

EU Today Podcast 6 Transcript

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[Intro music in theme of piano playing Ode to Joy]

Katie Lindner: Hello, and welcome to EU Today, a podcast from the Center for European studies, a Jean Monnet Center of Excellence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Thank you to the Erasmus+ program of the European Commission, the EU Delegation to the U.S., and the U.S. Department of Education for supporting our center and its programs. On this podcast, we sit down with scholars and policy leaders to discuss pressing issues facing the EU. We hope you enjoy it.

Brett Harris: Hello, my name is Brett Harris, and I am a Contemporary European Studies major at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In this episode, I will be interviewing Professor Phillip Ayoub on LGBT rights proliferation in the EU and transatlantic contexts. Dr. Ayoub is an Associate Professor of Diplomacy and World Affairs at Occidental College. He is an alum of the UNC TransAtlantic Masters Program, and received his PhD from Cornell University. Dr. Ayoub is the author of multiple articles and publications, including his 2016 book, *When States Come Out: Europe's Sexual Minorities and the Politics of Visibility*.

[Ode to Joy fades back in and plays for appx. 4 measures]

Brett Harris: Hello I'm Brett Harris and today I'm joined by Phillip Ayoub, Associate Professor of Diplomacy and World Affairs at Occidental College. Jumping right in, one of your research interests is the proliferation of LGBT rights in Europe, and one thing you've noticed how quickly these developments seem to have accelerated in the past two decades. To what degree do you think that the EU as a values or norms-based institution and the process of European integration have impacted the trends that you've noticed?

Phillip Ayoub: Great, Brett, thanks for having me on your podcast. Yeah, I think we have seen a lot of changes in the last two decades. And I think organizations like the

EU are very important for that. A lot of the earlier states that moved on LGBT rights, like Sweden or others, there were these characteristics — states that had, relatively high rates of secularism, were quite strong democracies, had relatively high wealth and those factors indicated what states we expected to move on LGBT rights. But then we saw other European states like Ireland or Malta become leaders on these issues. And it challenged some of those earlier explanations in compelling us to think about the transnational and international dynamics of LGBT rights diffusion and that's mainly what my work is on, not to say that domestic politics doesn't matter, but there's something international going on that explains why an issue like marriage equality, which existed nowhere, not long ago, now exists in so many dozens of states, and especially in the European region. And so I try to theorize how states become more porous or open to channels, what I call channels of visibility, and the EU is one of the main facilitators of opening states to these channels of visibility or transnational currents that can bring with them new ideas about LGBT people.

Brett Harris: Okay, awesome. Thank you. And thinking about that, the past decade has held some landmark developments for LGBT folks in the United States, as well as in Europe. How do you think these developments might be connected? Is there an advantage to viewing LGBT rights proliferation as a transatlantic or even global development?

Dr. Ayoub: Yeah, absolutely. They've always been connected. The first American gay rights organization in the 1920s in Chicago was founded by Henry Gerber, who was a protégé of Magnus Hirschfeld who was an early activist and researcher in the late 1800s and early 1900s. And he had an organization, for example, called World Sexual Reform. So these transnational linkages between queer people have existed for a really long time in history and they've existed really a lot in terms of the transatlantic currents between the two. And when we saw the movement, really the kind of node of the movement before the Second World War was in Germany, and that moved in the post war period to the Netherlands. And then after Stonewall it moved somewhat to the US with this new form of visibility politics and gay liberation activism and that also funneled back to Europe. So Stonewall was in 1969, the first pride was in 1970, and I believe in 1971 already the French had a Gay Liberation Front, which was named after the American version. So these transnational connections have always tied the movements together. That said, you know, in one of my first edited volumes with David Paternotte, we really argue that LGBT rights as we understand them, even in the US, do have a strong connection to what happened in Europe. So the development of these identities happened in Europe, the first movements around homosexuality also happened in Europe. And a lot of

the things that we consider innovations around LGBT rights were developed in European countries first, and then moved to the US. And oftentimes, they would move to US states first, since the federal government has been quite behind when it comes to LGBT rights at the federal level in the United States. So I think that understanding that transatlantic context is really important for LGBT rights, given that a lot of times we are a little bit blindsided, I think, by putting the needle on the record at Stonewall from this American perspective and saying, "American activists did LGBT rights," which is partly true. They changed how we think about LGBT rights, fundamentally, and that has also reshaped how we do LGBT rights. That said, European activists have been working on these issues for a really long time, and European states have really also lead the way in kind of innovating on these rights and they do influence each other reciprocally throughout history.

Brett Harris: Definitely. Thank you for sharing. And so you've mentioned earlier visibility and the visibility of norms, and so, in your opinion, is that always a good thing? Are there ever instances or contexts where increased visibility might actually mobilize a population against LGBT folks, in this transatlantic context or more broadly?

Dr. Ayoub: Yeah, I mean visibility is really tricky. It also takes a degree of privilege, to be visible, and for movements to make issues visible because sometimes you have to be invisible, just to survive as a movement or as a person. And I think that in that is a sentiment that visibility comes with a certain kind of risk of backlash. And I think we've definitely seen that in the European Union. Where certain states, or when movements make things visible, LGBT rights visible, that they have been met with forceful resistance. Interestingly enough, though sometimes that is preempted by governments, where certain leaders will stigmatize LGBT people in advance of the movement even and make anti-homophobia visible in terms of in order to try to get elected, etc. So it's a little bit tricky. In that sense, but what we've seen that's really helpful in the EU, is that there is kind of a normative in value context and has associated the EU to LGBT rights. That's problematic in some sense too, in that it can really be used as a way to exclude certain countries like Turkey from joining the EU because they're not "gay-friendly" enough or can stigmatize or hold certain countries as "backward" by saying that they have high degrees of homophobia. Which is really problematic, especially for queer people in those contexts. That said, the association with European LGBT rights has also been used politically in a productive way in that certain activists can say that, you know, adopting these rights is part of what it means to be a member of this community, and even though we are Italians or Poles or Latvians, we are also Europeans and part of European values enshrined in law is to also address LGBT rights. So it kind of helps with that kind of

in-group socialization, that is absent in some world regions where it's harder to say that, adopting these rights which are always portrayed as foreign and imposed, it's hard to, to say that they're indigenous to our states. In Europe, activists have more access to that frame in large part because the European Union takes a stand on those issues and we should also keep in mind, when we talk about visibility. I haven't really talked about the channels that are theorized in the book, which we don't have to do, but one important thing to take note is that the European Union, with Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty, was the first binding international law on LGBT rights which protected against discrimination in employment, on the basis of sexual orientation. So that's one of four tiers of the anti-discrimination measure that folks have protection under.

Brett Harris: Definitely. Really briefly as we're wrapping up, one thing that's been prominent in this idea of transatlantic ties and discourses that those ties might be weakening, given the current Trump administration and kind of other developments. What impact do you think the possible weakening of this relationship, or maybe even a resurgence of those relationship after this period of doubt — what effect do you think that could have on LGBT rights proliferation?

Dr. Ayoub: Yeah, that's an important question, and it's one that's a little bit hard to answer in terms of we have to see how things develop. But what I can say is that absolutely, the weakening of this relationship is detrimental to LGBT rights. I mean so much of the focus of my work has been how these kind of international collaborations across borders by activist activists and, you know, free flow of information and ideas can really benefit LGBT rights. Of course, with kind of rising populism and nationalism and kind of weakening collaboration across borders, that would be detrimental to LGBT rights for sure. Because LGBT people as small minorities in their various countries have really relied on that kind of cross-border collaboration with each other, which has been facilitated by the free flow of people across borders and a free flow of ideas, etc. So when we hear news like coming out of Hungary now or not just now, but over the last couple years, or when we see this kind of resurgence of America-first politics in the US under the Trump administration. These are formidable obstacles to LGBT rights activists. And nationalism also has been a key obstacle towards the proliferation of LGBT rights in part because it really rests on a very fixed and determined understanding of the national self, and gender and sexuality are quite fluid concepts and have always been defined as threatening to nation. And so I think that these are serious challenge. There is some evidence, though, that this kind of shared threat is recognized by LGBT people across different borders. That suggests that they themselves as activists are not abandoning this kind of international solidarity. We'll

have to see how that shakes out in terms of systematic research on these questions, but my hunch is that it would really hurt the gains that LGBT activists have made if we continue further down this path of less international cooperation.

Brett Harris: Definitely. Okay. Well, it looks like we're about out of time. Is there anything else you'd like to add before wrapping up?

Dr. Ayoub: Well yeah, I guess I would just say thank you again for inviting me to speak to you on this podcast. But I should also note that TAM was very important for my own interest in this topic because it is what brought me to Berlin during a wave of activism that I observed, and which was cross-border activism between Germany and Poland, and really excited me about this issue and inspired me to go to grad school. So it is exactly that kind of cross-border mobility that also the TransAtlantic Master's Program facilitated for me that really changed my career and my outlook on these questions that you've asked me about today. So they have a lot of their beginnings with UNC.

Brett Harris: Awesome. Well, we're always happy to have you back. Okay, thanks so much for sharing your expertise with me and our listeners, and have a great day!

[Ode to joy plays in the background]

Katie Lindner: Please note that any opinions expressed in the EU Today podcast are solely those of our guests and our hosts, and not of the UNC Center for European studies, which takes no institutional positions. Be sure to tune in for more episodes, and subscribe to *EU Today* wherever you listen to podcasts.

[Ode to Joy fades out]

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