



EWI Fellowship Research Programme

SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND GENDER EQUALITY

Jelena Jorgačević Kisić

Biography



Jelena Jorgačević Kisić was born in 1985 in Belgrade, Serbia. She graduated from the Faculty of Political Sciences in Belgrade, where she also obtained a master's degree in Theory of Culture. As a DAAD scholarship recipient, she later earned a master's degree in Religious Studies at the University of Erfurt, Germany. Currently, as a KAAD scholarship recipient, she is pursuing her doctorate at the University of Regensburg in Germany, at the Faculty of Philosophy, Art History, History and Humanities. The title of her dissertation is: "Church and Communism in Serbia:

What We Do (not) Remember – Church in Biographical Memory, 1945–1990." She has published her academic work in various domestic and international journals and edited volumes.

She is the deputy editor-in-chief of the Belgrade weekly magazine *Vreme*. She regularly publishes journalistic articles in various domestic and international media, and her work has been recognized with several national journalism awards. Since 2022, she has served as vice-chair of the International Association of Religion Journalists (IARJ).

She has organized and participated in numerous conferences and panels on various aspects of the relationship between religion, society, and the state, as well as religion and the media, with a particular focus on interreligious dialogue. She is a former fellow of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) and the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN).

Abstract

This paper explores how the issue of gender and gender equality is shaped in the discourse of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), which arguments are used—secular and/or theological—and, finally, how the dichotomy of "we" and "them" is constructed. Using the discourse-historical approach, the paper analyses four key texts, all created as a reaction to the Law on Gender Equality and the announcement of the introduction of gender-sensitive language: the Easter Epistle; an interview of the patriarch of the SOC; the conclusions from a scientific conference initiated, co-organised and sponsored by the SOC, which brought together various social actors who oppose the Law; as well as the welcome speech of the patriarch of the SOC at another, similar scientific conference. Topics of gender, gender equality and gender-sensitive language are presented as threats to traditional values, national identity and the Serbian language. The SOC positions itself as the protector of the family and moral order, constructing a dichotomy between "us" (the Church, the nation and experts who uphold traditional values) and "them" (global powers with their own ideological agenda). The paper also considers the current historical and political moment that is favourable for the affirmation of the aforementioned views of the SOC, as well as its positioning in part of the public as the supreme moral authority, while highlighting its silence on other social issues, such as environmental issues and mass protests of citizens at the end of 2024, which may affect its future position in Serbian society.

Keywords: Serbian Orthodox Church, gender, gender-sensitive language, gender equality

1. Introduction

You Yourself, Christ the Lord, sustain and multiply Your love, Your grace and Your blessing in every marriage and in every family, in our family and in the whole world, especially in our days, when the unseen forces of malice, under the heaven and visible, conscious and unconscious, their servants, strive to desecrate the sanctity of marriage and defile the purity of family by imposing unions against God and nature as a substitute for marriage and family.¹

These words, otherwise part of a longer prayer, resonated in all churches of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) around the world on the second and third Sunday of September 2022. No dissonant voice from the SOC regarding this was then heard in public. The reason for this, practically ordered prayer in all temples—which happens in extraordinary circumstances—was the holding of the LGBT event EuroPride in Belgrade. That year, as many times before, the question arose whether the event would be cancelled due to security reasons, which was previously announced. Nevertheless, the walk was realised on 17 September, but with a changed route and under the protection of strong police forces.² Six days earlier, another gathering, titled "Litija za spas Srbije"³ ("Procession for the Salvation of Serbia"), was held in the capital and was significantly better attended. It was organised by the SOC, and the procession was followed by a prayer said by bishops and the patriarch. It was the first time that Patriarch Porfirije clearly responded, in a negative tone, to the president of the country, Aleksandar Vučić, alluding to his statement that some people made a crusade out of the EuroPride topic.⁴

¹ Srpska pravoslavna crkva, 2022, Patrijarh odlučio: Na svim bogosluženjima molitva za svetinju braka i porodice, slogu i mir u našem narodu, *SPC.rs.*, 12 September, URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/patrijarh/8095.patrijarh-odlucio-na-svim-bogosluzenjima-molitva-za-svetinju-braka-i-porodice,-slogu-i-mir-u-nasem-narodu.html> (Accessed: 9 September 2024).

² Prajd šetnja održana u Beogradu uz jako obezbeđenje., 2022, *Slobodna Evropa*, 17 September. URL: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-evroprajd-prajd-setnja-zabrana-policija-obezbedjenje/32038574.html>. (Accessed: 1 September 2024).

³ *Litija* is a solemn procession of believers led by clergy that takes place outside the temple, most often, nowadays, on the eve of major holidays. Also, *litija* used to be held to stop rain, drought, war and infectious diseases.

⁴ Tanjug, RTV., 2022, Vučić nakon sednice Saveta za nacionalnu bezbednost: Ponovo smo kolateralna šteta sukoba velikih, o Evroprajd-u će odlučiti MUP 96 sati pre skupa. *RTV*, 10 September. URL: https://rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/vucic-nakon-sednice-saveta-za-nacionalnu-bezbednost-ponovo-smo-kolateralna-steta-sukoba-velikih-o-evroprajd-u-ce-odluciti-mup-96-sati-pre-skupa_1372483.html. (Accessed: 1 September 2024).

Who is waging the crusade? Others have come to our house and by propagating their ideas to us they are stealing from us and imposing them on us. They want to tell us how we should be. We are the objects in this story and we are the ones exposed to violence. They're brainwashing us! They are tormenting our souls! They would love to do it, but that will not happen!⁵

The citizens present held hundreds of icons and crosses, flags of Serbia, banners about Kosovo and Metohia, and a few pictures of Vladimir Putin and Draža Mihailović.⁶

A year earlier, the Law on Gender Equality (2021)⁷ was adopted. The law defines gender, gender equality and gender-sensitive language as follows:

Gender refers to socially determined roles, opportunities, behaviours, activities and attributes, which a particular society considers appropriate for women and men, including the interrelationships between men and women and the roles in those relationships that are socially determined depending on sex.⁸

Gender equality, according to this Law, implies:

Equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities, equal participation and balanced representation of women and men in all areas of social life, equal opportunities for the exercise of rights and freedoms, the use of personal knowledge and abilities for the personal development and development of society, equal opportunities and rights in access to goods and services, as well as the achievement of equal benefits from the results of work, taking into account biological, social and culturally formed differences between men and women and different interests, needs and priorities of women and men when adopting public and other policies and deciding on rights, obligations and statutory provisions, as well as constitutional provisions.⁹

⁵Desetine hiljada vernih na svenarodnom molebanu za očuvanje porodice., 2022, *čudo.rs*, 11 September. URL: <https://www.cudo.rs/десетине-хиљада-верних-на-свенародно> (Accessed: 1 September 2024).

⁶Ibid.

⁷Zakon o rodnoj ravnopravnosti („Sl. glasnik RS“, br. 52/2021) (Accessed: 30 August 2024).

⁸ Ibid., Article 6.

⁹ Ibid., Article 3.

Finally, gender-sensitive language is defined as a language that promotes equality between women and men, but also as

a tool that influences the awareness of those who use this language with the aim of achieving equality, including changes in opinions, attitudes and behaviours within the language they use in their personal and professional lives.¹⁰

As of June 2024, the Law should have entered into force in its entirety, which the SOC strongly opposed by taking a number of steps to suspend its implementation. Using critical discourse analysis, in this paper I analysed the contemporary discourse of the SOC on gender and gender equality.¹¹ I placed special emphasis on the discourse-historical approach of Ruth Wodak¹², which enables the analysis of the mutual relationship between discourse, social structures and historical context. This approach is particularly suited to the study of complex social phenomena and complex narratives. The discourse-historical approach also explores extralinguistic variables such as the history of institutions, the situational framework, and, based on this, how discourses and texts change in relation to sociopolitical changes.¹³ Therefore, the paper covers the linguistic and textual plan, the relationship between texts, genres and discourse, as well as social variables and the institutional framework of the specific "situational context", which also implies a broader sociopolitical and historical context in which the discourse is rooted and with which it is associated.¹⁴

The first part of the paper will present a brief overview of the role of the SOC in Serbian society in the 21st century, as well as its relations with decision-makers in the country. The emphasis here is on the conditions that allow the Church to influence political decisions, and they refer to the permeation of religious and national identity, as well as the moral authority that it has or pretends to have in society. Then, based on the existing research, I will present a concise overview of the previous views of the SOC on abortion and LGBT rights, and how they have changed, as well as the extent to which the Church has managed to exert a practical influence on political and legislative decisions in this field.

¹⁰ Ibid., Article 6.

¹¹ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

¹² Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)

¹³ Wodak, Ruth, Michael, Meyen., eds. 2016, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3rd edition, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

After that, by analysing the current political and social circumstances, I will try to answer the question as to why since 2022 there has been a more intensive commitment/engagement of the Church in the fight against gender equality, bearing in mind that in most countries of Europe, including those in the neighbourhood, similar activities have occurred much earlier. The central part of the paper will deal with the moves taken by the Church to influence the revocation of the Law on Gender Equality, which it considers a platform for the future introduction of "a hundred genders"¹⁵, as well as the discourse it has developed. I will explore the contemporary discourse of the SOC on gender and gender equality, by asking three key questions: how the issue of gender and gender equality is shaped in the analysed texts, which arguments are used—secular and/or theological—and, finally, how the discourse constructs the dichotomy of "we" and "they". For the purposes of this paper, I have selected four texts of different genres: the Easter Epistle from 2023; the interview of Patriarch Porfirije given to the daily newspaper "Politika" on Christmas 2024; the conclusions from the scientific conference "Serbian Identity, Serbian Language and the Law on Gender Equality", which was co-organised by the Church (16 January 2024); and the opening speech of the patriarch at the next gathering titled "Legal Aspects and Consequences of the Implementation of the Law on Gender Equality" (14 March 2024).

2. The role of the SOC in Serbian society in the 21st century

The return of religion to the public sphere in the 1990s in the entire region of the former Yugoslavia, after the imposed, forced secularisation following the end of the Second World War, and the sudden increase in religiosity were a consequence of both the wider trend of religious revival in which religion filled the vacuum created by the collapse of the socialist system and the wars (1991-1995) in the former Yugoslavia, i.e. the flourishing of nationalism. Due to the unbreakable intertwining of religious and national, religious affiliation has become a central identity determinant, serving as a *differentia specifica* between those who are culturally, linguistically, and in other respects, similar to "us" and "them".

¹⁵Zaključci naučnog skupa: Srpski identitet, srpski jezik i Zakon o rodnoj ravnopravnosti., 2024, *Spc.rs*, 25 January. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/patrijarh/10575.zakljucici-naucnog-skupa-%E2%80%9Esrpski-identitet,-srpski-jezik-i-zakon-o-%C2%A0rodnoj-ravnopravnosti%E2%80%9C.html> (Accessed: 30 August 2024).

After 2000, Serbia entered a period of transition towards the neoliberal capitalist market. There were many losers in the transition processes, and a sense of existential insecurity was often present, which is also associated with an increase in religious sentiment.¹⁶ However, only then, after the fall of the regime of Slobodan Milošević (5 October 2000), did a new period for the SOC begin.¹⁷ Religious education was introduced (2001), the Orthodox Faculty of Theology returned under the auspices of the Belgrade University (2004), the Law on Restitution of Property to Churches and Religious Communities was adopted (2006), and religious service was returned to the army (2011). The SOC became increasingly present in the public sphere. The Church's influence on public policies and government institutions increased.¹⁸

The SOC also went through a long process of finding its place in society, as well as defining relations with government authorities. Of course, this relationship is not static, and to some extent it depends on the historical moment and the agenda, i.e. priorities of those who run both the Church and the country, and such a relationship manifests some patterns of behaviour, i.e. actions. It was important for the political elites, from the beginning, to have the support of the Church, which was seen as the guardian of the nation and moral authority, while, at the same time, the Church was and has remained in many ways dependent on the government.

The dynamics of the relationship between the Church and the country and the positioning and influence of the Church on social issues are interestingly illuminated by the concept of the fusion of national and religious identities. This concept is not necessarily related to the level of religious sentiment but to the way national identity and interests are defined. As Anna Grzymała-Busse explains, the power of the Church to influence political decisions depends on its historical role in the creation or defence of the nation, as well as on the moral authority it enjoys in the society.¹⁹

¹⁶ Norris, Pippa, Inglehart, Ronald, 2004, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 114.

¹⁷ Buchenau, Klaus, The Serbian Orthodox Church, in: Leustean, Lucian N. (ed.), 2014, *Eastern Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge, p. 69.

¹⁸ Drezgić, Rada, 2010, Religion, Politics and Gender in the Context of Nation-State Formation: The Case of Serbia, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 31, no. 6, p. 956.

¹⁹ Grzymała-Busse, Anna, 2015, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, p. 2.

The more intertwined national and religious identities are, the greater moral authority the Church can have, and therefore the greater its political influence. When it comes to the Serbian Orthodox Church, this intertwining has deep historical roots that go back to the early stages of Serbian statehood and the period of the Ottoman Empire when religious representatives, thanks to the millet system, also had political power. It is exactly this connection between religious and national that makes political elites seek to secure the support of the Church so that they are not accused of betraying national interests.²⁰

The influence of the Church is most pronounced when it successfully presents itself as an actor who stands above party divisions and political conflicts, acting as a protector of national interests and identities. The Church, in such a role, positions itself as an impartial judge, free from narrow, individual interests.²¹ Conversely, its authority can be undermined if the perception of its impartiality comes into question.

It is the high representatives of the SOC and individuals close to them who have emphasised the supra-political position of the Church since 2021, often in response to criticism from part of the public that the Church does not sufficiently address social problems that, by their nature, would also include criticism of the authorities, whether it is environmental issues, the situation in Kosovo or similar topics.²²

What does cooperation between the Church and politicians in power look like in societies that meet the aforementioned conditions? The Church strives to provide an institutional approach²³, while politicians in turn receive the legitimisation of their ideas, support for the status quo through public church announcements in which it calls for patience or praises the efforts of government authorities, as well as the contribution to the preservation of peace in times of social turbulence and tension. In the context of Serbian society in recent years, affected by numerous crises and the unresolved problem of Kosovo's status, as well as the unenviable

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

²² See: Jerotej, vladika šabački, 2024, Saopštenje episkopa šabačkog g. Jeroteja povodom plana da u Jadru bude otvoren rudnik, *spc.rs*, 23 August. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/saopstenja/11592.saopstenje-episkopa-sabackog-g-jeroteja-povodom-plana-da-u-jadru-bude-otvoren-rudnik.html>. (Accessed: 30 August 2024); Baković, Biljana, 2024, Razgovor nedelje: prof. dr Darko Tanasković – Srpsko i rusko pravoslavlje na udaru spolja i iznutra, *Politika*, 25 August. URL: <https://www.eparhijasabacka.rs/iz-zivota-crkve/prof-dr-darko-tanaskovitch-srpsko-i-rusko-pravoslavlje-na-udaru-spolja-i-iznutra> (Accessed: 30 August 2024); Apostolovski, Aleksandar, 2024, Ekskluzivni intervju: patrijarh srpski Porfirije—Crkva će nastaviti da gradi mir. *Policy*, 7 January. URL: <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/593063/Crkva-ce-nastaviti-da-gradi-mir>. (Accessed: 30 August 2024).

²³ Grzymała-Busse, Anna, 2015, p. 49.

position of the Serbian community there, the Church is perceived as the only one with the capacity to potentially provide a significant social response, i.e. reaction.²⁴

Another aspect, which contributes to strengthening the moral authority of the Church, refers to its status as an endangered institution in past historical periods, that is, whether it has acquired the position of national martyrs. When it comes to the SOC, its vulnerability during the period of socialism (1945-1990), i.e. the so-called communist government, is often emphasised in the public, as well as in church discourse. In this context, Church representatives sometimes draw parallels with that period, using evocative expressions when they do not like social movements or decisions of the government, such as the ban on gatherings during the pandemic or the new Law on Gender Equality. This can serve as a way to highlight the totalitarian nature of such decisions but can also represent an attempt to draw a parallel between the threat experienced by the Church in the past and the present.

Finally, the figures say: according to the latest census, more than 81% of Serbian citizens identify themselves as Orthodox Christians.²⁵ Public opinion surveys consistently show that the SOC ranks among the two or three institutions most trusted by citizens from year to year. When it comes to the leading people of key institutions in Serbia, and despite the fact that his popularity is in a slight decline, Patriarch Porfirije is still the figure most trusted by young people in Serbia aged 15 to 30.²⁶

Examples of other countries suggest that the more the Church was considered a moral and national authority, the more its representatives played a more visible and direct role in the anti-gender movement.²⁷

²⁴See research on the influence of the Church when it comes to Kosovo: Nova društvena inicijativa, 2024, *Kosovo—Serbia—A Different Approach*. URL: <https://newsocialinitiative.org/kosovo-serbia-a-different-approach/>. (Accessed: 30 August 2024.); Andrić Rakić, Milica, 2022, *Nova jabuka razdora: SPC u dijalogu o normalizaciji*. URL: <https://kfos.org/srb/publikacije/124/nova-jabuka-razdora-spc-u-dijalogu-o-normalizaciji>. (Accessed: 10 August 2024).

²⁵Republički zavod za statistiku [Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia], 2023, URL: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn/vesti/20230616-st>. (Accessed: 10 August 2024).

²⁶Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije (KOMS), 2024, *Alternativni izveštaj o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbiji za 2024. Godinu*, Beograd: Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije, p. 121. URL: https://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Alternativni_izvestaj_2024.pdf. (Accessed: 1 August 2024).

²⁷Paternotte, David, Kuhar, Roman, 2017, *The Anti-Gender Movement in Comparative Perspective.*, in: Paternotte, David, Kuhar, Roman, (eds.), *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, p. 262.

3. DISCOURSE OF THE SOC ON REPRODUCTIVE AND LGBT RIGHTS

Like most other Orthodox churches—with the exception of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople—the SOC does not have a document in which to systematically present its social teaching.

As stated by Ov Cristian Norocel, in Eastern and Central Europe, religion often plays the role of an ethnicity marker in ethnonationalist projects while supporting the heteronormative conception of the nation as a male-led extended family.²⁸ The discourse on the high number of abortions as an indicator of national ruin, with the presentation of the woman-mother as a symbol and guardian of the nation²⁹, her reduction to a maternal role and attachment to the private sphere as a complement to the public, i.e., male sphere, has a long tradition, especially in the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe.³⁰ In Serbia, the connection between the birth rate and the survival and defence of the nation has been further intensified as a result of the wars in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

The debate on abortion began in 1993, when the then bishop of Zvornik and Tuzla, Vasilije Kačavenda, demanded its prohibition.³¹ The other bishops did not join in the request. Two years later (1995), the government adopted a new Act on the Procedure of Termination of Pregnancy in Health Care Institutions³², which remained liberal. Then a voice against abortion rises again from the Church, but this time in the Christmas Epistle. It is then presented as a threat to the survival of the nation and as a moral issue related to Christian teaching, while women—their emancipation and egoism—are cited as the culprits for low birth rates. As Rada Drezgić states in her analysis, when the Christmas Epistle spoke about it again in 2006, the responsibility was divided between women and men—both are defined through procreation, not just women—and in addition, it calls for mercy towards women who have had abortions.³³

²⁸Norocel, Ov Cristian, 2015, The Panoptic Performance of Masculinity for the Romanian Ethno-Nationalist Project: Disciplinary Intersections in Populist Radical Right Print Media, *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies (DiGeSt)* 2, no. 1–2, p. 145.

²⁹The role to which, as a rule, reference is made in masculine gender.

³⁰Drezgić, 2010, p. 959.

³¹Drezgić, Rada, 2015, Orthodox Christianity and Gender Equality in Serbia: On Reproductive and Sexual Rights, in: Hassenstab, Christine, Ramet, Sabrina, (eds.), *Gender (In)equality and Gender Politics in Southeastern Europe: A Question of Justice*, p. 297.

³²Zakon o postupku prekida trudnoće u zdravstvenim ustanovama („Sl. glasnik RS“, br. 16/95 i 101/2005 – dr. zakon (Accessed: 30 August 2024).

³³Ibid., p. 302.

Rada Drezgić describes the debate from the early 1990s as "a forum where new and old political actors compete for the hegemonic status of their ideas about gender and nation, the individual and society".³⁴ Later discussions on these topics, including the most recent ones, are marked by a similar character, reflecting the attempts of the dominant religious community, sometimes less and sometimes more successful, to consolidate (or perhaps just win) the position of the collective intellectual and supreme social arbiter in matters of morality.³⁵

Similarly, in the analysis of the role of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe, the fight against gender is seen as overlapping with evangelisation, i.e. the fight against the privatisation of religion.³⁶

In the second decade of the 2000s, Srđan Sremac and Danica Igrutinović point out that the arguments from the church discourse on abortion problematise demographic and national issues more than theological ones.³⁷ The focus is on birth rates, while the division into "we" and "they" is constructed in relation to the acceptance or rejection of traditional gender roles.³⁸ In 2013, the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church in its statement asked the government to ban abortion except in medical cases.³⁹ However, this request was not granted.

When it comes to LGBT rights, the SOC, similarly to churches in other Orthodox countries, but also beyond, showed resistance to their promotion.⁴⁰ Namely, other churches in Europe also viewed homosexuality as "unproductive sexuality".⁴¹ Such an understanding

³⁴Drezgić, 2010, p. 959.

³⁵See: in Slovenia Kuhar, Roman, 2017, Changing gender several times a day: The anti-gender movement in Slovenia, in: Paternotte, David, Kuhar, Roman, (eds.), *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, p. 219.

³⁶Paternotte, David, Kuhar, Roman, 2017, "Gender ideology" in movement: Introduction., in: Paternotte, David, Kuhar, Roman, (eds.), *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, p. 13.

³⁷Igrutinović, Danica, Sremac, Srđan and van den Berg, Mariecke, 2015, Pride Parades and/or Prayer Processions: Contested Public Space in Serbia #Belgrade Pride 2014, *Journal of Empirical Theology* 28, no. 2, p. 210.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

³⁹Drezgić, 2015, p. 297.

⁴⁰Aleksov, Bojan, Lackenby, Nicholas, 2023, 'Symphonia'? A New Patriarch Attempts to Redefine Church–State Relations in Serbia, *Southeast European Studies* 71, no. 3, p. 427.

⁴¹ Kuhar, Roman, 2015, Secularization of the Church, Clericalization of Society: Same-Sex Partnership Debates in Slovenia, in: Orthodox Christianity and Gender Equality in Serbia: On Reproductive and Sexual Rights, in: Hassenstab, Christine, Ramet, Sabrina, (eds.), *Gender (In)equality and Gender Politics in Southeastern Europe: A Question of Justice*, p. 271.

stemmed from the view that sexuality must serve biological reproduction, and thus the preservation of the nation and its values.

Nik Jovčić-Sas highlights three key topics in the SOC discourse when it comes to the LGBT population: LGBT identities are portrayed as a disease, as an evil imported from Western Europe or modern civilisation, and as a symbol of moral and cultural decline.⁴² The motive of "imposing a foreign culture" is also present in the analysis of the church press, where Western culture is often described as a "culture of death", reduced to materialism, while democracy and human rights are interpreted as instruments of subjugation of others.⁴³ Although the Church repeatedly, when the Pride parades were announced, raised its voice against them, even organising processions, the parades were not cancelled.

4. Political and social context in Serbia and gender equality

In 2016, the Info Trauma Centre and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development presented the Educational Package for Learning about Sexual Violence against Children for Primary and Secondary Schools in Serbia. The goal of the package, as explained, was to provide teachers with guidelines for talking to children about the body, sexuality, and desired and unwanted contact. This material is adapted to primary and high school children in order for them to be able to recognise and prevent different types of sexual violence against children and young people. However, after the campaign led by conservative academics to ban this package, which gained significant media space, it was withdrawn in 2017.⁴⁴ The Church did not have a visible role in this case.

Adriana Zaharijević points out that this was the first time that the concept of "gender ideology" appeared as a controversial framework in the public discourse in Serbia, with disorganised, mostly dispersed conservative intellectuals identified as the main, if not the only

⁴²Jovčić-Sas, Nik, 2018, The Tradition of Homophobia: Responses to Same-Sex Relationships in Serbian Orthodoxy from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day, in: Chapman, Mark D, Janes, Dominic (eds.), *Genders and Sexualities in History: New Approaches in History and Theology to Same-Sex Love and Desire*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.57-58.

⁴³Jovanov, Dejan, Lazar, Žolt, 2017, Serbian Orthodoxy Between Traditional and Universal Values: Discourse Analysis of the Journal *Orthodoxy. Sociological Review* 51, no. 1, pp. 148-151.

⁴⁴Zaharijević, Adriana, Habemus Gender: The Serbian Case. URL: <https://feministiq.net/en/habemus-gender-the-serbian-case/>.

carriers of that narrative.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Ivan Tranfić and Ana Dević remind us of the significant role of the Serbian Movement "Dveri" political party, which requested the resignation of the minister.⁴⁶ Conservative academic circles and Serbian Movement "Dveri" cited as key problems the promotion of homosexuality, "radical individualism, extreme feminism and totalitarian LGBT and gender ideology".⁴⁷

Serbian Movement "Dveri" is a right-wing political party that was originally registered as an association of citizens, i.e. a civil society organisation. According to their website, they have gone from "working in the NGO sector, through pro-life campaigns and family walks, to a relevant parliamentary political party"⁴⁸. This political party entered parliament in 2016, winning a little more than 5% of the vote in the elections. The first family walk was organised in 2011, and the following year they published a book in which they oppose the "ideology of homosexuality".⁴⁹

Unlike, for example, neighbouring Croatia, where several civil society organisations dedicated to the protection of the traditional family, the ban on abortion and conservative educational policies emerged⁵⁰, in Serbia this scene has remained rather scarce, negligible and largely invisible to the public. Also, while some movements in other countries, such as Croatia or France, sought to present their activities as broader than ecclesiastical and more inclusive, there was no need to do so in Serbia because only the Church has the capacity to articulate these views and achieve a more significant impact.

In his PhD thesis, Ivan Tranfić points out that until 2019, there was no formation of an anti-gender movement in Serbia that would be comparable to those in countries such as Romania, France or Croatia.⁵¹ He also states that anti-gender networks in Serbia are relatively

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Dević, Ana, 2021, Paradoxes of Gender Politics: Nationalism, Patriarchy and the Hijacked Feminism of the New Right in Serbia, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 27:2; Tranfić, Ivan, 2023-2024, *For Family, God, and Country: A Comparative Study of the Emergence of Anti-gender Movements in Southeast Europe*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, La Scuola Normale Superiore, 2023.

⁴⁷Tanjug, 2017, "Seksualizacija dece iza programa Ministarstva prosvete", *RTV*, 17 April. URL: https://rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/seksualizacija-dece-iza-programa-ministarstva-prosvete_817194.html. (Accessed: 15 July 2024).

⁴⁸Front page, Srpski pokret Dveri, 2024 URL: <https://dveri.rs>. (Accessed: 14 September 2024).

⁴⁹Tranfić, Ivan, 2023-2024, p. 161.

⁵⁰Petričušić, Antonija, Čehulić, Mateja, Čepo, Dario, 2017, Gaining Political Power by Utilizing Opportunity Structures: An Analysis of the Conservative Religious-Political Movement in Croatia, *Croatian Political Science Review* 54, no. 4, p. 69.

⁵¹Tranfić, Ivan, 2023-2024, p. 49.

poorly developed—they include only a few non-governmental organisations, but without decentralised networks of civic initiatives across the country. Among the actors are the cautious SOC, which avoids deeper engagement with civil society, as well as right-wing civil society with very limited infrastructure, resources and little impact. The anti-gender network still consists of scattered conservative academic circles, some lay Orthodox associations⁵², the aforementioned "Dveri" political party and several anti-abortion initiatives.⁵³ Meanwhile, after one round of elections that was largely boycotted by the entire opposition, Serbian Movement "Dveri", as part of the "National Gathering" coalition, did not pass the threshold with 2.76 percent of votes in the parliamentary elections in December 2023, and the longtime party president therefore resigned irrevocably. While this party was largely marginalised, the president of the "Zavetnici" [Oathkeepers] party with whom they were in coalition, Milica Đurđević Stamenkovski, entered the new government from the opposition, becoming the Minister of Family Welfare and Demography. It was not the first time that the ruling Serbian Progressive Party co-opted actors with whom it "shares" the electorate, but also co-opted issues such as birth rate and demography, that is, a radically right-wing narrative about them.⁵⁴ Namely, from the position of minister, Đurđević Stamenkovski said that "the strategic commitment of the country is to preserve the traditional family in contrast to the attempts of woke culture to euthanise the family as it has always existed⁵⁵," that it is the defence of Christian civilization, and that the family is at the core of all national interests. After several cases of obstetric violence, she stated that the story of obstetric violence and poor conditions in maternity hospitals was "part of the global agenda against giving births in Serbia"⁵⁶ that had been going on for 20 years.

⁵²According to Ivan Tranfić, two anti-gender civil society organisations deviate from the dominant model in which the emphasis is on maintaining the nation and demography. These are the organisations "Izaberi život" [Choose Life] and "Centar za bebe" [Centre for Babies], which are rooted in small Protestant communities, and which place emphasis on the survival of the traditional family, not Serbia.

Ibid, p. 172.

⁵³Tranfić, Ivan, 2023-2024.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Đurđević Stamenkovski pozvala građane da započnu demografsku obnovu nacije, 2024, *NI*, 23 September. URL: <https://n1info.rs/vesti/djurdjevic-stamenkovski-pozvala-sve-gradjane-da-zapocnu-demografsku-obnovu-nacije/>. (Accessed: 1 October 2024).

⁵⁶Đurđević Stamenkovski: Priče o akušerskom nasilju deo globalne agende protiv rađanja dece u Srbiji, 2024, *NI*, 23 July. URL: <https://n1info.rs/vesti/djurdjevic-stamenkovski-price-o-akuserskom-nasilju-deo-globalne-agende-protiv-radjanja-dece-u-srbiji/>. (Accessed: 1 October 2024).

In other words, the Serbian authorities at the same time formally meet the requirements of the EU in the accession process, while sending the opposite message to the domestic electorate. In this way, they are creating the image, as observed by Koen Sloopmaeckers and Ivan Tranfić, that liberal policies are accepted solely due to EU pressure.⁵⁷ Changes exist, but they are slow.

Given that the government itself generates conservative family policies, similar to Hungary, and co-opts actors who promote these narratives, it is not surprising that far-right parties have a short political life and limited support. Also, movements and anti-gender NGOs with minimal resources fail to make an impact on society. However, unlike Hungary, Serbia is a candidate for full membership in the European Union, and it still needs to harmonise its legislation with EU regulations, which makes the situation more complex.

The work of the SOC, as the headquarters of gatherings and the initiator of practical actions against certain gender policies, legal solutions, and/or events, which is not reduced to shaping public opinion and social values, comes with some delay, despite the fact that before there were potentially prerequisites to exert a stronger influence on government policy in this area.

As already mentioned, the Church's attempts to influence legislation related to abortion or the holding of the Pride parade and to influence the change of legal solutions such as the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination were⁵⁸ not very successful. Namely, at the beginning of March 2009, a new proposal of this Law was withdrawn from the procedure of its adoption 16 hours before the parliamentary debate. The reason for this was that the SOC, together with other traditional churches and religious communities in Serbia, objected to the proposal of this Law, pointing out as particularly controversial articles that guarantee freedom to change religion and prevent discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. However, the Law was adopted in the same year without major changes.⁵⁹

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) was ratified by Serbia on 21 November, 2013,

⁵⁷Sloopmaeckers, Koen, 2023, *Coming in: Sexual politics and EU accession in Serbia*. Manchester University Press, p. 45; Tranfić, Ivan, 2023-2024.

⁵⁸Zakon o zabrani diskriminacije („Sl. glasnik RS“, br. 22/2009 i 52/2021) (Accessed: 30 August 2024)

⁵⁹Drezgić, Rada, 2015, p. 307.

and it entered into force on 1 August 2014. Although it caused great resistance in some countries, in Serbia its ratification went largely without votes of resistance.⁶⁰

5. Discourse of the soc on gender and gender equality

In February 2021, the former Metropolitan of Zagreb and Ljubljana, Porfirije, who nurtured more than good relations with the majority community in Zagreb, was elected Patriarch.⁶¹ He was called a man of dialogue. He belongs to the younger generation of church leaders and, unlike his two predecessors, was educated abroad, speaks several languages, and is familiar with modern social movements. In the three years that he has been at the helm of the SOC, several areas of his activity have stood out as priorities: the issue of Kosovo, the culture of remembrance, and resistance to gender ideology. In a broader context, the reconciliatory role of the patriarch in relations in the region is particularly important, as well as skilled ecclesiastical diplomacy among Orthodox churches.⁶² Regarding the internal situation in the SOC, we can notice centralisation, which implies a decreasing number of mutually dissonant votes of the SOC in the public space. However, for the purposes of the paper, I will briefly focus on the topics that are more important for the analysis of the current political and social circumstances.

⁶⁰Unlike the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence [*Zakon o zabrani diskriminacije*] ("Official Gazette of RS", no. 94/2016 and 10/2023 - second law), which the Republic of Serbia was obliged to adopt on the basis of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Although the SOC did not formally declare its view on the occasion of the adoption of this Law, its entry into force caused great controversy in both the general and professional public because it was perceived as a tool by which women, otherwise, as confirmed by all relevant research, persons most often directly affected by domestic violence, would want to "benefit from" and "falsely report verbal and physical violence, and even attempted rape" (quote from the statement of a former judge, today's lawyer Denis Bećirić in the article "Bullies to court! We reveal what the new Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence brings" published on 22 February 2017 in the daily "Informer"; Accessed: 15 December 2024). It is also interesting that in 2024, the topic of ratification of the Istanbul Convention in Serbia was returned to the agenda in the SOC. Namely, in the interview given on Christmas (7 January 2024) to the daily newspaper Politika, Patriarch Porfirije also mentioned the Istanbul Convention. Criticizing the Law on Gender Equality, he pointed out: "It is envisaged to be an umbrella, comprehensive law, a platform for the implementation of the so-called Istanbul Declaration, so the possibility for e.g. adolescents to change sex, with hormones or surgical operations will be legally affirmed." (Apostolovski, Alexander, 2024). However, in the Istanbul Convention, gender means "socially determined roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men", and sex change is not mentioned (Council of Europe: Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, p. 5. The Istanbul Convention was also mentioned by Margaret Peters in her speech at the National Library in Belgrade (March 2024), describing it as one of the documents transferring power to "holders of global governance" (Peters, Margaret, 2024, Istorijski pregled rodne ideologije na Zapadu s posebnim osvrtom na stanje u Srbiji danas, *Pravoslavlje*, 15 March, pp. 9-10).

⁶¹Aleksov, Bojan, Lackenby, Nicholas, 2023, p. 416.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 418-424.

When considering the issue of Kosovo, the results of surveys conducted among the Serbian population in Kosovo in 2022 and 2024 are quite illustrative. When asked who the Government of Kosovo should negotiate with about the needs of the Serbian community, 51 percent of respondents from the North of Kosovo and as many as 80 percent in the rest of the territory said the SOC.⁶³ The second survey, conducted in 2022, indicated that the SOC can be a key creator, but also a potential destroyer of any agreement between Belgrade and Pristina, and that regardless of the way it will use its influence, the SOC is an actor that cannot be bypassed in this process.⁶⁴

These circumstances position the SOC as a key actor on the socio-political scene, whose silence or engagement can have a crucial impact on political dynamics, which the authorities undoubtedly recognise. On the other hand, the Church is also aware that this issue is extremely delicate when viewed through the prism of real politics.

However, taking into account the number of communications (speeches, statements) coming from the Patriarchate—whether they are "signed" by the Patriarch, the spokesperson of the SOC, or the Synod—and the gatherings organised by the SOC, the topic of central importance for the SOC is the issue of gender equality.

Zuzanna Radzik points out that gender ideology has become the new "enemy" of the illiberal wing of the Church in Poland⁶⁵, while Elżbieta Korolczuk states that in Poland, the anti-gender action represented a new strategy of the Catholic Church, aimed at disciplining liberal Catholics, especially in the period after church scandals.⁶⁶ This could also be relevant to the context of Serbia, although it would require more in-depth research.

During his speech at the "Procession for the Salvation of Serbia,"⁶⁷ Patriarch Porfirije, among other things, pointed out that the lessons that promote gender ideology were secretly included in textbooks for primary and secondary schools, without informing the public beforehand.⁶⁸ He then demanded from the competent government authorities to immediately

⁶³Nova društvena inicijativa, 2024, p. 14-15.

⁶⁴Andrić Rakić, Milica, 2022, p. 20.

⁶⁵Korolczuk, Elżbieta, Graff, Agnieszka, 2018, Gender as 'Ebola from Brussels': The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 4, p. 804.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷See pages 1-2.

⁶⁸Desetine hiljada vernih na svenarodnom molebanu za očuvanje porodice., 2022, *čudo.rs*, 11 September. URL: <https://www.cudo.rs/десетине-хиљада-верних-на-свенародно> (Accessed: 1 September 2024).

withdraw all textbooks, manuals, and additional teaching materials with such content from schools and preschool institutions. Soon, the Institute for the Improvement of Education issued an order to publishers to revise parts of educational materials related to gender and sexual identity. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education asked seven publishers of biology textbooks for the eighth grade to amend the allegedly controversial lessons, which was then implemented.⁶⁹

On 27 June 2024, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia temporarily suspended the application of the Law on Gender Equality, the one that triggered an avalanche of reactions in the public.⁷⁰

Namely, the adoption of this Law in 2021 was preceded by public debates on its draft, but the Church did not participate in them. During the first public debate in 2018, the objections were submitted by the organisations Serbian Movement "Dveri", Porodični sabor „Beograd“ [Family Assembly "Belgrade"], and Udruženje „Pravoslavna porodica“ [Association "Orthodox Family"]. A representative of the "Dveri" movement has proposed to delete the term "gender" from the law and replace it with the term "sex", adding that the Law is unconstitutional, since the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia does not recognise categories of gender.⁷¹ No organisation or political movement from the right political spectrum participated during the second public debate in 2021.⁷² After the Law was adopted, eight actors submitted a request for its constitutional review.⁷³ Two of its articles (Art. 37 and 44) caused the most criticism: the introduction of the gender category⁷⁴ and the application of gender-sensitive language. This Law was supposed to enter into force three years after its adoption (1

⁶⁹Georgievski, Jovana, 2022, Srbija i obrazovanje: Šta ne(će) biti u novim udžbenicima iz biologije i da li će 'nastavnica' postati zabranjena reč, *BBC News Serbian*, 21 November. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-63658998>. (Accessed: 1 September 2024).

⁷⁰Krstić, Ana, 2024, Privremeno obustavljena primena Zakona o rodnoj ravnopravnosti. URL: https://www.otvorenavratapravosudja.rs teme/ustavno-pravo/privremeno-obustavljena-primena-zakona-o-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti#_ftn8. (Accessed: 1 September 2024).

⁷¹URL: https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2018-11/izvestaj_o_sprovedenu_javnoj_raspravi_o_nacrtu_zakona_o_rodnoj_ravnopravnosti_19.07.2018PDF (Accessed: 1 August 2024).

⁷²URL: <https://minljmpdd.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/3-Izvestaj-o-sprovedenoj-javnoj-raspravi-o-Nacrtu-zakona-o-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti.pdf>. (Accessed: 1 August 2024).

⁷³Krstić, Ana, 2024.

⁷⁴Article 6, paragraph 1, item 1 of the Law on Gender Equality ("Official Gazette of RS", no. 52/2021) states that "gender denotes socially determined roles, opportunities, behaviors, activities and attributes, which a particular society considers appropriate for women and men, including the mutual relations between men and women and the roles in these relations that are socially determined depending on sex".

May 2024), which did not happen because the Constitutional Court issued a decision in June 2024 with a focus on the linguistic aspect of the Law, raising the question of whether legal provisions can impose rules that belong to the domain of linguistic science.⁷⁵ The decision was submitted to the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, as the enactor of the Law, with a deadline of 30 days for submitting their opinion. This deadline expired at the end of July 2024, but no information on the further fate of the Law is yet available to the public.⁷⁶

The main actor in the fight against this Law was the SOC. Its dignitaries have repeatedly, on various occasions, spoken against the Law. The SOC was also the initiator and organiser of gatherings that included a broad coalition of anti-gender actors, including international ones, developing a layered discourse on gender, gender equality and gender-sensitive language. Analysing this discourse, by asking three key questions: how the issue of gender and gender equality is shaped in the texts, which arguments are used—secular or/and theological—and, finally, how the discourse constructs the dichotomy of "we" and "they", for the purposes of this paper, I selected four texts of different genres. The first text is the Easter Epistle of 2023 (16 April 2023)⁷⁷; the second one is a part of the interview that Patriarch Porfirije gave on Christmas 2024 for the daily newspaper "Politika".⁷⁸ Early 2024 (16 January 2024), the SOC and Matica Srpska⁷⁹ held a scientific conference titled "Serbian Identity, Serbian Language and the Law on Gender Equality" in the National Library of Serbia, after which they issued an 11-point press release, which is the subject of this analysis.⁸⁰ The fourth text is the opening statement of Patriarch Porfirije, which he gave at another, similar gathering, now titled "Legal Aspects and Consequences of the Implementation of the Law on Gender Equality" on 14 March 2024, held at the same place and organised by the same people.⁸¹

⁷⁵Otherwise, it is interesting to note that the Radić Law Office has submitted a request to the Constitutional Court to prevent the application of the Law until the meaning of the term "gender" is clarified. Nevertheless, the Court focused on the issue of the use of gender-sensitive language.

⁷⁶Krstić, Ana, 2024.

⁷⁷Sveti arhijerejski Sabor Srpske pravoslavne crkve, 2023, Vaskršnja poslanica, *spc.rs*, 16 April. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news//9276.vaskrsnja-poslanica-srpske-pravoslavne-crkve.html>. (Accessed: 1 August 2024).

⁷⁸Apostolovski, Alexander, 2024.

⁷⁹The oldest Serbian literary, cultural and scientific society, See: <https://www.maticasrpska.org.rs/en/matica-srpska/>

⁸⁰Zaključci Naučnog skupa „Srpski identitet, srpski jezik i Zakon o rodnoj ravnopravnosti“, 2024, *spc.rs*, 25 January. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/patrijarh//10575.zakljucci-naucnog-skupa-%E2%80%9Esrpski-identitet.-srpski-jezik-i-zakon-o-%C2%A0rodnoj-ravnopravnosti%E2%80%9C.html>. (Accessed: 1 August 2024).

⁸¹Porfirije, Patriarch of the SOC, 2024, Patriarch Porfirije: Ne pristajemo da bilo kome zbog toga što govori srpskim jezikom budu uskraćena ljudska prava, a pogotovu da zbog toga bude kažnjavan, *spc.rs*, 14 March. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/patrijarh//10785.patrijarh-porfirije-ne-pristajemo-da-bilo-kome-zbog-toga-sto-govori->

Although the corpus could be significantly wider, bearing in mind the statements of the spokespersons of the SOC, the reporting of religious media, and the occasional statements of priests and bishops on this issue, for the purposes of this research, the focus is placed on the mentioned texts due to their genre diversity and the importance they have, which will be explained below. The texts will be analysed chronologically, in order to show possible changes in the discourse, i.e., the emphasis of one type of argument over others.

The Easter epistles of the SOC have profound significance, whether they deal with theological, pastoral, or moral topics. These epistles provide an opportunity for the patriarch and bishops to address all believers, highlighting issues that the Church considers crucial to faith and social life at a given moment.

Patriarch Porfirije's interview with the daily "Politika" has special significance not only because it addresses the widest public and is reported in almost all other media, but also due to the fact that the patriarch, after his enthronement, decided to give interviews rarely. Instead, he shifted to digital platforms, apparently aware of the impact of social networks. The patriarch is very active on them; his activities, photos, and parts of his speech are regularly published. His Facebook profile has over 40,000 followers, while his Instagram profile attracts more than 146,000 users. In addition, his activities are recorded in detail and transmitted on the official website of the SOC, where his words, gathering reports, and accompanying photos are regularly published.

However, journalists do not have the opportunity to ask him questions, which significantly limits two-way communication. Interviews are usually conducted once a year or even less frequently, which further increases their importance, and as a rule, they are conducted by journalists close to the Church.

When it comes to the gatherings held in January and March 2024, they brought together a broad coalition united on the issue of the Law on Gender Equality, where the SOC, as mentioned, stood out as a key actor, initiator, and a kind of spiritual sponsor of these events. The first gathering was attended by experts from various fields who oppose the Law: linguists from Matica Srpska and the Committee for Standardisation of the Serbian Language of the

[srpskim-jezikom-budu-uskracena-ljudska-prava-a-pogotovu-da-zbog-toga-bude-kaznjavan.html](https://www.srbija.gov.rs/srpskim-jezikom-budu-uskracena-ljudska-prava-a-pogotovu-da-zbog-toga-bude-kaznjavan.html) (Accessed: 1 August 2024).

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, professors, lawyers, clergy representatives, and intellectuals with strong right-wing views. This gathering was also attended by the Minister of Education and the Minister of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, despite representing the government that holds the majority in the National Assembly which had adopted the Law, now controversial in the eyes of the participants of the gathering.

The poster announcing the aforementioned gathering contains a photo of citizens walking with the Serbian flag flying above them.

Almost two months later, on 14 March 2024, a continuation of the previous gathering, titled "Legal Aspects and Consequences of the Implementation of the Law on Gender Equality" was held. As the first time, the opening remarks were given by the patriarch of the SOC and the president of Matica Srpska, followed by speeches of lawyers, attorneys, professors and theologians⁸². Representatives of government institutions were again in attendance, while the main lecture was given by Margaret Peters, an American from Brussels and one of the leading figures of the global anti-gender movement.⁸³

5.1. Easter epistle

In the Easter Epistle, gender is presented to the public as a multiple threat: first as a danger to spiritual, cultural, and social values, then as an attack on language and culture. Gender-sensitive language and gender equality are denoted as foreign and unnatural phenomena, contrary to tradition and values "established by God".

Unlike other texts that are the subject of analysis in this paper, here theological arguments are dominant, which corresponds to the genre of the epistle. Before introducing a critique of the Law, believers are reminded of the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah. This story, as reported in the Easter Epistle, describes people who lived in an attractive and advanced civilisation, but because of their "shameless life", alienated from the godliness and grace of God, they experienced destruction. This suggests that apparent progress leads to moral decline and distancing from faith. Accordingly, the bishops draw a parallel with the present,

⁸²Almost exclusively men.

⁸³See the list of participants: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/patrijarh//10786.naucni-skup-%E2%80%9Epravni-aspekti-i-posledice-zakona-o-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti%E2%80%9C.html>. (Accessed: 1 August 2024).

emphasising that faith, prayer, justice, and spiritual health are crucial for the preservation of the identity and survival of people.

After that, the focus shifts to gender-sensitive language, which is portrayed as a threat to marriage and family—understood as “sanctities established by God” and natural forms of human existence. The discourse of the epistle opposes "material grace" to the "order of God," "economic progress" to "spiritual health," implicitly suggesting that the choice between these extremes, that is, the choice of the right path, is crucial for the survival of society.

On this basis, "we" is constructed as the Church, the people, and traditional society—"we" is characterised by moral superiority, justice, and endangerment. In contrast, “they” are minorities, promoters of gender ideology and LGBT rights, presented as a threat to national identity, family, and language.

5.2. Interview with the Patriarch of the SOC

In the interview, Patriarch Porfirije presents gender-sensitive language as a threat to traditional values and an attack on identity, emphasising that the Law on Gender Equality is part of a broader agenda, specifically a platform for promoting sex change in adolescents.⁸⁴ Addressing the public through the secular media on Christmas, the patriarch uses evocative and strongly tinged terms such as "genderisation", "extremely violent" change of language, "the most radical reform since Vuk Karadžić to date" and "language massacre."⁸⁵

These terms, in a country where two mass murders with young people as victims occurred last spring and where expressions such as "extreme violence" and "massacre" carry strong associations with traumatic events, further intensify the emotional intensity of the message. Such language can serve to mobilise the public by causing fear of the alleged impending danger, but at the same time produce opposite reactions—criticism for the use of overly emotional and alarming discourse. Some parts of the public interpret this discourse as disproportionate, especially given that acute problems, such as actual violence in society, seem significantly less prominent on the list of priorities of the Church.

⁸⁴Apostolovski, Alexander, 2024.

⁸⁵Ibid.

The arguments of the patriarch are predominantly secular, with the key being the unconstitutionality of the Law on Gender Equality, and rely on the authority of legal experts and relevant institutions sympathetic to the Church's views on gender-sensitive language and the importance of respect for traditional values in general. He also points out the practical unsustainability and additional bureaucratisation that, according to him, the introduction of gender-sensitive language would cause. He particularly emphasises the claim that "an enormous bureaucracy", from companies to institutions, would be in charge of monitoring and punishing any deviation from the use of gender-sensitive language, although such provisions are not explicitly stated in the Law itself.

The patriarch additionally claims that the Law requires an equal number of men and women in all areas and occupations, regardless of their particularities and other factors, thus characterising it as totalitarian and discriminatory.

Theological arguments are present to the extent where the Law—that is, the introduction of gender-sensitive language and gender equality—is presented as contrary to believing in Christ. Without more detailed explanations, the patriarch emphasises that agreeing to such changes would be a betrayal of the Church.

"We" is once again constructed as the Church, the people, and the experts⁸⁶, that is, the "vast discriminated majority"—the guardians of tradition, the constitution, language, and morality—versus "them", promoters of gender ideology, associated with global agendas that threaten family, faith, and identity. Among "them" are members of parliament who voted for the Law, which the Patriarch considers unconstitutional. He even asks the question, "Who guarantees that it will not happen again?"⁸⁷, implying that, once again, the members of parliament might violate the Constitution of Serbia. Moreover, with this question, by which he implicitly pronounces members of parliament accountable, at the same time because of the adoption of the controversial Law, he indirectly, but still publicly, calls out the entire highest legislative body in the system of government bodies of the Republic of Serbia. This criticism is one of only two addressed to the ruling party since the introduction of Patriarch Porfirije to

⁸⁶Experts include men and women who speak about their professional titles in the masculine gender, advocating that the use of the feminine gender in occupational and other titles would be contrary to the linguistic norm, i.e. that the names of occupations and titles should—moreover, that it is only right—use the generic masculine gender.

⁸⁷Apostolovski, Alexander, 2024.

the throne. Being the first in a series of criticisms made in the context of opposition to EuroPride, this may indicate areas of potential conflict, that is, those topics in which the Church seeks to strengthen its influence.

5.3. Gatherings in response to the law on gender equality

The tone of the conclusions from the first gathering titled "Serbian Identity, Serbian Language and the Law on Gender Equality", signed by all participants, was extremely emotional. On two pages of the text, in 11 points, the word "violence" was repeated four times, referring to "violence against the Serbian language", "Serbian identity", "legal violence" introduced by the Law, as well as the "violence" of the manner of its application.⁸⁸ The foreignness and imposition of gender-sensitive language "from above" and "from outside" are further emphasised by the use of the English term "gender", which consistently appears with the Serbian equivalent "rod" (with quotation marks).

The obligation to apply gender-sensitive language, which in discourse is associated with totalitarian ideologies, such as communism, is emphasised as the key issue. The aforementioned legal solution is described as the introduction of "verbal offence", which entails fines and prison sentences, with the claim that its implementation will be supervised by "ten thousand commissioners".⁸⁹

Gender-sensitive language is presented as part of a broader gender ideology and is shaped as a foreign and unnatural construction associated with "anti-Christian and anti-civilizational determinations"⁹⁰, and as a threat to the Serbian language, identity, and culture. The agenda of those who impose it is described as an attempt to change the consciousness, opinion, and life of the Serbian people and society. The promotion of LGBT values, from kindergartens and schools to the everyday life of citizens, is considered particularly dangerous. In addition to the figure of the endangered child and youth in general, the SOC is also endangered because the Law violates its autonomy.⁹¹ Finally, gender is framed in contrast to sex, which, according to

⁸⁸Zaključci naučnog skupa: Srpski identitet, srpski jezik i Zakon o rodnoj ravnopravnosti., 2024, *spc.rs*, 25 January. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/patrijarh/10575.zakljucci-naucnog-skupa-%E2%80%9Esrpski-identitet,-srpski-jezik-i-zakon-o%C2%A0rodnoj-ravnopravnosti%E2%80%9C.html>. (Accessed: 1 August 2024).

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Item 9 states: "The Law on Gender Equality grossly violates the internal autonomy of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as the constitutional separation of churches and religious communities from the state." Ibid.

the interpretation of the conference participants, makes the Law unconstitutional on this basis as well because gender is not mentioned in the Constitution. Finally, the threat is amplified by apocalyptic scenarios, mentioning the introduction of "a hundred different genders"⁹² with the possibility of their further multiplication.

The text relies predominantly on secular arguments—references to science, linguistics, and legal bases. Linguistic arguments refer to feminitives, which are characterised as unnatural language structures or "anti-language." Legal claims are focused on the unconstitutionality of certain provisions, while social arguments—the most present and dominant—are based on the preservation of Serbian identity. Theological arguments are present to a much lesser extent and are mostly moral values, such as "God-given freedom" as a universal right.

"We" is constituted, as a rule, in the masculine gender, as the absolute majority of the citizens of Serbia, institutions that organised the event, scientists, and intellectuals who defend the traditional values of marriage and family. On the other hand, "they" are legislators, specifically government institutions that support the Law (headed by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality⁹³) and the LGBT community, which are designated as an absolute minority. "We" are once again presented as guardians of tradition, language, and identity, defending morality, justice, and science, while "they" are constructed as an aggressive, ideologically motivated threat to the survival of society.

In his address at the opening of the gathering in mid-January, the Patriarch briefly highlighted the concept of "indivisibility of Serbian culture" that opposes the Law, emphasising its unnaturalness and potential danger to young generations through, as he stated, "brainwashing"⁹⁴. However, in March, he was much more direct, talking about the acclamatory support received after the first gathering, and acting not only as a defender of the interests of the Serbian Orthodox people but also of other peoples living in Serbia.⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ As a woman at the head of the so-called individual authority in charge of combating discrimination.

⁹⁴ As the term "gender", used to emphasise the strangeness of the term itself, the term "brainwashing" was also not translated by the patriarch, while on the website of the Serbian Orthodox Church, where his integral speech was published, the word was not transcribed, but written in English. See: Porfirije, Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 2024.

⁹⁵ "Indeed, the almost acclamatory support of the general public after our gathering held at this place two months ago, especially with its Conclusions, strongly manifests that our Serbian Orthodox people, but also other peoples with whom we share the rays of the sun and the air we breathe, will not allow the next generations to come into the world with a 'hump'." Ibid.

The issue of gender in the address of the Patriarch of the SOC at this gathering is framed as a threat to traditional family values, national identity, language, and way of life. The Law on Gender Equality is presented as a violation of the natural and cultural foundations of Serbian society and its cohesion. The key metaphor is the "hump"⁹⁶—something that is fundamentally and permanently deformed, with no possibility of repair. The syntagm "parents 1 and 2, 3 and 4" symbolises the dehumanisation of family relationships, while the traditional roles of mother and father are emphasised as natural and irreplaceable. Gender equality and LGBT rights are associated with an attempt to "change consciousness" from an early age.

Argumentation relies on secular elements, especially through invoking democratic principles and the defence of human rights and freedoms. The law is described as contrary to the basic principles of democracy. He expresses fear of "penalties" for the use of the Serbian language and opposition to "intentions" to change the way of life and the ethos of society.

He also emphasises the inadmissibility of making the "personal preferences of the minority" binding for the majority. As in similar speeches, the reference to the unconstitutionality of the Law and its incompatibility with the standard Serbian language dominates, suggesting that the reasons for its rejection are rational, scientifically and legally based.

"We" is presented not only as a majority community— "our people"—but also as a community that shares true values with other nations. On the other hand, "they" are portrayed as a foreign factor, a minority associated with LGBT policy and global power centres, whose practices have been described as undemocratic and authoritarian.

The discourse is emotionally mobilising, with value-tinged expressions such as "changes in consciousness" and claims that children could be left without knowing who their mother and father are, or even who they themselves are. This formulation of discourse suggests that children, under the influence of "gender ideology", will be deprived of the knowledge of their ethno-religious identity, which is thus presented as essential and most important for every male (*pripadnik*) and female member (*pripadnica*)—although the female gender noun is never used—of their (Serbian) people.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Finally, the main conflict arises between the perceived natural and the imposed, where the threatened majority advocating everything "natural" is opposed to the authoritarian minority, which tries to impose everything "foreign" to the natural on the majority.

5.4. Arguments of the SOC against gender equality

In short, the issue of gender and gender equality is consistently presented in texts as a multiple threat to traditional values, national identity, language, and culture. The emphasis is on secular arguments, as well as references to experts, i.e., science.

In the Easter Epistle, theological arguments are dominant, which corresponds to its genre. In it, gender is framed as a threat to spiritual, cultural, and social values, and gender-sensitive language is described as foreign, unnatural, and contrary to tradition. The narrative draws on the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah to illustrate the danger of moving away from values established by God. The parallel with modern society suggests that apparent progress leads to moral decline. In addition, gender-sensitive language is labelled as a threat to marriage and family, while "we"—the Church, the people, and traditional society—are presented as morally superior guardians of faith and tradition. In contrast, "they" are minorities and promoters of gender ideology, portrayed as a threat to language, identity, and social order.

In the interview with the patriarch, the language was adapted to the secular public, with gender equality and the introduction of gender-sensitive language being presented as a threat to identity and language, but also as part of a wider "dangerous" agenda, such as promoting sex change in adolescents. The use of terms such as "genderisation," "linguistic massacre" and "extreme violence" aims to cause fear and mobilise the public. This discourse combines secular and legal arguments, highlighting the alleged unconstitutionality of the Law and its equally alleged practical unsustainability. In doing so, "we" is identified as a vast, discriminated majority—the people, the Church, and experts close to church views—while "they" are legislators, the LGBT community, and promoters of global agendas.

Announcements and speeches from gatherings further intensify the emotional tone by frequently using expressions such as "violence," foreign expressions (e.g. the word "brainwashing"), and relying on apocalyptic scenarios. Gender-sensitive language is described as an unnatural construction, associated with totalitarian ideologies and foreign domination, while the Law is repeatedly portrayed as violence against language and law. The issue of gender

here is associated with a wide range of social and moral issues, including the “dangerous” promotion of LGBT values and the endangering of the Church's autonomy. Through metaphors such as “parents 1 and 2” and “hump,” they emphasise the alleged dehumanization and irreversible damage to society.

The key strategy of these discourses is polarisation between “us”—the majority community, which preserves tradition, morality, and identity—and “them”—minorities and global power centres, whose practices are portrayed as foreign, authoritarian, and destructive. While theological arguments emerge mainly in contexts related to the Church, much more present, secular arguments prevail in addresses to the general public, relying on legal, linguistic, and democratic frameworks.

These discourses combine emotional mobilisation and rational arguments to create a perception of shared vulnerability and urgency. The issue of gender and gender equality is not presented as an isolated problem, but as a symbolic conflict between the preservation of tradition and the alleged imposition of foreign values, thus simultaneously mobilising public opinion and affirming the role of the Church as a key actor in social debates.

At the same time, while the discourse on gender equality tends to cause moral panic in the local public, there is a noticeable lack of voice of the Church in other issues of social importance, such as the announcement of the opening of the lithium mine by the international company Rio Tinto in the Jadar River valley in western Serbia during the spring of 2024 or mass protests of students, pupils, and citizens across the country, whose request is to determine the criminal responsibility for the death of 15 people on 1 November 2024, during the fall of the awning at the Railway Station in Novi Sad, the second largest city in Serbia.

6. Final considerations

Interestingly, in the reaction of the SOC to the Law on Gender Equality, which addresses the creation of equal opportunities for participation and equal treatment of women and men in the field of work, employment, education and other areas, as well as the introduction of measures to combat gender-based violence, which is a serious social problem in Serbia, the position of women was not mentioned once. Moreover, if the reference to the norm of family,

as the union of a man, a woman, and their children, is excluded, women are completely absent from the discourse.

With this paper, I have tried to point out the main elements that make the SOC a key actor when it comes to shaping the anti-gender discourse in Serbia, and its impact in this context on society and politics. With its public response to the Law on Gender Equality, especially its articles on the application of gender-sensitive language, the SOC has developed a discourse on gender and gender equality, formed a broader coalition, and established international contacts regarding this topic.

The analysis of the texts in this paper indicates that the SOC, in an effort to legitimise its position, uses a combination of theological and secular arguments, with an emphasis on secular ones, often framing them through the prism of protection of traditional values, national identity, and Serbian language and culture. The Church positions itself as a defender of the family and a guardian of the moral order, while presenting the advocates of gender policies as a foreign and imposed factor, whose "agenda" threatens the survival of the nation.

The moment for the SOC to influence policies and legislative solutions in the country is favourable. Within the current political context, the Church has been one of the rare institutions with the capacity to provide a significant social response, that is, to respond authoritatively to the decisions of government authorities on important social issues, such as the position of the Serbian community and the resolution of the status of Kosovo or gender policies. Of course, the Church does not necessarily use this capacity, and the representatives of government authorities are aware of that. By doing so, it strengthens its position as a *collective intellectual*, opening space for further influence on politics, especially in future social and political disputes. On the other hand, the fact that it speaks about gender equality, but not about other important social issues, such as environmental problems, student protests, the high levels of corruption, erosion of media freedom, or, more specifically, very poor conditions in maternity hospitals, domestic violence and the absence of dialogue in the public sphere, repels from the Church those parts of society, including believers, who are not close to right-wing ideas and who have a critical attitude towards the moves of the party that has been in power in Serbia for more than a decade and during whose rule the SOC has consolidated its social position and influence.

Bibliography and sources

Bibliography

- Aleksov, Bojan, Lackenby, Nicholas, 2023, 'Symphonia'? A New Patriarch Attempts to Redefine Church–State Relations in Serbia, *Southeast European Studies* 71, no. 3, pp. 412-433.
- Buchenau, Klaus, 2014, The Serbian Orthodox Church, in: Leustean, Lucian N. (ed.), *Eastern Ź Christianity and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge.
- Dević, Ana, 2021, Paradoxes of Gender Politics: Nationalism, Patriarchy and the Hijacked Feminism of the New Right in Serbia, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 27:2, pp. 226-245.
- Drezgić, Rada, 2010, Religion, Politics and Gender in the Context of Nation-State Formation: The Case of Serbia, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 31, no. 6, pp. 955-970.
- Drezgić, Rada, 2015, Orthodox Christianity and Gender Equality in Serbia: On Reproductive and Sexual Rights, in: Hassenstab, Christine, Ramet, Sabrina, (eds.), *Gender (In)equality and Gender Politics in Southeastern Europe: A Question of Justice*, pp. 297-318.
- Grzymała-Busse, Anna, 2015, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Igrutinović, Danica, Sremac, Srđan and van den Berg, Mariecke, 2015, Pride Parades and/or Prayer Processions: Contested Public Space in Serbia #Belgrade Pride 2014, *Journal of Empirical Theology* 28, no. 2, pp. 204-225.
- Jovanov, Dejan, Lazar, Źolt, 2017, Serbian Orthodoxy Between Traditional and Universal Values: Discourse Analysis of the Journal Orthodoxy. *Sociološki pregled* 51, no. 1, pp. 135-156.
- Jovčić-Sas, Nik, 2018, The Tradition of Homophobia: Responses to Same-Sex Relationships in Serbian Orthodoxy from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day, in: Chapman, Mark D, Janes, Dominic (ed.), *Genders and Sexualities in History: New Approaches in History and Theology to Same-Sex Love and Desire*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 55-77.
- Korolczuk, Elżbieta, Graff, Agnieszka, 2018, Gender as 'Ebola from Brussels': The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43, no. 4, pp. 797-821.
- Kuhar, Roman, 2015, Secularization of the Church, Clericalization of Society: Same-Sex Partnership Debates in Slovenia, in: Orthodox Christianity and Gender Equality in Serbia: On Reproductive and Sexual Rights, in: Hassenstab, Christine, Ramet, Sabrina, (eds.), *Gender (In)equality and Gender Politics in Southeastern Europe: A Question of Justice*, pp. 255-273.

- Kuhar, Roman, 2017, Changing gender several times a day: The anti-gender movement in Slovenia, in: Paternotte, David, Kuhar, Roman, (eds.), *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, pp. 215-232.
- Norocel, Ov Cristian, 2015, The Panoptic Performance of Masculinity for the Romanian Ethno-Nationalist Project: Disciplinary Intersections in Populist Radical Right Print Media, *Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies (DiGeSt)* 2, no. 1–2, pp. 143-156.
- Norris, Pippa, Inglehart, Ronald, 2004, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paternotte, David, Kuhar, Roman, 2017, The Anti-Gender Movement in Comparative Perspective., in: Paternotte, David, Kuhar, Roman, (eds.), *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, pp. 253-276.
- Paternotte, David, Kuhar, Roman, 2017, “Gender ideology” in movement: Introduction., in: Paternotte, David, Kuhar, Roman, (eds.), *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, pp. 1-22.
- Petričušić, Antonija, Čehulić, Mateja, Čepo, Dario, 2017, Gaining Political Power by Utilizing Opportunity Structures: An Analysis of the Conservative Religious-Political Movement in Croatia, *Croatian Political Science Review* 54, no. 4, pp. 61-84.
- Peters, Margaret, 2024, Istorijski pregled rodne ideologije na Zapadu s posebnim osvrtom na stanje u Srbiji danas, *Pravoslavlje*, 15 March, pp. 9-10.
- Savet Evrope: Konvencija o sprečavanju i borbi protiv nasilja nad ženama i nasilja u porodici. URL: <https://rm.coe.int/1680462540>.
- Slootmaeckers, Koen, 2023, *Coming in: Sexual politics and EU accession in Serbia*, Manchester University Press.
- Tranfić, Ivan, 2023-2024, For Family, God, and Country: A Comparative Study of the Emergence of Anti-gender Movements in Southeast Europe, unpublished doctoral dissertation, La Scuola Normale Superiore, 2023.
- Wodak, Ruth, Michael, Meyer, eds. 2016, *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, 3rd edition, London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Online publications

- Andrić Rakić, Milica, 2022, Nova jabuka razdora: SPC u dijalogu o normalizaciji. URL: <https://kfos.org/srb/publikacije/124/nova-jabuka-razdora-spc-u-dijalogu-o-normalizaciji>
- Baković, Biljana, 2024, Razgovor nedelje: prof. dr Darko Tanasković—Srpsko i rusko pravoslavlje na

- udaru spolja i iznutra, *Politika*, 25 August. URL: <https://www.eparhijasabacka.rs/iz-zivota-crkve/prof-dr-darko-tanaskovitsh-srpsko-i-rusko-pravoslavlje-na-udaru-spolja-i-iznutra>
- Desetine hiljada vernih na svenarodnom molebanu za očuvanje porodice., 2022, *čudo.rs*, 11 September. URL: <https://www.cudo.rs/десетине-хиљада-верних-на-свенародно>.
- Đurđević Stamenkovski: Priče o akušerskom nasilju deo globalne agende protiv rađanja dece u Srbiji, 2024, *NI*, 23 July. URL: <https://n1info.rs/vesti/djurdjevic-stamenkovski-price-o-akuserskom-nasilju-deo-globalne-agende-protiv-radjanja-dece-u-srbiji/>.
- Đurđević Stamenkovski pozvala građane da započnu demografsku obnovu nacije, 2024, *NI*, 23 September. URL: <https://n1info.rs/vesti/djurdjevic-stamenkovski-pozvala-sve-gradjane-da-zapocnu-demografsku-obnovu-nacije/>.
- Georgievski, Jovana, 2022, Srbija i obrazovanje: Šta (ne)će biti u novim udžbenicima iz biologije i da li će 'nastavnica' postati zabranjena reč, *BBC News Serbian*, 21 November. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-63658998>.
- Jerotej, vladika šabački, 2024, saopštenje episkopa šabačkog g. Jeroteja povodom plana da u Jadru bude otvoren rudnik, *spc.rs*, 23 August. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/saopstenja//11592.saopstenje-episkopa-sabackog-g-jeroteja-povodom-plana-da-u-jadru-bude-otvoren-rudnik.html>.
- Korolczuk, Elżbieta, 2014, “The War on Gender” from a Transnational Perspective—Lessons for Feminist Strategising, *Heinrich Böll Stiftung*. Perspective—Lessons URL: https://pl.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2014/10/war_on_gender_korolczuk.pdf.
- Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije (KOMS), 2024, Alternativni izveštaj o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbiji za 2024. godinu, Beograd: Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije. URL: https://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Alternativni_izvestaj_2024.pdf.
- Krstić, Ana, 2024, Privremeno obustavljena primena Zakona o rodnoj ravnopravnosti. URL: https://www.otvorenavratapravosudja.rs teme/ustavno-pravo/privremeno-obustavljena-primena-zakona-o-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti#_ftn8.
- Nova društvena inicijativa, 2024, Kosovo-Serbia—A Different Approach. URL: <https://newsocialinitiative.org/kosovo-serbia-a-different-approach/>.
- Prajd šetnja održana u Beogradu uz jako obezbeđenje., 2022, *Slobodna Evropa*, 17 September. URL: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-evroprajd-prajd-setnja-zabrana-policija-obezbedjenje/32038574.html>.
- Republički zavod za statistiku, 2023, URL: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-Latn/vesti/20230616-st>.

Srpska pravoslavna crkva., 2022, Patrijarh odlučio: Na svim bogoslužjenjima molitva za svetinju braka i porodice, slogu i mir u našem narodu, *spc.rs*. 12 September. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/patrijarh//8095.patrijarh-odlucio-na-svim-bogosluzenjima-molitva-za-svetinju-braka-i-porodice,-slogu-i-mir-u-nasem-narodu.html>.

Tanjug, 2017, "Seksualizacija dece iza programa Ministarstva prosvete", *RTV*, 17 April. URL: https://rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/seksualizacija-dece-iza-programa-ministarstva-prosvete_817194.html.

Tanjug, RTV., 2022, Vučić nakon sednice Saveta za nacionalnu bezbednost: Ponovo smo kolateralna šteta sukoba velikih, o Evroprajdu će odlučiti MUP 96 sati pre skupa. *RTV*, 10 September. URL: https://rtv.rs/sr_lat/politika/vucic-nakon-sednice-saveta-za-nacionalnu-bezbednost-ponovo-smo-kolateralna-steta-sukoba-velikih-o-evroprajdu-ce-odluciti-mup-96-sati-pre-skupa_1372483.html.

Zaharijević, Adriana, Habemus Gender: The Serbian Case. URL: <https://feministiq.net/en/habemus-gender-the-serbian-case/>.

Internet Sources

Apostolovski, Aleksandar, 2024, Ekskluzivni intervju: patrijarh srpski Porfirije—Crkva će nastaviti da gradi mir. *Politika*, 7 January. URL: <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/593063/Crkva-ce-nastaviti-da-gradi-mir>.

Porfirije, patrijarh SPC, 2024, Patrijarh Porfirije: Ne pristajemo da bilo kome zbog toga što govori srpskim jezikom budu uskraćena ljudska prava, a pogotovu da zbog toga bude kažnjava, *spc.rs*, 14 March. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/patrijarh//10785.patrijarh-porfirije-ne-pristajemo-da-bilo-kome-zbog-toga-sto-govori-srpskim-jezikom-budu-uskracena-ljudska-prava,-a-pogotovu-da-zbog-toga-bude-kaznjava.html>.

“Preki sud za siledžije! Otkrivamo šta donosi novi Zakon o sprečavanju porodičnog nasilja“, *Informer*, 22 February, 2017. URL: <https://informer.rs/drustvo/vesti/317283/preki-sud-za-siledzije-otkrivamo-sta-donosi-novi-zakon-o-sprecavanju-porodicnog-nasilja>.

Sveti arhijerejski Sabor Srpske pravoslavne crkve, 2023, Easter Epistle, *spc.rs*, 16 April. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news//9276.vaskrsnja-poslanica-srpske-pravoslavne-crkve.html>.

Zaključci naučnog skupa: Srpski identitet, srpski jezik i Zakon o rodnoj ravnopravnosti., 2024, *spc.rs*, 25 January. URL: <https://spc.rs/sr/news/patrijarh//10575.zakljucci-naucnog-skupa-%E2%80%9Esrpski-identitet,-srpski-jezik-i-zakon-o%C2%A0rodnoj-ravnopravnosti%E2%80%9C.html>.

Regulations

- Zakon o postupku prekida trudnoće u zdravstvenim ustanovama („Sl. glasnik RS“, br. 16/95 i 101/2005
– dr. zakon)
- Zakon o rodnoj ravnopravnosti („Sl. glasnik RS“, br. 52/2021)
- Zakon o sprečavanju nasilja u porodici („Sl. glasnik RS“, br. 94/2016 i 10/2023 – dr. zakon)
- Zakon o zabrani diskriminacije („Sl. glasnik RS“, br. 22/2009 i 52/2021)

This publication has been supported by the Ecumenical Women's Initiative from Omiš, Croatia. The content of the publication reflects the views of its authors alone and does not necessarily represent the official position held by EWI.