

Homosexuality in the Eastern Bloc

In the introduction to their collection *Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe*, Judit Takács and Roman Kuhar (2007, p. 11) point out that ‘the most powerful characteristic of “the Iron Curtain” derived from the puzzling fact that no one could really know what was going on behind it.’ This lack of information about homosexuality in the Eastern Bloc must have aroused the curiosity of Western activists. Already in its first report, the International Gay Association (IGA, later ILGA) established by Western organizations in 1978, indicated that its committees ‘were in charge of investigating the situation in “Socialist (Eastern European) countries”’ (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014a, p. 238). Three years later, IGA formalized its efforts and established the Eastern Europe Information Pool (EEIP) programme. The tasks of the programme—to collect information about homosexuality-related issues in the Eastern Bloc, make contacts with local homosexuals and ‘encourage the forming of informal interest-groups’ (EEIP 1983, p. 2)—were delegated to the Austrian organization Homosexual Initiative Vienna (HOSI), the initiator of the programme. One of the key outputs of HOSI in this regard was annual reports about homosexuality in the Eastern Bloc. The reports were published in English between 1982 and 1989, and constitute an invaluable source of information not only about the homosexuality-related issues in the Eastern Bloc and cross-border flows of information but also about the West-based activists who were producing the reports.

In this chapter, I will present a comprehensive analysis of all eight EEIP reports published before 1990. My main aim here is twofold. First, I want to highlight the complexity of the Eastern Bloc in relation to homosexuality against the tendency to homogenize and essentialize the region. While it proved to be tempting to lump all communist countries together and make broad claims, for example, that ‘prejudice against homosexuality as “a bourgeois degeneracy” became strongly imbued in Communist Parties throughout the world’ (Altman 1971, p. 219) or that ‘communism left a profoundly destructive legacy in this sphere, bequeathing a history of state repression of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals’ (O’Dwyer 2013, p. 103), I will rely on the EEIP reports as well as relevant academic literature to demonstrate the variety of ways in which homosexuality used to be governed and discussed in different Eastern Bloc countries. Second, I intend to emphasize the transnational aspects of the homosexual activism in the region in the 1980s, challenging the myth of the near total isolation of the Eastern Bloc. As explained in the previous chapter, the key role of ILGA and its predecessors (especially the International Committee for Sexual Equality, ICSE) in globalizing homosexual activism has been recognized by many authors in the field (e.g. Ayoub and Paternotte 2014b; Paternotte and Seckinelgin 2015; Rupp 2011), also, though less frequently, in relation to CEE (e.g. Ayoub and Paternotte 2012; Essig 1999, pp. 57–58). Therefore, the EEIP reports, commissioned by ILGA, provide an excellent information source for determining to what extent and how the association managed to penetrate the Iron Curtain and influence the activists in the Eastern Bloc as well as how they perceived the region in relation to homosexuality.

I will start by giving a brief description of the content of the EEIP reports and their production context (authors and sources) drawing on both the reports themselves and my interview with Andrzej Selerowicz, one of the key persons behind the reports. Next, I will discuss their authors’ ideological perspective on communism and point to some tensions it produced between activists on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain, especially in the early 1980s. In the following sections, I will present further analysis of the content of the EEIP reports, focusing on three issues commonly raised in the reports: (1) state laws and practices related to homosexuals, (2) public discourses on homosexuality and (3) homosexual self-organizing. As mentioned in Chap. 1, to arrive at a more precise picture of homosexuality in the Eastern Bloc, throughout this chapter, I will complement the information found in the reports by the academic

accounts of homosexuality-related issues in the region during the Cold War. Because of my limited knowledge of CEE languages, I will primarily rely on English-language references. Readers who would like to delve into the situation of homosexuals in a particular country are encouraged to consult the bibliographies of the works mentioned in this chapter, which often include entries in CEE languages.

3.1 EEIP REPORTS

The EEIP reports were produced and published by the ILGA's member organization HOSI. As Phillip Ayoub and David Paternotte (2014a, p. 240) explain, this organization was particularly interested in Eastern Bloc countries 'due to its geographical location in the region—Vienna being further east than Prague, the high number of lesbian and gay refugees in Vienna, and the many informal ties HOSI had to them'. Some of the objectives of the EEIP programme were to collect information about homosexuality in the Eastern Bloc and make contacts with local homosexuals. The key aim, however, was to support the founding of homosexual groups in the region 'according to the Western example' (EEIP 1983, p. 2). As the authors of the reports explained themselves, this proved to be a utopian idea, not only because of the resistance from some communist states but also due to the reluctance on the part of some local homosexuals:

in those countries with strict anti-homosexual laws (USSR [the Soviet Union], Romania), people are afraid of harassment from the police. This involves not only prison sentences but also imposed resettlement to remote areas. In those countries where a certain amount of liberation prevails, e.g., Hungary and Poland, homosexuals are content with their present freedom and lifestyle, e.g., private parties and nude beaches, and do not want to endanger it by unnecessary manifestos. (EEIP 1983, p. 2)

Therefore, HOSI decided to adopt a more realistic approach of raising 'gay awareness' and consolidating 'the community', for example by distributing a 'mini-newspaper' in Czech, German, Hungarian and Polish (EEIP 1983, p. 2) and organizing sub-regional conferences for homosexual groups in the Eastern Bloc (EEIP 1988, p. 2).

The EEIP reports, prepared for ILGA, were the key outputs of HOSI regarding its task to provide information about homosexuality in the

Eastern Bloc. The first report, published in June 1982, presented an overview of all countries included in the EEIP programme, that is, the Soviet Union and all the aligned countries (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania) but also Albania and Yugoslavia. The information about the countries was divided into two parts: ‘Legal information’ and ‘General information’. All the subsequent reports were less structured than the first one: instead of presenting a general overview of the entire region, they zoomed in on either particular countries or vital issues emerging at that time in the region, such as the release of the lesbian-themed film *Another Way* (1982) in Hungary (EEIP 1983, pp. 3–5); the organization of the first ‘gay culture week’ in Ljubljana in 1984 (EEIP 1984, pp. 4–5); or the question of HIV/AIDS arising in the region in the mid-1980s (EEIP 1986, pp. 2–5). As explained in the reports themselves, the strategy behind their structure was to achieve a cumulative effect: the subsequent reports were meant to add new information rather than repeat the already published facts. Partially as a result of this strategy, the reports overrepresented some countries, particularly East Germany and Poland but also Hungary and Yugoslavia, and underrepresented others, particularly Albania, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union (for details see Table 3.1).

Furthermore, the EEIP reports displayed a clear gender bias. Even though the word ‘lesbian’ was sometimes added to ‘gay’ in general discussions of homosexuality, the majority of information included in the reports was directly related to men only. Three notable exceptions include a self-introductory letter by the Slovenian lesbian group LILIT, reprinted in the

Table 3.1 Coverage of countries in the EEIP reports (in pages, approximate; ‘all total’ stands for the overall size of the reports)

<i>Year</i>	<i>1982</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>1985</i>	<i>1986</i>	<i>1987</i>	<i>1988</i>	<i>1989</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>All total</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>93</i>
Albania	0.5	0.5					0.5		1.5
Bulgaria	1	0.5							1.5
Czechoslovakia	1	0.5		1		0.5		2	5
East Germany	0.5	3.5	1.5	4	0.5	2.5	1	3	16.5
Hungary	1.5	1.5					5		8
Poland	1	3		3.5	2	3	1.5	1.5	15.5
Romania	1.5			3			1		5.5
Soviet Union	1					0.5			1.5
Yugoslavia	1		1.5	3.5	0.5	2	1.5		10

1988 report, as well as two special sections on ‘Lesbians in the GDR [East Germany]’, submitted by the International Lesbian Information Service (ILIS) (EEIP 1983, pp. 8–9) and a local lesbian activist Birgit Neumann (EEIP 1989, pp. 7–9). The bias was most likely related to the then-existing tensions between women and men within IGA, which added ‘lesbian’ to its name and transformed into ILGA only in 1986 (Paternotte and Seckinelgin 2015, p. 211). ILIS, originally a secretariat of IGA, was criticizing IGA’s leadership for, among other things, the inclusion of misogynist gay male groups. Consequently, as Paola Bacchetta explains, ‘many lesbians present at ILGA’s 1982 annual meeting in Turin, Italy, myself among them, separated and formed the ILIS’ (2002, p. 950) (the conference in Turin actually took place in 1981). The EEIP reports virtually never discussed any issues related to bisexuality, transgenderism or intersexuality.

Central figures behind the reports were members of the HOSI’s International Group: Kurt Krickler, who introduced the idea to other HOSI members after the IGA’s conference in Turin in 1981; Andrzej Selerowicz, a Polish citizen who immigrated to Austria in the 1970s; and John Clark, a US citizen and partner of Selerowicz. Arguably, Selerowicz was the key person in the team: not only was he the only insider, a native speaker of Polish with great command of German and fair knowledge of English, but also he happened to be employed in an Austrian foreign trade company as a sale representative for CEE, regularly travelling to the Eastern Block: most often to Hungary, quite regularly to Czechoslovakia and Poland, but also to Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Krickler was mainly responsible for gathering information about East Germany and Clark for translating all the data into English (interview with Selerowicz). Of course, there were also other people involved in EEIP programme, the first report, for example, mentioned additional two forenames: Dieter and Juan (EEIP 1982, p. 13), but the three surely formed the core of the EEIP team. When the format of the reports changed from the general overview of the region to special sections on particular countries and issues, the reports started to additionally include more by-lined articles by guest contributors based in the Eastern Bloc. The examples include a piece on Yugoslavia by Zagreb-based Widmaar Petrovic (EEIP 1987, pp. 5–6) and an already mentioned article on ‘Lesbians in the GDR’ by Halle-based Birgit Neumann (EEIP 1989, pp. 7–9).

The information sources in the EEIP reports were manifold. For example, to learn about the legal status of homosexuality in Eastern Bloc countries for the first report, Krickler contacted the countries’ embassies based in Vienna and, to HOSI’s surprise, received a reply from all of them

(interview with Selerowicz). However, most of the time the authors of the reports relied on the accounts of local individuals and groups that were involved in some sort of activism or at least were interested in the broader situation of homosexuals in their countries. In limited cases, these sources were clearly identified, as in the examples given in the previous paragraph. Most often, however, they remained anonymous, being labelled simply as ‘a gay Hungarian’ (EEIP 1982, p. 7) or “our man” in Bratislava’ (EEIP 1983, p. 11). From time to time, the reports also reprinted articles published elsewhere. The ‘Introduction’ to the first EEIP report itself was an excerpt from the 1977 book *Seminar: Gesellschaft und Homosexualität* (Seminar: Society and Homosexuality) by Rüdiger Lautmann. Other examples include a note on Romania, originally published in the German magazine *Rosa Flieder* (EEIP 1982, pp. 9–10) and an interview with a member of the Hungarian organization Homeros Lambda, reprinted from the Hungarian weekly *KEPES* 7 (EEIP 1988, pp. 10–12).

Another source of information was trips of the HOSI members, especially Selerowicz, to Eastern Bloc countries. In the 1983 report, for example, an account on Bulgaria was based on Selerowicz’s few-days stay in Sofia and a description of ‘Poland under martial law’ rested on Selerowicz’s two visits to Warsaw. Such trips were especially useful for the countries about which HOSI did not have much information and where it did not have any contact persons. Romania was definitely a case in point. When an anonymous member of HOSI travelled to Bucharest to gather basic information about the situation of homosexuals in the country, his starting points were places listed in the *Spartacus International Gay Guide*, such as the Caru’ cu Bere bar on Stavropoleos street and the swimming pool next to the Lido Hotel. While he failed to meet any homosexuals in those places, eventually he did get in touch with a local informer, though under more accidental circumstances:

I suddenly saw him among the grey masses on a crowded street. His neat appearance, his rather unique sunglasses and the small handbag under his arm made him stand out against the others. For a long time both of us kept looking in the same store window and watching each other. Almost paralyzed with fear—I had been warned about provocateurs—I asked him some stupid question about the time or the street. It turned out that he spoke English and was actually quite nice. He also accepted my invitation to a cup of coffee in a bistro close by. (EEIP 1985, p. 12)

The account continued with a description of an everyday life of a homosexual in Romania from the point of view of the interviewed man.

The majority of information provided in the EEIP reports was accompanied with the disclosure of the information source. Such a transparency increased the reliability of the reports as did a good dose of reflexivity on the part of the reports' authors. An interesting case in point is the description of Albanian legal provisions regarding homosexuality. In the 1982 report, HOSI explained that, at that time, Albania seemed to have the most liberal laws concerning homosexuality in the whole Europe, with no provisions delegating same-sex acts and the age of consent set equally for same-sex and opposite-sex acts at 14. At the same time, the authors disclosed that this information was derived from a German translation of the Albanian Penal Code and expressed their doubts about the accuracy of the translation (EEIP 1982, p. 12). In the following report, they returned to that matter and confirmed their previous findings (EEIP 1983, p. 2), which however were not true: Albania did, in theory, decriminalized same-sex acts in 1977 but, in reality, it retained other laws which were used to persecute same-sex acts until 1995 (Hildebrandt 2014; Torra 1998). Nevertheless, the majority of facts presented in the reports, which I checked against the contemporary academic literature in the field, proved to be correct. Apart from occasionally reflecting on their own sources of information, the reports also comprised a rich variety of perspectives, ensured by the inclusion of multiple sources. However, as shown in the previous paragraphs, those sources were quite accidental and their number and quality varied from country to country. Thus, the EEIP reports provided only a scattered, yet substantial, collection of information about homosexuality in the Eastern Bloc.

The EEIP reports were the key but not the only output of HOSI regarding the Eastern Bloc. Most remarkably, in 1984 the organization published a book in German entitled *Rosa Liebe unterm roten Stern: Zur Lage der Lesben und Schwulen in Osteuropa* (Pink Love under the Red Star: The Situation of Lesbians and Gay Men in Eastern Europe, Hauer et al. 1984). The book comprised some information already gathered for the previous EEIP reports but also original contributions about homosexual history and culture in particular countries, for example a chapter on 'Homoerotic themes in Polish 20th-century literature'. *Rosa Liebe unterm roten Stern* was launched at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 1984 and soon reached the audiences in Western, especially German-language, countries. The authors of the 1985 report declared that the reviews of the book had been published in magazines in Austria, Switzerland and West Germany as well as France, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden (EEIP 1985, p. 2). Originally, HOSI planned to publish an additional edition of the book in English but, as it explained in the 1986 report, it was unable to find a

keen publisher. Apart from the EEIP reports and the book, HOSI was also having a regular column ‘Ostreport’ (East Report), published in its own magazine in German *Lambda Nachrichten* (Lambda News) (Fig. 3.1).

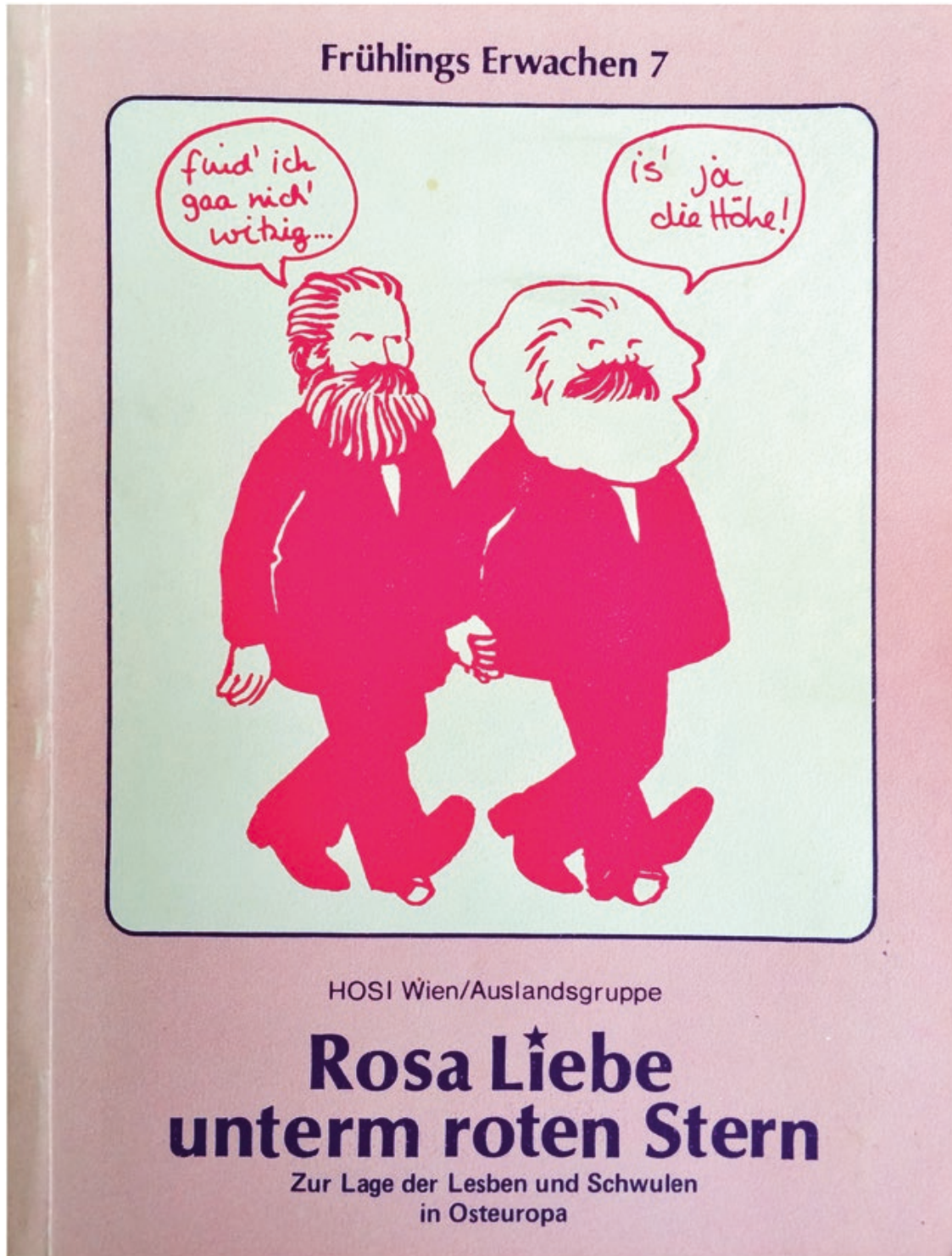


Fig. 3.1 Cover of the *Rosa Liebe unterm roten Stern* book. Courtesy of IHLIA Amsterdam. Translation: When Friedrich Engels comments: ‘I don’t find it funny at all...’, Karl Marx replies: ‘It’s outrageous!’

3.2 COMMUNISM AS THEY KNEW IT

Although the work of HOSI on the Eastern Bloc received a lot of acclaim from homosexual activists around Western Europe, it came under criticism from some groups at the other side of the Iron Curtain. A distinctly negative opinion was voiced by Christian Pulz, a member of a working group ‘Homosexuals in the Church’ organized under the umbrella of the Evangelical Church in East Germany. In his article ‘Pink love—not red enough?’, published in the West German magazine *Siegessäule* (Victory Column) in 1985 (and reprinted in a EEIP report), Pulz reviewed HOSI’s *Rosa Liebe unterm roten Stern*, accusing its authors of ‘anti-socialistic sensationalism’:

A distinct anti-communist prejudice stretches through almost all of the articles. Even some of the well-meant articles get caught up in the twilight of a political statement that cannot be accepted by us [...] To put it plainly: We lesbians and gay men from the Church working groups of the GDR [East Germany] are basically endeavouring to win sympathy from our society and its socialistic order [...] All problems concerning us can only be solved in our context of government or not at all. (EEIP 1985, p. 4)

Pulz continued by calling the book’s authors irresponsible and pointing out that their negative attitude towards communism could cause a lot of harm to local activists. By doing so, he articulated the resistance on the part of some Eastern Bloc activists against the ‘saving gays’ narrative (Bracke 2012), which some Western activists have been accused of in different parts of the world, as discussed in Chap. 1.

HOSI reprinted Pulz’s article in the 1985 report together with its official reply, in which the authors rejected the accusation of *Rosa Liebe unterm roten Stern* being ‘a slanderous anti-communist piece of garbage’ (EEIP 1985, p. 5). On the one hand, they explained that in several places in the book it had been stated that the criticism directed at some Eastern Bloc countries would also apply to some Western Bloc countries and that the legal situation of homosexuals in East Germany was actually more progressive at that time than in Austria or West Germany. On the other hand, the authors maintained that their solidarity with and consideration for homosexuals in the Eastern Bloc cannot be unconditional. They did not see their role as indiscriminately praising all the communist countries but rather as critically reporting on the situation of homosexuals in the region. Their take on communism, as they claimed, had been unprejudiced: ‘our attitude towards “true socialism” is a very real one—balanced, pragmatic

and non-dogmatic. Our view is clouded neither by blind pro- nor by hateful anti-communism' (EEIP 1985, p. 6).

It would be incorrect to assume that during the Cold War homosexual activists in the West were per se anti-communist. In fact, as Gert Hekma, Harry Oosterhuis and James Steakley (1995, p. 2) note, 'Most gay and lesbian liberation groups that sprang into existence in the wake of the 1969 Stonewall rebellion were radical, leftist, and utopian', which was reflected in their slogans such as the US 'Ho, ho, homosexual—The ruling class is ineffectual' (ca. 1970) or West German 'Brüder und Schwestern, ob warm oder nicht—Kapitalismus bekämpfen ist unsere Pflicht' (Brothers and sisters, whether gay or not—To fight capitalism is our collective job, ca. 1972). This did gradually change as the Cold War progressed due to the communist parties' persistently reluctant attitude towards homosexuality, which often proved to be ambivalent at best and oppressing at worst. Even though, many homosexual activists, both in the East and West, embraced communism and continued to be members of communist parties, including some key ILGA activists such as the Dutch Hein Verkerk and Bram Bol (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014a, p. 238).

In the late EEIP reports, especially those published after HOSI's dispute with East German activists, there were no direct negative statements about communism. However, a clear anti-communist attitude was adopted in the first report. Already on its cover, we find a quote from Dennis Altman (1971) about the prejudice against homosexuality being allegedly characteristic of communist parties 'throughout the world' (EEIP 1982, p. 1). In the introduction to the first report, which was a reprint from a West German book on homosexuality (Brockmann 1977), we read that 'A principle union between Marxist theory and antihomosexuality is not founded. However, the organisational forms and concrete stipulations of the continuing venture at the realization of Marxist socialism have left less room for gay emancipation than in advanced capitalistic societies' (EEIP 1982, p. 3). Besides, authors themselves expressed their unfavourable perception of communism in the description of some countries in the report. For example, when discussing Bulgaria, they commented that 'Anything that does not fit into the framework of communist society (and homosexuality is one of these things) either does not exist or should not exist' (EEIP 1982, p. 4). Such statements alienated some homosexual activists in the Eastern Bloc, such as Christian Pulz and some East German groups, which adopted a more assimilationist rather than confrontational strategy for emancipation, and justified the groups' reluctance towards HOSI's initiatives.

The first EEIP report was quite remarkable for essentializing not only communist ideology, embodied in communist parties and states, but also Eastern Bloc societies. As Francesca Stella (2015, p. 7) reminds us, there has been a still persistent tendency to reify national cultures of the region and attribute inferior qualities to them, under such labels as the ‘Soviet mindset’ or the ‘Balkan mentality’. In a similar vein, the authors of the first EEIP report pointed to the backwardness of some of the Eastern Bloc societies. Thus, the readers of the 1982 report could learn, for example, of Bulgaria that ‘patriarchy rules supreme in this typical Balkan country’ and that ‘these people have just forgotten what freethinking, personal opinions and private lifestyles are’ (p. 4); of Yugoslavia that ‘the real barrier in the life of a homosexual is, as in Bulgaria, the Balkan mentality and its concept of the macho family man’ (p. 13); and of Hungary that it was characterized by ‘the relatively low cultural level of the average citizen’ and by ‘the proud “maleishness” of males (heterosexuals)’ (p. 7). In the following report, the readers could additionally learn of East Germany that ‘the attitudes concerning the situation of women are comparable to those which were common in the West ten or twenty years ago’ (EEIP 1983, p. 8). The latter statement was notable because it not only pointed to the backwardness of East Germany but also juxtaposed it with the alleged progressiveness of the West. In that sense, it clearly exemplifies what Joanna Mizielińska and Robert Kulpa (2011, pp. 17–18) named a ‘Western progress narrative’, which makes the Western present the Eastern future to be achieved: ‘whatever CEE became/is/will be, West had become/has already been/will have been’.

Finally, the EEIP reports indicated that communist regimes themselves tended to present homosexuality as a product of the Western bourgeoisie lifestyle and thus incompatible with communist ideals. Indeed, as Hekma et al. (1995, p. 8) explain, ‘Socialists have repeatedly ascribed homosexuality to the “class enemy,” contrasting the “manly” vigor and putative purity of the working-class with the emasculated degeneracy and moral turpitude of the aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie’. In EEIP reports, we can find even stronger statements, for example about Eastern Bloc homosexuals themselves internalizing the association of homosexuality with the West: ‘Western lifestyle (and the degree of Western tolerance towards homosexuality) is considered evidence of Western decadence even by Bulgarian gays. Communist propaganda has done a good job!’ (EEIP 1983, p. 3). In a special section on ‘AIDS in Eastern Europe’, HOSI additionally reported that not only homosexuality but also HIV/AIDS

had been presented by some officials in the Eastern Bloc as a Western problem, which resulted in the denial of any HIV/AIDS cases in some countries in the region, particularly in the early 1980s. A case in point was an interview with the Soviet Union's Deputy Minister of Public Health, Piotr Burgasov, published in the trade union magazine *Trud* (Labour), where the official explained that 'This illness is a social problem that can be closely linked to the sexual freedom tolerated in some circles in the West which is, however, unnatural for our society' (EEIP 1986, p. 2). At this point, it is worth reminding that in the West too homosexuality happened to be attributed to those on the other side of the Iron Curtain, though never to the same extent as in the Eastern Bloc. The classic example is that of the Lavender Scare coupled with the Red Scare in the United States in the 1950s, when homosexuals were conflated with communists, even though most often just by the frequent co-occurrence of the two in the discourse of 'security risks' (Epstein 1994; Johnson 2006).

3.3 STATE LAWS AND PRACTICES

The diversity of legal provisions concerning homosexuality in the Eastern Bloc probably best illustrates the complexity of the region in homosexuality-related issues. First of all, we should acknowledge different trajectories of those provisions throughout the time in particular countries. In Romania, for example, the general tendency was to strengthen the anti-homosexual laws as the Cold War progressed. Viviana Andreescu (2011, p. 212) explains that female and male same-sex acts, yet only those which produced a 'public scandal', were criminalized in the country in 1937, with the punishment of six months to two years of incarceration. In 1948, the state introduced punishments for public displays of homosexuality (two to five years of incarceration) and in 1957, it criminalized not only public but also private same-sex acts with the increased prison time of three to ten years, reduced in 1968 to one to five years (Andreescu 2011, p. 212). In East Germany, by contrast, there was a general tendency towards liberalization: while at first the communist state carried over the paragraph 175a of the Nazi legal code, which forbade 'unnatural desire' between men, in 1968 it decriminalized homosexuality by abolishing the infamous paragraph. Yet, at the same time it passed a new law which introduced an inequality in regard to age of consent: 14 for heterosexuals and 18 for homosexuals, both women and men (McLellan 2011, pp. 115–118). In Poland, in turn, same-sex acts were decriminalized as early as in 1932 and has not been re-criminalized ever since (Płatek 2009).

The examples just quoted also point to the significant differences in homosexuality-related laws between different Eastern Bloc countries at particular moments in time. One of the aims of the EEIP reports, especially of their early editions, was to map these differences during the twilight of the Cold War. The information was first presented country by country, under the headline ‘Legal information’. Most of the time, these sections were short and to the point: they included reprints from relevant legal documents and only sporadically were accompanied by a commentary. The focus was on the current situation concerning (1) the legal status of homosexuality and (2) the age of consent for same-sex acts versus opposite-sex acts.

Regarding the former, the distinction was made between ‘simple homosexuality’, not qualified in any respect, and ‘special homosexuality’, related to the laws on, for example, rape, prostitution or sex in public, which explicitly referred to homosexuality. According to the information presented in the first two EEIP reports, simple homosexuality was still illegal in the early 1980s in Romania (one to five years for both female and male same-sex acts), the Soviet Union (up to five years only for male same-sex acts) and parts of Yugoslavia (Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina; up to one year only for male same-sex acts) but also, what was not stated in the reports, in Albania (Hildebrandt 2014; Torra 1998). Countries which did not criminalize homosexuality but provided tougher punishments for homosexuals than heterosexuals for different sex-related offences included Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary and parts of Yugoslavia (Croatia, Montenegro and Vojvodina). Poland and the Yugoslavia’s Republic of Slovenia made no references to homosexuality in their legal documents, since 1932 for Poland and since 1977 for Slovenia, and thus established the strongest legal equality between heterosexuals and homosexuals among all the EEIP countries (for more details see Hildebrandt 2014; Torra 1998).

There were also differences between Eastern Bloc countries in the 1980s regarding the age of consent for same-sex acts. In Albania, Romania, the Soviet Union and parts of Yugoslavia homosexuality was illegal so the age of consent for homosexuals was not an issue, though, theoretically, the age of consent in Albania was set in 1977 at 14 for all sex acts (Torra 1998). Some other countries which had not delegatized same-sex acts as such set a higher age of consent for homosexuals than heterosexuals. For example, as reported in the first two EEIP reports, in Bulgaria the age of consent was set at 21 for homosexuals and 14 for heterosexuals, in Czechoslovakia

at 18 and 15, in East Germany at 18 and 14, and in Hungary also at 18 and 14 respectively. In 1988, the Parliament of East Germany passed a change in the penal code evening out the age of consent for homosexuals and heterosexuals (EEIP 1989, p. 11). The Eastern Bloc countries which did not make any distinction in regard to age of consent between same-sex and opposite-sex acts in the early 1980s included Poland and Slovenia, with the age set at 15 and 16 respectively (see also Graupner 2000; Takács 2017; Torra 1998).

The differences in the legal treatment of homosexuals across the Eastern Bloc created a number of transnational problems in the region. One such problem arose when a citizen of Czechoslovakia, where homosexuality was legal except for a few special cases (Seidl 2016), was sentenced to five years of imprisonment for homosexuality during his stay in the Soviet Union, where male same-sex acts were severely punished. From the 1983 report we learn that ‘His mother tried everything to help him. After two years her son was finally allowed to be transferred to a Czech prison where he is now serving out the rest of his sentence’ (EEIP 1983, p. 11). Another case of transnational nature, though less related to legal provisions, also involved a Czechoslovakian citizen. He planned to go for holidays to the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, a popular summer destination for homosexuals in Eastern Bloc countries. However, when his mother found out about his homosexuality, she denounced him to the police suggesting that his plan was to escape from Bulgaria to Turkey with an inflatable boat. Consequently, as HOSI reported, the man was arrested, interrogated and his luggage searched: ‘As it did not even contain an air mattress, he was finally released, but a prohibition to leave the country was imposed upon him because it would be against the Republic’s interests that “such persons” represent the CSSR [Czechoslovakia] abroad’ (EEIP 1983, p. 11).

The latter anecdote demonstrates that it was not only legal provisions but also very concrete state practices that strongly affected the lives of homosexuals in the Eastern Bloc. A common practice in the region was a surveillance of male homosexuals by police forces and the secret service. Already in the first EEIP report, the authors mentioned the heavy persecution of homosexuals in Romania, where the police officers in plainclothes were reported to ‘go to the toilets and whip out their cocks in order to lure gays’ (EEIP 1982, p. 10), as well as the formal registration of homosexuals in Poland, which resulted in the creation of state ‘pink lists’, or ‘homosexual inventories’ (EEIP 1982, p. 8). In Poland, the practice of registering homosexuals intensified in 1985, when it took a form of a