Pages?

As these EmW Pages want to cover LGBTI Social as well LGBTI Business topics, we added a small hint allowing you the navigate easily through the Pages:

And if you see a [link](#), it is not only safe to click. It will provide you more reading to the topic.

-  **EmW Social Topic**
-  **EmW Business Topic**

The 2019 East meets West Conference

Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling

It is a tradition that on each closing ceremony of the Olympic Games the acting President of the International Olympic Committee declares that those Olympic Games 'were the best ever'. We know that East meets West is just a small organisation, not comparable at all with the Olympic Games but we can say, without any false modesty, that the **5th International East meets West Conference** was the best ever!

In the fitting surroundings of the **So-Hotel** in **Vienna** we were happy to welcome **130 conference participants** from **28 countries**. The East meets West Conferences have a multiple function. It is of course our yearly signature event where we meet our network and renew acquaintances and this on a high professional level. It is also an occasion for LGBTI interested people to meet, get motivated and get inspired by each others successes. But for us its also a possibility to introduce topics that we consider important for the future of the LGBTI movement.

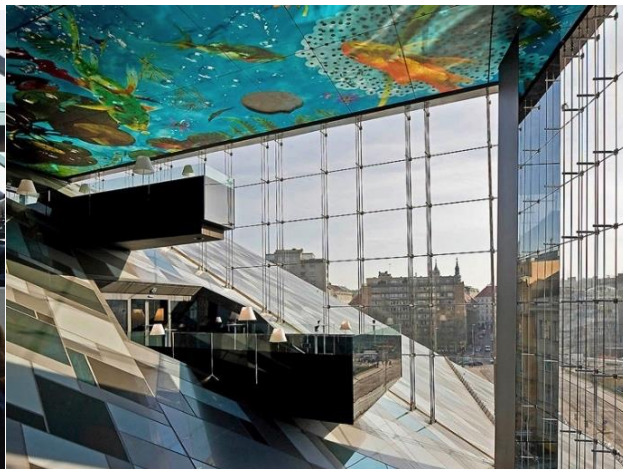
Our traditional 'a view from the East and a view from the West' offered once again a first hand report on the daily life of the local LGBTI community in less known countries like **Armenia** and **North Macedonia** and in countries we thought we knew well, like **Germany** and **Sweden**, but from which we got surprising deeper insights.

With the unique Conference theme '**Breaking through the Glass Ceiling**' we also introduced a burning topic, namely the awareness that the LGBTI community is one of the **economical players that are heavily underrepresented in the world of business**. The panellists that covered the various panels were clearly specialists in their own field of expertise and offered a wide but at the same time very concrete insight on the topic of LGBTI Businesses. Representatives from large international companies as well of small LGBTI owned and managed businesses made clear why it is crucial for entrepreneurs to '**come out in business**' and not only grow their business but also become strong role models in their community.

We were proud to have contributions from eminent international speakers:

- **Mayank Shah**, Founder and CEO at **MSDUK** (UK)
- **Jon Miller**, Founder of **Open for Business** and Partner at Brunswick (UK)
- **Irena Moozova**, Director for Equality at the **European Commission** (EU)

At the end of 2019 Conference we organised the first ever **LGBTI Supplier Diversity Match-making Session** in continental Europe. Although small, it was an important milestone and an innovative formula where corporate companies can get to know LGBTI owned and managed small businesses and discuss possible cooperation.



Did you miss the **2019 International East meets West Conference** and you are interested to participate on the 2020 Conference? Well, just keep following us on the social media or, unless already subscribed to hear from us, sign-up for East meets West news on www.eastmeetswest.eu and plan your participation!

Useful links

Conference Program, Documents

<http://eastmeetswest.eu/2019EmWConference.php>

<http://www.eastmeetswest.eu/2019Conference.pdf>

The 2019 Highlights

A New Star Was Born

● We, as **East meets West**, wanted more and more to focus our activities on supporting and driving **LGBTI Businesses** in Central & Eastern Europe, but we were looking for the right concept. We met the existing partners, the LGBTI Chambers of Commerce of **Scandinavia** and **Italy**, and we decided to join forces and created a joined statement called the "**Vienna Declaration on LGBTI Businesses**". Perhaps some of you remember this announcement back in 2018. We are very proud to share that at the 2019 East meets West Conference we officially launched the **EGLCC, The European Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce**, the umbrella organisation for locally established LGBTI Chambers in Europe. In fact, the EGLCC wants to bring to each European country, in the East and in the West, an active LGBTI Chamber of Commerce. So you see, not each great idea starts in a garage like it was the case of Apple. Some, like the EGLCC, got their inspiration from an LGBTI Conference during the Pride.

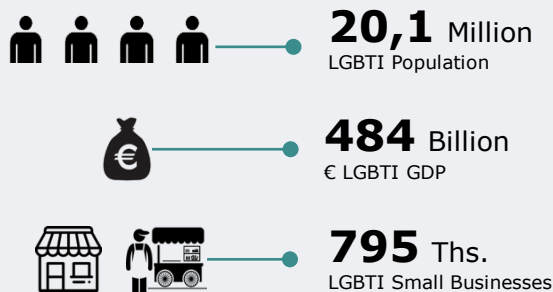
The **EGLCC** promotes the growth of **LGBTI Business in Europe** through:

- educating the wide public on the **economical impact** of LGBTI Diversity & Inclusion
- supporting **LGBTI business owners to grow** and discover new business **opportunities**, facilitating business networking and best practice sharing through local and international events
- introducing in Europe and in our LGBTI network the relatively unknown concept of **Supplier Diversity**, incl. common approach to registration and certification
- connecting **LGBTI Employee Resource Groups** (ERGs) of regional businesses

In 2019, EGLCC issued **standards for self-registration** of LGBTI owned and managed businesses and which were adapted by European chambers, incl. **East meets West**. Next on the agenda is to work on **European LGBTI certification standards** (exp. launch Q1/2020).



The **economical** significance of the current EGLCC region (excluding Russia)



The EU Platform of Diversity Charters made it to Vienna

● East meets West had the great privilege to co-organise on October 25th this year's annual expert seminar in Vienna. Themed '**LGBTI inclusive workplaces**', this successful event offered the participants insights and best practices to develop further their engagement from signing the **#EUCharters** and it confirmed the importance of the **EU Diversity** efforts as key driver for LGBTI inclusive workplaces. A very international and interested audience participated actively on the different panel discussions, covering very relevant topics such as the best way employers can support #LGBTI employees in the workplace, the rights and place in the labour market of Trans, Non-Binary and Intersex population and the role of leadership for creating a more diverse business.



Useful links

The European LGBTI Chamber of Commerce (**EGGCC**)
<http://www.eglcc.eu>

The EU Platform of **Diversity Charters**
<https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/tackling-discrimination>

The 2019 Highlights

Returning to Lithuania

● **East meets West** and **EGLCC** entered in 2019 into a very good cooperation with the **Lithuanian Diversity Charter**. But when in June 2019 Pavel for the first time walked down the streets of **Vilnius**, the **Lithuanian** capital, he did not know he would be back in just three months. Perhaps he must have touched one of the local statues. These long-held traditions among tourists are said to bring good fortune and a swift return to the city...

Launched only on October 3rd 2018, the Lithuanian Diversity Charter is one of the youngest. Nevertheless, the great work of the local DDG (**Diversity Development Group**) team got soon the attention of the many companies operating in Lithuania. By today, the charter was signed by over 40 companies. One of the DDG activities is to bring foreign experts to Lithuania to share their experiences and help accelerating the Diversity & Inclusion journey.

East meets West was invited to join on June 6th the **Baltic Pride HR Conference** and the panel hosted by Lithuanian Diversity Charter. The Audience could have a closer look at how companies in the West are ensuring diversity in the workplace through the application of different approaches, such as the opportunity to learn how businesses are developing strategic thinking on inclusive working environments. A deep-dive best-practice workshop followed on June 7th and hosted by **Telia** in their K26 center.

The 2nd time East meets West spoke in Vilnius was in September at the **1st Annual Conference of the Lithuanian Diversity Charter**. Accompanied by [Joanna Wootten](#), by running a workshop on 'The space for inclusive and diverse supply chain' we were able to educate the audience and also convince to consider including it in their local business practices.



Two Sessions at The 2019 OPEN Conference

● **East meets West** and **EGLCC** contributed to the success of the November 6-7th 2019 OPEN Conference in Budapest. On the 1st Conference day, key Diversity and Inclusion topic owners of internationally renowned companies like Google, Microsoft, Citi Bank and Coca-Cola shared views and activities on how they have become real diverse companies and how they still have challenges to cope with. Ludo managed an international workshop on the fascinating but in Europe still quite unknown subject of **Supplier Diversity**.

Unless you know..., we also have the competence on **LGBTI ERGs (Employee Resource Groups)**. The 2nd Conference day Ludo shared in his **master class** on "Building Impactful Employee Networks" not only our own experience at **Raiffeisen Bank International AG** (EMBRACE LGBTI ERG) but also the insights we collected and verified over years.

This year's OPEN Conference had over 200 participants from 11 countries. 37 speakers, ranging from CEOs, executives, and leaders from various backgrounds, from 7 countries across shared their experiences, best practices and ideas. The first ever **OPEN Spotlight Awards** received 27 nominations, out of which 13 received recognitions.



Useful links

Diversity Development Group (running the **Lithuanian Diversity Charter**)
<http://www.diversitygroup.lt>

WeAreOpen (organising the annual **OPEN Conference**)
<http://weareopen.hu> <http://www.openconference.hu>

Germany Writes History

Introducing The German LGBTIQ* Business Chamber

On July 6th 2019, **The German LGBTIQ* Business Chamber (GGLBC)** was founded as part of a ceremony in the Cologne Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Minister of State for Europe in the Foreign Office, **Michael Roth**, spoke passionately about the importance of recognizing LGBTIQ* rights as human rights and the role the **GGLBC** will play in recognising and promoting these rights.

The German LGBTIQ* Business Chamber sees itself as a strategic partner not only for the LGBTIQ* -owned businesses, but for the entire **German economy**. The goal of GGLBC is to strengthen the financial, intellectual and social capital of the LGBTIQ* business world through support and promotion, while providing the German economy with a platform for networking with the LGBTIQ* business community.

Reducing discrimination in the world of work is not just a political statement but is now also recognised as a **determining economical factor**. On the stock exchanges, the 275 companies, which obtained a 100% score in the Solactive Global Gender Diversity Index in the period 2011-2016, outperformed the global stock index MSCI. In addition, scientific studies show that increasing the involvement of individual LGBTIQ* people and their perspectives in the enterprise, by creating a non-discriminatory environment, not only leads to greater identification of employees and suppliers of business enterprises, but also to a higher standard of innovation and productivity within the company itself.

The Key Aims of GGLBC:

- Promote a **non-discriminatory environment in the world of work** so as **educational work** in the field of diversity and LGBTIQ*
- Help to better understand and use the **economic and personal resources** available in and to LGBTIQ* spheres through events, training, workshops and publications
- Introduce a **Certification system** that allows companies, institutions and consumers to reliably identify whether the potential business partner is an LGBTIQ* company or an LGBTIQ*-inclusive company.
- Active **Advocacy** and policy
- Offer **networking** of LGBTIQ* companies with LGBTIQ* inclusive companies

GGLBC advocates for the LGBTIQ* and LGBTIQ*-inclusive businesses on all policy levels, provides acknowledged tools (e.g. certification, which provides a diverse supplier certification for LGBTIQ* led and/or LGBTIQ*-inclusive companies) and supports businesses with LGBTIQ* related issues and LGBTIQ* marketing.

The **GGLBC** is already the 4th organisation operating in Europe as an **LGBTI Chamber of Commerce** and is next to East meets West, **IGLBC** and **SGLCC**, another proud member of the **EGLCC**, the European umbrella organisation.

Mission:

Enhancing **economic well-being** and **opportunities** for the LGBTIQ* community by being an **advocate** and resource for LGBTIQ* and LGBTIQ*-inclusive businesses.



Useful links

The German LGBTIQ* Business Chamber (GGLBC)
<https://www.gglbc.de>
info@gglbc.de



LGBTI Businesses Owners

Coming Out in Business and Untapped Business Opportunities

Some people wonder why **East meets West** extended its original more **social** strategy with a more **LGBTI business** involvement. What brought us to such a move? Most of us will remember the times, not so long ago, that the status of the LGBTI people was improving constantly. We saw strong and efficient anti-discrimination laws being introduced and gay marriage in different variations became reality. We believed in a kind of **LGBTI Domino theory** where country after country would stop homo-phobic policies. But this hope turned out to be false as the domino blocks stopped falling. Not only did the number of LGBTI friendly countries come to a stand-still, but countries nearby us made a turn back introducing discriminating policies. Just look at countries like Hungary and Poland.

But it goes even further. We no longer see high level politicians and organisations make clear pro-LGBTI statements when visiting countries with a poor LGBTI agenda. Very often the risk of displeasing local governments and endangering economical deals is just too high. So should we answer this lack of institutional support by lowering our social ambitions in projects? Should we say to part of the LGBTI community to wait a little longer to get the respect they are entitled to? Should we tell them to accept legal discrimination and abuse until the bad weather passes. No, clearly not, but what can be a valid alternative?

East meets West is convinced the answer lies in the non-institutional environment, **the very powerful private sector**. Are we not all consumers, employees and even small or big share holders in businesses? We are convinced that as East meets West, we have a big role to play in this environment by **increasing the social acceptance of LGBTI people** in the **business world** and redefining the meaning of Corporate Social Responsibility. This is the underlying reason for our business focus, that is why we co-founded the **EGLCC** and with this the necessary tool for having **LGBTI owned and managed businesses** taking their rightful place in society, so as in business **supply chain**. In 2019, East meets West opened a [Self-registration](#) program, which proves that **'Coming Out' in business** pays off and brings yet untapped business opportunities.



Inspirational Role Models



Laco Hudec Šubrt founded in 2017 VecizVeci. He aims for changing how the world looks at used clothing. As a small Self-registered LGBTI Business he specialises in the manufacture of fashion and conference bags made of recycled materials, and this way he greatly contributes to sustainability. He was the 2019 NGLCC BizPitch

semi-finalist, but most importantly the author of our 2019 East meets West Conference goody-bags. Laco is well known also for his successful musical career, which includes starring in Cats, Rent, Dance of Vampire, Mamma Mia, Aida, Flashdance, Producers, Jesus Christ Superstar, Anything Goes.

www.vecizveci.cz #IWASASHIRT

Iago Romero Ogando is an architect, a postgraduate teacher at the School of Architecture in Madrid and an entrepreneur with a strong commitment to use high technology to face social challenges. He is a co-founder at **Urban Data Eye**, a start-up that uses the latest advances in Artificial Intelligence to help design better and inclusive public spaces for cities like Pittsburgh PA or Madrid. They are now part of TechStars, one of the most demanding and competitive acceleration programs in the world, where Iago demonstrates that diversity is one of the biggest strengths a company can hold.



<http://urbandataeye.com/>

Tamara Littleton is founder and CEO of **The Social Element**, a consultancy-led social media agency advising some of the world's biggest brands on how to use social to solve business challenges. She founded the company in 2002 before the explosion of social media with the ambition of challenging the conventional agency model; pioneering and building her global business (now 300+ strong) predominantly through a remote working model, that to this day is truly innovative in the agency market. In 2013,



co-founded Polpeo, a crisis simulation platform for brands and their agencies so they could prepare for how a crisis would affect them online. Tamara is a tech pioneer, a champion of the diversity, LGBTQ and female entrepreneurial agenda and passionate about keeping children safe online.

<https://thesocialelement.agency/>

Armin Kohlberger is a Personal Coach and Crossfit Trainer (CF-L3). He works in an Industry that is a lot frequented by members of the LGBT+ community. Meeting people from all different kinds and helping them to reach healthy goals he likes most. Armin's Career began at John Harris Fitness. Meanwhile he is self-employed since almost six years and offers a variety of personal and group trainings.



<http://www.arminkohlberger.at/>



Useful links

Self-registration for LGBTI owned and managed businesses (East meets West)

http://www.eastmeetswest.eu/registrations/EmW_EGLCC_SelfRegistration_PDF.pdf

Diversity & Inclusion in the Supply Chain

The Cornerstone of the East meets West Strategy

● In this newsletter, among other themes, we explained why East meets West focuses also on **LGBTI businesses** and what brought us to launch the EGLCC, **The European LGBTI Chamber of Commerce**. But you will increasingly hear us mentioning the concept of Diversity & Inclusion in a Supply Chain (**Supplier Diversity**), the cornerstone of our LGBTI business strategy. Supplier Diversity is a well developed concept in the USA, but in Europe it is still rather unknown. If you now wonder what it is, your curiosity is quite normal so get ready for a crash course on Supplier Diversity:

Diversity & Inclusion in a Business environment covers many topics like the well known **Workplace Inclusion**, but also the way a business works with their **suppliers** is a crucial topic. If a company wants to be diverse and inclusive, it also should follow a **divers and inclusive policy** when engaging with external suppliers.

Supplier Diversity:

The **pro-active sourcing** of products and services **from previously under-used suppliers**, which includes businesses owned by **minorities**, in order to reflect the demographics of the communities in which the business operates.



When we look closer at the part “minority owned businesses”, like **LGBTI owned & managed businesses**, as suppliers to larger companies, they are **clearly heavily underrepresented** in the general pool of suppliers. The same goes for e.g. women owned businesses or businesses owned and operated by ethnic minorities. Why is this so? Larger companies have so-called procurement teams that take care of the contacts with external product providers and to get in this list of usual providers is almost impossible for smaller companies. If we want to improve this, we need to **convince the large companies as well as government and public organisations** to be diverse in working with minority businesses and include these when selecting suppliers. But we also need to have the **smaller LGBTI owned and managed businesses to register** as candidates for cooperation with large businesses and government authorities.

LGBTI Chambers of Commerce and **LGBTI Business Networks** play an essential role in Supplier Diversity. They educate the wider public on Supplier Diversity, its rationales and benefits. By running a network of LGBTI owned and operated businesses they are their **advocates** and **promoters** and help **discovering untapped business opportunities**. Typically they offer “**self-registration**” (a self-declaration of LGBTI business ownership) and **certifications** (thorough assessment).

Links to Advocates for Minority Businesses in Europe

LGBTI Owned and Operated:

- **East meets West** (Self-registration in CEE Countries)
http://eastmeetswest.eu/registrations/EmW_EGLCC_SelfRegistration_PDF.pdf
- **GGLBC – German LGBTIQ* Business Chamber** (Self-registration in Germany)
<https://www.gglbc.de>
- **IGLBC – Italian GLBT Business Chamber** (Self-registration in Italy)
<https://www.iglbc.it>
- **SGLCC – Scandinavian LGBT Chamber of Commerce** (Self-registration in Scandinavia)
<https://www.sglcc.se>

Women Owned and Operated:

- **WEConnect International** (Self-registration offered globally and certification in over 45 countries incl. the UK, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands)
<https://www.weconnectinternational.org>

Ethnic Minorities:

- **MSDUK** (Self-registration and certification in the UK)
<http://www.msduk.org.uk>



Short news from the EmW Network

East meets West works in a region where the LGBTI topics touch many people in a variety of ways. Sometimes political or sometimes business, often social, but always very driven! Enjoy the news from our network and be amazed. For more information about country related news, feel free to contact us: info@eastmeetswest.eu.



North Macedonia

The status and the rights of **LGBTI persons** in North Macedonia slightly improved in 2019 by the adoption of the long awaited **Antidiscrimination Law** that now explicitly recognises and protects against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in all areas, including employment, access to healthcare, education, housing, etc. Even further, the Law on Primary Education was also this year amended, with explicitly protects against discrimination in the whole education system on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity.



The real 2019 highlight was the very first **Skopje Pride Parade** on June 29th, which gathered nearly 2.000 participants on the streets of the city centre. Ministers, parliamentarians, politicians, activists from all over the Balkan region and a number of allies, openly showcasing their support and solidarity. It also got significant media attention in the months of May and June, that resulted in most likely the biggest (and costless) media campaign the LGBTI movement in North Macedonia has had so far.



Ukraine

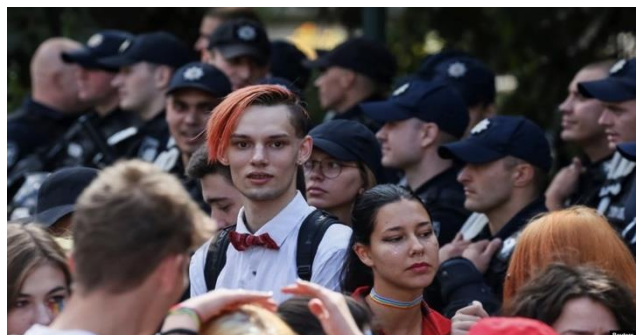
The **Ministry of Justice of Ukraine** developed for the first time a government research on human rights and business in Ukraine, the **National Baseline Assessment on Business**. And it is also the first time, that a Ministry got engaged in the LGBTI-organisation and included information about the LGBTI community in a statement & publications.

The **UN SOGI Independent Expert** on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz, visited the Ukraine and urged to promote tolerance and condemn hate. Read more in the [Press release](#).



Ukraine developed the first spotlight report on **Sustainable Development Goals** in the Ukraine and on LGBTI. It was presented in the UN headquarter in New York and included also the UN SOGI Independent Expert statement. Read more in the [SDGS Report](#).

Over 2.000 LGBTI and supporters participated in the Pride in the eastern Ukrainian city of **Kharkiv**, marking the city's first [Pride march](#). In the already established Pride March in the Ukrainian capital **Kiev**, local politicians and Western diplomats joined the larger crowd of 8.000 marching (compared to 5.000 a year ago). Nevertheless, there was still a tight security as far-right activists staged a counter-demonstration.





Austria

The Austrian capital **Vienna** hosted the **2019 EuroPride**. On a heated summer day, around 500.000 people joined the Pride March on Saturday, June 15th, which was an increase of 60 percent compared to the previous year. The more than 2 km long parade had 107 trucks and major attention of local and international businesses. The [Diplomats for Equality](#) showed again this year as one of the most shining groups!



Happy [#nationalcomingoutday!](#) We should not forget how important role models and allies are. **The Dutch Ambassador's Residency** in Vienna opened its doors and organised a panel talk to celebrate the October 11th coming out day. Such initiatives not only show how such events can make a difference, but mainly show how to be a great role-model among the diplomatic missions (not only) in Austria.



Same-sex marriage in Austria has been legal since January 1st 2019, following a decision of the Constitutional Court on December 4th 2017. The country has allowed registered partnerships (in German: Eingetragene Partnerschaft) since 1 January 2010.

Erste Bank was the proud host of the **2019 LGBT+ Business Forum**, the 7th edition of the event initiated by **IBM**. Erste Bank did (not only) by hosting the Forum promoted the sharing of good practices, but they continue being a great leader in Diversity & Inclusion in Austria and the whole CEE region. The audience was excited to receive a masterclass by **Ingrid Brodnig** on Social Media and hate speech against the LGBTI community. Ingrid is an Austrian journalist and publicist and who since April 2017 is the Austrian Digital Champion to EU. Perhaps 3 key learnings: 1. Reply with positive posts / promote positive posts, 2. Reach out to your own LGBTI Employee Resource Groups, they are a great resource, 3. Use this chance to provide a greater knowledge and understanding about the subject / situation and... use humor where possible.



BRich Austria celebrated the first year of its existence! By now BRich engages with more than 30 companies and their more than 100 ERG members. **BRich** is a joint initiative of the LGBTI Employee Resource Groups of Austrian companies and official entities, that want to connect LGBTI people and advocates in order to mutually support and inspire each other's networks across companies. BRich runs regular coming-togethers, organised by member companies. On such occasions the individual groups give updates of their LGBTI related activities, internal or external speakers offer insights on LGBTI Workplace trends and benefit from informal networking opportunities.





Czech Republic

● The **Czech Public Defender of Rights**, together with the **Prague Pride Association**, conducted one of the largest surveys among lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans people in the Czech Republic, and published the outcome on the 17th of May, IDAHOT Day. Read the [English summary report](#) of "Being LGBT+ in the Czech Republic - Experiences of LGBT+ people with prejudices, discrimination, harassment and hate violence" or the [full report](#) in Czech. What needs to be mentioned is that it is the first time since 2007 that a **public authority** in Czech Republic worked on LGBTI topics and suggested measures for the public administration.

● There is still an on-going debate on **marriage equality in Czech Republic**. Even the second discussion of the amendment to the Civil Code (back in March 2019 which lasted over 3 hours) did not bring the wanted results. There were several demonstrations in support of the amendment, countless personalities spoke in support of marriage equality, 18 CEOs of large businesses signed an open letter to the Prime Minister and met with him personally. Nevertheless, the Czech Republic is currently the only country in the region discussing something very positive for LGBTI. Read more about '[Jsme Fér](#)' activities.

● Prague hosted the **23rd ILGA-Europe Annual Conference** and welcomed on October 23 - 26th over 600 LGBTI activists from all over Europe and Middle Asia.

● **Pride Business Forum**, the only platform in the Czech Republic that creates space for discussion on LGBTI equality in the workplace across corporations and companies, kept growing and by year-end had 26 members, which signed to principles of **LGBTI equality at the workplace**. The platform cooperates closely both with the public and the private sphere and provides managers and business professionals a unique opportunity to share experiences on issues of diversity in corporate environments. In addition to the annual Pride Business Forum conference, they organize smaller thematic workshops throughout the year.



Slovakia

● Over 50 attendees joined the "LGBT Professionals 2019 - LGBT Marketing What & Why" event organized by **Diversity PRO**, a Slovak-based association, in partnership with IBM and the Embassy of Canada. The event was held on July 17th 2019 in Bratislava during the **Bratislava Pride Week**. Speakers from IBM, Lenovo, Accenture, Vacuumlabs, Slovenska Sporitelna and Pontis Foundation shared their insight into their marketing campaigns in support of LGBTI Diversity & Inclusion within their company premises and in Slovakia.

● **Košice PRIDE** was established to increase the visibility of LGBTI people in the east of Slovakia and to give them a platform to get together and publicly stand up for their rights. They address the need to continue the visible presence of the LGBTI community in the region, develop the not-existing community infrastructure and also develop an active network of LGBTI organizations, activists such as LGBTI-friendly NGOs. How did 2019 go for them? **Košice PRIDE** organised over 15 events and their **Pride March** attended almost 1.000 people.



● The 9th year of the **Rainbow PRIDE Bratislava** festival took place on Saturday, July 20th. Although the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic decided not to give support to the festival this year, the organisers did an amazing job and brought more than 10.000 people to march through the streets of the Slovakian capital. It was great to see among other guests the Public Defender of Rights **Mária Patakyová** and the Mayor of Bratislava **Matúš Vallo**.

● There is a rising attention to LGBTI also from businesses in Slovakia. The Rainbow PRIDE brought more businesses to march than ever before. We saw **Accenture's** large logo on their Bratislava head-office featuring a rainbow sign. On IDAHOT, **Dell Slovakia** brought together a cross company-public for a panel on different aspects of LGBTI life - a journey from a small LGBTI coffee shop owner to the organizing of great LGBTI events, a touching insight on the challenging situation of transgender in daily Slovak life and the legal protection against discrimination and its psychological impact on victims of discrimination.



Poland



Established already back in 2015, the **Federacja Znaki Równości** is the first Polish federation that brings together organisations that act for the LGBTI community. The Federation was established by 8 foundations and associations that operate in Małopolska (Lesser Poland region), Silesia and throughout Poland. The member organisations run various initiatives, from cultural and artistic ones, through legal representation and assistance, to sport and health-related initiatives. Although they differ from each other, they all have one common goal: to build an open and diverse society, free from any sort of discrimination, in particular from discrimination concerning sexuality and gender. Among its activities the Federation publishes **EQUALITY SIGNS**, a bulletin which brings to the public a snapshot of what is happening in Poland. Read [Issue #6](#) and there for instance an article on Krakow and how really open the city is.



○ A great example of the work of the Federation was the opening on June 15th 2019 of the **Krakow Equality Centre [DOM EQ](#)**, the only one of its kind in **Poland**. The official opening went off with a glittery bang, everyone cut the rainbow ribbon together, there was dancing and delicious treats. To mark the launch of the Centre they showed a cycle of paintings called "[Manifesto](#)" by **Marek Pavellek**, who was inspired by the issue of hate speech on the Internet. High culture went together with slightly less refined entertainment, resulting in a very successful unified whole.



Hungary



The 2019 edition (already the 3rd) of the **[OPEN Conference](#)** brought again together diversity specialists, marketing managers, HR professionals, media and advertising experts and leaders like CEOs and CFOs. Organized by **[WeAreOpen](#)**, a community initiative which aim is the WeAreOpen's mission, to show millions of people that openness is a value for organisations. Within two November conference days they welcomed over 200 people



● The annual OPEN Conference is not the only great work of the **WeAreOpen** community. This year, in preparation for **Budapest Pride**, the WeAreOpen declaration was signed by more than 100 company executives who are open minded and who believe this is why performance alone matters and who passed on the message to judge everyone in the workplace based solely on their actions.

● The **[Humen Travel Tourism Association](#)** launched a new program called **[Honeymoon in Budapest](#)**, which focuses on LGBTQ tourism. The project is unique in Hungary and aims to make Budapest an attractive destination for LGBTQ honeymooners by presenting the diverse opportunities offered by the capital. Leongs, Shinchi and Guzifer were the first to visit Budapest, and also the first couple to register for marriage in Taiwan which legalized same-sex marriage on May 17th 2019. Today, the Humen Travel Tourism Association has 25 members. Last year, the association created its LGBTQ-friendly tourism brand, **[Pink Budapest](#)**, which has a number of products, including an international publication, the sixty-page Pink Budapest Guide, which is published in 11 countries twice a year.





Slovenia

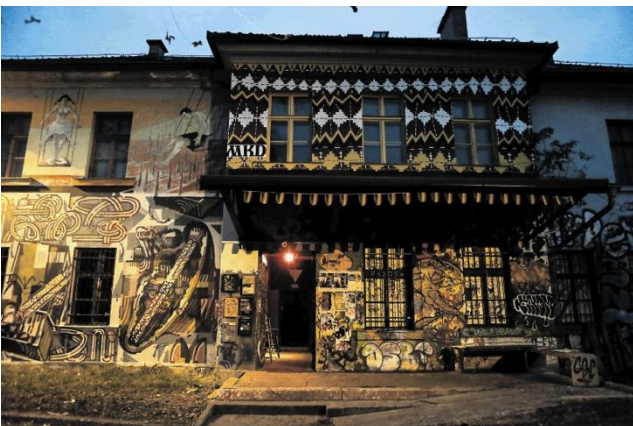
To tackle the issue of the underreporting of hate crimes in Slovenia, so as to monitor the state of violence against LGBTIQ community, **Legebitra** launched NiPrav.si. It is part of an international project **Call it Hate**, funded by the **European Commission**. On this website victims of anti-LGBTIQI discrimination and violence can report cases, get information about the reporting process, or seek support.



Legebitra published in June 2019 a **toolkit** [Rainbow in the pocket](#), the first manual in Slovenia for **youth workers** and **teachers** on LGBTIQ issues.



Slovenia was in 2019 confronted also with several negative happenings. On the morning of November 1st, one of Slovenia's few LGBT spaces, the **Tiffany Club in Ljubljana**, was violently **attacked** by a group. The door, windows and walls were smashed, and some of the employees inside were threatened with hateful shouting. The attackers fled by the time the police arrived. The community held a protest outside the club to show support. Prime Minister Marjan Šarc **condemned** the attack. Another attack happened in April 2019 when a **rock was thrown** to the window of LGBTIQ association **DIH**. In October a **gay person was beaten** in **Murska Sobota** and in November a **gay was thrown out** of club and threatened for being gay.



Bulgaria

2019 was the year which was in **Bulgaria** marked by ongoing discrimination and homophobia, coming very often from the parliamentarians and government officials. According to a local survey, there has been a regress in acceptance and empathy levels in the last 3 years in the Bulgarian society towards LGBTIQ people.

It was nevertheless also the year of the largest (in attendance) **Sofia Pride**. Co-organised by **GLAS**, it reached almost 7.000 people and received an unprecedented support from local celebrities, businesses and NGOs.

Two significant exhibitions are worth mentioning: **The Balkan Pride photo exhibit** in **Plovdiv**, the European 2019 Capital of Culture, met with protests from local politicians, but at the same time attracted a record number of visitors and gained an international media coverage which among others included 'The Guardian' and 'EuroNews'. The second exhibition **Homosoc** was based on a research around homosexuality during the Communism in Bulgaria. For the first time it brought to light important information about the regime's measures towards gay men, including doctors' attempts to cure homosexuality.

The only LGBTIQ community centre in the country, **The Rainbow Hub**, continues its great work in this rather challenging environment.



Work It OUT is a platform for domestic and international companies that are based in Bulgaria and that want to make their **workplaces more inclusive** and embrace the benefits of diversity. The purpose of the platform is to promote a positive business and economic case for equality of opportunity for every employee in Bulgaria. It is not a formal organization, but rather a community of companies all sharing the goals for acceptance and inclusion of LGBTIQ people. Newly in 2019, Work It OUT introduced **WIO Club**, a networking gathering for professionals.





Serbia

The most important 2019 news for Serbia was the announcement at the [EPOA Annual General Meeting](#): “**Belgrade wins the EuroPride 2022 in landslide vote**”. Read more on this fantastic [news](#), but also read through the [EuroPride Belgrade BidBook](#) and what hosting the EuroPride will bring not only to the city but also the entire region. EmW is happy to hear that one of the expectations is “Incentivise businesses to engage with LGBT+ organisations...”.



Following the launching of the **Global Standards for Business** in the Serbian language in December 2018, [ERA](#) (the regional organization providing knowledge, expertise and promoting regional and inter-regional cooperation) started to work together with their Serbian members on another important milestone – to have these standards endorsed by local companies.

This year for the very first time and with no incidents, a Pride march took place outside the capital, in **Novi Sad**, the 2nd largest city in Serbia.

The new legislation “The **Rulebook** on the Manner of Issuing and the Form of the Certificate of the Competent Health Institution on the Change of Sex” came into force on January 2019. Contrary to previous practices, surgeries and sterilisation will no longer be required. However, diagnosis and hormonal therapy continue to be mandatory. [Geten](#) will nevertheless continue lobbying to advance the local situation further.

On November 20th, [Geten](#) marked (as in the last 5 years) the 21st **International Day of Remembrance of the victims of transphobia (TDoR)**. During a performance, participants stood creating a circle holding messages listing issues that affect the trans community.



Albania

Over 300 people marched and then partied to celebrate the [Tirana Pride](#) 2019. The annual event drew more participants than in previous years. The Tirana Pride does not belong to the largest Prides, but is attended by **Ambassadors**, the Albanian Ombudsman, members of the **EU delegation**, and large numbers of Tirana’s international community and this year also saw an increased number of Albanian LGBTI individuals as well as allies of the community. Notably, only one person was seen with their face covered to hide their identity when compared to previous years where the number was much higher. A great credit deserved by one of the organisers, activist and founder at [Aleanca](#) LGBT, **Xheni Karaj**.



The **Dyke March** is a protest that was firstly organized in 1993 in Washington by a group of political activists “Lesbians Avengers” and has become an annual tradition in various cities around the world. “**Proud, revolutionary lesbian!**” was the motto of the [Tirana Dyke March](#) 2019, where the main focus was on lesbian women, transgender women and all other sexual minorities and those who still are being discriminated in Albania just because of love. The Dyke March in Tirana was organized by **Aleanca LGBT**, LGBTI Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Turkey (**ERA**) and European Lesbian Conference (**ELC**).

Another successful edition of the beauty pageant [Miss Trans Albania](#) took place on Saturday, January 26th. Two leading Albanian LGBTI organisations (Aleanca LGBT and [Streha LGBT](#), the only shelter for the LGBT+ community in Albania), organised one of the most exciting nights in Tirana and brought more visibility to the marginalised community of transgender people in Albania, whom rarely go out in public for their rights due to social stigma.

Tirana hosted on November 7 - 9th **ERA's Regional Annual Conference**. This year themed “OUR RIGHTS, YOUR FUTURE” aimed at strengthen networking, dialogue and cooperation among LGBTI organisations and their supporters in the Western Balkans and Turkey, such as lobbying and advocate for the improvement of **legislation** and **policy** on LGBTI rights in Albania and the region.



Lithuania

The 1st Annual Conference of the [Lithuanian Diversity Charter](#) took place on September 19th. Under the motto 'TAKING BEST OUT OF DIVERSITY', the [Conference](#) brought together more than 120 participants from the private and public sector. They were welcomed by the Vice-Minister of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, the Head of the European Commission Representation in Lithuania and the Mayor of Vilnius.

The **Baltic Pride** is an annual Pride parade rotating in turn between the capitals of the Baltic states: Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. This year, and already for the 4th time, the Lithuanian capital Vilnius and [LGL, The National LGBT Rights Organisation](#), were the hosts. Perhaps not (yet) the No.1 Pride when it comes to the number of kilometres of the Pride march, but definitely among the one with the most honest heart. The **Pride Voices Gala**, held at the Lithuanian Russian Drama Theatre, offered not only a great performance of European drag, staging La Diva Live, Sharonne and Catherine d'Oex, but provided also a unique opportunity to hear stories from the LGBTI community members, including Lord Michael Cashman (UK).



The **Baltic Pride** organised on June 6th a **Human Rights Conference** "Towards a Future European Roadmap for LGBTI Equality". Over 25 speakers, including government representatives, international and local decision-makers, experts and activists explored in four panels the conference theme through governmental, civil society and business lenses. The **Lithuanian Diversity Charter** ran a panel discussion, which took a closer look at how companies are ensuring diversity in the workplace through the application of different approaches and methodologies towards diversity and inclusion.



Belarus

[DOTYK](#) (Touch) is in Belarus the **festival of queer culture**. The main goal is to increase the visibility of LGBTIQ+ people and to reduce discrimination against them through educational and artistic techniques.



[OUTLOUD](#) offers a creative leadership educational program for LGBT+ people. As they say... "There are no 'special skills' that turn us into superheroes. But we can share things like skills, ideas, or support." The Program is a platform for working together to create an active civic community, as well as the opportunity to share the experience gained over the years of the [MAKEOUT](#) project.



On August 24th a man was beaten on Kastrichnickaja street, the more hipster and tolerant street in Minsk. Activists organised a public solidarity art-activist [campaign](#) against hate crime in Belarus:

#ПИДОРСКАЯОКТЯБРЬСКАЯ.





Croatia

● In December 2019, shortly before Christmas, for the very first time in Croatia, a **Zagreb** Court rules that same-sex married couple Ivo Šegota and Mladen Kožić have **the right to be foster parents**, and that the Ministry of Demography, which rejected their request to provide foster care last year, must implement the new decision within 60 days, this time in accordance with domestic and international legislation. Back in 2015, Ivo and Mladen were among the first couples to enter a life partnership after the Life Partnership Act was passed in Croatia. Read more on this great [news](#).



ERA @Western Balkans and Turkey



● The **ERA Annual General Assembly** approved ERA's **Principles and Standards on engaging with the private sector in the Western Balkans and Turkey**, which now paves the way for [ERA](#) to engage with the business sector in a clear framework. The standards were also translated in the Albanian language and presented at the 2019 ERA Annual Regional [Conference](#). ERA will work with **UN Albania** and other members to promote endorsements and promotion of these standards as a tool to intensify working with the business community.

ERA's mission is to inspire positive change in the society, promote and advocate for human rights of people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics, by facilitating cooperation and providing resources and capacity development for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons (LGBTI) movement across the Balkans and Turkey.



Bosnia & Herzegovina

● Back in 2016, the [Sarajevo Open Centre \(SOC\)](#) filed an appeal to the Constitutional Court regarding the attack at the 2014 [Merlinka Queer Festival](#). Three years after the attack at the festival an indictment was made against two identified attackers. Now finally there also is a [verdict](#) against the attackers. Although not a fully satisfactory judgment, it nevertheless represents a progress and motive for a continued fight against discrimination and violence against LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



● About 3.000 people marched on Sunday, September 9th, in the **first Pride March** in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That day was historical for LGBTI people in BiH and it was also the first Pride in the Balkans that ended peacefully, without any accidents. Many diplomats, political figures and people of influence supported the **Sarajevo Pride** and joined the March which came after more than 15 years of local activism: steady and continual work of empowerment with our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer community and oftentimes painstaking education of the representative of local institutions.



● In order to develop a labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH), which would provide diversity and social inclusion, the [SOC](#) started working on introducing a business diversity certificate for the BH business community. The main goal of **certification** is to incentivise and promote businesses with high inclusiveness indices, and consequently create decent working opportunities for disadvantaged groups (women, women single mothers, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI persons, etc.) within the BH business environment. The ultimate aim of this consultancy is to jointly develop a market intervention that will yield in introducing and implementing a diversity certification to the BH business community which will improve employee engagement and help companies to grow their businesses and celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity among their employees.



Armenia

○ [Pink Armenia](#), one of the local community-based LGBTI organisations, turned 12! Also known simply as "Pink", this Human Rights Defender NGO supports the needs of the community, and promotes the LGBTI persons' human rights protection process and advocates for the change of public policy around LGBTI issues. Pink Armenia aims to achieve the full protection of the rights of LGBTI people and equality prior to the law in Armenia by strengthening the capacity of LGBTI people to influence decision-makers' policies and approaches of the public.

The **atmosphere of intolerance** towards LGBTI people in Armenia nevertheless remains still high in various areas of the society. After the speech of a trans woman in the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia and the news about the film about Mel Daluzyan, hate speech and expressions of discrimination became more widespread.



○ One of the great work of **Pink Armenia** are their annual reviews of the **situation of LGBT people in Armenia**, legal analyses and other [reports](#). Some of them were presented at the Human Rights House in Yerevan, on the occasion of the IDAHOT week.

○ On November 8th-10th, the **5th Annual Rainbow Forum** took place in Yerevan and gathered around 60 LGBTI participants, as well as their parents, civil society representatives, artists, activists, lawyers and specialists from the health sector and other areas. The headline of this year's event was "The past, present, and the future of the LGBT movement" and reflected on running projects, challenges, and progresses.

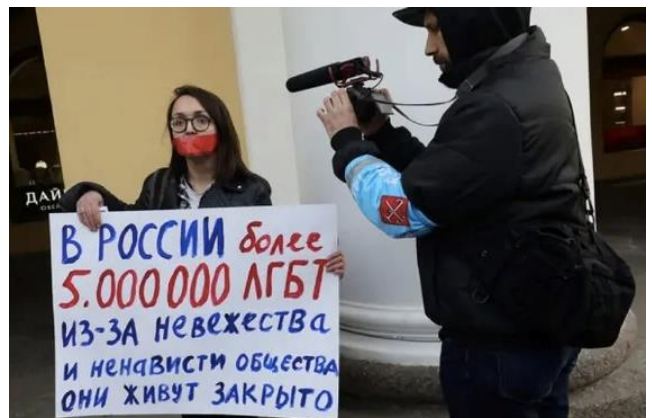


Russia

○ The **European Court of Human Rights** ruled against Russia over its refusal to register three associations, saying it was "unacceptable" to do so simply because they were defending LGBTI rights. Three associations, which promote lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights, had taken Russia to the European Court of Human Rights after exhausting their legal options at home. Between 2006 and 2011, **Rainbow House**, the **Movement for Marriage Equality** and **Sochi Pride House** all tried to register as associations with the Russian authorities. The European Court of Human Rights also ruled that the Russian government must pay 42,500 EUR in damages to the three groups for having refused their registration in recent years. Read the full ECHR 267 [Press Release](#).

○ A **Saint Petersburg Court** [ruled](#) end September that two LGBTI social media groups violated the notorious **Russian "gay propaganda"** law and ordered to block their sites. The two groups, **Russian LGBT Community** and **Russia LGBT Network** were present on Facebook as well as on the Russian social media platform VKontakte. The court judgments stated that the incriminating material was images representing same-sex relationships. The judge deemed this content as responsible for "rejecting family values, promoting non-traditional sexual relations and fostering disrespect for parents and/or other family members." Under the "gay propaganda" ban, adopted in 2013, portraying same-sex relations as socially acceptable is illegal. The rationale is that such information supposedly threatens the well-being of children.

○ Russian campaigners have [said](#) that a woman found murdered with multiple stab wounds in the city of **Saint Petersburg** was **Yelena Grigoryeva**, a well-known activist and a regular participant in rallies supporting a range of unpopular causes in modern Russia, including LGBT rights and freedom for Ukrainian political prisoners. Photographs posted to Grigoryeva's Facebook page showed her holding placards at various rallies and protests. One read: "In Russia there are more than 5 million gay people. Because of backwardness and hatred, they have to live secretly."





Kosovo

○ At an unusual time of the year and on an unusual day of the week, the **Prishtina Pride March** nevertheless went on! Held already for the third time, on Thursday October 10th, the annual **LGBTI Pride Parade** procession of thousands of people walked behind a banner reading 'Per kon t'rreh zemra' / 'Whomever your heart beats for'. We from Vienna loved seeing also another banner, by now the Europe-wide famous 'DIPLOMATS FOR EQUALITY'.



○ Prishtina celebrated on May 17th 2019 the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia and used this occasion to raise awareness of violations of LGBTI rights and promoting interest in the rights of LGBTI people in Kosovo. Two local LGBTI organisations, The **Center for Social Development (CSGD)** and **Center for Equality and Liberty (CEL)** held at this occasion in Prishtina also their annual conference "Constitutional and Equal Rights for LGBTI Persons". As a sign of solidarity, Kosovo's government this year illuminated the government building with rainbow flag colors.

○ A historical decision was taken by the **Kosovo Court of Appeals** on the 2nd August, officially approving the request of a trans citizen to change their name and gender marker in the Central Civil Status Register and Civil Status Principal Register. This decision is expected to be taken as a practice and positive example from the Civil Status Offices and the Agency for Civil Registry of Kosovo on how to deal with future requests of citizens who wish to officially change their name and gender markers.



Romania

○ On June 22nd, nearly 10.000 people despite rain showers marched on the major avenues of the Romanian capital, dancing and waving rainbow flags at the 2019 **Bucharest PRIDE**.



Important not to forget, in the region Romania has not passed any legislation recognising or promoting gay rights since the country joined 12 years ago the EU. As a result, gay couples and transgender people may still face problems as they try to go about with their lives.

Nearly a year ago, in October 2018, Romanians voted in their **referendum** asking to amend the constitution and ban same-sex marriage. Liviu Dragnea, leader of the ruling Social Democrat Party (PSD), and influential religious groups had urged Romanians to support the referendum. However, the country's election commission said that just 20.4 % of eligible voters had cast ballots, well below the 30 % threshold required by law. **Romanians boycotted the vote**, with dozens of human rights groups warning a successful referendum would have emboldened further attempts to chip away at the rights of minority groups and push Romania onto a populist track. Immediately after the failed referendum, the ruling Social Democrats said they would introduce legislation to legalize civil unions for same-sex couples, but there has been little progress in parliament.



Some of Our Plans for 2020

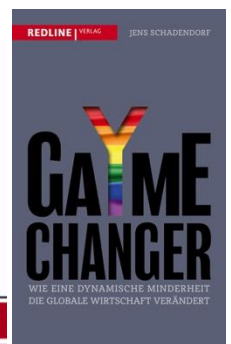
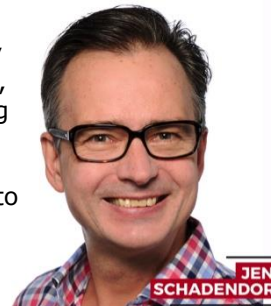
We cannot share with you all the plans **East meets West** and **EGLCC** have for 2020 as the year has just started, but here is the list of activities that have already been confirmed.

Type & Date		Location	More info & registration
● 24-26. 1. 2020	EGLCC Annual General Meeting	Vienna	(for EGLCC members only)
● 26. 1. 2020	Jens Schadendorf: The GaYme Changer	Vienna	2020emw.eventbrite.com
● 30. 1. 2020	Supplier Diversity Event @Dow Chemicals	Zurich	(by invitation only)
● 5. 2. 2020	AGPRO Business Lounge	Vienna	https://agpro.at
● 7. 3. 2020	Global Lgbt+ Leadership Summit & Charity Gala Dinner	Berlin	https://www.itb-berlin.com

Advance Praise for "GaYme Changer"

"The LGBT+ community has made great strides in the global business arena over the past years. Jens Schadendorf takes you by the hand and describes entrepreneurial players pushing for change, among them a fast-growing number of allies. By sharing fascinating backgrounds and accounts he also shows how progress was made specifically. Yet, this progress is not universal. The world needs more GaYme Changers. This book is an inspirational call-to-action to make this happen. I am already looking forward to the next edition with even more amazing stories."

Sander van't Noordende, Group CEO Products, Accenture



About East meets West

Founded in 2013 in Vienna, Austria, East meets West is a network of LGBTI professionals from Western & (primarily) Eastern Europe. East meets West facilitates the exchange of ideas, the sharing of best practices and generates mutual inspiration to improve the social acceptance of LGBTI men and women in the different countries. The East meets West brand has two pillars. East meets West Social has a catalyst function in the LGBTI organizational ecosystem by connecting NGOs, diplomatic representatives, officials, corporate players, entrepreneurs and variety of other inspiring personalities. East meets West Business is the facilitator of awareness on LGBTI businesses and that LGBTI men and women can be successful entrepreneurs and become role models inside and outside the LGBTI community. East meets West is also the founding member of the EGLCC, The European LGBTI Chamber of Commerce.



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