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## **URBAN SPACE AS A DEMOCRATIC SPACE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 2022 PRIDE PARADE MEDIA COVERAGE IN BELGRADE AND SARAJEVO**

**Abstract:** In post-conflict societies internal demarcation is based on tradition, religion, and heterosexual family values and within this frame sexual citizenship is considered “as ideology” and as a threat to society imposed from outside. At the same time the influence and importance of international norms and changes in the standard of international politics and the emerging culture of human rights cause conflict between inside and outside, national sovereignty and universal human rights. This conflict is not specific only to stability and hybrid systems, but the omnipresent illogicality of a closed system of citizenship. Following the Butler’s observation that “conjuncture of street and media constitutes a very contemporary version of the public sphere” (2011: 9), media textual and visual reports about Pride Parade in Belgrade and Sarajevo were analysed. In the analysis focus is on the borders of citizenship within the patriarchal matrix of nation-state confronted with the present bodies on the streets. The analysed textual and visual media reports confirm a hierarchisation of urban public space formed by national history and its material structures.

**Key words:** participatory democracy, public urban space, pride parade, citizenship, Sarajevo, Belgrade

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## Introduction

Different national states are on different places on social and political dimensions between tradition and progress, hierarchy and equality, patriarchy and gender equality, but the same logic of closing to *Others and Stranger* is present. In discussing events related to Pride Parades in the ex-Yu countries, one finds in the social science literature the imposed dichotomy between liberal pluralism and the discourse of tolerance, supposedly as European standards and values, on the one hand, and the ethno-nationalist notion of community on the other. This incompatibility and peculiarity allegedly due to the collectivist spirit of the Balkan countries is considered to block the progress in democratization efforts. This paper aims to overcome the constructed binary model of thinking insisting on the distinctive feature of the Balkans, as there are “more politically and ethically relevant questions than whether the Eastern European response is moral or immoral, modern or regressive, “European” or “backward” (Greenberg & Spasić, 2017, p. 326).

In this article we are trying to understand the connection between anti-LGBTQ+ politics and the rise of hate politics generally. The purpose of the work is not to contribute to the singular debate about LGBTQ+ visibility in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina but to analyse the role of nationalism and borders of citizenship in constructing practices and attitudes in public sphere towards the use of space to express resistance and visibility. Current “national security crisis” and externalisation of EU borders are therefore put within the similar framing of crisis of solidarity and politics created by the simple binary opposition of “us” versus “others”, but also public and private, accustomed in the closed system of citizenship.

In order not to represent and reproduce the prevailing image of the Southeast as a regressive authoritarian society in contrast to the liberal and pluralistic Western EU, this paper examined practices of hierarchization and exclusion of different groups from public places within the broader societal structures and dynamics, e.g. material and symbolic borders of citizenship. In doing so we will analyse happening around sexual citizens dispute on the streets in Balkan countries by analysing the manifestation of nationalist ideologies and practices of closing in the reaction to Pride Parades in Belgrade and Sarajevo reflected in the media. Media coverage reflects hegemonic control and in the words of Judith Butler: “Media does not merely report the scene, but is part of the scene and the action... and when censorship or violence are directed against those bodies (on the streets), are they not also directed against its access to media, and in order to establish hegemonic control over which images travel, and which do not?” (Butler, 2011, p. 9).

## Borders of citizenship

Citizenship is a concept that can be easily manipulated to legitimize exclusionary practices that arise through the hierarchical and closed system. As one of the most imprecise concepts in social theory and, as a research problem, citizenship can refer to an individual's legal status, social status and class, identity, and social and political activism (Vasiljević, 2016). In the context of this research, we consider citizenship as a relationship between an individual or a group and a political community.

Relationship between an individual and a political community can take many forms, depending on the definition of the political community and the prevailing ideologies with-

in that community. Therefore, the imposition of a vision of the political community (Joppke, 2003) and the prevailing definition of what counts as public interest within the prevailing ideologies has a significant impact on public spaces and visibility. Simmel (1908) points out that the relation to space is not only a condition but also a symbol of the relation to human being.

Container model of thinking and borders of citizenship within are presenting groups labelled as Others or not-belonging as a threat to society imposed from outside. Different places on social and political dimensions demonstrate nevertheless the same practices of exclusion, based on closed system of borders, boundaries and citizenship, as the basis of the “right to have a rights” (Arendt, 1973). Nation and nation-state are constructed according to a patriarchal matrix (Connell, 2005), which affects how political community and public interest are defined, and thus who is considered to belong or not to the imposed framework of national culture and collective identity. The definition of public space is influenced by prevailing discourses and ideologies about public goods and citizens' interests, which are directly determined by existing power relations.

At the same time, public diplomacy implies a growing awareness of the influence and importance of international norms and changes in the standard of international politics and the emerging culture of human rights. From the perspective of the clash between (ethno)national and universal human it is possible to analyse sexual citizenship dispute through the lens of politics and sentiments to those considered as Others and Stranger, not-belonging to the closed system of citizenship. Exclusion practices, set symbolic, legal and material boundaries, practices of preventing the right to be present in public spaces, externalisation of borders as a response to “migrant crisis” clearly reveal the same process of closing and moral ignorance of everything what is labelled as not belonging to the closed system. We address seemingly unrelated modes of political action into a common framework that goes beyond oversimplified dichotomies. Therefore, we have framed the questions of citizenship as sexual citizenship dispute and public spaces as a field of practice when analyse public reactions to LGBTIQ+ visibility and demand for right to use public spaces to express resistance.

Queer urban studies and LGBTIQ+ political struggles make clear that “the problem of power affects our bodies and everyday lives” (Foucault, 2012, p. 167), and consequently that democratic practices are spatial and physical. The importance of public visibility and open and free physical presence represents an evolution of feminist concepts through queer studies (Schuster, 2012, p. 649). LGBTIQ+ locate their identities and lifestyles beyond patterns that privilege heterosexuality and dual gender (Jagose, 2021). In their political struggles they insist on visibility because the separation of public and private spheres and the dominance of two-gender norms exclude gender ambiguity and make many places dangerous for people who do not conform to the heteronormative order (Browne, 2004).

Critique, when placed in a reciprocal relationship of exchange and dialog, that is, when given public space, can ideally lead to new norms, as public spaces are both spaces for discursive opinion formation and spaces for the formation and enactment of social identities. Public spaces are both a factor of integration and a focal point of ruptures and differences in urban society, where we can observe the establishment and maintenance of social, economic, and political power relations, as well as change and resistance (Klamt, 2012). The most cited ideal of public space is the agora or forum, where the assembly of

urban society has an important political and sometimes even democratic function. But this ideal is far from reality. Fraser (1990) criticizes that the bourgeois notion of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) is not only an unachieved utopian ideal, but also, more importantly, a masculine ideological concept. Through this critique, she develops a concept of counterpublics, arguing that there has never been only one (bourgeois) public sphere, but also competing public spheres precisely because the bourgeois public sphere lacked accessibility for all. Counterpublics are characterized by challenging the exclusive norms of the bourgeois public sphere and developing alternative political behaviour and alternative norms of public speaking. The competition of “counterpublics” opposed to dominant public sphere is present also in concrete physical space, as Lefebvre explains, through contradictions of space as effective and vibrant “conflicts between sociopolitical interests and forces” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 365).

### **Present bodies in front of us: People or Ideology?**

Prevailing definitions of community, belonging, and boundaries are determined by dominant political influences both within and outside the state. Internal and external influences can be at odds with each other, just as universal human rights and national sovereignty are sometimes at odds with each other, especially after the transformation of so-called postnational membership (Soysal, 2001). This conflict is not specific only to stabilocracy and hybrid systems (Laštro & Bieber, 2023), but the omnipresent illogicality of a closed system.

National and universal human come into collision to the last degree when confronted with present body and visibility of those labelled as Others. Recognised discrepancy reflects the fact that the rejection of the other “does not exist in an abstract sense, it is the rejection of the other that lives, with its present body and visibility it expresses disharmony and disorder” (Agiar, 2019, p. 219). The bodies present create disharmony, which awakens national narcissism and militaristic response to the emerging crisis towards Others considered Outsiders, both woven into the fabric of the closed system of national security. In post-conflict societies, in populist and illiberal regimes (Górska & Tausch, 2023), sexual citizenship is considered “as ideology”, and as a threat to society imposed from outside as internal demarcation is based on tradition, religion, and heterosexual family. The very fabric of the state, as well as the international system as we know it, is the result of conflict and violence (Howard, 1994, p. 256). Constructed within the closed system, militaristic approach to security continues to dominate national and international politics.

Mikuš (2011) and Krstić et al. (2020) when analysing the events surrounding the Pride Parade in Serbia, noted the militarized and depoliticized nature of state involvement in the events. The depoliticized participation of the state manifests itself through strict and blind procedures, institutions, and the rule of law, which acts as a mask that justifies a neutral stance towards the violence on the streets. Same militarized and depoliticized reactions are present at the EU borders where violence and deaths at the borders are ignored. Liberalization and openness are associated with the discourse of human rights and democracy, but the practices of securitization and militarization emerge as a tool to protect lines of distinction and produced hierarchies (Žarković & Jocić, 2021). Commitment to the rule of law make possible for practices of oppression to remain indisputable, neutral and depoliticized.

At the same time, sexuality and LGBTIQ+ rights play a crucial role in redefining national identities in the globalized world (Kahlina, 2013) as evidence of liberalization and

openness. The EU insists on demonstrating progress by moving away from its traditional identity and insisting on liberalisation following the discourse of tolerance, liberal pluralism, and greater public visibility and participation of the civil rights movement. The discourse of “Europeanism” as abstract discourse of liberalism and tolerance insists on functioning system through blind procedures and institutions as proof of democratisation. In this context, important criticism of the Pride Parade in EU countries is that it creates a parallel world and as such is only temporarily tolerated: “certain behaviours and certain identity positions are considered exceptions even outside of the carnival context and are therefore not taken seriously politically” (Schuster, 2012, p. 649). The tolerable deviation from the norm and tolerable carnivalization (Mesquita, 2008) means the attribution of the “constitutive outside” of the norm (Schuster, 2012, p. 649), which manifests itself as “a state of exception, a permitted violation of social norms within a regulated temporal and geographical context” (Mesquita, 2008, p. 135).

### **Contextualisation- Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia contesting sexual citizenship?**

In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, the NGO sector has developed very differently since 1992. For example, the first associations for the promotion and protection of human rights of LGBTIQ+ were established earlier in Serbia than in BiH, and the first Pride Parade in Serbia was organized earlier than in BiH. On the other hand, BiH had the 'last first' Pride, but alias the first in the region to adopt the Law on Gender Equality and establish state mechanisms for gender equality. Nevertheless, both societies deal with the comparable strict social hierarchies where heterosexism is at the centre of national identity and tradition (Ždralović et al., 2023).

Belgrade Pride (Belgrade Pride, 2023) was established in 2001 and faced violence from right-wing groups and an inadequate police response. In 2002 and 2003, laws against hate speech and discrimination were passed. Between 2004 and 2011, several laws supporting LGBTIQ+ rights were passed, including the Labor Law and the Higher Education Law. A Pride parade in 2009 was banned due to threats, and the 2010 march saw clashes between police and hooligans. In 2011, the Constitutional Court ruled against the Pride Parade ban. In the same year, the Law on Youth and the Law on Social Protection were adopted, prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation. Belgrade Pride 2011 was banned on the grounds that the state could not guarantee the safety of the rally participants. In response, activists organized “Pride in four walls” and a demonstration on the central Belgrade street, stopping traffic and displaying the banner “Love. Normal”. Belgrade Pride in 2012 under the slogan “Love, Faith, Hope” was again banned by a state decision. The official reason was that the state could not yet guarantee the security of the event, and the decision was communicated to the organizers on the eve of the event.

Over the past decade, there has been some legislative progress in Serbia regarding the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community. The government has introduced laws prohibiting discrimination and hate speech based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The country also witnessed the banning of far-right groups responsible for violent attacks during Pride parades. Pride Week and the parade have been successfully held for several years without incident, and government officials have shown their support for the LGBTIQ+ community. However, it was accompanied and secured by a large police presence. The appointment of Ana Brnabić, an openly lesbian politician, to a senior govern-

ment position was seen as a positive development for community representation in politics. The question remains how fundamental this change was for the LGBTIQ+ community. The Pride Parade organizing committee called on the state to legislate same-sex partnerships. The first Pride Info Center, which provides citizens and the LGBTIQ+ community with information about the movement for LGBTIQ+ rights, opened in 2017.

The 2019 “I Do not Give Up” campaign and the Pride Caravan in 10 cities across Serbia were strong initiatives aimed at strengthening the local LGBTIQ+ community and encouraging LGBTIQ+ people to be who they are, no matter where they live. The campaign was well received by the public and was also supported by numerous celebrities. The “Just Brave” campaign and the “What bothers us?” media campaign are also positive developments that draw attention to the issues faced by members of the LGBTIQ+ community and encourage public figures and citizens to support the passage of the Civil Partnership Law. In 2021, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialog organized a social dialog on the draft law on same-sex partnerships, in which 61 institutions and organizations participated. Thirteen proposers submitted comments with objections and suggestions. In May 2021, President Aleksandar Vučić stated that he could not sign the law on same-sex partnerships because the current constitution defines marriage as between a man and a woman.

The fact that Belgrade was chosen as the capital of EuroPride in 2022 was a significant achievement and seemed to be evidence of progress in the country. After several years of relatively peaceful parades, it was once again uncertain whether Pride 2022 in Belgrade would take place at all. The events took place under heavy security, but not on the scale originally planned.

The Queer Sarajevo Festival (QSF) was the first LGBTIQ+ “major public event in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Gavrić & Čaušević, 2021, p. 103). The QSF was organized by the Q Association and was supposed to take place in the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo in the period from September 24 to 28, 2008. Exhibitions, performances, discussions, and other similar events were planned for the QSF program. However, the festival was violently interrupted immediately after its opening (Ivanov, 2015). According to analyses (e.g. Durkalić, 2012), the media and the way this event was covered, especially the texts of the newspapers *Dnevni Avaz* and *Saff*, contributed to the violence. In the public sphere, a discussion was first sparked about the event itself, which showed homophobic attitudes that originated mainly in religion. The dominant argument 'against' in the debate was the holding of the QSF during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan (Ivanov, 2015; Nurkić, 2012).

As Gavrić and Čaušević (2021, p. 82) note, the QSF “exposed the willingness of right-wing groups to organize and spread violence and the unwillingness of the state to protect the festival of queer culture and art”. Conclusions about the failure of the state can also be drawn from the decision of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In September 2014, the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014) partially upheld Association Q's lawsuit. The court concluded that there was a violation of the right to freedom of assembly and association (Ustavni sud BiH, 2014). The Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina made a similar decision following the violent riots at the Merlinka International Queer Film Festival in 2014 (Ustavni sud BiH, 2018).

According to Huremovic and Čaušević (2018, p. 37), “during 2016 and the beginning of 2017 Sarajevo Open Centre documented over 25 cases of hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation or gender identity, and there were no reactions of the competent institutions or they were inadequate”. Considering the documented cases of hate crimes, Sarajevo Open Centre planned to organize a protest march “Violence is not normal” (Sarajevo Open Centre, 2017). However, the march did not take place because the Ministry of Transport of Sarajevo Canton did not approve a short traffic stop. Instead of the planned march for LGBTIQ+ human rights, a protest rally was held in Sarajevo in May 2017 against the denial of the right to public assembly (Huremović & Čaušević, 2018, pp. 37–38). The Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman/Ombudsmen of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman/Ombudsmen of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2017), after considering the complaint of the Sarajevo Open Centre, issued a recommendation (Recommendation No. P-174/17) stating that the Ministry of Transport of Sarajevo Canton, through its “administrative silence”, violated the right to peaceful assembly by making it impossible to hold the march on May 13, 2017.

The first Pride March in Bosnia and Herzegovina was held in Sarajevo in September 2019 under the slogan *Ima izać* (Come Out). The march in 2020 was cancelled due to the outbreak of coronavirus, but various activities were still held under the slogan *Nije život četiri zida* (Life does not consist of four walls) (Bh. povorka ponosa, 2022). In August 2021, the march was held under the motto *Otpor s margine* (Resistance from the edge), in June 2022 under the motto *Porodično okupljanje* (Family gathering), and in June 2023 under the motto *Ponosno zajedno* (Proud together). There are still challenges related to freedom of assembly, but reports on the state of LGBTIQ+ human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Brković et al., 2022, pp. 9–10) noted important steps toward “increasing the LGBTI community's trust in institutions” and “strengthening standards and legal understanding of discrimination”. However, progress has been limited and conditional. Urban public space is predefined and socioculturally contextualized, as it is when it is temporarily and conditionally 'borrowed' for a walk by those to whom it “does not belong” according to the hegemonic discourse.

## **Methodology**

A total of 255 newspaper articles (162 articles in Serbian media and 93 in Bosnia and Herzegovina media) were analysed. The purpose was to identify what image of Pride was disseminated in the media shortly before and immediately after the march and whether and how practices of dominant national propaganda, nation branding, and public diplomacy are used or abused in dealing with the right to parade through the city. Main research concern is about borders of citizenship within the patriarchal matrix of nation-state confronted with the present bodies on the streets.

To structure the study five main categories are applied to classify and interpret media textual and visual report: homogeneous community, tradition, family values, religion and security. Subcategories for the analysis are chosen in data-driven inductive approach emerging from the content.

Following the Butler's (2011, p. 9) observation that “conjuncture of street and media constitutes a very contemporary version of the public sphere”, media textual and visual reports were analysed: articles about Pride/March from ten media and internet portals

(five from Serbia and five from Bosnia and Herzegovina) published in 2022 - one week before and one week after the Pride parades, considering the date when the parade takes place in Belgrade and Sarajevo. The articles about the Belgrade Pride parade published from September 11 to 24, 2022, and the articles about the Sarajevo parade published from June 17 to July 1, 2022, were included in the analysis. Authors included media with different reporting styles.

In the case of Serbia, these were N1 – one of the few Serbian media outlets not controlled by the government (Cvejić et al., 2023), a television station operating in several countries of the former Yugoslavia and under the auspices of CNN; Politika and Večernje Novosti - traditional Belgrade dailies; Informer - a daily newspaper often considered a tabloid with links to ruling structures and pro-government media (Castaldo & Pinna, 2018); B92 – once the leading independent media in Serbia that survived Milošević's authoritarianism but could not survive “market censorship” (Stavljanin & Veljanovski, 2017), still has an Internet portal that is traditionally one of the most visited in Serbia, even if it is not critical of politics.

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 93 newspaper articles published in five media outlets with Internet presence were analysed: N1, Radio Sarajevo, Dnevni Avaz, Klix, and Saff. Media from different parts of the ideological spectrum were selected. In analyses of media reporting on LGBTIQ+ topics, N1 and Radio Sarajevo were identified as media that continuously reported positively and affirmatively on these topics (Huremović & Čaušević, 2018, pp. 33, 41). Klix and Dnevni Avaz are the media that are often identified as the media that reported the most on LGBTIQ+ topics (Huremović & Čaušević, 2018, pp. 10, 34, 49). Portal Klix has significantly improved the way it reports on LGBTIQ+ topics. However, considering the concept and popularity of this portal, readers' comments are still typical examples of hate speech in Internet comments (Huremović & Durkalić, 2017, pp. 40–41).

At the time of the Queer Sarajevo Festival, Dnevni Avaz and Saff were recognized as media that led the way in incitement and hate speech (Durkalić, 2012, p. 17; Nurkić, 2012). However, Dnevni avaz's reporting practice changed, and many texts of Dnevni Avaz were recognized as examples of good practice (Huremović & Čaušević, 2018, p. 41). Nevertheless, some texts from Dnevni Avaz aimed to attract readers' attention with their showiness (Huremović et al., 2014, p. 70). Saff, on the other hand, was chosen as a media that reports on LGBTIQ+ topics exclusively in a sensationalistic and offensive manner and spreads harmful stereotypes about members of the LGBTIQ+ community (Huremović & Durkalić, 2017, p. 4).

## **Media Reporting on the Pride Parade: Belgrade Pride**

About ½ of the articles tend to be positive about Pride, and the positive views are mostly expressed by Pride organizers, some government officials, or foreign representatives. Among the positive comments are calls against discrimination, for respecting human rights and democratic values, and for addressing security issues by supporting a peaceful Pride. A few days before Pride, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić stated that she would never accept the views that the LGBTIQ+ community contradicts the traditions and values of our society (Politika, 2022a), while Finance Minister stated that “Belgrade and Serbia are open and this is the value system we are trying to create and maintain in Belgrade” (Poli-



tika, 2022b). U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Serbia supported the LGBTIQ+ community, praised the efforts of Pride organizers, and called for tolerance and more respect between different groups (Tanjug News Agency, 2022a).

On the other hand, about ¼ of the articles are rather negative about Pride, and most views are shared by right-wing opposition politicians, church representatives and priests, the Minister of Police, but also the President of the Republic of Serbia. The Patriarch stressed that LGBTIQ+ “ideology” is unacceptable for Christians and that we should not let anyone “tell us what to be”. According to him, not all freedom is meaningful, and yet it is Christians who are exposed to violence (Petrović & Beta, 2022). President Vučić said in general that he will not deal with Pride because this issue is corruptly imposed on the Serbian people and all those who are for it, as well as those who are extremely against the march, are all “participating in a hybrid war against their country” (Tanjug News Agency, 2022b). The appearance of Europride as evidence of human rights improvement, supported by Western embassies, was seen in some articles as pressure on the Republic of Serbia (Večernje Novosti, 2022). About ¼ of the articles are rather neutral towards Pride, and these mostly contain general reports about events related to Pride and its organization.

The main elements and arguments that appear in the analysed articles are issues such as: security, human rights and democratic values. The themes of safety and security are included in both the articles that present negative and positive views of Pride. Human rights and democratic values are mostly mentioned as main arguments in the articles that express positive views about Pride.

In the articles where all categories occur together, i.e. they mention tradition, family, religion and a homogeneous community at once, they are in an extremely negative tone condemning Pride as imposed and not belonging, except in a few articles where there is a backlash and counter-arguments to such associations. In the media that can be described as tabloids, which according to the various analyses are partly or directly under the influence of the authorities, the aforementioned categories are not mentioned together in a single article, but there are articles that express a negative attitude towards the Pride stressing the issue of security.

There is a rhetoric of external imposition and evaluating Pride as an ideology, mainly from the perspective of religion, the church and a homogeneous community. On the other hand, there are very few opposing voices that follow the same line of reasoning, and it is possible to single out just one article in which a transgender singer comments her promotional video and invites the public to Belgrade Pride. In the video she is trying to emphasise that the Pride Parade and the Republic of Serbia complement each other and in doing so she highlights national symbols – in the promotional video the singer raises three-fingers salute, also tattooed on her back, as a distinctive sign for the ethnic Serb and a symbol for belonging to the Serbian nation but also being used as a symbol of Serbian ethno-nationalism (B92, 2022b).

### ***Photo analysis – Serbian media***

A total of 216 photos, from previously analyzed articles, were included in the photo analysis. According to the photo analysis, the majority of the photos in the media reports show large crowds of people on the streets with rainbow flags in the frame (27% of the total photos analyzed). Among those photos, 59% show a colorful crowd with rainbow flags in the foreground, with no clear and legible other banners and messages. Apart from such a stereotypi-

cal representation prevalent in the photos, clear messages and banners in the Pride can only be seen in 10 photos, with slogans expressing resistance to the imposed values and peace and love messages such as: "We walk and we will walk", "Stop the hatred" or "God is non-binary".

In addition to the depiction of the crowds and the rainbow flags, there are very few photos in which the representation of the Pride crowds is placed in specific locations (5%), where certain symbols of the city are also present and highlighted in the foreground or background of photos, such as the Parliament building, or some of the recognizable city squares or churches. In the depiction of the crowds at the Pride, it is not noticeable if the depiction of women or men dominates. But when analyzing the photos, which do not show large crowds but more intimate relationships in which people kiss or hug, dominantly women are shown in couple intimate poses in the media reports.



*Fig. 1. People kissing during the Belgrade Pride (source: B92, 2022a)*

In addition to the depiction of crowds on the streets, 6% of the photos only show rainbow flags in various arrangements without specific people and crowds in the foreground, with the rainbow flags being shown neutrally or together with city symbols and symbols of the European Union.



*Fig. 2. Rainbow flags in the front of the National Parliament building in Belgrade (source: Beta, 2022a)*

A significant number of the photos (20% of the total number) also show crowds gathered in the streets against the Pride, with dominantly men dressed in black or in clerical uniforms in the foreground, along with crosses, icons and censers (68%). In only 5% of the photos are women in the foreground, of which 4 photos show women with covered heads in black scarves with crosses and icons. One photo depicts three women wrapped in the flag of the Republic of Serbia. Serbian flags and the coat of arms are, apart from crosses, the dominant symbols in this group of photos. Again, there are very few legible and clear messages on the banners. Those which can be singled out are those which emphasize a strong religious sentiment or the suffering of the Serbian people under attack from outside, such as: “NATO BOMBS 1999, EURO PRIDE 2022. EUROPE – What is next?”; or “I didn't get a sandwich or money for today's arrival. I brought faith in God, a pure heart, home education and common sense. Christ is among us – is and will be”.



Fig. 3. Crowds gathered in the streets against the Pride in Belgrade (source: Petrović & Beta, 2022)



Fig. 4. Another group gathered in the streets against the Pride in Belgrade (source: BBC, 2022)

A considerable number of photos display police forces and police vehicles on the streets (19% of the total number). Among them, 71% is dominated by the depiction of police forces or police vehicles in the foreground, placed on the city streets without other people, and in 29% there is a depiction of a police cordon in front of larger or smaller groups of people on the streets.



*Fig. 5. Police forces on the streets of Belgrade (source: Beta, 2022b)*

The three aforementioned groups of photos dominate. In addition, a smaller number of photos also show ambassadors to Serbia or other foreign diplomats (5%), Serbian politicians (11%) and, above all, Prime Minister Brnabić (8%), who is the only one to be seen in photos together with activists, Pride coordinators and diplomats. In addition, 3% of the photos also show pop artists in various arrangements, and musicians on stage.

### **Media Reporting on the Pride Parade: BiH Pride March**

About 1/2 of the analysed articles from selected media in BiH are rather positive towards Pride. This group is dominated by texts reflecting press releases or statements by the organizers of the march and foreign officials, and less frequently by domestic officials and public figures.

On the other hand, about 1/4 of the articles are negative towards Pride. This group of articles focuses mainly on the statements of domestic officials (most often the status updates posted on social networks). These are usually not original articles, but the same Facebook status quoted by several different media outlets. For example, the Facebook status in which the representative in the Sarajevo Canton Assembly calls the march a “hostage crisis” and demands compensation for citizens and workers for the march was reported by almost all the media analysed (Dnevni avaz, 2022c; Klix, 2022e; N1 BiH, 2022c; Radio Sarajevo, 2022d). In most cases, the status was only quoted, and in this



case, as in most other similar articles, there was no critical commentary by the journalist. To express his personal opinion, one of the ministers used the official Facebook page of the Ministry of Sarajevo Canton. However, articles that quoted/paraphrased this statement often included a critical report (e.g. Radio Sarajevo, 2022b).

In addition, about ¼ of the articles are neutral towards Pride. This group of articles focuses mainly on service information (e.g., information about road traffic).

Among critical elements and arguments, both negative and positive views of the march are dominated by safety and security. In the positive aspects, safety was highlighted as there was not a single incident during the march. However, the event without incidents and with very strict security measures did not lead to a broader discussion in the media about a possible militarization of public space.

On the other hand, security is viewed negatively due to the potential danger to participants and other citizens when organizing a 'high-risk' event. In these articles, there is often a populist focus on the life needs of citizens or the interests of small businesses. For example, most of the media published in whole or in part the press release of the political party SDA, which is about the blockade of the city due to the march. This press release states, for example, that because of the security measures, “bakeries were closed, so that our elderly neighbours could not buy bread”, and “vendors were deprived of their right to earn a wage and their employers were prevented from making a profit” (Klix, 2022b; N1 BiH, 2022b; Radio Sarajevo, 2022c). In order to protect small businesses, media articles also cited the proposal of politicians from local communities to hold the Pride March at a location other than the city centre (Klix, 2022f). This proposal pushes the marginalized group into the suburbs while maintaining a monopoly over urban public space.

Since the slogan of the 2022 March was Family Gathering, the argument of family values was often present in media articles. The same argument had different meanings in articles with positive and negative views of the march. Articles with positive views mostly contained statements by the organizers pointing to the problem of domestic violence and non-acceptance on the one hand, and the importance of understanding and acceptance in the family on the other (e.g. Dnevni avaz, 2022a). At the same time, the counter-event was held under the slogan Vratite nam dugu (Give us back the rainbow), and the argument of the family and traditional values had a different meaning. Usually, the media disseminated summarized information about the anti-LGBT rally without critical review.

In the case of Sarajevo, the Pride March was often commented on by mutual accusations of conservative political currents (e.g. Klix, 2022g), while at the same time proving who vigorously defended the public space and allowed entry to a group that did not 'belong' there. The statements of some politicians in media articles disparagingly compared the Pride march to the siege of Sarajevo in 1992-1995 (e.g. Klix, 2022a), while others justified the questioning of the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons with the unfavourable socio-economic situation of other groups.

### ***Photo analysis – BiH media***

A total of 387 photos, from previously analyzed articles, were included in the photo analysis. Direct reporting from the Pride March was presented in 53% of the photos,

and from the anti-protest was presented in 17% of the photos. The topic of assembly and security is presented in 13% of the images. As part of the texts convey statements about the march before or after its holding, 7% of the analysed material are photographs of the authors of the statements, 2% are screenshots of statements published on social networks, and 4% are photographs from the press conference of a political party. Images of official documents are presented on 3% of the documents. Before the Pride March, homophobic messages appeared in public places, which were soon removed. Nevertheless, the photos of these messages, which comprise less than 1% of the analysed material, have been in the public domain. The journalistic text criticizes the message, but the illustration of the nuclear family as the only 'normal' family, although very quickly removed from the physical space, found its place online through media content.

However, from a general overview of the visual media reporting, it can be concluded that the dominant theme was the Pride March. Out of 207 photos from this category, 35% show groups, a gathering, or a parade, and the Pride parade is recognizable only through flags and other props (e.g. Klix, 2022c). In 44% of the photos, in addition to the symbols, text messages from the protest are visible (e.g. Radio Sarajevo, 2022a). In 12% of the photos, the focus is exclusively on the messages (e.g. Dnevni avaz, 2022b). 4% of the photos focus on public figures who participated in the Pride March, and 5% on the support of citizens from windows and balconies.



Fig. 6. Crowd, flags, and messages at the Pride in Sarajevo (source: Radio Sarajevo, 2022a)

Flags and other props in public places make LGBTIQ+ symbols visible and the protest recognizable. The text messages on the photos address issues of the rights and freedoms of LGBTIQ+ persons and the issue of public space. For example, there were messages on the banners: 'Whose streets are these? Our streets', 'Public space must be free'. These messages indicate that an excluded social group is winning the right to public space. Also, many of the messages show sensitivity to other social problems and social

groups, emphasising that multiple axes of inequalities are mutually constitutive. Thus, the posters have messages that address issues of domestic violence, gender-based violence, labour rights, migrants' rights etc. The message in several pictures is: 'Refugees welcome'. These and similar messages show openness and acceptance of diversity. Family is also an important theme of the slogans at the pride parade: 'Proudly with our children', 'This is a family gathering'.



Fig. 7. Pride – flags and banners (source: Dnevni avaz, 2022b)

These messages illustrate the principles of inclusivity, support and solidarity that dominate the slogans in photo reports from the Pride March. Opposite slogans and principles are represented in photo reports from anti-LGBT protests.

A significantly smaller number of photos were published from the so-called anti-protests - 66 photographs. Although the journalistic articles were mostly neutral, the messages in the visual material are value oriented. On the one hand, these messages reflect the right to express a value position in the public space. On the other hand, the content of these views is focused on denying the rights of others and advocating the monopolization of public space by one social group. The dominant messages in the photos are: 'The people do not want you', 'No LGBT in our city'. Men speak on behalf of the assembled group (e.g. Klix, 2022d), presenting their speech as speaking on behalf of the nation, and state. The motto of the entire gathering was 'Give us back the rainbow' and 'You stole our rainbow' (e.g. Klix, 2022d).





*Fig. 8. So-called anti-protests in Sarajevo (source: Klix, 2022d)*



*Fig. 9. 'Give back our rainbow' in Sarajevo (source: Klix, 2022d)*

Unlike the messages from the pride parade, which insisted on the diversity of families, in the photos from the anti-protest, the dominant paradigm is the traditional, patriarchal family. The anti-protest program with balloons and other content for children was designed and subsequently presented in photographs focusing on the traditional family. The photographs are dominated by the flags of Bosnia and Herzegovina and images of



traditional families. The dominant paradigms of anti-protest messages are patriotism, nationalism, traditionalism, patriarchy and religion.

Those texts that focused on safety, traffic regulation, and security measures were also significant for the analysis. A total of 50 photographs accompany these newspaper texts. On the one hand, usually very crowded streets are deserted in these photos, and the phrases 'blocked streets', 'police on the streets', and 'closed streets' are repeated in the titles of the articles and their content. On the other hand, the presence of the police shows the militarization of public space during the Pride parade.



*Fig. 10. Police on the streets of Sarajevo during the Pride March (source: N1 BiH, 2022a)*

## **Conclusion**

The act of walking/parading/protesting in the street is an act of entering a public urban space, but public space is never an empty space. However, the circumstances under which public events take place and the conditions under which it is organized pose a challenge to democratization. The analysed textual and visual media reports on Pride Parade in Belgrade and Sarajevo confirm a hierarchisation of urban public space formed by national history and its material structures and hegemonic struggle over the space of appearance. Nevertheless, it is a unique walk/protest/parade that is primarily framed as a 'risky' event and this scene provides a basic background for the events, and as such also a grey-zone which awakens national narcissism and militaristic response to the emerging crisis and towards those labelled as Outsiders.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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