



International Monterrey Model United Nations Simulation

American School Foundation of Monterrey



European Council

Topic: Debating the recent implementation of policies discriminating the LGBTQ+ community in Eastern Europe

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I. Committee Background

The European Council traces its roots back to early 1961 as informal summits hosted by the leaders of influential European nations. This arrangement continued until the summits were established in 1975 and formalized in 2009 with the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon. The European Council is composed of the heads of government of all EU member states along with the President of the Council, and the President of the EU Commission. Usually, meetings are held in the Justus Lipsius Building in Brussels, Belgium, and take place at least twice every six months. In these meetings, decisions are taken by consensus. According to the Treaty of Lisbon, the president of the Council is elected for a two and a half year term with the option of being re-elected for a second term. After every Council meeting, the president must brief the European Parliament. The current president, as of December 2019, is Charles Michel.

Even though the European Council possesses no formal powers, the influence of the heads of state is sufficient for its effective functioning. Its main purpose is to provide an impetus for development and settle issues outstanding from discussions at the lower level in EU foreign policy, which includes the ratification of important documents and negotiations of treaty amendments. In addition to this, the Council exercises the power to appoint the President of the European Central Bank, currently Christine Lagarde, and the High Representative of the Union of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell. Because of its influence and power, the European Council is regarded by many as the Union's dominant political authority.

II. Introduction

Description and Definition of the Topic

People in the LGBTQ+ community have been discriminated against and criticized for decades because of who they choose to love. Specifically, in Eastern Europe new regulations selecting against the LGBTQ+ people have been implemented: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation of Slovakia, Belarus Republic, Moldova, and Ukraine have all implemented these policies (Easton). This is seen in the acts of legislators and country leaders who have outlawed same-sex marriage, child adoptions, and the teaching of any LGBTQ+ subject in schools: they are spreading hatred against a large portion of their citizens by

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enforcing these regulations. According to a BBC article, a 2019 CBOS poll reported that “66% of respondents” believe same-sex couples should not “have the right to marry”, while “67% said they should not be open about their way of life in public”, and 84% believe they “should not be able to adopt children” (Easton, 2021).

Discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community has cost Eastern European countries about a yearly 2% in economic growth: countries such Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine are losing billions of dollars each year due to the lack of equality in the workplace, health costs related to HIV/AIDS, and depression (Greenhalgh, 2021). Author George Perlov said that “countries that are more open (in terms of LGBTQ+ rights) are generally speaking financially and economically are in a much better place” (Greenhalgh, 2021). Same-sex marriage and being part of the LGBTQ+ community is only allowed in a few countries and even there they are discriminated against by many. People have faced physical attacks, making it hard for them to live openly and stay true to who they are.

The Problem

Europe, once a pioneer of LGBTQ+ rights, has started to demonstrate discrimination against the community; governments of certain countries have been particularly involved in these anti-humanitarian behaviors. For instance, recent laws and restrictions have been implemented by the Hungarian parliament and supported by their Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán; these ban the promotion of content that encourages “homosexual behavior” in children, to prevent awareness on the topic (Kottasová, 2021). This lack of education with minors has left teens confused as to what they are feeling, making them feel alone and different in a predominantly straight community. Likewise, Poland’s sudden turn on the homosexual community has caused a worldwide controversy with anti-LGBTQ+ supporting the government, and the rest, LGBTQ+ members and allies, are protesting the recent events.

With the new laws that governments have imposed, government officials have significantly increased their hate speech and the number of hate crimes reported has increased; hate crimes have increased as a result of how people do not feel threatened by the government as they implement homophobic regulations. In addition to the already increasing hate, government officials in Armenia, Hungary, Poland, and Russia have officially banned pride events or any type of event that raises awareness towards the community (Kottasová, 2021). Turkey was the pioneer for this new wave of homophobia as they decided to ban gay pride marches in 2015 and even persecuted those who refused to stand down and hoped to regain their voice. One huge problem with the said situation is the growth of the presence and activity of the anti-LGBTQ+, anti-gender, and neo-Nazi protesters, who try to spread their ideas in erroneous and harmful ways. In addition to utilizing social media, these groups go as far as to make their public

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appearances known by protesting against the community in the same pride marches that are intended to support them (Kottasová, 2021).

III. History of the Topic

Chronological History of the Topic

Homosexuality in Europe was not viewed as something inherently bad during the early Roman Empire. Only homosexual men who participated in sexual intercourse were seen as sexually deviant and were persecuted for it. However, as time progressed, people became more intolerant towards LGBTQ+ identifying individuals (Mitchell, 2008). In 390 CE, Roman emperors Valentinian, Arcadius, and Theodosius created new anti-homosexual legislation decreeing: “he that basely abandons his sex cannot aspire to that of another without undergoing the supreme punishment” (Mitchell, 2008). This now meant that all homosexuals would be severely punished. This viewpoint adhered itself to Christianity and spread through its culture.

In the middle ages, after the fall of the Roman Empire, the views on homosexuality remained, for the most part, the same: all homosexual men were persecuted throughout Europe. However, homosexual women were not as persecuted as long as they would not try to simulate heterosexual relationships. Female homosexual relationships were not seen as sexual, therefore they were not deemed homosexual, allowing them to evade persecution (Bullough & Brundage, 2013). Regardless, if homosexual women were caught attempting to create the conditions of heterosexual intercourse they would be no different from homosexual men. The punishment remained the same since the late Roman Empire: homosexuals and effeminate men would be given the death penalty. The situation concerning homosexuality, its views, and its consequences, remained constant until around the 1700s (Bullough & Brundage, 2013).

During the 1700s, the punishment for having same-sex attraction was usually the death penalty. In Great Britain, during the pre-French Revolution times, people who identified as gay or lesbian would be burned or hung to death, castrated, or stoned. It was until 1786 that these punishments would be replaced with imprisonment (Zamora García & Ranz, 2019). In 1791, during the French Revolution, these laws finally changed: homosexual intercourse was no longer a crime in France. However, society was not open to these changes and did not accept this kind of love, making it dangerous and unthinkable for any homosexual to come out without putting their lives at risk from society. Throughout time, the right of being attracted to the same-sex has not been enforced nor protected by many countries and has had significant setbacks. For instance, during Queen Victoria’s rule, she applied the law that anyone that was attracted to the same-sex would spend two years in prison; anyone who acted on these attractions would have a life sentence in prison (Zamora García & Ranz, 2019).

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Scholars say that during the early 20th century, in the initial stages of the Russian Revolution, some revolutionary transformations took place “under initial Bolshevik policies” (Gradskova, et al., 2020). One of these policies included the decriminalization of homosexual relationships amongst Russian people. However, the Stalinist regime revoked these policies under his totalitarian version of communism: he re-criminalized “male homosexuality” in 1934 (Gradskova, et al., 2020). From this point forward, it was illegal to be a gay man in Russia for most of the 20th century until 1993, when male homosexuality was decriminalized once again; still, there were many discriminating regulations against the LGBTQ+ community in place. Meanwhile, in Czechoslovakia, the public would not discuss sexual orientation topics openly: it was a topic that generally would be avoided. The same trend could be seen in Russia and other eastern European countries. This idea of ‘ignoring’ conversations surrounding sexuality was dismissed during the 1970s and 80s when this topic became openly discussed. This trend was also seen in the East German Democratic Republic (GDR) (Gradskova, et al., 2020).

During the 60s, the countries of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, and Bulgaria decriminalized male homosexuality; however, culturally, people had the same views on the LGBTQ+ community as they had: a demeaning, non-human-like view (Gradskova, et al., 2020). Near the end of the century, in 1995, as the Polish constitution was being drafted: Article 32 Paragraph 2 originally stated that sexual orientation was not ground for discrimination. However, this version was blocked by protests from “right-wing parties and the then-President Lech Wałęsa” who claimed that such an inclusion would be a “threat to the family and moral upbringing of children” (Czarnecki, 2007). Homosexuality was legalized in Poland in 1932, earlier than most other European countries; same-sex marriage was still illegal and the whole topic was a taboo (Snijders, n.d.). Polish society did not accept gay men seeing as they were often beaten, discriminated against, robbed, and even killed. In 1985, all gay people had to deal with a policy requiring them to be registered in a database to supposedly control the spread of HIV; the government used several tactics including blackmail and force to get them to register (Snijders, n.d.). In Warsaw, pride events were banned up until 2005, in this year people fought the resistance against the moment and went to march and voice their pride (Roache, 2019).

Historical Case Studies

Swiss Vote on Gay Marriage

LGBTQ+ organizations and supporters in Switzerland hailed a “historic day” for the country after Swiss voters decisively supported same-sex marriage in a vote on Sunday, September 7th, 2021 (Amiel, 2021). Church groups and conservative political parties rejected the plan in the run-up to the election, claiming it would jeopardize the traditional family ideals and values (*Switzerland same-sex ... yes* 2021). Since 2007, same-sex couples in Switzerland have

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been able to register partnerships; however, some privileges are limited. The vote that was carried out would ensure fewer restrictions on the union process. Likewise, same-sex couples will be able to adopt unrelated children while married lesbian couples will be able to have children through sperm donation; something that these couples were previously unable to do as a result of the restrictions in place (Amiel, 2021). “It is a historic day for Switzerland, a historic day when it comes to equality for same-sex couples, and it is also an important day for the whole LGBTQ+ community,’ Jan Muller, of the ‘yes’ campaign committee, told AFP news agency” (*Switzerland same-sex ... yes 2021*). It is important to note that there is still one-third of the swiss population which was not in favor of the new legislation: it is up to the current leaders of the country to make sure that the people who abstained or voted against can understand the significance that this vote had on the LGBTQ+ community.

Same-Sex Marriage and Adoption in Spain

LGBTQ+ rights have experienced notable changes over the last decades in Spain. Back during the early Roman Empire in Spain, sexual interaction between men and same-sex marriages occurred until a law against homosexuality was promoted by Christian emperors. Hundreds of years later, after recognizing unregistered cohabitation between same-sex couples countrywide since 1994 and 1997, Spain legalized both same-sex marriage and adoption rights for same-sex couples in 2005 (McLean, 2005). The bill passed 187 to 147, and the freedom to marry and to adopt children regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation positively affected the country. Even though the vote was a close 56% to 44%, Spain was named one of the top 15 liberal countries that accept the LGBTQ+ community; this was reflected in how the community was more inclusive and diverse. Currently, around 90% of the population accepts homosexuality and the number keeps growing (Fernandez, 2021). This trend is especially helping teenagers, giving them a chance to express themselves without being scared of how the community will react to them if they are not heterosexual. Even couples from all around the world move to Spain due to the acceptance and aid the country and its people bring to the LGBTQ+ community. Even so, in 2018, 27-year-old activist, Angela Ponce, became the first transgender woman to compete in the Miss Universe contest, where she received a standing ovation, this shows how Spain and its movements are positively affecting the world (Fernandez, 2021).

Same-Sex Marriage in Armenia

Socially, the entire LGBTQ+ topic is a taboo, with 55% of interviewees in Armenia stating that they would cease any relationship with a friend or relative if they came out to be gay (*LGBT rights in Armenia 2021*). Moreover, Armenian LGBTQ+ citizens face a variety of legal and social obstacles while trying to achieve marriage, due to the unjust laws which define

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marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Many families are forced to go into a free union, meaning they are together but are not married, as a result of such discrimination. According to Equaldex, Armenians face no protection against this discrimination which leaves them vulnerable to a homophobic society (*LGBT rights in Armenia* 2021). Adding on, since same-sex marriage is illegal in Armenia, homosexual couples are unable to adopt a child: the law states that only married couples can adopt children, preventing any gay couple from adopting. Likewise, many other rights that Armenians earn from being married are denied to homosexual couples (Marukyan, 2011).

Gulags in the USSR

In the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), during the 1950s-70s, homosexuals were sent to correctional facilities in GULAG camps. In these camps, inmates were submitted to conversion therapy. However, the homosexual women imprisoned there were especially disruptive and resisted conversion therapy. In 1958, a colonel overseeing some gulags stated that “Because of jealousy, women create a scene, fight, knife one another and commit a range of crimes, drawing the youth into this and corrupting the latter. This also prevents other inmates from serving their sentences in peace” (Alexander, 2018). The men were not giving up without a fight, they refused conversion therapy; however, they would not create major disruptions. In the Gulags, homosexuals were treated with harsher methods than those convicted of anti-revolutionary activity: they were humiliated physically and psychologically, isolated, and sometimes raped. Homosexuals continued being persecuted in the union constantly up until 1991, when the USSR divided into many individual countries, each of which adopted their views and legislation regarding same-sex attraction and relationships; most of which kept the Soviet Code shortly afterward.

The Scientific-Humanitarian Committee

The very first gay and lesbian organization, The Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, was founded in Berlin in 1897. Its main objective consisted of helping the LGBTQ+ community achieve freedom from persecution and have the right to go out in public without hiding their sexual orientation. This organization was founded by Magnus Hirschfeld, a Jewish doctor who believed in “Justice through science” (Levy, 2020). The organization is named The Scientific-Humanitarian Committee because it is based on Hirschfeld’s belief in achieving social justice through scientific knowledge. One of the first actions that this organization made was to write a petition to go against the Imperial Penal Code: a code that does not allow same-sex attraction (Schlagdenhauffen, 2020). To add on, this organization was able to stand up for the rights of homosexuals by writing poems, sponsoring rallies, and campaigning for legal change. This

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organization was so successful that homosexual men and women were able to get more freedom in Germany and many communities started accepting them. Adding on, other organizations started to emerge, for example, the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology. However, despite the success of this organization, homosexuals in Eastern Europe are still harassed and discriminated against daily (*History of Homosexuality ... Berlin* n.d.).

Past UN Actions

The United Nations has been trying to advance and protect the human rights of LGBTQ+ people. In 2011, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) passed the first resolution regarding this issue; it was mainly concerned about violence towards the LGBTQ+ community and their human rights, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Two years later, in July 2013, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights launched the UN's Free & Equal campaign to promote understanding of the LGBTQ+ community. Adding on, the UN Refugee Agency played a crucial role in assisting LGBTQ+ people in fleeing violence and persecution, and in helping them resettle in more welcoming countries. Finally, in 2015, the UN created and called to action the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Out of the 17 goals, the UN SDG goal number 5 advocates for Gender Equality throughout the world. As a result, all countries committed to the SDGs are also committed to ensuring that LGBTQ+ people are not “left behind” (*Ten Ways the ... Rights* 2017).

Vitit Muntarhorn was designated as the UN's first-ever Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in September 2016. In that capacity, he has fought to prevent violence and prejudice against LGBTQ+ individuals in all UN member nations; likewise, he has worked to improve the popular opinion regarding the community (*Ten Ways the ... Rights* 2017). On the other hand, the UN has also released several ground-breaking reports on “discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity”, as well as guidelines and suggestions for national governments to use as a reference to deal with these issues (*Ten Ways the ... Rights* 2017). The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) slammed the planned US ban on qualified transgender people serving in the military in July 2017. In response to the situation, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon utilized his platform to push for equality repeatedly and consistently during his tenure from 2010 to 2017 (*Ten Ways the ... Rights* 2017).

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IV. Key Players and Points of View

Russia

Homosexuality has been legal in Russia since 1993, and transgender people have been allowed to legally change their gender in legal documents since 1997, as long as they first get surgery. Regardless, the popular social point of view is that homosexuality should not be allowed, as it is seen as “unnatural and wrong” by many in this society (*No Support* 2018). Moreover, same-sex marriage is still illegal in Russia; therefore, all gay couples are restricted from enjoying several rights that married heterosexual couples enjoy (*LGBT rights in Russia* 2021). Adding on, according to NBC News, a study showed that one in five Russians believe that people who identify as LGBTQ+ should be “eliminated from their society” (Kuhr, 2020). Only six percent of the entire Russian population supports homosexuality. Furthermore, the number of Russians who “would not want a homosexual neighbor” increased from 38 percent to 51 percent in the span of two years, from 2012 to 2014. To this day, conversion therapy in Russia is still legal and affects the LGBTQ+ community (*LGBT rights in Russia* 2021). This has gravely affected LGBTQ+ people living in Russia, seeing as they face daily threats and abuse from their communities and families. In 2019, a Russian LGBTQ+ network poll confirmed that 56 percent of homosexuals experienced physiological abuse, and 12 percent have received physical abuse. Moreover, according to Dmitri Lychev, editor of the gay publication *1/10*, gays and lesbians are scared to seek help from law enforcement officers because they fear they will be beaten or receive death threats from them (*Russia: Situation of ... Lesbians* 1999).

Ukraine

Ukraine made homosexuality legal in 1991 but it does not offer the same rights to same-sex couples as to heterosexual couples. Same-sex couples in Ukraine are not allowed to legally marry, which restricts their access to the legal umbrella that being married offers. Also, they are not allowed to adopt children while single people and heterosexual couples are allowed to do so. Ukrainian society stands against homosexuality (*LGBT rights in Ukraine* 2021). In a survey carried out from 2017 to 2020: 46.2 percent of people said they would not like to have homosexual neighbors, and 62.4 percent said homosexuality is unjustifiable. Moreover, conversion therapy in Ukraine is not banned by the government (*LGBT rights in Ukraine* 2021). In general, homosexual people have the same legal rights as any other citizen except when it comes to relationships. Ukraine also offers discrimination protection in the workplace and allows LGBTQ+ people to serve in the military. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church plays a big role in the situation regarding homophobia in Ukrainian society: constant lobbying on the government by the churches has prevented new legislations benefiting same-sex relationships from passing or being proposed (*Situation of LGBT ... 2021* 2021).

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Hungary

In June 2021, Hungarian Prime Minister, Victor Orban, presented a new law to “ban the promotion and portrayal of homosexuality to citizens under the age of 18” (Rankin, 2021). In other words, Hungary passed a law where the government is prohibiting the highlighting of LGBTQ+ subjects in school instructional material and on television for underaged kids. Prime Minister Orban displayed this change in the law to “protect children” and “prevent pedophiles,” although there is no data proving this law is efficient (Raza-Sheikh, 2021). On June 16, 2021, he posted a Facebook video where he said, “LGBTQ+ activists visit kindergartens and schools and conduct sexual education classes. They want to do this here in Hungary as well” (Raza-Sheikh, 2021). In other words, Victor Orban is blaming LGBTQ+ activist for pedophilia when they are only teaching kids that having same-sex interactions are okay and normal. However, Orban being significantly anti-homosexuality has started to set rules and blames homosexuals for harassing children (Walker, 2021). This recent change of law has sparked anger in communities all around the world. So much so that citizens in Brussels have accused Victor Orban of mixing up two very different ideas; homosexuality and pedophilia. Adding on, Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, referred to this change as a “disgrace” (*Hungary’s Viktor Orban ... dispute* 2021). As a result, the LGBTQ+ community and those who support them have taken action and have marched for their rights in Budapest. Furthermore, according to Aljazeera, it was the biggest pride march in 26 years, where more than 10,000 people attended the parade and held rainbow flags signs and banners reading: “LGTBQ Rights”. This parade went from Main Boulevard and crossed the Danube river, attracting the attention of everyone in the country (*Thousands march for ... Pride* 2021).

Vatican City

On July 6th, 2021, The New York Times published an article that revealed a message from the pope said to send mixed signals on LGBTQ+ rights. This article shows that precisely eight years after Pope Francis’ famous quote “Who am I to judge?” regarding the LGBTQ+ community (Horowitz, 2021). The Catholic Church has a history of rejecting same-sex marriage; however, the pope has been encouraging kindness and welcome’s homosexual people or any others to the Church. The note specifically said “the church will not bless same-sex unions because God ‘does not and cannot bless sin’” (Horowitz, 2021). With this being said, the pope has controversial opinions on the topic regarding the LGBTQ+ community and has a plethora of controversies surrounding this note. Recently, Pope Francis made a statement where he “expressed support for same-sex civil unions” (Horowitz, 2021). In June 2019 the Catholic Church took a position where they “condemned gender theory” arguing that it sought to

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“annihilate nature”; the statement was not signed by the pope, but his speeches and teaching, as well as those of previous popes, were quoted (Savage, 2021). Regardless, in his documentary, “Francesco” it is stated that: “Homosexual people have a right to be in a family. They are children of God and have a right to a family. Nobody should be thrown out or be made miserable over it” (Savage, 2021). This statement demonstrates the pope’s position where governments should allow same-sex marriages under civil law. Seeing as many people rely on the church to formulate their opinions, the fear the LGBTQ+ community has that the inconsistencies in the pope’s stance might increase homophobia is a problem that has many civilians worried worldwide.

Poland

In recent years, Poland has become an increasingly hostile environment for its LGBTQ+ citizens. Government officials blast and publicize vicious rhetoric towards the community, notorious ‘Equality Parades’, also known as Pride Marches, are banned, and above all, homosexual rights are oppressed. It has gotten to the point where LGBTQ+ community members flee Poland in hopes of finding a more accepting and diverse environment. According to a 2020 survey by ILGA-Europe, Poland ranks as the most homophobic country in the European Union (Pronczuk, 2021). Politically speaking, homosexual couples are not allowed to get married. Furthermore, there are no laws that recognize the notion of utilizing sexual orientation as a motive for assault as a hate crime. More so, the government intends to completely ‘hide’ the community’s hardships. Purposefully, government officials do not conduct polling on homosexual views or preferences and utilize that as a means of further oppressing their voices— “if there are no statistics, there is no problem” (Pronczuk, 2021). In part, the country’s homophobic tendencies are rooted in the Roman Catholic Church’s dominant role in both social and political life, as well as the strong conservative culture in the country. Essentially, the church works with the government to promote conservative lives for Polish citizens, and simultaneously, oppress the LGBTQ+ community.

V. Possible Solutions

To increase LGBTQ+ equality, society has to start to encourage and accept LGBTQ+ activism and have more leadership from the UN regarding the subject. Activist groups that come together to generate ideas on how to push forward to earn rights, and protection of those are part of the solution. With the help of more people every day, the acceptance of LGBTQ+ groups will be normalized and they will be able to live day to day with no worries about their safety nor how others feel about them (Leach, 2016). The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

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Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) already works to protect women's rights, this group should also be focused on protecting LGBTQ+ women and their rights. Another solution is to provide greater legal assistance to LGBTQ+ communities around the world; acknowledging that they belong to a historically harassed minority group, it is imperative that they have access to enough legal resources to protect themselves. Adding on, national legislations should push for more inclusive constitutions and laws that grant and protect the rights of all citizens (*Combating discrimination based ... identity* 2021). Likewise, countries must ensure that no LGBTQ+ person fleeing their country, due to persecution on the grounds of their sexual orientation, "is returned to a territory where their life or freedom is at threat" (*UN issues first ... people* 2011).

Adding on, if schools and workplaces promote the involvement of clubs and organizations, it will help create a much more friendly and open environment for all (*How to Support ... Youth* 2021). According to Advocacy Manuel, "'advocacy' refers to taking action to create or foster change in policy, legal or societal environments for LGBT people in accordance with international human rights standards. It involves identifying issues and analyzing them in relation to existing human rights standards and taking appropriate action. It means speaking up for human rights – yours and others'" (*Combating discrimination based ... identity* 2021). In other words, the more involvement and support for the LGBTQ+ community means the more chance it will have in their community for their rights.

Another possible solution is to encourage lawmakers to advance the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, and to recognize same-sex relationships as relationships capable of everything a straight relationship is capable of doing. This would mean allowing homosexuals in relationships to adopt children, get married, and have legal protection (*How to Support ... Youth* 2021). This would greatly increase the quality of life for LGBTQ+ people because having legal protection and recognition would mean more freedom, which would be very beneficial to these people. Additionally, given that anywhere between 1.5% and 7.4% of the European population identifies as LGBTQ+, a lack of rights is a problem affecting more people than it might seem at first glance (Richter, 2016).

VI. Current Status

Currently, homosexuals in Eastern Europe are still fighting for respect and their rights in their community. Recently a report by The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA) announced a report that said that the European Government used the pandemic of COVID-19 to "strike out against the LGTBQ+ community" (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013). Adding on this, the report discovered that Poland and other Eastern European countries dropped to rank the lowest based on LGTBQ+ rights. According to the United Nations Human

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Rights Office of the High Commissioner: “The restrictions introduced in parts of Eastern Europe are inherently discriminatory in both intent and effect. The limitations they place on the exercise of rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly and their impact on the work of human rights defenders” (*Threatening the rights ... Europe* 2013). In other words, the discrimination of the LGTBQ+ community has drastically increased in eastern Europe over the past years.

Many eastern European countries maintain strict policies making it illegal for same-sex marriages. Meanwhile, other governments do not recognize any sort of same-sex union. As a result of such legislation, discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community can go unpunished. Likewise, many countries still permit conversion therapy, which is a pseudoscientific practice that seeks to change an individual’s sexual orientation. While it has been highly discredited by many organizations, including the American Psychological Association, many countries still allow conversion therapy (*The Lies and ... Identity* n.d.). This type of therapy is dangerous and can have long-term psychological effects; especially when it is applied to children. Leaders, laws, and society, have not helped in making the LGBTQ+ community more welcomed and respected, and it is still an ongoing problem that needs to be addressed. The recently implemented homophobic policies must be broken down, analyzed, and replaced by more inclusive policies that respect and grant equal rights to all citizens of the country, regardless of sexual orientation.

Note: The background paper mainly focused on the issues that homosexuals experience with very little discussion on other sexual orientations, such as the transgender community. During the debate, you will be expected to address all types of orientations and the hardships that they encounter. In preparation for the debate, please research how your country treats all sexual orientations, both socially and legally.

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