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GAYROPA AND THE BEAR: HOW GENDER DISCOURSE SHAPES CONTEMPORARY RUSSIANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD EUROPE

In recent years, the identity of Russian citizens in terms of their civilizational heritage has undergone a significant change. They have ceased to think of themselves as Europeans, or of Russia as part of Europe. In 2011, according to research conducted by the Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, only 13 per cent of Russians considered themselves Europeans. A mere seven per cent of respondents supported the idea of Russia “stepping into the common European home” (a decade ago this figure was twice as high). Over a third of respondents shared the view that Russia is a unique Eurasian civilization.

These changes are supported by the rhetoric of the authorities. In 2012, in an address to the Federal Assembly, Vladimir Putin called Russia a “state-civilization” which would never merge with the surrounding world.¹ Later he developed this statement in a speech at the Valdai International Discussion Club in September 2013.²

As David Campbell points out, identity is constituted in relation to differences, while differences are constituted in relation to identity.³ The representations of the Other thus serve as a necessary part of an ideal image of Self. For Russia, Europe has traditionally held a distinctive place among the most important “Others”, who help to define what it “means to be Russian”. The aim of this article is to examine the role of gender discourse in answering the question whether Russia belongs to Europe. The study is based on an analysis of contemporary Russian public discourses focusing on the “gender deviancy of Europe”, reflected in the speeches of politicians, journalists, and comments on Internet-forums.

¹ Address to the Federal Assembly, President of Russia, Official website, 12 December, 2012, <<http://президент.рф/новости/17118#sel=69:20,69:44>>.

² V. Putin, Speech transcript, „Rossiiskaia gazeta“, 19 September 2013.

³ D. Campbell, *Writing security: United States foreign policy and the politics of identity*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1998, p. 9.

The first section of the study is devoted to clarifying basic methodological approaches to researching the role of gender discourse in international relations. Next we consider how gender discourse is used in the politics of national identity in Vladimir Putin's Russia. The next section focuses on representations of the countries of so-called 'Old Europe' through the prism of the concept *Gayropa*, which has become increasingly visible in Russian internet activity in recent years and is used to characterize the European gender order. Additionally, we highlight the gender characteristics attributed to the nations of 'New Europe'. Finally, the paper explores the images used in relations between Russia and the post-Soviet states (above all, Ukraine) and today's European Union.

1. Gender discourse as a factor in international relations: Methodological approaches

As an essential part of the social order, gender is actively used in order to create a picture of the world as a whole and to organize social relations between different social groups (nations, classes etc). A number of factors make it possible to consider gender outside of relations between the sexes proper, factors which let us particularly note the role of gender discourse role in delineating social boundaries and hierarchies.

Fredrik Barth showed that the social boundaries between communities are established with the help of ethnic markers, or elements of culture selected by group members themselves in order to emphasize their differences from those around them (for example, clothes, language, lifestyle, etc.).⁴ Based on these ideas, Nira Yuval-Davis suggested that gender symbols should be interpreted as "symbolic border guards". Along with other markers, these identify people as members, or non-members, of a certain community.⁵ Images of men and women serve as markers enabling the process of inclusion and exclusion in the formation of the collective identity, separating Us from Them.⁶

Another important factor is the inclusion of gender discourse in power relations: gender markers also produce a system of evaluations and preferences. In the first instance, this concerns social relations proper between men and women, which are characterized by the privileged status of men. However, the hierarchical relations between the sexes are also used as a matrix which legitimates other forms of social inequality.

⁴ F. Barth, *Introduction*, [in:] *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. F. Barth, Bergen, London 1969, p. 14.

⁵ N. Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, Sage Publications, London-Thousand Oaks, CA 1997, p. 23.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Culture's androcentrism, that is, the presence of a value hierarchy of masculinity and femininity, also influences the hierarchy of social subjects. The marking of them as feminine or masculine attributes some particular qualities to them and assigns them an appropriate position in the social hierarchy. Thus, the use of gender metaphors serves as an effective mechanism in the production of power hierarchies.⁷ The interpretation of feminine as something second-rate and subordinate determines the main form of exploitation of gender metaphors: Us are represented as masculine and Them as feminine, and political infighting makes which active use of these markers.⁸ Researchers take a special interest in the role played by metaphors in the discourse on international relations.⁹ By analyzing representations of the Gulf War, George Lakoff observed that active use was made of mechanisms of metaphorical thinking in discussions of foreign policy: backed up by bombs, metaphors can kill. Metaphor is a basic mechanism used by people to simplify the world and bring it closer to their own life experience. It provides a ready-made solution, releasing people from the obligation to think and enabling them to skip over contradictions. In this fashion, it functions as one means of mythologizing politics.

Due to the role which gender metaphors (for instance, rape, prostitution, seduction, and others) play in constructing social borders and hierarchies, they are widely used in representations relating to international relations. Competition in international relations is often depicted as a masculine competition. In this way the discourse on international affairs serves as a means of shaping and reshaping gender orders.¹⁰

2. Remasculinization of Russia

We start by making the critical point that the gender characteristics which Russian hegemonic discourse ascribes to contemporary Europe is dependent on the Russians' way of imagining Russia itself. We designate the politics

⁷ For more on the role of metaphors, including gender ones, in the relationship of power, see G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Metaphors we live by*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1980; H. Haste, *The Sexual Metaphor*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1994.

⁸ K. Verdery, *From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Eastern Europe*, "East European Politics and Societies" 1994, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 228; T.H. Eriksen, *The Sexual Life of Nations: Notes on Gender and Nationhood*, "Kvinner, køn og forskning" 2002, No. 2, p. 52–65.

⁹ See, for instance, C. Cohn, *Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War*, [in:] *Gendering War Talk*, ed. M. Cooke and A. Woollacott, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 1993, p.227–246; P.A. Chilton, *Security Metaphors, Cold War Discourse from Containment to Common House*, Peter Lang, New York–Bern–Frankfurt/M 1996; M.P. Marks, *The Prison as Metaphor: Re-Imagining International Relations*, Peter Lang Publishing Group, New York 2004.

¹⁰ Ch. Hooper, *Manly States: Masculinities, International Relations, and Gender Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York 2001, p. 84–88.

of identity realized in 2000-2010 as directed towards creating a positive collective identity for Russians, which with the help of gender discourse became “remasculinization of Russia”.¹¹ The remasculinization of Russia has two dimensions. First, it includes creating attractive images of national masculinity (above all, that of the *muzhik*). Secondly, this remasculinization is achieved by attributing masculine characteristics to the country as a whole.

The model of the *muzhik* gained significant popularity in the post-Soviet period.¹² The contemporary *muzhik* is rather distant from the male peasant of imperial Russia, on which the stereotype is based. Today the *muzhik* concept is used to designate, first, national masculinity, and second, high-rank, “real” masculinity. This masculinity should be considered as hegemonic for Russia at the beginning of the 21st century. As is well known, R. Connell introduced the term “hegemonic masculinity”, that is, masculinity dominating determination of the norms of gender relations.¹³ Olga Shaburova, who first analysed the image of the *muzhik* in post-Soviet culture, revealed the role of negative identification in those processes: to become a *muzhik*, you have to prove that you are neither a woman, nor a child, nor a homosexual.¹⁴ For the purposes of this study, it is important to keep in mind yet another “nor:” the standard of the Russian *muzhik* is also juxtaposed with representations of Western masculinities. Unlike the imagined ‘sensitive man’ of the present-day West, the Russian *muzhik* is sturdy, tough and strong; he doesn’t speak too much, but makes his deeds speak for him.¹⁵ It is alleged that the degeneration of European masculinity is reflected in Western men’s effeminacy, infantilism, and egocentrism, which are explained, not least, by the spreading homosexuality in Europe.¹⁶ So in this environment, sexism and homophobia are not seen as vices.

This construction of positive images of national masculinity is exploited in the legitimation of the current political regime in Russia. The authorities seek to incorporate the model of “*muzhik*” into the ideology they are constructing. It is significant that the president himself acts as the cultural icon of national mas-

¹¹ O. Riabov, T. Riabova, *Remasculinization of Russia? Gender, Nationalism and Legitimation of Power under Vladimir Putin*, “Problems of Post-Communism” 2013, Vol. 60, No. 3.

¹² O.V. Shaburova, *Muzhik ne suetitsia, ili pivo s kharakterom (The muzhik does not fuss, or beer with strong character)*, [in:] *O Muzhe(n)stvennosti: Sbornik Statei*, NLO, Moskva 2002, p. 553–554.

¹³ R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1995, p. 76.

¹⁴ O.V. Shaburova, *Muzhik ne suetitsia...*, p. 534.

¹⁵ For more about the *muzhik*, see T. Riabova, O. Riabov, *The Real Man of Politics in Russia (On Gender Discourse as a Resource for the Authority)*, “Social Sciences” 2011, Vol. 42, No. 3 p. 58–74, 63–65.

¹⁶ E. Tsalko, T. Riabova, *Russkost’ i evropeiskost’ skvoz’ prizmu gendernykh identifikatorov (po rezul’tatam sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia)*, “Zhenshchina v Rossiiskom Obshchestve”. 2012, No. 2, p. 57–65.

culinity.¹⁷ The characteristics of Putin as a “real *muzhik*” are actively included in discourse aimed at legitimating his power. In December 2009, news agencies distributed national poll data (N = 1,800; 7 regions) on opinions of who was seen as “a real man” in Russia. Putin received the majority (14%) of votes, far ahead of the actors Vladimir Vysotsky and Konstantin Khabensky (7% each), Minister of Emergency Situations Sergey Shoygu (6%), the businessmen Roman Abramovich (5%), Mikhail Khodorkovsky (3%), the head of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, and Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (2% each).¹⁸ Two years earlier we conducted a questionnaire poll (N = 400, Ivanovo) that sought to clarify how the gender factor influenced voters in their approach to politicians. The respondents had no hesitation in identifying “the real man” of Russian politics: Putin was the first name chosen by nearly half of those polled (44.8%).¹⁹

Another method for the remasculinization of Russia is the modification of Russia’s image, namely by extending attributes of masculinity to it. In examining the gender connotations of the new image of Russia, we focus on such characteristics as independence and strength. First, these characteristics are components of masculinity which dominate in cultures of Modernity and, second, they are marked as really masculine exactly in the post-Soviet period, as is evidenced by the survey results.²⁰ As for independence, it has a clear gender association, especially in contemporary Russia.²¹ In the 1990s Russia’s dependence on foreign aid was evaluated as evidence of her lack of self-determination, and hence non-masculinity. The idea of “sovereign democracy” became an ideological cornerstone of Putin’s second term. Sovereignty is seen as an opportunity for Russia to decide its own fate, to render it less dependent on international financial organizations, to make it a subject rather than an object in world politics, to lay claim to a measure of self-sufficiency—these are precisely the things that Putin’s rule is given credit for.

The second essential trait of the new image of Russia is strength. One might even speak about a cult of strength in Russia, be it national military might, athletic achievements, or the fitness of national leaders. Putin’s comments on the terrorist attack in Beslan in September 2004 are worthy of our attention: “We displayed weakness. And the weak are always beaten.”²²

¹⁷ T. Riabova, O. Riabov, *Real Man of Politics...*, p. 64.

¹⁸ For details, see <www.regnum.ru/news/1231490.html>.

¹⁹ Next, trailing far behind, were Sergey Ivanov, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Sergey Shoygu, and First Vice Premier Medvedev (5.8%, 5.0%, 4.8%, and 3.5% respectively). T. Riabova, *Pol vlasti: Gendernye stereotipy v sovremennoi rossiiskoi politike (Gender stereotypes in Contemporary Russian Politics)*, Ivanovo State University, Ivanovo 2007, p. 127.

²⁰ For instance, see *ibidem*, p. 47.

²¹ E. Gapova, *On Nation, Gender, and Class Formation in Belarus... And Elsewhere in the Post-Soviet World*. “Nationalities Papers” 2002, Vol. 30, No. 4, p. 652–653.

²² Speech transcript (September 4, 2004), <www.lenta.ru/russia/2004/09/04/putin/>; see also Medvedev’s conversation with Kirill Pozdnyakov. NTV Television Channel (July, 26, 2009), <www.kreml.org/other/219181538>.

The growing popularity of Russia's "bear" image serves as an indirect confirmation of the trend towards cultivating strength as an attribute of Russians. This popularity, to be sure, has another source as well. It was generated by United Russia Party, whose logo is a polar bear.²³ At the same time one should take into account that the symbol gains support among people of various political orientations. The polar bear's strength and ability to fight for itself makes it the best symbol of the nation in the eyes of many Russians. As is indicated by our sociological survey and interviews held in Russia (2009), strength is a trait associated in the first instance with the bear as a metaphor of Russia.²⁴

3. Old Europe

As social identity theory postulates, the desire for a positive identity is realized not only by improving the image of the Self, but also by worsening the image of the Other.²⁵ Analyzing the remarkable shift in Russians' perceptions of Us and Them, Edward Lucas points out that since the mid-2000s the West has ceased to be an indisputable moral authority for Russia.²⁶ This also refers to gender issues. In the 1990s Western masculinity, above all, American masculinity, was considered as a model, while Western civilization was endowed with masculine characteristics (strength, rationality, independence, individualism). In the 2000s the situation changed. Irina Savkina, in examining the reception of the West in contemporary Russian literature, draws attention to the fact that Russian authors attribute masculine and "Western" traits to Russia.²⁷

The distinctive feature of the demasculinization of Old Europe is reflected in the neologism *Gayropa*: homosexuality is denoted as the essence of the European lifestyle.²⁸ The allegations branding Europe as sexually deviant have been

²³ O. Riabov, , *Okhota na medvedia: O roli simbolov v politicheskoi bor'be* (Bear Hunting: On the role of Symbols in Political Struggle), "Neprikosnovennyi Zapas" 2009, No. 1, p. 195–211; A. de Lazari, O. Riabov, M. Żakowska. *Europa i Niedźwiedź*, Centrum Polsko-Rosyjskiego Dialogu i Porozumienia, Warszawa 2013.

²⁴ T. Riabova, *Medved' kak simbol Rossii: sotsiologicheskoe izmerenie* (Bear as a Symbol of Russia: Sociological Perspective), [in:] *Russkii medved': istoriia, semiotika, politika*, eds. O. Riabov, A. de Lazari, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, Moscow 2012, p. 345–347.

²⁵ H. Tajfel, , *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, Cambridge University Press–Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Cambridge–New York–Paris 1982.

²⁶ E. Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008. See analogical opinion survey results about Russians' attitudes towards the USA, at <www.vz.ru/politics/2013/2/19/621054.html>.

²⁷ I. Savkina, , *Gender s russkim aktsentom* (Gender with a Russian Accent), [in:] *Vater Rhein und Mutter Wolga. Diskurse um Gender und Nation in Deutschland und Russland*, eds. von E. Cheure, R. Nohejl und A. Napp, Ergon, Würzburg 2005, p. 470–471.

²⁸ O. Riabov, T. Riabova, *The decline of Gayropa? How Russia intends to save the world*, "Eurozine", 05 February 2014.

made by politicians, journalists, bloggers and commentators on Internet forums. There is nothing especially original about Russian invective on the gender deviancy of Europe. The concept of the “rotten West”, which can be traced back to the works of the Slavophiles, includes claims about the superiority of the Russian family and of Russian gender norms. Criticism of the bourgeois gender order that featured in Soviet propaganda during the Cold War acts as another ideological source for the rejection of Gayropa today. In fact, allegations about the decadence and effeminacy of the Western civilization are an important component of anti-Western discourse generally.²⁹

Today, the gender dimension has become one of the most important aspects of allegations levelled against the West. The destruction of the traditional gender order in Europe is associated with the legalization of same-sex marriage, the growing influence of feminism and the destruction of the traditional family unit. It is alleged that these processes are bound to lead to a very real decline in European civilization, primarily because they pervert human nature itself and destroy the foundations of humanity. One of contemporary Russia's most prominent conservative thinkers, Alexander Dugin, uses the terms “trans-human” and “post-human” to describe the development of European civilization as he sees it. According to Dugin, the logic of liberalism presupposes the destruction of all collective identities, from the state and the nation to gender and humanity. Once gender has been dismantled, humanity will take a similar course: “If we do not apply the brakes just a little, we will hurtle on to the bitter end, until we're asked to baptize a chimera, a bio-robot, a cyborg or to marry a fly to a human being.”³⁰ The Chairman of the State Duma foreign affairs committee, Alexei Pushkov, has assessed changes to the gender order in European countries “as an attempt to alter the very foundation of human civilization”.³¹

A programme on a major Russian TV channel, entitled “The repressive minority”, included a discussion by the participants of “gay totalitarianism”.³² And on 12 December 2013, in an address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, President Vladimir Putin emphasized that the “destruction of traditional values ‘from above’ not only brings negative consequences for societies, but is essentially anti-democratic, since it is implemented [...] against the will of the majority of people”. In this way, European civilization is perceived to have lost an intrinsic attribute: democracy. The other crucial characteristic which Europe is being deprived of today is its Christian roots.

²⁹ See I. Buruma, A. Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies*, The Penguin Press, New York 2004.

³⁰ A. Dugin, *We should move to a politics of spirit (Nado perekhodit' k politike dush)*, <evrazia.org/article/2259 >.

³¹ “Izvestiia”, 21 December 2013.

³² TV-Channel “Rossiya-1”, 18 June 2013.

By putting a label on European civilization, the concept of Gayropa helps to support the collective identity of Russians. According to many authors and commentators, current differences in the gender order of Europe and Russia emerge from the very essence of these civilizations. The essentialization of these differences is achieved by appealing to cultural traditions. When explaining his personal, negative attitude toward the legalization of same-sex marriage in Russia, Putin referred to the need to respect the traditions of Russian society.³³ The title of pro-Kremlin journalist Maksim Shevchenko's article devoted to the changes of European gender order – "So we're not Europe? Thank heavens for that!" – demonstrates the compensatory way in which the Gayropa concept is approached in Russia. The Chechen leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, has said: "Unfortunately a significant number of Russians want to be on an equal footing with Europeans and their way of life, although on the whole, Europeans possess neither culture nor morality [...] They welcome all that is subhuman. To them, same-sex marriage is normal. It is awful even to talk about it. Personally, I would never want to be a European".³⁴ On Internet forums, analogous ideas are expressed more unequivocally. For example: "How are Asians inferior to Europe with their homos, their hypocrisy, their colonial disdain for the rest of the world [...] Be proud that you're Asian; there is no point begging for recognition from Europeans".³⁵ Paraphrasing a famous line from Alexander Blok's 1918 poem *Scythians*, in which the poet contrasts the notion of Russia as a sphinx with Europe as Oedipus, the author of another commentary writes: "Yes, we are Scythians, yes – we are straight!".³⁶

The concept of Gayropa not only creates symbolic borders between Russia and Europe, but contributes to the definition of a new national idea. It is well known that the crisis of collective identity that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union prompted an existential search for Russia's significance and its fundamental values. More recently, there has been a noticeable tendency to define the country's place in the contemporary world by counterposing gender orders in Russia and Europe. For example, the director of the Institute for Political Research, Sergei Markov, has noted that "in postmodern Europe, deviations such as homosexuality are considered the norm. Russia is taking a different route. It sees itself

³³ "Odnopolye braki v Chechne?! Do zhertv by doshlo!" – Putin zatmil sebia v Amsterdame ("Same-sex marriages in Chechnya?! There would be victims!") – Putin surpasses himself in Amsterdam), "Moskovskii Komsomolets", 10 April 2013.

³⁴ R. Kadyrov, *Europeans welcome all that is subhuman* (*Evropeitsy privetstvuiut vse nechelovecheskoe*), <www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2013/09/13/n_3181757.shtml>.

³⁵ Comment in forum to A. Mishin, *In the eyes of Europe we are monsters*, "Komsomolskaia Pravda", 29 March 2013, guest no. 7647, <www.kp.ru/daily/26053.4/2964959/?cp=2#comment>.

³⁶ Comment to R. Nosikov, *Naked truth about gay-parades, kissing in public, Gorbachev and Freud*, "Odnako", 21 August 2013, <www.odnako.org/blogs/golaya-pravda-o-gey-paradah-publicnih-poceluyah-gorbachyove-i-freyde/comments/page-2/#1184089>.

as the conservative wing of Europe and, as such, [...] it is finding a way of overcoming its identity crisis.”³⁷

In this way, the concept of Gayropa is bound up with a traditional, perceived opposition between Russia and Europe. But it also includes another element, with deep historical roots, that is bound to affect the positioning of the country. While accusing Europe of degeneracy, the discourse refers back to the notion of “two Europes” postulated by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. It sees Russia as the successor to the real, authentic Europe. In the post-Soviet period, this school of thought re-emerged in the early 2000s. Today, say the propagators of this idea, many Europeans look to Russia with hope, as the protector of Christianity and hence genuinely European values. For instance, Sergey Karaganov stresses that, “in a sense we are more European than Europe itself, since we defend traditional European values.”³⁸ Markov asserts that Russia today is a “citadel, a fortress and a lighthouse for conservative Europeans”.³⁹ A comment on this from a Russian Internet-user is illustrative: “Europe, too, is applauding Putin. After all, only he can save the world from the blue inquisition.”⁴⁰

To grasp the full significance of this situation for Russia, one must take into account not only processes associated with establishing national identity, but the logic behind internal political conflicts as well. The Gayropa narrative has come to affect internal politics because transformations in Europe are reported in terms which suggest that they pose a threat to Russia. This view is not only clearly expressed in forums and public addresses given by conservative authors; it has also become a feature in the official discourse. In March 2013, Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov criticized the EU for promoting Western values – and the defence of the gay community in particular – as universal standards, and for imposing them on Russia.⁴¹ The problem was even considered by the Security Council of Russia. In April 2013 the Secretary of the Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, proposed giving special attention to “the strengthening of national security in the sphere of spirituality and morals”, adding that the issue of same-sex relationships featured importantly among threats to national security.

⁴² In an Internet forum, one of supporters of the authorities writes about same-sex

³⁷ <www.vz.ru/politics/2013/6/11/631085.html>.

³⁸ S. Karaganov, *Im ochen' khotelos' uteret' nos naglym russkim* (*They desired get the better of bold Russians*), 30 May 2014, <<http://lenta.ru/articles/2014/05/29/karaganov/>>.

³⁹ <www.vz.ru/politics/2013/6/11/631085.html>.

⁴⁰ Comment to the article *Deserves admiration*, “Vzgliad”, 13 January 2014, www.vz.ru/world/2014/1/13/667705.html[]. The word *gei* (from the English *gay*) appeared in the Russian language only in the early 1990s and is used together with *goluboi*, to refer to homosexual men. *Goluboi* also means blue and one can therefore often read about “blue Europe” or the “blue lobby” in politics.

⁴¹ <www.newsland.ru/news/detail/id/918554/>.

⁴² <www.kommersant.ru/pda/kommersant.html?id=2178141>

unions in the following way: “Looking at this vile abomination, you understand that there can be no alternative to Putin!”⁴³

It is worth noting that European sexual deviancy is often seen in particular as a natural result of Western democratic development. For instance, among the comments to an article which dealt with the accusations of homophobia that Lech Wałęsa is subjected to in his home country, one can find the following: “One always gets what he pays for. Devour your European values with spoons, comrade Wałęsa! You as a famous Russophobe and merited *der 'mokrat* should bear responsibility for spreading sodomy in your Poland!”⁴⁴

In this context, the political opposition in Russia is branded as a group guilty not only of betraying the nation, but of sexual perversion. The masculinity and femininity of people within the Russian protest movement – “the creative class” – are viewed as deviant. They therefore lack political legitimacy, and their opposition is often explained away in terms of sexual abnormality. Supporters of the Russian liberal opposition aspire, in turn, to represent the authorities and their supporters as retrograde, disconnected from progressive human development, and alienated from the spirit of a European civilization founded on human rights and freedoms. They defend European gender norms and values by arguing that the “patriarchal tradition” and “homophobia” lie at the heart of the current political system.

The representatives of the opposition are equally bound to take into account the mood in Russia; above all their supporters are prepared to accept the European standpoints discussed here. As a June 2013 poll conducted by the All-Russian Centre for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM) showed, the vast majority of Russians (88 per cent) support the idea of introducing a ban on the promotion of homosexuality; 42 per cent believe that non-traditional sexual orientations should be punishable by law.⁴⁵ According to a survey run by the Levada Centre in June 2012, 43 per cent of respondents share the view that gays and lesbians suffer from a defective moral sense, while 32 per cent suppose that they are mentally deficient.

Finally, Gayropa is used in the rhetoric of Russian international politics. Lack of masculine qualities is interpreted as both a military and political weakness. During the Ukrainian crisis, this is reflected in the common conviction that Europe isn't able to respond seriously. The winning of the Eurovision Song Contest 2014 by the transvestite Conchita Wurst was considered by many Russian journalists and politicians as evidence of Gayropa's moral decline. For example, one of the comments to an article devoted to Poland's participation in a “crusade” against Russia reads: “What kind of crusaders are you, Europeans? You are conchitas!”⁴⁶ (Fig. 1)

⁴³ Comment on the article by G. Clavel, *Mariage gay: le baiser des députés PS Yann Galut et Nicolas Bays pour la postérité*, original in “Le Huffington Post”. For the Russian translation, see www.inosmi.ru/world/20130128/205161448.html.

⁴⁴ <<http://www.russia.ru/Razgvlad/status/3fff10000012a>>.

⁴⁵ <wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=114190>.

⁴⁶ <<http://www.vz.ru/news/2014/5/22/687858.html>>.



Figure 1

Source: http://rufabula.com/media/upload/images/2014/05/19/148361_600.433.jpg

4. New Europe

The symbolic demasculinization pictured above is to be applied to the 'New Europe'. If the politics of these states opposes Russia's interests it is also quite often treated as a result of the USA's influence on these states, which are represented as lacking sovereignty, independence, and force; hence, masculinity. For example, Shevchenko declares that this part of Europe has grown used to fawning on Americans.⁴⁷ Such representations are accompanied by the use of metaphors and images which help to demasculinize Russia's neighbors.

In April 2014, in face of the escalation of confrontation between Russia and New Europe, a remarkable text entitled "About Buffers" was published.⁴⁸ The article is devoted to problem of buffer states, and played on the fact that the Russian word *bufera* serves also as a slang designation for female breasts. The author calls attention to the Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė's definition of her country as a buffer state, and interprets this in the following way: Grybauskaitė assigns a woman's role to Lithuania; this woman's happiness is to truly serve to her fiancé – the West.⁴⁹

Another remarkable characteristic of the countries of 'New Europe' is the assertion that their geopolitical choice depends solely on vested interests, and that the only

⁴⁷ *Pravo znat'* (The right to know), 31 May 2014 (TVTZ-Channel).

⁴⁸ V. Mamontov, *Pro bufera* (About buffers), "Vzgliad": Internet-newspaper, 25 April 2014, <http://vz.ru/columns/2014/4/25/683975.html>.

⁴⁹ In the authors' opinion, the current pro-Western regime in Kiev is pictured in the same female role of a buffer for Ukraine. Those who want to keep their independence, and hence their manhood, and who object to be turned into a buffer, fight against Kiev's authorities in Donbas. <http://all-rss.com/item-1456063-speakers-vladimir-mamontov-about-buffer/>

thing they want to know is who pays more. No wonder then that the metaphor of prostitution, which is so widespread in Russian political rhetoric,⁵⁰ is actively exploited with respect to the countries of New Europe. A special target of criticism is Poland. Włodzimierz Marciniak considers the image of Poland as a prostitute the most widespread stereotype among Russians. In his opinion, this stereotype has its sources in Russians' attitudes to the world: they believe that only large states have a say, and the rest can only sell themselves.⁵¹ Indeed, Russian newspaper articles quite often mention "sponsors of Poland", and expand on their viewpoint that Poland is a country which always clings to the richer and stronger.⁵² Users of internet forums very frequently evoke the metaphor of prostitution.⁵³ Specifically, the phrase "Poland is the main prostitute in Europe"⁵⁴ is very popular, and users ascribe its authorship to Lenin, or Churchill, and even Napoleon.⁵⁵

Finally, New Europe's military and political weakness serves as important evidence of its lack of masculinity, which is especially visible against a background of the strength of the Russian bear. For instance, a collage from 2005 pictures the leaders of Poland, the Baltic states, and Georgia in a bear hug; the image is accompanied with a caption: "The Russian Bear is kind, but how long can you offend him?" (Fig. 2).



Figure 2

Source: A. Dorofeev, *Collage*, "Аргументы и Факты" 2005, No. 20

⁵⁰ T. Riabova, *Pol vlasti...*

⁵¹ *W oczach Rosjan Polska to dziwka* (In the eyes of Russians, Poland is a Prostitute), Polska-Times.pl, 2 September 2009, <www.polskatimes.pl/artykul/158697,w-oczach-rosjan-polska-to-dziwka,id,t.html#material_1>.

⁵² Idem.

⁵³ See e.g., 7 November 2007, <www.ibk.ru/34493.html>.

⁵⁴ See comments on: J. Korejba, *Pol'sha — Viagra Europy* (Poland – the viagra of Europe), 24 February 2014, <<http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/1328085/>>.

⁵⁵ E.g., 1 April 2014, <<http://politikus.ru/events/15900-veymarskiy-treugolnik-vystupaet-za-novu-yu-politiku-es-na-vostoke-evropy.html>>, <<http://m.mirtesen.ru/groups/30766262362/blog/43358175752>>, <<http://topwar.ru/30228-aleksandr-shtorm-polsha-v-afganistane-cena-voyny-i-obeschaniy-ssha.html>>.

5. The Post-Soviet states: the Case of Ukraine

The Post-Soviet states are, on the one hand, represented as brother countries which are bound with Russia by natural ties. On the other hand, if they flirt with the West, the Russian hegemonic discourse ostracizes them, and one can see the familiar demasculinization rhetoric. Firstly, these countries are accused of mercenariness and perfidy (and in this case the metaphor of prostitution is usually employed), and of a lack of independence, i.e. an absence of masculinity. Second, when discussing the geopolitical choices of the post-Soviet states, Russian commentators often resort to the image of Gayropa, arguing that the import of European values by these countries represents a path toward degeneracy. For instance, "Izvestiia" cites Pushkov's comment that Moldova "was instructed to organize regular gay pride parades" as a condition of signing its agreement on association with the EU.⁵⁶

The case of Ukraine – especially after the Orange revolution – serves a good example of the symbolic demasculinization of the post-Soviet states. In the gas supply dispute of 2006 Ukraine was represented in a Russian TV program as a kept woman, a "flighty Ukrainian mistress" (*TVTS-Postskriptum*, 26 March 2006). Russian protestors at the demonstration near the American Embassy in Moscow held a poster with the words "A gentleman always pays for his girlfriend", calling on the USA to pay off Ukrainian debts to Russia. In criticizing the Ukrainian leaders' politics during the next "Gas War" of 2009, Putin compared transit countries with an overly picky girl. "They should have no illusions, the girls should have no illusions – the groom has other choices, they have to understand".⁵⁷ Another collage – "The beauty is being lead away" – appeared on the cover of an issue of the popular weekly "Argumenty i Fakty", portraying Ukraine in a guise of a young woman who is being guided, or forced to go, to the West on a road paved with US dollars. (Fig. 3).

During the current aggravated crisis in Ukraine, the relations between Crimea, Donbas and Kiev are often portrayed with help of gender and family metaphors. For instance, "The tale about Crimea" presents Ukraine as "a whore who was given in marriage over and over again to many husbands".⁵⁸ Another popular text among internet users pictures the independence referendum in two southeast Ukrainian regions as a divorce demanded by "Donbas" who is sick of the promiscuity of his "wife", who is ready to copulate with every foreign Tom, Dick or Harry.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ "Izvestiia", 21 December 2013.

⁵⁷ Speech transcript, "Vesti" (12 January 2009), <www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=241133>.

⁵⁸ T. Kliuchko-Stepanenko, *Zdravstvuy, Krym! Dobro pozalovat' na Rodinu! (Greetings to Crimea! Welcome to Motherland!)*, „Proza.ry“, 20 March 2014, <<http://www.proza.ru/2014/03/20/1287>>.

⁵⁹ *Eto vsio narodnoe tvorchestvo: Kak prokhodil referendum na Donbasse*; See the comment on <<http://www.visti.ks.ua/novosti/v-ukraine/13416-eto-vse-narodnoe-tvorchestvo-kak-prohodil-psevdoreferendum-na-donbasse.html>>



Figure 3

Source: A. Dorofeev, Collage – “The beauty is being lead away”, “Аргументы и Факты” 2005, No. 20



Figure 4

Source: http://s00.yaplakal.com/pics/pics_original/8/8/2/2940288.jpg

Russian media began employing the Gayropa metaphor in its coverage of the 2013-2014 crisis even before the Euromaidan wave of civil unrest began. On 7 November 2013, Pushkov wrote on Twitter: “The release of Timoshenko will provoke EU demands that Ukraine should broaden the reach of gay culture.

Instead of victory parades, Kiev will be holding gay-pride marches.”⁶⁰ The spread of gay culture is seen as a threat to fundamental values and sacrosanct ideals; it is represented as a challenge not just to the gender order of society but to national identity. The de-motivational poster “Mother Ukraine calls you!” may serve as an illustration of this phenomenon. (Fig. 4)

Even the earliest reports from Kiev featured the term “Gayromaidan”.⁶¹ Russian press correspondents used this as a thematic focus in many of their publications.⁶² One article in *Komsomolskaia Pravda*, concerning the visit of the German Minister of Foreign Affairs to Maidan, appeared with the headline “Gays fuel the Maidan fire: Ukraine called to join Europe by nationalists, anti-Semites, neo-Nazis and homosexuals”.⁶³

In the Euromaidan context, this issue appears alongside a number of assertions in the media. Primarily, it is said that some of the most active Ukrainian supporters of closer ties with the EU are representatives of the gay community fighting for their own privileges. It is argued that, in the event of an opposition victory, same-sex marriages would be legalized in Ukraine and, in the future, the country can expect to be subjected to all the “delights of Gayropa” discussed above. Further, within the EU, the “blue lobby” is particularly active in attempting to get back at Russia for its passage of “anti-gay laws”.

Leaders of the Euromaidan protests have also been scrutinised in these terms. On the one hand, the sympathy of some towards gay culture has been used to suggest that their aspiration to join Europe is not only evidence of their betrayal of Slavic brotherhood and the shared history of Russians and Ukrainians, but of their sexual deviancy. News that the Klitschko brothers were photographed by a journal for sexual minorities a decade ago has been widely disseminated in the Russian media. On the other hand, it has also been emphasized that Ukrainians have a long way to go before they achieve modern European standards and that it is far too early for them to join the EU. A significant proportion of protesters at Maidan are, it has been said, “nationalist cavemen” from far-right groups who have no conception of European ideals, including tolerance towards sexual minorities.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ <vz.ru/news/2013/11/7/658568.html>.

⁶¹ *Gayromaidan today: Protest action or an expensive farce? (Geiromaidan segodnia: aktsiia protesta ili nedeshevyi fars?)*, 23 November 2013, <rumol.org/2013/11/23/gejromajdan-segodnya-akciya-protesta-ili-nedeshevyj-fars/>.

⁶² For example, see V. Vorsobin, *Ukraine out in the square again (Ukrainu opiat' maidanit)*, “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, 25 November 2013.

⁶³ S. Polosatov, *Gei-drovishki v koster Maidana: Ukrainu zovut v Evropu natsionalisty, antisemity, neonatsisty i gomoseksualisty (Gay fuel in the Maidan fire: Ukraine called to join Europe by nationalists, anti-Semites, neo-Nazis and homosexuals)*, “Komsomolskaya Pravda”, 5 December 2013.

⁶⁴ E.g., S. Glaz'ev, *Euroshizofreniia na Ukraine (Euroschizophrenia in Ukraine)*, 15 January, 2014, <http://www.glazev.ru/sodr_ssn/354/>.

Such use of the Gayropa image in Russian accounts of the Euromaidan protests was intended not just for the Ukrainian public, but for domestic consumption. The idea that Ukraine's interest in European integration is bound to lead to the country's downfall obviously allows the Russian authorities to demonstrate to the Russian public that, in Russia, it is the authorities themselves who are the sole guarantors of normalcy. Therefore, in March 2014 the Russian media distributed information that LGBT-activists had claimed: "Russian gays and lesbians don't recognize the results of the referendum in Crimea".⁶⁵

The Ukrainian opponents of their country's European integration have been keen to make use of the "Gayropa" image. In September 2013, Ukrainian communists released ads which showed how the EU forced a boy symbolizing Ukraine to array himself as a girl.⁶⁶ In October in Kharkov, a political demonstration against European integration was held under the slogan "We don't need Gayropa!".⁶⁷ At the first demonstration by supporters of the Party of Regions in Kiev in November, which emphasized the group's opposition to the signing of an agreement with the EU, slogans included "Good-bye GAYropa!" and "Euro=homo".⁶⁸ In December, at a so-called "Anti-Maidan" meeting Prime minister Nikolai Azarov declared: "Opposition leaders are telling stories. They say we will sign an agreement on association with the EU and be travelling to Europe without visas tomorrow. We also have to fulfil a whole series of conditions: we have to make same-sex marriage legal, and we have to pass a law about the equality of sexual minorities." This address was widely publicized and commented upon in the Russian as well as Ukrainian press.⁶⁹

The concept continues to be widely employed after the opposition victory in Euromaidan. In April, Lugansk protesters release a "rap-appeal" with the words "We don't wish our children to have gay pride parades".⁷⁰ In May, commenting on Conchita Wurst's success, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy declared: "How Donbas can be in favour of such a Europe? Donbas will raise the Russian banner!"⁷¹

⁶⁵ Gei Rossii ne priznaiut krymskii referendum (Russian gays do not recognize Crimean referendum), "Vpered, Russia!": Internet patriotic newspaper, 18 March 2014, <<http://pressa.mirtesen.ru/blog/43643710582/Gei-Rossii-ne-priznaiut-krymskogo-referenduma?page=1#42738564983>>.

⁶⁶ <http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/1602201-plohaya-igra-kompartiya-ispolzovala-de-tej-v-antireklame-evrosoyuza>.

⁶⁷ *Nam ne nuzhna Gayropa (We don't need Gayropa)*, 1 November 2013, <<http://internovosti.net/sobytiya/nam-ne-nuzhna-gejropa20131031.html>>.

⁶⁸ V. Vorsobin, *Ukraine out...*

⁶⁹ The head of the EU delegation to Ukraine, Jan Tombinski, was quick to rebut the statement, and that is also indicative (Vzgliad, Internet-newspaper, 14 December 2013, <<http://vz.ru/news/2013/12/14/664375.html>>).

⁷⁰ "Moskovskii Komsomoletz", 22 April 2014, <http://www.mk.ru/politics/world/article/2014/04/22/1017931-repobraschenie-iz-zahvachennogo-sbu-luganska-nam-vashe-nato-vovse-ne-na-do-myi-ne-zhelaem-detyam-geyparada.html>.

⁷¹ See on <<http://tree.biz.ua/news/borodaya-konchita-pobeditel-evrovideniya-kommentarii-na-rossiyskom-tv-i-fotozhaby-video-foto>>.

6. Conclusions

Gender discourse plays an important role in contemporary Russians' attitudes toward Europe. On one hand, it negatively influences the image of Europe, while on the other it reflects many significant aspects of Russians' comprehension of Us versus Them. Due to the role which gender images, symbols, and metaphors play in constructing social boundaries and hierarchies, they are widely used in the representations of Russian-European relations. Influential politicians and experts speak out on the issue, and leading publications are publishing articles provoking a huge response among commentators on the Internet.

The gender characteristics which the Russian media ascribes to Europe depend on the way Russians imagine Russia itself. The politics of identity realized since 2000 – the “remasculinization of Russia” – are a reaction to the demasculinization of the country in the 1990s, and the image of the Russian bear serves as a symbol of national masculinity. In order to draw very sharp symbolic boundaries between Russia and Europe, and provide a positive collective identity of Russians, Europe is depicted as devoid of masculine qualities.