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An abstract, textured background image with vibrant colors including teal, blue, orange, and yellow, resembling a close-up of a flower or a microscopic view of a material.

Breaking the Walls

The First Pride March in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract:

Pride Marches are usually considered as the most important manifestations of LGBTI activism and politics, either as festive and commercial celebrations or protests against violations of human rights of the LGBTI population. The first BiH Pride March from September 2019 successfully took the form of the latter, under heavy security measures and without any incidents in Sarajevo. Bosnia is regarded as a highly patriarchal country with strong homophobia and structural discrimination towards its minorities and marginalized groups. In that context, the Pride March is the most visible expression of LGBTI struggles for social recognition and acceptance. It also illustrates the status of human rights in BiH and represents a form of symbolic politics concerning the EU. This study aims to examine how the event was organized, how it indicated the human rights of LGBTI persons in the country, and what was the influence of Western Embassies and international organizations in BiH on its preparation and staging. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the organizers, the attendees, activists, and members of the LGBTI community in the country; 11 in total.

The analysis shows a connection between the egalitarian Organizing Committee (activists/individuals) and the March's claim for equality of LGBTI people in BiH society, including a correlation between the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and discrimination of LGBTI persons in BiH. The analysis also shows strong cooperation between the organizers and the international community in the country.

The study concludes the March being organized as a collaborative and a multi-level project, indicating the discrimination and homophobia through additional security costs imposed on the organizers. Finally, the study finds the international community's efforts as co-decisive for March's success.

Key words: Pride March, LGBTI, BiH, discrimination, human rights, Europeanisation

Acronyms and abbreviations:

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BD	The Brčko District
BHRI	The Bosnia & Herzegovina Resilience Initiative
CC BiH	The Constitutional Court of BiH
CS	The Canton of Sarajevo
CM BiH	The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina
DPA	The Dayton Peace Agreement
ECHR	The European Court of Human Rights
ECPHRFF	The European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
EPOA	The European Pride Organizers Association
FBiH	The Federation of BiH
FA	Freedom of Assembly
FTV	Federal Television
HRC	Human Rights Council
ICLD	Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ILGA	The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersexual, Queer
LPACS	The Law on Public Assembly of the Canton of Sarajevo
LPD	The Law on Prohibition of Discrimination
MHRR BiH	Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH
MIACS	Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Canton of Sarajevo
MTCS	Ministry of Transport of the Canton of Sarajevo
OCPM	The Organizing Committee of the Pride March
OHR	The Office of the High Representative
PIC	The Peace Implementation Council
RFA	The Right to Freedom of Assembly
RS	Republic of Srpska
RTRS	Radio Television of Republic of Srpska
SOC	Sarajevo Open Centre

SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity
SPDPSC	The Second Police Department and the Police Station Centre
TA	Thematic Analysis
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
QSF	Queer Sarajevo Festival
YP	The Yogyakarta Principles

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Table of content

Abstract.....	2
Acronyms and abbreviations.....	3
Acknowledgements	5
1. Introduction.....	7
1.1 Statement of the problem	9
1.2 Purpose of the study and research questions	13
1.3 Outline.....	13
1.4 Previous research on (the) Pride(s).....	14
1.5 Delimitations	19
2. Theoretical framework.....	20
2.1 Human Rights of LGBTI persons.....	20
2.2 Europeanization	22
2.3 Connection to problem, purpose, and the questions of the study	24
2.4 Operationalisation.....	24
3. Methods and data.....	26
3.1 Research design	26
3.2 Data collection and material.....	27
3.3 Analysis of collected material	29
3.4 Ethical considerations	31
4. Results and analysis.....	33
4.1 Background	33
4.2 Empirical findings.....	36
4.2.1 Organization of the Pride March.....	36
4.2.2 The Pride March´s indications on human rights and freedoms of LGBTI persons in BiH.....	44
4.2.3 Contribution of Western diplomatic missions and international organizations in BiH to the Pride March´s organization	49
5. Conclusion	54
Bibliography.....	58
Appendices.....	66
Appendix 1: Interview guide in Bosnian	66
Appendix 2: Interview guide in English	67

1. Introduction

On September 8th, 2019, the capital city of Sarajevo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the last of the countries of former Yugoslavia, hosted its first Pride March ever. The event was announced on a press conference in Sarajevo on 1st of April 2019 and hosted by the Organizing Committee of the Pride March (OCPM) – a group of feminists and LGBTI activists from Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla, Prijedor, Bijeljina.

The slogan of the March was “Ima izać’!”, which was translated as “Door, please!” on the official website of the organizers. Since the low visibility¹ has been one of the hardest problems for LGBTI people in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia or BiH), the slogan represents an empowered claim for LGBTI persons’ place in Bosnian society. The phrase is an expression often heard in public transportation across Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also refers to opening the door of the proverbial closet when LGBTIQ people come out — that is when they reveal their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or sex characteristics to themselves or others (Povorkaponosa 2019).²

¹ LGBT activism in BiH became visible after the war of the 1990s, particularly in the mid-2000s, mainly in Sarajevo. In recent years other large cities such as Banja Luka, Tuzla and Mostar created their own organisations (Swimelar 2019). The first officially founded association in the country was “Association Q” in 2004 in Sarajevo. It existed for almost six years with significant results in the educational area, culture (festivals) and support for LGBT persons. In 2009 Equilibrium was founded in Banja Luka. In 2010 Sarajevo Open Centre initiated its edition of human rights of LGBT persons (Bavčić & Delić 2015). In the same year Oštra Nula was founded in Banja Luka. However, in Mostar the first LGBT association, LibertaMo, closed officially in 2019 since most of its members (Croatian/EU citizens) left the country (Pušić 2020). In the meantime, new and younger activists have come out in Mostar, and they have been in contact with the OCPM in Sarajevo (Vasić 2020). In that sense, the future of activism in Mostar remains to be seen. In addition, Prijedor is also a noteworthy city with its association Kwart.

² It is interesting to mention that there have been different translations of the slogan (“Door, please!”), <https://povorkaponosa.ba/english-2/>, retrieved on 1st of April 2020), namely “I want out”, “Coming out” or “it will come out”, but what seems closest to the literal translation of “Ima izać’!” would probably be “There’s to go out!” or “There’re to go out!”, signifying an impersonal body or entity wishing or intending to step out of the means of public transport. Moreover, 5 days after the March’s announcement, attendees at the football game of the two most famous clubs in Sarajevo “hung a banner saying, ‘Forbid it, please!’ alongside the flag of the Kingdom of Brunei. Shortly before, Brunei had announced that it will criminalise same-sex relations and punish them with the death sentence” (ILGA-EUROPE, 2019). See: https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/2020/bosnia_and_herzegovina.pdf, <https://soc.ba/en/reaction-the-spread-of-hate-towards-lgbt-people-in-bih-continues-in-sports-competitions/>, retrieved on 21st of April 2020. It seems impossible to recognize any notion of “please” in the banner’s (and the accompanying flag) paraphrasing message. Again, grasping the most literal sense, maybe the closest meaning of “Ima zabranit’!” would be “There’s to forbid!” or “There is to be forbidden!”.

The event, somewhat surprisingly, assembled more than 2.000 people. It ended peacefully without incidents and with applause after the walk, speeches given by members of the Organising Committee, and a joint singing of traditional Bosnian folk song, Snijeg Pade Na Behar Na Voće, and famous antifascist song, Bella Ciao.

More than 1000 policemen, private security guards and snipers on the surrounding roofs kept the gathering safe. Foreign media reports outlined the inaugural nature of the Bosnian first gay pride and the heavy security measures, marking it as a test of tolerance for BiH and its society. 17 embassies to BiH, including Delegations of the EU to BiH and the UN in BiH, issued a joint statement regarding the Pride March, congratulating the OCPM, the March participants, local institutions, and citizens of BiH (US Embassy 2019).³

Domestic public reactions were profoundly divided: many public persons welcomed the announcement and invited people on social networks and in media to join and support the Pride⁴, while its opponents expressed their disagreement and concerns about traditional (Bosnian) values. The day before the event, a counter-protest, The Traditional Family Day, organised by the Association Svjetlo, was held in Sarajevo (N1 2019). On the same day, another counter-protest was held in the other part of the city, organised by the conservative Muslim Initiative Iskorak. The attendees walked the street, shouted “Allahu Ekber”, held banners with homophobic inscriptions, and ended with a joint prayer for the rain to fall (Oslobodjenje 2019). Regarding the March, the two proclamations were announced⁵; one from the Association Mladi Muslimani and the other from the Association Svjetlo, naming it “the Shame Parade”, praising traditional Bosnian family and marital values between a man and a woman, addressing LGBTI people as “deviant persons” and declaring the Pride as “evil” (Mladi Muslimani 2019).

³ U.S. Ambassador to BiH, Eric Nelson, marched in the Pride, together with the UK Ambassador to BiH, Matthew Field, Dunja Mijatović, Commissioner of Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Terry Reintke, a member of the EU Parliament from the Green Party from Germany, Edin Forto, at the time Prime Minister of the Canton of Sarajevo, together with others, famous and prominent persons and citizens. See: <https://ba.usembassy.gov/joint-statement-on-successfully-holding-bosnia-and-herzegovinas-first-pride-march/>, retrieved on 2nd of April 2020

⁴ In this work small variations of the official name, the BiH Pride March, will occur (the Pride, the March) as the name has been differently used by its organizers, the attendees and in various empirical sources.

⁵ The two documentaries were released as well: *Povorka* by Alen Drljević, FTV (Federal television), 2019, and *Šetamo za ljubav, bebo*, by Berina Džemailović, Kriva Media, 2019.

The organizers of the first BiH Pride March described it as:
a protest against inequality and violations of the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer people ... rooted in the principles and values of antifascism, equality, solidarity, freedom, social justice, self-determination, secularity, inclusivity, antimilitarism, the rule of law, openness to dialogue and non-violent communication (Povorkaponosa 2019).

1.1 Statement of the problem

Across the world's cities and localities pride marches (pride parades, pride events, pride festivals, gay prides) emerge as the most significant and visible manifestations of LGBTI⁶ movements and politics (Peterson, Wahlström and Wennerhag 2018). Although LGBTI activism(s) in Post-Yugoslav space cannot be reduced to pride marches, these events are commonly perceived as the litmus test of the status of LGBT rights and democracy because of their claims for public space, increased visibility of activists and the risks associated with this kind of civic engagement (Bilić and Stubbs 2015, Sloomaeckers 2017).

Furthermore, there have been very little scholarly papers on BiH LGBTI rights (Swimelar 2019). This is particularly valid for the March due to its relatively recent occurrence. Having the BiH Pride in focus, this thesis will contribute to a better understanding of the Bosnian LGBTI community and its allies, who organised and supported the event, on one side, while joining the growing literature on Post-Yugoslav LGBTI activism on the other.

The BiH March is important for several reasons. Firstly, the event took place significantly later than other regional prides – Belgrade and Ljubljana (2001), Zagreb (2002), Podgorica (2013)⁷. Bosnia is regarded as a highly conservative, patriarchal, and unfriendly LGBTI political and

⁶ In this work I follow the ILGA's (The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association) use of this acronym and an umbrella term. It is widely referred to as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexual movement, and activism. See <https://ilga.org/about-us>, retrieved on 1st of April 2020. As Peterson, Wahlström and Wennerhag explain it, LGBT acronym is still more often used in scholarly texts and public discourses. Variations and differences in the acronym's letters (and its order) sometimes reflect different goals and priorities among groups and organisations, just as well as some issues of contest(s). However, throughout this text variations will occur (only) because of different sources being referred.

⁷ Except for North Macedonia and its first Pride in Skopje, June 2019, which also went without incidents, despite the counter-protests of conservative structures in the country. Previously, in 2012 March for Tolerance was announced, but its activists were attacked (Subversive Front 2015).

cultural context⁸ (which does not imply that the regional countries are not), but the Pride went peacefully and without incidents, unlike the first neighbouring events.

To understand the reasons and logic behind the event's organisation, efforts of the BiH LGBT community and its allies – a coalition of political interests that have joined together in a struggle against repressive gender and sexual norms, need to be considered. They constitute an amalgam of specific local/cantonal/national circumstances' context, related and continuous initiatives of Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC)⁹, shared regional and learnt lessons processes, with broad international influences and collaborations in the end. The significance of doing so refers to the legislative, political, cultural, and religious shift(s) that have been occurring in the country in recent years. Therefore, it is important to put an accent on additional institutional and societal meanings of (incremental and contingent) change(s) since its announcement and the March itself. Change(s), as I assume, lead towards (more) equitable, tolerant, diverse, and modern Bosnian society, which is why the first Pride matters, especially concerning its positive echo in public. Those shifts are relevant not only for BiH and its LGBTI activism as “a set of collective, but heterogeneous, divergent and conflicting, struggles for social change” (Bilić 2016, 4), but for the theoretical and practical studies of contemporary politics, as LGBTI rights are among the most controversial social issues (Ayoub 2015).

Secondly, according the BiH Constitution, constitutions of its entities and cantons, the Brčko District (BD) statute, as well as the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECPHRFF), the right to freedom of assembly is guaranteed to citizens in BiH, with restrictions only in cases of protecting the safety of people and property.

⁸ Beside the Queer Sarajevo Festival (QSF) trauma from 2008 (see 4.1), the Merlinka Festival from 2014 was also violently interrupted when a group of 14 masked men invaded the discussion in the cinema “Kriterion” in Sarajevo, resulting in minor physical injuries but with severe psychological consequences. It is interesting that in both cases police were not able to effectively secure the event or to prevent the attacks, even though both festivals were properly registered and announced. However, The Constitutional Court of BiH (CCBiH) ordered

The Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Government of the Canton of Sarajevo to make payment of a monetary amount in the name of compensation for non-pecuniary damage due to the established violation of constitutional rights ... by failing to ensure the safety of the participants of the festival, violated the right to freedom of assembly of LGBTI people and the prohibition of being subjected to torture and degrading treatment (SOC 2019).

Previously the Court ruled in the case of QSF as well, stating violation the right to freedom of assembly. See: http://www.ustavnisud.ba/dokumenti/_bs/AP-1020-11-691933.pdf, retrieved on 19th of April 2020.

⁹ The most influential feminist NGO in BiH. More at: <https://soc.ba/en/about-us/>, retrieved on 19th of April 2020.

Nevertheless, before the Pride, the right to free assembly of LGBTI people in BiH had been almost impossible to obtain (Durkalić, 2019), while in the Canton of Sarajevo (CS) the freedom of assembly of LGBTI persons was violated during 2017 and 2018 (Pink Report 2019, 29). Therefore, the March raises questions about an exceptional or a regular right to freedom of assembly for LGBTI persons in BiH, while indicating their human, civil and political rights of in the country.

25 years after the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA)¹⁰ BiH has gained nothing more than the status of “permanently potential” EU candidate country in a prolonged process of post-war transition. The predominant political paradigm of ethnic divisions, with strong nationalistic parties, structural tendencies of re-traditionalization in society, highly complex, decentralised, dysfunctional, and impoverished state, created some sort of Bosnian *status quo*. On the other hand, the EU, and international discourses of LGBTI rights, liberation, and democracy have tried to change the long-lasting deadlock. Bosnian LGBTI community, with its demands for recognition of non-heteronormative sexualities, has been in the fissure between abovementioned realities (Selmić 2016).

As LGBTI activism is often influenced and coordinated across national borders and through an international process of diffusion of ideas, the first BiH March raises question about the process of Europeanization of the country and the possible progress in the process of an accession. “LGBT rights increasingly belong at the core of European values in the imagination of many

¹⁰ According to the DPA, the document that ended the Bosnian war, and its Annex 4, the current Constitution of BiH, the country is divided in the two entities: Federation of BiH (FBiH) and Republic of Srpska (RS). The Brčko District is a special administrative unit. Every entity has its constitution, presidency, government, and a complete bureaucratic structure. FBiH is divided on the ten cantons with each having its government, ministries, assemblies, with additional political and bureaucratic structures. The Council of Ministers of BiH (CM BiH) represents a state government with a severe lack of competences. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) is an international institution responsible for overseeing implementation of civilian aspects of the DPA, representing the last “address” for its interpretation. The institution has a status of a diplomatic mission to BiH and is made up of diplomats seconded by the governments of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC), the body that represents international community in the country, personified by its Ambassadors (OHR n.d.). More at: <http://www.ohr.int/international-community-in-bih/peace-implementation-council/>, retrieved on 25th of April 2020.

The EU Delegation to BiH leads the process of the EU integration and accession of the country. BiH is regarded as a highly decentralized state. According to Carl Bildt, the first High Representative in BiH, BiH is “probably the most decentralized state in the world” (Dijkstra 1999, 226), and, maybe, “the most complicated system of government” (Guardian 2014).

actors” (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014, 2), while over the past decade “gay tolerance” has become one of the most important criteria that need to be fulfilled by (potential) candidate countries and has been regularly accentuated in the EU Commission’s Progress Reports (Bilić 2016). Additionally, pride events are commonly seen as symbolic markers of these countries’ readiness to join the EU. The ability of LGBT people to fight for their right to the freedom of assembly is used as a litmus test of Europeanness (Slootmaeckers 2017). BiH has been recognized as a “potential candidate country” in Thessaloniki in 2003, which, after the long period of political deadlock, raises questions of the Pride’s effects and influence on European future of the country.

In this context, to know more about “external” support on and to the event, it is important to examine the extent of collaboration between the OCPM, Western diplomatic missions and international organizations in BiH. This question is relevant since “one of the main strategic objectives of Bosnia and Herzegovina is its full membership in the European Union” (The Presidency of BiH 2018, 6), while the EU Commission’s Opinion on BiH EU membership confirms that “The EU provides guidance to the country on reform priorities on the EU membership path” (European Commission 2019, 3). At this point, it is possible to claim the triple nature of the BiH Pride March. On its first side, the event is a central expression of LGBTI struggles for social recognition in the country. “Coming out is a powerful political act and a means of increasing LGB visibility and power” (Sauntson 2015, 1).¹¹ On the other, it serves as an indicator of the status of human rights in BiH. On the third side, the March represents a form of symbolic politics in relation to the EU. Furthermore, this triad produces the twofold implications: LGBTI community appears as an increasingly potent actor on “the political scene” in BiH, while domestic institutions and organizations demonstrated their capacities and capabilities to successfully secure and host this complex and a high-risk event. In addition, the Bosnian Pride in Sarajevo is important for examination its eventual distinctiveness in relation to other regional events, as the last event of its kind in post – Yugoslav space.

¹¹ Coming out has increasingly been adopted as a politically correct act in LGBTI communities, even a duty and an obligation, assuming that it would be harder for their opponents to marginalize and discriminate them (Huremović 2012).

1.2 Purpose of the study and research questions

With the Pride March in focus, from its announcement in April 2019 to the event in September, and further on, up until May 2020, this research study aims to trace human rights of LGBTI persons in BiH, examining the importance of Europeanization for the event and its community in the country. The following research questions will be answered throughout the thesis:

- How was the first BiH Pride March organized?

The question assumes direct contact with its organizers – the OCPM. To be able to answer it, the focus will be on the OCPM's membership, organizational structure, working experiences, prevalent problems, and challenges.

- How has the Pride March indicated the status of human rights and freedoms of LGBTI persons in BiH?

An answer to this question focuses on freedom of assembly in the CS¹² and the OCPM's (negotiation) experiences with the cantonal police.

- How did Western diplomatic missions and international organizations in BiH contribute to the event and its organization?

By examining the OCPM's coordinative experiences with Western Embassies in Sarajevo, the Ambassadors, and other foreign organizations in BiH, the answer will be provided for the international dimension of the event.

1.3 Outline

After the first part and the introduction to the March, having presented the statement of the problem, the purpose of the thesis and the research questions, previous research on regional prides will be discussed, ending with a delimitations section. The thesis then continues with chapter two in which the theoretical framework is presented. Human Rights theory is discussed in connection with discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), following up with the right to assembly of LGBT people in BiH. Further, the concept of Europeanisation is used to explain the influences of Western embassies to BiH and support of international organizations in Sarajevo for the Pride to take place. Chapter three of the thesis is about the methods and the data. The research design of the Bosnian first Pride March is being

¹² Apart from being decentralized and complicated, BiH is one of the most bureaucratized states. "In the complicated administrative and legal constellation of BiH, the freedom of assembly is regulated by 12 laws in the two entities and one district, and the laws are implemented under 12 ministries of internal affairs" (Durkalić 2019, 9).

displayed, which is being followed with the discussion on the data collection – interviews as a method of data collection in qualitative research, stating shortly its advantages and disadvantages. Additionally, a “tool” for analysing the data - content analysis - is being introduced, together with its reasons and different aspects of use. The last part of this chapter is being concluded with ethical considerations. Chapter four is presenting the collected data and the analysis, which will offer answers to the research questions of the thesis. Finally, in chapter five conclusions will be brought, ending it with recommendations for further research and its possible directions.

1.4 Previous research on (the) Pride(s)

Due to the relatively recent occurrence of the Bosnian first Pride, there hasn't been much scholarly research on it. However, this section will address two papers explicitly related to the March. Furthermore, the neighbourhood's experiences are well documented through media coverages, living experiences of activists, attendees, and collaborations. “There has been enormous solidarity in the LGBT movement in the region” (Miletic 2020).¹³ Additionally, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo are conservative, patriarchal, and unfriendly LGBTI environments as well, therefore being relevant and instructive for the Bosnian case.

In her policy brief Durkalić (2019) focuses on the importance of freedom of assembly (FA) arguing that BiH LGBTI community developed a specific form of activism by creating “cleverly shaped initiatives” in small gatherings, symbolic walks and public events, reaching a wider public, became bolder and stronger. Their focus of advocacy has been on institutions, police, security agencies, and media; mainly in Sarajevo. Investing small and significant changes over the years, the community paved its way to the March. Durkalić argues that the Pride without incidents would be

¹³ It is important to point out that the success of the Zagreb Pride of LGBTIQ persons and families has largely been due to cooperation, solidarity, and coordination of the LGBTIQ movement throughout the region. Since we share a common history, we have always supported each other. It was the same in the preparation of the Pride March in Sarajevo – in the preparation phase, we had been available and shared our experiences and recommendations with the organizers, including the attendance at the March in Sarajevo as well (Urlić 2020).

the ultimate test for the authorities, which will demonstrate their willingness to ensure that the right to assembly of LGBTI people is respected. It will also serve as an additional demonstration of the country's willingness to observe its obligations related to international human rights law and its prospective accession to the European Union (EU) (Durkalić 2019, 9).

Judging by the March and the subsequent reactions from/on it, it seems that BiH "passed the double test". It is important to note that specific form of BiH activism has not been an invention *per se*. The LGBT community had to adjust its visibility to the unfriendly environment while paying special attention to the recorded attacks in the country. In that sense, it seems appropriate to observe its activist's practices as necessary reactions and/or adjustments. An additional reason might be in low protesting culture and civic participation, which has its roots, *inter alia*, in authoritarian "past" of the country.

In the other paper, Swimelar compares the QSF and the announcement of the Pride, arguing that "the nationalist challenge may be changing and lessening in terms of the threat perception of LGBT rights" (Swimelar 2019, 10). The author finds "positive shifts" and responses "notably different and less nationalist than the discourse from a decade ago" (Swimelar 2019, 16). She argues strong Bosniaks' ethnonationalism in Sarajevo as a structural constraint to LGBT visibility and human rights' progress, tracing discursive shifts, from "claims that homosexuality is directly harming one's ethnic identity and community" to "traditional values, morality, and concern for children" (Swimelar 2019, 17), which counter-protests regarding the Pride March in Sarajevo affirmed.

Indeed, in the Conclusion of the Council of Muftis of the Islamic Community in BiH on the issue of LGBT persons from December 2015, signed by the current Raisu-l-Ulama (Grand Mufti), Husein ef. Kavazović, it is stated that Islam promotes "marriage (between a man and a woman) and family" while, according to Quran, homosexuality is qualified "a great sin", but "violence against any person based on his personal beliefs and orientation is not allowed" (Islamska Zajednica u BiH 2015). This attitude has been asserted throughout the interviews with members of the OCPM, including the attitudes of the Catholic Church. The Eastern

Orthodox Church in BiH remained refrained towards the March. However, in 2008 the same webpage published protests of 13 NGOs against the QSF, stating, among the rest, that “science has proven the same-sex unions to be unnatural”, that they are “the source of the most contagious diseases” and that homosexuality is “immoral” (Islamska Zajednica u BiH 2008). Interestingly, the Association Mladi Muslimani (one of the 13 NGOs from 2008) in its proclamation follows the similar discourse, broadening it and calling upon “relevant statistics” (without citing the source(s), as it was not cited in 2008), which allegedly have proven “that LGBT people are more prone to drug and drug use and that they are more likely to suffer from depression and psychiatric disorders”, connecting “persons of homosexual habits” with “paedophiles” (Mladi Muslimani 2019).¹⁴ According to this comparison, it seems that the Islamic Community in BiH has gone through a discursive differentiation over the last decade, while some of its affiliations (having the proclamation’s text in mind) seem to have experienced some sort of fragmentation. Finally (to confirm the “positive shifts”), before the March “posters showing a photo of US Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina Eric Gordon Nelson and the message ‘Gay is not OK’ appeared in Sarajevo” (N1 2019), which were, compared to those from 2008 and the QSF (see 4.1), far less threatening.

Regional experiences on prides tell their stories about violence and the EU pressure(s). In his analysis of Belgrade Pride(s), Bilić argues a link between homosexuality and European integration processes, in which “tolerance” towards gays and lesbians was constructed as a sign of civilisation and modernity. The author presents the process of accumulation of “European pressure” with Serbian LGBT population as a “bargaining chip” in the EU integration process (Bilić 2016, 138). Divisions within the LGBT scene (the two Prides in September 2015) show the other side, in which “globalisation of gay identity”, highly professionalised LGBT organisations, an imperialistic dimension of Europeanisation in disregarding local context’s specific features, produced causes of alienated activism, with sometimes even harmful consequences for local LGBTI community (Bilić 2016, 138, 145, 146).

¹⁴ It is also interesting to mention the attitude from one of the Association’s members. I was not allowed to record our short conversation in Sarajevo, but he said that he would support gay rights and same-sex unions if Bosnia had Sharia law.

Slootmeckers argues the alleged EU's LGBT-friendliness and LGBT rights as non-negotiable parts of the accession as problematic for those communities which are not rooted in the EU *acquis*. He showed multi-scalar LGBT politics in the Belgrade Pride as well, resulting in " ... a yearly spike in hate crimes against LGBT people in the period leading up to and following the Pride" (Slootmeckers 2017, 9). The author agrees with Bilić that making Pride a goal in itself, for "few NGO activists, the EU ambassadors and 5000 policemen, in order to write a good report so that the EU can tell that there is good progress in Serbia" (Slootmeckers 2017, 11), rather than a tool for real improvements, causes alienation of activism. Positioning the event only within the freedom of assembly issue overemphasize its "successfulness", while statuses of LGBT people deteriorate. The Pride's militarization created some sort of paradoxical "transparent closet" that blocks and harms authentic local LGBT strategies, whilst reinforcing traditionalism and nationalism. Belgrade prides and LGBTI experiences from Serbia are relevant for BiH for learnt lessons process (assuming the community, domestic and the EU officials) and close collaborations of the activisms. Through some (historical) perspective it may be regarded that Belgrade stands at the beginning of "pride(s) agenda", while Bosnia concludes the process of the post – Yugoslav space, for which Bilić and Stubbs, following Mizieleńska and Kulpa, argue a "third way" label, assuming, *inter alia*, the armed conflicts and a significant patriarchal backlash in the 1990s, differentiating it from the "sequential" nature of North American/Western concept, and the "coincidental" way of Eastern European LGBTQ activism.¹⁵

In Croatia, the first Split Pride in 2011 is somewhat exceptional because it wasn't staged in the capital, despite being coordinated from Zagreb. While accompanied with violence and homophobic attacks, the event subsequently increased the number of the attendees in the Zagreb Pride, as a counterreaction. In the meantime, Zagreb Pride has implemented a system of annual recruitment for those interested in organisation. It seems this "model" has been followed by the OCPM, with the invitation for those interested to take part in organization of the second Pride March in BiH (Povorkaponosa 2020). Kajinić mapped participants' experiences and emotions

¹⁵ The Western way assumes future-orientated linear process in which later activist strategies build upon the successes and failures of the preceding ones, while the Eastern way started in 1989 (when the West was already in queer/non-identitarian forms of LGBTQ politics), combining models, goals and structures to create hybrid strategies, often opposite to local contexts, and under the pressure of the EU "may actually precede, or even substitute for, wider public acceptance of non hetero-normative sexual identities (Bilić and Stubbs 2015, 130). In addition, the authors claim continuous judicial, pedagogical, and cultural programmes, which, on the other side, brings activists into new levels of professionalization.

from Belgrade and Zagreb Prides arguing that the Zagreb Pride with its effects “brought a great deal of empowerment to LGBT persons Croatia” (Kajinić 2019, 67). She found similarity in “aggressiveness of homophobia in both Serbian and Croatian societies”, but differentiates the lack of official political support in Belgrade, while in Zagreb the relative support provided efficient police protection, regardless of latter attacks on the Pride participants (Kajinić 2019 81). The author argues great mutual support between the activists, with Zagreb being even partially conceived as a response to the violence in Belgrade and, thus, the two Prides as interrelated. Additionally, she has also analysed the Festival of Lesbian and Gay Film in 2010 in Ljubljana, arguing an ambivalent relationship with the Europeanisation: on one hand, it coincided with Slovenian symbolic distancing from the former Yugoslav space, while, on the other, the event was strongly locally and regionally rooted (Kajinić 2016).

In the case of Montenegro¹⁶, Kalezić and Brković argue that the Prides in 2013 and 2014 would not have been possible without EU pressure, attaching the events directly with accession negotiations and opening Chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) 24 (justice, freedom, and security). Additionally, it seems that there is a correlation between the (less antagonizing) official names – the Pride Procession in Montenegro and the Pride March in BiH. For the Procession “the activists tried to integrate symbols of local heritage and traditional patriarchal masculinity and femininity into the visual politics of Pride” (Kalezić and Brković 2016, 170) which seem to had been followed in BiH with “Ima izać!”, as something typically Bosnian. In Macedonia, Kajevska argues state-endorsed homophobia as an impetus for the further proliferation of LGBT organisations and activities, with local LGBTI activists relying on international (EU) NGOs’ support. Rise of awareness of human rights of LGBTI people among public persons contributed to their increased visibility, which seems relevant for BiH and the Pride March video campaign. Rexhepi argues the unifying agenda of Europeanisation in Kosovo as framing Islamic religious traditions as backward elements which threaten Kosovo’s future in the EU while ignoring intersectional subjectivities such as queer Muslims. Proving Europeanness becomes imperative in the integration process and a disciplinary measure in reaching EU standards, in mandatory legal harmonisations for example, which, on the other side, increases resistance towards sexual rights. The case of Kosovo might be particularly

¹⁶ Violence and attacks happened. “During the first parade in Podgorica, Montenegro, in 2013, 2,000 police officers protected 150 marchers from 1,500 counterdemonstrators” (Ayoub 2016, 3).

important for BiH due to its context of LBQT communities of Muslims in relation to the secular project of Europeanisation. In addition, throughout most of the regional experiences, the EU policies of insurances on staging prides caused serious problems for the activists and the community, increasing rates of violence and internal pressures. On the other side, prides are not only signs of Europeanness, but an authentic expression of local communities and its allies. The question is would it be possible to organize such an event without the help and/or pressure from the EU. In these, regional, contexts BiH and its the Pride March might offer something additionally different.

1.5 Delimitations

The late occurrence (in comparison to the other regional events) of the BiH first Pride invites elaboration of numerous aspects of BiH structural patriarchy, institutionalized ethnonationalism implemented by the DPA, homophobia, legacies of the Yugoslav wars¹⁷, but the thesis is limited in scope and important parts of (historical) contributions to the Pride March must be left out. Bosnian Feminism has been the driving force of LGBTI activism, while most members of the OCPM are girls and women. Due to the necessary limitations of the research, special chapter on Bosnian feminism as a preceding struggle of/for the first Pride will not be included, although its presence in this work is (hopefully) structurally inherent. Furthermore, DPA, as a constitutional context of the event, reproduces basis for discrimination of “Others”¹⁸ in the country. Having in mind solidarity as one of the crucial values of the Pride and the logic behind its organization, a special chapter on other minorities and marginal groups in the country - Roma, persons with disabilities, workers, migrants, must be left out as well.

¹⁷ Žarana Papić, a pivotal author of Yugoslavian feminism, saw the conflicts as

A tribalist patriarchy which seeks to erase sexual difference through the rule of war-oriented nationalist masculinity. One cannot be a woman in the former Yugoslavia: one must be a Serbian, a Croatian, or a Bosnian woman. Sexual difference is killed by nationalism (Weed and Schor 1997, 40). Misogyny as a legacy of the war has remained profoundly present in public and private life of BiH women (Bavčić & Delić 2015). Nada Ler Sofronić was one of the first theoreticians and regional activists. Her PhD thesis “Marxism and Theories of Woman’s Emancipation”, defended in Belgrade in 1982, was the first feminist’s thesis in socialistic Yugoslavia.

¹⁸ According to the DPA, the Constitutive Peoples (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) enjoy exclusive rights of political representation in BiH, while other ethnic groups and minorities (“Others” in the Constitution of BiH) are being discriminated and cannot be elected in the Presidency of BiH and the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. Sejdić & Finci is probably the most notable case. More at <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/litigation/sejdic-and-finci-v-bosnia-and-herzegovina>, retrieved on 25th of April 2020.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Human Rights of LGBTI persons

Human rights are commonly perceived as universal moral principles and norms founded in legal, philosophical and political ideas, considered to be inalienable and “inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status” (United Nations n.d.). Human rights of LGBTI persons incrementally emerged from gay liberation movements¹⁹ in the West in the late 1960s²⁰ and early 1970s; from fighting for equality and civil rights up to discourses and international debates over gender and sexuality until the early 1990s, with the subsequent involvement of powerful international organizations such as the UN and the EU. (Kollman and Waites 2009). The proliferation of LGBT friendly legislation “has amplified the voice of a once politically invisible group and has become a recurrent theme in modern European politics” (Ayoub 2015, 294).

The Declaration of Montreal (International Conference on LGBT Human Rights from 2006) and the Yogyakarta Principles (YP) on the Application of International Human Rights Law concerning Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) from 2006 (supplemented in 2017), drafted and signed by global LGBTI activists and NGOs, offer a set of precepts intended to address and to protect the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. These Principles have become a referential document for human rights’ standards at the UN, various states’ and NGO’s policies, catalysing “the movement for the human rights protection of LGBT populations and aided its evolution simply by making extant how existing stated protections should apply” (Langlois 2019, 6). The right to liberty and free development of human personality, by progressive logic of interpretation, therefore, involves SOGI.²¹ Additionally, The UN’s Human Rights Council (HRC) decided, for the first time in history, “to

¹⁹ Stonewall riots in New York City, from 28 June 1969, are widely considered to be an initial catalyst and the main event resulting in the gay liberation movement and the struggle for LGBT rights, primarily in the USA, afterwards in Western Europe and all over the world now, half a century after the riots broke out.

²⁰ “Although the gay and lesbian rights movement in the United States started as early as the 1950s, it made dramatic progress only after 1969” (Eskridge 1993, 1483).

²¹ Although not explicitly stated in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), these terms are part of evolving concepts and progressive interpretations of human rights corpus.

Sexual orientation is understood to refer to each person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, individuals of a different gender or the same gender or more than one gender and gender identity is understood to refer to each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms (The Yogyakarta Principles 2017).

document discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, in all regions of the world” (Human Rights Council 2011). In 2016 this body passed a resolution for establishing an independent expert for protection against violence and discrimination based on SOGI.

Violations of LGBTI rights have been particularly present in cases of freedom of assembly, with special attention for minority and marginal groups in their struggle for recognition and equality (Durkalić 2019). Until the Pride March in Sarajevo, BiH was part of discriminating practices of (its) citizens based on (different) SOGI, even though the ECPHRFF²² with its protocols has been incorporated in the Constitution of BiH in 2002, with BiH as a member state in the Council of Europe and an obligation to follow and obey the adopted regulations. As one of the 169 States that have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), BiH has obliged to follow anti-discrimination principles based on a broader interpretation of sex/gender (Banović 2011). Additionally, homosexuality was decriminalized in FBiH in 1996, in RS in 1998, and in BD in 2003.²³ In 2003 the Law on Gender Equality was adopted, introducing the term sexual orientation, while The Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (LPD) was adopted in 2009 and amended in 2016, “not necessarily from an inland need, but because of the international rush” (Gavrić 2015). However, the fact that the Pride was held means an additional shift of the (discriminatory) *status quo* and improvement of the right to assembly, despite the persisting problems with additional security costs. Apart from legal dimension of the problem, the connection of human rights and the Pride(s) is in increased visibility, equality, and citizenship of LGBTI persons, which makes Prides as inherently political acts. In addition, the usual notion of LGBTI rights is that these rights are individual human rights protected by the state. However, BiH as “a state without stateness” has had acute issues with the process of state-building, while “being one of two frozen conflict

²² The article 11: “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to freedom of association with others” (ECPHRFF n.d.). Nevertheless, SOGI is not explicitly mentioned in the Convention. “Only” sex discrimination is prohibited. However, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) allows progressive interpretations of the Convention. Furthermore, the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (The Istanbul Convention) was the first international convention explicitly mentioning SOGI, which BiH ratified in 2013. Interestingly, out of all the BiH constitutions, only the BD’s constitution explicitly mention sexual orientation (Banović 2011).

²³ In Yugoslavia (an act of) male homosexuality was decriminalised in 1977 in SR Croatia, SR Slovenia, SR Montenegro, and Vojvodina province. BiH, SR Serbia, SR Macedonia, and Kosovo province kept criminalizing homosexuality but without prosecutions. Lesbian relation was decriminalized in Yugoslavia in 1951. See <https://soc.ba/en/the-lecture-we-shouldnt-miss-on-homosexuality-in-yugoslavia/>, retrieved on 24th of April 2020.

countries seeking EU membership (Kosovo being the other)” (Perry 2011, 2). Furthermore, the fact of an individual as a society’s subject has been recognized as a precondition for a citizen’s status, but in BiH by the DPA “individual” rights are granted to the three ethnic groups (constitutive peoples, Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs), and not to citizens, where “ethnos pretends to be demos” (Mujkić, Seizović and Abazović 2008, 14). Having in mind values of the Pride March and LGBTI movement in the region as well, the event in Sarajevo brings to the front an important question of opposition in BiH: citizenry vs. ethnicity.

One of the disapproving and discriminatory “arguments” of the March’s opponents has been usually and repeatedly expressed as “Let them do it within their 4 walls”²⁴, which, as a counteraction, points out one of the main purposes of the March in Sarajevo: breaking those walls of forced privacy, coming out and claiming the public space. In that (the remaining walls’) sense, The March in Sarajevo is politically relevant because of its subversive nature and the expression of resistance, forming other political objectives, challenging normative gender roles and common usage of public space.

2.2 Europeanization

Along with fundamental rights, LGBT rights have become increasingly salient between the EU and the countries in its proximity (Slootmaeckers, Touquet and Vermeersch 2016), while the EU accession negotiations with the Western Balkans have pushed human rights to the front in recent years (Godzisz 2019). Articles 10 and 19 of The Treaty On The Functioning Of The European Union explicitly state that the Union, in defining and implementing its policies and activities, “shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation” (The Treaty 2016). In the last decade advocacy of LGBT rights has become a litmus test for candidate countries’ “Europeanness”, which, on the other side, assumes “the EU’s self-presentation of LGBT-friendliness emerged as part of a wider agenda of (re)defining its symbolic boundaries” (Slootmaeckers 2019, 2). BiH is not a

²⁴ Emina Bošnjak, SOC’s executive director, wrote:

On the 8th of September most of my fellow citizens had the first chance in their lives to see that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer does not mean that we are just concerned with sex and sexuality (which we are, by the way), but more deeply with the underlying conditions that make lives unbearable for many: violence, injustice, and discrimination. More at: <https://soc.ba/en/dont-worry-nothings-changed-yet-everything-is-new/>, retrieved on 26th of April 2020.

member state of the EU and for that reason the *acquis* has not been officially applied to its territory. However, the country applied for membership in 2016 after a long period of reforms and adjustments. In 2018 and 2019 BiH submitted responses to the EU questionnaire, while the Commission's Opinion from May 2019 has been the last official document on the process.²⁵

As a complex, multi-level, dynamic and adaptive process, the concept of Europeanization is defined through processes of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies (Radaelli 2003, 30).

However, the process of transmission of European norms, values, beliefs, and practices in the region may often be ambiguous²⁶, which is particularly relevant for BiH, with its long process of recovery and transition, and the EU. Nevertheless, it seems how Europeanization has no alternatives in the region despite being “a complex, dynamic and troubled ‘translation process’ whereby ‘ways of governing and being governed through language, practices and techniques’ are constantly contested and renegotiated” (Bilić 2016c, 6). The context of proclaimed tolerance towards sexual minorities is incorporated in member states’ national imaginaries as a marker of their alleged progressiveness and modernity that should distinguish them from “others” (Kahlina, 2013). Judging the Pride’s success, this study aims to highlight if the event changed anything substantial or additional for LGBTI community and, more generally, for Bosnia’s “otherness”. Although BiH is not (yet) a candidate country, it is legitimate to bring together its first Pride March and Europeanization because “Pride parades, for example, can now serve to illustrate a candidate country’s endorsement of European norms” (Slootmaeckers et al 2016, 4). Furthermore, the emphasis on holding of Pride parades serves as a litmus test for readiness

²⁵ It is interesting to refer some of its parts, just to have a glimpse of Brussels’ perspective.

There are no countrywide strategies on human rights and on antidiscrimination. The equality of all citizens is not ensured. The laws on non-discrimination and on gender equality are in place but not sufficiently enforced, including on gender-based violence ... The protection and inclusion of vulnerable groups is not yet adequate, in particular for persons with disabilities, children, LGBTI people, members of the Roma community, detainees, migrants and asylum seekers (European Commission 2019, 9).

²⁶ On one side the EU is commonly perceived as an attractive and prosperous political entity, while, on the other, West European/Anglo-Saxonian wealth is established in the history of colonial and imperial exploitation, often driven by racism. In that sense European sexual politics may be regarded in neo-colonial context (Bilić 2016c).

for EU membership, while an idea of Europe, as an optimistic, more positive and stable future, which will eventually become reality in BiH (Selmić 2016), makes an analytical point of interweaving and probably one of the practical reasons for the Pride's large attendance in Sarajevo.

2.3 Connection to problem, purpose, and the questions of the study

Having the BiH first Pride March in focus, this thesis investigates how the event was organised, being “the most important event in BiH in 2019” (Bakić 2020). Regarding the previous experiences of (in)security in regional Prides, violations of FA in the CS and local initiatives of SOC, Human Rights theory is appropriate to address the issue of structural discrimination of LGBTI persons in BiH. By focusing on FA this research study aims to explore, explain, and evaluate differences between past events and the Pride, tracing eventual and additional shifts or improvements that have been taking place since April and September 2019.

Further, the concept of Europeanization is beneficial to explain broader aspects and logic behind prides, while encompassing practical issues of attendance as well. If the freedom of assembly relates to “technical” aspects of the event, with the legal background as the first basis for a practical possibility of LGBTI people and their allies to come out and walk together in Sarajevo, the idea of Europeaness and Europeanization behind the Pride allows an analysis of some other, transgressive, liberal, and open-minded BiH. I find it useful to examine the OCPM's work by using Radealli's definition for its broad and creative dimensions of Europe in a domestic context, allowing an examination of the interactive side of the OCPM and practical steps that had been taken in collaboration with diplomatic missions in BiH. Additionally, symbolic, civilizational, and historic dimensions are assumed as underlying values for the community and the country, adding the Pride's substantial or secondary significance for the EU accession of BiH and the European future of the country.

2.4 Operationalisation

To operationalize Human Rights theory on the BiH Pride takes the research back to April 2019 at the official announcement of the event, when the OCPM had no guarantees that the Pride

will be held. Members of the OCPM (15 individuals with their signatures) submitted their requests to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Canton of Sarajevo (MIACS) and to the Ministry of Transport of the Canton of Sarajevo (MTCS). By focusing on the period from April and September 2019 until now (May 2020), the research aims to explore changes (in comparison to previous attempts) and improvements in negotiations with the police concerning the organization of the event and freedom of assembly. The focus on this period aims to examine problems, difficulties and obstacles faced by the OCPM and LGBTI minority in the country. By asking the same questions members of the OCPM in the interviews, this research aims to join and compare their answers with other obtained empirical data, to be able to reach conclusions and trace eventual improvements or deteriorations. The relevancy of this argument is apparent in relation to usual benefits and regular use of the freedom of assembly in CS, for example, by other associations and citizens; non-LGBTI persons. The point is to examine the extent of discrimination and homophobia towards the LGBTI community in BiH in case of organizing and attending a public event.

Europeanization will be operationalized by joining empirical results to theoretical concepts of the approach. This will be performed in two directions. The first one aims for an examination of collaborative experiences of the OCPM with Western embassies and international organizations, while the other brings data from the embassies and other, public empirical materials. In interviews, the organizers were asked the same questions and sub-questions on the extent and details of their collaboration. The answers' mutual coherence is being measured. Then, the OCPM's answers are compared with data from embassies and public sources to determine the extent of consistency. Merging scholarly research on Europeanization, the OCPM members' answers, information from embassies and available empirical sources will offer "a whole picture" on the event – its preceding foundations, organizational arrangements from April to September 2019, and actions taken after the Pride. In the broadest sense of the word, Europeanization co-establishes context of/for the Pride, which will be applied to Bosnian circumstances to understand the event's staging in Sarajevo with its implications for human rights of LGBTI community in the country. On the other hand, it is probably not possible to establish "the whole picture" literally, as some details and nuances almost always remain unknown, even for the insiders themselves. But all the obtainable data should be sufficient for an elementary understanding of the Pride.

Additionally, by answering the Europeanization question, it is also possible to shed light on the organizational aspects of the event, which makes this part crucial in an analytical sense.

3. Methods and data

In this chapter selection of the case and methods will be discussed. An explanation of the way in which an analysis of the empirical data was conducted will be provided and displayed, including ethical considerations of the data collection and its utilization in the study.

3.1 Research design

By its nature, this research is a qualitative approach and a case study focusing on a single event - the BiH first Pride March that took place in September 2019 in Sarajevo. Although Prides have been staged around the world for about half a century, the fact of BiH hosting its first event (and as the last one out of European and countries of the former Yugoslavia) represents a milestone, especially for those who organized and attended it. One side of this study is about that, insiders' stories and their experiences, while the other side of the study relies on other empirical sources: field notes, documentary and video material, media sources and other "traces" about the event. On the other side, a simple definition of a case study is that it is a study of individuals (Eckstein 2009), while a broader and comprehensive one defines this type of study as "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and in its real-world context ... copes with the technically distinctive situation ... relies on multiple sources of evidence" (Yin 2018, 45-46). By borrowing and emphasizing "elements" of Yin's definition this research study will highlight a set of decisions taken by the OCPM, along with their reasons, the ways in which it was exercised and implemented, and, finally, with what results. All three elements address the important dimensions of the event.

A qualitative approach is inevitably characterized by our own biases and standpoints in the research process. Furthermore, it is a naturalistic study of subjective experiences, addressing interactive meanings, while reflecting on self, others, and context. This kind of research is an open and holistic study, sometimes being painful or joyous, but often generated by changes in its boundaries and interpretations. It poses unique ethical challenges for all included. Methods

are numerous and diverse, interactive, and relational. Prolonged engagement usually improves study, but data collection is rarely optimal. Finally, qualitative research emphasizes critical and “out of box” thinking in renewed and growing contributions to knowledge in arts and humanities (Drisko 2016). An application of qualitative research study in case of the BiH Pride is logical and appropriate for several reasons. It is a field study conducted *in situ*, having conducted interviews with members of the OCPM and the event’s attendees. The study is about its social (institutional) meanings, values, and their different interpretations and perspectives on it. The event happened for the first time in BiH, providing a unique opportunity to learn and reflect on something unprecedented and unexperienced in the country.

The usual criticism of case studies refers to the argument that they are not an appropriate “tool” for generalization (Stake 2011). However, the Pride happened in Bosnia for the first time ever, which leaves a generalization out of option. Prides in Western cultures are usually staged as celebrations, while Bosnian March is a protest. The first regional prides were protests, in patriarchal and homophobic context as well, but accompanied by violence and attacks on LGBTI activists. Bosnian Pride went without incidents, making a substantial difference.

3.2 Data collection and material

To conduct my research on the Pride March, I have arrived in Bosnia from Sweden on 16th of February 2020. The plan of the fieldwork in the country was to stay until 27th March 2020 and return to Umeå. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic and the measures being taken in BiH and the EU, my plan changed, while the fieldwork had to be adjusted in accordance with the restrictive circumstances. Nevertheless, in order to answer the research questions, I have conducted (in-depth)²⁷ interviews with 5 members the OCPM, 4 interviews with the Pride’s

²⁷ Out of 5 interviews with members of the OCPM, only two were conducted in a real (natural), face-to-face situation. The other two happened on Skype and Zoom, while the last one was sent to me in a written form. One reason for this, as mentioned, has been in the COVID-19 situation, while the other concerns trust and belonging, as I assume.

In October 2019, my contact with SOC on Facebook was established. At that point, I started with my inquiry about LGBTI issues in BiH, but without a clear idea about a research subject. After being awarded the ICLD’s fieldwork grant in late November, I wrote an email to SOC in January 2020. SOC’s executive director, Emina Bošnjak answered and encouraged me to write on the OCPM’s group email, which I did twice before coming to Bosnia in February. I presented myself, the project, and its context. However, only one person answered (Branko) and expressed his interest in participating in an interview. Later in February, I visited SOC for the first time, to attend a movie projection about the Pride, “We walk for love, baby” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_cKY8zCS74, retrieved on 27th of April 2020). At that occasion, I thought

attendees, and 2 activists and members of the community who did not attend the event. My initial fieldwork plans assumed interviews with the counter-protests' organizers in Sarajevo and representatives of the Islamic Community in BiH. Despite several attempts for contact, they've remained out of my reach. "An accidental coffee" with two members of The Association of Young Muslims in Sarajevo was short but they refused to be recorded during the conversation. However, attitudes of religious communities and conservative associations in BiH on the Pride are obtained through different webpages and media sources. Furthermore, I submitted a request to the MIACS to access security data on the Pride. The request was denied for "the confidential nature of operational data" but formally approved to confirm basic information on security participation and operational success, which will be referred subsequently. My additional requests to the Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies of BiH and the Federal Police Administration of FBiH remained unanswered. My questions to the U.S. embassy in BiH on their eventual support for the Pride remained unanswered, just as those to the Netherlands embassy. However, the British and the Swedish embassies answered, providing me with data on their support for the event, which will be discussed subsequently. From the Delegation of the EU to BiH and the OHR I received short but informative responses.

In-depth interviews, used in this research as prime sources of data, are characteristic for their basic structure of questions and themes on one side while being sufficiently flexible to allow spontaneous answers of the interviewee on the other. The material is generated in a relatively

that something wasn't right. I felt I could have been welcomed and accepted with more friendliness. Maybe I had great expectations and the enthusiasm about the research project and myself in it, I don't know, but I was disappointed, frustrated, and worried. I felt as if I am chasing someone or annoying them about that interview etc. I had those or similar notions throughout all the research period in Bosnia.

However, that night I recorded a conversation with young members of the LGBTI community from Zenica. We shared a room in one of the Sarajevo's hostels. They were friendly, curious, and talkative, giving me even some sense of comfort and relief. Additionally, I am not gay, nor an activist and member of the LGBTI community in the country, appearing maybe out of nowhere in some sense. Having that in mind, I was subsequently told that it was "business as usual", that information was kept safe and not so easily shared, that it took a longer period of cooperation and coexistence, a lot of effort to get hold of people and to get them to trust you, with many people and researchers sending various requests. The last point is especially interesting since Emina told me, when we met in Tuzla at Merlinka Festival, about researchers who came, took what they needed, and went, without giving anything back, or just being grateful.

At some point in April, after 4 requests and correspondence, I conducted an important interview with Vladana, the OCPM member from Sarajevo. Nevertheless, despite several attempts, I did not receive a single official document from the OCPM.

Further, out of 4 interviews with the Pride's attendees, only one was conducted face-to-face, the two were sent to me in written forms, while the last was sent to me in an audio form. The interview with an activist was conducted face-to-face and recorded. Finally, an overall account on my interviews: 5 face-to-face interviews, 2 video calls, 3 written ones and 1 audio (self-recorded) and sent to me.

free interaction process, while the researcher uses probes and different techniques to reach deeper levels of meanings of responses. New knowledge may be generated in the conversation, with specific variations depending on research questions and/or mutual influence of the researcher and the interviewee. Finally, searching for nuances of meanings implies a natural environment in which an interview is conducted face-to-face and tape-recorded (Legard, Keegan and Ward 2003). Advantages of interviews in qualitative research are in their efficiency of collecting data and accessible clarifications, but involving personal interaction assumes some of its limitations as well. As qualitative researchers try to unfold the meaning of someone's experiences (Kvale 2007), personal involvement seems thus inevitable.

3.3 Analysis of collected material

Since BiH Pride March is an exceptional activist's act and a massive street protest in Bosnian case, an interpretative inquiry for its meanings and relationships within the organization and intertwined influences is necessary to be able to understand the driving logic behind it.

Widely known as one of the most common and flexible "tools", "techniques", even "a process of encoding qualitative information" (Boyatzis 1998, 6) in qualitative research, thematic analysis (TA) is used in this work for analysing the conducted interviews with members of the OCPM, the attendees of the Pride and the activist. I will follow the approach of Braun & Clarke in which TA is defined as "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke 2006, 6).

Before the analysis, some decisions need to be made. What counts as a theme²⁸ or "considerable space in data items" should be known when "a journey" begins, and this is up to researchers themselves. The relevance and prevalence of theme(s) is attached to meanings of importance in research question(s). Further, we should know what type of analysis we are about to conduct, and with what claims. For example, we may have a rich thematic description or more detailed but smaller number of themes. The themes can be identified in two ways: in an inductive (bottom-up) way or in a theoretical (top-down) way. The first approach assumes a strong link between themes and the data, with a possible weak connection between the themes, asked

²⁸ Boyatzis defines a theme as "a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis 1998, 161).

questions and theoretical/analytical standpoint of the researcher. On the other hand, a theoretical TA is more analytically and theoretically driven method, with a focus on “a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data” (Braun & Clarke 2006, 12).

As the focus of this work is on the Pride’s organization, its indications on human rights of LGBTI people in Bosnia and the role of Europeanization in its set up, the analysis will be based on a theoretical, deductive, top-down method. The decision should be also made concerning the identification of themes: should we go for a semantic (explicit) level or latent (interpretative) one, where the first approach describes surface, form and meanings, while the latter goes for the features and layers that established the form and meanings. Due to my research questions on the organization and influences of the Pride, this work will include the first approach. I find this more logical since previous attempts to organize a pride in Bosnia failed. That fact that the country hosted its first Pride is meaningful enough to stay on the surface and technical side of it, despite eventual notions of banality or superficiality. Hopefully, with future prides in the country, different research will be conducted, including organizer’s and participants’ more nuanced and subtle meanings.

As TA is a quest across the data for repeated patterns of meaning, Braun and Clarke offer a step-by-step guide for doing the analysis. The first step means familiarizing ourselves with the data. We should go deep into our meanings and try to comprehend them thoroughly, which for example may assume several readings or reviewing the original source, focusing on patterns of meanings. Transcribing data may be an important introductory act as well. The second step concerns creating an initial code list from the data. Coding means extracting something meaningful, interesting, or significant for our research. It is important for all data to be coded. The third phase implies searching for themes. It involves analysing similar codes and creation a theme out of it. Phase four is about reviewing and refining our themes. It is a process in which we will change and discard some of the themes based on their meaningfulness and relevancy. Candidate themes should form a coherent pattern on one level, while the second level involves the whole data set and its authentic reflection within a candidate theme. The final part of this phase should result in a thematic map with a clear idea over our themes and inscribed meanings. The fifth step is to “define and refine”. It involves establishing the essences among the themes

and determining what part of the data each one represents. For each theme, an analysis is provided, offering a small story behind it, which should follow the general “tone” of the data. The final part should be about our theme’s (“concise and punchy”) names. The sixth phase is about final analysis and writing a report. We should be representative and coherent, offering arguments for the validity of our interpretative analysis and for close connection with the research question(s) (Braun & Clarke 2006, 15-23).

Finally, the authors offer advice on avoiding some pitfalls. A good analysis should offer illustrative extracts that go beyond their specific content, with themes cohering around a central idea, while interpretations must be consistent with the extracts and the theoretical framework, with the theory and method being applied rigorously. Some of the disadvantages of this method may be in poorly conducted analysis or inappropriate research questions. In the end, authors warn on “methodolatry”, which happens when we lose our connection with the topic and research questions (Braun & Clarke 2006, 16-28).

One of the reasons why I decided to use TA for my research study on the Pride is that this research has been my first qualitative research. TA is an accessible and popular method of qualitative data analysis. Although it may be criticized for its subjectivity and lack of nuances, I find this method appropriated since I have been conducting fieldwork research in direct contact with LGBTI activists whose expression imply similar meanings and repeating themes when they speak about themselves, their community, problems in everyday life, or the Pride.

3.4 Ethical considerations

As interview inquiry is “a moral enterprise” (Kvale 2007, 23), ethical aspects of this study need to be addressed since ethics in qualitative research “is an integral aspect of all decision making in research, from problem formulation to the presentation of results” (Preissle 2008, 276).

Before conducting interviews with members of the OCPM, I presented myself in an email and explain all relevant facts about my research project. Before arriving in Bosnia, I sent a reminder

attaching the preliminary interview guide. Participation in interviews has been free and voluntary. Participants are not coerced to answer my questions while interviews' termination has been possible at any moment. Assuming free and informed consent, answers from the interviewees are responsibly used and for academic purposes only. I have explicitly assured my interview candidates about the confidentiality of responses and anonymity of identities if requested.

In addition, the only written interview with a member of the OCPM resulted from my visit to SOC and to Cure Foundation in Sarajevo, which have their offices in the same building. I was recommended to send her an email and, after the basic presentation of myself and the project, we have corresponded, and after some time I was sent the answers with permission to use her name if cited.

The interviews with the attendee of the Pride and the activist are conducted spontaneously during the Merlinka Festival in Tuzla, while the interview with LGBTI members from Zenica was recorded in a shared room in Sarajevo after watching the movie in SOC. As in the abovementioned, I presented myself, the project and its context, while they freely decided to participate, allowing me to use the names. The two written interviews from the attendees I received on Facebook's messenger. We don't know each other personally, but, as we have common (Facebook) friends, they were recommended to me for contact. As stated, after I presented myself and the project in personal correspondence, they took a couple of days and sent me their answers, with permission to use their names if being cited. The last interview with the attendee and the performing artist of the Pride was sent to me in an audio format. We have known each other for years, but we only met once. I emailed him, presented the project, and sent the interview questions. After receiving his audio answers, he permitted me to use his name if being cited. All participants freely decided to allow me to use their real names and surnames in this research study. The transcribed text follows the interviewee's oral statements, while consequences for the subjects of participation in the research project are attentively considered (Kvale 2007, 25-31).

4. Results and analysis

In this chapter, the thesis reaches its central part. The fieldwork's content will be presented: empirical findings from 11 interviews on the Pride will be analysed in connection with the theoretical framework in chapter 2, and the questions will be answered. Before that, a background will be displayed as an introduction to the "subject" and its context. Additionally, to be able to answer the first question (How was the BiH Pride March organized?), the focus will be mostly on findings from the interviews with members of the OCPM - "the insiders". All other aspects of research questions, following the relevancy of their findings, will be treated and distributed equally from all the interviewees.

4.1 Background

In BiH the eighth general elections were held 7 October 2018, confirming the traditional governance of nationalistic parties in the country. However, in late December 2018 The Sarajevo Canton Assembly confirmed the new Cantonal Government. For 26 out of the past 28 years the CS was dominated by the same party – conservative, nationalistic, Bosniaks' SDA (Democratic Action) party. The coalition that took control was led by Naša Stranka, a social-liberal, multi-ethnic political party, having its first head of Sarajevo's government.

Although the Pride was announced on 1st of April 2019, its organizers started earlier with their plans, activities and advocacy.²⁹ The substantial change in the cantonal political "environment" served as one of the encouraging motives and strengthening momentums to continue with preparations of the event³⁰. Keeping in mind the violence and attacks on LGBT activists during the first prides in Belgrade and Zagreb, as well as the most traumatic case in Bosnian LGBTI activism's history – Queer Sarajevo Festival (QSF), 24 September 2008, international and regional activists, supporters, and attendees perceived the first Bosnian Pride March as an exemplary success. A homophobic and violent group of Wahhabi Muslims and local football hooligans gathered and, yelling religious paroles and insults, threw stones at the Academy of Fine Arts, invaded the premises and brutally assaulted the participants; some of whom upon

²⁹ "Earlier" in this case may be taken in a broader sense as well, including the Q association, QSF and previous, historical attempts and acts of visibility of LGBTI activism in BiH.

³⁰ In the meantime, Assembly of the CS voted a new (old) government, but, eventually, that is something for the second Pride's OCPM to deal with. See: <http://ba.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a413944/Sarajevo-Canton-gets-new-Government-opposition-claims-procedures-were-violated.html>, retrieved on 30th of April 2020.

they were leaving the event. Before the festival's opening, "the lynching atmosphere" (Nurkić 2012) was spreading in the city for days, coinciding with the month of Ramadan, which additionally contributed to the planned violence.³¹ The day after the attacks, the organizers hosted a press conference and cancelled the QSF.

Further, as seen in one of the numerous videos on the Pride March, a person was carrying the banner with an inscription: "Freedom of Assembly is Not Free", probably referring (previous) violations and discrimination of this right for LGBTI persons in CS and BiH. In parliamentary democracies, freedom of peaceful assembly is one of the fundamental human rights and, with the right to freedom of expression, represents one of the pillars of a contemporary democratic society. "The right of assembly protects the members of a group based not upon their principles or politics but by virtue of their coming together in a way of life" (Inazu 2012, 185-186). As it has been cited in chapter 2, The ECPHRFF's article 11 explicitly allows freedom of peaceful assembly, but the state is given wide discretionary freedom of assessment to respond to riots or criminal offences for example. The article's phrase "necessary in a democratic society", interestingly, makes a volatile basis for restrictive or vague interpretations.

The MIACS's interpretation of the Law on Public Assembly of the Canton of Sarajevo (LPACS) imposes obligatory and expensive requirements on organisers with security agencies, ambulance teams, including preparedness of firefighting service, the presence of own stewards for maintaining peace and order. "Such requests create unreasonable financial and other difficulties for civil society organisations, but also for individuals who organise public assemblies and influence the exercise of the right to freedom of assembly in Sarajevo Canton" (Pink Report 2019, 29). However, in January the CCBiH has ruled a milestone verdict, addressing the MIACS for failing to protect SOC's festival Merlinka, which is the first verdict related to the accountability of public officials in relation to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly in BiH (Bavčić 2019), while, in the meantime, SOC and its international partners organised educational training for the MIACS's police officers on freedom of assembly as a fundamental

³¹ Interestingly, organizers of the QSF, when planning the event, did not know that their Festival would coincide with the Ramadan.

human right and attendance to the Pride in Skopje, as a part of complex national, regional and international preparations and coordination of activities for the first Pride March.³²

On the other side, the fact that the event was held without violence means “new visibility” (Swimelar 2019) for LGBTI people, and the country as well. Bosnia’s international reputation is usually burdened with negative connotations: war legacies, ethnic divisions, hatred, poverty, corruption, instability. The Pride showed other, different, and transgressive side of BiH. The progress (within/of Bosnian LGBTI activism) since the QSF (2008) seems apparent: the community has come a long way in resisting violence and discrimination, the two verdicts of the CC BiH had been taken as legal foundations for the Pride - a multi-ethnic, civic and an inclusive event for the whole country, even having an explicit and official domestic support from the Ombudsmen, with more balanced, soften, less hateful and notably different responses of conservative, religious, and nationalist actors, linking the Pride March with “normal society” phrase (Swimelar 2019, 14-16). Additionally, Selmić’s (2016) arguing that “the LGBT movement in BiH lacks either governmental or societal support” seems to be challenged or changed with the Pride March.

The unanimous support for the event from the EU and other western embassies has been evident³³, although it is unclear to what extent. The support from the U.S. has been continuously present in the country. While the financial assistance is transparently documented, it is almost impossible to trace effects of the next statement: “We at USAID are listening, and it is our goal to help you make sure others listen, too” (USAID 2019). The EU provides support and grants

³² Moreover, SOC’s and its partners’ training with the police officers in BiH has been a continuous activity over the years. For example <https://soc.ba/en/the-training-for-the-police-officers-in-bihac-hate-crime-a-topic-avoided-in-practice/>, retrieved on 1st of May 2020. During 2016, cooperation with the Police Academy of FBiH was realized, resulting in training for cadets in hate crimes. In September 2018, the FBiH Government gave a positive evaluation of the 2018-2020 Draft Action Plan for Equality of LGBT persons in BiH, which was proposed by the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH (MHRR BiH). The plan follows recommendations of the Council of Europe concerning the prevention of discrimination based on SOGI. However, RS gave a negative opinion due to a lack of “public consultations” with its institutions (Pink report 2019, 9-13). However, discrimination in the country continues.

LGBT persons in BiH face discrimination in numerous fields, including employment, education, housing, and health care. As reported by relevant CSOs, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation/gender identity/sexual characteristics is most prevalent in the employment sector, as well as in accessing goods and services. Discrimination against LGBT persons within the educational system can lead to hate speech, violence and systemic discrimination. The prosecution of hate crimes as well as hate speech remains insufficient (OSCE 2019, 18).

³³ International community in BiH issued several joint statements concerning the Pride March. See for example <http://europa.ba/?p=63555>, retrieved on 2nd of May 2020.

“considerable resources” and “financial assistance” to BiH (EU Delegations to BiH 2019). So far, from my personal experience of living in BiH, this research study, various empirical sources, and regional experiences, it seems reasonable to assume international influence in the country as decisive for the Pride March to happen in Sarajevo. However, the questions are still open.

4.2 Empirical findings

Pride Marches are somewhat specific events since they establish “a matrix” which bring together sexual, political, legal, and religious aspects of/in a society (Bilić 2016). The BiH first Pride March brought these issues together in an unprecedented way, being an unique experience for its organizers, attendees, the whole country, and the region while closing the almost two decades-long process of Pride staging in post – Yugoslav space. Further, the purpose of the question on its organization is not only in offering technical or procedural details of the event. By highlighting important organizational details, it will be possible to know more how BiH LGBTI community has been organized and structured in general, with insights on broader, regional, and international networking aspects. On the other side, the Pride March is also a contextual and historical question, involving numerous preceding struggles, traumas, defeats and achievements, which now can be seen through all the sequential steps that led to it - the most important event of the community’s “new visibility” in the country.

4.2.1 Organization of the Pride March

Before establishing their organizational structure, the OCPM members realised that they needed to communicate intensively with each other and, discussing openly the purpose of their project, their values, mission, goals, and ways of achieving, they met each other more closely and built additional mutual trust. Although the announcement of the Pride March was on 1st of April 2019, its preparations started a year before with monthly meetings. It is important to know that the organizers didn’t know what to expect: it was a new situation for all members, with significant difficulties and numerous uncertainties, from private doubts of every member to their working performances. Theoretically, the March could have been cancelled 48 hours before the event itself. Members of the OCPM shared their intentions, plans, invitations, and ideas with the community, thus promoting the project before the announcement. In the initial

phase they received a lot of (unexpected) support from people (allies) who wanted to help, contribute, and participate, which was quite encouraging for the OCPM.

Furthermore, as the BiH Pride March was “a protest against inequality and violation of human rights of LGBTI persons in BiH” (Povorkaponosa 2019). The OCPM, as an informal group of 15 volunteers³⁴, feminists, activists, and individuals established an egalitarian and democratic structure with equal voting right, thus giving a model example, to themselves and others. Finally, even though the March was a serious project with great responsibility and inherent stresses for the OCPM, they also had fun and joys along the way. Throughout interviews with the organizers, several important themes emerged: communication, common values, horizontal structure, security, and LGBTI community in BiH.

“We had to harmonize our values. What is our mission? How are we going to do it? What is the political situation? So, there was a lot, a lot of communication between us” (Kešetović 2020).

“We really had a horizontal structure in the Organizing Committee. There was democracy in terms of the decision-making process. Even when there were some differences in attitudes, opinions, values differences, that were somehow the basis for deciding; we voted, the majority decided in some of these matters” (Bakić 2020).

As it can be assumed, the OCPM had their “misunderstandings”. For example, one “line” of the “crew” wanted the March “just” for the LGBTI community, while another opted for ways to include other minorities and marginalized groups in the country. After some time, the OCPM was divided into teams (groups or (sub)teams if we assume the body itself as a team already), which were appointed with certain tasks and areas of working activities: security, communication, media, community, advocacy, fundraising, the international community, volunteers, regional support. Every team had its leader for coordination. Also, 6 persons were designated as “The Pride March’s faces”, presenting the March and work of the OCPM in/on (social) media. In addition, they informed members of the international community on their

³⁴ During their work two persons left the OCPM, as I was informed, for private reasons, so the number of individuals varied over time. Nevertheless, every member of the OCPM represented themselves and guaranteed for the March as a citizen.

progress, adding the regular meetings with the Government of CS and, MIACS and other institutions.

“So, we had a PR sub-team which responded to emails, communicated with reporters, talked to people who made appearances, or who were willing to speak; it is a security risk and everyone is not ready to be on TV all the time. We had a sub-group of people who communicated with volunteers. Two or three of these people talked to guards and volunteers about who would bring banners, who would carry water and flags, and who would explain to people how to enter the March and how to line up when they came; to the sub-team for the international community, which had meetings with the international community every month, to inform them what we were doing, so they could support or highlight their support” (Vasić 2020).

Although it may seem the OCPM was “strictly” divided into its (sub)teams and their tasks, the dynamic nature and complexity of organization required multi-functionality, flexibility, and creativity of every member in contributing to the March. However, the intense work had its negative dimensions for all members, either from Sarajevo or from other cities. As one of the principal decisions, in the beginning, had been to stage the Pride March at any cost, with time the (sub)teams’ tasks were sometimes mixed and, as the event drew near, organizers were dealing with diffused matters. It is important to accentuate that members of the OCPM had to be exceptionally clever, cautious, diligent, innovative, responsible, and brave, sometimes probably doing everything they could, just to meet the “organizational imperative” – the Pride March. Indeed, it was smart, creative, responsible, and brave to stand behind the March as a protest by their own signature as individuals (assuming a lawsuit scenario), while having SOC and other organizations as background support. For example, the OCPM received help from other organisations as well, who provided their bank accounts for funds because guarantees for transactions in BiH must be obtained from a legal entity exclusively.

“I got involved everywhere, starting with some finances, then to advocacy and lobbying. I was dealing with communication with people coming from the region, with accommodation, food. Then I dealt with the organization of people coming from Tuzla. I was also involved in the organization of activities here, such as, I do not know, making banners and organizing various workshops so that people understood what the March was about and how it was going to be. I think I took a lot of things. I worked like a horse” (Bakić 2020).

As it was referred, the BiH Pride March is a logical continuation of shared regional experiences of know-how in terms of Prides' organisation, but with added details and values, specific to Bosnian context: the DPA, the CS's laws and the late occurrence of the event. Moreover, the activists were not the only ones who shared experiences. The cantonal police officers visited Pride in Skopje in June.

“We started to prepare a year in advance by gathering people who organized the first parades in Podgorica, Belgrade and Zagreb. We called them and said we really need everything you learnt, for the first time we want to hear what mistakes you made and how it was negotiated. We except some things that happened in the past to happen again, and what we truly want is to learn from you. When they organized their marches, it started somehow with activism, without some work with institutions. We are organizing the March on the foundation of seven years of work with institutions, especially in the Canton of Sarajevo, especially with the police³⁵, and I think that gives different relations” (Vasić 2020).

The event included the whole country, while its organisation produced specific issues and (psychological) difficulties for the OCPM's members. On one side, the March was necessarily centralized, which resulted in harder pressure for activists from Sarajevo. On the other side, activists from almost all parts of the country contributed to organization, which brought logistical issues to the front. However, the echo of the March in RS was significantly less present. The event wasn't promoted on the RTRS and in other media of that entity, which is logical under the general (the DPA) atmosphere of ethnic division in the country. As one of the organizers pointed out, all events in Sarajevo are perceived as some FBiH story from the RS perspective. In addition, one of the organizers emphasized the March's success stating how the event gathered people from different entities and cantons. Entities and cantons are the cities in BiH, mutually distant by two, or three hours of car driving. I am pointing this out to address the severity of ethnic and administrative divisions in the country and how deeply the DPA has been

³⁵ “In Dublin there is a pride party for the whole city, everyone is on the streets, drinking and dancing, young and old, children, parents and grandparents, with crowded pubs and long waiting lines if you haven't showed up on time. It was different in Sarajevo. We were accommodated in hotels/hostels, where we were 'guarded' by the police, which, I must say, were truly professional. Sunday morning – panic, nervousness, stress, comparing the first regional experiences, but courage and pride triumphed over fear. While we were leaving the hostel in groups, escorted by the police, the boy shouted from the window: 'Mother, here's the gay pride!' We arrived at the gathering place. It was crowded, with a lot of people waiting to enter” (Pušić 2020).

rooted in the country's political and civic culture, 25 years after its inception. Finally, and most importantly, the LGBTI community from RS was well coordinated and fully included in the event, which can't be stated for Mostar and its activists³⁶ (see footnote 1).

“We decided to provide transportation for people who couldn't come, accommodation, some security things, you know, there was a bus that picked people around Banja Luka and Prijedor. We tried to be inclusive; not to have just an elitist, Sarajevo thing” (Ćulibrk 2020).

“We must be realistic about it. Sarajevo is our capital city and the fact is that the centre of power is there and the centre of all institutions. The March happened there under those local norms, so we had to submit to that. But I think we communicated that clearly in the beginning. Was it going to be the Sarajevo Pride? No way! The BiH Pride March! The March of all the people in this country. We have been very careful about the language we use, so we could include different perspectives, and okay, how would RS react to that, unfortunately, that is a fact. More responsibility fell on the people from Sarajevo, and the greater risk was placed on them too. For example, we had to be more careful about personal safety from the announcement, but the fact is that there were fewer threats outside of Sarajevo, there was less attention on the March than in Sarajevo” (Bakić 2020).

“Months before the March there were media conferences and gatherings where we had MPs, open-minded and friendly parliamentarians who, at certain conferences and on Women's Network BiH, spoke about the problems of this marginalized group. We had public figures who participated in some activities and debates before the March and were coming to socialize with the community and support it” (Boljanić 2020).

Formally and prior to the press conference on 1st of April 2019, members of the OCPM submitted their requests to the MIACS and MTCS for the Pride March to take place in Sarajevo, on 8th of September 2019. Interestingly and in accordance to the LPASC, the authorities don't issue an approval or decision on it, but the practice has shown that if the event hasn't been cancelled or prohibited, it would be held. Additionally, 48 hours before the event is the last deadline for the announced event's prohibition, which leaves a broad space for discretion. During the period between April and September 2019, political parties, media, and officials issued different statements, sometimes possibly creating some confusion in public with (sensationalistic) fake news about how the March would be cancelled. But the general impression on BIH media and the correct, professional system of reporting was positive from

³⁶ *“And we were asked by the ambassadors: ‘Where are your Catholics?’ ‘We don't know’, we answered, ‘We did not give them passports’” (Kešetović 2020).*

the organizers (media as allies as well). This has been, among the rest, the result of previous SOC's educational media workshops and established friendships in the CS. The OCPM had its media strategy and a PR concept (launching "only" positive messages, what shows to attend, the March faces), communicating very transparently and constantly accentuating the message of the security, which was the most prevalent theme in the organisational context.

Beside interviews (with members of the OCPM), it is also clear from the OCPM's document, General and Safety Instructions for the Participants of the First BiH Pride March, how caution and security were vital for the organization. To access "the secured area of the March" "the designated entrance point" (the Kulovića street) was open "between 11:00 and 12:00 hrs", with an imperative "to go through a security check" for all participants. At the entrance, people were greeted by the volunteers and inspected by the security staff to prevent "anyone from attempting to bring any items that could endanger the security of participants into the Pride March." The organizers provided water bottles for participants and issued accreditations for journalists. Participants were requested not to "wear any recognizable LGBTIQ symbols until after you have entered the secured area", or not to "tell strangers (e.g. taxi drivers) where you are going", to "avoid asking passers-by for directions" or to "avoid using public transportation" and not to "arrive alone". All promotional materials and contents had to be in accordance with the values of the Pride March. After the end of the official programme, participants are "ordered" to "leave the area immediately" with a recommendation to "go home or to another safe space and to avoid moving around the city during the day", to "store all recognizable symbols or items you wore during the Pride March in a backpack or an opaque bag", and to avoid Bašaršija, the Old Town neighbourhoods, shopping malls and religious sites. Some of the safety tips were not to "consume alcohol or any other mind-altering substances before, during or after the Pride March!", not to "respond to verbal provocations" and to follow carefully "the instructions by the police, security guards, and volunteers" (General and Safety Instructions 2019, 1-2). In addition, The Second Police Department and the Police Station Centre (SPDPSC) in Sarajevo issued a short statement on my behalf, signed by its Chief Inspector, Mirsad Đelilović, and attached it to the decision of the MIACS from 18 March 2020, signed by its Information Access Officer, Tarik Kršlak, stating that:

“The SPDPSC, on 08.09.2019 with other security and safety agencies of BiH, participated in providing security to the Pride March under the name ‘Ima izać’ which was held on the territory of the Canton of Sarajevo, where no incident was recorded during the security operation” (The SPDPSC’s Decision 2020, 1-2).

The organization of the March included a broad network of the collaboration of institutions, organisations, NGO’s, groups, and individuals. In that sense, the OCPM’s work is a multi-level operation (mission) with worldwide contacts and contributions, even possibly, in some cases, unknown to all members of the OCPM.

“We opened PayPal and who wanted to donate, there was this possibility. There are people from the community, all over the world, who wanted to be a part of this, but they couldn’t come. I think an event dedicated to our March was organized in Denmark, to raise money for us, but I don’t know the details, I can’t capture everything. But there were people who came from different sides and wanted to help. Maybe not financially, but in another way, to promote the March, to contribute” (Bakić 2020).

After the March, a cocktail was organized by the international community in the National Museum of BiH. It was a safe place for the activists, the community, and their guests. After the event, members of the OCPM stayed in Sarajevo at a hotel for a couple of days and then left for Neum, which can also be regarded as a safe place logic as well. This means that the organizers followed the triple logic of a safe place and some sort of shelter after the Pride.

“After the March we were in one location at the hotel. Later the plan was for everyone to move. On Wednesday everyone moved to Neum. We got some money so, more-less, everyone left. I had to go to Prijedor because I had a planned trip” (Ćulibrk 2020).

“The Organizing Committee finished its work at the end of the year. After the meeting and summarizing the first March, some of the members resigned while some of us decided to stay and continue in the new Committee” (Miličević 2020).

Although the OCPM's work was formally completed by the end of 2019, the official website is still active, and the second Pride March is about to "come out" soon (depending on the COVID-19 situation), with the new OCPM, new ideas and new LGBTI visibility zeal in BiH.

Officially and strictly speaking: 15 persons organized the BiH first Pride March. However, without SOC, its staff, resources, donors, contacts, allies, achieved results in CS and the ongoing projects, it seems impossible for the small Bosnian LGBTI community to organize and to host such an event. Organization of the March demanded coordination and communication between (members of) the OCPM and the cantonal institutions in the FBiH, the OCPM's coordination among LGBTI persons and activities between the two entities in BiH, advocacy in state institutions and contact with international organizations. Domestic community members contributed through workshops, making banners, volunteering as stewards for example, or just in Sarajevo that day walking, singing, protesting. Free transport, accommodation and water were provided by the OCPM. Furthermore, the March was a "result" of a learnt regional lessons process, with shared know-how, incorporating experiences from Belgrade, Zagreb, Montenegro. Regional activists supported the event and attended it while sharing and strengthening LGBTIQ solidarity of post-Yugoslav space. Serious organizational discipline and hard work were invested in the event preparation: from advocacy to decoration, from media and internet campaign to security matters and logistics. The OCPM worked out different "what if" scenarios, for eventual cases of rain or cancellation for example.

On the other side, cantonal police departments, federal police and state agencies had to coordinate their activities with the OCPM and the private security agency (Securitas). The March started on Sunday, 8th of September 2019 at 12 o'clock. It is interesting to note how the sounds of the drums and the whistling were heating up the atmosphere before the walk started, adding something dramatic to the whole event. At its conclusion, members of the OCPM, together with their friends and guests, some community members and allies joined the event in the National Museum. Others took the already waiting buses and went back home. Interestingly, not all members of the OCPM walked in the March. Two of them had to be at the two "check-points" with the police, to make sure that everything went well. And it did. One member of the OCPM accentuated the fact of preparing the March for months but without being able to walk it. One member of the OCPM took a trip to Spain, but within the Erasmus program as he

informed me. No evidence of others leaving the country was obtained. The OCPM, after some analysis and evaluations, concluded its work by the end of 2019, with some of the members continuing with their involvement for the second Pride, while others left the OCPM, sealing their historic role in the first BiH Pride March. In the meantime, throughout different events, festivals and on social networks, the March has been discussed and promoted, with some of the OCPM members sharing their working experiences on the event.

4.2.2 The Pride March's indications on human rights and freedoms of LGBTI persons in BiH

As it was stated in the introduction, low visibility of LGBTI community in BiH is one of the main reasons why the Pride March took place. Beside homophobia³⁷, discrimination, and hatred in the country³⁸, LGBTI persons are often forced to their own privacy. The March was the first massive event aiming to break those imposed (four) walls. In that sense, all members of the OCPM expressed their sense of pride throughout the interviews. Moreover, the fact that everything went well, and the March received support in public contributed to the already confident impressions and prevalent themes of satisfaction of members of the OCPM. Furthermore, in all interviews, the informants emphasized the importance of citizens support. On one side, it hadn't been expected. On the other, they saw it as a sign of acceptance, approval and recognition for their work, efforts and different SOGI. One of the reasons for such a large attendance was the counter-protest, affecting the people's (citizens of Sarajevo) decision to choose between the two versions of the country and its future. But one of the messages from the April's press conference was that the March represented a struggle for freedom for all discriminated persons and groups in the country, for all over which violence was perpetrated and who were excluded from society. That was a broad and strong message of solidarity from the OCPM, which brought them additional popularity. In that sense, a lot of people couldn't enter the March due to space limitations and other reasons, for example, in cases of people with dogs or parents with children, which had some exceptions for the latter. People were waving and greeting from their windows along the Marshall Tito Street, contributing to the already

³⁷ The term is defined as "irrational fear of, and aversion to, homosexuality and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons based on prejudice" (Council of Europe 2011, 131).

³⁸ In his famous Letter from 1920, "our" Nobel prize winner writer, Ivo Andrić described Bosnia as a country of hatred. One of the fighters for rights of women in BiH and the March's attendee pointed out this dimension with its "other side". "There is so much hatred in our country, so much old hatred left that it was unbelievable that such a love could move so many people to participate" (Mustačević 2020).

positive and cheerful atmosphere. The importance of the event is evident in several dimensions. First and foremost, for the LGBTI activism and empowerment of the community in BiH.

“The March is important that people go out, to get faces, that they are no longer some abstract community seeking some rights; but these are specific people, with a lot of people outside of the community, who came out to support for political and other reasons. The March is important in general. I know how many people outed after that, to their parents as well” (Imamović 2020).

“I was afraid to attend the March, Ena was afraid, and we were all afraid. We did not attend it. Because we were like, you know, the place is open, the police, I don’t know if you watched the video, they don’t have rifles, they don’t have anything. And you never know with the happenings here. A guy just pulls a gun out of nowhere. I don’t know, it is paranoia. But I think I am not afraid for next year. Honestly, when I saw how it went, and when I see activists like Lejla, I feel more confident” (Bekrić 2020).

“The feeling was amazing, to see faces of familiar people, smiling, proud, cheerful, knowing how much each of them contributed to activism over the years. We cried, but out of happiness. A bit in shock for many people went out in the streets, much more than expected. Well, a feeling of pride towards your own country, that it can be different, that it can be better, somehow restores your faith and hope for a better tomorrow” (Pušić 2020).

The March’s effects are not so clear as it seems that there have been numerous and ambiguous effects. For example, some people decided to “come out”, either for attending the event and thus being empowered, or simply being influenced by the event’s controversies, the polarisation of BiH society or the March’s emerging hype. On the other side, some of the gay men decided to “stay within the walls”, maybe being afraid of the high visibility and attention, but contributed “in the shadow” of workshops and within the safety of LGBTI community. Thanks to Pride one person found out that her father wasn’t a homophobic person, so she was thinking to say “Ima izać!” to him. On a more general level, one group in the Government of FBiH considering legislation that needs to be amended to find modalities for same-sex unions. Another at the state level is aiming for a comprehensive LGBT Action plan. It seems that the March reactivated some processes in the country. In addition, the Government of the CS in December 2019 adopted the CS’s Gender Action Plan for 2019-2022 period, in which most of SOC’s propositions were accepted. One of the activists noted that exhibition of portraits of transgender people was held in a public institution in Tuzla without Wahhabis, which might be connected to the March and its influence, but we don’t know that reliably. On the other side,

one activist articulated critical remarks on the March and its heavy security measures, claiming nothing substantially changed for LGBTI persons. Another person expressed scepticism towards a mentality change in the corrupt and poor country with a devastated system of education. But at least the LGBTIQ community is not alone anymore.

“A person, who was walking in the March, a lesbian or a gay man, is very happy because she saw a granny waving from the window. It fills her with joy. I am glad these things are happening, but I don’t know how important it is; I mean, it is probably important, but I can’t recognize it from my perception. Police were everywhere, the entrance was shut, these people were later taken from point A to point B” (Boljanić 2020).

On the other side, from the interviews and personal correspondence with members of the OCPM, I found that the MIACS, with its (Specialist) Support Unit(s), was officially in charge for the event’s safeguard. Most of the meetings between the OCPM and the MIACS happened on the police officers’ initiatives and after their phone call. On 21st of June 2019, the OCPM’s (sub)team for the security of the March was informed at the meeting that it would be necessary to provide concrete fences (blocks) for closing the streets (which could be obtained from the city administration or the Bosman company), to prevent possible car(s) from driving into the March.³⁹ Additionally, the police demanded installation of an iron fence, which is usually done by the security agency. The OCPM was expected to pay for these additional and unexpected security measurements.

“And the biggest problem we had was the fact that the law on freedom of public assembly allowed the MIACS, moreover, imposed hiring private security agency on organizers, which in context of the Pride March meant many security guards, and we were additionally asked for concrete blocks for the Pride, and metal fences at the gathering point and ending point, which is not an unusual procedure, but as the Pride March was organized by 15 individuals, that was a heavy financial burden on the organizers” (Vasić 2020).

³⁹ In general, the LPACS requires organizers to inform the MIACS, or one of the Police Departments, on the program and goals of peaceful assembly, including data on its site, date and time, name and the organizers’ address, personal data of the assembly’s leader, a list of stewards with personal data, data on security measures being taken by the organizers, an estimation on a number of possible participants and other data (The LPACS’s article 11, 2009).

Previously, the OCPM had received the MTCS' decision for the March's route. However, due to the MIACS's additional security requests, the route had to be changed, with necessary new transport suspension requirements in the new streets. This required readdressing the MTCS. Subsequently, the route was changed and, for the lower costs, shortened. That route was the March's actual route – from the Eternal Flame, along the Marshall Tito Street, to the BiH (parliament) square. On the other side, widely interpreting “restrictions on the freedom of public assembly that are necessary in a democratic society”⁴⁰ produces discretionary (and discriminatory) decisions in some cases. This has been a regular cantonal institutional practice in previous years, resulting in SOC having difficulties and/or being *de facto* prohibited to freely assemble for LGBTI community in the country. LPACS's article 19 and paragraphs 6 and 7 clearly state the duties of police officers.⁴¹ However, it seems that the March showed an inverted logic of the MIACS's interpretation of the LPACS, where LGBTI persons were the ones responsible for potential violence based on prejudices on SOGI, homophobia and transphobia. Maybe the banalizing message of the institutional security practice would be: you are guilty for who you are and what you want or plan to do with “it”, so if you claim your right to a public space, you have to (be able to) “pay the risk”, otherwise you can't walk the city.

On 18th of May 2020, I attended SOC's Digital Presentation of LGBTI Human Rights, Pink Report 2020, in which it was stated that in 2019 SOC had documented 105 cases of hate speech and calls for violence. 16 cases of incidents and criminal offences based on prejudices on grounds of SOGI had been recorded. Since the BiH Pride March was the most massive gathering for equal rights of LGBTI persons, SOC has recorded an increasing trend of threats towards LGBTI persons in public (online) sphere. The monitoring had recorded that the ratio was three times higher compared to earlier years, especially in the period between the announcement of the March and the event itself, recording the two attacks on lesbian couples (SOC 2020).

⁴⁰ The LPACS's article 5, 2009.

⁴¹ “Keeping the public order and peace in the area next to the place of peaceful assembly is executed by police officers” and “The competent police authority is obliged to prevent obstruction or disabling of the peaceful assembly held in accordance with the provisions of this Law” (The LPACS, 2009).

There have been unreported cases of hate crimes, threats, and attacks, in both entities of BiH, but with more resolved cases after the March happened as well.⁴² In that sense, “new visibility” for LGBTI population in BiH meant a massive public gathering and a protest but also accentuated violence towards LGBTI persons as a public matter. Public discussion about it (the violence) more openly has been a significant improvement. On the other side, it still means everyday cases of hate speeches and insults with a new need(s) to come out to families, friends, colleagues. It also means constant influence on BiH institutions and hoping for growth of general awareness towards the importance of tolerance and diversity in BiH society.

However, as one of the activists pointed out: it is not the same thing to be gay or lesbian in Sarajevo, where you can meet community members and where professional activists appear on media, meet and host ambassadors and (international) officials while working on various and interesting projects for the benefit of LGBTI persons⁴³ as it would be in Gacko and Živinice or other smaller places in BiH, assuming that is much harder in the latter, where it takes significantly more courage to be “out”, or just to live as gay or lesbian, than it would be in bigger Bosnian cities. On the other hand, being a Pride March face and a well-known activist in Sarajevo or Banja Luka implies greater risk and, sometimes, ostracism as well. But in general, the Pride March raises issues on freedom of assembly for all citizens in BiH. Additional security costs, “sometimes” imposed on a discretionary basis and thus potentially discriminatory, seem like a legitimate reason to initiate a proposal for the FBiH Law on Freedom of Assembly, if not on the state level. That initiative could include not only LGBTI activists, but ecological groups, syndicates, and other discriminated groups in BiH. On the other side, “the political chaos”⁴⁴ in FBiH seems as a highly demotivating for any of such or similar attempts in foreseeable time.

⁴² In BiH incidents are seldom reported. For the few reported instances, there is usually inaction or inadequate action to address the problem (World Bank 2018).

⁴³ As one of the activists pointed out: “The BiH LGBTI community is very small but powerful. They have their organizations in Tuzla, Sarajevo, Banja Luka, maybe a couple more in other cities, but they are recognized, they are on national television, they are in the Council of Ministers, do you understand me?” (Mustačević 2020). I am not sure about “the community” being powerful, but then we have to ask ourselves how we define “the community” in the country. I would argue that SOC is very powerful, especially in CS. Furthermore, if we try to identify SOC as “the community” that would not be legitimate since there are other (although very few) LGBT organisations in the country. In that sense, it seems that the LGBTI community in (F)BiH is highly centralised with professionalized SOC’s metropolitan activism as its centre.

⁴⁴ More than 19 months after the General Elections in BiH, the new Government of FBiH hasn’t been (yet?) appointed.

“The idea of the March was to influence institutions and to show that institutions can do their job beyond the political parties’ control and occupation, which we have shown” (Vasić 2020).

Throughout the interviews with the OCPM members and other sources, it seems apparent that the FBiH police demonstrated a high level of professionalism and consideration, even sometimes being friendly and encouraging for the organizers. But if the first BiH Pride March assumes the whole country, would it be possible to argue the same treatment of the RS police? I am not so sure. Recent cases show an increase of police oppression in Banja Luka, especially in examples of freedom of assembly for different NGO activists (Stokić 2019).

4.2.3 Contribution of Western diplomatic missions and international organizations in BiH to the Pride March’s organization

BiH and Sarajevo have been among the last European countries and capital cities⁴⁵ to host the Pride March. On the official site, there have been 5 international donors to the event: USAID, Sida, Heinrich Böll Stiftung (Sarajevo Office), The German Embassy in Sarajevo, BiH, Civil Rights Defenders (Povorkaponosa 2019).

Throughout the interviews with members of the OCPM, questions on collaborative experiences with embassies and the international community were the most sensitive parts. The informants did not know some details or were not sure about it. I assume they may have shown hesitation due to the confidential nature of some of the information. For example, questions on the budget or on the gathering in the National Museum after the March. When asking questions about the international community and the embassies I also felt some discomfort, assuming the subject as something “external”. Nevertheless, answers testify that they collaborated very closely and that the OCPM had significant help from the embassies and their representatives: there was a (sub)team for communication with the international community with regular (monthly and/or

⁴⁵ Steve Taylor, EPOA (European Pride Organizers Association): “Sarajevo was the final Balkan capital city to have a Pride, but there are other European capitals that have yet to have a Pride parade, including Baku and Yerevan” (personal correspondence with the author, March 2020).

more often) briefings (as it was stated in the part on organisation of the March), while ambassadors occasionally visited the OCPM and kept track on their work.

“I think it's good that we had so much support from the international community and from the ambassadors, who were coming and asking how we were doing. I think it was important because it also created some pressure on the police that they had to give 100%. Unfortunately, it is like that. I would like them to prioritize us, the citizens, but when an ambassador comes, it is seen differently” (Kešetović 2020).

The ambassadors and representatives of international community and organisations helped with their presence and support for the March, which increased pressure on local authorities and made the OCPM's work more effective, while, on the other side, they had direct meetings with representatives of the Government of the CS and state institutions. I was informed from the British Embassy in BiH, Ambassador Matt Field used social networks⁴⁶ to give his, but also the Embassy's, support for staging the Pride. *“We have also been a part of wider efforts of the international community, in constant contact with the coordinating body, for providing the necessary and requested support for holding this event by the authorities in Sarajevo Canton. Thus, Ambassador Field, along with many other ambassadors, had regular contacts and conversations with BiH officials who were able to ensure that the Pride would be held in a safe environment. On the day of the event, a large team of the British Embassy was part of the March, and we also supported the participants' gathering, mostly those outside BiH, in the National Museum of BiH”* (personal correspondence with the author, March 2020). A sign of close collaboration and partnership was visible in following the OCPM's instructions: international community issued joint support statements, transmitted local incentives, accentuating the importance of BiH community and local activists' efforts, with no special EU features, banners or messages during the March. Spokesperson of the Delegation of the EU to BiH in our telephone conversation said that the Delegation was not included in the March's organization, but some of their staff attended the event, giving their symbolical support. However, they did not answer my e-mail. The OHR was not included in the organization as

⁴⁶ The UK Ambassador to BiH has been regularly active and optimistic on his blog as well. *“The rights of LGBTI people in BiH have been moving forwards, in some parts of the country more than others, but there is still more to do. This year I hope we will see a comprehensive LGBTI action plan, and a breakthrough in recognition of same-sex partnerships.”* (Field 2020).

well, but they sent me the link in which the focus was on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, stating that *“There is no reason why BiH should be left behind as the only country in the region where the LGBT community is not able to hold a peaceful gathering”* (The OHR 2019). The night before the March the Dutch Ambassador Reinout Vos had invited *“the Dutch delegation and some of the local organisers at his residency, as well as the Swedish Ambassador and several other guests. Over dinner we discussed the historic significance of this Pride”* (van Roozendaal 2019).

In addition, the international community contributed by helping to pay some part of the additional security costs, which amounted around 30,000 euros. IOM’s office in Sarajevo paid one part of the costs. I have tried to obtain data on financial support for the Pride March from the IOM but without success. However, within the IOM BiH there has been a program, The Bosnia & Herzegovina Resilience Initiative (BHRI), which is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The program aims to reduce the threat of ideologically motivated violence in BiH, with the IOM’s support against incidents of violence and their escalation. Maybe one part of the Pride March’s security costs were paid from this program. Furthermore, the workshop in Skopje for police officers was financed from the international funds. As the data suggest, if it had not been financially supported from international community and some of its organisations in the country, the BiH Pride March would have not probably been staged, either for the OCPM’s impossibility to afford it, or even not having the opportunity to afford it.

“The March itself was not so expensive, but the security was, which cost about 60,000 marks, it seems to me. The security agency cost so much and the blocks that were set up. And here I have to say again, considering that we as individuals could not bear it even with organizations (although we were willing) it was covered by donor funds. A part was covered by SOC from its own funds, a part was covered by IOM from its own funds” (Vasić 2020).

The OCPM’s member pointed out that a non-activist LGBTI person doesn’t trust the BiH institutions, but when the information of the ambassadors’ attendance became public, people felt more confident to attend it as well. In a sense: if they would not secure it for me, they would for them. One of the attendees said that the embassies of foreign countries had the most

significant influence on the March. One of the activists and March attendees went so far as to say the USA and the UK ambassadors' attendance were a crucial reason that people hadn't been killed. She said that in BiH nothing was done for the benefit of people, but for the sake of joining the EU, so people could count on that side as a supportive one. The other informant pointed out the need for strengthening the security measures due to the ambassadors' walk in the March. This is an interesting thought that might be an argument for those concrete blocks and iron fences, as well as the snipers on the roofs and the heavy security measures in general. This potentially makes a reasonable motive for the BHRI's eventual payment of the March's additional security costs, especially if we remember the recent history and the terrorist's attack on the USA Embassy in Sarajevo.⁴⁷ On the other side, the OCPM and the international community (sub)team's member argued they wanted to avoid the well-known story of the March's happening because of the EU pressure. The team member added that the March was organised because LGBTI people from BiH wanted it to happen, together with their allies and activists. In that sense, as she said, the EU officials and ambassadors in the country showed their understanding and support, although they did ask about the March and when (hoping) it would happen. Nevertheless, the explanation on the awaited pulse of the LGBTI community was sufficient for them (international community) not to insist on its staging.

However, I have noted a contradiction in my data. The information I received from the Swedish Embassy in Sarajevo states that the first donor meeting for the March was held at the Embassy on SOC's request, in late summer 2018, while one of the interviewees (the OCPM's member of a (sub)team for international community) explicitly claimed that "they" (meaning the international community) did not know until 1st of April that the March would be held, like the rest of public. *"The Embassy of Sweden supports Sarajevo Open Centre, an NGO who was leading the coalition of in total 14 CSO/NGOs all over BiH who formed the organizing committee. Sweden gives core support to Sarajevo Open Centre which also includes financial support to the first BiH pride parade ever. We also, based on the request from Sarajevo Open Centre, organized a first Donor coordination meeting at our embassy in late summer 2018 which was the first meeting of its kind, led by Sarajevo Open Centre and the Embassy of Sweden (personal correspondence with the author, March 2020).*

⁴⁷ Mevlid Jasarevic, a member of the Wahhabi sect, was walking the city and "fired shots at the US embassy in the Bosnian capital Sarajevo" (BBC 2011).

“There was not so much pressure for the March from the international community and they did not know until the 1st of April, like others, that it would be organized. We told them that we want to listen to the voice of our community, and when the community would want it, like it happened when we had 15, 16 people, who were ready to stand behind it with their name and surname, and when people called us, saying ‘it is time, we want to organize it’, and not to have it for 15 of us, with family, friends and a small circle of associates, but exactly as it happened now. They reacted quite nicely to that” (Vasić 2020).

Having in mind all the (empirical) sources used in this work, her statement doesn't seem to be corresponding to reality. The logic behind it argues an authenticity and autonomy of the LGBTI community in Bosnia, the uniqueness of the first Pride in the country. But (if I am allowed to be a bit ironic), it seems hard to believe that, for example, the ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to BiH, Mr Vos, returned to his office after lunch on 1st of April 2019, and saw in the news that they would have the first BiH Pride March in September. The function of the irony is present to support findings from previous (regional) patterns of the vast influence of the EU and global LGBTI politics on the whole post-Yugoslav space, and, maybe, as a reflected echo of my researcher's naivety. Furthermore, the presence, influence, and power of the international community in the country and in SOC's activities have been immensely validated. In that sense, it seems highly unlikely that such an important and complex social and cultural event like the (the first) Pride March could have been planned and prepared without the knowledge of international diplomatic missions in the country, from the beginning to the end of the process. Additionally, the information of “14 CSO/NGOs all over BiH who formed the organizing committee” seems less important, as the OCPM applied a dual approach: in a formal sense, 15 individuals with their signatures submitted the requests for the first Pride March in BiH, while, informally, they had (their) organisations as background support, which was already stated.

Besides financial contribution and co-organisational efforts, negotiations with BiH officials, lobbying and networking, communication and symbolic support, attendances and friendships, the international community in BiH helped the March indirectly and historically; from the first LGBTQ organisations in the country, its first festivals and visibilities, to the legislation area

and implementation of The Law on Prohibition of Discrimination for example, to SOC's edition of Human Rights Papers and educational workshops with the police, media, and in so many other, numerous projects in the country. The comprehensive LGBTI Action plan and same-sex partnerships will probably be implemented in the future, although I don't agree with Mr Field's "prognosis". As it can be seen from both - the country's EU accession process and the March - it takes more time for Bosnia, but that time eventually comes. However, in some sense, it does not seem even possible to know the extent and the depth of the international community's influence for/on the BiH Pride March. But it is possible to affirm the international community's co-decisive role for its staging in Sarajevo.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the first Pride March in BiH. In the introduction, the event was presented with an informative overview of the most important facts related to its staging in Sarajevo, on September 8th, 2019. The aim of the study was to answer the three research questions that were stated in the first chapter. How was the first BiH Pride March organized? How has the Pride March indicated the status of human rights and freedoms of LGBTI persons in BiH and how did Western diplomatic missions and international organizations in BiH contribute to the event and its organization?

As the results have shown, the first BiH Pride March was organized as a collaborative multi-level project. The event was thoroughly prepared through the coordinative network of the OCPM, an egalitarian structure and democratically assembled body, its (straight) allies, BiH institutions, (private) security agencies and companies, Western Embassies, international organisations in Sarajevo and members of the (BiH) LGBTI community.

Furthermore, the March has indicated the status of human rights and freedoms of LGBTI persons in BiH in several (ambiguous) ways. On one side, the LGBTI community successfully and convincingly showed its faces and identities, demonstrating new visibility and empowerment. These were exemplified either through significant public support and positive discursive shifts in the country or through individual cases of encouraging coming outs and emerging opportunities for new (institutional) dialogues and (legislative) improvements in BiH.

On the other side, the event reasserted limitations and the discriminatory dimensions of the right to peaceful assembly for LGBTI community (in the CS) causing a trend of a triple increase of threats and hate speech towards LGBTI persons since the March's press conference in April 2019. It seems that (the MIACS's interpretation of) LPACS does not differentiate commercial public events from citizens' peaceful assemblies, for which additional security costs (the number of the concrete blocks for example) are subjected to blurry possibilities of discretion. In addition, it is symptomatic to note a fact that intertwines violence based on SOGI and Europeanisation. Ever since the LPD was adopted in 2009, all recorded and reported cases of attacks on LGBTI persons were treated as misdemeanours, where the perpetrators would get away only with financial fines (SOC 2020). Treating and ruling the attacks in penal prosecution, as bias-motivated crimes, would produce different effects, in which BiH would demonstrate its consistency and willingness to protect LGBTI persons more effectively, thus probably influencing and discouraging homophobia to some extent as well. It seems that both sides, the EU and BiH, have been (too) tolerant to the nominal side of the law, or as was named by the two activists, "dead letters on paper" of the LPD. However, as it was stated, the March produced new and positive shifts. The CS's Gender Action Plan for 2019-2022 incorporated SOC's proposition of systematic education of police officers on hate crimes. SOC pushes its way, it is for sure. But predominantly in Sarajevo. Centralised and professionalised LGBTI activism in Sarajevo follows the regional and broader patterns of centre *vs.* periphery relations, which seems logical but insufficient for a comprehensively sensitive approach towards every member of the LGBTI community.

Furthermore, the results have shown the crucial importance of Western Embassies and international organisations for the event's staging in Sarajevo. Following the scholarly research on post-Yugoslav space and a two-decade process of linkage between the EU accession process and LGBTI (Prides') emancipation, it is interesting to note that the relative EU's failure to have a stronger impact in the distinctly multi-ethnic states of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina ... is indicative of the resilience of the nation state, the importance of patriarchal heteronormative masculinities within assemblages of nationalism, and the issues that Europe has in "managing" multi-ethnic communities (Bilić and Stubbs 2016, 238-239) became a successfully changed analogy and a new fact of civic culture in post-Yugoslav space. Having in mind close regional cooperation and lessons learnt process, the two countries had their first Prides within the difference of just 3 months (closely cooperating in the meantime), which

seems highly correlative and instructive for “prides’ management” in post-conflict multi-ethnic countries on one hand, while affirming the dominant status of Europeanisation in the region on the other. Furthermore, the same authors argue a need for “attenuating or cutting the conceptual link between homosexuality/non-heterosexuality and Europe” in favour of “local socio-political practices and historical contexts” (Bilić and Stubbs 2016, 240). At least in a symbolic and decorative manner, the BiH March demonstrated and performed “the cut”. As it was stated, the March was free from the EU features, pointing out the authenticity of the local community, while all members of the OCPM asserted good and positive (“no pressure”) experiences with the international community. In addition, the event was strongly determined by its protest, egalitarian, and intersectional character, which (consensually) left no space for the EU neo-liberal “outfits”, certifying that all included sides learnt something: activists, local officers and Western Embassies. In that sense Bosnian first Pride March appeared as a successful result of a two-decade process of regional learning.

The BiH Pride demonstrated several distinctive features. The event as the historical achievement of LGBTI activism had its sequential foundations: either in traumas of the past (QSF) of older activists and people who left the country for good, or in “cleverly shaped initiatives” as Durkalić (2019) argued, including the SOC’s training and educational programs with the police, state prosecutors, judges, media and members of the LGBTI community in the end. The March’s political context, evident in the CS’s coalition government led by a social-liberal Prime minister from December 2018, made the OCPM’s job somewhat easier. In that sense, it will be interesting to see how the second Pride March would take place, due to the current nationalistic government in the CS and the COVID-19 situation. Finally, the event received unexpected citizens’ support, which only partly relates to the counter protests. Many people came and joined because of their beliefs. The March carried a strong antifascist notion and Sarajevo answered.

In my opinion, further research on BiH LGBTI activism and/or Pride Marches in the country should focus on professionalisation and its side effects on one side, while the other side might interrogate its intersectional efforts and effects of the March’s proclaimed solidarity.

Furthermore, a special research study should focus only on Mostar⁴⁸ and “the scene” in Herzegovina. The third research option should focus on RS. Throughout interviews with members of the OCPM, they the March was often argued as belonging to everyone in the country, claiming its future decentralisation and staging in other BiH cities. In that sense, it seems important to conduct a case study on Banja Luka and its LGBTI activism. Finally, SOC deserves a special research study. Its work has been the most important for the whole community. SOC could be a focal point for scholarship on all relevant LGBTI issues in the country, including the process of Europeanisation.

⁴⁸ Except its famous new-old bridge, the city has been “famous” as a case-city. Due to its ethnical divisions, no elections have been held in this city since 2008.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide in Bosnian

Pitanja:

Kako si bila/bio uključen(a) u organizaciju Povorke?

Koji su se problemi pojavljivali u radu i kakva su (ti) iskustva u komunikaciji i suradnji s domaćim institucijama?

Da li je se (negativna, diskriminatorna) praksa neke BiH institucije promijenila prema LGBTI zajednici od Povorke i u odnosu na nju?

Koji je značaj Povorke za BiH i zašto je ona važna?

Koja je veza Povorke i ljudskih prava LGBT ooba u BiH?

Kakva su ti iskustva sa donatorima i međunarodnim organizacijama?

Koja je uloga Povorke u EU integracijama BiH i evropskoj perspektivi zemlje?

Koji su i kakvi efekti Povorke nakon pola godine od njenog održavanja?

U kojoj mjeri je feminizam važan za organizaciju i održavanje Povorke?

Da li je Povorka važna za druge manjine u BiH i, ako da, zašto?

Kakav je osjećaj šetati u Povorci i biti dio historijskog trenutka i pionirskog rada?

Kako si doživio Povorku?

Da li je još nešto važno vezano za Povorku što nisam pitao ili želiš naglasiti?

Hvala!

Appendix 2: Interview guide in English

Questions:

How have you been involved in the Pride March (organisation)?

What problems have you encountered in your work and what are (your) experiences of communication and cooperation with domestic institutions?

Has the (negative, discriminatory) practice of some BiH institution changed towards the LGBTI community since and concerning the Pride March?

What is the significance of the Pride for BiH and why is it important?

What is the connection between the March and human rights of LGBT people in BiH?

How is your experience with donors and international organizations?

What is the role of the Pride in BiH's EU integration and the country's European perspective?

What are the effects of the March after half a year of its holding?

To what extent is feminism important for organizing and staging the Pride?

Is the March important to other minorities in BiH and, if so, why?

How does it feel to walk in the Pride and be part of a historical moment and pioneering work?

How did you experience the March?

Is there anything else relevant to the Pride March that I did not ask, or you wish to emphasize?

Thank you!