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It was not that long ago, that features about lesbian partnerships with children from previous heterosexual marriages were unconceivable in the Serbian press. Today, empathy-evoking stories on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons which place them in the context of everyday life, written in a non-sensationalist manner and crucial for their inclusion in society, are slowly finding their way into the pages of national newspapers. However, such texts represent exceptions, because the prevailing coverage continues to be far from inclusive and ethical.

The media image of LGBT persons is still full of negative stereotypes and prejudices which result in the denial of their human rights. LGBT persons continue to be presented as a social anomaly, placed in the same category as shocking news, scandals or entertainment and depicted as non-patriots and persons with lifestyles that are foreign and opposite of the traditional Serbian orthodox culture.

The press tends to marginalize LGBT population by minimizing their social significance. The media conveys a message suggesting that there are far more serious concerns in Serbian society than the issue of discrimination of LGBT persons. This is illustrated by contextually-related excerpts such as „this is the worst possible moment for gay parade“ and „Serbia has not been in such a difficult economic situation for very long time.“



In addition to largely ignoring the issue of LGBT human rights under the pretext of the economic crisis, the media also largely acts in a way that turn one social group against the other by disseminating and emphasizing opinions that the LGBT population is less deprived with regard to human rights than are other social groups: „workers, unemployed, senior citizens, persons with disabilities and all those hunger strikers...are by far a more threatened category of citizens in Serbia than are homosexuals, transvestits and similar“. The media suggest that LGBT demands are a luxury of developed countries.

One of the contributions of media to the adverse image of this segment of the population is its constant negative context placement. The media does not need to openly express an unfavorable stance on LGBT persons in order for there to be an associated negative perception by the public. If news on threats, assaults, killings, illnesses and conflicts is the prevailing content related to the LGBT community, even if it presents LGBT persons as victims and condemns violence against them, the negative context nonetheless generates an accompanying negative connotation with incidents and violence, and this in turn adversely affects the public perception of this social group.

The marginalization of LGBT persons also takes place in discussions involving extremists, who

garner significant media attention in every debate on human rights of the LGBT community. Hate-filled arguments of extremist organizations add to the negative image of the LGBT population with LGBT persons accused of “not being patriotic enough”, „not being Orthodox Christian enough“, „not having compassion for the ways of the Serbian nation“ and „being indifferent on the Kosovo issue“. This media construction involving the diametrically opposing extremes, hooligans and extremists on one end and LGBT persons and their supporters on the other, suggests them both as being socially unacceptable, with „normality“ being somewhere in between.

Apart from presenting extreme, militant opinions which completely deny human rights to LGBT persons, the print media in Serbia also gives prominence to the „four wall“ stance, thus expressing intolerance, but in a less conspicuous way. According to the „four wall“ stance, „everyone's sexual orientation is a private matter and should remain within one's four walls. Coming out is not considered appropriate. A stance like this serves to maintain the stigma, reinforcing the stereotype of LGBT persons as a social anomaly. “My stance is that everyone is allowed to do whatever they want within their four walls, but publicly it is not acceptable, because we are Orthodox Christians,” the media quoted a politician. “If men want to kiss themselves, they should do that where nobody can see them.”

The media coverage of the Pride March mostly focuses on safety aspects. Sensationalist reporting and the media focus on security, contributes to the public image of Pride as a disproportionately highrisk event. A daily newspaper used the same headline twice in ten days: „Five thousand policemen guard five hundred gays.“ This reporting approach serves to intimidate rather than assure citizens. It also represents implicit criticism of the „wasting“ of tax payer money. In such a way, the intended effect is not achieved through hate speech but through seemingly well-intended safety concerns.

Journalists are not always aware of their discriminative practices however. In this sense more should be done to raise awareness among them of the consequences of particular approaches to reporting on LGBT-related issues. Although the Serbian media has made a certain amount of progress in LGBT reporting in the last decade, there still remains a lot to be done to make reporting on this social group more inclusive, tolerant and ethical.

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