

Public Letter from the LGBT+ community to Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of Serbia

Dear Ms. Brnabić,

In this letter, we are addressing you as members of the Serbian LGBT+ community; To you as the Prime Minister and publicly open lesbian, and a respective member of the society, one that falls into that group of 10% of our population that is still being cut short of many rights, none of which you have stood up for even though you say you have done a lot.

For a long time now, we were looking to address you about putting focus on problems we as the group are faced with, such as: frequent violence, dysfunctional institutions that either fail to see us or help us legally, without any indications of improvement that should happen as a result of actions taken by Government in which you are the Prime Minister.

Questions, confusion, often even anger have been feelings for effectiveness (or lack thereof) of your work towards improving the living conditions of the LGBT+ community. Adoption of the 'Same-sex Civil Partnership Act' by Montenegrin Parliament, but also your part in the panel on the fight against injustice and COVID-19 together with the PMs of Luxembourg and Ireland organized by the Atlantic Council, altogether were the decision point for us to send you a letter.

Montenegrin Parliament voted on July 1, 2020 that prioritization of human rights of the LGBT+ community does not need the 'right moment' to be relevant, nor is the legal recognition of the same-sex life partnership less important than any problem in their society.

Just to remind you, adoption of bill that would allow such freedoms was planned as part of a Strategy for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination for the period between 2014 and 2018. Two years had passed with both the Law and the Strategy left on paper with no legal enforcement.

You shared your stance in the media, on the notion that more important "subjects of public significance" should be addressed first, before any law regarding same-sex marriage/partnership should be considered. Such a notion is wrong, but also offensive for all members of the LGBT+ community.

Because people in same-sex relationships are invisible to the eyes of law, they have no right of inheriting properties from their partners, nor they have any right to visit their partners in the hospital. Such obscure legal obstacles rightfully qualify as a subject that should be significant to the public (Many of which have shown as important in the times of COVID-19), equally as much as problems regarding unemployment, poverty and resolution concerning Kosovo and Metohija.

This way we are also asking you to stop seeing our problems as insignificant, or less so than some others 'publicly significant', because we are citizens of the Republic of Serbia which you are the Prime Minister of, legal recognition of same-sex partnerships in some form is indeed a significant problem, and a matter of national interest.

You have dismissed claims that you "have done nothing for the LGBT+ community" on the aforementioned panel. You have also claimed that having somebody publicly outed as a member of the LGBT+ community, is of higher importance than electing laws that equalize LGBT+ people with other citizens in regards of their rights, and that the birth of your (partner's) child gaining a positive reaction is a sign that Serbia has changed (at least we hope so).

Visibility is undoubtedly adding to better acceptance of LGBT+ people in the society, Ms. Brnabić. But how has that improved our lives in reality? Recent research has shown that as much as 58% of polled high school students that are members of the LGBT+ community had experienced some sort of violence, whilst over half of the interviewees believe that schools actively tolerate violence and discrimination targeting the LGBT+ people.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has released a comprehensive report on LGBT+ people in European union, along with Serbia and North Macedonia. Regarding openness about their sexuality, only 5% of LGBT+ citizens in Serbia consider themselves "very open" in that regard. European average is 23%. As much as 71% of LGBT+ people are avoiding holding hands with their partner in public, while European average for that bit of data is 30%. In past 5 years, 17% of LGBT+ people in Serbia had experienced some sort of physical or sexual violence because of their identity, while in the EU average is about 11%.

Having such degrading statistics in mind, along with the fact that we are behind the EU in every which way concerning acceptance and integration of LGBT+ people, allow us to pose a question – If you consider your contributions to be vast towards narrowing the distance between LGBT+ people and the society, being an openly gay PM for the previous three years, how come the data be so worrying and defeating?

Has it crossed your mind that this data is perfectly showing that your openly lesbian status is being used by the people in power to avoid touching the subject of LGBT+ rights for years now?

On the subject of birth of your child, (according to Serbian laws, you being unrelated to him is preventing you from taking over guardianship over him, visiting him or doing anything considered parenting) many LGBT+ organizations have praised this event as a sign of opening up debates regarding the same-sex parenthood.

We also believe that in unfortunate circumstances you have omitted any comments about positive feedback from the society being masked in good portion by the lack of homophobic and transphobic headlines from newspapers and tabloids that are pro-government and closely related to your party, that have usually published such headlines in a very bald-faced manner.

Trans people in Serbia are being constantly marginalized, without any hopes of their current status being improved in near future. Blueprint of a law regarding gender identity has been in existence since 2013. while also being revised last year without any clear indication of it being enacted anytime soon. Legal acts regarding marriage registry are against the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights and are requiring trans individuals to undergo interventions and treatments which may be harmful and result in their infertility. Also, absence of adequate documents lead to discrimination and ill treatment almost daily, while also putting them in a bad economic position.

You have been cordially meeting with leaders of countries that are most repressive towards LGBT+ people and are continuously degrading lives of LGBT+ individuals, without ever asking them to change such inhumane practices, although it is hard to expect from you to pose such questions given your concern about the LGBT+ people and their rights in your own country.

Besides, members of the Serbian parliament have records of frequent use of expressions and terms that are homophobic and transphobic which are hardly ever condemned. Likewise, rallies of the party you are a member of have been marked with songs by singers that have previously had criminal charges filed against them by independent bodies of the Republic of Serbia.

Therefore, we the undersigned LGBT+ individuals kindly ask you stop misinforming others about the significance of your work for LGBT+ community in Serbia, and are appealing to you to show your support through a worthy initiative that will prove efficient in enacting laws that regulate how we live, through adequately implementing existing regulations, that is if you are seriously considering to improve our lives and have come to a conclusion that "our time has come".

We are not just another checkbox that remains there for you to tick towards the membership in the European Union. We are the citizens of Serbia, but also people with names who are barred from exercising their rights. We understand that you have not personally dealt with issues of ordinary LGBT+ people, like being rejected by parents for sexual orientation or gender identity, or by being attacked in the street, mobbed at work or rejected by the society itself and we are glad that there are LGBT+ individuals that had no such issues.

But your privileged status compared to ours shall not allow you to remain silent upon our destinies while bragging about doing a lot for us.

Because you have done nothing.