

CIVIC

## Visas for New Montenegro

By: Daliborka Uljarević

**Our ministers and other decision makers have also travelled, and we paid for their trips through the public budget, as well as for their stays in expensive hotels out of which they could not see the specificities of the cities they visited, so they remained with the same provincial mindset with which they had set out on that road in the first place. The difference is that now the roads will be open to those who have less in their pockets but much more in their hearts and minds. This is a big change that will contribute to the formers' political retirement, in order to ensure that they cease smothering that "big breathing space" that Dinosa talked about but they never managed to create. And a herald of good news for Montenegro**

These days have been marked by two apparently different themes which are in fact strongly intertwined: actualisation of rights of LGBT persons and the decision on visa liberalisation.

On the technical level, the connection between the two lies in the commitments we are still expected to fulfil, since we got visa liberalisation "on credit". The issue at hand is adoption of anti-discrimination laws and their implementation.

On the level of content, which is more important, the existence of tolerance, i.e. the acceptance of difference will crucially define our capacity to Europeanise and modernise.

In Montenegro, differences as basis for the deepening of knowledge, understanding and cooperation are difficult to accept. They are emphasised as a reason for opposition, which only broadens the existing or creates new gap. The attitude towards tolerance can hardly be any better if we bear in mind that the state has not yet been properly established, that many of the key barriers to its development have not be resolved, and that the ruling political elite has no vision, will or strategy to overcome them.

These are the constrains. But they are not excuses not to change things by getting rid of ancient prejudices, and to some extent of tradition which has lost its *raison d'être*, customs which have no place in a world which strives towards progress, towards getting to know the other and others, towards a dialogue which is not burdened by conditions and positions.

European integrations bring rules which ought to be respected. Their basis is the respect of the right to be different – in the ethnic, national, cultural, political, sexual, and every other sense. A part of that is formalised, through a series of documents whose ratification is more a result of external pressures than of an internal commitment to these principles and awareness of the need for their implementation.

If it were otherwise, we would not have the current Government recently supporting a special statement in the United Nations against discrimination of sexual minorities, and afterwards announcing, in the person of the relevant minister that "THIS (he is speaking about LGBT persons! Author's note) is not good news" and that he would personally "would not be very happy if THIS existed in Montenegro"!?

The damage is done to the citizens, in this case homosexuals, lesbians, bisexual and transsexual persons who certainly represent a higher percentage of the population than the minority represented by the said minister. He had built his political carrier on the defence of rights of the Albanian minority, and in

this pursuit he enjoyed support of all those who are aware of the importance of minority rights. It is natural, therefore, to ask which criteria are guiding Minister **Dinoša** in ranking minorities according to their importance and value to the society, or in declaring a part of Montenegrin citizens a “bad news”, ignoring even their personality. Or, would it be even more natural to ask Prime Minister **Đukanović** what makes him protect this member of his Government?

Someone who does not have even elementary knowledge of and sensibility for human rights cannot be a minister of human rights. That is, he can, but only in a Government which did not distance itself through concrete actions from this excess, thus demonstrating that this is indeed the official stance, that tolerance is not accepted as the basis of all governmental action and that public interest is subordinated to inter-party transactions.

I know very well what kind of country I am living in and that LGBT persons are here considered a phenomenon one ought to fight, a family disgrace or a disorder. I believe this is partially out of ignorance, because the issue here is discrimination, which can affect all of us, on various grounds, it is a question of making true on our words (and we like to boast about it!), a question of credibility of the policy of equality of all citizens and their freedoms, which are the keystone of democracy. Or, let us go back to that tradition that serves as a cover to our minister and his fellows: this is a question of honour and of ability to be tolerant and protect the others from yourself as much as you protect yourself from others.

There are not two same people in this world. That's why we have to be ready for the fact that we will very rarely discover our own traits in others, and more often than not we will face contrasts and differences. And we have to have the good will and openness to look the person with a different worldview from ours in the eye, without our look carrying scorn or turning into intolerance.

Visa liberalisation is a historical turning point for Montenegro. It signifies de-ghettoisation of our society, through those people who will, perhaps for the first time, get to know Europe they've been dreaming about and who will bring the spirit of tolerance and a proactive attitude towards human rights and freedoms. These people will see different cultures, different lifestyles, orientations and decisions which are not decisively ours. Our ministers and other decision makers have also travelled, and we paid for their trips through the public budget, as well as for their stays in expensive hotels out of which they could not see the specificities of the cities they visited, so they remained with the same provincial mindset with which they had set out on that road in the first place. The difference is that now the roads will be open to those who have less in their pockets but much more in their hearts and minds. This is a big change that will contribute to the formers' political retirement, in order to ensure that they cease smothering that “big breathing space” that Dinoša talked about but they never managed to create. And a herald of good news for Montenegro.

*The author is executive director of Centre for Civic Education (CCE)*