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## **Human Rights and Democracy Violation Early Warning *Weekly Newsletter* – Special issue**

### **HOMOPHOBIA IN SERBIA**

#### **A survey on the perception of homosexuality and LGBT population in Serbian public**

Carried out on behalf of  
*GayStraight Alliance* (<http://www.gsa.org.rs>),  
Belgrade  
by

*Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID)*  
Belgrade  
in  
February – March 2008

**A comprehensive survey of Serbian public's perception of homosexuality and attitude towards LGBT population was carried in Serbia in February and March 2008. Having in mind that there is considerable intolerance towards the very idea of an increased presence of that topic in the public debate, as well as the fact that the attitude towards "being different" is still intolerant and indeed hostile, the EWS Team decided to summarize the key findings in this survey and offer them as an indicator of the prevailing social climate in this country as well. The integral version of the survey (in Serbian) is to be found at the above GSA web address.**





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A representative sample of 967 was interviewed on the entire territory of Serbia (excl. Kosovo). In order to reflect the structure of the entire population, as established by the 2002 population census, the sample was composed along the following lines:

**Gender:** female - 52%, male - 48%.

**Age:** 15 to 19- 4%, 20 to 29 – 23%, 30 to 39 – 17%, 40 to 49 - 19%, 50 to 59 - 18%, older than 60 - 19%.

**Education level:** no school or grammar school only – 19%, vocational school - 13%, other secondary school – 50%, college or university – 18%.

**Occupation:** farmers - 6%, unskilled or semi-skilled workers - 8%, skilled workers - 21%, technicians -15%, clerks - 12%, professionals/experts - 14%, housewives - 12%, pupils and students - 12%.

**Employment status:** self-employed – 7%, employed in private company – 17%, employed in state/public sector – 13%, jobless – 18%, retired – 19%, independent farmer – 3%, housewife – 10%, pupil/student – 12%, other – 1%

**Table 1: Dis/approval of negative attitudes towards homosexuality (in %)**

	Approves	Dis-approves	No attitude	Total
<b>Homosexuality is sickness</b>	70	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Church rightfully condemns homosexuality</b>	60	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Authorities should suppress homosexuality in organized way</b>	51	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Homosexuality is very dangerous for society</b>	50	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>I wouldn't vote for my favorite party if it's to advocate gay rights</b>	40	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Homosexuality is designed by the West and aimed to destruct family and our tradition</b>	36	<b>40</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Topic of homosexuality is imposed here by various NGOs</b>	28	<b>40</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>





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**Table 2: Dis/approval of positive attitudes towards homosexuality (in %)**

	<b>Approves</b>	<b>Dis- approves</b>	<b>No attit.</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Homosexuality has always existed: once kept secret, it's subject of debate today</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Everyone's entitled to own sexual pattern unless it jeopardizes others</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Homosexuals are the same human beings as we are</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Public leisure facilities accessible to LGBT people should be provided</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Gays in Serbia are endangered and should be supported in their struggle for their rights</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>People should be allowed to enter same sex marriages</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Pride parades should be permitted as a legitimate way of struggle for gay rights</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Gays should be allowed to adopt children</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>

A synthetic indicator of attitudes towards homosexuality was made on the basis of the above 15 assertions and dis/approval level thereof:

- 35% respondents have an extremely negative attitude;
- 32% mostly or predominantly negative attitude;
- 22% no attitude or neutral;
- 10% mainly positive attitude;
- 1% extremely positive attitude.





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**Table 3: Traditionalism<sup>1</sup> and attitude towards homosexuality (in %)**

	<b>Untra- ditional</b>	<b>Mainly untradi- tional</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Mainly traditio- nalist</b>	<b>Traditi- onalist</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>Positive attitude</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Mainly positive</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Neutral</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Mainly negative</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Negative</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>45</b>	57	<b>35</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Based on criteria laid down as described, 17% of the respondents have a strongly traditionalist orientation, 33% mainly traditionalist, 34% are neither traditionalist nor non-traditionalist, 11% mainly non-traditionalist and 5% non-traditionalist attitude towards life generally.

There is no approval of homosexuality among those considered as "traditionalist", whereas the level of disapproval reaches 84 to 87%.

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<sup>1</sup> Traditionalism was tested against assertions such as: „Leading jobs in business should be entrusted to men“, „The most important virtue of a woman lies in being a good wife and mother“, „Folkways and traditions have to be observed strictly“, „Morality preached by my congregation should be adhered to“, „Extra-marrital community is not acceptable for our people's morality“.





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**Table 3: Authoritarianism<sup>2</sup> and attitude towards homosexuality (in %)**

	Untra- ditional	Mainly untradi- tional	None	Mainly traditio- nal	Tradici-onalan	Average
<b>Positive attitude</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Mainly positive</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Neutral</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Mainly negative</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Negative</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The survey shows that the Serbian population can be ranked as mainly authoritarian: 17% tend to be extremely authoritarian, 33% mainly authoritarian, 28% demonstrate a mixed pattern, 14% are mainly non-authoritarian and 4% non-authoritarian.

77% of mainly authoritarian and 81% of authoritarian respondents have a negative attitude towards homosexuality, whereas 44% of non-authoritarian and 21% of mainly non-authoritarian respondents accept homosexuality.

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<sup>2</sup> Authoritarianism was tested on the basis of assertions such as: „Children should be brought up in strict discipline“, „Teachers and professors should be strict with pupils and students“, „Youth need strict discipline, strong will and readiness to fight for family and fatherland“, „This country needs a strong and brave leader who will be followed by the people“, „Respect for authority is the greatest virtue children can be taught today“.





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**Table 4: Nationalism<sup>3</sup> and attitude towards homosexuality (in %)**

	Non-nationalistic	Neutral	Nationalistic
<b>Positive attitude</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Mainly positive</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Neutral</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Mainly negative</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Negative</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Generally, there is an ambivalent attitude towards ethnicity in Serbia: 62% have mixed feelings, 13% belong to extreme nationalists, whereas 25% can be classified as non-nationalistic.

**Table 5: Conformism<sup>4</sup> and attitude towards homosexuality (in %)**

	Non-conformist	Mainly nonconformist	Neither nor	Mainly conformist	Conformist	Average
<b>Positive attitude</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Mainly positive</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Neutral</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Mainly negative</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Negative</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The survey shows that 19% of the population can be considered to be „absolute conformists“, 24% as „mainly conformist“, 19% are “in the middle of the road“, 19% as “mainly nonconformist“, and 19% as “absolute nonconformists“.

<sup>3</sup> Nationalism was tested against assertions such as: „It is important to bring one's children up in the awareness of the nation they belong to“, „I am very attached to my nation“, „Display of national symbols is a sign of primitivism“, „My ethnic background is irrelevant to me“, „I am prepared to sacrifice myself for the interests and dignity of my nation“.

<sup>4</sup> Conformism was tested against assertions such as: „I don't like people who behave and think differently from the majority“ and „I try to differ from others as little as possible“.





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Psychological correlates such as anxiety, as well as have general attitudes like optimism (hope, proactive approach to change) and pessimism (fear, indifference, and helplessness) and level of satisfaction with life in general, have also been examined in relation to respondents' attitude towards homosexuality. As a rule, people who tend to be anxious, pessimistic and dissatisfied with life display a lower level of understanding and tolerance of LGBT.

High level of correlation between membership and/or sympathy for nationalistic, xenophobic and authoritarian political parties such as *Socialist Party of Serbia* (SPS), *Democratic Party of Serbia* (DSS) and *Serbian Radical Party* (SRS) and intolerant, indeed hostile attitude towards homosexuality, has been established: none of the respondents who identify themselves with the SPS has a positive attitude, whereas 94% of them have a negative attitude towards LGBT. 81% of those close to SRS and 72% of DSS sympathizers have a negative attitude.

Religious beliefs also play an important role. Before measuring the correlation between religion and attitude towards homosexuality, the CeSID pollsters examined the presence and role of religion in our society. The survey showed that 6% of the population declare themselves as atheists, 22% are non-believers who observe church holidays and customs, 58% are occasional and 13% regular church-goers, whereas only 1% said they are active in church committees and other bodies and activities. Atheists have the highest level of understanding for homosexuality (19% positive and 31% neutral), whereas none of the "firm believers" has positive and 89% negative attitude (11% are neutral).

**Table 6: Personal acquaintance with homosexuals and attitude towards homosexuality (in %)**

	I know no such person	I know who they are, but not personally	I know them personally	Average
<b>Positive attitude</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Mainly positive attitude</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Neutral</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Mainly negative attitude</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Negative</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>





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Interpretation of the origins of homosexuality and attitude towards it are also closely intertwined.

**Table 7: Interpretation of origins and attitude towards homosexuality (in %)**

	<b>Deter- mined by nature</b>	<b>Influence of social environment</b>	<b>A mattaer of fashion- ability</b>	<b>Don't know, no opinion</b>	<b>Ave- rage</b>
<b>Positive attitude</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Mainly positive</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Neutral</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Mainly negative attitude</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Negative</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>







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**Table 8: Reaction upon realization that a close person is homosexual, correlated with the general attitude towards homosexuality (in %)**

	Would support such person	Would pretend nothing happening	Would try to convince him/her it's wrong	Would break with such person	Don't know	Average
<b>Positive att.</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Mainly positive att.</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Neutral</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Mainly negative</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Negative</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 9: Social distance towards homosexual persons (in %)**

Would you object to a homosexual person ...	Yes	No objections	Don't know, no answer	Total
<b>...being a teacher in your child's school</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>...being your relative</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>...socializing and exchanging visits with you</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>...having a leading position in the state</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>...being your boss at work</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>...working together with you</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>...being your neighbor or live in same town</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>...being your compatriot</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 10: Group characteristics and their attitude towards homosexuality**

	Positive and neutral	Negative and neutral	Negative
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Female more than male</b>	<b>Male more than female</b>	<b>Female and male balanced</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>Highschool and University</b>	<b>Vocation and secondary sch.</b>	<b>Grammar school or no school</b>





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<b>Age</b>	<b>Younger</b>	<b>Middle ages</b>	<b>Older</b>
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Professionals and clerical jobs</b>	<b>Skilled workers and technicians</b>	<b>Laborers, farmers, housewives</b>
<b>Social status</b>	<b>Upper middle class</b>	<b>Middle and lower middle class</b>	<b>Lower class</b>
<b>Internet</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Never</b>
<b>Daily newspapers<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Regularly (<i>Danas, Politika</i>)</b>	<b>Occasionally (<i>Blic, Press</i>)</b>	<b>Seldom (<i>Več. Novosti, Kurir</i>)</b>
<b>Television stations</b>	<b><i>B92 and Fox</i></b>	<b><i>Pink</i></b>	<b><i>RTS and Pink</i></b>

\* \* \*

*In-depth interviews with representatives of relevant government agencies and other institutions were intended to represent an important segment of the survey. The CeSID pollsters' attempts to carry out such interviews in various state institutions, however, remained fruitless: none of the prospective interviewees in the Ministries for Interior, Justice and Labor and Social Affairs agreed to participate.*

In 9 of the intended 30 interviews with representatives of political parties interviewers were usually reminded of those parties' (general and non-committing) programmatic declarations and maintained that "sexual minorities, like all other minorities in Serbia, are not discriminated against and enjoy protection".

The *Liberal Democratic Party* (LDP) confirmed once again that it is the only party with a high level of sensibility for these issues.

This presentation offering only a limited selection of results, the entire survey can be found at GSA's website: <http://www.gsa.org.rs/cms-run>

<sup>5</sup> *Danas* and *Politika* are considered to be "serious" and "decent" dailies intended for educated audience, *Blic* and *V. Novosti* represent classic boulevard newspapers, whereas *Press* and *Kurir* cater to the lowest instincts and are often instrumentalized by hidden centers of power (tycoons, secret services, xenophobic political parties and groups).





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