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# Neoliberal governmentality and the (de)politicisation of LGBT rights: The case of the European Union in Turkey

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## Abstract

The European Union (EU) prides itself for being a promoter of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights in the world. It supports LGBT organisations abroad with the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). Yet, the EIDHR has come under scrutiny by scholars arguing that it is based on neoliberal rationalities and depoliticises civil society. The literature analyses the EU's documents but does not study funding in practice. Moreover, it has a narrow understanding of politicisation failing to include insights from feminist and queer literature. To problematize the EU's policy, we need to analyse it in the sites it intervenes in. It is unclear whether and how the EIDHR depoliticises LGBT organisations and issues. Studying the case of Turkey, I argue that the EU's support of LGBT organisations had ambiguous effects which are not necessarily the ones intended by the EU nor the ones expected by the governmentality literature. The EU's funding depoliticised the organisations in the sense that they looked less political and more transparent. Yet, this helped making LGBT rights' claims more legitimate within Turkey's political struggles. At the same time, EU funding created conflicts within the LGBT movement about the question of Western external funding and neoliberal co-optation.

## Keywords

European Union, governmentality, LGBT, politicisation, Turkey

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## Introduction

The European Union (EU) sees itself as a promoter of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)<sup>1</sup> rights in the world (Council of the European Union, 2013). Yet, the EU has failed to include gender identity and sexual orientation in a consistent manner in its external relations (Thiel, 2015). The EU's LGBT policy originates in the Council's Employment Directive 2000/78 which guarantees the non-discrimination of sexual minorities within the EU in the labour market (Bilić, 2016: 2; Council of the European

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Union, 2000: 2). Therefore, the EU's LGBT rights policy has been limited to the common market. Of all the EU's external policies, enlargement has been the area in which the EU has had the highest chances to push for LGBT rights because candidate countries have to adopt the EU *acquis*. Yet, the EU has not been very successful in promoting LGBT rights in its external relations (Mos, 2013; O'Dwyer, 2012; Sloomaeckers et al., 2016). In 2013, the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU adopted the 'Guidelines to promote and protect the enjoyment of all human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons': 'The EU aims to promote and protect all human rights of LGBT persons on the basis of existing international legal standards in this area, including those set by the United Nations and the Council of Europe' (Council of the European Union, 2013: 2). But the EU's 2016 'Global Strategy' does not include any reference to LGBT rights although it mainstreams gender (European Union, 2016). The guidelines of 2013 suggest that the main activity of LGBT rights promotion is supporting civil society organisations (CSOs) and human rights defenders (Council of the European Union, 2013: 7–9) but how effective the EU is in supporting LGBT organisations is understudied. The Foucauldian literature criticises the EU's funding of human rights organisations for its transference of neoliberal rationalities that render human rights as a technical issue and depoliticise them and the CSOs funded. This literature is important for showing the neoliberal configuration of EU foreign policies and questioning their Eurocentric discourse (İşleyen, 2015a, 2015b; Kurki, 2011; Tagma et al., 2013; Muehlenhoff, 2017). However, while some authors (Malmvig, 2014; Tazzioli and Walters, 2016; Wittendorp, 2016) study governmentality beyond EU documents, none of them investigate the depoliticisation claim in the 'field'. It is unclear whether, and how, EU funding depoliticises LGBT organisations and how this affects the situation of LGBT rights in non-EU countries.

I try to answer these questions for the case of Turkey. First, I challenge the depoliticisation claim by asking whether depoliticisation is always undesirable and by broadening the understanding of the political in the governmentality literature. I do so by incorporating insights from feminist and queer international relations (IR) theory long neglected in this literature. Second, using these theoretical considerations, I study the EU support for LGBT rights organisations in Turkey. I analyse projects that were funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). I focus on the EIDHR because it directly transfers grants to organisations without channelling it through governmental agencies – in contrast to other EU funds – and for this reason has been the most important funding source for LGBT organisations in Turkey (Interview C with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Ankara; Interview E with EU Delegation in Turkey, 2013, Ankara). Although the literature has identified neoliberal governmentality in various EU and international policies (İşleyen, 2015b; Jaeger, 2007, 2010), it has directly criticised the EIDHR for its neoliberal governmentality in its calls, funding requirements, and procedures (Kurki, 2011; Tagma et al., 2013). The EU increased the EIDHR budget for the time period between 2014 and 2020 from €1,104,000,000 to €1,333,000,000 (European Commission, 2016; EU Delegation to Turkey, 2016). I studied EIDHR-funded projects taking place between 2002 and 2013 and conducted interviews with people working at LGBT CSOs in 2013. I chose this period because the crack-down of the Gezi protests is regarded as a significant turning point in the political climate in Turkey with more repressive politics gaining ground. It is thus crucial to study the effects of EU funding for LGBT organisations in Turkey around that time to understand how the EU's policy influenced the LGBT movement and its struggles to create continuities even during increasing authoritarianism. Third, I summarise and discuss my findings. I argue

that in the case of Turkey, the EU's funding of LGBT rights organisations had ambiguous effects which are not necessarily the ones intended by the EU, nor the ones expected by the governmentality literature.

The case of Turkey is especially interesting because here the political discourse strongly politicises human rights and civil society. My article also advances the literature on Turkey–EU relations and civil society in Turkey (Alpan and Diez, 2014; Ketola, 2013; Muehlenhoff, 2015; Zihnioğlu, 2013). Markus Ketola's (2013) and Özge Zihnioğlu's (2013) research on EU civil society funding in Turkey shows the incompatibility of the EU's civil society concept with civil society as it exists in Turkey. Yet, they do not show the effects of these incompatibilities. The EU and the CSOs are not completely independent from one another. They are both struggling over what democracy and civil society mean. CSOs are confronted with the EU's discourse and its funding requirements while the EU is confronted with the CSOs' reactions. The EU's promotion of LGBT rights is not a linear process (see Bilić, 2016: 6).

The analysis also has implications that go beyond the case of Turkey. First, it is relevant for the study of EU policies in other countries with authoritarian political systems, high distrust in civil society (e.g. see Tagma et al., 2013), and weak social welfare states. Second, the analysis problematises the reductionist critique of the neoliberal nature of the EU's intervention in non-EU countries, providing relevant insights for research on other 'neoliberal' external policies. It does so by challenging and contextualising the claim that the EU's neoliberal policies are depoliticising and that this is always undesirable. I go beyond the analysis of EU documents and direct attention to the sites of intervention, their political struggles, and the actors involved – LGBT CSOs, and activists. This article also enriches the governmentality literature with a feminist and queer view on depoliticisation. The analysis thus offers a complex and ambiguous picture of the EU's support of LGBT rights organisations, its neoliberal nature, and its depoliticising effects.

### **Queering the theory of depoliticisation and neoliberal governmentality**

The literature studying EU civil society support through governmentality points to the neoliberal rationalities of funding instruments and assumes their depoliticising effects (İşleyen, 2015b; Kurki, 2011; Merlingen, 2007; Tagma et al., 2013). Similarly, the critical IR literature suggests that the neoliberal governmentality of international policies is depoliticising and implies that this is negative (e.g. Flinders and Wood, 2014; Jaeger, 2007; Joseph, 2013; Lipschutz, 2005; Methmann, 2013). Foucault introduces the concept of governmentality in his lectures (Foucault et al., 2008) to describe the development of the European welfare states from the 16th century onwards. Governmentality refers to a new form of governing in which the sovereign increasingly disappeared and states rely on strategies and rationalities (or mentalities) (Foucault, 1982: 793; Hindess, 1996: 106–113). Although governmentality targets *free* individuals and gives them responsibilities, it is based on power. This power is not coercive but productive, working through free individuals (Foucault, 1982: 790). Successful governmentality makes free citizens act according to these mentalities (Dean, 1999: 31; Lipschutz, 2005). Although scholars do not clearly differentiate between liberal and neoliberal rationalities (İşleyen, 2015b; Kurki, 2011; Merlingen, 2007b), they imply that it is mostly neoliberal rationalities that are depoliticising.

Despite the fact that many authors hardly define depoliticisation, they share three – often implicit – assumptions about depoliticisation. First, depoliticisation is not apolitical

in itself but makes something appear apolitical. Flinders and Wood (2014: 136) state that '[...] few scholars associate depoliticisation with the removal of politics; and many associate it with the denial of politics or the imposition of a specific (and highly politicized) model of statecraft'. For these authors, depoliticisation is part of *neoliberal* politics and thus political (Kurki, 2011). Depoliticisation is a process of presenting or constituting something as apolitical while it is not. Second, depoliticisation refers to removing an issue from the sphere of political contestation. As İşleyen (2015a) writes on the base of Methmann's (2013) work,

Depoliticization within governmentality works through strategies and techniques that tame struggles, manage inconsistencies, and disrupt contestation moves, as a result of which the social order and its deep-rooted practices are left unchallenged. (İşleyen, 2015a: 258)

Neoliberal rationalities prevent political contestation because solutions to issues are presented as objective, neutral, and, thus, apolitical. Third, the mechanism through which neoliberal governmentality depoliticises is by rendering issues 'technical': 'It transforms political issues into technical and managerial problems, thereby removing them from the sphere of political decision-making and fundamental contention' (Jaeger, 2007: 260). EU policy-making is particularly constituted as 'technical' and based on 'expertise' in order to find the supposedly most effective solution to a problem (Walters and Haahr, 2005). Such 'technical' decision-making appears apolitical and free of ideologies although is neoliberal itself (Kurki, 2011).

To sum up, the literature assumes that depoliticisation is neoliberal and removes issues from the sphere of political contestation by rendering them technical. This conceptualisation implies that depoliticisation is undesirable as it limits political contestation and deepens structural inequalities because of its neoliberal nature. Overall, I agree that depoliticisation is political and should be problematized. However, the literature has a reductionist view of depoliticisation because it presents depoliticisation as always undesirable and uses a narrow definition of the political as only taking place in the public sphere, dismissing private instances of politicisation. Here, the debate on the EU's governmentality would benefit from the insights of feminist and queer IR literature. Let me illustrate this in more detail.

Regarding the undesirability of depoliticisation, the literature is Eurocentric because it is based on Foucault's conceptualisation of governmentality as it developed in Western Europe (Foucault et al., 2008). Scholars studying the EU's intervention in non-EU countries apply it to non-Western contexts where the political systems are different and developed differently. The governmentality concept is based on the assumption of a generally free and liberal society (Foucault et al., 2008), an assumption that does not even necessarily hold true for EU member states. The point is that rendering an issue technical might make it possible to discuss it in the first place if the issue has not previously been part of free political debate. For example, in Turkey, Kurdish rights have not been (and increasingly are not) a legitimate demand because they have been highly politicised. Moreover, they have been presented as a threat to national security, becoming 'securitised' (Bilgin, 2008). When human rights issues are securitised and banned from political debates, making them appear less political might be helpful for moving them into the 'normal' sphere of politics (Buzan et al., 1998: 29).

Moreover, the literature assumes that neoliberal governmentality depoliticises an issue through economic rationalities and technologies. Neoliberal rationalities constitute civil

society as an economic entrepreneur which is self-responsible and is supposed to use technologies of visibility and performances (Walters and Haahr, 2005). Individuals and civil society use procedures to increase their efficiency and productivity, and reduce costs such as setting targets, defining ways to get there, and measuring output – that is technologies of performance. They document all of this to make their work visible and accountable (Walters and Haahr, 2005: 122–127). The literature expects that the technologies of visibility and performance are strongly depoliticising because they present an issue as technical and manageable instead of political (Baumgarten and Ullrich, 2012; Li, 2007: 236). However, they also present it as transparent and visible. The ambiguous understanding of visibility provided by feminist and queer perspectives challenges the assumption of undesirable depoliticisation. On the one hand, LGBT people are often invisible in a heteronormative world: ‘these bodies have been *absented* and this is a form of discursive violence’ (Shepherd and Sjoberg, 2012: 9, emphasis in original). This invisibility (re)produces heteronormativity, ‘others’ LGBT people and implies their marginal role in politics, society, and history (Shepherd and Sjoberg, 2012). In this sense management practices could make LGBT organisations more visible and more transparent and create space for LGBT issues in civil and political society, especially if they have been previously neglected and/or securitised. Meanwhile, being visible as LGBT people may also reproduce their othering and categorisation as different. This raises the question whether LGBT communities want to assimilate or be radically different. Do they want the same rights as heterosexuals, like the right to get married (similar to liberal feminist ideas), or do they want society to transform and move away from labels and heteronormative ideas (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 131–139; Thiel, 2015: 78–79)? LGBT communities often discuss whether EU supported LGBT groups are complicit with the EU’s neoliberal policies and prevent larger transformations. For example, in Croatia, EU support for LGBT rights created conflicts between professionalised CSOs supported by the EU and grassroots groups demanding more radical social change (Butterfield, 2016). Depoliticisation might be desirable in the sense that it makes LGBT issues visible in a previously securitised setting but it might have limited transformative potential and create conflicts within LGBT communities.

Related to this, the governmentality literature also has a narrow definition of politics. It dismisses the fact that politics also takes place in private spaces: ‘Rather than relocating the analysis of politics itself, critical theorists equate politicization with relocating issues in the public sphere or the “the political” by removing them from the “depoliticized” arenas of family, economy, or bureaucracy’ (Cruikshank, 1999: 117). This is a feminist understanding of politics that considers the private to be political and the public and private sphere as overlapping and interacting (Mouffe, 1992). It is surprising that the governmentality literature dismisses this form of politicisation despite being interested in the micro-level practices of governing (Merlingen, 2011: 164). Thus, a more fluid conceptualisation of the private and public spheres enables us to see that ‘micro-level’ politicisation may lead to more structural change and politicisation (Li, 2007: 26).

Adopting this feminist understanding of the political also complicates the analysis of a key element of neoliberal governmentality, namely the empowerment of civil society. The EU intends to ‘empower’ CSOs by increasing their ‘capacities’, such as in management and financial capacities (Lemke, 2001: 201). The idea of empowerment is often passed on in projects that CSOs implement with EU funding. Scholars criticise the fact that empowerment asks individuals to help themselves instead of relying on the state (Dean, 1999: 67). People are encouraged to participate in political decision-making as an

active self-responsible citizen. Yet, their participation often rather legitimises than changes the status quo because once you take part in political decision-making it is more difficult to criticise the outcome (Muehlenhoff, 2017: 48; Olivius, 2014: 157). This is additionally problematic because while empowerment works 'through, not against, the subjectivity of the poor' (Cruikshank, 1999: 73), the relations of empowerment are largely dependent on the knowledge of the people who empower, that is, the experts (Cruikshank, 1999: 72; Dean, 1999: 67–69). However, 'empowerment' also carries an idea of emancipation and has been a strategy of the Left for triggering resistance and political participation (Cruikshank, 1999: 68). Empowerment projects might politicise individuals by creating a shared experience and communities (Cruikshank, 1999: 80; Li, 2007: 26) and/or triggering resistance to them (Cruikshank, 1999: 118–121).

Moreover, neoliberal rationalities supposedly make civil society organisations an integral part of government by constituting them as a service provider for those in need, serving as a substitute for the declining welfare state (Lemke, 2001: 203). Kurki claims that the EU makes CSOs into social service providers by financing projects focusing on social support (Kurki, 2011). This is depoliticising because donors and social service providers define what marginalised people need (Cruikshank, 1999: 38). The people become dependent on the CSOs which act as managers of marginalisation instead of politicising the situation (Ferguson, 1990: 256). This might be a correct analysis in declining welfare states in which social services are increasingly privatised. But in contexts in which specific services have never been provided for by the state because they were not recognised as needed, performing this role is highly political. In fact, most non-EU states in which the EU's neoliberal rationalities intervene have never had a social welfare state. For example, in Turkey, the state tortured Kurdish people in its prisons and CSOs provided medical, psychological, and legal services to torture survivors. The performativity in providing these services by the organisation and in torture survivors (constituted as 'survivors' instead of 'victims') claiming them transforms survivors into subjects and is political (see Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 140–148).

By integrating feminist and queer theory, I suggest a more complex understanding of (de)politicisation which acknowledges instances of politicisation on the individual level and the possibility of a more desirable form of depoliticisation which makes a rights claim more legitimate. Depoliticisation should be problematised in a more nuanced way and by investigating the site of intervention and possible depoliticisation. In the following, I analyse activities of LGBT CSOs in Turkey funded by the EIDHR between 2002 and 2013. I analyse the practices and discourses of the CSOs using their project documents, their websites, and interviews conducted with people working for LGBT CSOs and LGBT activists in Turkey in 2013. I selected the major organisations that had received EU funding (Amargi, Kaos GL, Siyah Pembe Üçgen, and Spod)<sup>2</sup>. I do not provide an analysis of the neoliberal rationalities in the EIDHR documents because scholars have clearly shown these elsewhere (Kurki, 2011, 2013; Tagma et al., 2013). Instead, I focus on the effects of the neoliberal rationalities.

## **The EIDHR and the (de)politicisation of LGBT rights in Turkey**

LGBT rights were not visible and not an issue of public debate in Turkey before 2000. Although homosexuality has never been illegal in Turkey (Engin, 2015: 840), there is no law ensuring non-discrimination. LGBT people have been strongly discriminated against

in their private, public, and work lives. The military denies LGBT people from serving in the army because it regards homosexuality as a psychological disorder (Engin, 2015: 840–843). Up until 2010, there were several instances in which LGBT organisations were threatened by closure. Although none of them was closed in the end, they continue to be under constant pressure (Amnesty International Turkey, 2009; *Hürriyet Daily News*, 2011; Interview F with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Izmir/Tübingen). Since the early 2000's, however, partly coinciding with the beginning of Turkey's EU accession talks and Turkey's reform process in 2005, LGBT rights entered political debates and were politicised by Turkish officials (Arat and Nuñez, 2017: 2). Especially in the end of the first decade of the millennium, LGBT issues were increasingly discussed in public. One trigger for public debate was the murder of Ahmet Yıldız in 2009 who was killed by his father for being gay. The public termed this the first 'gay honour-killing', a representation that was criticised by LGBT groups for implying that his murder might be legitimate (Akkuş and Şahan, 2013; Şafak, 2012). The case of Yıldız increased public awareness for the discrimination of LGBT people in Turkey because national newspapers, for example, *Hürriyet* and *Radikal*, reported on it (Aydemir, 2012; Vural, 2011). Yet, it also shows that despite homosexuality not being illegal, Turkish authorities do not protect LGBT individuals and often do not prosecute and punish harassment and violence against LGBT people. Yıldız had made an official complaint to the police stating that he was threatened by his family but the police did not act on it (Arat and Nuñez, 2017: 2). LGBT individuals have been described as a threat to 'public morality and family' or being 'abnormal' and 'sick' by state officials (Arat and Nuñez, 2017; Engin, 2015). For example, the deputy of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) Türkan Dağoğlu stated in 2013 that LGBT people conducted 'abnormal behavior' (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2013).

Nevertheless, between 2002 and 2013 LGBT organisations became a more legitimate actor and LGBT rights gained visibility on the political agenda with representatives from different parties, such as the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP), the Republican Peoples' Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) and the AKP advocating for them (Birdal, 2015: 131–132; *Hürriyet Daily News*, 2013; Oda TV, 2013: 131–132).

As with most human rights organisations in Turkey, the first LGBT associations, Kaos GL and Lambda, were founded in the 1990s (Kaos GL, 2014b; Lambdaistanbul, 2016; Pope and Pope, 2011: 342). A second wave of LGBT CSOs including Pembe Hayat, Siyah Pembe Üçgen and Spod (Sosyal Politikalar Cinsiyet Kimliği ve Cinsel Yönelim Çalışmaları Derneği) registered in the late 2000s when LGBT issues gained more acceptance (Pembe Hayat, 2016a; Siyah Pembe Üçgen, 2016; Spod, 2012b). The LGBT movement has grown over the past decade and has become one of the largest activist movements in Turkey. It has traditionally been anarchist (Birdal, 2015: 131; Interview D with LGBT Activists, 2013, Istanbul; Interview G with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul/Tübingen).

From the beginning, one of the main tasks of LGBT CSOs in Turkey has been to provide LGBT people who suffered harassment, discrimination, and abuse with legal, medical, and psychological services by running support centres and hotlines (Kaos GL, 2014b; Pembe Hayat, 2016b; Spod, 2016a). According to the governmentality literature the provision of social services through CSOs is a typical neoliberal task because it relieves the state of fulfilling this duty (Kurki, 2011). But in Turkey, as in many other countries, the state never offered any services for LGBT people because it did not



recognise the safe-guarding of LGBT rights as its responsibility (Arat and Nuñez, 2017). The LGBT organisations perform a political role by constituting LGBT individuals as subjects with rights and problematising their harassment. The performativity in providing services makes LGBT people and issues visible in the public sphere (see Butler and Athanasiou, 2013: 140–148). While only a minority of EIDHR funds are used for these services, a majority supported monitoring and awareness-raising activities. Because the LGBT organisations document the cases brought to them by survivors of violence, they are able to report them and constitute LGBT rights violation as a problem in the Turkish public. Kaos GL and Siyah Pembe Üçgen implemented EIDHR-funded projects together in which they documented crimes committed against LGBT people. The report calls on the Turkish state to protect the human rights of LGBT individuals referring to the European Convention on Human Rights (Kaos GL and Siyah Pembe Üçgen İzmir and Pembe Hayat, 2010). Generally, LGBT CSOs used a discourse that reflected the EU's human rights discourse. Within EIDHR-funded projects and on their websites, they proclaimed that LGBT rights were human rights referring to the European Convention on Human Rights and to the situation of LGBT rights in other European countries (Kaos GL, 2014b; Kaos GL, Siyah Pembe Üçgen İzmir and Pembe Hayat, 2010; Spod, 2012c). EU support and the EU accession process, therefore, provided LGBT CSOs with an opportunity and reference point to make the violation of LGBT rights visible and to demand their protection (O'Dwyer, 2012 finds similar effects in Poland). At that time, the discourse of universal and particularistic (still constituted as a minority) human rights also resonated with the AKP's government discourse of democratisation and human rights (Birdal, 2015).

Moreover, the LGBT organisations engaged with politicians from all parties and the media which was impossible before 2000 when LGBT rights were a 'non-issue'. With EIDHR funding two organisations drafted a report on hate crime and hate speech in the media which they presented to the public and representatives of the AKP, CHP, and Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP) (EU Delegation ILGA Europe, 2011; Interview C with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Ankara; EU Delegation to Turkey, 2014). Another EIDHR supported project produced a guide for media professionals on how to avoid hate speech and stereotypical representations of the LGBT community (Güner, 2013). A representative of the largest LGBT organisation in Turkey described the role of the EU as decisive in enabling a public conversation about LGBT issues: 'When the EU comes and supports LGBT issues, lots of political people might see that it is a public issue [...]. Ten years ago in the mainstream media, LGBT was not a right-based issue' (Interview C with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Ankara).

However, despite the organisations' success in politicising LGBT issues and engaging with the media and politicians, they did not run the risk of being co-opted and depoliticised by becoming a part of the political decision-making system. When LGBT organisations intervened in the debate on the new Turkish constitution and demanded that it should include the protection of sexual orientation and gender identity (Birdal, 2015; Spod, 2012c), they were not successful. In two EIDHR projects, LGBT organisations invited different political actors, activists, and academics to discuss their demand for the new constitution (Kaos GL, 2013a, 2013b). Although Erdoğan had publicly supported this in 2002 and 2010 by stating that LGBT rights were human rights (Kaos GL, 2002, 2010), a majority of politicians of the AKP and the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) voted against it in 2013. The issue triggered strong opposition and

hate speech from politicians accusing the LGBT community of demanding ‘special’ rights (Dursun, 2013) and not being ‘normal’ (Arat and Nuñez, 2017). Nevertheless, the LGBT organisations put the issue on the political agenda. The debate on the constitution allowed the LGBT community to ‘make new contacts in the political establishment, especially the CHP’ in addition to the already existing links to the left Kurdish HDP (Birdal, 2015: 131). Overall, the LGBT CSOs increased their visibility and public awareness for LGBT rights (Interview A with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul; Interview B with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul; Interview C with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Ankara; Interview D with LGBT activists, 2013, Istanbul; Interview F with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Izmir/Tübingen; Interview C with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Ankara). In contrast to what the literature assumes, they used EIDHR grants to achieve long-term political goals such as including the non-discrimination on the base of gender identity and sexual orientation in the constitution.

Moreover, instead of stressing the self-responsibility for emancipation of LGBT individuals as the literature suggests (Kurki, 2011: 353), the organisations focused on publicly pointing out the unacceptable situation that LGBT people are in. With the help of EIDHR and other funds, they published reports on human rights abuses and hate speech in the media on a yearly basis (Kaos GL, 2014c; Pembe Hayat, 2014b; Spod, 2016b). They used their websites and publications (e.g. Kaos GL and Pembe Hayat have their own magazine) to inform about LGBT issues and to enable discussion within the LGBT community (Pembe Hayat, 2014a; Kaos GL, 2014a, 2014b). They monitored rights, demanded the respect of rights, and constituted LGBT people as subjects and as a community. So, EIDHR funds were not used to integrate LGBT movement into a neoliberal market but to claim rights and advance it through improved visibility and performativity.

Nevertheless, the organisations themselves had to act like economic managers because of the EU’s requirements for project management and evaluation, the so-called technologies of visibility and performance. The largest CSOs adopted these technologies not only in their EIDHR-funded projects but also in the way they work more generally. They write reports and produce visible outputs (such as guides) for EU projects and other activities. The youngest organisation, Spod, publishes a report on its activities once a year (Spod, 2012a) and Kaos GL, Pembe Hayat, and Siyah Pembe Üçgen document their activities online. They prioritised this kind of transparency more than women’s organisations that I also studied. People working at LGBT organisations were positive about EU funding in regard to improving and ‘professionalising’ their work:

With the EU process civil society started to be more civil. Now there are less political links. The EU process is determinant. Before EU funding many NGOs were quite weak, no projects were being done. (Interview C with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Ankara)

The EU ‘helped to open doors’ for the organisations after a time during which society and politicians had been very sceptical of them (Interview C with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Ankara). Using neoliberal technologies made them more visible and transparent. My interview partner said that they appeared less political, but this depoliticisation might not be undesirable because it actually constituted LGBT issues as legitimate and made them part of the political agenda.

Meanwhile, EU grants for LGBT organisations also created divisions within the movement. While some organisations struggled to fulfil the funding requirements (Interview B

with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul), others opposed EU support on political grounds, especially activists who criticised EU funding as ‘neoliberal’ and ‘imperialist’: ‘LGBT organisations are always debating whether to get funding, whether it is legitimate. There is no one single answer to it [...] It is always about western powers and rising neoliberalism in those countries that impede social rights’ (Interview G with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul/Tübingen). People in the LGBT community have different ideas of how to engage politically. A coordinator at a LGBT organisation describes their role as doing political lobbying: ‘We are becoming more and more a political actor. We see it as our responsibility to pull LGBT rights organisations to be more active in the political arena and in political advocacy and lobbying [...]’ (Interview G with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul/Tübingen). Other LGBT activists see the risk of ‘reproducing neoliberal hegemony’ (Birdal, 2015: 128) instead of seeking more radical change. One organisation promoting women’s and LGBT rights had existential debates over international and EU funding:

We had discussions about funding. Some were against funding. We had the aim to finance ourselves but that wasn’t that easy. In the last year we decided to try to survive with funding. But we had political discussions, we had separated groups. And we thought that it should not be our aim just to survive if we cannot reach our main aim which is to get rid of patriarchy and to change society. Then it is not meaningful and thus we decided to close the organization. (Interview A with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul)

The conflict over external funding contributed to the end of the organisation. Similarly, in 2013, LGBT activists opposed using Dutch funds for the Pride Week in Istanbul because they were against external, ‘neoliberal’ involvement (Interview G with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul/Tübingen). Thus, the existence of EU and other grants created divisions within the LGBT community (Interview A with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul; Interview D with LGBT activists, 2013, Istanbul; Interview G with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul/Tübingen). This also demonstrates that depoliticisation through neoliberal rationalities is not a linear process. Instead, LGBT groups and activists are agents who react to, and resist, neoliberal rationalities and funding (Muehlenhoff, 2015). They are aware and find ways to work with or without them. Instead of depoliticisation, political debates appeared regarding the kind of change and the means to achieve it. This might create divisions but could also have different implications as Birdal (2015) suggests:

[...] this process is the inevitable result of the massification of the movement and it would help the movement to reach out to larger segments of the society and force the political actors in Turkey to be more responsive to LGBT demands. [...] the movement could rely on its tradition of pluralism and cooperation practices and even make contribution to Turkish politics in this regard. (Birdal, 2015: 131)

The largest LGBT organisation indeed sees a connection between the growing movement and EU support in terms of funds and accession process: ‘With the EU process and after the AKP changed the Kemalist state, there is now a movement and the civil society organisations used the media and got engaged with politics and international organisations’ (Interview C with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Ankara). The LGBT movement used the Gezi Park protests to increase the visibility of LGBT issues in Turkey. This was possible because for the first time the LGBT movement protested together with other groups

of civil society (Birdal, 2015; Interview C with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Ankara; Interview G with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Istanbul/Tübingen): 'LGBT people were at the forefront of the Gezi protests and used it very well in terms of legitimacy and contact with other groups with which it never had contacts before. We could not have created this form of legitimacy within five years' (Interview F with LGBT Organisation, 2013, Izmir/Tübingen). Since the Gezi protests, the Istanbul Pride March has attracted more and more people (with more than 100,000 attendants in 2013) until it was banned in 2015, 2016, and 2017 in an increasingly oppressive political climate (Sarfati, 2015: 30–31; Shafak, 2016; *The Guardian*, 2017).

Although EU funding neither caused the emergence of the LGBT movement nor of the Gezi protests, EIDHR-funded projects contributed to the visibility and legitimacy of LGBT rights' demands in Turkey. EU support enabled LGBT organisations to look less political which made it easier for them to raise political demands and engage with politicians and the media. Although the governing AKP party was largely opposed to LGBT rights, LGBT issues became part of political struggles in Turkey. Erdoğan has not publicly spoken out against LGBT rights despite his conservative family ideology and an increasingly oppressive climate in Turkey (*The Guardian*, 2017). Yet, in February 2018, Ali Erol, the founder of Kaos GL, was arrested because of his social media posts (LGBTI News Turkey, 2018). Nevertheless, Turkey's LGBT organisations and activists continue to be active and take part in political debates. The EU's neoliberal rationalities partly changed the ways LGBT organisations work in terms of documenting their work but the organisations were not simply passive recipients or objects of depoliticisation. In contrast, they used EIDHR funds for long-term goals or resisted them and discussed their possible negative effects and their neoliberal political nature. However, the neoliberal rationalities of EU civil society funding also contributed to the end of one more radical LGBT organisation.

## Conclusion

There are a number of studies showing that the EIDHR is based on neoliberal rationalities and claiming that it depoliticises civil society. These works usually analyse the EU's documents (Kurki, 2011; Tagma et al., 2013). While they problematise the diffusion of EU norms, they do not look into what this means in practice and whether, and how, neoliberal rationalities depoliticise civil society in a local setting. I studied how governmentality works in a concrete case to understand its (de)politicising effects. I told a different story about EIDHR funding and depoliticisation of LGBT organisations in Turkey than the governmentality literature would expect. I first took issue with the theoretical underpinnings of the depoliticisation claim in the governmentality literature by questioning whether depoliticisation is always undesirable, widening the understanding of the political from the public to the private sphere and challenging its Eurocentrism. Using insights from queer and feminist IR literature on the notion of the political, visibility, and performativity, I argued that neoliberal rationalities have more complex and ambiguous depoliticising, as well as politicising, effects.

In a second step, using these theoretical considerations I analysed the (de)politicising effects of the EIDHR. I did this by studying EIDHR-funded projects on LGBT rights using project documents and interviews with people working in the CSOs. I argued that in the case of Turkey, the EU's funding of LGBT rights organisations had ambiguous effects that are not necessarily the ones intended by the EU, nor the ones expected by the

governmentality literature. The analysis demonstrates that in practice, the depoliticising effects of governmentality are not straightforward. Only a few EIDHR funds were used for providing medical, legal, or psychological services to victims of violence and discrimination although this is a large part of the organisations' work. Moreover, because the state does not safeguard LGBT rights, performing these services is politicising because it constitutes LGBT individuals as subjects. These findings challenge the Eurocentric argument of the governmentality literature that service provision is neoliberal and depoliticising (Kurki, 2011). EDIHR projects included monitoring LGBT rights abuses that constitute LGBT rights as a political problem. However, LGBT organisations adopted the EU's technologies of visibility and performance to a strong extent documenting their work in reports and on their websites. Yet, these instruments of transparency and the reference to the EU human rights discourse increased the legitimacy for their demands within Turkish civil and political society. Here, LGBT groups managed to make the non-discrimination of people on the base of their gender identity and sexual orientation a legitimate demand to discuss by Turkish politicians. They also used EIDHR funds to trigger this political debate. Although the perspective of EU membership puts political pressure on Turkey to improve its human rights record, it has not resulted in any concrete legislation that could be linked back to the EU accession process. My analysis shows that it was LGBT organisations that turned LGBT rights into a legitimate political issue with the help of EIDHR funds (in addition to other financial support from political foundations and/or other EU states).

Overall, EIDHR funding was not used for short-term non-political activities as the governmentality literature suggests but for projects that were integrated into the organisations' long-term strategies. Nevertheless, the EU's policies created conflicts within the LGBT movement where discussions on EU funding and resistance to it took place. In practice, the depoliticisation effects are more ambiguous than often suggested by document-based analyses. The contexts in which the EU acts are complex and neoliberal rationalities play out differently. This is not to say that they are unproblematic but to suggest that their problematisation should include a more complex understanding of depoliticisation as well as a more comprehensive picture of the sites of EU civil society promotion and how these sites interact with the EU's neoliberal governmentality in practice.

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### **Notes**

1. I decided to use the term 'LGBT' (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) instead of 'LGBTI' (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex) (as the European Union (EU) does) because intersex people debate whether they want to be included as they consider their needs as intersex-specific. Moreover, most LGBT groups in Turkey that I was in contact with say 'LGBT'. I am aware that any categorisation is problematic in some way.

2. I conducted seven interviews on this topic including interviews with representatives of CSOs working on LGBT rights, LGBT rights activists, and a representative of the EU Delegation to Turkey. The interviews were conducted in June, September, and October 2013. One interview was done via Skype and another one was done via an email conversation. The others took place in Istanbul and Ankara. I do not mention the names of my interview partners and their organisations to keep the people interviewed protected (the interviewees did not require this however).

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