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Examination session (May or November)		May 2015

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: Human Rights ✓
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Title of the extended essay: Russia's Anti-Gay Propaganda Law: Its Effect on Russia's LGBT Citizens, Activists, and Political Relations

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The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

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Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Candidate session number		
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Achievement level

Criteria	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	<input type="text" value="2"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
B introduction	<input type="text" value="1"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
C investigation	<input type="text" value="2"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
D knowledge and understanding	<input type="text" value="2"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
E reasoned argument	<input type="text" value="2"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
F analysis and evaluation	<input type="text" value="1"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
G use of subject language	<input type="text" value="2"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
H conclusion	<input type="text" value="1"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
I formal presentation	<input type="text" value="2"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
J abstract	<input type="text" value="2"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>
K holistic judgment	<input type="text" value="2"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>
Total out of 36	<input type="text" value="19"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>

Name of examiner 1: _____ Examiner number: _____
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IB Assessment Centre use only: B: _____

IB Assessment Centre use only: A: _____

**Russia's Anti-Gay Propaganda Law: Its
Effect on Russia's LGBT Citizens, Activists,
and Political Relations** ✓



Word Count: 3,574 ✓

Abstract

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Abstract

This research essay analyzes Russia's recent law making propaganda supporting "non-traditional lifestyles" illegal. The effects the law has on activists and citizens are discussed, as well as the potential effects on political relations.

Basically, the trouble with this law is its loose wording that can be interpreted in different ways. Because of this, many seemingly unfair arrests have been made.

The research question for this essay is as follows: *How and to what extent does the Russian government's anti-gay propaganda law affect the LGBT citizens, activists, and political relations?* This question is answered with the following thesis: *The Russian government uses its interpretations of the anti-propaganda law to keep LGBT citizens from activism or expression, and it is keeping other nations from supporting Russia.*

The methodology used for this research paper relied heavily on news reports. This is because the law is incredibly new, meaning that there are not many published scholarly sources on the topic. To make up for that, scholarly sources were used wherever possible, especially to define terms such as "propaganda".

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I. Introduction:

The rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered (“LGBT”) individuals in Russia have fluctuated immensely. During the Soviet Regime, homosexuality was criminalized. The post-Soviet Russian government revoked the criminalization towards homosexuality, but that did not have much of an effect on the brutality of the Russian government towards Russia’s LGBT citizens.

In June 2013, President Putin signed an anti-propaganda law, which was passed by the Russian government. This law, acting as an amendment to a child protection law already in place in Russia, protected against “...the propagandising of non-traditional sexual relations among minors” (BBC News). Failure to follow this law resulted in fines from “...4,000 roubles (£78; \$121) for an individual to 1m roubles for organisations” (BBC).

At first glance, it is understandable how the amendment had such support, considering it was put in place to protect Russian citizens under the age of eighteen (herein referred to as “minors”). However, the amendment contains loose wording that can be interpreted in a myriad of ways, including interpretation from governmental authorities. This poses the question *how and to what extent does the Russian government’s anti-gay propaganda law affect the LGBT citizens, activists, and political relations?*

This amendment is commonly interpreted as not allowing activists to hold demonstrations about LGBT life because it is seen as propaganda aimed at Russian minors. Another common interpretation is not allowing LGBT individuals to do any action that could be considered showing that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered because it could be seen by minors, therefore becoming a form of propaganda. This includes holding hands with

someone of the same sex or homosexual parents telling their children that their family is equal to a heterosexual family. As this shows, the conclusion can be made that *the Russian government uses its interpretations of the anti-propaganda law to keep LGBT citizens from activism or expression, and it is keeping other nations from supporting Russia.*

HR academic context? Discrimination?

II. A History of Homosexuality in Russia

Under the Soviet Union, homosexuality was considered illegal. Any individual caught taking part in homosexual activity would be sent to the Gulags in Siberia (Schaaf 2). In fact, while travelling in Russia, “[Essig] was told a ‘joke’ about about gay men...” In the U.S. you send all your gays to Camp San Francisco; here we send ours to Camp Siberia” (Essig x). This “joke” does not mention lesbians at all because, at the time, the common Soviet belief was that lesbians did not even exist.

A goal of the Soviet Union was to spread the Communist ideals (Underwood). Part of this was inferred as, “Under these norms, the image of the good Soviet citizen was constructed as a hardworking proletarian, devoted to the Party, and absolutely and necessarily heterosexual” (Underwood). These ideals seemed to sustain successfully throughout the Soviet Union until 1993.


After the fall of the Soviet Union, resulting in the decriminalization of homosexuality, LGBT citizens were no longer living in fear of being persecuted for being who they were.

“With the fall of the Soviet Union, the idea that sexual minorities should be punished or cured ended, and for a while was awash in queer possibilities. For those of us who lived in large cities like Moscow or St. Petersburg, life was not



that different than it was in New York or San Francisco. There were gay bars, lesbian bookstores, queer political groups, and a growing sense that it was possible to be both queer and Russian” (Essig).

However, this simply resulted in the government not being able to criminalize citizens for being gay. Some Russian citizens were still brutal to LGBT Russian citizens. For example, there was an activist group who planned gay rights events in Moscow in 2006. They were denied by the government to hold a gay pride parade, but they marched anyway. A group of anti-homosexual Russian nationalists saw the parade and began to violently attack the members of the parade, all while police officers watched and stood by, not intervening to protect the marchers. The marchers were arrested while the attackers were not (Schaaf 2). This event is just one example of many that occurred before the anti-propaganda law was passed in 2013. It was events like this that contributed to the poor treatment LGBT citizens experienced after the law was put in place; it did not change much about the public’s perspective, simply how the government was able to handle situations.



III. The Law

The formal wording of the anti-propaganda law is as follows:

“Propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors, manifested in the distribution of information aimed at forming non-traditional sexual orientations, the attraction of non-traditional sexual relations, distorted conceptions of the social equality of traditional and non-traditional sexual relations among minors, or imposing information on non-traditional sexual relations which evoke interest in

these kinds of relations – if these actions are not punishable under criminal law – will be subject to administrative fines: for private citizens in the amount of 4,000 – 5,000 rubles; for administrative officials, 40,000 – 50,000 rubles; for legal entities, 800,000 – 1,000,000 rubles or suspension of business activities for up to 90 days” (SRAS).

It is important to make explicit note that this law does not, by any means, ban homosexual acts or make homosexuality illegal. It simply states that information that might encourage a homosexual lifestyle cannot be presented or distributed to minors.

According to ABC News, President Putin signed this law into effect in order “...to gain support among conservative Russians” (Leslie & Tilley). President Putin returned to presidency in 2012, and “...the anti-gay propaganda law is one of a suite of new measures seen as a way of securing the support of conservative Russians” (Leslie & Tilley). It is clear that President Putin’s goal was to gain support by the majority of Russia, and it can be easily said that the majority of Russia would be considered conservative. President Putin seemed to have the majority of the population’s support because the Russian Public Opinion Centre polled the Russian population, and the gay propaganda ban had support from 88% of the surveyed citizens (Leslie & Tilley). In the same article, it is also said that “The law states that it seeks to ‘protect the younger generation from the effects of homosexual propaganda’. It says the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality, including giving the impression that gay relationships are normal, could harm children because they are not capable of critically assessing such information” (Leslie & Tilley).

IV. Explanation of How Propaganda Pertains to this Law ✓

Within this law, one could say that the term “propaganda” is extremely subjective. In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *propaganda* is defined as “ideas or statements that are often false or exaggerated and that are spread in order to help a cause, a political leader, a government, etc.” (In order to avoid confusion, this is the definition that will be referred to within this essay).

Using this definition of the term, one could argue that it supports the law. This could be accurate if one considers homosexuality or living a homosexual lifestyle to be a cause. In this case, a minor seeing a gay couple holding hands in public or an activist group petitioning for gay rights would both be considered propaganda, and they would both be considered illegal (however, the activist group would be *more* illegal due to the fact that it would be considered an organization, not a personal relationship).

V. “Non-traditional Sexual Orientations” ✓

Perhaps a term that is even more subjective/controversial than “propaganda” used in this law is the term “non-traditional sexual orientation”. In order for this law to be effective, it would have to assume that “non-traditional sexual orientation” would be sexual orientations that did not fit into the typical, heterosexual relationships commonly seen in Russia and all over the world. Furthermore, this law seemingly points more directly at homosexual sexual orientations being what is referred to as “non-traditional” in this law because of the way it is enforced. This proves that, even though the word “homosexual” is not used once in the description of the law, there is no question as to what is meant by it mentioning “non-traditional sexual orientations”. President Putin is also on record stating that “...Russia needs to ‘cleanse’ itself of homosexuality if it wants

to increase its birth rate” (USA Today News). Furthermore, President Putin is on record saying, from the same source as the previous citation, that “...anything that gets in the way of [increasing population growth] we should clean up...” because population growth is said to be vital for the development of Russia as a country and economic powerhouse. Perhaps one could argue that a relationship following a “non-traditional sexual orientation” is such because homosexuals cannot reproduce. However, one could then also argue that heterosexual couples who choose not to have children could be considered “non-traditional”, and it’s highly improbable that a person has been attacked simply for being heterosexual in the same manner that people have been discriminated against for being homosexual.

VI. How Peoples’ Personal Lives Have Been Affected ✓

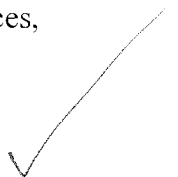
As seen throughout this essay, there is no doubt that a lot of people have been and will be affected by the presence of this law. It affects a relatively large demographic of the Russian population. ?

People are losing their jobs because of this law. There were seven cases, documented by Human Rights Watch, where teachers had complaints filed against them and were either dismissed or had to resign. These public or anonymous complaints were made simply because people felt the educators *could* “...spread ‘propaganda’ of non-heterosexual orientation to children” (Human Rights Watch).

Hate against Russia’s LGBT citizens now includes online harassment. There are multiple vigilante groups who find LGBT citizens and harass or attack them while recording it on a camera, later posting it online “...to fully destroy the victims’ professional and personal lives and

sense of selves” (Michaelson). One group in particular, under the name “Occupy Pedophilia” and under the lead of Maxim Martsinkevich, is known for luring gay men online to meet in person in order to harass them in a myriad of ways, all while being recorded (Teeman). There is one case in particular that tests the Russian government’s legal system. Martsinkevich used his methods to lure a gay Iraqi man. Martsinkevich then “...stripped and beat [the] gay Iraqi man, shaved his head, painted Stars of David on his body and a rainbow on his forehead, and humiliated him with sex toys” (Teeman). This video got published, and Martsinkevich got arrested--but not for attacking a gay man. He was arrested for being racist. The arrest seemed to have nothing to do with the fact that the man attacked was a *gay* Iraqi man, it was because he was a gay *Iraqi* man. The fact that Russian law enforcement did not sentence Martsinkevich to jail for any charge relating to a hate crime against an LGBT citizen but solely on a non-Russian citizen proves that Russia’s values are placed on nationalism, not equality for all of its citizens.

However, this attack against the Iraqi man is not what would be considered the most famous attack. The most famous attack was against Alexander Bohun. “[Bohun] had responded to a personal dating ad on Russian social media giant VK.com, and instead of meeting the person described in the ad, he was met by a group of ultra-nationalists responsible for several homophobic assaults on LGBT persons, including Maxim Sergeevich Martsinkevich” (Levesque). After the attack, Bohun talked to police officers. He told the police that Martsinkevich “...had repeatedly beaten him and intimidated him with threats of violence, forcing him to make a series of false statements” (Levesque). Later, the prosecutor’s office’s spokesperson announced that Bohun stated the following: “I was referred to as a ‘pedophile,’ mocked, and forced to admit actions and desires that I have not committed in any circumstances,



and I had to admit all that publicly” (Levesque). The fact that Bohun, and all of Martsinkevich’s other victims, had to admit things on camera could have detrimental effects on the victims, socially and mentally. In Russia’s conservative society, being a gay citizen is difficult, and many live what would be referred to as “in the closet”--essentially not announcing publicly that they are gay and keeping it a secret from friends and family. This would explain the overwhelming desire to meet significant others online, instead of in person. Because a majority of the gay population in Russia does not display their sexuality publicly, meeting others online could be seen as the best possible way. Knowing that also explains why Occupy Pedophilia’s method of finding gays online seemed to work so well.

The above-mentioned attacks were all on adults. However, this law does not discriminate who it affects. On 3 February, 2014, a teenage girl announced to her class that she was a lesbian. Because this is considered a “nontraditional sexual orientation”, she was found guilty of violating the anti-gay propaganda law. Again, this is because there is the possibility that, by talking about this, she could spread the idea of homosexuality being a part of a “normal” lifestyle. This clearly supports the idea of citizens losing their right to freely express who they are.

Disruptive



VII. Its Effect on Activism

According to Human Rights Watch, many people have been affected within just one year of the law being signed. Three LGBT activists in two different cities in Russia were fined for having one-person pickets. These pickets were obviously done in public places, and their signs had messages such as “‘There is no such thing as gay propaganda’ and ‘Being gay and loving

gays is normal” (Human Rights Watch). Finally, “A newspaper in the far eastern Khabarovsk region was fined for publishing an interview with a teacher who said he was fired for being gay” (Keating).

Activists are openly harassed and attacked: “A September gay rights event in St. Petersburg came under attack by anti-gay activists who doused participants in liquid and sickening gas” (Keating). Many venues do not allow pickets for LGBT rights to happen on their property because they fear, reasonably so, that the venue itself, as well as the activists, will get fined or prosecuted for allowing the event to be held. It has gotten to the point where activists feel the need to leave the country in order to accomplish what they feel they need to do--fight for obviously-needed gay rights.

Due to the vagueness of the law, an investigation has even been opened into children’s books, written by Lyudmila Ulitskaya, “...because they promote tolerance of gay relationships” (Keating). Also, a manufacturing company that produces a game showing same-sex relationships was fined. It is apparent that this law affects activists and journalism as well as businesses.

As shown, it seems as if law enforcement is able to use this law to any extent as they wish. While this is legally allowable (afterall, a law is a law and can be enforced as such), it would appear that the enforcement of this law tends to be inconsistent. Right after this law was signed into effect, activists did not know what to think about it or its severity on their actions because “...it was vague and general enough that no one seemed exactly sure what ‘gay propaganda’ was, or how strictly the regulations would be enforced” (Keating). However, there is now no question that the answer seems to be that taking part in any form of activism is full of risk. The activists might be fined, attacked, or even possibly sent to jail. This is a seemingly clear

violation of one's right to participate in activism, a right taken away as an implication of this law.

VIII. Its Effect on Political Relations ✓

In most parts of the world, there seems to be an overall trend of governments progressing towards more equality for its country's citizens. In just the last ten years, fifteen countries (mostly European) legalized same-sex marriage (Freedom to Marry). This fact seems to show a very positive trend in countries embracing equality. However, as shown throughout this essay, Russia's priorities seem to be different than a majority of the world's. (It is worth noting that it well known that Russia is not the only country doing this; it is also happening in many African countries).

While doing so is completely allowable and up to the Russian government, they cannot avoid suffering the repercussions from other country leaders. For example, President Obama has said:

"I have no patience for countries that try to treat gays or lesbians or transgender persons in ways that intimidate them or are harmful to them...One of the things I think is very important for me to speak out on is making sure that people are treated fairly and justly because that's what we stand for, and I believe that that's a precept that's not unique to America. That's just something that should apply everywhere" (Adomanis).

This is just one example of a significant world leader not supporting Russia and its decision to implement such a law.

A rather large conflict for country leaders regarding this law was whether or not to attend the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. Many countries, such as Italy and Germany, went to the games, but they made it very clear that they (the country's leaders) did not approve of Russia's law (Orwall).

While a country's decision to attend or not attend the Olympics is one thing, perhaps a more vital repercussion Russia might face is the lack of support by country leaders around the globe. Depending on the intensity of the leaders' opinions on the matter, it is completely possible that Russia might be cut off in the future from any military or economic support from a country leader who strongly opposes the law.

non-discrimination

IX. Conclusion

While equality for LGBT people has never really been in place in Russia's existence, the anti-gay propaganda law seems to have made safety an issue for Russia's LGBT citizens. The law states that individuals or organizations may not "...[distribute] information among minors that 1) is aimed at creating nontraditional sexual attitudes, 2) makes nontraditional sexual relations attractive, 3) equates the social value of traditional and nontraditional sexual relations, or 4) creates an interest in nontraditional sexual relations" (Essig). While this law was created in order to "protect" Russian minors, it is having detrimental effects on Russia's LGBT individuals.

This law is being used as justification for hate crimes against LGBT citizens, and it is also being used by the Russian law enforcement as a way to justify not stopping hate crimes they are witnessing. Some examples given in this paper were attacks by a Russian, nationalist vigilante group under the name "Occupy Pedophilia". They, especially their leader, Maxim

Martsinkevich, are known for luring in gay men using fake online profiles. They then complete actions in some combination of pouring urine on the victim, shaving the victim's hair, writing derogatory terms on the victim, and having the victim "admit" to things they did not actually do. All of this would be recorded, and that recording would be posted online for the public to watch. Russia's law enforcement did nothing about these attacks because, in the eyes of the Russian government, a person simply expressing the fact that they are homosexual is considered propaganda. This expression could be any form of two males holding hands in public, picketing for gay rights, or announcing that you are gay to a group of minors. While Occupy Pedophilia's method of harassment seems to be the most common, it is definitely not the only form of harassment.

In response to the research question, *how and to what extent does the Russian government's anti-gay propaganda law affect the LGBT citizens, activists, and political relations?*, it seems that the Russian government undoubtedly treats the LGBT citizens of Russia differently than the heterosexual, "traditional" citizens. The anti-gay propaganda law is used as justification to treat LGBT people poorly. Law enforcement is using the law to stop LGBT activists from working towards creating a safer, more equal environment for LGBT citizens. This is able to happen because the Russian government does not want to promote a "non-traditional" lifestyle such as homosexuality, argued by President Putin as a method used to increase population growth in Russia. However, that vague description of this law's job has led to multiple interpretations, especially as to what is considered to be promoting the lifestyle, thereby creating inconsistent and seemingly unequal enforcement of the law.

From this law, Russia has also lost (and could potentially lose) international relations. ?

This could possibly have a detrimental effect on Russia's future economy or military status.

In order to clarify this law, Russia's government should consider making the wording more specific. It could even use the term "homosexual" if that's what the true motive behind writing this law is. While that still seems unfair and unequal, at least it would be more clear and easier to enforce. It would help get rid of any confusion or argument stemming from the lack of clarity expressed in this law's wording.

Most countries are progressing in the area of human rights, especially rights for LGBT citizens, but Russia seems to be going backwards. After all, "This law openly discriminates against LGBT people, legitimizes anti-LGBT violence, and seeks to erase LGBT people from the country's public life" (Hugh Williamson, Human Rights Watch). There is no way that this type of environment fosters a progression towards equality.

Interesting subject but the essay is descriptive. It lacks of theoretical support on HR (what about non-discrimination?)

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Theoretical
background on HR
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XI. Addendum

There are two main reasons I was incredibly interested and invested in this topic: First, I am gay. Because I've spent most of my life worrying about and fighting for gay rights in my own country, that passion eventually spilled over to other countries. Second, it is with the aforementioned passion that my desire to bring attention to what is happening in other countries is fueled. I feel like the only way for things to change is to bring attention to them, and this seemed to be the best way possible for me to do so. I am incredibly passionate about change for the better (equality, in this case), and hope this essay can bring at least one more person's attention to what is going on in Russia.

While I thought I knew a lot about the subject before researching for the paper, I was incredibly wrong; I thought I "knew" facts that turned out to be false, and there were many things that I learned, specifically the reasons behind having the law. Because I have such a personal connection to the topic, it was sometimes difficult to read such devastating things that are happening to people. I couldn't help but ask myself, "Why them?" and think, "That very well could be me." Yes, it was difficult, but it was also very necessary--I learned so much about a topic so near and dear to me.

One final thing: This essay is in no way an essay trying to speak poorly of Russia. I genuinely do believe that Russia is an incredibly beautiful country, full of culture, wonderful people, and, in my opinion, the most beautiful language. It is solely focused towards the politics of Russia and should be interpreted and processed as so.