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It Couldn't Happen in the EU, Until It Did: Pride Organiser Under Criminal Investigation, Facing One Year in Prison

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In his *State of the Nation* address in February 2025, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán [offered](#) an unsolicited warning:

"I advise the Pride organisers not to bother preparing for this year's parade. It would be a waste of time and money – no matter what Distriktskommandant Weber and his Hungarian agents say."

Within three weeks, Parliament adopted amendments explicitly aimed at preventing LGBTQI-themed assemblies. [As a result of these new provisions](#), organising such an event is punishable by up to one year of prison, while participants may be fined up to EUR 500 for committing a petty offence. The law authorises facial recognition technology to identify participants *en masse* and excludes the conversion of fines to community service or incarceration.

Budapest Pride went ahead not as a public assembly but as a municipal cultural event. The police are investigating the Mayor of Budapest in relation to it, although on legally questionable grounds. At the same time, the authorities announced that no petty-offence procedures would be initiated against participants.



Outside Budapest, however, the consequences are very different. Pécs Pride, the only annual LGBTQI-related assembly beyond Budapest, was scheduled for 4 October. The organiser, a private individual, duly notified the police, as required by law. The police banned the event, and Hungary's supreme court, the Kúria, upheld the ban. Aware of the legal risks, the organiser proceeded with the march regardless. [It became](#) one of the largest Pécs Prides ever, drawing thousands onto the streets.

Pécs Pride 2025, Géza Buzás-Hábel facing the crowd. Photo: [Béla Váradi](#)

The police did not disperse the crowd, and the march went ahead peacefully.

Two weeks later, the organiser was [summoned for interrogation](#) before the police as a criminal suspect for “organising a prohibited assembly”, an offence punishable by up to one year in prison. This is the first known case in the European Union where a human rights defender faces criminal prosecution for organising a Pride march — a step until now only seen in Russia or Turkey.

Who Is the Organiser?

Géza Buzás-Hábel is a teacher and human rights defender from Pécs, Hungary’s fifth largest city. He is gay, Roma, and deeply embedded in his community. He studied Romology and Applied Linguistics at the University of Pécs and has worked for years teaching Romani language and Roma culture in Europe’s first Roma nationality high school. Previously, he worked in the city’s children’s home and lectured at Eötvös József College, training future primary-school and early-childhood teachers.

As director and co-founder of the [Diverse Youth Network](#), Géza has been the long-term organiser of Pécs Pride, Hungary’s only Pride outside Budapest. Over the years he has built trust locally, maintained constructive relationships with public institutions, and ensured the event remained inclusive and peaceful.

This year, Pécs Pride received legal support from four Hungarian human rights organisations — Amnesty International Hungary, Háttér Society, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, and the Hungarian Helsinki Committee — as part of the [series of actions](#) aimed at defending the right to assembly. The same organisations continue to stand by Géza, and the Hungarian Helsinki Committee and Háttér Society provide him legal representation in the ongoing criminal procedure.

In the run-up to the 2025 Pécs Pride, responding to the police ban and the Kúria’s decision, [Géza told 444.hu](#):

“When I saw that the new regulations were adopted, my first thought was that we will not bow down, we will hold the event.”

He consciously chose not to hold the march as a municipal event (unlike in Budapest) because, as he explained, “the community’s future cannot depend on the attitude of a particular politician.”

Géza’s thoughtful resolve — not defiance for its own sake — was the foundation of a peaceful and successful Pécs Pride, where thousands marched not as radicals but as EU citizens exercising their rights to freedom of assembly and expression.



Now, in late October 2025, he has become a suspect in a criminal investigation for providing the means to peaceful protest. Today, during his interrogation, Géza said:

„I did indeed organise the 2025 Pécs Pride and called on the public to participate. However, I am not guilty. By organising the Pride and calling for participation, I exercised my fundamental right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, guaranteed by European and international law.”

Why This Case Matters Beyond Hungary

The criminal procedure against Géza Buzás-Hábel is not a local anomaly. It is a turning point for the European Union. For the first time in EU history, a person is facing criminal charges for organising a Pride march: an act protected under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (the Charter), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and the values defined in Article 2 TEU.

This case exposes a dangerous shift in Hungary’s long campaign against LGBTQI people and civil society. Until now, repression came through administrative bans, smear campaigns, or petty-offence fines. The 2025 amendments go further: they turn the exercise of fundamental rights into potential criminal acts. [What began](#) as a “child-protection” narrative has evolved into the criminalisation of peaceful assembly and expression — striking at the heart of European values.

If criminal law can be used in an EU Member State to punish someone for organising Pride, the precedent will embolden others to follow. It marks the first breach of the EU’s internal firewall against authoritarian legalism — the point where Russian-style repression enters the Union’s own legal space.

The Hungarian Assembly Act’s new provisions directly contradict:

- Articles 10 and 11 of the ECHR and Articles 11 and 12 of the Charter, guaranteeing freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association;
- Article 21 of the Charter, prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation; and
- the values enshrined in Article 2 TEU, including human dignity, equality, and respect for human rights, as well as Article 6 TEU.

By criminalising the organisation of an LGBTQI event, the Hungarian authorities are in systemic and deliberate breach of these rights and values. Despite receiving extensive legal analyses from [Hungarian](#) and [European](#) civil society organisations earlier this year, the Commission has thus far limited its reaction to an “assessment” of the amendments. This raises an unavoidable question:

How long can the European Commission remain in “assessment mode” while a teacher faces prison for exercising the rights it claims to protect?

On 8 October 2025, the Commission unveiled its new LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030, declaring that “everybody in the European Union should be safe and free to be themselves.” Yet only weeks later, in an EU Member State, a human rights defender is facing criminal charges for doing exactly that — and the Commission’s response remains procedural silence. The credibility of the Union’s new strategy will be measured not by press releases but by what happens next in Pécs.

What Needs to Happen

If a teacher in an EU Member State can face prison for organising a Pride march, it is not only Hungarian democracy that is at stake, but the credibility of the European Union itself. The response must match the gravity of the issue.

The European Commission must finally take action — not just assess. It should

- Publicly recognise the criminal investigation against Géza Buzás-Hábel as a test case for EU values and a potential breach of Articles 2 and 6 TEU, and Articles 11, 12 and 21 of the Charter.
- Open infringement proceedings against Hungary for criminalising peaceful LGBTQI assemblies and for allowing the blanket use of facial recognition technology to identify unknown perpetrators of petty offences and seek interim measures from the Court of Justice.
- Link the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030 to concrete enforcement tools and budgetary conditions to ensure it is more than a declarative document.

EU Member States must raise the issue collectively and bilaterally.

- Raise it in bilateral dialogues with Hungarian authorities, making clear that criminalising Pride organisers has no place in the EU.
- Support joint public statements defending freedom of assembly and human rights defenders at risk.
- Explore ways to meaningfully assist human rights defenders at risk within the European Union.

A Test for Europe

A gay Roma teacher in southern Hungary should not have to risk going to prison to remind the EU what its values mean. Whether Europe acts now to defend him and the values he stands for will determine whether those values still protect anyone at all.