

“GEJ” (GAY) IN  
SOUTHEAST EUROPE:  
LGBTI RIGHTS IN A  
EUROPEAN-GLOBAL  
CORNER

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**“Gej” (Gay) in Southeast Europe: LGBTI Rights in a European-Global Corner**

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politics” within international relations as well as national electoral politics, as the Serbian example illustrates.

## Cultures, Politics, and Pride

Visibility does not automatically translate into full social acceptance and integration. In fact, public events such as Pride parades have been touchpoints for clashes in the Southeast European region, as they have in other places in Europe. These clashes offer windows into backlashes against the growing visibility of LGBTI activism and the EU microscopes on the acceding countries. Table One outlines the recent history of Southeast European Pride parades and public reception of these events, as well as the central activist organizations active in each country. (Since Croatia was not yet an EU member when this research began, it is included here.) Scholars have documented that Pride events are important for helping the LGBTI community to create “a space for vindication, [visibility], and commemoration” and for claiming a physical presence in public spaces that are presumed to be exclusively heterosexual.

Across Southeast Europe, records on progress toward social and legal inclusivity of LGBTI individuals are mixed. Despite the recent bans, Serbian activists held small, unauthorized parades from 2011 to 2013. Bosnia and Herzegovina has never had a Pride parade and has seen its small Pride events

country in the report). This study did map shifting attitudes toward increasing tolerance for gender and sexual minorities across Europe since the 1980s, although earlier studies of these Southeast European countries were not available to map their changes over time. Despite such changes, transnational watchdog groups such as HGA-Europe document the continuation of LGBTI hate speech across all regions of Europe; as they reported in 2013, “Degrading, offensive, and defamatory language is being used by public officials at all levels starting from heads of states to local councilors.”

As Christian, Muslim, and other religious institutions have enjoyed a rise in both visibility and political voice across Southeast Europe in recent years, opposition to LGBTI groups has become amplified through such platforms. Among those who have used their religious teachings to oppose LGBTI movements include some Muslim adherents in Bosnia and Turkey, and Christian Orthodox believers in Serbia. Caution must be used in attributing homophobic violence to specific cultural identities, such as religion, however. Individual members of any society, and their leaders, might apply cultural tenets in a number of potential directions from peacemaking to violence. In addition to faith-based groups, organized opposition to LGBTI rights emerged through ultranationalist and football fan groups. Following a 2012 attack on an event that was to launch a new LGBTI magazine in Priština, Kosovo, members of the football fan group Pilsat declared on Facebook: “Our past and culture do not allow these degenerate and anti-family ‘cultures’ to be promoted in our midst. Pilsat will take action against these degenerate characteristics in the future as well.”

Despite what appears to be intransigent resistance from within their societies, sometimes sanctioned by political leaders, there is a consistent presence and growth of civil society organizations for LGBTI rights. Activists affiliated with these organizations have been pressing for social and political change in tandem with their respective countries’ transitions to strengthen stability and democratic governance. Activist strategies not only target what is often called a “single issue” of LGBTI rights—but extend to broader democratic development. In the Balkans, for example, there are two umbrella activist groups: the Southeastern European Queer Network of LGBTI activists from the former Yugoslavia, and BABELNOR, a network of 20 organizations from Balkan, Nordic, and Eastern European countries. The rise of such initiatives signals that cross-national and inter-ethnic collaboration is the rule rather than the exception when it comes to LGBTI rights organizing. Further, these activists are using the opportunity of the current window of international scrutiny of their countries’ practices and policies to press for rights against discrimination and homophobic violence that they have yet to enjoy. They are also benefiting in small but symbolically significant ways from increasing access to international assistance, such as grants from international NGOs and governmental bodies.

As community organizing on behalf of LGBTI rights has increased across this region, it becomes more evident that the actors working on stability and democratization include civil society as well as the state. These organizers have been scoping out a virtual presence through websites and social media that

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Kuyper, Lisette, Jurjen Iedema, and Saskia Keuzenkamp. (2013). *Towards tolerance: Exploring changes and explaining differences in attitudes towards homosexuality in Europe*. Den Haag, Netherlands: The Netherlands Institute for Social Research. Retrieved from

[http://www.scp.nl/english/Publications/Publications\\_by\\_year/Publications\\_2013/Towards\\_Tolerance](http://www.scp.nl/english/Publications/Publications_by_year/Publications_2013/Towards_Tolerance)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Demolli, D. (2012, December 17). *Attack on Kosovo 2.0 widely condemned*. Balkan Insight. Retrieved from <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/attack-kosovo2-0-widely-condemned>

signifies both their tech-savvy youthful drive and their transnational connectedness. This activism's transnational online footprint offers safe spaces away from risky public streets, also allows international publicity and potential scrutiny of any violent acts and absence of protection that LGBTI people suffer. The organizations collaborate with a number of transnational alliances, such as the International Lesbian Gay Association (ILGA, and ILGA-Europe) and IGLYO (International Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Youth and Student Organization), which has a European focus.

## Europe and the Globe: Aligning on LGBTI Mainstreaming

As LGBTI communities are becoming more visible in the Southeast European region, so are LGBTI concerns moving toward the center of development, human rights, and international relations agendas at both European and global levels. These issues are rapidly being "mainstreamed," to borrow a term from the parallel efforts to give women's concerns more central attention in such cross-national assistance, negotiating, and strategizing. The year 2013 saw unprecedented levels of announcements related to LGBT mainstreaming. In December 2013, the State H(1).ilary

the fall of 2013. The new guidelines require the following: “1) Eliminate discriminatory laws and policies, including the death penalty; 2) Promote equality and non-discrimination at work, in healthcare and in education; 3) Combat state or individual violence against LGBTI persons; and 4) Support and protect human rights defenders.”





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Table 1			
Country	Pride Parade History	LGBTI Organizations	EU Status
Albania	2012:Tirana: First Pride parade attacked with tube bombs, no injuries.	Aleanca LGBT	Non-candidate (Preaccession)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2008:Sarajevo:Organizers of Q Festival attacked (BiH has never had a P parade).	Organization Q (mostly inactive); Sarejevo Open Centre	Non-candidate (Preaccession)
Croatia	2002:Zagreb First Pride parade. 200 participants met heckling and jeering. 2011: Split First Pride parade. 200 marchers met 8,000 gayti protesters who assaulted marchers with stones and bottles. 2012: Zagreb Pride parade draws 10,000 marchers plus government officials; no violence. 2013: Split Pride parade with 500 marchers, including city and national government officials; no violence; hundreds of riot police on site.	Iskorak Kontra (Lesbian Group) Lesbian organization Rijeka LORI Women's Room Zenska Soba Zagreb Pride Organization	Member as of 2013
Kosovo	2012:Priština: Party to launch new publication about sexuality attacked, resulting in one serious injury.	Libertas Kosova	Non-candidate (Pre