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Media portrayal of gender equality in
Montenegro in the context of EU accession
negotiations
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I. Introduction

Gender inequality has been a problem that continues to exist for centuries, and it can still be recognised today on different levels – locally, nationally and globally. Although we live in societies that have advanced significantly in the field of human rights protection, there is still much work to be done regarding women’s rights, as we continue to witness many violations of the same. Even nowadays, women and girls face different obstacles in private and professional life. Throughout history, they have been denied certain rights simply because of their gender. The movement for women's rights is often categorised into three waves of feminism. The first one concerned legal issues and occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The second wave extended to more issues including family, sexuality and workplace rights, between the 1960s and 1980s. The third wave emerged in the 1990s and continues today. It highlights diversity within the feminist movements (Freedman, 2002).

Over the past few decades, gender equality has gained widespread acceptance and numerous countries and international organisations have made commitments to achieving it (Lombardo, Meier, & Verloo, 2017, p. 1). Gender equality is one of the founding EU values that is firmly embedded in the Treaties of the EU,¹ the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union² (Articles 21 and 23) and secondary legislation (European Parliament, 2024).

Candidate countries for EU membership are expected to fulfil EU requirements and respect EU values. According to the European Commission, the empowerment of women and girls and achievement of gender equality is a precondition to a peaceful, prosperous, and fair society everywhere.³ Although gender includes not only women and men but also persons with other gender identities, this research focuses on gender equality between women and men due to the availability of data and limited resources.

¹ Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty on European Union, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/treaty-on-european-union.html>. Accessed on 8 July 2024.

Articles 8, 10, 19, 153 and 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/treaty-on-the-functioning-of-the-european-union.html>. Accessed on 8 July 2024.

² Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012P%2FTXT>. Accessed on 8 July 2024.

³ Available at https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/gender-equality_en. Accessed on 10 June 2024.

Montenegro, a small parliamentary republic from the Western Balkans region with a communist background, sees European integration as its path forward. It declared European Union (EU) membership as its primary strategic foreign policy objective shortly after gaining independence in 2006. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Montenegro was agreed upon in 2007 and took effect in 2010. Montenegro submitted its application to join the EU in December 2008. In 2010, the country was granted candidate status by the European Council, and in 2012, accession negotiations officially began. Montenegro has frequently been referred to as the frontrunner in these negotiations (Radulović, et al., 2011, p. 92; Milošević, Bajramspahić, & Bogojević, 2018, p. 5; Lilyanova, 2018, p. 1; Nenezić & Kecojević, 2019, p. 7).⁴ Recently, another significant milestone in EU integration of Montenegro has been achieved. At the Intergovernmental Conference in Brussels on 26 June 2024, Montenegro received a positive report on the fulfilment of the interim benchmarks in Chapters 23 and 24, which is marked as a historic day both for the EU and Montenegro (Office of the Prime Minister of Montenegro, 2024).⁵

Gender equality in Montenegro is regulated by a comprehensive set of laws, strategies, and institutions. Equal rights for men and women are guaranteed by the legal system in all spheres of life, including the workplace. Gender equality is further regulated by various ratified international agreements and regulations, mainly those within the EU and UN systems. The accession negotiations within the EU are also believed to further strengthen these efforts (Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2021, p. 3). In Montenegro, international law has supremacy over national laws in case of differences, as established by

⁴ *Chief Negotiator Predrag Zenović for Pobjeda: Montenegro is still for Brussels and a leader in integration*, 7 January 2024. Available at <https://www.eu.me/en/chief-negotiator-predrag-zenovic-for-pobjeda-montenegro-is-still-for-brussels-and-a-leader-in-integration/>. Accessed on 8 July 2024.

EU accession, Várhelyi: Montenegro is the most advanced candidate, 28 February 2024. Available at <https://euronews.al/en/eu-accession-varhelyi-montenegro-is-the-most-advanced-candidate/#:~:text=The%20European%20Commissioner%20for%20Neighborhood%20and%20Enlargement%20C%20Oliver,revitalize%20the%20European%20Union%20enlargement%20process%20with%20accession.> Accessed on 8 July 2024.

⁵ *A historic day for Montenegro: After seven years of waiting for IBAR, confirmation that Montenegro is irresistibly moving towards the European Union* (translated from Montenegrin), Office of the Prime Minister of Montenegro, 26 June 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.me/clanak/istorijski-dan-za-crnu-goru-poslije-sedam-godina-cekanja-ibar-potvrda-da-crna-gora-nezadrzivo-ide-ka-evropskoj-uniji>. Accessed on 26 June 2024.

Article 9 of the Constitution of Montenegro (*Službeni list Crne Gore* (Official Gazette of Montenegro), number 1/2007).⁶

Despite the success and inevitable progress in achieving gender equality and meeting EU requirements, prior research indicates that Montenegro still faces major challenges. In its history, the country has never had a female prime minister or president of the state. Moreover, women are rarely candidates for these positions. The Montenegrin National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2025 identifies the low level of gender equality as the central problem. This document recognises issues such as gender stereotypes, limited implementation of laws and insufficient empowerment of women and persons of different gender, and gender identities. Gender equality problems are believed to result from traditional gender roles, lack of awareness, patriarchal societal systems, and gender stereotypes.

The key research question of this study is “**How is gender equality portrayed in Montenegrin media in the context of EU accession negotiations?**”. Other objectives include:

- a) Analyse the frequency, context and tone of EU references in media articles about gender equality
- b) Assess dominant media narratives centred around the EU’s role and influence on gender equality in Montenegro
- c) Determine the portrayal of the EU in terms of its valorisation (positive, negative, neutral) and the constructs applied (EU as a benevolent force, a hegemon, transformative power, or as a normative power)
- d) Evaluate how is the concept of gender equality represented in Montenegrin media (as a societal need or as an external imposition).

The central claim of this study derived from the analysis of media discourse in Montenegro is that **reforms aimed at achieving gender equality have been largely driven or influenced by the European Union**. It also confirms Montenegro's overall pro-EU orientation and commitment to EU accession. The media represents dominantly positive opinions of the EU’s influence on gender equality, portraying it as a normative power. Other portrayals include the EU as a benevolent force, transformative power and as a hegemon. Critical opinion on the EU’s influence on gender equality in Montenegro makes up 10% of EU references. The study

⁶ Available at <http://sluzbenilist.me/pregled-dokumenta-2/?id={70C61F26-B411-4FA2-BEF3-45A4E23C998A}>.

Accessed on 8 July 2024.

revealed broader tensions between external obligations and genuine, internal commitment to the principle of gender equality. The main critiques represented in the media include the superficiality of compliance with the EU standards, ineffective implementation of laws, marginalisation of civil society in the EU accession negotiations process, and the need for contextual adaptation of gender equality policies. Implications of these findings could lead to a better understanding and inspire ideas of how gender equality strategies in Montenegro could be improved.

This research aims to fill the gap of the lack of studies that comprehensively analyse media portrayal of the EU and gender equality in the context of EU accession negotiations in Montenegro. By focusing on the Montenegrin media discourse, it contributes to the scholarly literature by offering new insights into the links between gender equality, media, European integration and EU accession negotiations. This research adds to the literature on how is the EU's impact on domestic gender equality mediated through public discourse in candidate countries. The relevance of the studies on media discourse on important issues is well-documented, as well as the media's ability to both reflect and influence public perceptions on social issues, including gender equality. It shapes our beliefs and behaviours, including adolescents' perceptions of gender (Garcia & Martinez, 2019), gender roles, stereotypes and individuals' self-perceptions (Brown & Lee, 2018; Smith & Johnson, 2020).

The methodology used for the research is Qualitative Discourse Analysis followed by a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Qualitative discourse analysis, which includes coding and interpreting text data, was applied in order to reveal the meaning behind words and phrases within the contextual background. This approach provides the tools required to accurately assess media narratives, evaluate how gender equality is portrayed, and interpret media texts. Critical in-depth analysis of the language, content, and attitude is made possible by CDA. Furthermore, it allows examination of the patterns in media and how the meanings are constructed and conveyed.

The structure of the thesis is divided into an introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion. The introduction provides the background and context of the research and outlines the main objectives, research problem, research questions, and the significance of the study. The literature review provides theoretical framework and research that have been done on gender equality, the role of the media, media portrayals of gender equality and the EU. The methodological chapter explains the qualitative discourse analysis

approach, data collection methods, and the analytical framework applied to examine the media portrayal of gender equality and the EU in Montenegro. The findings and discussion chapters present the results of the research and their implications. It includes an in-depth analysis of how Montenegrin media portrays gender equality in the context of EU accession negotiations and it critically examines both positive and negative representations. Finally, the conclusion part summarises the key contributions, findings and their implications. It also provides future research directions and outlines the limitations of my study.

II. Literature review

The main purpose of this literature review is to explore relevant studies and publications for analysing how EU accession negotiations influenced gender equality in enlargement countries, with a case study on Montenegro. Specifically, to answer the broader question, my study aims to analyse the media discourse. The EU imposes rules and certain conditions during the negotiation process which is believed to have significantly impacted Montenegro's stance and efforts in achieving gender equality. Still, it remains uncertain how this has influenced domestic discourse and how the media in Montenegro perceives the EU's role. This study seeks to close the gap by assessing the frequency, attitude and context of EU references in Montenegrin media. Additionally, the research contributes to the understanding of the complex dynamics of gender equality, media representation and EU accession negotiations. By providing contextual insights into the Montenegrin case, it adds to the discussion on how the EU values are portrayed in enlargement countries.

II.1. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is based on a multidisciplinary approach, integrating media and gender studies with EU conditionality and normative power theories. Several main concepts that are important are gender, gender equality, the media's role in shaping public perceptions and social transformation, the EU's normative power and the EU's conditionality within the accession negotiations. Additionally, the patriarchy, a more abstract concept was inferred from the analysis of previous scholarly works.

Gender equality, equality between men and women, entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female (as cited in Pavlic, Ruprecht & Sam-Vargas, 2000, p. 5).

Furthermore, gender refers to “the social differences and relations between men and women which are learned, vary widely among societies and cultures, and change over time”. (as cited in Pavlic, Ruprecht & Sam-Vargas, 2000, p. 6). It is also important to distinguish gender equality from gender equity. While gender equality is defined above, gender equity “means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs” (as cited in Pavlic, Ruprecht & Sam-Vargas, 2000, p. 6). This could involve fair or equitable treatment, or treatment that is different but is deemed comparable in terms of rights, advantages, responsibilities, and chances.

The official procedure by which a candidate country accepts and applies the *acquis communautaire* – the body of legislation of the EU – is known as EU accession negotiations. The purpose of these negotiations is to fulfil the obligations required for EU membership. The negotiations occur at intergovernmental conferences between the candidate state and EU member states. The process consists of several chapters, each addressing a different policy area.⁷ Similarly, EU enlargement refers to the process by which new member states are becoming new members of the European Union. According to the European Commission, the enlargement process involves “bringing new countries into the EU family by making sure they meet EU standards and can take on the obligations of membership” (European Commission, n.d.).⁸

Patriarchy and patriarchal society are concepts that were frequently mentioned in the sources used for the development of this research. Thus, I believe it is relevant to define it ahead. There are many definitions of patriarchy and extensive use of the concept, especially among social scientists such as Weber, who defined patriarchy back in 1947 as “a system of government in which men ruled societies through their position as heads of households” (cited in Walby, 1989, p. 214). The meaning of the concept has been more developed since Weber’s definition. However, it is difficult to agree on a universal definition of the concept. This research will rely on the definition provided by Walby (1989), who referred to it as “a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1989, p. 214).

⁷ Available at https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/glossary/accession-negotiations_en. Accessed on 10 June 2024.

⁸ Available at https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/eu-enlargement_en. Accessed on 10 June 2024.

According to this author, there are six key structures of patriarchy and in each of them, men are dominant: the household, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality and cultural institutions.

II.1.1. The role of the media

The media plays an important role in shaping and reflecting public perceptions and its importance is very well documented. Numerous studies on the role of the media and how it affects public opinion show how crucial the media is to our societies. Moreover, many scholars claim that it often reflects, strengthens and reinforces societal systems and beliefs, such as traditional gender stereotypes and norms (Bachmann, Harp, & Loke, 2018; Rakow, 2001; Richardson & Wearing, 2014; Rudloff, 2015).

Many studies showed that the media navigated public discourse by agenda-setting. Media agenda-setting theory is one of the most popular communication theories that dates from 1972 when it was set up by McCombs and Shaw (Luo et al., 2019, p. 150). According to the agenda-setting theory, the media's power to set the agenda and decide which issues to prioritise and promote allows them to have a big impact on how important a topic is perceived by the general population. Brosius & Haas (2011) explained that agenda-setting scholars assume that widespread media coverage of an issue can influence public perception of its importance.⁹ They also argued that even news media play a significant role by influencing not what people think, but what they think about. Because media news is often the first instance where individuals seek information, their ability to shape people's perceptions by which news they prioritise is huge (McCombs & Shaw, pp. 17-26).

The research also draws upon foundational theories from media representation and gender studies. Particularly, two main concepts are found to be relevant: symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978) and gender stereotype and role theory (Bem, 1993; Goffman, 1977). Annihilation theory argues that there is often an underrepresentation of women and other marginalised groups in the media or even entire exclusion of women's contributions and experiences. Tuchman claimed that the underrepresentation and misperceptions of women in the media reinforce their subordinate position in society (1978). Additionally, women are believed to be often marginalised in the media and portrayed in their traditional roles, while their professional successes are being diminished. According to stereotype theory (Bem, 1993),

⁹ Available at <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0021.xml>. Accessed on 1 July 2024.

the media frequently perpetuates old gender norms, which further restricts the potential of both men and women and makes it more challenging for individuals to overcome the stereotypes and fully express themselves. Similarly, the role theory implies that the media has a considerable influence on social understanding of gender roles and assigned behaviours. It is thought that media portrayals and communication of behavioural standards have a major impact on how society perceives certain issues, either by upholding or questioning established norms.

II.1.2. Theories on EU influence and conditionality in candidate countries

It was extensively explored and acknowledged that the EU exercises normative power and conditionality over candidates for EU membership. Constructivist theories highlight the normative aspect and argue that the EU primarily exerts its influence through promoting its norms, values, and processes of identity development. Rationalist ideas, on the other hand, emphasise how the EU exerts influence through strategic bargaining, security, and financial incentives. Through social learning and normative pressure theories, Checkel (2001) argued that due to normative pressure, candidate countries align their values and norms with the EU, which becomes a part of their national identity transformation. The rationalist's explanation of conditionality is a model where candidate states compare costs and benefits, that is the benefits of the EU assistance (financial assistance, membership, security reasons) in case they comply with EU conditions, and the costs of domestic reforms that are necessary for compliance with the EU criteria (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004, pp. 661, 663 & 664). Although not a primary focus of this research, it is worth mentioning Europeanisation – another, widely discussed and popular theory, with an extensive scope of literature. It emphasises the domestic reforms and transformations the EU influenced and brought about in the candidate countries (Radaelli, 2003). Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005) developed a theoretical framework which implied that Europeanisation occurs through three mechanisms: socialisation (transmission of ideas, beliefs, and attitudes from the EU to the domestic level), conditionality (the use of EU sanctions or incentives to encourage national adherence to EU laws and regulations), and learning (the transfer of knowledge and expertise from the EU to the domestic level). However, there is also a debate on the effectiveness of the EU's normative power and conditionality. Some academics draw attention to its shortcomings and restrictions, highlighting the unfavourable aspects and the EU's inability to implement proclaimed objectives in Montenegro (Vučković, 2018; Vučković, 2021; Uvalić, 2014).

II.2. Previous research

II.2.1. Gender equality in Montenegro in the context of EU accession negotiations

Montenegro's progress in EU accession negotiations is a topic of interest for many scholars (Radulović, et al., 2011; Ivanović, 2015; Corpădean, 2018; Vučković, 2018; Milošević, Bajramspahić & Bogojević, 2018; Nenezić & Kecojević, 2019; Vučković, 2021). While some discuss domestic issues that hamper the progress of Montenegro (Nenezić & Kecojević, 2019; Milošević, Bajramspahić, & Bogojević, 2018), others adopt a top-down approach and focus on analysing or criticising the transformative power of the European Union (Vučković, 2018; Vučković 2021; Malaj & Polo, 2023). In the domain of gender equality, the literature review showed that the country underwent many institutional, legislative and policy changes to adhere to the principle of gender equality and meet the EU requirements and recommendations. Sources that provide information and evaluation on Montenegro's gender equality position were valuable for contextualising media portrayals and understanding gender equality issues, frameworks and the country's background (European Commission, 2021; Bešić, 2018; Davidović, 2022; Vojvodić, 2023; Komar, 2019; Statistical Office of Montenegro & European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023; Pavićević, 2023).

The Gender Equality Index for Montenegro was produced in 2019 for the first time, by the Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT) & European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). It was an important step to take a closer look into the gender equality issues in Montenegro in six main domains (work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health), to track progress towards gender equality, and compare it to the EU countries. The index value ranges from 1 to 100, with 1 indicating complete inequality and 100 representing complete equality. Montenegro earned 55 out of a possible 100 points, which is lower than the EU average of 67.4. In spheres of money and power, the principle of „glass-ceiling“ is visible (Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights, 2021, p. 32), which can be defined as the „artificial impediments and invisible barriers that militate against women's access to top decision-making and managerial positions in an organisation, whether public or private and in whatever domain“

(European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.).¹⁰ Results of the second Montenegro's Gender Equality Index from 2023 showed a score of 59.3, which is 4.3 higher compared to the one from 2019 (Statistical Office of Montenegro, 2023). Again, the greatest gender inequality and the gap between the EU and Montenegro was in the spheres of power (44.1), knowledge (53.4), and money (61.9).

The country's legislative framework is aligned with EU requirements and standards, which points out that Montenegro has a progressive institutional capacity and legislative framework (Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2021, p. 7). However, among gender issues, there are persistent gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles (Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2021), domestic and gender-based violence (United Nations Development Programme, 2013), sex-selective abortion (Kiščenko, 2021; Davidović, 2022), and underrepresentation of women in media (Pejović, 2022). Furthermore, although the Law on Gender Equality includes the obligation of gender-balanced representation in the state institutions and organs (Articles 3, 10, 12, 16 and 17. Available at *Službeni list Crne Gore* (Official Gazette of Montenegro); number 46/2007), women are underrepresented in the domains of economy, politics, and decision-making both nationally and locally (Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights, 2021, p. 31). Research conducted by Institute Alternative titled „Potentials of early integration of Montenegro into the EU gender equality framework” demonstrates several issues, among which is the lack of proper assessment of legislative compliance with EU gender equality standards and an insufficient understanding of gender mainstreaming among public sector employees (Pavićević, 2023, pp. 11-12).

¹⁰ Available at https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1099?language_content_entity=en. Accessed on 10 June 2024.

II.2.2. Studies on media portrayal of gender equality

When it comes to media studies, two patterns reoccurred across previous research. Through information selection and distribution, media is believed to significantly influence the processes of social transformation and the shaping of public opinion, particularly gender equality. Often, it influences social attitudes by reinforcing gender stereotypes or promoting gender equality. Kumari & Joshi (2015) claimed that the media frequently mirrors societal beliefs without challenging conservative norms, which could strengthen and reinforce gender stereotypes or patriarchal notions of gender. Ward & Grower (2020) addressed the topic by analysing how media impacts the development of gender stereotypes, societal expectations and traditional roles from a young age.

Secondly, the literature pointed out that besides the fact that media often reflects already established stereotypical societal beliefs, it has a huge potential to bring about changes and drive social transformation. Moreover, many claimed that the media must be responsible for challenging detrimental behaviours and applying the principle of gender equality (Davidović, 2023; Richardson & Wearing 2024).

Santoniccolo, Trombetta, Paradiso & Rollè (2023) emphasised that media coverage is not neutral and can either reinforce the existing norms or challenge them, depending on their representation and coverage of related topics and issues. Some scholars highlighted media should take a more proactive role and an analytical approach to gender issues in order to challenge gender stereotypes (Richardson & Wearing 2014; Davidović, 2022)

Richardson & Wearing (2014) compared media representation of gender across different cultural contexts and noted that there is an international trend of gender bias and gender misrepresentations in the media. This indicates a global scope of the problem that needs to be addressed by investing more efforts in promoting the principles of gender equality in the media. They further claimed that the media strengthens a fixed binary system of gender and notions of masculinity and femininity through the sexualisation and objectification of women (pp. 3, 8 & 5). Their research is grounded on a poststructuralist theoretical framework that includes key gender and media theories, covering the concepts of masculinity, femininity and queer theory.

Similar findings can be seen in the studies of media representations of gender in Montenegro. In a research titled *Rodno ogledalo medija* (Gender mirror of the Montenegrin media) published by the Office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Pejović (2022) point

out that there is a stereotypical portrayal of women where men are depicted as powerful, important and influential, and women are most often submissive and marginalised. Additionally, Davidović (2022) examined the role of media discourse on sensitive topics such as sex-selective abortion (SSA). The study confirmed that media framing either reinforces or challenges patriarchal beliefs. In this case, findings showed that Montenegrin media mirror patriarchal norms and lack analytical thinking and reports on SSA. From these studies on media content issues, it can be assumed that there is a low awareness of gender equality in Montenegro. Montenegrin media does not sufficiently challenge the patriarchal society, traditional gender roles and stereotypes, but rather reinforces them. Furthermore, there is underrepresentation of women in all aspects of the media, especially in politics and economics-related topics. For instance, „*Rodno ogledalo medija*” (Gender mirror of the Montenegrin media) showed that women were presented in only 14.8% of articles and pieces in the economy section (Pejović, 2022, p. 3). That is 9 percentage points lower than the global average. This claim was also confirmed by both Gender Equality Indexes of Montenegro (2019 & 2023) which showed the greatest gender inequality in the spheres of money and power.

II.2.3. Studies on media portrayal of the EU

A significant number of studies covered the topic of the portrayal of the EU in different countries and related to different topics (Menéndez Alarcón, 2010; Jain & Pandey 2010; D’Haenens, 2005; Steuer, 2019; Iliopoulou, 2020). However, to the best of my knowledge, they are rarely related to gender equality. Menéndez Alarcón (2010) conducted a detailed content analysis to depict the media portrayal of the EU in France, Spain and the United Kingdom, which resulted in a finding that EU representation in the media significantly differs across countries because of the differences in national contexts. D’Haenens (2005) focused on the media framing of the EU in quality press news in the EU member states, revealing that the most frequent frames are conflicts and economic burdens of the EU membership. Steuer (2020) focused on crisis narratives and public perceptions by analysing media framing of the EU during a crisis.

Media representation of the EU as a political institution was extensively studied (D’Haenens 2005; Menéndez Alarcón, 2010; Jain & Pandey, 2010; Zografova, Bakalova & Mizova, 2012; Iliopoulou, 2020; Gioltzidou, Gioltzidou & Chrysafis, 2023). However, there is a lack of research on media portrayal of the EU in Montenegro. Public opinion of the European

integration and EU accession negotiations in Montenegro is more studied (Djurović, 2023), as well as the political discourse on the EU (Uskoković, n.d.).

II.2.4. Analysis of EU accession negotiations' impact on domestic policies

The impact of EU accession negotiations on domestic policies and social transformation in candidate countries is a widely discussed topic. Many scholars analysed the transformative power of the EU and how the EU accession process affects domestic policy changes in different candidate countries. These studies addressed various spheres, such as foreign policy, national identity, governance, institutional, socioeconomic, and legislative reforms (Jović, 2006; Baun & Marek, 2010; Freyburg & Richter, 2010; Mendelski, 2013). The same topic was significantly analysed with the case study of Western Balkans, emphasising the complex impact of the EU on democratisation, social transformations and statehood (Džankić, 2014; European Commission, 2015; De Wispelaere, Berki, & Balokovic, 2020; Malaj & Polo, 2023). Specifically, several studies critically analysed the EU's involvement and transformative power in Montenegro (Uvalić, 2014; Čepo & Kovačić, 2016; Vučković, 2018). Vučković's (2018) findings showed that the EU's conditionality and transformative power are weak and insufficient, which resulted in Montenegro's only superficial progress in efforts to meet EU conditions. According to him, the primary reason is that the EU has not applied sufficient pressure on Montenegro. Avdeyeva (2009) claimed that compliance of the candidate countries depends on the domestic political system, the ideology of political parties in power, the strength of women's movements, and political influence.

II.3. Research gap

Despite the extensive literature on gender equality and the media's influence on public perceptions and societal attitudes, there is a noticeable gap in comprehensive studies linking these two areas in the context of Montenegro. The existing literature lacks a thorough analysis linking media portrayal of gender equality and EU accession negotiations in Montenegro. While considerable research was done on the EU's impact on gender equality and broader domestic reforms in Montenegro and other candidate countries, no analysis of media portrayal of gender equality in Montenegro in the context of EU accession negotiations was undertaken. This study

aims to integrate previous perspectives to examine how media portrayals of gender equality are influenced by EU accession negotiations in Montenegro.

III. Methodology

III.1. Research design

III.1.1. Qualitative discourse analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

This research involves discourse analysis, starting with broad qualitative discourse research applied to all selected media articles, followed by a CDA on a smaller sample. Combining these methodologies enables a comprehensive study of the media's role in shaping public discourse on gender equality within the broader framework of Montenegro's EU accession negotiations process. Qualitative analysis is performed on articles whose content explicitly or implicitly mentions the EU's role in gender equality topics.

Qualitative discourse analysis, which includes coding and interpreting text data, was applied in order to understand the meaning behind words and phrases in the media within the contextual background. This method offers resources needed to properly assess various media narratives, evaluate how gender equality is portrayed, and interpret media texts. The book by Gee (2014) offers a comprehensive introduction to discourse analysis, including examples from different contexts and practical steps for doing analysis.

CDA is a method that enables in-depth analysis of the language, content, attitude and tone of the media articles in discussing gender equality. Furthermore, it will allow examination of the patterns in media and how the meanings are constructed and conveyed in a social context related to gender equality in Montenegro. This research method is useful for understanding the underlying power dynamics and ideologies in media discourse. It will enable examination of how media narratives challenge or support social structures and public perceptions. Additionally, it can be used for analysing the influence of the agenda-setting theory that claims that media not only mirror public perceptions but also shape them by choosing which information to disseminate. It is important to see how Montenegrin media perceives gender equality issues and which aspects of the problem they prioritise. Fairclough's three-dimensional model is used in the study, which is widely utilised when analysing media discourse (Fairclough, 1992). His model involved three dimensions – text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation) and social analysis (explanation). The model is beneficial for understanding how media construct power relations and social reality.

III.2. Data collection

The process of data gathering included gathering articles from the most prominent Montenegrin online media portals: RTCG, CdM, and Vijesti. The type of media, online media portals, was chosen due to their availability and because it is one of the most used media types in Montenegro, according to the research conducted by the Digital Forensic Centre in 2023.¹¹ The selection of these portals is based on their popularity and the trust they have among the Montenegrin public. Quantitative research from May 2023 on public opinion regarding media use and media literacy reveals that the most trusted online media portals in Montenegro are: Vijesti (33.1%), RTCG (15.4%), and CDM (11.4%).¹² The research is conducted by the Digital Forensic Centre annually to monitor trends and changes in attitudes and opinions. RTCG (Radio Television of Montenegro)¹³ is the national public broadcaster in Montenegro, which means that it is a state-owned media and has a great responsibility towards the public. CdM, or Cafe del Montenegro,¹⁴ is a private online media outlet in Montenegro that provides different types of information, including articles and news on a wide range of relevant topics such as economics, politics, society, and other topics. Vijesti¹⁵ are a private media that includes television, daily newspapers and an online portal. In addition to its long history dating back to 1997, Vijesti is one of the most influential and most trusted media outlets in Montenegro.¹⁶

Selection criteria

Language: I searched for and selected articles written in the Montenegrin language. While some portals have English versions available, I deliberately chose to focus on Montenegrin to create a comprehensive and representative database, as there were more articles available in Montenegrin than in English. For instance, by searching the same term in English and Montenegrin, one of the portals (RTCG) had 1344 articles when searching the term *rodna ravnopravnost*, in contrast to 178 articles in English if searched „gender equality“.

¹¹ Available at <https://dfcme.me/wp-content/uploads/Istrazivanje-javnog-mnjenja-2023.pdf>. Accessed on 1 June 2024.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Available at <https://rtcg.me/>. Accessed on 1 June 2024.

¹⁴ Available at <https://www.cdm.me/>. Accessed on 1 June 2024.

¹⁵ Available at <https://www.vijesti.me/>. Accessed on 1 June 2024.

¹⁶ Available at <https://www.vijesti.me/about-us>. Accessed on 1 June 2024.

Source: as mentioned before, RTCG, CdM and Vijesti were selected based on their reach and trustworthiness according to the Montenegrin public opinion. Additionally, they make a good representation of the media in Montenegro as they are among the most influential media and represent both state-owned (RTCG) and private (Vijesti, CdM) media.

Time frame: Articles were collected from the period of 2019 until March 2024. This time frame was chosen because it covers one of the most important milestones in gender equality efforts in Montenegro. Namely, 2019 is the year when the first Gender Equality Index for Montenegro was produced. The second Gender Equality Index was produced in 2023, another important year for gender equality in Montenegro that will be covered in this analysis. This time span also covers a huge political change in Montenegrin. Following the 2020 parliamentary elections, a leading political party that ruled in Montenegro for about 30 years was overthrown for the first time. This change initiated political instability.

Search process

The term *rodna ravnopravnost*, which means gender equality in Montenegrin, was searched via the search option on online portals. At the time of the search process, the initial search showed a total of 1344 articles on the portal of RTCG, while CdM and Vijesti did not show the number of available articles.¹⁷ Some articles contained the whole term in the title or the main text, while others included only one word, either *rodna* or *ravnopravnost*. Thus, the majority of articles did not talk about gender equality and were discussing other topics that are not relevant to this research. The filtration process included scanning through articles and choosing the relevant sample for the discussion on gender equality. Articles were filtered to exclude those that:

- Were not focused on gender equality.
- Discussed gender equality outside Montenegro.
- Were short announcements or promotional content without substantial discussion on gender equality.
- Merely reported on statements from non-EU officials without substantial discussion on gender equality and reference to the EU.

¹⁷ This was the case at the time of developing this research. Please note that this number will grow over time due to the production of new content.

The initial filtration process led to a dataset of 372 articles in total: 230 from RTCG, 84 from CdM, and 58 from Vijesti.

Further filtering

The next step was another filtering process which aimed to narrow down the dataset for qualitative study analysis. This process included selection of the articles that mention the EU or its role in gender equality explicitly or implicitly at least once. While filtrating and checking references of the EU, I also included synonyms of the EU as a political institution, European integration, EU accession negotiations, or a specific EU institution. This step led to a final dataset of 99 articles: 56 from RTCG, 31 from CdM, and 12 from Vijesti.

III.3. Data analysis

Using MAXQDA software, media articles were subjected to a thorough coding procedure. The coding scheme was developed to capture different dimensions of how the EU and gender equality are portrayed in Montenegrin media. Within the primary analysis of the articles, I examined the frequency of reporting and the attitudes towards the EU by the media while reporting on gender equality issues.¹⁸

III.3.1. Analysis process

Coding: Each article was coded based on predefined codes that were derived from the first filtrating process and the codes that were not pre-determined and were created during the analysis of the media articles itself. The codes were applied to the segments of media texts that convey one idea, and not the whole article. In Table 1, you can find the codebook developed within the study.

¹⁸ Similar approach was taken in Zografova, Y., Bakalova, D., & Mizova, B. (2012). *Media Reporting Patterns in Europe: The Cases of Construction of the EU and Reform Treaty*. *Javnost - The Public*, 19(1), 67–84.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2012.11009079>

Table 1: Codebook

Main code	Subcodes
Media tone	Media tone positive; Media tone negative; Media tone neutral
EU as a Transformative Power	EU conditionality in EU accession negotiation process
EU as a Normative Power	Alignment with EU values; Compliance with EU legislative framework; Adherence to EU standards
EU as a Hegemon	-
EU as a Benevolent Force	EU funding; EU support
Factual Reporting and/or Comparing with Gender Equality in the EU	-
Montenegro as a Region's Frontrunner in EU negotiations	-
Portrayal of Gender Equality	Gender equality not being the priority in the EU negotiations process; Gender equality as a condition for EU membership; Gender equality as a foundation of a democratic society; Gender equality as a trend or imperative from the West/EU
Statements from EU Representatives and Official EU Reports	EU conditionality; Recognition of Montenegro's progress and efforts; Criticism; Recommendations; Support

Pattern analysis: Secondly, coded segments were analysed in order to see how gender equality and the EU and its role are communicated and portrayed in the media, including an examination of the frequency of EU mentions and the context in which the EU's role is mentioned.

Critical Discourse Analysis: CDA was used to further analyse the coded data and create links between the findings and social context, including power relations and social structures reflected in the media. CDA is a great method for examination of how media discourse might

challenge or support existing power and social structures related to gender equality and EU accession negotiations. It helps to comprehend how media narratives about gender equality might reflect broader societal issues, especially in the context of the EU negotiations.

III.4. Theoretical framework and connections

Agenda-setting theory contributes to understanding how media in Montenegro present gender equality in the context of EU accession negotiations. It discusses how narratives are created by highlighting certain aspects of reality. While evaluating and analysing the articles and their coded segments, I try to categorise them depending on how they frame gender equality concerns in connection to the EU. For instance, it could be determined that an article portrays the EU as a transformative power that brings about desirable gender policies to Montenegro or as an external power imposing undesirable reforms. By classifying the frames, I investigate how different narratives are produced and how they may impact public perception regarding the EU's influence on gender equality.

Secondly, theories of the EU's conditionality, normative and transformative power are also crucial for this study. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier's (2004) conditionality theory in Central and Eastern Europe explained how the EU influences enlargement countries to comply with EU standards while setting conditions in the accession negotiations. Analysing mentions of the EU's conditionality in the media allows me to examine how they perceive the EU's requirements. The analysis will answer whether these conditions are portrayed as desirable goals or unnecessary burdens and obligations.

Another theory that could be linked to the research and is related to media representation is the theory of social constructionism which suggests that social processes and interactions, including media language and discourse, affect our understanding of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1996). The theory is applied by analysing how the language in Montenegrin media constructs social realities about gender equality and the EU's role. If an article refers to gender equality as a "European value" that Montenegro should strive for, it creates a social reality where alignment with the EU values goes hand in hand with the progress towards gender equality.

III.5. Tools and software

To assist in the development of my research, two tools were used. Grammarly assisted in ensuring clarity and correctness of the language used, while MAX Qualitative Data Analysis (MAXQDA) software provided support for coding and analysing qualitative data.

IV. Contextual background

IV.1. Montenegro and EU accession negotiations

Soon after gaining independence in 2006, Montenegro proclaimed membership in the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the main strategic foreign policy goals of the country. EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Agreement was signed in 2007 and entered into force in 2010. In 2008, Montenegro submitted its application for EU membership. Visa-free travel to the Schengen area for citizens of Montenegro was granted. In 2010 the European Council granted Montenegro candidate status for EU membership, and in 2012, the accession negotiations were formally opened. As another step forward on the path to European integration and pro-Western affiliation, it achieved its second main strategic foreign policy goal by joining NATO in 2017, becoming NATO's 29th member.

The main condition for accession to the EU is the ratification of all of the EU's foundational rights and obligations, as well as its institutional structure, collectively known as *acquis Communautaire* (Craig & de Búrca, 2015; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Kenealy, Peterson, & Corbett, 2015; Nugent, 2017). The most crucial aspects of the acquisition are primary legislation (the founding Treaties), secondary legislation (regulations, directives, decisions, recommendations, and opinions), and other legal sources (e.g. decisions of the European Court of Justice). Negotiating chapters are at the same time chapters of the *acquis communautaire*. There are 35 chapters in total. Montenegro opened all negotiating chapters (33) out of which 3 are provisionally closed. Negotiating chapters include various rights and obligations of the candidate country in different areas (e.g. free movement of goods and capital, justice, freedom and security, etc). Recently, Montenegro reached yet another important turning point in its EU integration. It is considered a historic day for the EU and Montenegro as on June 26, 2024, during the Intergovernmental Conference in Brussels, Montenegro received a positive report on the fulfilment of the interim benchmarks in Chapters 23 and 24 (Office of the Prime Minister of Montenegro, 2024).¹⁹ The negotiating structure consists of the Secretariat of the Negotiating Group, the Negotiating Group, State Delegation of Montenegro for Negotiations

¹⁹ Available at <https://www.gov.me/clanak/istorijski-dan-za-crnu-goru-poslije-sedam-godina-cekanja-ibar-potvrda-da-crna-gora-nezadrzivo-ide-ka-evropskoj-uniji>. Accessed on 26 June 2024.

on Accession of Montenegro to the European Union, College for Negotiations, and the Rule of Law Council.²⁰

The EU has been the largest foreign donor and the biggest trading partner of Montenegro (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), n.d.). EU investments in Montenegro date back to 2001 with the programme of assistance to the Western Balkans countries called Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development, and Stabilisation Programme (CARDS).²¹ Following the CARDS Programme, the Instrument for Pre-accession (IPA) was implemented until 2013 and then succeeded by IPA II, which provided Montenegro with 270 million in grants between 2014 and 2020. The IPA II Programme has been instrumental in supporting critical areas to help Montenegro prepare for EU membership. EU investments and financial aid have facilitated reforms and accelerated development in Montenegro across various sectors. Notably, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU has provided over €115 million in grants and favourable loans.²² In 2021, Montenegro received €500 million in Foreign Direct Investment from the EU, while the trade in goods with the EU amounted to €1.78 billion in 2022 (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), n.d.).

Recent political instability has had an impact on the accession negotiation process with the EU. In 2020, the three-decade rule of Milo Djukanovic's Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) came to an end. After 2020, Montenegro went through many elections and changes of governments, which also had an impact on European integration and main foreign policy goals and visions. Some governments consisted of parties with different orientations, among which were parties who were pro-Serbian, pro-Russian and against the Euro-Atlantic integration, which it made it difficult to agree on many issues that additionally stagnated the reforms and Montenegrin development. For more than two years, Montenegrin parliament could not agree on a Supreme State Prosecutor. However, in 2023, a new government was formed and Milojko Spajic, the leader of the Pokret Evropa sad (PES – Europe Now Movement) became the prime minister of Montenegro. Finally, the Parliament was able to choose the last member of the Constitutional

²⁰ Available at <https://www.eu.me/en/negotiating-structure/>. Accessed on 1 June 2024.

²¹ Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/the-cards-programme-2000-2006.html>. Accessed on June 1 2024.

²² More information is available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/montenegro/european-union-and-montenegro_en?s=225. Accessed on 1 June 2024.

Court, members of the Judicial Council and the Supreme State Prosecutor. The current government is pro-EU oriented and is firmly dedicated to finish Montenegro's reforms and fulfil all EU requirements. It may be viewed as a pro-EU momentum that provides hope after a few years of political instability. The country set a long-term goal of becoming the 28th EU member state by 2028, but in the meantime, there are many challenges and requirements to be achieved. „The EU needs a success story in the Western Balkans, and the entire region is closely watching Montenegro“ (Nič et al., 2023).

IV.2. Gender equality in Montenegro

IV.2.1. Legislative and institutional framework

Gender equality in Montenegro is regulated by the Constitution of Montenegro, the Law on Gender Equality (*Zakon o rodnoj ravnopravnosti* in Montenegrin)²³, the Human Rights Act from 2007, and the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (2010) that guarantees the same rights to men and women in every sphere of life, including the job market. The Constitution safeguards gender equality (Article 18) and prohibits discrimination on any ground (Article 8).²⁴ *Zakon o rodnoj ravnopravnosti* aims to achieve non-discrimination against women in every domain and defines the meaning and content of the concept of gender equality.

Gender equality means that women and men equally participate in all spheres of public and private life and that they have equal status, equal opportunities to enjoy and exercise all their rights and freedoms, to make use of their individual skills and capabilities for the development of society and equally benefit from achieved results of their work (Translated from Montenegrin language. *Zakon o rodnoj ravnopravnosti* (Law on Gender Equality), Article 2).

²³ Date of adoption: 2007. Date of publication: 2022. Retrieved from *Službeni list Crne Gore* (Official Gazette of Montenegro), number 46/2007. Retrieved on 20 June 2024 from <http://sluzbenilist.me/pregled-dokumenta-2/?id={78550F83-52B2-4272-BB5B-70346B7F88E6}>.

²⁴ Constitution of Montenegro. Retrieved from *Službeni list Crne Gore* (Official Gazette of Montenegro), number 1/2007. Available at <http://sluzbenilist.me/pregled-dokumenta-2/?id={70C61F26-B411-4FA2-BEF3-45A4E23C998A}>. Accessed on 20 June 2024.

This law binds the Parliament, the Government of Montenegro, local governments, political parties and media to respect the gender equality principle.

Gender discrimination is defined as “all legal and de facto, direct or indirect differentiation, privilege, exclusion or restriction based on gender which results in difficulties for the discriminated persons to be granted acknowledgement, access or exercise of their human rights and freedom in political, educational, economic, social, cultural, sports, civil and in other fields of public and private life“ (Translated from Montenegrin language. *Zakon o rodnoj ravnopravnosti* (Law on Gender Equality), Article 4).

Additionally, in the Labour Law (*Zakon o radu*), Montenegro allows both maternity and parental leave (Articles 126 and 127).²⁵

Gender equality is further regulated by various ratified international acts and regulations, especially in the EU and UN systems. EU accession negotiations are also believed to strengthen those efforts (Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2021). Montenegro ratified main international agreements and conventions and committed itself to ensuring gender equality and adhering to international standards. In Montenegro, international law has supremacy over national laws in the case of differences, which is established by Article 9 of the Constitution of Montenegro.²⁶ The main international acts that have been ratified are:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1979 (CEDAW)²⁷
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995²⁸

²⁵ *Službeni list Crne Gore* (Official Gazette of Montenegro), number 74/2019. Retrieved on 20 June 2024 from <http://sluzbenilist.me/pregled-dokumenta-2/?id={53CAEE70-A8DA-4C14-B915-1A29CA6447EE}>.

²⁶ Constitution of Montenegro. *Službeni list Crne Gore* (Official Gazette of Montenegro), number 1/2007. Retrieved on 20 June 2024 from <http://sluzbenilist.me/pregled-dokumenta-2/?id={70C61F26-B411-4FA2-BEF3-45A4E23C998A}>.

²⁷ Adopted December 18, 1979, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13. Ratified by Montenegro on October 23, 2006. Retrieved on 20 June 2024 from https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=en

²⁸ Retrieved on 20 June 2024 from https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/PFA_E_Final_WEB.pdf

- European Union Gender Equality Directives Directive 2006/54/EC and Directive 2010/41/EU²⁹
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women 1999³⁰
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (2000)³¹
- Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence 2011 (Istanbul Convention)³²
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions on Gender Equality³³

²⁹ Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32006L0054>

Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity.

Retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32010L0041>

³⁰ Adopted October 6, 1999, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 2131, p. 83. Ratified by Montenegro on October 23, 2006. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8-b&chapter=4&clang=en

³¹ Adopted October 31, 2000, United Nations Document S/RES/1325. Montenegro has endorsed this resolution, but as it is not a treaty, it does not require ratification. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325(2000))

³² Adopted May 11, 2011, Council of Europe Treaty Series, No. 210. Ratified by Montenegro on October 22, 2013. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from [Council of Europe <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treaty-num=210>

³³ Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100).

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C100

Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C111

Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156).

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C156

Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C183

Following its independence in 2006, Montenegro started adopting many strategic documents related to gender equality.³⁴ The most important strategic documents that address gender equality issues are:

- National Strategy for Employment and Human Resources Development for the period 2007-2011³⁵
- Plan of Activities for Achieving Gender Equality in Montenegro (2008-2012)³⁶
- Plan of Activities for Achieving Gender Equality in Montenegro (2013-2017)³⁷
- Plan of Activities for Achieving Gender Equality in Montenegro (2017-2021)³⁸
- National Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence (2016-2020)³⁹
- National Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence (2020-2024)
- National Strategy for Gender Equality (2021-2025) with Action plan for (2021-2022)⁴⁰
- Strategy for the development of women's entrepreneurship (2021-2024)⁴¹

³⁴ United Nations Development Programme. (2013). „Women entrepreneurship in Montenegro“, available at <https://www.undp.org/montenegro/publications/women-entrepreneurship-montenegro>. Accessed on 20 June 2024.

³⁵ *Nacionalna strategija zapošljavanja i razvoj ljudskih resursa za period 2007-2011* was a strategic framework for the implementation of reforms in the labour market and is aligned with the European employment policy and the most recent integrated policy guidelines at the time. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/bf62f4b2-f2d3-46ab-8fcd-403ebd5e9ba0>

³⁶ *Plan aktivnosti za postizanje rodne ravnopravnosti u Crnoj Gori 2008-2012*. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/b491f4cf-bb0f-49f3-a260-ea269cd3ca3f>

³⁷ *Plan aktivnosti za postizanje rodne ravnopravnosti u Crnoj Gori 2013-2017*. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/69af78ab-4033-471f-bec3-d65fe3d97e66>

³⁸ *Plan aktivnosti za postizanje rodne ravnopravnosti u Crnoj Gori 2017-2021*. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/b491f4cf-bb0f-49f3-a260-ea269cd3ca3f>

³⁹ *Strategija zaštite od nasilja u porodici 2016-2020 sa akcionim planom za navedeni period*. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://www.csrg.me/images/Dokumenti/Strateska%20dokumenta/Strategija%20zastite%20od%20nasilja%20u%20porodici%202016-2020.pdf>

⁴⁰ *Nacionalna strategija rodne ravnopravnosti 2021-2025. godine sa Akcionim planom 2021-2022. godine*. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from: <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/41e3ee6a-757a-4684-9763-9fee5e933afd>

⁴¹ Ministry of Economic Development. (2021). *Strategija razvoja ženskog preduzetništva 2021-2024*. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://biznis-api.gov.me/media/files/1690436317-1648105686-strategija-razvoja-zenskog-preduzetnistva-2021-2024.pdf>

- Action Plan for the Gender-Responsible Parliament of Montenegro (2022-2024)⁴²
- Local Action Plans for Achieving Gender Equality

In addition to appropriate legislative and strategic frameworks, the institutional framework that has the component of gender equality was established, including bodies focused on improving women's economic status and entrepreneurship. Two main institutional measures adopted to achieve gender equality include the Department for Gender Equality in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Parliament's Gender Equality Committee.

IV.2.2. Key gender equality issues

Women make up about 51.3% of the Montenegrin population (World Bank, n.d.)⁴³, yet statistics show that they are not proportionally represented in many spheres of public life. According to the Montenegrin National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2025, the central problem is the low level of gender equality. The Strategy recognised problems that cause gender inequality in Montenegro in three spheres – applying the law, gender stereotypes, and insufficient empowerment of women and persons of different gender and gender identities. In attempts and efforts to achieve gender equality, Montenegro has gone the furthest in legislation. However, there arises the important question of whether those laws are properly implemented in practice. In fact, after careful consideration of gender inequality examples in practice, discrimination, and obstacles that the Montenegrin female population faces, one can argue that there is only declarative, *de jure* gender equality, but not essential. Numerous sources point out important gender equality problems: gender-based violence, underrepresentation of women in media, politics and economics, sex-selective abortion, societal practices related to the rules of inheritance, sexualisation and objectification of women. These problems are influenced or caused by traditional gender roles, lack of awareness, patriarchal societal systems and gender stereotypes. In its report on Montenegro in 2023, the European Commission notes that „there is an urgent need to effectively address deeply rooted societal behaviour that degrades and discriminates against women, resulting in instances of gender-based violence“ (European Commission, 2023). The Commission’s report from 2023 shows that the problems that were

⁴² *Akcioni plan za rodno odgovornu Skupštinu Crne Gore 2022 – 2024*. Retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://zakoni.skupstina.me/zakoni/web/dokumenta/sjednice-radnih-tijela/3059/7812-.pdf>

⁴³ Statistics available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=ME>. Accessed on 20 June 2024.

recognised in previous reports remain today: women's underrepresentation in economic and political decision-making, hate speech, and the use of gender-based violence against women in politics and public life.

In the judiciary, there is an underrepresentation of women in higher judicial positions, a lack of awareness and sensitivity towards gender equality issues among judiciary members, a significant gender pay gap and insufficient legal frameworks to address sexual harassment and discrimination (European Commission, 2021).

IV.2.3. Gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles

In Montenegro, like in many other countries, gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles persist. There is a division between men's and women's jobs, where women typically are expected to occupy the domains of health, child care, education, and entertainment, while spheres that bring more power, influence, and money – business, politics, economics; are reserved for men, despite women's proven leadership skills (Barsh, Cranston, & Lewis, 2008; Ortega, Øvergård, & Henden, 2015; Zenger & Folkman, 2019). According to the data provided by the Statistical Office of Montenegro (*Uprava za statistiku* in Montenegrin) in the publication "Žene i muškarci u Crnoj Gori" (Women and Men in Montenegro), although there were more women among graduates in the period from 2009 until 2019, there were also more women in the unemployed population in Montenegro from 2016 until 2019 (as cited in Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2021, p.14).

According to the Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism of Montenegro, data from 2021 show that out of the total number of graduates, 59.2% were women and 40.8% were men.⁴⁴ Similarly, of those who completed master's studies, 64.1% were women and 35.9% were men.⁴⁵ In 2021, 14 people received the title of Doctor of Science. Of the above number of PhDs, 64.3% are women and 35.7% are men.⁴⁶ These statistics confirm that women make up the majority of higher-educated individuals in Montenegro compared to men. Even though they are generally

⁴⁴ Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism of Montenegro. (2023). Available at <https://biznis.gov.me/vodici-i-informacije/zensko-preduzetnistvo-zasto-je-vazno-i-sta-smo-postigli-do-sad>.

Accessed on 14 June 2024.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

more educated than men, they are often forced to work in low-paying sectors. In addition, the As cited in Gender Equality Index for Montenegro from 2019, that women own barely 4% of all real estate properties, which frequently leads to a variety of other disadvantages in their private and professional lives (Komar, 2019, p. 20). Consequently, the percentage of women-owned companies in Montenegro remains below 10%.⁴⁷

According to the Law on Gender Equality, women have the right to equal participation in all areas of the public and private sector, “equal standing and equal opportunities for the exercise of all rights and freedoms and the use of personal knowledge and abilities for the development of society, as well as the achievement of equal benefit from the results of work“ (Translated from Montenegrin. Law on Gender Equality, Articles 2 & 7).⁴⁸ Montenegro has committed to enforcing international directives such as the Directive of the European Parliament and the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers: Directive 2010/18/EU⁴⁹ and Directive 2019/1158.⁵⁰ However, women experience many difficulties in attempts to balance professional and private life. National Strategy for Gender Equality showed that according to the data gathered by the Statistical Office of Montenegro, the burden of housework and childcare is on women in most cases: 68% of women spend at least one hour doing housework every day, compared to only 10.3% of men who spend the same amount of time (Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2021, p. 34).

Women are often spoken of in the context of the traditional role of a woman. These traditional roles limit a woman and predetermine her as someone who should primarily take care of the family, children, and the elderly. On the other hand, power, influence, high political and leadership positions, and business are prescribed to men. The discussion about whether women

⁴⁷ UNDP. (2022). <https://www.undp.org/montenegro/press-releases/undp-creates-website-women-business>. Accessed on 13 June 2024.

⁴⁸ Date of adoption: 2007. Date of publication: 2022. Retrieved from *Službeni list Crne Gore* (Official Gazette of Montenegro), number 46/2007. Retrieved on 20 June 2024 from <http://sluzbenilist.me/pregled-dokumenta-2/?id={78550F83-52B2-4272-BB5B-70346B7F88E6}>.

⁴⁹ Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32010L0018>. Accessed on 13 June 2024.

⁵⁰ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019L1158>. Accessed on 13 June 2024.

“belong at home” is still very heated. Some argue that they should be fully committed to their families because they are the ones who should take care of the kids, husband, and the household.

I also want to talk about a controversial question that many women have been asked, including myself: “Do you want to focus on your family, or on your career? What do you want to choose?” This is only one of the sensitive questions, not to mention questions about wanting to give birth to children, getting married, etc. In 2019, the NGO Centre for Women's Rights published a report on gender-based discrimination in the field of work and employment that showed worrying data: 59% of surveyed women and 29% of men were asked questions about their marital status during a job interview, 41% of women and 18% of men were asked about the number of children they have (Komar, et al., 2019, p. 10). The report addresses the issue of gender discrimination in the workplace and employment by analysing key legal frameworks and comparing them to the EU acquis on gender equality. Do men also often get questions like these?

Traditional gender roles in patriarchal societies limit women because of the perception that someone who chooses a career and successful professional life with a full-time job, is predetermined to be a less committed mother and wife. Traditional, conservative, and patriarchal societies have doubts about whether women should pursue their careers because it is believed to harm a woman’s primary role as a housewife and care provider for the family. Moreover, someone who decides not to raise a family, have children or get married is frequently criticised and seen as a failure, and her accomplishments are completely disregarded. People often think that the most important success, goal and role of every woman is to “marry well” and be a mother. I have often heard comments on girls like “Look at her, she graduated from college and found a good job, she was just wasting her time. Now she is not married yet, she has not done anything, and her time is running out.”

Montenegrin society is still considered to be highly patriarchal, which is a societal system that has been there for many years and could be solved primarily through education, raising awareness, condemning discrimination and violence against women, and investing efforts to implement gender equality laws in practice. Because of many obstacles, women are discouraged from engaging in public life and politics. Those who want to expose themselves in public life – especially in politics – encounter much more criticism than men. The media also plays a major role – it often sabotages women leaders, and agents of change, by spreading false information, or sensitive information from private life, which often involves the sexualisation

and objectification of women. For example, the only female politician who stood as a candidate for the position of the president of Montenegro, Draginja Vuksanović, has faced a lot of misogynistic and sexist abuse throughout her career.⁵¹

Gender-based discrimination and inequality start even before a girl is born. Namely, another gender equality issue in Montenegro is sex-selective abortion (SSA). SSA, which can be defined as „the intentional elimination of female fetuses through abortion“ (as cited in Davidović, 2022, p. 2), is labelled as „one of the most worrisome and contested topics in contemporary gender-based analyses“ (as cited in Davidović, 2022, p. 2). Montenegro is among 12 countries in the world with a strong sex ratio at birth imbalances (Chao et al., 2019, p. 9303). Sex-selective abortion is a direct and most gruesome consequence of rules of inheritance in Montenegro and son preference because society values a male child more than a female child. In efforts to raise awareness about the problem and challenge detrimental traditions and systems of values, the Centre for Women’s Rights launched the “Unwanted” (*Neželjena*) campaign. The campaign gained huge popularity and attention and initiated discussions not only in Montenegro but in the whole region of the Western Balkans. This could lead to women who do not give birth to a son often feeling ashamed or not valuable enough. Kiščenko (2021) tells a story about a woman named Ivana and her mother. Ivana’s mother underwent multiple sex-selective abortions because she was pressured by her husband and his family to give birth to a male child. She thought she would be more loved by her husband and his family if she did so, and at the age of 44, she finally gave birth to a son. However, her relationship with her partner did not improve and she is now left with immense emotional suffering because of abortions that she underwent.

When it comes to the practice of inheritance in Montenegro, the traditional rule is that the property is being passed on to the male heir which creates many obstacles for women in claiming their property. Although according to the Inheritance Law,⁵² women have the same rights, in most cases, they are not claiming them. It is almost always predetermined within the families and agreed beforehand that everything should be passed to male children. Even if they wanted to, women would feel a social burden if they chose to claim their property rights. This is because sons will *nastaviti lozu porodice* which means that they will „continue the family“

⁵¹ Read more here: <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/politika/681538/seselj-objavio-knjigu-u-kojoj-vrijedja-vuksanovic-stankovic-brojne-osude>. Accessed on 10 March 2024.

⁵² *Zakon o nasljeđivanju*. Adopted in 2008. Available at <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/7b5a5f8a-b61f-483b-80e3-34450d8b8e3d>. Accessed on 7 March 2024.

because they are the ones who will still carry the family surname. Another reason could be that traditional roles see men as providers and the breadwinners. I often hear from my family, friends, and neighbours that daughters are *tuđa kuća*, which in English means „someone else's house“. The conveyed meaning of this phrase is that when women eventually get married, they are not under the control of their father anymore (they are not under „his roof“, as it is often phrased in Montenegro). After a woman gets married, it is now her husband who has to take care of her because it is always a man who is expected to have control over family resources. Another common practice is that when getting married, women change their surnames and accept their husbands', although according to the law, they are not required to do so. As a Montenegrin who was raised in Montenegro, I have never heard that a man accepted his wife's surname or added it to his up until now. However, this practice is not common only in Montenegro, and it is not seen as problematic as other cultural norms. If these traditional roles and practices continue to be common and accepted, they will continue to significantly hamper the progress of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in Montenegro. They clash with the modern aspirations of Montenegrin society trying to break free from deeply rooted beliefs and customs.

Montenegrin society, already historically patriarchal, has been experiencing re-traditionalisation attempts in the past few years by anti-Western and conservative actors. The Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro is considered to be one of the main conservative, anti-Western and pro-Russian actors that has a huge impact on public opinion on social issues, alongside some political elites that have the same orientation and are blaming the EU for diminishing „old, traditional values“ (Rudović, 2023).⁵³ The Church considers Russia its only true ally, however, the official foreign policy of Montenegro has always been pro-EU oriented. Montenegrin authorities imposed sanctions on Russia since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, following the EU's foreign policy agenda. According to a survey by the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM), Montenegro's membership in the European Union is supported by 76% of citizens, while even 59% believe that the EU accession negotiations should be the focus of foreign policy (De Facto, 2023).⁵⁴ However, anti-EU and anti-Western narratives have left consequences on public opinion. A survey from the same year

⁵³ Available at <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/antizapadni-narativ-i-konzervativizam-crna-gora/32312346.html>. Accessed on 20 June 2024.

⁵⁴ Available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/montenegro/%C4%8Dlanstvo-crne-gore-u-evropskoj-uniji-podr%C5%BEava-80-procenata-gra%C4%91ana_me?s=225. Accessed on 25 March 2024.

conducted by the Centre for Democratic Transition (CDT), shows that 34% of respondents see Russia as the patron saint of Slavs and Orthodoxy, whereas 34% do not think so (Centre for Democratic Transition, 2023). It also shows that 40.7% of citizens believe the EU and the West distort traditional values and impose deviant behaviour. A third of citizens (34.3%) believe that such a claim is false. In comparison, a quarter (25%) responded that they did not know, which confirms that some people believe in misinformation and conspiracy theories.⁵⁵

Domestic violence and violence against women is another important topic to address. It „remains a serious and persistent issue and the most extreme manifestation of gender inequality in Montenegro” (European Commission, 2023, p. 46). The Commission advised Montenegro to amend the National Strategy 2021-2025 so it addresses the issues of gender-based violence and domestic violence, as well as to set up crisis support facilities and specific procedures for women who have experienced sexual violence. 91.7% of Montenegrins believe domestic violence exists, and every fourth person holds the victim accountable (United Nations Development Programme, 2013, pp. 53 & 57). In Montenegro, one in every five women (20.2%) reported experiences of violence from an intimate relationship, while 6.2% of women reported non-partner violence in their adulthood (Statistical Office of Montenegro, 2022, p.1). A shocking information is that even about 76% of women in Montenegro suffer from sexual or/and intimate partner violence (United Nations Development Programme, 2015, p. 29). According to the study from 2018 initiated by the Council of Europe and conducted by the NGO Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (CEDEM) in agreement with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Ombudsman, “Forms, Patterns, and Extent of Discrimination in Montenegro – Trends and Analysis”, 34.1% of respondents claim that there is gender-based discrimination by answering the question of "to what extent is generally discrimination expressed towards certain groups" (Bešić, 2018, p. 61). 94.8% of women are portrayed as victims in the media when reporting about domestic violence, while only 1.3% of media content tackles gender-based violence (Pejović, 2022, p. 5). Directorate for Gender-Based Violence set up by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in 2022 is a crucial step in establishing the necessary institutional framework to facilitate the effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention and prioritise monitoring and improving protection and prevention systems (European Commission, 2023, p. 47).

⁵⁵ Available at <https://www.cdtmn.org/2023/03/07/gradani-masovno-vjeruju-u-dezinformacije-i-teorije-zavjere/>.

Accessed on 25 June 2024.

IV.2.4. Women in money and power

Montenegrin politics have a male-centred character and women hardly ever occupy high positions. They are inevitably less influential and powerful than men in Montenegro due to a worrying underrepresentation of women in economics, business and politics. The underrepresentation of women in politics and high positions in the Parliament and political parties was also noted in the European Commission's report on Montenegro (European Commission, 2020, p. 13). Especially successful women, in particular women in politics, are often being judged, sexualised, harassed, and discouraged from continuing their candidacy for higher political positions. It is not only a coincidence that in the history of Montenegro, there has never been a female prime minister or a president of the country. Moreover, only once a woman stood as a candidate for the head of the state in 2018. The decision of women to run – but also to accept political candidacy – is greatly influenced by the traditional roles of women and men and the patriarchal environment in Montenegro, which affects their motivation and reduces their desire to participate in more influential spheres of public life. Despite the increase in the number of elected women in politics, it is arguably mostly descriptive. Mere statistics and increased numbers do not prove women's empowerment in politics and do not necessarily create space for women's political activism and advocacy (Vojvodić, 2023). By comparing the results from Montenegro Gender Equality Indexes from 2019 and 2023, only a minor positive change can be seen in the domains of money and power. This weakens the female population within institutional frameworks – both at the national and local level, with only a few exceptions where women occupy key positions.

A survey conducted by Unija poslodavaca Crne Gore (Union of Employers of Montenegro) and E3 Consulting d.o.o., “Žene u menadžmentu u Crnoj Gori” (Women in Management in Montenegro) showed that companies are characterised by the dominance of men over women at all levels of governance, where women who are in key management positions constitute only 36.6% (Unija poslodavaca Crne Gore and E3 Consulting d.o.o., 2017). Survey participants believe that some of the obstacles to women's leadership in companies in Montenegro are: women's greater responsibility for the care of the family compared to men; traditional gender roles assigned by society which creates an atmosphere where men are discouraged from taking parental leave; and stereotypes about women. Other statistics show that women own only 4% of homes/real estate, 8% of land, and 14% of holiday homes in Montenegro, while only 9.6 % of the owners of business entities are women (European Commission, Directorate-General for

Justice and Consumers & Simović-Zvicer, 2021). According to the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2025 for Montenegro, the European Commission's 2020 Report on Montenegro claims that

Despite equality of women and men in employment and social policy and measures taken, women are still subject to discrimination in the labour market, resulting in lower participation and lower income generation rates and, in turn, hindering access to long-term employment contracts and access to paid maternity leave. Issues such as employment gaps and pay, sexual harassment in the workplace, lack of accessible childcare, unpaid work, and tax incentive systems remain largely unresolved (Translated from Montenegrin. As cited in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2021, p. 36).

IV.3. Montenegro's compliance with the EU gender equality criteria

Montenegro is committed to achieving the principle of gender equality. Encouraging, supporting, motivating, and empowering women by investing effort in changing traditional, patriarchal, and conservative gender stereotypes and norms, should lead to an increased number of female leaders. This is a long-term process that has begun but has not finished yet.

In one of the main strategic documents of Montenegro, the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2025, it was noted that gender inequality issues hamper Montenegro's democratisation process and progress in EU integration (Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2021, p. 3). The document portrays the EU standards as an ideal that Montenegro should strive to achieve in the process of the EU accession negotiations. It was mentioned several times that the Strategy dedicated special attention to alignment with the obligations arising from Montenegro's negotiations for membership in the European Union (Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2021, pp. 5-7). In particular, the objectives and aims of the Strategy are aligned with the Strategy of the European Union for Gender Equality 2020-2025. The strategy outlines operational objectives in line with recommendation 3.6.B from the Action Plan for Chapter 23, as well as recommendations from Chapter 19 of Montenegro's EU accession negotiations (Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2021, p. 8).

Montenegro, as a signatory of numerous international documents regarding women's rights, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), pursues policies by respecting widely accepted standards in the field of gender equality. This certainly includes documents of the European Union related to this area (Translated from Montenegrin. Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, 2013, p. 7).

IV.4. Media and gender equality

The media has a significant impact on shaping our beliefs and behaviours, including adolescents' perceptions of gender (Garcia & Martinez, 2019), gender roles, stereotypes and individuals' self-perceptions (Brown & Lee, 2018; Smith & Johnson, 2020). Gender stereotypes can be described as „beliefs about certain attributes that differentiate how women and men are (descriptive beliefs) or should be (prescriptive or proscriptive beliefs), and frequently address traits, physical characteristics, role behaviours, and occupations.“ (as cited in Ward & Grower 2020, p. 178). Academic research often describes the media as "contemporary mediators of hegemony" (as cited in Davidović, 2022, p. 4), meaning their influence on public opinion is significant and can shape the audience's gender-based beliefs. In their research, Richardson & Wearing (2014) examined how gender norms and identities are influenced and reflected in modern media, concluding that media plays a significant role in forming societal ideas about femininity and masculinity. Furthermore, they claimed that media often that the media frequently perpetuates gender norms and prejudices by portraying gender identities as fixed and binary, ignoring gender variety (Richardson & Wearing, 2014).

Media and its reporting patterns are one of the „public sphere's major aspects and one of citizens' basic means for obtaining information and for shaping representations, attitudes and opinions concerning various issues of EU enlargement, development and perspectives“ (Zografova, Bakalova, & Mizova, 2012, p. 68). Media is also important in raising awareness (as cited in Zografova, Bakalova, & Mizova, 2012, p. 68). “We don't see reality the way it is, but the way our languages are. Our languages are the media. The media are our metaphors. Our metaphors create the content of our culture” (as cited in Gioltzidou, Gioltzidou, & Chrysafis, 2023, p. 2).

Media representation of women in Montenegro is very low – only 21% of persons that are read about, speak or are being spoken to are women, which makes the presence of women in the media in Montenegro 4% lower than the global average of 25% (Pejović, 2022, p. 2). Women account for 59.5% of victims cited in the news. When only domestic and gender-based violence is considered, 94.8% of women are portrayed as victims in the news, far higher than the share of male victims. Stories about gender equality account for only 1.7% of all media material, while only 1.3% of media content discusses gender-based violence (Pejović, 2022, p. 5). Furthermore, Montenegrin media is dominated by men – most of the content is produced by men and is about men. All in all, the contribution of women to our society is much bigger than their representation in the media.

V. Findings

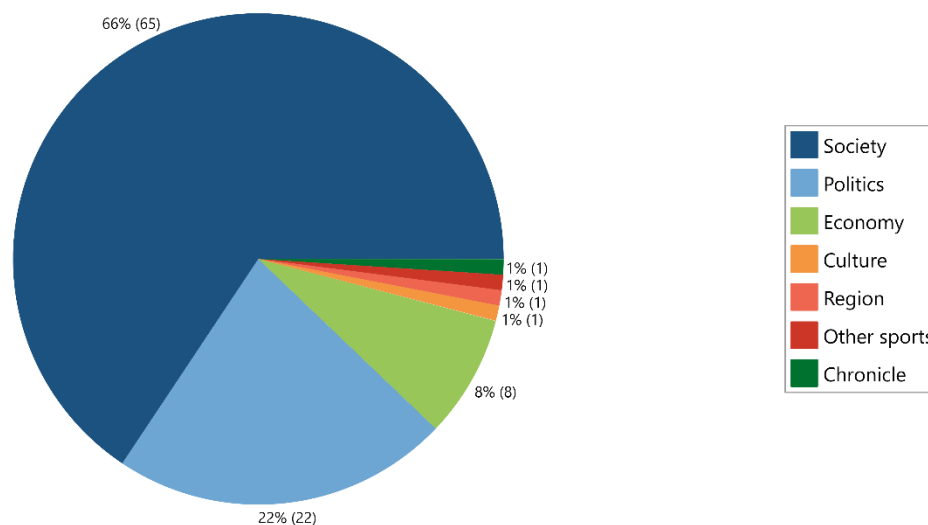
V.1. Media Analysis

The study covered media articles from three online Montenegrin portals that discussed gender equality from 2019 until March 2024. The search process involved gathering articles by searching the term *rodna ravnopravnost* (gender equality) on the websites of Montenegro's three most trusted online portals. Searching for gender equality provided a comprehensive list of media articles discussing issues across various aspects of life. Many initially displayed articles were excluded because they did not essentially discuss gender equality.

However, while collecting and analysing data, it was observed that media coverage of topics related to gender equality may be limited and insufficient. The first notice was made during the search process. For example, when searching for another key EU value, *vladavina prava* (the rule of law) on the RTCG portal, a total of 34557 articles were found in May 2024. However, when searching for *rodna ravnopravnost* on the same day, only 1344 articles were discovered. The comparison was made using the search function on the *rtcg.me* web portal. This number is even smaller for the other two selected portals. It was also noticed that there is a lack of opinion articles and editorials related to gender issues. Although several feature articles offer in-depth analysis of gender equality issues, the predominant type is news reporting. These articles provide factual and objective information about new developments and events and do not offer comprehensive analysis (Pavlik & McIntosh, 2021). Feature articles provide more than just factual reporting – they include information about the context, background and other relevant information in a narrative style (Rich, 2015). Editorials go even further – they are a type of media pieces that present the perceptions of the editorial board or the media as a whole, addressing important developments or issues and advocating for specific policies (Fink & Schudson, 2013). Lastly, opinion articles provide the author's subjective, personal opinion and perspective on a topic. The author is an individual, mostly a journalist or an expert who engages in a debate and provides critical thinking on various issues (Johnson-Cartee, 2005).

Another finding during the search and selection processes is that gender equality was predominantly discussed in the "Society" section of online portals. Among analysed articles on gender issues in the context of EU accession negotiations, 65 articles were in the Society section, 22 in Politics, 8 from Economy, 1 from the Culture, 1 from the Region, 1 from Other sports, and 1 from the Chronicle.

Distribution of articles on gender equality in the context of EU accession negotiations



Graph 1: The pie chart illustrates the distribution of media articles selected for analysis based on their sections. It shows from which sections (Society, Politics, Economy, Culture, Region, Other Sports, and Chronicle) the articles were retrieved.

In addition to the EU, the media frequently mentions several other external actors that promote, support, and fund activities related to gender equality in Montenegro. These include the United Nations (UN), specifically the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

V.2. Frequency of EU references in media articles about gender equality

In total, 99 media articles on gender equality from three online portals referred to the EU and its influence. Each coded segment conveys a certain attitude towards the EU and could be coded with multiple codes, depending on its meaning and idea. In qualitative research, a code is defined as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2021, p. 4). Most of the segments were coded with more than one code and all articles were coded with the same codebook.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Check Table 1 on page 20.

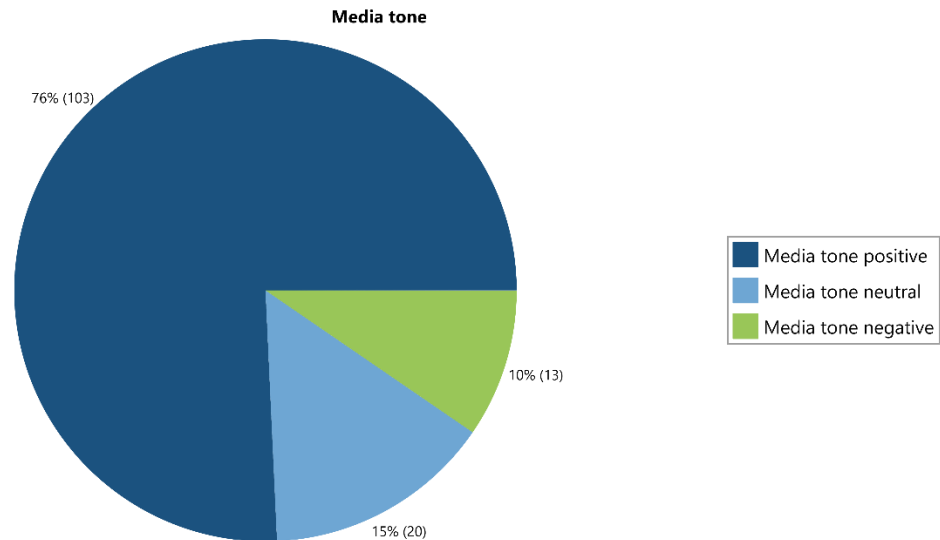
V.3. Media tone towards the EU

In discourse analysis, particularly in media studies, media tone is an important factor. It usually refers to the general attitude or emotional quality of media coverage on a certain topic and has been extensively studied by many academics. It includes the language, visuals, and context used in the media. This part of the analysis examines the media tone towards the EU and its implications for gender equality in Montenegro. The categorisation was provided by Farnsworth and Lichter, who divided media coverage into three basic tones: positive, negative, and neutral. "Positive coverage emphasises favourable aspects, successes, and benefits related to the subject. Negative coverage highlights criticisms, failures, and adverse effects. Neutral coverage presents information without apparent bias towards positivity or negativity, aiming to provide a balanced view." (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2007, p. 28).

Media tone towards the EU's influence on gender equality in Montenegrin online portals is dominantly positive. Most of the articles contained a positive tone (69), 17 had neutral, and only 11 negative. In other words, when it comes to the coded segments of the articles, 103 were positive, 20 of them neutral, and 13 had a negative tone.

Note that not all of the articles represented a single perception. Most of them represented various sides and stakeholders, presenting different opinions and statements on the topic under discussion. Positive media tone towards the EU's influence correlates with general public support and a positive attitude towards the EU and potential EU membership (De Facto, 2021). On the other hand, negative tones can point out criticism of the EU's involvement or contribute to a negative public perception. The tone of the statements of EU officials and representatives was not assessed and not included in the results. This is because it is irrelevant since the research focuses on the perceptions of the EU from domestic actors and stakeholders.

Graph 2 shows the frequency of media tone of analysed articles.

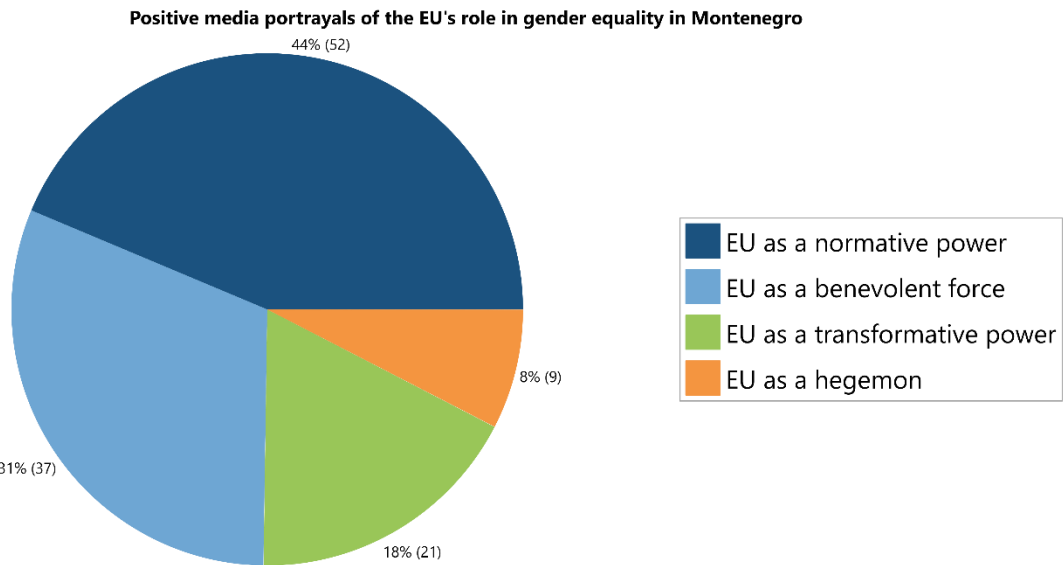


Graph 2: This pie chart illustrates the media's tone regarding the European Union's influence on gender equality in Montenegro.

V.4. Dominant narratives

Positive narratives highlight the efforts and progressive developments in achieving gender equality. Additionally, they also reassure and highlight Montenegro's pro-EU orientation and commitment to fulfil all the criteria within accession negotiations. On the other hand, much content discusses and emphasises challenges and gender equality issues, reflecting a critical view of the slow pace of change and deeply rooted societal barriers, such as gender stereotypes, traditional roles and patriarchal norms. Reports on gender-based violence, underrepresentation of women in politics and economics, hate speech, and discrimination in different areas all point out struggles in achieving true equality, despite progressive legislative and policy frameworks.

When it comes to the media portrayal of the EU's influence on gender equality, it is predominantly portrayed as the normative power, with 52 mentions. Additionally, it is frequently represented as a benevolent force (37 mentions). Articles also mention the EU-driven reforms and transformative power of the EU in gender equality practices and policies (21 mentions). Less frequently, the EU is seen as a hegemon in the promotion of gender equality (9 mentions). The graph below illustrates the frequencies of these perceptions in Montenegrin media, showing the times that media texts were coded with given codes.



Graph 3: The pie chart illustrates the primary themes in media portrayals of the European Union's influence on gender equality in Montenegro.

The EU's normative power is reflected in Montenegro's efforts to adhere to EU standards (33 references), comply with the EU legislative framework (22 references) and align with the EU values (20 references). Media also portray the EU as a benevolent force that helps Montenegro in achieving gender equality through funding (28) and supporting (18) various activities, projects and research. There are frequent references to the EU accession negotiations and conditionality, which is predominantly portrayed as a process that has strengthened Montenegro's gender policies. The EU is not only claimed to have a positive impact on gender equality but is also represented as a driver of change. This emphasises its transformative power, especially in enlargement countries. Moreover, in one of the articles it is stated that the "Western Balkan countries have achieved everything so far under the pressure of the EU and within the framework of the policy of conditionality".⁵⁷ However, in another article, it was claimed that the underrepresentation of women in politics shows that Montenegro is not ready for reforms regarding gender policies within the negotiation process.⁵⁸

In a few instances, the media explicitly portrayed gender equality as a fundamental value of the EU and a key prerequisite for overall equality, social justice, sustainable growth and development of society. Additionally, gender equality is also referred to as one of the key

⁵⁷ Translated from Montenegrin. Available at <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/236684/pristup-cu-nedovoljan-da-vladavina-prava-funkcionise.html>. Accessed on May 10 2024.

⁵⁸ Article available at <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/484535/bez-zena-na-pozicijama-nema-napredne-politike.html>. Accessed on May 10 2024.

criteria for closing chapter 23.⁵⁹ “The gender perspective must be clearly recognised as an integral part of Montenegro's accession process to the EU” uses persuasive language reflected in the terms “clearly” and “must”.⁶⁰ Gender equality is inevitably seen as a condition imposed by the EU that Western Balkans countries must achieve if they want to become a member of the Union. The EU contributes to these efforts by supporting and funding various gender-related projects in addition to providing recommendations and guidelines. In the same article, it is stated that for these reasons “gender equality must be a priority, both in the EU accession process and in the process of creating successful public policies”. This implies that gender equality is not a priority in EU accession negotiations but should become one because of its importance.

“Montenegro must ensure the inclusion of gender perspectives at all levels” implies that this has not been done yet.⁶¹ Another article argues that gender equality should be one of the priorities in Montenegro's political agenda due to its importance. It points out that Montenegrin officials do not recognise and acknowledge the significance of gender equality issues for Montenegrin society as a whole. They are reminded of Montenegro’s obligation to pursue gender equality objectives set by the EU in legislative and strategic documents.⁶² Some see the problem of women’s underrepresentation in politics as proof that Montenegro is not ready for EU accession. It is claimed that this demonstrates that it is not taking EU integrations seriously.⁶³

⁵⁹ Article available at <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/482986/u-novoj-vladi-samo-cetiri-zene-nijedna-nije-potpredsjednica.html>. Accessed on May 1 2024.

⁶⁰ Translated from Montenegrin. Available at <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/502145/czp-rodna-perspektiva-mora-biti-jasno-prepoznata-kao-sastavni-dio-procesa-pristupanja-crne-gore-eu>. Accessed on May 10 2024.

⁶¹ Translated from Montenegrin. Available at <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/306177/rodna-ravnopravnost-kljucni-preduslov-razvoja-drustva.html>. Accessed on May 10 2024.

⁶² Available at <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/298743/aktivnije-doprinosi-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti-i-jacanju-uloge-zena-.html>. Accessed on May 10 2024.

⁶³ Available at <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/484535/bez-zena-na-pozicijama-nema-napredne-politike.html>. Accessed on May 10 2024.

V.5. Portrayal of gender equality

This part of the analysis summarises the portrayal of gender equality in media articles. The main code which is “portrayal of gender equality”, the coding procedure included the following subcodes: Gender equality as

- a condition for EU membership
- a foundation of a democratic society
- a trend or imperative from the West/EU; and
- gender equality not being a priority in the EU accession process.

V.5.1. Gender equality as a condition for EU membership

This perception was found in 15 segments from 13 media articles. Perceptions with a positive note claim that EU accession negotiations strengthen Montenegro’s gender policies because gender equality is one of the key EU values. They highlight this fact as a reminder and motivation for Montenegro to keep working on gender issues if it wants to join the EU in the future. The main critical narrative centred around the perception of gender equality as a condition for EU membership is that Montenegro is more focused on fulfilling EU requirements rather than being committed to a genuine societal transformation. For instance, this can be inferred from the statement that “Gender equality must be understood as a real need of society, not just a condition for entering the EU”.⁶⁴

V.5.2. Gender equality as a foundation of democratic society

In some cases, there is a view that perceptions of gender equality as a condition of a democratic society and conditions for EU accession are mutually exclusive, such as in the following phrase: „Time will tell whether gender equality is understood as a real need of our society, or only as a

⁶⁴ Translated from Montenegrin. Available at <https://www.cdm.me/politika/bajic-rodnu-ravnopravnost-shvatiti-kao-potrebu-drustva-a-ne-kao-uslov-za-ulazak-u-eu/>. Accessed May 11 2024.

condition for joining the EU.⁶⁵ In other instances, it is mentioned that „The equal position of women and men is one of the cornerstones of a truly democratic society, which Montenegro should become”⁶⁶ and that „it is an indisputable democratic and economic need to create a society of equal opportunities for all“.⁶⁷

V.5.3. Gender equality as a trend or imperative from the West/EU

Gender equality is often depicted as a trend or an EU imposition. This was found in 6 instances across 6 media articles. All of these articles expressed a negative attitude toward this observation and will be examined in detail in the later part of this analysis. These articles depict the concept of gender equality as an external imposition, an imported concept, rather than a change that was initiated within a domestic context. However, they are not being critical of the concept itself. Moreover, the concept is considered to be crucial for the development and real societal needs. The critique lies in the superficiality and formality of the gender reforms that are being initiated in order to please main external gender equality promoters, especially the EU.

V.5.4. Gender equality not being a priority in the EU accession process

Gender equality not being a priority in the EU accession process is mentioned explicitly once⁶⁸ and implicitly twice.⁶⁹ The main perceptions are centred around the marginalisation of gender equality in EU accession negotiations and the critique of Montenegro’s progress in gender equality efforts and the EU-driven reforms. Despite being a condition for EU membership, gender equality is considered to be marginalised among other political and economic

⁶⁵ Translated from Montenegrin. Available at <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/394796/demokratizacija-crne-gore-putem-veceg-ucesca-zena-u-politici.html>. Accessed May 11 2024.

⁶⁶ Translated from Montenegrin. Available at <https://www.cdm.me/politika/abazovic-naucnice-zauvijek-promijenile-svijet/>. Accessed on May 11 2024.

⁶⁷ Translated from Montenegrin. Available at <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/ekonomija/354079/vrijeme-da-zene-budunestrljive-i-zahitjevaju-promjenu.html>. Accessed on May 11 2024.

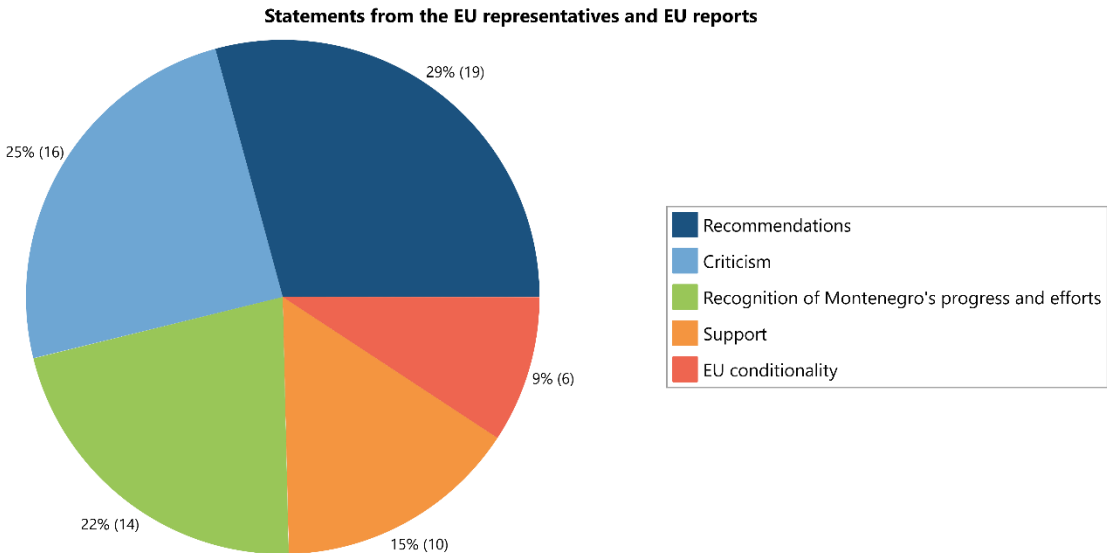
⁶⁸ Available at <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/391996/ljudska-prava-zena-nijesu-prioritet-u-procesu-priključenja-eu.html>. Accessed on May 11 2024.

⁶⁹ Available at <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/306177/rodna-ravnopravnost-ključni-preduslov-razvoja-drustva.html>; <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/298743/aktivnije-doprinjetei-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti-i-jacanju-uloge-zena-.html>. Accessed on May 11 2024.

conditions. Secondly, gender policies in Montenegro are criticised for being formal, having limited implementation, and lacking genuine societal transformations and women empowerment. These articles will be analysed more closely in the next part of the analysis which focuses on the narratives with a negative/critical tone.

V.6. Statements from the EU representatives and EU reports

Media articles also frequently reported and cited statements from EU officials (especially from the representatives of the Delegation of the EU to Montenegro) and presented information from EU reports on gender equality. From this, it can be implied that the opinion of the EU is highly respected, relevant and represented in the media. The analysis showed that recommendations are the most frequent in these statements. Important gender equality issues and limitations of Montenegro’s response are often being critiqued. On the other hand, the EU is also recognising the progress that the country has been making on the path to achieving full gender equality. Lastly, the EU representatives express their willingness to support this process and remind Montenegro of the importance of gender equality as one of the main conditions for EU membership.



Graph 4: The pie chart provides a visual representation of the frequency with which Montenegrin media have mentioned, cited, or reported on statements from EU representatives and EU reports regarding gender equality in Montenegro.

V.7. Critical examination of negative media tone towards the EU and gender equality in Montenegro

This analysis focuses on segments from media articles that were coded with a negative tone towards the EU. The decision to do a more detailed analysis of segments with a negative tone is made based on its importance for understanding the constraints regarding the EU's influence on gender equality in Montenegro. Furthermore, given the substantial number of selected media articles, it would be unfeasible to conduct a comprehensive CDA within the scope and resources of this project. Therefore, a decision to critically examine the negatively toned media articles was made for a project to remain feasible and focused, while still providing meaningful insights into the media discourse on gender equality in Montenegro.

A dominantly positive media tone could be expected because of the contextual background and general pro-EU stance of the Montenegrin government and the public. Research conducted by De Facto on behalf of the Delegation of the European Union in November 2023 showed a positive attitude towards the EU and high support for EU accession.⁷⁰ It demonstrated the fact that Montenegro's membership in the EU is supported by 80 percent of citizens, which makes it 'one of the few, if not the only, issues on which there is a consensus in Montenegro'.⁷¹ These positive narratives were discussed in the previous part.

Analysing the negative tone could indicate important, broader issues and constraints of the EU's influence on gender equality in the context of EU negotiations in Montenegro. CDA and Fairclough's framework will guide the analysis (1995). The framework includes three steps: textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis. The first step is looking at the language that is being used to express the negative views. The second step looks at how stories are created and received in Montenegrin media. Lastly, broader societal implications of these narratives are explored, with a focus on how they reflect and influence public perception of the EU and gender equality.

⁷⁰ Available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/montenegro/%C4%8Dlanstvo-crne-gore-u-evropskoj-uniji-podr%C5%BEava-80-procenata-gra%C4%91ana_me?s=225. Accessed May 13 2024.

⁷¹ Statement of Olivera Komar, available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/montenegro/%C4%8Dlanstvo-crne-gore-u-evropskoj-uniji-podr%C5%BEava-80-procenata-gra%C4%91ana_me?s=225. Accessed May 13 2024.

In total 12 times negative media tone was determined among 99 articles from three Montenegrin portals. These negative portrayals are coded as segments of the texts, capturing the whole idea. The negative tone was spotted 2 times in Vijesti, 3 times in CdM and 7 times in RTCG. On a few occasions, identical statements were found in articles from different portals.

V.7.1. Gender equality as a trend and as an imposition from the West

Gender equality is perceived as a fad, a trend, and something that we should import from the West, which is wrong. It is the essential foundation of a democratic society⁷²

vijesti.me, 30/06/2023

Title: “Novaković Đurović: Gender equality is seen as a fad, women can fight for their space”⁷³,

Document section: Society

Link: <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/663308/novakovic-djurovic-rodna-ravnopravnost-se-doživljava-kao-hir-zene-su-sposobne-da-se-izbore-za-svoj-prostor>

In this statement, a Minister of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism states that gender equality in Montenegro is seen as a fad and a trend that must be imported from the West. It is perceived as an imperative that should be adhered to. It can be implied that if it was not because it is "a trend from the West", Montenegro would not see achieving gender equality as important. She argues that this perception is wrong since it shows that Montenegro is trying to adhere to external gender equality standards without seeing it as a foundation of a democratic society, which it is.

This calls for shifting the focus of gender equality as a condition imposed within European integration. Arguably, that could be one of the reasons why Montenegro struggles with the implementation of gender equality laws and policies that are aligned with the EU legislative framework. It could be inferred that this is also the call for Montenegro to invest more efforts in achieving gender equality because it genuinely sees it as a need and a crucial part of a democratic society, not only a trend that must be adopted in order to demonstrate and prove the commitment to a Western orientation. The question is whether the author thinks that these two

⁷² Translated from Montenegrin: „Rodna ravnopravnost se doživljava kao hir, kao trend i nešto što treba da uvezemo sa Zapada, što je pogrešno. Ona je suštinski temelj demokratskog društva”

⁷³ Translated from Montenegrin: “Novaković Đurović: Rodna ravnopravnost se doživljava kao hir, žene su sposobne da se izbore za svoj proctor”

perceptions of gender equality are mutually exclusive. Even though this question is not discussed explicitly, from the discourse, it appears that the author portrays them as such. Whether that is the case could be a topic for discussion.

A dismissive language in the statement is noted. Words like “trend” and “fad” convey the meaning of gender equality as something that is rather not a serious societal issue. It implies that gender equality is not genuinely valued and is simply perceived as an imperative by external factors. It also includes a corrective statement, where it is claimed that this perception of gender equality is wrong and that it should be viewed as a fundamental principle of any democratic society instead, including Montenegrin. While portraying gender equality as an external “trend” the media sheds light on the cultural tensions and resistance to the imposition of external norms at any cost. The analysed statement can be interpreted as either validation for scepticism towards Western norms or as a call to realise the real value and importance of gender equality for democratisation of Montenegrin society. In other words, it calls for reframing gender equality.

V.7.2. Automated transposition of EU Directives

She emphasised that the improvement of women's rights in laws is more often a consequence of the automated transposition of EU directives than it is a consequence of thorough analysis and consultations with the beneficiaries of the law. This harmonisation of legal solutions with the *acquis* of the EU, although it contributes to better protection of rights, is not based on a detailed analysis of the current situation and the different practical and strategic needs of women and men in the sectors in order to solve the concrete and specific problems that women in Montenegro encounter," the Institute Alternative (IA) announced.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Translated from Montenegrin: “*Naglasila je i da je unapređenje ženskih prava u zakonima često više posljedica automatizovanog transponovanja EU direktiva, nego temeljne analize i konsultacija sa korisnicama i korisnicima zakona. Ovakvo usklađivanje zakonskih rješenja sa tekovinama EU, iako doprinosi boljoj zaštiti prava, ne počiva na detaljnoj analizi trenutnog stanja i različitih praktičnih i strateskih potreba žena i muškaraca u sektorima kako bi se rješavali konkretni i specifični problemi na koje žene u Crnoj Gori nailaze*”, saopštili su iz IA.”

vijesti.me, 04/02/2021

Title: “Gender-neutral laws are a factor in the persistence of gender inequality in Montenegro”⁷⁵.

Section: Society

Link: <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/509513/rodno-neutralni-zakoni-faktor-istrajavanja-rodne-neravnopravnosti-u-crnoj-gori>

cdm.me, 04/02/2021⁷⁶

Title: „Laws ignore women's inequality in many areas”⁷⁷

Section: Society

Link: <https://www.cdm.me/drustvo/zakoni-ignorisu-nejednakost-zena-u-mnogim-oblastima/>

The need for contextual adaptation of EU requirements

In the segment presented above, the improvement of gender equality in the legislative framework is portrayed as a consequence of the automatic transposition of EU directives. The same statement was found in two articles from two portals – Vijesti and CdM, both in the “Society” section. It emphasises the tension between the “automated” transposition of EU directives and the need for a contextual adaption of gender equality policies and laws. This contradiction implies a rather superficial compliance with EU requirements and standards. Even though the EU’s influence is believed to improve domestic gender equality, it points to the negative effect of this process, which is a lack of a thorough and meaningful engagement with the issue at hand.

The term “automated” indicates a mechanical method of adopting EU regulations. This shows that legislative reforms are driven more by the EU’s external requirements than by a genuine, internally motivated desire to reduce gender inequalities. The segment was coded with a negative tone because it points to the negative effect of the EU’s law transposition in Montenegro, and criticises the lack of detailed analysis and reflection on domestic needs and issues. Highlighting the lack of thorough analysis suggests that the legal amendments may not target the specific demands and issues women and girls experience in Montenegro. It

⁷⁵ Translated from Montenegrin: “*Rodno neutralni zakoni faktor istrajavanja rodne neravnopravnosti u Crnoj Gori*”

⁷⁶ Identical article was found on two online media portals.

⁷⁷ Translated from Montenegrin: “*Zakoni ignorišu nejednakost žena u mnogim oblastima*”

emphasises the contrast between formal legal frameworks and the actual needs and reality of the beneficiaries of the laws, which may undermine the effectiveness of the EU-driven reforms.

Textual analysis implies a reference to the mechanical adoption of EU Directives. The term “automated” implies that adopting EU regulations and directives is a superficial process. Although it acknowledges the positive impact of compliance with the EU standards, which inevitably “contributes to better protection of human rights”, it emphasises its inadequacy in addressing the strategic and practical needs of women in Montenegro. This narrative reinforces scepticism about the efficiency of EU-driven reforms by highlighting the lack of connection to the specific national and local context.

Harmonisation with the EU Acquis

A crucial part of the EU accession process is harmonisation with the EU Acquis. It is framed as a process that inevitably contributes to the “better protection of rights”, acknowledging the positive aspects of aligning with the EU norms and standards. Better protection of rights implies that EU-driven measures are beneficial for the legal status of women in Montenegro, at least on paper. However, it is also implied that this process may be superficial if it does not take into account the practical needs of women and the national and local context. In this statement, the automatic transposition of EU laws and standards is criticised for not being based on a “detailed analysis of the current situation”. The criticism indicates a broader issue of the ineffectiveness of gender equality measures and difficulties with law implementation due to a lack of understanding of the context and social needs.

Practical and strategic needs

“Different practical and strategic needs of women and men” highlights the significance of context-specific solutions in achieving true gender equality. In other words, realising that men and women from different areas and backgrounds may have different needs, suggests that a one-size-fits-all strategy may be insufficient. This emphasises the need for a gender-sensitive analysis and strategies that address the specific barriers that women in Montenegro face. Furthermore, the mention of “concrete and specific problems” and “consultations with the beneficiaries of the laws” implies that legal reforms should be based on the realities of men and

women in Montenegro. Additionally, it calls for the inclusion of beneficiaries of the laws in the process of policy-making.

V.7.3. Exclusion of civil society in the EU accession negotiation process

In Montenegro, the overall lack of participation and inclusion of women's civil society organisations in the European Union (EU) accession process is more than evident. Consequently, women's rights and gender equality are not prioritised in this process. This was highlighted at the conference 'LBTQ Women and Gender Policies in the EU Accession Process,' organised by Queer Montenegro. Miloš Knežević, the Executive Director of Queer Montenegro, stated that their experience indicates that women from the LBTQ community, as well as transgender, intersex, and gender-variant individuals (TiRV), are even less involved in the EU accession process.⁷⁸

rtcg.me, 26/12/2022

Title: „Women's human rights are not a priority in the EU accession process“⁷⁹

Section: Politics

Link: <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/391996/ljudska-prava-zena-nijesu-prioritet-u-procesu-priključenja-eu.html>

The first sentence starts a negative tone by emphasising a significant weakness of the process of EU negotiations in Montenegro. It mentions the lack of participation of women's civil society organisations. "General" and "more than evident" imply that this issue is not new and that the problem is widely recognised and undeniable. The underrepresentation of women's civil organisations in negotiations caused an opinion that women's rights and gender equality are marginalised within the EU accession negotiations. Mentioning other marginalised groups and

⁷⁸ Translated from Montenegrin: “U Crnoj Gori opšti nedostatak učešća i uključenosti ženskih organizacija civilnog društva u proces pristupanja Evropskoj uniji (EU) je više nego evidentan, pa samim tim ljudska prava žena i rodna ravnopravnost nijesu prioritet u tom procesu. To je poručeno na konferenciji „LBTQ žene i rodne politike u procesu pristupanja EU“, koju je organizovao Kvir Montenegro (Queer Montenegro). Izvršni direktor NVO Kvir Montenegro, Miloš Knežević, rekao je da prema njihovom dosadašnjem iskustvu prepoznaju da su žene iz LBTQ zajednice, kao i trans interseksualne i rodno varijantne osobe (TiRV), još manje uključene i proces priključenja EU.”

⁷⁹ Translated from Montenegrin: “Ljudska prava žena nijesu prioritet u procesu priključenja EU”

individuals (LGBTQ women and gender-variant individuals) that experience even greater discrimination and exclusion, suggests that there are different levels of marginalisation within the already isolated civil society. Furthermore, authors sharing their own experiences provide more credibility and weight to the claim, which in this case is the Queer Montenegro organisation.

Regarding the context, this segment reports on a conference organised by Queer Montenegro, whose focus was LGBTQ and women's rights in the EU negotiations. It draws attention to the marginalisation of vulnerable groups in important political processes, particularly during the negotiations with the EU. The article conveys a critical attitude towards the EU accession negotiations process, claiming that it does not prioritise human rights and gender equality. The target audience is civil society, activists and the general public that is concerned about human rights and European integration. Those who question the EU's impact and the inclusivity of the EU negotiation process may agree with the statement. Reader impact may also be reflected in the reinforcement of sceptical views among readers who feel there that vulnerable groups and civil society are isolated from political decision-making. Societal implications reflected in this article are the marginalisation of civil society and the questioning of EU priorities in the negotiation process.

V.7.4. Perception of gender equality: Condition for EU membership versus a real societal need

According to her, gender equality must be understood 'as a real need of our society, not just as a condition for joining the European Union'.⁸⁰

cdm.me, 27/05/2023

Title: "Bajić: Gender equality should be understood as a societal need rather than merely a condition for EU membership"⁸¹

Section: Politics

⁸⁰ Translated from Montenegrin: „Rodna ravnopravnost se, po njenim riječima, mora shvatiti “kao stvarna potreba našeg društva, a ne samo kao uslov za ulazak u Eropsku uniju”

⁸¹ Translated from Montenegrin: „Rodnu ravnopravnost shvatiti kao potrebu društva a ne kao uslov za ulazak u EU“

Link: <https://www.cdm.me/politika/bajic-rodnu-ravnopravnost-shvatiti-kao-potrebu-drustva-a-ne-kao-uslov-za-ulazak-u-eu/>

Gender equality must be understood as a genuine societal need and not merely as a condition for joining the European Union (EU), according to the Movement for Changes (PzP). They emphasised the necessity of implementing policies that promote equal opportunities.⁸²

rtcg.me, 27/05/2023

Title: "Gender equality must be understood as a genuine need of society."⁸³

Section: Society

Link: <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/431660/rodna-ravnopravnost-mora-se-shvatiti-kao-stvarna-potreba-drustva.html>

It is suggested that time will reveal whether gender equality is perceived as a genuine need of our society or merely as a prerequisite for joining the EU.⁸⁴

rtcg.me, 09/01/2023

Title: "Democratisation of Montenegro Through Greater Participation of Women in Politics"⁸⁵

Section: Society

Link: <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/394796/demokratizacija-crne-gore-putem-vecceg-ucesca-zena-u-politici.html>

Textual analysis of those excerpts from the media articles reveals a repetition of some ideas. They created a division between two perceptions of the gender equality concept. Namely, all of them convey that the concept should be portrayed as a real need of society, not only as a condition for EU membership. Imperative language can be found in phrases such as “must be understood” and “the necessity of implementing policies” in the first two excerpts. In the third

⁸² Translated from Montenegrin: “*Rodna ravnopravnost se mora shvatiti kao stvarna potreba društva, a ne samo kao uslov za ulazak u Evropsku uniju (EU), ocijenili su iz Pokreta za promjene (PzP) navodeći da je neophodno uvesti politike jednakih mogućnosti.*”

⁸³ Translated from Montenegrin: “*Rodna ravnopravnost mora se shvatiti kao stvarna potreba društva*”

⁸⁴ Translated from Montenegrin: “*Navodi da će vrijeme pokazati da li se rodna ravnopravnost shvata kao stvarna potreba našeg društva, ili samo kao uslov za ulazak u EU.*”

⁸⁵ Translated from Montenegrin: “*Demokratizacija Crne Gore putem većeg učešća žena u politici*”

excerpt from a media article, textual analysis shows a conditional framing. Whether gender equality is understood as "a genuine need of our society" or "merely as a prerequisite for joining the EU" creates a dichotomous view of gender equality. The third excerpt indicates that it still may not be sure which view is dominant in Montenegro that the time will show which opinion will prevail. "Time will tell" adds a temporal component and represents uncertainty and anticipation of possible future developments. In other words, it means that the current understating of gender equality has yet to be fully tested.

Additionally, it is important to consider a broader contextual background to understand these statements. These opinions are provided within a wider discussion on gender equality and Montenegro's EU accession process. Taking into consideration the contextual background, surveys and general pro-EU policies, it can be argued that EU accession negotiations are also seen as part of the democratisation and Europeanisation processes.

The first two statements are given by Anika Bajić, a candidate for the parliament from the "Pokret za promjene" (Movement for Changes) (PzP). The third excerpt is part of the article that presented the statements from Milica Mitrović, President of the NGO "Citizen Group Bu2".

V.7.5. Critique of superficial compliance: challenging EU's conditionality in Montenegro

The rule of law is defined not by the laws adopted, but by their implementation and practice. The current approach of the European Union (EU) is insufficient to help Western Balkan countries transform and ensure the proper functioning of the rule of law. This was highlighted during the panel discussion 'Why the EU Should Care About the Rule of Law in the Western Balkans.' Jovana Marović, Executive Director of the Politikon Network, noted that so far, Western Balkan states have achieved everything under the pressure of the EU and within the framework of its conditionality policy.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Translated from Montenegrin: „Vladavina prava se ne definiše kroz usvojene zakone, nego kroz njihovu implementaciju i praksu, a sadašnji pristup Evropske unije (EU) nije dovoljan da bi pomogao zemljama Zapadnog Balkana da se transformišu i da vladavina prava funkcioniše kako treba, ocijenjeno je na panel diskusiji "Zašto EU treba da mari za vladavinu prava na Zapadnom Balkanu".

rtcg.me, 08/04/2019

Title: "EU Approach Insufficient for Effective Rule of Law"⁸⁷

Section: Politics

Link: <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/236684/pristup-eu-nedovoljan-da-vladavina-prava-funkcionise.html>

It is evident that the progress is technical rather than substantive; we have made the most progress in improving legislation, which is significant considering Montenegro's size. However, when discussing the quality of legislation, the fact that a law has been amended does not necessarily mean it is of higher quality. This does not imply that the rule of law is established, that the law is the same for everyone, or that the institutions enforcing these laws are independent and impartial," Marović stated.⁸⁸

rtcg.me, 08/04/2019

Title: "EU Approach Insufficient for Effective Rule of Law"⁸⁹

Link: <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/236684/pristup-eu-nedovoljan-da-vladavina-prava-funkcionise.html>

According to her, the EU is not consistent in the messages it sends regarding the Western Balkans' prospects, and its approach is not based on thoughtful consideration and 'studying' of the region. 'These are lessons learned from previous waves of enlargement. For example, what worked well for Croatia does not necessarily work for Montenegro,' Marović explained.⁹⁰

Izvršna direktorka Politikon mreže, Jovana Marović, ocijenila je da su države Zapadnog Balkana do sada sve postigle pod pritiskom EU i u okviru politike uslovljavanja.“

⁸⁷ Translated from Montenegrin: "Pristup EU nedovoljan da vladavina prava funkcioniše"

⁸⁸ Translated from Montenegrin: „Evidentno je da je napredak tehnički, a ne suštinski, da smo najviše postigli na unapređenju zakonodavstva i da taj uspjeh nije mali u odnosu na to kolika je Crna Gora. Međutim, kada govorimo o kvalitetu zakonodavstva, to što je neki zakon izmijenjen ne znači da je on kvalitetniji. To ne znači da postoji vladavina prava i da je zakon isti za sve i to ne znači da su institucije, koje sprovode te zakone nezavisne i nepristrasne”, rekla je Marović.”

⁸⁹ Translated from Montenegrin: "Pristup EU nedovoljan da vladavina prava funkcioniše"

⁹⁰ Translated from Montenegrin: „Prema njenim riječima, EU nije dosljedna u porukama koje šalje u odnosu na perspektivu Zapadnog Balkana i njen pristup se ne bazira na promišljanju i “proučavanju” Zapadnog Balkana. “To su naučene lekcije, iz prethodnih talasa pridruživanja. Npr. ono što je bilo dobro za Hrvatsku ne mora da bude dobro za Crnu Goru”, pojasnila je Marović.”

rtcg.me, 08/04/2019

Title: "EU Approach Insufficient for Effective Rule of Law"⁹¹

Section: Politics

Link: <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/236684/pristup-eu-nedovoljan-da-vladavina-prava-funkcionise.html>

Once again, media discourse conveys a critique of the superficial compliance to the EU standards in Montenegro and the Western Balkan region. It has a critical and negative tone towards the EU's approach in enlargement countries from the region. It is highlighted that harmonising the legal framework with EU standards is not enough. The focus should instead be on the implementation of these laws, and this is where the problem lies. It is explicitly stated in the first excerpt that the true rule of law is not demonstrated by mere adoption of laws, but rather their application and enforcement. This implies a broader problem of poor implementation of legislation in Montenegro. Moreover, amending laws does not always mean that the law is improved. Montenegro has done the most work in developing and improving the legislative framework in order to comply with the EU standards. It leaves an impression that implementation progress is substantially limited and insufficient.

Additionally, the EU's approach in Western Balkans countries is criticised, arguing that its engagement is "not enough" to solve the problem explained. In other words, it reflects the limitations of EU conditionality, arguing that it leads only to superficial compliance rather than societal transformation and substantial improvements. "It is evident" that Montenegrin progress is "technical, rather than substantive". "It is evident" portrays this issue as well-known and evidence-based.

The excerpts are from the same article from the RTCG portal. The article is about the panel discussion titled "Why the EU Should Care About the Rule of Law in the Western Balkans" (translated from Montenegrin) organised by the Politikon Network, the European Fund for the Balkans, and the Balkan in Europe Policy Advisory Group. The opinions expressed were those of Jovana Marović, Executive Director of the Politikon Network.

⁹¹ Translated from Montenegrin: "*Pristup EU nedovoljan da vladavina prava funkcioniše*"

Until we change the cultural context in which we live so that these laws are genuinely implemented rather than just checked off as a requirement for joining the European Union, nothing significant will change in the lives of men and women.⁹²

cdm.me, 08/03/2023

Title: "International Women's Day: Where Does the Balkans Stand on Legal and Actual Gender Equality?"⁹³

Section: Region

Link: <https://www.cdm.me/svijet/region/medunarodni-dan-zena-gde-je-balkan-po-ravnopravnosti-zena-pred-zakonom-i-u-stvarnosti/>

The use of transformative and conditional language in “until we change the cultural context” indicates that cultural practices must be changed for a full transformation in addition to legal reforms. Rather than just relying on legal reforms to satisfy EU criteria, the focus should be on law implementation and cultural awareness. Here, the impact of legal reforms and EU compliance on the day-to-day life of people in Montenegro is also tackled. It is argued that legal reforms alone will not have any drastic change in the daily lives of men and women in Montenegro. The statement is given on International Women’s Day by Nada Drobnjak, a gender equality expert from Montenegro. It criticises the reforms influenced by the EU, implying that they are superficial and not tailored to the specific cultural context of Montenegro.

V.7.6. Women’s political (under)representation

The leader of the 'For the Future of Podgorica' coalition list, Jelena Borovinić Bojović, once again urged her female colleagues to never accept that women's participation in politics is discussed only through the lens of percentage quotas mandated by certain standards. 'We are not only numbers. We are not here to be used as figures to present a supposedly positive image to the European Union or to justify grants by merely

⁹² Translated from Montenegrin: „Sve dok ne promijenimo kulturni kontekst u kom živimo u kom će se ti zakoni zaista primjenjivati, a ne biti štrik za pristup Evropskoj uniji, neće se ništa drastično promijeniti u životima muškaraca i žena.“

⁹³ Translated from Montenegrin: „Međunarodni dan žena: Gde je Balkan po ravnopravnosti žena pred zakonom i u stvarnosti“

fulfilling formalities. Unfortunately, women in politics have always been viewed this way,' Borovinić Bojović stated at the conference organised by the Centre for Civic Education titled 'Monitoring the 2022 Local Elections in Montenegro from a Gender Perspective,' held in Podgorica.⁹⁴

rtcg.me, 29/11/2022

Title: "Women in politics must not be reduced to mere percentages"⁹⁵

Section: Society

Link: <https://rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/388044/zene-u-politici-ne-smiju-biti-samo-procenti.html>

The author criticises limited efforts for achieving women's political participation only by establishing quotas and increasing the number of the involvement of women due to statistics, and without substantial reforms. The phrase “we are not only numbers” demonstrates the rebellion against an approach in which women's participation in politics is seen to be improved only to the extent necessary to meet the EU standards' quotas to ingratiate itself with the EU. The effectiveness of the EU's influence in improving women's political participation in Montenegro is questioned. In this regard, irony is used in phrases like “to present a supposedly positive image to the European Union” and “merely fulfilling formalities”.

The language is used to evoke emotions among the readers, especially among women politicians with the phrases “We are not only numbers. We are not here to be used as figures”. Speaking in the first person plural (“we”) can be used to awaken a sense of shared destiny among the readers. This narrative is established in a way that includes the audience in the story by making them active participants rather than just passive observers.

It can be implied that she is trying to convey that the dignity and contributions to the society of women politicians are being overlooked and neglected. There is a clear contrast between

⁹⁴ Translated from Montenegrin: „Nositeljka liste koalicije „Za budućnost Podgorice“, Jelena Borovinić Bojović još jednom je pozvala sve svoje kolegice da nikada ne pristanu da se o učešću žena u politici govori samo kroz prizmu procenata zastupljenosti na koje obavezuju neki standardi. "Mi nismo brojevi. Mi ne služimo bilo kome da bismo izigravale cifre, kojima će da se posluže da bi se u navodno pozitivnom svjetlu približili Evropskoj uniji ili opravdali grantove pukim zadovoljavanjem formalnosti. Nažalost, do sada se na žene u politici uvijek tako gledalo", poručila je Borovinić Bojović sa konferencije Centra za građansko obrazovanje "Monitoring lokalnih izbora 2022. godine u Crnoj Gori iz rodne perspektive", koja se održava u Podgorici.”

⁹⁵ Translated from Montenegrin: "Žene u politici ne smiju biti samo procenti"

superficial compliance and substantive reforms, in addition to the critique of external (EU) influence. The speaker opposes the opinion that gender equality in politics is achieved if women's participation quotas are met. Montenegro is trying to meet EU requirements due to pressure within the EU accession negotiations, although they might not correspond to the internal context, needs and realities.

The statement is given within the efforts to improve and evaluate women's political participation. More specifically, it is provided within a conference on monitoring local elections from a gender equality perspective. The speaker, Jelena Borovinić Bojović, has held several high positions – she served as a minister of health, president of the Podgorica Assembly, and president of the Assembly of the Community of Municipalities of Montenegro. On the date when the media article was published, she was the leader of the 'For the Future of Podgorica' coalition list.

The primary audience includes women politicians, but also policymakers in Montenegro, and civil society organisations and activists. Those who believe they are not valued enough and that their contributions are disregarded by a system that prioritises formalities over substantive participation may resonate with this statement. Readers may also identify with this opinion if they believe that EU requirements neglect national and local specificities, which could potentially lead to a more sceptical approach toward EU policies. It advocates for a more inclusive policymaking mechanism that truly reflects national and local realities.

VI. Discussion

VII.1. Interpretation of findings

The findings show that the EU accession negotiations have significantly influenced the media discourse on gender equality in Montenegro. They further reveal that media portrayals of the EU and its influence on gender equality are dominantly positive. Furthermore, they show that EU gender equality requirements are dominantly portrayed as desirable goals in Montenegrin media discourse. However, CDA that was performed on a few articles with a negative tone revealed that some of them may portray EU requirements as unnecessary burdens.

Taking all results into consideration, the main claim of this research is that reforms aimed at achieving gender equality have been largely driven or influenced by the European Union. The most dominant narratives present the EU as a normative power and as a benevolent force. Other positive portrayals include the EU as a transformative power and as a hegemon in advocating for gender equality. These findings align well with theories about EU conditionality and compliance, showing that the EU's impact goes beyond institutional reforms to include social and normative changes within the candidate countries. The findings also confirm that Montenegro adheres to the EU norms, values, standards and legislative frameworks. Segments of media articles coded under “EU as a normative power” (52) likely emphasised the EU’s role in guiding Montenegro’s efforts and progress in achieving gender equality as one of the key EU values. Frequent mentions of EU funding and support (37) for various projects and activities that aim to improve the gender equality situation in Montenegro, portray it as one of the key actors in socio-economic development, with implications for how gender equality initiatives are funded and prioritised.

After determining the overall positive tone of the media and the inevitable EU’s influence, the study puts a significant emphasis on the negative attitude in the media discourse. Although the negative tone makes up only 10% of coded segments, it is crucial to understand what may hamper the process of achieving gender equality in Montenegro. It is argued that an in-depth analysis of critical opinions on the interference of the EU in gender equality issues and Montenegro’s response is crucial for understanding the whole picture. In other words, it sheds light on possible limitations of Montenegro’s progress on the one hand, and the EU’s approach on the other.

The analysis revealed different perceptions of gender equality in Montenegrin media. In the negatively toned segments of the media articles, there is tension between those two. Firstly, gender equality is presented as a fad, a trend, an EU condition or an external imposition. Secondly, others see it primarily as a foundation and a real need of any democratic society (specifically Montenegrin). In those articles, the tension between the two perceptions is created. From this, it can be implied that EU conditionality has imposed something that Montenegrin society was not ready for yet, arguably due to the cultural and patriarchal gender norms and customs. What these media articles were trying to convey is that seeing gender equality merely as a trend and something that has to be checked off to be closer to the EU is wrong and has adverse effects. Namely, they argue that gender policies are routinely created and are not tailored to the specific context of Montenegro and the real needs of its citizens.

This refers to the broader tensions between external obligations and internal commitment. Although not always mutually exclusive, this contradiction suggests that while legal frameworks may align with EU norms, the societal and cultural acceptance of gender equality remains superficial or even resistant. This eventually leads to the ineffectiveness of the implementation of gender equality laws and policies in Montenegro. The study assumes that this could be one of the reasons why gender equality efforts still have significant limitations besides the legal and institutional framework that is very well aligned with the EU standards.

The common theme linking all negatively toned media portrayals is the critique of superficial compliance in the area of gender equality. The emphasis is put on the implementation of laws, which is claimed to be highly restricted. Media discourse suggests that this problem is crucial in Montenegro. It confirms the findings of previous studies that mention it as one of the primary challenges that still need to be addressed.

These findings are believed to provide a comprehensive picture of how media in Montenegro portray the EU in discussions on gender equality. The media coverage of analysed articles on gender equality is believed to summarise and reflect the general narrative and attitude in Montenegro. Even though the media covers gender equality topic in the form of news reporting and feature articles, these offer robust coverage as well as different perspectives and opinions. Analysed media cover key developments and different perspectives including opinions of various stakeholders – such as politicians, EU representatives, civil society and decision-makers. However, it is assumed that the results do not represent the opinions of selected online

portals or journalists. Despite this, in line with the agenda-setting theory, news reporting has a crucial impact on shaping public perceptions by choosing which information to share.

VII.2. Challenging the notion of legal changes alone

The critical narrative of the EU's approach towards gender equality in Montenegro may reinforce scepticism about the efficiency of EU-driven reforms. A few limitations of those gender equality reforms were revealed in the media discussion:

- a) The lack of connection to the specific national and local context as well as the practical and strategic needs of women (and men) in Montenegro;
- b) The lack of proper implementation of gender equality laws and superficial compliance;
- c) EU's inconsistency in communication with the Western Balkans; and
- d) Marginalisation of civil society in the EU accession negotiations.

The media suggests that there is a need for a revision of gender equality strategy, that should focus more on public dialogue and media and civil society engagement, besides legal frameworks. It advocates the active engagement of women and other marginalised groups in the development of legislation that is meant to address their needs. It is implied that more inclusivity in policy-making processes should contribute to a deeper societal transformation.

The EU is criticised for taking a one-size-fits-all approach and for being inconsistent in communication with the Western Balkans. It is suggested that the EU's engagement in enlargement countries should be adapted to the national context and realities, noting that every country is specific and requires a unique approach. The discussion expresses a broader public concern about the efficiency and depth of the legal reforms, challenging the notion that simple compliance with the EU norms equals to the progress in the lives of women. It is argued that legal reforms alone will not have any drastic change on daily life of men and women in Montenegro.

VII. Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive overview of media coverage of gender equality in Montenegro from 2019 until 2024 in the context of EU accession negotiations. It also thoroughly analyses media portrayals of the EU and main narratives related to gender equality. The main claim of this study is that the EU accession negotiations have significantly influenced media discourse on gender equality in Montenegro.

The predominant media portrayal of the EU is positive, portraying it as a normative power, a benevolent force, and a transformative influence.

The findings are important because they represent media coverage on a crucial topic that not only reflects public perceptions but also potentially shapes them. They also reveal that the EU's influence extends beyond institutional and legislative frameworks, fostering normative changes within candidate countries like Montenegro.

The results point out that the EU norms, values and legislative frameworks are presented as desirable goals in Montenegrin media. This emphasises the role of the EU in guiding Montenegro's progress towards gender equality, which is in line with the concept of the EU as a normative power in candidate countries. Despite the persistence of issues such as patriarchal society, gender stereotypes and traditional roles, Montenegro appears to be moving in the right direction to combat these issues and achieve EU gender equality standards. On the other hand, findings also revealed certain limitations of the EU's influence. Namely, the most important is the notion of a tension between the perception of gender equality merely as an EU condition and the perception of it as a real societal need. Some of the articles present them as mutually exclusive ideas, while others call for emphasis on the latter one. Other important constraints include the superficiality of EU compliance, the lack of contextual adaption and the exclusion of civil society in EU negotiations.

The limitations of this study include the dominance of news reporting in the media articles covering gender equality, which may have restrictions on the depth of the analysis. It limits the analysis in a way that does not provide the media's own opinions and critical analysis. Some articles offer more in-depth analysis in feature articles, providing different perspectives and opinions. Thus, it should be noted that the findings do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the selected online portals or journalists. In addition, comparing changes over time was made difficult by the lack of media pieces from the pre-negotiation period. During the search process

for media articles, the initial idea was to compare the pre-negotiation period with the period after the start of negotiations to see if there were any changes and if so, what has changed. However, there were no available articles from before the start of negotiations, and even if there were only a few – it was surely not enough for a thorough analysis. In order to provide a more comprehensive knowledge of the EU's impact on perceptions of gender equality, future studies could broaden the scope to include other countries and different media formats.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the research provides insightful information on the complex relationships between gender equality, media portrayal, and EU accession negotiations. It contributes to the academic literature on media, gender equality, and EU integration by offering insight and understanding of how the impact of the EU is conveyed through media discourse in Montenegro. The research also provides a comprehensive overview of the specific national context of Montenegro and certain social behaviours and beliefs that significantly influence the progress in achieving gender equality. Thus, it provides a nuanced understanding of gender equality issues and achievements in Montenegro, together with its contextual background and the impact of the EU accession negotiations. With the analysis focused on the media discourse, the research underlines the crucial importance of the media in the broader context of gender equality promotion and EU integrations.

Since this study concerns only two genders (women and men), future research broaden the scope of the analysis into including persons with different gender identities.

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