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Gay Pride at the Christopher Street Day Parade in Cologne (July 2006)

The annual Christopher Street Day (CSD) parade in Cologne, the largest of its kind in Europe, generally attracts 20,000 participants and more than 600,000 onlookers. In this online report, CSD organizers describe the festive mood of the 2006 parade as well as the resounding success of that year's slogan: "100% North Rhine-Westphalia – only with us!" They go on to address matters of political concern: namely, the state government's current plans for budget cuts that were originally supposed to hit lesbians and gays disproportionately hard. They end with demands for equality, visibility, acceptance, and self-confidence.

The CSD Köln / ColognePride says "Thank You!"

Two weeks of ColognePride with politics, partying, and culture was only the successful prelude to a CSD weekend, the likes of which Cologne had never experienced before.

Under a gloriously blue sky and pure sunshine, hundreds of thousands people poured into the CSD street festival on the city squares in Cologne's Old Town, danced their feet off on the stage in front of city hall, enjoyed political discussions and cabaret at the Alte Markt [Old Market], cheered for first-rate artists and the opening show, and rejoiced during the "Candles against Forgetting" memorial service and during the closing ceremony at the Heumarkt [Haymarket].

The parade captivated the crowd as well: high-heeled transvestites, manly leather-clad types, floats, and countless social and political activist groups made their way from Deutzer Bridge through downtown Cologne, stopping just short of the cathedral.

The political slogan of this year's CSD/ColognePride festival ("100% North Rhine-Westphalia – Only with us!") found particular and unexpected resonance: nearly all of the parade participants made use of the slogan in one way or another. At the Heumarkt, the MCs asked "100% North Rhine-Westphalia?," and thousands answered in unison, "ONLY WITH US!" And there was hardly anyone at the street festival who didn't have a sticker with the slogan on his clothes or bare skin.

Once again, the board of KLuST* would like to thank everyone who made this lively, peaceful, political, and joyful CSD possible, and along with the entire ColognePride organizational team, we look forward to an equally successful CSD in 2007!

“100% NRW – Only with us!”

. . . surely isn't the catchiest CSD/ColognePride slogan of recent years. Still, it was important for us to address the NRW state government's current plans for budget cuts that were originally supposed to hit us lesbians and gays disproportionately hard, and to connect them with the larger question of the place and importance that gays and lesbians have in our state.

[. . .]

100% Equality

In the face of empty public coffers, the new black-yellow** state government coalition assumed office with the intention of cutting the state's voluntary services by an average of 20%. Aside from the fact that this ostensibly fair-seeming formula for cuts isn't actually applied uniformly across the boards, lesbian-gay self help [organizations] in NRW were threatened by cuts to the tune of almost 40% in the state government's first draft budget. It was only through vocal protest, which was also voiced by many other social and political groups, that the gay-lesbian community managed to secure the support of the FDP faction in the *Landtag* [state parliament] as well as the support of a few CDU experts, and eventually reduced the cuts to the average of 20% propagated by the state government. We are pleased with this partial success; at the same time, however, we find it remarkable that lesbians and gays apparently still (or once again?) have to fight to be treated equally, at the very least, in the upcoming cuts. We demand: 100% equality!

100% Visibility

The state of NRW is celebrating its 60th birthday this year. Statistically speaking, during these six decades, lesbians and gays have consistently comprised approximately 5-10% of the population throughout the various regions of North Rhine-Westphalia. This minority has only been publicly visible for a good 15 years. Before that, social ostracism and, to some extent, even criminal prosecution marked the lives of gays and lesbians in NRW. The situation today, one in which homosexuals can live increasingly self-assured and open lives, is not something that can be taken for granted, since the social acceptance of minorities is not a permanent and guaranteed state, but rather a fleeting blessing that must be preserved and strengthened. As the newest addition to our movement, lesbian-gay senior outreach work in North Rhine-Westphalia was cut back to “0” by the black-yellow state government, and older lesbians and gays have been made invisible once again. It is important that we lesbians and gays continue to make clear that we are an integral part of this state; that we need political and financial support

* Kölner Lesben- und Schwulentag e.V., or the Cologne Lesbian and Gay Conference, a registered association – eds.

** A black-yellow government is a coalition government between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) – eds.

in our work on behalf of acceptance; and that 100% North Rhine-Westphalia can only exist with us. We need: 100% visibility!

100% Acceptance

Appreciation and acceptance by the majority are the natural goal of every minority. We gays and lesbians therefore demand that the state government, which was elected by the majority of the population, give us not only equal treatment in the upcoming cuts but also a positive sign that our work on social policy is welcome and appreciated. Financial cuts – independent of the fact that they always entail painful restrictions and the curtailment of substantive work – can only be tolerated if there is no reason to suspect that they are also connected with a lack of esteem. We demand: 100% acceptance!

100% Self-Confidence

In times of budget cuts in the public sphere, it becomes more important for the lesbian-gay community to think about how future projects in the area of gay-lesbian self-help can be developed, implemented, and given financial backing. We have developed a culture of personal responsibility and civic engagement, which we need to expand and which can provide positive impetuses to other social groups. The prerequisite for this is that we develop a separate identity as a lesbian-gay minority, one that makes it meaningful to invest private funds – for example, in the form of donations, foundations, or estate gifts – in gay-lesbian self-help projects. The willingness to assume more personal responsibility should not lead us to entirely absolve the state of its responsibility to promote the acceptance of lesbians and gays in NRW. Conversely, it is necessary that the state provide initial support to enable future-oriented financing models, which have no tradition in Germany, in the gay-lesbian sphere. We need: 100% self-confidence.

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Source: “Der CSD Köln/Cologne Pride sagt Danke!” [“The CDS Cologne/Cologne Pride says ‘Thank you!’”], www.cologne-pride.de.

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