Homosexuality in Latvian and Polish parliamentary debates 1994–2013

A historical approach to conflict in political discourse

Joanna Chojnicka

6.1 Introduction

It is safe to say that homosexuality belongs to the most controversial and contentious topics in political discourse of both Latvia and Poland. These two Central- and Eastern-European (CEE) post-socialist states that joined the European Union together in 2004 are commonly described as homophobic due to the limitations of expression and assembly rights, regular use of hate speech by public figures – including politicians and religious leaders – or lack of legislation addressing the needs of the LGBT community (Abramowicz, 2007; Amnesty International, 2006; Locmelis, 2002; O’Dwyer and Schwartz, 2010). In the most recent Rainbow Map ranking, which assesses the social climate for LGBT people in European countries, they scored the lowest of all EU countries – Poland at 18 percent and Latvia, together with Lithuania, at 17 percent. The EU average was 48 percent and Europe’s overall score – including Turkey with 9 percent and Russia with 6 percent – was 38 percent (https://rainbow-europe.org/).

The conditions described above belong to political and legal domains and are thus likely to be discussed by legislative bodies, which makes it reasonable to expect many references to homosexuality in the discourse of parliamentary debates. It is also justified to anticipate many examples of conflict, disagreement and antagonism in Latvian and Polish political discourse on this topic, with homosexuality being such a bone of contention there, especially in the period chosen. The study is based on a corpus of transcripts of Latvian (http://saeima.lv/lv/par-saeimu/archivs/) and Polish (http://sejm.gov.pl/Sejm8.nsf/page.xsp/archiwum/) parliamentary debates from the years 1994 to 2013, available online. This 20-year period represents an exciting era in modern history, when political debates settled accounts with the legacy of socialism/communism, analysed costs and benefits of democratic transition or wondered about the two countries’ place and role in Europe/European Union. More fundamentally, and relevantly for this chapter, it was also a time when the clash of various narratives of
national identity – some revisiting the glorious nationalist past, others construing a future of innovation, modernisation and globalisation – coincided with the increasing visibility of the LGBT community. Homosexuality became incorporated by many of these narratives, as this chapter will attempt to show. What is more, the 20-year period makes it possible for this chapter to offer a historical perspective on the development of discursive conflict around homosexuality, with the amount of data to be handled remaining within the margin of manageability.

The fact that homosexuality is a source of controversy and conflict in Latvian and Polish public discourse makes studies on this topic attractive and relevant, but there is also a risk of instrumentalising and spectacularising hardships faced by the LGBT community there. This chapter has been written from the perspective of an ally, and every effort has been made to approach the subject thoughtfully and considerately. One of the motivations for this study was the wish to contribute to a better understanding of the reasons for, and solutions to, the disadvantageous social climate for LGBT people in the two countries. Another rationale for investigating Latvian and Polish language material was the perceived need to diversify the field of discourse, gender and sexuality, where research conducted in and on Anglo-American contexts predominates (Kulpa and Mizielińska, 2011; Szulc, 2014).

In this study, the topic of homosexuality relates to conflict in two ways. First, it may become a topic of – often heated and hostile – discussion, for example, in a debate on civil partnerships, marriage equality or anti-discrimination law. Second, a reference to homosexuality may be used as an insult in a debate on any, also unrelated, topic. Such reference can take the form of offensive name-calling (e.g. PL pedały! [“faggots!”]) or an ironic – either jocular or sarcastic – statement used to discredit an opponent, as in Example 6.1. This means that we may expect a rather substantial variety of discursive features and strategies to account for, analyse and compare.

**Example 6.1**

*LV* Es saprotu, ka Tautas partijas frakcijas līderim patīkamāks ir homoseksuālis,
nevis čekists, bet [...] tā ir viņa personīgā lieta, par kuru nav jārunā no tribīnes.

I understand that the leader of the People’s Party faction prefers a homosexual to a Chekist, but [...] this is his personal thing that shouldn’t be talked about from the podium.

(30 March 2000)

As a point of departure, conflict is understood to be a disagreement, opposition or antagonism expressed in linguistic behaviour. But the analysis will show that this definition may not suffice in cases when the linguistic behaviour associated with conflict is used one-sidedly, against a discursively constructed opponent with no actual speaker(s) to fill the slot. Here, a discursive rather than linguistic approach, recognising the existence of discourses in conflict – even if not realised in actual language use – could be more adequate.

With this chapter, I hope to contribute to the ongoing academic debate on such issues as conflict in political discourse, homosexuality as a topic of political debate – especially in Central and Eastern Europe – or the use of insults in spoken discourse.

### 6.2 Theoretical framework

The chapter’s theoretical–methodological framework is partly based on Foucault’s theory of sexuality (1980) and his method of genealogical analysis (Carabine, 2001), and partly inspired by Kurvinen’s study of the historical development of media discourse on
Homosexuality is understood here as a historically constructed and maintained discourse, a product of the more general interplay between social structures and institutions, power and knowledge: “sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience which has historical, social and cultural, rather than biological, origins” (Spargo, 1999, p.12). Foucault “prioritised the crucial role of institutions and discourses in the formation of sexuality” (ibid., p.13). This link between sexuality and power may be more discernible in the case of countries that have undergone – or are still undergoing – a systemic transition. In gender and sexuality research, it is commonplace to consider the political and socio-cultural context not as a mere background, but an important contributing factor (Kuhar and Takács, 2007; Štulhofer and Sandfort, 2005).

In official discourses of the Soviet Union – that Latvia was part of – and socialist Poland prior to democratic transition, sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular were taboo topics. Putniņa notes how people in CEE “missed the opportunity to debate sexuality in the 1960s. Debates around homosexuality emerged in the virtual absence of a critical discourse tradition dealing with sexuality and gender” (2007, p.324). After the fall of the Soviet Union, both countries highlighted the return to traditional values as an element of the process of rebuilding their national identities. Communism in any shape or form became the definition of evil: anything associated with or resembling it was automatically rejected. In this context, a link has been noted between homophobia and anticommunism, where homosexuals and communists pose serious threats to the prevailing social and sexual order (Epstein 1994). In a widespread argument, opponents of the European Union compare it to the Soviet Union. “This link is also made in numerous claims about the existence of a powerful ‘homosexual lobby’ apparently supported by the West”, notes Gruszczynska (2007, p.108). This, paradoxically, means a double silencing of homosexuality discourses coming from apparently opposing directions – one conditioned by the communist/socialist past and the other emerging in resistance to it.

Coming back to the connection of discourse and power, it also means that the LGBT communities and their allies are a “discourse minority”: they are underrepresented in public discourse as producers of texts, as a side of the debate. They constitute “issues” talked “about”, but rarely contribute their side of the story and their point of view. Figuring as constructed participants in discursive conflicts over morality, they are attributed opinions and beliefs presupposed to be perceived negatively by the majority of the society. This means that when they do speak out, they are forced to do so from a defensive position.

It is becoming obvious that the conflict over homosexuality in Latvia and Poland is not only about sexuality: it is a conflict of political and ideological nature that involves attitudes towards tradition and modernity, collectivism and individualism, order and freedom (Sidorenko, 2008). And while this may be the case anywhere in the world, the case of post-socialist countries is additionally complicated by the historical issues mentioned above, making attitudes towards sexual minorities a “litmus-paper test” of tolerance, openness and inclusiveness (Graff, 2006, p.448).

### 6.3 Methods and materials

In terms of methodology, the chapter partly employs Foucault’s genealogical discourse analysis, an approach used to study discourse in order to reveal power/knowledge networks (Carabine, 2001, p.275). “Genealogy is concerned with describing the procedures, practices, apparatuses and institutions involved in the production of discourses and knowledges, and their power effects” (ibid., p.276), as well as with tracing changes in the power/knowledge/
discourse triad from a historical perspective. It is based upon the following assumptions: power operates at every level of society; normalisation – the discursive construction of norm – is one of the ways of deploying power; power/knowledge/discourse are intricately intermeshed; discourses are constitutive; discourses have a normalising role and regulatory outcomes; discourses are uneven, contradictory and contested; knowledge, truth and discourse are socially constructed and historically specific (ibid., p.280). Doing genealogical discourse analysis involves identifying themes, categories and objects of discourse, looking for evidence of inter-relationships between discourses, identifying discursive strategies and techniques employed, looking for absences/silences, resistances and counter-discourses, all against the background of historical context (ibid., p.281).

In this study, discourse is understood as a particular way of representing the world that rests upon, and reveals hints about, a broader background of ideological assumptions, beliefs and values. The terms “Left discourse” and “Right discourse” refer to this understanding. But discourse can also be defined as “a particular history of talk about a particular idea or set of ideas” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p.42). This definition is at work when a reference is made to the “discourse on sexuality/homosexuality”. As a result, this study’s task is to follow the struggle between various ways of representing the world in their attempts to fix their own understanding of homosexuality as the right or correct one. The focus lies mostly on discursive themes, objects and strategies: referential – concerned with naming and labelling, predicational – concerned with assigning attributes and actions, and argumentative – concerned with supporting claims (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009). Also important are the dynamic relationships between different discourses, for example, interdiscursivity – employing various discourses within one statement, or recontextualisations – when a term from one discourse is reappropriated by another one.

Foucault’s approach to discourse analysis and his theory of sexuality (1980) have already inspired an analysis of media discourse on homosexuality in another CEE country – namely, Estonia (Kurvinen, 2007). This study follows the development of discourse on homosexuality from medical discourse – discussion concerning AIDS, homosexuality as a disease – to sexualised discourse: sex and homosexual, especially lesbian, relationships as spectacular, trendy topics. A similar procedure of tracing the shift of discourses on homosexuality will be attempted here, and Kurvinen’s text can additionally be used for comparative purposes across countries/languages, discourse genres and periods.

As mentioned above, the study uses a corpus of transcripts of parliamentary debates. All the transcripts were first searched using a set of parallel keywords in both languages, as listed below in Table 6.1. The results of the keyword search are presented in Table 6.2.

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Table 6.2 Results of the keyword search

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All the texts – debate turns, statements, reports and questions – containing the keywords were selected and copy-pasted into a .doc document, in order to make it possible to access the whole context of their use. In the case of all debate turns and some reports and questions, I additionally read other contributions to the same debate in order to get a better idea of how the discussion developed. Some reports, questions and most statements were not part of a debate, but stand-alone texts announced in the course of a parliamentary sitting; others were not even read out but submitted to record in written form. The Latvian transcripts additionally contained radio reports on parliamentary proceedings, while the Polish ones included many repetitions – the same debate was to be found in numerous documents in the online archive. Some results were also irrelevant. For example, \textit{minorit\*/mniejsz\*} can also refer to national, ethnic, parliamentary and not only sexual minorities. Table 6.2 presents the number of keywords after filtering, i.e. discarding repeated and irrelevant occurrences, and thus allow describing tendencies and shifts of frequency. The results that remained after filtering were arranged chronologically – separately for both languages – and read repeatedly, making detailed notes about features relevant for the analysis, including:

- the topic of the debate where a keyword was used. This is important for establishing whether the use of a reference to homosexuality was motivated by the topic or off-topic
- whether it was a part of a speech from the podium or an interruption from the audience – interruptions usually have an offensive or disruptive character
- whether the reference caused any reaction from other speakers
- other issues mentioned together with a reference to homosexuality, if relevant. References to homosexuality often occur in lists. In Example 6.3, such a listing is not relevant to our analysis, since the list is offered for illustrating another point (that HIV can affect anyone) and is thus not in focus. But in Example 6.5 below, homosexuality is listed together with stealing and abortion, and in Example 6.7 – with euthanasia and rejecting religion, and this is relevant since such use is meant to discredit homosexuality by associating it with phenomena commonly considered to be extremely negative
- the stance taken towards homosexuality. It was usually possible to distinguish between a positive, negative or neutral stance on the basis of a pragmatic reading. To illustrate, Example 6.2 below is considered positive because the speaker states that the problems of sexual minorities should be better addressed by law; Example 6.6 is positive because the speaker explicitly defends sexual minorities (“they shouldn’t be offended”). Examples 6.1 and 6.5 are deemed negative: in 6.1, the speaker makes a joke at homosexuals’ expense, and in 6.5, the speaker refers to homosexuality as a deviation. Example 6.3 is considered neutral: the speaker includes homosexuality in a list of possible social identities or states, without judging any of them. Example 6.4, which is ambiguous, illustrates that this sort of analysis does not always lead to an unequivocal result
- whether the reference was made in an offensive or sarcastic manner or as a joke. Again, this is done by way of pragmatic reading, keeping in mind the difficulties in interpreting irony or jocularity in written discourse and the role of cultural background knowledge (see the chapter on irony in Chojnicka, 2012). To me, Examples 6.1 and 6.9 are ironical and jocular, but the cultural references – to Chekists in 6.1 and MP Ikonowicz in 6.9 – may make it difficult for readers unfamiliar with these contexts to see why.

The approach taken in the analysis was mostly qualitative. Due to the fact that all the material was obtained using keywords – it would have been impossible to read through all the
transcripts – some references to homosexuality may have been missed. For this reason, and
due to difficulties with counting occurrences discussed above, the chapter will not make any
quantitative claims.

In what follows, I will attempt to tell a narrative of homosexuality as both a subject of
conflict and a means employed in conflict in Latvian and Polish parliamentary debates over
a period of 20 years. Due to differences in the quantity of material, I will discuss Poland in
detail and Latvia through comparison. Throughout the discussion, to facilitate the reading
flow, examples will be provided in their English translations only, unless the original is nec-
esary for illustrating a strictly linguistic (formal) rather than discursive feature or phenom-
enon. Each example is preceded by a country code – LV for Latvia and PL for Poland – and
followed by its occurrence date.

6.4 The history of homosexuality in Latvian and Polish parliamentary debates

The parliament of the Republic of Latvia is called Saeima and comprises 100 members
elected by proportional representation every four years. The first term began in November
1922, after Latvia proclaimed independence from the Russian Empire in 1918. During the
fourth term, in 1934, a coup was staged to establish a nationalist dictatorship and the parlia-
ment was dissolved. Latvia was part of the Soviet Union in the years 1940–1941 and again,
after being occupied by Nazi Germany, in 1944–1991. In the years 1990–1993, Latvia had
a transitional parliament called the Supreme Council. Saeima was restored in 1993 with the
fifth term, resuming the pre-war enumeration.

Sejm is the lower chamber of the bicameral parliament of the Republic of Poland, com-
prising 460 members elected by proportional representation every four years. The tradition
of legislative gatherings dates back to the king’s councils of the 12th century, but the modern
parliament, consisting of Sejm and Senat (Senate), was established in 1919 after Poland
regained independence from Russia, Prussia and Austria-Hungary in 1918. The parliament
was dissolved at the beginning of World War II. A unicameral Sejm existed throughout the
duration of the Polish People’s Republic, but its power was symbolic. The bicameral parlia-
ment was restored in 1991 with the first term, discontinuing the enumeration from socialist
times. In what follows, I will use the term Sejm to refer only to the Polish parliament’s lower
chamber and Saeima to refer only to the Latvian parliament.

Transitional terms of Latvian and Polish parliaments – the Supreme Council 1990–1993
and the first democratic Sejm 1991–1993, respectively – were hardly concerned with homo-
sexuality. Although they fall out of the scope of this study, two facts may be mentioned:
first, the few references to homosexuality that do appear are quite neutral to positive, as in
Example 6.2; second, the term “sexual minorities”, associated with human rights discourse
that was only making its way into CEE, was used in both parliaments for the first time as
early as in 1992.

Example 6.2

PL: [The law] leaves the problems of sexual minorities, for example homosexuals,
completely out of the educators’ attention (30 December 1992).

On the basis of the analysis of material from the years 1994–2013, it was possible to dis-
tinguish six phases in the history of discourse on homosexuality in Polish parliamentary
debates. These phases cut through parliamentary terms, which suggests that they reflect
more general debates taking place in the society at the given time. The discussion of study results in the remaining part of this chapter will be organised chronologically, following the periodisation scheme outlined below:

2. 1997–2001: instrumentalisation of homosexuality by the Right
5. 2008–2011: calm after the storm

As Table 6.2 shows, references to homosexuality in the Latvian parliament over the same period were so scarce that it is hardly possible to talk about different phases. Latvian MPs seem to have missed the HIV/AIDS crisis debate – homosexuality was discussed in this context for the first time as late as in 2004. But there is some evidence for the instrumentalisation of homosexuality between 1997 and 2001 and strong evidence for thematisation of homosexuality in the EU debate between 2004 and 2006. After that, however, the discourses in Poland and Latvia parted ways completely: in Poland, the number of references to homosexuality continued to rise, while in Latvia the topic seems to have been silenced. The space between phases 3 and 4 above illustrates this division.


Homosexuality became an object of discussion – rather than a passing reference as in Example 6.2 above – in Poland in 1994, during the second parliamentary term of 1993–1997, and in Latvia in 1996, during the sixth term of 1995–1998. It was first thematised by the Polish Sejm with regard to the European Union, already then seen by some as in conflict with traditional Christian values. In 1995, the number of references to homosexuality in the Sejm increased, almost all made in the same context: the worldwide HIV/AIDS epidemic. This mirrors Kurvinen’s finding that the topic first entered the public debate in Estonia in connection with this issue and as part of medical discourse (2007, p.292). Some MPs mentioned homosexuals as an increased-risk group, but the overall debate was kept neutral and civil rather than judgemental or hostile, as the following example demonstrates:

Example 6.3
PL: HIV does not choose, whether you are rich or poor, black or white, whether you live in a town or countryside, whether you are a hetero- or homosexual (27 October 1995).

In Latvia, references to homosexuality between 1995 and 1998 were restricted to debates on criminal issues, especially rape of men – for example, in the army – and children, which points to the notorious association of homosexuality with paedophilia. It was a time of apparent terminological confusion, with the labels homoseksuālists “a homosexual” and pederasts “a pederast” used interchangeably, and lack of consistency in spelling (lesbiete/lezbiete “a lesbian”). Most often such references were employed jokingly, in apparent attempts to create a kind of locker-room rapport with an audience presumed to be mostly male and 100 percent straight:
Example 6.4

LV: Well then let better specialists on pederasty issues go deeper into the topic if they want to talk about it, but we, I think, should talk about the matter’s legal side and that’s all (5 February 1997).

The locker-room register or style “includes not only lots of profanity but also ways of talking disparagingly about women and about other men who don’t measure up to certain norms of masculinity” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p.306). Verbal aggression against victims both absent and present in the interaction is common, and often makes use of derogatory terms that imply the victim’s homosexuality, such as “fag”, “homo”, “queer” (Armstrong 1997, p.329). The locker-room style is typical of all-male activities, but also increasingly present in mixed-sex interactions, especially those that used to be a male domain – for example, golf (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p.94) or politics – and its purpose is to facilitate male homosocial bonding and police non-masculine and non-heteronormative behaviour. See also Chojnicka (2014) on transsexuality as a topic in Latvian parliamentary discourse.

Back in Poland, references to homosexuality remained largely formal, neutral and rational until early 1996, when a debate on abortion took place. In it, homosexuality became clearly associated with leftist-liberal politics, see Example 6.5. It should be noted that applying the right-wing/left-wing division to the political scene in Latvia and Poland is problematic. Since the democratic transition, neither parliament has had a party that could be considered left-wing according to Western European standards. Most parties seen as leftist are actually centrist and many are conservative when it comes to social issues. Also, the term “liberal” is confusing; it is usually used by conservatives to mean “progressive”, with a negative connotation. In the article, I use the terms “Right’s discourse” and “Left’s discourse” to mean the traditionalist/conservative and socially liberal/progressive discourse, respectively.

Example 6.5

PL: Exactly this leftist-liberal formation calls a thief a dishonest businessman, the murder of a child in its mother’s womb – pregnancy interruption procedure, and a sexual deviation – a different sexual orientation (1 March 1996).

Example 6.6

PL: Unfortunately, we differ in everything, also in language. You talk about deviants. We talk about people who belong to a sexual minority, and claim that not only do they have the right to it, but also that they have been constructed this way and shouldn’t be offended at every opportunity (1 March 1996).

Although the reference to homosexuality in Example 6.5 was unmotivated since the debate concerned abortion, the response in 6.6 did not question its justifiability, instead employing human rights discourse to oppose it. This response also framed the conflict in terms of language use, as if suggesting the insulting term zboczenie “deviation” to be a legitimate linguistic choice. The use of offensive terms in principle will rarely be questioned before the introduction of the hate speech concept in the late 2000s. Note also the sarcastic recontextualisation of the human rights discourse term “sexual orientation” in Example 6.5, quite a typical feature of the Right’s discourse, especially in the Latvian material.
6.4.2 The years 1997–2001: instrumentalisation of homosexuality by the Right

The abortion debate in 1996 seems to mark an important shift. From then on, until the end of the second term of Sejm and throughout the third term 1997–2001, homosexuality played a very specific role, although it was never a debate topic itself. However, it was used quite frequently by the Right to flag leftist-liberal politics. The “leftist-liberal formation” became defined through its assumed positive attitude towards abortion, homosexual marriages, as well as pornography and sometimes prostitution, as in *lewackie siły aborcyjno-homoseksualne*, which could be loosely translated as “leftist pro-abortion and pro-homosexuality forces”. More generally, any phenomenon or idea could be discursively connected or compared with homosexuality in an attempt to present it negatively, to discredit it. Such instrumental use of homosexuality by the Right could be seen in debates on divergent and seemingly unrelated topics and was particularly visible in discussions on the future of Poland in the European Union, which was of central concern at that time. For instance, in Example 6.7, the juxtaposition of Europe and religion/Christianity is clear. In traditional/conservative Right discourse, Europe became the “Europe of deviations” (*Europa zboczeń*), dominated by the infamous “homosexual lobby” (*lobby homoseksualistów*), a term introduced into parliamentary discourse during this period – the first example in the corpus dates from 22 September 1998. In another example, during a debate on pornography in 2000, a speaker responded to the proposal of adapting legal solutions already existing in EU countries by suggesting that it would pave the way for the legalisation of homosexual partnerships as well. This example shows how the association of the EU with support for same-sex partnerships worked to discredit the Union itself and any initiative coming from it that a speaker disagreed with. It also shows how homosexuality could be instrumentalised in a discussion on a hardly connected topic. Example 6.8, which offers another statement from the same debate on pornography, illustrates this point quite well. While comparing the proposed solution – penalisation of the use of pornography – to the law in Russia, the speaker offered a digression, a by-the-way remark on homosexuality also being penalised in Russia. The purpose of this move was to substantiate and strengthen the proposal to penalise pornography by drawing a parallel to the penalisation of homosexuality. If this comparison was supposed to serve its purpose, the speaker must have presupposed that everyone agreed that the penalisation of homosexuality would be a good idea.

Example 6.7

**PL:** Who are the people that want to unite Europe on the basis of laws on euthanasia, homosexual marriages, who reject the Decalogue and proclaim new values such as: tolerance, democracy, peace, human rights, gender equality? Are these values not present in the Decalogue, in Christianity? (6 June 2001).

Example 6.8

**PL:** The penalization of pornography proposed in this draft is similar only to the Russian penal code law among European solutions. It should be added here that in addition to this solution, in addition to the absolute prohibition of pornography, the Russian Penal Code also introduces the penalization of homosexuality (10 May 2000).

These examples suggest that the speakers quoted presupposed their negative attitude to homosexuality to be commonly shared, taken for granted. Indeed, many MPs in the timeframe of
1997–2001 seemed to assume abortion and homosexuality to be predominantly understood as wrong. This is necessary if the attribution of a supportive attitude towards homosexuality, abortion, euthanasia or prostitution is supposed to work to the disadvantage of Europe, the European Union or the Left. But it is also paradoxical, as by using presuppositions, speakers claim common ground with all hearers – which necessarily includes the Left – while defining the Left as not sharing this ground at the same time.

Defining the Left in such a negative way made it extremely risky to claim allegiance to it. Indeed, with the lack of formal leftist representation in the parliament and the absence of speakers who would defend leftist principles, the Right appeared to be constructing an imaginary, straw-man enemy. What is more, there were no responses in protest against the extremely negative portrayal and instrumental use of homosexuality by the Right, which made the conflict around homosexuality appear unilateral, with the accusations of the Right remaining unchallenged. The Right appeared to be creating problems rather than responding to them, for example, by discussing counter-arguments to homosexual marriage while it was not on the agenda at all. Such unmotivated usage represents a conflict larger than the single topic of a debate: an ideological conflict between traditional, conservative values and modern, progressive ones. The Right, but not the Left discourse – at least not in the corpus material – seemed to be referring back to these large ethical, moral, philosophical questions even when discussing, for example, the state budget, radio and television law, or voluntary and nongovernmental organisations. This made the debate less focused and trivialised moral/ethical values by invoking them too frequently. It also made the contrast between Right and Left seem more pronounced or absolute – even though, as has been emphasised repeatedly, leftist politics were hardly represented and never defended in the parliament at that time.

There were only a couple exceptions to the principle of leaving negative and instrumental references to homosexuality unanswered. First, they provoked reactions if aimed at a specific person. The remark in Example 6.9 caused a response from the MP mentioned in it. MP Ikonowicz objected to being compared with sexual minorities, but this only sparked further abuse. The speaker of Example 6.9 explained how Ikonowicz constituted a minority since he was the only MP unable to understand the logic of enumeration. Jocularity was also the strategy used once to respond to an offensive remark towards sexual minorities. Example 6.10, like Example 6.9, represents a creative, jocular recontextualisation of a term from human rights discourse (“minority”). Note, however, how the speaker found it necessary to disclaim their membership of this minority, anticipating that their defence could be interpreted as an (undesired) admission of their own homosexuality. It is also important to note that within the period 1997–2001 the widespread offensive label denoting male homosexuals pedał, pedały (“faggot”, “faggots”) was used for the first time – not in a speech but as an interjection from the audience (Example 6.11).

Example 6.9

PL:  I think that [the Left’s] energy in the defence of those threatened by exclusion has been exhausted on the defence of homosexuals, lesbians and MP Ikonowicz (17 December 1997).

Example 6.10

PL:  Honourable Members! I speak with some embarrassment, since I am not a sexual minority […] as a mental minority I believe that the gravest danger in this House is lack of distance towards oneself and lack of sense of humour (4 November 1999).
Example 6.11
PL: Widać, kto się pedałami interesuje.
It’s obvious who’s interested in faggots (22 July 1999).

Around the same time in Latvia, during the seventh parliamentary term of 1998–2002, homosexuality remained a marginal topic. But the few references to it (see Table 6.2) do exemplify the instrumental use of homosexuality in ideological – albeit one-sided – conflict, similar to the one just described for Poland. The following example illustrates it quite well:

Example 6.12
LV: A battle is taking place in Latvia and worldwide between the old Christian morality, which until now has enabled the Latvian nation to survive, and a new morality with exaggerated human rights, even with the right to homosexuality and abuse of children (7 September 2000).

Here, the speaker considered “the right to homosexuality” to be an “exaggerated” human right and associated it with abuse of children. The concern for children’s safety belongs to the most frequent argumentation strategies of the Right. It is unclear whether in this example “abuse of children” refers to homosexuality itself – often confused with paedophilia – or to adoption by same-sex couples. The opponents of legalising same-sex partnerships often assume that the demand for the right to adopt children will be the next step if homosexual unions are allowed. This is another example of presupposition since same-sex adoption can only function as such a threat if it is universally considered as wrong. Example 6.12 additionally illustrates an aspect of the conflict barely present in Poland – the worry over the nation’s survival. In Latvia, which is a small country tending towards nationalism, the threat of the nation dying out has always been one of the strongest arguments against homosexuality (Chojnicka, 2015).

6.4.3 The years 2001–2006: the EU debate

Another important shift in political discourse on homosexuality seems to be associated with entering the European Union in 2004 – during the fourth parliament term of 2001–2005 in Poland and the eighth term of 2002–2006 in Latvia. Both parliaments discussed anti-discrimination policies in employment, required by the EU, and the obligation to protect sexual minorities within employment law caused eruptions of homophobic statements. Particularly in Latvia, the religiously focused Latvia’s First Party (Latvijas Pirmā partija, LPP) became the locus of anti-gay politics (Chojnicka, 2015, p.142). Outside the parliament, the first equality marches were attempted in Warsaw in 2004 and 2005, banned by the city’s mayor and later state president Lech Kaczyński; the first attempted Riga Pride was banned in 2006.

In 2002, the Polish Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD) submitted a draft law on civil unions allowing both hetero- and homosexual partnerships. It was the first debate in Sejm on an explicitly homosexuality-related topic. After entering the EU, the atmosphere was clearly not conducive to such proposals anymore. Although during the negotiation process, the pro-EU stance was predominant both in the Polish society and among political elites, the incorporation itself “aroused suspicion and opposition from political trends that saw greater openness to the outside world as a threat to values derived from Poland’s own, apparently specific, past” (Cox and Myant, 2008, p.2). Public discourse increasingly focused “on patriotic values and the promotion of moral education based on Catholic values in a way that presents negative images of foreign influences, cosmopolitan
values and cultural diversity, and sees these as challenges to traditional aspects of ‘the Polish way of life’” (ibid., p.5). Similar processes were taking place in Latvia, where an amendment was added to the Constitution in 2006 to define marriage exclusively as a union between one woman and one man.

Within this context of anti-European backlash, offensive and insulting references to homosexuality grew in frequency and intensity. While previously only one Polish term – zbożenie (“deviation”) – was used consistently to anchor homosexuality within the Right’s discourse, the early 2000s saw a proliferation of synonymous referential strategies, including wypaczenie (“distortion”), niegodziwość (“iniquity, evil”) and zachowania antyrodzinne i antyludzkie (“antifamily and antihuman behaviours”). In 2003, the infamous expression promocja homoseksualizmu (“promotion (propagation) of homosexuality”) was used for the first time. It expresses the idea that people – especially children and youth – can become homosexual after having been exposed to representations of homosexuality in various media and is at the foundation of the so-called Russian gay propaganda law. Its use in argumentation by the Right was increasing consistently, leading to a draft law prohibiting content that violates the principle of protection of marriage and the family – including content referred to as “the promotion of homosexuality” – being proposed in the Polish parliament in 2007 but eventually rejected. See also Example 6.17. During the EU debate 2001–2006, other referential strategies emphasising the negative impact of tolerance towards homosexuality, especially on children and youth, included deprawacja dzieci i młodzieży (“deprivation of children and youth”), demoralizacja (“demoralisation”) and propagacja przemocy, zboczeń, pornografii (“propagation of violence, deviations, pornography”). Homosexuality continued to be associated with abortion and both were framed as serious crimes against children, as in zabijanie dzieci i adoptowanie dzieci przez zboczeńców (“killing children and adopting children by deviants”).

Also in Latvian, some synonyms joined the previously prevailing (though semantically ambiguous) label pederasti (“pederasts”), e.g. nenormāliki (“abnormals”), pedini “fag-gots”, heterofobi (“heterophobes”). Homosexuality was referred to as izvirtība (“deviation, debauchery”), netikumiba (“immorality”), nešķīstība (“impurity”), sodomisms (“sodomy”), nepareiza seksuālā orientācija (“incorrect sexual orientation”), perverss dzīvesveids (“perverse lifestyle”); listed with other phenomena suggesting its pathological character, e.g. pederastija, lesbiānisms, pedofilija, zoofilija, nekrofilija un citas patoloģijas (“pederasty, lesbianism, paedophilia, zoophilia, necrophilia and other pathologies”); or lumped together with social problems unrelated to sexuality, e.g. narkomānija, dzeršana, pederastija (“drug addiction, alcoholism, pederasty”). Similarly, as in Polish, some terms were used to present homosexuals as a powerful political interest group: homointerešu grupa (“homo-interest group”), geju un lesbiesu lobijs (“gay and lesbian lobby”), pederastu un lesbiesu lobijs (“pederast and lesbian lobby”) or even pedokrātija (“faggocracy”). Many Polish speakers employed the term attributed to Pope John Paul 2nd cywilizacja śmierci (“civilisation of death”), whose main features were homosexuality, abortion and euthanasia. Also, the new discursive association of homosexuality with drugs can be regarded in the civilisation of death frame:

**Example 6.13**

**PL:** A formation that […] wants the legalization of gay relationships and legalization of drugs has no moral right to say what is good for the family (16 February 2005).

In Latvia, homosexuality as a threat to the family was again mostly associated with concerns over the whole nation’s survival – the node word within this discourse being demogrāfiskā
krīze/katastrofa (“demographic crisis/catastrophe”) – and here seen as a “parody of the family” (ģimenes parodija), “hostile and destructive tendencies” (naidīgas un destruktīvas tendencies) or even “voluntary suicide” (brīvprātīgā pašnāvība, meaning “childlessness”).

In Polish debates, some new terms appeared to describe the leftist-liberal politics, for example laicka poprawność polityczna (“laic political correctness”) or środowiska liberalno-laickie (“liberal-laic milieu”). Note the association of the Left with atheism/laicism in the two examples. In the years 2001–2006, the values of the Left, conflated with the values of the EU, became synonymous with atheism and antonymous with respect to Christian values that Poland was supposed to represent. Example 6.14 illustrates quite well the claim that leftist politics was defined through its association with homosexuality and abortion:

**Example 6.14**

PL: The [Labour] Union shows its leftism in a way hardly relevant to the government, e.g. gays, lesbians, abortion is the main subject of concern of this party (24 August 2004).

This utterance is especially interesting in the context of a complete lack of statements supporting gay rights or legalisation of abortion, with the exception of the SLD proposal mentioned above, in the years 2001–2006. Like in the previous phase of 1997–2001, the Right’s discourse seemed to be creating problems rather than reacting to them, raising the question of who was actually promoting homosexuality here.

An important turn in this respect took place in 2004, when a speaker identified themselves with the Left for the first time and entered the ethical/ideological dimension of the conflict over homosexuality, previously occupied one-sidedly by the Right – see Example 6.15 below. The term tolerancja (“tolerance”) then became an influential node word in the Left’s discourse to be employed frequently in future debates.

**Example 6.15**

PL: I was a participant in the march of anti-globalists in Warsaw and march for freedom in Cracow. According to the extreme Right […] I am thus a leftist. I, the leftist, agree […] that the acceptance of lack of tolerance causes violence (12 May 2004).

Another feature of the phase of 2001–2006 was the Polish Right’s widespread resistance towards human rights discourse, most prominently the terms mniejszości seksualne (“sexual minorities”) and orientacja seksualna (“sexual orientation”). The former was often preceded in the Right’s discourse by the hedge tak zwane (“so-called”), indicating an ironic, unsupportive, resilient attitude towards the term’s justifiability. In Latvia, these terms from human rights discourse seemed to be adapted by the Right quite early and employed both ironically as described above and in a form of an inversion of accusation/blame argument:

**Example 6.16**

LV: We that are not homosexuals – what human rights do we have? (26 March 1998).

**Example 6.17**

PL: It is impossible to promote homosexuality, no matter how hard I tried to promote it, you, if you are not homosexual, would not become homosexual. You can promote chickens in a supermarket, not homosexuality (29 April 2004).
As in the previous phase 1997–2001, there were very few voices in the defence of homosexuality. Next to Example 6.15 another statement may be mentioned, made to protest against the proliferation of the “promotion of homosexuality” argument – see Example 6.17. Furthermore, a new development in comparison to previous years seemed to be the introduction of a new identity label gej (“a gay”, existing only as a noun), which was probably used for the first time in 2002 (recall also Example 6.13); in Latvia, it started being used in 1999. Soon enough, it came to be used as an insult in interjections:

Example 6.18

PL: Speaker on the podium: “I’m smiling to Mr Lepper …”
Interjection from the audience: “Gay!” (21 April 2005).

In general terms, while there were considerably fewer references to homosexuality in Latvian than Polish parliamentary debates between 2001 and 2006, these references were more likely to be sarcastic or jocular. Appearing in debates on unrelated topics, they seemed to be used to provide comic relief and the kind of locker-room rapport mentioned earlier – please see Example 6.19 and recall Example 6.4. The appeal of such jokes depends on the presupposition that everyone in the audience is heterosexual. It is possible to assume that many Latvian parliamentarians did not take the issue of homosexuality seriously and truly believed the problem did not exist in Latvia at all – a stance actually expressed a few times in the debates. On the other hand, humour could also be used in defence of homosexuality, although rather indirectly, through making jokes at the expense of those expressing anti-gay views – as in Examples 6.20–6.21 below (compare also Examples 6.25–6.27):

Example 6.19

LV: Deciding whether sexual orientation is an object of discrimination or not is much more amusing than discussing trailers and semi-trailers (22 April 2004).

Example 6.20

LV: The Civil Law has already solved the question of same-sex, two-sex and three-sex marriages a long time ago (26 October 2005).

Example 6.21

LV: Dear colleagues from the LPP! The more I listen to you, the more convinced I become that many of you have problems in the sex department […] and you are constantly suffering from some sort of complexes (15 September 2005).

6.4.4 The years 2005–2007: radicalisation of the Polish Right

The fifth term of 2005–2007 of the Polish parliament saw the first peak in the number of references to homosexuality, even though it was dissolved after only two years. It was a controversial term as it included members from the populist parties Samoobrona (Self-Defence) and Liga Polskich Rodzin (League of Polish Families, LPR). The latter’s representative and Minister of Education 2005–2007 Roman Giertych “led a public attack on the rights
of sexual minorities, particularly in schools” (O’Dwyer and Schwartz, 2010, p.225), turning his unabashed homophobia into political capital and contributing significantly to the politicisation of sexuality (Sidorenko, 2008). He was also the one to propose the ban on representations of homosexuality mentioned above. In the debates, the previous government’s concern for gay and lesbian rights was always LPR’s central objection – even though the analysis above clearly shows no such concern. When the parliament debated a vote of no confidence in him, his own defence emphasised the impudence of his predecessor, who allowed gay organisations and German transsexuals to be invited to Polish schools (8 September 2006). In a discussion on the drug prevention programme, he mentioned “anarchistic, feminist and homosexual organisations” as factors leading to the increase of drug consumption among youths – another example of the association of homosexuality with drugs (recall Example 6.13). With the populist parties in the parliament, the quality of the discussion clearly deteriorated. Although homosexuals were subject to verbal abuse before, the extent of those insults did not come close to what can be seen in Example 6.22 and many similar statements from 2005–2007.

Example 6.22

PL: Another shameless equality march – manifestation of gays and lesbians and their allies – is being planned for the coming Saturday in Warsaw. Degeneration will spread on the streets of our capital, public disruption will become a fact […] these continuously recurring manifestations of deviation in many cities of Poland are not an expression of equality and freedom, but a clear provocation of enemies of normality, enemies of common sense, enemies of Christian principles and simply enemies of morality and public order. Everyone has the right to their sexual orientation regardless of whether it is a consequence of mental disorder, so illness, or an expression of a wild fashion for difference […] as long as they are confined in the sphere of their privacy […] No minority has the right to terrorize the majority […] Do residents that do not want to have anything to do with sexual pathologies […] have to feel threatened by the invasion of gays and lesbians, by the public propaganda of sodomy? […] There can be no approval of an event that promotes homosexuality in the capital of Poland, that encourages public disorder, that clearly demoralizes society and constitutes an obscene provocation from a group that turns homosexuality into an ideology and a tool in political and religious battle (8 June 2006).

This fragment draws on many different discourses that are mixed together. It contains some war metaphors – the (sexual) minority as terrorists and enemies, the activism of gays and lesbians as an invasion – which belong to the discourse of war and terrorism popularised worldwide after 9/11 (Machin and van Leeuwen, 2007). Medical discourse (“deviation”, “mental disorder”, “illness”, “pathologies”) constructs homosexuality as a disease while terms from moral (“shameless”, “degeneration”, “obscene”, “demoralises”) and religious (“Christian principles”, “sodomy”) discourses present it as condemnable. Actions of gays and lesbians are also represented as a threat to the public order (“disruption”, “provocation”, “public order”, “disorder”), which is of particular value to the Right. Last but not least, the fragment employs the notorious homosexual propaganda strategy (“propaganda of sodomy”) and (“promotes homosexuality”).

The fifth term also saw the first use of the highly offensive label pederaści (“pederasts”), noteworthy as the term was already rather archaic. In the Latvian material, while it had been
used relatively frequently in the 1990s, it almost disappeared in the 2000s. Furthermore, in 2005–2007, the phenomena listed together with homosexuality were not only abortion and pornography but also, for example, “autoerotism” (masturbation), divorce or contraception. This showcases an extreme retraditionalisation of the Right’s discourse in Poland and the importance of Catholicism as the foundation for this development. In Latvia, where the influence of the Catholic Church is much lower, using such discursive strategies would make no sense; not only divorce or contraception but also abortion – which to this day incites the most vehement opposition from the Polish Right – are uncontroversial and do not have any antagonising potential. We need to be careful, however, not to draw a simple causal link between religiosity and a conservative attitude towards sexuality and reproductive rights; after all, the situation of the LGBT community in Latvia is similar, and not better, as in Poland. In fact, I believe that the same shift towards retraditionalisation took place there as well, but with another outcome – a silencing of homosexuality in Latvian parliamentary debates after 2006.

Probably the most noteworthy aspect of the conflict in this timeframe was the fact that the opponents of the Right started to define it in ideological terms, associating it with specific values/attitudes. So just as the Left was defined through its association with abortion, homosexuality, pornography and so on, the Right came to be defined through its association with neo-Nazism, racism, homophobia, xenophobia and so on. In addition, the strategy of the Right to frame a debate on anything, including animal experiments or mobile telephone networks, in ethical/moral/ideological terms, was overtaken by its opponents, who started to make such explicit references to their moral and political beliefs as well, as in Example 6.23. The Left also started to defend some of the groups (assumed to be) targeted by the Right due to their association with leftist-liberal politics, although rarely mentioning sexual minorities exclusively – see Example 6.24. On the other hand, the number of humorous, jocular remarks from the opponents of the Right that did mention homosexuality increased significantly, commenting on the preoccupation of some MPs with the topic, as in Examples 6.25–6.28.

Example 6.23

PL: You, ladies and gentlemen of the Right, agree to, or even accept discrimination and inequality. We, the Left, regard equality and justice to be basic values of the society. You want to decide what a family should look like, want to tell Poles how they should live and what they should believe in. We promote freedom of opinion, freedom to choose and decide one’s own way to happiness and realization of one’s life plans (10 November 2005).

Example 6.24

PL: PiS [Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – Law and Justice party] can do nothing so well as finding enemies. An enemy can be anything: SLD, nurses […] Jaruzelski of course, a gay and a feminist, Germany with Russia, judges (7 September 2007).

Example 6.25

PL: You, Sir, as usual dream about the rights of homosexuals (24 November 2005).

Example 6.26

PL: Mr Giertych associates everything with homosexual organisations, so I understand his obsession (22 June 2006).
Example 6.27

PL: MP Wierzejski, your obsession with sexual minorities predestines you to become a member of the Polish Sexologist Association. I hope you have already submitted your application (23 June 2006).

Example 6.28

PL: In the breaks between […] successive hunts for homosexuals […] will you have at least a bit of time to address the educational problems that are important for Polish children and youth? (28 June 2007).

In response, the Right seemed to attempt to overtake or recontextualise the tolerance discourse, for example, coming up with the neologism Chrystofobia (“christophobia”, parallel to homophobia), or claim that while racism, nationalism or fascism were indeed unacceptable, they only happened somewhere else, not in Poland:

Example 6.29

PL: It is these countries, mainly Germany and France, that stand behind the resolution of the European Parliament […] which are responsible for possible cases of racism, nationalism, fascism or xenophobia in Europe. In Poland there are no such cases (23 June 2006).

6.4.5 The years 2007–2011: calm after the storm

The sixth parliamentary term of 2007–2011, following the prematurely dissolved Sejm (for a good reason), was like the calm after the storm, witnessing less populist argumentation and explicitly hostile anti-gay discourse. The most notable development was the increase in references to religion and religious arguments by both sides. The Right continued associating the increasing visibility of homosexuality with the influence of the European Union, and the EU with anti-religion attitudes, for example, Unia prowadzi walkę z religią (“the [European] Union leads the fight against religion”), nie walczcie z religią (“don’t fight against religion”). As these examples show, war metaphors (“fight”) continue to be widely employed by the Right discourse, presenting religion and religious people as victims of attacks that have institutional backing (“the Union leads the fight”). The expression dyskryminacja chrześcijan (“discrimination of Christians”) exemplifies the recontextualisation of human rights discourse, where the term “discrimination” is applied to the majority rather than minority of the society. Pro-gay voices started employing religious arguments as well, asking “Can gays and lesbians not be good Christians? Can Protestant, Orthodox, Buddhist believers not be good Polish citizens?” (24 June 2009). This last example also demonstrates the increasing focus of the Left on various definitions of minorities usually listed together – national, ethnic, religious, sexual – reflecting the growing significance of pluralism/multiculturalism in the EU and Poland and probably working to cushion sexual minorities among other, more acceptable ones. The Right responded with a new term, multi-kulti, used with a kind of mocking, contemptuous connotation. The expression is actually an abbreviation of the term multikulturowość (“multiculturalism”), which has been reappropriated by the Right discourse like “political correctness”, “sexual orientation” or “sexual minority”. Homosexuality was targeted by the Right with full force again in 2011, when discussing legislation on hate speech and hate-motivated crimes, as well as the question of recognising
civil partnerships concluded abroad, including same-sex ones. Some notable referential strategies included roszczenia homolobby (“demands of the homolobby”), degradacja społeczna i cywilizacyjna (“social and civilisational degradation”) and afirmacja zaburzeń seksualnych (“affirmation of sexual dysfunctions”). Homosexuality was also associated with paedophilia, which surprisingly had not happened that often before in the Polish material, although it was commonplace in the Latvian material throughout the 20-year period.

Over the same period, Latvia also had two parliamentary terms – the ninth in 2006–2010 and the tenth in 2010–2011. For the years 2007–2011, there were extremely few results from the keyword search. For example, homoseks* had only five occurrences in 2010, pederast* – two in 2007, while gej* and lesb*/lezb* had none. The term seksuālā orientācija was found four times; once in 2009 and three times in 2010, in a debate on EU directives concerning anti-discrimination legislation. In all cases the uses were neutral as in the example below:

Example 6.30

LV: [The financial crisis] affects all the country residents regardless of gender, race, ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation and age (8 October 2009).

It is difficult to speculate about the reasons for this silence. It is possible that Latvian parliamentarians reacted to the earlier explosion of homophobic discourse by turning homosexuality into a taboo, which would point to the retraditionalisation rather than liberalisation of discourse, as suggested above. Another possibility is that a new vocabulary, invisible in key word search, was developed to avoid using the words that had become emotionally charged. There are some expressions denoting homosexuals in colloquial Latvian that could have been recontextualised by parliamentary discourse, e.g. mīkstie (“the soft ones”) or zilie lit. “the blue ones”. Still, as they remain colloquial and informal, a search of these terms could only return insults and interjections rather than actual debates on homosexuality as a topic.

6.4.6 The years 2011–2013: Polish Left joins the discussion

The final period to be considered here involves the Polish parliament’s seventh term of 2011–2015 and Latvian parliament’s eleventh term of 2011–2014; in both cases, material was collected until the end of 2013. The search in Latvian returned very few results again. On 13 December 2012, Saeima discussed a proposal to include in the Criminal Code a paragraph “on responsibility for sexual intercourse, pederasty and lesbianism with a person who has not reached 16 years of age” (par atbildību par dzimumsakariem, pederastiju un lesbiānismu ar personu, kura nav sasniegusi 16 gadu vecumu). The proposal was rejected but note the use of the controversial term “pederasty” to mean “male homosexuality” and how the enumeration separates “pederasty and lesbianism” from sexual relations. In 2012–2013, Saeima discussed the questions of civil unions and hate speech, but no references to homosexuality were made in these contexts.

In Poland, the seventh term was the first one that involved both sides of the conflict over homosexuality on more or less equal terms. With the election of the first openly transsexual MP, Anna Grodzka, and re-election of the openly gay Robert Biedroń, three draft laws important for the LGBT community were discussed: legislation on civil partnerships, gender recognition and hate-motivated crimes, explaining the second peak in the number of references to homosexuality, especially in 2013. All these topics were treated seriously.
by most discussants. Also, those who spoke against them tried to present substantive and rational arguments, e.g. using Article 18 of the Constitution on the protection of marriage. In particular, Anna Grodzka’s project of gender recognition law received unprecedented support and was accepted by the parliament, only to be vetoed by the president Andrzej Duda.

That said, there was no shortage of homophobic, hostile statements and insults. In the discussion on civil unions, relationships based exclusively on sex and physical pleasure were defined as ‘pure evil’ and traditional family – as a value that is “not up to discussion”. On these premises, homosexual – but never heterosexual – couples were then presented as interested only in sex: związki homoerotyczne są przejawem hedonizmu (“homoerotic relationships are a sign of hedonism”); nietrwale, jałowe związki (“unstable, sterile relationships”). The term “cohabitation” was deemed “meaningless” in relation to same-sex relationships, “based on mutual abuse” and threatening to family and nation. On the other hand, this discussion saw probably the first defence of homosexuality as a phenomenon – as opposed to defence of homosexual people’s human rights:

Example 6.31

**PL:** It has been known since Antiquity that homosexuality happens as something completely normal. You want to return Poland to the Middle Ages and almost burn people with another worldview, preference, taste. It is unacceptable (24 January 2013).

Homosexuality was also equated with paedophilia (gej – przyjacień dziecka [“gay – a child’s friend”]) and mentioned in a list of sexual deviations that included attraction towards the same sex, children, animals and objects. This statement caused an immediate protest by the MP Biedroń, who, as an openly gay man, felt personally offended. His presence in the parliament also motivated other MPs to protest homophobic statements from the podium.

The discussion on hate speech and hate crimes seemed to encourage many neologisms with the homo- prefix, e.g. homomarsze (“homo-marches”); homopropaganda (“homo-propaganda”); gejowska homomowa (“gay homo-speech”); homolewica (“homo-Left”), and revisited some of the previously mentioned expressions, most notably homoseksualne lobby (“homosexual lobby”); heterofobia (“heterophobia”); pseudokultura homoseksualna (“homosexual pseudo-culture”); and sexual orientation as “gibberish” (orientacja seksualna to bełkot). Example 6.32 illustrates the use of a fairly marginal and archaic term of abuse Sodomita (“sodomite”), which, as a religious discourse term, flags a religious argument. It is also similar to Example 6.16 in that it presents the majority, not the minority, as in need of protection. Also 6.33 below reflects homosexuality as an issue of concern in religion – especially Christianity – and exemplifies the kind of grand ideological argument discussed previously.

Example 6.32

**PL:** A sodomite, a homosexual should have legal protection […] a Catholic, an Orthodox – not (24 May 2012).

Example 6.33

**PL:** we live in the times when some think that gender is constructed, sexual orientation – inborn, substances causing psychoses and suicides are harmless, Christianity is called a sect, priests are publicly called boors, when persons designated as “homo-ophobic” are publicly encouraged to be destroyed (20 February 2013).
My final example shows the grand ideological argument from the other side of the conflict. It also suggests that these two positions – Left and Right – should not be considered equal, merely two opposing worldviews to choose from – a development from what we saw in Example 6.6:

**Example 6.34**

**PL:** This evil [of hate crime] that we talk about today has its provenance in and is encouraged by political groups which elevate xenophobia, nationalism, homophobia, discrimination of various social groups, and their provenance is unfortunately in the extreme Right. And it is encouraged by the discourse that has us all hostage, that there is a symmetry between those who are fascists, who are nationalists, who are sexists, and those who are anti-fascists, anti-sexists, and so on (22 November 2012).

This example is well suited to conclude the presentation of results, as it brings us back to the question of discourse and power, emphasising the role that language/discourse plays in representing the world in particular ways.

### 6.5 Discussion and conclusion

Studying the corpus has confirmed my initial expectation that the topic of homosexuality has encouraged conflict, disagreement and antagonism in the modern history of political discourse in Latvia and Poland, yielding many thought-provoking results. First of all, it proved possible to distinguish a few phases in the development of discourse on homosexuality between 1994 and 2013. In Poland, homosexuality entered the public debate in the context of the HIV/AIDS crisis (1994–1998), and quickly became incorporated by the Right discourse as an instrument in argumentation against the European Union and the Left (1997–2001). The debates on the future of Poland in the European Union between 2001–2006 solidified this instrumental use of homosexuality, which saw its first peak during the period of radicalisation of the Right (2005–2007), represented in the parliament by two extremist and populist parties. After the premature dissolution of that parliamentary term, the time of relative calm followed (2008–2011), with the slow mobilisation of the other side of the debate. The final phase of 2011–2013 saw the second peak in the number of references to homosexuality, caused both by parliamentary initiatives concerning the LGBT community being discussed and by the participation of both sides of the debate on more or less equal terms.

The Latvian material offers a very different story. There were hardly any references to homosexuality before 1998, then a short period of instrumentalisation of homosexuality by the Right in 1999–2000, followed by the EU debate in 2004–2006, after which the topic seems to have been silenced. The EU debate in Latvia coincided with the radicalisation of the Right, which, similarly as in Poland, was a reaction to joining the European Union in 2004. It is thus an important finding that the mobilisation of the Right against homosexuality seems to be connected with anxieties and fears concerning the nations’ future role in the European community and the survival of national identity. The fact, however, that directly after this moment of convergence, the discourses on homosexuality in Saeima and Sejm developed in two radically different ways requires explanation.

While contextualising the study results within the political and socio-cultural environment of Latvia and Poland would require a whole new article, one aspect is worth mentioning,
as it may be one of the reasons for this silence over homosexuality in Saeima after 2006. Despite its small size, Latvia has a relatively large Russian-speaking minority (about one-third of its residents; ca. 12 percent of the country’s inhabitants have no citizenship status). This minority is resented by many Latvians who see it as residue of Soviet Union’s collapse and justification for Russia to interfere into Latvia’s internal affairs. Thus, the refusal of some Latvian politicians to admit that discrimination exists in their country or to grant legal protection to vulnerable groups may have less to do with gays and lesbians and more with their fear of Russian-speaking residents being granted “special privileges” (Chojnicka, 2013). Still, it would only be a partial explanation. I believe that the absence of references to homosexuality in Latvian material after 2006 could also be at least partly attributed to the retraditionalisation of political discourse in response to the European Union expansion in 2004. The same process took place in Poland, but there the result was an increase in negative and offensive references to homosexuality rather than its tabooisation.

Another important finding is that there were only a few cases where homosexuality was part of a debate topic, for example, on civil unions in Sejm or anti-discrimination legislation in both parliaments. More frequently it was an object of discussion in a debate on a topic seen as more-or-less related, such as HIV/AIDS, sexual education, abortion, sexual offences, hate crimes – thus, topics associated with sexuality, reproduction/reproductive rights and criminal law. But the majority of references to homosexuality were unmotivated with regard to the debate topic, functioning as offensive strategies used to discredit either an opponent in the debate or the LGBT community as representing an undesired worldview or lifestyle. The use of such strategies rested upon the presupposition that homosexuality is commonly considered as something wrong. An idea or a person could be easily discredited by being associated, connected or compared to homosexuality. While lacking motivation in the direct context of the given debate, such instrumental use of homosexuality as a strategy in conflict does, of course, reflect more general debates taking place in the society and the growing visibility of the LGBT community. This growing visibility, however, does not correlate with increasing tolerance/acceptance in a simple, linear way. While some legal solutions aiming at improving the social climate for the LGBT community in Poland were finally discussed at the very end of the 20-year period, the increase in number of references to homosexuality must also be attributed to the rise in instrumental use of such references as offensive strategies.

Taking a historical approach made it possible to trace the development of verbal strategies of insult and abuse over the 20-year period. Many insulting labels denoting homosexuality or homosexuals that have been used by legal representatives of Latvians and Poles in their official, formal speeches, and these statements clearly constitute cases of hate speech as understood today. In the Sejm, growing awareness of the concept of hate speech has helped to formulate responses to such cases of verbal aggression, but they remain rare. In general, the linguistic behaviour that could be considered insulting or abusive has been more openly hostile and threatening in the Polish material and more ironic and jocular in the Latvian one. Contrary to Kurvinen’s (2007) results, medical discourse has played a marginal role in the story reconstructed here: both references to HIV/AIDS and framing homosexuality as a disease were scarce. The Right in both parliaments saw homosexuality consistently as a sexual deviation, parallel to zoophilia or necrophilia. Almost absent in Poland, the frequent association/confusion of homosexuality with paedophilia in Latvia is illustrated by the double meaning of the term pederastija and may be associated with the common concern for the small nation’s survival. Homosexuality was also seen as a choice – a selfish and hedonistic one – and gays and lesbians as personally responsible for the consequences of
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this choice. Same-sex couples were seen as illegitimate and meaningless and their relationships as based only on sex and unable to produce children, deeming invisible both heterosexual relations based exclusively on physical pleasure and uninterested in having children, and same-sex couples raising their own or adopted children. Sexualisation of discourse on same-sex relations reported by Kurvinen was absent. These differences are most likely to be genre-dependent.

Instead, the prevailing discourses in the conflict over homosexuality seem to be nationalistic and religious ones, confirming my earlier findings (Chojnicka, 2015). The former is more frequent in Latvia, a small country whose rightist politicians worry about the nation’s future; the latter is more widespread in Poland, whose Right sees the country as the last bastion of Christianity in the atheist/laic EU. Additionally, the human rights discourse could be employed by both sides of the conflict, with the Right using it ironically or to reverse the accusation.

Last but definitely not least, the most outstanding aspect of homosexuality in Latvian and, to an even greater extent, Polish parliamentary debates seems to me the way the Right’s discourse employs it to flag what it calls leftist-liberal politics. By attributing to it a positive, supportive attitude towards homosexuality and other phenomena presupposed to be commonly believed as unacceptable, the Right constructs an imaginary – and impossible – straw-man opponent. This positive attitude is then operationalised to discredit the Right’s opponents in a debate on any topic in a move that I have called a “grand ideological argument”. It happens in the context of an almost absolute lack of initiatives aiming at legalising any of these things. What other phenomena are associated with homosexuality depends on many socio-cultural factors that may change over time. Abortion is a very interesting example. In Poland, it is legal only in exceptional cases but hardly ever practised due to political pressure. The Right continues to politicise the issue by regularly threatening to delegalise it completely. Fervent opposition to both abortion and homosexuality appears to be a constant component of the Right’s political agenda. But in Latvia, where abortion is legal and access to it taken for granted, its connection to homosexuality is completely absent in the Right discourse. The influence of the Catholic Church in Poland may play a role here but is probably not the only explanation.

By constructing the Left through its assumed positive attitude towards homosexuality, abortion, pornography, prostitution, euthanasia and, increasingly, drug use, the Right’s discourse does two things. First, it creates an opponent position that is extremely difficult and risky to claim. And in fact, declarations of leftist-liberal affiliations in the corpus are very rare. Second, by taking it for granted that an association with homosexuality must be insulting and demeaning, it reinforces negative attitudes towards it. Again, voices in defence of homosexuality are absent in the Latvian material and rare in the Polish ones before 2011.

It thus appears that the conflict over homosexuality in Latvian and Polish parliamentary debates is to a large extent one-sided, with the Right struggling against an opponent that it constructs itself, providing counter-arguments for proposals that nobody makes, and instrumentalising homosexuality as a discursive strategy in order to discredit any actual competitor or proposal. By doing so, the Right constantly positions itself with regard to a much larger conflict that has been taking place in the societies of Latvia and Poland ever since the democratic transition. It is a conflict between traditional and modern values, typical in transitional societies but here additionally amplified by the anxiety caused by the EU expansion, which raised questions concerning the future role and significance of national identity. This is one of the reasons why anti-gay opposition in the parliaments was at its peak directly after Latvia and Poland joined the EU in 2004. But outside the parliament, this grand ideological
conflict has never been one-sided, and both leftist-liberal ideas and support for the LGBT community are currently finding more and more representatives.

References


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