

Visit to Valletta, Malta, 13th – 16th September 2023

This visit was in order to attend and participate in the EuroPride Legislators Delegation. The event was taking place in Malta after a successful bid in 2020 at the European Pride Organisers Association to host the 2023 event. Malta has consistently ranked at the top of ILGA-Europe's annual "Rainbow Europe" index since 2015. Countries are given a score from zero to 100 percent, with the lower end reflecting poor human rights for LGBTQ+ individuals, and the higher reflecting an equal society.

Malta itself is a hub of good practice for progressive policy making and practices for LGBTQ+ people – in 2016 it became the first EU country to ban 'conversion therapy'. It has also progressed more recent advances with regard to an equal basis for blood donation, developing a more inclusive education for young people, and the introduction of a third-gender option on ID cards and passports.

The first plenary session I attended was a discussion titled "A lens on the LGBTQ+ community in Africa – a platform for legislators" which was organised by the group Parliamentarians for Global Action. The session featured different parliamentarians from Africa sharing their experiences and their thoughts on advocating for inclusive change in their respective countries. This was especially interesting as this year's CPA Conference was to be held in Accra - with the Ghanaian Parliament discussing an anti-LGBTQ+ bill domestically, it seemed there was a role for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to promote LGBTQ+ equality in this context.

This theme was also prevalent in the afternoon session organised by the Global Equality Caucus which was a roundtable for Commonwealth legislators titled "What more can the Commonwealth do to further LGBT+ right?". This session was only open to legislators, and was for enabling a discussion to share best practice on achieving progressive legislative reform, as well as agreeing a common strategy for inclusive change in the Commonwealth. The work some countries have achieved in this field is truly innovative and Wales would be able to emulate some of the cutting edge thinking debated.

The Friday morning session was organised by the European Parliament Intergroup on LGBTI rights – "Rainbow families: the future of relationships and parenthood recognition across Europe". The plenary session discussed and examined the varying efforts across countries in Europe to introduce partnership and adoption rights for LGBT+ couples in Europe. Much of the discussion centred around successful examples where progressive change had been brought to bear, with further discussion and debate on the examples where progress was still needing to be made.

I also attended the 2nd event run by the Global Equality Caucus in partnership with the Hungarian Parliament's LGBT+ Intergroup – "Strategies and experiences in the struggle for LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe". We heard from not only legislators but from activists across Central and Eastern Europe, who shared personal stories and experiences of advocating for LGBTQ+ rights in difficult circumstances. Some of the stories shared were a stark reminder of the variability across the continent for how countries treat LGBTQ+ Citizens. Hungary scores 30% on the rainbow index – for reference the United Kingdom is scored at a 53%. The gap between Hungary and the UK is equal to the gap between UK and 2 of the top 3 nations (Belgium + Denmark).

I then attended the Global Parliamentary Forum session on the morning of the Saturday, hosted by the Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives, in collaboration with the Global Equality Caucus and Parliamentarians for Global Action. The purpose of the event was to bring together all legislators attending EuroPride, to meet with like-minded colleagues on the chamber floor and discuss common strategies to support global LGBT+ inclusion. This was followed by the briefing for

legislators by the Global Equality Caucus on HIV Prevention in Europe, which provided myself and the other attendees with the latest data on HIV prevention strategies, their effectiveness, and the lessons learned.