

28.02.2012

Russian LGBT Network

"Best practice" of using the concept of "traditional values" in Russia

"Traditional values" in Russia are not just discourse. They are part of the political and social reality. The use of traditional values rhetoric has served to justify a crackdown on dissent and the imposition of severe restrictions on the LGBT community. An alliance of ultra nationalists, conservatives, Christian Orthodox and Protestant fundamentalists are seeking to impose an ideological monopoly. It is safe to say that today, Russian society is going through a period of "traditionalist revanchism"¹.

This overview examines the key actors shaping the traditionalist agenda. Particular focus will be made on the actions and rhetoric by the traditionalists against the LGBT community. *Traditional values* in this discourse are understood as Bible-based values. For the purposes of this discourse, the terms "traditional values", "family values" and "traditional family values" are synonymous. It is the battle for "traditional values" that serves as a platform to bring together Orthodox Christian conservatives, Protestant fundamentalists and conservative Catholics.

In June 2011, the representative office of the ROC Moscow Patriarchate in Strasbourg published a report by a "group of Russian experts" titled "About the right to have a critical view of homosexuality and about legitimate restrictions on the aggressive promotion of homosexuality," which is in effect a summary of homophobic argument for launching the attacks on the human rights of LGBT persons. There are many statements of the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, including official statements, where the commitment to "traditional values" is opposed to human rights, including human rights for LGBT people.

Another religious group in Russia actively participating in culture wars is the Russian United Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) (ROSKhVE). ROSKhVE is led by Sergey Ryakhovsky, who is Co-Chairman of the Advisory Council of Heads of Russian Protestant Churches. Since 2004, this organisation has regularly circulated its statements about the unacceptability of the "promotion of homosexuality" and the need to restrict the constitutional rights of LGBT persons. In June 2011, ROSKhVE backed the "report" published by the ROC Moscow Patriarchate's representative office in Strasbourg. A clause on "countering the promotion of homosexuality" has been included in the official action plan of this religious organisation for 2012. In 2012, it is ROSKhVE activists who alongside "Orthodox Christian activists" actively collect signatures in Russia's regions in support of regional legislation banning the so-called "promotion of homosexuality."

The following key milestones can be highlighted:

- a) since 1991 (in a number of Russian regions) till present (across the entire Russia): introduction of religious education in public schools – school subject on the Basics of Christian Orthodox Culture (currently "Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics");
- b) since the 1990s till present: an offensive on the religious liberty of citizens, the division of religions into the "traditional religions of Russia" (Christianity: Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, Lutheranism; Islam; Judaism; and Buddhism) and "sects", "totalitarian sects" etc. (all religious associations not fitting into the concept of "traditional religions");
- c) second half of the 1990s – 2000s: efforts to obstruct liberal priests and opinions within the ROC Moscow Patriarchate itself (barring from ministry, outstaffing, excommunication). Currently, the "Orthodox Christian liberals" try to be inconspicuous in the life of the church and have returned (like it was the case back in the Soviet Union) into "internal immigration";
- d) since the 1990s till present: introduction of a military chaplain system;
- e) late 1990s: ban on sex education in Russian schools (many of the above mentioned organisations,

¹ Excerpt from "Russia in the 21st Century: A Culture War Caused by Traditionalist Revanchism" in *The Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People in the Russian Federation*. See <http://www.mhg.ru/publications/EA10000> for complete publication with citations.

- particularly the Parents' Committees and the People's Council were among those initiating the ban);
- f) 2003: Orthodox Christian extremists from the People's Council vandalized the "Caution! Religion" modern art exhibition set up in the Andrey Sakharov Centre;
 - g) 2005: the Centre's Director Yury Samodurov and the exhibition supervisor Lyudmila Vasilevskaya found guilty of "inciting ethnic and religious strife";
 - h) 2006: Director of the Andrey Sakharov Centre Yury Samodurov and the "Forbidden Art 2006" exhibition supervisor Andrey Yerofeyev accused under the same article, "inciting ethnic and religious strife", in response to complaints by activists of the People's Council;
 - i) 2010: Yury Samodurov and Andrey Yerofeyev found guilty, in other words, the triumph of conservative Church censorship in Russia;
 - j) On 30 November 2010, Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev signed Federal Law of the Russian Federation No. 327-ФЗ "On the Transfer of Property of a Religious Nature Held in State or Municipal Ownership into the Ownership of Religious Organisations";
 - k) since 2000 till present: the introduction of Theology specialization at public higher education establishments (as of 2011, 21 higher education establishments gave degrees in this specialization). In fact, there can be no "theology" in modern Russia in the sense it is understood in the West – there is not a single theology school; experts are lacking and theological education in Orthodox Christian educational establishments markedly differs from international standards in this area and is a mixture of religious fundamentalism and conservatism;
 - l) since 2000 till present: active opposition to the introduction of juvenile justice in Russia;
 - m) since 2000 till present: the introduction of censorship, banning of books "promoting drugs" (including by authors like William Seward Burroughs, Irvine Welsh, Stanislav Grof, Timothy Francis Leary, Aleister Crowley and others);
 - n) since 2006 till present: annual denials of permits to hold a Gay Pride march in Moscow;
 - o) since 2006 (with some earlier attempts) till present: enactment of legislation at the regional level (2006 – the Ryazan Region, 2011 – the Arkhangelsk Region, 2012 – the Kostroma Region, St. Petersburg, the Novosibirsk Region, the Magadan Region, the Samara Region, the Krasnodar Territory, and others, total: 10 regions) and first reading (in January 2013) at the federal level (the relevant bill was introduced by Deputies of the Novosibirsk City Duma) against the so-called "promotion of homosexuality among minors";
 - p) 2008: Rosokhrankultura (Federal Service for Monitoring Compliance with Cultural Heritage Protection Law) issued a warning to 2x2 TV channel to halt broadcasting of certain cartoon series. ROSKhVE requested Prosecutor General Yury Chaika to shut down the channel which in their view was engaged in "hidden or explicit promotion of homosexuality and pedophilia, asocial lifestyles, and other numerous vices."
 - q) 2011: years-long targeted offensive on the reproductive rights of women culminated in the enactment of a law which, according to some experts, significantly restricts the reproductive rights;
 - r) 2012: introduction of varied punishment for heterosexual and homosexual acts with persons under 16; no punishment may be given for such actions in case of marriage – no same-sex marriages are recognized in Russia;
 - s) 2012: introduction of tougher punishment for offences against sexual integrity of children up to chemical castration;
 - t) 2012: tougher law on rallies;
 - u) 2012: enactment of the law on "foreign agent" NCOs;
 - v) 2012: the law on censorship in the Internet;
 - w) 2012: feminist activists from Pussy Riot condemned for a "punk prayer" at the altar of Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour – the activists convicted for two years in general regime penal colony.

In the current situation, the growing LGBT movement has found itself on the frontlines of a cultural war, since the issues related to gender, sexuality and family form the basis of the human being's identity and any liberal approaches are seen by the conservatives as an attack on the "traditional values".