

CIVIC
Pride

By: Daliborka Uljarević

It would have been more honest, then, if our deputy prime minister in charge of the political system simply said that he and his colleagues are ashamed of being seen sitting or parading with fags and lesbians and those who support them.

Some issues are simply not popular. Which is exactly why it's the duty of all of us who do not feel like discriminated minorities to push for these topics, to insist on them even if those directly concerned cannot. For our sake, as much as for theirs. You never know when you'll end up being a minority in need of support and encouragement.

Today, the first Pride Parade was supposed to take place in Podgorica, an event meant to celebrate the much needed tolerance towards the other, equality and universality of human rights in our society. The event was postponed, because of the lack of adequate political and security conditions. A testimony to the gap between the words and deeds of our officials. One cannot live on nice words, even if they sooth our ears.

Much has been said on this topic in the last few months, often with inappropriate zeal bordering on unbridled hate speech, especially where the authors could remain anonymous, so it's important to highlight a few facts.

Montenegrin Constitution guarantees equality before the law to all citizens, regardless of their personal characteristics, freedom of peaceful gathering, freedom of association and action, and priority of international law through its direct implementation when it differs from the national legislation. What the Pride Parade was trying to accomplish was a legal right, guaranteed by the Constitution and international documents, of a group of our citizens, members of a minority – a sexual minority, but also of all others who as “majority” would have lent them support.

But the freedom of choice of average citizens isn't the freedom of choice of the decision-makers. In democratic societies and those that aspire to that title, the authorities have the duty to protect and promote the rule of law. This cannot and must not be a matter of personal whim, good or bad will, sympathy towards somebody or lack thereof... This is also clear to the Government of Montenegro, and so we keep hearing that the organisers have “full political support”, that it “offered a much greater level of institutional support than any other government in the region” etc. The reality unambiguously proves them wrong.

Organisers of this Pride Parade, from civil society, have never received a single response in writing to their communications, either from the Government of Montenegro or the responsible institutions. Our colleagues from the region have explicitly warned about the importance of written communication in the preparation of such events, which undoubtedly carry high security risks.

The preparations for the Belgrade Pride 2010 included weekly meetings between the civil society and the Government. In Montenegro, during three months of preparations there were two such meetings. One of them, which attracted a lot of media attention, was attended by the president of the LGBT Forum Progress **Zdravko Cimbalević** together with the deputy prime minister **Duško Marković**, director of the Police **Veselin Veljović** and deputy minister for human and minority rights **Blanka Radošević Marović**. Much was promised in front of the cameras, and then all communication dried out. The only open channelled remained between the organisers and the police inspector in charge of the matter, **Darko Knežević**.

LGBT Forum Progress asked for political representatives to attend the event. Only 4 days before the announced date of the Pride, they were informed that only civil servants will be there.

Do we need any more evidence that the Government does not want a Pride Parade?

Involvement of the political representatives, not civil servants, in the organisation of the Pride would be a measurable indicator of the rhetorical political support and a necessary step in guaranteeing security and dignity of the participants. In this turbulent region, similar events were only successful when they received such support. Even in the far more tolerant Slovenia (concerning this issue) the Pride was always supported by the mayors, and the ministers of home affairs attended the event as its official sponsors. In Croatia, Pride was supported by the former and present presidents, and the ministers of home affairs and MPs took active part in the event. In Serbia, which is our favourite benchmark where we can score ourselves points of advantage, the minister of human and minority

rights took part in the event, and there is little chance that it could have ever happened without professional and political involvement of the deputy prime minister and minister of home affairs.

It would have been more honest, then, if our deputy prime minister in charge of the political system simply said that he and his colleagues are ashamed of being seen sitting or parading with fags and lesbians and those who support them. It would be more honest if they just said that this is not what their voters want, and that between party interest and individual prejudices on the one hand and professional duties and public interests in improving the rights of all citizens on the other they happily chose the first one. It wouldn't have been the first time – we have heard similar things long ago from minister **Ferhat Dinoša**, and they obviously have fewer qualms hanging out with him, exclusionary and homophobic as he is, than respecting the citizens who, through this and similar activities, only wish to claim their right to equal chances and treatment in our society.

Government's approach towards the organisation of the Pride Parade is a continuation of its hypocritical politics, with the difference that many in this country are quite happy to accept that. Some issues are simply not popular. Which is exactly why it's the duty of all of us who do not feel like discriminated minorities to push for these topics, to insist on them even if those directly concerned cannot. For our sake, as much as for theirs. You never know when you'll end up being a minority in need of support and encouragement.

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