

Gay rights and LGBTQI movements in Europe

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ABSTRACT

The history of gay rights movements, initially LGBT and later LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex), can be understood only in light of the forms of persecution and oppression faced by individuals who had emotional and sexual relations with persons of their own gender and/or did not conform to the social expectations of their own gender. Their emergence dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century. There has been an increasing awareness of the demands made by the LGBTQI movement during the early twenty-first century, notably with regard to measures for combatting discrimination, which are at the foundation of the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000).



First national march for gay rights and freedoms, Paris, April 4, 1981

During the nineteenth century, the first gay liberation thinkers laid the groundwork for a militant movement that demanded the end of the criminalization, pathologisation and social rejection of non-heterosexual sexuality. In 1836, the Swiss man Heinrich Hösli (1784-1864) published in German the first essay demanding recognition of the rights of those who followed what he called masculine love. Nearly three decades later, the German jurist Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895) wrote twelve volumes between 1864 and 1879 as part of his "Research on the Mystery of Love Between Men" (*Forschungen über das Räthsel der mann männlichen Liebe*). He also circulated a

manifesto to create a federation of Uranians (1865), a term which designated men who loved men. He was engaged in the struggle to repeal § 175 of the German penal code, which condemned “unnatural relations between men,” and in 1869 publicly declared he was a Uranist during a congress of German jurists. He died in exile in Italy before the birth of the liberation movement which he had called for.

A first gay liberation movement emerged in Berlin in 1897, revolving around the doctor Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935), co-founder of the Wissenschaftlich-humanitäre Komitee (WhK, Scientific-Humanitarian Committee). The committee took multiple actions: a petition in favour of appealing § 175, the publication of books and brochures on homosexuality, the publication of a review (*Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, Yearbook for Intermediate Sexual Types), and the circulation of an educational film on the damage caused by homophobia (*Anders als die anderen*, Different from Others, 1919). In the ensuing period, committee branches were created in a number of German cities and neighbouring countries whose laws condemned homosexuality (Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, etc.). Other gay militant organizations were created after a split within the WhK, such as the Community of the Special (*Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*), founded by the German Adolf Brand (1874-1945) who advocated naturism among other things. The Union for the Rights of Men (*Bund für Menschenrechte*), founded in 1922 by Friedrich Radszuweit (1876-1932), was the first to be open to lesbians. Although their relations were not illegal, some of them expressed their wish to be members of militant organizations that would give them visibility within the first homosexual movement. At the same time, the World League for Sexual Reform was founded in 1921 by Hirschfeld, whose members included reformer doctors and representatives from twenty-five countries, including sixteen in Europe, evidence that the question had become an international one. In the face of commonplace homophobia, it demanded of states “a rational attitude [...] with respect to homosexual men and women,” along with acknowledgment that sexual relations between consenting adults belonged to the private sphere. The rise of the Far Right brought the movement to a halt. Violent Nazi repression caused the dissolution of the League in 1933 and the exile of its members, which was the underlying cause of the end of the first gay rights movement and the deportation of homosexuals in wartime Europe. The only one to endure was the Circle (*der Kreis*), located in Zurich and founded in 1932 by Karl Meier (1897-1974). In fact, its newsletter diffused from Switzerland was the only regular homosexual publication until the aftermath of the conflict.

Despite the reigning conservatism of the post-war period, “clubs” discreetly formed to promote homosexual sociability through readings, conferences, excursions, and even masked balls. In 1951, the International Committee for Sexual Equality (ICSE) was formed in Amsterdam, demanding rights for homosexuals. In France, André Baudry (born in 1922) created in 1954 the homophilic association Arcadie, a mythological reference to the land where love reigned. Its eponymous review enjoyed increasing success despite the Mirguet amendment (1960), according to which homosexuality was a “social scourge” in the same manner as alcoholism. In the United Kingdom, the Homosexual Law Reform Society began in 1960 to work towards the decriminalization of homosexuality (achieved in England and Wales in 1967).

May 1968 brought renewed energy, and enabled the creation of revolutionary homosexual groups inspired by the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in the US. A movement of the same name was founded in London in 1971. That same year HAW (Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin) was created in the FRG, and FHAR (Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire) in Paris. These groups fought against heterosexism, proclaiming that “*les pédés*” [fags] and “*les gouines*” [dykes] (terms that they appropriated) had to seize the public space and fight to obtain new rights. During that decade, marches commemorated the Stonewall Inn riots in New York (1969), and spread across Europe (London, Paris, Antwerp, Bremen, Berlin, etc.), offering hitherto unseen visibility to homosexual movements.

The 1980s were marked by the adoption of the rainbow flag, the LGBT acronym, the professionalization of gay and lesbian militancy, and the presence of openly homosexual candidates during elections. For instance, in France, Maurice Cherdron ran unsuccessfully in the 1981 legislative election as the candidate for the Collectif homosexuel de l'Ouest parisien [Gay Collective of Western Paris], while in Germany Albert Eckert (born in 1960) became the

congressman for the Alternative slate in 1989. The ravages of the HIV/Aids epidemic sparked the creation of organizations to raise public awareness and combat the scourge (Terrence Higgins Trust in the United Kingdom in 1982, Deutsche Aids Hilfe in 1983, France Aides in 1984, and Act Up in 1989). In the face of this mobilization, from 1989 onwards the European Parliament encouraged its member states to decriminalize homosexual relations and recognize same-sex unions. In 1993, the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. Since then there has been a convergence in the fight being led by sexual minorities, which have gradually been joined by trans and intersex movements, a fact that is reflected by the new acronym LGBTQI. The Association Beaumont Continental (ABC, 1975) fought against the pathologizing of transsexuals, which was won in France in 2010. The OII (Organization Intersex International), which opposes sexual bicategorization, has called for the end of gender assignment and the genital mutilation that accompanies it.

In the early twenty-first century, member states have been more attentive to the demands of the LGBTQI movement, in accordance with the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. The charter forbids any discrimination based on sexual orientation and protects transgender persons from discrimination based on "gender" in accordance with the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union. Outside of the European Community, demands are not as loud or are even suppressed, as demonstrated by the measures forbidding "homosexual propaganda" in Russia since 2013, or the persecution of homosexuals in Chechnya, which was denounced in 2017 by a number of European chancelleries.

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