



DEMOCRACY FOR ALL

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF LGBTI PERSONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Conference Summary

“DEMOCRACY FOR ALL”

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF LGBTI
PERSONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Belgrade, Republic of Serbia
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Author:

Jovanka Todorovic

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Jovanka Todorovic

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Daniel Mitkovski

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¹ <http://www.astraeafoundation.org/>

² <https://www.giz.de/en/html/index.html>



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1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THE 2015 "DEMOCRACY FOR ALL" CONFERENCE

The Conference "Democracy for All: Political Participation of LGBTI Persons in the Western Balkans" (hereafter: "Democracy for All" conference) was held in Belgrade, Serbia from September 15th to 17th 2015, bringing together nearly 150 participants from the civil society and governmental sector, members of Serbia's National Assembly (hereafter: "MPs"), as well as the representatives of the independent state bodies from all Western Balkan countries. It was organized by Labris, in partnership with the LGBTQ Victory Institute (Victory Institute) and HES (Hirschfeld-Eddy-Stiftung), financially supported by Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, and the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the National Assembly's Committee for Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality provided significant co-organizational support.

It is important to highlight the fact that this conference was part of a broader 3-year project, entitled "*International Partnership for LGBTI Political Participation and Leadership in the Balkans*", which focused on political leadership training and represented a continuation of Victory Institute's and Labris' strategy to increase the political participation of LGBTI people in the Balkans.

From May to November 2014, Labris, the Victory Institute, and NDI supported by Astraea, organized "Political Leadership Training for LGBTI people in the Balkans" in Belgrade, Serbia, which included five 3-day training modules, as well as inviting the trainees to the "Democracy for All" conference. The training was designed to provide the necessary tools for LGBTI individuals to participate in the democratic process, as a tool to advance towards equality. It provided comprehensive non-partisan training for future candidates, campaign staff, and LGBTI community leaders interested in political participation. The training modules stressed the need for strengthening the capacity of LGBTI leaders to be involved in their democracies in order to secure progress towards full equality for every citizen. While running as an openly

LGBTI candidate may not have been a feasible reality at the time, these trainings planted the seed of political participation for future possibilities.

Additionally, Labris and Victory Institute collaborated with one of our trainees from Kosovo to organize a Civil Society Forum in Prishtinë/Priština, Kosovo (March 2015). Three more were organized after the “Democracy for All” conference, in collaboration with trainees, in Belgrade, Serbia (June 2016), Skopje, Macedonia (April 2016) and Tirana, Albania (May 2016). These events brought together LGBTI civil society leaders, local party and government representatives, and regional high-ranking government officials to discuss strategies on promoting political participation of the LGBTI population in their countries.

As part of this overall project, the three-day “Democracy for All” conference concentrated on the political participation of LGBTI persons in the Western Balkans. It consisted of a pre-conference session, which was held on September 15th in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, with 86 participants in attendance. This was followed by the two-day conference, attended by nearly 150 participants.

The conference had three main goals, three thematic axes, and was broken down into three types of sessions³:

Goals:

1. Identify progress, challenges, and best practices in the processes of political participation and human rights of the LGBTI population in the region.
2. Encourage LGBTI political participation in the Balkans.
3. Help the Balkan LGBTI movement move the equality agenda forward with State institutions.

Themes:

1. LGBTI Political Leadership

³ Full conference agenda can be found in Annex A

2. Democracy and LGBTI Participation
3. Tools for Participation

Sessions:

1. Plenary Panels: all participants attend and expand on different issues raised in each thematic area.
2. Panel Discussions: the audience chooses from a series of discussions, so they may have a more in-depth discussion and exchange experiences on some of the issues addressed in the plenary panels.
3. Workshops: running simultaneously to other workshops, facilitated by experts in the field and allow the audience to acquire specific skills that will serve them well in the performance of their political leadership.

Although the conference had a regional focus, "Democracy for All" also brought reputable foreign political leaders from outside of the Balkan region - from France, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, as well as the representatives of the Embassies in the Republic of Serbia, the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia.

The pre-conference meeting at the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia was attended by civil society activists, independent institutions at the local and national level, representatives of Embassies' in the Republic of Serbia, the OSCE Mission to Serbia, the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia, as well as a representative of the Government of Montenegro and MPs from Albania, Ireland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. This diverse group of participants represented a truly historic moment. It was the first time that in any country in the Western Balkans, LGBTI activists sat down together with decision-makers to talk about greater political participation of the LGBTI community, one of most underrepresented groups in the region.

One of the main goals of this meeting was to connect MPs from the Western Balkan countries with MPs from EU countries, in order to exchange ideas about their role in the promotion of human rights of LGBTI persons and



the advancement of equality for minority groups. The pre-conference meeting also allowed a national focus on Serbia, in order to take advantage of the participation of international high-ranking LGBTI officials and allies already present for the conference.

Also, worth mentioning is the fact that another important event took place on 15th September, in the hall of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, historical for the LGBTI movement in the Western Balkans. The founding assembly of regional LGBTI association – The Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Turkey (hereafter: ERA) took place, becoming the umbrella LGBTI association in the Balkans, gathering nearly 30 LGBTI organizations from the region. ERA decided to write the importance of political participation of LGBTI persons in the Western Balkans into its structure and guiding principals, and members were able to attend the conference.

2. DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE PRE-CONFERENCE & "DEMOCRACY FOR ALL" CONFERENCE

2.1. Pre-Conference Demographics

The majority identified as gay, followed by heterosexuals and lesbians, while only a few identified as bisexuals and trans persons, and 2 attendees did not specify their sexual orientation/gender identity.

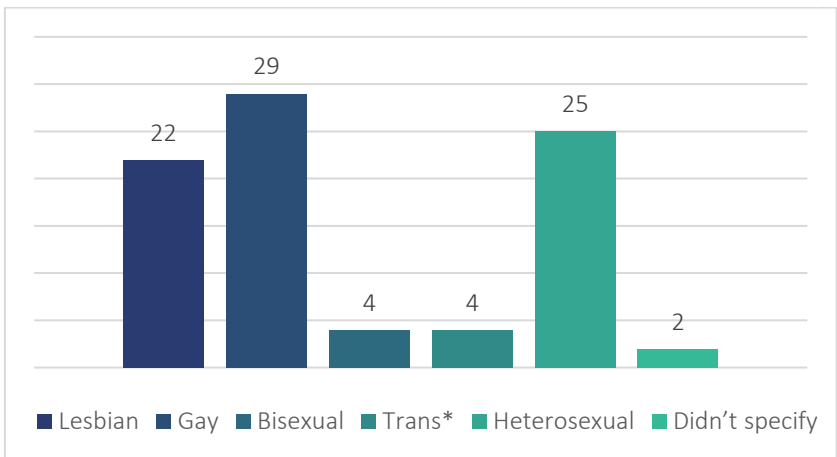


Table 1: Sexual orientation/gender identity representation of pre-conference's attendees

With regard to the pre-conference attendees' area of work, following table indicates that majority were members of LGBTI organizations, followed by the representatives of political parties/movements, civil society organizations and institutions, while 5 attendees did not specify their area of work.

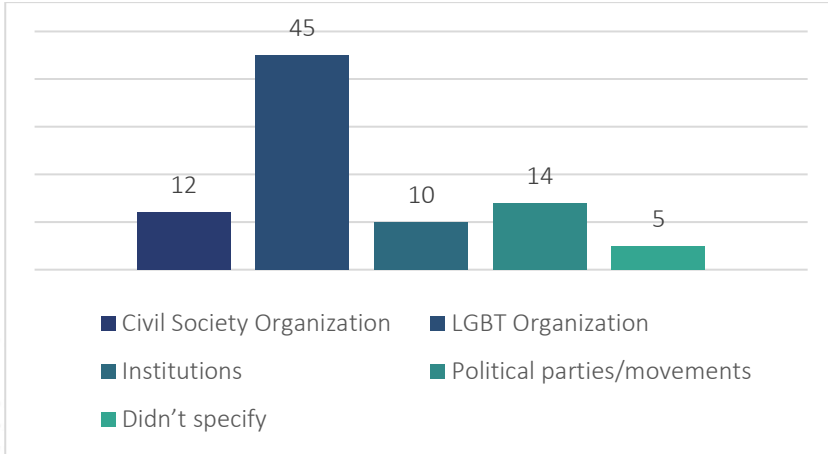


Table 2: The pre-conference attendees' area of work

As for geographic background, the vast majority of pre-conference attendees were from urban areas, as shown in table below.

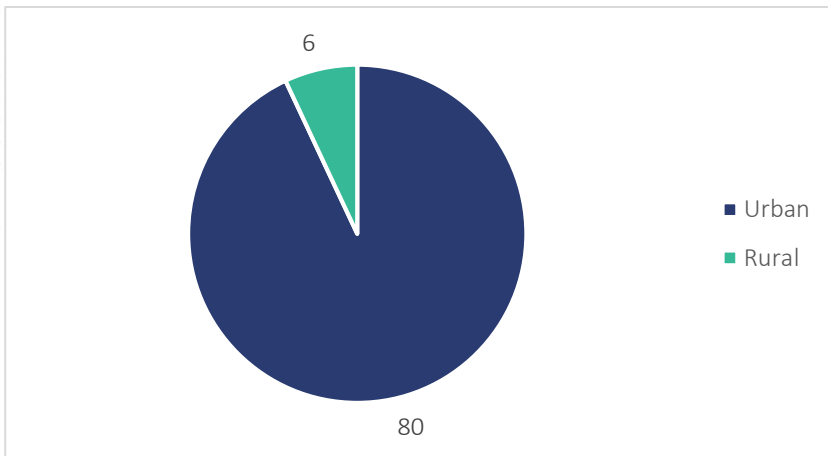


Table 3: The pre-conference attendees' geographic background – urban or rural

2.2. "Democracy for All" Conference Demographics

As for the gender representation of the "Democracy for all" conference is concerned, likewise the participants of the pre-conference, female attendees slightly outnumbered male, while 3 people did not specify their gender.

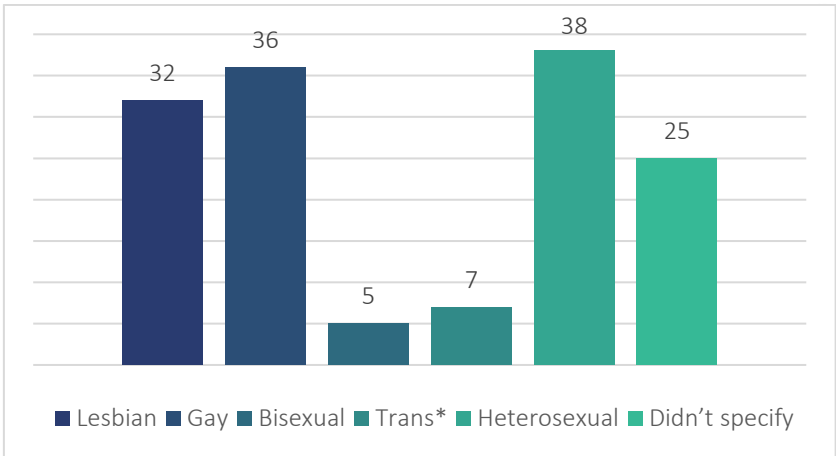


Table 4: Sexual orientation/gender identity of "Democracy for all" conference attendees

As far as the conference attendees' area of work is concerned, the majority of participants were affiliated with LGBTI organizations, followed by representatives of institutions and other civil society organizations, followed by representatives from political parties/movements and 11 people who did not specify their area of work.

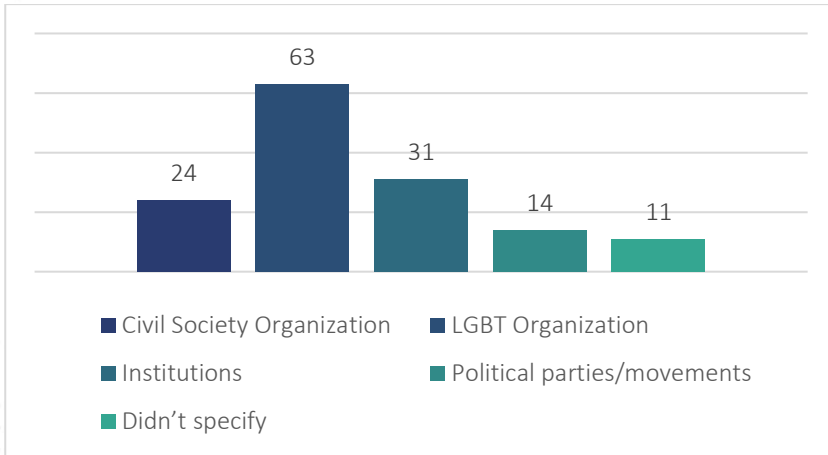


Table 5: Area of work of "Democracy for all" conference attendees

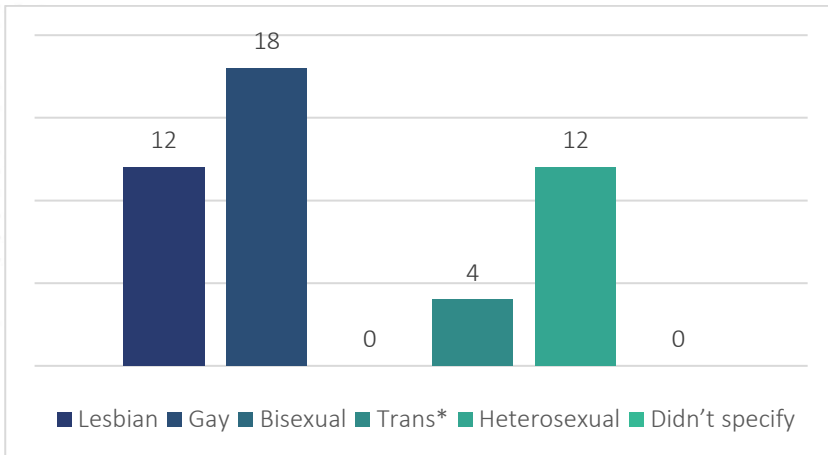


Table 6: Sexual orientation of the "Democracy for all" conference key speakers

The data in Table 10 represents the self-reported area of work of "Democracy for All" conference speakers. Most were from LGBTI organizations.

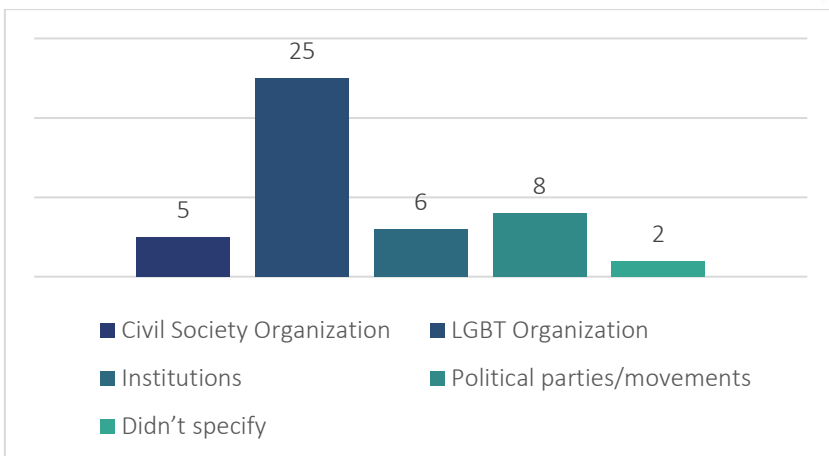


Table 7: The area of work of "Democracy for all" conference key speakers

The geographic distribution of attendees was wide. Some key participants were Liljana Popovska, Member of Parliament from Macedonia, Matej Tašner Vatovac, Member of the Slovenian Parliament, Arbjola Halimi, Member of the Albanian Parliament, Andrija Popović, Member of the Parliament of Montenegro, Jerry Buttimer, Member of the Irish Parliament, Wiktor Dynarski of the Trans-Fuzja Foundation in Poland, Anđela Čeh of the Serbian Office for Human and Minority Rights, Montenegro Council Member for Civil Control of the Police Saša Zeković, and Jovan Kojičić, Adviser to Prime Minister in Montenegro.



3. MAIN FINDINGS

3.1. The main findings of the Pre-Conference, September 15, 2015

During the pre-conference on the 15th, attendees were addressed by Irish MP, Jerry Buttimer, who expressed satisfaction for being invited to participate in this meeting and added that the mechanisms must be found to counter stereotypes in order to achieve full equality within society. Also, among the speakers were the Regional Director of the National Democratic Institute for Central and Eastern Europe, Robert Benjamin from the USA, long-time MP of the German Parliament (Bundestag), Michael Kauch, and Adviser to the Montenegrin Prime Minister, Jovan Kojičić, who welcomed this initiative of the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia, and announced a similar initiative in Montenegrin Parliament, stressing the importance of education as one of the main tools for combating social stereotypes.

Deputy President Ljiljana Malušić, on the behalf of the Committee for Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, also addressed the audience and pointed out that there is not only progress in terms of political support for LGBTI rights at the government level, but also at the parliamentary level. Malušić discussed the range of activities that the Committee undertakes, pointing first to the annual report on the situation of LGBTI persons as well as the joint representation of public policy proposals for improving the situation of the LGBTI community in Serbia. She added that the Committee would continue even more intensively to address the protection of LGBTI rights.

One important feature of the pre-conference was the findings in the regional research conducted by NDI, Civil Rights Defenders, and the Victory Institute, titled “LGBTI Public Opinion Poll: Western Balkans”⁴ which outlines perceptions of the general population towards LGBTI issues. NDI representative, Marko Ivković, presented the regional public opinion survey on attitudes towards LGBTI persons in the region and how they influence political

⁴ <https://www.slideshare.net/NDIdemocracy/ndi-public-opinion-poll-in-the-balkans-on-lgbti-communities>

participation, followed by a discussion on how political parties and elected officials can support LGBTI rights.

One key conclusion highlighted several times during the conference, is the fact that political parties do not receive backlash when they support openly LGBTI candidates. The study investigated how citizens decide their vote, and it was found that ultimately voters will support a party based on issues other than the LGBTI status of a candidate. It was also shown that the Serbian party did not lose support after supporting Pride initiatives. It is also worth mentioning that the conference itself was very well received by the pro-equality Parliamentarians in the National Parliament during the pre-conference session, where the research was presented for the first time.

Another conclusion of regional study is that the greater visibility of LGBTI people contributes to greater understanding by the general population, and that this visibility consequently leads to greater legal and social equality. Therefore, participation of openly LGBTI persons within party structures will be beneficial to other members of the party in understanding LGBTI issues. Similarly, the visibility of openly LGBTI elected and appointed officials in local and national government will help to sway public opinion in a positive direction, as well as encourage further participation from the LGBTI community.

Overall, the issues discussed in the National Assembly varied, from everyday problems faced by LGBTI persons in the Western Balkans, to the prevention measures and ways to improve mechanisms to combat homophobia and transphobia. This pre-conference meeting was also a very useful opportunity for Parliaments from the region to exchange experiences, to discuss the political rights of LGBTI people, and to start the process of jointly reaching a solution to improve the status of marginalized social groups.

3.2. The main findings of the "Democracy for All" Conference; September 16-17, 2015

The conference debate confirmed what was already well-known – that the common perception heading into the conference was that LGBTI advocates in the Western Balkan countries are more likely to influence the

social changes through the civil sector, as activists, rather than from the political sphere. Voices raised during the conference debate could let us conclude that the governments are still not totally open and supportive towards LGBTI issues, not even in Slovenia and Croatia, the EU member states.

It is evident that the "Democracy for All" conference initiated a new approach to the LGBTI activism in this region. It tackled discrimination of LGBTI persons in the Western Balkans by offering the concept of political participation as a tool to advance toward equality, which is one of the main pillars of the Victory Institute's work.

The conversations had during this conference represented the natural fit between the advocacy-related work already being done and the newer efforts aimed to increase the political participation of LGBTI people. Panels and plenaries explored the different ways in which political participation can move the equality agenda forward. Positive arguments regarding the pluralization of political spaces for everyone were highlighted, as well as best practices in the processes of democratic participation and protection of human rights of LGBTI persons in the Balkans.

3.3. Key conclusions from Plenary and Panel Sessions

Opening Ceremony (Welcome Address)

At the opening ceremony, newly appointed German Ambassador to Serbia, H.E. Mr. Axel Dittmann, welcomed the idea of organizing the conference and similar events. Gordon Duguid, Charge D'Affairs of the USA Embassy in Belgrade, echoed this idea and stressed his satisfaction with the work of LGBTI organizations in Serbia, as well as the work of the Serbian government. He welcomed the dialogue between civil society and government that led to the successful Pride Parade in 2014. Both diplomats highlighted that the amelioration of the status of LGBTI people in Serbia is visible and that events like this should only encourage future developments. Both speakers placed the opening speech's discussions of the human rights of LGBTI persons within the context of the status of LGBTI people in the countries from which they were from, and within the context of what their embassies did for human rights of LGBTI people in Serbia.

In addressing the audience, the organizers, Victory Institute, Labris and HES, gave a broader framework of the project "International Partnership for LGBTI Political Participation and Leadership in the Balkans", which encompasses the 5 LGBTI leadership training modules, the civil society forums and the "Democracy for All" conference. The conference is a part of a broader strategy to encourage greater political participation of LGBTI people in the Balkans, as a tool to advance human rights and equality.

Taken together, the opening speakers encouraged participants to be active during the sessions, and to consider important questions throughout the conference, such as:

- How can we increase political participation of LGBTI people in the Western Balkans countries?
- How can we improve the dialogue between civil society and the government?
- How can we influence political decisions as civil society activists?

LGBTI Visibility: Exploring the construction of a real democracy

Aspects of democracy, such as inclusion and representation in advancing the human rights and participation of LGBTI persons, falls under the "Democracy and LGBTI Participation" conference theme. This plenary gathered a total of 8 speakers from Germany, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Belgium, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden.

All speakers shared the information regarding the status of human rights of LGBTI people in their countries and topics that are on the political agenda, underlining the biggest concerns, but also noting the opportunities for overcoming them. Very diverse panelists, with significantly different experiences, gave an insight of the obstacles they experienced. Slovenian activist, Tatjana Greiff, recalled leaving "cozy well-known environment of LGBTI activism" and entering in the political arena.

For Swedish speaker Johanna Lönn, the "biggest benefit of being an open candidate is to provide the possibility for identification." Member of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) from Germany, Michael Kauch, stressed that it is

important to have separate issue portfolios, and to strategically coordinate with relevant straight allies for LGBTI issues separately. The main recommendations made by the speakers during this plenary session were:

- Democracy, to have legitimacy, needs broader perspectives and representation.
- It is important to be where decisions are made (i.e. in government) in order to be well-heard and to make solid impacts.
- It is important to have different issue portfolios, and one specifically for LGBTI rights.
- For out LGBTI politicians, private decisions matter, both in positive and negative ways.
- Through the LGBTI intergroup in the European Parliament (EP), which is the largest intergroup encompassing 1/5 of all EP members, you can carry certain things through, give visibility to topics, and impact the agenda.
- Often, for pragmatic reasons, LGBTI people decide not to come out, as they know that it could influence their political career and prevent further involvement in politics.
- Need for strengthening the relationship between public perception of LGBTI people in the region and political participation.

Poll about Public Perception of LGBTI People in the region: How does this affect political participation?

NDI representative Marko Ivković presented the data gathered within the “LGBTI Public Opinion Poll: Western Balkans⁵ that was conducted in the summer of 2015 in six Western Balkan countries: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. This research was done in coordination with NDI and IPSOS Research and supported by USAID, the Victory Institute, and Civil Right Defenders.

The regional poll, meant to promote more inclusive political processes, showed that although the most respondents do not believe that LGBTI people should be able to live openly based on equal rights, it is still true

⁵ <https://www.slideshare.net/NDIdemocracy/ndi-public-opinion-poll-in-the-balkans-on-lgbti-communities>

that young, educated and urban residents in six Western Balkans countries tend to support human rights of LGBTI persons. Furthermore, the poll revealed low levels of knowledge about the LGBTI population, and a correspondingly high degree of resistance to equal rights and opportunities based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

"The fact that LGBTI people are largely invisible to the general population produces low understanding of the size and scope of discrimination, physical violence and psychological abuse towards LGBTI people", Marko Ivković from NDI/Serbia, who directed the research, said in his presentation. "In Serbia, for example, only 18 percent of the general population personally knows someone who is openly LGBTI, and that's the highest rate among the countries surveyed".

Some of the most important results of LGBTI sample within the poll were discussed:

- Three out of four LGBTI persons have been exposed to psychological abuse and verbal harassment, one out of four have suffered physical violence, and one out of two LGBTI persons has faced discrimination at school, at work, or elsewhere due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- One of the worrying findings was the fact that most would try to "cure" their child, if they were LGBTI and most would stop communication when discovering a friend or neighbor to be LGBTI.
- The strong majority rejects same-sex marriage, but is prepared to see some marriage-related rights extended to same-sex couples. More than one-third of the general population supports the hospitalization access, property inheritance and health insurance coverage for same-sex couples.
- When people were asked directly whether they as voters would vote for a political party that supports human rights of LGBTI people, most responded that they would not, ranging from 47% in Serbia to 58% in Albania. However, when survey questions delved deeper into the issues, research showed that voters actually base their vote off other issues such as economy and unemployment.
- Another encouraging data point is that Serbia's ruling party did not lose support in allowing the 2014 Belgrade Pride Parade to take place.

Cultivating allies: Marriage equality as a case study

One of the most discussed topics throughout the two days was marriage equality and this panel gathered 7 speakers from the region, one from the US and another from Ireland, to share recent best practices.

The Macedonian speaker spoke about the obstacles local activists faced in advocating for same-sex partnership law, especially in the light of no access to the national TV station. She explained how they are currently advocating, mentioning the three groups they created: a group of legal experts, LGBTI activists, and members from the LGBTI community. For the first time, these three groups came together in front of parliament only to lobby for LGBTI rights.

The Bosnian activist explained a very deliberately and carefully developed advocating strategy for articulating the marriage equality issue. This conversation came at a time where this was a very important strategic question of Bosnian LGBTI activism, and although activists don't expect law to enter parliamentary procedure, they do want political parties to take a stance on this issue.

The speaker from Marriage Equality USA, Brian Silva, stressed: "We cannot have LGBTI equality without marriage equality, but we cannot let marriage equality be the definition of full equality".

Some key conclusions from the panel included:

- Marriage equality is important for LGBTI equality, but it should not be the definition of full equality and it cannot be the only focus.
- Advocacy strategies for this delicate issue must be carefully developed, in accordance to the social climate, but that still benefits the LGBTI populations.
- Laws are not enough, unless the culture is not changed at the same time. Thus, groups should not only concentrate their efforts on laws but in other avenues like cultural production and grassroots initiatives.

Cultivating allies: Know their needs

In this panel, MPs of several Balkan nations as well as an MP from Ireland spoke on how to best maximize alliance of straight partners, and recognition in public discourse. Among the speakers, a general strategy was outlined that consisted of three main points to gain public favor. To begin this process, LGBTI persons must build coalitions of existing allies to back them in their initial approaches to legislative bodies. The speakers emphasized the importance of NGOs and international human rights organizations in providing the backing and validation to messaging in communities where conversations on LGBTI issues are in their infancy.

Next, using the pressure from these coalitions, LGBTI citizenry must be brave and willing to share their stories to normalize their existence and issues within the general populace. The power of authenticity, visibility, and story-telling was noted among the speakers as an important tool to humanize LGBTI issues among allies. Irish MP Jerry Buttimer is quoted, saying, “NGOs are critical but with them, they need to build influence within political parties. I think you will find that within political parties – when we personalize, when we make it human, that we are the sons and daughters, friends and colleagues, that they [the parties] know and live in their community...it will make all of our tasks that little bit easier.” Once these coalitions are formed and LGBTI citizenry are visible, strategic political maneuvering can be employed as defined by the context of the state. For example, Macedonian MP Liljana Popovska spoke of taking advantage of political crisis/turmoil to move “difficult” legislation. Others spoke that LGBTI issues are not wholly *legal* issues, but that social attitudes are at the core of strife and thus contextual information is needed to maneuver this third step.

The fundamental point that ran through this session was the importance of international/NGO coalition building to provide ethos (and sometimes even pathos) to local LGBTI political movements in order to build ally-ship and future coalitions.

Key points are as follows:

- NGOs and International Body coalitions are crucial in establishing ethos and support for LGBTI issues on local levels.
- Local LGBTI leaders must seek to tell their stories and make themselves visible to normalize as much of their experience as possible.
- Local political maneuvering with the backing of built coalitions is important for the changing of legislation, but social attitudes must to be changed by open example and normalization.

The power of our vote in the Western Balkans: Mobilizing the LGBTI vote for the change

In the discussions for mobilizing LGBTI identifying people to vote, there was emphasis on the creation of platforms to engage these individuals and to approach this population through grassroots initiatives and concrete outreach activities. Speakers representing the Western Balkans emphasized the voice of individuals and showing political parties the power that the LGBTI population has through voting. As NDI noted in the pre-conference, this means being open to political parties about how to engage with these individuals and how to support LGBTI people who are open, to becoming active in the party.

- Parties should be open to working with LGBTI individuals and securing their votes.
- LGBTI groups should work to support LGBTI political participation and strategize with parties on a more intense level.
- The accession process is a vital time to work to promote LGBTI political participation and rights, so actors should move swiftly to make gains.

Trans Elected Officials: Redefining Politics

In a very insightful discussion, trans activists underscored the marginalization of trans people not only in politics but also within LGBTI activist movements. In a critique of the conference itself, the director of Transgender Europe, Julia Ehart, commented how trans speakers were placed on a panel talk specifically about trans issues, rather than being spread across to board to speak to a broader range of topics.

Further, the conversation also focused on supporting trans people becoming more visible, and to work with each other to push for acceptance. The conclusion was made that more trans people are needed in political life, and all participants agreed that greater visibility of trans people leads to greater degree of understanding of the trans community's needs. Similarly, the greater visibility would allow trans rights to become integrated within the political agenda at all levels where decisions are being made.

In order to achieve this, the whole LGBTI community must work together in solidarity. The speakers underlined the necessity and importance to understand and respect the use of correct gender pronouns, preferred names, gender identity, as well as providing the strong support to trans victims of violence, hate speech and discrimination.

A recurring theme emerged: Elected officials can do small things to create a big impact for the LGBTI community. Actions such as those mentioned above can set the tone of respect for an elected official's constituents. Leading by example can teach and encourage the larger population to learn about and respect their LGBTI neighbors, and thus promote further participation from the trans community.

Some of the key points discussed were:

- LGB individuals must become more supportive of trans issues and acknowledge the differences between the LGB population's needs and the realities faced by trans people.
- Political needs of trans people must be included in party platforms in order to allow access to full citizenship to this very vulnerable group.

Lesbian political leadership: Their role in promoting equality

The subject of lesbian women in politics was highlighted throughout the two-day conference, with a much deeper dialogue taking place during this panel. Discussions underlined the lesbophobia that exists in all levels of governments. Lesbians are positioned precariously because of the patriarchal structure within politics. This is evident in sexist arguments about women

generally in political circles. Women are already lacking in politics, let alone lesbian women.

On one hand, while the conclusion was that all countries in the Western Balkans are generally homophobic, there are still instances of progress and success such as Slovenian lesbian activist, Nataša Sukič, who was elected in 2014 as a City Councilor of Ljubljana. The panel reflected that all methods of political work are required at the same time – some must lobby institutions and political parties, while others should be more engaged in street activism.

An activist from Sarajevo, Emina Bošnjak, spoke about the systemic barriers in Bosnia and Herzegovina with its 16 levels of authorities, and the fact that they generally lobby at the cantonal level. Professor Zorica Mršević, PhD, Senior Research Fellow from the Belgrade’s Institute of Social Sciences spoke about the fundamental importance of feminist values in political activism and lesbian activists.


- The quota system in the region is problematic but necessary since without it, women would be in a worse position to enter politics.
- Human rights groups should understand the issues faced by lesbian women and make attempts to approach their work with an intersectional approach, including lesbians that also identify as Roma.

Workshops

On the last day, participants split up to attend one of three simultaneously occurring workshops:

- Workshop I: Advocacy techniques (with Nebojsa Andric)
- Workshop II: Running for office (with Kristina Wilfore)
- Workshop III: Social media activism (with Aleksandar Savic and Stefan Sparavalo)

The most highly-attended one was the “Advocacy Techniques” workshop. During this workshop, participants engaged in roleplaying exercises to argue for and against the rights of LGBTI-identifying people. The primary



lesson learned was the necessity to understand all viewpoints at play in these campaigns, and to learn how to navigate your opponent's arguments effectively.

The other two workshops focused on the process of becoming involved in politics, and learning the skills necessary to leverage social media as an effective tool for activism and social change. Kristina Wilfore, an expert on campaigns, elections and development of civil representation and greater participation of women in politics, led the "Running for Office" workshops which provided participants some of the necessary skills to run a successful electoral campaign as an openly LGBTI person.

The "Social Media Activism" was led by marketing experts from the consulting agency "Pin Consulting" Aleksandar Savić and Stefan Šparavalo. Aleksandar and Stefan are also former participants of the 2014 political leadership trainings, so this also served as an opportunity for further leadership development for them. They trained participants on effective usage of social media in order to get out your message, covering topics from how to use graphics to finding your target audiences.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE 2015 "DEMOCRACY FOR ALL" CONFERENCE

The "Democracy for All" conference was an overall success and sparked networking opportunities both regionally and globally. The central focus of the event was for LGBTI activists to be more involved in working with political parties and State institutions, to work in better cooperation with those bodies, or to provide the toolset to equip leaders to run for local office. Throughout the two-day conference (as well as the pre-conference, which took place the day prior), participants discussed various ways of how to advance their work forward for LGBTI human rights and better political representation for and of LGBTI-identifying persons. Below are the main conclusions and lessons learned from the conference.

Common grounds

- Discussions on political participation of LGBTI-identifying people tend to focus on broader LGBTI rights topics instead of actually on political participation. Although these topics are valid and important to understand, political participation of LGBTI people should also be raised as an important topic to be effectively tackled.
- Political participation of LGBTI citizens is low in each country, which is the reason why political parties and governments from all Western Balkan countries should encourage political participation of LGBTI persons and other underrepresented groups, through various types of support, from attending events, to being vocal about social acceptance of LGBTI rights.
- Trans people are some of the most vulnerable and marginalized among the LGBTI community, which is why their participation should be particularly taken into consideration in future activities.
- Same-sex marriage (partnership) is a top issue in all countries, and the progress related to marriage equality varies in each country, from Slovenia, being the most progressive, to Macedonia where it is challenging to even openly address this topic.
- No country has state statistics on homophobia/transphobia-motivated hate crimes and government and prosecutor offices should develop one.
- The focus must not be solely on gay men in politics, as is often the case, but

should instead be in intersectional approach to LGBTI persons of all identities and backgrounds.

- Hate speech made by political figures occurs often and usually goes unpunished.
- All governments should be more vocal in condemning hate crimes and hate speech.

Lessons learned

- The outnumbering of cis male speakers at the sessions showed that the gender balance in this area is challenging to overcome, and moving forward, more mechanisms will be put in place to ensure more gender-balanced conference, including the participation of trans and non-binary-identifying individuals.
- All Western Balkan's countries share very similar issues, not only with LGBTI issues, but also in terms of political participation and political systems. Thus, better cooperation should be promoted in the future to share ideas, strategies, and best practices throughout regional networks of activists and allies.
- It is important for activists to listen carefully and respectfully to the arguments of those who oppose protection of the human rights of LGBTI persons, and develop strategies to argue against such perspectives to encourage change and understanding.
- Partnerships should be developed with diverse stakeholders to coordinate intersectional approaches to LGBTI political participation' and rights' movements.

Apart from the importance of the conclusions and lessons learning, the conference also served as an opportunity for participants to build lasting local, regional, and global networks that will help them to work towards strengthening democratic participation and human rights of LGBTI people in their countries. All conference attendees agreed that "Democracy for All" conference created a very important and highly-needed space for reflection, dialogue and exchange of experiences between LGBTI rights activists, allies and PR experts.

Finally, there is no doubt that the “Democracy for All” conference significantly advanced the discourse on human rights at the highest level, as well as cooperation between civic and governmental sectors, among LGBTI activists themselves; and among LGBTI activists, political parties and MPs. Even though many challenges still exist and were identified during these three days, the commitment by all sectors and willingness to cooperate, strongly endorsed and encouraged by the EU accession process, was evident. The pre-conference, held in the Parliamentary building and co-organized by the Committee for Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality within the National Parliament, positioned LGBTI issues at the highest level in Serbia, and sent declarative and clear message that doors for cooperation are finally opening, after decades of being closed. The “Democracy for All” conference succeeded in placing LGBTI human rights issues onto the public political agenda of the Western Balkans.

5. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

- **"LGBTI Public Opinion Poll: Western Balkans"**, Civil Right Defenders, Belgrade, Serbia, 2015, available at https://www.civilrightsdefenders.org/files/LGBTI_Regional_Poll_Data_FINAL01.10.15-A.pdf, accessed on 1st November, 2016.

6. LIST OF ACRONYMS USED

| | |
|--------|---|
| ERA | LGBTI the Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Turkey |
| HES | Hirschfeld-Eddy-Stiftung |
| LGBTI | lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans and intersex persons |
| LGBTIQ | lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans, intersex and queer persons |
| LGBTQ | lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans and queer persons |
| MPs | Members of Parliament |
| NDI | The National Democratic Institute |

7. ANNEX A “DEMOCRACY FOR ALL” CONFERENCE AGENDA - SEPTEMBER 2015

Wednesday, September 16

08.00 - 08.30 - Participant Registration

(Plenary Sessions)

08.30 - 09.30 - Opening Ceremony (Welcome address to the participants)

- Jovanka Todorovic, Labris - Lesbian Human Rights Organization
- Luis Abolafia - Gay and Lesbian Victory Institute
- Klaus Jetz - Hirschfeld Eddy Foundation
- H.E. Mr. Axel Dittmann German Ambassador to Serbia
- Gordon Duguid, Charge D’Affairs US Embassy in Belgrade

09.30 - 11.00 - LGBTI Visibility: Exploring the construction of a real democracy

- Michael Kauch, Free Democratic Party (FDP), Germany
- Johanna Lönn, RFSL (The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights), Sweden
- Miha Lobnik, LEGEBITRA, Slovenia
- Bekim Asani, LGBTI United Tetovo, Macedonia
- Tatjana Greiff, ŠKUC-LL Lesbian Section, Slovenia
- Boris Milicevic, Socialist party of Serbia, Serbia
- Saša Zekovic, Council for Civil Control of the Police, Montenegro
- Agim Margilaj, Center for Social Group Development, Kosovo

11.00 - 11.30 - Break

11.30 - 13.30 - Poll about Public Perception of LGBTI People in the region: How does this affect political participation?

- Marko Ivković, NDI REEAPS, Serbia
- Kristina Wilfore, Karakoyun Strategies, Turkey

13.30 - 14.30 - Lunch

14.30 - 16.00 - Cultivating allies: Marriage equality as a case study

- Jerry Buttimer, MP, Ireland
- Franko Dota, Zagreb Pride, Croatia
- Miha Lobnik, LEGEBITRA, Slovenia
- Biljana Ginova, LGBTI Support Center Skopje/LezFem, Macedonia
- Danijel Kalezic, Queer Montenegro, Montenegro
- Sasa Gavric, Sarajevo Open Center, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Brian Silva, Marriage Equality USA (MEUSA), USA

16.00 - 16.30 - Break

16.30 - 18.30 - Cultivating allies: Know their needs

- Matej Tasner Vatovec, MP, Slovenia
- Liljana Popovska, MP, Macedonia
- Andrija Popovic, MP, Montenegro
- Arbjola Halimi, MP, Albania

Thursday, September 17

09.00 - 10.30 - The power of our vote in the Western Balkans: Mobilizing the LGBTI vote for the change

- Rajmonda Sylbije, Centre for Equality and Liberty in Kosovo (CEL Kosovo), Kosovo
- Dragana Todorovic, Labris, Serbia
- Antonio Mihajlov, Subversive Front, Macedonia
- Amarildo Fecanji, PINK Embassy / LGBTI Pro Albania, Albania
- Jelena Colakovic, Juventas, Montenegro
- Damir Banovic, Sarajevo Open Center, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Sanja Juras, Lesbian Group Kontra, Croatia

10.30 - 11.00 - Break

(Panel Discussions)

11.00 - 12.30 - Trans Elected Officials: Redefining Politics

- Julia Ehart, ED. Transgender Europe, Germany
- Wiktor Dynarski, Trans-Fuzja Foundation, Poland
- Milan Djuric, Gayten LGBT, Centre for Promotion of LGBTIQ Rights
- Ali Can Kalan, Pink Life LBTT Solidarity Association, Turkey

11.00 - 12.30 - Lesbian political leadership: Their role in promoting equality

- Andjela Ceh, Office for Human and Minority Rights, Government of the Republic of Serbia, Serbia
- Emina Bosnjak, Sarajevo Open Centre, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Tatjana Greiff, ŠKUC-LL Lesbian Section, Slovenia
- Zorica Mrsevic, The Institute of Social Sciences, Serbia
- Sedef Cakmak, City Councillor, Turkey
- Tanya Domi, Columbia University, USA

12.30 - 13.30 - Lunch

(Parallel Workshops)

13.30 - 15.00 - Workshop I: Advocacy techniques (Nebojsa Andric)

13.30 - 15.00 - Workshop II: Running for office (Kristina Wilfore)

13.30 - 15.00 - Workshop III: Social media activism (Aleksandar Savic, Stefan Sparavalo)

15.00 – 15.30 - Break

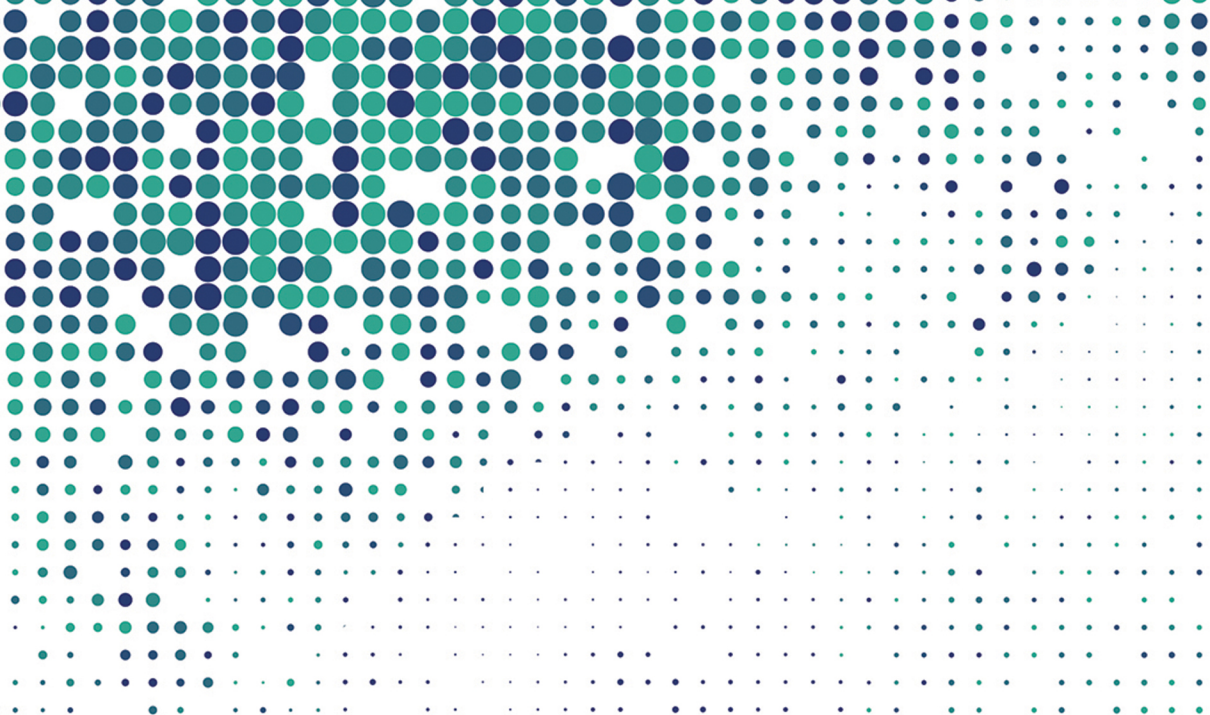
(Parallel Workshops – Continuation)

13.30 - 15.00 - Workshop I: Advocacy techniques (Nebojsa Andric)

13.30 - 15.00 - Workshop II: Running for office (Kristina Wilfore)

13.30 - 15.00 - Workshop III: Social media activism (Aleksandar Savic, Stefan Sparavalo)

17.00 – 18.00 - Closing panel (Labris)



LEBRIE
ORGANIZACIJA ZA LEZBEJSKA LJUDSKA PRAVA



VICTORY
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