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**Political challenges of LGBT activism  
in post-soviet Armenia**

Bachelor thesis

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## Zadání bakalářské práce

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### Cíl, metody, literatura, předpoklady:

The main topic explored in this paper is the approach of the Governments of the third Republic of Armenia to and its impact on LGBT activism. Religion and traditions play a huge role on the formation of the state policy, which unfortunately challenges development of LGBT movement in Armenia. Religion and traditions hugely affects the political life in Armenia, and national and the "true" Christian identities combined under the same identity and values does not give a room for development of LGBT movement. In addition, it happens in a historical moment in which LGBT rights campaigns have never been so successful in other Eastern Partnership Countries. From 2007 (Parliamentary) 2008 (Presidential) elections, when the Republican Party won the elections and next year Republican President was elected, the Armenian government started to build a nationalistic image and identity of heteronormative society, where LGBT movement does not have a place to exist. Armenia decriminalized homosexuality in 2003, but until now, there is no legislation, national strategy or even a public debate around equality for LGBT community in Armenia, in a country, which declared and obliged itself to promote European values, equality and human rights. From 2003 until 2008 presidential elections, Armenia had a European discourse and even declared that the ultimate goal in foreign policy is to become a member of the European Union. But later Armenia ruled by the Republican president from 2008 until 2013, who developed a close relationship with Russia, and became one of the most LGBT-phobic countries in the European region, according to ILGA-Europe. Therefore, the existence and development of LGBT movement is not successful so far in Armenia, and the purpose of this paper is to explore the main challenges that LGBT movement faces so far to achieve its goals. Based on the above-mentioned issues, this paper seeks to answer two main questions. They are: 1. How did the state policy towards LGBT issue change before and after 2008 elections in Armenia that implied an ideological change in government? 2. What kind of impact did those changes have on LGBT movement in Armenia? To find the answers of the above-mentioned questions different methods in different stages of the research will be used. The main methodology of the research is analyzing policy changes towards LGBT issues and the power of LGBT movement diachronically in different periods (again from 2003 2008 and from 2008 2013), because diachronically comprising the same issue at different times in one country offers a better solution to the control problem. For better understanding of the chosen topic, analysis of political discourse towards LGBT issues will be done from 2003 2013. In addition, interviews with LGBT organizations will be conducted. As a theoretical framework of this research, the political opportunity theory described by Meyer and Minkoff in their work called "Conceptualizing political opportunity". Political opportunity theory promises a means to predict variance in the periodicity, style, and content of activist claims over time and variance across institutional contexts.

Amnesty International. 2013. Human Rights Situation of LGBT People, Annual Review Armenia. Armenia: Public Information and Need of Knowledge NGO. Bernstein, Mary. 1997. "Celebration and suppression: the strategic uses of identity by the lesbian and gay movement". The American Journal of Sociology 103, No. 3. Retrieved from: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/chwe/ps269/bernstein.pdf> (11.04.2017). ILGA-Europe / COC Netherlands. 2009. Forced Out: LGBT People in Armenia. Amsterdam, Brussels. Kollman, Kelly, and Waites, Matthew. 2011. "United Kingdom: changing political opportunity structures, policy success and continuing challenges for lesbian, gay and bisexual movements". In: The Lesbian and Gay Movement and the State: Comparative Insights into a Transformed Relationship. Eds. Manon Tremblay, David Paternotte, and Carol Johnson. Burlington: Ashgate, 181196. Kornak, Jacek. 2015. Queer as a Political Concept. Helsinki: Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies Gender Studies University of Helsinki. Academic thesis. Lijphart, Arend. 1971. "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method". The American Political Science Review 65, No. 3. Retrieved from: <http://www.la.utexas.edu/users/chenry/core/Course%20Materials/Lijphart1971/0.pdf> (17.04.2017). Meyer, David S. 2004. "Protest and political opportunities". Annual Review of Sociology 30, 125145. Retrieved from: [http://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/IMG/pdf/2004\\_Meyer\\_POS\\_ARS.pdf](http://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/IMG/pdf/2004_Meyer_POS_ARS.pdf) (13.04.2017). Meyer, David S., Minkoff, Debra C. 2004. "Conceptualizing Political opportunity". Social Forces 82(4), 14571492. Retrieved from: <http://www.somuchthis.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/politicalOpportunity.pdf> (18.04.2017). Tilly, Charles. 1977. Studying social movements/studying collective action. Working paper 168, University Of Michigan. Retrieved from: <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/50943/168.pdf> (15.04.2017). United Nations Human Rights Committee. 2012. Human Rights Violations of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) People in Armenia: A Shadow Report. Geneva.

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### **Declaration of Authorship**

I hereby attest that this thesis and its content is based on my own work, unless stated otherwise. All the references and sources of information used to compose this thesis have been quoted and acknowledged, under the supervision of my supervisor.

In Hradec Králové 18.7.2018

Signature

## **Abstract**

GEVORGYAN, ASHOT. Political challenges of LGBT activism in post-soviet Armenia. Hradec Králové, Philosophical Faculty, University of Hradec Králové 2018, 40 pp. Bachelor thesis.

This thesis tries to explore the main challenges that LGBT movement in Armenia faced to achieve its goals from 2002 till 2012. The aim of the thesis is to diachronically compare and analyze the political discourse on LGBT issues and its impact on LGBT movement in the following periods: from 2003 – 2007, and from 2008 – 2012.

The methodology of the research is analysis of political discourse of representatives of the Government and Parliament on LGBT issues, and analysis of the power and the unity of LGBT movement diachronically in two electoral periods (from 2003 – 2007 and from 2008 – 2012).

The theoretical framework of this research constitutes the combination of two theories related to the studies of social movements: structure of political opportunities and the resource mobilization theory. Research studies the influence of political discourse on the power and unity of LGBT movement in Armenia based on the principles of resource mobilization theory through the analysis of the resources (material and human), mobilization capacity (number of protest) and the unity of the movement.

Key words: LGBT, Armenia, social movements, political discourse.

## **Anotace**

GEVORGYAN, ASHOT. Politické výzvy LGBT aktivismu v post-sovětské Arménii Hradec Králové, Filozofická fakulta, Univerzita Hradec Králové 2018, 40 s. Bakalářská práce.

Tato práce zkoumá hlavní výzvy, které čelilo LGBT hnutí v Arménii k dosažení svých cílů od roku 2002 do 2012. Cílem práce je diachronně porovnávat a analyzovat politický diskurz o otázkách LGBT a dopad toho diskurzu na LGBT hnutí v následujících obdobích: od roku 2003 do 2007 a od roku 2008 do 2012.

Metodologie výzkumu je diachronní komparace analýzy politického diskurzu o LGBT a síly LGBT hnutí v obou volebních obdobích (2003 – 2007 a 2008 – 2012).

Teoretický rámec tohoto výzkumu představuje kombinaci dvou teorií souvisejících se studiem sociálních hnutí: struktura politických příležitostí a teorie mobilizace zdrojů. Práce zkoumá vliv politického diskurzu na sílu a jednotu LGBT hnutí v Arménii na základě principů teorie mobilizace zdrojů prostřednictvím analýzy zdrojů (materiálních a lidských), mobilizační kapacity (počet protestů) a jednoty hnutí.

**Klíčová slova:** LGBT, Arménie, sociální hnutí, politický diskurz

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Armenia is an LGBT-phobic heteronormative low middle-income country, where the situation is difficult for LGBT people to come out, be visible, express themselves or fight for their rights. Over the last couple of years, LGBT people have indeed become more visible and active in the public sphere. Although Armenia decriminalized homosexuality in 2003, society remains highly intolerant and traditional in its values (Carroll, Quinn, 2003: 28). Nonetheless, the state and society never cease to force them back “into the closet” with threats of ostracization, harassment, physical and psychological violence, hate speech, hate crime and bullying. Despite a degree of success achieved in recent years, members of the group continue to face violence, oppression, and harassment from the general public, as well as specific institutions, including from politicians. Bias-motivated violence based on gender identity frequently goes unreported and, hence, remain without proper investigation and retribution especially when there is a lack of legal framework related to hate crime. Deeply rooted LGBT-phobia permeating virtually all segments of society is reinforced by traditional values, as well as binary, heteronormative gender roles, which, in turn, fuel the discriminatory culture prevents LGBT people to fully enjoy their rights and freedoms. A flawed understanding of democratic values and minority rights has also largely been inherited from the Soviet Union, and has been symptomatic of small nations with a collective memory of unresolved conflict and survivalist ideology, where LGBT people are seen as a threat to local customs and religion. Moreover, political elites promotes LGBT phobia and during elections to get electoral credits. According to one of the studies carried out by Pink Armenia in 2011 about public acceptance of LGBT people , 18.6% of Armenians think that homosexuality is a disease, 12.7% Armenians think that It is the negative influence of western countries and 72.1% have negative attitude towards LGBT people in Armenia (Pink Armenia, 2011: 4-25).

Generally speaking, LGBT people are still deemed to be at best non-existent, and at worst deviant, immoral, abnormal or diseased. This is



especially true as in many cases it is actually the local media, some civil society groups and even politicians promote LGBT-phobia.

The independent candidate Robert Qocharyan won presidential elections in February 2003. Later, during the same year, Parliamentary elections were held in Armenia, when the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) emerged as the largest party. After the election in 2003, the Government, A was formed by three parties – , Rule of Law Party and Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Central Electoral Committee of RA: 2018). The RPA party won the parliamentary elections held in 2007 with almost 33% of votes, and with the Rule of Law Party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and Prosperous Armenia formed the Government (A1 Plus: 2016). The Heritage party was the only pro-Western and opposition, having the least number of seats in the Parliament. In 2008 Serzh Sargsyan, leader of RPA party and acting prime minister won the presidential elections and became the President of Armenia.

The 2003 – 2007 Government, with the head of independent president Robert Qocharyan, had a pro-European discourse, became a member country of Council of Europe, decriminalized homosexuality and signed many international documents on human rights protection. President Qocharyan even declared that one of the long-term goals of Armenia is to become an EU member State. For Armenians, and especially for the Armenian LGBT community, being an EU or Europeanized country, means being a country, which accepts the diversity, inclusion and equality, where the rights of citizens are protected without any discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. As the first step to be integrated with European structures and as a condition for Armenia to become a CoE member country, Armenia decriminalized homosexuality in 2003.

The 2008 – 2012 Government, with the head of RPA Serzh Sargsyan (the successor of Robert Qocharyan), adopted close relationships with Russia, which is famous with its LGBT-phobic political environment. Soon many international organizations, such as Human Right Watch and ILGA-Europe, listed Armenia as one of the LGBT-phobic countries in the European region.

Between 2003 and 2007, Armenia improved the situation of LGBT people and gave a hope to LGBT community for equality by decriminalizing

homosexuality. However, the change of pro-European policy into pro-Russian aggravated the situation and Armenia remained as one of the most LGBT-phobic places in Europe from 2008 to 2012.

On one side, Armenia was taking international obligations to improve human rights situation, but on the other side, the political environment in Armenia was highly LGBT-phobic. Armenian LGBT movement was struggling to improve conditions for LGBT people, but it seems that it did not have many achievements so far. As a person who is actively involved in human rights protection, in this research I try to understand and explore the main challenges that LGBT movement in Armenia faced to achieve its goals. The aim of the thesis is to diachronically compare and analyze the political discourse on LGBT issues and its impact on LGBT movement in the following periods:

- from 2003 – 2007, and
- from 2008 – 2012.

It was impossible for me to write about LGBT movement in Armenia, without a help from a local LGBT organization. While I was searching an organization to host me for the research, I found there are only four active LGBT organizations. One of them – “Right Side” Human Rights defender NGO hosted me as a researcher from December 2017 until January 2018, to help me with my research and the thesis. “Right Side” Human Rights defender NGO is a relatively new, community-based NGO, which seeks to ensure well-being, protection and equality of trans community in Armenia by achieving social-cultural and legal changes through cooperation with state bodies, civil society and with international organizations. It is the only trans organization operating in the Southern Caucasus region (Right Side NGO: 2018).

Based on the above-mentioned issues, this research seeks to answer two main questions, which are:

1. How did the political discourse on LGBT issues change before and after 2008 elections in Armenia?
2. What kind of impact did these changes have on the power and unity of LGBT movement in Armenia?

The methodology of the research is analysis of political discourse of representatives of the Government and MPs on LGBT issues, and analysis of the power and the unity of LGBT movement diachronically in two electoral periods (from 2003 – 2007 and from 2008 – 2012). The book “Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on language” by Michel Foucault was helpful for choosing the right methodology for the research.

I gathered the information and data used for the research from different sources. The sources include both printed and online documents. I analyzed interviews with politicians, parliamentary discussions, reports and studies from various local and international organizations, such as “We for Civil equality” NGO, Pink Armenia, CoE and interviews with local activists such as Karen Badalyan (the founder of “We for Civil equality” NGO) and Aida Muradyan (former senior adviser of the RA Ombudsmen), which I conducted during my internship. Most of the data is available online and the time frame is selected according to the research questions (2003 – 2012). I collected some useful information based on techniques of non-participant observation during my internship. The information is mostly about community-based organizations and their resources.

The theoretical framework of this research constitutes the combination of two theories related to the studies of social movements: structure of political opportunities and the resource mobilization theory. These two theories give enough academic space for in-depth understanding of the given social movement, particularly the political factors influencing on the movement to achieve its goals and the strength and mobilization of the movement. David Meyer describes the political opportunities theory in his book “Politics of Protest: Social Movements in America”. This theory allows to understand the influence of the political context and environment on the success of the movement. In this case, research focuses on discursive political opportunities, specifically how the discourse of the political elites influence on the unity and strength of the LGBT movement in Armenia. I study the influence of political discourse on the power and unity of LGBT movement in Armenia based on the principles of resource mobilization theory through the analysis of the resources (material and human), mobilization capacity (number of protest) and the unity of the movement. John McCarthy and

Mayer Zald wrote about this theory in “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory” in “American Journal of Sociology” in 1977. Diani’s and Tilly’s works were also very helpful for me to define the theoretical framework of the research. I used Diani's definition of social movement described in the book “Leaders or Brokers? Positions and Influence in Social Movement Networks” to conceptualize LGBT movement in Armenia, and Charles Tilly’s definition of mobilization and protests.

The first LGBT group formed in Armenia was “Menq”<sup>1</sup>, in 2003, which was later registered as “We For Civil Equality” NGO in 2006. The second famous LGBT organization is Pink Armenia, established in 2007. In 2008, WOW – queer women network was established. Later in 2012 MSM Armenia started to work on LGBT issues too.

The research analyzes the power and unity of the movement considering “We For Civil Equality” NGO, Pink Armenia, WOW and the MSM Armenia NGO, because these four organizations were community based organizations active in the selected period.

The literature used in this research consists of books and different academic articles, media articles, studies and reports made by local and international organizations and some internal documents of Armenian LGBT organizations. The used literature is in three languages: Armenian, Russian and English. Most of the literature is available in electronic formats.

The research is composed of eight chapters including the introduction, where the main problem and research questions are defined. The second chapter includes the two theories: political opportunity structure and resource mobilization, as well as the definition of social movement. The third chapter is dedicated to the methodology of the research. The fourth chapter is the analysis of political discourse on LGBT issues in Armenia and consists of three sub-chapters: political discourse in 2003 – 2007, political discourse in 2008 – 2012 and comparison of political discourse in the two periods. The fifth chapter studies power and unity of LGBT movement in post-soviet Armenia and consists of three sub-chapters: power and unity of LGBT movement in 2003 – 2007, power and unity of LGBT movement in 2008 –

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<sup>1</sup>In English “We”.

2012 and comparison of power and unity of LGBT movement in the two periods. The conclusion of the thesis includes the answers to the research questions and outcomes of the research. Then there is the full list of abbreviations and literature.

## **2. THEORETICAL PART – SOCIAL MOVEMENT, ITS STRENGTH AND UNITY**

Social movements have been a subject of large number of scientific studies in Europe and in the United States of America for the last thirty years.

This chapter includes three sub-chapters: the definition of LGBT movement as a social movement, the theoretical framework of this research, which constitutes a combination of two theories related to the studies of social movements: political opportunities structure and resource mobilization theories.

### **2.1. LGBT movement as a social movement**

Conceptualizing the social movement is a rather complex task. Many sociologists tried to conceptualize social movement. Starting from 19<sup>th</sup> century, number of concepts of the social formations were formulated and updated throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Barša a Císař, 2004: 19-20).

According to Mario Diani, “social movement is a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups or organizations engaged in political or cultural conflicts based on shared collective identity” (Diani, 2003: 105 – 122).

Social movement organizations are establishments engaged in actions to advance movement's goals. Usually, movements consist of many organizations pursuing different political or cultural changes. As such, there were number of NGOs and groups in 2002 – 2012, which worked for LGBT equality in Armenia. The first LGBT group formed in Armenia was GLAG which later changed the name into “Menq”, in 2003 “Menq” was registered as “We For Civil Equality” NGO in 2006. The second famous LGBT organization is Pink Armenia registered in 2007, WOW – queer women network was established In 2008 and in spring 2012 MSM Armenia started to work on LGBT issues too.

These four NGOs considered themselves as LGBT community-based organisations and had similar missions. All of them had similar missions,

which were about achieving equality for LGBT people, or to improve the lives of LGBT people by using different approaches and strategies.

There were other non-LGBT organisations and activists as well, who advocated for LGBT equality, i.e. Armenian Helsinki Association, individual activists and journalists etc. But my research focuses only on studying only four of them and in the following chapters I study the power and unity of the movement based on these four organisations:

- “We For Civil Equality” NGO,
- Pink Armenia,
- WOW – queer women network, and
- MSM Armenia.

## **2.2. Political opportunities theory**

I have already mentioned in the introductory part that the theoretical framework of this research constitutes combination of two theories related to the studies of social movements: political opportunities structure and resource mobilization theories.

In order to answer to the research questions formulated in introduction, I start with studying the openness of political environment towards LGBT issues.

The theory of political opportunities allows understanding the changes in political environment and its influence on the development and success of social movements. (Císař a kol., 2011: 149). The theory argues that the opportunities provided by the political environment and changes in this environment, can cause protests, which are the main prerequisite for the formation and development of social movements. David Meyer also argues that, when authorities offer a given constituency routine and meaningful avenues for access, only few of members of social movements protest . At the other end of the spectrum of openness, authorities can repress various constituencies, and develop a prerequisite for a movement to lodge their claims. (Mayer, 2004: 129).

The political opportunities theory speaks about the characteristics of the external environment, which supports or discourage collective action. The

initial condition is that external factors increase or decrease the prospects of social movement in recruiting members, making demands and protest. The political opportunity theory, presupposes the establishment and activism of social movements, especially when a certain political, social, cultural order is problematic and cannot be solved by the order itself (Mayer, 2004: 1457 – 1492).

I chose this theory, because I study and compare the openness of the political environment towards LGBT issues through political discourse analysis by comparing it diachronically in 2003 – 2007 and in 2008 – 2012.

### **2.3. Resource mobilization theory**

This subchapter conceptualizes the theory of resource mobilization and the unity of LGBT movement.

From my point of view, to understand and compare the power and unity of LGBT movement in Armenia, in two different electoral periods. In order to complete the above mentioned task I chose the resource mobilization theory. While the political opportunities theory provides possibility to study the external factors of the environment, where movement exists, the resource mobilization theory gives opportunity to study the strengths and weaknesses of the movement, based on its resources and mobilization capacity.

The development of resource mobilization theory dates back to the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This approach deals primarily with the movement, its strategies, its possibilities and its dynamics.

John McCarthy and Mayer Zald put forward the theory in the American Journal of Sociology in “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory”. The appearance of their theory was a breakthrough in the study of social movements because it focused on variables that are sociological rather than psychological. Thanks to them, social movements are no longer viewed as irrational, emotion-driven, and disorganized. The core of the theory is social movement organization works towards bringing money, supporters, attention of the media creates alliances with those in power, and refining the organizational structure in order to be successful. The theory also revolves around the central notion of how



messages of social change are spread from person to person and group to group. (McCarthy and Zald, 1977: 1212–1241).

Císař in “Staří, noví, radikální: politický aktivismus v České republice očima teorie sociálních hnutí”, which is available in “Sociologický časopis”, also notes, that the resource mobilization theory focuses on various types of resources and their availability. It is the resources that, according to this approach, decide how successful the movement can be. The more resources are available, the more chances there will be to achieve a successful social change. Activist groups may have different resources, but their availability is variable and important. Movements need organizational basis, funds, assets, and human resources (including members and volunteers). They also need moral and cultural resources, such as legitimacy, solidarity, skills, etc. (Císař, 2011: 151).

### **2.3.1. Resources of the movement**

Edwards and McCarthy identified five types of resources available to social movement organizations (Edwards, McCarthy, 2004: 116-152). These types are:

Moral: Resources available to the SMO such as solidarity support, legitimacy and sympathetic support.

Cultural: Knowledge that likely has become widely, though not necessarily universally known.

Social-Organizational: Resources that deal with spreading the message.

Material: Includes financial and physical capital, like office space, money, equipment and supplies.

Human Resources: such as labor, experience, volunteers and expertise in a certain field.

I limit my research on studying the material and human resources of SMOs. I study and compare financial resources (including the sources of funding) and human resources, which I consider the number of paid staff and the volunteers of SMOs.

### **2.3.2. Mobilization of the movement**

To understand the concept of mobilization, I should refer to Tilly, who describes mobilization as a process in which the group ceases to be a passive union of individuals and becomes an active participant in public life (Tilly, 1978: 69). Social movements are adapting and combining various forms of protest to gain support for people who would otherwise stay at home (Tarrow, 1998: 20). The repertoire of collective actions is more or less general, because similar groups use similar forms of collective action (Znebejánek 1997: 114). The mobilization usually takes the form of protest actions, which Porta and

Diani notes as a mobilization form of individual and collective action aimed at affecting cultural, political, and social processes. These protests challenge the status quo or decisions that are seen as unfair, through a number of practices such as petitions, demonstration, boycotts, refusing to pay rent or tax, occupations, sit-ins, blocking traffic, strikes, and riots (Porta, Diani, 2009: 64 – 87).

In this research I analyze and compare the number of protests organized SMOs in two selected periods. I limit the forms of protests into number of parades, marches, demonstrations, petitions and sit-ins organized by SMOs.

### **2.3.3. “Unity” of the movement**

Once social movements are defined as a diverse range of collective actions undertaken by many different actors, the issue of a movement's unity becomes problematic. Mario Diani asserts that the boundaries of a social movement network are defined by the specific collective identity shared by the actors involved in the interaction (Diani, 1992: 9). Alberto Melucci notes that individuals unite through a large number of interactions (i.e, relationships) in which they negotiate and collaborate (Melucci, 1988: 329–48).

To explore the unity of the movement, I analyze and compare the following information in two electoral periods diachronically.

- Whether there are some common platforms that SMOs participate coordinate activities or projects

- Whether these SMOs implement collaborative projects together or how they cooperate while organizing activities .

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Political Discourse analysis**

Due to the nature of the subject of this research, discourse analysis is the most appropriate method to answer to the research question formulated in the introductory chapter. To understand the possible changes of political discourse on LGBT, I analyze and compare the political discourse diachronically in two electoral periods in Armenia (2003 – 2007 and 2008 – 2012).

But first of all, there is a need to understand what is discourse and how to analyze the political discourse.

The word "discourse" comes from the Latin words *discurrere*, which means, to start talking, to speak, to talk, to talk about a topic (Vávra, 2008: 204).

The interdisciplinary use of the term subsequently appeared in the 1960s, when Foucault talked about it in his epistemological work "Archeology of knowledge and the discourse on language". According to Foucault, the discourse brought significant rethinking of the view on the language: the language ceases to be a non-problematic tool of communication and becomes a certain network of coordination that outlines and predicts the movement of our thoughts and the telling about the reality (Foucault, 2002: 94-96). Fairclough, Norman and Wodak noted that the understanding of discourse as a social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, the institution and the social structure that frames it (Fairclough a kol, 1997: 258 – 284).

Discourse analysis has traditionally been defined as a set of methods and theories for examining the language used, talk etc. According to Van Dijk, topics of discourse analysis include various levels or dimensions of discourse, such as sounds, gestures, syntax, the lexicon, style, rhetoric, meanings, speech acts, moves, strategies, turns, and other aspects of interaction. Genres of discourse (various types of discourse in politics, the media, education, science, business, etc.) (Dijk, 1993: 352 – 371).

Bhatia talks about the political discourse as a tool of governments that reflects the dominant ideology. He also adds that this tool is subject of questioning and interpretation (Bhatia 2005: 9 – 12).

Even though it is very common in social and humanitarian sciences today, political discourse is a particularly complex phenomenon in terms of definition. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sartori introduced a flexible approach by arguing that political concepts may be relative to the “language” of a certain political belief. Some scientists went even further and argued that the political processes themselves are constituted through the text and the use of speech (Chilton and Schäffner, 1997: 206-230). Norman Fairclough believes that political discourse is the clearest illustration of the constructive / constitutive force of discourse (Fairclough, 1995: 3-4).

Politics can be divided into political science, political philosophy and practical politics. Part of the political discourse is anything that is said or written in one of these areas. It is also the talk of ordinary people about political issues or politics. Currently, media provides large amount of political discourse. Thanks to them, politics gets to the audience, to the citizens (Bartošek, 2005: 23 – 35).

The term political discourse is also analyzed by several linguists. The Russian linguists Baranov and Kazakevich, emphasize its institutional character and define it as a summary of all speech acts used in political discussions and also public policy rules, which are proven by tradition and experience. (Baranov, Kazakevich 1991: 5-12). They also point out that communication takes place not only between specific people but also between representatives of one or more public institutions (government, parliament, social organizations) and representatives of another public institution and citizens. This approach is important for this research, because it explores the interaction of these actors.

Sheygal describes a political discourse as an institutional communication, which unlike personally oriented communication, uses a system of professionally oriented characters, that is to say, it has its own language (lexicon, phraseology). Taking into consideration, the significance of the situational and cultural context, political discourse manifests itself as a

phenomenon, which can be characterized by this sample formula: discourse = own language + text + context (Sheygal, 2000: 175).

In the context of this research, I consider as a political discourse, a discourse, which denotes written and verbal communications on LGBT issues by Armenian politicians, specifically by representatives of the Government and MPs.

For the purposes of the discourse analysis I selected a corpus of texts. I selected texts from the period since the year of decriminalization of homosexuality in Armenia, that is 2003 till 2012. To understand the possible changes of political discourse on LGBT, the political discourse is analyzed based on a diachronic comparison approach in two electoral periods (from 2003 – 2007 and from 2008 – 2012) in Armenia.

The below mentioned sources are forming the corpus of texts to analyze and compare. These sources include interviews and statements made by MPs and representatives of the Government about LGBT issues in the selected period.

- The study “The social situation concerning homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in Armenia” conducted by CoE,
- The report “The situation of homosexuals and lesbians; public perception of gays and lesbians; availability of state protection and whether there exist state programs to promote the respect of their human rights (January 2003 – December 2005), done by Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada,
- Report “Forced out – LGBT people in Armenia” conducted by ILGA-Europe/COC fact finding mission in Armenia,
- “Human Rights Violations of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) People in Armenia: A Shadow Report” submitted for consideration at the 105th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Committee,
- Article “Bigots on Baghramian? Parliament Members Continue Gay Debate published by Julia Hakobyan in ArmeniaNow,
- Article “Armenia: Gays Live with Threats of Violence, Abuse” published by Marianna Grigoryan in Eurasianet,

- Article “In Armenia, gays say they face scorn and harassment” published by Gayane Abrahamyan in ArmeniaNow,
- Article “Is the presence of dashnak<sup>2</sup> songs and Artyusha Shahbazyan in “Diversity Parade” and presence coincidences” published by Arpine Simonyan in Aravot daily,
- Article “Materials collected on another attack on rock pub in Yerevan” published in news.am,
- Article “Arson Attack on Gay-Friendly Bar in Yerevan Raises Fears of Nationalist Extremism” publish by Byron Bradley in ararat magazine.or,
- Article “We are for criminalizing homosexuals” published in Aravot Daily,
- Article “Far right arson against DIY bar in Yerevan, Armenia” in avtonom.org
- Article “Armenian nationalism. Raffi versus sectarianism?” by Vahan Ishkhanian,

### **3.2. Strategy to analyze the power and unity of the movement**

To understand the power and unity of LGBT movement in Armenia, I chose the method of documents' of analysis. There are several types of documents that I analyze. On the one hand, there are articles available online about the resources of movements, on the other hand, there are number of reports and information available on the websites of selected organizations. I also conducted Interview during my internship, with one of the founders of LGBT movement in Armenia – Karen Badalyan, for deepen the understanding of the power and unity of the movement.

During my internship in “Right Side” human rights defender NGO, I also used one of the techniques of qualitative research, which is non-

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<sup>2</sup>Dashnak is a person who is a member of ARF party. Dashnak songs promote Armenian patriotism. The origins of these songs lay largely in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Armenian political parties were established to struggle for the political and civil rights of Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire.

participant observation of the movement. I tried to observe the ties within the movement by everyday interaction with different actors of the movement.

When I was looking for data about financial resources of the movement for the period of 2003 – 2012, I discovered that not all organizations have web pages). Besides, some of the NGOs do not operate anymore and finding a contact person was almost impossible.



## **4. POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON LGBT ISSUES**

This chapter analyses and compares the political discourse on LGBT issues in Armenia and consists of three sub-chapters: political discourse in 2003 – 2007, political discourse in 2008 – 2012 and comparison of political discourse in 2003 – 2007 and in 2008 – 2012.

### **4.1. Political discourse in 2003 – 2007**

This sub-chapter analyses the political discourse of MPs and representatives of the Government on LGBT issues from 2003 – 2007 in chronological order based on the corpus of text which is provided in methodological part of the research.

In the fall of 2004, prompted by the announcement of the leader of extreme right wing political party “Armenian Aryan Union” Armen Avetisyan that some Armenian top officials were gay, various parliament members initiated debates, which were broadcasted over the public TV channels. “Any member found to be gay should resign” one of the MPs stated. Presidential advisor for National Security, Garnik Isagulyan shared this opinion with the MP. Another female MP, Alvard Petrosyan told Aravot daily that, as a “normal woman”, she is afraid of homosexuals, and called them “enemies of women”. Although Armenia decriminalized homosexuality in 2003, one year later the Parliament held a discussion about “gay officials” and encouraged them to resign. These particular discourses are proves, that even though Armenia started Europeanisation of the country, being homosexual remained highly unacceptable. The political environment still considered LGBT people as a threat for the country.

In early 2006, when asked if he thought an LGBT parade would be allowed in Yerevan in case of an organization applying for authorization, the representative of Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave the opinion that a “gay parade would only be possible in Armenia in a hundred years. He said society would be strongly against an open demonstration of homosexuality, it could be perceived as an attempt “to recruit young people into homosexuality”. Although, there were no legal obstacles to organize protests, this discourse

negatively affected the mobilization of the community and organization of protests, which I study in the next chapter.

Another example of discourse when Ministry of Defense spoke about the rape case in the Army in 2006. The representative normalized rape of homosexuals in the army, when journalist Zhanna Alexenyana addressed a question to the representative of the Ministry of Defense about the case, she only expressed that “cases of this nature are quite common in the army and that in 2006 alone there were about 30 cases of that kind.”

Similar negative discourse leading to forced segregation of LGBT people in prisons was documented. The Ministry of Justice responsible said: "I will be surprised if there are...".The Ministry representative furthermore did not link segregation with discrimination: “If a man does not want to have a dinner on the same table with a LGBT person, I do not see this as a crime, or as a discrimination. You can also not want to have dinner with persons who smell bad. But if I have a shop and I say the LGBT persons cannot buy from my shop, it would be discrimination. But if I do not want to have dinner with him because I do not like him, it is not a crime.” This case is a proof that political regime does not think that LGBT people exist. Moreover, they compare LGBT people with people, who smell bad.

While addressing the problems of LGBT people in employment area, representative of Ministry of labor and social protection refused to acknowledge the need of protection of LGBT people and declared that: “Any factors not related to the work cannot be used for discrimination of any employee” and “the legal basis thus is sufficient to ensure protection of rights of LGBT persons in the field of employment and social care and insurance.”<sup>3</sup>

Both, the representatives of the Parliament and the Government made discriminatory and hateful statements about LGBT issues during the selected period. The analysis of political discourse in this period shows that the LGBT movement had limited political opportunities and the regime was not open for the success of LGBT movement.

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<sup>3</sup>Armenian legislation does not protect LGBT people from discrimination based on SOGI.

#### **4.2. Political discourse in 2008 – 2012**

This sub-chapter analyses the political discourse on LGBT issues in 2003 – 2007 in chronological order based on the corpus of texts which is provided in methodological part of the research.

The first discourse of this period is the answer of the representative Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the question of CoE related to LGBT rights: “The problems related to LGBT persons are very low on the priority list of the Government, partly because the Government has much more urgent matters to address, partly because of the nature of problems. There are very minor problems, since there are very few people in the country with a non-traditional sexual orientation”. The representative clearly mentioned that the Government does not prioritize LGBT issues. Meanwhile, the Government did not accept LGBT people as people with non-traditional sexual orientation with minor problems.

Some other Armenian public officials have spoken out against the LGBT community by making a number of discriminatory statements. Notably, the Secretary of the National Security Council, Arthur Baghdasaryan, announced that LGBT individuals are a “threat to Armenian national security because homosexuality is both extremely dangerous and unacceptable for Armenia”. Answering to the query by Armenian tabloid "Irvunk" newsletter, Arthur Baghdasaryan, in his capacity as a secretary of Armenia’s National Security Council, stated: “I am against limitations of human rights, but in general homosexuality is “unnatural” and “unacceptable” for Armenians as the first Christian nation with traditional values”. This case shows that the religion influenced on the political environment, which notably remained intolerant towards LGBT people, and considers them as a threat to the security of the country.

MPs Karen Avagyan and Eduard Sharmazanov, both from RPA, made similar discriminatory statements to the public in 2008. Avagyan pledged that “if I knew any homosexual, I should not have any relations/contacts with him”. Sharmazanov stated that he “doesn’t accept sexual minorities and strongly object to their existence”. Both of these statements of the representatives of the Parliament promoted segregation and exclusion of LGBT community.

There were recorded constant clashes between the police and gay and transgender sex workers (whose night meeting point is children's park near the Yerevan municipality), which resulted in eristic discussions over LGBT issues in Armenia in 2009. Yerevan Mayor Gagik Beglaryan made statements about the park in a local press declaring he would "clean the city of transgender sex workers". Municipality refused commenting on the statement, saying that "the municipality has much more important problems to solve than gays ". Emma Khudabashain, an MP, talking about the same park encouraged people to "throw stones at homosexuals". Contrary to the expectations of many activists that MPs should condemn the statement of the Mayor, the representatives of the Parliament called for violence against LGBT community.

In May 2012 two young people bombed the D.I.Y pub<sup>4</sup>. Later, ARF MP Artsvik Minasyan paid the bail to release them. The MP told in an interview to Panorama.am website, that he is personally familiar with the young perpetrators. "I consider them as normal guys, and police still has to find out to which extent they are a threat to the society". To question if deputy has some position in regards to sexual minorities, he answered "For sure I have, but I would not like that to be the main argument against (the pub). In this case, I am certain that these young guys acted right – in context of our national ideology. It is another issue that damages they caused should be compensated".

The MP considered the perpetrators as "normal guys", and even publicly confirmed that he paid the bail for their release. This is an example that the politicians continued to support violence against LGBT community by creating an environment of impunity

A number of NGOs organized a "Diversity parade"<sup>5</sup> in 2012. Secretary of the ARF faction Artyusha Shahbazyan commented to Aravot.am

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<sup>4</sup>D.I.Y. Rock Pub was located in Yerevan center and known by many as a gathering spot for the Armenian LGBT community.

<sup>5</sup>The United Nation marks World Day for Cultural Diversity on May 21. To mark the day, number of non-governmental organizations, including Pink Armenia, organized a march in Yerevan. A nationalist group of young people tried to prevent the march. The Police managed to prevent the clash, and no serious incidents were in place.

about anti-parade protesters wearing ARF t-shirts<sup>6</sup> and rejected the party involvement in organizing attack on the participants of the parade. Shahbazyan considered a good sign that young anti-march demonstrators were singing patriotic song: “If our people start to sing our songs it is a good sign, they come closer to their national roots”. In response to the question what impressions he had from the “Diversity Parade”, Mr. Shahbazyan replied: “It is very sad that often national issues do not have such a response. I am wondering what makes this topic so interesting?”.

This was the first time when the community co-organized and participated in a public demonstration, but politicians criticized it and supported anti-demonstration organized by nationalists.

Meanwhile, Raffi Hovannisian – the Leader of the opposition party “Heritage” visited the D.I.Y. club and stated “the club is fired by fascist youth. The interest of each Armenian should be to build a country, which protects the rights of every minority. Armenians are not free in their own land, if their rights are not protected.” He was the first ever leader of a political party in Armenia, who stand with LGBT community.

#### **4.3. Comparison of political discourse in 2003 – 2007 and in 2008 – 2012**

This subchapter compares the political discourse on LGBT issues from 2003 – 2007 and in 2008 – 2012.

In 2003 – 2007 Armenian politicians believed that homosexuality is a disease to be treated, or simply non-traditional understanding of morality. The views and the attitudes towards homosexuality were negative or ignorant in both periods. Some politicians called homosexuals “sexual perverts”, “enemies of women”, “threat for children’s future”. The Parliament held a discussion about homosexuals in state bodies after the following year of the decriminalization. The representative of Ministry of Foreign affairs e described pride events as “propaganda”, Ministry of Defense normalized rape in the army, while the representative of Ministry of Justice surprised that there

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<sup>6</sup>Young nationalists were singing patriotic songs and holding posters with “Keep children away”, “These are gay”, “No to perversion” and other slogans written on their t-shirts.

are homosexuals in prisons and legitimated the discrimination against LGBT in prisons. Ministry labor and social protection said that there is no need to protect LGBT people from discrimination in employment, because the current legal system is enough.

I was able to find also some positive language used by politicians In 2008 – 2012, though there is only one case, but I find that the political discourse was quite negative in general.

In this period, once Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that it did not prioritize LGBT issues and called challenges of the community “very minor” and described homosexuality as “a non-traditional sexual orientation”.

Secretary of the National Security Council announced that LGBT individuals are a “extremely dangerous, unnatural and unacceptable for Armenia”.

Some of MPs this time mentioned that they strongly object the existence of LGBT community and do not want to have any type of contacts with LGBT people and encouraged people to attack on homosexuals.

Yerevan Mayor Gagik Beglaryan wanted to “clean the city of transgender sex workers”.

For some ARF representatives it was a mystery why problems of LGBT community is “important”. They also normalized the attack on LGBT friendly bar by mentioning that the attack was in line with Armenian national ideology, but avoided to speak publicly about their view on LGBT issues.

It seems that the Heritage party was the first party which supported the community and positively spoke about LGBT rights.

To summarize the comparison, Armenian politicians were largely negative and intolerant towards LGBT issues in both of the selected periods. Politicians considered them as, abnormal, untraditional, and even extremely dangerous threat to National Security. while the Governing party members were promoting hate and discrimination there was only one politician who spoke about the need of LGBT people to be protected. The representatives of the Government did not consider the need to improve protection of LGBT people. Aida Muradyan as one of the initiators of anti-discrimination legislation, confirmed the above; that when she started to negotiate with

different state bodies about the importance to adopt the legislation, she discovered that many politicians are very ignorant towards LGBT issues. “They do not want to comment anything related about LGBT, because they know that most probably will be criticized by international organization such as EU or CoE, because of their negative attitude”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> I conducted the interview during my internship

## 5. POWER AND UNITY OF LGBT MOVEMENT

This chapter studies and compares power and unity of LGBT movement in post-soviet Armenia and consists of three sub-chapters: Power and unity of LGBT movement in 2003 – 2007, power and unity of LGBT movement in 2008 – 2012 and comparison of power and unity of LGBT movement in the two periods.

### 5.1. Power and unity of LGBT movement in 2003 – 2007

This subchapter studies the power and unity of LGBT movement in 2003 – 2007 by analyzing the protests, unity, human and financial resources.

#### 5.1.1. Forms of protests

I was not able to find any public demonstration, petition or sit-ins organized by LGBT movement in the selected period. Karen Badalyan confirmed in the interview that there were no protest event organized from 2003 – 2007. According to him, LGBT movement did not have a priority to organize protest actions at that time (table 1.).

table 1.

Number of protests organized in favor of LGBT people by years 2003 – 2007

(Source: author)

	Years				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number of marches, petitions and sit-ins organized in favor of LGBT people.	0	0	0	0	0

#### 5.1.2. The “unity” of the movement

The political context, when being homosexual is not criminal anymore, helped the community to self-organize and unite .

The earliest recorded LGBT initiative in Armenia was GLAG, the first gay and lesbian Armenian group formed in 2003. Later, it was transformed into the first LGBT NGO called “We For Civil Equality”, also known as “Menq” (gayarmenia.blogspot.com: 2007). The second meeting of that group



took place two weeks later in mid-November. At the third meeting, 50 people gathered in the office of an international organization. It was themed around World AIDS Day (December 1) and included elements of HIV/AIDS prevention, with condoms being distributed. The fourth meeting in mid-December was also in the office of an international organization, and gathered around 45 people. It combined HIV/AIDS prevention awareness with psychological and coming out games. (Carroll, Quinn, 2008: 51). From 2003 – 2006 there were 4 meetings organized by individual member of the LGBT community.

In July 2006, We For Civil Equality NGO was registered by the Ministry of Justice in Armenia as the first LGBT NGO in Armenia (State registry of RA: 2018) and it operated alone for almost a year until Pink Armenia, another NGO was registered in December 2007.

Karen Badalyan<sup>8</sup> mentioned In interview that although the two organizations had an aim to improve lives of LGBT people in Armenia, they did not cooperate in this period, because they have heard about Pink Armenia only in the end of the following year. Meanwhile, he mentioned that Pink Armenia knew about their existence and has never approached to them for cooperation in this period.

### **5.1.3. Human and financial resources**

I could not find any information about the financial resources of the group “GLAG”, but according to gayarmenia.blogspot.com it was a group of eight gay men and one transsexual gathered in a Yerevan café in 2003.

The list of the funded projects of WFCE is available in their strategic plan (Badalyan, 2009: 8-10). In 2006 WFCE had only one project for 5 years funded by the Dutch Government, in 2007 they received funding from ILGA-Europe. Karen Badalyan also informed me that they had 4 staff members and 4 volunteers.

According to State Registry of the RA, Pink Armenia was registered in December 2007 by three people and they reports does not mention that they had any funded project in this period.

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<sup>8</sup> I conducted the interview during my internship.

In this period the funding for LGBT activism came from international resources – one EU based organisation and EU member country Government, and from 2003 – 2007 there were only 15 people involved in the activism.

The information about the number of funded projects and human resources is available in a table below (table 2.).

table 2.

Financial and material resources 2003 – 2007 (Source: author)

		Years				
		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Number of funded projects	GLAG	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	We for Civil Equality	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	2
	Pink Armenia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Number of staff and volunteers	GLAG	8	8	8	n/a	n/a
	We for Civil Equality	n/a	n/a	n/a	8	8
	Pink Armenia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3

## 5.2. Power and unity of LGBT movement in 2008 – 2012

This subchapter studies the power and unity of LGBT movement in 2008 – 2012 by analyzing the protests, the unity of the movement frameworks human and financial resources.

### 5.2.1. Forms of protests

There was only one public march organized during this selected period, which was the “Diversity parade”. The demonstration was held to mark World Day of Cultural Diversity on May 21, 2012, and included refugees, ethnic minorities as well as homosexuals. However, its opponents were convinced it was a gay pride parade, so they staged what they described as an “anti-parade”, which ended with them confronting the marchers. Skirmishes between the two groups did not escalate into wider violence.

Two petitions were initiated to ensure fair investigation of the D.I.Y. case in 2012. Both of the petitions are available on change.org website.

I did not find any sit-ins in the selected period. Karen Badalyan told me that he also cannot remember that the LGBT organization conducted sit-ins.

Although there were not so many protest actions, LGBT organisations were providing legal services to the community and were mostly working on HIV issues and community organizing. WOW collective was using art to promote equality. Some of their works included translation and coining of new phrases in Armenian regarding gender and sexuality, accounts of coming out to self and family, and arguments on the goals of a feminist art (kickstarter.com: 2009). WOW was working on to publish a book about gender and sexuality. The table 3. shows the number of protest actions by years.

table 3.

Number of protests organized in favor of LGBT people by years 2008 – 2012 (Source: author)

	Years				
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of marches, petitions and sit-ins organized in favor of LGBT people.	0	0	0	0	3

### 5.2.2. The “unity” of the movement

Karen Badalyan informed me in his interview, that Pink Armenia and We for Civil Equality never had any collaborative project or any type of partnership together in this selected period. He also told that they had good partnership with MSM Armenia and they were trying to address LGBT issues together by implementing collaborative projects.

WOW collective was affiliated with the Women’s Resource Center in Yerevan, since they were focusing on queer women issues. I could not find any information about partnership between WOW collective and other SMOs.

While I was doing my internship, I noted, that Pink Armenia has better formal relations with women groups and networks than with LGBT

organisations. According to their annual reports they implemented many projects with women and HIV service provider organizations.

When it comes to common platforms that SMOs participated and cooperated, Karen Badalyan informed me that on a national level the only platform that three organisations (except WOW) were meeting was CCM.<sup>9</sup>

We for Civil Equality NGO and Pink Armenia were also members of ILGA-Europe, which is the pan European association of LGBT organisations.

To summarize: two representatives of the movement more or less had formal and informal relations including collaborative project implementations, community organizing and advocacy. The rest of organizations were trying to develop their networking with other NGOs and other social movements, such as HIV activism and women rights activism.

### **5.2.3. Human and financial resources**

We for Civil Equality NGO continued receiving funding for projects. In average three projects per year were funded. WFCE has never received state funding for the projects. The projects were funded by US and EU based organisations.

Pink Armenia in their organization's report 2007 – 2014 lists their funded projects. Although they mention in they report that they not apply and do not receive funding from governments, which apply repression or hate on LGBT community, in 2008 they had one project co-funded by RA Ministry of youth and sport affairs. This project was focusing on prevention of sexually transmitted infections. They also received funding from local office of Soros Foundation, Counterpart international and other EU based foundations (Pink Armenia: 2015).

From December 2012 MSM Armenia was implementing the project called “Towards the Finish Line: Youth for Universal Access” funded by MTV<sup>10</sup>. MSM Armenia had 2 staff members and 8 volunteers.

Karen Badalyan informed that WFCE had 7 paid staff members and as of 2012 had about 200 volunteers in this period. Pink Armenia reports 8

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<sup>9</sup> CCM – Country Coordinating Mechanism of HIV related projects.

<sup>10</sup> The TV channel.

staff members and the same number of local volunteers as WFCE and 30 international volunteers additionally. WOW received individual donations to print the book, which I consider as one project. WOW was a collective of 5 women.

Table 4. represents the number of funded projects and number of staff and volunteers per organizations by years.

table 4.

Financial and material resources 2003 – 2007 (Source: author)

		Years				
		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of funded projects	MSM Armenia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1
	We for Civil Equality	3	4	3	3	3
	Pink Armenia	1	2	1	3	7
	WOW	1	1	1	n/a	n/a
Number of staff and volunteers	MSM Armenia	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11
	We for Civil Equality	207	207	207	207	207
	WOW	5	5	5	5	5
	Pink Armenia	238	238	238	238	238

### **5.3. Comparison of Power and unity of LGBT movement in in 2003 – 2007 and 2008 – 2012**

This subchapter compares the power and unity of LGBT movement in two electoral periods.

#### **5.3.1. Forms of protests**

I was not able to find any public demonstration, petition and sit-ins organized by LGBT movement in 2003 – 2007. Later Karen Badalyan confirmed that there were no public events organized in this period. There was only one public event organized in 2008 – 2012, which was the “Diversity parade”. The demonstration was held to mark World Day of Cultural Diversity on May 21, and included refugees, ethnic minorities as well as homosexuals. It was co-organized by Pink Armenia, which later had

to relocate their office because of the security concerns. Additionally, in the second period two petitions organized in relation to D.I.Y. case.

While there are only three protest actions, I have to notice that LGBT SMOs were mostly focusing on community organizing, providing sexual healthcare and legal services to the community.

### **5.3.2. The “unity” of the movement**

Since there was not any registered NGO from 2003 – 2006, I should notice that the collaboration between actors of the movement were taking place on an individual level, from decriminalization until the registration of WFCE, individual activists organized number of meeting to coordinate their actions. WFCE registered in 2006 and until the end of the first period was alone in its mission.

I could not find any collaboration of partnership between Pink Armenia and other SMOs, but Pink Armenia implemented various of projects with women rights and HIV service organisations. WOW collective was affiliated with the Women’s Resource Center in Yerevan, since they were focusing on queer women issues. I could not find any information about partnership between WOW collective and other selected SMOs.

Although they had same goal to improve LGBT situation, only We for Civil Equality and MSM Armenia were able to establish a partnership and jointly implement project. The project was focused on HIV prevention among LGBT youth.

### **5.3.3. Human and financial resources**

In 2003 – 2006 until the registration of WFCE, LGBT movement in Armenia did not have financial resources. There were only couple of activists who organized number of meeting. WFCE received first funding in 2006 and two project were funded in 2007. In 2008 – 2012 We For Civil Equality continued to be the “wealthiest” organization in terms of number of funded projects. The funding came from EU based sources. WFCE increased also human resources from 8 to around 200 people.

Pink Armenia also increased its financial and human resources. They receiving almost the same number of projects and had almost the same number of staff and volunteers.

in comparison to the first periods, it is obvious, that the movement became much “richer” in terms of the human and financial resources in the second period. The funding came from EU and US based sources, except one co-funded project by the state.

Both WOW and MSM Armenia implemented per one project. WOW received individual donations, MSM Armenia had funding from MTV.

Their human resources of WOW is only 5 volunteers.

MSM Armenia had 2 staff members and 8 volunteers.

It is also important to mention, that most of the projects were dedicated to prevention of HIV among LGBT community and there were no state funding, except one co funded project (which did not specifically relate to LGBT).

## 6. CONCLUSION

The main goal of the thesis was to diachronically compare and analyze the political discourse on LGBT issues and its impact on LGBT movement from 2003 – 2007 and from 2008 – 2012, in order to understand and explore the main challenges that LGBT movement in Armenia was facing to achieve its goals. To achieve this objective, this research sought to answer two main questions, which are

- How did the political discourse on LGBT issues change before and after 2008 elections in Armenia?
- What kind of impact did these changes have on the power and unity of LGBT movement in Armenia?

Being historically known as a traditional society, Armenia has come a long way since decriminalization of homosexuality in 2003. The political discourse analysis shown that constant intimidation and prejudices were deeply ingrained in political culture making the political environment extremely LGBT-phobic and unwelcoming for LGBT community. Armenian politicians considered homosexuality as a disease, labeling LGBT persons as "enemies of the society", "threat to national security", "people with non-traditional sexual orientation", "sexual perverts" etc. While speaking very negatively about LGBT issues, Armenian politicians were lacking of political will to make steps to improve the protection of LGBT rights. At the same time some nationalist political parties were promoting hate and violence against LGBT community. The comparison shown that the political discourse has not changed much. But during the second period under review, there was only one political party, representing the opposition, which openly supported the LGBT rights.

The statements by Armenian public officials condemning individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity foster increased prejudice against the LGBT community that permeates Armenian society. Thus, the Armenian government fails in its obligation to ensure protection of LGBT individuals from discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.



There was only one public event organized in 2012, which was the “Diversity parade”. The demonstration was co-organized by Pink Armenia to mark World Day of Cultural Diversity on May 21, LGBT activists organised two petitions in the second period in the second period.

Three out of four representatives of LGBT movement prioritized sexual health and HIV issues and implemented number of projects dedicated to sexual health and discrimination. The restricted political opportunities forced LGBT movement speak about LGBT rights using healthcare sector as an open door to reach the politicians on one side and the ideology of diversity as tool to raise the visibility of the community on the other side.

Meanwhile, it is hard to speak about the united and powerful LGBT movement in Armenia, where representatives of the movement were lacking enough collaboration and partnership among each other, when some of the representatives had only one project funded, while others had more than 15. Although the movement became stronger in terms of resources and mobilization capacity during the second period, it was still depended on international funding, was divided and uncoordinated.

But the lack of engagement of national and international human rights agencies with the concerns of LGBT people, many of whom were afraid to come out, further isolated and weakened the movement .

The extremely LGBT-phobic political culture from one side and the divided movement from another side brought only few positive changes in the life of the LGBT community in Armenia.

An overwhelming majority of Armenians belong to a religion that condemns homosexuality. Although Armenia is a secular state, the religion still plays huge role in politics. The political discourse was heavily influenced by Christian traditions of Armenian apostolic church, which does not accept homosexuality.

The progress of the movement provides hope that LGBT people in Armenia may begin to establish a voice in civil society and in politics.

Further research about social inequalities and public acceptance of LGBT people in Armenia can bring new insights into this issue, which will be very useful for the national and regional LGBT movements, allowing them to form or update their strategies. I believe that the lessons we can gain in the

future can become one of the possibilities to improve the situation of LGBT people in Armenia.

## **7. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ARF – Armenian Revolutionary Federation

CoE – Council of Europe

EU – European Union

ILGA-EUROPE – European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association

LGBT – Lesbian, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender

MP – Member of Parliament

NGO – Non-Governmental organization

RA – Republic of Armenia

RPA – The Republican Party of Armenia

SMO – Social Movement Organisation

SOGI – sexual orientation, gender identity

TGEU – Transgender Europe

UN – United Nations

US – United States

WFCE – We for Civil Equality

## 8. LITERATURE

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### **Interviews**

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Interview with Aida Murdyan