



WeitBlick



Serbia's Radical Right and Homophobia

Since the fall of the Milošević regime, several groups on the radical right with clerical-fascist orientation have emerged and gained influence on Serbian political and public life. Their main topic of agitation is the fight against LGBT life in Serbia.

by Đorđe Tomić

All post-Yugoslavian states show at least some willingness to take serious responsibility for minority issues - the Belgrade Gay Pride was for the first time heavily protected by the police in 2010, for example. But homophobia still remains a broad social phenomenon in the region. However, perhaps the greatest challenge comes from radical right groups. Thus, the mentioned Pride was attacked by around 6,000 right-wing activists. This indicates not only the strength of radical right groups in Serbia, but also a new development in the region's political situation. Due to strong nationalisms as 'mainstream' state politics during the 1990s, the radical right in the post-Yugoslavian area was generally unnoticed. Today, many groups, which emerged during the last ten or fifteen years, face political marginalization and even prosecution by state authorities.

The present government in Serbia consists of those parties, which during the 1990s were the most prominent agents of nationalism in the region, but which today present themselves as 'moderate' and 'pro-European'. However, while the political context changed in the last few years, there have been major changes on the right-wing as well.

With God against gays

Although in all parts of the post-Yugoslavian area there still exist neo-fascist formations, which associate themselves with fascist groups and symbols from the Second World War period (like the Ustaša in Croatia), the most interesting change refers to the quite new type of autochthonous radical right group which emerged in Serbia in the 1990s: the clerical fascist groups. Despite common actions and mutual sympathy

between the transnationally organized neo-Nazi groups and clerical fascists, the latter seem much better organized and may have more broad political influence. They emerged from local radical right intellectual circles in Serbia, who have propagated nationalism since the mid-1980s and advocate a specific form of aggressive clerical nationalism, their most important specific being the close relationship to parts of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The key element of these groups is some kind of religious narrative. Religion is not merely framed as some national historical heritage they aim to protect: A whole value system, derived from some religious views, is adopted and proposed in terms of a political program, based on religious morals and ethics. One prominent example of such use of religion is the installation of patriarchal structures of society. As the nation is seen as a living organism,



gender roles change completely: Women are regarded only as mothers – they should give birth to new Serbs. In view of the clerical fascists, the structure of power in society should follow the divine triad of God – king – pater familias. Thus, as good wives, women should obey their husbands. Homosexuality is seen

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as unnatural, or in clerical terms, as a sin. The homophobic message, which often comes directly from clerical elites, further legitimizes the verbal violence, and even the physical violence, committed against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons.

The oldest clerical fascist group in Serbia, *Srpski otačastveni pokret Obraz* (Serbian Patriotic Movement Obraz),

founded in 2001, was officially banned by the Constitutional Court of Serbia in June 2012. However, other groups emerged during the last years. In contrast to *Obraz*, which still acted in terms of the ‘old’ nationalism of the 1990s, for example aiming to rehabilitate recent war criminals, the newly founded groups present themselves as more ‘modern’ and – similar to ultra-nationalist parties – more ‘moderate’. Due to more serious reactions of the state, they often give up open violence as means of political action, trying to mobilize as some sort of ‘genuine’ popular movement. Some of the groups openly address social issues, such as unemployment and poverty. With regard to their anti-gay and anti-lesbian actions, these groups engage more often in some sort of ‘pro-life’ demonstrations. Thus, instead of openly supporting violent attacks on the attempts to organize Pride manifestations – even though some activists join these attacks – groups like *Dveri* organize anti-demonstrations, called ‘family marches’, taking place parallel to or shortly before the Pride. By presenting ‘the traditional family’ as a value, they try to underline the ‘normality’ of heterosexual relationships, but actually propagate their patriarchal views. Since these groups enjoy the support of many orthodox priests, these actions and arguments might have a quite broad impact, especially on the socially weak parts of the population, even though the apathy, spreading during the last years, will be the more probable reaction of most people within the society.

Rising “Gates”

Among the ‘newcomers’ on the clerical fascist scene in Serbia is *Srpski Narodni Pokret 1389* (Serbian National Movement 1389), which appeared in 2006. By its name it reminds of the historical battle of Kosovo polje in 1389, which was fought between the medieval ‘Serbs’ and the Ottoman ‘Turks’. The most surprising development regards the group *Dveri srpske* (Serbian Gates), meanwhile simply called *Dveri*, which under-

went a similar development as *Obraz*. The group emerged around the *Dveri srpske* magazine and was founded in 1999. Besides publishing the magazine and books with clerical and nationalist content, the movement has organized several public debates in various parts of Serbia so far. Mostly, they take place in the universities or literary clubs and are supported by professors, writers or representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The topics of these lectures – mostly ex cathedra – generally involve historical revisionist theses and try to rehabilitate historical figures from the nationalist, but also even fascist past of Serbia. One key issue, discussed in these manifestations, is Kosovo.

The first actions, trying to draw broad public attention and marking the transformation of the group into a ‘movement’, included a sort of pro-life campaign, arguing that the Serbian people are dying out. *Dveri* is close to the Serbian Orthodox Church and serves as a forum for nationalist intellectuals. In 2012 it succeeded in registering as a political party. It won over four percent of the votes in the last parliamentary elections in Serbia in May 2012, and although it did not gain any seats in the State Parliament, it managed to enter some local parliaments, and in Novi Sad, the second largest city in Serbia, it even participates in the government. Moreover, the group exhibits quite a strong mobilizing potential, focusing on topics, which in some other political context would probably ‘belong’ to the protest repertoire of leftist groups. Thus, it was only *Dveri*, which protested against the imports of genetically modified food to Serbia. Combining well-known populism with some form of ‘grass-roots’ activism, this group might very well further gain acceptance by the population, especially as at same time there is no other strong political alternative in Serbia. Having in mind that the Serbian Orthodox Church, which *Dveri* cooperates with, is by many people still perceived as the only ‘undamaged moral authority’ in Serbia, this risk becomes even higher. □



Obraz-Graffito with anti-gay symbol and the threatening slogan “We are waiting for you!” in Belgrade