

How LGBTI activism is defending democracy

[Blog, Civil Rights and Freedom, democracy, ILGA-Europe](#)

As attacks on democracy and freedom grow across Europe and beyond, LGBTI movements are inherently at the forefront of resistance. Here, ILGA-Europe's co-chairs, reflect on what meaningful progress looks like at this critical time, and how LGBTI organising is a backbone of democracy.

For this special blog, marking a month since the beginning of the year, we're sitting down with the newly elected co-chairs of ILGA-Europe's board, Simona Muršec and Mamikon Hovsepyan, to chat about the times our movement finds itself navigating, how our activism, experience and organising can bring leadership to the growing people power in the fight against the dismantling of democracy, why we're at the forefront in the first place, and what hope we have at this critical moment in the world.

Q: As we move into 2026, what makes you feel optimistic about the LGBTI movement's ability to shape its own future?

Mamikon:

"The region is again in a very turbulent situation. In some countries, we see better developments; in others, especially in Eastern Europe or Central Asia, we see anti-democratic actions targeting the LGBTI movement. But what matters is that we break borders between countries. We are united in supporting each other, taking care of our security, and pushing for change."

Simona:

"It is not easy to be very hopeful about what is happening in the world. But one thing is clear to me: there is a lot of power in our movement.

Hungary is a clear example. Pride was banned, yet activists, Pride organisers, and broad support within the country mobilised. The huge march last June showed that authoritarian legislation and prohibition are not going to fly.

At the same time, in the Hungarian city of Pécs, Pride organisers are now being threatened with up to one year of imprisonment. So why am I still hopeful? Because of how the international human rights community is organising around this. We may not have the power to change legislation directly, but there is power in how we protest and how we protect individual protesters.

We have resilience built through decades and centuries of oppression. This is not the time to stand down. It is the time to fight oppressive laws and regimes."

Q: This year, what would meaningful progress for LGBTI movements look like for you?

Simona:

"Meaningful progress is recognising which struggles are truly fundamental and deserve most of our energy. We cannot fight on all fronts equally.

Often, the biggest battles are not immediately visible as LGBTI issues. In Slovenia, one of the key struggles is protecting civil society itself. The extreme right is trying to weaken non-governmental organisations, their independence, and their funding. Without civil society, there is no accountability and no mobilisation for justice.

The same applies to bodily autonomy, including abortion rights. These are not always seen as core LGBTI issues, but structurally they are decisive in the medium and long term."

Mamikon:

“Governments are finding new ways to silence human rights defenders. This is not only happening in Russia or in countries copying Russian laws. Every country has its own mechanisms to put pressure on civil society, and we have to connect and work together across borders.

Digital safety is one priority. It is no longer just about passwords. In some countries, where activists cannot operate openly, digital activism becomes essential.

Technology is changing fast. Artificial intelligence, social media, new systems: they can be harmful or useful. We need to take what is useful for our activism and avoid the harm.

Laws are important, but they are not enough. When we cannot fight authorities directly, we need to work with society to change attitudes towards our communities and towards human rights more broadly.”

Q: How can LGBTI movements strengthen democracy beyond advancing their own rights?

Simona:

“LGBTI activists, especially Pride organisers, are often at the forefront when regimes become more oppressive. Protecting Pride strengthens democracy because it protects freedom of assembly and the right to protest. If a regime can criminalise Pride, it can criminalise any other voice it considers threatening.

Strategic litigation is another example. Even when cases are explicitly LGBTI-related, strengthening the independence of courts benefits democracy as a whole.

We also need to politicise people. The more politically conscious and engaged LGBTI people are, the stronger democracy becomes. Engagement looks different everywhere, but there are almost always ways to engage.

When we look at the full LGBTI spectrum, especially among younger generations, we are talking about a significant part of society. Mobilising that potential could be transformative.”

Mamikon:

“It is crucial that the movement is involved in decision-making processes. Otherwise, policies will be made without us and not about us. Experience shows that when the movement is present, better decisions are made.

We have to refuse to disappear. Some politicians want to erase us, but we will not let that happen. Even in the hardest situations, people are still falling in love and building families. These things give us strength to continue fighting for our rights.

We need to grow the movement and bring more people in.”

Q: What do you see as your role as co-chairs?

Mamikon:

“Our role is to help address the challenges the organisation is facing, whether financial gaps, governance questions, or bringing in specific expertise. I always think about what we can contribute to make the organisation stronger.

And maybe this sounds romantic, but my wish is to keep the rainbow visible, even when the political climate is cloudy.”

Simona:

“Our role as co-chairs is to support the strategic direction of the organisation together with the Secretariat and advisory board.

Personally, I want the board to work in a way that allows members to really take ownership: with clarity around roles, timelines, and responsibilities. I also believe it is important for the board to stay close to the membership, through better communication and informal spaces, including at conferences.

Taking responsibility, being transparent, and staying in dialogue with members is essential.”

Simona Muršec and Mamikon Hovsepyan are the co-chairs of ILGA-Europe's board. Simona is the President of [Ljubljana Pride Association](#) since 2015 and a devoted Human Rights Education trainer and facilitator of youth

policy processes for over 20 years. Mamikon is an LGBTI activist and human rights defender living and working in Armenia. He began his activism in 2002 and founded [Pink Armenia](#) in 2007, where he works now as a communications director.