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Serbian gay parade is called off

A Gay Pride march in Serbia has been called off after police told organisers they could not guarantee its safety.

One of the organisers said Serbia's prime minister had urged them to switch Sunday's rally from central Belgrade, but the proposal was "unacceptable".

President Boris Tadic vowed on Friday to protect the participants.

Anti-gay groups had threatened violence if the march were allowed to go ahead. "We're expecting you" posters had been stuck around the Serbian capital.



Belgrade is full of posters telling participants: "We're expecting you"

"Pride parades are traditionally organised in the main streets of big cities," said one of the organisers, Dragana Vuckovic.

It is "unacceptable" to stage the parade in a "field", she told the media.

The decision had been taken after a meeting on Saturday with Prime Minister Mirko Cvetkovic.

Nationalist and religious leaders have opposed a Serbian bill banning discrimination against homosexuals.

The ultra-nationalist Serb Popular Movement 1389 hailed the cancellation of Sunday's march as "a great victory for normal Serbia".

"In our city infidels and Satanists will not pass," it added.

Homosexuality in Serbia is still far from accepted, says the BBC's Mark Lowen in Belgrade.

The gay scene is underground and members of the community are regularly the target of discrimination.

Belgrade's first gay parade in 2001 descended into chaos amid widespread violence by mobs of protesters - with television images of bleeding participants and police firing rubber bullets broadcast around the world.

The organising committee of the planned Sunday march will certainly keep up the pressure, says our correspondent.

"The state has failed the fundamental test," it says in a statement. "The next exam period is approaching fast. The Republic of Serbia has capitulated. We have not."

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Gay Pride organising committee

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