Master Thesis Proposal
Charles University
Faculty of Social Sciences
International Area Studies: Balkan, Eurasian and Central European Studies

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Topic:
The Role of the EU in Improving Sexual Minority Rights in Albania

Research Question:
According to a recent study Albania is the most homophobic country in Europe. At the same time it has been concluded through numerous of studies that traditional values still seem to dominate the Albanian way of life. None the less sexual minority policies are changing, and the LGBT community are becoming more visible in the public as well as political domain, which is an interesting and slightly paradoxical fact, since public opinion are still predominantly homophobic.

Having already stated homophobia in Albania as a fact, and having concluded that traditional values are still dominant, the research question will evolve around the changing policies and visibility of the LGBT community and social movement. Knowing that Albania are moving closer to the European Union, and knowing that the Copenhagen Criteria “form an integral part of both the Copenhagen political criteria for accession and the EU legal framework on combating (LGBT) discrimination”, and that the 2009 Lisbon Treaty commits the European Union (EU) to pursue universal and indivisible human rights and fundamental freedoms in all its external activities, I intend to analyze not only the conditions under which the LGBT movement operate in Albania, but also the effect of the movement, and I want to explore the role of the EU. So, to sum up, the research question will be why (and how) these political changes are taking place, despite of the predominantly negative public opinion on sexual minority matters, and what the role of the EU is. This will stand in comparison with the other Balkan societies. What makes Albania typical, and what makes it a unique case in relation to the rest of the Balkan countries?
In order to fully answer this question, I need to look at the levels and characteristics of homophobia in Albania. I will base my research on a review of the homosexual history and the political LGBT-movement in the context of the country’s specific cultural traditions and political system. What happens when their issues enter mainstream political processes? How can certain political and social contexts shape opportunities for social movements to make gains? I will argue that homophobia in Albania is often indulged in or at least condoned by state authorities, as to why its cause is partly due to what I will refer to as “ politicization of homophobia”. My main argument will in other words be how homophobia has become a tool for political mobilization and opposition to ‘Europeanization’ by revitalizing nationalism, and, in short, that the topic is more about cultural identity and national pride than about sexual orientation or public morality. In order to do this I will use two of the main definitions of homophobia, Cultural and Institutional homophobia, as stated by the LGBT Resource Center, by analyzing the affect of cultural, religious and political institutions in forming the policies and public attitudes related to homosexuality and transgenderism. Conclusively, I intend to analyze and compare available data to explain the affect of the (post-) communist society and democratization, with the prospects of EU-accession, on the abovementioned issues within the Albanian society. I will follow up on these results by comparing them to similar cases/happenings and political changes in other Balkan countries, and I will end with a perspectival debate to conduct a final conclusion.

Hypotheses:

That the EU is the main force behind the improvements for sexual minority groups in Albania.

Outline:

1. Introduction
   a. Why Albania?
2. Literature Review
3. Research Methodology
   a. Limitations of Methods
   b. What Data to Analyse
4. Cultural tradition and patriarchy
a. Albania and religion
b. Homosexual history of Albania
c. Homosexuality during communism
d. Transgenderism & Lesbianism
e. Sexual Revolution in Albania

5. Cultural and Institutional Homophobia in Albania
6. The LGBT-Movement in Albania
7. Political Opportunities
8. European Integration of Albania
9. Comparison with Serbia and Romania
10. Conclusion

**Literature Review:**

Studies on Albania agree that the society is based on traditional values, predominantly connected to the Kanun and its strong notions on family. The literature on Albania reveals a patriarchal society dominated by men, although signs of gender related changes in politics and customs are also acknowledged in the scope of literature. In the article *Religious Values in the Post-Communistic Albania* Ina K. Zhupa confirms a broad consent that the family and its traditions play a much bigger role for the average Albanian, compared with their trust in religious institutions (K. Zhupa 2014), and when it comes to the core of the topic – homophobia – available data in journals and reports also imply that traditional family values, as opposed to religious beliefs, is used more often as an argument against homosexuality. Literature, nonetheless, lacks clear explanations on the causes of homophobia in Albania. The patriarchal society is often solely blamed, while other factors – such as the lack of education and the fact that sexuality in general is considered a taboo in the Albanian society – is overlooked. This creates a one-dimensional and, to some degree, naive scope of literature that often does not look into the politicization of homosexuality nor conducts analytics of the Albanian LGBT community and their opportunities to make political gains.

The literature on the homosexual history of Albania – although sparse – includes a range of writers spanning from poet Lord Byron to German specialist in Albanian history and culture Johann Georg von Hahn, balkanologist Gustav Ludwig Weigand and Paul Näcke, German psychologist. In this context the consent is that homosexuality flourished somewhat openly among the Scythian
warriors, and some research exists about what has been referred to as “boy-love” in the Gege culture in Northern parts of Albania. However, disagreements exist to the extent of homosexuality in these cases, and while historian John Boswell does not jump to conclusions about the cases of ceremonies of same-sex unions in Eastern Europe between Christians and non-Christians, Paul Nägele discussed these unions in Albania strictly in the context of homosexuality. However, in some contexts Nägele can probably be considered a questionable source, as his findings are not well documented but rather reports on anecdotes and “assurances” from native Albanians that is hard to confirm. The same goes with Johann Georg von Hahn who uses poetry, which he calls “the actual language used to him by an Albanian Gege”, as a way to document homosexuality in the Gege culture. There are in other words certain gaps in these nineteenth-century books and travel ethnographies that only give an idea – as opposed to documented facts – about homosexuality in Albania at the time.

Literature that deals with homosexuality during communist times is also sparse, and only legislative facts seem possible to fully document. Most of the literature and articles stem from native Albanians who lived through that period as homosexuals, such as Genci Xhelaj and others interviewed by a range of newspapers. Their stories provide a good general idea about the dangers of being homosexual at the time, but it does not provide any true or detailed facts of the period in question, or about how Hoxhaism deals with the issue.

In more contemporary data certain gaps are visible when it comes to clear explanations. The available data are pretty straightforward, but does not provide any true explanation to their background or causes, to the position of the Albanian LGBT-community or the influence of the EU. Some journals do give an impression of the position of the EU, but they do not measure any real connection between the criteria of EU-accession and the situation in Albania, and a scope of literature concerning the Albanian LGBT-movement is also lacking.