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Country: Serbia

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If someone is familiar with Serbian media, it is likely no surprise that women are most likely to be represented tending to their households, or in articles relating to lifestyle and family. Women are rarely quoted about politics—and even journalists reporting stories about violence against women are more likely to quote men, than women.

According to Media Diversity Institute’s Gender and the Media Expert Dr. Snezana Milivojevic, women are the subjects of less than 25 percent of all Serbian media—which is somewhere around the European average. This number falls when it comes to experts who are quoted—unless, of course, the topic is celebrities.

While the number rises slightly when it comes to political experts, Dr. Milivojevic explains that this is because the political party benefits from having women as visible members of the party,

rather than the woman's expertise being valued in and of itself.

There are significantly more women journalists in southeastern Europe—however, there are fewer women editors, media directors and almost no women media owners. This is a trend that reflects the power relations within the profession, and explains the lack of value placed on stories about women.

If there are more women in the newsroom, the thinking follows that there will be more journalists sensitive to gender-related issues. However, the power imbalance sometimes creates an additional hostile atmosphere when women journalists see themselves as success stories for making it into the newsroom in the first place—and don't support other women journalists. This further contributes to the myth that women are less professionally capable.

Often, the media's language is very traditional, read: patriarchal. In Serbia's patriarchal culture, a woman's physical appearance is far more often the tool for discrediting her than her knowledge or expertise, a practice that Milivojevic blames on appearance being the area where a woman is more vulnerable and exposed.

When it comes to sensitive issues, women are even further excluded. Recently, Stasa Zajovic, founder and activist of [Women in Black](#), antimilitarist peace organisation founded during the conflict in Balkans in 1991, received an award commending her for her efforts towards building peace. The mainstream media ignored the event—further fueling a common trend that women are involved with socially problematic and undesirable topics and deserve to be ignored. As patriarchal culture is directly linked to the military, aggressive politics doesn't want to commemorate women's roles in peace activism, even though it has been two and a half decades after the conflicts.

If the media does not ignore women, it ridicules them. Journalists, public figures—including MPs—use this strategy to handle women who think differently, their words often amplified by the media.

Our media is incredibly influential; it forms our image of the world we live in, and is the space we learn how to be citizens. In Serbia, it is gendered at every turn—from the children’s magazines which advertise dolls for girls and toy cars for boys, to the ignorance of women’s stories and delegitimizing of women’s initiatives when they get older. However, as there are more and more ways for the public to influence the media, Milivojevic feels positively that this will be used to change the perception of women in the media.

“I often think that these new generations are making pressure on the media to change this patriarchal and misogynist speech because they do not want to live in it anymore.”