



ADF INTERNATIONAL

## The case of Päivi Räsänen, MP

### Background:

Päivi Räsänen has served as a member of the Finnish Parliament since 1995, was chair of the Christian Democrat Party from 2004-2015, and was Minister of the Interior from 2011-2015.

In 2019, she was accused of “hate speech” and interviewed by the police after questioning her church leadership on Twitter. She had posted in response to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland’s official partnership with the LGBT event “Pride 2019”.

The Prosecutor General then initiated a second, third, and fourth investigation. These concerned a pamphlet that Räsänen wrote more than 16 years ago outlining the official teaching of her own church on human sexuality, a television interview, and a radio interview. Despite the police previously concluding that no crime had been committed, the Prosecutor General re-opened the file.

### Key Principles:

The right to freedom of speech is a fundamental right protected in all major human rights treaties and is the foundation of a democratic society. “Hate speech” laws undermine this important right by criminalizing speech based on vague and subjective definitions of “offense”. This ultimately has a chilling effect on speech which undermines public discourse and drives diverse views from the public square.

### Key Facts:

- In June 2019, the church board of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland announced its official partnership with the LGBT event “Pride 2019”. Räsänen questioned her church’s leadership on this decision on social media, attaching an image of a bible passage.
- The authorities opened an investigation regarding the social media post and summoned her to a four-hour police interview on 1 November 2019. She is alleged to have committed the crime of “ethnic agitation” which carries a maximum penalty of two years’ imprisonment.
- On 4 November 2019, the Prosecutor General also announced that Räsänen would face an investigation into a pamphlet she was asked to write in 2004 on her church’s teaching on human sexuality. The police had previously investigated this allegation and concluded that no crime had been committed.
- Räsänen attended another police interview on 2 March 2020.
- Shortly after, two additional preliminary investigations were added regarding interviews Räsänen gave on a television program and a radio show. These had also been previously dismissed and then reopened.

### What’s at Stake:

Freedom of speech was hard won and is now protected by all major human rights treaties, it is the cornerstone of every free and democratic society. It’s not just Mrs. Räsänen’s freedom at stake, it’s everyone’s. If the state can tell you what you can and cannot say, and even what you can and cannot think, then we do not live in a free society.

**Bottom Line:** Everyone should be free to express their deeply held beliefs about important issues without fear of censorship or criminal sanction.