

## ILGA-EUROPE 19TH CONFERENCE, 2015

### CONFERENCE HOST REPORT

1. During the **first day** of the conference the general atmosphere reflected a *sense of threat*, a *sense of urgency*, and a *sense of opportunity* regarding the present European and international situation of LGBTI rights and activism.

2. The *sense of threat* reflected perceptions of both the ongoing structural changes in the fabric of the social, economic, and political systems, and specific – i.e., conjunctural – phenomena, namely: the crisis of the welfare state; the rise of undemocratic governments, nationalism, and xenophobia; recession and austerity; the crisis of European moral authority regarding the refugee crisis; backlash in gender and sexuality rights; and the “highjacking” of the human rights discourse by its/our opponents, among others.

3. The *sense of urgency* reflected the felt need for *tactical* action targetting the specific phenomena that emerge from the more general phenomena identified above: the urgency in seeking allies; in overcoming the self-isolation of some LGBTI movements, groups or agendas; in enhancing internal diversity so as to enrich the discourse, the understanding of the surrounding world, and forms of action; in embracing an intersectional approach to both diversity and inequality; in avoiding forms of homonationalism by governments and conservative movements.

4. The *sense of opportunity* reflected a concern with more *strategic* and long-run decisions, regarding: whether *Human Rights* is the right – or the only - encompassing framework for discourse; whether *equality* or *equal opportunity* should not be brought back into our discourse (and European discourse, thus connecting other areas of exclusion, such as gender, religion, disability, etc.); whether *citizenship* should be also included in the discursive framework.

5. The **second day** of the conference allowed for a richer and more positive consideration of *opportunities* and *strategy*. As an example, let us consider three iconic moments in the day: first, the example of LGSM and the fight against Thatcher's policies and solidarity with the British miners; second, the discussions, in the "Diversity space", on religion and ethnicity; third, and between those two ends of the day, discussions on asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the panel on Greek politics. (entries 6, 7, and 8, respectively)

6. The iconic example of LGSM can be also a reminder of how we, LGBTI people, probably will never be *other people's miners*. This pushes us to think about how important it is to take our internal diversity as a positive quality that helps the building of bridges outside the LGBTI movement. Finding allies for specific causes, but also for general principles in times of constraints in democracy, the welfare state and civil society. The triangle Human Rights / Citizenship / Equality is probably the necessary one for framing our discourse, actions, alliance building and respect for diversity.

7. Both inside the movement and outside, *alliances* mean finding common ground and establishing compromise, under the bigger umbrella of that triangle, thus participating in the fulfilment of the democratic promise. And *diversity* should *not* be seen as a neutral term, but rather as an acknowledgment and recognition of positional *inequalities*, both inside and outside the movement.

8. More and more civil society organisations, governments and public opinion recognise that *the rights of minorities are the final test of democracy* of and for all. That is why *LGBTI rights are now the main target of reactionary attacks* **and** the *symbol of progressive politics*. This is the message that we can convey to our potential allies in order to overcome the more pessimistic perception that, as a minority, we will never be other people's miners....

9. By the end of the **last day** of the conference, we were able to ask ourselves *what can we take back home with us?* Before answering that question we needed to consider that we were all going back to *very different homes*. In some, there

simply is no democracy, there is growing nationalism (always a gender-and sexuality-based phenomenon), religious fundamentalism and backlash, border closings, xenophobia, austerity, and marginalisation of LGBTI issues in the political agendas. Also, the sum total of our different European homes is *less and less a common home*, if we consider the gravity of the decadence of the “European project”.

10. However, the LGBTI movement can be seen as *a home of sorts*. Because it is intrinsically *transnational, cosmopolitan, and diverse*. LGBTI people have always migrated or ran away from the countryside to the cities, or from peripheral to central countries; their cultural references have always been global; the internal diversity of LGBTI movements has allowed - and indeed pushed for - dialogues between men and women, cis- and trans-, “Black” and “White” and so forth. The minority status of LGBTI people allows them to be at the same time inside their niche and inside the wider society - indeed with a form of “*double consciousness*” (see W.E.B. DuBois) that allows for understanding, at the same time, how the mainstream society works (we were socialized in it and for it), *and* how our alternative situations and lives work (the experience of homophobia and transphobia, the embodied experience of inequality and exclusion). This is a characteristic that many wider social movements and identities do not have.

Considerations of diversity/inequality can and should lead to the building of alliances in which our “agenda” is never encompassing and over-determining like others (political ideologies, the labour movement, etc.). And since our experience is the epitome of *the personal as political*, the defence of our lives and rights can be a very palpable cause for others and a symbol of a more just society. From threat and urgency we can identify the opportunity that lies in diversity and in alliance building.

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