



## **Survival of LGBTI Rights in Turkey (2015-2019)**

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**Abstract:**

*This study conducted among LGBTI civil society organisations in Turkey is aimed at understanding how the LGBTI community contests, counters, and evades the heteronormative policies of the Turkish government in the years between 2015 and mid-2019. To answer this question, qualitative research methods were used. In-depth interviews were held with multiple CSOs focusing on LGBTI rights and discourse analysis was executed on available documents by the European Union regarding the subject. The analysis shows that the CSOs have developed strategies and tactics to tackle the marginalising consequences of Turkish policy towards LGBTI individuals. Due to the current dire EU-Turkey relations, the EU has limited possibility to intervene other than providing financial support.*

**Keywords:** *European Union; heteronormativity; LGBTI; tactics and strategy; Turkish government*

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## Introduction

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Turkey is a country that has been slammed in the international arena for its lack of human rights and its treatment of minorities for years. The sheer amount of cases against Turkey in which the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR, 2019) found at least one violation between 1959 and 2018 shows the dire situation, as this figure is 3,532 to the Netherlands's mere 164 in the same period. Although there have been improvements in current years, it seems that nowadays, especially after the coup attempt in 2016, that the human rights situation, particularly with respect to minority rights, is turning bleak once again.

Although Turkey is a candidate country for the European Union, it is stated that there are severe concerns for the protection of the fundamental rights of LGBTI people (European Commission, 2018). Turkish authorities interrupted Pride marchers, which can be seen as a violation of freedom of assembly and association, on İstiklal Street in İstanbul since 2015. Police officers used tear gas, water cannon vehicles, and rubber bullets against people who took place in the marchers to force the protesters to leave these protesting areas. The 2015 LGBTI Pride March is somewhat essential, LGBTI Pride March in Turkey was an event carried out for years without authorities' limitation or police intervention, since this kind of excessive violent behaviour by Turkish authorities was firstly used to hold the event. Hence, this research focuses on the period of 2015 till mid-2019. According to the authorities, the reason for the interruption of 2015 LGBTI Pride March fell on the Islamic month of Ramadan when the Prophet Muhammad initially received heavenly messages from God (Fantz, Tuysuz & Damon, 2015).

In 2016, officials in İstanbul reissued similar orders for LGBTI Pride March stating that they could not allow the Pride March because of "security concerns" and those who tried to participate in the march could encounter a police intervention. Despite the ban, some activists still were willing to carry out the Pride March, and the police interrupted the march second year in a row, similar to the prior one. Police officers used disproportionate force and violently arrested 29 people including Volker Beck who is a prominent member of the Green Party in Germany (Samuels, 2016). According to the news of Samuels (2016), Beck said, "They ripped my passport away from me and pushed me around. It was a massive and arbitrary police attack that we saw".

Officials took a similar way of tackling to the 2017 Pride March. The İstanbul governor rejected a Pride March protest to take place, declaring a statement that "The march will not be allowed after considering the security of citizens, especially the participants themselves, and tourists who will be in the area" (Uras, 2017). Nevertheless, despite this prohibition, some activists gathered, as they saw this ban as unjust and unfair. Police in İstanbul reacted by breaking up the Pride March, firing rubber bullets as well as pepper gas towards the demonstrators. While the government employed the "Ramadan" argument for why the demonstrations were shut down, the 2017 protests did not happen during the month. A spokesperson for the Pride Week and an LGBTI activist Lara Güney Özlen asserts that "For the last two years, the march overlapped with Ramadan. This year it does not. So, that is not an excuse [to prevent it] either. I believe the ban is about not accepting our sexual



orientation and it is a reaction to the movement getting stronger" (Al Jazeera, 2017). What is more, the Ankara governor banned all LGBTI events in the region for an unspecified period. A series of bans on LGBTI-related events followed in other cities. The ban includes preventing exhibitions, panel discussions, public meetings, and film festivals. Local authorities mentioned the reason of the ban as "public security", "protecting public health and morality", "social sensitivity", and "protecting other people's rights and freedoms".

A ban which was issued on November 2017 about the events by LGBTI rights groups by the governor of Ankara was implemented throughout 2018, and caused other bans of meetings and events in other cities and makes Turkey more difficult to live for LGBTI individuals. On July 2018, the Istanbul governor prevented the city's yearly Pride March for the fourth year in a row, mentioning security and public order concerns.

According to Pembe Hayat Association's website (2019), the first trans organisation in Turkey, the District Administrative Court had decided that although the ban was issued during the Emergency State Laws, that it was unspecified in terms of duration, and that the ban included no limits and qualifications on the nature of the banned activities was unlawful. After this decision, the appeal given by Pembe Hayat to the governorate for the event namely, "LGBTI+ Rights, Restrictions and LGBTI+ Short Film Screening", organised to take place on May 4, 2019, was refused for the same reasons as the previous ban.

Overall, these constraints and restrictions on LGBTI community in Turkey violate the freedom of expression, assembly, and association as their fundamental rights which is highlighted in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and other international Conventions.

The circumstances confronting the LGBTI community in Turkey are rather severe: there is an existence of a real threat to those who are LGBTI in Turkey by the ones that are willing to suppress their human rights. The LGBTI community remains to be discriminated by the Turkish government's policies although the government claims to be an open society for those residing in its borders. This study is not only about the Turkish LGBTI individuals and how they suffer from the government's policies, as it is more about LGBTI individuals in many parts of the world who continue to face discrimination. LGBTI community is often viewed as targets by governments and homophobic members of the society. Unfortunately, especially after 2015, the tension between LGBTI activists and government leaders are somewhat ubiquitous in Turkey.

The Turkish state's policies can be explained by the heteronormativity theory since the authorities in Turkey as it is discussed in the introduction marginalizes the LGBTI community and excludes them from society and eradicates their visibility.

Turkey is a compelling case for analysing since as a candidate country for the European Union (EU); Turkey has to be in line with the international obligations concerning respect for fundamental rights and freedoms. Although the political elites or leaders always claim that Turkey respects the international human rights law and should be considered an excellent partner for the EU economically and politically, however, the country is served poorly by its current government on LGBTI individuals. It is important to state that the EU's founding values include the rule of law and respect for human rights; hence, the country should be considerate of LGBTI individuals within its borders.



Given the hostile conditions LGBTI community faces in Turkey leads me to the following research question:

**How does the LGBTI community contest, counter or evade the practical consequences of Turkish government's policies? And how does the European Union support these countermeasures?**

From this question three sub-questions are formulated:

**What are the policies of the Turkish government on LGBTI rights? In what way is the Turkish government suppressing LGBTI political activity?**

**How are the activities of the LGBTI related civil society benefitting the members of the community?**

**To what extent does the European Union support civil society organisations and LGBTI rights activists under this hostile environment?**

I have explored how civil society organisations are working within this environment to promote and improve human rights for LGBTI people. The primary goal of this research is to examine how individuals and civil society organisations are working to make the conditions better for sexual minorities.

As I have argued earlier, although Turkey legally does not ban homosexuality, the Turkish government has been using ambiguous state laws or bans to discriminate against LGBTI individuals since 2015. Although there are numerous challenges for the LGBTI community in Turkey, I centre on how LGBTI activists are working to promote and improve human rights conditions in Turkey and what sort of tactics they develop to deal with Turkish government's policies.

This research is socially relevant as it makes room for improvements of the quality of life of sexual minorities. In return, Turkish authorities would offer public assurance that protects LGBTI individuals and their fundamental rights and freedoms and eradicates the last minute decisions to ban the parade and the police's excessive intervention and violence.

## **Theoretical framework**

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This chapter is structured as a discussion of several theories, which are then applied to the subject of this research and relevant parties, the Turkish government, the European Union and the LGBTI community.

Heteronormativity is an assumption that heterosexuality is 'normal' state for human beings due to the fact that the belief that people fall into one or other category of a strict gender binary, therefore this assumption contributes further to the claim that someone's biological sex, sexuality, gender identity, and gender roles are aligned (Harris & White,



2018). As it can be understood from the definition itself, heteronormativity could marginalise the LGBTI community. Heteronormative cultures as explained by Doug Meyer (2015) entitles heterosexuality as natural and normal and promotes an environment in which members of the LGBTI community are discriminated against in many aspects of the population such as employment, marriage and tax codes. According to Butler (1993), heteronormativity and homonormativity can be seen as performative, where one of the most important features of performative is the repetitiveness of the executed actions.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984) describes a fundamental critical analysis between strategies and tactics in the case of repression and expression. According to de Certeau (1984), strategies, in general, are practised by organisational power structures, regardless of whether they are small or large, such as government or governance, or state or municipality. Strategies are used against some external entity to establish a set of connections for official or peculiar ends, whether opponents, adversaries, patients, or simply subjects. De Certeau (1984) asserts that the strategy is always the scope of the influence of power and strategy considers control. Strategies are considered to be hegemonic at all times, and referring to all hegemonic structure, strategies capture all times in daily life and they have their own limits.

Tactics are different from strategies, they are often not the result of careful consideration but seizing the moment, with limited room to breathe as it is mostly limited by the boundaries imposed by strategies. They are also different from strategies in a way that mostly the ones who suffer from subjugation operate them (de Certeau, 1984). Tactics do not have explicit borders; they are like stealing or eroding mechanisms of power. Tactics have some techniques to tackle this power mechanism; however, they do not have intentions of obtaining or defeating strategies.

Over the 1990s, the debate on the effect of the European Union on member states gathered pace. 'Europeanisation' entered the vocabulary of practitioners and academics alike. Europeanisation is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, whose reading and interpretation differs (Morlino, 1999).

In the book of *the Politics of the Europeanization* which was edited by Kevin Featherstone and Claudio M. Radaelli, Radaelli (2003) argued that Europeanisation is the process of construction, diffusion and institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, "ways of doing things" and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated by the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, political structures and public choices. Europeanisation can also be a change in the external boundaries of Europe through *Enlargement*. In that sense, one can conceive Europeanisation as a system whereby forms of political organisation are exported to countries outside the EU.

## **Understanding the Turkish government policies**

The Turkish government's policies can be seen as their 'strategy', asserting their power in their own space, capitalizing on previously acquired advantages. Previous bans for the sake of "public security", "protecting public health and morality", "social sensitivity", and "protecting other people's rights and freedoms" are thus used to reaffirm their grasp on the



power within their borders. Activists however depend on ‘tactics’, taking advantage of opportunities in a hostile or foreign place. They actually depend on these quick strikes as the opportunities are often fleeting and require the so called ‘tactic mobility’, keeping careful watch for any circumstance that enables them to strike back in the enemy’s territory, as tactics never take place in their *own* place. The policies of the Turkish government can be seen as a heteronormative “strategy”. Reinforcing their grasp of power over the LGBTI community within the borders of Turkey by oppressing individuals through vague and ambiguous laws and “ethics” by defining heterosexuality as “normal”.

In many Western European cultures one can see the gradual change in views as performative, it forms a sequence of effects as defined by Butler (1993). Over the years the repeating expression of homosexuality has changed the attitude towards the LGBTI community from abnormal to normal and society therefore now has a more homonormative stance. The reverse however is true for Turkey’s point of view, the repeated bans and limitations put upon LGBTI events has constructed a heteronormative setting.

### **Understanding the tactics of the LGBTI communities**

Even though LGBTI is often used as an umbrella term there are actually two quite distinct communities encompassing this term. On the one hand we have the LGB, Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals who are part of this minority because of their sexual preference. The second part, the TI part are the Transgender and Intersex people, part of the umbrella term but a different community as their common denominator is, instead of sexual orientation, gender identity. LGB and TI are however both sexual minorities and are stronger together in their struggle for respect and understanding. Sexual minorities include anyone whose sexuality or gender identity does not conform to the majority; anyone who is not cisgendered and heterosexual. Whereas cisgender means anyone whose personal identity and gender is aligned with their birth sex.

The usage of visibility tactics is an activist’s most common approach in a lot of human rights contexts. Employing these tactics however is something that often happens with careful consideration and planning. Not because the tactic is thought to be non-effective but because one has to carefully consider the rewards opposed to the risks involved. Slow and gradual adoption of the visibility tactic however can transform this tactic into a strategy, as when winning over the minds of the intended targets will create a place of power within the hostile territory. When this hybrid of a tactic and a strategy occurs it will then be easier to prevail over the oppressive force as they now have a base to take home their winnings to. The issue with visibility however becomes clear when publicizing about LGBTI subjects is seen against “ethics” or morals or even illegal by law (Muedini, 2018).

### **Understanding why and how the EU might take actions to intervene**

The EU Guidelines to promote and protect the enjoyment of all human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons by the Council of the European Union (2013) states that the EU fully upholds the position that all individuals,





without any discrimination, are qualified to enjoy the full range of human rights and the LGBTI people have the same human rights as all individuals. This principle is cherished in numerous international instruments, providing for a broad scope in its utilisation.

To be able to judge how a third party might influence the struggle between the Turkish State and the LGBTI activists it's important to have insight in both tactics and strategies. The interactions between the strategies and the tactics and the resulting outcome can be used as a starting point to analyse how an effective counterstrategy might be formulated. By observing these interactions and hearing involved parties a more complete insight is given into the conflict. As human rights in general and thus LGBTI rights in specific play a central role in the EU, which then can be seen as one of the European Union's strategies the EU can play an important part in the guidance and support of LGBTI activists in Turkey. Especially so, considering the fact that Turkey is one of the potential future member states. International support by the EU by for example; giving political asylum and funding the CSOs relating to LGBTI activism can be effective measures to reinforce ongoing and future activities performed by these activist groups. In fact, the EU's strategy mainly consists of actively condemning human rights violations, giving support and hearing human rights activists is done on a daily basis. The EU aiding these organisations therefore mitigates or dampens the related visibility risks and is then of political and social relevance.

The website of the European Commission's International Cooperation and Development ([https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sectors/human-rights-and-governance/democracy-and-human-rights/anti-discrimination-movements/lgbt\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sectors/human-rights-and-governance/democracy-and-human-rights/anti-discrimination-movements/lgbt_en)) provides information about the stand of the European Union on LGBTI rights.

The Regulation (Eu) No 235/2014 Of The European Parliament And of the Council (11 March 2014) states that the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) is a thematic funding tool for EU external action intending to promote projects in the area of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy in non-EU countries. This instrument is created to support civil society to enhance an effective force for political reform and the defence of human rights.

By implementing the EIDHR projects, the EU supports and promotes the rights of LGBTI all over the world as stated on their websites:

*“Projects aim at improving LGBTI organisations’ visibility and acceptance, and enhancing their dialogue with authorities to change laws; combatting homophobia and prejudices against LGBTI persons; protecting LGBTI persons from violence and enhancing access to psychosocial, medical, mediation and reintegration programs for victims; and providing training, information and legal support to LGBTI persons and organisations. Emergency funding is also provided to LGBTI human rights defenders.”*

## Methods and data

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By concentrating on the individual perspectives and experiences of the human rights defenders particularly LGBTI rights activists as well as civil society organisations associating LGBTI rights, this study aims to provide an explanatory framework of the current exercise of

the fundamental rights of LGBTI people on freedom of expression, assembly and association. Also, how the Turkish state policies and discriminate sexual minorities in Turkey during the EU accession process.

When the centre of the study is regarded, the use of qualitative research methods was chosen, as qualitative methods examine the phenomena in its natural environment by interpreting the meanings and what those meanings bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Furthermore, the qualitative method is, in general, more beneficial in explanatory studies because this method provides a unique tool to explore the dynamics behind certain concepts or patterns and ascertains descriptive connections to present an explanatory framework (Ritchie, 2003). In this regard, qualitative research methods efficiently reach the heart and implications behind the observed political, economic and social contexts (Berg, 2001). These methods are also helpful in the research implementation process because of their “flexible research design”, and “the volume and richness of the data” (Snape & Spencer, 2003). Considering these factors, this study utilised qualitative research methods to provide a thorough analysis of the subject.

Multiple interviews were conducted to get the individual perspective and experience of LGBTI rights activists and civil society organisations’ members; therefore, in-depth interviews stood as a proper choice for this study among the other qualitative data collection methods.

The convenience sampling method was used; in this way, I could reach out to numerous activists and civil society organisations. Interviewees gave consent for all interviews that they intended to partake in. Online interviews were held. The interviews were conducted in Turkish since the interviewees told that they could express themselves better in their mother tongues.

In this research, some civil society organisations leaders or members were interviewed and they are all human rights activists who have been fighting for LGBTI rights in Turkey. Activists of leading LGBTI organisations namely, Kaos GL in Ankara, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (SPoD) in İstanbul and Siyah Pembe Üçgen Association in İzmir were liaised. Contact was made directly with the aforementioned civil society organisations by e-mail and they accepted to have an online interview. The interviews are available on request. These organisations were selected as they all have received EU funding. Secondly, three different organisations were picked to have diverse experiences and identities within the LGBTI community. Ideally more organisations would have been interviewed, however the amount of LGBTI related CSOs in Turkey is limited. Lastly, these organisations are spread all over Turkey and thus different geographical based experience can be researched. Although it can be thought that discussing these sensitive issues and gaining access would be difficult, the LGBTI organisations were quite open to discuss and express themselves. In addition to these, it was intended to have an interview with the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey (EUD) with the related sector managers to discuss how can they support LGBTI community and civil society organisations because of the bans and restrictions in the country. However, EUD refused to have an online interview. Then, a number of questions were prepared for them and sent to them via e-mail, to be more transparent and accountable for both parties. However, instead of replying the questions, they responded with “after an assessment and analysis of the questions, answers to



the questions can be found in the Turkey Country Report 2019 by European Commission” blocking this path of research.

By their very nature, in-depth interviews provide the researchers with the grasp of “why people experience or understand a social phenomenon in a particular way” (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Hence, in-depth interviews provide a suitable setting for the researcher to understand and refine the personal views, experiences, sentiments, convictions, knowledge and identities of interviewees in their daily life (Seale, 2004). On this point, notably, un-structured in-depth interviews are esteemed for their flexible and multi-layered framework which allows interviewees to explain their perspectives “in depth” and by practising their “own language” (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003).

In this regard, for this study un-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to analyse the current restrictions and bans of the Turkish state's policies on sexual minorities and how LGBTI communities counter, contest, or evade the practical consequences of Turkish government’s policies.

Satisfactory selection of the interviewees is another vital point for the collection of the required data to build a well-grounded analysis (Boeije, 2010). In this study, the selection method of the interviewees was “purposive/typical case sampling” which enables the researcher to make sample selection on their special criteria (Walliman, 2006). This criterion was picking interviewees that work for the different types of LGBTI organisations from gay, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, intersexuals and more on the spectrum. Besides, diversity was carefully considered during the interviewee selection process to ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis (Boeije, 2010).

For the data analysis process, this study used a thematic analysis method that enables to find similar and outstanding dynamics, particularly in the texts of in-depth interviews (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The analysis process was supported by the use of data analysis software Atlas for a quicker and well-organised analysis.

Moreover, this analysis method presents a capable device for the “conceptualisation of the field research” by decreasing the textual data into parts to identify and consolidate them under specific conceptualisations showing similar patterns (Boeije, 2010, p.96). Since the anticipated data from this study had the potential to be comprehensive and far-reaching, the application of thematic analysis can give a more precise, structured and well-coordinated analysis (Boeije, 2010, p.96).

The research also benefits from discourse analysis of the documents of the European Commission and the referred documents by the EUD in order to understand how the EU supports LGBTI civil society organisations and activists in Turkey. According to Potter (1997), discourse analysis “emphasizes the way versions of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse”. Also as Bryman (2016) said language is portrayed in discourse analysis as constituting or creating the social world; it is not merely a means of grasping that world, as it is in most qualitative research methods.

## Results

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### Heteronormativity

Although LGBTI rights activists and organisations have made some progress in Turkey, heteronormativity is one of the most significant difficulties for the LGBTI community since the policies of the Turkish government on LGBTI rights could be explained by heteronormativity. It is necessary to understand the Turkish government's policies suppressing LGBTI organisations. Organisations like Kaos GL, SPoD, and Siyah Pembe Üçgen have similar thoughts about the policies of the Turkish government on LGBTI rights. Looking at the various challenges the different activists brought up, NGO members were all in rather strong agreement about the heteronormative policies of the government. For example, when asked about the years after 2015, on the government policies on LGBTI, Murat Köylü as the External Affair Coordinator of Kaos GL replied:

*“Before 2015, some people could be thought of as governmental authority or the government, were making homophobic or transphobic statements. It happened less in the past and did not show an organised appearance. When we look at this moment, ... after 2015, both the government, President Erdoğan, MPs, ministers or other officials at work, ... have turned homophobic and transphobic hate speech into a campaign. Since 2015, there has been a ban on Pride Marches in İstanbul and other cities, ban on LGBTI events in Ankara, in addition, Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey's (TİHEK) legislation lack features such as sexual orientation, gender identity and suchlike.”*

Köylü also pointed out that

*“Including human rights organisations such as TİHEK, the Turkish government assigned extraordinarily homophobic and transphobic people in these organisations although they work for human rights, they are not ashamed of making and declaring homophobic comments, and ... these people came to us with, unfortunately, a very hostile attitude after 2015, and it is still ... not acted upon by the government. This attitude is perhaps related to the political conjuncture because when the AKP, the ruling party, came to power in 2002, the process of European Union candidacy was very heated, for both sides. Sadly, then both the government of Turkey, as well as some of the Member States of the European Union, made a conscious mistake, to terminate the process of Turkey's accession to the EU.”*

Müge Akbasan, the chairperson of SPoD (Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association), also stated that before 2015, there was no overwhelming ban on Pride Marches. However, after 2015 onwards, the Turkish government showed harsher positions to the ones that they cannot see as themselves including the LGBTI community, and she added:

*“The month of Ramadan was a justification for the ban of these Pride Marches. This situation led to an unlawful process, a process that was not governed by legal provisions, which adversely affected the LGBTI community. We had to physically close our office. Apart from these, there were some statutory decrees that some of the associations faced with closing down or suspension... Not only the Pride weeks were banned but also, in 2017, with the ban on LGBTI activities, narrowed down our movement's space. The statements made by the*



*current President before 2017 are in a different place. He had a non-exclusive attitude. However, the discourses we encountered in 2015 and later had led to the use of religion, conservatism, hate speech, and the right-wing media organisations to target LGBTI rights, and this is still unfortunately on-going.”*

Erdem Gürsu, the general coordinator and LGBTI activist of Siyah Pembe Üçgen, stated that after 2015, the Turkish government began to create a culture of fear in the country, however, it is not only affecting the LGBTI community but also other minority groups. As he noted:

*“The LGBTI community has been in solidarity with many groups and thus made them a trigger... perhaps, if the LGBTI community had not been in contact with the disgruntled fractions, organisations or social movements, it would not be as prominent today... I think the ban process started because there was a fear that the other minority groups try to gain more visibility in the form of social movement.”*

Köylü also said that the current Turkish government has a general negative attitude to the social groups who do not have an organic or clientelist relationship with them, but rather have a very hostile attitude towards LGBTI. As he noted:

*“They have an attitude towards everyone, but they have a distinct attitude towards LGBTI organisations and women's and feminist organisations. ... they [the government] have..., a relationship with similar groups internationally as far as I understand. They use increasingly similar terminology and conceptual framework. ... it is called "anti-gender movement". ... they are not only against LGBTI organisations but also the organisations which demand gender equality, sexual diversity, and seeking emancipation of women.”*

When questioned why there were numerous bans on LGBTI Pride Marches and why does the Turkish government have a strategy to ‘ban LGBTI events/activities’, Gürsu stated:

*“Since the Pride Marches were getting the attention of everyone, there were shockingly dramatic increases in the years when you look at the number of people who took part in the Pride Marches... I think that the Turkish government could think that the next step might have caused concern for what will happen.”*

Regarding the question of whether the Turkish government’s policies has heteronormative connotations or not, Köylü spoke about how policies are beyond heteronormative, brutally so, by saying that:

*“Obviously, beyond the heteronormativity, there is a complete heterosexist, disgendered and transphobic approach. We now have restrictions on freedom of expression in Turkey... but they have a hostile approach, if we call their approach as heteronormative, it remains a little bit polite, they have a more hostile approach. In all of these legislations, policies and discourse, LGBTI is not only ignored but also portrayed as a criminal. I frankly cannot think of any time when LGBTI people in Turkey have been under a governmental attack this much, and they are doing it in a much more sophisticated way. They [the government] exclude and target LGBTI plus disseminate it through the government’s mainstream media.”*



Gürsu also highlighted that the Turkish government policies have heteronormative features by stating that:

*“The power has to be heteronormative, that is, the definition of heteronormativity is not only about the heterosexual relationship, it is also about how to organise work-employment life, social security, right to inheritance and such like, ... all of those rights are related to one another. Therefore, all governments, ..., are heteronormative, if they do not want to make things difficult for themselves.”*

According to the interviewees the Turkish government is certainly heteronormative in nature, although the government uses different phrasing all CSOs agree that this phrasing tries to hide the fact this strategy is heteronormative. The LGBTI community feels marginalized by the repetitive heteronormative actions taken by Turkish authorities. The interviewees feel they have less rights than other Turkish citizens.

### **Tactics & Strategies**

Despite the heteronormative conditions and policies in Turkey, the LGBTI organisations never stop. They try to counter and contest the practical consequences of the Turkish government’s policies. They understand that their work is vital for the LGBTI community in the country. When asked about how the LGBTI community contests, counters or evades the practical consequences of the Turkish government’s policies, Murat Köylü replied that there are no ways to evade the policies of the Turkish government but they, as Kaos GL, try to stay positive and be hopeful about the future by saying:

*“We continue to say that all of these things, which were done by the government, are wrong. What the Turkish government does is against human rights norms and universal principles. Plus, it is also against the spirit of our constitution...It is against the spirit of our equality, the spirit of equal citizenship, which is mentioned in the Constitution of Turkey. We invite them to be righteous, what is good, what is logical, be conscientious and to fulfil their responsibilities and obligations.”*

When asked how LGBTI community carries out their activities and counter the policies in this current environment, Erdem Gürsu replied:

*“We could not do a lot; LGBTI rights have further shrunk. Mostly, activities can be executed informally in private or closed places, and, unfortunately, this can be seen in the other social structures in civil society in Turkey. I cannot speak of such a brilliant magical touch that ones have accomplished but LGBTI people. In the past, we were somewhat proud of this side of us. When the LGBTI movement could perform a broader set of different, more destructible actions, maybe the awareness and attention would be overwhelming.”*

Moreover, he continued:

*“For example, the Pride Marches in İstanbul is something that I have experienced*



*individually, firstly because I am an LGBTI individual and I am an activist; ... I could say that in the period of Gezi Park resistance in 2013, people in Turkey learned a way of involving in politics which is when there was a need for being upset, they tried to make fun of the reality or when there is a need for being silent, people chose to be aloud.... When looking at the history of the LGBTI community in Turkey, this is a very traditional way of tackling for us ...”*

Gürsu explained that how important to tackle the Turkish government policies on LGBTI rights through people who know human rights well and by saying that

*“The only thing we, as LGBTI organisations can do against the Turkish government is to make something with the language of the law. LGBTI organisations in Turkey have a good base of lawyers or people who have a higher consciousness and knowledge on human rights, and mostly they are quite aware of the literature, developments and cases in the field of human rights... this is very crucial.”*

As a tactic, Müge Akbasan said that they had registered their association to the Department of Association as not an LGBTI organisation but as a social policy and sexual orientation studies association that was done in probably 2011 foreseeing the current situation.

Köylü also discussed what Kaos GL, as one of the oldest LGBTI rights organisations in Turkey, tries to do in order to have a living space for the LGBTI community by stating:

*“... I can only speak on behalf of Kaos GL... we disseminate the correct information ... on our news site. We always refer to both international Conventions and national legislation. We say that a pluralist, inclusive and human rights-based democracy cannot exist without meeting the needs of LGBTI citizens and LGBTI refugees, both in terms of legislation and in the context of politics. For this, we are in contact with the international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and European Union (EU). So, essentially, we convey information to international structures stemming from Turkey’s international agreements and its national legislation. We do not pass this information in a secret way or something, so I wish we could have a dialogue and talk to the government.”*

When explicitly asked whether they have tried to focus more on how to engage with the state authorities and bureaucrats to discuss the problems or challenges they have as LGBTI, Köylü explained:

*“It was the case in the past, yet now we could not hope for such a thing since we are under the impression of it not being productive at all. However, we always highlight that we are open to discussion of the problems with the government in our publications. Because we, as civil society, will, of course, be critical. Ontologically, civil society exists to criticise.”*



Köylü added:

*“The organisations that I mentioned before such as UN, EU, OSCE are not just our strategic partners, but are also political institutions, they are responsible for human rights violations, they are obligated to prevent violations... the government of Turkey, too... however, of course, we cannot establish a relationship with Turkey as we established with the others in this hostile environment. Actually, it should be precisely like that... The Turkish government should ask us 'You, as a civil society, what do you see missing?'. So last year, at least five known transgender women were killed. According to some researches in Europe, Turkey is the country where the most transgender people are killed. The Turkish government should ask themselves 'As the Turkish government, what should we do?'. Also, they ask us 'As a civil society organisation, what can you do?', 'How could we collaborate, where can we cooperate?'... but right now, it is the psychology in the current government of Turkey has a structure which interprets the slightest criticism as insult or hatred. In this way, the problem cannot be solved not only for LGBTI issues but other issues as well.”*

Akbasan agrees, even going as far as saying they actively avoid contact with government officials by saying that:

*“No LGBTI associations in Turkey work one-to-one with the Turkish government; more precisely, they could not work with them; there is no such room. Therefore, we are trying to be as far away from the government’s radar as possible... even one time, the President of Turkey met with the local authorities and pointed out the activities of one municipality, Nilüfer Municipality in Bursa, as a target because of the contributions to the LGBTI rights. In addition, the major right-wing media organisations that are supporting the government circulate news from the annual Declaration of Associations which CSOs were funded by the European Union or Consulates... by doing that they show the associations or consulates as targets. Indeed, the statements of the government trigger those media organisations to allow hate speech.”*

When asked a possible strategy for the CSOs as trying to build solidarity with a couple of MPs, Köylü said it did not work out any more. In the past, they have tried to do that. They have made them bring their voices to parliament and increased the visibility of LGBTI in the mainstream media. However, it is no longer an effective way in the current context of Turkey when thinking about the deterioration of the media in the country. Therefore, for Köylü, they are trying different strategies. As he noted:

*“We are doing capacity-building activities within our own. We work with more LGBTI people. This process must be strengthened... since it is necessary to continue to be hopeful for LGBTI individuals. One day, any government will want to overcome these current problems. This is also an obligation, that is, governments are already there for them... when they want to face those problems, we would like to be fully equipped with all kinds of solutions. Therefore, we have opened up the areas where we could be more productive, and at the same time, we are trying to strengthen our organisation and our activism.”*



Gürsu also responded similarly and said:

*“We always tried to reach important people, such as a political party’s leader... it was crucial to visit the Turkish National Assembly. In this way, we thought that we would reach a situation that could start something faster. However, it did not work like that... now what we are doing is much more logical and practical ... we have started to work with the neighbourhood politics. For example, we are trying to work with the local government now.”*

Moreover, he gives an example from where Siyah Pembe Üçgen Association is located, in İzmir by saying that:

*“We met with the district headmen; then we gave training and workshops to the district municipalities in terms of gender equality, sexual rights, and identity discrimination. Then we continued with the top executives in the organisations such as the deputy mayor, managers who are responsible for human resources and suchlike. This, of course, cannot be done quickly in every district in Turkey... you cannot do those things where a local government is ruled by nationalist or right-wing parties, yet in İzmir, we are a little bit lucky since there is a more left-wing local government. This left-wing local government supports our work at some point.”*

Gürsu also mentioned another important tactic that they have currently applied is trying to focus on education of different groups on the LGBTI community and explained it as:

*“Our training groups were different, for example, we worked with the bus drivers who are the paid employees in municipalities. Also, we worked with the cleaning staff responsible for the parks and gardens, you could question why do you choose that sort of target group for your trainings... it is because in a period of time sex workers met with their customers in the gardens and parks which is still a current practice, indeed... when the cleaning staff received training they do not perceive the sex workers are a threat or something in those places, instead they could think that maybe those people [sex workers] even need protection... Sometimes I thought that maybe we come to this point from desperation but we were skipping this micro but important step...”*

All three organisations agree on the ban on any LGBTI events by the governor of Ankara currently being one of the biggest challenges. When asked about the ban on LGBTI activities for an indefinite period and what sort of tactics they have found out to counter the ban. Köylü stated that:

*“We have strengthened our international reporting, human rights reporting... and tried to strengthen our knowledge on human rights. We have tried to organise our activities in other cities such as İzmir. On the one hand, we have continued our legal processes related to this process and continue to do so after it is finished. Unfortunately, there is a governorate that does not comply with the court decision, but this time it bans every individual activity, one by*



*one. That is what we are trying to fight. Of course, we are deeply affected by the ban when you could not do any activity that could have a strong political and legal projection in the capital of the country... We are giving weight to our media organisation, mainly social media and suchlike.”*

Gürsu stated that Ankara governor’s ban looks good on paper since it states that the governor wants to protect LGBTI individuals due to the fact that it is a sensitive community that does not have much power. He went on to say:

*“On behalf of the LGBTI community, Ankara governorate made a statement that it would like to protect us... I do not think that this protection has any meaning... these legal arrangements are so arbitrary.”*

Akbasan discussed some tactics SPoD adopts against Ankara’s governor’s ban of LGBTI events, and she said:

*“... we are trying to avoid the abbreviation LGBTI+ in our announcements and events. In fact, ... the process after the ban of Ankara, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, intersex, pansexual, queer; we have not much considered using those terms in our work as in the text of the ban of the Governorate of Ankara, especially the word LGBTI was indicated.”*

The interviewees experience the strategy employed by the Turkish government with every (planned) activity, building upon previous bans and restrictions this strategy only grows stronger. The activists learned an opportunistic tactic to effectively counter these restrictions. Seizing the moment to defy the status-quo. As a strategy the CSOs try to keep an open space for discussion of LGBTI rights issues. All organisations reached a consensus on that having contact with government officials is not part of their strategy as it is deemed ineffective. They also state that educating and informing is a vital part of their strategy.

## **LGBTI Community, structure and inclusion**

When asked about there being any division between LGB and T, or is it all together as LGBTI. For Gürsu, indeed, there is a split among the activists; however, there is more severe discussion than that; therefore, it seems that it is not sharp split among the activists and he stated that

*“I would say roughly, L and G are available, no B, T is on the other side, I is, supposing someone puts it randomly... This is terrible. I said it with a laugh, but I feel guilty. My laugh is suppressing my feeling of the guilt... the reason is a lesbian and gay majority. I am talking about a generalisation that trans inclusive politics of the moment in Turkey is unlikely while eighty or ninety per cent of trans women make a living as sex workers. Transgender men are entirely involved in society by forgetting their old times to become integrated into society as a man again... apart from those, of course, there are many beautiful good stories.”*

When Kaos GL was asked about their name since their name includes GL but not the other letters of LGBTI, Köylü explained that:



*“Our name has become a brand name that is why it has remained as it is... We are celebrating our 25th year now. We are working on all subjects related to all LGBTI issues, including bisexual, intersex, and trans people.”*

To Köylü, specialisation for the organisations could be quite crucial because, with specialisation, one specific organisation could focus on one particular subject such as transgender rights by saying:

*“What the trans people can encounter in the context of various process of life could be different from what the non-trans people encounter. In this sense, specialisation is essential... This is not a specialisation of LGBTI, but a specialisation on a distinct subject. For instance, an association may be working on trans rights or the process of transition... however, surely this specialisation should not exist by ignoring the big picture of LGBTI... it is going to make you blind.”*

When asked about how important it is to keep LGBTI individuals together as one in order to counter the current problems in Turkey, Köylü said,

*“It is... necessary, but organisations can gain more specific missions. For example, an organisation comes out and says that we will only work on the military processes of gay men; another organisation can work on social and economic policies... The holistic view should be preserved... Organisations should work more closely together and give importance to the division of labour that we lack of most of the time among LGBTI organisations... without segregation, filling each other’s fields, feeding each other; otherwise, it is more like being a club... it also reduces the feeling of human rights since it is easy to talk about human rights, but it is more difficult to defend someone’s right... so, it is essential to keep LGBTI altogether.”*

For Gürsu, the reason of all those LGBTI activists are all together is the number of types of LGBTI activists is one, and there is no different type of LGBTI activism such as Socialist LGBTI, AKP-lovers LGBTI, or conservative LGBTI, therefore among the activists, there is a more unitary structure among LGBTI in Turkey.

There is no division within the LGBTI community as seen in some other parts of the world, all interviewed persons state the CSOs include and fight for the rights and visibility of all members of the LGBTI community, especially so because they need the strength unison gives. They do feel a possible need for specialisation within the community, but this is more focused on legal versus social specialization and not different parts of the LGBTI community.

## **European Union’s role and strategy**

When asked about the European Union’s role on the LGBTI rights in Turkey, different answers were received from the respondents. For Köylü, it is a controversial subject since the EU is nevertheless a political structure, policy maker, and it gives directives, plus, it must be critical. Köylü said that

*“So, for a while, the relationship between the EU and Turkey was frozen... I knew more*



*about the EU three years ago. We now have less contact with Brussels unfortunately, but we still have contact with the EU Delegation to Turkey, here in Ankara. However, speaking for myself, as a candidate country, as a non-governmental organisation from a non-EU member country, find the agreement they [the EU] made with Turkey for refugee policies terrible.”*

Then Köylü added:

*“Recently the EU is pursuing a timid policy. Of course, in the end, there are various diplomatic methods that they could follow; nevertheless, they are communicating less with us. For example, we are getting more information from various embassies, such as their conversation with Ankara governor’s deputies on the ban and related authorities. To me, at least in the context of publicising... or sharing those things with non-governmental organisations, it is timider than the past, but the European Union is trying to mainstream its policy and law. We should not be unfair by being too critical, as we can report many issues through the European Parliament. There were collected to protest the Turkish government.”*

Gürsu stated that there is no need for the role of the EU on LGBTI rights in Turkey. He thinks that the EU could not be criticised since what he is expecting is something else internally within the geography that he lives in by stating that:

*“I do not want them to intervene, yet sometimes... Sometimes I think that if we are a Member State of the EU, things would be different yet it is because our politics are deficient and we do not know how to negotiate and discuss... therefore, I do not have any criticism for the EU like they do not do anything for us.... My expectation from my society or country is learning how to discuss, negotiate and take some further steps instead of saying ‘I know best, you shut up!’.”*

Gürsu also added that:

*“Firstly, the EU will not get involved in Turkey because of the political tension. Secondly, I think they do not care what is happening in Turkey on LGBTI rights. What I meant by that is the EU is more interested in economy, energy and suchlike with Turkey... in the long term, the saviour is not the EU in Turkey on LGBTI rights, the saviour could be creating awareness, and this could be achieved through academy and intellectuality.”*

Akbasan said on the relationship with EU that:

*“The state of our relationship with the European Union is due to the shadow reports we provide to them in time... Every year, we host the delegates from the European Parliament for the Pride Week in İstanbul. Even though the marches were banned in İstanbul, a delegation comes, and the activities are carried out during the Pride Week without any problem...”*

She also added that:

*“The government of Turkey has not taken the EU into consideration for such a long time. We do not have a government that takes the decision of the European Court of Human Rights seriously and fulfils its obligations under the international Conventions... this is why the EU and the discourses or criticism of the actors of the EU do not make an impact on LGBTI rights and are not seen in the mainstream media... therefore, we do not have much faith in the EU... although it is a supportive structure psychologically when things are getting serious, we could not see them as an effective structure.”*

Köylü also mentioned how important the EU fund is namely, EIDHR, and he said,

*“Because of the inaccessibility of the government funds for the LGBTI organisations, we can apply to the European Union’s funds through the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey. EIDHR... in this manner, when it comes to projects, they are not intervening in the content of the projects. However, we could not develop very innovative or impressive content due to the current situation in Turkey. So we are only able to do extremely basic things. In this sense, the EU is one of the organisations with whom the LGBTI community has a dialogue. My example before, about refugees, is essential to understand the relationship between Turkey and the EU. The EU seems less critical and less silent towards the Turkish government yet, maybe, the EU could do something through silent diplomacy, as a civil society organisation, we could not know what is happening in that fashion.”*

As reported by the respondents not much Europeanisation takes place, partly due to the tense and stagnant relationship between the EU and Turkey. The EU does not have a lot of influence on Turkey and the interviewees do not feel like they are important to the EU. The funding through EIDHR seems like a good but sometimes a futile tool.

## **Discourse Analysis for the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey**

Through the website of the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey (<https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/financing-instruments-8853>), it could be understood that the European Commission supports the rights of LGBTI persons and has funded various projects, including under the Sivil Düşün EU Programme and the EIDHR to combat the discrimination of LGBTI people.

It can be argued that by publishing the Turkey Report 2019 the European Commission (2019) not only do their own accountability but also seek to establish the accountability of Turkey for its actions and implementations of legislation and guidelines concerning the situation of LGBTI persons in Turkey in the context of accession negotiations. It does so in the following ways:

1. The EU holds the potential member country accountable through making it clear that Turkey is accountable for the EU’s report, not the EU. It justifies the European Union’s report and its demand for action and change.



2. The report often draws attention to the extensive discussion and thought that went into the EU's report, referring to issues through terms as 'serious concerns', 'early stage' and 'backsliding' which refers to the process behind the report.
3. It references to the EU's specialist expertise. The EU requests the implementation of international laws and reports extensively on how the adoption of this legislation is in the early stages.
4. It also appeals to external authorities. The report is legitimised by referring to Turkey's failure to comply with *EU acquis*.

This study shows that accountability is performed first in the obvious sense that the EU accounts for its report but also diverts responsibility for what are negative results onto Turkey.

By publishing the "List of actions by the Commission to advance LGBTI equality" the EU (2015) takes a strong stance in how LGBTI individuals should be equal in rights to cisgendered and heterosexual people. Moreover, mentioning LGBTI rights, particularly in the Turkey Report 2019, the European Commission (2019) again stresses and reaffirms the perspective of the EU that the situation has to improve. Hence, the sole act of publishing the report implies the importance of adopting EU legislation and guidelines.

On the EUD's website, the EUD (2010) published the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), with input from HRDs in Turkey, in 2010 and updated in 2012, 2015, 2016 and December 2018. It provides operational guidelines for EU Missions to implement the EU's Guidelines for Human Rights Defenders, notably concerning the provision of adequate support for HRDs as well as the monitoring of the situation of HRDs in Turkey. In the framework of this strategy, regular meetings take place every year about EU missions with HRDs and NGOs, and liaison officers are appointed in order to secure local assistance when needed.

In addition to the Guidelines, financial support for human right defenders is also provided under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). Referring to the website of EUD, EIDHR guidelines priority is given to people who are not heard; in other words, minority groups, the LGBTI community being one of them. There is no specific priority for advocating for LGBTI issues. However, as published on the EUD's website (2017) looking at the Award Notice of the year of 2016, EIDHR fund went to two LGBTI organisations out of a total of 23, namely, Kaos GL and Siyah Pembe Üçgen Association.

In the "Annual Report 2018 on the List of actions to advance LGBTI equality", the Commission (2018) tries to give the message that for the external action of the EU in the framework of LGBTI issues, the Commission proceeded to monitor and encourage the development of legal procedure carefully. Also, policy tools to secure non-discrimination against LGBTI people in enlargement and neighbourhood countries.

Implementation of the 2013 "Guidelines to promote and protect the enjoyment of all human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and intersex (LGBTI) persons" lead the external actions of the European External Action Service (EEAS) on this matter.

Effectively, the EU can only influence the struggle between the Turkish State and the LGBTI activists by showing their concerns through the country report and other press



releases. The European Union, however, also offers financial tools employing the EIDHR and the Sivil Düşün Programme to enable CSOs and individual activists to take action. Through these means, the European Union supports the LGBTI community in Turkey to counter, contest or evade the practical consequences of the Turkish government's policies. No other specific funding exists for LGBTI issues and organisations in particular. Due to the stagnant and tense relationship between the EU and Turkey they cannot take any further action as the credibility of the EU in the country is deficient.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

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### **Conclusion**

In this thesis, it is discussed how the LGBTI community counters, contests or evades the practical consequences of the policies of the Turkish government, indicating just how heteronormative the state is by their statements or in actions. The circumstances for the LGBTI community have been and, probably, keep on getting worse.

Recently, the actions of the Turkish government that is attempting to annihilate any LGBTI rights movement have created conditions in which LGBTI rights remains a pressing matter, especially with the risen authoritarianism and heteronormativity in recent years. These aspects notwithstanding, LGBTI human rights organisations have been able to improve upon the conditions confronting LGBTI community in Turkey.

Despite the difficulties and the high risks, the LGBTI civil society organisations Kaos GL, SPoD and Siyah Pembe Üçgen Association continue pressing forward, as repeating their actions introduces a slight change from heteronormativity to homonormativity (Butler, 1993). They realise what they do as civil society organisations for the LGBTI community is indispensable. LGBTI rights-based activists are working to determine new tactics and strategies as defined by de Certeau (1984) to contest the practical consequences of the heteronormative policies of the Turkish government. As strategy they try to conduct their activities in private or closed places for safety, defying the status-quo for visibility and have a strong legal team in the field of human rights to more effectively contest the heteronormative Turkish politics. Furthermore, registering not as an LGBTI organisation but as social policy association helps. Conveying information to intergovernmental and international organisations who are upholding peace and security due to lack of dialogue with the national government for support is another often used strategy. As the UN, OSCE and the EU, are also political institutions responsible for the correct handling of human rights violations the CSOs rely on them for protection, because the current context in Turkey makes it impossible for them to depend on the Turkish politicians as they have in the past. Capacity-building to reinforce the strength and numbers within the CSO is another often used tactic. This way they want to be fully equipped with all kinds solutions for current and future issues. Another tactic employed is changing the geographical location of the events, moving it to a city where no such ban is in effect. Which is actually an interesting way of operating for an activist group, there is no need for activism in a place where the issue does not present itself. Lastly,



avoiding using the term LGBTI in their work is another tactic as there is a specific ban on the term.

In recent years, particularly after 2015, as discussed, their tactics have evolved to a strategy as happening sometimes as described by de Certeau (1984) have expanded to incorporate additional grassroots work like more education and training programmes, along with working within municipalities, strengthening their human rights knowledge, focusing more on micro instead of macro politics.

It appears that given the unwillingness of collaboration by the national AKP government as well as Erdoğan's strong political hold in power, activists are shifting much of their attention to the local. Therefore, it could be claimed that grassroots activism and municipality work will remain to be a centrepiece of LGBTI rights-based organisation or activism going forward. Along with this, NGOs have also found ways to build and promote linkages with local administrations. Organisations such as Siyah Pembe Üçgen have concentrated a significant amount of time on these activities. Where most activism relies on tactics, seizing the moment in opportunistic ways (de Certeau, 1984) as opposed by strategy, NGOs in this research used more long term strategies, strategies which have proven time and time again to be effective.

The importance of continued visibility as LGBTI, without any division among the activists, is another crucial strategy. It seems that everyone in the community is working on improving the visibility of the LGBTI community in Turkey. Therefore, it may be said that this activism has been flourishing in Turkey.

Along with the work of LGBTI civil society organisations, there is still room for international actors such as the EU to have a role in LGBTI rights in Turkey. As mentioned by the interviewees, the LGBTI community is facing a dire situation in Turkey. As an intergovernmental and supranational organisation, the European Union can be more involved. The EU uses Europeanisation as a strategy, as described by Radaeli (2003) Europeanisation is the process of creation, dissemination and institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, systems, policy paradigms, forms, and shared ideas and standards that are first established and incorporated by the EU policy process and then consolidated in the logic of domestic discourse, political constructions and public preferences. Europeanisation however, is ineffective in the case of Turkey according to the results. All CSO members interviewed agree the deteriorated relationship between Turkey and the EU is the cause. One of the few ways the European Union can provide aid is to contact NGOs in Turkey and ask them what they can do to help, especially in acute situations. This should be something different than a Western-driven discourse; it could be an open exchange/dialogue on what measures can be taken to ameliorate the conditions for the marginalised in Turkey. This might take the form of more project collaboration, fundraising for LGBTI projects, training/workshops or other political ways of communication with the Turkish government to tell what is most required in Turkey for sexual minorities.

Because of the recent development in Turkey, the government has granted even less care for LGBTI rights. The conditions are amongst the most unfavourable that have been for the LGBTI community in a long time. The government is not on the side of LGBTI rights, and it persists to make conditions that much more challenging.

Notwithstanding the worsening trend in current years, civil society organisations are





fighting for the rights of all in Turkey. Therefore, it is necessary that these groups not only are appreciated for their work but are also provided the much-needed support for advancing their work. Besides, there must be continuing consideration given to any human rights violations in the country. It must be clear that there will be no toleration or whatsoever for any right abuse of any individual. It is solely when everyone is provided with their full set of human rights, including sexual identity rights, a community may live in harmony and prosperity.

Despite the current situation in Turkey, it is understood that people continue to fight for their human rights, demanding equality. They continue to speak out against heteronormative structures as described by Butler (1993) and Meyer (2015) and sexual inequalities in Turkey. While the track is far from straightforward, the LGBTI community has displayed no sign of giving up. They keep their struggle with their work in local activism, workshop organisation, increasing visibility as altogether without any split among the activists and through fighting for education and human rights knowledge for the LGBTI in Turkey.

It is believed that the EU continues to express their concern about the conditions the LGBTI community faces; however, it would stay as a question mark how effectively the EU supports the LGBTI community within the borders of Turkey as a candidate country.

## **Discussion**

This study has several limitations. First of all, this research was conducted in a limited time. Within three months, five civil society organisations and the Delegation of the European Union to Turkey were contacted- in a result of that, three interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed. Further research could include more public organisations, national or international, like Human Rights and Equality Institution of Turkey, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and World Health Organization. Being able to have an in-depth interview with the EUD more insight could have been acquired from the perspective of the EU and its strategy for Turkey. Lastly, this research is explanatory and tries to understand the problems efficiently. A recommendation for further research is to use a quantitative approach to research the relations between concepts.

The research is beneficial not only in listing cases of LGBTI rights abuses in Turkey but also in showing how LGBTI rights activists and civil society organisations are willing to risk their lives in challenging authorities on concerns of ensuring full rights for the LGBTI community in Turkey.

The tactics and strategies those LGBTI activists used are probably not only limited to Turkey, another LGBTI activist in another part of the world might also use the same strategies and tactics under challenging conditions and apply some of the strategies to their work.

With the developments in Turkey since 2015, the condition is one in which democracy seems to be deteriorating. The failed military coup in 2016, and the backlash which resulted, that is still gripping the country, the nearly frozen relations between the EU and Turkey, concerns regarding terrorism, and the government's fight with Kurdish forces,

have led to the situations of instability in Turkey.

This study brings arguments to improve the condition of human rights activists especially the ones who deal with LGBTI, which in turn will be positive for both, activists and policymakers. Enhancing dialogue and understanding the sexual minorities instead of banning and discriminating against the LGBTI community relaxes the tense environment for the LGBTI community in Turkey and also creates a better society. Also, when sexual minorities have their fundamental rights and freedoms, they will identify more with the society in which they live.

For the public at large, this research could provide a sharper panorama of the way of how LGBTI rights activists tackle the heteronormative policies of the government under pressure. It may be used to open a debate on how and why those bans should be lifted for the sake of sexual minorities. When those bans would be lifted, Turkey can take a step further democratically in the accession of the European Union.

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## Appendix

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### Appendix A. CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH



#### CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

##### INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website ([http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page\\_id=17](http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17)). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

##### PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: The Survival of LGBTI Rights in Turkey

Name, email of student: Yiğit Yılmaz, 478043yy@student.eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Prof. dr. Willem Schinkel, schinkel@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 01-09-2018 – 31-08-2019

Is the research study conducted within DPAS  YES - NO

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?  
(e.g. internship organization)



## PART II: TYPE OF RESEARCH STUDY

Please indicate the type of research study by circling the appropriate answer:

1. Research involving human participants.  YES - NO

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? YES -  NO

*Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (CCMO).*

2. Field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants.  YES - NO

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else).  YES - NO

## PART III: PARTICIPANTS

**(Complete this section only if your study involves human participants)**

Where will you collect your data?

The data will be collected in the Netherlands, through the internet interviewees from other parts of the world will potentially be interviewed. As we're talking about the EU as an organizations and Turkey as a state there's a big chance multiple interviewees will be from either or both groups.

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

About 10 or 15 people

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

As the LGBTI communities and the activists within are an enormous amount of people it is uncertain how big the exact population is.

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES -  NO

2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written



- 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES -  NO
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES -  NO
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants?  
*Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).* YES -  NO
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES -  NO
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)?  YES - NO
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES -  NO
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES -  NO
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES -  NO
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES -  NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

As interviewees are from the LGBTI communities it's practically impossible to not have this information, this information will however only be noted by explicit consent of the interviewee

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

Data will be anonymised following GDPR and AVG (Algemene Verordening personen Gegevens)

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible





circumstances this could be.

Certain subjects might have an emotional impact on interviewees, they will however will be informed they can stop or take a break at any time to either recompose themselves or skip the subject at hand

#### **Part IV: Data storage and backup**

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Sensitive notes are held on the body of the researcher at all time till they can be transferred to a secure storage, a secure storage meaning a locked room where only the researcher has access to.

*Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.*

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Me, I will backup the data to encrypted storage media.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Weekly

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

By removing or the name, address and city data while saving only the year of birth, This will make it impossible for readers of the data to determine what person is attached to this data.

*Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.*

#### **PART VI: SIGNATURE**

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.



Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Yiğit Yılmaz  
Schinkel

Name (EUR) supervisor: Willem

Date: 16-03-2019

Date:16-03-2019