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THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOVIET UNION ON THE  
ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL MINORITIES IN ESTONIA  
AND HUNGARY

Bachelor's Thesis

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Tallinn 2015

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## **ABSTRACT**

Since the end of the 1980's sexual minorities have been granted increasingly more equal rights in the European Union. However, the ex-Soviet Union member states and satellite states are noticeably less tolerant towards the acceptance of sexual minorities. In this bachelor's thesis the main objective is to find out how being a member state of the Soviet Union (Estonia) or a satellite state of the Soviet Union (Hungary) shaped the current attitudes towards sexual minorities in terms of legislative and societal acceptance.

The research problem was how did being a member state or a satellite state of the Soviet Union influence the attitudes towards sexual minorities in present day Estonia and Hungary? The hypothesis was that the Soviet Union had more influence on its member states and less influence on its satellite states on shaping the attitudes towards sexual minorities. The method used in this bachelor's thesis was comparative analysis of most similar cases. In order to solve the research problem in this case study, empirical qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed to analyse, compare, and contrast theoretical data and statistical data.

The results showed that the Hungarian society was more tolerant towards minorities and more satisfied with their democracy earlier than Estonia, indicating a lesser influence from the Soviet Union. The hypothesis was supported by the results as the Soviet Union had more influence on shaping the societal attitudes towards sexual minorities in Estonia and less influence in Hungary. The implication of this research shows that the acceptance of sexual minorities in the society takes time as societies are still influenced by the Soviet legacy; requires legislative support; and sufficient information for people to make up their own minds.

The title is: The Influence of the Soviet Union on the Attitudes towards Sexual Minorities in Estonia and Hungary

**Keywords:** Soviet Union, LGBT rights, Registered Partnership, social attitudes, Estonia, Hungary

## INTRODUCTION

In October 2014 the Estonian parliament was the first of the ex-Soviet Union member states that narrowly passed the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act, which grants two same-or opposite sex individuals legal recognition of their relationship. The legislation brought about unusual protests in Estonia, as many members of the society and political elite protested against the acceptance of the proposed law, arguing that it goes against the idea of a traditional family model. Seeing as Estonia is a fairly liberal country, the reasons behind the sharp opposition for Lesbian, Gay, Bi, and Transsexual (LGBT) rights became a controversial issue in the society. As a result it is important to research the reasons behind the predominantly negative attitudes towards sexual minorities in the Estonian society. To give a more comprehensive analysis, Estonia is compared with Hungary – an ex-Soviet Union satellite state that passed their gender neutral Registered Partnership Act in 2007 (implemented in 2009). To clarify, member states were occupied countries that were official members of the Soviet Union, whereas satellite states were formally independent countries that were politically and economically influenced by the Soviet Union.

The reason why Estonia and Hungary are chosen for this particular case study is because Hungary and Estonia share similarities when looking at recent history; however a difference that stands out is that Hungary was a satellite state to the Soviet Union whereas Estonia was a member state. The similarities are that both countries initially became independent in 1918; were under socialist regimes during the Soviet era after World War II; went back to creating a democratic republic after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Hungary in 1989, Estonia in 1991); and then joined the European Union in 2004. Hungary was the second ex-satellite state of the Soviet Union to pass their gender-neutral Registered Partnership Act in 2007, and Estonia was the first ex-member state to pass the law in 2014. The countries also share a similar language originating from the Finno-Ugric Uralic language family which correlates with similar shared cultural values and beliefs. In addition, it is important to justify that the reason why Estonia and Hungary were chosen is also because they are both countries in which practicing religion rates are low which according to Takács et al. (2012) is the most important factor in reference to tolerance towards sexual minorities. Therefore the role of religion in shaping attitudes towards sexual minorities should be marginal. Even though the predominant religion in Hungary is Roman Catholic, the frequency that people attend religious services is

low (Hungarian Central Statistics Office 2011). Therefore analysing Estonia and Hungary provide appropriate grounds to employ the comparative method of most similar cases (Finifter 1993).

The main topic of the bachelor's thesis studies the influence of the Soviet Union on the attitudes towards sexual minorities. Moreover the impact of being a member state (Estonia) versus being a satellite state (Hungary) is compared by looking at the attitudes, values and beliefs that were left in the society as a legacy of communism. The research problem is how did being a member state or a satellite state of the Soviet Union influence the attitudes towards sexual minorities in present day Estonia and Hungary? It is hypothesized that the Soviet Union had a greater impact on its member states and lesser impact on its satellite states on shaping the attitudes of its citizens regarding the acceptance of sexual minorities. The independent variable in this case is being a member state or a satellite state of the Soviet Union and the dependent variable is the derived attitude towards sexual minorities. The reason why the independent variable is important to research is because it can clarify the predominantly negative reasons behind negative attitudes towards sexual minorities in Estonia and Hungary.

The topic translates to the present context by looking at how supportive the society and parliament have been in accepting the Registered Partnership Act in 2007 Hungary and 2014 Estonia. It has to be noted that there are significant confounding variables that can also have a role in shaping the negative or positive attitudes of the majority towards sexual minorities. For example, the domestic politics and the role of the pro-LGBT European Union are also to be analysed.

The bachelor's thesis concentrates on finding answers to the following research questions:

- 1) What were the main methods of the Soviet Union in shaping attitudes toward sexual minorities in the member states? Did the same methods apply in satellite states?
  - a) What was the state-level attitude toward human sexuality and minorities?
  - b) How did state-level intolerance translate to general negative attitudes in the society?
- 2) How does the Soviet legacy affect the attitudes towards sexual minorities after independence?
  - a) How has the European Union tried to overcome the issues regarding the acceptance and treatment of sexual minorities in the Eastern members?

- b) How will state-level acceptance of a gender-neutral Registered Partnership Act improve the lives of sexual minorities?

The method that is followed in this bachelor's thesis is the comparative method of most similar cases, concentrating on Estonia and Hungary. According to Finifter (1993) the comparative method is used for small number of cases which differ only in terms of key variables that are the focus of analysis, allowing for the assessment of their influence. Empirical data is analysed using qualitative and quantitative research sources. Other author's findings and theories are analysed to find answers to the research problem at hand. Statistical primary data has been gathered from for example Eurobarometer, ILGA Europe, European Value Study (EVS), and the Estonian and Hungarian local statistics offices.

The paper is divided into three main chapters. In the first theoretical chapter the main theories and empirical evidence about how politics can shape attitudes of the public are outlined in order to give an overview about the research problem and all areas of research. The second chapter is methodological and it describes the comparative method of most similar cases, used for collecting and processing information in order to solve the research problem. The third chapter assembles the results obtained from the previous chapters and analyses the results with reference to analogous research results. There is also a short chapter devoted to future research proposals, recommendations, and the limitations encountered during the research process.

# **1. THEORY**

## **1.1 Influence of the Soviet Union in member states and satellite states with reference to attitude formation**

In order to find answers to the proposed research question, it is important to explain the main terms under investigation. As the hypothesis indicates, the level of direct control exhibited on the society by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) has the most influence in shaping the attitudes towards sexual minorities. Therefore, it is important to clarify the difference between member states and satellite states. From 1956 until 1991 the Soviet Union consisted of 15 countries that were occupied by the USSR as an aftermath of World War II. The countries were known as the member states which included the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. On the other hand, the satellite states in Eastern Europe were formally independent, but in reality the Soviet leadership kept the countries under control in political, economic and military terms (Takács and Szalma 2014). According to Borhi the USSR needed to have control over Hungary because Eastern Europe as a whole was an important buffer zone between the European allies of the United States and the USSR itself. As Hungary's main ally Germany had collapsed after World War II, the Soviet Union was the regions only threatening military power. According to the international relations balance of power theory outlined by Walt (1990), weak states are likely to bandwagon with stronger powers when allies are not available; therefore the socialist state in Hungary became almost inevitable after World War II. However, the state control was still higher in member states than it was in satellite states as all aspects of the Estonian society were directly controlled and coordinated with Soviet leadership.

The objective of the Soviet Union was to entirely follow Marxist ideology and have absolute control over the citizens' lives (including private lives). Therefore, the state was in an ample position to use fear and punishments to control people in the fully occupied countries such as Estonia. Especially in the beginning period of the USSR, causing fear and terror among the public was done so that people would not think of rebelling against the state. This concept goes back to Machiavellian principles of "It is better to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both" (Machiavelli 1513). In Estonia as well as other occupied countries,

people were not allowed to deviate from the state set morals and regulations, and even small nonconformities could have resulted in the loss of freedom as was set out by the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Federation, Article 121 (Kon 1998). On the other hand, satellite states were under milder control, although public displays of non-Soviet ideals were still not recommended. For example, in Hungary there was a special clause introduced including punishments up to three years of imprisonment for ‘perversion against nature conducted in a scandalous manner’ which also included alleged homosexuality (Takács 2015).

As the behavioural patterns of sexual minorities went against the Soviet ideals, the publics’ attitudes were conditioned by the state to be intolerant of sexual minorities as the Soviet Union dictated the living environment for people living in the member states. In other words, the power of social conditioning by fear of the state conditioned people to follow the accepted behaviour patterns and attitudes. Attitudes have been defined by many different psychologists starting with Gordon Allport in 1935, who said that “attitudes are blends of personal beliefs and values which represent their knowledge of the world and their understandings of moral good and bad” (Gross 2010, 365). Attitudes, like stereotypes and prejudices, make it easier for people to live in a complex world, by providing ready-made comprehensive reactions and interpretations. Suba (2012) found that people’s attitudes are conditioned by their families, their living environment and social interactions, which in the context of this paper would be the independent variable of living in a member state or a satellite state of the Soviet Union.

It is important to explain how sexual minorities were treated under the control of the Soviet Union. According to Phillips (2009) homosexuality was criminalized in the USSR and it fell under the category of mental disabilities. This meant that homosexuals were subject to institutionalization under the clause of mental disability in the member states including Estonia. On the whole, people with mental disabilities were stigmatized and made invisible throughout the USSR in order to create a false image that there were no negative aspects to the Soviet Union, which also applied to people with physical disabilities (Phillips 2009). Kon (1998) elaborated that psychiatry was vastly misused in the Soviet Union as a political tool used to institutionalize people with state-fabricated diagnoses. Homosexuality was initially criminalized by Stalin in 1934 and the only progress that was made during the years was that Lenin categorized it as a disease rather than a criminal activity (LaSala 2011). According to Kon (1998), homosexuality was criminalized in all member states by the Criminal Code of



the Russian Soviet Federation, Article 121. It is estimated that from 1934-1986 around 1000 people per year were prosecuted under the Article 121 (Kon 1998). In Estonia, the USSR criminal code paragraph 118 sentenced homosexuality with up to two years in prison and homosexuality was only decriminalized after Estonia regained independence in 1992 (Baumann 2013).

Takács (2015) outlines that the situation for sexual minorities was in the socialist satellite state Hungary. Even though Hungary decriminalized homosexuality in 1961 (implemented in 1962) which was even earlier than many Western states like the United Kingdom, homosexuality was still hidden from the public eye until the early 1990s. The reason why the Hungarian legislators decided to decriminalize homosexuality was because it was considered to be an involuntary, personal inborn developmental disorder, which had no criminal intent and therefore could not be handled legally as a crime (Takács 2014). This indicates that the Hungarian state was evidently more tolerable toward sexual minorities already starting from 1961. However, this does not diminish the fact that the Hungarian society still followed communist ideals to a large extent, which banned homosexuality until 1989; therefore the members of the society were still not exposed to sexual minorities in their daily lives as they are at the present time.

Sexuality on the whole was a taboo topic in the USSR. Mole (2011) writes that the communist regime silenced all aspects of human sexuality, and the sole purpose of sex was reproduction in order to ensure the lasting of the proletariat working class. The main goal of the USSR was to have a proletarian revolution throughout the world, following Marxist and Leninist ideologies and philosophy. As Phillips (2009) writes, the proletariat revolution ideology guided all decisions and had the highest priority in the USSR. Under Marxist and Leninist philosophies, the Soviet Union outlined that homosexuality was a product of the bourgeoisie lifestyle and it was therefore not accepted in the USSR (Kon 2009). In the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic all human sexuality was unmentionable as it was considered to be unnatural, unacceptable and embarrassing which caused people's attitudes to become accordingly intolerant. Therefore, the USSR conditioned people to follow the accepted behaviour patterns.

Esbenshade (1995) connected national identity, national narrative and individual memory derived from the Soviet experience, which have all led to the predominantly negative attitudes toward sexual minorities. According to Esbenshade (1995) "memory's duty is to demonstrate

that the past actively exists in the present” meaning that the fifty years of Soviet influence were able to fully and permanently shape the attitudes of the generations who were born and raised in the communist regimes. In this research paper, the term older generation is used for the generations who were born and raised under the influence of the Soviet Union, and younger generation is used for the generations that were born and raised in the democratic republics of Estonia or Hungary.

Media censorship and propaganda were also political tools used extensively by the Soviet Union to gain control and maintain public support in member states. The government had full monopoly over what was published in the traditional media (televisions, print, and radio) in all member states. Therefore they were able to expose only exactly those aspects of their regime which they wanted the society to see. Phillips (2009) criticized the Soviet leader Josef Stalin’s trend of silencing and denying any negative aspects of the Soviet Union, however it was done with the intent to shape the formation of the public’s opinions and thereby their attitudes. Szabó’s (2010) theory outlines that the media has the power to shape the attitudes of a society and create “systems of social values and institutionalize gender, sexual and other identifications” (Szabó 2010, 13). In a similar way education systems in member states were influenced by politics, as school curriculums in were redesigned according to socialist philosophies and ideals that also had a significant impact in shaping the society’s attitudes towards sexual minorities starting from an early age. According to Sirk (2015) schools were forced to disregard certain subjects like social-and human studies that could have exposed too much of human sexuality. Overall school curriculums were supposed to keep in accordance with Marxist and Leninist philosophical ideological views. In the satellite state Hungary the media was less regulated and speaking one’s mind was not directly punishable, however in reality there could have still been consequences for being openly against the Soviet regime ideals as satellite states remained in the USSR’s sphere of influence. In addition, education curriculums were under less regulation especially after the Hungarian revolution in 1956.

The Soviet Union’s legacy of fear shaped by societal distrust towards Soviet authorities created a longitudinal distrusting mentality for people. LaSala (2011) writes that members of the society are influenced by their collective history and culture which have the power to shape people’s values and beliefs over a long period of time. It is often said by psychologists that anything unknown is uncomfortable, threatening, and unnerving for people therefore they tend to avoid unfamiliarities (Gross, 2010). Mole (2011) argues that anything unfamiliar is

essentially a threat and in the present case homosexuality is a threat to stability of the nation in a world where people long to maximize predictability in an unstructured world.

Takács et al. (2012) linked unfamiliarity more specifically in the context of attitudes towards homosexuals. According to Takács et al. (2012) there are three main types of attitude deriving, the first is experience-based which derives attitudes according to past interactions with homosexuals; the second is defensive attitudes which come from a person's personal anxieties by externalising inner conflicts; and the third type is symbolic attitudes which relate to socialisation with important reference groups. They found that people tend to use the experience-based attitude deriving the most and tend to be positively minded about sexual minorities if they have had a previous personal positive interaction with a homosexual.

## **1.2 Independence and globalization in creating more tolerance**

In order to understand the origins of the current attitudes towards sexual minorities in Estonia and Hungary, it is important to understand the difference between minorities and majorities in a democratic state. After the formal collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonia regained independence in 1991 and Hungary restored their full democracy with a free-trade economy in 1989. Both countries are to this day democratic parliamentary republics. The problem which arises is that even though in an ideal world the voice of the majority has the power in democratic countries, politicians have the task of also making sure that the rights of minorities are covered. Functioning democracies should operate in a way in which no one is discriminated, excluded or marginalized. Mole (2011) emphasizes that often politicians take the rule of the majority for granted and disregard the rights of minority groups which has been the case with LGBT rights in many European countries. When it comes to delicate and controversial issues, such as LGBT rights, there can also be an evident divergence between societal wants and state-level acceptance. Takács and Szalma (2011) wrote that minority groups need structural social equality which can best be granted by equal rights legislations. In addition, Paju (2014) suggests that in a plural democracy the leaders need to cooperate and reach homogeneity and political consensus in order to ensure the acceptance of LGBT rights. To provide an interdisciplinary approach, the divide between minorities and majorities creates a psychological concept of in-group versus out-group which in this case are the majority public and the sexual minorities. The societal divide can lead to even further marginalization

of minority groups as the majority wants sexual minorities to remain invisible from the public eye (Szabó 2010).

The Soviet Union kept their member states isolated from any channels which could provide foreign information as Soviet Union had full control over media and it was difficult to travel outside of the USSR. As foreign media channels were prohibited and most people were not allowed to travel outside the USSR borders, people were easily manipulated as they did not know the conditions in the capitalist Western countries. After the revolutions and the liquidation of the USSR, former member-and satellite states were subject to vast influences of globalization. The foreign information flow also exposed concealed concepts such as homosexuality to the people. Szabó (2010) writes that Hungary was increasingly influenced by globalization and multiculturalism which provided “capitalist, (neo)-liberal, and Western oriented values” (Szabó 2010, 5) to make their way into the society; however the communist mentality was still the dominant way of thinking among people.

It can be said that due to the fact that Hungary maintained its autonomy throughout the Soviet era, it was easier for them to rebuild their country after the fall of the USSR, than it was for Estonia which had been without a sovereign government for over fifty years. Understandably economic and military policies gained priority when rebuilding the state, and softer issues such as LGBT rights take more time and need a more mature society before they can be implemented. Inglehart and Baker (2000) attributed this to a theory which states that “different societies follow different trajectories even when they are subjected to the same forces of economic development”. Therefore the cultural, geographical situation-specific forces combined influence the speed of LGBT recognition and equal rights on the state-level. Mole (2011) wrote that after the fall of the Soviet Union domestic policies had to concentrate on increasing the population as there was a threat to the continued existence of the newly independent ex-Soviet nations. Understandably homosexuality does not result in reproduction; therefore it was against the perceived public good even after the fall of the Soviet Union (Mole 2011).

One of the main arguments of the current LGBT opposition is that sexual minorities undermine the meaning and concept of the traditional family model. This became especially evident in Estonia when the parliament was discussing the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act and the public opposition organized a gathering of signatures and a public protest outside the house of Parliament to show their discontent. The leaders of the opposition

were mostly religious or political right-wing nationalists who supported the concept of a traditional family model, and therefore were calling homosexuals unnatural and against God's will (Ojamaa 2013). The traditional family model of a married husband and a wife has many supporters because after the collapse of the USSR, most of the member-and satellite states were at demographic lows as it became clear that the population growth rate was decelerating. However, the traditional family model is a direct influence of the Soviet Union as that was the most popular image of a family propagandized by Soviet controlled media and educational sources. Controversial stands on LGBT rights also give rise to non-traditional nationalist parties that typically have strong ideological stances. In Estonia this was the Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE) and in Hungary this was Jobbik, the Movement for a Better Hungary (JOBBIK).

### **1.3 The role of the pro-LGBT European Union in attitude formation**

In 2004, the European Union (EU) had its fifth and biggest enlargement that added eight Eastern-European countries (including Estonia and Hungary), and two Mediterranean countries to the union. This was a strategically important enlargement as seven countries out of ten were formerly either member-or satellite states of the USSR. The enlargement aimed to promote regional stability and economic prosperity in the Eastern European countries which would also benefit the European Union (EU) as a whole. In addition, the enlargement was important to prevent Eastern bloc countries from further Russian influence. The European Union has a vastly different stance on the acceptance of sexual minorities than the Soviet Union. The EU operates on the principles that all people in its member states should be treated fairly and equally, including the treatment of sexual minorities. Even though, the EU promotes equal rights among their member states, Kollman (2009) points out that the EU lacks an enforcement method in the member states, even though they can use soft measures to slightly guide national policy outcomes.

Seemingly, the EU has more power among the applicant states than it does among member states. According to Pelz (2014) the EU is highly successful in enacting policy changes during the accession period through conditionality. For example Pelz (2014) found that in Montenegro and Serbia (both applicant countries) the pro-LGBT anti-discrimination legislation was passed quickly and smoothly even though the public view is predominantly

against sexual minorities. This creates the image that political elites simply pass laws in order to gain fast access to the EU. The Estonian Parliament prohibited discrimination of sexual minorities in the workplace in 2004; however LaSala (2011), who carried out interviews with homosexual participants for his empirical research, found that this was also only done under the pressure of fulfilling the European Union accession criteria. However, once a country is part of the EU such as Estonia and Hungary, the success rate of the EU conditionality drops dramatically. Therefore the theory of Europeanization becomes increasingly important as it gives insight into the “enforcement of supranational rules in domestic contexts” (Pelz 2014, 4), which in this case is the method the EU can use to promote LGBT rights in member states.

The soft measures which the EU uses in member states to promote LGBT rights are aimed to bring about more tolerance and acceptance. For example ILGA-Europe (2014) found that the EU finances and uses various social campaigns to raise awareness, and cooperates with local pressure groups that stand for LGBT rights. Pelz (2014) also introduced the concept of social learning which can influence domestic policy makers by “repeated interactions with EU institutions (Pelz 2014, 4) to persuade the policy makers into the specific goal. However, Kollman (2009) pointed out that the Europeanization theory is flawed as the acceptance of supranational policies through social learning still depends on the local politicians’ willingness to accept foreign lobbying efforts.

In addition to the EU, there are also other international organisations which seek to create more tolerance towards sexual minorities in the ex-Soviet Union countries. As Estonia and Hungary are both members of the United Nations, they should also follow the laws set out by the organization. The legislative acceptance of sexual minorities began already in 1948 when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations called for “fundamental and inalienable rights upon every human being, guaranteeing the right to life, liberty and freedom from persecution”. Article 2 of the Declaration even specifically highlighted that distinctions should not be made according to any physical or emotional status which by proxy includes sexual orientation. In 2011 the Human Rights Council elevated gender and sexual identity issues as priorities in the UDHR (Paju, 2014). ILGA-Europe in 2014 further agreed that the United Nations is looking for ways in which further monitor and promote the concept of non-discrimination.

The first country to accept the Registered Partnership Act was Denmark in 1989. By 2015, 18 European countries have implemented the legislation, however only two countries

have been ex-Soviet satellite states (Czech Republic in 2005 and Hungary in 2009) and one has been ex-Soviet member state (Estonia in 2016) (Appendix 1). When the Estonian Parliament set a date for the vote on the Registered Partnership Act, the decision brought up unusual protests and anti-LGBT demonstrations in public places and in the media. The public opposition was very active and vocal about their position calling sexual minorities morally unacceptable and immoral. The clash, which was also heavily covered by the media between September and November 2014, was unique because no other laws in Estonia had had such an effect on the public. It is important to mention that in reality the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act only benefits a relatively small proportion of the population - the sexual minorities and heterosexual couples who wish to register their partnership without getting married; and the law has no direct impact on the opposition group. The conflict created by the public opposition of the Registered Partnership Act also goes against the UDHR (1948) treaty principles that clearly prohibit any kind of discrimination and restriction of rights. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA 2009) also distinctly clarifies that one of the main principles of the EU is equal treatment of every person and article 21 clearly forbids discrimination according to sexual orientations.

European Union member states have granted equal rights to sexual minorities since 1989 when Denmark passed the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act. In addition, marriage and adoption rights have also been granted in many other EU countries (Appendix 1). Representatives of sexual minorities agree that state-level acceptance and protection have made significant improvements to their lives. However one of the biggest problems that sexual minorities in Estonia and Hungary face is the problem of invisibility. As sexual minorities were made invisible in the Soviet Union (Phillips 2009), the same mentality still exists in the society even to this day. The Danish Institute for Human Rights (2009) found that sexual minorities are often ignored by the media and “low visibility and stereotypical representation” also contribute to the feeling of isolation and invisibility, especially in countries where equal rights are not granted by the state. Takács et al. (2012) came up with a theory which categorizes the attitudes towards accepting sexual minorities into five different frames. The morality frame classifies homosexuality as a moral sin; sickness frame as a medical condition; deviance frame as a purposefully divergent behaviour; privacy frame as a private matter; and human rights frame as a biological genetic predisposition of personality (Takács et al. 2012).

## **1.4 The influence of domestic politics on acceptance of sexual minorities**

It has become apparent that current domestic political trends may have a significant influence on the attitudes towards sexual minorities in the society and these trends may even have more power in influencing state level acceptance of sexual minorities than the legacies of the Soviet Union. As communism destroyed traditional class cleavages that are the basis for political competition in the West, parties have to rely on non-traditional ways to gain votes. One of the ways to gain votes is to concentrate on polarizing issues that strongly appeal to majority groups, while excluding other policy goals. For example, this method was seen in the 2015 parliamentary election in Estonia, where Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE) based a large proportion of their campaign on anti-LGBT preservation of the traditional family model. This is an example of a case where current politicians used the negative attitudes towards sexual minorities preserved from the Soviet era as basis for their political campaign.

An important concept in this bachelor's thesis that needs clarification is the difference between social and political homophobia. Pelz (2014) explains that social homophobia comes from long lasting legacies of historical processes which shape the views of the majority, such as communism, religion and a strong sense of national identity. Political homophobia on the other hand is used by political actors to promote their platforms by either favouring or opposing LGBT rights (Pelz 2014). In many other EU countries political figures have purposefully used anti-LGBT campaigns in order to gain popularity and thereby votes. ILGA-Europe (2014) found in their annual review in 2014 that many countries experience instances where political actors openly use hatred and discrimination towards sexual minorities. This is especially evident when looking at the present context in Hungary where the most recent Parliamentary elections brought a high success to the right-wing nationalist party JOBBIK. Takács et al. (2012) wrote that after the political change in Hungary there are increasing levels of social intolerance, homophobia due to a lack of political support and even a "danger of reversal of those rights and legal protection that had been gained" (Takács et al. 2012, 101). There seems to be a correlation between the stability and ideological drive of domestic politics, and the overall attitudes towards sexual minorities in the society. Pelz (2014) found that the stability of political parties has a significant influence on passing LGBT rights; more



specifically countries that have volatile and ideologically driven party systems are less likely to pass LGBT rights and vice versa.

LGBT rights fall under the category of more delicate issues in the society that require the heads of state to make difficult decisions which are not necessarily backed with general support from the society. Suba (2012) suggests that there are occasions where the state must move ahead of the people, for example with the abolishment of the death penalty, giving women the right for education and voting, as well as the equal treatment of people of colour. Estonia and Hungary have both been forerunners in their geographic and historical area in terms of accepting LGBT rights. Hungary was the second ex-USSR satellite state to accept and enforce a gender neutral Registered Partnership Act after the Czech Republic, and Estonia was the first ex-USSR member state. To conclude the first section, Takács et al. (2012) came up with certain criteria which need to be covered in order to combat homophobia. According to Takács et al. (2012), the society needs enough information to make up their own minds by coverage of LGBT issues in the media, politics and education; and application and improvement of existing legislation in order to increase social acceptance. Therefore it is important to research which of these determining factors are covered in Estonia and Hungary in order to see the underlying attitudes in the societies.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Description of the research method**

The research object in this bachelor's thesis is the role of the Soviet Union in shaping attitudes towards sexual minorities. More specifically the differences between a member state (Estonia) and satellite state (Hungary) of the Soviet Union are compared in order to see whether and how much the level of Soviet control influences the acceptance of LGBT rights. The hypothesis is that the Soviet Union had greater impact on its member states and lesser impact on its satellite states on shaping the attitudes of its citizens regarding the acceptance of sexual minorities. The independent variable therefore is being a member state or a satellite state of the Soviet Union, and the dependent variable is the attitude towards sexual minorities. The method that is used is the comparative method of most similar cases that differ only in terms of key variables, allowing for the systematic comparison of their influence (Finifter, 1993).

The research materials that were analysed in order to find the results in this case study were qualitative and quantitative sources of empirical data. The analysed qualitative data sources were materials published by political scientists and sociologists (such as Mole 2011, Pelz 2014, Takács) which were compared and contrasted with each other in light of the research problem at hand. As the research question concentrates on two countries most similar cases method was used which systematically analyses cases that differ in terms of key variables that are the focus of analysis. In this case Estonia and Hungary were compared to see the influence of the level of domination by the Soviet Union which was larger in member states and smaller in satellite states. Quantitative data sources were used to find relevant statistics to support or oppose the hypothesis, such as ILGA-Europe (2014), Eurobarometer, and the Estonian and Hungarian Statistics Office. The statistical data is compared against the EU average and other former Eastern bloc countries (when appropriate) in order to see the full picture of the progress that has been made regarding the acceptance of LGBT rights. If the exact data was not available, other relevant and reliable results are used instead. The collected data was then systematically categorized into theoretical aspects and methodological aspects. The problem is solved by conclusions made by the author that are backed by existing results,

theories, and methods used and found in previous analogous research. As this is a theoretical paper, large part of the focus is on systemizing and analysing previous research and theories in order to solve the research problem.

## **2.2 Data collection**

As was found in Chapter 1.1, people's attitudes are shaped by first-hand and second-hand exposure to sexual minorities through personal experiences as through media and education. Therefore it is researched how much information about sexual minorities was available in Estonia and Hungary during the Soviet era. The results are found by analysing qualitative findings from Takács (2014), Havens and Sirk (2015). The time of decriminalization of homosexuality is also important to compare because it follows that in Hungary where homosexuality was decriminalized earlier than in all of USSR and the USSR control was less intense, the media had an opportunity for more freedom.

Phillips (2009) and Mole (2011) wrote that the legacy of the Soviet Union is one of the most important factors in shaping attitudes towards homosexuality in Estonia and Hungary today because people have been conditioned to fear any alternations from collective norms. As was seen in Chapter 1, Takács and Szalma (2011) linked dissatisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system to societal homophobia. Therefore it is important to see the levels of democracy deficit in both countries under investigation. Eurobarometer annually carries out research in all European countries to find out the average public opinions on different topics and problems in the society. In the context of the research problem, the question that can be used from the Eurobarometer survey is the question about satisfaction with democracy. The Eurobarometer (2006, 2014) uses a question "How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country?" which according to Takács and Szalma (2011) is also an important indicator for the acceptance of sexual minorities in the society. The result for Estonia and Hungary will be compared in the years 2006 and 2014 which are noteworthy years for the particular countries because they highlight the public opinions closest to the years in which the gender neutral Registered Partnership Acts were passed in Hungary (in 2007) and Estonia (in 2014). In addition the level of human rights coverage for LGBT people on the state-level in Estonia and Hungary as well as other Eastern bloc countries is looked at by comparing the ILGA Europe Rainbow Index from the year 2014

which connects anti-discrimination laws, legal recognition and protection, and family recognition.

Takács and Szalma (2011) also suggested that there is a link between the general satisfaction with life and the acceptance of sexual minorities. One database which provides statistical data of life satisfaction is Eurofound (2012) which finds the subjective well-being that people experience in European countries by carrying out surveys after every four years. The data is looked at in the years 2003, 2007 and 2012 in Estonia and Hungary to see the satisfaction with life before joining the European Union (2003), when Hungary passed the Registered Partnership Act (2007) and two years before Estonia passed the Registered Partnership Act (2012).

Another aspect under research is the notion of invisibility experienced by sexual minorities living in Estonia and Hungary. It is important to find under what circumstances people find homosexuality acceptable (if any) which in the case of Hungary can be seen from Takács et al. (2012) results on the use of different frames to categorize the attitudes towards sexual minorities (Chapter 1.5). As the same study is not available for results in Estonia, the European Values Study (EVS) was used instead for both countries. Since 1981 the EVS has carried out research in European countries to find statistics about societal discrimination. The study includes finding agreement levels to the statement “Homosexuals should be able to live their lives as they wish” and the accordance levels are recorded in all EU countries. A limitation was that the EVS study results were not freely available; however the results are gathered from similar research done by Lipka (2013) who also used the same EVS statistics.

The differences between generations are a particularly interesting area of research as the theoretical chapter suggests that the Soviet Union’s legacy dictating negative attitudes towards sexual minorities should be the strongest in the older generations that grew up in the Soviet Union member-and satellite states. In addition, it is more difficult to change the attitudes of the older generation who have already made up their beliefs and values a long time ago. Societal tolerance was researched in Estonia 2014 by Turu-Uuringute AS that carries out personal interviews with a large number of participants, and finds answers to the overall tolerance levels, as well as specific questions about sexual minorities’ rights for legal recognition. A similar research about societal tolerance of sexual minorities through telephone interviews is also done in Hungary by Median Public Opinion & Market Research Institute (2007). The relationship between 2007 Hungary and 2014 Estonia is compared as those were

the years in which the gender neutral Registered Partnership Acts were accepted in the respective countries. In addition, the generational differences in attitudes towards sexual minorities are compared in Estonia and Hungary when available

It is important to compare the relevant demographic statistics in Estonia and Hungary after the fall of the Soviet Union, and before the gender neutral Registered Partnership Acts were passed in both countries because falling demographic statistics give grounds for the supporters of the traditional family model and for the domestic political parties using anti-LGBT arguments to support their political campaigns. The demographic statistics between Estonia and Hungary are compared in the years 1991, 2007 and 2014 (or years closest to these if no data was available). This is because these years mark some of the most important changes for the LGBT community in Estonia in Hungary. 1991 was when both countries were rebuilding their democracies, 2007 was when Hungary passed the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act, and 2014 was when Estonia passed the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act. Therefore it is important to see whether the views of Estonian society were less tolerant in 2007 and whether they had reached the same levels as Hungary by in 2014. Demographic data is derived from the Estonian and Hungarian official statistics offices Statistics Estonia and Hungarian central statistics office. The reason why 2004 is not included in the comparison, which was the year both countries were accepted in to the European Union, is because the results were not relevantly different from the results in 2007 as there were no major changes in political, societal or economic landscapes during the three years between 2004 and 2007.

To see how much influence the European Union has on the attitudes towards sexual minorities, the trust levels in the European Union institutions can be compared in Estonia and Hungary in 2004, 2007 and 2013. The trust level is found from Eurostat (2015) which measures the level of citizens' confidence in EU institutions. A higher level of trust towards EU institutions can be linked with higher societal and political tolerance of sexual minorities because it follows that the EU has had more influence in creating a trustworthy atmosphere by using soft measures.

As Pelz' (2014) and Paju (2014) suggested, domestic political parties influence the attitudes towards sexual minorities to a large extent. As was found in Chapter 1.6, usually stable party systems are linked to the legislation of LGBT rights because the political actors have a better opportunity to push forward ideologically debated issues without having to

worry about losing popularity. As Pelz (2014) suggested, the stability and reduced ideological drive of domestic parties links to the likelihood of legislative acceptance of sexual minorities by the state. Therefore the stability and ideological drive of political parties in Estonia and Hungary is compared from the beginning of the independence period until the gender neutral Registered Partnership Acts were passed. In addition, the Parliamentary votes of the gender neutral Registered Partnership Acts in the Estonian and Hungarian Parliament are also compared to see the state-level acceptance of LGBT rights.

In order to justify the reason why religion was not considered important by this bachelor's thesis, it is important to find relevant statistics about the importance of religion in Estonian and Hungarian societies compared with the EU average. Qualitative data from Takács et al. (2012) is compared with quantitative data from DIHR and Eurobarometer in 2004 and 2006.

## **3. RESULTS**

### **3.1 Results**

By using censorship of the media and blocking foreign media sources in the member states of the Soviet Union, they made sure that the society was sheltered from information regarding sexual minorities. The same tactics were used as educational textbooks were rewritten so that students would be taught in accordance with Soviet ideologies. Takács (2014) found that human sexuality in itself was not in accordance with Soviet ideals, which specifically called for sexuality only for reproductive purposes. According to Sirk (2015), people in Estonia had little and state fabricated extremely biased knowledge about homosexual behaviour. On the other hand, the situation in Hungary was less severe and the first time (homo) sexuality was publicly discussed in the media was in 1972 when a youth magazine wrote about homosexuality. According to Havens, the Hungarian television broadcasted more Western shows than in any other Eastern bloc nation, for example shows from Walt Disney and MTV. Therefore it follows that the overall knowledge of Western information in the society was higher in Hungary than it was in Estonia. As Estonian media was under strict censorship of the Soviet Union the first articles about homosexuality were only able to appear after the country had regained independence in 1991.

As theoretical research in Chapter 1 has shown homosexuality was criminalized in the Soviet Union and it was punished by imprisonment or psychiatric detention. The criminalization of homosexuality played an important role in shaping people's attitudes in Estonia and Hungary because it created an understanding that homosexuality is something illegal. Hungary decriminalized homosexuality in 1961, which was already a first sign of state-level acceptance of sexual minorities. Although the attitudes on the societal level are unknown from the year 1961, it can be formulated that they were predominantly negative due to the global negative attitudes towards homosexuality at the time however, people were less afraid of sexual minorities because they did not have to fear extreme prosecutions and they were more familiar with the concept as a whole. In Estonia decriminalization of homosexuality took thirty more years than in Hungary, as homosexuality was decriminalized in 1992. Therefore it is comprehensible that the collective memory still sees homosexuality as

something criminal and feared to a large extent. On the other hand, the state-level granting of LGBT rights was significantly faster in Estonia than it was in Hungary. Namely, the time between decriminalization and the acceptance of the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act took 46 years in Hungary (from 1961-2007) and only 22 years in Estonia (from 1992-2014).

The results of Eurobarometer survey in Estonia, Hungary and the EU average are compared in the years 2006 and 2012 in Table 1. The respondents were asked to answer “How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in the EU?”

Table 1. Satisfaction with democracy in Estonia and Hungary in 2006 and 2012 (%)

|            | 2006 | 2012 |
|------------|------|------|
| Estonia    | 47   | 57   |
| EU average | 50   | 50   |
| Hungary    | 60   | 36   |

Source: (Eurobarometer 2006, 2012)

The results in Table 1 show that one year before Hungary passed their gender neutral Registered Partnership Act, Hungarians were more satisfied with their democracy than the majority of European countries. Estonia in 2012 had increased by 10% from 2006-2012 and was also higher than the EU average, two years before the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act was passed. As was suggested by Takács and Szalma’s (2011) theory, higher satisfaction with democracy correlates with higher acceptance of sexual minorities. It has to be pointed out that by 2012 Estonia had risen close to the Hungarian percentage in 2006; however Hungary had fallen by a significant 24%. This may be attributed to the changes in the Hungarian political landscape. In addition, ILGA Europe Rainbow Index found that in 2014 human rights of LGBT people were covered 35% in Estonia and 54% in Hungary. Interestingly the EU average was 46% which shows that in terms of legal recognition, protection and anti-discrimination, the Estonian society is still below the average. However, it must be said that out of the ex-Soviet Union member states, Estonia has the highest results from ILGA Europe’s study as the other results range from as low as 6% in Russia to 26% in Georgia. Latvia covered 20% and Lithuania 22% which is significantly lower than in Estonia. Passing the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act on the state-level was rigorously close in both Estonia and Hungary. The Hungarian Parliamentary vote resulted in 199 votes in



favour and 159 votes against meaning the law was passed with 55% in favour and 45% against. In Estonia the results were even closer as the law was passed with 40 votes in favour and 38 against so the percentages were 51% vs 49%.

The data from Eurofound (2012) in Table 2 shows the subjective satisfaction with life in Estonia and Hungary in 2003, 2007 and 2012

Table 2. Satisfaction with life in Estonia and Hungary in 2003, 2007 and 2012 (0-10)

| Satisfaction with life | 2003 | 2007 | 2012 |
|------------------------|------|------|------|
| Estonia                | 5.95 | 6.72 | 6.29 |
| Hungary                | 5.94 | 5.59 | 5.78 |

Source: (Eurofound 2012)

The results show that overall Hungary has a lower score on the subjective satisfaction with life. However, on the whole the scores are considered similar as the difference has not exceeded one point on the Eurofound level. Overall Estonia and Hungary are both under the EU average which is 7.1 in the year 2012. The same low scores are also found in other countries that were under the Soviet influence.

The results of the EVS survey that asked for the agreement levels with the question “Homosexuals should be free to live their lives as they wish” showed that overall post-socialist Europe has a much higher dislike towards homosexuals than Western Europe (Appendix 2). More specifically about Estonia and Hungary the results from 2010 showed that they had quite similar results with 41% of the respondents from Estonia approving with the statement and 44% of Hungarians approving with the statement.

According to Takács et al. (2012) the data from Hungary between 1996-2007 shows a “growing prominence of the privacy frame” and decline in support for the human rights frame. Therefore people accept homosexuality if it is kept private and out of the public eye which is also the trend that came out from analysing qualitative research from Estonia (Baumann 2013; Suba 2012). The overall tolerance levels before the acceptance of the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act in Estonia and Hungary can be seen from Table 3:

Table 3. Tolerance levels in Hungary 2007 and Estonia 2014 (%)

|                        | Hungary<br>2007 | Estonia<br>2014 |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Tolerance              | 30%             | 34%             |
| Registered partnership | 34%             | 40%             |

Source: (Median Public Opinion & Market Research Institute 2007, Turu-uuringute AS 2014)

Table 3 shows the results from Turu-Uuringute AS, and Median Public Opinion & Market Research Institute before the acceptance of the gender neutral Registered Partnership Acts. The results show that in 2007 30% of Hungarians were tolerant towards sexual minorities while in 2014 34% of Estonians were tolerant towards sexual minorities therefore the results can be considered similar. At the same time it must be pointed out that in both cases the younger generations were more tolerant towards the acceptance of gender neutral registered partnerships than the older generations. In Hungary 2007 41% of under 30 year olds would grant equal rights and protection by law to sexual minorities and in Estonia 2014 around 50% of under 30 year olds would grant equal rights and protection by law to sexual minorities. In addition, The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA 2009) results indicate that the countries where sexual minorities are legally protected, the overall tolerance levels in the society rise, which has also been the case in Hungary after the acceptance and implication of the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act, although after 2012 the tolerance levels are falling due to the political situation. The rising levels of tolerance after the granting of legal protection can be attributed to the fact that after the initial shock, the society gets used to the new norm. The results also show that in Estonia and in Hungary there were quite well defined characteristics of people who were more tolerant of sexual minorities and it was found that homosexuality tends to be more acceptable to the younger generations, females, with higher education, social status and income.

After the independence in Estonia, Karelson and Pall (2003) write that marriage, birth and fertility rates were at an all-time low and declining steeply, while the number of extramarital births increased which marked the beginning of the dissolution of the traditional family model. Takács (2015) found that the demographic statistics in Hungary were similar as she writes that late marriages, postponed pregnancies and decreasing fertility rates made the Hungarian society more similar to Western countries. The demographic changes after the fall of the Soviet Union are important to analyse because the opposition to LGBT rights often

uses the traditional family model as a basis for their opposing arguments because there is a need for sustainability. Table 4 shows that the overall population, crude birth rate, fertility rate and average age for marriage have all decreased from 1991-2014.

Table 4. Demographic data (population size, crude birth rate, fertility rate and average age for marriage) in Estonia and Hungary in 1991, 2007 and 2014

| Demographic data | Population size (x1000) |            | Crude birth rate (per 1000) |            | Fertility rate (per 1000) |            | Average age for marriage |            |
|------------------|-------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|
|                  | <b>HU</b>               | <b>EST</b> | <b>HU</b>                   | <b>EST</b> | <b>HU</b>                 | <b>EST</b> | <b>HU</b>                | <b>EST</b> |
| 1991             | 10.373                  | 1.561      | 12.3                        | 12.4       | 1.85                      | 1.80       | 23                       | 23         |
| 2007             | 10.056                  | 1.341      | 9.7                         | 11.8       | 1.32                      | 1.69       | 29                       | 28         |
| 2014             | 9.849                   | 1.314      | 9.3                         | 10.4       | 1.41                      | 1.55       | 30                       | 29         |

Source: (Hungarian central statistics office 2015, Statistics Estonia 2015)

Looking at Table 4 it can be seen that the argument used by anti-LGBT groups and politicians is justified as in both countries the population has fallen quite drastically after the fall of the USSR, especially considering the fact that the populations in both countries were increasing mostly throughout the Soviet era. The same declining characteristics can also be seen in the crude birth rates and fertility rates, and the average marriage age has increased which can also be seen in both countries.

The result from Eurostat show that levels of trust in EU institutions is has been higher in Hungary since 2004 which was the year that both Estonia and Hungary entered the European Union. In 2004 the level of trust was 68% in Hungary and 62% in Estonia. By 2007 both countries had fallen by 1% so the results were 67% in Hungary and 61% in Estonia. And after the financial crisis the levels had fallen to 57% in Estonia and 58% in Hungary by 2012. It can be said that the EU has had more influence on the attitudes towards sexual minorities in Hungary because of the higher percentages; however the difference between the two countries is quite small therefore more influence can still be attributed to the level of dominance of the Soviet Union.

The political situation in Hungary and Estonia has been relatively stable between 2003 and 2012. The political landscape in Hungary went through a major change when the right-wing national conservative Fidesz party won the elections and JOBBIK was elected into the parliament in 2012. However, before the acceptance of the Registered Partnership Act in 2007, the composition of the national assembly in Hungary had been fairly stable from 1994-

2010 with Fidesz – the national conservative party and Hungarian social democratic party having the majority before the acceptance of the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act. As was said by Pelz's (2014) theory the more stable and ideologically unchanged political systems are, the more likely LGBT rights are to be passed. Estonian political landscape had also remained constant over the ten years before the Registered Partnership Act was passed in 2014, with the Reform party leading the government. Stable political composition also gives more access for pressure groups to lobby the government in accordance with LGBT groups.

The results show that religion is not significantly important when considering the acceptance of sexual minorities when following the theory by Takács et al. (2012) who suggested that the most significant factor in terms of religion was how frequently people attend religious services. DIHR (2009) data shows that in 2003 over 75% of Hungarians identified themselves as religious however Eurobarometer (2004) found that in 2004 only 12% of Hungarians attended religious services once a week and 4% of Estonians attended religious services once a week. These results are both considered significantly low when compared to the rest of the world; therefore the impact of religion is marginal. In addition, data from Eurobarometer 2006 shows that Estonia and Hungary both rank significantly below the EU average as religion was considered important by 20% of Estonians, 32% of Hungarians and the EU average was 46%. Interestingly, Estonia was the lowest out of all EU countries (Eurobarometer 2006). As religion played less significant role in creating more tolerance and acceptance towards sexual minorities, and this leads to the hypothesis that perhaps the main role behind shaping people's values and beliefs are more shaped by the influence of Soviet Union.

### **3.1.2 Discussion of the results**

When analysing the results comprehensively, it can be seen that one of the factors which have shaped people's attitudes to be more intolerant towards sexual minorities in Estonia is the lack of media exposure during the Soviet era. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Western television shows quickly became increasingly popular in Estonia, so people were more exposed to LGBT topics which potentially created more tolerable views towards sexual minorities. According to Havens, "during socialism, Hungarian television boasted more channel diversity and more openness to foreign broadcasts, including Western channels, than any other Eastern bloc nation" which shows that in Hungary people were more exposed to

human sexuality ideas from television many years before Estonia. However, it is important to mention, that homosexuality was a taboo topic even in the Western world until the recent decades, therefore the amount of exposure to homosexuality in particular was still small even in Hungary. The role of education has also had a strong impact on the attitudes towards sexual minorities in Estonia and Hungary during the communist era, and the legacy continues even twenty five years after the collapse of the USSR. Through propaganda and censorship the public was made to believe that human sexuality is something to be embarrassed about, although early psychologists such as Ellis and Freud wrote about sexuality being an innate and inseparable part of humanity already in the 1920s (Gross 2010). The reason why Estonia accepted the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act faster than Hungary after the decriminalization can also be attributed to the fact that sexual minorities are much more exposed on all media channels than they were during the Soviet era.

The results of the Eurobarometer (2006, 2014) surveys show that while Estonian society's satisfaction with democracy followed a steady increase between 2006 and 2014, Hungary on the other hand had a steep decline from 60% to 36%. The main research objective was supported showing that the satisfaction with democracy (and the tolerance levels by proxy) was very close before the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act was passed – 60% in 2006 Hungary and 57% in 2012 Estonia. It can be assumed that the reasons behind the steep decline in Hungary are to do with the changing political landscape in the Hungarian Parliament. The political situation also largely impacts sexual minorities as there is a possibility that the LGBT rights which were granted in 2007 can be reversed by the conservative party JOBBIK (Takács et al. 2012). The state-level acceptance of sexual minorities was looked at when comparing the Parliamentary votes in Estonia and Hungary on the Registered Partnership Act. In this case the results were again very similar, as the results in Hungary 2007 were 55%-45% and 51%-49% in Estonia 2014. The close results indicate that even on the state-level the issue concerning sexual minorities is delicate and polarizing. Interestingly in both countries, the anti-LGBT parties were elected into the respective parliaments after the countries passed the gender neutral Registered Partnership Acts. This shows that the ideologically driven parties use of anti-LGBT platforms were successful in gathering votes for the elections.

Overall the results show that Estonia and Hungary have had quite similar values in tolerance levels and attitudes towards homosexuals from 1991 until 2012 like the EVS survey,

tolerance levels and Eurofound data shows. The demographic data also follows similar patterns between 1991 and 2007. Hungary has been slightly more tolerable towards sexual minorities and more permissive of passing LGBT rights which goes in accordance with the hypothesis of the bachelor's thesis that the Soviet Union had less impact in shaping the attitudes of satellite states. However, the results change after 2012 when the Hungarian political system went through a major change and a conservative far-right party won the elections. This shows that the power of domestic political systems seems to have an even stronger impact on the attitudes towards sexual minorities than the role of the Soviet Union especially when looking at the state-level attitudes.

A clear line has to be drawn between the societal and state level acceptance of sexual minorities. Results show that the societal attitudes are more influenced by the Soviet legacies, whereas the state attitudes are more influenced by domestic political parties and EU influence. Phillips (2009) found that state-level discrimination of any minorities directly influences the societal attitudes towards the said minorities, to the extent where the legacies of discrimination can last over many generations. This theory is also supported by results found by Pelz (2014) who wrote that in the Estonian society deep seated homophobia is an inevitable legacy of the Soviet occupation.

The results also support the argument that younger generations are more tolerant towards sexual minorities which again indicates that the older generations are stuck in the mentality preserved from the Soviet era of not accepting differences from collective norms. However it also became clear that Soviet Union's influence is most strongly felt in the general public (especially among the elder generation), but the state-level acceptance of sexual minorities is less influenced by Soviet legacies. Each country is different and it is very difficult to predict future developments in the area of LGBT rights. Even though, it seems that most EU countries are warming up to the idea of accepting sexual orientation differences, political changes can even go as far as to counteract already endorsed laws.

The negative demographic changes in Estonian and Hungarian societies are important because they give strong grounds for the opposition's argument against LGBT rights, ultimately saying that the traditional family model must be protected in order to avoid extinction. Estonia has one of the smallest populations in all European Union member states with only Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta having smaller populations. It is also important to clarify that Estonia went through bigger demographic changes under communism due to

heavy foreign labour inflows that decreased the share of ethnic Estonians after the fall of the Soviet Union. The same trends were not present in the Hungarian society. Therefore ensuring maximum levels of reproduction is considered important by the society and politics.

However, it follows that sexual minorities in Estonia and Hungary make up a rather small proportion of the whole population, therefore the declining populations cannot be attributed to homosexual couples inability to have children. Moreover there are many other variables that influence the falling demographic statistics such as immigration which has become an increasingly problematic area in Eastern European countries. High levels of immigration and as trend of focusing on careers rather than child bearing have a larger impact on decreasing population sizes in both Estonian and Hungarian societies than the acceptance of LGBT rights.

### **3.2 Findings**

This section pulls together some of the most important research results. Overall it can be seen that the Soviet Union had a significant influence on shaping the attitudes of its citizens. Moreover, the hypothesis was supported and the Soviet Union had a greater impact on shaping the attitudes towards sexual minorities in its member state – Estonia; and lesser impact in its satellite state - Hungary. This can be seen from the fact that Hungary accepted the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act in 2007 and it took Estonia seven years to reach the same tolerance levels towards homosexuals. As the older generations attitudes were significantly shaped by Soviet propaganda and censorship from early childhood, they were conditioned to be prejudiced against LGBT rights. It has to be emphasized that Hungary reached higher levels earlier than Estonia, which supports the hypothesis that the Soviet Union had less of an influence on the mentalities of the society and the state elite in Hungary. Overall, the data found by the results showed that Hungary 2007 and Estonia 2014 show that in most research areas the countries scored similarly. This can indicate that there are certain societal levels of tolerance, satisfaction with life and satisfaction with democracy that a country needs to reach that correlate with state-level acceptance. However, in order to come up with a reliable theory it is necessary to compare statistics from other European countries that have passed the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act

Secondly, another feature that determines the attitudes towards sexual minorities is the stability and ideological concentration of political parties that have been in charge after the fall of the Soviet Union. Sexual minorities have categorized state-level legislative acceptance as one of the most important factors in creating more tolerable attitudes within the society. The findings on the roles of the political parties in Estonia and Hungary have been in accordance with Pelz's (2014) theory of stable political systems. However, the main point that was found was the importance of the difference between political and social acceptance of sexual minorities. The results showed that the Soviet legacy that was under research in this paper has the most influence of societal acceptance; whereas domestic party systems have more influence on political acceptance.

The results indicate that the Soviet mentality will last for a long time and the best way to increase the levels of acceptance for sexual minorities in the society is to bring about state-level acceptance of gender neutral legislations, and give the society more time to get accustomed with new existing norms as well as provide sufficient media coverage on topics concerning sexual minorities in order to increase public exposure. It has been shown that state-level acceptance is especially valued on the side of representatives of sexual minorities because state-level acceptance has been correlated with accelerated societal acceptance. When looking at other areas where the state has moved ahead of the society that were brought out in previous chapters, it can be seen that in every case the society eventually follows as they get used to the new norms, and even starts to accept issues which were previously vocally fought against, like the abolishment of the death penalty or the introduction gender equality. Research shows often controversial laws are passed with the societal majority being in strong opposition, however over time people come to understand the necessity of the more radical policy changes. It follows that LGBT rights are one of these issues where the general public does not necessarily yet understand how accepting and tolerating minorities would benefit the society as a whole. It is also important to highlight that in both cases, Estonia and Hungary, the public support for the state-level acceptance of LGBT rights is rather low when compared with Western European countries. On the other hand, Estonia and Hungary are among the forerunners of accepting LGBT rights in their respective historical and geographical areas, and they are among the highest scorers in former Eastern bloc countries.



### 3.2.1 Analogous research results

According to Mole (2011), in the Soviet Union educational systems fully ignored any aspects of human sexuality other than reproduction. However, the current situation is similar as ILGA Europe (2014) and DIHR (2009) criticize the current Hungarian school curriculums for not providing enough information on sexual minorities as the topic is either completely absent or sexual minorities are shown in a negative way. Paju (2014) found that education about sexual minorities is an inseparable part of rising levels of societal tolerance towards minority groups.

In this paper, the satisfaction with democracy was researched as Takács and Szalma (2011) found that the level of trust in current state democracy is an important indicator of acceptance of sexual minorities which also became apparent in this research paper. However, Takács and Szalma (2011) analysed data gathered by European Social Survey (ESS 2012) from 23 European countries and found that there is also a correlation between a democracy deficit and higher levels of homophobia. This indicates that the societies in countries where people are more satisfied with their lives are also more tolerant towards LGBT rights; and in countries where there is a democracy deficit people are less tolerant towards LGBT rights. Interestingly the findings also showed that the highest levels of democracy deficit were recorded in former state-socialist countries including Estonia and Hungary, even after 25 years since the fall of the Soviet Union.

The differences between generations have been found in most empirical studies that have researched the tolerance levels towards sexual minorities. Szabó's (2010) results indicate that in Hungary the tolerance in the society towards sexual minorities follows the privacy frame brought out by Takács et al. (2012) which states that that state and society should not intervene in private matters as long as it remains unseen from the public eye. The same frame applies in Estonia where Baumann (2013) found that the older generation tolerates homosexuality if it not seen in public. As it has been found that homosexuality is generally more acceptable to the younger generation, Baumann (2013) also found that younger generations in Estonian city Pärnu are more tolerant towards sexual minorities and they even approve the opportunity for marriage and adoption.

### **3.3 Limitations and proposals**

Both Estonia and Hungary passed the gender neutral Registered Partnership Acts on the state level while the majority of the society was predominantly opposed to the legislation. Even though representatives of the LGBT communities often say that state-level acceptance is more important than societal acceptance in order for sexual minorities to feel included, this raises a question of how beneficial is state-level acceptance without the support of the society. Justifiably it has to be mentioned, that even though being a part of the European Union means countries have to follow certain rules and regulations, LGBT rights are a specifically delicate subject that has been left entirely for the domestic legislators. Even though universal acceptance and non-discrimination are considered to be a top priority for international organisations like the United Nations, it is also important to consider that reshaping people's beliefs and values cannot be done easily. The question rises whether it should be done at all, or maybe it is better to keep cultural diversity even in terms of minority rights. The current EU minimum of LGBT rights that is insisted from all member states is the principle of non-discrimination. The gender neutral Registered Partnership Act, marriage rights, and adoption rights are out of the EU's direct grasp and left for the domestic policies. This is where the EU has the possibility to use soft power; however this does not guarantee desired results.

Overall it became clear that attitudes towards sexual minorities are difficult to change in former socialist countries because people's beliefs and values have been strongly influenced by the communist regime. The Soviet legacy last even twenty-five years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as the generational differences show a clear divide between the older and younger generations in both Estonia and Hungary. Even though the EU's efforts to increase tolerance and acceptance in member states using soft power cannot be disregarded, it still does not have the power to change the opinions of whole generations. Research results show that the best recommendation for domestic governments for changing attitudes is simply to allow more time for people to make up their own minds while making sure that the media neutrally covers all sides of the arguments surrounding issues and questions about sexual minorities. As globalization and easy internet access has made the transfer of ideas universal, it is also a good practice to offer comprehensive educational curriculums starting from an early age in order to increase awareness and decrease discrimination.

One of the main limitations when carrying out this research was that the dependent variable looked at the attitudes towards sexual minorities. Attitudes are essentially intangible variables, similarly to cultural and religious arguments, therefore it is difficult to operationalize and measure changing attitudes based on people's qualitative opinions rather than concrete facts. This is also because people's connotations of attitudes can be different. Moreover collective memory and social learning also played important roles in determining the speed and method of LGBT acceptance, however it is extremely difficult to numerically measure exactly how much of an impact they had. This is also why the results were supported using statistics in terms of percentages, as it gives at least a rough overview of the underlying societal attitudes in Estonia and Hungary.

Although the research paper compares the social situation post acceptance of the Registered Partnership Act in Hungary it became apparent that recent political events in Hungary made comparisons very difficult as the situation for LGBT people in Hungary has become increasingly unstable because of the political discrimination. Even though ILGA-Europe (2014) points out that the Ombudsman and Equal Treatment Authority are ensuring that the already existing legislations do not get reversed. As the results show, the tolerance levels towards sexual minorities among the society in Hungary have decreased in the recent years after the previous parliamentary election in 2012.

Another limitation that became apparent in the research process was that there are many published sources available which provide statistical information on LGBT topics and are published by reliable sources such as ILGA-Europe (2014), Eurobarometer and FRA (2011). However on closer analysis often the results for similar questions resulted in different results. The reasons for this were that the research was done using a different method for example questionnaires vs. interviews.

Finally, another aspect that needs to be brought out is that the hypothesis suggests an answer that would apply to all Soviet Union member states and satellite states. However, in this research paper only one member state and one satellite state is researched therefore it cannot be said that the same results will certainly be found in other Soviet Union member states and satellite states. In order to reach a more comprehensive outlook it would be necessary to carry out research that would investigate into all member states and satellite states of the USSR. However, that would require extremely rigorous research as the number

of independent variables would be considerably bigger and it would also be necessary to take into account the role of religion and less stable political party systems.

Despite these limitations, further research can be done on some aspects that have risen from this bachelor's thesis paper. Firstly the opposition to LGBT rights often justifiably uses the impact of homosexual parents on the upbringing of children. This is an important field to study in future research because so far no longitudinal studies have been done to see how well children who have been raised by homosexual parents are able to cope with their life as children and as adults. The issue with children was also raised by the research carried out by Turu-Uuringute AS where it became clear that even when people were generally tolerant towards sexual minorities, their attitudes changed dramatically when they had to consider their children being homosexual. In Estonia the main opposition group in the 2015 Parliamentary elections was EKRE and they were criticized by ILGA-Europe (2014) that condemned the fact that supporters of the conservative party collected over 38 000 signatures against same-sex couples, which shows extreme levels of intolerant attitudes in the society. To see the full impact of the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act, it would also be necessary to research the effect it has had on the society after implementation. Thirdly, further research that compares more than one former member state and satellite state of the Soviet Union would also be necessary in order to have a more comprehensive picture of the attitudes towards sexual minorities. However, when analysing other countries it has to be noted that the role of religion will most likely be attributed a more significant role than in this case study.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the hypothesis which was raised in the beginning of the research paper was supported by the research results as the Soviet Union had a greater impact on influencing the attitudes of its citizens towards sexual minorities in member states, and lesser impact in its satellite states. Essentially the Soviet Union had more control in its member states and thereby had a greater opportunity to infiltrate into all layers of the society. The Soviet Union created an intolerant environment in the member states where sexual minorities were invisible and largely unknown to the general public because there was no exposure of sexuality from the media or education. The results pointed to many ways in which the Soviet Union managed to control the shaping of public attitudes in the member states, for example having full control of the media and school curriculums, as well as trying to control even the personal lives of the citizens. Therefore the attitudes of the society were permanently conditioned to be unaccepting of sexual minorities. In satellite states, the USSR had less power and less control over the media as for example in Hungary, traditional media sources exposed more of human sexuality and even sexual minorities during the final decades of the Soviet Union. Therefore in Hungary people were more exposed to western ideas on sexuality and social differences which also shaped their mentality to be more tolerant of minorities.

Overall the research results indicated that the Hungarian society was more tolerant towards minorities and more satisfied with their democracy earlier than Estonia. Therefore the Hungarian parliament was also able to pass the gender neutral Registered Partnership Act in 2007 as the aforementioned criteria were also correlated with overall attitudes towards the acceptance of sexual minorities. On the other hand Estonia had rather low tolerance levels in 2007 and had grasped similar levels by 2014 which indicates that the Soviet Union had lesser impact on shaping the attitudes towards sexual minorities in Hungary, as the negative societal attitudes were less severely conditioned into the collective societal memory and therefore Hungary reached higher tolerance levels earlier than Estonia. In addition the similar results in 2014 Estonia and 2007 Hungary show that societal tolerance and satisfaction levels also have an influence on the state-level acceptance of LGBT rights. In both countries, research showed that the older generations that grew up under socialist regimes are less tolerant towards sexual minorities and primarily follow the privacy frame.

One idea that was found by the results of the bachelor's thesis was that there is a clear difference between the societal acceptance of sexual minorities and the political acceptance of sexual minorities. In other words, the hypothesis was supported when looking at the societal attitudes as the Soviet legacy still influences the collective memory, which can be seen from the generational differences in tolerance levels towards sexual minorities as well as the differences between the level of state control in satellite-and member states. On the other hand, in both countries Estonia and Hungary, the results show that attitudes towards sexual minorities on the state level are influenced by domestic politics and the European Union's use of soft-power and social learning more than the influence of the Soviet Union. The parliamentary elite have used the approach of moving ahead of the general public, and thereby they have accepted LGBT rights before the majority of the society has come to accept sexual minorities. In addition, state level acceptance was brought out as one of the most important factors that counteract the personal problems for sexual minorities such as invisibility and societal isolation.

It is understood that all controversial decisions which are made at the state-level require time in order to be accepted in the society. This is because decisions about delicate and personal issues require time and societal maturity because influence of the Soviet Union is still dominant in the attitudes of the many generations that grew up in the USSR. When trying to create more tolerable societal attitudes towards sexual minorities it became clear that time is an unavoidable element that has the power to counter homophobia in the society. Additionally the state should intervene minimally in control over the media and education in order to provide unbiased information about of sexual minorities so people can make up their own minds and shape their attitudes accordingly. State level legislative acceptance was found to be one of the most important criteria of social inclusion brought out by representatives of sexual minorities. In Estonia, supporters of the traditional family model in the society and in the parliament are in strong opposition with legalizing LGBT rights. When considering the recent political atmosphere in Hungary which has turned more discriminative towards sexual minorities, it is important to mention that potentially reversing already achieved LGBT rights can have devastating effects on the representatives of the sexual minorities.

To conclude, globalization, multiculturalism and easy access to the internet have made the world a much smaller and intertwined place than it was during the Soviet Union. People's attitudes are changing faster than before because different viewpoints of information are

easily available at many different sources and people have the power to formulate their own opinions, unlike the censored information that was available in the Soviet Union. As a result, equal rights for sexual minorities are becoming more accepted throughout the world. As social learning takes place by following examples set by other countries, it can be said that Estonia and Hungary are pioneering countries with passing gender neutral Registered Partnership Acts in their geographical locations and historical conditions. With support from international organizations, the trend follows that sexual minority representatives in other former state-socialist countries will be granted equal rights in the near future.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Introduction of gender neutral same-sex marriage, registered partnership and adoption by same-sex couples in European countries

| COUNTRY         | SAME-SEX MARRIAGE | REGISTERED PARTNERSHIP | ADOPTION  |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------|
| Austria         | -                 | 2010                   | 2013      |
| Belgium         | 2003              | 2000                   | 2006      |
| Czech Republic  | -                 | 2005                   | -         |
| Denmark         | 2012              | 1989                   | 2007/2009 |
| Estonia         | -                 | (2016)                 | -         |
| Finland         | -                 | 2002                   | 2009      |
| France          | 2013              | 1999                   | 2013      |
| Germany         | -                 | 2001                   | 2004      |
| Hungary         | -                 | 2009                   | -         |
| Iceland         | 2010              | 1996                   | 2006      |
| Ireland         | -                 | 2010/2011              | -         |
| Luxembourg      | -                 | 2004                   | -         |
| The Netherlands | 2001              | 1998                   | 2001      |
| Norway          | 2008/2009         | 1993                   | 2009      |
| Portugal        | 2010              | -                      | 2013      |
| Slovenia        | -                 | 2005                   | 2011      |
| Spain           | 2005              | -                      | 2005      |
| Sweden          | 2009              | 1994                   | 2003      |
| Switzerland     | -                 | 2004                   | -         |
| United Kingdom  | 2013              | 2005                   | 2002/2008 |

Source: Takács and Szalma (2014)

## Appendix 2. European countries' views on homosexuality

| % of people in each country who agree or strongly agree that "gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish." |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Western/Northern Europe                                                                                                                  |    |
| Netherlands                                                                                                                              | 92 |
| Sweden                                                                                                                                   | 89 |
| Denmark                                                                                                                                  | 89 |
| Belgium                                                                                                                                  | 87 |
| Great Britain                                                                                                                            | 84 |
| Norway                                                                                                                                   | 83 |
| France                                                                                                                                   | 82 |
| Ireland                                                                                                                                  | 82 |
| Switzerland                                                                                                                              | 82 |
| Germany                                                                                                                                  | 81 |
| Spain                                                                                                                                    | 80 |
| Finland                                                                                                                                  | 74 |
| Portugal                                                                                                                                 | 59 |
| Eastern/Southern Europe                                                                                                                  |    |
| Czech Republic                                                                                                                           | 65 |
| Greece                                                                                                                                   | 50 |
| Slovenia                                                                                                                                 | 49 |
| Bulgaria                                                                                                                                 | 47 |
| Hungary                                                                                                                                  | 45 |
| Poland                                                                                                                                   | 44 |
| Slovakia                                                                                                                                 | 42 |
| Estonia                                                                                                                                  | 41 |
| Croatia                                                                                                                                  | 38 |
| Lithuania                                                                                                                                | 28 |
| Ukraine                                                                                                                                  | 28 |
| Russia                                                                                                                                   | 25 |

Source: Lipka (2013)