

# HOMOSEXUALITY AND POLITICS IN THE WESTERN WORLD

The place of homosexuality, reasons to affirm one's sexual identity and possible effects on diplomacy and international relations



Illustration: Nato Tardieu

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To cite this work: Josselin Chesnel, "Homosexuality and politics in the Western world. The place of homosexuality, reasons to affirm one's sexual identity and possible effects on diplomacy and international relations", Gender in Geopolitics Institute, February 2021.

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*"I would hope that five, ten, one hundred, a thousand would rise. I would like to see every gay lawyer, every gay architect come out, stand up and let the world know. [...] I urge them to do that, urge them to come out. Only that way will we start to achieve our rights. [...] And if a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door."*

Harvey Milk, 1978.

## I - INTRODUCTION AND PREREQUISITE

### A. Definitions: homosexuality and Western world

When it comes to talking about homosexuality and politics, gay visibility in politics as well as the effects that sexual orientation had, might have had or could have on the world's progress, it seems inconsistent to not mention Harvey Milk's heritage, a man who is widely considered as the first openly homosexual person to have been elected to an important institution in the West. Beyond that, as a pioneer of visibility of minorities in the public sector, not mentioning his memory, his fight would be an unforgivable mistake: assassinated for his success that must emerge like our own, we might not have been writing about him if it hadn't existed. With this duty of remembrance accomplished, what is the point of the study of homosexual identity in the Western political world? What could "the Western world" mean?

The Western world is a geopolitical concept that is notably inspired from the works of American professor Samuel Huntington about the clash of civilisations. The existence of this Western world is based on the idea that several nations are the heirs of European civilisational benefits. If this theory is generally the object of multiple scientific controversies, it is widely accepted that today, this world is made up of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the members of the European Union (EU) as well as their direct neighbours (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland...), or a geographic area of approximately a billion people in the world. If this report presents mostly the subject of homosexuality and those who proclaim it in the political sphere, meaning individuals who are attracted by the same sex as their own, it now

does so through the meaning that is generally used: LGBT+ people (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people and others).

This paper, which aims to be transversal and multidisciplinary, needs to study states that follow similar paths when it comes to the place of political minorities within it. It would be wise to also conduct an analogous study relating to other regions of the world.

Therefore, even if it not our role to be exhaustive, we will aim to create a political typology of LGBT+ people, as well as many of the challenges related to that that the entirety of Western societies face, before talking about more potential reflections.

## **B. The sociology of homosexuality: affirming oneself as a political move**

Let's start with an observation: being gay and proclaiming it is still a struggle everywhere in the West. Even if we hear and read that everything is well, or better than it was since the New York police raid on Stonewall Inn in 1969, a founding event for the gay community<sup>1</sup> and its emergence, we have to write that even though it's partly true, paradoxically, there is nothing more inaccurate. It must be emphasised that within our societies, LGBT+ people are still frequently marginalised and trapped in heteronormative societies<sup>2</sup>. For a better understanding of the stakes mentioned here, we will be classifying a concept that many LGBT+ people themselves don't consecrate within the community: on one side, the integralists (one's sexual identity is lived in a global way and qualifies the entire life of the individual who proclaims it) and on the other side, the universalists (they demand the right to indifference, and they are disciples of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948: they want emancipation through the perfect equality of the rights of all citizens of one nation). Sometimes, the two combine.

Therefore, for the integralists who wish for affirmation of sexual identity in politics, there has been a drive from public power that goes beyond societal context, a vague but fascinating hope of exerting a certain pressure on all minorities. In this sense,

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<sup>1</sup> The term that will be used in this paper as "LGBT+ community to talk about the movement of LGBT+ people as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> Heteronormativity, or the social norm of heterosexuality.

affirming a difference and working on protecting this right to difference and individual emancipation prevails much more than the right to indifference. The universalist side of LGBT+ politicians, however, defend and reclaims this right to indifference because it only conceives emancipation through the perfect equality of rights, which makes its movement not truly follow the footsteps of their pioneers. In this conceptual context, it is indeed something that we need to emphasise: for defenders of the right to difference, those universalists are mostly people the LGBT+ community frequently call “out of the circles”<sup>3</sup>, and wish for dissimulation rather than affirmation of their sexual identity, a tamer and more policed image of homosexuality, invisibility, assimilation to the common heterosexuality rather than assertion of differences as societal riches. This has been less and less prevalent in LGBT+ individuals who get involved in politics and who don’t want to apologise for their identity. Therefore, there are many questions that are raised in the minds of those LGBT+ people who make their sexual identity a political banner: why do public discrimination and homophobic hatred exist, and why do they perdure? How can we counter them politically?

However, sometimes, these two currents of the LGBT+ community converge. Therefore, within our Western societies, during electoral campaigns and when humiliating or insulting words are said to the LGBT+ community, the LGBT+ political sphere seems to agree on their point of view: ignoring those words would be allowing them. Not rising against them, not being outraged and not opposing them would be silently consenting. Indeed, everywhere in our Western societies, LGBT+ politicians express themselves and rise to defend the legacy of laws that are often new, bills that are considered as cultural victories obtained through necessary democratic confrontation when it comes to winning such battles<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, this Western LGBT+ political sphere often builds its defence on an idea of equality between citizens.

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<sup>3</sup> Meaning all the LGBT+ people who do not go to places or do not participate in events related to said LGBT+ community and who do not openly fight for the affirmation of their sexuality.

<sup>4</sup> One example is France, during the 2017 presidential campaign, where the candidate who has since become President of the Republic said that, in his opinion, the debates on marriage for all in 2012 and 2013, as well as the practice of the government of the time, had humiliated the *Manif pour tous* activists, who were opposed to the law. These remarks provoked a certain amount of protest from several openly homosexual French political representatives.

The defence of acquired rights and the battle in favour of future rights is often what motivates LGBT+ people who get involved in politics: it is part of what guides their actions towards the citizens of their respective states. It is also a question of accomplishments: thus, when Bertrand Delanoë, a first-time candidate to the position of mayor of Paris in 2001, came out three years before that, therefore becoming the first major French politician to do so and then winning the electoral battle despite it all, it is proof for not only French LGBT+ people but also people from abroad that it is possible to succeed when you're openly gay. His election at the head of the capital of a Western country is such a rare political event that it is still mentioned today as an essential phase of emancipation and political visibility of LGBT+ people in the world<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, in April 2019, openly lesbian Lori Lightfoot is elected at the head of Chicago, the third largest American city. A previous event that is even more impactful was the election of Georgina Beyer, the first transgender woman to become a member of Parliament in New Zealand in 1999.

### **C. The communitarian aspect: the old demon that divides LGBT+ people**

While some people call the political actions of LGBT+ people fundamentalist, meaning that they are uncompromising towards heterosexual individuals, it would be more accurate to call them integralist. The concept of LGBT+ community is, of course, directly influenced by this perception. Therefore, an openly LGBT+ politician's actions are sometimes envisioned in a communitarian sense but it serves the greater good, in their opinion. According to this conception of public action, serving the progress of the rights of those who have them the least is serving the state of the community they represent, as well as the image of this entity in the eyes of the citizens and the rest of the world. That is what guides, in part, the actions of Western governments that have been aiming for better rights for sexual minorities since the beginning of the century, at the price of long and difficult political discussions, but in the name of the consecration of ideas and the defence of minorities to allow for better citizenship for all.

From then, the question of communitarian necessity is frequently justified for the LGBT+ political sphere. In societies with educational systems that are largely

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<sup>5</sup> It holds even greater symbolic strength because during a public event in 2002, Bertrand Delanoë was stabbed by someone who justified it by saying he "didn't [like] politicians, especially homosexuals."

considered as inequalitarian and creators of uncontrollable frustrations here and there, the LGBT+ political sphere indeed believes that these problems are for LGBT+ people to try and fix. There are also many who emphasise, not because of defeatism but to show the necessity of the battle that links them to the LGBT+ community, how the resulting uninformed societies when it comes to sexual minorities and their rights, whose populations follow the law regarding that, is a limit that they think is unattainable in our time. Until that time comes, allowing and judging progress can't be done without individual involvement from LGBT+ people for the common population.

So while there is, here and there, an obvious problem of conceiving that two men or two women could love and accompany each other, it is out of the question that LGBT+ people stop loving or accompanying each other, or that they be quiet about it. LGBT+ men and women who get involved in politics everywhere within our Western democracies know that. This communitarian dimension and its flourishing seem to explain rather clearly the pivot from the beginning of the 2000s thanks to the mayor of Paris, Bertrand Delanoë. Indeed, while he was openly favourable to Pacs (civil partnerships) at the end of the 1990s, he was clearly opposed to the idea of same-sex marriage in the name of the fight against LGBT+ communitarianism. Therefore, in the name of the communitarian aspect, which he ends up conceiving as a necessary battle, but refutes as a form of separatism, he declares that he is in favour of same-sex marriages at the beginning of his mandate as the mayor of Paris.

Animated by a vision of emancipation of LGBT+ people, these LGBT+ politicians affirm their respective sexual orientations and therefore mould part of the decisions that they will need to make in their everyday lives. However, does that influence diplomatic and international relations, especially when being gay is a crime punished by imprisonment or death in more than seventy countries?

## II – THE PLACE OF SEXUAL VISIBILITY IN WESTERN POLITICS

### A. Europe: current general state of the affirming of sexual identity and appreciation of equal rights

While Western societies may seem peaceful to the non-Western world, they seem ordinarily brutal to their LGBT+ political spheres. However, can we really say that they are intolerant? When it comes to talking about LGBT+ people and their place in society, we saw that several political visions of sexual visibility exist. Therefore, and to illustrate, during almost every Western electoral campaign, it is the role of political LGBT+ people to talk about everything discrimination towards minorities. Within different Western societies, the activist side of the LGBT+ community is particularly significant. We can extend this point simply by mentioning the case of Robert Biedroń, an openly gay Polish deputy mayor then European MP, a strong activist for the rights of LGBT+ people and candidate of the left-wing coalition in the 2020 presidential election. Therefore, he has made it known several times that it seemed crucial to him to affirm his sexual identity and brandish it like a political weapon while, during the year 2019, many Polish regions (almost a hundred) declared they were “LGBT-free zones” and that the government itself was also involved in a similar logic of discrimination towards LGBT+ people.

This activist aspect partly explains why more and more representatives of Western LGBT+ political staff believe that the notion of tolerance is in fact, at best, inadequate. In their opinion, homosexuality should not have to be simply tolerated, but must be expressed freely: not on the margins, not wisely, not intermittently. For other LGBT+ people, who sometimes get confused with the former, it must become so common, even so common that it could go unnoticed, just like heterosexuality. What is being argued is that no one should have to come out of the closet, because it is unacceptable that loving someone of the same sex as one's own is at best a vice, and at worst a disease. Let's unpack this with the help of statistics by studying data provided by ILGA Europe (European Region of the International Lesbian and Gay Association), the European section of this international association. In close collaboration with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, it annually ranks forty-nine European countries in terms of the legal equality of LGBT+ people compared to other citizens. Between 2012 and 2017, while France and its government were more committed than usual to the rights of LGBT+ people, France went from twenty-third

to fifth place in the ILGA Europe ranking. Despite these great results, and partly due to the lack of significant progress on LGBT+ minority rights since then, France was ninth in 2019, while the Republic of Malta was very distinctly in first place, followed by Belgium and Luxembourg, which have respectively had and still have an openly gay head of government<sup>6</sup>.

Ireland and Serbia, whose heads of government are also openly LGBT+<sup>7</sup>, are respectively eighteenth and thirtieth. That point must be emphasised: while the affirmation of sexual identity in international politics does not necessarily have an important impact, it undeniably has some influence on the population's perceptions, with the Republic of Ireland being a considerably catholic and conservative nation, and with the Serbian society still deeply influenced by religious tradition<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, Ireland is on a level of legal equality between heterosexual and LGBT+ citizens that is very similar to Germany or Iceland's, who are respectively sixteenth and nineteenth, and far more advanced than other states like Switzerland, who is twenty-eighth. Actually, Serbia finds itself on a similar level as Switzerland, but also as Czechia, a member state of the EU and sitting at the thirty-first place. Serbia still is far more advanced when it comes to equality than for example Lithuania, Cyprus, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland or even Latvia, who are all member states of the EU and are at the very end of that ranking, which shows how belonging to the European Union does not come with any legal and communitarian constraints when it comes to equal rights.

Let's also make something clear: new civil rights for homosexuals does not mean that they feel more comfortable in society. Indeed, every year there is a great survey on the condition of LGBT+ people in the member states of the EU. Regarding the question of worrying about holding your partner's hand in the street, half of the citizens of the EU who participated in the survey annually confirm that they feel real worry about it. While this varies depending on the country, we can mention two cases. The first is the case of the states of Central and Eastern Europe, where the gaps are huge. Therefore, while 53% of Slovenes said they were discriminated against or harassed due to their sexual orientation in 2012, 60% Croatians shared that sentiment,

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<sup>6</sup> Belgian Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo from 2011 to 2014, who was the first openly gay head of government in the EU ; and Luxembourgish Prime Minister Xavier Bettel since 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Respectively, Leo Varadkar (elected in 2017) and Ana Brnabić (also elected in 2017).

<sup>8</sup> 90% of Ireland and Serbia indeed declare that they are believers.

making it the second most worried country on this subject after Lithuania. It is partly linked to their respective contemporary history. Indeed, Slovenia quickly opened to the West after their independence war in 1991, wishing to join the European space to the point of becoming a member of the EU in 2004 and therefore being the first Balkan state to do so. Croatia, despite having become independent in the same day of the same year, took longer to join the EU: not only because it wasn't ready to follow the Union's demands, but also because of a lack of drive that was expressed as largely as in neighbouring Slovenia. It joined the EU in 2013 and as of today, is still the latest member of the European Union. This study from 2012 is even more interesting in the case of France, where 41% of French people declared they were discriminated against or harassed due to their sexual orientation, which can seem like a high number for West European country. The best explanation for this percentage can probably be found in the phase of nationwide debates relating to same-sex marriage, a period where the tensions between the *Manif pour tous*<sup>9</sup> and LGBT+ people, as well as the frictions between political representatives of the majority and opposition were numerous. Consequently, it is important to understand that countries that frequently show themselves to be the most advanced in terms of individual liberties are not automatically the most open societally when it comes to LGBT+ themes and rights.

## **B. Important precedents in terms of political affirmation and visibility**

In the West, there are many events that aptly demonstrate the role played by homosexuality and LGBT+ leaders who proclaim it, both in interpersonal and global diplomatic relations. Only a few cases suffice to illustrate this.

For example, the Icelandic Prime Minister Johanna Sigurdardottir, who governed the country from 2009 to 2013 and openly lesbian: she was the first head of state to have married someone of the same sex while still in power<sup>10</sup>. In 2011, she is followed by the then-new Belgian Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo. However, an important step seemed to be taken in 2013, when Xavier Bettel became the Prime Minister of Luxembourg. After having married his husband during the year 2015, only a few months after the adoption of the same-sex marriage law in the country, he's since

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<sup>9</sup> The political and social group that is most firmly opposed to same-sex marriage.

<sup>10</sup> Johanna Sigurdardottir married her wife during the year 2010, not long after the adoption of the law on same-sex marriage.

then been regularly proclaiming his homosexuality and the existence of his husband, Gauthier Destenay. The international press has since often been echoing their private life. A notable example is that, since 2017, Gauthier Destenay has appeared on official photos of the different North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) summits as the First Gentleman among the First Ladies. While that is a non-event for the majority of international observers, others emphasise how this official photo of all the partners of the heads of state and government allows for a wider visibility of LGBT+ people. In the mentioned cases of these three homosexual heads of state, their form of activism proclaims an affirmation of their sexual identity and therefore a manifestation of the right to difference rather than a formality for any right to indifference, which, as opposed to them, the current Irish and Serbian heads of state, Leo Varadkar and Ana Brnabić proclaim. While the first wished to say in 2015 that his sexual orientation did not define him, the second simply declared that she did not give her sexual orientation any importance compared to the “capacity to love her homeland and work in the greater interest of her country.”

On a more anecdotal note, that allows to demonstrate the degree of influence that LGBT+ activism can have on heterosexual heads of state and government, a French example is worth mentioning. In June 2016, while reacting to the homophobic shooting in Orlando, Florida, USA<sup>11</sup>, which stirred many emotions within Western LGBT+ communities, President François Hollande made a mistake and had his digital social media French presidential page write that “The homophobic killing in Orlando struck [...] at the freedom to choose one's sexual orientation and lifestyle”. Alerted to the tactlessness of such language, which was widely criticised for suggesting that sexual orientation is a choice, he corrected himself and rewrote the following day: “The homophobic killing in Orlando struck at America and freedom: the freedom to live one's sexual orientation and choose one's way of life”, which was then quite widely praised despite the initial blunder. In doing so, the French President was responding to the demands of a large community, who feared that their struggle would not progress because the overwhelmingly male and heterosexual political representatives in power around the world. Thus, for the LGBT+ people referred to as integralists in this paper, who favour the presence of LGBT+ political staff, it is a question of not leaving power to heterosexual men alone. This is all the truer as these men also seem capable of the most violent protests, as seen with leaders such as

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<sup>11</sup> In the nightclub named Pulse, 49 people were killed and 53 were wounded by the terrorist Omar Mateen.

Donald Trump in the United States or Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, who are regularly accused of that violence. If one indeed starts from the premise that a head of state sets the tone for the society that elected him, the mental representation of LGBT+ people in that society can be terrible. When Jair Bolsonaro had be written on his Facebook page on the 29th of April 2020 that the World Health Organisation's policy for the education of young children is "pleasure in touching one's body", "masturbation", "homosexuality" and "first sexual experience", this almost immediately exalted anti-LGBT+ people in their words and actions, even if said message was quickly deleted<sup>12</sup>. In this particular respect, universalists agree with integralists: the less LGBT+ people are understood, the more they will be marginalised, which the LGBT+ community as a whole seems to refuse to allow. Globally across the Western world, LGBT+ people who are involved in politics are in fact still fearful of the legacy of unequal and conscientiously brutal European societies.

Moreover, the same French President Hollande came very close to a diplomatic incident with the Holy See in 2015 as he named Laurent Stefanini as its ambassador, an openly gay diplomat. Faced with outraged contestations from the Vatican, the post of French ambassador remained vacant for more than a year. For LGBT+ people who are politically involved within Western societies, it is very clear that their cause will never be subjected to a consensus, but always a dissensus, especially when they try to influence political and/or diplomatic decisions. From then on, a part of them considers that those who encourage, in one way or another, the exclusion of LGBT+ people and intolerance towards their existence and the exercising of their rights, are political opponents.

### **C. The example of same-sex marriage**

While a part of the Western LGBT+ community thinks that the fight for the right to marriage is a bourgeois struggle, the other thinks that, on the contrary, it is a battle for a pure equality of rights in the way that, legally, LGBT+ could have the choice of getting married or not. Here and there in the Western world, it clearly looks like it's a

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<sup>12</sup> Words translated from Spanish on the Argentine information website Infobae, available at [https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2020/04/30/jair-bolsonaro-dijo-que-la-organizacion-mundial-de-la-salud-incentiva-la-masturbacion-y-la-homosexualidad-entre-ninos/?fbclid=IwAR1-525F0TQoWWj1pvuSTSeOEXm\\_uZP2AX8DnaT\\_TDzdlARtFpeyzXRgRjg](https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2020/04/30/jair-bolsonaro-dijo-que-la-organizacion-mundial-de-la-salud-incentiva-la-masturbacion-y-la-homosexualidad-entre-ninos/?fbclid=IwAR1-525F0TQoWWj1pvuSTSeOEXm_uZP2AX8DnaT_TDzdlARtFpeyzXRgRjg).

political fight that is more and more victorious for the community. In the year 2001, the Netherlands became the first country to legalise same-sex marriage. They are followed by the following states: Belgium in 2003, Spain and Canada in 2005, Norway and Sweden in 2009, Portugal and Iceland in 2010, Denmark in 2012, France and New Zealand in 2013, the United Kingdom in 2014, Luxembourg, the United States and Ireland in 2015, Finland, Malta, Germany and Australia in 2017, and Austria in 2019, therefore making up the twenty-eight countries who authorise same-sex marriage.

During the different societal debates relating to same-sex marriage that took place in the last few years in the West, it was common for governments who wanted to institute such legislations and for LGBT+ who wanted to access this right to be accused of leading an “evil project” by the more conservative parties. These opposing parties even went so far as to compare same-sex partners to animals and called LGBT+ couples magnets for affectively deranged people. Some also declared that the progress of LGBT+ rights wasn’t important because the battle against unemployment was more serious, and kept repeating that LGBT+ people disturbed the natural order, to the point of comparing them and their children to “powerful terrorists.”<sup>13</sup>

Also, and somewhat paradoxically, within several member states of the EU, many people from the far-left said and wrote that governments who are politically committed to equal rights gave LGBT+ the right to marriage. But for defenders of the law, that is an error of appreciation: marriage is certainly not given to LGBT+ people, they fight for the ability to offer all couples the possibility of getting married if they so wish. That is why in many countries, like in France, it wasn’t about gay marriage but rather, as its name indicated, *mariage pour tous* (marriage for all). For politically committed LGBT+ people, legal battles like the right to marriage are always necessary demonstrations of the power relations with heterosexual decision-makers. Every time a bill that favours the rights of sexual minorities is adopted, it is, in their opinion, not society that is crumbling, but rather a traditional conception of it.

For LGBT+ activists and defenders of marriage for all, the battle against conservatives became even more legitimate since the 4th of May 2020, when the outgoing Pope Benedict XVI compared gay marriage to “the Antichrist”, the entity that would preach hostility towards the Catholic faith before the Apocalypse. Actually, these laws related to marriage must, for LGBT+ people who defend them, make history, sometimes at

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<sup>13</sup> Words that were notably said by MP Nicolas Dhuicq during French Parliamentary discussions of November 2012 relating to the bill on the fight against terrorism. He adds that “Terrorists have one flaw: they’ve never known paternal authority.”

the price of particularly violent political disputes, which brought them non-negligible political visibility. It is a necessary step of normalisation before starting other battles for the recognising of LGBT+ people, like the right to access ART (Assisted Reproductive Technology) for all, or issues related to personal records of transgender people. It is for that reason that the Luxembourgish Prime Minister often proclaims his marriage to his husband. Similarly, in the United States, since the federal decision of the country's Supreme Court related to same-sex marriage in 2015, the political scene clearly appears more accessible to LGBT+ candidates. The popular Pete Buttigieg, the first openly gay political personality of influence and candidate to the Democrat primaries before abandoning his spot for Joe Biden, demonstrates that fact. Since then, many close friends of Buttigieg's, sometimes LGBT+ themselves, advocate for him playing an essential role in Biden's campaigning team and, beyond that, in the American administration if Biden was to be elected in November 2020.

### III – LGBT+ POLITICAL INVOLVMENT: COMMUNITARIAN

#### MOTIVES ?

##### **A. The permanent challenge of visibility within traditional societies**

In the West, the perception of discrimination seems to be rather unanimous among LGBT+ people. It very often involves traditional religions, like worship representatives or followers. It is often the believers of monotheistic religions that have resurfaced during the debates on the right to marriage and have attempted, with varying degrees of success depending on the national societies studied, to regain the place they used to have in the public domain. In this context, the obstacle to be overcome is clearly that of the lack of love between the religious fact and the supporters of the affirmation of a minority sexual identity. This is indeed to be noted: for many advocates of the rights of LGBT+ people, religions invoke a norm which is their own, and do not tolerate anything that differs from it. In short, religions and religious practices are said to exert a harmful pressure on the construction of the identity of many individuals in search of meaning, acceptance of who they are and individual emancipation. If there is indeed a feeling that seems to dominate within Western LGBT+ communities, it is that of seeing religions monopolise the public space through the weight of taboos, and the way in which these taboos are passed on within families, generation after generation. Yet for committed LGBT+ people, newfound personal freedoms have been hard won, and perhaps nothing matters more than their need for protection from religious actors.

Therefore, beyond purely communitarian motives to the involvement of LGBT+ individuals in politics, there are many stakes for the international LGBT+ political spheres. Since the hatred and rejection of homosexuality continues to wound and kill, since it happens within private and public spheres, since the violence on identities assigned by electoral necessity sometimes seems crazy, since it hurts, since defending the notion that homophobia is not an idea or an opinion but a crime is needed, since it is unacceptable that the suicide rates among young homosexuals is far higher than for young heterosexuals, since we need to repeat that homosexuality is neither a choice nor an illness since it can constitute the very essence of a human being, a perfect type of equal rights as well the recognising of identities and sexual singularities is what all societies should strive for. Together, these two objectives, respectively belonging to followers of LGBT+ universalism and integralism, are not

antinomic. Therefore, in 2015 in the United States, when a Californian federal bill, as marginal as it may seem, turned out to aim to legalise the killing of LGBT+ people, these people as well as the American LGBT+ political spheres see it as an obvious justification of their political involvement, regardless of the way that they express it..

It is in this context that the battles for new LGBT+ rights take place here and there in Europe, like for example the one favouring the access to ART for lesbian couples. Indeed, the fact that different governments do not plan any extension of the system often seems reactionary and lesbophobic to them, which is all the more true when the same governments, when they consider potential legalisation, imagine it with conditions that LGBT+ people and their political representatives consider discriminatory: mandatory mention of a sperm donation on official registries (which is not the case for heterosexual couples who use ART), civil liability of the couple to the donour, etc. In short, while this is not only a process of differentiation, enshrined in the law, between homosexual couples and heterosexual couples, it is also, and just as explicitly, a clear distinction made between women and men. Thus, in this respect, the political battle within Western societies is sometimes twofold, and thus provokes a certain convergence of struggles. Indeed, while it not only directly concerns LGBT+ people and their rights, it also involves women's rights and the issue of gender equality.

To illustrate this, another example of the struggle for the visibility of LGBT+ people within Western societies, and beyond mere political representation, is the one initiated in Scotland in 2018. On that year, Scotland became the first nation in the world to include LGBT+ rights history in its school curriculum, politically driven by the fight against homophobic and transphobic violence.

## **B. The Chechen example that worries the West**

At the beginning of 2017, international medias talked about work and concentration camps in the Constitutive Republic of Chechnia in Russia where LGBT+ people were persecuted and executed for their supposed homosexuality.

Some headlines even announced that President Ramzan Kadyrov had planned on exterminating every LGBT+ person present in the Republic by the beginning of Ramadan, in full impunity and just beyond the borders of Europe. Back then, a spokesperson for the Chechen presidency even declared that "There are no

homosexuals in Chechenia, how can we repress people who don't exist? If some cases were to appear, (...) their close ones would make sure that they're sent to places no one ever comes back from."

The reactions from LGBT+ people and LGBT+ political spheres were unanimous everywhere in the West: horror predominates, and many LGBT+ people thought that the worst part of this is the deafening silence of a community that watches this happen from a distance and does not intervene in these purges, rather than the purges themselves. There is a question that many of them therefore asked: is it by choice, by powerlessness or because the victims are homosexuals, thus people to whom it is harder to relate?

During the same year, and as a response to the realisation that the situation was not getting better but worse, organisations for the defence of LGBT+ rights declare, here and there in Western societies, that they urgently need volunteers to house exfiltrated people, meaning persecuted Chechen homosexual refugees. Many representatives of the LGBT+ political spheres then let it be known that, in their opinion, the state did not take enough accountability. Therefore and for example, during the last French presidential campaign, the organisation named SOS Homophobie calls out for candidates to take a stance on this subject. "Foreign policy is one of the most important fields of action for the President, we wish that the candidates to the highest elected position clearly position themselves against LGBTphobia and defend human rights on an international scale". During the year 2017, many Western organisation for the defence of LGBT+ rights decided to file a complaint to the International Court of The Hague for genocide towards LGBT+ people.

### **C. Interviews: food for thought and prospective**

*The following interviews aim to enrich and go deeper in reflection, and therefore are animated by the wish to let the actors of French society speak, meaning a politician and a member of an organisation. Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, these interviews were conducted by phone calls.*

#### 1. Pierre Karleskind, French European MP

**Pierre Karleskind, a French member of the European Parliament, agreed to testify to us. President of the Pêche Commission, he is also part of the European**

**Parliament's LGBTI Intergroup, a parliamentary forum that aspires to protect and make LGBT+ people's fundamental rights progress within the EU. As the civil identities of the individuals sometimes mentioned are not relevant to this paper, this interview has been marginally modified so that they do not appear.**

*"At the Parliament, we experience a lot of diversity, so we often crack jokes like:  
"Oh! Did you find a straight assistant?""*

*Homosexuality and European Parliament: what can be said about it?*

**Pierre Karleskind:** At the European Parliament, the question [Note: of belonging to a sexual minority] is not a non-subject. It is a workplace that is sufficiently multicultural, and it is interesting in that way. In fact, gay or lesbian, no one cares. People who work there can talk about it or not, even if it's probably not brought up as much on the side of our conservative colleagues. But for work relations, it doesn't really matter.

At the Parliament, we experience a lot of diversity, so we often crack jokes like "Oh! Did you find a straight assistant?"

*So it is never really important?*

**Pierre Karleskind:** An example about transgender people proves me wrong: there is someone at the European Parliament who is known to be transgender. While it isn't certain that it changes the way she works in any way, it makes people talk for sure. What still surprises me is the idea that homosexuality [Note: or any other sexual minority] always is about your private life, while heterosexuality is perfectly public! But this person, she's transgender, and we hear it in almost every conversation: "Oh, you know this person is trans", like it has any importance!

Also, within the Parliament, there's an organ, the Conference of Presidents [Note: of commissions and political groups]. One of its most eminent members always makes statements that are practically caricatural. Member of the EPP (European People's Party), he is on the party's right-wing side. In almost every intervention of his, he can make chauvinistic and misogynistic comments towards his female colleagues. He always has something to say to one colleague in particular...He calls her "the

Parliament's terrible Child", while he calls his male colleagues "President this", "President that".

*Let's think about a prospective: what would happen if the United States had an openly gay president, as a first world power as well as for its diplomatic relations?*

**Pierre Karleskind:** I think it will happen. This country is capable of the worst and the best: Barack Obama was George W. Bush's successor, and then his own successor was Donald Trump. The best can emerge from the United States. People say that Barack Obama was the last black president of the United States, not because he was literally the last, but because since then and from now on, no one would care about a presidential candidate's skin colour. I think the same could happen [Note: for homosexuality]: a sort of right to indifference would predominate.

Would that have an impact on diplomatic relations? That's an interesting question. I remember what an ambassador told us in a conference while I was still a student. He told us that diplomacy had nothing to do with morals, that there was nothing good or bad in that field. In fact, it's Realpolitik, and the people we talk to don't care about who we are. How else would Hillary Clinton as Secretary of state have negotiated with powers that don't give women basic rights? The reality here is that a diplomat is almost no longer an individual: they are what they represent, and that's why it shouldn't fundamentally have any impact.

*So homosexuality and diplomacy: what are the incidences?*

**Pierre Karleskind:** Something I find interesting about French and international diplomats is that there is an important number of homosexual people. I think that's due to the fact that, in order to have a diplomatic career, we need to move countries every 3 years, and if we want to get married and take care of our children, we need to end our diplomatic careers. And, at least for now, heterosexuals have more children than homosexuals! There's a real skimming, and not at a small scale.

In fact, diplomacy between states in the world is mostly led by homosexual people. Not having children seems more practical to have a career!

2. Bruno Gonidou, SOS Homophobie Bretagne delegate

**Bruno Gonidou, a delegate from SOS Homophobie Bretagne, also agreed to testify. Created in 1994, the organisation SOS Homophobie aims to fight against homophobic and transphobic acts in France, but also to fight for the recognising and the progress of LGBT+ people's rights.**

*“ Proclaiming your LGBT+ identity and being, for example, a head of government, is a message of hope for many gays or lesbians. It's saying that:  
“ Whatever your sexual orientation is, it's possible.” ”*

*Let's imagine an openly gay leader, somewhere on the planet: does this have any impact on anything?*

**Bruno Gonidou:** The impact that LGBT+ leaders have is real, because it breaks the codes of the white and heterosexual male politician. Proclaiming your LGBT+ identity and being, for example, a head of government, is a message of hope for many gays or lesbians. It's saying that “Whatever your sexual orientation is, it's possible”. It's a bonus, because you serve as a role model and you make the community gain visibility. Affirmation is a beautiful message that says, “I succeeded, and I carry on”. Many young LGBT+ people need people to relate to, especially if they're fifteen, sixteen or seventeen, if they're isolated and ask themselves a lot of questions. If everyone embraced their identity in politics, it would open the door to a lot of perspectives. That's why it's important to talk about it.

In fact, there are two strong messages: first, openly affirming oneself as LGBT+, then the access to the head of state. The impact they have as individuals on equal rights, on the struggle against LGBT+phobias is strong, and the message they deliver is just as strong.

*Let's think about a prospective: what would happen if the United States had an openly gay president, as a first world power as well as for its diplomatic relations?*

**Bruno Gonidou:** If it hasn't been the case already! Firstly, I imagine it would sour the relations with several states, like those around the Arabian Gulf. But it could also be an effective means of diplomatic pressure for the United States since several states in the world would be forced to compromise. If an openly gay president were elected in the United States tomorrow, it would not cause any diplomatic blockades or breaks, but a little period of tension. It is difficult to imagine a rupture of relations due to a leadership perceived as LGBT+. In fact, it would be a great occasion to make the rights of LGBT+ people in the world progress, it would be another weapon and a symbolically strong message. It would send a message of hope both in the White House and in international negotiations.

But it all depends on the political use that is made of one's sexuality. The final aim is to not emphasise it, to trivialise it. But again, if this were the case in a Western power, the symbolism would be strong and Saudi Arabia, for example, would not break off all contact for all that. The impact is therefore at least symbolic. It is up to the elected representative to choose whether or not to make something of their homosexuality and say "I am not just that, but I am gay, and I want to make the world progress on this issue", or to put their sexual orientation aside. In any case, the symbol remains: to all those who are struggling, who are persecuted, who are rejected, it is to say that we can do it. However, this would not constitute a revolution either: as gay as they are, the leader of the United States would not stop wars! It's a matter of opting for a vision without clichés: a gay man is not always nice.

*Homosexuality in terms of international relations: was there an important contemporary event?*

**Bruno Gonidou:** During one of the meetings with Mike Pence, Vice-President of the United States who was well-known for his anti-LGBT positions, the Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar came with his husband [Note: in March 2019 for an official visit to Washington] and declared to the press that "I am here this morning as the leader of my country, imperfect and human, but judged for my political actions and not my sexual orientation [...] I don't believe my country is the only one where that is possible: it is in every country where freedom is precious."

I'm also thinking of the speech that Luxembourgish Prime Minister Xavier Bettel gave in front of the leaders of the Arabian League [Note: in February 2019 at the summit of the EU and the Arabian League in Egypt, Xavier Bettel proclaims his homosexuality

and his marriage and deploras the fact that he would've been sentenced to death if he had been a national of one of the represented countries that day], where he introduced himself by affirming his homosexuality. There was freezing cold tension in the room, and even if this political tool was on the table since the beginning, discussions continued.

*Xavier Bettel and Leo Varadkar are indeed openly LGBT+ public personalities, even if the former is more of an activist than the latter. What must be known about this political affirmation of sexual identity in Europe, for example?*

**Bruno Gonidou:** When you look at openly LGBT+ European leaders, it is not a communitarian vision that they uphold, but the idea that their decision to proclaim their sexuality does not prevent them from being elected and running things. The idea is to say that they no longer lead a good little straight life in order to do well and have a career! And it's already a nice message to say: "I'm asserting myself, this is who I am, and I'm not reducing myself to this." In any case, the aim is not to vote for any sexuality, but for a programme. In any case, it's certain: an openly gay or lesbian politician is a huge symbol and raises hopes about potential power relations.

In short, it is fine for the politician to come out openly, but it is their decision. Beyond the political choice that this implies, it is above all a personal choice. But if they do it, it allows a certain representativeness, takes up space and trivialises homosexuality. In fact, I am in favour of those who come out in politics, because it sends a strong message! But it's not our job to push for outing [Note: the fact of publicly revealing someone's homosexuality without their consent]. Nevertheless, I encourage everyone to say it, as much as possible, and in all areas: politics, sports, the press... To make things progress in our societies, better visibility and therefore possible identification is what is needed. This is the ideal to strive for, even if that path is, once again, personal. Moreover, while the bigger activists do not conceive commitment without affirmation, others are gay and committed, but do not wish to put their sexuality forward. So should LGBT+ political figures be affirming their homosexuality? No. Would I like them to? Yes, I would.

*During the French presidential campaign of 2017, SOS Homophobie durably alerted and even called out to candidates regarding the situation of LGBT+ Chechen people. What were the impacts of this campaign?*

**Bruno Gonidou:** These campaigns have an impact if we don't let up the pressure. It's important to show the candidates what's happening elsewhere, to push them to publicly take a stance. You force their eyes to open, because without a bit of a forced interrogation and solicitation, it can be hard. But maintaining the pressure is a daily struggle. After an awareness campaign for the candidates, you have to check what they do once they're elected, and being that pebble in politicians' shoes is the associations' role! That's why they're important: they shake up public powers, they call out to others to raise awareness and give people a prod, they show certain subjects to the public and act as a sort of customer service beyond awareness, meaning the study of commitments, of different fortunes and successes. What have you done with your commitments? Where are we at? What about what wasn't done? It can be applied to Chechenia as well as other international themes.

Public powers are the ones who can change things. An association can't do anything without the help of the elected and the government. There are therefore some questions that I ask myself when it comes to those themes: should our head of state give a long speech to the Kremlin and Putin? Should we push him to do it? Should we consider that this is not the time to talk about this? Where should we aim? How should we solve this problem? Today, we don't talk about Chechenia as much, but that problem isn't solved yet. And what about the states where homosexuals are hanged? What about the "contracts" at stake? How can we juggle that? It's not easy for a head of state, but can we compromise with human rights? If yes, then how far...?

*Actually, can't we believe that it could've been different if an openly gay candidate fully committed themselves to the subject? And if there were things to learn from involvement in international politics when one is an LGBT+ person, what would they be?*

**Bruno Gonidou:** If a homosexual candidate had taken this subject for themselves and made it a major point of their programme, the cause would've gained great visibility. In that case, sexuality is important. While simply being LGBT+ isn't enough to take care of a problem in politics, it is true that we could've gone deeper if a clearly affirmed candidate had fully embraced the subject.

These leaders give visibility, break codes and stereotypes and therefore work for a more inclusive society. It isn't about taking a communitarian vision of things. One doesn't vote for a candidate because she's a lesbian, but above all because of the programme.

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