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Romania stages Gay Pride as same-sex marriage ban looms

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BUCHAREST, June 08, 2013 (AFP) - Romania's homosexual community takes to the streets for a Gay Pride parade on Saturday but a controversial amendment to the constitution banning same-sex marriage threatens to overshadow the event.

Hundreds of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) activists and sympathisers are expected to join the march in downtown Bucharest, an annual event which in previous years was marred by minor disturbances.

Romanian lawmakers are currently discussing a constitutional amendment restricting the legal definition of marriage to a "union between a man and a woman".

The article was proposed by the dominant Orthodox Church and accepted by a parliamentary committee tasked with amending the 1991 constitution.

Centre-left Prime Minister Victor Ponta has called for a new committee ivote in the committee, saying he does not see the need for a change to the current definition of marriage as "a union between spouses".

Ponta pointed to neighbouring Hungary, where a similar amendment by Prime Minister Viktor Orban's right-wing government triggered sharp criticism from the European Commission, although he said he did not himself back same-sex marriage.

"The MPs' amendment is an attempt to ban the family life of LGBT couples, but it can also affect single-parent or extended families," Accept president Florin Buhuceanu told AFP.

"The controversy sparked by this article betrays the Romanian society's low level of tolerance to the LGBT minority and the need for public debates on this topic."

Rights group Amnesty International too voiced concern over the move, stressing that every person has the right to set up a family, "without discrimination as to sexual orientation or gender identity".

The chairman of Romania's Anti-Discrimination Council, Csaba Asztalos, said the vote demonstrated

"the negative stereotypes and prejudice against sexual minorities".

"It has nothing to do with the wish to protect the family but only aims to signal that politicians share the voters' hatred of homosexuals."

Sexual minorities, members of the Roma community and people infected with HIV are the main victims of discrimination in Romania, opinion polls show.

A poll conducted in 2011 found that 73 percent of Romanians would not like to have a homosexual among their relatives and 45 percent among their work colleagues.

But Asztalos said Romanians were gradually becoming more tolerant.

US charge d'affaires Duane Butcher called on Romanians to join him at the march, which begins at 1400 GMT.

"From the full decriminalisation of homosexuality in 2000... to this day, Romania has shown its commitment to equal rights for LGBT Romanians, " he said in a statement.

[See the topic on aegis.org](http://aegis.org)