

Sexual equality and the making of the European Union: LGBT rights, European identity, and the East/West divide

In the past decade, LGBT rights became an important part of the discourses that mark the European Union as a global model when it comes to sexual equality, human rights, and democracy. In addition to the discursive level, the need to end discrimination on the grounds of sexuality has been incorporated in a number of relevant EU documents which set the frame for the common EU politics. Most notably, it also became a part of the EU enlargement politics, demanding the protection of LGBT people against discrimination in the countries that aspire to become EU member states. However, although it has impacted some positive changes when it comes to unequal social position of sexual minorities, especially in aspiring countries, EU politics of LGBT rights has also had negative effects. Some of these effects have been directly connected with the ways in which the rights of sexual minorities have been feeding into the Orientalist logic that constructs the “tolerant and progressive Western Europe” against the “homophobic, illiberal, post-communist East.” In this way, the discourses of LGBT rights became a part and parcel of the re/production of hierarchical East/West binary within the supranational European Union. This talk will discuss in more details the ways in which the LGBT rights have been embedded in the making of the EU with the particular focus on the positive and negative effects of EU politics of LGBT rights.

Short bio:

Dr Katja Kahlina received her PhD in Comparative Gender Studies from Central European University. She worked as a Research Fellow on the CITSEE (Europeanisation of Citizenship in the Successor States of the Former Yugoslavia) project at the School of Law, University of Edinburgh. She was also a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Global Justice Academy, University of Edinburgh, where she served as a member of Steering Committee. Katja has published articles on nationalism, sexuality, and belonging in the context of nation-building in Croatia; gender, sexuality, and the concept of identity; and transformation of sexuality and citizenship in relation to globalization/‘Europeanization’. Her most recent publications include the special issue on transformations of gender, sexuality and citizenship in South East Europe published in *Women’s Studies International Forum*. She is currently working on the book project that looks at the ways in which the discourses and practices of democracy figure in relation to religious resistance towards changing norms of gender and sexuality on the global scale.